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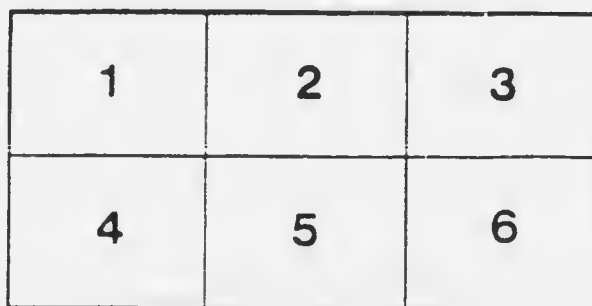
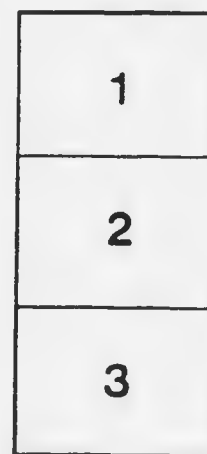
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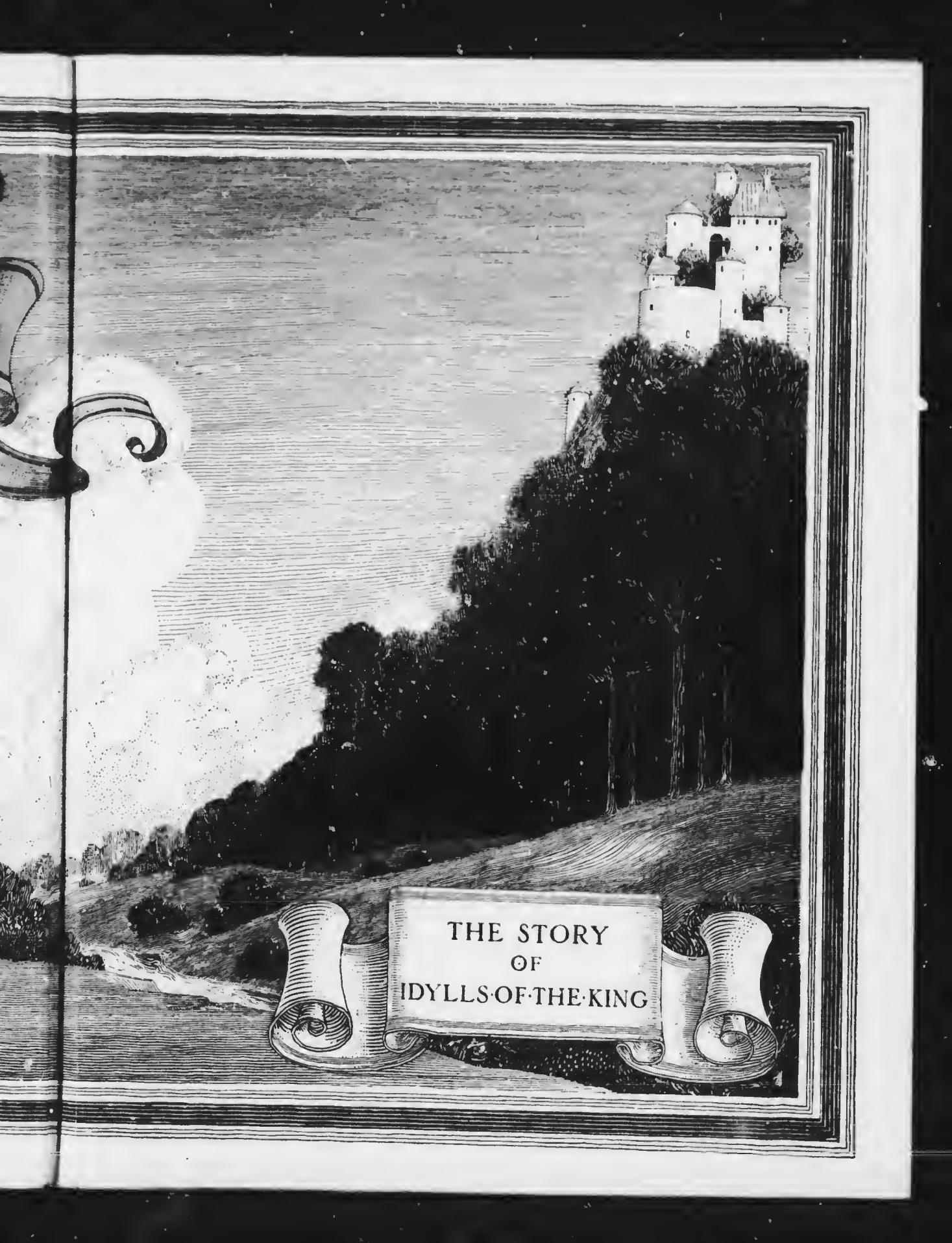
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THE STORY OF IDYLLS OF THE KING





