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Idylls of the King

by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

August, 1996 [Etext #610]

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Idylls of the King  
IN TWELVE BOOKS  
by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Flos Regum Arthurus (Joseph of Exeter)

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Dedication

These to His Memory--since he held them dear,  
Perchance as finding there unconsciously  
Some image of himself--I dedicate,  
I dedicate, I consecrate with tears--  
These Idylls.

And indeed He seems to me  
Scarce other than my king's ideal knight,  
'Who revered his conscience as his king;  
Whose glory was, redressing human wrong;  
Who spake no slander, no, nor listened to it;  
Who loved one only and who clave to her--'  
Her--over all whose realms to their last isle,  
Commingled with the gloom of imminent war,  
The shadow of His loss drew like eclipse,  
Darkening the world. We have lost him: he is gone:  
We know him now: all narrow jealousies  
Are silent; and we see him as he moved,  
How modest, kindly, all-accomplished, wise,  
With what sublime repression of himself,  
And in what limits, and how tenderly;  
Not swaying to this faction or to that;

Not making his high place the lawless perch  
Of winged ambitions, nor a vantage-ground  
For pleasure; but through all this tract of years  
Wearing the white flower of a blameless life,  
Before a thousand peering littlenesses,  
In that fierce light which beats upon a throne,  
And blackens every blot: for where is he,  
Who dares foreshadow for an only son  
A lovelier life, a more unstained, than his?  
Or how should England dreaming of his sons  
Hope more for these than some inheritance  
Of such a life, a heart, a mind as thine,  
Thou noble Father of her Kings to be,  
Laborious for her people and her poor--  
Voice in the rich dawn of an ampler day--  
Far-sighted summoner of War and Waste  
To fruitful strifes and rivalries of peace--  
Sweet nature gilded by the gracious gleam  
Of letters, dear to Science, dear to Art,  
Dear to thy land and ours, a Prince indeed,  
Beyond all titles, and a household name,  
Hereafter, through all times, Albert the Good.

Break not, O woman's-heart, but still endure;  
Break not, for thou art Royal, but endure,  
Remembering all the beauty of that star  
Which shone so close beside Thee that ye made  
One light together, but has past and leaves  
The Crown a lonely splendour.

May all love,  
His love, unseen but felt, o'ershadow Thee,  
The love of all Thy sons encompass Thee,  
The love of all Thy daughters cherish Thee,  
The love of all Thy people comfort Thee,  
Till God's love set Thee at his side again!

#### The Coming of Arthur

Leodogran, the King of Cameliard,  
Had one fair daughter, and none other child;  
And she was the fairest of all flesh on earth,  
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

For many a petty king ere Arthur came  
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war  
Each upon other, wasted all the land;  
And still from time to time the heathen host

Swarmed overseas, and harried what was left.  
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,  
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,  
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.  
For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,  
And after him King Uther fought and died,  
But either failed to make the kingdom one.  
And after these King Arthur for a space,  
And through the puissance of his Table Round,  
Drew all their petty principdoms under him.  
Their king and head, and made a realm, and reigned.

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste,  
Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,  
And none or few to scare or chase the beast;  
So that wild dog, and wolf and boar and bear  
Came night and day, and rooted in the fields,  
And wallowed in the gardens of the King.  
And ever and anon the wolf would steal  
The children and devour, but now and then,  
Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat  
To human sucklings; and the children, housed  
In her foul den, there at their meat would growl,  
And mock their foster mother on four feet,  
Till, straightened, they grew up to wolf-like men,  
Worse than the wolves. And King Leodogran  
Groaned for the Roman legions here again,  
And Caesar's eagle: then his brother king,  
Urien, assailed him: last a heathen horde,  
Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood,  
And on the spike that split the mother's heart  
Spitting the child, brake on him, till, amazed,  
He knew not whither he should turn for aid.

But--for he heard of Arthur newly crowned,  
Though not without an uproar made by those  
Who cried, 'He is not Uther's son'--the King  
Sent to him, saying, 'Arise, and help us thou!  
For here between the man and beast we die.'

And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms,  
But heard the call, and came: and Guinevere  
Stood by the castle walls to watch him pass;  
But since he neither wore on helm or shield  
The golden symbol of his kinglihood,  
But rode a simple knight among his knights,  
And many of these in richer arms than he,  
She saw him not, or marked not, if she saw,  
One among many, though his face was bare.  
But Arthur, looking downward as he past,  
Felt the light of her eyes into his life  
Smite on the sudden, yet rode on, and pitched  
His tents beside the forest. Then he drave



The heathen; after, slew the beast, and felled  
The forest, letting in the sun, and made  
Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight  
And so returned.

For while he lingered there,  
A doubt that ever smouldered in the hearts  
Of those great Lords and Barons of his realm  
Flashed forth and into war: for most of these,  
Colleaguings with a score of petty kings,  
Made head against him, crying, 'Who is he  
That he should rule us? who hath proven him  
King Uther's son? for lo! we look at him,  
And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice,  
Are like to those of Uther whom we knew.  
This is the son of Gorlois, not the King;  
This is the son of Anton, not the King.'

And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt  
Travail, and throes and agonies of the life,  
Desiring to be joined with Guinevere;  
And thinking as he rode, 'Her father said  
That there between the man and beast they die.  
Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts  
Up to my throne, and side by side with me?  
What happiness to reign a lonely king,  
Vext--O ye stars that shudder over me,  
O earth that soundest hollow under me,  
Vext with waste dreams? for saving I be joined  
To her that is the fairest under heaven,  
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,  
And cannot will my will, nor work my work  
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm  
Victor and lord. But were I joined with her,  
Then might we live together as one life,  
And reigning with one will in everything  
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,  
And power on this dead world to make it live.'

Thereafter--as he speaks who tells the tale--  
When Arthur reached a field-of-battle bright  
With pitched pavilions of his foe, the world  
Was all so clear about him, that he saw  
The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,  
And even in high day the morning star.  
So when the King had set his banner broad,  
At once from either side, with trumpet-blast,  
And shouts, and clarions shrilling unto blood,  
The long-lanced battle let their horses run.  
And now the Barons and the kings prevailed,  
And now the King, as here and there that war  
Went swaying; but the Powers who walk the world  
Made lightnings and great thunders over him,

And dazed all eyes, till Arthur by main might,  
And mightier of his hands with every blow,  
And leading all his knighthood threw the kings  
Carados, Urien, Cradlemont of Wales,  
Claudias, and Clariance of Northumberland,  
The King Brandagoras of Latangor,  
With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore,  
And Lot of Orkney. Then, before a voice  
As dreadful as the shout of one who sees  
To one who sins, and deems himself alone  
And all the world asleep, they swerved and brake  
Flying, and Arthur called to stay the brands  
That hacked among the flyers, 'Ho! they yield!'  
So like a painted battle the war stood  
Silenced, the living quiet as the dead,  
And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord.  
He laughed upon his warrior whom he loved  
And honoured most. 'Thou dost not doubt me King,  
So well thine arm hath wrought for me today.'  
'Sir and my liege,' he cried, 'the fire of God  
Descends upon thee in the battle-field:  
I know thee for my King!' Whereat the two,  
For each had warded either in the fight,  
Swore on the field of death a deathless love.  
And Arthur said, 'Man's word is God in man:  
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death.'

Then quickly from the foughten field he sent  
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,  
His new-made knights, to King Leodogran,  
Saying, 'If I in aught have served thee well,  
Give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife.'

Whom when he heard, Leodogran in heart  
Debating--'How should I that am a king,  
However much he help me at my need,  
Give my one daughter saving to a king,  
And a king's son?'--lifted his voice, and called  
A hoary man, his chamberlain, to whom  
He trusted all things, and of him required  
His counsel: 'Knowest thou aught of Arthur's birth?'

Then spake the hoary chamberlain and said,  
'Sir King, there be but two old men that know:  
And each is twice as old as I; and one  
Is Merlin, the wise man that ever served  
King Uther through his magic art; and one  
Is Merlin's master (so they call him) Bleys,  
Who taught him magic, but the scholar ran  
Before the master, and so far, that Bleys,  
Laid magic by, and sat him down, and wrote  
All things and whatsoever Merlin did  
In one great annal-book, where after-years

Will learn the secret of our Arthur's birth.'

To whom the King Leodogran replied,  
'O friend, had I been holpen half as well  
By this King Arthur as by thee today,  
Then beast and man had had their share of me:  
But summon here before us yet once more  
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere.'

Then, when they came before him, the King said,  
'I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl,  
And reason in the chase: but wherefore now  
Do these your lords stir up the heat of war,  
Some calling Arthur born of Gorlois,  
Others of Anton? Tell me, ye yourselves,  
Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's son?'

And Ulfius and Brastias answered, 'Ay.'  
Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights  
Knighted by Arthur at his crowning, spake--  
For bold in heart and act and word was he,  
Whenever slander breathed against the King--

'Sir, there be many rumours on this head:  
For there be those who hate him in their hearts,  
Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,  
And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man:  
And there be those who deem him more than man,  
And dream he dropt from heaven: but my belief  
In all this matter--so ye care to learn--  
Sir, for ye know that in King Uther's time  
The prince and warrior Gorlois, he that held  
Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea,  
Was wedded with a winsome wife, Ygerne:  
And daughters had she borne him,--one whereof,  
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent,  
Hath ever like a loyal sister cleaved  
To Arthur,--but a son she had not borne.  
And Uther cast upon her eyes of love:  
But she, a stainless wife to Gorlois,  
So loathed the bright dishonour of his love,  
That Gorlois and King Uther went to war:  
And overthrown was Gorlois and slain.  
Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged  
Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,  
Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls,  
Left her and fled, and Uther entered in,  
And there was none to call to but himself.  
So, compassed by the power of the King,  
Enforced was she to wed him in her tears,  
And with a shameful swiftness: afterward,  
Not many moons, King Uther died himself,  
Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule

After him, lest the realm should go to wrack.  
And that same night, the night of the new year,  
By reason of the bitterness and grief  
That vext his mother, all before his time  
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born  
Delivered at a secret postern-gate  
To Merlin, to be holden far apart  
Until his hour should come; because the lords  
Of that fierce day were as the lords of this,  
Wild beasts, and surely would have torn the child  
Piecemeal among them, had they known; for each  
But sought to rule for his own self and hand,  
And many hated Uther for the sake  
Of Gorlois. Wherefore Merlin took the child,  
And gave him to Sir Anton, an old knight  
And ancient friend of Uther; and his wife  
Nursed the young prince, and reared him with her own;  
And no man knew. And ever since the lords  
Have foughten like wild beasts among themselves,  
So that the realm has gone to wrack: but now,  
This year, when Merlin (for his hour had come)  
Brought Arthur forth, and set him in the hall,  
Proclaiming, "Here is Uther's heir, your king,"  
A hundred voices cried, "Away with him!  
No king of ours! a son of Gorlois he,  
Or else the child of Anton, and no king,  
Or else baseborn." Yet Merlin through his craft,  
And while the people clamoured for a king,  
Had Arthur crowned; but after, the great lords  
Banded, and so brake out in open war.'

Then while the King debated with himself  
If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,  
Or born the son of Gorlois, after death,  
Or Uther's son, and born before his time,  
Or whether there were truth in anything  
Said by these three, there came to Cameliard,  
With Gawain and young Modred, her two sons,  
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent;  
Whom as he could, not as he would, the King  
Made feast for, saying, as they sat at meat,

'A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas.  
Ye come from Arthur's court. Victor his men  
Report him! Yea, but ye--think ye this king--  
So many those that hate him, and so strong,  
So few his knights, however brave they be--  
Hath body enow to hold his foemen down?'

'O King,' she cried, 'and I will tell thee: few,  
Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him;  
For I was near him when the savage yells  
Of Uther's peerage died, and Arthur sat

Crowned on the dais, and his warriors cried,  
"Be thou the king, and we will work thy will  
Who love thee." Then the King in low deep tones,  
And simple words of great authority,  
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self,  
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some  
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,  
Some flushed, and others dazed, as one who wakes  
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.

'But when he spake and cheered his Table Round  
With large, divine, and comfortable words,  
Beyond my tongue to tell thee--I beheld  
From eye to eye through all their Order flash  
A momentary likeness of the King:  
And ere it left their faces, through the cross  
And those around it and the Crucified,  
Down from the casement over Arthur, smote  
Flame-colour, vert and azure, in three rays,  
One falling upon each of three fair queens,  
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends  
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright  
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.

'And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit  
And hundred winters are but as the hands  
Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege.

'And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,  
Who knows a subtler magic than his own--  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.  
She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,  
Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist  
Of incense curled about her, and her face  
Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;  
But there was heard among the holy hymns  
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells  
Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms  
May shake the world, and when the surface rolls,  
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.

'There likewise I beheld Excalibur  
Before him at his crowning borne, the sword  
That rose from out the bosom of the lake,  
And Arthur rowed across and took it--rich  
With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,  
Bewildering heart and eye--the blade so bright  
That men are blinded by it--on one side,  
Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,  
"Take me," but turn the blade and ye shall see,  
And written in the speech ye speak yourself,  
"Cast me away!" And sad was Arthur's face  
Taking it, but old Merlin counselled him,

"Take thou and strike! the time to cast away  
Is yet far-off." So this great brand the king  
Took, and by this will beat his foemen down.'

Thereat Leodogran rejoiced, but thought  
To sift his doubtings to the last, and asked,  
Fixing full eyes of question on her face,  
'The swallow and the swift are near akin,  
But thou art closer to this noble prince,  
Being his own dear sister;' and she said,  
'Daughter of Gorlois and Ygerne am I;  
'And therefore Arthur's sister?' asked the King.  
She answered, 'These be secret things,' and signed  
To those two sons to pass, and let them be.  
And Gawain went, and breaking into song  
Sprang out, and followed by his flying hair  
Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw:  
But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,  
And there half-heard; the same that afterward  
Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom.

And then the Queen made answer, 'What know I?  
For dark my mother was in eyes and hair,  
And dark in hair and eyes am I; and dark  
Was Gorlois, yea and dark was Uther too,  
Wellnigh to blackness; but this King is fair  
Beyond the race of Britons and of men.  
Moreover, always in my mind I hear  
A cry from out the dawning of my life,  
A mother weeping, and I hear her say,  
"O that ye had some brother, pretty one,  
To guard thee on the rough ways of the world."

'Ay,' said the King, 'and hear ye such a cry?  
But when did Arthur chance upon thee first?'

'O King!' she cried, 'and I will tell thee true:  
He found me first when yet a little maid:  
Beaten I had been for a little fault  
Whereof I was not guilty; and out I ran  
And flung myself down on a bank of heath,  
And hated this fair world and all therein,  
And wept, and wished that I were dead; and he--  
I know not whether of himself he came,  
Or brought by Merlin, who, they say, can walk  
Unseen at pleasure--he was at my side,  
And spake sweet words, and comforted my heart,  
And dried my tears, being a child with me.  
And many a time he came, and evermore  
As I grew greater grew with me; and sad  
At times he seemed, and sad with him was I,  
Stern too at times, and then I loved him not,  
But sweet again, and then I loved him well.

And now of late I see him less and less,  
But those first days had golden hours for me,  
For then I surely thought he would be king.

'But let me tell thee now another tale:  
For Bleys, our Merlin's master, as they say,  
Died but of late, and sent his cry to me,  
To hear him speak before he left his life.  
Shrunk like a fairy changeling lay the mage;  
And when I entered told me that himself  
And Merlin ever served about the King,  
Uther, before he died; and on the night  
When Uther in Tintagil past away  
Moaning and wailing for an heir, the two  
Left the still King, and passing forth to breathe,  
Then from the castle gateway by the chasm  
Descending through the dismal night--a night  
In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost--  
Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps  
It seemed in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof  
A dragon winged, and all from stern to stern  
Bright with a shining people on the decks,  
And gone as soon as seen. And then the two  
Dropt to the cove, and watched the great sea fall,  
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,  
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep  
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged  
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:  
And down the wave and in the flame was borne  
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,  
Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried "The King!  
Here is an heir for Uther!" And the fringe  
Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,  
Lashed at the wizard as he spake the word,  
And all at once all round him rose in fire,  
So that the child and he were clothed in fire.  
And presently thereafter followed calm,  
Free sky and stars: "And this the same child," he said,  
"Is he who reigns; nor could I part in peace  
Till this were told." And saying this the seer  
Went through the strait and dreadful pass of death,  
Not ever to be questioned any more  
Save on the further side; but when I met  
Merlin, and asked him if these things were truth--  
The shining dragon and the naked child  
Descending in the glory of the seas--  
He laughed as is his wont, and answered me  
In riddling triplets of old time, and said:

"Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!  
A young man will be wiser by and by;  
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.  
Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lea!

And truth is this to me, and that to thee;  
And truth or clothed or naked let it be.

Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows:  
Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?  
From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

'So Merlin riddling angered me; but thou  
Fear not to give this King thy only child,  
Guinevere: so great bards of him will sing  
Hereafter; and dark sayings from of old  
Ranging and ringing through the minds of men,  
And echoed by old folk beside their fires  
For comfort after their wage-work is done,  
Speak of the King; and Merlin in our time  
Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn  
Though men may wound him that he will not die,  
But pass, again to come; and then or now  
Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,  
Till these and all men hail him for their king.'

She spake and King Leodogran rejoiced,  
But musing, 'Shall I answer yea or nay?'  
Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw,  
Dreaming, a slope of land that ever grew,  
Field after field, up to a height, the peak  
Haze-hidden, and thereon a phantom king,  
Now looming, and now lost; and on the slope  
The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,  
Fire glimpsed; and all the land from roof and rick,  
In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind,  
Streamed to the peak, and mingled with the haze  
And made it thicker; while the phantom king  
Sent out at times a voice; and here or there  
Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest  
Slew on and burnt, crying, 'No king of ours,  
No son of Uther, and no king of ours;'  
Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze  
Descended, and the solid earth became  
As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven,  
Crowned. And Leodogran awoke, and sent  
Ulfius, and Brastias and Bedivere,  
Back to the court of Arthur answering yea.

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved  
And honoured most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth  
And bring the Queen;--and watched him from the gates:  
And Lancelot past away among the flowers,  
(For then was latter April) and returned  
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.  
To whom arrived, by Dubric the high saint,  
Chief of the church in Britain, and before  
The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the King  
That morn was married, while in stainless white,



The fair beginners of a nobler time,  
And glorying in their vows and him, his knights  
Stood around him, and rejoicing in his joy.  
Far shone the fields of May through open door,  
The sacred altar blossomed white with May,  
The Sun of May descended on their King,  
They gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen,  
Rolled incense, and there past along the hymns  
A voice as of the waters, while the two  
Swore at the shrine of Christ a deathless love:  
And Arthur said, 'Behold, thy doom is mine.  
Let chance what will, I love thee to the death!'  
To whom the Queen replied with drooping eyes,  
'King and my lord, I love thee to the death!'  
And holy Dubric spread his hands and spake,  
'Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world  
Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,  
And all this Order of thy Table Round  
Fulfil the boundless purpose of their King!'

So Dubric said; but when they left the shrine  
Great Lords from Rome before the portal stood,  
In scornful stillness gazing as they past;  
Then while they paced a city all on fire  
With sun and cloth of gold, the trumpets blew,  
And Arthur's knighthood sang before the King:--

'Blow, trumpet, for the world is white with May;  
Blow trumpet, the long night hath rolled away!  
Blow through the living world--"Let the King reign."

'Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur's realm?  
Flash brand and lance, fall battleaxe upon helm,  
Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.

'Strike for the King and live! his knights have heard  
That God hath told the King a secret word.  
Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.

'Blow trumpet! he will lift us from the dust.  
Blow trumpet! live the strength and die the lust!  
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.

'Strike for the King and die! and if thou diest,  
The King is King, and ever wills the highest.  
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.

'Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!  
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!  
Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign.

'The King will follow Christ, and we the King  
In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing.

Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign.'

So sang the knighthood, moving to their hall.  
There at the banquet those great Lords from Rome,  
The slowly-fading mistress of the world,  
Strode in, and claimed their tribute as of yore.  
But Arthur spake, 'Behold, for these have sworn  
To wage my wars, and worship me their King;  
The old order changeth, yielding place to new;  
And we that fight for our fair father Christ,  
Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old  
To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,  
No tribute will we pay:' so those great lords  
Drew back in wrath, and Arthur strove with Rome.

And Arthur and his knighthood for a space  
Were all one will, and through that strength the King  
Drew in the petty pryncedoms under him,  
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame  
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reigned.

Gareth and Lynette

The last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,  
And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring  
Stared at the spate. A slender-shafted Pine  
Lost footing, fell, and so was whirled away.  
'How he went down,' said Gareth, 'as a false knight  
Or evil king before my lance if lance  
Were mine to use--O senseless cataract,  
Bearing all down in thy precipitancy--  
And yet thou art but swollen with cold snows  
And mine is living blood: thou dost His will,  
The Maker's, and not knowest, and I that know,  
Have strength and wit, in my good mother's hall  
Linger with vacillating obedience,  
Prisoned, and kept and coaxed and whistled to--  
Since the good mother holds me still a child!  
Good mother is bad mother unto me!  
A worse were better; yet no worse would I.  
Heaven yield her for it, but in me put force  
To weary her ears with one continuous prayer,  
Until she let me fly discased to sweep  
In ever-highering eagle-circles up  
To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop  
Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,  
A knight of Arthur, working out his will,  
To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain, when he came

With Modred hither in the summertime,  
Asked me to tilt with him, the proven knight.  
Modred for want of worthier was the judge.  
Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,  
"Thou hast half prevailed against me," said so--he--  
Though Modred biting his thin lips was mute,  
For he is alway sullen: what care I?'

And Gareth went, and hovering round her chair  
Asked, 'Mother, though ye count me still the child,  
Sweet mother, do ye love the child?' She laughed,  
'Thou art but a wild-goose to question it.'  
'Then, mother, an ye love the child,' he said,  
'Being a goose and rather tame than wild,  
Hear the child's story.' 'Yea, my well-beloved,  
An 'twere but of the goose and golden eggs.'

And Gareth answered her with kindling eyes,  
'Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine  
Was finer gold than any goose can lay;  
For this an Eagle, a royal Eagle, laid  
Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm  
As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.  
And there was ever haunting round the palm  
A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw  
The splendour sparkling from aloft, and thought  
"An I could climb and lay my hand upon it,  
Then were I wealthier than a leash of kings."  
But ever when he reached a hand to climb,  
One, that had loved him from his childhood, caught  
And stayed him, "Climb not lest thou break thy neck,  
I charge thee by my love," and so the boy,  
Sweet mother, neither clomb, nor brake his neck,  
But brake his very heart in pining for it,  
And past away.'

To whom the mother said,  
'True love, sweet son, had risked himself and climbed,  
And handed down the golden treasure to him.'

And Gareth answered her with kindling eyes,  
'Gold?' said I gold?--ay then, why he, or she,  
Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world  
Had ventured--had the thing I spake of been  
Mere gold--but this was all of that true steel,  
Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,  
And lightnings played about it in the storm,  
And all the little fowl were flurried at it,  
And there were cries and clashings in the nest,  
That sent him from his senses: let me go.'

Then Bellicent bemoaned herself and said,  
'Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness?'

Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth  
Lies like a log, and all but smouldered out!  
For ever since when traitor to the King  
He fought against him in the Barons' war,  
And Arthur gave him back his territory,  
His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there  
A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburiable,  
No more; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows.  
And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,  
Albeit neither loved with that full love  
I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love:  
Stay therefore thou; red berries charm the bird,  
And thee, mine innocent, the jousts, the wars,  
Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang  
Of wrenched or broken limb--an often chance  
In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,  
Frights to my heart; but stay: follow the deer  
By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns;  
So make thy manhood mightier day by day;  
Sweet is the chase: and I will seek thee out  
Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace  
Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year,  
Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness  
I know not thee, myself, nor anything.  
Stay, my best son! ye are yet more boy than man.'

Then Gareth, 'An ye hold me yet for child,  
Hear yet once more the story of the child.  
For, mother, there was once a King, like ours.  
The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,  
Asked for a bride; and thereupon the King  
Set two before him. One was fair, strong, armed--  
But to be won by force--and many men  
Desired her; one good lack, no man desired.  
And these were the conditions of the King:  
That save he won the first by force, he needs  
Must wed that other, whom no man desired,  
A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile,  
That evermore she longed to hide herself,  
Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye--  
Yea--some she cleaved to, but they died of her.  
And one--they called her Fame; and one,--O Mother,  
How can ye keep me tethered to you--Shame.  
Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.  
Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,  
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King--  
Else, wherefore born?'

To whom the mother said  
'Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,  
Or will not deem him, wholly proven King--  
Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King,  
When I was frequent with him in my youth,

And heard him Kingly speak, and doubted him  
No more than he, himself; but felt him mine,  
Of closest kin to me: yet--wilt thou leave  
Thine easeful bidding here, and risk thine all,  
Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King?  
Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth  
Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son.'

And Gareth answered quickly, 'Not an hour,  
So that ye yield me--I will walk through fire,  
Mother, to gain it--your full leave to go.  
Not proven, who swept the dust of ruined Rome  
From off the threshold of the realm, and crushed  
The Idolaters, and made the people free?  
Who should be King save him who makes us free?'

So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain  
To break him from the intent to which he grew,  
Found her son's will unwaveringly one,  
She answered craftily, 'Will ye walk through fire?  
Who walks through fire will hardly heed the smoke.  
Ay, go then, an ye must: only one proof,  
Before thou ask the King to make thee knight,  
Of thine obedience and thy love to me,  
Thy mother,--I demand.

And Gareth cried,  
'A hard one, or a hundred, so I go.  
Nay--quick! the proof to prove me to the quick!'

But slowly spake the mother looking at him,  
'Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,  
And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks  
Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,  
And those that hand the dish across the bar.  
Nor shalt thou tell thy name to anyone.  
And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day.'

For so the Queen believed that when her son  
Beheld his only way to glory lead  
Low down through villain kitchen-vassalage,  
Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud  
To pass thereby; so should he rest with her,  
Closed in her castle from the sound of arms.

Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied,  
'The thrall in person may be free in soul,  
And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I,  
And since thou art my mother, must obey.  
I therefore yield me freely to thy will;  
For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself  
To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves;  
Nor tell my name to any--no, not the King.'

Gareth awhile lingered. The mother's eye  
Full of the wistful fear that he would go,  
And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turned,  
Perplext his outward purpose, till an hour,  
When wakened by the wind which with full voice  
Swept bellowing through the darkness on to dawn,  
He rose, and out of slumber calling two  
That still had tended on him from his birth,  
Before the wakeful mother heard him, went.

The three were clad like tillers of the soil.  
Southward they set their faces. The birds made  
Melody on branch, and melody in mid air.  
The damp hill-slopes were quickened into green,  
And the live green had kindled into flowers,  
For it was past the time of Easterday.

So, when their feet were planted on the plain  
That broadened toward the base of Camelot,  
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn  
Rolling her smoke about the Royal mount,  
That rose between the forest and the field.  
At times the summit of the high city flashed;  
At times the spires and turrets half-way down  
Pricked through the mist; at times the great gate shone  
Only, that opened on the field below:  
Anon, the whole fair city had disappeared.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,  
One crying, 'Let us go no further, lord.  
Here is a city of Enchanters, built  
By fairy Kings.' The second echoed him,  
'Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home  
To Northward, that this King is not the King,  
But only changeling out of Fairyland,  
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery  
And Merlin's glamour.' Then the first again,  
'Lord, there is no such city anywhere,  
But all a vision.'

Gareth answered them  
With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow  
In his own blood, his pryncedom, youth and hopes,  
To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea;  
So pushed them all unwilling toward the gate.  
And there was no gate like it under heaven.  
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined  
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,  
The Lady of the Lake stood: all her dress  
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;  
But like the cross her great and goodly arms  
Stretched under the cornice and upheld:

And drops of water fell from either hand;  
And down from one a sword was hung, from one  
A censer, either worn with wind and storm;  
And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish;  
And in the space to left of her, and right,  
Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,  
New things and old co-twisted, as if Time  
Were nothing, so inveterately, that men  
Were giddy gazing there; and over all  
High on the top were those three Queens, the friends  
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.

Then those with Gareth for so long a space  
Stared at the figures, that at last it seemed  
The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings  
Began to move, seethe, twine and curl: they called  
To Gareth, 'Lord, the gateway is alive.'

And Gareth likewise on them fixt his eyes  
So long, that even to him they seemed to move.  
Out of the city a blast of music pealed.  
Back from the gate started the three, to whom  
From out thereunder came an ancient man,  
Long-bearded, saying, 'Who be ye, my sons?'

Then Gareth, 'We be tillers of the soil,  
Who leaving share in furrow come to see  
The glories of our King: but these, my men,  
(Your city moved so weirdly in the mist)  
Doubt if the King be King at all, or come  
From Fairyland; and whether this be built  
By magic, and by fairy Kings and Queens;  
Or whether there be any city at all,  
Or all a vision: and this music now  
Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth.'

Then that old Seer made answer playing on him  
And saying, 'Son, I have seen the good ship sail  
Keel upward, and mast downward, in the heavens,  
And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air:  
And here is truth; but an it please thee not,  
Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.  
For truly as thou sayest, a Fairy King  
And Fairy Queens have built the city, son;  
They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft  
Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,  
And built it to the music of their harps.  
And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,  
For there is nothing in it as it seems  
Saving the King; though some there be that hold  
The King a shadow, and the city real:  
Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass  
Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become

A thrall to his enchantments, for the King  
Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame  
A man should not be bound by, yet the which  
No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,  
Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide  
Without, among the cattle of the field.  
For an ye heard a music, like enow  
They are building still, seeing the city is built  
To music, therefore never built at all,  
And therefore built for ever.'

Gareth spake

Angered, 'Old master, reverence thine own beard  
That looks as white as utter truth, and seems  
Wellnigh as long as thou art statured tall!  
Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been  
To thee fair-spoken?'

But the Seer replied,

'Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards?  
"Confusion, and illusion, and relation,  
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion"?'  
I mock thee not but as thou mockest me,  
And all that see thee, for thou art not who  
Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art.  
And now thou goest up to mock the King,  
Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie.'

Unmockingly the mocker ending here  
Turned to the right, and past along the plain;  
Whom Gareth looking after said, 'My men,  
Our one white lie sits like a little ghost  
Here on the threshold of our enterprise.  
Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I:  
Well, we will make amends.'

With all good cheer

He spake and laughed, then entered with his twain  
Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces  
And stately, rich in emblem and the work  
Of ancient kings who did their days in stone;  
Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court,  
Knowing all arts, had touched, and everywhere  
At Arthur's ordinance, tipt with lessening peak  
And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven.  
And ever and anon a knight would pass  
Outward, or inward to the hall: his arms  
Clashed; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear.  
And out of bower and casement shyly glanced  
Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love;  
And all about a healthful people stept  
As in the presence of a gracious king.



Then into hall Gareth ascending heard  
A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld  
Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall  
The splendour of the presence of the King  
Throned, and delivering doom--and looked no more--  
But felt his young heart hammering in his ears,  
And thought, 'For this half-shadow of a lie  
The truthful King will doom me when I speak.'  
Yet pressing on, though all in fear to find  
Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one  
Nor other, but in all the listening eyes  
Of those tall knights, that ranged about the throne,  
Clear honour shining like the dewy star  
Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure  
Affection, and the light of victory,  
And glory gained, and evermore to gain.

Then came a widow crying to the King,  
'A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft  
From my dead lord a field with violence:  
For howsoe'er at first he proffered gold,  
Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes,  
We yielded not; and then he reft us of it  
Perforce, and left us neither gold nor field.'

Said Arthur, 'Whether would ye? gold or field?'  
To whom the woman weeping, 'Nay, my lord,  
The field was pleasant in my husband's eye.'

And Arthur, 'Have thy pleasant field again,  
And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,  
According to the years. No boon is here,  
But justice, so thy say be proven true.  
Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did  
Would shape himself a right!'

And while she past,  
Came yet another widow crying to him,  
'A boon, Sir King! Thine enemy, King, am I.  
With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord,  
A knight of Uther in the Barons' war,  
When Lot and many another rose and fought  
Against thee, saying thou wert basely born.  
I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.  
Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son  
Thralled in his castle, and hath starved him dead;  
And standeth seized of that inheritance  
Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.  
So though I scarce can ask it thee for hate,  
Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,  
Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for my son.'

Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him,  
'A boon, Sir King! I am her kinsman, I.

Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man.'

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried,  
'A boon, Sir King! even that thou grant her none,  
This railer, that hath mocked thee in full hall--  
None; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag.'

But Arthur, 'We sit King, to help the wronged  
Through all our realm. The woman loves her lord.  
Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates!  
The kings of old had doomed thee to the flames,  
Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead,  
And Uther slit thy tongue: but get thee hence--  
Lest that rough humour of the kings of old  
Return upon me! Thou that art her kin,  
Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not,  
But bring him here, that I may judge the right,  
According to the justice of the King:  
Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King  
Who lived and died for men, the man shall die.'

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,  
A name of evil savour in the land,  
The Cornish king. In either hand he bore  
What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines  
A field of charlock in the sudden sun  
Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,  
Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,  
Delivering, that his lord, the vassal king,  
Was even upon his way to Camelot;  
For having heard that Arthur of his grace  
Had made his goodly cousin, Tristram, knight,  
And, for himself was of the greater state,  
Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord  
Would yield him this large honour all the more;  
So prayed him well to accept this cloth of gold,  
In token of true heart and fealty.

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend  
In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth.  
An oak-tree smouldered there. 'The goodly knight!  
What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?'  
For, midway down the side of that long hall  
A stately pile,--whereof along the front,  
Some blazoned, some but carven, and some blank,  
There ran a treble range of stony shields,--  
Rose, and high-arching overbrowed the hearth.  
And under every shield a knight was named:  
For this was Arthur's custom in his hall;  
When some good knight had done one noble deed,  
His arms were carven only; but if twain  
His arms were blazoned also; but if none,  
The shield was blank and bare without a sign

Saving the name beneath; and Gareth saw  
The shield of Gawain blazoned rich and bright,  
And Modred's blank as death; and Arthur cried  
To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth.

'More like are we to reave him of his crown  
Than make him knight because men call him king.  
The kings we found, ye know we stayed their hands  
From war among themselves, but left them kings;  
Of whom were any bounteous, merciful,  
Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enrolled  
Among us, and they sit within our hall.  
But as Mark hath tarnished the great name of king,  
As Mark would sully the low state of churl:  
And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold,  
Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,  
Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead,  
Silenced for ever--craven--a man of plots,  
Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings--  
No fault of thine: let Kay the seneschal  
Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied--  
Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen!'

And many another suppliant crying came  
With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man,  
And evermore a knight would ride away.

Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily  
Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men,  
Approached between them toward the King, and asked,  
'A boon, Sir King (his voice was all ashamed),  
For see ye not how weak and hungerworn  
I seem--leaning on these? grant me to serve  
For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knaves  
A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.  
Hereafter I will fight.'

To him the King,  
'A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon!  
But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay,  
The master of the meats and drinks, be thine.'

He rose and past; then Kay, a man of mien  
Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself  
Root-bitten by white lichen,

'Lo ye now!  
This fellow hath broken from some Abbey, where,  
God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow,  
However that might chance! but an he work,  
Like any pigeon will I cram his crop,  
And sleeker shall he shine than any hog.'

Then Lancelot standing near, 'Sir Seneschal,  
Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the hounds;  
A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know:  
Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,  
High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands  
Large, fair and fine!--Some young lad's mystery--  
But, or from sheepecot or king's hall, the boy  
Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,  
Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him.'

Then Kay, 'What murmurest thou of mystery?  
Think ye this fellow will poison the King's dish?  
Nay, for he spake too fool-like: mystery!  
Tut, an the lad were noble, he had asked  
For horse and armour: fair and fine, forsooth!  
Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it  
That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day  
Undo thee not--and leave my man to me.'

So Gareth all for glory underwent  
The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage;  
Ate with young lads his portion by the door,  
And couched at night with grimy kitchen-knives.  
And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,  
But Kay the seneschal, who loved him not,  
Would hustle and harry him, and labour him  
Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set  
To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood,  
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bowed himself  
With all obedience to the King, and wrought  
All kind of service with a noble ease  
That graced the lowliest act in doing it.  
And when the thralls had talk among themselves,  
And one would praise the love that linkt the King  
And Lancelot--how the King had saved his life  
In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's--  
For Lancelot was the first in Tournament,  
But Arthur mightiest on the battle-field--  
Gareth was glad. Or if some other told,  
How once the wandering forester at dawn,  
Far over the blue tarns and hazy seas,  
On Caer-Eryri's highest found the King,  
A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,  
'He passes to the Isle Avilion,  
He passes and is healed and cannot die'--  
Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,  
Then would he whistle rapid as any lark,  
Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud  
That first they mocked, but, after, revered him.  
Or Gareth telling some prodigious tale  
Of knights, who sliced a red life-bubbling way  
Through twenty folds of twisted dragon, held  
All in a gap-mouthed circle his good mates

Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,  
Charmed; till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come  
Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind  
Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart.  
Or when the thralls had sport among themselves,  
So there were any trial of mastery,  
He, by two yards in casting bar or stone  
Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust,  
So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go,  
Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights  
Clash like the coming and retiring wave,  
And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy  
Was half beyond himself for ecstasy.

So for a month he wrought among the thralls;  
But in the weeks that followed, the good Queen,  
Repentant of the word she made him swear,  
And saddening in her childless castle, sent,  
Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon,  
Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow.

This, Gareth hearing from a squire of Lot  
With whom he used to play at tourney once,  
When both were children, and in lonely haunts  
Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand,  
And each at either dash from either end--  
Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.  
He laughed; he sprang. 'Out of the smoke, at once  
I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee--  
These news be mine, none other's--nay, the King's--  
Descend into the city:' whereon he sought  
The King alone, and found, and told him all.

'I have staggered thy strong Gawain in a tilt  
For pastime; yea, he said it: joust can I.  
Make me thy knight--in secret! let my name  
Be hidden, and give me the first quest, I spring  
Like flame from ashes.'

Here the King's calm eye  
Fell on, and checked, and made him flush, and bow  
Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answered him,  
'Son, the good mother let me know thee here,  
And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine.  
Make thee my knight? my knights are sworn to vows  
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,  
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,  
And uttermost obedience to the King.'

Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees,  
'My King, for hardihood I can promise thee.  
For uttermost obedience make demand  
Of whom ye gave me to, the Seneschal,

No mellow master of the meats and drinks!  
And as for love, God wot, I love not yet,  
But love I shall, God willing.'

And the King

'Make thee my knight in secret? yea, but he,  
Our noblest brother, and our truest man,  
And one with me in all, he needs must know.'

'Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know,  
Thy noblest and thy truest!'

And the King--

'But wherefore would ye men should wonder at you?  
Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,  
And the deed's sake my knighthood do the deed,  
Than to be noised of.'

Merrily Gareth asked,

'Have I not earned my cake in baking of it?  
Let be my name until I make my name!  
My deeds will speak: it is but for a day.'  
So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm  
Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly  
Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.  
Then, after summoning Lancelot privily,  
'I have given him the first quest: he is not proven.  
Look therefore when he calls for this in hall,  
Thou get to horse and follow him far away.  
Cover the lions on thy shield, and see  
Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain.'

Then that same day there past into the hall  
A damsel of high lineage, and a brow  
May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,  
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose  
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower;  
She into hall past with her page and cried,

'O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,  
See to the foe within! bridge, ford, beset  
By bandits, everyone that owns a tower  
The Lord for half a league. Why sit ye there?  
Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,  
Till even the lonest hold were all as free  
From cursed bloodshed, as thine altar-cloth  
From that best blood it is a sin to spill.'

'Comfort thyself,' said Arthur. 'I nor mine  
Rest: so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,  
The wastest moorland of our realm shall be  
Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall.  
What is thy name? thy need?'

'My name?' she said--  
'Lynette my name; noble; my need, a knight  
To combat for my sister, Lyonors,  
A lady of high lineage, of great lands,  
And comely, yea, and comelier than myself.  
She lives in Castle Perilous: a river  
Runs in three loops about her living-place;  
And o'er it are three passings, and three knights  
Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth  
And of that four the mightiest, holds her stayed  
In her own castle, and so besieges her  
To break her will, and make her wed with him:  
And but delays his purport till thou send  
To do the battle with him, thy chief man  
Sir Lancelot whom he trusts to overthrow,  
Then wed, with glory: but she will not wed  
Save whom she loveth, or a holy life.  
Now therefore have I come for Lancelot.'

Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth asked,  
'Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush  
All wrongers of the Realm. But say, these four,  
Who be they? What the fashion of the men?'

'They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King,  
The fashion of that old knight-errantry  
Who ride abroad, and do but what they will;  
Courteous or bestial from the moment, such  
As have nor law nor king; and three of these  
Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day,  
Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,  
Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise  
The fourth, who always rideth armed in black,  
A huge man-beast of boundless savagery.  
He names himself the Night and oftener Death,  
And wears a helmet mounted with a skull,  
And bears a skeleton figured on his arms,  
To show that who may slay or scape the three,  
Slain by himself, shall enter endless night.  
And all these four be fools, but mighty men,  
And therefore am I come for Lancelot.'

Hereat Sir Gareth called from where he rose,  
A head with kindling eyes above the throng,  
'A boon, Sir King--this quest!' then--for he marked  
Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull--  
'Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,  
And mighty through thy meats and drinks am I,  
And I can topple over a hundred such.  
Thy promise, King,' and Arthur glancing at him,  
Brought down a momentary brow. 'Rough, sudden,  
And pardonable, worthy to be knight--

Go therefore,' and all hearers were amazed.

But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath  
Slew the May-white: she lifted either arm,  
'Fie on thee, King! I asked for thy chief knight,  
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave.'  
Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turned,  
Fled down the lane of access to the King,  
Took horse, descended the slope street, and past  
The weird white gate, and paused without, beside  
The field of tourney, murmuring 'kitchen-knave.'

Now two great entries opened from the hall,  
At one end one, that gave upon a range  
Of level pavement where the King would pace  
At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood;  
And down from this a lordly stairway sloped  
Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers;  
And out by this main doorway past the King.  
But one was counter to the hearth, and rose  
High that the highest-crested helm could ride  
Therethrough nor graze: and by this entry fled  
The damsel in her wrath, and on to this  
Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door  
King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,  
A warhorse of the best, and near it stood  
The two that out of north had followed him:  
This bare a maiden shield, a casque; that held  
The horse, the spear; whereat Sir Gareth loosed  
A cloak that dropt from collar-bone to heel,  
A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,  
And from it like a fuel-smothered fire,  
That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flashed as those  
Dull-coated things, that making slide apart  
Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns  
A jewelled harness, ere they pass and fly.  
So Gareth ere he parted flashed in arms.  
Then as he donned the helm, and took the shield  
And mounted horse and graspt a spear, of grain  
Storm-strengthened on a windy site, and tipt  
With trenchant steel, around him slowly prest  
The people, while from out of kitchen came  
The thralls in throng, and seeing who had worked  
Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,  
Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,  
'God bless the King, and all his fellowship!'  
And on through lanes of shouting Gareth rode  
Down the slope street, and past without the gate.

So Gareth past with joy; but as the cur  
Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause  
Be cooled by fighting, follows, being named,  
His owner, but remembers all, and growls



Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door  
Muttered in scorn of Gareth whom he used  
To harry and hustle.

'Bound upon a quest  
With horse and arms--the King hath past his time--  
My scullion knave! Thralls to your work again,  
For an your fire be low ye kindle mine!  
Will there be dawn in West and eve in East?  
Begone!--my knave!--belike and like enow  
Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth  
So shook his wits they wander in his prime--  
Crazed! How the villain lifted up his voice,  
Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave.  
Tut: he was tame and meek enow with me,  
Till peacocked up with Lancelot's noticing.  
Well--I will after my loud knave, and learn  
Whether he know me for his master yet.  
Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance  
Hold, by God's grace, he shall into the mire--  
Thence, if the King awaken from his craze,  
Into the smoke again.'

But Lancelot said,  
'Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King,  
For that did never he whereon ye rail,  
But ever meekly served the King in thee?  
Abide: take counsel; for this lad is great  
And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword.'  
'Tut, tell not me,' said Kay, 'ye are overfine  
To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies.'  
Then mounted, on through silent faces rode  
Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate.

But by the field of tourney lingering yet  
Muttered the damsel, 'Wherefore did the King  
Scorn me? for, were Sir Lancelot lackt, at least  
He might have yielded to me one of those  
Who tilt for lady's love and glory here,  
Rather than--O sweet heaven! O fie upon him--  
His kitchen-knave.'

To whom Sir Gareth drew  
(And there were none but few goodlier than he)  
Shining in arms, 'Damsel, the quest is mine.  
Lead, and I follow.' She thereat, as one  
That smells a foul-fleshed agaric in the holt,  
And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,  
Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose  
With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, 'Hence!  
Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease.  
And look who comes behind,' for there was Kay.  
'Knowest thou not me? thy master? I am Kay.'

We lack thee by the hearth.'

And Gareth to him,

'Master no more! too well I know thee, ay--  
The most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall.'  
'Have at thee then,' said Kay: they shocked, and Kay  
Fell shoulder-slipt, and Gareth cried again,  
'Lead, and I follow,' and fast away she fled.

But after sod and shingle ceased to fly  
Behind her, and the heart of her good horse  
Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,  
Perforce she stayed, and overtaken spoke.

'What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?  
Deem'st thou that I accept thee aught the more  
Or love thee better, that by some device  
Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness,  
Thou hast overthrown and slain thy master--thou!--  
Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon!--to me  
Thou smellest all of kitchen as before.'

'Damsel,' Sir Gareth answered gently, 'say  
Whate'er ye will, but whatsoe'er ye say,  
I leave not till I finish this fair quest,  
Or die therefore.'

'Ay, wilt thou finish it?

Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks!  
The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it.  
But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave,  
And then by such a one that thou for all  
The kitchen brewis that was ever supt  
Shalt not once dare to look him in the face.'

'I shall assay,' said Gareth with a smile  
That maddened her, and away she flashed again  
Down the long avenues of a boundless wood,  
And Gareth following was again beknaved.

'Sir Kitchen-knave, I have missed the only way  
Where Arthur's men are set along the wood;  
The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves:  
If both be slain, I am rid of thee; but yet,  
Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit of thine?  
Fight, an thou canst: I have missed the only way.'

So till the dusk that followed evensong  
Rode on the two, reviler and reviled;  
Then after one long slope was mounted, saw,  
Bowl-shaped, through tops of many thousand pines  
A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink  
To westward--in the deeps whereof a mere,

Round as the red eye of an Eagle-owl,  
Under the half-dead sunset glared; and shouts  
Ascended, and there brake a servingman  
Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,  
'They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere.'  
Then Gareth, 'Bound am I to right the wronged,  
But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee.'  
And when the damsel spake contemptuously,  
'Lead, and I follow,' Gareth cried again,  
'Follow, I lead!' so down among the pines  
He plunged; and there, blackshadowed nigh the mere,  
And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed,  
Saw six tall men haling a seventh along,  
A stone about his neck to drown him in it.  
Three with good blows he quieted, but three  
Fled through the pines; and Gareth loosed the stone  
From off his neck, then in the mere beside  
Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.  
Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet  
Set him, a stalwart Baron, Arthur's friend.

'Well that ye came, or else these caitiff rogues  
Had wreaked themselves on me; good cause is theirs  
To hate me, for my wont hath ever been  
To catch my thief, and then like vermin here  
Drown him, and with a stone about his neck;  
And under this wan water many of them  
Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone,  
And rise, and flickering in a grimly light  
Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life  
Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood.  
And fain would I reward thee worshipfully.  
What guerdon will ye?'

Gareth sharply spake,

'None! for the deed's sake have I done the deed,  
In uttermost obedience to the King.  
But wilt thou yield this damsel harbourage?'

Whereat the Baron saying, 'I well believe  
You be of Arthur's Table,' a light laugh  
Broke from Lynette, 'Ay, truly of a truth,  
And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave!--  
But deem not I accept thee aught the more,  
Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit  
Down on a rout of craven foresters.  
A thresher with his flail had scattered them.  
Nay--for thou smellest of the kitchen still.  
But an this lord will yield us harbourage,  
Well.'

So she spake. A league beyond the wood,  
All in a full-fair manor and a rich,

His towers where that day a feast had been  
Held in high hall, and many a viand left,  
And many a costly cate, received the three.  
And there they placed a peacock in his pride  
Before the damsel, and the Baron set  
Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.

'Meseems, that here is much discourtesy,  
Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.  
Hear me--this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,  
And prayed the King would grant me Lancelot  
To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night--  
The last a monster unsubduable  
Of any save of him for whom I called--  
Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-knave,  
"The quest is mine; thy kitchen-knave am I,  
And mighty through thy meats and drinks am I."  
Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,  
"Go therefore," and so gives the quest to him--  
Him--here--a villain fitter to stick swine  
Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong,  
Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman.'

Then half-ashamed and part-amazed, the lord  
Now looked at one and now at other, left  
The damsel by the peacock in his pride,  
And, seating Gareth at another board,  
Sat down beside him, ate and then began.

'Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave, or not,  
Or whether it be the maiden's fantasy,  
And whether she be mad, or else the King,  
Or both or neither, or thyself be mad,  
I ask not: but thou strikest a strong stroke,  
For strong thou art and goodly therewithal,  
And saver of my life; and therefore now,  
For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh  
Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back  
To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.  
Thy pardon; I but speak for thine avail,  
The saver of my life.'

And Gareth said,  
'Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,  
Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell.'

So when, next morn, the lord whose life he saved  
Had, some brief space, conveyed them on their way  
And left them with God-speed, Sir Gareth spake,  
'Lead, and I follow.' Haughtily she replied.

'I fly no more: I allow thee for an hour.  
Lion and stout have isled together, knave,

In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks  
Some ruth is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool?  
For hard by here is one will overthrow  
And slay thee: then will I to court again,  
And shame the King for only yielding me  
My champion from the ashes of his hearth.'

To whom Sir Gareth answered courteously,  
'Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.  
Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find  
My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay  
Among the ashes and wedded the King's son.'

Then to the shore of one of those long loops  
Wherethrough the serpent river coiled, they came.  
Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep; the stream  
Full, narrow; this a bridge of single arc  
Took at a leap; and on the further side  
Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold  
In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily in hue,  
Save that the dome was purple, and above,  
Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering.  
And therebefore the lawless warrior paced  
Unarmed, and calling, 'Damsel, is this he,  
The champion thou hast brought from Arthur's hall?  
For whom we let thee pass.' 'Nay, nay,' she said,  
'Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn  
Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here  
His kitchen-knave: and look thou to thyself:  
See that he fall not on thee suddenly,  
And slay thee unarmed: he is not knight but knave.'

Then at his call, 'O daughters of the Dawn,  
And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,  
Arm me,' from out the silken curtain-folds  
Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls  
In gilt and rosy raiment came: their feet  
In dewy grasses glistened; and the hair  
All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem  
Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.  
These armed him in blue arms, and gave a shield  
Blue also, and thereon the morning star.  
And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,  
Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,  
Glorying; and in the stream beneath him, shone  
Immingled with Heaven's azure waveringly,  
The gay pavilion and the naked feet,  
His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

Then she that watched him, 'Wherefore stare ye so?  
Thou shakest in thy fear: there yet is time:  
Flee down the valley before he get to horse.  
Who will cry shame? Thou art not knight but knave.'

Said Gareth, 'Damsel, whether knave or knight,  
Far liefer had I fight a score of times  
Than hear thee so missay me and revile.  
Fair words were best for him who fights for thee;  
But truly foul are better, for they send  
That strength of anger through mine arms, I know  
That I shall overthrow him.'

And he that bore  
The star, when mounted, cried from o'er the bridge,  
'A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me!  
Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn.  
For this were shame to do him further wrong  
Than set him on his feet, and take his horse  
And arms, and so return him to the King.  
Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave.  
Avoid: for it beseemeth not a knave  
To ride with such a lady.'

'Dog, thou liest.  
I spring from loftier lineage than thine own.'  
He spake; and all at fiery speed the two  
Shocked on the central bridge, and either spear  
Bent but not brake, and either knight at once,  
Hurled as a stone from out of a catapult  
Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,  
Fell, as if dead; but quickly rose and drew,  
And Gareth lashed so fiercely with his brand  
He drave his enemy backward down the bridge,  
The damsel crying, 'Well-stricken, kitchen-knave!'  
Till Gareth's shield was cloven; but one stroke  
Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground.

Then cried the fallen, 'Take not my life: I yield.'  
And Gareth, 'So this damsel ask it of me  
Good--I accord it easily as a grace.'  
She reddening, 'Insolent scullion: I of thee?  
I bound to thee for any favour asked!'  
'Then he shall die.' And Gareth there unlaced  
His helmet as to slay him, but she shrieked,  
'Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay  
One nobler than thyself.' 'Damsel, thy charge  
Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight,  
Thy life is thine at her command. Arise  
And quickly pass to Arthur's hall, and say  
His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave  
His pardon for thy breaking of his laws.  
Myself, when I return, will plead for thee.  
Thy shield is mine--farewell; and, damsel, thou,  
Lead, and I follow.'

And fast away she fled.

Then when he came upon her, spake, 'Methought,  
Knave, when I watched thee striking on the bridge  
The savour of thy kitchen came upon me  
A little faintlier: but the wind hath changed:  
I scent it twenty-fold.' And then she sang,  
"O morning star" (not that tall felon there  
Whom thou by sorcery or unhappiness  
Or some device, hast foully overthrown),  
"O morning star that smilest in the blue,  
O star, my morning dream hath proven true,  
Smile sweetly, thou! my love hath smiled on me."

'But thou begone, take counsel, and away,  
For hard by here is one that guards a ford--  
The second brother in their fool's parable--  
Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot.  
Care not for shame: thou art not knight but knave.'

To whom Sir Gareth answered, laughingly,  
'Parables? Hear a parable of the knave.  
When I was kitchen-knave among the rest  
Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates  
Owned a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,  
"Guard it," and there was none to meddle with it.  
And such a coat art thou, and thee the King  
Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I,  
To worry, and not to flee--and--knight or knave--  
The knave that doth thee service as full knight  
Is all as good, meseems, as any knight  
Toward thy sister's freeing.'

'Ay, Sir Knave!

Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight,  
Being but knave, I hate thee all the more.'

'Fair damsel, you should worship me the more,  
That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies.'

'Ay, ay,' she said, 'but thou shalt meet thy match.'

So when they touched the second river-loop,  
Huge on a huge red horse, and all in mail  
Burnished to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun  
Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower,  
That blows a globe of after arrowlets,  
Ten thousand-fold had grown, flashed the fierce shield,  
All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots  
Before them when he turned from watching him.  
He from beyond the roaring shallow roared,  
'What doest thou, brother, in my marches here?'  
And she athwart the shallow shrilled again,  
'Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall  
Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms.'

'Ugh!' cried the Sun, and vizoring up a red  
And cipher face of rounded foolishness,  
Pushed horse across the foamings of the ford,  
Whom Gareth met midstream: no room was there  
For lance or tourney-skill: four strokes they struck  
With sword, and these were mighty; the new knight  
Had fear he might be shamed; but as the Sun  
Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,  
The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream  
Descended, and the Sun was washed away.

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford;  
So drew him home; but he that fought no more,  
As being all bone-battered on the rock,  
Yielded; and Gareth sent him to the King,  
'Myself when I return will plead for thee.'  
'Lead, and I follow.' Quietly she led.  
'Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again?'  
'Nay, not a point: nor art thou victor here.  
There lies a ridge of slate across the ford;  
His horse thereon stumbled--ay, for I saw it.

"O Sun" (not this strong fool whom thou, Sir Knave,  
Hast overthrown through mere unhappiness),  
"O Sun, that wakenest all to bliss or pain,  
O moon, that layest all to sleep again,  
Shine sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."

What knowest thou of lovesong or of love?  
Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,  
Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance,--

"O dewy flowers that open to the sun,  
O dewy flowers that close when day is done,  
Blow sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."

'What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike,  
To garnish meats with? hath not our good King  
Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom,  
A foolish love for flowers? what stick ye round  
The pasty? wherewithal deck the boar's head?  
Flowers? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay.

"O birds, that warble to the morning sky,  
O birds that warble as the day goes by,  
Sing sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."

'What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle,  
Linnet? what dream ye when they utter forth  
May-music growing with the growing light,  
Their sweet sun-worship? these be for the snare  
(So runs thy fancy) these be for the spit,  
Larding and basting. See thou have not now



Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly.  
There stands the third fool of their allegory.'

For there beyond a bridge of treble bow,  
All in a rose-red from the west, and all  
Naked it seemed, and glowing in the broad  
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight,  
That named himself the Star of Evening, stood.

And Gareth, 'Wherefore waits the madman there  
Naked in open dayshine?' 'Nay,' she cried,  
'Not naked, only wrapt in hardened skins  
That fit him like his own; and so ye cleave  
His armour off him, these will turn the blade.'

Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge,  
'O brother-star, why shine ye here so low?  
Thy ward is higher up: but have ye slain  
The damsel's champion?' and the damsel cried,

'No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven  
With all disaster unto thine and thee!  
For both thy younger brethren have gone down  
Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star;  
Art thou not old?'

'Old, damsel, old and hard,  
Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys.'  
Said Gareth, 'Old, and over-bold in brag!  
But that same strength which threw the Morning Star  
Can throw the Evening.'

Then that other blew  
A hard and deadly note upon the horn.  
'Approach and arm me!' With slow steps from out  
An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stained  
Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,  
And armed him in old arms, and brought a helm  
With but a drying evergreen for crest,  
And gave a shield whereon the Star of Even  
Half-tarnished and half-bright, his emblem, shone.  
But when it glittered o'er the saddle-bow,  
They madly hurled together on the bridge;  
And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,  
There met him drawn, and overthrew him again,  
But up like fire he started: and as oft  
As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,  
So many a time he vaulted up again;  
Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,  
Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,  
Labour'd within him, for he seemed as one  
That all in later, sadder age begins  
To war against ill uses of a life,  
But these from all his life arise, and cry,

'Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down!'  
He half despairs; so Gareth seemed to strike  
Vainly, the damsel clamouring all the while,  
'Well done, knave-knight, well-stricken, O good knight-knave--  
O knave, as noble as any of all the knights--  
Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied--  
Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round--  
His arms are old, he trusts the hardened skin--  
Strike--strike--the wind will never change again.'  
And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote,  
And hewed great pieces of his armour off him,  
But lashed in vain against the hardened skin,  
And could not wholly bring him under, more  
Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,  
The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs  
For ever; till at length Sir Gareth's brand  
Clashed his, and brake it utterly to the hilt.  
'I have thee now;' but forth that other sprang,  
And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms  
Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,  
Strangled, but straining even his uttermost  
Cast, and so hurled him headlong o'er the bridge  
Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,  
'Lead, and I follow.'

But the damsel said,  
'I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;  
Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves.

"O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,  
O rainbow with three colours after rain,  
Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me."

'Sir,--and, good faith, I fain had added--Knight,  
But that I heard thee call thyself a knave,--  
Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled,  
Missaid thee; noble I am; and thought the King  
Scorned me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,  
For thou hast ever answered courteously,  
And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal  
As any of Arthur's best, but, being knave,  
Hast mazed my wit: I marvel what thou art.'

'Damsel,' he said, 'you be not all to blame,  
Saving that you mistrusted our good King  
Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one  
Not fit to cope your quest. You said your say;  
Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold  
He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet  
To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets  
His heart be stirred with any foolish heat  
At any gentle damsel's waywardness.  
Shamed? care not! thy foul sayings fought for me:

And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks  
There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,  
Hath force to quell me.'

Nigh upon that hour  
When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,  
Lets down his other leg, and stretching, dreams  
Of goodly supper in the distant pool,  
Then turned the noble damsel smiling at him,  
And told him of a cavern hard at hand,  
Where bread and baken meats and good red wine  
Of Southland, which the Lady Lyonors  
Had sent her coming champion, waited him.

Anon they past a narrow comb wherein  
Where slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse  
Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues.  
'Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,  
Whose holy hand hath fashioned on the rock  
The war of Time against the soul of man.  
And yon four fools have sucked their allegory  
From these damp walls, and taken but the form.  
Know ye not these?' and Gareth lookt and read--  
In letters like to those the vexillary  
Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt--  
'PHOSPHORUS,' then 'MERIDIES'--'HESPERUS'--  
'NOX'--'MORS,' beneath five figures, armed men,  
Slab after slab, their faces forward all,  
And running down the Soul, a Shape that fled  
With broken wings, torn raiment and loose hair,  
For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.  
'Follow the faces, and we find it. Look,  
Who comes behind?'

For one--delayed at first  
Through helping back the dislocated Kay  
To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,  
The damsel's headlong error through the wood--  
Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops--  
His blue shield-lions covered--softly drew  
Behind the twain, and when he saw the star  
Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,  
'Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend.'  
And Gareth crying pricked against the cry;  
But when they closed--in a moment--at one touch  
Of that skilled spear, the wonder of the world--  
Went sliding down so easily, and fell,  
That when he found the grass within his hands  
He laughed; the laughter jarred upon Lynette:  
Harshly she asked him, 'Shamed and overthrown,  
And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,  
Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?'  
'Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son  
Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent,

And victor of the bridges and the ford,  
And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom  
I know not, all through mere unhappiness--  
Device and sorcery and unhappiness--  
Out, sword; we are thrown!' And Lancelot answered, 'Prince,  
O Gareth--through the mere unhappiness  
Of one who came to help thee, not to harm,  
Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole,  
As on the day when Arthur knighted him.'

Then Gareth, 'Thou--Lancelot!--thine the hand  
That threw me? An some chance to mar the boast  
Thy brethren of thee make--which could not chance--  
Had sent thee down before a lesser spear,  
Shamed had I been, and sad--O Lancelot--thou!'

Whereat the maiden, petulant, 'Lancelot,  
Why came ye not, when called? and wherefore now  
Come ye, not called? I gloried in my knave,  
Who being still rebuked, would answer still  
Courteous as any knight--but now, if knight,  
The marvel dies, and leaves me fooled and tricked,  
And only wondering wherefore played upon:  
And doubtful whether I and mine be scorned.  
Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall,  
In Arthur's presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool,  
I hate thee and for ever.'

And Lancelot said,  
'Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! knight art thou  
To the King's best wish. O damsel, be you wise  
To call him shamed, who is but overthrown?  
Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.  
Victor from vanquished issues at the last,  
And overthrower from being overthrown.  
With sword we have not striven; and thy good horse  
And thou are weary; yet not less I felt  
Thy manhood through that wearied lance of thine.  
Well hast thou done; for all the stream is freed,  
And thou hast wreaked his justice on his foes,  
And when reviled, hast answered graciously,  
And makest merry when overthrown. Prince, Knight  
Hail, Knight and Prince, and of our Table Round!'

And then when turning to Lynette he told  
The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said,  
'Ay well--ay well--for worse than being fooled  
Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave,  
Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks  
And forage for the horse, and flint for fire.  
But all about it flies a honeysuckle.  
Seek, till we find.' And when they sought and found,  
Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life

Past into sleep; on whom the maiden gazed.  
'Sound sleep be thine! sound cause to sleep hast thou.  
Wake lusty! Seem I not as tender to him  
As any mother? Ay, but such a one  
As all day long hath rated at her child,  
And vext his day, but blesses him asleep--  
Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle  
In the hushed night, as if the world were one  
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness!  
O Lancelot, Lancelot'--and she clapt her hands--  
'Full merry am I to find my goodly knave  
Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I,  
Else yon black felon had not let me pass,  
To bring thee back to do the battle with him.  
Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first;  
Who doubts thee victor? so will my knight-knave  
Miss the full flower of this accomplishment.'

Said Lancelot, 'Peradventure he, you name,  
May know my shield. Let Gareth, an he will,  
Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh,  
Not to be spurred, loving the battle as well  
As he that rides him.' 'Lancelot-like,' she said,  
'Courteous in this, Lord Lancelot, as in all.'

And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutched the shield;  
'Ramp ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all spears  
Are rotten sticks! ye seem agape to roar!  
Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord!--  
Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.  
O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these  
Streams virtue--fire--through one that will not shame  
Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.  
Hence: let us go.'

Silent the silent field  
They traversed. Arthur's harp though summer-wan,  
In counter motion to the clouds, allured  
The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege.  
A star shot: 'Lo,' said Gareth, 'the foe falls!'  
An owl whoopt: 'Hark the victor pealing there!'  
Suddenly she that rode upon his left  
Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying,  
'Yield, yield him this again: 'tis he must fight:  
I curse the tongue that all through yesterday  
Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now  
To lend thee horse and shield: wonders ye have done;  
Miracles ye cannot: here is glory enow  
In having flung the three: I see thee maimed,  
Mangled: I swear thou canst not fling the fourth.'

'And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know.  
You cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice,

Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery  
Appal me from the quest.'

'Nay, Prince,' she cried,  
'God wot, I never looked upon the face,  
Seeing he never rides abroad by day;  
But watched him have I like a phantom pass  
Chilling the night: nor have I heard the voice.  
Always he made his mouthpiece of a page  
Who came and went, and still reported him  
As closing in himself the strength of ten,  
And when his anger tare him, massacring  
Man, woman, lad and girl--yea, the soft babe!  
Some hold that he hath swallowed infant flesh,  
Monster! O Prince, I went for Lancelot first,  
The quest is Lancelot's: give him back the shield.'

Said Gareth laughing, 'An he fight for this,  
Belike he wins it as the better man:  
Thus--and not else!'

But Lancelot on him urged  
All the devisings of their chivalry  
When one might meet a mightier than himself;  
How best to manage horse, lance, sword and shield,  
And so fill up the gap where force might fail  
With skill and fineness. Instant were his words.

Then Gareth, 'Here be rules. I know but one--  
To dash against mine enemy and win.  
Yet have I seen thee victor in the joust,  
And seen thy way.' 'Heaven help thee,' sighed Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud that grew  
To thunder-gloom palling all stars, they rode  
In converse till she made her palfrey halt,  
Lifted an arm, and softly whispered, 'There.'  
And all the three were silent seeing, pitched  
Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,  
A huge pavilion like a mountain peak  
Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge,  
Black, with black banner, and a long black horn  
Beside it hanging; which Sir Gareth graspt,  
And so, before the two could hinder him,  
Sent all his heart and breath through all the horn.  
Echoed the walls; a light twinkled; anon  
Came lights and lights, and once again he blew;  
Whereon were hollow tramlings up and down  
And muffled voices heard, and shadows past;  
Till high above him, circled with her maids,  
The Lady Lyonors at a window stood,  
Beautiful among lights, and waving to him  
White hands, and courtesy; but when the Prince

Three times had blown--after long hush--at last--  
The huge pavilion slowly yielded up,  
Through those black foldings, that which housed therein.  
High on a nightblack horse, in nightblack arms,  
With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,  
And crowned with fleshless laughter--some ten steps--  
In the half-light--through the dim dawn--advanced  
The monster, and then paused, and spake no word.

But Gareth spake and all indignantly,  
'Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,  
Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,  
But must, to make the terror of thee more,  
Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries  
Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,  
Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers  
As if for pity?' But he spake no word;  
Which set the horror higher: a maiden swooned;  
The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept,  
As doomed to be the bride of Night and Death;  
Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm;  
And even Sir Lancelot through his warm blood felt  
Ice strike, and all that marked him were aghast.

At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neighed,  
And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with him.  
Then those that did not blink the terror, saw  
That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.  
But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.  
Half fell to right and half to left and lay.  
Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm  
As throughly as the skull; and out from this  
Issued the bright face of a blooming boy  
Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying, 'Knight,  
Slay me not: my three brethren bad me do it,  
To make a horror all about the house,  
And stay the world from Lady Lyonors.  
They never dreamed the passes would be past.'  
Answered Sir Gareth graciously to one  
Not many a moon his younger, 'My fair child,  
What madness made thee challenge the chief knight  
Of Arthur's hall?' 'Fair Sir, they bad me do it.  
They hate the King, and Lancelot, the King's friend,  
They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,  
They never dreamed the passes could be past.'

Then sprang the happier day from underground;  
And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance  
And revel and song, made merry over Death,  
As being after all their foolish fears  
And horrors only proven a blooming boy.  
So large mirth lived and Gareth won the quest.

And he that told the tale in older times  
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,  
But he, that told it later, says Lynette.

#### The Marriage of Geraint

The brave Geraint, a knight of Arthur's court,  
A tributary prince of Devon, one  
Of that great Order of the Table Round,  
Had married Enid, Yniol's only child,  
And loved her, as he loved the light of Heaven.  
And as the light of Heaven varies, now  
At sunrise, now at sunset, now by night  
With moon and trembling stars, so loved Geraint  
To make her beauty vary day by day,  
In crimsons and in purples and in gems.  
And Enid, but to please her husband's eye,  
Who first had found and loved her in a state  
Of broken fortunes, daily fronted him  
In some fresh splendour; and the Queen herself,  
Grateful to Prince Geraint for service done,  
Loved her, and often with her own white hands  
Arrayed and decked her, as the loveliest,  
Next after her own self, in all the court.  
And Enid loved the Queen, and with true heart  
Adored her, as the stateliest and the best  
And loveliest of all women upon earth.  
And seeing them so tender and so close,  
Long in their common love rejoiced Geraint.  
But when a rumour rose about the Queen,  
Touching her guilty love for Lancelot,  
Though yet there lived no proof, nor yet was heard  
The world's loud whisper breaking into storm,  
Not less Geraint believed it; and there fell  
A horror on him, lest his gentle wife,  
Through that great tenderness for Guinevere,  
Had suffered, or should suffer any taint  
In nature: wherefore going to the King,  
He made this pretext, that his principedom lay  
Close on the borders of a territory,  
Wherein were bandit earls, and caitiff knights,  
Assassins, and all flyers from the hand  
Of Justice, and whatever loathes a law:  
And therefore, till the King himself should please  
To cleanse this common sewer of all his realm,  
He craved a fair permission to depart,  
And there defend his marches; and the King  
Mused for a little on his plea, but, last,



Allowing it, the Prince and Enid rode,  
And fifty knights rode with them, to the shores  
Of Severn, and they past to their own land;  
Where, thinking, that if ever yet was wife  
True to her lord, mine shall be so to me,  
He compassed her with sweet observances  
And worship, never leaving her, and grew  
Forgetful of his promise to the King,  
Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,  
Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,  
Forgetful of his glory and his name,  
Forgetful of his pryncedom and its cares.  
And this forgetfulness was hateful to her.  
And by and by the people, when they met  
In twos and threes, or fuller companies,  
Began to scoff and jeer and babble of him  
As of a prince whose manhood was all gone,  
And molten down in mere uxoriousness.  
And this she gathered from the people's eyes:  
This too the women who attired her head,  
To please her, dwelling on his boundless love,  
Told Enid, and they saddened her the more:  
And day by day she thought to tell Geraint,  
But could not out of bashful delicacy;  
While he that watched her sadden, was the more  
Suspicious that her nature had a taint.

At last, it chanced that on a summer morn  
(They sleeping each by either) the new sun  
Beat through the blindless casement of the room,  
And heated the strong warrior in his dreams;  
Who, moving, cast the coverlet aside,  
And bared the knotted column of his throat,  
The massive square of his heroic breast,  
And arms on which the standing muscle sloped,  
As slopes a wild brook o'er a little stone,  
Running too vehemently to break upon it.  
And Enid woke and sat beside the couch,  
Admiring him, and thought within herself,  
Was ever man so grandly made as he?  
Then, like a shadow, past the people's talk  
And accusation of uxoriousness  
Across her mind, and bowing over him,  
Low to her own heart piteously she said:

'O noble breast and all-puissant arms,  
Am I the cause, I the poor cause that men  
Reproach you, saying all your force is gone?  
I am the cause, because I dare not speak  
And tell him what I think and what they say.  
And yet I hate that he should linger here;  
I cannot love my lord and not his name.  
Far liefer had I gird his harness on him,

And ride with him to battle and stand by,  
And watch his mightful hand striking great blows  
At caitiffs and at wrongers of the world.  
Far better were I laid in the dark earth,  
Not hearing any more his noble voice,  
Not to be folded more in these dear arms,  
And darkened from the high light in his eyes,  
Than that my lord through me should suffer shame.  
Am I so bold, and could I so stand by,  
And see my dear lord wounded in the strife,  
And maybe pierced to death before mine eyes,  
And yet not dare to tell him what I think,  
And how men slur him, saying all his force  
Is melted into mere effeminacy?  
O me, I fear that I am no true wife.'

Half inwardly, half audibly she spoke,  
And the strong passion in her made her weep  
True tears upon his broad and naked breast,  
And these awoke him, and by great mischance  
He heard but fragments of her later words,  
And that she feared she was not a true wife.  
And then he thought, 'In spite of all my care,  
For all my pains, poor man, for all my pains,  
She is not faithful to me, and I see her  
Weeping for some gay knight in Arthur's hall.'  
Then though he loved and revered her too much  
To dream she could be guilty of foul act,  
Right through his manful breast darted the pang  
That makes a man, in the sweet face of her  
Whom he loves most, lonely and miserable.  
At this he hurled his huge limbs out of bed,  
And shook his drowsy squire awake and cried,  
'My charger and her palfrey;' then to her,  
'I will ride forth into the wilderness;  
For though it seems my spurs are yet to win,  
I have not fallen so low as some would wish.  
And thou, put on thy worst and meanest dress  
And ride with me.' And Enid asked, amazed,  
'If Enid errs, let Enid learn her fault.'  
But he, 'I charge thee, ask not, but obey.'  
Then she bethought her of a faded silk,  
A faded mantle and a faded veil,  
And moving toward a cedarn cabinet,  
Wherein she kept them folded reverently  
With sprigs of summer laid between the folds,  
She took them, and arrayed herself therein,  
Remembering when first he came on her  
Drest in that dress, and how he loved her in it,  
And all her foolish fears about the dress,  
And all his journey to her, as himself  
Had told her, and their coming to the court.

For Arthur on the Whitsuntide before  
Held court at old Caerleon upon Usk.  
There on a day, he sitting high in hall,  
Before him came a forester of Dean,  
Wet from the woods, with notice of a hart  
Taller than all his fellows, milky-white,  
First seen that day: these things he told the King.  
Then the good King gave order to let blow  
His horns for hunting on the morrow morn.  
And when the King petitioned for his leave  
To see the hunt, allowed it easily.  
So with the morning all the court were gone.  
But Guinevere lay late into the morn,  
Lost in sweet dreams, and dreaming of her love  
For Lancelot, and forgetful of the hunt;  
But rose at last, a single maiden with her,  
Took horse, and forded Usk, and gained the wood;  
There, on a little knoll beside it, stayed  
Waiting to hear the hounds; but heard instead  
A sudden sound of hoofs, for Prince Geraint,  
Late also, wearing neither hunting-dress  
Nor weapon, save a golden-hilted brand,  
Came quickly flashing through the shallow ford  
Behind them, and so galloped up the knoll.  
A purple scarf, at either end whereof  
There swung an apple of the purest gold,  
Swayed round about him, as he galloped up  
To join them, glancing like a dragon-fly  
In summer suit and silks of holiday.  
Low bowed the tributary Prince, and she,  
Sweet and statelily, and with all grace  
Of womanhood and queenhood, answered him:  
'Late, late, Sir Prince,' she said, 'later than we!'  
'Yea, noble Queen,' he answered, 'and so late  
That I but come like you to see the hunt,  
Not join it.' 'Therefore wait with me,' she said;  
'For on this little knoll, if anywhere,  
There is good chance that we shall hear the hounds:  
Here often they break covert at our feet.'

And while they listened for the distant hunt,  
And chiefly for the baying of Cavall,  
King Arthur's hound of deepest mouth, there rode  
Full slowly by a knight, lady, and dwarf;  
Whereof the dwarf lagged latest, and the knight  
Had vizor up, and showed a youthful face,  
Imperious, and of haughtiest lineaments.  
And Guinevere, not mindful of his face  
In the King's hall, desired his name, and sent  
Her maiden to demand it of the dwarf;  
Who being vicious, old and irritable,  
And doubling all his master's vice of pride,  
Made answer sharply that she should not know.

'Then will I ask it of himself,' she said.  
'Nay, by my faith, thou shalt not,' cried the dwarf;  
'Thou art not worthy even to speak of him;'  
And when she put her horse toward the knight,  
Struck at her with his whip, and she returned  
Indignant to the Queen; whereat Geraint  
Exclaiming, 'Surely I will learn the name,'  
Made sharply to the dwarf, and asked it of him,  
Who answered as before; and when the Prince  
Had put his horse in motion toward the knight,  
Struck at him with his whip, and cut his cheek.  
The Prince's blood spirted upon the scarf,  
Dyeing it; and his quick, instinctive hand  
Caught at the hilt, as to abolish him:  
But he, from his exceeding manfulness  
And pure nobility of temperament,  
Wroth to be wroth at such a worm, refrained  
From even a word, and so returning said:

'I will avenge this insult, noble Queen,  
Done in your maiden's person to yourself:  
And I will track this vermin to their earths:  
For though I ride unarmed, I do not doubt  
To find, at some place I shall come at, arms  
On loan, or else for pledge; and, being found,  
Then will I fight him, and will break his pride,  
And on the third day will again be here,  
So that I be not fallen in fight. Farewell.'

'Farewell, fair Prince,' answered the stately Queen.  
'Be prosperous in this journey, as in all;  
And may you light on all things that you love,  
And live to wed with her whom first you love:  
But ere you wed with any, bring your bride,  
And I, were she the daughter of a king,  
Yea, though she were a beggar from the hedge,  
Will clothe her for her bridals like the sun.'

And Prince Geraint, now thinking that he heard  
The noble hart at bay, now the far horn,  
A little vexed at losing of the hunt,  
A little at the vile occasion, rode,  
By ups and downs, through many a grassy glade  
And valley, with fixt eye following the three.  
At last they issued from the world of wood,  
And climbed upon a fair and even ridge,  
And showed themselves against the sky, and sank.  
And thither there came Geraint, and underneath  
Beheld the long street of a little town  
In a long valley, on one side whereof,  
White from the mason's hand, a fortress rose;  
And on one side a castle in decay,  
Beyond a bridge that spanned a dry ravine:

And out of town and valley came a noise  
As of a broad brook o'er a shingly bed  
Brawling, or like a clamour of the rooks  
At distance, ere they settle for the night.

And onward to the fortress rode the three,  
And entered, and were lost behind the walls.  
'So,' thought Geraint, 'I have tracked him to his earth.'  
And down the long street riding wearily,  
Found every hostel full, and everywhere  
Was hammer laid to hoof, and the hot hiss  
And bustling whistle of the youth who scoured  
His master's armour; and of such a one  
He asked, 'What means the tumult in the town?'  
Who told him, scouring still, 'The sparrow-hawk!'  
Then riding close behind an ancient churl,  
Who, smitten by the dusty sloping beam,  
Went sweating underneath a sack of corn,  
Asked yet once more what meant the hubbub here?  
Who answered gruffly, 'Ugh! the sparrow-hawk.'  
Then riding further past an armourer's,  
Who, with back turned, and bowed above his work,  
Sat riveting a helmet on his knee,  
He put the self-same query, but the man  
Not turning round, nor looking at him, said:  
'Friend, he that labours for the sparrow-hawk  
Has little time for idle questioners.'  
Whereat Geraint flashed into sudden spleen:  
'A thousand pips eat up your sparrow-hawk!  
Tits, wrens, and all winged nothings peck him dead!  
Ye think the rustic cackle of your bourg  
The murmur of the world! What is it to me?  
O wretched set of sparrows, one and all,  
Who pipe of nothing but of sparrow-hawks!  
Speak, if ye be not like the rest, hawk-mad,  
Where can I get me harbourage for the night?  
And arms, arms, arms to fight my enemy? Speak!'  
Whereat the armourer turning all amazed  
And seeing one so gay in purple silks,  
Came forward with the helmet yet in hand  
And answered, 'Pardon me, O stranger knight;  
We hold a tourney here tomorrow morn,  
And there is scanty time for half the work.  
Arms? truth! I know not: all are wanted here.  
Harbourage? truth, good truth, I know not, save,  
It may be, at Earl Yniol's, o'er the bridge  
Yonder.' He spoke and fell to work again.

Then rode Geraint, a little spleenful yet,  
Across the bridge that spanned the dry ravine.  
There musing sat the hoary-headed Earl,  
(His dress a suit of frayed magnificence,  
Once fit for feasts of ceremony) and said:

'Whither, fair son?' to whom Geraint replied,  
'O friend, I seek a harbourage for the night.'  
Then Yniol, 'Enter therefore and partake  
The slender entertainment of a house  
Once rich, now poor, but ever open-doored.'  
'Thanks, venerable friend,' replied Geraint;  
'So that ye do not serve me sparrow-hawks  
For supper, I will enter, I will eat  
With all the passion of a twelve hours' fast.'  
Then sighed and smiled the hoary-headed Earl,  
And answered, 'Graver cause than yours is mine  
To curse this hedgerow thief, the sparrow-hawk:  
But in, go in; for save yourself desire it,  
We will not touch upon him even in jest.'

Then rode Geraint into the castle court,  
His charger trampling many a prickly star  
Of sprouted thistle on the broken stones.  
He looked and saw that all was ruinous.  
Here stood a shattered archway plumed with fern;  
And here had fallen a great part of a tower,  
Whole, like a crag that tumbles from the cliff,  
And like a crag was gay with wilding flowers:  
And high above a piece of turret stair,  
Worn by the feet that now were silent, wound  
Bare to the sun, and monstrous ivy-stems  
Claspt the gray walls with hairy-fibred arms,  
And sucked the joining of the stones, and looked  
A knot, beneath, of snakes, aloft, a grove.

And while he waited in the castle court,  
The voice of Enid, Yniol's daughter, rang  
Clear through the open casement of the hall,  
Singing; and as the sweet voice of a bird,  
Heard by the lander in a lonely isle,  
Moves him to think what kind of bird it is  
That sings so delicately clear, and make  
Conjecture of the plumage and the form;  
So the sweet voice of Enid moved Geraint;  
And made him like a man abroad at morn  
When first the liquid note beloved of men  
Comes flying over many a windy wave  
To Britain, and in April suddenly  
Breaks from a coppice gemmed with green and red,  
And he suspends his converse with a friend,  
Or it may be the labour of his hands,  
To think or say, 'There is the nightingale.'  
So fared it with Geraint, who thought and said,  
'Here, by God's grace, is the one voice for me.'

It chanced the song that Enid sang was one  
Of Fortune and her wheel, and Enid sang:

'Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel and lower the proud;  
Turn thy wild wheel through sunshine, storm, and cloud;  
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.

'Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;  
With that wild wheel we go not up or down;  
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.

'Smile and we smile, the lords of many lands;  
Frown and we smile, the lords of our own hands;  
For man is man and master of his fate.

'Turn, turn thy wheel above the staring crowd;  
Thy wheel and thou are shadows in the cloud;  
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.'

'Hark, by the bird's song ye may learn the nest,'  
Said Yniol; 'enter quickly.' Entering then,  
Right o'er a mound of newly-fallen stones,  
The dusky-raftered many-cobwebbed hall,  
He found an ancient dame in dim brocade;  
And near her, like a blossom vermeil-white,  
That lightly breaks a faded flower-sheath,  
Moved the fair Enid, all in faded silk,  
Her daughter. In a moment thought Geraint,  
'Here by God's rood is the one maid for me.'  
But none spake word except the hoary Earl:  
'Enid, the good knight's horse stands in the court;  
Take him to stall, and give him corn, and then  
Go to the town and buy us flesh and wine;  
And we will make us merry as we may.  
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.'

He spake: the Prince, as Enid past him, fain  
To follow, strode a stride, but Yniol caught  
His purple scarf, and held, and said, 'Forbear!  
Rest! the good house, though ruined, O my son,  
Endures not that her guest should serve himself.'  
And reverencing the custom of the house  
Geraint, from utter courtesy, forbore.

So Enid took his charger to the stall;  
And after went her way across the bridge,  
And reached the town, and while the Prince and Earl  
Yet spoke together, came again with one,  
A youth, that following with a costrel bore  
The means of goodly welcome, flesh and wine.  
And Enid brought sweet cakes to make them cheer,  
And in her veil enfolded, manchet bread.  
And then, because their hall must also serve  
For kitchen, boiled the flesh, and spread the board,  
And stood behind, and waited on the three.  
And seeing her so sweet and serviceable,

Geraint had longing in him evermore  
To stoop and kiss the tender little thumb,  
That crost the trencher as she laid it down:  
But after all had eaten, then Geraint,  
For now the wine made summer in his veins,  
Let his eye rove in following, or rest  
On Enid at her lowly handmaid-work,  
Now here, now there, about the dusky hall;  
Then suddenly address the hoary Earl:

'Fair Host and Earl, I pray your courtesy;  
This sparrow-hawk, what is he? tell me of him.  
His name? but no, good faith, I will not have it:  
For if he be the knight whom late I saw  
Ride into that new fortress by your town,  
White from the mason's hand, then have I sworn  
From his own lips to have it--I am Geraint  
Of Devon--for this morning when the Queen  
Sent her own maiden to demand the name,  
His dwarf, a vicious under-shapen thing,  
Struck at her with his whip, and she returned  
Indignant to the Queen; and then I swore  
That I would track this caitiff to his hold,  
And fight and break his pride, and have it of him.  
And all unarmed I rode, and thought to find  
Arms in your town, where all the men are mad;  
They take the rustic murmur of their bourg  
For the great wave that echoes round the world;  
They would not hear me speak: but if ye know  
Where I can light on arms, or if yourself  
Should have them, tell me, seeing I have sworn  
That I will break his pride and learn his name,  
Avenging this great insult done the Queen.'

Then cried Earl Yniol, 'Art thou he indeed,  
Geraint, a name far-sounded among men  
For noble deeds? and truly I, when first  
I saw you moving by me on the bridge,  
Felt ye were somewhat, yea, and by your state  
And presence might have guessed you one of those  
That eat in Arthur's hall in Camelot.  
Nor speak I now from foolish flattery;  
For this dear child hath often heard me praise  
Your feats of arms, and often when I paused  
Hath asked again, and ever loved to hear;  
So grateful is the noise of noble deeds  
To noble hearts who see but acts of wrong:  
O never yet had woman such a pair  
Of suitors as this maiden: first Limours,  
A creature wholly given to brawls and wine,  
Drunk even when he wooed; and be he dead  
I know not, but he past to the wild land.  
The second was your foe, the sparrow-hawk,



My curse, my nephew--I will not let his name  
Slip from my lips if I can help it--he,  
When that I knew him fierce and turbulent  
Refused her to him, then his pride awoke;  
And since the proud man often is the mean,  
He sowed a slander in the common ear,  
Affirming that his father left him gold,  
And in my charge, which was not rendered to him;  
Bribed with large promises the men who served  
About my person, the more easily  
Because my means were somewhat broken into  
Through open doors and hospitality;  
Raised my own town against me in the night  
Before my Enid's birthday, sacked my house;  
From mine own earldom foully ousted me;  
Built that new fort to overawe my friends,  
For truly there are those who love me yet;  
And keeps me in this ruinous castle here,  
Where doubtless he would put me soon to death,  
But that his pride too much despises me:  
And I myself sometimes despise myself;  
For I have let men be, and have their way;  
Am much too gentle, have not used my power:  
Nor know I whether I be very base  
Or very manful, whether very wise  
Or very foolish; only this I know,  
That whatsoever evil happen to me,  
I seem to suffer nothing heart or limb,  
But can endure it all most patiently.'

'Well said, true heart,' replied Geraint, 'but arms,  
That if the sparrow-hawk, this nephew, fight  
In next day's tourney I may break his pride.'

And Yniol answered, 'Arms, indeed, but old  
And rusty, old and rusty, Prince Geraint,  
Are mine, and therefore at thy asking, thine.  
But in this tournament can no man tilt,  
Except the lady he loves best be there.  
Two forks are fixt into the meadow ground,  
And over these is placed a silver wand,  
And over that a golden sparrow-hawk,  
The prize of beauty for the fairest there.  
And this, what knight soever be in field  
Lays claim to for the lady at his side,  
And tilts with my good nephew thereupon,  
Who being apt at arms and big of bone  
Has ever won it for the lady with him,  
And toppling over all antagonism  
Has earned himself the name of sparrow-hawk.'  
But thou, that hast no lady, canst not fight.'

To whom Geraint with eyes all bright replied,

Leaning a little toward him, 'Thy leave!  
Let me lay lance in rest, O noble host,  
For this dear child, because I never saw,  
Though having seen all beauties of our time,  
Nor can see elsewhere, anything so fair.  
And if I fall her name will yet remain  
Untarnished as before; but if I live,  
So aid me Heaven when at mine uttermost,  
As I will make her truly my true wife.'

Then, howsoever patient, Yniol's heart  
Danced in his bosom, seeing better days,  
And looking round he saw not Enid there,  
(Who hearing her own name had stolen away)  
But that old dame, to whom full tenderly  
And folding all her hand in his he said,  
'Mother, a maiden is a tender thing,  
And best by her that bore her understood.  
Go thou to rest, but ere thou go to rest  
Tell her, and prove her heart toward the Prince.'

So spake the kindly-hearted Earl, and she  
With frequent smile and nod departing found,  
Half disarrayed as to her rest, the girl;  
Whom first she kissed on either cheek, and then  
On either shining shoulder laid a hand,  
And kept her off and gazed upon her face,  
And told them all their converse in the hall,  
Proving her heart: but never light and shade  
Coursed one another more on open ground  
Beneath a troubled heaven, than red and pale  
Across the face of Enid hearing her;  
While slowly falling as a scale that falls,  
When weight is added only grain by grain,  
Sank her sweet head upon her gentle breast;  
Nor did she lift an eye nor speak a word,  
Rapt in the fear and in the wonder of it;  
So moving without answer to her rest  
She found no rest, and ever failed to draw  
The quiet night into her blood, but lay  
Contemplating her own unworthiness;  
And when the pale and bloodless east began  
To quicken to the sun, arose, and raised  
Her mother too, and hand in hand they moved  
Down to the meadow where the jousts were held,  
And waited there for Yniol and Geraint.

And thither came the twain, and when Geraint  
Beheld her first in field, awaiting him,  
He felt, were she the prize of bodily force,  
Himself beyond the rest pushing could move  
The chair of Idris. Yniol's rusted arms  
Were on his princely person, but through these

Princelike his bearing shone; and errant knights  
And ladies came, and by and by the town  
Flowed in, and settling circled all the lists.  
And there they fixt the forks into the ground,  
And over these they placed the silver wand,  
And over that the golden sparrow-hawk.  
Then Yniol's nephew, after trumpet blown,  
Spake to the lady with him and proclaimed,  
'Advance and take, as fairest of the fair,  
What I these two years past have won for thee,  
The prize of beauty.' Loudly spake the Prince,  
'Forbear: there is a worthier,' and the knight  
With some surprise and thrice as much disdain  
Turned, and beheld the four, and all his face  
Glowed like the heart of a great fire at Yule,  
So burnt he was with passion, crying out,  
'Do battle for it then,' no more; and thrice  
They clashed together, and thrice they brake their spears.  
Then each, dishorsed and drawing, lashed at each  
So often and with such blows, that all the crowd  
Wondered, and now and then from distant walls  
There came a clapping as of phantom hands.  
So twice they fought, and twice they breathed, and still  
The dew of their great labour, and the blood  
Of their strong bodies, flowing, drained their force.  
But either's force was matched till Yniol's cry,  
'Remember that great insult done the Queen,'  
Increased Geraint's, who heaved his blade aloft,  
And cracked the helmet through, and bit the bone,  
And felled him, and set foot upon his breast,  
And said, 'Thy name?' To whom the fallen man  
Made answer, groaning, 'Edyrn, son of Nudd!  
Ashamed am I that I should tell it thee.  
My pride is broken: men have seen my fall.'  
'Then, Edyrn, son of Nudd,' replied Geraint,  
'These two things shalt thou do, or else thou diest.  
First, thou thyself, with damsel and with dwarf,  
Shalt ride to Arthur's court, and coming there,  
Crave pardon for that insult done the Queen,  
And shalt abide her judgment on it; next,  
Thou shalt give back their earldom to thy kin.  
These two things shalt thou do, or thou shalt die.'  
And Edyrn answered, 'These things will I do,  
For I have never yet been overthrown,  
And thou hast overthrown me, and my pride  
Is broken down, for Enid sees my fall!  
And rising up, he rode to Arthur's court,  
And there the Queen forgave him easily.  
And being young, he changed and came to loathe  
His crime of traitor, slowly drew himself  
Bright from his old dark life, and fell at last  
In the great battle fighting for the King.

But when the third day from the hunting-morn  
Made a low splendour in the world, and wings  
Moved in her ivy, Enid, for she lay  
With her fair head in the dim-yellow light,  
Among the dancing shadows of the birds,  
Woke and bethought her of her promise given  
No later than last eve to Prince Geraint--  
So bent he seemed on going the third day,  
He would not leave her, till her promise given--  
To ride with him this morning to the court,  
And there be made known to the stately Queen,  
And there be wedded with all ceremony.  
At this she cast her eyes upon her dress,  
And thought it never yet had looked so mean.  
For as a leaf in mid-November is  
To what it is in mid-October, seemed  
The dress that now she looked on to the dress  
She looked on ere the coming of Geraint.  
And still she looked, and still the terror grew  
Of that strange bright and dreadful thing, a court,  
All staring at her in her faded silk:  
And softly to her own sweet heart she said:

'This noble prince who won our earldom back,  
So splendid in his acts and his attire,  
Sweet heaven, how much I shall discredit him!  
Would he could tarry with us here awhile,  
But being so beholden to the Prince,  
It were but little grace in any of us,  
Bent as he seemed on going this third day,  
To seek a second favour at his hands.  
Yet if he could but tarry a day or two,  
Myself would work eye dim, and finger lame,  
Far liefer than so much discredit him.'

And Enid fell in longing for a dress  
All branched and flowered with gold, a costly gift  
Of her good mother, given her on the night  
Before her birthday, three sad years ago,  
That night of fire, when Edyrn sacked their house,  
And scattered all they had to all the winds:  
For while the mother showed it, and the two  
Were turning and admiring it, the work  
To both appeared so costly, rose a cry  
That Edyrn's men were on them, and they fled  
With little save the jewels they had on,  
Which being sold and sold had bought them bread:  
And Edyrn's men had caught them in their flight,  
And placed them in this ruin; and she wished  
The Prince had found her in her ancient home;  
Then let her fancy flit across the past,  
And roam the goodly places that she knew;  
And last bethought her how she used to watch,

Near that old home, a pool of golden carp;  
And one was patched and blurred and lustreless  
Among his burnished brethren of the pool;  
And half asleep she made comparison  
Of that and these to her own faded self  
And the gay court, and fell asleep again;  
And dreamt herself was such a faded form  
Among her burnished sisters of the pool;  
But this was in the garden of a king;  
And though she lay dark in the pool, she knew  
That all was bright; that all about were birds  
Of sunny plume in gilded trellis-work;  
That all the turf was rich in plots that looked  
Each like a garnet or a turkis in it;  
And lords and ladies of the high court went  
In silver tissue talking things of state;  
And children of the King in cloth of gold  
Glanced at the doors or gamboled down the walks;  
And while she thought 'They will not see me,' came  
A stately queen whose name was Guinevere,  
And all the children in their cloth of gold  
Ran to her, crying, 'If we have fish at all  
Let them be gold; and charge the gardeners now  
To pick the faded creature from the pool,  
And cast it on the mixen that it die.'  
And therewithal one came and seized on her,  
And Enid started waking, with her heart  
All overshadowed by the foolish dream,  
And lo! it was her mother grasping her  
To get her well awake; and in her hand  
A suit of bright apparel, which she laid  
Flat on the couch, and spoke exultingly:

'See here, my child, how fresh the colours look,  
How fast they hold like colours of a shell  
That keeps the wear and polish of the wave.  
Why not? It never yet was worn, I trow:  
Look on it, child, and tell me if ye know it.'