George Hood



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OF
IDYLLS OF THE KING



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THE STORY OF IDYLLS OF THE KING







“LO, THOU LIKEWISE SHALT BE KING!”—Page 290

THE STORY OF
IDYLLS OF THE KING

ADAPTED FROM
TENNYSON

By INEZ N. McFEE

WITH THE ORIGINAL POEM

Illustrated by
M · L · KIRK



CANADIAN EDITION
FOR SALE IN CANADA ONLY

NEW YORK
FREDERICK · A · STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

PR 5574

I3

M3

1912

Px x x

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Printed in the United States of America

1996

INTRODUCTION

THE stories sketched herein are for the most part founded on Tennyson's "Idylls of the King." The aim of the writer has been to put the subject matter of the "Idylls" into readable form for young readers,—to lay a foundation, as it were, for Tennyson's tales. They are stories of "noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue, and sin."

Before reading these tales the young reader should know that King Arthur was a good and wise king who ruled over parts of England in the sixth century. In those days England was divided into a number of petty kingdoms, each ruled by its own king, and Arthur was the wisest and best of these rulers. Indeed, so great was he, that he conquered a large number of his neighbor kings, and finally came to be the ruler of all Western, or Celtic England. He was so chivalrous and kind, so wise and just, that people everywhere sang his praises. Story after story about him was handed down from one generation to another, until, even before printing came into use, writers of many lands took him for the highest type of chivalrous gentleman. He was made to stand for all that was good and pure in life, and his name became a household watchword.

A writer named Mallory gathered the Arthur stories together and had them published in one book. He called his work "Morte d'Arthur." Tennyson got much of the material for his "Idylls" from Mallory, but each author added to the original records to suit his own fancy. Thus, Arthur really reigned in the *sixth* century, but Mallory put him into a setting of feudal chivalry and knighthood at its highest flower, which was actually reached in the twelfth century. Tennyson went farther and put in conversation and happenings of his own day and age. Therefore, while the

story of Arthur is beautiful and inspiring, it is not exactly true to his time. But this fact does not in any way affect the interest of the tale.

The traveler over Great Britain finds everywhere mementos of Arthur. From "Arthur's Seat" at Edinburgh to "Arthur's Castle of Tintagil" in Cornwall, his name is in the air. Winchester claims to have been the seat of Arthur's royal palace — the city spoken of in the tales as Camelot. Bamborough Castle in Northumberland boasts of having been "Joyous Gard," the home of Lancelot, Arthur's best-loved knight; while Guilford in Surrey is said to have been the home of "the lily maid of Astolat," who died for love of Lancelot. Devonshire is known as the home of Geraint, one of Arthur's strong knights, and Glastonbury is the traditional "island-valley of Avalon" whither Arthur passed at the close of the tales. It was to Glastonbury, we are told, that Joseph of Arimathea conveyed the Holy Grail after the Saviour's death, and there the Feast of the Pentecost was always faithfully observed by Arthur and his knights.

Tennyson uses his "Idylls" to point a moral. In some respects he makes them a tale of "Paradise Lost." In the beginning, he shows us Arthur's kingdom — a creation bright and fair, perfect in every way. The blight of sin, however, creeps in at last and gradually spreads corruption, until all ends in what seems to be defeat and failure; but through the clouds we can see the sun shining, and we feel that Arthur's life has not been lived in vain. We do not deal with the moral in our rendering of the stories. We give them for their pictures of chivalrous times, for their beauty of thought and action, and for their portrayal of right, truth, and might conquering over wrong. It is our hope that young readers will profit from acquaintance with the brave, and courteous knights, and the pure, true, beautiful ladies around whom the tales are woven, and be led to realize the truth of the saying: "Do after the good, and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renown."

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THE STORY OF IDYLLS OF THE KING

CHAPTER I

HOW ARTHUR CAME TO BE KING

KING UTHUR Pendragon lay dying. He was sore at heart and sadly troubled. His spirit could not bear to leave the earth, for he had no heir to succeed him. Loudly did he mourn, and all his attendants were filled with pity. Merlin, the great wizard, and his master Bleys were sent for, and tried in vain to comfort him.

At last the two wise men went out from the King's presence, and paced along the shore beside the sea. They were sad and troubled, for they could think of no way in which their magic might help their beloved King. It was night — a dismal night, "in which the bounds of Heaven and earth seemed lost." Suddenly, from out the blackness, a dragon-winged ship loomed up at sea. Bright and all shining she was, and there were many people on her decks. But only a glimpse the two wise men had ere she passed from sight. Then master and pupil stood silently watching the great waves rise and fall. Wave after wave came in, each mightier than the last, until finally the 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, that rode to Merlin's feet."

Quickly the old wizard caught up the child. "The King!" he cried. "Here is an heir for Uther!"

As he spoke, the fringe of the great breaker, swooping up the strand, lashed at him and rose all around him in fire, so that he and

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the child were clothed in flame. Then the fire died down, a peaceful calm fell, and stars and sky were bright and clear.

Straightway Merlin and Bleys hurried to the castle, and great was the rejoicing when the glad tidings were borne throughout the court that an heir had been given to Uther from the deep sea. The old King was glad and happy indeed, and his spirit passed from his body in peace. But he did not die until he had blessed the child and commanded two knights and two ladies to take it, wrapped in cloth-of-gold, and deliver it to a poor man they would find waiting at the outer gates of the castle. The wise old King knew that when he was dead the babe's life would be in danger, and that many of his wicked, unscrupulous nobles would try to take the throne.

Now the old man at the gate was Merlin in disguise, but the knights and ladies knew it not. He bore the babe secretly away, and carried him to Sir Anton, an old friend of King Uther's. The good knight had the child christened by a holy priest, naming him Arthur. Then his wife took the babe and nursed him and reared him with her own children.

Great was the speculation at court as to where the child had gone, and strife and trouble arose among the more powerful nobles as to who should rule in King Uther's stead. But Merlin charged them, saying:

"Have heed what ye do. The child is not dead. God will have His will; in His own good time He will bring forth Uther's heir and crown him King. And Uther's heir shall be greatest of all great kings; all his enemies shall fall before him. And before he dies he shall long have been King of all England, and have under his rule Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, and more kingdoms than are now known."

The petty kings and nobles marveled at what Merlin said, and though they scoffed at him in secret, they dared not take the throne, for well they knew the wisdom of his prophecies. And for many years there were wrangling and bloodshed in the land.

Knaves and cutthroats went their way undisturbed, and the country sank into decay. Wild men and people from over the sea plundered and laid waste the borderlands, and Terror rode barebacked over the hills and through the dales. At last Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury and told him to make known to all the lords of the realm, and to all the gentlemen of arms, that if they would come to London at Christmas time, a miracle would be shown to them, revealing who was to be their King. Of course all the lords and gentlemen were eager to know who this might be, and long before dawn on Christmas Day the great church in London was packed with hopeful guests, who waited anxiously for the hour of prayer, after which the miracle was to be made known.

When all had been permitted to file into the churchyard, there was seen a large, square marble block, having in its midst an anvil all of steel. In the anvil was stuck a beautiful sword, with naked blade. And on the sword were letterings and markings of gold, which, being interpreted, read:

"Whoso pulleth this sword from out this anvil and marble is the true King of all England."

The people marveled, for the feat seemed easy; and there was some wrangling among the lords, for each of them wished to be King, as to who should have the first trial to draw out the sword. The question having been settled by the Archbishop after some difficulty, one after another went up and tried to draw the sword from the anvil. But no one could even make it stir.

"It is plain," said the Archbishop, "that the man is not here who can draw the sword. But doubtless God will make him known in good time. Let us issue a proclamation that there will be another trial on Twelfth Day. In the meantime, let us provide ten good knights to guard the sword."

All was done as the Archbishop said. Then, as the nobles and gentlemen did not care to return to their homes and journey back again, it was arranged to have a great joust, or tournament, on New Year's Day. The Archbishop was glad of this excuse to

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keep the lords and the common people together, for he hoped that during the joust some sign would be given as to who should win the sword.

Now it happened that Sir Anton lived on a large estate near London, and he decided to go up to the tournament with his son, Sir Kay, and young Arthur for his companions. When they had ridden a few miles on their journey, Sir Kay discovered that he had forgotten his sword. He was much dismayed, for he meant to take part in the tourneys, and he begged Arthur to ride back for it. This the sweet-tempered lad willingly consented to do, though by so doing he would miss a large part of the tournament. But the trip was a useless one, for when he arrived at the castle, he found that all the servants had set off across the fields for the tournament. There was no one to find the sword for him, and he was forced to turn back empty-handed.