And Enid looked, but all confused at first,  
Could scarce divide it from her foolish dream:  
Then suddenly she knew it and rejoiced,  
And answered, 'Yea, I know it; your good gift,  
So sadly lost on that unhappy night;  
Your own good gift!' 'Yea, surely,' said the dame,  
'And gladly given again this happy morn.  
For when the jousts were ended yesterday,  
Went Yniol through the town, and everywhere  
He found the sack and plunder of our house  
All scattered through the houses of the town;  
And gave command that all which once was ours  
Should now be ours again: and yester-eve,  
While ye were talking sweetly with your Prince,

Came one with this and laid it in my hand,  
For love or fear, or seeking favour of us,  
Because we have our earldom back again.  
And yester-eve I would not tell you of it,  
But kept it for a sweet surprise at morn.  
Yea, truly is it not a sweet surprise?  
For I myself unwillingly have worn  
My faded suit, as you, my child, have yours,  
And howsoever patient, Yniol his.  
Ah, dear, he took me from a goodly house,  
With store of rich apparel, sumptuous fare,  
And page, and maid, and squire, and seneschal,  
And pastime both of hawk and hound, and all  
That appertains to noble maintenance.  
Yea, and he brought me to a goodly house;  
But since our fortune swerved from sun to shade,  
And all through that young traitor, cruel need  
Constrained us, but a better time has come;  
So clothe yourself in this, that better fits  
Our mended fortunes and a Prince's bride:  
For though ye won the prize of fairest fair,  
And though I heard him call you fairest fair,  
Let never maiden think, however fair,  
She is not fairer in new clothes than old.  
And should some great court-lady say, the Prince  
Hath picked a ragged-robin from the hedge,  
And like a madman brought her to the court,  
Then were ye shamed, and, worse, might shame the Prince  
To whom we are beholden; but I know,  
That when my dear child is set forth at her best,  
That neither court nor country, though they sought  
Through all the provinces like those of old  
That lighted on Queen Esther, has her match.'

Here ceased the kindly mother out of breath;  
And Enid listened brightening as she lay;  
Then, as the white and glittering star of morn  
Parts from a bank of snow, and by and by  
Slips into golden cloud, the maiden rose,  
And left her maiden couch, and robed herself,  
Helped by the mother's careful hand and eye,  
Without a mirror, in the gorgeous gown;  
Who, after, turned her daughter round, and said,  
She never yet had seen her half so fair;  
And called her like that maiden in the tale,  
Whom Gwydion made by glamour out of flowers  
And sweeter than the bride of Cassivelaun,  
Flur, for whose love the Roman Caesar first  
Invaded Britain, 'But we beat him back,  
As this great Prince invaded us, and we,  
Not beat him back, but welcomed him with joy  
And I can scarcely ride with you to court,  
For old am I, and rough the ways and wild;

But Yniol goes, and I full oft shall dream  
I see my princess as I see her now,  
Clothed with my gift, and gay among the gay.'

But while the women thus rejoiced, Geraint  
Woke where he slept in the high hall, and called  
For Enid, and when Yniol made report  
Of that good mother making Enid gay  
In such apparel as might well beseem  
His princess, or indeed the stately Queen,  
He answered: 'Earl, entreat her by my love,  
Albeit I give no reason but my wish,  
That she ride with me in her faded silk.'  
Yniol with that hard message went; it fell  
Like flaws in summer laying lusty corn:  
For Enid, all abashed she knew not why,  
Dared not to glance at her good mother's face,  
But silently, in all obedience,  
Her mother silent too, nor helping her,  
Laid from her limbs the costly-broidered gift,  
And robed them in her ancient suit again,  
And so descended. Never man rejoiced  
More than Geraint to greet her thus attired;  
And glancing all at once as keenly at her  
As careful robins eye the delver's toil,  
Made her cheek burn and either eyelid fall,  
But rested with her sweet face satisfied;  
Then seeing cloud upon the mother's brow,  
Her by both hands she caught, and sweetly said,

'O my new mother, be not wroth or grieved  
At thy new son, for my petition to her.  
When late I left Caerleon, our great Queen,  
In words whose echo lasts, they were so sweet,  
Made promise, that whatever bride I brought,  
Herself would clothe her like the sun in Heaven.  
Thereafter, when I reached this ruined hall,  
Beholding one so bright in dark estate,  
I vowed that could I gain her, our fair Queen,  
No hand but hers, should make your Enid burst  
Sunlike from cloud--and likewise thought perhaps,  
That service done so graciously would bind  
The two together; fain I would the two  
Should love each other: how can Enid find  
A nobler friend? Another thought was mine;  
I came among you here so suddenly,  
That though her gentle presence at the lists  
Might well have served for proof that I was loved,  
I doubted whether daughter's tenderness,  
Or easy nature, might not let itself  
Be moulded by your wishes for her weal;  
Or whether some false sense in her own self  
Of my contrasting brightness, overbore

Her fancy dwelling in this dusky hall;  
And such a sense might make her long for court  
And all its perilous glories: and I thought,  
That could I somehow prove such force in her  
Linked with such love for me, that at a word  
(No reason given her) she could cast aside  
A splendour dear to women, new to her,  
And therefore dearer; or if not so new,  
Yet therefore tenfold dearer by the power  
Of intermitted usage; then I felt  
That I could rest, a rock in ebbs and flows,  
Fixt on her faith. Now, therefore, I do rest,  
A prophet certain of my prophecy,  
That never shadow of mistrust can cross  
Between us. Grant me pardon for my thoughts:  
And for my strange petition I will make  
Amends hereafter by some gaudy-day,  
When your fair child shall wear your costly gift  
Beside your own warm hearth, with, on her knees,  
Who knows? another gift of the high God,  
Which, maybe, shall have learned to lisp you thanks.'

He spoke: the mother smiled, but half in tears,  
Then brought a mantle down and wrapt her in it,  
And claspt and kissed her, and they rode away.

Now thrice that morning Guinevere had climbed  
The giant tower, from whose high crest, they say,  
Men saw the goodly hills of Somerset,  
And white sails flying on the yellow sea;  
But not to goodly hill or yellow sea  
Looked the fair Queen, but up the vale of Usk,  
By the flat meadow, till she saw them come;  
And then descending met them at the gates,  
Embraced her with all welcome as a friend,  
And did her honour as the Prince's bride,  
And clothed her for her bridals like the sun;  
And all that week was old Caerleon gay,  
For by the hands of Dubric, the high saint,  
They twain were wedded with all ceremony.

And this was on the last year's Whitsuntide.  
But Enid ever kept the faded silk,  
Remembering how first he came on her,  
Drest in that dress, and how he loved her in it,  
And all her foolish fears about the dress,  
And all his journey toward her, as himself  
Had told her, and their coming to the court.

And now this morning when he said to her,  
'Put on your worst and meanest dress,' she found  
And took it, and arrayed herself therein.



## Geraint and Enid

O purblind race of miserable men,  
How many among us at this very hour  
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,  
By taking true for false, or false for true;  
Here, through the feeble twilight of this world  
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach  
That other, where we see as we are seen!

So fared it with Geraint, who issuing forth  
That morning, when they both had got to horse,  
Perhaps because he loved her passionately,  
And felt that tempest brooding round his heart,  
Which, if he spoke at all, would break perforce  
Upon a head so dear in thunder, said:  
'Not at my side. I charge thee ride before,  
Ever a good way on before; and this  
I charge thee, on thy duty as a wife,  
Whatever happens, not to speak to me,  
No, not a word!' and Enid was aghast;  
And forth they rode, but scarce three paces on,  
When crying out, 'Effeminate as I am,  
I will not fight my way with gilded arms,  
All shall be iron;' he loosed a mighty purse,  
Hung at his belt, and hurled it toward the squire.  
So the last sight that Enid had of home  
Was all the marble threshold flashing, strown  
With gold and scattered coinage, and the squire  
Chafing his shoulder: then he cried again,  
'To the wilds!' and Enid leading down the tracks  
Through which he bad her lead him on, they past  
The marches, and by bandit-haunted holds,  
Gray swamps and pools, waste places of the hern,  
And wildernesses, perilous paths, they rode:  
Round was their pace at first, but slackened soon:  
A stranger meeting them had surely thought  
They rode so slowly and they looked so pale,  
That each had suffered some exceeding wrong.  
For he was ever saying to himself,  
'O I that wasted time to tend upon her,  
To compass her with sweet observances,  
To dress her beautifully and keep her true'--  
And there he broke the sentence in his heart  
Abruptly, as a man upon his tongue  
May break it, when his passion masters him.  
And she was ever praying the sweet heavens  
To save her dear lord whole from any wound.

And ever in her mind she cast about  
For that unnoticed failing in herself,  
Which made him look so cloudy and so cold;  
Till the great plover's human whistle amazed  
Her heart, and glancing round the waste she feared  
In ever wavering brake an ambuscade.  
Then thought again, 'If there be such in me,  
I might amend it by the grace of Heaven,  
If he would only speak and tell me of it.'

But when the fourth part of the day was gone,  
Then Enid was aware of three tall knights  
On horseback, wholly armed, behind a rock  
In shadow, waiting for them, caitiffs all;  
And heard one crying to his fellow, 'Look,  
Here comes a laggard hanging down his head,  
Who seems no bolder than a beaten hound;  
Come, we will slay him and will have his horse  
And armour, and his damsel shall be ours.'

Then Enid pondered in her heart, and said:  
'I will go back a little to my lord,  
And I will tell him all their caitiff talk;  
For, be he wroth even to slaying me,  
Far liefer by his dear hand had I die,  
Than that my lord should suffer loss or shame.'

Then she went back some paces of return,  
Met his full frown timidly firm, and said;  
'My lord, I saw three bandits by the rock  
Waiting to fall on you, and heard them boast  
That they would slay you, and possess your horse  
And armour, and your damsel should be theirs.'

He made a wrathful answer: 'Did I wish  
Your warning or your silence? one command  
I laid upon you, not to speak to me,  
And thus ye keep it! Well then, look--for now,  
Whether ye wish me victory or defeat,  
Long for my life, or hunger for my death,  
Yourself shall see my vigour is not lost.'

Then Enid waited pale and sorrowful,  
And down upon him bare the bandit three.  
And at the midmost charging, Prince Geraint  
Drove the long spear a cubit through his breast  
And out beyond; and then against his brace  
Of comrades, each of whom had broken on him  
A lance that splintered like an icicle,  
Swung from his brand a windy buffet out  
Once, twice, to right, to left, and stunned the twain  
Or slew them, and dismounting like a man  
That skins the wild beast after slaying him,

Stript from the three dead wolves of woman born  
The three gay suits of armour which they wore,  
And let the bodies lie, but bound the suits  
Of armour on their horses, each on each,  
And tied the bridle-reins of all the three  
Together, and said to her, 'Drive them on  
Before you;' and she drove them through the waste.

He followed nearer; ruth began to work  
Against his anger in him, while he watched  
The being he loved best in all the world,  
With difficulty in mild obedience  
Driving them on: he fain had spoken to her,  
And loosed in words of sudden fire the wrath  
And smouldered wrong that burnt him all within;  
But evermore it seemed an easier thing  
At once without remorse to strike her dead,  
Than to cry 'Halt,' and to her own bright face  
Accuse her of the least immodesty:  
And thus tongue-tied, it made him wroth the more  
That she could speak whom his own ear had heard  
Call herself false: and suffering thus he made  
Minutes an age: but in scarce longer time  
Than at Caerleon the full-tided Usk,  
Before he turn to fall seaward again,  
Pauses, did Enid, keeping watch, behold  
In the first shallow shade of a deep wood,  
Before a gloom of stubborn-shafted oaks,  
Three other horsemen waiting, wholly armed,  
Whereof one seemed far larger than her lord,  
And shook her pulses, crying, 'Look, a prize!  
Three horses and three goodly suits of arms,  
And all in charge of whom? a girl: set on.'  
'Nay,' said the second, 'yonder comes a knight.'  
The third, 'A craven; how he hangs his head.'  
The giant answered merrily, 'Yea, but one?  
Wait here, and when he passes fall upon him.'

And Enid pondered in her heart and said,  
'I will abide the coming of my lord,  
And I will tell him all their villainy.  
My lord is weary with the fight before,  
And they will fall upon him unawares.  
I needs must disobey him for his good;  
How should I dare obey him to his harm?  
Needs must I speak, and though he kill me for it,  
I save a life dearer to me than mine.'

And she abode his coming, and said to him  
With timid firmness, 'Have I leave to speak?'  
He said, 'Ye take it, speaking,' and she spoke.

'There lurk three villains yonder in the wood,

And each of them is wholly armed, and one  
Is larger-limbed than you are, and they say  
That they will fall upon you while ye pass.'

To which he flung a wrathful answer back:  
'And if there were an hundred in the wood,  
And every man were larger-limbed than I,  
And all at once should sally out upon me,  
I swear it would not ruffle me so much  
As you that not obey me. Stand aside,  
And if I fall, cleave to the better man.'

And Enid stood aside to wait the event,  
Not dare to watch the combat, only breathe  
Short fits of prayer, at every stroke a breath.  
And he, she dreaded most, bare down upon him.  
Aimed at the helm, his lance erred; but Geraint's,  
A little in the late encounter strained,  
Struck through the bulky bandit's corselet home,  
And then brake short, and down his enemy rolled,  
And there lay still; as he that tells the tale  
Saw once a great piece of a promontory,  
That had a sapling growing on it, slide  
From the long shore-cliff's windy walls to the beach,  
And there lie still, and yet the sapling grew:  
So lay the man transfixt. His craven pair  
Of comrades making slower at the Prince,  
When now they saw their bulwark fallen, stood;  
On whom the victor, to confound them more,  
Spurred with his terrible war-cry; for as one,  
That listens near a torrent mountain-brook,  
All through the crash of the near cataract hears  
The drumming thunder of the huger fall  
At distance, were the soldiers wont to hear  
His voice in battle, and be kindled by it,  
And foemen scared, like that false pair who turned  
Flying, but, overtaken, died the death  
Themselves had wrought on many an innocent.

Thereon Geraint, dismounting, picked the lance  
That pleased him best, and drew from those dead wolves  
Their three gay suits of armour, each from each,  
And bound them on their horses, each on each,  
And tied the bridle-reins of all the three  
Together, and said to her, 'Drive them on  
Before you,' and she drove them through the wood.

He followed nearer still: the pain she had  
To keep them in the wild ways of the wood,  
Two sets of three laden with jingling arms,  
Together, served a little to disedge  
The sharpness of that pain about her heart:  
And they themselves, like creatures gently born

But into bad hands fallen, and now so long  
By bandits groomed, pricked their light ears, and felt  
Her low firm voice and tender government.

So through the green gloom of the wood they past,  
And issuing under open heavens beheld  
A little town with towers, upon a rock,  
And close beneath, a meadow gemlike chased  
In the brown wild, and mowers mowing in it:  
And down a rocky pathway from the place  
There came a fair-haired youth, that in his hand  
Bare victual for the mowers: and Geraint  
Had ruth again on Enid looking pale:  
Then, moving downward to the meadow ground,  
He, when the fair-haired youth came by him, said,  
'Friend, let her eat; the damsel is so faint.'  
'Yea, willingly,' replied the youth; 'and thou,  
My lord, eat also, though the fare is coarse,  
And only meet for mowers;' then set down  
His basket, and dismounting on the sward  
They let the horses graze, and ate themselves.  
And Enid took a little delicately,  
Less having stomach for it than desire  
To close with her lord's pleasure; but Geraint  
Ate all the mowers' victual unawares,  
And when he found all empty, was amazed;  
And 'Boy,' said he, 'I have eaten all, but take  
A horse and arms for guerdon; choose the best.'  
He, reddening in extremity of delight,  
'My lord, you overpay me fifty-fold.'  
'Ye will be all the wealthier,' cried the Prince.  
'I take it as free gift, then,' said the boy,  
'Not guerdon; for myself can easily,  
While your good damsel rests, return, and fetch  
Fresh victual for these mowers of our Earl;  
For these are his, and all the field is his,  
And I myself am his; and I will tell him  
How great a man thou art: he loves to know  
When men of mark are in his territory:  
And he will have thee to his palace here,  
And serve thee costlier than with mowers' fare.'

Then said Geraint, 'I wish no better fare:  
I never ate with angrier appetite  
Than when I left your mowers dinnerless.  
And into no Earl's palace will I go.  
I know, God knows, too much of palaces!  
And if he want me, let him come to me.  
But hire us some fair chamber for the night,  
And stalling for the horses, and return  
With victual for these men, and let us know.'

'Yea, my kind lord,' said the glad youth, and went,

Held his head high, and thought himself a knight,  
And up the rocky pathway disappeared,  
Leading the horse, and they were left alone.

But when the Prince had brought his errant eyes  
Home from the rock, sideways he let them glance  
At Enid, where she droopt: his own false doom,  
That shadow of mistrust should never cross  
Betwixt them, came upon him, and he sighed;  
Then with another humorous ruth remarked  
The lusty mowers labouring dinnerless,  
And watched the sun blaze on the turning scythe,  
And after nodded sleepily in the heat.  
But she, remembering her old ruined hall,  
And all the windy clamour of the daws  
About her hollow turret, plucked the grass  
There growing longest by the meadow's edge,  
And into many a listless annulet,  
Now over, now beneath her marriage ring,  
Wove and unwove it, till the boy returned  
And told them of a chamber, and they went;  
Where, after saying to her, 'If ye will,  
Call for the woman of the house,' to which  
She answered, 'Thanks, my lord;' the two remained  
Apart by all the chamber's width, and mute  
As two creatures voiceless through the fault of birth,  
Or two wild men supporters of a shield,  
Painted, who stare at open space, nor glance  
The one at other, parted by the shield.

On a sudden, many a voice along the street,  
And heel against the pavement echoing, burst  
Their drowse; and either started while the door,  
Pushed from without, drave backward to the wall,  
And midmost of a rout of roisterers,  
Femininely fair and dissolutely pale,  
Her suitor in old years before Geraint,  
Entered, the wild lord of the place, Limours.  
He moving up with pliant courtliness,  
Greeted Geraint full face, but stealthily,  
In the mid-warmth of welcome and graspt hand,  
Found Enid with the corner of his eye,  
And knew her sitting sad and solitary.  
Then cried Geraint for wine and goodly cheer  
To feed the sudden guest, and sumptuously  
According to his fashion, bad the host  
Call in what men soever were his friends,  
And feast with these in honour of their Earl;  
'And care not for the cost; the cost is mine.'

And wine and food were brought, and Earl Limours  
Drank till he jested with all ease, and told  
Free tales, and took the word and played upon it,

And made it of two colours; for his talk,  
When wine and free companions kindled him,  
Was wont to glance and sparkle like a gem  
Of fifty facets; thus he moved the Prince  
To laughter and his comrades to applause.  
Then, when the Prince was merry, asked Limours,  
'Your leave, my lord, to cross the room, and speak  
To your good damsel there who sits apart,  
And seems so lonely?' 'My free leave,' he said;  
'Get her to speak: she doth not speak to me.'  
Then rose Limours, and looking at his feet,  
Like him who tries the bridge he fears may fail,  
Crossed and came near, lifted adoring eyes,  
Bowed at her side and uttered whisperingly:

'Enid, the pilot star of my lone life,  
Enid, my early and my only love,  
Enid, the loss of whom hath turned me wild--  
What chance is this? how is it I see you here?  
Ye are in my power at last, are in my power.  
Yet fear me not: I call mine own self wild,  
But keep a touch of sweet civility  
Here in the heart of waste and wilderness.  
I thought, but that your father came between,  
In former days you saw me favourably.  
And if it were so do not keep it back:  
Make me a little happier: let me know it:  
Owe you me nothing for a life half-lost?  
Yea, yea, the whole dear debt of all you are.  
And, Enid, you and he, I see with joy,  
Ye sit apart, you do not speak to him,  
You come with no attendance, page or maid,  
To serve you--doth he love you as of old?  
For, call it lovers' quarrels, yet I know  
Though men may bicker with the things they love,  
They would not make them laughable in all eyes,  
Not while they loved them; and your wretched dress,  
A wretched insult on you, dumbly speaks  
Your story, that this man loves you no more.  
Your beauty is no beauty to him now:  
A common chance--right well I know it--palled--  
For I know men: nor will ye win him back,  
For the man's love once gone never returns.  
But here is one who loves you as of old;  
With more exceeding passion than of old:  
Good, speak the word: my followers ring him round:  
He sits unarmed; I hold a finger up;  
They understand: nay; I do not mean blood:  
Nor need ye look so scared at what I say:  
My malice is no deeper than a moat,  
No stronger than a wall: there is the keep;  
He shall not cross us more; speak but the word:  
Or speak it not; but then by Him that made me

The one true lover whom you ever owned,  
I will make use of all the power I have.  
O pardon me! the madness of that hour,  
When first I parted from thee, moves me yet.'

At this the tender sound of his own voice  
And sweet self-pity, or the fancy of it,  
Made his eye moist; but Enid feared his eyes,  
Moist as they were, wine-heated from the feast;  
And answered with such craft as women use,  
Guilty or guiltless, to stave off a chance  
That breaks upon them perilously, and said:

'Earl, if you love me as in former years,  
And do not practise on me, come with morn,  
And snatch me from him as by violence;  
Leave me tonight: I am weary to the death.'

Low at leave-taking, with his brandished plume  
Brushing his instep, bowed the all-amorous Earl,  
And the stout Prince bad him a loud good-night.  
He moving homeward babbled to his men,  
How Enid never loved a man but him,  
Nor cared a broken egg-shell for her lord.

But Enid left alone with Prince Geraint,  
Debating his command of silence given,  
And that she now perforce must violate it,  
Held commune with herself, and while she held  
He fell asleep, and Enid had no heart  
To wake him, but hung o'er him, wholly pleased  
To find him yet unwounded after fight,  
And hear him breathing low and equally.  
Anon she rose, and stepping lightly, heaped  
The pieces of his armour in one place,  
All to be there against a sudden need;  
Then dozed awhile herself, but overtoiled  
By that day's grief and travel, evermore  
Seemed catching at a rootless thorn, and then  
Went slipping down horrible precipices,  
And strongly striking out her limbs awoke;  
Then thought she heard the wild Earl at the door,  
With all his rout of random followers,  
Sound on a dreadful trumpet, summoning her;  
Which was the red cock shouting to the light,  
As the gray dawn stole o'er the dewy world,  
And glimmered on his armour in the room.  
And once again she rose to look at it,  
But touched it unawares: jangling, the casque  
Fell, and he started up and stared at her.  
Then breaking his command of silence given,  
She told him all that Earl Limours had said,  
Except the passage that he loved her not;



Nor left untold the craft herself had used;  
But ended with apology so sweet,  
Low-spoken, and of so few words, and seemed  
So justified by that necessity,  
That though he thought 'was it for him she wept  
In Devon?' he but gave a wrathful groan,  
Saying, 'Your sweet faces make good fellows fools  
And traitors. Call the host and bid him bring  
Charger and palfrey.' So she glided out  
Among the heavy breathings of the house,  
And like a household Spirit at the walls  
Beat, till she woke the sleepers, and returned:  
Then tending her rough lord, though all unmasked,  
In silence, did him service as a squire;  
Till issuing armed he found the host and cried,  
'Thy reckoning, friend?' and ere he learnt it, 'Take  
Five horses and their armours;' and the host  
Suddenly honest, answered in amaze,  
'My lord, I scarce have spent the worth of one!  
'Ye will be all the wealthier,' said the Prince,  
And then to Enid, 'Forward! and today  
I charge you, Enid, more especially,  
What thing soever ye may hear, or see,  
Or fancy (though I count it of small use  
To charge you) that ye speak not but obey.'

And Enid answered, 'Yea, my lord, I know  
Your wish, and would obey; but riding first,  
I hear the violent threats you do not hear,  
I see the danger which you cannot see:  
Then not to give you warning, that seems hard;  
Almost beyond me: yet I would obey.'

'Yea so,' said he, 'do it: be not too wise;  
Seeing that ye are wedded to a man,  
Not all mismated with a yawning clown,  
But one with arms to guard his head and yours,  
With eyes to find you out however far,  
And ears to hear you even in his dreams.'

With that he turned and looked as keenly at her  
As careful robins eye the delver's toil;  
And that within her, which a wanton fool,  
Or hasty judger would have called her guilt,  
Made her cheek burn and either eyelid fall.  
And Geraint looked and was not satisfied.

Then forward by a way which, beaten broad,  
Led from the territory of false Limours  
To the waste earldom of another earl,  
Doorm, whom his shaking vassals called the Bull,  
Went Enid with her sullen follower on.  
Once she looked back, and when she saw him ride

More near by many a rood than yestermorn,  
It wellnigh made her cheerful; till Geraint  
Waving an angry hand as who should say  
'Ye watch me,' saddened all her heart again.  
But while the sun yet beat a dewy blade,  
The sound of many a heavily-galloping hoof  
Smote on her ear, and turning round she saw  
Dust, and the points of lances bicker in it.  
Then not to disobey her lord's behest,  
And yet to give him warning, for he rode  
As if he heard not, moving back she held  
Her finger up, and pointed to the dust.  
At which the warrior in his obstinacy,  
Because she kept the letter of his word,  
Was in a manner pleased, and turning, stood.  
And in the moment after, wild Limours,  
Borne on a black horse, like a thunder-cloud  
Whose skirts are loosened by the breaking storm,  
Half ridden off with by the thing he rode,  
And all in passion uttering a dry shriek,  
Dashed down on Geraint, who closed with him, and bore  
Down by the length of lance and arm beyond  
The crupper, and so left him stunned or dead,  
And overthrew the next that followed him,  
And blindly rushed on all the rout behind.  
But at the flash and motion of the man  
They vanished panic-stricken, like a shoal  
Of darting fish, that on a summer morn  
Adown the crystal dykes at Camelot  
Come slipping o'er their shadows on the sand,  
But if a man who stands upon the brink  
But lift a shining hand against the sun,  
There is not left the twinkle of a fin  
Betwixt the cressy islets white in flower;  
So, scared but at the motion of the man,  
Fled all the boon companions of the Earl,  
And left him lying in the public way;  
So vanish friendships only made in wine.

Then like a stormy sunlight smiled Geraint,  
Who saw the chargers of the two that fell  
Start from their fallen lords, and wildly fly,  
Mixt with the flyers. 'Horse and man,' he said,  
'All of one mind and all right-honest friends!  
Not a hoof left: and I methinks till now  
Was honest--paid with horses and with arms;  
I cannot steal or plunder, no nor beg:  
And so what say ye, shall we strip him there  
Your lover? has your palfrey heart enough  
To bear his armour? shall we fast, or dine?  
No?--then do thou, being right honest, pray  
That we may meet the horsemen of Earl Doorm,  
I too would still be honest.' Thus he said:

And sadly gazing on her bridle-reins,  
And answering not one word, she led the way.

But as a man to whom a dreadful loss  
Falls in a far land and he knows it not,  
But coming back he learns it, and the loss  
So pains him that he sickens nigh to death;  
So fared it with Geraint, who being pricked  
In combat with the follower of Limours,  
Bled underneath his armour secretly,  
And so rode on, nor told his gentle wife  
What ailed him, hardly knowing it himself,  
Till his eye darkened and his helmet wagged;  
And at a sudden swerving of the road,  
Though happily down on a bank of grass,  
The Prince, without a word, from his horse fell.

And Enid heard the clashing of his fall,  
Suddenly came, and at his side all pale  
Dismounting, loosed the fastenings of his arms,  
Nor let her true hand falter, nor blue eye  
Moisten, till she had lighted on his wound,  
And tearing off her veil of faded silk  
Had bared her forehead to the blistering sun,  
And swathed the hurt that drained her dear lord's life.  
Then after all was done that hand could do,  
She rested, and her desolation came  
Upon her, and she wept beside the way.

And many past, but none regarded her,  
For in that realm of lawless turbulence,  
A woman weeping for her murdered mate  
Was cared as much for as a summer shower:  
One took him for a victim of Earl Doorm,  
Nor dared to waste a perilous pity on him:  
Another hurrying past, a man-at-arms,  
Rode on a mission to the bandit Earl;  
Half whistling and half singing a coarse song,  
He drove the dust against her veiless eyes:  
Another, flying from the wrath of Doorm  
Before an ever-fancied arrow, made  
The long way smoke beneath him in his fear;  
At which her palfrey whinnying lifted heel,  
And scoured into the coppices and was lost,  
While the great charger stood, grieved like a man.

But at the point of noon the huge Earl Doorm,  
Broad-faced with under-fringe of russet beard,  
Bound on a foray, rolling eyes of prey,  
Came riding with a hundred lances up;  
But ere he came, like one that hails a ship,  
Cried out with a big voice, 'What, is he dead?'  
'No, no, not dead!' she answered in all haste.

'Would some of your people take him up,  
And bear him hence out of this cruel sun?  
Most sure am I, quite sure, he is not dead.'

Then said Earl Doorm: 'Well, if he be not dead,  
Why wail ye for him thus? ye seem a child.  
And be he dead, I count you for a fool;  
Your wailing will not quicken him: dead or not,  
Ye mar a comely face with idiot tears.  
Yet, since the face is comely--some of you,  
Here, take him up, and bear him to our hall:  
An if he live, we will have him of our band;  
And if he die, why earth has earth enough  
To hide him. See ye take the charger too,  
A noble one.'

He spake, and past away,  
But left two brawny spearmen, who advanced,  
Each growling like a dog, when his good bone  
Seems to be plucked at by the village boys  
Who love to vex him eating, and he fears  
To lose his bone, and lays his foot upon it,  
Gnawing and growling: so the ruffians growled,  
Fearing to lose, and all for a dead man,  
Their chance of booty from the morning's raid,  
Yet raised and laid him on a litter-bier,  
Such as they brought upon their forays out  
For those that might be wounded; laid him on it  
All in the hollow of his shield, and took  
And bore him to the naked hall of Doorm,  
(His gentle charger following him unled)  
And cast him and the bier in which he lay  
Down on an oaken settle in the hall,  
And then departed, hot in haste to join  
Their luckier mates, but growling as before,  
And cursing their lost time, and the dead man,  
And their own Earl, and their own souls, and her.  
They might as well have blest her: she was deaf  
To blessing or to cursing save from one.

So for long hours sat Enid by her lord,  
There in the naked hall, propping his head,  
And chafing his pale hands, and calling to him.  
Till at the last he wakened from his swoon,  
And found his own dear bride propping his head,  
And chafing his faint hands, and calling to him;  
And felt the warm tears falling on his face;  
And said to his own heart, 'She weeps for me:'  
And yet lay still, and feigned himself as dead,  
That he might prove her to the uttermost,  
And say to his own heart, 'She weeps for me.'

But in the falling afternoon returned  
The huge Earl Doorm with plunder to the hall.

His lusty spearmen followed him with noise:  
Each hurling down a heap of things that rang  
Against his pavement, cast his lance aside,  
And doffed his helm: and then there fluttered in,  
Half-bold, half-frighted, with dilated eyes,  
A tribe of women, dressed in many hues,  
And mingled with the spearmen: and Earl Doorm  
Struck with a knife's haft hard against the board,  
And called for flesh and wine to feed his spears.  
And men brought in whole hogs and quarter beeves,  
And all the hall was dim with steam of flesh:  
And none spake word, but all sat down at once,  
And ate with tumult in the naked hall,  
Feeding like horses when you hear them feed;  
Till Enid shrank far back into herself,  
To shun the wild ways of the lawless tribe.  
But when Earl Doorm had eaten all he would,  
He rolled his eyes about the hall, and found  
A damsel drooping in a corner of it.  
Then he remembered her, and how she wept;  
And out of her there came a power upon him;  
And rising on the sudden he said, 'Eat!  
I never yet beheld a thing so pale.  
God's curse, it makes me mad to see you weep.  
Eat! Look yourself. Good luck had your good man,  
For were I dead who is it would weep for me?  
Sweet lady, never since I first drew breath  
Have I beheld a lily like yourself.  
And so there lived some colour in your cheek,  
There is not one among my gentlewomen  
Were fit to wear your slipper for a glove.  
But listen to me, and by me be ruled,  
And I will do the thing I have not done,  
For ye shall share my earldom with me, girl,  
And we will live like two birds in one nest,  
And I will fetch you forage from all fields,  
For I compel all creatures to my will.'

He spoke: the brawny spearman let his cheek  
Bulge with the unswallowed piece, and turning stared;  
While some, whose souls the old serpent long had drawn  
Down, as the worm draws in the withered leaf  
And makes it earth, hissed each at other's ear  
What shall not be recorded--women they,  
Women, or what had been those gracious things,  
But now desired the humbling of their best,  
Yea, would have helped him to it: and all at once  
They hated her, who took no thought of them,  
But answered in low voice, her meek head yet  
Drooping, 'I pray you of your courtesy,  
He being as he is, to let me be.'

She spake so low he hardly heard her speak,

But like a mighty patron, satisfied  
With what himself had done so graciously,  
Assumed that she had thanked him, adding, 'Yea,  
Eat and be glad, for I account you mine.'

She answered meekly, 'How should I be glad  
Henceforth in all the world at anything,  
Until my lord arise and look upon me?'

Here the huge Earl cried out upon her talk,  
As all but empty heart and weariness  
And sickly nothing; suddenly seized on her,  
And bare her by main violence to the board,  
And thrust the dish before her, crying, 'Eat.'

'No, no,' said Enid, vext, 'I will not eat  
Till yonder man upon the bier arise,  
And eat with me.' 'Drink, then,' he answered. 'Here!  
(And filled a horn with wine and held it to her,)  
'Lo! I, myself, when flushed with fight, or hot,  
God's curse, with anger--often I myself,  
Before I well have drunken, scarce can eat:  
Drink therefore and the wine will change thy will.'

'Not so,' she cried, 'by Heaven, I will not drink  
Till my dear lord arise and bid me do it,  
And drink with me; and if he rise no more,  
I will not look at wine until I die.'

At this he turned all red and paced his hall,  
Now gnawed his under, now his upper lip,  
And coming up close to her, said at last:  
'Girl, for I see ye scorn my courtesies,  
Take warning: yonder man is surely dead;  
And I compel all creatures to my will.  
Not eat nor drink? And wherefore wait for one,  
Who put your beauty to this flout and scorn  
By dressing it in rags? Amazed am I,  
Beholding how ye butt against my wish,  
That I forbear you thus: cross me no more.  
At least put off to please me this poor gown,  
This silken rag, this beggar-woman's weed:  
I love that beauty should go beautifully:  
For see ye not my gentlewomen here,  
How gay, how suited to the house of one  
Who loves that beauty should go beautifully?  
Rise therefore; robe yourself in this: obey.'

He spoke, and one among his gentlewomen  
Displayed a splendid silk of foreign loom,  
Where like a shoaling sea the lovely blue  
Played into green, and thicker down the front  
With jewels than the sward with drops of dew,

When all night long a cloud clings to the hill,  
And with the dawn ascending lets the day  
Strike where it clung: so thickly shone the gems.

But Enid answered, harder to be moved  
Than hardest tyrants in their day of power,  
With life-long injuries burning unavenged,  
And now their hour has come; and Enid said:

'In this poor gown my dear lord found me first,  
And loved me serving in my father's hall:  
In this poor gown I rode with him to court,  
And there the Queen arrayed me like the sun:  
In this poor gown he bad me clothe myself,  
When now we rode upon this fatal quest  
Of honour, where no honour can be gained:  
And this poor gown I will not cast aside  
Until himself arise a living man,  
And bid me cast it. I have griefs enough:  
Pray you be gentle, pray you let me be:  
I never loved, can never love but him:  
Yea, God, I pray you of your gentleness,  
He being as he is, to let me be.'

Then strode the brute Earl up and down his hall,  
And took his russet beard between his teeth;  
Last, coming up quite close, and in his mood  
Crying, 'I count it of no more avail,  
Dame, to be gentle than ungentle with you;  
Take my salute,' unknighly with flat hand,  
However lightly, smote her on the cheek.

Then Enid, in her utter helplessness,  
And since she thought, 'He had not dared to do it,  
Except he surely knew my lord was dead,'  
Sent forth a sudden sharp and bitter cry,  
As of a wild thing taken in the trap,  
Which sees the trapper coming through the wood.

This heard Geraint, and grasping at his sword,  
(It lay beside him in the hollow shield),  
Made but a single bound, and with a sweep of it  
Shore through the swarthy neck, and like a ball  
The russet-bearded head rolled on the floor.  
So died Earl Doorm by him he counted dead.  
And all the men and women in the hall  
Rose when they saw the dead man rise, and fled  
Yelling as from a spectre, and the two  
Were left alone together, and he said:

'Enid, I have used you worse than that dead man;  
Done you more wrong: we both have undergone  
That trouble which has left me thrice your own:

Henceforward I will rather die than doubt.  
And here I lay this penance on myself,  
Not, though mine own ears heard you yestermorn--  
You thought me sleeping, but I heard you say,  
I heard you say, that you were no true wife:  
I swear I will not ask your meaning in it:  
I do believe yourself against yourself,  
And will henceforward rather die than doubt.'

And Enid could not say one tender word,  
She felt so blunt and stupid at the heart:  
She only prayed him, 'Fly, they will return  
And slay you; fly, your charger is without,  
My palfrey lost.' 'Then, Enid, shall you ride  
Behind me.' 'Yea,' said Enid, 'let us go.'  
And moving out they found the stately horse,  
Who now no more a vassal to the thief,  
But free to stretch his limbs in lawful fight,  
Neighed with all gladness as they came, and stooped  
With a low whinny toward the pair: and she  
Kissed the white star upon his noble front,  
Glad also; then Geraint upon the horse  
Mounted, and reached a hand, and on his foot  
She set her own and climbed; he turned his face  
And kissed her climbing, and she cast her arms  
About him, and at once they rode away.

And never yet, since high in Paradise  
O'er the four rivers the first roses blew,  
Came purer pleasure unto mortal kind  
Than lived through her, who in that perilous hour  
Put hand to hand beneath her husband's heart,  
And felt him hers again: she did not weep,  
But o'er her meek eyes came a happy mist  
Like that which kept the heart of Eden green  
Before the useful trouble of the rain:  
Yet not so misty were her meek blue eyes  
As not to see before them on the path,  
Right in the gateway of the bandit hold,  
A knight of Arthur's court, who laid his lance  
In rest, and made as if to fall upon him.  
Then, fearing for his hurt and loss of blood,  
She, with her mind all full of what had chanced,  
Shrieked to the stranger 'Slay not a dead man!'  
'The voice of Enid,' said the knight; but she,  
Beholding it was Edyrn son of Nudd,  
Was moved so much the more, and shrieked again,  
'O cousin, slay not him who gave you life.'  
And Edyrn moving frankly forward spake:  
'My lord Geraint, I greet you with all love;  
I took you for a bandit knight of Doorm;  
And fear not, Enid, I should fall upon him,  
Who love you, Prince, with something of the love



Wherewith we love the Heaven that chastens us.  
For once, when I was up so high in pride  
That I was halfway down the slope to Hell,  
By overthrowing me you threw me higher.  
Now, made a knight of Arthur's Table Round,  
And since I knew this Earl, when I myself  
Was half a bandit in my lawless hour,  
I come the mouthpiece of our King to Doorm  
(The King is close behind me) bidding him  
Disband himself, and scatter all his powers,  
Submit, and hear the judgment of the King.'

'He hears the judgment of the King of kings,'  
Cried the wan Prince; 'and lo, the powers of Doorm  
Are scattered,' and he pointed to the field,  
Where, huddled here and there on mound and knoll,  
Were men and women staring and aghast,  
While some yet fled; and then he plainlier told  
How the huge Earl lay slain within his hall.  
But when the knight besought him, 'Follow me,  
Prince, to the camp, and in the King's own ear  
Speak what has chanced; ye surely have endured  
Strange chances here alone;' that other flushed,  
And hung his head, and halted in reply,  
Fearing the mild face of the blameless King,  
And after madness acted question asked:  
Till Edyrn crying, 'If ye will not go  
To Arthur, then will Arthur come to you,'  
'Enough,' he said, 'I follow,' and they went.  
But Enid in their going had two fears,  
One from the bandit scattered in the field,  
And one from Edyrn. Every now and then,  
When Edyrn reined his charger at her side,  
She shrank a little. In a hollow land,  
From which old fires have broken, men may fear  
Fresh fire and ruin. He, perceiving, said:

'Fair and dear cousin, you that most had cause  
To fear me, fear no longer, I am changed.  
Yourself were first the blameless cause to make  
My nature's prideful sparkle in the blood  
Break into furious flame; being repulsed  
By Yniol and yourself, I schemed and wrought  
Until I overturned him; then set up  
(With one main purpose ever at my heart)  
My haughty jousts, and took a paramour;  
Did her mock-honour as the fairest fair,  
And, toppling over all antagonism,  
So waxed in pride, that I believed myself  
Unconquerable, for I was wellnigh mad:  
And, but for my main purpose in these jousts,  
I should have slain your father, seized yourself.  
I lived in hope that sometime you would come

To these my lists with him whom best you loved;  
And there, poor cousin, with your meek blue eyes  
The truest eyes that ever answered Heaven,  
Behold me overturn and trample on him.  
Then, had you cried, or knelt, or prayed to me,  
I should not less have killed him. And so you came,--  
But once you came,--and with your own true eyes  
Beheld the man you loved (I speak as one  
Speaks of a service done him) overthrow  
My proud self, and my purpose three years old,  
And set his foot upon me, and give me life.  
There was I broken down; there was I saved:  
Though thence I rode all-shamed, hating the life  
He gave me, meaning to be rid of it.  
And all the penance the Queen laid upon me  
Was but to rest awhile within her court;  
Where first as sullen as a beast new-caged,  
And waiting to be treated like a wolf,  
Because I knew my deeds were known, I found,  
Instead of scornful pity or pure scorn,  
Such fine reserve and noble reticence,  
Manners so kind, yet stately, such a grace  
Of tenderest courtesy, that I began  
To glance behind me at my former life,  
And find that it had been the wolf's indeed:  
And oft I talked with Dubric, the high saint,  
Who, with mild heat of holy oratory,  
Subdued me somewhat to that gentleness,  
Which, when it weds with manhood, makes a man.  
And you were often there about the Queen,  
But saw me not, or marked not if you saw;  
Nor did I care or dare to speak with you,  
But kept myself aloof till I was changed;  
And fear not, cousin; I am changed indeed.'

He spoke, and Enid easily believed,  
Like simple noble natures, credulous  
Of what they long for, good in friend or foe,  
There most in those who most have done them ill.  
And when they reached the camp the King himself  
Advanced to greet them, and beholding her  
Though pale, yet happy, asked her not a word,  
But went apart with Edyrn, whom he held  
In converse for a little, and returned,  
And, gravely smiling, lifted her from horse,  
And kissed her with all pureness, brother-like,  
And showed an empty tent allotted her,  
And glancing for a minute, till he saw her  
Pass into it, turned to the Prince, and said:

'Prince, when of late ye prayed me for my leave  
To move to your own land, and there defend  
Your marches, I was pricked with some reproof,

As one that let foul wrong stagnate and be,  
By having looked too much through alien eyes,  
And wrought too long with delegated hands,  
Not used mine own: but now behold me come  
To cleanse this common sewer of all my realm,  
With Edyrn and with others: have ye looked  
At Edyrn? have ye seen how nobly changed?  
This work of his is great and wonderful.  
His very face with change of heart is changed.  
The world will not believe a man repents:  
And this wise world of ours is mainly right.  
Full seldom doth a man repent, or use  
Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch  
Of blood and custom wholly out of him,  
And make all clean, and plant himself afresh.  
Edyrn has done it, weeding all his heart  
As I will weed this land before I go.  
I, therefore, made him of our Table Round,  
Not rashly, but have proved him everyway  
One of our noblest, our most valorous,  
Sanest and most obedient: and indeed  
This work of Edyrn wrought upon himself  
After a life of violence, seems to me  
A thousand-fold more great and wonderful  
Than if some knight of mine, risking his life,  
My subject with my subjects under him,  
Should make an onslaught single on a realm  
Of robbers, though he slew them one by one,  
And were himself nigh wounded to the death.'

So spake the King; low bowed the Prince, and felt  
His work was neither great nor wonderful,  
And past to Enid's tent; and thither came  
The King's own leech to look into his hurt;  
And Enid tended on him there; and there  
Her constant motion round him, and the breath  
Of her sweet tendance hovering over him,  
Filled all the genial courses of his blood  
With deeper and with ever deeper love,  
As the south-west that blowing Bala lake  
Fills all the sacred Dee. So past the days.

But while Geraint lay healing of his hurt,  
The blameless King went forth and cast his eyes  
On each of all whom Uther left in charge  
Long since, to guard the justice of the King:  
He looked and found them wanting; and as now  
Men weed the white horse on the Berkshire hills  
To keep him bright and clean as heretofore,  
He rooted out the slothful officer  
Or guilty, which for bribe had winked at wrong,  
And in their chairs set up a stronger race  
With hearts and hands, and sent a thousand men

To till the wastes, and moving everywhere  
Cleared the dark places and let in the law,  
And broke the bandit holds and cleansed the land.

Then, when Geraint was whole again, they past  
With Arthur to Caerleon upon Usk.  
There the great Queen once more embraced her friend,  
And clothed her in apparel like the day.  
And though Geraint could never take again  
That comfort from their converse which he took  
Before the Queen's fair name was breathed upon,  
He rested well content that all was well.  
Thence after tarrying for a space they rode,  
And fifty knights rode with them to the shores  
Of Severn, and they past to their own land.  
And there he kept the justice of the King  
So vigorously yet mildly, that all hearts  
Applauded, and the spiteful whisper died:  
And being ever foremost in the chase,  
And victor at the tilt and tournament,  
They called him the great Prince and man of men.  
But Enid, whom her ladies loved to call  
Enid the Fair, a grateful people named  
Enid the Good; and in their halls arose  
The cry of children, Enids and Geraints  
Of times to be; nor did he doubt her more,  
But rested in her fealty, till he crowned  
A happy life with a fair death, and fell  
Against the heathen of the Northern Sea  
In battle, fighting for the blameless King.

#### Balin and Balan

Pellam the King, who held and lost with Lot  
In that first war, and had his realm restored  
But rendered tributary, failed of late  
To send his tribute; wherefore Arthur called  
His treasurer, one of many years, and spake,  
'Go thou with him and him and bring it to us,  
Lest we should set one truer on his throne.  
Man's word is God in man.'

His Baron said

'We go but harken: there be two strange knights  
Who sit near Camelot at a fountain-side,  
A mile beneath the forest, challenging  
And overthrowing every knight who comes.  
Wilt thou I undertake them as we pass,  
And send them to thee?'

Arthur laughed upon him.  
'Old friend, too old to be so young, depart,  
Delay not thou for aught, but let them sit,  
Until they find a lustier than themselves.'

So these departed. Early, one fair dawn,  
The light-winged spirit of his youth returned  
On Arthur's heart; he armed himself and went,  
So coming to the fountain-side beheld  
Balin and Balan sitting statuelike,  
Brethren, to right and left the spring, that down,  
From underneath a plume of lady-fern,  
Sang, and the sand danced at the bottom of it.  
And on the right of Balin Balin's horse  
Was fast beside an alder, on the left  
Of Balan Balan's near a poplartree.  
'Fair Sirs,' said Arthur, 'wherefore sit ye here?'  
Balin and Balan answered 'For the sake  
Of glory; we be mightier men than all  
In Arthur's court; that also have we proved;  
For whatsoever knight against us came  
Or I or he have easily overthrown.'  
'I too,' said Arthur, 'am of Arthur's hall,  
But rather proven in his Paynim wars  
Than famous jousts; but see, or proven or not,  
Whether me likewise ye can overthrow.'  
And Arthur lightly smote the brethren down,  
And lightly so returned, and no man knew.