"Alas!" said he, "I will not go to my brother without a sword. He shall do his share in the tourney, even though it be late in the day. I will get me down to the churchyard and draw out the sword from the marble."

When he had come to the churchyard and made fast his horse to the stile, he went to the tent which had been placed over the marble block, and peeped in. And lo! the brave and trusted knights who had been left to guard the sword had stolen away to the tourneys! Seizing the weapon by the handle, Arthur pulled it easily from the marble, mounted his horse, and rode away in search of Sir Kay, to whom he delivered the sword.

Sir Kay recognized it at once, and, saying nothing of his intentions to Arthur, he spurred his horse to his father's side. Showing the sword to Sir Anton, he said, "Lo, Sir, here is the sword that was in the marble in the churchyard, wherefore I must be King of all England."

Sir Anton was astonished. But he knew his son. Privately summoning Arthur, he made Sir Kay and the boy go quietly with him to the churchyard. There he examined the marble; then he

drew them into the church and sternly bade Sir Kay tell him the truth about the stone.

"How is it that you now have the sword in your possession? You could no more draw it on Christmas Day than any other knight!" he demanded.

Sir Kay knew his father was not to be deceived, so he answered truly: "My brother Arthur brought it to me."

"Zounds!" exclaimed the old knight. "And how came you by it, boy?"

Arthur told him.

"Then," said Sir Anton, "I see that you, lad, must be the destined King of our land."

"H!" cried Arthur in bewilderment, for he had not understood the true significance of the sword. "Wherefore I? Are you dreaming, Father? Why should I be King?"

"Because God will have it so," answered Sir Anton solemnly, uncovering his head. "Know you not, lad, that it has been ordained that whosoever pulleth this sword from the marble shall be King? It is a sign from the Great Ruler on high. Now, that there may be no mistake, let us see if you can put the sword back in its place and draw it out again."

"Surely, Sir, that is easy!" answered Arthur, and straightway led the way to the churchyard.

Lightly he hurled the gleaming steel into the center of the anvil. Then Sir Anton took hold of the sword and tried to draw it out, but in vain. Sir Kay next tried with all his might to move the sword, but he could not stir it.

"Nay," said Sir Anton, "you are not the man. Do you try, Arthur."

And Arthur took hold of the sword and drew it forth easily. At this Sir Anton and Sir Kay knelt on the ground before him and bowed low their heads.

"Alas," cried Arthur, "wherefore do you kneel to me, mine own dear father and my brother?"

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"Nay, my lord Arthur," answered good Sir Anton, "call me father no more. You are not of our kin. None of my blood courses in your veins."

Then he told Arthur how he had taken him from Merlin and brought him up as his own son; and how the wizard had said that Arthur was sent from heaven to be King. Arthur was deeply moved, but the thought that he might be the King paled before the loss of his good parents, and he was even more deeply grieved.

Seeing this, the old knight said kindly: "Do not take it to heart, my lord Arthur. We will still be your friends, if it please you."

"If it please me!" exclaimed Arthur. "What manner of man should I be if it did not please me? It would ill-behoove me to show aught but kindness and love to you and my good mother, Lady Eleanor, who have stood for so many years between me and the world. Nay, Sir Anton, if it should be that I have the good fortune to be crowned King, ask what you will of me and the favor shall be granted, even unto the half of my kingdom."

"Lord Arthur," replied the old knight, bowing low, "your kindness and courtesy do credit to the wise teachings of my good lady. I thank you. But I shall ask no more of you than that you make my son, Sir Kay, seneschal of all your lands."

"Indeed," answered Arthur, "that will I do willingly. And, by my faith, no man but he shall fill that office while he and I live."

Then Sir Anton counseled Arthur and Sir Kay to hold their peace till Twelfth Day, when Arthur might take his turn among all those who came to try for the sword.

"For," said he, "no other man can take the sword, let him try as he may. You are the King that God has sent to save the land. It is best that you prove yourself before all the lords and common people."

When Twelfth Day came, a great crowd again assembled, and all the mighty and powerful men of the kingdom tried in turn to draw the sword. But none of them could do it. Then Arthur

stepped out modestly from the ranks of the gentlemen and drew the sword with ease. At first the people were amazed. Then there was a great shout and a mutter of angry voices. How could all the great and powerful knights submit to be ruled by a mere boy, who had never even been knighted? It was with difficulty that the Archbishop of Canterbury and his assistants finally restored order. Then the Archbishop proposed that the question should not be decided till Candlemas, which is the second day of February, and to this all agreed.