Then Balin rose, and Balan, and beside  
The carolling water set themselves again,  
And spake no word until the shadow turned;  
When from the fringe of coppice round them burst  
A spangled pursuivant, and crying 'Sirs,  
Rise, follow! ye be sent for by the King,'  
They followed; whom when Arthur seeing asked  
'Tell me your names; why sat ye by the well?'  
Balin the stillness of a minute broke  
Saying 'An unmelodious name to thee,  
Balin, "the Savage"--that addition thine--  
My brother and my better, this man here,  
Balan. I smote upon the naked skull  
A thrall of thine in open hall, my hand  
Was gauntleted, half slew him; for I heard  
He had spoken evil of me; thy just wrath  
Sent me a three-years' exile from thine eyes.  
I have not lived my life delightsomely:  
For I that did that violence to thy thrall,  
Had often wrought some fury on myself,  
Saving for Balan: those three kingless years  
Have past--were wormwood-bitter to me. King,  
Methought that if we sat beside the well,  
And hurled to ground what knight soever spurred

Against us, thou would'st take me gladlier back,  
And make, as ten-times worthier to be thine  
Than twenty Balins, Balan knight. I have said.  
Not so--not all. A man of thine today  
Abashed us both, and brake my boast. Thy will?'  
Said Arthur 'Thou hast ever spoken truth;  
Thy too fierce manhood would not let thee lie.  
Rise, my true knight. As children learn, be thou  
Wiser for falling! walk with me, and move  
To music with thine Order and the King.  
Thy chair, a grief to all the brethren, stands  
Vacant, but thou retake it, mine again!'

Thereafter, when Sir Balin entered hall,  
The Lost one Found was greeted as in Heaven  
With joy that blazed itself in woodland wealth  
Of leaf, and gayest garlandage of flowers,  
Along the walls and down the board; they sat,  
And cup clashed cup; they drank and some one sang,  
Sweet-voiced, a song of welcome, whereupon  
Their common shout in chorus, mounting, made  
Those banners of twelve battles overhead  
Stir, as they stirred of old, when Arthur's host  
Proclaimed him Victor, and the day was won.

Then Balan added to their Order lived  
A wealthier life than heretofore with these  
And Balin, till their embassy returned.

'Sir King' they brought report 'we hardly found,  
So bushed about it is with gloom, the hall  
Of him to whom ye sent us, Pellam, once  
A Christless foe of thine as ever dashed  
Horse against horse; but seeing that thy realm  
Hath prospered in the name of Christ, the King  
Took, as in rival heat, to holy things;  
And finds himself descended from the Saint  
Arimathaeon Joseph; him who first  
Brought the great faith to Britain over seas;  
He boasts his life as purer than thine own;  
Eats scarce enow to keep his pulse abeat;  
Hath pushed aside his faithful wife, nor lets  
Or dame or damsel enter at his gates  
Lest he should be polluted. This gray King  
Showed us a shrine wherein were wonders--yea--  
Rich arks with priceless bones of martyrdom,  
Thorns of the crown and shivers of the cross,  
And therewithal (for thus he told us) brought  
By holy Joseph thither, that same spear  
Wherewith the Roman pierced the side of Christ.  
He much amazed us; after, when we sought  
The tribute, answered "I have quite foregone  
All matters of this world: Garlon, mine heir,

Of him demand it," which this Garlon gave  
With much ado, railing at thine and thee.

'But when we left, in those deep woods we found  
A knight of thine spear-stricken from behind,  
Dead, whom we buried; more than one of us  
Cried out on Garlon, but a woodman there  
Reported of some demon in the woods  
Was once a man, who driven by evil tongues  
From all his fellows, lived alone, and came  
To learn black magic, and to hate his kind  
With such a hate, that when he died, his soul  
Became a Fiend, which, as the man in life  
Was wounded by blind tongues he saw not whence,  
Strikes from behind. This woodman showed the cave  
From which he sallies, and wherein he dwelt.  
We saw the hoof-print of a horse, no more.'

Then Arthur, 'Let who goes before me, see  
He do not fall behind me: foully slain  
And villainously! who will hunt for me  
This demon of the woods?' Said Balan, 'I!  
So claimed the quest and rode away, but first,  
Embracing Balin, 'Good my brother, hear!  
Let not thy moods prevail, when I am gone  
Who used to lay them! hold them outer fiends,  
Who leap at thee to tear thee; shake them aside,  
Dreams ruling when wit sleeps! yea, but to dream  
That any of these would wrong thee, wrongs thyself.  
Witness their flowery welcome. Bound are they  
To speak no evil. Truly save for fears,  
My fears for thee, so rich a fellowship  
Would make me wholly blest: thou one of them,  
Be one indeed: consider them, and all  
Their bearing in their common bond of love,  
No more of hatred than in Heaven itself,  
No more of jealousy than in Paradise.'

So Balan warned, and went; Balin remained:  
Who--for but three brief moons had glanced away  
From being knighted till he smote the thrall,  
And faded from the presence into years  
Of exile--now would strictlier set himself  
To learn what Arthur meant by courtesy,  
Manhood, and knighthood; wherefore hovered round  
Lancelot, but when he marked his high sweet smile  
In passing, and a transitory word  
Make knight or churl or child or damsel seem  
From being smiled at happier in themselves--  
Sighed, as a boy lame-born beneath a height,  
That glooms his valley, sighs to see the peak  
Sun-flushed, or touch at night the northern star;  
For one from out his village lately climed

And brought report of azure lands and fair,  
Far seen to left and right; and he himself  
Hath hardly scaled with help a hundred feet  
Up from the base: so Balin marvelling oft  
How far beyond him Lancelot seemed to move,  
Groaned, and at times would mutter, 'These be gifts,  
Born with the blood, not learnable, divine,  
Beyond my reach. Well had I foughten--well--  
In those fierce wars, struck hard--and had I crowned  
With my slain self the heaps of whom I slew--  
So--better!--But this worship of the Queen,  
That honour too wherein she holds him--this,  
This was the sunshine that hath given the man  
A growth, a name that branches o'er the rest,  
And strength against all odds, and what the King  
So prizes--overprizes--gentleness.  
Her likewise would I worship an I might.  
I never can be close with her, as he  
That brought her hither. Shall I pray the King  
To let me bear some token of his Queen  
Whereon to gaze, remembering her--forget  
My heats and violences? live afresh?  
What, if the Queen disdained to grant it! nay  
Being so stately-gentle, would she make  
My darkness blackness? and with how sweet grace  
She greeted my return! Bold will I be--  
Some goodly cognizance of Guinevere,  
In lieu of this rough beast upon my shield,  
Langued gules, and toothed with grinning savagery.'

And Arthur, when Sir Balin sought him, said  
'What wilt thou bear?' Balin was bold, and asked  
To bear her own crown-royal upon shield,  
Whereat she smiled and turned her to the King,  
Who answered 'Thou shalt put the crown to use.  
The crown is but the shadow of the King,  
And this a shadow's shadow, let him have it,  
So this will help him of his violences!'  
'No shadow' said Sir Balin 'O my Queen,  
But light to me! no shadow, O my King,  
But golden earnest of a gentler life!'

So Balin bare the crown, and all the knights  
Approved him, and the Queen, and all the world  
Made music, and he felt his being move  
In music with his Order, and the King.

The nightingale, full-toned in middle May,  
Hath ever and anon a note so thin  
It seems another voice in other groves;  
Thus, after some quick burst of sudden wrath,  
The music in him seemed to change, and grow  
Faint and far-off.



And once he saw the thrall  
His passion half had gauntleted to death,  
That causer of his banishment and shame,  
Smile at him, as he deemed, presumptuously:  
His arm half rose to strike again, but fell:  
The memory of that cognizance on shield  
Weighted it down, but in himself he moaned:

'Too high this mount of Camelot for me:  
These high-set courtesies are not for me.  
Shall I not rather prove the worse for these?  
Fierier and stormier from restraining, break  
Into some madness even before the Queen?'

Thus, as a hearth lit in a mountain home,  
And glancing on the window, when the gloom  
Of twilight deepens round it, seems a flame  
That rages in the woodland far below,  
So when his moods were darkened, court and King  
And all the kindly warmth of Arthur's hall  
Shadowed an angry distance: yet he strove  
To learn the graces of their Table, fought  
Hard with himself, and seemed at length in peace.

Then chanced, one morning, that Sir Balin sat  
Close-bowered in that garden nigh the hall.  
A walk of roses ran from door to door;  
A walk of lilies crost it to the bower:  
And down that range of roses the great Queen  
Came with slow steps, the morning on her face;  
And all in shadow from the counter door  
Sir Lancelot as to meet her, then at once,  
As if he saw not, glanced aside, and paced  
The long white walk of lilies toward the bower.  
Followed the Queen; Sir Balin heard her 'Prince,  
Art thou so little loyal to thy Queen,  
As pass without good morrow to thy Queen?'  
To whom Sir Lancelot with his eyes on earth,  
'Fain would I still be loyal to the Queen.'  
'Yea so' she said 'but so to pass me by--  
So loyal scarce is loyal to thyself,  
Whom all men rate the king of courtesy.  
Let be: ye stand, fair lord, as in a dream.'

Then Lancelot with his hand among the flowers  
'Yea--for a dream. Last night methought I saw  
That maiden Saint who stands with lily in hand  
In yonder shrine. All round her prest the dark,  
And all the light upon her silver face  
Flowed from the spiritual lily that she held.  
Lo! these her emblems drew mine eyes--away:  
For see, how perfect-pure! As light a flush  
As hardly tints the blossom of the quince

Would mar their charm of stainless maidenhood.'

'Sweeter to me' she said 'this garden rose  
Deep-hued and many-folded! sweeter still  
The wild-wood hyacinth and the bloom of May.  
Prince, we have ridden before among the flowers  
In those fair days--not all as cool as these,  
Though season-earlier. Art thou sad? or sick?  
Our noble King will send thee his own leech--  
Sick? or for any matter angered at me?'

Then Lancelot lifted his large eyes; they dwelt  
Deep-tranced on hers, and could not fall: her hue  
Changed at his gaze: so turning side by side  
They past, and Balin started from his bower.

'Queen? subject? but I see not what I see.  
Damsel and lover? hear not what I hear.  
My father hath begotten me in his wrath.  
I suffer from the things before me, know,  
Learn nothing; am not worthy to be knight;  
A churl, a clown!' and in him gloom on gloom  
Deepened: he sharply caught his lance and shield,  
Nor stayed to crave permission of the King,  
But, mad for strange adventure, dashed away.

He took the selfsame track as Balin, saw  
The fountain where they sat together, sighed  
'Was I not better there with him?' and rode  
The skyless woods, but under open blue  
Came on the hoarhead woodman at a bough  
Wearily hewing. 'Churl, thine axe!' he cried,  
Descended, and disjoined it at a blow:  
To whom the woodman uttered wonderingly  
'Lord, thou couldst lay the Devil of these woods  
If arm of flesh could lay him.' Balin cried  
'Him, or the viler devil who plays his part,  
To lay that devil would lay the Devil in me.'  
'Nay' said the churl, 'our devil is a truth,  
I saw the flash of him but yestereven.  
And some do say that our Sir Garlon too  
Hath learned black magic, and to ride unseen.  
Look to the cave.' But Balin answered him  
'Old fabler, these be fancies of the churl,  
Look to thy woodcraft,' and so leaving him,  
Now with slack rein and careless of himself,  
Now with dug spur and raving at himself,  
Now with droopt brow down the long glades he rode;  
So marked not on his right a cavern-chasm  
Yawn over darkness, where, nor far within,  
The whole day died, but, dying, gleamed on rocks  
Roof-pendent, sharp; and others from the floor,  
Tusklike, arising, made that mouth of night

Whereout the Demon issued up from Hell.  
He marked not this, but blind and deaf to all  
Save that chained rage, which ever yelpt within,  
Past eastward from the falling sun. At once  
He felt the hollow-beaten mosses thud  
And tremble, and then the shadow of a spear,  
Shot from behind him, ran along the ground.  
Sideways he started from the path, and saw,  
With pointed lance as if to pierce, a shape,  
A light of armour by him flash, and pass  
And vanish in the woods; and followed this,  
But all so blind in rage that unawares  
He burst his lance against a forest bough,  
Dishorsed himself, and rose again, and fled  
Far, till the castle of a King, the hall  
Of Pellam, lichen-bearded, grayly draped  
With streaming grass, appeared, low-built but strong;  
The ruinous donjon as a knoll of moss,  
The battlement overtopped with ivytods,  
A home of bats, in every tower an owl.

Then spake the men of Pellam crying 'Lord,  
Why wear ye this crown-royal upon shield?'  
Said Balin 'For the fairest and the best  
Of ladies living gave me this to bear.'  
So stalled his horse, and strode across the court,  
But found the greetings both of knight and King  
Faint in the low dark hall of banquet: leaves  
Laid their green faces flat against the panes,  
Sprays grated, and the cankered boughs without  
Whined in the wood; for all was hushed within,  
Till when at feast Sir Garlon likewise asked  
'Why wear ye that crown-royal?' Balin said  
'The Queen we worship, Lancelot, I, and all,  
As fairest, best and purest, granted me  
To bear it!' Such a sound (for Arthur's knights  
Were hated strangers in the hall) as makes  
The white swan-mother, sitting, when she hears  
A strange knee rustle through her secret reeds,  
Made Garlon, hissing; then he sourly smiled.  
'Fairest I grant her: I have seen; but best,  
Best, purest? thou from Arthur's hall, and yet  
So simple! hast thou eyes, or if, are these  
So far besotted that they fail to see  
This fair wife-worship cloaks a secret shame?  
Truly, ye men of Arthur be but babes.'

A goblet on the board by Balin, bossed  
With holy Joseph's legend, on his right  
Stood, all of massiest bronze: one side had sea  
And ship and sail and angels blowing on it:  
And one was rough with wattling, and the walls  
Of that low church he built at Glastonbury.  
This Balin graspt, but while in act to hurl,

Through memory of that token on the shield  
Relaxed his hold: 'I will be gentle' he thought  
'And passing gentle' caught his hand away,  
Then fiercely to Sir Garlon 'Eyes have I  
That saw today the shadow of a spear,  
Shot from behind me, run along the ground;  
Eyes too that long have watched how Lancelot draws  
From homage to the best and purest, might,  
Name, manhood, and a grace, but scanty thine,  
Who, sitting in thine own hall, canst endure  
To mouth so huge a foulness--to thy guest,  
Me, me of Arthur's Table. Felon talk!  
Let be! no more!

But not the less by night

The scorn of Garlon, poisoning all his rest,  
Stung him in dreams. At length, and dim through leaves  
Blinkt the white morn, sprays grated, and old boughs  
Whined in the wood. He rose, descended, met  
The scorner in the castle court, and fain,  
For hate and loathing, would have past him by;  
But when Sir Garlon uttered mocking-wise;  
'What, wear ye still that same crown-scandalous?'  
His countenance blackened, and his forehead veins  
Bloated, and branched; and tearing out of sheath  
The brand, Sir Balin with a fiery 'Ha!  
So thou be shadow, here I make thee ghost,'  
Hard upon helm smote him, and the blade flew  
Splintering in six, and clinkt upon the stones.  
Then Garlon, reeling slowly backward, fell,  
And Balin by the banneret of his helm  
Dragged him, and struck, but from the castle a cry  
Sounded across the court, and--men-at-arms,  
A score with pointed lances, making at him--  
He dashed the pummel at the foremost face,  
Beneath a low door dipt, and made his feet  
Wings through a glimmering gallery, till he marked  
The portal of King Pellam's chapel wide  
And inward to the wall; he stept behind;  
Thence in a moment heard them pass like wolves  
Howling; but while he stared about the shrine,  
In which he scarce could spy the Christ for Saints,  
Beheld before a golden altar lie  
The longest lance his eyes had ever seen,  
Point-painted red; and seizing thereupon  
Pushed through an open casement down, leaned on it,  
Leapt in a semicircle, and lit on earth;  
Then hand at ear, and harkening from what side  
The blindfold rummage buried in the walls  
Might echo, ran the counter path, and found  
His charger, mounted on him and away.  
An arrow whizzed to the right, one to the left,  
One overhead; and Pellam's feeble cry  
'Stay, stay him! he defileth heavenly things

With earthly uses'--made him quickly dive  
Beneath the boughs, and race through many a mile  
Of dense and open, till his goodly horse,  
Arising wearily at a fallen oak,  
Stumbled headlong, and cast him face to ground.

Half-wroth he had not ended, but all glad,  
Knightlike, to find his charger yet unlamed,  
Sir Balin drew the shield from off his neck,  
Stared at the priceless cognizance, and thought  
'I have shamed thee so that now thou shamest me,  
Thee will I bear no more,' high on a branch  
Hung it, and turned aside into the woods,  
And there in gloom cast himself all along,  
Moaning 'My violences, my violences!'

But now the wholesome music of the wood  
Was dumb'd by one from out the hall of Mark,  
A damsel-errant, warbling, as she rode  
The woodland alleys, Vivien, with her Squire.

'The fire of Heaven has killed the barren cold,  
And kindled all the plain and all the wold.  
The new leaf ever pushes off the old.  
The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell.

'Old priest, who mumble worship in your quire--  
Old monk and nun, ye scorn the world's desire,  
Yet in your frosty cells ye feel the fire!  
The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell.

'The fire of Heaven is on the dusty ways.  
The wayside blossoms open to the blaze.  
The whole wood-world is one full peal of praise.  
The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell.

'The fire of Heaven is lord of all things good,  
And starve not thou this fire within thy blood,  
But follow Vivien through the fiery flood!  
The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell!'

Then turning to her Squire 'This fire of Heaven,  
This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again,  
And beat the cross to earth, and break the King  
And all his Table.'

Then they reached a glade,  
Where under one long lane of cloudless air  
Before another wood, the royal crown  
Sparkled, and swaying upon a restless elm  
Drew the vague glance of Vivien, and her Squire;  
Amazed were these; 'Lo there' she cried--'a crown--  
Borne by some high lord-prince of Arthur's hall,  
And there a horse! the rider? where is he?

See, yonder lies one dead within the wood.  
Not dead; he stirs!--but sleeping. I will speak.  
Hail, royal knight, we break on thy sweet rest,  
Not, doubtless, all unearned by noble deeds.  
But bounden art thou, if from Arthur's hall,  
To help the weak. Behold, I fly from shame,  
A lustful King, who sought to win my love  
Through evil ways: the knight, with whom I rode,  
Hath suffered misadventure, and my squire  
Hath in him small defence; but thou, Sir Prince,  
Wilt surely guide me to the warrior King,  
Arthur the blameless, pure as any maid,  
To get me shelter for my maidenhood.  
I charge thee by that crown upon thy shield,  
And by the great Queen's name, arise and hence.'

And Balin rose, 'Thither no more! nor Prince  
Nor knight am I, but one that hath defamed  
The cognizance she gave me: here I dwell  
Savage among the savage woods, here die--  
Die: let the wolves' black maws ensepulchre  
Their brother beast, whose anger was his lord.  
O me, that such a name as Guinevere's,  
Which our high Lancelot hath so lifted up,  
And been thereby uplifted, should through me,  
My violence, and my villainy, come to shame.'

Thereat she suddenly laughed and shrill, anon  
Sighed all as suddenly. Said Balin to her  
'Is this thy courtesy--to mock me, ha?  
Hence, for I will not with thee.' Again she sighed  
'Pardon, sweet lord! we maidens often laugh  
When sick at heart, when rather we should weep.  
I knew thee wronged. I brake upon thy rest,  
And now full loth am I to break thy dream,  
But thou art man, and canst abide a truth,  
Though bitter. Hither, boy--and mark me well.  
Dost thou remember at Caerleon once--  
A year ago--nay, then I love thee not--  
Ay, thou rememberest well--one summer dawn--  
By the great tower--Caerleon upon Usk--  
Nay, truly we were hidden: this fair lord,  
The flower of all their vestal knighthood, knelt  
In amorous homage--knelt--what else?--O ay  
Knelt, and drew down from out his night-black hair  
And mumbled that white hand whose ringed caress  
Had wandered from her own King's golden head,  
And lost itself in darkness, till she cried--  
I thought the great tower would crash down on both--  
"Rise, my sweet King, and kiss me on the lips,  
Thou art my King." This lad, whose lightest word  
Is mere white truth in simple nakedness,  
Saw them embrace: he reddens, cannot speak,

So bashful, he! but all the maiden Saints,  
The deathless mother-maidenhood of Heaven,  
Cry out upon her. Up then, ride with me!  
Talk not of shame! thou canst not, an thou would'st,  
Do these more shame than these have done themselves.'

She lied with ease; but horror-stricken he,  
Remembering that dark bower at Camelot,  
Breathed in a dismal whisper 'It is truth.'

Sunnily she smiled 'And even in this lone wood,  
Sweet lord, ye do right well to whisper this.  
Fools prate, and perish traitors. Woods have tongues,  
As walls have ears: but thou shalt go with me,  
And we will speak at first exceeding low.  
Meet is it the good King be not deceived.  
See now, I set thee high on vantage ground,  
From whence to watch the time, and eagle-like  
Stoop at thy will on Lancelot and the Queen.'

She ceased; his evil spirit upon him leapt,  
He ground his teeth together, sprang with a yell,  
Tore from the branch, and cast on earth, the shield,  
Drove his mailed heel athwart the royal crown,  
Stampt all into defacement, hurled it from him  
Among the forest weeds, and cursed the tale,  
The told-of, and the teller.

That weird yell,  
Unearthlier than all shriek of bird or beast,  
Thrilled through the woods; and Balin lurking there  
(His quest was unaccomplished) heard and thought  
'The scream of that Wood-devil I came to quell!  
Then nearing 'Lo! he hath slain some brother-knight,  
And tramples on the goodly shield to show  
His loathing of our Order and the Queen.  
My quest, meseems, is here. Or devil or man  
Guard thou thine head.' Sir Balin spake not word,  
But snatched a sudden buckler from the Squire,  
And vaulted on his horse, and so they crashed  
In onset, and King Pellam's holy spear,  
Reputed to be red with sinless blood,  
Redded at once with sinful, for the point  
Across the maiden shield of Balan pricked  
The hauberk to the flesh; and Balin's horse  
Was wearied to the death, and, when they clashed,  
Rolling back upon Balin, crushed the man  
Inward, and either fell, and swooned away.

Then to her Squire muttered the damsel 'Fools!  
This fellow hath wrought some foulness with his Queen:  
Else never had he borne her crown, nor raved  
And thus foamed over at a rival name:  
But thou, Sir Chick, that scarce hast broken shell,

Art yet half-yolk, not even come to down--  
Who never sawest Caerleon upon Usk--  
And yet hast often pleaded for my love--  
See what I see, be thou where I have been,  
Or else Sir Chick--dismount and loose their casques  
I fain would know what manner of men they be.'  
And when the Squire had loosed them, 'Goodly!--look!  
They might have cropt the myriad flower of May,  
And butt each other here, like brainless bulls,  
Dead for one heifer!

Then the gentle Squire  
'I hold them happy, so they died for love:  
And, Vivien, though ye beat me like your dog,  
I too could die, as now I live, for thee.'

'Live on, Sir Boy,' she cried. 'I better prize  
The living dog than the dead lion: away!  
I cannot brook to gaze upon the dead.'  
Then leapt her palfrey o'er the fallen oak,  
And bounding forward 'Leave them to the wolves.'

But when their foreheads felt the cooling air,  
Balin first woke, and seeing that true face,  
Familiar up from cradle-time, so wan,  
Crawled slowly with low moans to where he lay,  
And on his dying brother cast himself  
Dying; and he lifted faint eyes; he felt  
One near him; all at once they found the world,  
Staring wild-wide; then with a childlike wail  
And drawing down the dim disastrous brow  
That o'er him hung, he kissed it, moaned and spake;

'O Balin, Balin, I that fain had died  
To save thy life, have brought thee to thy death.  
Why had ye not the shield I knew? and why  
Trampled ye thus on that which bare the Crown?'

Then Balin told him brokenly, and in gasps,  
All that had chanced, and Balan moaned again.

'Brother, I dwelt a day in Pellam's hall:  
This Garlon mocked me, but I heeded not.  
And one said "Eat in peace! a liar is he,  
And hates thee for the tribute!" this good knight  
Told me, that twice a wanton damsel came,  
And sought for Garlon at the castle-gates,  
Whom Pellam drove away with holy heat.  
I well believe this damsel, and the one  
Who stood beside thee even now, the same.  
"She dwells among the woods" he said "and meets  
And dallies with him in the Mouth of Hell."  
Foul are their lives; foul are their lips; they lied.  
Pure as our own true Mother is our Queen."



'O brother' answered Balin 'woe is me!  
My madness all thy life has been thy doom,  
Thy curse, and darkened all thy day; and now  
The night has come. I scarce can see thee now.

Goodnight! for we shall never bid again  
Goodmorrow--Dark my doom was here, and dark  
It will be there. I see thee now no more.  
I would not mine again should darken thine,  
Goodnight, true brother.

Balan answered low

'Goodnight, true brother here! goodmorrow there!  
We two were born together, and we die  
Together by one doom:' and while he spoke  
Closed his death-drowsing eyes, and slept the sleep  
With Balin, either locked in either's arm.

Merlin and Vivien

A storm was coming, but the winds were still,  
And in the wild woods of Broceliande,  
Before an oak, so hollow, huge and old  
It looked a tower of ivied masonwork,  
At Merlin's feet the wily Vivien lay.

For he that always bare in bitter grudge  
The slights of Arthur and his Table, Mark  
The Cornish King, had heard a wandering voice,  
A minstrel of Caerlon by strong storm  
Blown into shelter at Tintagil, say  
That out of naked knightlike purity  
Sir Lancelot worshipt no unmarried girl  
But the great Queen herself, fought in her name,  
Sware by her--vows like theirs, that high in heaven  
Love most, but neither marry, nor are given  
In marriage, angels of our Lord's report.

He ceased, and then--for Vivien sweetly said  
(She sat beside the banquet nearest Mark),  
'And is the fair example followed, Sir,  
In Arthur's household?'--answered innocently:

'Ay, by some few--ay, truly--youths that hold  
It more beseems the perfect virgin knight  
To worship woman as true wife beyond  
All hopes of gaining, than as maiden girl.  
They place their pride in Lancelot and the Queen.

So passionate for an utter purity  
Beyond the limit of their bond, are these,  
For Arthur bound them not to singleness.  
Brave hearts and clean! and yet--God guide them--young.'

Then Mark was half in heart to hurl his cup  
Straight at the speaker, but forbore: he rose  
To leave the hall, and, Vivien following him,  
Turned to her: 'Here are snakes within the grass;  
And you methinks, O Vivien, save ye fear  
The monkish manhood, and the mask of pure  
Worn by this court, can stir them till they sting.'

And Vivien answered, smiling scornfully,  
'Why fear? because that fostered at thy court  
I savour of thy--virtues? fear them? no.  
As Love, if Love is perfect, casts out fear,  
So Hate, if Hate is perfect, casts out fear.  
My father died in battle against the King,  
My mother on his corpse in open field;  
She bore me there, for born from death was I  
Among the dead and sown upon the wind--  
And then on thee! and shown the truth betimes,  
That old true filth, and bottom of the well  
Where Truth is hidden. Gracious lessons thine  
And maxims of the mud! "This Arthur pure!  
Great Nature through the flesh herself hath made  
Gives him the lie! There is no being pure,  
My cherub; saith not Holy Writ the same?"--  
If I were Arthur, I would have thy blood.  
Thy blessing, stainless King! I bring thee back,  
When I have ferreted out their burrowings,  
The hearts of all this Order in mine hand--  
Ay--so that fate and craft and folly close,  
Perchance, one curl of Arthur's golden beard.  
To me this narrow grizzled fork of thine  
Is cleaner-fashioned--Well, I loved thee first,  
That warps the wit.'

Loud laughed the graceless Mark,  
But Vivien, into Camelot stealing, lodged  
Low in the city, and on a festal day  
When Guinevere was crossing the great hall  
Cast herself down, knelt to the Queen, and wailed.

'Why kneel ye there? What evil hath ye wrought?  
Rise!' and the damsel bidden rise arose  
And stood with folded hands and downward eyes  
Of glancing corner, and all meekly said,  
'None wrought, but suffered much, an orphan maid!  
My father died in battle for thy King,  
My mother on his corpse--in open field,  
The sad sea-sounding wastes of Lyonesse--

Poor wretch--no friend!--and now by Mark the King  
For that small charm of feature mine, pursued--  
If any such be mine--I fly to thee.  
Save, save me thou--Woman of women--thine  
The wreath of beauty, thine the crown of power,  
Be thine the balm of pity, O Heaven's own white  
Earth-angel, stainless bride of stainless King--  
Help, for he follows! take me to thyself!  
O yield me shelter for mine innocence  
Among thy maidens!

Here her slow sweet eyes  
Fear-tremulous, but humbly hopeful, rose  
Fixt on her hearer's, while the Queen who stood  
All glittering like May sunshine on May leaves  
In green and gold, and plumed with green replied,  
'Peace, child! of overpraise and overblame  
We choose the last. Our noble Arthur, him  
Ye scarce can overpraise, will hear and know.  
Nay--we believe all evil of thy Mark--  
Well, we shall test thee farther; but this hour  
We ride a-hawking with Sir Lancelot.  
He hath given us a fair falcon which he trained;  
We go to prove it. Bide ye here the while.'

She past; and Vivien murmured after 'Go!  
I bide the while.' Then through the portal-arch  
Peering askance, and muttering broken-wise,  
As one that labours with an evil dream,  
Beheld the Queen and Lancelot get to horse.

'Is that the Lancelot? goodly--ay, but gaunt:  
Courteous--amends for gauntness--takes her hand--  
That glance of theirs, but for the street, had been  
A clinging kiss--how hand lingers in hand!  
Let go at last!--they ride away--to hawk  
For waterfowl. Royaller game is mine.  
For such a supersensual sensual bond  
As that gray cricket chirpt of at our hearth--  
Touch flax with flame--a glance will serve--the liars!  
Ah little rat that borest in the dyke  
Thy hole by night to let the boundless deep  
Down upon far-off cities while they dance--  
Or dream--of thee they dreamed not--nor of me  
These--ay, but each of either: ride, and dream  
The mortal dream that never yet was mine--  
Ride, ride and dream until ye wake--to me!  
Then, narrow court and lubber King, farewell!  
For Lancelot will be gracious to the rat,  
And our wise Queen, if knowing that I know,  
Will hate, loathe, fear--but honour me the more.'

Yet while they rode together down the plain,

Their talk was all of training, terms of art,  
Diet and seeling, jesses, leash and lure.  
'She is too noble' he said 'to check at pies,  
Nor will she rake: there is no baseness in her.'  
Here when the Queen demanded as by chance  
'Know ye the stranger woman?' 'Let her be,'  
Said Lancelot and unhooded casting off  
The goodly falcon free; she towered; her bells,  
Tone under tone, shrilled; and they lifted up  
Their eager faces, wondering at the strength,  
Boldness and royal knighthood of the bird  
Who pounced her quarry and slew it. Many a time  
As once--of old--among the flowers--they rode.

But Vivien half-forgotten of the Queen  
Among her damsels broidering sat, heard, watched  
And whispered: through the peaceful court she crept  
And whispered: then as Arthur in the highest  
Leavened the world, so Vivien in the lowest,  
Arriving at a time of golden rest,  
And sowing one ill hint from ear to ear,  
While all the heathen lay at Arthur's feet,  
And no quest came, but all was joust and play,  
Leavened his hall. They heard and let her be.

Thereafter as an enemy that has left  
Death in the living waters, and withdrawn,  
The wily Vivien stole from Arthur's court.

She hated all the knights, and heard in thought  
Their lavish comment when her name was named.  
For once, when Arthur walking all alone,  
Vext at a rumour issued from herself  
Of some corruption crept among his knights,  
Had met her, Vivien, being greeted fair,  
Would fain have wrought upon his cloudy mood  
With reverent eyes mock-loyal, shaken voice,  
And fluttered adoration, and at last  
With dark sweet hints of some who prized him more  
Than who should prize him most; at which the King  
Had gazed upon her blankly and gone by:  
But one had watched, and had not held his peace:  
It made the laughter of an afternoon  
That Vivien should attempt the blameless King.  
And after that, she set herself to gain  
Him, the most famous man of all those times,  
Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts,  
Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls,  
Was also Bard, and knew the starry heavens;  
The people called him Wizard; whom at first  
She played about with slight and sprightly talk,  
And vivid smiles, and faintly-venomed points  
Of slander, glancing here and grazing there;

And yielding to his kindlier moods, the Seer  
Would watch her at her petulance, and play,  
Even when they seemed unloveable, and laugh  
As those that watch a kitten; thus he grew  
Tolerant of what he half disdained, and she,  
Perceiving that she was but half disdained,  
Began to break her sports with graver fits,  
Turn red or pale, would often when they met  
Sigh fully, or all-silent gaze upon him  
With such a fixt devotion, that the old man,  
Though doubtful, felt the flattery, and at times  
Would flatter his own wish in age for love,  
And half believe her true: for thus at times  
He wavered; but that other clung to him,  
Fixt in her will, and so the seasons went.

Then fell on Merlin a great melancholy;  
He walked with dreams and darkness, and he found  
A doom that ever poised itself to fall,  
An ever-moaning battle in the mist,  
World-war of dying flesh against the life,  
Death in all life and lying in all love,  
The meanest having power upon the highest,  
And the high purpose broken by the worm.

So leaving Arthur's court he gained the beach;  
There found a little boat, and stept into it;  
And Vivien followed, but he marked her not.  
She took the helm and he the sail; the boat  
Drave with a sudden wind across the deeps,  
And touching Breton sands, they disembarked.  
And then she followed Merlin all the way,  
Even to the wild woods of Broceliande.  
For Merlin once had told her of a charm,  
The which if any wrought on anyone  
With woven paces and with waving arms,  
The man so wrought on ever seemed to lie  
Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower,  
From which was no escape for evermore;  
And none could find that man for evermore,  
Nor could he see but him who wrought the charm  
Coming and going, and he lay as dead  
And lost to life and use and name and fame.  
And Vivien ever sought to work the charm  
Upon the great Enchanter of the Time,  
As fancying that her glory would be great  
According to his greatness whom she quenched.

There lay she all her length and kissed his feet,  
As if in deepest reverence and in love.  
A twist of gold was round her hair; a robe  
Of samite without price, that more exprest  
Than hid her, clung about her lissome limbs,

In colour like the satin-shining palm  
On shallows in the windy gleams of March:  
And while she kissed them, crying, 'Trample me,  
Dear feet, that I have followed through the world,  
And I will pay you worship; tread me down  
And I will kiss you for it;' he was mute:  
So dark a forethought rolled about his brain,  
As on a dull day in an Ocean cave  
The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall  
In silence: wherefore, when she lifted up  
A face of sad appeal, and spake and said,  
'O Merlin, do ye love me?' and again,  
'O Merlin, do ye love me?' and once more,  
'Great Master, do ye love me?' he was mute.  
And lissome Vivien, holding by his heel,  
Writhed toward him, slided up his knee and sat,  
Behind his ankle twined her hollow feet  
Together, curved an arm about his neck,  
Clung like a snake; and letting her left hand  
Droop from his mighty shoulder, as a leaf,  
Made with her right a comb of pearl to part  
The lists of such a board as youth gone out  
Had left in ashes: then he spoke and said,  
Not looking at her, 'Who are wise in love  
Love most, say least,' and Vivien answered quick,  
'I saw the little elf-god eyeless once  
In Arthur's arras hall at Camelot:  
But neither eyes nor tongue--O stupid child!  
Yet you are wise who say it; let me think  
Silence is wisdom: I am silent then,  
And ask no kiss;' then adding all at once,  
'And lo, I clothe myself with wisdom,' drew  
The vast and shaggy mantle of his beard  
Across her neck and bosom to her knee,  
And called herself a gilded summer fly  
Caught in a great old tyrant spider's web,  
Who meant to eat her up in that wild wood  
Without one word. So Vivien called herself,  
But rather seemed a lovely baleful star  
Veiled in gray vapour; till he sadly smiled:  
'To what request for what strange boon,' he said,  
'Are these your pretty tricks and fooleries,  
O Vivien, the preamble? yet my thanks,  
For these have broken up my melancholy.'

And Vivien answered smiling saucily,  
'What, O my Master, have ye found your voice?  
I bid the stranger welcome. Thanks at last!  
But yesterday you never opened lip,  
Except indeed to drink: no cup had we:  
In mine own lady palms I culled the spring  
That gathered trickling dropwise from the cleft,  
And made a pretty cup of both my hands

And offered you it kneeling: then you drank  
And knew no more, nor gave me one poor word;  
O no more thanks than might a goat have given  
With no more sign of reverence than a beard.  
And when we halted at that other well,  
And I was faint to swooning, and you lay  
Foot-gilt with all the blossom-dust of those  
Deep meadows we had traversed, did you know  
That Vivien bathed your feet before her own?  
And yet no thanks: and all through this wild wood  
And all this morning when I fondled you:  
Boon, ay, there was a boon, one not so strange--  
How had I wronged you? surely ye are wise,  
But such a silence is more wise than kind.'

And Merlin locked his hand in hers and said:  
'O did ye never lie upon the shore,  
And watch the curled white of the coming wave  
Glassed in the slippery sand before it breaks?  
Even such a wave, but not so pleasurable,  
Dark in the glass of some presageful mood,  
Had I for three days seen, ready to fall.  
And then I rose and fled from Arthur's court  
To break the mood. You followed me unasked;  
And when I looked, and saw you following me still,  
My mind involved yourself the nearest thing  
In that mind-mist: for shall I tell you truth?  
You seemed that wave about to break upon me  
And sweep me from my hold upon the world,  
My use and name and fame. Your pardon, child.  
Your pretty sports have brightened all again.  
And ask your boon, for boon I owe you thrice,  
Once for wrong done you by confusion, next  
For thanks it seems till now neglected, last  
For these your dainty gambols: wherefore ask;  
And take this boon so strange and not so strange.'

And Vivien answered smiling mournfully:  
'O not so strange as my long asking it,  
Not yet so strange as you yourself are strange,  
Nor half so strange as that dark mood of yours.  
I ever feared ye were not wholly mine;  
And see, yourself have owned ye did me wrong.  
The people call you prophet: let it be:  
But not of those that can expound themselves.  
Take Vivien for expounder; she will call  
That three-days-long presageful gloom of yours  
No presage, but the same mistrustful mood  
That makes you seem less noble than yourself,  
Whenever I have asked this very boon,  
Now asked again: for see you not, dear love,  
That such a mood as that, which lately gloomed  
Your fancy when ye saw me following you,

Must make me fear still more you are not mine,  
Must make me yearn still more to prove you mine,  
And make me wish still more to learn this charm  
Of woven paces and of waving hands,  
As proof of trust. O Merlin, teach it me.  
The charm so taught will charm us both to rest.  
For, grant me some slight power upon your fate,  
I, feeling that you felt me worthy trust,  
Should rest and let you rest, knowing you mine.  
And therefore be as great as ye are named,  
Not muffled round with selfish reticence.  
How hard you look and how denyingly!  
O, if you think this wickedness in me,  
That I should prove it on you unawares,  
That makes me passing wrathful; then our bond  
Had best be loosed for ever: but think or not,  
By Heaven that hears I tell you the clean truth,  
As clean as blood of babes, as white as milk:  
O Merlin, may this earth, if ever I,  
If these unwitty wandering wits of mine,  
Even in the jumbled rubbish of a dream,  
Have tript on such conjectural treachery--  
May this hard earth cleave to the Nadir hell  
Down, down, and close again, and nip me flat,  
If I be such a traitress. Yield my boon,  
Till which I scarce can yield you all I am;  
And grant my re-reiterated wish,  
The great proof of your love: because I think,  
However wise, ye hardly know me yet.'

And Merlin loosed his hand from hers and said,  
'I never was less wise, however wise,  
Too curious Vivien, though you talk of trust,  
Than when I told you first of such a charm.  
Yea, if ye talk of trust I tell you this,  
Too much I trusted when I told you that,  
And stirred this vice in you which ruined man  
Through woman the first hour; for howsoe'er  
In children a great curiousness be well,  
Who have to learn themselves and all the world,  
In you, that are no child, for still I find  
Your face is practised when I spell the lines,  
I call it,--well, I will not call it vice:  
But since you name yourself the summer fly,  
I well could wish a cobweb for the gnat,  
That settles, beaten back, and beaten back  
Settles, till one could yield for weariness:  
But since I will not yield to give you power  
Upon my life and use and name and fame,  
Why will ye never ask some other boon?  
Yea, by God's rood, I trusted you too much.'

And Vivien, like the tenderest-hearted maid



That ever bided tryst at village stile,  
Made answer, either eyelid wet with tears:  
'Nay, Master, be not wrathful with your maid;  
Caress her: let her feel herself forgiven  
Who feels no heart to ask another boon.  
I think ye hardly know the tender rhyme  
Of "trust me not at all or all in all."  
I heard the great Sir Lancelot sing it once,  
And it shall answer for me. Listen to it.

"In Love, if Love be Love, if Love be ours,  
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers:  
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.

"It is the little rift within the lute,  
That by and by will make the music mute,  
And ever widening slowly silence all.

"The little rift within the lover's lute  
Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit,  
That rotting inward slowly moulders all.

"It is not worth the keeping: let it go:  
But shall it? answer, darling, answer, no.  
And trust me not at all or all in all."

O Master, do ye love my tender rhyme?'

And Merlin looked and half believed her true,  
So tender was her voice, so fair her face,  
So sweetly gleamed her eyes behind her tears  
Like sunlight on the plain behind a shower:  
And yet he answered half indignantly:

'Far other was the song that once I heard  
By this huge oak, sung nearly where we sit:  
For here we met, some ten or twelve of us,  
To chase a creature that was current then  
In these wild woods, the hart with golden horns.  
It was the time when first the question rose  
About the founding of a Table Round,  
That was to be, for love of God and men  
And noble deeds, the flower of all the world.  
And each incited each to noble deeds.  
And while we waited, one, the youngest of us,  
We could not keep him silent, out he flashed,  
And into such a song, such fire for fame,  
Such trumpet-glowings in it, coming down  
To such a stern and iron-clashing close,  
That when he stopt we longed to hurl together,  
And should have done it; but the beauteous beast  
Scared by the noise upstarted at our feet,  
And like a silver shadow slipt away

Through the dim land; and all day long we rode  
Through the dim land against a rushing wind,  
That glorious roundel echoing in our ears,  
And chased the flashes of his golden horns  
Till they vanished by the fairy well  
That laughs at iron--as our warriors did--  
Where children cast their pins and nails, and cry,  
"Laugh, little well!" but touch it with a sword,  
It buzzes fiercely round the point; and there  
We lost him: such a noble song was that.  
But, Vivien, when you sang me that sweet rhyme,  
I felt as though you knew this cursed charm,  
Were proving it on me, and that I lay  
And felt them slowly ebbing, name and fame.'

And Vivien answered smiling mournfully:  
'O mine have ebbed away for evermore,  
And all through following you to this wild wood,  
Because I saw you sad, to comfort you.  
Lo now, what hearts have men! they never mount  
As high as woman in her selfless mood.  
And touching fame, howe'er ye scorn my song,  
Take one verse more--the lady speaks it--this:

"My name, once mine, now thine, is closelier mine,  
For fame, could fame be mine, that fame were thine,  
And shame, could shame be thine, that shame were mine.  
So trust me not at all or all in all."

'Says she not well? and there is more--this rhyme  
Is like the fair pearl-necklace of the Queen,  
That burst in dancing, and the pearls were spilt;  
Some lost, some stolen, some as relics kept.  
But nevermore the same two sister pearls  
Ran down the silken thread to kiss each other  
On her white neck--so is it with this rhyme:  
It lives dispersedly in many hands,  
And every minstrel sings it differently;  
Yet is there one true line, the pearl of pearls:  
"Man dreams of Fame while woman wakes to love."  
Yea! Love, though Love were of the grossest, carves  
A portion from the solid present, eats  
And uses, careless of the rest; but Fame,  
The Fame that follows death is nothing to us;  
And what is Fame in life but half-disfame,  
And counterchanged with darkness? ye yourself  
Know well that Envy calls you Devil's son,  
And since ye seem the Master of all Art,  
They fain would make you Master of all vice.'

And Merlin locked his hand in hers and said,  
'I once was looking for a magic weed,  
And found a fair young squire who sat alone,

Had carved himself a knightly shield of wood,  
And then was painting on it fancied arms,  
Azure, an Eagle rising or, the Sun  
In dexter chief; the scroll "I follow fame."  
And speaking not, but leaning over him  
I took his brush and blotted out the bird,  
And made a Gardener putting in a graff,  
With this for motto, "Rather use than fame."  
You should have seen him blush; but afterwards  
He made a stalwart knight. O Vivien,  
For you, methinks you think you love me well;  
For me, I love you somewhat; rest: and Love  
Should have some rest and pleasure in himself,  
Not ever be too curious for a boon,  
Too prurient for a proof against the grain  
Of him ye say ye love: but Fame with men,  
Being but ampler means to serve mankind,  
Should have small rest or pleasure in herself,  
But work as vassal to the larger love,  
That dwarfs the petty love of one to one.  
Use gave me Fame at first, and Fame again  
Increasing gave me use. Lo, there my boon!  
What other? for men sought to prove me vile,  
Because I fain had given them greater wits:  
And then did Envy call me Devil's son:  
The sick weak beast seeking to help herself  
By striking at her better, missed, and brought  
Her own claw back, and wounded her own heart.  
Sweet were the days when I was all unknown,  
But when my name was lifted up, the storm  
Broke on the mountain and I cared not for it.  
Right well know I that Fame is half-disfame,  
Yet needs must work my work. That other fame,  
To one at least, who hath not children, vague,  
The cackle of the unborn about the grave,  
I cared not for it: a single misty star,  
Which is the second in a line of stars  
That seem a sword beneath a belt of three,  
I never gazed upon it but I dreamt  
Of some vast charm concluded in that star  
To make fame nothing. Wherefore, if I fear,  
Giving you power upon me through this charm,  
That you might play me falsely, having power,  
However well ye think ye love me now  
(As sons of kings loving in pupilage  
Have turned to tyrants when they came to power)  
I rather dread the loss of use than fame;  
If you--and not so much from wickedness,  
As some wild turn of anger, or a mood  
Of overstrained affection, it may be,  
To keep me all to your own self,--or else  
A sudden spurt of woman's jealousy,--  
Should try this charm on whom ye say ye love.'

And Vivien answered smiling as in wrath:  
'Have I not sworn? I am not trusted. Good!  
Well, hide it, hide it; I shall find it out;  
And being found take heed of Vivien.  
A woman and not trusted, doubtless I  
Might feel some sudden turn of anger born  
Of your misfaith; and your fine epithet  
Is accurate too, for this full love of mine  
Without the full heart back may merit well  
Your term of overstrained. So used as I,  
My daily wonder is, I love at all.  
And as to woman's jealousy, O why not?  
O to what end, except a jealous one,  
And one to make me jealous if I love,  
Was this fair charm invented by yourself?  
I well believe that all about this world  
Ye cage a buxom captive here and there,  
Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower  
From which is no escape for evermore.'

Then the great Master merrily answered her:  
'Full many a love in loving youth was mine;  
I needed then no charm to keep them mine  
But youth and love; and that full heart of yours  
Whereof ye prattle, may now assure you mine;  
So live uncharmed. For those who wrought it first,  
The wrist is parted from the hand that waved,  
The feet unmortised from their ankle-bones  
Who paced it, ages back: but will ye hear  
The legend as in guerdon for your rhyme?