However, when Candlemas came, Arthur again was the only one from among the vast throng assembled in the churchyard who could draw the sword. But the people were no better satisfied than before; so they agreed to have another trial on Easter Day. And again it happened that none but Arthur could take the sword. Once more it was agreed that another trial should take place — this time at the Feast of the Pentecost, commonly known as Whitsunday, seven weeks after Easter.

Now so bitter was the feeling against Arthur that Merlin was fearful lest he come to harm, so the wizard prevailed upon the Archbishop to send ten of Uther's best-beloved knights to serve the young King-to-be as a body-guard. They were to attend Arthur at all times, and never to leave him even for a moment, until the great day for the Feast of the Pentecost arrived.

The people had now grown reckless over the choice of King, feeling that any full-grown man could rule more wisely than a mere stripling; so all manner of men were allowed to test their strength on the day of Pentecost. But all to no purpose, for none but Arthur could draw the sword. When for the fourth time he prevailed over all the knights and strong men of the land, a murmur ran through the crowd. A presentiment seemed to descend upon them. And all the common people fell upon their knees, crying:

Let Arthur be crowned King! We will take no other. He it is whom God has sent. Deny him no longer, lest a great pestilence come upon us. Long live Arthur, the King!"

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Many of the knights now began to waver, and several of them came and knelt at Arthur's feet and implored him to forgive them for doubting him. This Arthur did readily, and, taking the sword, knelt and offered it on the altar before the Archbishop. Then he was knighted by the best man there.

Arthur was crowned at once, in the presence of all the people, and there he swore to the lords and the common people to be a true king forevermore, and to rule the land with right and justice. On one side of him stood the wizard, Merlin, his beard whitened by the frosts of a hundred winters, and on the other stood the Lady of the Lake, who had appeared as though by magic, clothed in white samite, mystic and wonderful. A mist of incense curled about her, and her face was well-nigh hidden in the gloom.

Just as the coronation ceremonies were over, the attention of the people was attracted toward the lake near by. And behold, a most wonderful sword rose above the waters in the center of the lake!

"The mystic sword!" cried the Lady of the Lake. "Make haste, my lord Arthur, row out and secure it. Excalibur, meaning cut-steel, is his name. Strong and powerful is he. And with him in your hands no enemy can stand before you."

"And mind you, O King," said the wizard, "secure you the scabbard, for it is ten times more powerful than the sword. While you have the scabbard upon you, you shall lose no blood, be you ever so sorely wounded."

Thus admonished, Arthur lost no time in securing the sword. And a wonderful sword it was, with a blade so bright that men were blinded by it. "All the haft twinkled with diamond sparks, myriads of topaz-lights and jacinth-work of subtlest jewelry." On the hilt was engraved the "Elfin Urim," mysterious Hebrew jewels, having a hidden meaning. Some say that this symbol consisted of four rows of precious stones on which were inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; others that it was formed of three stones, one of which indicated in some mysterious way the answer

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"Yes," the second "No," while the third was neutral. On one side of the blade was engraved in Hebrew, "*Take me,*" but on the other side were the words "*Cast me away.*" When he had read the inscriptions, Arthur was at a loss what to do, and his face grew sad at the thought of throwing away the wonderful sword. But Merlin came to his aid.

"Take the sword and strike!" he counseled. "The time to cast away is yet far off."

And Arthur obeyed.

CHAPTER II

THE FOUNDING OF THE ROUND TABLE

ARTHUR had scarcely been king an hour before complaints began to pour in upon him. Lords, knights, and ladies besought him to restore lands which had been taken from them, in one way and another, since the death of Uther. The widowed and the fatherless came to him for protection, and prayed him to give them aid in various causes. The King received all who sought him, for he had a kind heart and longed with all his soul to establish order, truth, and justice throughout his realm. But many difficulties plunged him into a sea of trouble, and he readily saw that he must have a band of faithful helpers.

One of the first acts was to make Sir Kay seneschal of England, according to the promise given to Sir Anton. To him was entrusted, as far as possible, the restoration of all lands to their proper owners. Arthur next remembered some old friends of King Uther's, Sir Baldwin, Sir Ulfus and Sir Brastias. Sir Baldwin was made Constable of Britain, and Sir Ulfus, Chamberlain; while Sir Brastias he appointed Warden of the country north of the River Trent. Of course a large part of the land over which these lords were supposed to hold sway was Arthur's realm only in name, as it was ruled by kings who were hostile to him. This land had to be conquered. To conquer it Arthur would need a large army; therefore he conceived the idea of founding an order called *The Knights of the Round Table*.

These knights were to be chosen from the flower of the land. They were to be brave, true, chivalrous, loyal, ever ready to fight for the right and to champion the cause of the weak. A large number presented themselves at Arthur's call, and he took the

THE FOUNDING OF THE ROUND TABLE 11

hands of each separately in his own, and, in a voice that trembled, bade the knighted make the following vow:

“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 honor 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.”

So simple were the words of great authority, so strait were the vows to his majesty, that when the knights rose 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.” Then, when he had finished knighting them, the King “spake, and cheered his Table Round with large, divine, and comfortable words,” beyond the power of pen to tell.

As he talked a miracle happened. From eye to eye through all their Order flashed a momentary likeness of the King; and ere it left their faces, through the casement over Arthur came three rays of beautiful light — flame-color, vert (green), and azure, one falling upon each of three fair Queens who stood in silence near his throne.”

Just who these three Queens were who attended King Arthur we do not know. Some say that they were the Queen Morgan le Fay, Arthur's sister, the Queen of Northgales, and the Queen of the Waste Lands. But others, and by far the greater number, say that they were mystic Queens sent from heaven to watch over the King, and that they were embodiments of the three cardinal virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity. They always hovered near him; but only rarely were they visible to the eyes of the knights in attendance.

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The royal palace and the court of the Knights of the Round Table were to be established at Camelot. To Merlin was entrusted the planning of the castle and the grounds, and the result was more than might have been expected even of a mighty wizard. It was indeed a city of enchantment — "a city of shadowy palaces and stately, rich in emblem and the work of ancient kings who did their days in stone." Here and there pinnacles and spires rose toward heaven, and everywhere were beautiful touches from the hand of Merlin the Mage, who knew all arts.

A great wall was built all about the castle grounds, and the entrance thereto was not like any other gate 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
Stretch'd under all 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."

Both the castle and wall, however, were many years in the building, and during all this time Arthur and his knights were waging the battle of truth and justice. "And now the Barons and little kings prevailed, and now the King, as here and there the war went swaying." But no enemy of Arthur could long hold out against Excalibur, which was so bright in his eyes that it gave the light of thirty torches; and Arthur's domain widened and

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lengthened daily, while the pure and noble deeds of the King and his knights uplifted and bettered all with whom they came in contact. Arthur and the noble knights of the Round Table were known far and wide, and everywhere they were both loved and feared.

Perhaps the hardest struggle of all, was that with the Welsh kings and barons. They were most stubborn in their resistance against King Arthur. So, after he had conquered all England and won to himself many true and valiant knights, he went down into Wales and caused a great Feast of the Pentecost to be held in the city of Caerleon, hoping thus to please the people. To this feast came many great kings with large hosts of powerful knights. And Arthur rejoiced, for he thought they had come to do honor to him; and he sent messengers to them with rich presents.

But the kings refused even to look at these, and repulsed the bearers with bitter scorn, saying that they would receive no gifts from a beardless boy of questionable blood. And they sent word to Arthur that they had come to bring *him* gifts, which they would deliver with sharp swords, betwixt the neck and shoulders. They charged the messengers to say plainly to Arthur that they had come to slay him, for they would never submit to the rule of a mere boy.

Arthur and his lords took counsel together, and decided to entrench themselves in a strong tower which was near at hand. Accordingly, five hundred picked knights were chosen, food was hastily gathered in, and the army fortified behind strong walls. Hardly were they safely settled, when the mighty Army of the Kings besieged them, but all to no purpose, for the strong walls of the tower sheltered them well. For fifteen days the siege lasted; then Merlin came into the city.

The kings welcomed him gladly, for the old wizard had many times worked powerful charms for them.

“But,” they demanded, “why is this boy — this slender strip-

ling, Arthur, a mere nobody, the chosen King of all your noble people?"

"Because," answered Merlin sternly, "he is the Heaven-sent son of King Uther Pendragon. And it is not meet that ye fight against him, besides it will profit ye naught. Powerful is he and brave, endowed with God-given strength. All his enemies shall fall before him, and he shall be ruler over land and sea. Greater than all great kings shall he be, and all the people will bow before him and cry, 'All hail, the good King Arthur!'"

There were some among the kings who heeded Merlin's words; but others, and those the more powerful, laughed scornfully, and muttered under their breath things not exactly complimentary to the old wizard. However, he gained from them a promise to listen to Arthur if he cared to come out and speak with them, and they assured him that Arthur would be allowed to come and go in peace.