'There lived a king in the most Eastern East,  
Less old than I, yet older, for my blood  
Hath earnest in it of far springs to be.  
A tawny pirate anchored in his port,  
Whose bark had plundered twenty nameless isles;  
And passing one, at the high peep of dawn,  
He saw two cities in a thousand boats  
All fighting for a woman on the sea.  
And pushing his black craft among them all,  
He lightly scattered theirs and brought her off,  
With loss of half his people arrow-slain;  
A maid so smooth, so white, so wonderful,  
They said a light came from her when she moved:  
And since the pirate would not yield her up,  
The King impaled him for his piracy;  
Then made her Queen: but those isle-nurtured eyes  
Waged such unwilling though successful war  
On all the youth, they sickened; councils thinned,  
And armies waned, for magnet-like she drew  
The rustiest iron of old fighters' hearts;  
And beasts themselves would worship; camels knelt

Unbidden, and the brutes of mountain back  
That carry kings in castles, bowed black knees  
Of homage, ringing with their serpent hands,  
To make her smile, her golden ankle-bells.  
What wonder, being jealous, that he sent  
His horns of proclamation out through all  
The hundred under-kingdoms that he swayed  
To find a wizard who might teach the King  
Some charm, which being wrought upon the Queen  
Might keep her all his own: to such a one  
He promised more than ever king has given,  
A league of mountain full of golden mines,  
A province with a hundred miles of coast,  
A palace and a princess, all for him:  
But on all those who tried and failed, the King  
Pronounced a dismal sentence, meaning by it  
To keep the list low and pretenders back,  
Or like a king, not to be trifled with--  
Their heads should moulder on the city gates.  
And many tried and failed, because the charm  
Of nature in her overbore their own:  
And many a wizard brow bleached on the walls:  
And many weeks a troop of carrion crows  
Hung like a cloud above the gateway towers.'

And Vivien breaking in upon him, said:  
'I sit and gather honey; yet, methinks,  
Thy tongue has tript a little: ask thyself.  
The lady never made unwilling war  
With those fine eyes: she had her pleasure in it,  
And made her good man jealous with good cause.  
And lived there neither dame nor damsel then  
Wroth at a lover's loss? were all as tame,  
I mean, as noble, as the Queen was fair?  
Not one to flirt a venom at her eyes,  
Or pinch a murderous dust into her drink,  
Or make her paler with a poisoned rose?  
Well, those were not our days: but did they find  
A wizard? Tell me, was he like to thee?

She ceased, and made her lithe arm round his neck  
Tighten, and then drew back, and let her eyes  
Speak for her, glowing on him, like a bride's  
On her new lord, her own, the first of men.

He answered laughing, 'Nay, not like to me.  
At last they found--his foragers for charms--  
A little glassy-headed hairless man,  
Who lived alone in a great wild on grass;  
Read but one book, and ever reading grew  
So grated down and filed away with thought,  
So lean his eyes were monstrous; while the skin  
Clung but to crate and basket, ribs and spine.

And since he kept his mind on one sole aim,  
Nor ever touched fierce wine, nor tasted flesh,  
Nor owned a sensual wish, to him the wall  
That sunders ghosts and shadow-casting men  
Became a crystal, and he saw them through it,  
And heard their voices talk behind the wall,  
And learnt their elemental secrets, powers  
And forces; often o'er the sun's bright eye  
Drew the vast eyelid of an inky cloud,  
And lashed it at the base with slanting storm;  
Or in the noon of mist and driving rain,  
When the lake whitened and the pinewood roared,  
And the cairned mountain was a shadow, sunned  
The world to peace again: here was the man.  
And so by force they dragged him to the King.  
And then he taught the King to charm the Queen  
In such-wise, that no man could see her more,  
Nor saw she save the King, who wrought the charm,  
Coming and going, and she lay as dead,  
And lost all use of life: but when the King  
Made proffer of the league of golden mines,  
The province with a hundred miles of coast,  
The palace and the princess, that old man  
Went back to his old wild, and lived on grass,  
And vanished, and his book came down to me.'

And Vivien answered smiling saucily:  
'Ye have the book: the charm is written in it:  
Good: take my counsel: let me know it at once:  
For keep it like a puzzle chest in chest,  
With each chest locked and padlocked thirty-fold,  
And whelm all this beneath as vast a mound  
As after furious battle turfs the slain  
On some wild down above the windy deep,  
I yet should strike upon a sudden means  
To dig, pick, open, find and read the charm:  
Then, if I tried it, who should blame me then?'

And smiling as a master smiles at one  
That is not of his school, nor any school  
But that where blind and naked Ignorance  
Delivers brawling judgments, unashamed,  
On all things all day long, he answered her:

'Thou read the book, my pretty Vivien!  
O ay, it is but twenty pages long,  
But every page having an ample marge,  
And every marge enclosing in the midst  
A square of text that looks a little blot,  
The text no larger than the limbs of fleas;  
And every square of text an awful charm,  
Writ in a language that has long gone by.  
So long, that mountains have arisen since

With cities on their flanks--thou read the book!  
And ever margin scribbled, crost, and crammed  
With comment, densest condensation, hard  
To mind and eye; but the long sleepless nights  
Of my long life have made it easy to me.  
And none can read the text, not even I;  
And none can read the comment but myself;  
And in the comment did I find the charm.  
O, the results are simple; a mere child  
Might use it to the harm of anyone,  
And never could undo it: ask no more:  
For though you should not prove it upon me,  
But keep that oath ye sware, ye might, perchance,  
Assay it on some one of the Table Round,  
And all because ye dream they babble of you.'

And Vivien, frowning in true anger, said:  
'What dare the full-fed liars say of me?  
They ride abroad redressing human wrongs!  
They sit with knife in meat and wine in horn!  
They bound to holy vows of chastity!  
Were I not woman, I could tell a tale.  
But you are man, you well can understand  
The shame that cannot be explained for shame.  
Not one of all the drove should touch me: swine!'

Then answered Merlin careless of her words:  
'You breathe but accusation vast and vague,  
Spleen-born, I think, and proofless. If ye know,  
Set up the charge ye know, to stand or fall!'

And Vivien answered frowning wrathfully:  
'O ay, what say ye to Sir Valence, him  
Whose kinsman left him watcher o'er his wife  
And two fair babes, and went to distant lands;  
Was one year gone, and on returning found  
Not two but three? there lay the reckling, one  
But one hour old! What said the happy sire?  
A seven-months' babe had been a truer gift.  
Those twelve sweet moons confused his fatherhood.'

Then answered Merlin, 'Nay, I know the tale.  
Sir Valence wedded with an outland dame:  
Some cause had kept him sundered from his wife:  
One child they had: it lived with her: she died:  
His kinsman travelling on his own affair  
Was charged by Valence to bring home the child.  
He brought, not found it therefore: take the truth.'

'O ay,' said Vivien, 'overtrue a tale.  
What say ye then to sweet Sir Sagamore,  
That ardent man? "to pluck the flower in season,"  
So says the song, "I trow it is no treason."

O Master, shall we call him overquick  
To crop his own sweet rose before the hour?’

And Merlin answered, ‘Overquick art thou  
To catch a loathly plume fallen from the wing  
Of that foul bird of rapine whose whole prey  
Is man’s good name: he never wronged his bride.  
I know the tale. An angry gust of wind  
Puffed out his torch among the myriad-roomed  
And many-corridor’d complexities  
Of Arthur’s palace: then he found a door,  
And darkling felt the sculptured ornament  
That wreathen round it made it seem his own;  
And wearied out made for the couch and slept,  
A stainless man beside a stainless maid;  
And either slept, nor knew of other there;  
Till the high dawn piercing the royal rose  
In Arthur’s casement glimmered chastely down,  
Blushing upon them blushing, and at once  
He rose without a word and parted from her:  
But when the thing was blazed about the court,  
The brute world howling forced them into bonds,  
And as it chanced they are happy, being pure.’

‘O ay,’ said Vivien, ‘that were likely too.  
What say ye then to fair Sir Percivale  
And of the horrid foulness that he wrought,  
The saintly youth, the spotless lamb of Christ,  
Or some black wether of St Satan’s fold.  
What, in the precincts of the chapel-yard,  
Among the knightly brasses of the graves,  
And by the cold Hic Jacets of the dead!’

And Merlin answered careless of her charge,  
‘A sober man is Percivale and pure;  
But once in life was flustered with new wine,  
Then paced for coolness in the chapel-yard;  
Where one of Satan’s shepherdesses caught  
And meant to stamp him with her master’s mark;  
And that he sinned is not believable;  
For, look upon his face!--but if he sinned,  
The sin that practice burns into the blood,  
And not the one dark hour which brings remorse,  
Will brand us, after, of whose fold we be:  
Or else were he, the holy king, whose hymns  
Are chanted in the minster, worse than all.  
But is your spleen frothed out, or have ye more?’

And Vivien answered frowning yet in wrath:  
‘O ay; what say ye to Sir Lancelot, friend  
Traitor or true? that commerce with the Queen,  
I ask you, is it clamoured by the child,  
Or whispered in the corner? do ye know it?’



To which he answered sadly, 'Yea, I know it.  
Sir Lancelot went ambassador, at first,  
To fetch her, and she watched him from her walls.  
A rumour runs, she took him for the King,  
So fixt her fancy on him: let them be.  
But have ye no one word of loyal praise  
For Arthur, blameless King and stainless man?'

She answered with a low and chuckling laugh:  
'Man! is he man at all, who knows and winks?  
Sees what his fair bride is and does, and winks?  
By which the good King means to blind himself,  
And blinds himself and all the Table Round  
To all the foulness that they work. Myself  
Could call him (were it not for womanhood)  
The pretty, popular cause such manhood earns,  
Could call him the main cause of all their crime;  
Yea, were he not crowned King, coward, and fool.'

Then Merlin to his own heart, loathing, said:  
'O true and tender! O my liege and King!  
O selfless man and stainless gentleman,  
Who wouldst against thine own eye-witness fain  
Have all men true and leal, all women pure;  
How, in the mouths of base interpreters,  
From over-fineness not intelligible  
To things with every sense as false and foul  
As the poached filth that floods the middle street,  
Is thy white blamelessness accounted blame!'

But Vivien, deeming Merlin overborne  
By instance, recommenced, and let her tongue  
Rage like a fire among the noblest names,  
Polluting, and imputing her whole self,  
Defaming and defacing, till she left  
Not even Lancelot brave, nor Galahad clean.

Her words had issue other than she willed.  
He dragged his eyebrow bushes down, and made  
A snowy penthouse for his hollow eyes,  
And muttered in himself, 'Tell her the charm!  
So, if she had it, would she rail on me  
To snare the next, and if she have it not  
So will she rail. What did the wanton say?  
"Not mount as high;" we scarce can sink as low:  
For men at most differ as Heaven and earth,  
But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell.  
I know the Table Round, my friends of old;  
All brave, and many generous, and some chaste.  
She cloaks the scar of some repulse with lies;  
I well believe she tempted them and failed,  
Being so bitter: for fine plots may fail,

Though harlots paint their talk as well as face  
With colours of the heart that are not theirs.  
I will not let her know: nine tithes of times  
Face-flatterer and backbiter are the same.  
And they, sweet soul, that most impute a crime  
Are pronest to it, and impute themselves,  
Wanting the mental range; or low desire  
Not to feel lowest makes them level all;  
Yea, they would pare the mountain to the plain,  
To leave an equal baseness; and in this  
Are harlots like the crowd, that if they find  
Some stain or blemish in a name of note,  
Not grieving that their greatest are so small,  
Inflate themselves with some insane delight,  
And judge all nature from her feet of clay,  
Without the will to lift their eyes, and see  
Her godlike head crowned with spiritual fire,  
And touching other worlds. I am weary of her.'

He spoke in words part heard, in whispers part,  
Half-suffocated in the hoary fell  
And many-wintered fleece of throat and chin.  
But Vivien, gathering somewhat of his mood,  
And hearing 'harlot' muttered twice or thrice,  
Leapt from her session on his lap, and stood  
Stiff as a viper frozen; loathsome sight,  
How from the rosy lips of life and love,  
Flashed the bare-grinning skeleton of death!  
White was her cheek; sharp breaths of anger puffed  
Her fairy nostril out; her hand half-clenched  
Went faltering sideways downward to her belt,  
And feeling; had she found a dagger there  
(For in a wink the false love turns to hate)  
She would have stabbed him; but she found it not:  
His eye was calm, and suddenly she took  
To bitter weeping like a beaten child,  
A long, long weeping, not consolable.  
Then her false voice made way, broken with sobs:

'O crueller than was ever told in tale,  
Or sung in song! O vainly lavished love!  
O cruel, there was nothing wild or strange,  
Or seeming shameful--for what shame in love,  
So love be true, and not as yours is--nothing  
Poor Vivien had not done to win his trust  
Who called her what he called her--all her crime,  
All--all--the wish to prove him wholly hers.'

She mused a little, and then clapt her hands  
Together with a wailing shriek, and said:  
'Stabbed through the heart's affections to the heart!  
Seethed like the kid in its own mother's milk!  
Killed with a word worse than a life of blows!

I thought that he was gentle, being great:  
O God, that I had loved a smaller man!  
I should have found in him a greater heart.  
O, I, that flattering my true passion, saw  
The knights, the court, the King, dark in your light,  
Who loved to make men darker than they are,  
Because of that high pleasure which I had  
To seat you sole upon my pedestal  
Of worship--I am answered, and henceforth  
The course of life that seemed so flowery to me  
With you for guide and master, only you,  
Becomes the sea-cliff pathway broken short,  
And ending in a ruin--nothing left,  
But into some low cave to crawl, and there,  
If the wolf spare me, weep my life away,  
Killed with inutterable unkindliness.'

She paused, she turned away, she hung her head,  
The snake of gold slid from her hair, the braid  
Slipt and uncoiled itself, she wept afresh,  
And the dark wood grew darker toward the storm  
In silence, while his anger slowly died  
Within him, till he let his wisdom go  
For ease of heart, and half believed her true:  
Called her to shelter in the hollow oak,  
'Come from the storm,' and having no reply,  
Gazed at the heaving shoulder, and the face  
Hand-hidden, as for utmost grief or shame;  
Then thrice essayed, by tenderest-touching terms,  
To sleek her ruffled peace of mind, in vain.  
At last she let herself be conquered by him,  
And as the cageling newly flown returns,  
The seeming-injured simple-hearted thing  
Came to her old perch back, and settled there.  
There while she sat, half-falling from his knees,  
Half-nestled at his heart, and since he saw  
The slow tear creep from her closed eyelid yet,  
About her, more in kindness than in love,  
The gentle wizard cast a shielding arm.  
But she dislinked herself at once and rose,  
Her arms upon her breast across, and stood,  
A virtuous gentlewoman deeply wronged,  
Upright and flushed before him: then she said:

'There must now be no passages of love  
Betwixt us twain henceforward evermore;  
Since, if I be what I am grossly called,  
What should be granted which your own gross heart  
Would reckon worth the taking? I will go.  
In truth, but one thing now--better have died  
Thrice than have asked it once--could make me stay--  
That proof of trust--so often asked in vain!  
How justly, after that vile term of yours,

I find with grief! I might believe you then,  
Who knows? once more. Lo! what was once to me  
Mere matter of the fancy, now hath grown  
The vast necessity of heart and life.  
Farewell; think gently of me, for I fear  
My fate or folly, passing gayer youth  
For one so old, must be to love thee still.  
But ere I leave thee let me swear once more  
That if I schemed against thy peace in this,  
May yon just heaven, that darkens o'er me, send  
One flash, that, missing all things else, may make  
My scheming brain a cinder, if I lie.'

Scarce had she ceased, when out of heaven a bolt  
(For now the storm was close above them) struck,  
Furrowing a giant oak, and javelining  
With darted spikes and splinters of the wood  
The dark earth round. He raised his eyes and saw  
The tree that shone white-listed through the gloom.  
But Vivien, fearing heaven had heard her oath,  
And dazzled by the livid-flickering fork,  
And deafened with the stammering cracks and claps  
That followed, flying back and crying out,  
'O Merlin, though you do not love me, save,  
Yet save me!' clung to him and hugged him close;  
And called him dear protector in her fright,  
Nor yet forgot her practice in her fright,  
But wrought upon his mood and hugged him close.  
The pale blood of the wizard at her touch  
Took gayer colours, like an opal warmed.  
She blamed herself for telling hearsay tales:  
She shook from fear, and for her fault she wept  
Of petulancy; she called him lord and liege,  
Her seer, her bard, her silver star of eve,  
Her God, her Merlin, the one passionate love  
Of her whole life; and ever overhead  
Bellowed the tempest, and the rotten branch  
Snapt in the rushing of the river-rain  
Above them; and in change of glare and gloom  
Her eyes and neck glittering went and came;  
Till now the storm, its burst of passion spent,  
Moaning and calling out of other lands,  
Had left the ravaged woodland yet once more  
To peace; and what should not have been had been,  
For Merlin, overtalked and overworn,  
Had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.

Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm  
Of woven paces and of waving hands,  
And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,  
And lost to life and use and name and fame.

Then crying 'I have made his glory mine,'

And shrieking out 'O fool!' the harlot leapt  
Adown the forest, and the thicket closed  
Behind her, and the forest echoed 'fool.'

#### Lancelot and Elaine

Elaine the fair, Elaine the loveable,  
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,  
High in her chamber up a tower to the east  
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot;  
Which first she placed where the morning's earliest ray  
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;  
Then fearing rust or soilure fashioned for it  
A case of silk, and braided thereupon  
All the devices blazoned on the shield  
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,  
A border fantasy of branch and flower,  
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.  
Nor rested thus content, but day by day,  
Leaving her household and good father, climbed  
That eastern tower, and entering barred her door,  
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,  
Now guessed a hidden meaning in his arms,  
Now made a pretty history to herself  
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,  
And every scratch a lance had made upon it,  
Conjecturing when and where: this cut is fresh;  
That ten years back; this dealt him at Caerlyle;  
That at Caerleon; this at Camelot:  
And ah God's mercy, what a stroke was there!  
And here a thrust that might have killed, but God  
Broke the strong lance, and rolled his enemy down,  
And saved him: so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield  
Of Lancelot, she that knew not even his name?  
He left it with her, when he rode to tilt  
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,  
Which Arthur had ordained, and by that name  
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur, long before they crowned him King,  
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse,  
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.  
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave  
Like its own mists to all the mountain side:  
For here two brothers, one a king, had met  
And fought together; but their names were lost;

And each had slain his brother at a blow;  
And down they fell and made the glen abhorred:  
And there they lay till all their bones were bleached,  
And lichened into colour with the crags:  
And he, that once was king, had on a crown  
Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside.  
And Arthur came, and labouring up the pass,  
All in a misty moonshine, unawares  
Had trodden that crowned skeleton, and the skull  
Broke from the nape, and from the skull the crown  
Rolled into light, and turning on its rims  
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn:  
And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,  
And set it on his head, and in his heart  
Heard murmurs, 'Lo, thou likewise shalt be King.'

Thereafter, when a King, he had the gems  
Plucked from the crown, and showed them to his knights,  
Saying, 'These jewels, whereupon I chanced  
Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the King's--  
For public use: henceforward let there be,  
Once every year, a joust for one of these:  
For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn  
Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow  
In use of arms and manhood, till we drive  
The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land  
Hereafter, which God hinder.' Thus he spoke:  
And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still  
Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,  
With purpose to present them to the Queen,  
When all were won; but meaning all at once  
To snare her royal fancy with a boon  
Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last  
And largest, Arthur, holding then his court  
Hard on the river nigh the place which now  
Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust  
At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh  
Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere,  
'Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move  
To these fair jousts?' 'Yea, lord,' she said, 'ye know it.'  
'Then will ye miss,' he answered, 'the great deeds  
Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,  
A sight ye love to look on.' And the Queen  
Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly  
On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.  
He thinking that he read her meaning there,  
'Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more  
Than many diamonds,' yielded; and a heart  
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen  
(However much he yearned to make complete  
The tale of diamonds for his destined boon)

Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,  
'Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,  
And lets me from the saddle;' and the King  
Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.  
No sooner gone than suddenly she began:

'To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame!  
Why go ye not to these fair jousts? the knights  
Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd  
Will murmur, "Lo the shameless ones, who take  
Their pastime now the trustful King is gone!"'  
Then Lancelot vexed at having lied in vain:  
'Are ye so wise? ye were not once so wise,  
My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.  
Then of the crowd ye took no more account  
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,  
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,  
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,  
Them surely can I silence with all ease.  
But now my loyal worship is allowed  
Of all men: many a bard, without offence,  
Has linked our names together in his lay,  
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,  
The pearl of beauty: and our knights at feast  
Have pledged us in this union, while the King  
Would listen smiling. How then? is there more?  
Has Arthur spoken aught? or would yourself,  
Now weary of my service and devoir,  
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord?'

She broke into a little scornful laugh:  
'Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,  
That passionate perfection, my good lord--  
But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven?  
He never spake word of reproach to me,  
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,  
He cares not for me: only here today  
There gleamed a vague suspicion in his eyes:  
Some meddling rogue has tampered with him--else  
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,  
And swearing men to vows impossible,  
To make them like himself: but, friend, to me  
He is all fault who hath no fault at all:  
For who loves me must have a touch of earth;  
The low sun makes the colour: I am yours,  
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond.  
And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts:  
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream  
When sweetest; and the vermin voices here  
May buzz so loud--we scorn them, but they sting.'

Then answered Lancelot, the chief of knights:  
'And with what face, after my pretext made,

Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I  
Before a King who honours his own word,  
As if it were his God's?'

'Yea,' said the Queen,  
'A moral child without the craft to rule,  
Else had he not lost me: but listen to me,  
If I must find you wit: we hear it said  
That men go down before your spear at a touch,  
But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name,  
This conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown:  
Win! by this kiss you will: and our true King  
Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,  
As all for glory; for to speak him true,  
Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,  
No keener hunter after glory breathes.  
He loves it in his knights more than himself:  
They prove to him his work: win and return.'

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,  
Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,  
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,  
Chose the green path that showed the rarer foot,  
And there among the solitary downs,  
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;  
Till as he traced a faintly-shadowed track,  
That all in loops and links among the dales  
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw  
Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.  
Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.  
Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,  
Who let him into lodging and disarmed.  
And Lancelot marvelled at the wordless man;  
And issuing found the Lord of Astolat  
With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,  
Moving to meet him in the castle court;  
And close behind them stept the lily maid  
Elaine, his daughter: mother of the house  
There was not: some light jest among them rose  
With laughter dying down as the great knight  
Approached them: then the Lord of Astolat:  
'Whence comes thou, my guest, and by what name  
Livest thou between the lips? for by thy state  
And presence I might guess thee chief of those,  
After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.  
Him have I seen: the rest, his Table Round,  
Known as they are, to me they are unknown.'

Then answered Sir Lancelot, the chief of knights:  
'Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known,  
What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.  
But since I go to joust as one unknown  
At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not,



Hereafter ye shall know me--and the shield--  
I pray you lend me one, if such you have,  
Blank, or at least with some device not mine.'

Then said the Lord of Astolat, 'Here is Torre's:  
Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre.  
And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.  
His ye can have.' Then added plain Sir Torre,  
'Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it.'  
Here laughed the father saying, 'Fie, Sir Churl,  
Is that answer for a noble knight?  
Allow him! but Lavaine, my younger here,  
He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,  
Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,  
And set it in this damsel's golden hair,  
To make her thrice as wilful as before.'

'Nay, father, nay good father, shame me not  
Before this noble knight,' said young Lavaine,  
'For nothing. Surely I but played on Torre:  
He seemed so sullen, vext he could not go:  
A jest, no more! for, knight, the maiden dreamt  
That some one put this diamond in her hand,  
And that it was too slippery to be held,  
And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,  
The castle-well, belike; and then I said  
That if I went and if I fought and won it  
(But all was jest and joke among ourselves)  
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.  
But, father, give me leave, an if he will,  
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight:  
Win shall I not, but do my best to win:  
Young as I am, yet would I do my best.'

'So will ye grace me,' answered Lancelot,  
Smiling a moment, 'with your fellowship  
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,  
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend:  
And you shall win this diamond,--as I hear  
It is a fair large diamond,--if ye may,  
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will.'  
'A fair large diamond,' added plain Sir Torre,  
'Such be for queens, and not for simple maids.'  
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,  
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,  
Flushed slightly at the slight disparagement  
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,  
Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus returned:  
'If what is fair be but for what is fair,  
And only queens are to be counted so,  
Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid  
Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,  
Not violating the bond of like to like.'

He spoke and ceased: the lily maid Elaine,  
Won by the mellow voice before she looked,  
Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments.  
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,  
In battle with the love he bare his lord,  
Had marred his face, and marked it ere his time.  
Another sinning on such heights with one,  
The flower of all the west and all the world,  
Had been the sleeker for it: but in him  
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose  
And drove him into wastes and solitudes  
For agony, who was yet a living soul.  
Marred as he was, he seemed the goodliest man  
That ever among ladies ate in hall,  
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.  
However marred, of more than twice her years,  
Seamed with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,  
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes  
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

Then the great knight, the darling of the court,  
Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall  
Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain  
Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,  
But kindly man moving among his kind:  
Whom they with meats and vintage of their best  
And talk and minstrel melody entertained.  
And much they asked of court and Table Round,  
And ever well and readily answered he:  
But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,  
Suddenly speaking of the wordless man,  
Heard from the Baron that, ten years before,  
The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.  
'He learnt and warned me of their fierce design  
Against my house, and him they caught and maimed;  
But I, my sons, and little daughter fled  
From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods  
By the great river in a boatman's hut.  
Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke  
The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill.'

'O there, great lord, doubtless,' Lavaine said, rapt  
By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth  
Toward greatness in its elder, 'you have fought.  
O tell us--for we live apart--you know  
Of Arthur's glorious wars.' And Lancelot spoke  
And answered him at full, as having been  
With Arthur in the fight which all day long  
Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem;  
And in the four loud battles by the shore  
Of Douglas; that on Bassa; then the war  
That thundered in and out the gloomy skirts

Of Celidon the forest; and again  
By castle Gurnion, where the glorious King  
Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,  
Carved of one emerald centered in a sun  
Of silver rays, that lightened as he breathed;  
And at Caerleon had he helped his lord,  
When the strong neighings of the wild white Horse  
Set every gilded parapet shuddering;  
And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,  
And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit,  
Where many a heathen fell; 'and on the mount  
Of Badon I myself beheld the King  
Charge at the head of all his Table Round,  
And all his legions crying Christ and him,  
And break them; and I saw him, after, stand  
High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume  
Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,  
And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,  
"They are broken, they are broken!" for the King,  
However mild he seems at home, nor cares  
For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts--  
For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs  
Saying, his knights are better men than he--  
Yet in this heathen war the fire of God  
Fills him: I never saw his like: there lives  
No greater leader.'

While he uttered this,  
Low to her own heart said the lily maid,  
'Save your own great self, fair lord;' and when he fell  
From talk of war to traits of pleasantry--  
Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind--  
She still took note that when the living smile  
Died from his lips, across him came a cloud  
Of melancholy severe, from which again,  
Whenever in her hovering to and fro  
The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,  
There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness  
Of manners and of nature: and she thought  
That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.  
And all night long his face before her lived,  
As when a painter, poring on a face,  
Divinely through all hindrance finds the man  
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,  
The shape and colour of a mind and life,  
Lives for his children, ever at its best  
And fullest; so the face before her lived,  
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full  
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.  
Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought  
She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.  
First in fear, step after step, she stole  
Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating:

Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,  
'This shield, my friend, where is it?' and Lavaine  
Past inward, as she came from out the tower.  
There to his proud horse Lancelot turned, and smoothed  
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.  
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew  
Nearer and stood. He looked, and more amazed  
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw  
The maiden standing in the dewy light.  
He had not dreamed she was so beautiful.  
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,  
For silent, though he greeted her, she stood  
Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.  
Suddenly flashed on her a wild desire,  
That he should wear her favour at the tilt.  
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.  
'Fair lord, whose name I know not--noble it is,  
I well believe, the noblest--will you wear  
My favour at this tourney?' 'Nay,' said he,  
'Fair lady, since I never yet have worn  
Favour of any lady in the lists.  
Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know.'  
'Yea, so,' she answered; 'then in wearing mine  
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,  
That those who know should know you.' And he turned  
Her counsel up and down within his mind,  
And found it true, and answered, 'True, my child.  
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:  
What is it?' and she told him 'A red sleeve  
Broidered with pearls,' and brought it: then he bound  
Her token on his helmet, with a smile  
Saying, 'I never yet have done so much  
For any maiden living,' and the blood  
Sprang to her face and filled her with delight;  
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine  
Returning brought the yet-unblazoned shield,  
His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,  
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine:  
'Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield  
In keeping till I come.' 'A grace to me,'  
She answered, 'twice today. I am your squire!'  
Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, 'Lily maid,  
For fear our people call you lily maid  
In earnest, let me bring your colour back;  
Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed:'  
So kissed her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,  
And thus they moved away: she stayed a minute,  
Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there--  
Her bright hair blown about the serious face  
Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss--  
Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield  
In silence, while she watched their arms far-off  
Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.

Then to her tower she climbed, and took the shield,  
There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away  
Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,  
To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight  
Not far from Camelot, now for forty years  
A hermit, who had prayed, laboured and prayed,  
And ever labouring had scooped himself  
In the white rock a chapel and a hall  
On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,  
And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry;  
The green light from the meadows underneath  
Struck up and lived along the milky roofs;  
And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees  
And poplars made a noise of falling showers.  
And thither wending there that night they bode.

But when the next day broke from underground,  
And shot red fire and shadows through the cave,  
They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away:  
Then Lancelot saying, 'Hear, but hold my name  
Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,'  
Abashed young Lavaine, whose instant reverence,  
Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,  
But left him leave to stammer, 'Is it indeed?'  
And after muttering 'The great Lancelot,  
At last he got his breath and answered, 'One,  
One have I seen--that other, our liege lord,  
The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,  
Of whom the people talk mysteriously,  
He will be there--then were I stricken blind  
That minute, I might say that I had seen.'

So spake Lavaine, and when they reached the lists  
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes  
Run through the peopled gallery which half round  
Lay like a rainbow fallen upon the grass,  
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat  
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,  
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,  
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,  
And from the carven-work behind him crept  
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make  
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them  
Through knots and loops and folds innumerable  
Fled ever through the woodwork, till they found  
The new design wherein they lost themselves,  
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work:  
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,  
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.

Then Lancelot answered young Lavaine and said,

'Me you call great: mine is the firmer seat,  
The truer lance: but there is many a youth  
Now crescent, who will come to all I am  
And overcome it; and in me there dwells  
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch  
Of greatness to know well I am not great:  
There is the man.' And Lavaine gaped upon him  
As on a thing miraculous, and anon  
The trumpets blew; and then did either side,  
They that assailed, and they that held the lists,  
Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,  
Meet in the midst, and there so furiously  
Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,  
If any man that day were left afield,  
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.  
And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw  
Which were the weaker; then he hurled into it  
Against the stronger: little need to speak  
Of Lancelot in his glory! King, duke, earl,  
Count, baron--whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,  
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,  
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight  
Should do and almost overdo the deeds  
Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, 'Lo!  
What is he? I do not mean the force alone--  
The grace and versatility of the man!  
Is it not Lancelot?' 'When has Lancelot worn  
Favour of any lady in the lists?  
Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know.'  
'How then? who then?' a fury seized them all,  
A fiery family passion for the name  
Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.  
They couched their spears and pricked their steeds, and thus,  
Their plumes driven backward by the wind they made  
In moving, all together down upon him  
Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,  
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all  
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,  
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,  
And him that helms it, so they overbore  
Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear  
Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear  
Pricked sharply his own cuirass, and the head  
Pierced through his side, and there snapt, and remained.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully;  
He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,  
And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.  
He up the side, sweating with agony, got,  
But thought to do while he might yet endure,  
And being lustily holpen by the rest,

His party,--though it seemed half-miracle  
To those he fought with,--drave his kith and kin,  
And all the Table Round that held the lists,  
Back to the barrier; then the trumpets blew  
Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve  
Of scarlet, and the pearls; and all the knights,  
His party, cried 'Advance and take thy prize  
The diamond;' but he answered, 'Diamond me  
No diamonds! for God's love, a little air!  
Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!  
Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not.'

He spoke, and vanished suddenly from the field  
With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.  
There from his charger down he slid, and sat,  
Gasping to Sir Lavaine, 'Draw the lance-head:'  
'Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot,' said Lavaine,  
'I dread me, if I draw it, you will die.'  
But he, 'I die already with it: draw--  
Draw,'--and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave  
A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,  
And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank  
For the pure pain, and wholly swooned away.  
Then came the hermit out and bare him in,  
There stanch'd his wound; and there, in daily doubt  
Whether to live or die, for many a week  
Hid from the wide world's rumour by the grove  
Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,  
And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,  
His party, knights of utmost North and West,  
Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles,  
Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,  
'Lo, Sire, our knight, through whom we won the day,  
Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize  
Untaken, crying that his prize is death.'  
'Heaven hinder,' said the King, 'that such an one,  
So great a knight as we have seen today--  
He seemed to me another Lancelot--  
Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot--  
He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore, rise,  
O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight.  
Wounded and wearied needs must he be near.  
I charge you that you get at once to horse.  
And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you  
Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given:  
His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him  
No customary honour: since the knight  
Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,  
Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take  
This diamond, and deliver it, and return,  
And bring us where he is, and how he fares,

And cease not from your quest until ye find.'

So saying, from the carven flower above,  
To which it made a restless heart, he took,  
And gave, the diamond: then from where he sat  
At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,  
With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince  
In the mid might and flourish of his May,  
Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,  
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint  
And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal  
Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,  
Nor often loyal to his word, and now  
Wroth that the King's command to sally forth  
In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave  
The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings.

So all in wrath he got to horse and went;  
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,  
Past, thinking 'Is it Lancelot who hath come  
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain  
Of glory, and hath added wound to wound,  
And ridden away to die?' So feared the King,  
And, after two days' tarrance there, returned.  
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing asked,  
'Love, are you yet so sick?' 'Nay, lord,' she said.  
'And where is Lancelot?' Then the Queen amazed,  
'Was he not with you? won he not your prize?'  
'Nay, but one like him.' 'Why that like was he.'  
And when the King demanded how she knew,  
Said, 'Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,  
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk  
That men went down before his spear at a touch,  
But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name  
Conquered; and therefore would he hide his name  
From all men, even the King, and to this end  
Had made a pretext of a hindering wound,  
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn  
If his old prowess were in aught decayed;  
And added, "Our true Arthur, when he learns,  
Will well allow me pretext, as for gain  
Of purer glory."'

Then replied the King:  
'Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,  
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,  
To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.  
Surely his King and most familiar friend  
Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed,  
Albeit I know my knights fantastical,  
So fine a fear in our large Lancelot  
Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains  
But little cause for laughter: his own kin--



Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this!--  
His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him;  
So that he went sore wounded from the field:  
Yet good news too: for goodly hopes are mine  
That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.  
He wore, against his wont, upon his helm  
A sleeve of scarlet, broidered with great pearls,  
Some gentle maiden's gift.'

'Yea, lord,' she said,  
'Thy hopes are mine,' and saying that, she choked,  
And sharply turned about to hide her face,  
Past to her chamber, and there flung herself  
Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,  
And clenched her fingers till they bit the palm,  
And shrieked out 'Traitor' to the unhearing wall,  
Then flashed into wild tears, and rose again,  
And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

Gawain the while through all the region round  
Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,  
Touched at all points, except the poplar grove,  
And came at last, though late, to Astolat:  
Whom glittering in enamelled arms the maid  
Glanced at, and cried, 'What news from Camelot, lord?  
What of the knight with the red sleeve?' 'He won.'  
'I knew it,' she said. 'But parted from the jousts  
Hurt in the side,' whereat she caught her breath;  
Through her own side she felt the sharp lance go;  
Thereon she smote her hand: wellnigh she swooned:  
And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came  
The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince  
Reported who he was, and on what quest  
Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find  
The victor, but had ridden a random round  
To seek him, and had wearied of the search.  
To whom the Lord of Astolat, 'Bide with us,  
And ride no more at random, noble Prince!  
Here was the knight, and here he left a shield;  
This will he send or come for: furthermore  
Our son is with him; we shall hear anon,  
Needs must hear.' To this the courteous Prince  
Accorded with his wonted courtesy,  
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,  
And stayed; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine:  
Where could be found face daintier? then her shape  
From forehead down to foot, perfect--again  
From foot to forehead exquisitely turned:  
'Well--if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!  
And oft they met among the garden yews,  
And there he set himself to play 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, till the maid  
Rebelle against it, saying to him, 'Prince,  
O loyal nephew of our noble King,  
Why ask you not to see the shield he left,  
Whence you might learn his name? Why slight your King,  
And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove  
No surer than our falcon yesterday,  
Who lost the hen we slept her at, and went  
To all the winds?' 'Nay, by mine head,' said he,  
'I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven,  
O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes;  
But an ye will it let me see the shield.'  
And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw  
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crowned with gold,  
Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mocked:  
'Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true man!  
'And right was I,' she answered merrily, 'I,  
Who dreamed my knight the greatest knight of all.'  
'And if I dreamed,' said Gawain, 'that you love  
This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, ye know it!  
Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?'  
Full simple was her answer, 'What know I?  
My brethren have been all my fellowship;  
And I, when often they have talked of love,  
Wished it had been my mother, for they talked,  
Meseemed, of what they knew not; so myself--  
I know not if I know what true love is,  
But if I know, then, if I love not him,  
I know there is none other I can love.'  
'Yea, by God's death,' said he, 'ye love him well,  
But would not, knew ye what all others know,  
And whom he loves.' 'So be it,' cried Elaine,  
And lifted her fair face and moved away:  
But he pursued her, calling, 'Stay a little!  
One golden minute's grace! he wore your sleeve:  
Would he break faith with one I may not name?  
Must our true man change like a leaf at last?  
Nay--like enow: why then, far be it from 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 me leave  
My quest with you; the diamond also: here!  
For if you love, it will be sweet to give it;  
And if he love, it will be sweet to have it  
From your own hand; and whether he love or not,  
A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well  
A thousand times!--a thousand times farewell!  
Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two  
May meet at court hereafter: there, I think,  
So ye will learn the courtesies of the court,  
We two shall know each other.'

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.

Thence to the court he past; there told the King  
What the King knew, 'Sir Lancelot is the knight.'  
And added, 'Sire, my liege, so much I learnt;  
But failed to find him, though I rode all round  
The region: but I lighted on the maid  
Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him; and to her,  
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,  
I gave the diamond: she will render it;  
For by mine head she knows his hiding-place.'

The seldom-frowning King frowned, and replied,  
'Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more  
On quest of mine, seeing that ye 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,  
Lingered that other, staring after him;  
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzzed abroad  
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.  
All ears were pricked at once, all tongues were loosed:  
'The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,  
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat.'  
Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all  
Had marvel what the maid might be, but most  
Predoomed her as unworthy. One old dame  
Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.  
She, that had heard the noise of it before,  
But sorrowing Lancelot should have stooped so low,  
Marred her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.  
So ran the tale like fire about the court,  
Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared:  
Till even the knights at banquet twice or thrice  
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,  
And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid  
Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat  
With lips severely placid, felt the knot  
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen  
Crushed the wild passion out against the floor  
Beneath the banquet, where all the meats became  
As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat,  
Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept  
The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,  
Crept to her father, while he mused alone,  
Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,

'Father, you call me wilful, and the fault  
Is yours who let me have my will, and now,  
Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?'  
'Nay,' said he, 'surely.' 'Wherefore, let me hence,'  
She answered, 'and find out our dear Lavaine.'  
'Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine:  
Bide,' answered he: 'we needs must hear anon  
Of him, and of that other.' 'Ay,' she said,  
'And of that other, for I needs must hence  
And find that other, wheresoe'er he be,  
And with mine own hand give his diamond to him,  
Lest I be found as faithless in the quest  
As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me.  
Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams  
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,  
Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid.  
The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,  
My father, to be sweet and serviceable  
To noble knights in sickness, as ye know  
When these have worn their tokens: let me hence  
I pray you.' Then her father nodding said,  
'Ay, ay, the diamond: wit ye well, my child,  
Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,  
Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it--  
And sure I think this fruit is hung too high  
For any mouth to gape for save a queen's--  
Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,  
Being so very wilful you must go.'

Lightly, her suit allowed, she slipt away,  
And while she made her ready for her ride,  
Her father's latest word hummed in her ear,  
'Being so very wilful you must go,'  
And changed itself and echoed in her heart,  
'Being so very wilful you must die.'  
But she was happy enough and shook it off,  
As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us;  
And in her heart she answered it and said,  
'What matter, so I help him back to life?'  
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide  
Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs  
To Camelot, and before the city-gates  
Came on her brother with a happy face  
Making a roan horse caper and curvet  
For pleasure all about a field of flowers:  
Whom when she saw, 'Lavaine,' she cried, 'Lavaine,  
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?' He amazed,  
'Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot!  
How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot?'  
But when the maid had told him all her tale,  
Then turned Sir Torre, and being in his moods  
Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,  
Where Arthur's wars were rendered mystically,

Past up the still rich city to his kin,  
His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot;  
And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove  
Led to the caves: there first she saw the casque  
Of Lancelot on the wall: her scarlet sleeve,  
Though carved and cut, and half the pearls away,  
Streamed from it still; and in her heart she laughed,  
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,  
But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.  
And when they gained the cell wherein he slept,  
His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands  
Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream  
Of dragging down his enemy made them move.  
Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn,  
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,  
Uttered a little tender dolorous cry.  
The sound not wanted in a place so still  
Woke the sick knight, and while he rolled his eyes  
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,  
'Your prize the diamond sent you by the King:'  
His eyes glistened: she fancied 'Is it for me?'  
And when the maid had told him all the tale  
Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest  
Assigned to her not worthy of it, she knelt  
Full lowly by the corners of his bed,  
And laid the diamond in his open hand.  
Her face was near, and as we kiss the child  
That does the task assigned, he kissed her face.  
At once she slipt like water to the floor.  
'Alas,' he said, 'your ride hath wearied you.  
Rest must you have.' 'No rest for me,' she said;  
'Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest.'  
What might she mean by that? his large black eyes,  
Yet larger through his leanness, dwelt upon her,  
Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself  
In the heart's colours on her simple face;  
And Lancelot looked and was perplexed in mind,  
And being weak in body said no more;  
But did not love the colour; woman's love,  
Save one, he not regarded, and so turned  
Sighing, and feigned a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided through the fields,  
And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates  
Far up the dim rich city to her kin;  
There bode the night: but woke with dawn, and past  
Down through the dim rich city to the fields,  
Thence to the cave: so day by day she past  
In either twilight ghost-like to and fro  
Gliding, and every day she tended him,  
And likewise many a night: and Lancelot  
Would, though he called his wound a little hurt  
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times

Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem  
Uncourteous, even he: but the meek maid  
Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him  
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,  
Milder than any mother to a sick child,  
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,  
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love  
Upbore her; till the hermit, skilled in all  
The simples and the science of that time,  
Told him that her fine care had saved his life.  
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,  
Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,  
Would listen for her coming and regret  
Her parting step, and held her tenderly,  
And loved her with all love except the love  
Of man and woman when they love their best,  
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death  
In any knightly fashion for her sake.  
And peradventure had he seen her first  
She might have made this and that other world  
Another world for the sick man; but now  
The shackles of an old love straitened him,  
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,  
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made  
Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.  
These, as but born of sickness, could not live:  
For when the blood ran lustier in him again,  
Full often the bright image of one face,  
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,  
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.  
Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace  
Beamed on his fancy, spoke, he answered not,  
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well  
What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant  
She knew not, and the sorrow dimmed her sight,  
And drave her ere her time across the fields  
Far into the rich city, where alone  
She murmured, 'Vain, in vain: it cannot be.  
He will not love me: how then? must I die?'  
Then as a little helpless innocent bird,  
That has but one plain passage of few notes,  
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er  
For all an April morning, till the ear  
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid  
Went half the night repeating, 'Must I die?'  
And now to right she turned, and now to left,  
And found no ease in turning or in rest;  
And 'Him or death,' she muttered, 'death or him,'  
Again and like a burthen, 'Him or death.'

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,

To Astolat returning rode the three.  
There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self  
In that wherein she deemed she looked her best,  
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought  
'If I be loved, these are my festal robes,  
If not, the victim's flowers before he fall.'  
And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid  
That she should ask some goodly gift of him  
For her own self or hers; 'and do not shun  
To speak the wish most near to your true heart;  
Such service have ye done me, that I make  
My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I  
In mine own land, and what I will I can.'  
Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,  
But like a ghost without the power to speak.  
And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,  
And bode among them yet a little space  
Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced  
He found her in among the garden yews,  
And said, 'Delay no longer, speak your wish,  
Seeing I go today:' then out she brake:  
'Going? and we shall never see you more.  
And I must die for want of one bold word.'  
'Speak: that I live to hear,' he said, 'is yours.'  
Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:  
'I have gone mad. I love you: let me die.'  
'Ah, sister,' answered Lancelot, 'what is this?'  
And innocently extending her white arms,  
'Your love,' she said, 'your love--to be your wife.'  
And Lancelot answered, 'Had I chosen to wed,  
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine:  
But now there never will be wife of mine.'  
'No, no,' she cried, 'I care not to be wife,  
But to be with you still, to see your face,  
To serve you, and to follow you through the world.'  
And Lancelot answered, 'Nay, the world, the world,  
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart  
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue  
To blare its own interpretation--nay,  
Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,  
And your good father's kindness.' And she said,  
'Not to be with you, not to see your face--  
Alas for me then, my good days are done.'  
'Nay, noble maid,' he answered, 'ten times nay!  
This is not love: but love's first flash in youth,  
Most common: yea, I know it of mine own self:  
And you yourself will smile at your own self  
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life  
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age:  
And then will I, for true you are and sweet  
Beyond mine old belief in womanhood,  
More specially should your good knight be poor,  
Endow you with broad land and territory

Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,  
So that would make you happy: furthermore,  
Even to the death, as though ye were my blood,  
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.  
This I will do, dear damsel, for your sake,  
And more than this I cannot.'

While he spoke

She neither blushed nor shook, but deathly-pale  
Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied:  
'Of all this will I nothing;' and so fell,  
And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

Then spake, to whom through those black walls of yew  
Their talk had pierced, her father: 'Ay, a flash,  
I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead.  
Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.  
I pray you, use some rough discourtesy  
To blunt or break her passion.'

Lancelot said,

'That were against me: what I can I will;'  
And there that day remained, and toward even  
Sent for his shield: full meekly rose the maid,  
Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield;  
Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,  
Unclasping flung the casement back, and looked  
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.  
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound;  
And she by tact of love was well aware  
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.  
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,  
Nor bad farewell, but sadly rode away.  
This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat:  
His very shield was gone; only the case,  
Her own poor work, her empty labour, left.  
But still she heard him, still his picture formed  
And grew between her and the pictured wall.  
Then came her father, saying in low tones,  
'Have comfort,' whom she greeted quietly.  
Then came her brethren saying, 'Peace to thee,  
Sweet sister,' whom she answered with all calm.  
But when they left her to herself again,  
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field  
Approaching through the darkness, called; the owls  
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt  
Her fancies with the fallow-rifted glooms  
Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,  
And called her song 'The Song of Love and Death,'



And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing.

'Sweet is true love though given in vain, in vain;  
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain:  
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:  
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.  
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

'Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,  
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,  
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'I fain would follow love, if that could be;  
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;  
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die.'

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,  
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind  
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought  
With shuddering, 'Hark the Phantom of the house  
That ever shrieks before a death,' and called  
The father, and all three in hurry and fear  
Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn  
Flared on her face, she shrilling, 'Let me die!'

As when we dwell upon a word we know,  
Repeating, till the word we know so well  
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,  
So dwelt the father on her face, and thought  
'Is this Elaine?' till back the maiden fell,  
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,  
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.  
At last she said, 'Sweet brothers, yesternight  
I seemed a curious little maid again,  
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,  
And when ye used to take me with the flood  
Up the great river in the boatman's boat.  
Only ye would not pass beyond the cape  
That has the poplar on it: there ye fixt  
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.  
And yet I cried because ye would not pass  
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood  
Until we found the palace of the King.  
And yet ye would not; but this night I dreamed  
That I was all alone upon the flood,  
And then I said, "Now shall I have my will:"  
And there I woke, but still the wish remained.  
So let me hence that I may pass at last  
Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,  
Until I find the palace of the King.  
There will I enter in among them all,

And no man there will dare to mock at me;  
But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,  
And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me;  
Gawain, who bad a thousand farewells to me,  
Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bad me one:  
And there the King will know me and my love,  
And there the Queen herself will pity me,  
And all the gentle court will welcome me,  
And after my long voyage I shall rest!

'Peace,' said her father, 'O my child, ye seem  
Light-headed, for what force is yours to go  
So far, being sick? and wherefore would ye look  
On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all?'