Then Merlin went to King Arthur. "Go out and speak boldly to them as their King and Chieftain," he advised. "And spare them not; neither be thou afraid, for thou shalt overcome them in spite of all."

So Arthur hastily donned robes of peace over his heavy armor and went out to meet them. With him went Sir Kay, Sir Brastias, Sir Baldwin, and the Great Archbishop of Canterbury. Wiseiy and well did Arthur speak to the hostile kings, and never once did he fail to reply readily to the many questions which they asked. But his wisdom and gentle kindness did not impress them. They defied him, and Arthur told them so, but with spirit, that he would yet make them bow their heads in submission. Then the kings turned away in great wrath.

After Arthur had gone back to the tower, Merlin turned to the kings, saying: "What will ye do? Ye had better disband quietly, for I say unto you that truly ye will never prevail. No, not were your number doubled unto ten times ten, for God is with Arthur and his knights."

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But the kings were angry and sore of spirit, and they said to him scornfully: "Since when have we taken advice from dreamers?"

Then Merlin faded swiftly from their sight, vanishing by magic, and the kings were troubled. They had no wish to anger the old wizard, lest he work some charm upon them.

At once Merlin appeared before Arthur, counseling him fiercely: "Set upon yonder rebellious rascals this hour, and smite them. Go against them with weapons like their own; then, if the battle waxes against you, draw Excalibur and he shall win the victory."

And it came to pass as Merlin had foretold.

Within the hour Arthur and his knights fell upon the vast Army of the Kings, and for a time the battle waxed hot and fierce. Everywhere Arthur appeared in the thickest of the fight, until finally his horse was slain under him, and several of the rebel knights sprang upon him. Quickly he unsheathed Excalibur and waved him aloft. There was a light like that of thirty torches, low thunders rumbled, and lightnings played around, and the rebellious kings and barons shrank together, afraid. Then Arthur and his knights pressed them close. Slowly they retreated; the citizens of Caerleon joined Arthur and fell upon them with clubs and stones, slaying many knights; and finally the remnant of the noble Army of the Kings broke and fled.

And Merlin came to King Arthur and counseled him not to follow them. So Arthur and his knights returned to Camelot and held council as to what were best to be done. For Merlin had told them that the kings though defeated were not humbled, and would follow him into his own country to wreak vengeance upon him.

At the council it was decided to send for Merlin and abide by his advice, and he came, saying: "I warn ye that your enemies are exceeding strong. They are as good men-at-arms as any in all the land. Since ye fought with them they have added four Scot-

tish kings and a powerful duke, with their large companies of knights, to their number. If our King goeth out to meet them, even with all the able knights he can gather together in his realm, he will be out-numbered, overcome, and slain.

"Now, if ye will, hark ye to my advice: Across the seas there live two strong and powerful brothers; kings they are. One is King Ban of Benwick, and the other King Bors of France. They have a very rich and powerful enemy, King Claudas, who worries them continually and against whom they cannot prevail. Now, let my lord King Arthur send two trusty messengers unto these kings and entreat them to come to our aid, promising in return to help deliver them from King Claudas."

And the King and all his knights approved; so Ulfus and Bras-tias were chosen as messengers to the brothers. They started in great haste for the city of Benwick. In a narrow pass among the mountains they were set upon by eight knights from the court of King Claudas, but God was with them and they overcame, and left their enemies lying sorely wounded upon the field.

At Benwick, very fortunately, they found both King Ban and King Bors, enjoying life in peace; for their enemy King Claudas and most of his knights had gone away over the borders for a big hunt. As soon as the kings learned that the messengers came from the court of Arthur and were of the Round Table, they welcomed them most heartily, and summoned attendants to give them food and bind the wounds they had received upon their journey.

Until morning the good knights tarried, and then set out upon the homeward journey with joyful hearts. Not only did they have about their persons as many rich gifts for King Arthur as they could well carry, but they had something that was of far greater value — a promise from King Ban and King Bors to come to Camelot as soon as they could make ready, and help Arthur in his struggle with the rebellious Welsh and Scots.

Great was the joy among the knights of the Round Table, when the good news was heard. Preparations were at once begun

THE FOUNDING OF THE ROUND TABLE 17

for a grand feast and tournament when the kings and their followers should arrive. Arthur and a band of his most noble knights went twenty miles along the way to meet the expected guests, and most heartily did they greet them. The next day almost one thousand knights took part in the tourneys and enjoyed the bountiful feasts. King Arthur, King Ban, and King Bors, the Archbishop of Canterbury, old Sir Anton, and the ladies of Arthur's court sat on a platform covered with cloth-of-gold, and acted as judges of the contests. And a merry time every one had. It was the largest joust yet held in England.