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move,  
And bluster into stormy sobs and say,  
'I never loved him: an I meet with him,  
I care not howsoever great he be,  
Then will I strike at him and strike him down,  
Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,  
For this discomfort he hath done the house.'

To whom the gentle sister made reply,  
'Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,  
Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault  
Not to love me, than it is mine to love  
Him of all men who seems to me the highest.'

'Highest?' the father answered, echoing 'highest?'  
(He meant to break the passion in her) 'nay,  
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;  
But this I know, for all the people know it,  
He loves the Queen, and in an open shame:  
And she returns his love in open shame;  
If this be high, what is it to be low?'

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat:  
'Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I  
For anger: these are slanders: never yet  
Was noble man but made ignoble talk.  
He makes no friend who never made a foe.  
But now it is my glory to have loved  
One peerless, without stain: so let me pass,  
My father, howsoe'er I seem to you,  
Not all unhappy, having loved God's best  
And greatest, though my love had no return:  
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,  
Thanks, but you work against your own desire;  
For if I could believe the things you say  
I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease,  
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man  
Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die.'

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,  
She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven,  
Besought Lavaine to write as she devised  
A letter, word for word; and when he asked  
'Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord?  
Then will I bear it gladly;' she replied,  
'For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,  
But I myself must bear it.' Then he wrote  
The letter she devised; which being writ  
And folded, 'O sweet father, tender and true,  
Deny me not,' she said--'ye never yet  
Denied my fancies--this, however strange,  
My latest: lay the letter in my hand  
A little ere I die, and close the hand  
Upon it; I shall guard it even in death.  
And when the heat is gone from out my heart,  
Then take the little bed on which I died  
For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's  
For richness, and me also like the Queen  
In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.  
And let there be prepared a chariot-bier  
To take me to the river, and a barge  
Be ready on the river, clothed in black.  
I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.  
There surely I shall speak for mine own self,  
And none of you can speak for me so well.  
And therefore let our dumb old man alone  
Go with me, he can steer and row, and he  
Will guide me to that palace, to the doors.'

She ceased: her father promised; whereupon  
She grew so cheerful that they deemed her death  
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.  
But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh  
Her father laid the letter in her hand,  
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.  
So that day there was dole in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground,  
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows  
Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier  
Past like a shadow through the field, that shone  
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,  
Palled all its length in blackest samite, lay.  
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,  
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,  
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.  
So those two brethren from the chariot took  
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,  
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung  
The silken case with braided blazonings,  
And kissed her quiet brows, and saying to her

'Sister, farewell for ever,' and again  
'Farewell, sweet sister,' parted all in tears.  
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,  
Oared by the dumb, went upward with the flood--  
In her right hand the lily, in her left  
The letter--all her bright hair streaming down--  
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold  
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white  
All but her face, and that clear-featured face  
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,  
But fast asleep, and lay as though she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved  
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last,  
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,  
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,  
With deaths of others, and almost his own,  
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds: for he saw  
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen  
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed  
With such and so unmoved a majesty  
She might have seemed her statue, but that he,  
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kissed her feet  
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye  
The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,  
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,  
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side,  
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,  
They met, and Lancelot kneeling uttered, 'Queen,  
Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,  
Take, what I had not won except for you,  
These jewels, and make me happy, making them  
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,  
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's  
Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words:  
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin  
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it  
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words  
Perchance, we both can pardon: but, my Queen,  
I hear of rumours flying through your court.  
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,  
Should have in it an absolute trust  
To make up that defect: let rumours be:  
When did not rumours fly? these, as I trust  
That you trust me in your own nobleness,  
I may not well believe that you believe.'

While thus he spoke, half turned away, the Queen  
Broke from the vast oriel-embowering vine  
Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,  
Till all the place whereon she stood was green;

Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand  
Received at once and laid aside the gems  
There on a table near her, and replied:

'It may be, I am quicker of belief  
Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.  
Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.  
This good is in it, whatsoever of ill,  
It can be broken easier. I for you  
This many a year have done despite and wrong  
To one whom ever in my heart of hearts  
I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?  
Diamonds for me! they had been thrice their worth  
Being your gift, had you not lost your own.  
To loyal hearts the value of all gifts  
Must vary as the giver's. Not for me!  
For her! for your new fancy. Only this  
Grant me, I pray you: have your joys apart.  
I doubt not that however changed, you keep  
So much of what is graceful: and myself  
Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy  
In which as Arthur's Queen I move and rule:  
So cannot speak my mind. An end to this!  
A strange one! yet I take it with Amen.  
So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls;  
Deck her with these; tell her, she shines me down:  
An armet for an arm to which the Queen's  
Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck  
O as much fairer--as a faith once fair  
Was richer than these diamonds--hers not mine--  
Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,  
Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will--  
She shall not have them.'

Saying which she seized,  
And, through the casement standing wide for heat,  
Flung them, and down they flashed, and smote the stream.  
Then from the smitten surface flashed, as it were,  
Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.  
Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain  
At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,  
Close underneath his eyes, and right across  
Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge.  
Whereon the lily maid of Astolat  
Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away  
To weep and wail in secret; and the barge,  
On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.  
There two stood armed, and kept the door; to whom,  
All up the marble stair, tier over tier,  
Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that asked  
'What is it?' but that oarsman's haggard face,

As hard and still as is the face that men  
Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks  
On some cliff-side, appalled them, and they said  
'He is enchanted, cannot speak--and she,  
Look how she sleeps--the Fairy Queen, so fair!  
Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood?  
Or come to take the King to Fairyland?  
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,  
But that he passes into Fairyland.'

While thus they babbled of the King, the King  
Came girt with knights: then turned the tongueless man  
From the half-face to the full eye, and rose  
And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.  
So Arthur bad the meek Sir Percivale  
And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;  
And reverently they bore her into hall.  
Then came the fine Gawain and wondered at her,  
And Lancelot later came and mused at her,  
And last the Queen herself, and pitied her:  
But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,  
Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

'Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,  
I, sometime called the maid of Astolat,  
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,  
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.  
I loved you, and my love had no return,  
And therefore my true love has been my death.  
And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,  
And to all other ladies, I make moan:  
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.  
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,  
As thou art a knight peerless.'

Thus he read;  
And ever in the reading, lords and dames  
Wept, looking often from his face who read  
To hers which lay so silent, and at times,  
So touched were they, half-thinking that her lips,  
Who had devised the letter, moved again.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all:  
'My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,  
Know that for this most gentle maiden's death  
Right heavy am I; for good she was and true,  
But loved me with a love beyond all love  
In women, whomsoever I have known.  
Yet to be loved makes not to love again;  
Not at my years, however it hold in youth.  
I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave  
No cause, not willingly, for such a love:  
To this I call my friends in testimony,

Her brethren, and her father, who himself  
Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,  
To break her passion, some discourtesy  
Against my nature: what I could, I did.  
I left her and I bad her no farewell;  
Though, had I dreamt the damsel would have died,  
I might have put my wits to some rough use,  
And helped her from herself.'

Then said the Queen

(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)  
'Ye might at least have done her so much grace,  
Fair lord, as would have helped her from her death.'  
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,  
He adding,

'Queen, she would not be content  
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.  
Then might she follow me through the world, she asked;  
It could not be. I told her that her love  
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down  
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame  
Toward one more worthy of her--then would I,  
More specially were he, she wedded, poor,  
Estate them with large land and territory  
In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,  
To keep them in all joyance: more than this  
I could not; this she would not, and she died.'

He pausing, Arthur answered, 'O my knight,  
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,  
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,  
To see that she be buried worshipfully.'

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm  
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went  
The marshalled Order of their Table Round,  
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see  
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,  
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,  
And mass, and rolling music, like a queen.  
And when the knights had laid her comely head  
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,  
Then Arthur spake among them, 'Let her tomb  
Be costly, and her image thereupon,  
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet  
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.  
And let the story of her dolorous voyage  
For all true hearts be blazoned on her tomb  
In letters gold and azure!' which was wrought  
Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames  
And people, from the high door streaming, brake  
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,  
Who marked Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,

Drew near, and sighed in passing, 'Lancelot,  
Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love.'  
He answered with his eyes upon the ground,  
'That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven.'  
But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,  
Approached him, and with full affection said,

'Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have  
Most joy and most affiance, for I know  
What thou hast been in battle by my side,  
And many a time have watched thee at the tilt  
Strike down the lusty and long practised knight,  
And let the younger and unskilled go by  
To win his honour and to make his name,  
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man  
Made to be loved; but now I would to God,  
Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,  
Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems,  
By God for thee alone, and from her face,  
If one may judge the living by the dead,  
Delicately pure and marvellously fair,  
Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man  
Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons  
Born to the glory of thine name and fame,  
My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake.'

Then answered Lancelot, 'Fair she was, my King,  
Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.  
To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,  
To doubt her pureness were to want a heart--  
Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love  
Could bind him, but free love will not be bound.'

'Free love, so bound, were freest,' said the King.  
'Let love be free; free love is for the best:  
And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,  
What should be best, if not so pure a love  
Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee  
She failed to bind, though being, as I think,  
Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know.'

And Lancelot answered nothing, but he went,  
And at the inrunning of a little brook  
Sat by the river in a cove, and watched  
The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes  
And saw the barge that brought her moving down,  
Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said  
Low in himself, 'Ah simple heart and sweet,  
Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love  
Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?  
Ay, that will I. Farewell too--now at last--  
Farewell, fair lily. "Jealousy in love?"  
Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?



Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,  
May not your crescent fear for name and fame  
Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes?  
Why did the King dwell on my name to me?  
Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,  
Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake  
Caught from his mother's arms--the wondrous one  
Who passes through the vision of the night--  
She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns  
Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn  
She kissed me saying, "Thou art fair, my child,  
As a king's son," and often in her arms  
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.  
Would she had drowned me in it, where'er it be!  
For what am I? what profits me my name  
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:  
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;  
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?  
To make men worse by making my sin known?  
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?  
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man  
Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break  
These bonds that so defame me: not without  
She wills it: would I, if she willed it? nay,  
Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,  
I pray him, send a sudden Angel down  
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,  
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,  
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.'

So groaned Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,  
Not knowing he should die a holy man.

#### The Holy Grail

From noiseful arms, and acts of prowess done  
In tournament or tilt, Sir Percivale,  
Whom Arthur and his knighthood called The Pure,  
Had passed into the silent life of prayer,  
Praise, fast, and alms; and leaving for the cowl  
The helmet in an abbey far away  
From Camelot, there, and not long after, died.

And one, a fellow-monk among the rest,  
Ambrosius, loved him much beyond the rest,  
And honoured him, and wrought into his heart  
A way by love that wakened love within,  
To answer that which came: and as they sat

Beneath a world-old yew-tree, darkening half  
The cloisters, on a gustful April morn  
That puffed the swaying branches into smoke  
Above them, ere the summer when he died  
The monk Ambrosius questioned Percivale:

'O brother, I have seen this yew-tree smoke,  
Spring after spring, for half a hundred years:  
For never have I known the world without,  
Nor ever strayed beyond the pale: but thee,  
When first thou camest--such a courtesy  
Spake through the limbs and in the voice--I knew  
For one of those who eat in Arthur's hall;  
For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,  
Some true, some light, but every one of you  
Stamped with the image of the King; and now  
Tell me, what drove thee from the Table Round,  
My brother? was it earthly passion crost?'

'Nay,' said the knight; 'for no such passion mine.  
But the sweet vision of the Holy Grail  
Drove me from all vainglories, rivalries,  
And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out  
Among us in the jousts, while women watch  
Who wins, who falls; and waste the spiritual strength  
Within us, better offered up to Heaven.'

To whom the monk: 'The Holy Grail!--I trust  
We are green in Heaven's eyes; but here too much  
We moulder--as to things without I mean--  
Yet one of your own knights, a guest of ours,  
Told us of this in our refectory,  
But spake with such a sadness and so low  
We heard not half of what he said. What is it?  
The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?'

'Nay, monk! what phantom?' answered Percivale.  
'The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord  
Drank at the last sad supper with his own.  
This, from the blessed land of Aromat--  
After the day of darkness, when the dead  
Went wandering o'er Moriah--the good saint  
Arimathaeon Joseph, journeying brought  
To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn  
Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord.  
And there awhile it bode; and if a man  
Could touch or see it, he was healed at once,  
By faith, of all his ills. But then the times  
Grew to such evil that the holy cup  
Was caught away to Heaven, and disappeared.'

To whom the monk: 'From our old books I know  
That Joseph came of old to Glastonbury,

And there the heathen Prince, Arviragus,  
Gave him an isle of marsh whereon to build;  
And there he built with wattles from the marsh  
A little lonely church in days of yore,  
For so they say, these books of ours, but seem  
Mute of this miracle, far as I have read.  
But who first saw the holy thing today?'

'A woman,' answered Percivale, 'a nun,  
And one no further off in blood from me  
Than sister; and if ever holy maid  
With knees of adoration wore the stone,  
A holy maid; though never maiden glowed,  
But that was in her earlier maidenhood,  
With such a fervent flame of human love,  
Which being rudely blunted, glanced and shot  
Only to holy things; to prayer and praise  
She gave herself, to fast and alms. And yet,  
Nun as she was, the scandal of the Court,  
Sin against Arthur and the Table Round,  
And the strange sound of an adulterous race,  
Across the iron grating of her cell  
Beat, and she prayed and fasted all the more.

'And he to whom she told her sins, or what  
Her all but utter whiteness held for sin,  
A man wellnigh a hundred winters old,  
Spake often with her of the Holy Grail,  
A legend handed down through five or six,  
And each of these a hundred winters old,  
From our Lord's time. And when King Arthur made  
His Table Round, and all men's hearts became  
Clean for a season, surely he had thought  
That now the Holy Grail would come again;  
But sin broke out. Ah, Christ, that it would come,  
And heal the world of all their wickedness!  
"O Father!" asked the maiden, "might it come  
To me by prayer and fasting?" "Nay," said he,  
"I know not, for thy heart is pure as snow."  
And so she prayed and fasted, till the sun  
Shone, and the wind blew, through her, and I thought  
She might have risen and floated when I saw her.

'For on a day she sent to speak with me.  
And when she came to speak, behold her eyes  
Beyond my knowing of them, beautiful,  
Beyond all knowing of them, wonderful,  
Beautiful in the light of holiness.  
And "O my brother Percivale," she said,  
"Sweet brother, I have seen the Holy Grail:  
For, waked at dead of night, I heard a sound  
As of a silver horn from o'er the hills  
Blown, and I thought, 'It is not Arthur's use

To hunt by moonlight;' and the slender sound  
As from a distance beyond distance grew  
Coming upon me--O never harp nor horn,  
Nor aught we blow with breath, or touch with hand,  
Was like that music as it came; and then  
Streamed through my cell a cold and silver beam,  
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,  
Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive,  
Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed  
With rosy colours leaping on the wall;  
And then the music faded, and the Grail  
Past, and the beam decayed, and from the walls  
The rosy quiverings died into the night.  
So now the Holy Thing is here again  
Among us, brother, fast thou too and pray,  
And tell thy brother knights to fast and pray,  
That so perchance the vision may be seen  
By thee and those, and all the world be healed."

'Then leaving the pale nun, I spake of this  
To all men; and myself fasted and prayed  
Always, and many among us many a week  
Fasted and prayed even to the uttermost,  
Expectant of the wonder that would be.

'And one there was among us, ever moved  
Among us in white armour, Galahad.  
"God make thee good as thou art beautiful,"  
Said Arthur, when he dubbed him knight; and none,  
In so young youth, was ever made a knight  
Till Galahad; and this Galahad, when he heard  
My sister's vision, filled me with amaze;  
His eyes became so like her own, they seemed  
Hers, and himself her brother more than I.

'Sister or brother none had he; but some  
Called him a son of Lancelot, and some said  
Begotten by enchantment--chatterers they,  
Like birds of passage piping up and down,  
That gape for flies--we know not whence they come;  
For when was Lancelot wanderingly lewd?

'But she, the wan sweet maiden, shore away  
Clean from her forehead all that wealth of hair  
Which made a silken mat-work for her feet;  
And out of this she plaited broad and long  
A strong sword-belt, and wove with silver thread  
And crimson in the belt a strange device,  
A crimson grail within a silver beam;  
And saw the bright boy-knight, and bound it on him,  
Saying, "My knight, my love, my knight of heaven,  
O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine,  
I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt.

Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,  
And break through all, till one will crown thee king  
Far in the spiritual city:" and as she spake  
She sent the deathless passion in her eyes  
Through him, and made him hers, and laid her mind  
On him, and he believed in her belief.

'Then came a year of miracle: O brother,  
In our great hall there stood a vacant chair,  
Fashioned by Merlin ere he past away,  
And carven with strange figures; and in and out  
The figures, like a serpent, ran a scroll  
Of letters in a tongue no man could read.  
And Merlin called it "The Siege perilous,"  
Perilous for good and ill; "for there," he said,  
"No man could sit but he should lose himself:"  
And once by misadventure Merlin sat  
In his own chair, and so was lost; but he,  
Galahad, when he heard of Merlin's doom,  
Cried, "If I lose myself, I save myself!"

'Then on a summer night it came to pass,  
While the great banquet lay along the hall,  
That Galahad would sit down in Merlin's chair.

'And all at once, as there we sat, we heard  
A cracking and a riving of the roofs,  
And rending, and a blast, and overhead  
Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry.  
And in the blast there smote along the hall  
A beam of light seven times more clear than day:  
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail  
All over covered with a luminous cloud.  
And none might see who bare it, and it past.  
But every knight beheld his fellow's face  
As in a glory, and all the knights arose,  
And staring each at other like dumb men  
Stood, till I found a voice and sware a vow.

'I sware a vow before them all, that I,  
Because I had not seen the Grail, would ride  
A twelvemonth and a day in quest of it,  
Until I found and saw it, as the nun  
My sister saw it; and Galahad sware the vow,  
And good Sir Bors, our Lancelot's cousin, sware,  
And Lancelot sware, and many among the knights,  
And Gawain sware, and louder than the rest.'

Then spake the monk Ambrosius, asking him,  
'What said the King? Did Arthur take the vow?'

'Nay, for my lord,' said Percivale, 'the King,  
Was not in hall: for early that same day,

Scaped through a cavern from a bandit hold,  
An outraged maiden sprang into the hall  
Crying on help: for all her shining hair  
Was smeared with earth, and either milky arm  
Red-rent with hooks of bramble, and all she wore  
Torn as a sail that leaves the rope is torn  
In tempest: so the King arose and went  
To smoke the scandalous hive of those wild bees  
That made such honey in his realm. Howbeit  
Some little of this marvel he too saw,  
Returning o'er the plain that then began  
To darken under Camelot; whence the King  
Looked up, calling aloud, "Lo, there! the roofs  
Of our great hall are rolled in thunder-smoke!  
Pray Heaven, they be not smitten by the bolt."  
For dear to Arthur was that hall of ours,  
As having there so oft with all his knights  
Feasted, and as the stateliest under heaven.

'O brother, had you known our mighty hall,  
Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago!  
For all the sacred mount of Camelot,  
And all the dim rich city, roof by roof,  
Tower after tower, spire beyond spire,  
By grove, and garden-lawn, and rushing brook,  
Climbs to the mighty hall that Merlin built.  
And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt  
With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall:  
And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,  
And in the second men are slaying beasts,  
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,  
And on the fourth are men with growing wings,  
And over all one statue in the mould  
Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown,  
And peaked wings pointed to the Northern Star.  
And eastward fronts the statue, and the crown  
And both the wings are made of gold, and flame  
At sunrise till the people in far fields,  
Wasted so often by the heathen hordes,  
Behold it, crying, "We have still a King."

'And, brother, had you known our hall within,  
Broader and higher than any in all the lands!  
Where twelve great windows blazon Arthur's wars,  
And all the light that falls upon the board  
Streams through the twelve great battles of our King.  
Nay, one there is, and at the eastern end,  
Wealthy with wandering lines of mount and mere,  
Where Arthur finds the brand Excalibur.  
And also one to the west, and counter to it,  
And blank: and who shall blazon it? when and how?--  
O there, perchance, when all our wars are done,  
The brand Excalibur will be cast away.

'So to this hall full quickly rode the King,  
In horror lest the work by Merlin wrought,  
Dreamlike, should on the sudden vanish, wrapt  
In unremorseful folds of rolling fire.  
And in he rode, and up I glanced, and saw  
The golden dragon sparkling over all:  
And many of those who burnt the hold, their arms  
Hacked, and their foreheads grimed with smoke, and seared,  
Followed, and in among bright faces, ours,  
Full of the vision, prest: and then the King  
Spake to me, being nearest, "Percivale,"  
(Because the hall was all in tumult--some  
Vowing, and some protesting), "what is this?"

'O brother, when I told him what had chanced,  
My sister's vision, and the rest, his face  
Darkened, as I have seen it more than once,  
When some brave deed seemed to be done in vain,  
Darken; and "Woe is me, my knights," he cried,  
"Had I been here, ye had not sworn the vow."  
Bold was mine answer, "Had thyself been here,  
My King, thou wouldst have sworn." "Yea, yea," said he,  
"Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail?"

"Nay, lord, I heard the sound, I saw the light,  
But since I did not see the Holy Thing,  
I sware a vow to follow it till I saw."

'Then when he asked us, knight by knight, if any  
Had seen it, all their answers were as one:  
"Nay, lord, and therefore have we sworn our vows."

"Lo now," said Arthur, "have ye seen a cloud?  
What go ye into the wilderness to see?"

'Then Galahad on the sudden, and in a voice  
Shrilling along the hall to Arthur, called,  
"But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail,  
I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry--  
'O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me.'"

"Ah, Galahad, Galahad," said the King, "for such  
As thou art is the vision, not for these.  
Thy holy nun and thou have seen a sign--  
Holier is none, my Percivale, than she--  
A sign to maim this Order which I made.  
But ye, that follow but the leader's bell"  
(Brother, the King was hard upon his knights)  
"Taliessin is our fullest throat of song,  
And one hath sung and all the dumb will sing.  
Lancelot is Lancelot, and hath overborne  
Five knights at once, and every younger knight,

Unproven, holds himself as Lancelot,  
Till overborne by one, he learns--and ye,  
What are ye? Galahads?--no, nor Percivales"  
(For thus it pleased the King to range me close  
After Sir Galahad); "nay," said he, "but men  
With strength and will to right the wronged, of power  
To lay the sudden heads of violence flat,  
Knights that in twelve great battles splashed and dyed  
The strong White Horse in his own heathen blood--  
But one hath seen, and all the blind will see.  
Go, since your vows are sacred, being made:  
Yet--for ye know the cries of all my realm  
Pass through this hall--how often, O my knights,  
Your places being vacant at my side,  
This chance of noble deeds will come and go  
Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires  
Lost in the quagmire! Many of you, yea most,  
Return no more: ye think I show myself  
Too dark a prophet: come now, let us meet  
The morrow morn once more in one full field  
Of gracious pastime, that once more the King,  
Before ye leave him for this Quest, may count  
The yet-unbroken strength of all his knights,  
Rejoicing in that Order which he made."

'So when the sun broke next from under ground,  
All the great table of our Arthur closed  
And clashed in such a tourney and so full,  
So many lances broken--never yet  
Had Camelot seen the like, since Arthur came;  
And I myself and Galahad, for a strength  
Was in us from this vision, overthrew  
So many knights that all the people cried,  
And almost burst the barriers in their heat,  
Shouting, "Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale!"

'But when the next day brake from under ground--  
O brother, had you known our Camelot,  
Built by old kings, age after age, so old  
The King himself had fears that it would fall,  
So strange, and rich, and dim; for where the roofs  
Tottered toward each other in the sky,  
Met foreheads all along the street of those  
Who watched us pass; and lower, and where the long  
Rich galleries, lady-laden, weighed the necks  
Of dragons clinging to the crazy walls,  
Thicker than drops from thunder, showers of flowers  
Fell as we past; and men and boys astride  
On wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan,  
At all the corners, named us each by name,  
Calling, "God speed!" but in the ways below  
The knights and ladies wept, and rich and poor  
Wept, and the King himself could hardly speak



For grief, and all in middle street the Queen,  
Who rode by Lancelot, wailed and shrieked aloud,  
"This madness has come on us for our sins."  
So to the Gate of the three Queens we came,  
Where Arthur's wars are rendered mystically,  
And thence departed every one his way.

'And I was lifted up in heart, and thought  
Of all my late-shown prowess in the lists,  
How my strong lance had beaten down the knights,  
So many and famous names; and never yet  
Had heaven appeared so blue, nor earth so green,  
For all my blood danced in me, and I knew  
That I should light upon the Holy Grail.

'Thereafter, the dark warning of our King,  
That most of us would follow wandering fires,  
Came like a driving gloom across my mind.  
Then every evil word I had spoken once,  
And every evil thought I had thought of old,  
And every evil deed I ever did,  
Awoke and cried, "This Quest is not for thee."  
And lifting up mine eyes, I found myself  
Alone, and in a land of sand and thorns,  
And I was thirsty even unto death;  
And I, too, cried, "This Quest is not for thee."

'And on I rode, and when I thought my thirst  
Would slay me, saw deep lawns, and then a brook,  
With one sharp rapid, where the crisping white  
Played ever back upon the sloping wave,  
And took both ear and eye; and o'er the brook  
Were apple-trees, and apples by the brook  
Fallen, and on the lawns. "I will rest here,"  
I said, "I am not worthy of the Quest;"  
But even while I drank the brook, and ate  
The goodly apples, all these things at once  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone,  
And thirsting, in a land of sand and thorns.

'And then behold a woman at a door  
Spinning; and fair the house whereby she sat,  
And kind the woman's eyes and innocent,  
And all her bearing gracious; and she rose  
Opening her arms to meet me, as who should say,  
"Rest here;" but when I touched her, lo! she, too,  
Fell into dust and nothing, and the house  
Became no better than a broken shed,  
And in it a dead babe; and also this  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone.

'And on I rode, and greater was my thirst.  
Then flashed a yellow gleam across the world,

And where it smote the plowshare in the field,  
The plowman left his plowing, and fell down  
Before it; where it glittered on her pail,  
The milkmaid left her milking, and fell down  
Before it, and I knew not why, but thought  
"The sun is rising," though the sun had risen.  
Then was I ware of one that on me moved  
In golden armour with a crown of gold  
About a casque all jewels; and his horse  
In golden armour jewelled everywhere:  
And on the splendour came, flashing me blind;  
And seemed to me the Lord of all the world,  
Being so huge. But when I thought he meant  
To crush me, moving on me, lo! he, too,  
Opened his arms to embrace me as he came,  
And up I went and touched him, and he, too,  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone  
And wearying in a land of sand and thorns.

'And I rode on and found a mighty hill,  
And on the top, a city walled: the spires  
Pricked with incredible pinnacles into heaven.  
And by the gateway stirred a crowd; and these  
Cried to me climbing, "Welcome, Percivale!  
Thou mightiest and thou purest among men!"  
And glad was I and clomb, but found at top  
No man, nor any voice. And thence I past  
Far through a ruinous city, and I saw  
That man had once dwelt there; but there I found  
Only one man of an exceeding age.  
"Where is that goodly company," said I,  
"That so cried out upon me?" and he had  
Scarce any voice to answer, and yet gasped,  
"Whence and what art thou?" and even as he spoke  
Fell into dust, and disappeared, and I  
Was left alone once more, and cried in grief,  
"Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself  
And touch it, it will crumble into dust."

'And thence I dropt into a lowly vale,  
Low as the hill was high, and where the vale  
Was lowest, found a chapel, and thereby  
A holy hermit in a hermitage,  
To whom I told my phantoms, and he said:

"O son, thou hast not true humility,  
The highest virtue, mother of them all;  
For when the Lord of all things made Himself  
Naked of glory for His mortal change,  
'Take thou my robe,' she said, 'for all is thine,'  
And all her form shone forth with sudden light  
So that the angels were amazed, and she  
Followed Him down, and like a flying star

Led on the gray-haired wisdom of the east;  
But her thou hast not known: for what is this  
Thou thoughtest of thy prowess and thy sins?  
Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself  
As Galahad." When the hermit made an end,  
In silver armour suddenly Galahad shone  
Before us, and against the chapel door  
Laid lance, and entered, and we knelt in prayer.  
And there the hermit slaked my burning thirst,  
And at the sacring of the mass I saw  
The holy elements alone; but he,  
"Saw ye no more? I, Galahad, saw the Grail,  
The Holy Grail, descend upon the shrine:  
I saw the fiery face as of a child  
That smote itself into the bread, and went;  
And hither am I come; and never yet  
Hath what thy sister taught me first to see,  
This Holy Thing, failed from my side, nor come  
Covered, but moving with me night and day,  
Fainter by day, but always in the night  
Blood-red, and sliding down the blackened marsh  
Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top  
Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below  
Blood-red. And in the strength of this I rode,  
Shattering all evil customs everywhere,  
And past through Pagan realms, and made them mine,  
And clashed with Pagan hordes, and bore them down,  
And broke through all, and in the strength of this  
Come victor. But my time is hard at hand,  
And hence I go; and one will crown me king  
Far in the spiritual city; and come thou, too,  
For thou shalt see the vision when I go."

'While thus he spake, his eye, dwelling on mine,  
Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew  
One with him, to believe as he believed.  
Then, when the day began to wane, we went.

'There rose a hill that none but man could climb,  
Scarred with a hundred wintry water-courses--  
Storm at the top, and when we gained it, storm  
Round us and death; for every moment glanced  
His silver arms and gloomed: so quick and thick  
The lightnings here and there to left and right  
Struck, till the dry old trunks about us, dead,  
Yea, rotten with a hundred years of death,  
Sprang into fire: and at the base we found  
On either hand, as far as eye could see,  
A great black swamp and of an evil smell,  
Part black, part whitened with the bones of men,  
Not to be crost, save that some ancient king  
Had built a way, where, linked with many a bridge,  
A thousand piers ran into the great Sea.

And Galahad fled along them bridge by bridge,  
And every bridge as quickly as he crost  
Sprang into fire and vanished, though I yearned  
To follow; and thrice above him all the heavens  
Opened and blazed with thunder such as seemed  
Shoutings of all the sons of God: and first  
At once I saw him far on the great Sea,  
In silver-shining armour starry-clear;  
And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung  
Clothed in white samite or a luminous cloud.  
And with exceeding swiftness ran the boat,  
If boat it were--I saw not whence it came.  
And when the heavens opened and blazed again  
Roaring, I saw him like a silver star--  
And had he set the sail, or had the boat  
Become a living creature clad with wings?  
And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung  
Redder than any rose, a joy to me,  
For now I knew the veil had been withdrawn.  
Then in a moment when they blazed again  
Opening, I saw the least of little stars  
Down on the waste, and straight beyond the star  
I saw the spiritual city and all her spires  
And gateways in a glory like one pearl--  
No larger, though the goal of all the saints--  
Strike from the sea; and from the star there shot  
A rose-red sparkle to the city, and there  
Dwelt, and I knew it was the Holy Grail,  
Which never eyes on earth again shall see.  
Then fell the floods of heaven drowning the deep.  
And how my feet recrost the deathful ridge  
No memory in me lives; but that I touched  
The chapel-doors at dawn I know; and thence  
Taking my war-horse from the holy man,  
Glad that no phantom vexed me more, returned  
To whence I came, the gate of Arthur's wars.'

'O brother,' asked Ambrosius,--'for in sooth  
These ancient books--and they would win thee--teem,  
Only I find not there this Holy Grail,  
With miracles and marvels like to these,  
Not all unlike; which oftentime I read,  
Who read but on my breviary with ease,  
Till my head swims; and then go forth and pass  
Down to the little thorpe that lies so close,  
And almost plastered like a martin's nest  
To these old walls--and mingle with our folk;  
And knowing every honest face of theirs  
As well as ever shepherd knew his sheep,  
And every homely secret in their hearts,  
Delight myself with gossip and old wives,  
And ills and aches, and teething, lyings-in,  
And mirthful sayings, children of the place,

That have no meaning half a league away:  
Or lulling random squabbles when they rise,  
Chafferings and chatterings at the market-cross,  
Rejoice, small man, in this small world of mine,  
Yea, even in their hens and in their eggs--  
O brother, saving this Sir Galahad,  
Came ye on none but phantoms in your quest,  
No man, no woman?'

Then Sir Percivale:

'All men, to one so bound by such a vow,  
And women were as phantoms. O, my brother,  
Why wilt thou shame me to confess to thee  
How far I faltered from my quest and vow?  
For after I had lain so many nights  
A bedmate of the snail and eft and snake,  
In grass and burdock, I was changed to wan  
And meagre, and the vision had not come;  
And then I chanced upon a goodly town  
With one great dwelling in the middle of it;  
Thither I made, and there was I disarmed  
By maidens each as fair as any flower:  
But when they led me into hall, behold,  
The Princess of that castle was the one,  
Brother, and that one only, who had ever  
Made my heart leap; for when I moved of old  
A slender page about her father's hall,  
And she a slender maiden, all my heart  
Went after her with longing: yet we twain  
Had never kissed a kiss, or vowed a vow.  
And now I came upon her once again,  
And one had wedded her, and he was dead,  
And all his land and wealth and state were hers.  
And while I tarried, every day she set  
A banquet richer than the day before  
By me; for all her longing and her will  
Was toward me as of old; till one fair morn,  
I walking to and fro beside a stream  
That flashed across her orchard underneath  
Her castle-walls, she stole upon my walk,  
And calling me the greatest of all knights,  
Embraced me, and so kissed me the first time,  
And gave herself and all her wealth to me.  
Then I remembered Arthur's warning word,  
That most of us would follow wandering fires,  
And the Quest faded in my heart. Anon,  
The heads of all her people drew to me,  
With supplication both of knees and tongue:  
"We have heard of thee: thou art our greatest knight,  
Our Lady says it, and we well believe:  
Wed thou our Lady, and rule over us,  
And thou shalt be as Arthur in our land."  
O me, my brother! but one night my vow

Burnt me within, so that I rose and fled,  
But wailed and wept, and hated mine own self,  
And even the Holy Quest, and all but her;  
Then after I was joined with Galahad  
Cared not for her, nor anything upon earth.'

Then said the monk, 'Poor men, when yule is cold,  
Must be content to sit by little fires.  
And this am I, so that ye care for me  
Ever so little; yea, and blest be Heaven  
That brought thee here to this poor house of ours  
Where all the brethren are so hard, to warm  
My cold heart with a friend: but O the pity  
To find thine own first love once more--to hold,  
Hold her a wealthy bride within thine arms,  
Or all but hold, and then--cast her aside,  
Foregoing all her sweetness, like a weed.  
For we that want the warmth of double life,  
We that are plagued with dreams of something sweet  
Beyond all sweetness in a life so rich,--  
Ah, blessed Lord, I speak too earthlywise,  
Seeing I never strayed beyond the cell,  
But live like an old badger in his earth,  
With earth about him everywhere, despite  
All fast and penance. Saw ye none beside,  
None of your knights?'

'Yea so,' said Percivale:

'One night my pathway swerving east, I saw  
The pelican on the casque of our Sir Bors  
All in the middle of the rising moon:  
And toward him spurred, and hailed him, and he me,  
And each made joy of either; then he asked,  
"Where is he? hast thou seen him--Lancelot?--Once,"  
Said good Sir Bors, "he dashed across me--mad,  
And maddening what he rode: and when I cried,  
'Ridest thou then so hotly on a quest  
So holy,' Lancelot shouted, 'Stay me not!  
I have been the sluggard, and I ride apace,  
For now there is a lion in the way.'  
So vanished."

'Then Sir Bors had ridden on  
Softly, and sorrowing for our Lancelot,  
Because his former madness, once the talk  
And scandal of our table, had returned;  
For Lancelot's kith and kin so worship him  
That ill to him is ill to them; to Bors  
Beyond the rest: he well had been content  
Not to have seen, so Lancelot might have seen,  
The Holy Cup of healing; and, indeed,  
Being so clouded with his grief and love,  
Small heart was his after the Holy Quest:

If God would send the vision, well: if not,  
The Quest and he were in the hands of Heaven.

'And then, with small adventure met, Sir Bors  
Rode to the lonest tract of all the realm,  
And found a people there among their crags,  
Our race and blood, a remnant that were left  
Paynim amid their circles, and the stones  
They pitch up straight to heaven: and their wise men  
Were strong in that old magic which can trace  
The wandering of the stars, and scoffed at him  
And this high Quest as at a simple thing:  
Told him he followed--almost Arthur's words--  
A mocking fire: "what other fire than he,  
Whereby the blood beats, and the blossom blows,  
And the sea rolls, and all the world is warmed?"  
And when his answer chafed them, the rough crowd,  
Hearing he had a difference with their priests,  
Seized him, and bound and plunged him into a cell  
Of great piled stones; and lying bounden there  
In darkness through innumerable hours  
He heard the hollow-ringing heavens sweep  
Over him till by miracle--what else?--  
Heavy as it was, a great stone slipt and fell,  
Such as no wind could move: and through the gap  
Glimmered the streaming scud: then came a night  
Still as the day was loud; and through the gap  
The seven clear stars of Arthur's Table Round--  
For, brother, so one night, because they roll  
Through such a round in heaven, we named the stars,  
Rejoicing in ourselves and in our King--  
And these, like bright eyes of familiar friends,  
In on him shone: "And then to me, to me,"  
Said good Sir Bors, "beyond all hopes of mine,  
Who scarce had prayed or asked it for myself--  
Across the seven clear stars--O grace to me--  
In colour like the fingers of a hand  
Before a burning taper, the sweet Grail  
Glided and past, and close upon it pealed  
A sharp quick thunder." Afterwards, a maid,  
Who kept our holy faith among her kin  
In secret, entering, loosed and let him go.'

To whom the monk: 'And I remember now  
That pelican on the casque: Sir Bors it was  
Who spake so low and sadly at our board;  
And mighty reverent at our grace was he:  
A square-set man and honest; and his eyes,  
An out-door sign of all the warmth within,  
Smiled with his lips--a smile beneath a cloud,  
But heaven had meant it for a sunny one:  
Ay, ay, Sir Bors, who else? But when ye reached  
The city, found ye all your knights returned,

Or was there sooth in Arthur's prophecy,  
Tell me, and what said each, and what the King?'

Then answered Percivale: 'And that can I,  
Brother, and truly; since the living words  
Of so great men as Lancelot and our King  
Pass not from door to door and out again,  
But sit within the house. O, when we reached  
The city, our horses stumbling as they trode  
On heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,  
Cracked basilisks, and splintered cockatrices,  
And shattered talbots, which had left the stones  
Raw, that they fell from, brought us to the hall.

'And there sat Arthur on the dais-throne,  
And those that had gone out upon the Quest,  
Wasted and worn, and but a tithe of them,  
And those that had not, stood before the King,  
Who, when he saw me, rose, and bad me hail,  
Saying, "A welfare in thine eye reproves  
Our fear of some disastrous chance for thee  
On hill, or plain, at sea, or flooding ford.  
So fierce a gale made havoc here of late  
Among the strange devices of our kings;  
Yea, shook this newer, stronger hall of ours,  
And from the statue Merlin moulded for us  
Half-wrenched a golden wing; but now--the Quest,  
This vision--hast thou seen the Holy Cup,  
That Joseph brought of old to Glastonbury?"

'So when I told him all thyself hast heard,  
Ambrosius, and my fresh but fixt resolve  
To pass away into the quiet life,  
He answered not, but, sharply turning, 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 pavilion in a field,  
And merry maidens in it; and then this gale  
Tore my pavilion from the tenting-pin,  
And blew my merry maidens all about  
With all discomfort; yea, and but for this,  
My twelvemonth and a day were pleasant to me."

'He ceased; and Arthur turned to whom at first  
He saw not, for Sir Bors, on entering, pushed  
Athwart the throng to Lancelot, caught his hand,  
Held it, and there, half-hidden by him, stood,  
Until the King espied him, saying to him,  
"Hail, Bors! if ever loyal man and true



Could see it, thou hast seen the Grail;" and Bors,  
"Ask me not, for I may not speak of it:  
I saw it;" and the tears were in his eyes.

'Then there remained but Lancelot, for the rest  
Spake but of sundry perils in the storm;  
Perhaps, like him of Cana in Holy Writ,  
Our Arthur kept his best until the last;  
"Thou, too, my Lancelot," asked the king, "my friend,  
Our mightiest, hath this Quest availed for thee?"

"Our mightiest!" answered Lancelot, with a groan;  
"O King!"--and when he paused, methought I spied  
A dying fire of madness in his eyes--  
"O King, my friend, if friend of thine I be,  
Happier are those that welter in their sin,  
Swine in the mud, that cannot see for slime,  
Slime of the ditch: but in me lived a sin  
So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,  
Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung  
Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower  
And poisonous grew together, each as each,  
Not to be plucked asunder; and when thy knights  
Sware, I sware with them only in the hope  
That could I touch or see the Holy Grail  
They might be plucked asunder. Then I spake  
To one most holy saint, who wept and said,  
That save they could be plucked asunder, all  
My quest were but in vain; to whom I vowed  
That I would work according as he willed.  
And forth I went, and while I yearned and strove  
To tear the twain asunder in my heart,  
My madness came upon me as of old,  
And whipt me into waste fields far away;  
There was I beaten down by little men,  
Mean knights, to whom the moving of my sword  
And shadow of my spear had been enow  
To scare them from me once; and then I came  
All in my folly to the naked shore,  
Wide flats, where nothing but coarse grasses grew;  
But such a blast, my King, began to blow,  
So loud a blast along the shore and sea,  
Ye could not hear the waters for the blast,  
Though heapt in mounds and ridges all the sea  
Drove like a cataract, and all the sand  
Swept like a river, and the clouded heavens  
Were shaken with the motion and the sound.  
And blackening in the sea-foam swayed a boat,  
Half-swallowed in it, anchored with a chain;  
And in my madness to myself I said,  
'I will embark and I will lose myself,  
And in the great sea wash away my sin.'  
I burst the chain, I sprang into the boat.

Seven days I drove along the dreary deep,  
And with me drove the moon and all the stars;  
And the wind fell, and on the seventh night  
I heard the shingle grinding in the surge,  
And felt the boat shock earth, and looking up,  
Behold, the enchanted towers of Carbonek,  
A castle like a rock upon a rock,  
With chasm-like portals open to the sea,  
And steps that met the breaker! there was none  
Stood near it but a lion on each side  
That kept the entry, and the moon was full.  
Then from the boat I leapt, and up the stairs.  
There drew my sword. With sudden-flaring manes  
Those two great beasts rose upright like a man,  
Each gript a shoulder, and I stood between;  
And, when I would have smitten them, heard a voice,  
'Doubt not, go forward; if thou doubt, the beasts  
Will tear thee piecemeal.' Then with violence  
The sword was dashed from out my hand, and fell.  
And up into the sounding hall I past;  
But nothing in the sounding hall I saw,  
No bench nor table, painting on the wall  
Or shield of knight; only the rounded moon  
Through the tall oriel on the rolling sea.  
But always in the quiet house I heard,  
Clear as a lark, high o'er me as a lark,  
A sweet voice singing in the topmost tower  
To the eastward: up I climbed a thousand steps  
With pain: as in a dream I seemed to climb  
For ever: at the last I reached a door,  
A light was in the crannies, and I heard,  
'Glory and joy and honour to our Lord  
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail.'  
Then in my madness I essayed the door;  
It gave; and through a stormy glare, a heat  
As from a seventimes-heated furnace, I,  
Blasted and burnt, and blinded as I was,  
With such a fierceness that I swooned away--  
O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,  
All palled in crimson samite, and around  
Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes.  
And but for all my madness and my sin,  
And then my swooning, I had sworn I saw  
That which I saw; but what I saw was veiled  
And covered; and this Quest was not for me."

'So speaking, and here ceasing, Lancelot left  
The hall long silent, till Sir Gawain--nay,  
Brother, I need not tell thee foolish words,--  
A reckless and irreverent knight was he,  
Now boldened by the silence of his King,--  
Well, I will tell thee: "O King, my liege," he said,  
"Hath Gawain failed in any quest of thine?"

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 least.  
But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,  
I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,  
And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,  
To holy virgins in their ecstasies,  
Henceforward."

"Deafer," 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 if indeed there came a sign from heaven,  
Blessed are Bors, Lancelot and Percivale,  
For these have seen according to their sight.  
For every fiery prophet in old times,  
And all the sacred madness of the bard,  
When God made music through them, could but speak  
His music by the framework and the chord;  
And as ye saw it ye have spoken truth.

"Nay--but thou errest, Lancelot: never yet  
Could all of true and noble in knight and man  
Twine round one sin, whatever it might be,  
With such a closeness, but apart there grew,  
Save that he were the swine thou spakest of,  
Some root of knighthood and pure nobleness;  
Whereto see thou, that it may bear its flower.

"And spake I not too truly, O my knights?  
Was I too dark a prophet when I said  
To those who went upon the Holy Quest,  
That most of them would follow wandering fires,  
Lost in the quagmire?--lost to me and gone,  
And left me gazing at a barren board,  
And a lean Order--scarce returned a tithe--  
And out of those to whom the vision came  
My greatest hardly will believe he saw;  
Another hath beheld it afar off,  
And leaving human wrongs to right themselves,  
Cares but to pass into the silent life.  
And one hath had the vision face to face,  
And now his chair desires him here in vain,  
However they may crown him elsewhere.

"And some among you held, that if the King  
Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow:  
Not easily, seeing that the King must guard  
That which he rules, and is but as the hind  
To whom a space of land is given to plow.  
Who may not wander from the allotted field

Before his work be done; but, being done,  
Let visions of the night or of the day  
Come, as they will; and many a time they come,  
Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,  
This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,  
This air that smites his forehead is not air  
But vision--yea, his very hand and foot--  
In moments when he feels he cannot die,  
And knows himself no vision to himself,  
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One  
Who rose again: ye have seen what ye have seen."

'So spake the King: I knew not all he meant.'

#### Pelleas and Ettarre

King Arthur made new knights to fill the gap  
Left by the Holy Quest; and as he sat  
In hall at old Caerleon, the high doors  
Were softly sundered, and through these a youth,  
Pelleas, and the sweet smell of the fields  
Past, and the sunshine came along with him.

'Make me thy knight, because I know, Sir King,  
All that belongs to knighthood, and I love.'  
Such was his cry: for having heard the King  
Had let proclaim a tournament--the prize  
A golden circlet and a knightly sword,  
Full fain had Pelleas for his lady won  
The golden circlet, for himself the sword:  
And there were those who knew him near the King,  
And promised for him: and Arthur made him knight.

And this new knight, Sir Pelleas of the isles--  
But lately come to his inheritance,  
And lord of many a barren isle was he--  
Riding at noon, a day or twain before,  
Across the forest called of Dean, to find  
Caerleon and the King, had felt the sun  
Beat like a strong knight on his helm, and reeled  
Almost to falling from his horse; but saw  
Near him a mound of even-sloping side,  
Whereon a hundred stately beeches grew,  
And here and there great hollies under them;  
But for a mile all round was open space,  
And fern and heath: and slowly Pelleas drew  
To that dim day, then binding his good horse  
To a tree, cast himself down; and as he lay

At random looking over the brown earth  
Through that green-glooming twilight of the grove,  
It seemed to Pelleas that the fern without  
Burnt as a living fire of emeralds,  
So that his eyes were dazzled looking at it.  
Then o'er it crost the dimness of a cloud  
Floating, and once the shadow of a bird  
Flying, and then a fawn; and his eyes closed.  
And since he loved all maidens, but no maid  
In special, half-awake he whispered, 'Where?  
O where? I love thee, though I know thee not.  
For fair thou art and pure as Guinevere,  
And I will make thee with my spear and sword  
As famous--O my Queen, my Guinevere,  
For I will be thine Arthur when we meet.'

Suddenly wakened with a sound of talk  
And laughter at the limit of the wood,  
And glancing through the hoary boles, he saw,  
Strange as to some old prophet might have seemed  
A vision hovering on a sea of fire,  
Damsels in divers colours like the cloud  
Of sunset and sunrise, and all of them  
On horses, and the horses richly trapt  
Breast-high in that bright line of bracken stood:  
And all the damsels talked confusedly,  
And one was pointing this way, and one that,  
Because the way was lost.

And Pelleas rose,  
And loosed his horse, and led him to the light.  
There she that seemed the chief among them said,  
'In happy time behold our pilot-star!  
Youth, we are damsels-errant, and we ride,  
Armed as ye see, to tilt against the knights  
There at Caerleon, but have lost our way:  
To right? to left? straight forward? back again?  
Which? tell us quickly.'

Pelleas gazing thought,  
'Is Guinevere herself so beautiful?'  
For large her violet eyes looked, and her bloom  
A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens,  
And round her limbs, mature in womanhood;  
And slender was her hand and small her shape;  
And but for those large eyes, the haunts of scorn,  
She might have seemed a toy to trifle with,  
And pass and care no more. But while he gazed  
The beauty of her flesh abashed the boy,  
As though it were the beauty of her soul:  
For as the base man, judging of the good,  
Puts his own baseness in him by default  
Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend

All the young beauty of his own soul to hers,  
Believing her; and when she spake to him,  
Stammered, and could not make her a reply.  
For out of the waste islands had he come,  
Where saving his own sisters he had known  
Scarce any but the women of his isles,  
Rough wives, that laughed and screamed against the gulls,  
Makers of nets, and living from the sea.

Then with a slow smile turned the lady round  
And looked upon her people; and as when  
A stone is flung into some sleeping tarn,  
The circle widens till it lip the marge,  
Spread the slow smile through all her company.  
Three knights were thereamong; and they too smiled,  
Scorning him; for the lady was Ettarre,  
And she was a great lady in her land.

Again she said, 'O wild and of the woods,  
Knowest thou not the fashion of our speech?  
Or have the Heavens but given thee a fair face,  
Lacking a tongue?'

'O damsel,' answered he,  
'I woke from dreams; and coming out of gloom  
Was dazzled by the sudden light, and crave  
Pardon: but will ye to Caerleon? I  
Go likewise: shall I lead you to the King?'

'Lead then,' she said; and through the woods they went.  
And while they rode, the meaning in his eyes,  
His tenderness of manner, and chaste awe,  
His broken utterances and bashfulness,  
Were all a burthen to her, and in her heart  
She muttered, 'I have lighted on a fool,  
Raw, yet so stale!' But since her mind was bent  
On hearing, after trumpet blown, her name  
And title, 'Queen of Beauty,' in the lists  
Cried--and beholding him so strong, she thought  
That peradventure he will fight for me,  
And win the circlet: therefore flattered him,  
Being so gracious, that he wellnigh deemed  
His wish by hers was echoed; and her knights  
And all her damsels too were gracious to him,  
For she was a great lady.

And when they reached  
Caerleon, ere they past to lodging, she,  
Taking his hand, 'O the strong hand,' she said,  
'See! look at mine! but wilt thou fight for me,  
And win me this fine circlet, Pelleas,  
That I may love thee?'

Then his helpless heart  
Leapt, and he cried, 'Ay! wilt thou if I win?'  
'Ay, that will I,' she answered, and she laughed,  
And straitly nipt the hand, and flung it from her;  
Then glanced askew at those three knights of hers,  
Till all her ladies laughed along with her.

'O happy world,' thought Pelleas, 'all, meseems,  
Are happy; I the happiest of them all.'  
Nor slept that night for pleasure in his blood,  
And green wood-ways, and eyes among the leaves;  
Then being on the morrow knighted, sware  
To love one only. And as he came away,  
The men who met him rounded on their heels  
And wondered after him, because his face  
Shone like the countenance of a priest of old  
Against the flame about a sacrifice  
Kindled by fire from heaven: so glad was he.

Then Arthur made vast banquets, and strange knights  
From the four winds came in: and each one sat,  
Though served with choice from air, land, stream, and sea,  
Oft in mid-banquet measuring with his eyes  
His neighbour's make and might: and Pelleas looked  
Noble among the noble, for he dreamed  
His lady loved him, and he knew himself  
Loved of the King: and him his new-made knight  
Worshipt, whose lightest whisper moved him more  
Than all the ranged reasons of the world.

Then blushed and brake the morning of the jousts,  
And this was called 'The Tournament of Youth:'  
For Arthur, loving his young knight, withheld  
His older and his mightier from the lists,  
That Pelleas might obtain his lady's love,  
According to her promise, and remain  
Lord of the tourney. And Arthur had the jousts  
Down in the flat field by the shore of Usk  
Holden: the gilded parapets were crowned  
With faces, and the great tower filled with eyes  
Up to the summit, and the trumpets blew.  
There all day long Sir Pelleas kept the field  
With honour: so by that strong hand of his  
The sword and golden circlet were achieved.

Then rang the shout his lady loved: the heat  
Of pride and glory fired her face; her eye  
Sparkled; she caught the circlet from his lance,  
And there before the people crowned herself:  
So for the last time she was gracious to him.

Then at Caerleon for a space--her look  
Bright for all others, cloudier on her knight--

Lingered Ettarre: and seeing Pelleas droop,  
Said Guinevere, 'We marvel at thee much,  
O damsel, wearing this unsunny face  
To him who won thee glory!' And she said,  
'Had ye not held your Lancelot in your bower,  
My Queen, he had not won.' Whereat the Queen,  
As one whose foot is bitten by an ant,  
Glanced down upon her, turned and went her way.

But after, when her damsels, and herself,  
And those three knights all set their faces home,  
Sir Pelleas followed. She that saw him cried,  
'Damsels--and yet I should be shamed to say it--  
I cannot bide Sir Baby. Keep him back  
Among yourselves. Would rather that we had  
Some rough old knight who knew the worldly way,  
Albeit grizzlier than a bear, to ride  
And jest with: take him to you, keep him off,  
And pamper him with papmeat, if ye will,  
Old milky fables of the wolf and sheep,  
Such as the wholesome mothers tell their boys.  
Nay, should ye try him with a merry one  
To find his mettle, good: and if he fly us,  
Small matter! let him.' This her damsels heard,  
And mindful of her small and cruel hand,  
They, closing round him through the journey home,  
Acted her hest, and always from her side  
Restrained him with all manner of device,  
So that he could not come to speech with her.  
And when she gained her castle, upsprang the bridge,  
Down rang the grate of iron through the groove,  
And he was left alone in open field.

'These be the ways of ladies,' Pelleas thought,  
'To those who love them, trials of our faith.  
Yea, let her prove me to the uttermost,  
For loyal to the uttermost am I.'  
So made his moan; and darkness falling, sought  
A priory not far off, there lodged, but rose  
With morning every day, and, moist or dry,  
Full-armed upon his charger all day long  
Sat by the walls, and no one opened to him.

And this persistence turned her scorn to wrath.  
Then calling her three knights, she charged them, 'Out!  
And drive him from the walls.' And out they came  
But Pelleas overthrew them as they dashed  
Against him one by one; and these returned,  
But still he kept his watch beneath the wall.

Thereon her wrath became a hate; and once,  
A week beyond, while walking on the walls  
With her three knights, she pointed downward, 'Look,



He haunts me--I cannot breathe--besieges me;  
Down! strike him! put my hate into your strokes,  
And drive him from my walls.' And down they went,  
And Pelleas overthrew them one by one;  
And from the tower above him cried Ettarre,  
'Bind him, and bring him in.'

He heard her voice;  
Then let the strong hand, which had overthrown  
Her minion-knights, by those he overthrew  
Be bounden straight, and so they brought him in.

Then when he came before Ettarre, the sight  
Of her rich beauty made him at one glance  
More bondsman in his heart than in his bonds.  
Yet with good cheer he spake, 'Behold me, Lady,  
A prisoner, and the vassal of thy will;  
And if thou keep me in thy donjon here,  
Content am I so that I see thy face  
But once a day: for I have sworn my vows,  
And thou hast given thy promise, and I know  
That all these pains are trials of my faith,  
And that thyself, when thou hast seen me strained  
And sifted to the utmost, wilt at length  
Yield me thy love and know me for thy knight.'

Then she began to rail so bitterly,  
With all her damsels, he was stricken mute;  
But when she mocked his vows and the great King,  
Lighted on words: 'For pity of thine own self,  
Peace, Lady, peace: is he not thine and mine?'  
'Thou fool,' she said, 'I never heard his voice  
But longed to break away. Unbind him now,  
And thrust him out of doors; for save he be  
Fool to the midmost marrow of his bones,  
He will return no more.' And those, her three,  
Laughed, and unbound, and thrust him from the gate.

And after this, a week beyond, again  
She called them, saying, 'There he watches yet,  
There like a dog before his master's door!  
Kicked, he returns: do ye not hate him, ye?  
Ye know yourselves: how can ye bide at peace,  
Affronted with his fulsome innocence?  
Are ye but creatures of the board and bed,  
No men to strike? Fall on him all at once,  
And if ye slay him I reckon not: if ye fail,  
Give ye the slave mine order to be bound,  
Bind him as heretofore, and bring him in:  
It may be ye shall slay him in his bonds.'

She spake; and at her will they couched their spears,  
Three against one: and Gawain passing by,

Bound upon solitary adventure, saw  
Low down beneath the shadow of those towers  
A villainy, three to one: and through his heart  
The fire of honour and all noble deeds  
Flashed, and he called, 'I strike upon thy side--  
The caitiffs!' 'Nay,' said Pelleas, 'but forbear;  
He needs no aid who doth his lady's will.'

So Gawain, looking at the villainy done,  
Forbore, but in his heat and eagerness  
Trembled and quivered, as the dog, withheld  
A moment from the vermin that he sees  
Before him, shivers, ere he springs and kills.

And Pelleas overthrew them, one to three;  
And they rose up, and bound, and brought him in.  
Then first her anger, leaving Pelleas, burned  
Full on her knights in many an evil name  
Of craven, weakling, and thrice-beaten hound:  
'Yet, take him, ye that scarce are fit to touch,  
Far less to bind, your victor, and thrust him out,  
And let who will release him from his bonds.  
And if he comes again'--there she brake short;  
And Pelleas answered, 'Lady, for indeed  
I loved you and I deemed you beautiful,  
I cannot brook to see your beauty marred  
Through evil spite: and if ye love me not,  
I cannot bear to dream you so forsworn:  
I had liefer ye were worthy of my love,  
Than to be loved again of you--farewell;  
And though ye kill my hope, not yet my love,  
Vex not yourself: ye will not see me more.'

While thus he spake, she gazed upon the man  
Of princely bearing, though in bonds, and thought,  
'Why have I pushed him from me? this man loves,  
If love there be: yet him I loved not. Why?  
I deemed him fool? yea, so? or that in him  
A something--was it nobler than myself?  
Seemed my reproach? He is not of my kind.  
He could not love me, did he know me well.  
Nay, let him go--and quickly.' And her knights  
Laughed not, but thrust him bounden out of door.

Forth sprang Gawain, and loosed him from his bonds,  
And flung them o'er the walls; and afterward,  
Shaking his hands, as from a lazar's rag,  
'Faith of my body,' he said, 'and art thou not--  
Yea thou art he, whom late our Arthur made  
Knight of his table; yea and he that won  
The circlet? wherefore hast thou so defamed  
Thy brotherhood in me and all the rest,  
As let these caitiffs on thee work their will?'

And Pelleas answered, 'O, their wills are hers  
For whom I won the circlet; and mine, hers,  
Thus to be bounden, so to see her face,  
Marred though it be with spite and mockery now,  
Other than when I found her in the woods;  
And though she hath me bounden but in spite,  
And all to flout me, when they bring me in,  
Let me be bounden, I shall see her face;  
Else must I die through mine unhappiness.'

And Gawain answered kindly though in scorn,  
'Why, let my lady bind me if she will,  
And let my lady beat me if she will:  
But an she send her delegate to thrall  
These fighting hands of mine--Christ kill me then  
But I will slice him handless by the wrist,  
And let my lady sear the stump for him,  
Howl as he may. But hold me for your friend:  
Come, ye know nothing: here I pledge my troth,  
Yea, by the honour of the Table Round,  
I will be leal to thee and work thy work,  
And tame thy jailing princess to thine hand.  
Lend me thine horse and arms, and I will say  
That I have slain thee. She will let me in  
To hear the manner of thy fight and fall;  
Then, when I come within her counsels, then  
From prime to vespers will I chant thy praise  
As prowest knight and truest lover, more  
Than any have sung thee living, till she long  
To have thee back in lusty life again,  
Not to be bound, save by white bonds and warm,  
Dearer than freedom. Wherefore now thy horse  
And armour: let me go: be comforted:  
Give me three days to melt her fancy, and hope  
The third night hence will bring thee news of gold.'

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.'  
Then bounded forward to the castle walls,  
And raised a bugle hanging from his neck,  
And winded it, and that so musically  
That all the old echoes hidden in the wall  
Rang out like hollow woods at hunting-tide.

Up ran a score of damsels to the tower;  
'Avaunt,' they cried, 'our lady loves thee not.'  
But Gawain lifting up his vizor said,  
'Gawain am I, Gawain of Arthur's court,

And I have slain this Pelleas whom ye hate:  
Behold his horse and armour. Open gates,  
And I will make you merry.'

And down they ran,  
Her damsels, crying to their lady, 'Lo!  
Pelleas is dead--he told us--he that hath  
His horse and armour: will ye let him in?  
He slew him! Gawain, Gawain of the court,  
Sir Gawain--there he waits below the wall,  
Blowing his bugle as who should say him nay.'

And so, leave given, straight on through open door  
Rode Gawain, whom she greeted courteously.  
'Dead, is it so?' she asked. 'Ay, ay,' said he,  
'And oft in dying cried upon your name.'  
'Pity on him,' she answered, 'a good knight,  
But never let me bide one hour at peace.'  
'Ay,' thought Gawain, 'and you be fair enow:  
But I to your dead man have given my troth,  
That whom ye loathe, him will I make you love.'

So those three days, aimless about the land,  
Lost in a doubt, Pelleas wandering  
Waited, until the third night brought a moon  
With promise of large light on woods and ways.

Hot was the night and silent; but a sound  
Of Gawain ever coming, and this lay--  
Which Pelleas had heard sung before the Queen,  
And seen her sadden listening--vext his heart,  
And marred his rest--'A worm within the rose.'

'A rose, but one, none other rose had I,  
A rose, one rose, and this was wondrous fair,  
One rose, a rose that gladdened earth and sky,  
One rose, my rose, that sweetened all mine air--  
I cared not for the thorns; the thorns were there.

'One rose, a rose to gather by and by,  
One rose, a rose, to gather and to wear,  
No rose but one--what other rose had I?  
One rose, my rose; a rose that will not die,--  
He dies who loves it,--if the worm be there.'

This tender rhyme, and evermore the doubt,  
'Why lingers Gawain with his golden news?'  
So shook him that he could not rest, but rode  
Ere midnight to her walls, and bound his horse  
Hard by the gates. Wide open were the gates,  
And no watch kept; and in through these he past,  
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 spied not any light in hall or bower,  
But saw the postern portal also wide  
Yawning; and up a slope of garden, all  
Of roses white and red, and brambles mixt  
And overgrowing them, went on, and found,  
Here too, all hushed below the mellow moon,  
Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave  
Came lightening downward, and so spilt itself  
Among the roses, and was lost again.

Then was he ware of three pavilions reared  
Above the bushes, gilden-peakt: in one,  
Red after revel, droned her lurdane knights  
Slumbering, and their three squires across their feet:  
In one, their malice on the placid lip  
Frozen by sweet sleep, four of her damsels lay:  
And in the third, the circlet of the jousts  
Bound on her brow, were Gawain and Ettarre.

Back, as a hand that pushes through the leaf  
To find a nest and feels a snake, he drew:  
Back, as a coward slinks from what he fears  
To cope with, or a traitor proven, or hound  
Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame  
Creep with his shadow through the court again,  
Fingering at his sword-handle until he stood  
There on the castle-bridge once more, and thought,  
'I will go back, and slay them where they lie.'

And so went back, and seeing them yet in sleep  
Said, 'Ye, that so dishallow the holy sleep,  
Your sleep is death,' and drew the sword, and thought,  
'What! slay a sleeping knight? the King hath bound  
And sworn me to this brotherhood;' again,  
'Alas that ever a knight should be so false.'  
Then turned, and so returned, and groaning laid  
The naked sword athwart their naked throats,  
There left it, and them sleeping; and she lay,  
The circlet of her tourney round her brows,  
And the sword of the tourney across her throat.

And forth he past, and mounting on his horse  
Stared at her towers that, larger than themselves  
In their own darkness, thronged into the moon.  
Then crushed the saddle with his thighs, and clenched  
His hands, and maddened with himself and moaned:

'Would they have risen against me in their blood  
At the last day? I might have answered them  
Even before high God. O towers so strong,  
Huge, solid, would that even while I gaze  
The crack of earthquake shivering to your base

Split you, and Hell burst up your harlot roofs  
Bellowing, and charred you through and through within,  
Black as the harlot's heart--hollow as a skull!  
Let the fierce east scream through your eyelet-holes,  
And whirl the dust of harlots round and round  
In dung and nettles! hiss, snake--I saw him there--  
Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell. Who yells  
Here in the still sweet summer night, but I--  
I, the poor Pelleas whom she called her fool?  
Fool, beast--he, she, or I? myself most fool;  
Beast too, as lacking human wit--disgraced,  
Dishonoured all for trial of true love--  
Love?--we be all alike: only the King  
Hath made us fools and liars. O noble vows!  
O great and sane and simple race of brutes  
That own no lust because they have no law!  
For why should I have loved her to my shame?  
I loathe her, as I loved her to my shame.  
I never loved her, I but lusted for her--  
Away--'

He dashed the rowel into his horse,  
And bounded forth and vanished through the night.

Then she, that felt the cold touch on her throat,  
Awaking knew the sword, and turned herself  
To Gawain: 'Liar, for thou hast not slain  
This Pelleas! here he stood, and might have slain  
Me and thyself.' And he that tells the tale  
Says that her ever-veering fancy turned  
To Pelleas, as the one true knight on earth,  
And only lover; and through her love her life  
Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain.

But he by wild and way, for half the night,  
And over hard and soft, striking the sod  
From out the soft, the spark from off the hard,  
Rode till the star above the wakening sun,  
Beside that tower where Percivale was cowed,  
Glanced from the rosy forehead of the dawn.  
For so the words were flashed into his heart  
He knew not whence or wherefore: 'O sweet star,  
Pure on the virgin forehead of the dawn!'  
And there he would have wept, but felt his eyes  
Harder and drier than a fountain bed  
In summer: thither came the village girls  
And lingered talking, and they come no more  
Till the sweet heavens have filled it from the heights  
Again with living waters in the change  
Of seasons: hard his eyes; harder his heart  
Seemed; but so weary were his limbs, that he,  
Gasping, 'Of Arthur's hall am I, but here,  
Here let me rest and die,' cast himself down,  
And gulfed his griefs in inmost sleep; so lay,

Till shaken by a dream, that Gawain fired  
The hall of Merlin, and the morning star  
Reeled in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell.

He woke, and being ware of some one nigh,  
Sent hands upon him, as to tear him, crying,  
'False! and I held thee pure as Guinevere.'

But Percivale stood near him and replied,  
'Am I but false as Guinevere is pure?  
Or art thou mazed with dreams? or being one  
Of our free-spoken Table hast not heard  
That Lancelot'--there he checked himself and paused.

Then fared it with Sir Pelleas as with one  
Who gets a wound in battle, and the sword  
That made it plunges through the wound again,  
And pricks it deeper: and he shrank and wailed,  
'Is the Queen false?' and Percivale was mute.  
'Have any of our Round Table held their vows?'  
And Percivale made answer not a word.  
'Is the King true?' 'The King!' said Percivale.  
'Why then let men couple at once with wolves.  
What! art thou mad?'

But Pelleas, leaping up,  
Ran through the doors and vaulted on his horse  
And fled: small pity upon his horse had he,  
Or on himself, or any, and when he met  
A cripple, one that held a hand for alms--  
Hunched as he was, and like an old dwarf-elm  
That turns its back upon the salt blast, the boy  
Paused not, but overrode him, shouting, 'False,  
And false with Gawain!' and so left him bruised  
And battered, and fled on, and hill and wood  
Went ever streaming by him till the gloom,  
That follows on the turning of the world,  
Darkened the common path: he twitched the reins,  
And made his beast that better knew it, swerve  
Now off it and now on; but when he saw  
High up in heaven the hall that Merlin built,  
Blackening against the dead-green stripes of even,  
'Black nest of rats,' he groaned, 'ye build too high.'

Not long thereafter from the city gates  
Issued Sir Lancelot riding airily,  
Warm with a gracious parting from the Queen,  
Peace at his heart, and gazing at a star  
And marvelling what it was: on whom the boy,  
Across the silent seeded meadow-grass  
Borne, clashed: and Lancelot, saying, 'What name hast thou  
That ridest here so blindly and so hard?'  
'No name, no name,' he shouted, 'a scourge am I

To lash the treasons of the Table Round.'  
'Yea, but thy name?' 'I have many names,' he cried:  
'I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,  
And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast  
And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen.'  
'First over me,' said Lancelot, 'shalt thou pass.'  
'Fight therefore,' yelled the youth, and either knight  
Drew back a space, and when they closed, at once  
The weary steed of Pelleas floundering flung  
His rider, who called out from the dark field,  
'Thou art as false as Hell: slay me: I have no sword.'  
Then Lancelot, 'Yea, between thy lips--and sharp;  
But here I will disedge it by thy death.'  
'Slay then,' he shrieked, 'my will is to be slain,'  
And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fallen,  
Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake:  
'Rise, weakling; I am Lancelot; say thy say.'

And Lancelot slowly rode his warhorse back  
To Camelot, and Sir Pelleas in brief while  
Caught his unbroken limbs from the dark field,  
And followed to the city. It chanced that both  
Brake into hall together, worn and pale.  
There with her knights and dames was Guinevere.  
Full wonderingly she gazed on Lancelot  
So soon returned, and then on Pelleas, him  
Who had not greeted her, but cast himself  
Down on a bench, hard-breathing. 'Have ye fought?'  
She asked of Lancelot. 'Ay, my Queen,' he said.  
'And hast thou overthrown him?' 'Ay, my Queen.'  
Then she, turning to Pelleas, 'O young knight,  
Hath the great heart of knighthood in thee failed  
So far thou canst not bide, unfrowardly,  
A fall from him?' Then, for he answered not,  
'Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen,  
May help them, loose thy tongue, and let me know.'  
But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce  
She quailed; 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 hand.'

The Last Tournament



Dagonet, the fool, whom Gawain in his mood  
Had made mock-knight of Arthur's Table Round,  
At Camelot, high above the yellowing woods,  
Danced like a withered leaf before the hall.  
And toward him from the hall, with harp in hand,  
And from the crown thereof a carcanet  
Of ruby swaying to and fro, the prize  
Of Tristram in the jousts of yesterday,  
Came Tristram, saying, 'Why skip ye so, Sir Fool?'

For Arthur and Sir Lancelot riding once  
Far down beneath a winding wall of rock  
Heard a child wail. A stump of oak half-dead,  
From roots like some black coil of carven snakes,  
Clutched at the crag, and started through mid air  
Bearing an eagle's nest: and through the tree  
Rushed ever a rainy wind, and through the wind  
Pierced ever a child's cry: and crag and tree  
Scaling, Sir Lancelot from the perilous nest,  
This ruby necklace thrice around her neck,  
And all unscarred from beak or talon, brought  
A maiden babe; which Arthur pitying took,  
Then gave it to his Queen to rear: the Queen  
But coldly acquiescing, in her white arms  
Received, and after loved it tenderly,  
And named it Nestling; so forgot herself  
A moment, and her cares; till that young life  
Being smitten in mid heaven with mortal cold  
Past from her; and in time the carcanet  
Vext her with plaintive memories of the child:  
So she, delivering it to Arthur, said,  
'Take thou the jewels of this dead innocence,  
And make them, an thou wilt, a tourney-prize.'

To whom the King, 'Peace to thine eagle-borne  
Dead nestling, and this honour after death,  
Following thy will! but, O my Queen, I muse  
Why ye not wear on arm, or neck, or zone  
Those diamonds that I rescued from the tarn,  
And Lancelot won, methought, for thee to wear.'

'Would rather you had let them fall,' she cried,  
'Plunge and be lost--ill-fated as they were,  
A bitterness to me!--ye look amazed,  
Not knowing they were lost as soon as given--  
Slid from my hands, when I was leaning out  
Above the river--that unhappy child  
Past in her barge: but rosier luck will go  
With these rich jewels, seeing that they came  
Not from the skeleton of a brother-slayer,  
But the sweet body of a maiden babe.  
Perchance--who knows?--the purest of thy knights  
May win them for the purest of my maids.'

She ended, and the cry of a great jousts  
With trumpet-blowings ran on all the ways  
From Camelot in among the faded fields  
To furthest towers; and everywhere the knights  
Armed for a day of glory before the King.

But on the hither side of that loud morn  
Into the hall staggered, his visage ribbed  
From ear to ear with dogwhip-weals, his nose  
Bridge-broken, one eye out, and one hand off,  
And one with shattered fingers dangling lame,  
A churl, to whom indignantly the King,

'My churl, for whom Christ died, what evil beast  
Hath drawn his claws athwart thy face? or fiend?  
Man was it who marred heaven's image in thee thus?'

Then, sputtering through the hedge of splintered teeth,  
Yet strangers to the tongue, and with blunt stump  
Pitch-blackened sawing the air, said the maimed churl,

'He took them and he drave them to his tower--  
Some hold he was a table-knight of thine--  
A hundred goodly ones--the Red Knight, he--  
Lord, I was tending swine, and the Red Knight  
Broke in upon me and drave them to his tower;  
And when I called upon thy name as one  
That doest right by gentle and by churl,  
Maimed me and mauled, and would outright have slain,  
Save that he sware me to a message, saying,  
"Tell thou the King and all his liars, that I  
Have founded my Round Table in the North,  
And whatsoever his own knights have sworn  
My knights have sworn the counter to it--and say  
My tower is full of harlots, like his court,  
But mine are worthier, seeing they profess  
To be none other than themselves--and say  
My knights are all adulterers like his own,  
But mine are truer, seeing they profess  
To be none other; and say his hour is come,  
The heathen are upon him, his long lance  
Broken, and his Excalibur a straw."

Then Arthur turned to Kay the seneschal,  
'Take thou my churl, and tend him curiously  
Like a king's heir, till all his hurts be whole.  
The heathen--but that ever-climbing wave,  
Hurl'd back again so often in empty foam,  
Hath lain for years at rest--and renegades,  
Thieves, bandits, leavings of confusion, whom  
The wholesome realm is purged of otherwhere,  
Friends, through your manhood and your fealty,--now

Make their last head like Satan in the North.  
My younger knights, new-made, in whom your flower  
Waits to be solid fruit of golden deeds,  
Move with me toward their quelling, which achieved,  
The loneliest ways are safe from shore to shore.  
But thou, Sir Lancelot, sitting in my place  
Enchained tomorrow, arbitrate the field;  
For wherefore shouldst thou care to mingle with it,  
Only to yield my Queen her own again?  
Speak, Lancelot, thou art silent: is it well?'

Thereto Sir Lancelot answered, 'It is well:  
Yet better if the King abide, and leave  
The leading of his younger knights to me.  
Else, for the King has willed it, it is well.'

Then Arthur rose and Lancelot followed him,  
And while they stood without the doors, the King  
Turned to him saying, 'Is it then so well?  
Or mine the blame that oft I seem as he  
Of whom was written, "A sound is in his ears"?  
The foot that loiters, bidden go,--the glance  
That only seems half-loyal to command,--  
A manner somewhat fallen from reverence--  
Or have I dreamed the bearing of our knights  
Tells of a manhood ever less and lower?  
Or whence the fear lest this my realm, upreared,  
By noble deeds at one with noble vows,  
From flat confusion and brute violences,  
Reel back into the beast, and be no more?'

He spoke, and taking all his younger knights,  
Down the slope city rode, and sharply turned  
North by the gate. In her high bower the Queen,  
Working a tapestry, lifted up her head,  
Watched her lord pass, and knew not that she sighed.  
Then ran across her memory the strange rhyme  
Of bygone Merlin, 'Where is he who knows?  
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

But when the morning of a tournament,  
By these in earnest those in mockery called  
The Tournament of the Dead Innocence,  
Brake with a wet wind blowing, Lancelot,  
Round whose sick head all night, like birds of prey,  
The words of Arthur flying shrieked, arose,  
And down a streetway hung with folds of pure  
White samite, and by fountains running wine,  
Where children sat in white with cups of gold,  
Moved to the lists, and there, with slow sad steps  
Ascending, filled his double-dragoned chair.

He glanced and saw the stately galleries,

Dame, damsel, each through worship of their Queen  
White-robed in honour of the stainless child,  
And some with scattered jewels, like a bank  
Of maiden snow mingled with sparks of fire.  
He looked but once, and veiled his eyes again.

The sudden trumpet sounded as in a dream  
To ears but half-awaked, then one low roll  
Of Autumn thunder, and the jousts began:  
And ever the wind blew, and yellowing leaf  
And gloom and gleam, and shower and shorn plume  
Went down it. Sighing weariedly, as one  
Who sits and gazes on a faded fire,  
When all the goodlier guests are past away,  
Sat their great umpire, looking o'er the lists.  
He saw the laws that ruled the tournament  
Broken, but spake not; once, a knight cast down  
Before his throne of arbitration cursed  
The dead babe and the follies of the King;  
And once the laces of a helmet cracked,  
And showed him, like a vermin in its hole,  
Modred, a narrow face: anon he heard  
The voice that billowed round the barriers roar  
An ocean-sounding welcome to one knight,  
But newly-entered, taller than the rest,  
And armoured all in forest green, whereon  
There tript a hundred tiny silver deer,  
And wearing but a holly-spray for crest,  
With ever-scattering berries, and on shield  
A spear, a harp, a bugle--Tristram--late  
From overseas in Brittany returned,  
And marriage with a princess of that realm,  
Isolt the White--Sir Tristram of the Woods--  
Whom Lancelot knew, had held sometime with pain  
His own against him, and now yearned to shake  
The burthen off his heart in one full shock  
With Tristram even to death: his strong hands gript  
And dented the gilt dragons right and left,  
Until he groaned for wrath--so many of those,  
That ware their ladies' colours on the casque,  
Drew from before Sir Tristram to the bounds,  
And there with gibes and flickering mockeries  
Stood, while he muttered, 'Craven crests! O shame!  
What faith have these in whom they swear to love?  
The glory of our Round Table is no more.'

So Tristram won, and Lancelot gave, the gems,  
Not speaking other word than 'Hast thou won?  
Art thou the purest, brother? See, the hand  
Wherewith thou takest this, is red!' to whom  
Tristram, half plagued by Lancelot's languorous mood,  
Made answer, 'Ay, but wherefore toss me this  
Like a dry bone cast to some hungry hound?

Lest be thy fair Queen's fantasy. Strength of heart  
And might of limb, but mainly use and skill,  
Are winners in this pastime of our King.  
My hand--belike the lance hath dript upon it--  
No blood of mine, I trow; but O chief knight,  
Right arm of Arthur in the battlefield,  
Great brother, thou nor I have made the world;  
Be happy in thy fair Queen as I in mine.'

And Tristram round the gallery made his horse  
Caracole; then bowed his homage, bluntly saying,  
'Fair damsels, each to him who worships each  
Sole Queen of Beauty and of love, behold  
This day my Queen of Beauty is not here.'  
And most of these were mute, some angered, one  
Murmuring, 'All courtesy is dead,' and one,  
'The glory of our Round Table is no more.'

Then fell thick rain, plume droopt and mantle clung,  
And pettish cries awoke, and the wan day  
Went glooming down in wet and weariness:  
But under her black brows a swarthy one  
Laughed shrilly, crying, 'Praise the patient saints,  
Our one white day of Innocence hath past,  
Though somewhat draggled at the skirt. So be it.  
The snowdrop only, flowering through the year,  
Would make the world as blank as Winter-tide.  
Come--let us gladden their sad eyes, our Queen's  
And Lancelot's, at this night's solemnity  
With all the kindlier colours of the field.'

So dame and damsel glittered at the feast  
Variously gay: for he that tells the tale  
Likened them, saying, as when an hour of cold  
Falls on the mountain in midsummer snows,  
And all the purple slopes of mountain flowers  
Pass under white, till the warm hour returns  
With veer of wind, and all are flowers again;  
So dame and damsel cast the simple white,  
And glowing in all colours, the live grass,  
Rose-campion, bluebell, kingcup, poppy, glanced  
About the revels, and with mirth so loud  
Beyond all use, that, half-amazed, the Queen,  
And wroth at Tristram and the lawless jousts,  
Broke up their sports, then slowly to her bower  
Parted, and in her bosom pain was lord.

And little Dagonet on the morrow morn,  
High over all the yellowing Autumn-tide,  
Danced like a withered leaf before the hall.  
Then Tristram saying, 'Why skip ye so, Sir Fool?'  
Wheeled round on either heel, Dagonet replied,  
'Belike for lack of wiser company;

Or being fool, and seeing too much wit  
Makes the world rotten, why, belike I skip  
To know myself the wisest knight of all.'  
'Ay, fool,' said Tristram, 'but 'tis eating dry  
To dance without a catch, a roundelay  
To dance to.' Then he twangled on his harp,  
And while he twangled little Dagonet stood  
Quiet as any water-sodden log  
Stayed in the wandering warble of a brook;  
But when the twangling ended, skipt again;  
And being asked, 'Why skipt ye not, Sir Fool?'  
Made answer, 'I had liefer twenty years  
Skip to the broken music of my brains  
Than any broken music thou canst make.'  
Then Tristram, waiting for the quip to come,  
'Good now, what music have I broken, fool?'  
And little Dagonet, skipping, 'Arthur, the King's;  
For when thou playest that air with Queen Isolt,  
Thou makest broken music with thy bride,  
Her daintier namesake down in Brittany--  
And so thou breakest Arthur's music too.'  
'Save for that broken music in thy brains,  
Sir Fool,' said Tristram, 'I would break thy head.  
Fool, I came too late, the heathen wars were o'er,  
The life had flown, we sware but by the shell--  
I am but a fool to reason with a fool--  
Come, thou art crabbed and sour: but lean me down,  
Sir Dagonet, one of thy long asses' ears,  
And harken if my music be not true.

"Free love--free field--we love but while we may:  
The woods are hushed, their music is no more:  
The leaf is dead, the yearning past away:  
New leaf, new life--the days of frost are o'er:  
New life, new love, to suit the newer day:  
New loves are sweet as those that went before:  
Free love--free field--we love but while we may."

'Ye might have moved slow-measure to my tune,  
Not stood stockstill. I made it in the woods,  
And heard it ring as true as tested gold.'

But Dagonet with one foot poised in his hand,  
'Friend, did ye mark that fountain yesterday  
Made to run wine?--but this had run itself  
All out like a long life to a sour end--  
And them that round it sat with golden cups  
To hand the wine to whosoever came--  
The twelve small damosels white as Innocence,  
In honour of poor Innocence the babe,  
Who left the gems which Innocence the Queen  
Lent to the King, and Innocence the King  
Gave for a prize--and one of those white slips

Handed her cup and piped, the pretty one,  
"Drink, drink, Sir Fool," and thereupon I drank,  
Spat--pish--the cup was gold, the draught was mud.'

And Tristram, 'Was it muddier than thy gibes?  
Is all the laughter gone dead out of thee?--  
Not marking how the knighthood mock thee, fool--  
"Fear God: honour the King--his one true knight--  
Sole follower of the vows"--for here be they  
Who knew thee swine enow before I came,  
Smuttier than blasted grain: but when the King  
Had made thee fool, thy vanity so shot up  
It frightened all free fool from out thy heart;  
Which left thee less than fool, and less than swine,  
A naked aught--yet swine I hold thee still,  
For I have flung thee pearls and find thee swine.'

And little Dagonet mincing with his feet,  
'Knight, an ye fling those rubies round my neck  
In lieu of hers, I'll hold thou hast some touch  
Of music, since I care not for thy pearls.  
Swine? I have wallowed, I have washed--the world  
Is flesh and shadow--I have had my day.  
The dirty nurse, Experience, in her kind  
Hath fouled me--an I wallowed, then I washed--  
I have had my day and my philosophies--  
And thank the Lord I am King Arthur's fool.  
Swine, say ye? swine, goats, asses, rams and geese  
Trooped round a Paynim harper once, who thrummed  
On such a wire as musically as thou  
Some such fine song--but never a king's fool.'

And Tristram, 'Then were swine, goats, asses, geese  
The wiser fools, seeing thy Paynim bard  
Had such a mastery of his mystery  
That he could harp his wife up out of hell.'

Then Dagonet, turning on the ball of his foot,  
'And whither harp'st thou thine? down! and thyself  
Down! and two more: a helpful harper thou,  
That harpest downward! Dost thou know the star  
We call the harp of Arthur up in heaven?'

And Tristram, 'Ay, Sir Fool, for when our King  
Was victor wellnigh day by day, the knights,  
Glorying in each new glory, set his name  
High on all hills, and in the signs of heaven.'

And Dagonet answered, 'Ay, and when the land  
Was freed, and the Queen false, ye set yourself  
To babble about him, all to show your wit--  
And whether he were King by courtesy,  
Or King by right--and so went harping down

The black king's highway, got so far, and grew  
So witty that ye played at ducks and drakes  
With Arthur's vows on the great lake of fire.  
Tuwhoo! do ye see it? do ye see the star?'

'Nay, fool,' said Tristram, 'not in open day.'  
And Dagonet, 'Nay, nor will: I see it and hear.  
It makes a silent music up in heaven,  
And I, and Arthur and the angels hear,  
And then we skip.' 'Lo, fool,' he said, 'ye talk  
Fool's treason: is the King thy brother fool?'  
Then little Dagonet clapt his hands and shrilled,  
'Ay, ay, my brother fool, the king of fools!  
Conceits himself as God that he can make  
Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk  
From burning spurge, honey from hornet-combs,  
And men from beasts--Long live the king of fools!'

And down the city Dagonet danced away;  
But through the slowly-mellowing avenues  
And solitary passes of the wood  
Rode Tristram toward Lyonesse and the west.  
Before him fled the face of Queen Isolt  
With ruby-circled neck, but evermore  
Past, as a rustle or twitter in the wood  
Made dull his inner, keen his outer eye  
For all that walked, or crept, or perched, or flew.  
Anon the face, as, when a gust hath blown,  
Unruffling waters re-collect the shape  
Of one that in them sees himself, returned;  
But at the slot or fewmets of a deer,  
Or even a fallen feather, vanished again.

So on for all that day from lawn to lawn  
Through many a league-long bower he rode. At length  
A lodge of intertwisted beechen-boughs  
Furze-crammed, and bracken-rooft, the which himself  
Built for a summer day with Queen Isolt  
Against a shower, dark in the golden grove  
Appearing, sent his fancy back to where  
She lived a moon in that low lodge with him:  
Till Mark her lord had past, the Cornish King,  
With six or seven, when Tristram was away,  
And snatched her thence; yet dreading worse than shame  
Her warrior Tristram, spake not any word,  
But bode his hour, devising wretchedness.

And now that desert lodge to Tristram lookt  
So sweet, that halting, in he past, and sank  
Down on a drift of foliage random-blown;  
But could not rest for musing how to smoothe  
And sleek his marriage over to the Queen.  
Perchance in lone Tintagil far from all



The tonguesters of the court she had not heard.  
But then what folly had sent him overseas  
After she left him lonely here? a name?  
Was it the name of one in Brittany,  
Isolt, the daughter of the King? 'Isolt  
Of the white hands' they called her: the sweet name  
Allured him first, and then the maid herself,  
Who served him well with those white hands of hers,  
And loved him well, until himself had thought  
He loved her also, wedded easily,  
But left her all as easily, and returned.  
The black-blue Irish hair and Irish eyes  
Had drawn him home--what marvel? then he laid  
His brows upon the drifted leaf and dreamed.

He seemed to pace the strand of Brittany  
Between Isolt of Britain and his bride,  
And showed them both the ruby-chain, and both  
Began to struggle for it, till his Queen  
Graspt it so hard, that all her hand was red.  
Then cried the Breton, 'Look, her hand is red!  
These be no rubies, this is frozen blood,  
And melts within her hand--her hand is hot  
With ill desires, but this I gave thee, look,  
Is all as cool and white as any flower.'  
Followed a rush of eagle's wings, and then  
A whimpering of the spirit of the child,  
Because the twain had spoiled her carcanet.

He dreamed; but Arthur with a hundred spears  
Rode far, till o'er the illimitable reed,  
And many a glancing plash and sallowy isle,  
The wide-winged sunset of the misty marsh  
Glared on a huge machicolated tower  
That stood with open doors, whereout was rolled  
A roar of riot, as from men secure  
Amid their marshes, ruffians at their ease  
Among their harlot-brides, an evil song.  
'Lo there,' said one of Arthur's youth, for there,  
High on a grim dead tree before the tower,  
A goodly brother of the Table Round  
Swung by the neck: and on the boughs a shield  
Showing a shower of blood in a field noir,  
And therebeside a horn, inflamed the knights  
At that dishonour done the gilded spur,  
Till each would clash the shield, and blow the horn.  
But Arthur waved them back. Alone he rode.  
Then at the dry harsh roar of the great horn,  
That sent the face of all the marsh aloft  
An ever upward-rushing storm and cloud  
Of shriek and plume, the Red Knight heard, and all,  
Even to tipmost lance and topmost helm,  
In blood-red armour sallying, howled to the King,

'The teeth of Hell flay bare and gnash thee flat!--  
Lo! art thou not that eunuch-hearted King  
Who fain had clipt free manhood from the world--  
The woman-worshipper? Yea, God's curse, and !!  
Slain was the brother of my paramour  
By a knight of thine, and I that heard her whine  
And snivel, being eunuch-hearted too,  
Sware by the scorpion-worm that twists in hell,  
And stings itself to everlasting death,  
To hang whatever knight of thine I fought  
And tumbled. Art thou King? --Look to thy life!'

He ended: Arthur knew the voice; the face  
Wellnigh was helmet-hidden, and the name  
Went wandering somewhere darkling in his mind.  
And Arthur deigned not use of word or sword,  
But let the drunkard, as he stretched from horse  
To strike him, overbalancing his bulk,  
Down from the causeway heavily to the swamp  
Fall, as the crest of some slow-arching wave,  
Heard in dead night along that table-shore,  
Drops flat, and after the great waters break  
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,  
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud,  
From less and less to nothing; thus he fell  
Head-heavy; then the knights, who watched him, roared  
And shouted and leapt down upon the fallen;  
There trampled out his face from being known,  
And sank his head in mire, and slimed themselves:  
Nor heard the King for their own cries, but sprang  
Through open doors, and swording right and left  
Men, women, on their sodden faces, hurled  
The tables over and the wines, and slew  
Till all the rafters rang with woman-yells,  
And all the pavement streamed with massacre:  
Then, echoing yell with yell, they fired the tower,  
Which half that autumn night, like the live North,  
Red-pulsing up through Alioth and Alcor,  
Made all above it, and a hundred meres  
About it, as the water Moab saw  
Came round by the East, and out beyond them flushed  
The long low dune, and lazy-plunging sea.

So all the ways were safe from shore to shore,  
But in the heart of Arthur pain was lord.

Then, out of Tristram waking, the red dream  
Fled with a shout, and that low lodge returned,  
Mid-forest, and the wind among the boughs.  
He whistled his good warhorse left to graze  
Among the forest greens, vaulted upon him,  
And rode beneath an ever-showering leaf,

Till one lone woman, weeping near a cross,  
Stayed him. 'Why weep ye?' 'Lord,' she said, 'my man  
Hath left me or is dead;' whereon he thought--  
'What, if she hate me now? I would not this.  
What, if she love me still? I would not that.  
I know not what I would'--but said to her,  
'Yet weep not thou, lest, if thy mate return,  
He find thy favour changed and love thee not'--  
Then pressing day by day through Lyonesse  
Last in a roky hollow, belling, heard  
The hounds of Mark, and felt the goodly hounds  
Yelp at his heart, but turning, past and gained  
Tintagil, half in sea, and high on land,  
A crown of towers.

Down in a casement sat,  
A low sea-sunset glorying round her hair  
And glossy-throated grace, Isolt the Queen.  
And when she heard the feet of Tristram grind  
The spiring stone that scaled about her tower,  
Flushed, started, met him at the doors, and there  
Belted his body with her white embrace,  
Crying aloud, 'Not Mark--not Mark, my soul!  
The footstep fluttered me at first: not he:  
Catlike through his own castle steals my Mark,  
But warrior-wise thou stridest through his halls  
Who hates thee, as I him--even to the death.  
My soul, I felt my hatred for my Mark  
Quicken within me, and knew that thou wert nigh.'  
To whom Sir Tristram smiling, 'I am here.  
Let be thy Mark, seeing he is not thine.'

And drawing somewhat backward she replied,  
'Can he be wronged who is not even his own,  
But save for dread of thee had beaten me,  
Scratched, bitten, blinded, marred me somehow--Mark?  
What rights are his that dare not strike for them?  
Not lift a hand--not, though he found me thus!  
But harken! have ye met him? hence he went  
Today for three days' hunting--as he said--  
And so returns belike within an hour.  
Mark's way, my soul!--but eat not thou with Mark,  
Because he hates thee even more than fears;  
Nor drink: and when thou passest any wood  
Close vizer, lest an arrow from the bush  
Should leave me all alone with Mark and hell.  
My God, the measure of my hate for Mark  
Is as the measure of my love for thee.'

So, plucked one way by hate and one by love,  
Drained of her force, again she sat, and spake  
To Tristram, as he knelt before her, saying,  
'O hunter, and O blower of the horn,

Harper, and thou hast been a rover too,  
For, ere I mated with my shambling king,  
Ye twain had fallen out about the bride  
Of one--his name is out of me--the prize,  
If prize she were--(what marvel--she could see)--  
Thine, friend; and ever since my craven seeks  
To wreck thee villainously: but, O Sir Knight,  
What dame or damsel have ye kneeled to last?'

And Tristram, 'Last to my Queen Paramount,  
Here now to my Queen Paramount of love  
And loveliness--ay, lovelier than when first  
Her light feet fell on our rough Lyonesse,  
Sailing from Ireland.'

Softly laughed Isolt;  
'Flatter me not, for hath not our great Queen  
My dole of beauty trebled?' and he said,  
'Her beauty is her beauty, and thine thine,  
And thine is more to me--soft, gracious, kind--  
Save when thy Mark is kindled on thy lips  
Most gracious; but she, haughty, even to him,  
Lancelot; for I have seen him wan enow  
To make one doubt if ever the great Queen  
Have yielded him her love.'

To whom Isolt,  
'Ah then, false hunter and false harper, thou  
Who brakest through the scruple of my bond,  
Calling me thy white hind, and saying to me  
That Guinevere had sinned against the highest,  
And I--misyoked with such a want of man--  
That I could hardly sin against the lowest.'

He answered, 'O my soul, be comforted!  
If this be sweet, to sin in leading-strings,  
If here be comfort, and if ours be sin,  
Crowned warrant had we for the crowning sin  
That made us happy: but how ye greet me--fear  
And fault and doubt--no word of that fond tale--  
Thy deep heart-yearnings, thy sweet memories  
Of Tristram in that year he was away.'

And, saddening on the sudden, spake Isolt,  
'I had forgotten all in my strong joy  
To see thee--yearnings?--ay! for, hour by hour,  
Here in the never-ended afternoon,  
O sweeter than all memories of thee,  
Deeper than any yearnings after thee  
Seemed those far-rolling, westward-smiling seas,  
Watched from this tower. Isolt of Britain dashed  
Before Isolt of Brittany on the strand,  
Would that have chilled her bride-kiss? Wedded her?'

Fought in her father's battles? wounded there?  
The King was all fulfilled with gratefulness,  
And she, my namesake of the hands, that healed  
Thy hurt and heart with unguent and caress--  
Well--can I wish her any huger wrong  
Than having known thee? her too hast thou left  
To pine and waste in those sweet memories.  
O were I not my Mark's, by whom all men  
Are noble, I should hate thee more than love.'

And Tristram, fondling her light hands, replied,  
'Grace, Queen, for being loved: she loved me well.  
Did I love her? the name at least I loved.  
Isolt?--I fought his battles, for Isolt!  
The night was dark; the true star set. Isolt!  
The name was ruler of the dark--Isolt?  
Care not for her! patient, and prayerful, meek,  
Pale-blooded, she will yield herself to God.'

And Isolt answered, 'Yea, and why not I?  
Mine is the larger need, who am not meek,  
Pale-blooded, prayerful. Let me tell thee now.  
Here one black, mute midsummer night I sat,  
Lonely, but musing on thee, wondering where,  
Murmuring a light song I had heard thee sing,  
And once or twice I spake thy name aloud.  
Then flashed a levin-brand; and near me stood,  
In fuming sulphur blue and green, a fiend--  
Mark's way to steal behind one in the dark--  
For there was Mark: "He has wedded her," he said,  
Not said, but hissed it: then this crown of towers  
So shook to such a roar of all the sky,  
That here in utter dark I swooned away,  
And woke again in utter dark, and cried,  
"I will flee hence and give myself to God"--  
And thou wert lying in thy new leman's arms.'

Then Tristram, ever dallying with her hand,  
'May God be with thee, sweet, when old and gray,  
And past desire!' a saying that angered her.  
"May God be with thee, sweet, when thou art old,  
And sweet no more to me!" I need Him now.  
For when had Lancelot uttered aught so gross  
Even to the swineherd's malkin in the mast?  
The greater man, the greater courtesy.  
Far other was the Tristram, Arthur's knight!  
But thou, through ever harrying thy wild beasts--  
Save that to touch a harp, tilt with a lance  
Becomes thee well--art grown wild beast thyself.  
How darest thou, if lover, push me even  
In fancy from thy side, and set me far  
In the gray distance, half a life away,  
Her to be loved no more? Unsay it, unswear!

Flatter me rather, seeing me so weak,  
Broken with Mark and hate and solitude,  
Thy marriage and mine own, that I should suck  
Lies like sweet wines: lie to me: I believe.  
Will ye not lie? not swear, as there ye kneel,  
And solemnly as when ye sware to him,  
The man of men, our King--My God, the power  
Was once in vows when men believed the King!  
They lied not then, who sware, and through their vows  
The King prevailing made his realm:--I say,  
Swear to me thou wilt love me even when old,  
Gray-haired, and past desire, and in despair.'

Then Tristram, pacing moodily up and down,  
'Vows! did you keep the vow you made to Mark  
More than I mine? Lied, say ye? Nay, but learnt,  
The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself--  
My knighthood taught me this--ay, being snapt--  
We run more counter to the soul thereof  
Than had we never sworn. I swear no more.  
I swore to the great King, and am forsworn.  
For once--even to the height--I honoured him.  
"Man, is he man at all?" methought, when first  
I rode from our rough Lyonesse, and beheld  
That victor of the Pagan throned in hall--  
His hair, a sun that rayed from off a brow  
Like hillsnow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes,  
The golden beard that clothed his lips with light--  
Moreover, that weird legend of his birth,  
With Merlin's mystic babble about his end  
Amazed me; then, his foot was on a stool  
Shaped as a dragon; he seemed to me no man,  
But Michael trampling Satan; so I sware,  
Being amazed: but this went by-- The vows!  
O ay--the wholesome madness of an hour--  
They served their use, their time; for every knight  
Believed himself a greater than himself,  
And every follower eyed him as a God;  
Till he, being lifted up beyond himself,  
Did mightier deeds than elsewhere he had done,  
And so the realm was made; but then their vows--  
First mainly through that sullyng of our Queen--  
Began to gall the knighthood, asking whence  
Had Arthur right to bind them to himself?  
Dropt down from heaven? washed up from out the deep?  
They failed to trace him through the flesh and blood  
Of our old kings: whence then? a doubtful lord  
To bind them by inviolable vows,  
Which flesh and blood perforce would violate:  
For feel this arm of mine--the tide within  
Red with free chase and heather-scented air,  
Pulsing full man; can Arthur make me pure  
As any maiden child? lock up my tongue

From uttering freely what I freely hear?  
Bind me to one? The wide world laughs at it.  
And worldling of the world am I, and know  
The ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour  
Woos his own end; we are not angels here  
Nor shall be: vows--I am woodman of the woods,  
And hear the garnet-headed yaffingale  
Mock them: my soul, we love but while we may;  
And therefore is my love so large for thee,  
Seeing it is not bounded save by love.'

Here ending, he moved toward her, and she said,  
'Good: an I turned away my love for thee  
To some one thrice as courteous as thyself--  
For courtesy wins woman all as well  
As valour may, but he that closes both  
Is perfect, he is Lancelot--taller indeed,  
Rosier and comelier, thou--but say I loved  
This knightliest of all knights, and cast thee back  
Thine own small saw, "We love but while we may,"  
Well then, what answer?'

He that while she spake,  
Mindful of what he brought to adorn her with,  
The jewels, had let one finger lightly touch  
The warm white apple of her throat, replied,  
'Press this a little closer, sweet, until--  
Come, I am hungered and half-angered--meat,  
Wine, wine--and I will love thee to the death,  
And out beyond into the dream to come.'

So then, when both were brought to full accord,  
She rose, and set before him all he willed;  
And after these had comforted the blood  
With meats and wines, and satiated their hearts--  
Now talking of their woodland paradise,  
The deer, the dews, the fern, the founts, the lawns;  
Now mocking at the much ungainliness,  
And craven shifts, and long crane legs of Mark--  
Then Tristram laughing caught the harp, and sang:

'Ay, ay, O ay--the winds that bend the brier!  
A star in heaven, a star within the mere!  
Ay, ay, O ay--a star was my desire,  
And one was far apart, and one was near:  
Ay, ay, O ay--the winds that bow the grass!  
And one was water and one star was fire,  
And one will ever shine and one will pass.  
Ay, ay, O ay--the winds that move the mere.'

Then in the light's last glimmer Tristram showed  
And swung the ruby carcanet. She cried,  
'The collar of some Order, which our King

Hath newly founded, all for thee, my soul,  
For thee, to yield thee grace beyond thy peers.'

'Not so, my Queen,' he said, 'but the red fruit  
Grown on a magic oak-tree in mid-heaven,  
And won by Tristram as a tourney-prize,  
And hither brought by Tristram for his last  
Love-offering and peace-offering unto thee.'

He spoke, he turned, then, flinging round her neck,  
Claspt it, and cried, 'Thine Order, O my Queen!  
But, while he bowed to kiss the jewelled throat,  
Out of the dark, just as the lips had touched,  
Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek--  
'Mark's way,' said Mark, and clove him through the brain.

That night came Arthur home, and while he climbed,  
All in a death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom,  
The stairway to the hall, and looked and saw  
The great Queen's bower was dark,--about his feet  
A voice clung sobbing till he questioned it,  
'What art thou?' and the voice about his feet  
Sent up an answer, sobbing, 'I am thy fool,  
And I shall never make thee smile again.'

Guinevere

Queen Guinevere had fled the court, and sat  
There in the holy house at Almesbury  
Weeping, none with her save a little maid,  
A novice: one low light betwixt them burned  
Blurred by the creeping mist, for all abroad,  
Beneath a moon unseen albeit at full,  
The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,  
Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still.

For hither had she fled, her cause of flight  
Sir Modred; he that like a subtle beast  
Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne,  
Ready to spring, waiting a chance: for this  
He chilled the popular praises of the King  
With silent smiles of slow disparagement;  
And tampered with the Lords of the White Horse,  
Heathen, the brood by Hengist left; and sought  
To make disruption in the Table Round  
Of Arthur, and to splinter it into feuds  
Serving his traitorous end; and all his aims  
Were sharpened by strong hate for Lancelot.



For thus it chanced one morn when all the court,  
Green-suited, but with plumes that mocked the may,  
Had been, their wont, a-maying and returned,  
That Modred still in green, all ear and eye,  
Climbed to the high top of the garden-wall  
To spy some secret scandal if he might,  
And saw the Queen who sat betwixt her best  
Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court  
The wiliest and the worst; and more than this  
He saw not, for Sir Lancelot passing by  
Spied where he couched, and as the gardener's hand  
Picks from the colewort a green caterpillar,  
So from the high wall and the flowering grove  
Of grasses Lancelot plucked him by the heel,  
And cast him as a worm upon the way;  
But when he knew the Prince though marred with dust,  
He, reverencing king's blood in a bad man,  
Made such excuses as he might, and these  
Full knightly without scorn; for in those days  
No knight of Arthur's noblest dealt in scorn;  
But, if a man were halt or hunched, in him  
By those whom God had made full-limbed and tall,  
Scorn was allowed as part of his defect,  
And he was answered softly by the King  
And all his Table. So Sir Lancelot help  
To raise the Prince, who rising twice or thrice  
Full sharply smote his knees, and smiled, and went:  
But, ever after, the small violence done  
Rankled in him 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.

But when Sir Lancelot told  
This matter to the Queen, at first she laughed  
Lightly, to think of Modred's dusty fall,  
Then shuddered, as the village wife who cries  
'I shudder, some one steps across my grave;'  
Then laughed again, but faintlier, for indeed  
She half-foresaw that he, the subtle beast,  
Would track her guilt until he found, and hers  
Would be for evermore a name of scorn.  
Henceforward rarely could she front in hall,  
Or elsewhere, Modred's narrow foxy face,  
Heart-hiding smile, and gray persistent eye:  
Henceforward too, the Powers that tend the soul,  
To help it from the death that cannot die,  
And save it even in extremes, began  
To vex and plague her. Many a time for hours,  
Beside the placid breathings of the King,  
In the dead night, grim faces came and went  
Before her, or a vague spiritual fear--

Like to some doubtful noise of creaking doors,  
Heard by the watcher in a haunted house,  
That keeps the rust of murder on the walls--  
Held her awake: or if she slept, she dreamed  
An awful dream; for then she seemed to stand  
On some vast plain before a setting sun,  
And from the sun there swiftly made at her  
A ghastly something, and its shadow flew  
Before it, till it touched her, and she turned--  
When lo! her own, that broadening from her feet,  
And blackening, swallowed all the land, and in it  
Far cities burnt, and with a cry she woke.  
And all this trouble did not pass but grew;  
Till even the clear face of the guileless King,  
And trustful courtesies of household life,  
Became her bane; and at the last she said,  
'O Lancelot, get thee hence to thine own land,  
For if thou tarry we shall meet again,  
And if we meet again, some evil chance  
Will make the smouldering scandal break and blaze  
Before the people, and our lord the King.'  
And Lancelot ever promised, but remained,  
And still they met and met. Again she said,  
'O Lancelot, if thou love me get thee hence.'  
And then they were agreed upon a night  
(When the good King should not be there) to meet  
And part for ever. Vivien, lurking, heard.  
She told Sir Modred. Passion-pale they met  
And greeted. Hands in hands, and eye to eye,  
Low on the border of her couch they sat  
Stammering and staring. It was their last hour,  
A madness of farewells. And Modred brought  
His creatures to the basement of the tower  
For testimony; and crying with full voice  
'Traitor, come out, ye are trapt at last,' aroused  
Lancelot, who rushing outward lionlike  
Leapt on him, and hurled him headlong, and he fell  
Stunned, and his creatures took and bare him off,  
And all was still: then she, 'The end is come,  
And I am shamed for ever;' and he said,  
'Mine be the shame; mine was the sin: but rise,  
And fly to my strong castle overseas:  
There will I hide thee, till my life shall end,  
There hold thee with my life against the world.'  
She answered, 'Lancelot, wilt thou hold me so?  
Nay, friend, for we have taken our farewells.  
Would God that thou couldst hide me from myself!  
Mine is the shame, for I was wife, and thou  
Unwedded: yet rise now, and let us fly,  
For I will draw me into sanctuary,  
And bide my doom.' So Lancelot got her horse,  
Set her thereon, and mounted on his own,  
And then they rode to the divided way,

There kissed, and parted weeping: for he past,  
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen,  
Back to his land; but she to Almesbury  
Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald,  
And heard the Spirits of the waste and weald  
Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan:  
And in herself she moaned 'Too late, too late!'  
Till in the cold wind that foreruns the morn,  
A blot in heaven, the Raven, flying high,  
Croaked, and she thought, 'He spies a field of death;  
For now the Heathen of the Northern Sea,  
Lured by the crimes and frailties of the court,  
Begin to slay the folk, and spoil the land.'

And when she came to Almesbury she spake  
There to the nuns, and said, 'Mine enemies  
Pursue me, but, O peaceful Sisterhood,  
Receive, and yield me sanctuary, nor ask  
Her name to whom ye yield it, till her time  
To tell you:' and her beauty, grace and power,  
Wrought as a charm upon them, and they spared  
To ask it.

So the stately Queen abode  
For many a week, unknown, among the nuns;  
Nor with them mixed, nor told her name, nor sought,  
Wrapt in her grief, for housel or for shrift,  
But communed only with the little maid,  
Who pleased her with a babbling heedlessness  
Which often lured her from herself; but now,  
This night, a rumour wildly blown about  
Came, that Sir Modred had usurped the realm,  
And leagued him with the heathen, while the King  
Was waging war on Lancelot: then she thought,  
'With what a hate the people and the King  
Must hate me,' and bowed down upon her hands  
Silent, until the little maid, who brooked  
No silence, brake it, uttering, 'Late! so late!  
What hour, I wonder, now?' and when she drew  
No answer, by and by began to hum  
An air the nuns had taught her; 'Late, so late!'  
Which when she heard, the Queen looked up, and said,  
'O maiden, if indeed ye list to sing,  
Sing, and unbind my heart that I may weep.'  
Whereat full willingly sang the little maid.

'Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!  
Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.  
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

'No light had we: for that we do repent;  
And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.  
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

'No light: so late! and dark and chill the night!  
O let us in, that we may find the light!  
Too late, too late: ye cannot enter now.

'Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?  
O let us in, though late, to kiss his feet!  
No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now.'

So sang the novice, while full passionately,  
Her head upon her hands, remembering  
Her thought when first she came, wept the sad Queen.  
Then said the little novice prattling to her,  
'O pray you, noble lady, weep no more;  
But let my words, the words of one so small,  
Who knowing nothing knows but to obey,  
And if I do not there is penance given--  
Comfort your sorrows; for they do not flow  
From evil done; right sure am I of that,  
Who see your tender grace and stateliness.  
But weigh your sorrows with our lord the King's,  
And weighing find them less; for gone is he  
To wage grim war against Sir Lancelot there,  
Round that strong castle where he holds the Queen;  
And Modred whom he left in charge of all,  
The traitor--Ah sweet lady, the King's grief  
For his own self, and his own Queen, and realm,  
Must needs be thrice as great as any of ours.  
For me, I thank the saints, I am not great.  
For if there ever come a grief to me  
I cry my cry in silence, and have done.  
None knows it, and my tears have brought me good:  
But even were the griefs of little ones  
As great as those of great ones, yet this grief  
Is added to the griefs the great must bear,  
That howsoever much they may desire  
Silence, they cannot weep behind a cloud:  
As even here they talk at Almesbury  
About the good King and his wicked Queen,  
And were I such a King with such a Queen,  
Well might I wish to veil her wickedness,  
But were I such a King, it could not be.'

Then to her own sad heart muttered the Queen,  
'Will the child kill me with her innocent talk?'  
But openly she answered, 'Must not I,  
If this false traitor have displaced his lord,  
Grieve with the common grief of all the realm?'

'Yea,' said the maid, 'this is all woman's grief,  
That she is woman, whose disloyal life  
Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round  
Which good King Arthur founded, years ago,

With signs and miracles and wonders, there  
At Camelot, ere the coming of the Queen.'

Then thought the Queen within herself again,  
'Will the child kill me with her foolish prate?'  
But openly she spake and said to her,  
'O little maid, shut in by nunnery walls,  
What canst thou know of Kings and Tables Round,  
Or what of signs and wonders, but the signs  
And simple miracles of thy nunnery?'

To whom the little novice garrulously,  
'Yea, but I know: the land was full of signs  
And wonders ere the coming of the Queen.  
So said my father, and himself was knight  
Of the great Table--at the founding of it;  
And rode thereto from Lyonesse, and he said  
That as he rode, an hour or maybe twain  
After the sunset, down the coast, he heard  
Strange music, and he paused, and turning--there,  
All down the lonely coast of Lyonesse,  
Each with a beacon-star upon his head,  
And with a wild sea-light about his feet,  
He saw them--headland after headland flame  
Far on into the rich heart of the west:  
And in the light the white mermaiden swam,  
And strong man-breasted things stood from the sea,  
And sent a deep sea-voice through all the land,  
To which the little elves of chasm and cleft  
Made answer, sounding like a distant horn.  
So said my father--yea, and furthermore,  
Next morning, while he past the dim-lit woods,  
Himself beheld three spirits mad with joy  
Come dashing down on a tall wayside flower,  
That shook beneath them, as the thistle shakes  
When three gray linnets wrangle for the seed:  
And still at evenings on before his horse  
The flickering fairy-circle wheeled and broke  
Flying, and linked again, and wheeled and broke  
Flying, for all the land was full of life.  
And when at last he came to Camelot,  
A wreath of airy dancers hand-in-hand  
Swung round the lighted lantern of the hall;  
And in the hall itself was such a feast  
As never man had dreamed; for every knight  
Had whatsoever meat he longed for served  
By hands unseen; and even as he said  
Down in the cellars merry bloated things  
Shouldered the spigot, straddling on the butts  
While the wine ran: so glad were spirits and men  
Before the coming of the sinful Queen.'

Then spake the Queen and somewhat bitterly,

'Were they so glad? ill prophets were they all,  
Spirits and men: could none of them foresee,  
Not even thy wise father with his signs  
And wonders, what has fallen upon the realm?'

To whom the novice garrulously again,  
'Yea, one, a bard; of whom my father said,  
Full many a noble war-song had he sung,  
Even in the presence of an enemy's fleet,  
Between the steep cliff and the coming wave;  
And many a mystic lay of life and death  
Had chanted on the smoky mountain-tops,  
When round him bent the spirits of the hills  
With all their dewy hair blown back like flame:  
So said my father--and that night the bard  
Sang Arthur's glorious wars, and sang the King  
As wellnigh more than man, and railed at those  
Who called him the false son of Gorlois:  
For there was no man knew from whence he came;  
But after tempest, when the long wave broke  
All down the thundering shores of Bude and Bos,  
There came a day as still as heaven, and then  
They found a naked child upon the sands  
Of dark Tintagil by the Cornish sea;  
And that was Arthur; and they fostered him  
Till he by miracle was approven King:  
And that his grave should be a mystery  
From all men, like his birth; and could he find  
A woman in her womanhood as great  
As he was in his manhood, then, he sang,  
The twain together well might change the world.  
But even in the middle of his song  
He faltered, and his hand fell from the harp,  
And pale he turned, and reeled, and would have fallen,  
But that they stayed him up; nor would he tell  
His vision; but what doubt that he foresaw  
This evil work of Lancelot and the Queen?'

Then thought the Queen, 'Lo! they have set her on,  
Our simple-seeming Abbess and her nuns,  
To play upon me,' and bowed her head nor spake.  
Whereat the novice crying, with clasped hands,  
Shame on her own garrulity garrulously,  
Said the good nuns would check her gadding tongue  
Full often, 'and, sweet lady, if I seem  
To vex an ear too sad to listen to me,  
Unmannerly, with prattling and the tales  
Which my good father told me, check me too  
Nor let me shame my father's memory, one  
Of noblest manners, though himself would say  
Sir Lancelot had the noblest; and he died,  
Killed in a tilt, come next, five summers back,  
And left me; but of others who remain,

And of the two first-famed for courtesy--  
And pray you check me if I ask amiss-  
But pray you, which had noblest, while you moved  
Among them, Lancelot or our lord the King?’

Then the pale Queen looked up and answered her,  
‘Sir Lancelot, as became a noble knight,  
Was gracious to all ladies, and the same  
In open battle or the tilting-field  
Forbore his own advantage, and the King  
In open battle or the tilting-field  
Forbore his own advantage, and these two  
Were the most nobly-mannered men of all;  
For manners are not idle, but the fruit  
Of loyal nature, and of noble mind.’

‘Yea,’ said the maid, ‘be manners such fair fruit?’  
Then Lancelot’s needs must be a thousand-fold  
Less noble, being, as all rumour runs,  
The most disloyal friend in all the world.’

To which a mournful answer made the Queen:  
‘O closed about by narrowing nunnery-walls,  
What knowest thou of the world, and all its lights  
And shadows, all the wealth and all the woe?  
If ever Lancelot, that most noble knight,  
Were for one hour less noble than himself,  
Pray for him that he scape the doom of fire,  
And weep for her that drew him to his doom.’

‘Yea,’ said the little novice, ‘I pray for both;  
But I should all as soon believe that his,  
Sir Lancelot’s, were as noble as the King’s,  
As I could think, sweet lady, yours would be  
Such as they are, were you the sinful Queen.’

So she, like many another babbler, hurt  
Whom she would soothe, and harmed where she would heal;  
For here a sudden flush of wrathful heat  
Fired all the pale face of the Queen, who cried,  
‘Such as thou art be never maiden more  
For ever! thou their tool, set on to plague  
And play upon, and harry me, petty spy  
And traitress.’ When that storm of anger brake  
From Guinevere, aghast the maiden rose,  
White as her veil, and stood before the Queen  
As tremulously as foam upon the beach  
Stands in a wind, ready to break and fly,  
And when the Queen had added ‘Get thee hence,’  
Fled frightened. Then that other left alone  
Sighed, and began to gather heart again,  
Saying in herself, ‘The simple, fearful child  
Meant nothing, but my own too-fearful guilt,

Simpler than any child, betrays itself.  
But help me, heaven, for surely I repent.  
For what is true repentance but in thought--  
Not even in inmost thought to think again  
The sins that made the past so pleasant to us:  
And I have sworn never to see him more,  
To see him more.'

And even in saying this,  
Her memory from old habit of the mind  
Went slipping back upon the golden days  
In which she saw him first, when Lancelot came,  
Reputed the best knight and goodliest man,  
Ambassador, to lead her to his lord  
Arthur, and led her forth, and far ahead  
Of his and her retinue moving, they,  
Rapt in sweet talk or lively, all on love  
And sport and tilts and pleasure, (for the time  
Was maytime, and as yet no sin was dreamed,)  
Rode under groves that looked a paradise  
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth  
That seemed the heavens upbreking through the earth,  
And on from hill to hill, and every day  
Beheld at noon in some delicious dale  
The silk pavilions of King Arthur raised  
For brief repast or afternoon repose  
By couriers gone before; and on again,  
Till yet once more ere set of sun they saw  
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship,  
That crowned the state pavilion of the King,  
Blaze by the rushing brook or silent well.

But when the Queen immersed in such a trance,  
And moving through the past unconsciously,  
Came to that point where first she saw the King  
Ride toward her from the city, sighed to find  
Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold,  
High, self-contained, and passionless, not like him,  
'Not like my Lancelot'--while she brooded thus  
And grew half-guilty in her thoughts again,  
There rode an armed warrior to the doors.  
A murmuring whisper through the nunnery ran,  
Then on a sudden a cry, 'The King.' She sat  
Stiff-stricken, listening; but when armed feet  
Through the long gallery from the outer doors  
Rang coming, prone from off her seat she fell,  
And grovelled with her face against the floor:  
There with her milkwhite arms and shadowy hair  
She made her face a darkness from the King:  
And in the darkness heard his armed feet  
Pause by her; then came silence, then a voice,  
Monotonous and hollow like a Ghost's  
Denouncing judgment, but though changed, the King's:



'Liest thou here so low, the child of one  
I honoured, happy, dead before thy shame?  
Well is it that no child is born of thee.  
The children born of thee are sword and fire,  
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,  
The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts  
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea;  
Whom I, while yet Sir Lancelot, my right arm,  
The mightiest of my knights, abode with me,  
Have everywhere about this land of Christ  
In twelve great battles ruining overthrown.  
And knowest thou now from whence I come--from him  
From waging bitter war with him: and he,  
That did not shun to smite me in worse way,  
Had yet that grace of courtesy in him left,  
He spared to lift his hand against the King  
Who made him knight: but many a knight was slain;  
And many more, and all his kith and kin  
Clave to him, and abode in his own land.  
And many more when Modred raised revolt,  
Forgetful of their troth and fealty, clave  
To Modred, and a remnant stays with me.  
And of this remnant will I leave a part,  
True men who love me still, for whom I live,  
To guard thee in the wild hour coming on,  
Lest but a hair of this low head be harmed.  
Fear not: thou shalt be guarded till my death.  
Howbeit I know, if ancient prophecies  
Have erred not, that I march to meet my doom.  
Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me,  
That I the King should greatly care to live;  
For thou hast spoilt the purpose of my life.  
Bear with me for the last time while I show,  
Even for thy sake, the sin which thou hast sinned.  
For when the Roman left us, and their law  
Relaxed its hold upon us, and the ways  
Were filled with rapine, here and there a deed  
Of prowess done redressed a random wrong.  
But I was first of all the kings who drew  
The knighthood-errant of this realm and all  
The realms together under me, their Head,  
In that fair Order of my Table Round,  
A glorious company, the flower of men,  
To serve as model for the mighty world,  
And be the fair beginning of a time.  
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear  
To reverence the King, as if he were  
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,  
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,  
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,  
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,  
To honour his own word as if his God's,

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 master 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.  
And all this throve before I wedded thee,  
Believing, "lo mine helpmate, one to feel  
My purpose and rejoicing in my joy."  
Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;  
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;  
Then others, following these my mightiest knights,  
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,  
Sinned also, till the loathsome opposite  
Of all my heart had destined did obtain,  
And all through thee! so that this life of mine  
I guard as God's high gift from scathe and wrong,  
Not greatly care to lose; but rather think  
How sad it were for Arthur, should he live,  
To sit once more within his lonely hall,  
And miss the wonted number of my knights,  
And miss to hear high talk of noble deeds  
As in the golden days before thy sin.  
For which of us, who might be left, could speak  
Of the pure heart, nor seem to glance at thee?  
And in thy bowers of Camelot or of Usk  
Thy shadow still would glide from room to room,  
And I should evermore be vexed with thee  
In hanging robe or vacant ornament,  
Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair.  
For think not, though thou wouldst not love thy lord,  
Thy lord hast wholly lost his love for thee.  
I am not made of so slight elements.  
Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame.  
I hold that man the worst of public foes  
Who either for his own or children's sake,  
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife  
Whom he knows false, abide and rule the house:  
For being through his cowardice allowed  
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,  
She like a new disease, unknown to men,  
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,  
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps  
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse  
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young.  
Worst of the worst were that man he that reigns!  
Better the King's waste hearth and aching heart  
Than thou reseated in thy place of light,  
The mockery of my people, and their bane.'

He paused, and in the pause she crept an inch  
Nearer, and laid her hands about his feet.  
Far off a solitary trumpet blew.  
Then waiting by the doors the warhorse neighed  
At a friend's voice, and he spake again:

'Yet think not that I come to urge thy crimes,  
I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere,  
I, whose vast pity almost makes me die  
To see thee, laying there thy golden head,  
My pride in happier summers, at my feet.  
The wrath which forced my thoughts on that fierce law,  
The doom of treason and the flaming death,  
(When first I learnt thee hidden here) is past.  
The pang--which while I weighed thy heart with one  
Too wholly true to dream untruth in thee,  
Made my tears burn--is also past--in part.  
And all is past, the sin is sinned, and I,  
Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God  
Forgives: do thou for thine own soul the rest.  
But how to take last leave of all I loved?  
O golden hair, with which I used to play  
Not knowing! O imperial-moulded form,  
And beauty such as never woman wore,  
Until it became a kingdom's curse with thee--  
I cannot touch thy lips, they are not mine,  
But Lancelot's: nay, they never were the King's.  
I cannot take thy hand: that too is flesh,  
And in the flesh thou hast sinned; and mine own flesh,  
Here looking down on thine polluted, cries  
"I loathe thee:" yet not less, O Guinevere,  
For I was ever virgin save for thee,  
My love through flesh hath wrought into my life  
So far, that my doom is, I love thee still.  
Let no man dream but that I love thee still.  
Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,  
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,  
Hereafter in that world where all are pure  
We two may meet before high God, and thou  
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know  
I am thine husband--not a smaller soul,  
Nor Lancelot, nor another. Leave me that,  
I charge thee, my last hope. Now must I hence.  
Through the thick night I hear the trumpet blow:  
They summon me their King to lead mine hosts  
Far down to that great battle in the west,  
Where I must strike against the man they call  
My sister's son--no kin of mine, who leagues  
With Lords of the White Horse, heathen, and knights,  
Traitors--and strike him dead, and meet myself  
Death, or I know not what mysterious doom.  
And thou remaining here wilt learn the event;

But hither shall I never come again,  
Never lie by thy side; see thee no more--  
Farewell!

And while she grovelled at his feet,  
She felt the King's breath wander o'er her neck,  
And in the darkness o'er her fallen head,  
Perceived the waving of his hands that blest.

Then, listening till those armed steps were gone,  
Rose the pale Queen, and in her anguish found  
The casement: 'peradventure,' so she thought,  
'If I might see his face, and not be seen.'  
And lo, he sat on horseback at the door!  
And near him the sad nuns with each a light  
Stood, and he gave them charge about the Queen,  
To guard and foster her for evermore.  
And while he spake to these his helm was lowered,  
To which for crest the golden dragon clung  
Of Britain; so she did not see the face,  
Which then was as an angel's, but she saw,  
Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights,  
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship  
Blaze, making all the night a steam of fire.  
And even then he turned; and more and more  
The moony vapour rolling round the King,  
Who seemed the phantom of a Giant in it,  
Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray  
And grayer, till himself became as mist  
Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom.

Then she stretched out her arms and cried aloud  
'Oh Arthur!' there her voice brake suddenly,  
Then--as a stream that spouting from a cliff  
Fails in mid air, but gathering at the base  
Re-makes itself, and flashes down the vale--  
Went on in passionate utterance:

'Gone--my lord!

Gone through my sin to slay and to be slain!  
And he forgave me, and I could not speak.  
Farewell? I should have answered his farewell.  
His mercy choked me. Gone, my lord the King,  
My own true lord! how dare I call him mine?  
The shadow of another cleaves to me,  
And makes me one pollution: he, the King,  
Called me polluted: shall I kill myself?  
What help in that? I cannot kill my sin,  
If soul be soul; nor can I kill my shame;  
No, nor by living can I live it down.  
The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months  
The months will add themselves and make the years,  
The years will roll into the centuries,

And mine will ever be a name of scorn.  
I must not dwell on that defeat of fame.  
Let the world be; that is but of the world.  
What else? what hope? I think there was a hope,  
Except he mocked me when he spake of hope;  
His hope he called it; but he never mocks,  
For mockery is the fume of little hearts.  
And blessed be the King, who hath forgiven  
My wickedness to him, and left me hope  
That in mine own heart I can live down sin  
And be his mate hereafter in the heavens  
Before high God. Ah great and gentle lord,  
Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint  
Among his warring senses, to thy knights--  
To whom my false voluptuous pride, that took  
Full easily all impressions from below,  
Would not look up, or half-despised the height  
To which I would not or I could not climb--  
I thought I could not breathe in that fine air  
That pure severity of perfect light--  
I yearned for warmth and colour which I found  
In Lancelot--now I see thee what thou art,  
Thou art the highest and most human too,  
Not Lancelot, nor another. Is there none  
Will tell the King I love him though so late?  
Now--ere he goes to the great Battle? none:  
Myself must tell him in that purer life,  
But now it were too daring. Ah my God,  
What might I not have made of thy fair world,  
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?  
It was my duty to have loved the highest:  
It surely was my profit had I known:  
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.  
We needs must love the highest when we see it,  
Not Lancelot, nor another.'

Here her hand

Grasped, made her veil her eyes: she looked and saw  
The novice, weeping, suppliant, and said to her,  
'Yea, little maid, for am I not forgiven?'  
Then glancing up beheld the holy nuns  
All round her, weeping; and her heart was loosed  
Within her, and she wept with these and said,

'Ye know me then, that wicked one, who broke  
The vast design and purpose of the King.  
O shut me round with narrowing nunnery-walls,  
Meek maidens, from the voices crying "shame."  
I must not scorn myself: he loves me still.  
Let no one dream but that he loves me still.  
So let me, if you do not shudder at me,  
Nor shun to call me sister, dwell with you;  
Wear black and white, and be a nun like you,

Fast with your fasts, not feasting with your feasts;  
Grieve with your griefs, not grieving at your joys,  
But not rejoicing; mingle with your rites;  
Pray and be prayed for; lie before your shrines;  
Do each low office of your holy house;  
Walk your dim cloister, and distribute dole  
To poor sick people, richer in His eyes  
Who ransomed us, and halter too than I;  
And treat their loathsome hurts and heal mine own;  
And so wear out in almsdeed and in prayer  
The sombre close of that voluptuous day,  
Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King.'

She said: they took her to themselves; and she  
Still hoping, fearing 'is it yet too late?'  
Dwelt with them, till in time their Abbess died.  
Then she, for her good deeds and her pure life,  
And for the power of ministration in her,  
And likewise for the high rank she had borne,  
Was chosen Abbess, there, an Abbess, lived  
For three brief years, and there, an Abbess, past  
To where beyond these voices there is peace.

#### The Passing of Arthur

That story which the bold Sir Bedivere,  
First made and latest left of all the knights,  
Told, when the man was no more than a voice  
In the white winter of his age, to those  
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,  
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,  
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King:

'I found Him in the shining of the stars,  
I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,  
But in His ways with men I find Him not.  
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.  
O me! for why is all around us here  
As if some lesser god had made the world,  
But had not force to shape it as he would,  
Till the High God behold it from beyond,  
And enter it, and make it beautiful?  
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,  
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,  
And have not power to see it as it is:  
Perchance, because we see not to the close;--

For I, being simple, thought to work His will,  
And have but stricken with the sword in vain;  
And all whereon I leaned in wife and friend  
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm  
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.  
My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death;  
Nay--God my Christ--I pass but shall not die.'

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,  
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain killed  
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown  
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear  
Went shrilling, 'Hollow, hollow all delight!  
Hail, King! tomorrow thou shalt pass away.  
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.  
And I am blown along a wandering wind,  
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.'  
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change  
Their season in the night and wail their way  
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream  
Shrilled; but in going mingled with dim cries  
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,  
As of some lonely city sacked by night,  
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail  
Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and called,  
'Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,  
Thine, Gawain, was the voice--are these dim cries  
Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild  
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?'

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake:  
'O me, my King, let pass whatever will,  
Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field;  
But in their stead thy name and glory cling  
To all high places like a golden cloud  
For ever: but as yet thou shalt not pass.  
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death  
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;  
And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise--  
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,  
And with him many of thy people, and knights  
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown  
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.  
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.  
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.'

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:  
'Far other is this battle in the west  
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,  
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,  
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,  
And shook him through the north. Ill doom is mine  
To war against my people and my knights.

The king who fights his people fights himself.  
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke  
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.  
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way  
Through this blind haze, which ever since I saw  
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,  
Hath folded in the passes of the world.'

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,  
And ever pushed Sir Modred, league by league,  
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse--  
A land of old upheaven from the abyss  
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;  
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,  
And the long mountains ended in a coast  
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away  
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.  
There the pursuer could pursue no more,  
And he that fled no further fly the King;  
And there, that day when the great light of heaven  
Burned at his lowest in the rolling year,  
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.  
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight  
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.  
A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea:  
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew  
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold  
With formless fear; and even on Arthur fell  
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.  
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,  
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;  
And some had visions out of golden youth,  
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts  
Look in upon the battle; and in the mist  
Was many a noble deed, many a base,  
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,  
And ever and anon with host to host  
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,  
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash  
Of battleaxes on shattered helms, and shrieks  
After the Christ, of those who falling down  
Looked up for heaven, and only saw the mist;  
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,  
Oaths, insults, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,  
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs  
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,  
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail  
Of suffering, silence follows, or through death  
Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,  
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,  
A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day



Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came  
A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew  
The mist aside, and with that wind the tide  
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field  
Of battle: but no man was moving there;  
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,  
Nor yet of heathen; only the wan wave  
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro  
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down  
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,  
And shivered brands that once had fought with Rome,  
And rolling far along the gloomy shores  
The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,  
And whiter than the mist that all day long  
Had held the field of battle was the King:

'Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,  
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,  
And beats upon the faces of the dead,  
My dead, as though they had not died for me?--  
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fallen  
Confusion, till I know not what I am,  
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.  
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.'

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: 'My King,  
King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,  
There also will I worship thee as King.  
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live  
Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought  
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,  
Modred, unharmed, the traitor of thine house.'

Then spake the King: 'My house hath been my doom.  
But call not thou this traitor of my house  
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.  
My house are rather they who sware my vows,  
Yea, even while they brake them, owned me King.  
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,  
When all the purport of my throne hath failed,  
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.  
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;  
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see  
Yet, ere I pass.' And uttering this the King  
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege  
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword  
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,  
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,  
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle rolled

Among the mountains by the winter sea;  
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,  
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their lord,  
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,  
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,  
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,  
A broken chancel with a broken cross,  
That stood on a dark strait of barren land:  
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one  
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:  
'The sequel of today unsolders all  
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights  
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep  
They sleep--the men I loved. I think that we  
Shall never more, at any future time,  
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,  
Walking about the gardens and the halls  
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.  
I perish by this people which I made,--  
Though Merlin sware that I should come again  
To rule once more; but, let what will be, be,  
I am so deeply smitten through the helm  
That without help I cannot last till morn.  
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,  
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how  
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm  
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
Holding the sword--and how I rowed across  
And took it, and have worn it, like a king;  
And, wheresoever I am sung or told  
In aftertime, this also shall be known:  
But now delay not: take Excalibur,  
And fling him far into the middle mere:  
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:  
'It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,  
Aidless, alone, and smitten through the helm--  
A little thing may harm a wounded man;  
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,  
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruined shrine he stept,  
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,  
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,  
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang  
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down  
By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,  
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,  
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,  
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth  
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:  
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,  
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work  
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long  
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,  
This way and that dividing the swift mind,  
In act to throw: but at the last it seemed  
Better to leave Excalibur concealed  
There in the many-knotted waterflags,  
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.  
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:  
'Hast thou performed my mission which I gave?  
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:  
'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,  
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:  
'Thou hast betrayed thy nature and thy name,  
Not rendering true answer, as beseemed  
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight:  
For surer sign had followed, either hand,  
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.  
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.  
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,  
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing  
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time  
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,  
Counting the dewy pebbles, fixed in thought;  
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,  
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote  
His palms together, and he cried aloud:

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,  
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,  
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,  
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.  
What good should follow this, if this were done?  
What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,  
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.  
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand  
An act unprofitable, against himself?  
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.  
What record, or what relic of my lord  
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath

And rumours of a doubt? But were this kept,  
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,  
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,  
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,  
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.  
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps  
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."  
So might some old man speak in the aftertime  
To all the people, winning reverence.  
But now much honour and much fame were lost.'

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,  
And hid Excalibur the second time,  
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:  
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:  
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,  
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:  
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,  
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!  
Authority forgets a dying king,  
Laid widowed of the power in his eye  
That bowed the will. I see thee what thou art,  
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,  
In whom should meet the offices of all,  
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;  
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl  
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.  
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,  
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:  
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,  
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,  
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged  
Among the bulrush beds, and clutched the sword,  
And strongly wheeled and threw it. The great brand  
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,  
And flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch,  
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock  
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.  
So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur:  
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
And caught him by the hilt, and brandished him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.  
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:  
'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.  
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:  
'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems  
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,  
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,  
Not though I live three lives of mortal men,  
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.  
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;  
But when I looked again, behold an arm,  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
That caught him by the hilt, and brandished him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:  
'My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.  
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,  
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear  
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,  
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,  
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes  
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere  
Remorsefully regarded through his tears,  
And would have spoken, but he found not words;  
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,  
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,  
And rising bore him through the place of tombs.

But, as he walked, King Arthur panted hard,  
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed  
When all the house is mute. So sighed the King,  
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick!  
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'

But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,  
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walked,  
Larger than human on the frozen hills.  
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry  
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.  
Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves  
And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
The bare black cliff clanged round him, as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels--  
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,  
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,

Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,  
Beneath them; and descending they were ware  
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,  
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream--by these  
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose  
A cry that shivered to the tingling stars,  
And, as it were one voice, an agony  
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills  
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,  
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmured Arthur, 'Place me in the barge.'  
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens  
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.  
But she, that rose the tallest of them all  
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,  
And loosed the shattered casque, and chafed his hands,  
And called him by his name, complaining loud,  
And dropping bitter tears against a brow  
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white  
And colourless, and like the withered moon  
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;  
And all his greaves and cuisses dashed with drops  
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls--  
That made his forehead like a rising sun  
High from the dais-throne--were parched with dust;  
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,  
Mixed with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.  
So like a shattered column lay the King;  
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,  
From spur to plume a star of tournament,  
Shot through the lists at Camelot, and charged  
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:  
'Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?  
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?  
For now I see the true old times are dead,  
When every morning brought a noble chance,  
And every chance brought out a noble knight.  
Such times have been not since the light that led  
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.  
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved  
Which was an image of the mighty world,  
And I, the last, go forth companionless,  
And the days darken round me, and the years,  
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:  
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfils himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.  
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?

I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
May He within himself make pure! but thou,  
If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?  
For so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.  
But now farewell. I am going a long way  
With these thou seest--if indeed I go  
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)--  
To the island-valley of Avilion;  
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,  
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies  
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns  
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,  
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail  
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan  
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,  
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood  
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere  
Revolving many memories, till the hull  
Looked one black dot against the verge of dawn,  
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,  
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn  
Amazed him, and he groaned, 'The King is gone.'  
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,  
'From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

Whereat he slowly turned and slowly clomb  
The last hard footstep of that iron crag;  
Thence marked the black hull moving yet, and cried,  
'He passes to be King among the dead,  
And after healing of his grievous wound  
He comes again; but--if he come no more--  
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,  
Who shrieked and wailed, the three whereat we gazed  
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,  
They stood before his throne in silence, friends  
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?'

Then from the dawn it seemed there came, but faint  
As from beyond the limit of the world,  
Like the last echo born of a great cry,  
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice

Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb  
Even to the highest he could climb, and saw,  
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,  
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,  
Down that long water opening on the deep  
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go  
From less to less and vanish into light.  
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

To the Queen

O loyal to the royal in thyself,  
And loyal to thy land, as this to thee--  
Bear witness, that rememberable day,  
When, pale as yet, and fever-worn, the Prince  
Who scarce had plucked his flickering life again  
From halfway down the shadow of the grave,  
Past with thee through thy people and their love,  
And London rolled one tide of joy through all  
Her trebled millions, and loud leagues of man  
And welcome! witness, too, the silent cry,  
The prayer of many a race and creed, and clime--  
Thunderless lightnings striking under sea  
From sunset and sunrise of all thy realm,  
And that true North, whereof we lately heard  
A strain to shame us 'keep you to yourselves;  
So loyal is too costly! friends--your love  
Is but a burthen: loose the bond, and go.'  
Is this the tone of empire? here the faith  
That made us rulers? this, indeed, her voice  
And meaning, whom the roar of Hougoumont  
Left mightiest of all peoples under heaven?  
What shock has fooled her since, that she should speak  
So feebly? wealthier--wealthier--hour by hour!  
The voice of Britain, or a sinking land,  
Some third-rate isle half-lost among her seas?  
There rang her voice, when the full city pealed  
Thee and thy Prince! The loyal to their crown  
Are loyal to their own far sons, who love  
Our ocean-empire with her boundless homes  
For ever-broadening England, and her throne  
In our vast Orient, and one isle, one isle,  
That knows not her own greatness: if she knows  
And dreads it we are fallen. --But thou, my Queen,  
Not for itself, but through thy living love  
For one to whom I made it o'er his grave



Sacred, accept this old imperfect tale,  
New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,  
Ideal manhood closed in real man,  
Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,  
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,  
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still; or him  
Of Geoffrey's book, or him of Malleor's, one  
Touched by the adulterous finger of a time  
That hovered between war and wantonness,  
And crownings and dethronements: take withal  
Thy poet's blessing, and his trust that Heaven  
Will blow the tempest in the distance back  
From thine and ours: for some are sacred, who mark,  
Or wisely or unwisely, signs of storm,  
Waverings of every vane with every wind,  
And wordy trucklings to the transient hour,  
And fierce or careless looseners of the faith,  
And Softness breeding scorn of simple life,  
Or Cowardice, the child of lust for gold,  
Or Labour, with a groan and not a voice,  
Or Art with poisonous honey stolen from France,  
And that which knows, but careful for itself,  
And that which knows not, ruling that which knows  
To its own harm: the goal of this great world  
Lies beyond sight: yet--if our slowly-grown  
And crowned Republic's crowning common-sense,  
That saved her many times, not fail--their fears  
Are morning shadows huger than the shapes  
That cast them, not those gloomier which forego  
The darkness of that battle in the West,  
Where all of high and holy dies away.

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,  
Laid widowed of the power in his eye  
That bowed the will. I see thee what thou art,  
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,  
In whom should meet the offices of all,  
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;  
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl  
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.  
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,  
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:  
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,  
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,  
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged  
Among the bulrush beds, and clutched the sword,  
And strongly wheeled and threw it. The great brand  
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,  
And flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch,  
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock  
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.  
So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur:  
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
And caught him by the hilt, and brandished him

Three times, and drew him under in the mere.

And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:

'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.

Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:

'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems

Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,

Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,

Not though I live three lives of mortal men,

So great a miracle as yonder hilt.

Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;

But when I looked again, behold an arm,

Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,

That caught him by the hilt, and brandished him

Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:

'My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.

Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,

And bear me to the margin; yet I fear

My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,

Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,

And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes  
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere  
Remorsefully regarded through his tears,  
And would have spoken, but he found not words;  
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,  
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,  
And rising bore him through the place of tombs.

But, as he walked, King Arthur panted hard,  
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed  
When all the house is mute. So sighed the King,  
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick!  
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'

But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,  
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walked,  
Larger than human on the frozen hills.  
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry  
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.  
Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves  
And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
The bare black cliff clanged round him, as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels--  
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,  
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,  
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,  
Beneath them; and descending they were ware  
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,  
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream--by these  
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose  
A cry that shivered to the tingling stars,  
And, as it were one voice, an agony  
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills  
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,  
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmured Arthur, 'Place me in the barge.'  
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens  
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.  
But she, that rose the tallest of them all  
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,  
And loosed the shattered casque, and chafed his hands,  
And called him by his name, complaining loud,  
And dropping bitter tears against a brow  
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white  
And colourless, and like the withered moon  
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;  
And all his greaves and cuisses dashed with drops  
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls--  
That made his forehead like a rising sun

High from the dais-throne--were parched with dust;  
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,  
Mixed with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.  
So like a shattered column lay the King;  
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,  
From spur to plume a star of tournament,  
Shot through the lists at Camelot, and charged  
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:  
'Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?  
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?  
For now I see the true old times are dead,  
When every morning brought a noble chance,  
And every chance brought out a noble knight.  
Such times have been not since the light that led  
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.  
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved  
Which was an image of the mighty world,  
And I, the last, go forth companionless,  
And the days darken round me, and the years,  
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:  
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfils himself in many ways,

Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?

I have lived my life, and that which I have done

May He within himself make pure! but thou,

If thou shouldst never see my face again,

Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer

Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice

Rise like a fountain for me night and day.

For what are men better than sheep or goats

That nourish a blind life within the brain,

If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer

Both for themselves and those who call them friend?

For so the whole round earth is every way

Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

But now farewell. I am going a long way

With these thou seest--if indeed I go

(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)--

To the island-valley of Avilion;

Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,

Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies

Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns

And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,

Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail

Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan

That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,

Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood  
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere  
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