When the eleven rebellious kings marched up against Arthur, he and his allies were not only ready but waiting for them, and a battle was fought on the plains below Camelot. The great Army of the Kings was utterly routed, and Arthur acknowledged as King of Great Britain. His allies, the kings Ban and Bors, laden with rich presents, returned to their own countries, happy in the assurance that if their enemy, Claudas, ever again molested them, they had only to send to the court of Arthur to obtain the means necessary to quiet him forever.

Scarcely had the foreign kings gone and Arthur and his noble knights settled down for a time of peaceful quiet, when guests arrived at Court. They were Bellicent, wife of King Lot of Orkney, with her sons, and a host of servants. Now Lot was one of the kings who had recently been engaged in the war against Arthur. But Queen Bellicent represented that she came in friendship, and told Arthur she had just discovered that she was his half-sister, being the daughter of Igraine, wife of Uther, by a former marriage. She was a very beautiful woman, and Arthur's heart went out to her. Pure and truthful himself, he was the last man in the world to detect falsehood, deceit, and cunning in another, so he made her most welcome. And not until her departure, a month later, did he learn that she had really come to him as a spy.

All was revealed to him in a marvelous dream, which filled him

with dread. It seemed as though there came into his land a large number of griffins and serpents which burnt and slew the people throughout the land. And Arthur thought that he went to battle with them and that, although they wounded him sorely, he finally succeeded in slaying them.

"What does it mean?" he inquired of Merlin.

"Ah, my Lord Arthur," answered the old man solemnly, "it was a gruesome dream, and it meant *Treason*. You have indeed entertained serpents in your court unawares for the past thirty days. They shall bite and sting like adders! Queen Bellicent's son shall break up your noble order of the Knights of the Round Table, lay in waste the glories of Camelot, and slay you in battle."

And Arthur was disheartened at the words, and drooped in exceeding bitterness of spirit.

But Merlin counseled him wisely: "Rebel not. It is God's will, and He doth all things well. Forget it! I should not have told you, for it profits no man to know the Future! Pray regard it as though you knew it not, my Lord Arthur. Live ever as the pure, blameless King, and when years hence, for it will be years hence, the end comes, you will receive your reward. Sorrow not, my lord, for you shall die an honorable death, but I shall die shamefully. I shall be buried alive!"

Arthur marveled much over the words of the wizard, and, later he saw how faithfully this prophecy of doom was fulfilled, particularly that about the magician's own sad ending. It seems that Merlin, old as he was, fell in love with Vivien, a beautiful but wicked maiden of Arthur's court. She enticed from the old man a great number of his magic secrets, and used them to further her own interests. At last Merlin became so deeply in love with Vivien that he could scarcely bear to have the maiden out of his sight, and she grew very weary of him. Moreover, she was afraid of him because he was a wizard. She feared that in one of his jealous frenzies he would work some charm upon her.

Now, there was one charm the secret of which Merlin would

never tell Vivien, though he frequently hinted of its great power. Of course, when she found he would not tell the secret, she was most anxious to know it, so she tried in every way to learn it. But Merlin was wise: he was aware of Vivien's feeling for him, and he knew that if she discovered the secret his life would be in danger; for one who knew it could work a spell upon another that would put that other into a deep sleep; then the possessor of the charm could cause the ground, or a tree, to open, allowing him to roll the victim in and seal him up.

But alas for Merlin! He thought so much about the secret that daily it became harder for him to keep it. He had a presentiment that some day, in an unguarded moment, he would tell the charm. And sure enough he did!

He and Vivien were sitting under a large oak tree in the Breton forest of Borceliande. A great weariness was upon Merlin, for he was very old, having lived three times the number of years usually allotted to man. He had not the strength to withstand Vivien's coaxing to tell him the secret and he yielded. Hardly had he told it to her when he felt a great drowsiness stealing over him. In a moment, he lay in a deep sleep, and Vivien stood over him, clapping her hands and laughing in wild glee. Then, with a few mysterious moves and passes, she caused the great tree to open, and roughly tumbled Merlin in. No sooner was he safely inside than the tree closed up again,—

"And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,
And lost to life and use and name and fame."

And Vivien laughed and shrieked wildly, "I have made his glory mine. Fool! O fool!" she cried. Then she turned and sprang away through the forest, and the thicket closed behind her as the deep woods echoed "fool!"

CHAPTER III

ARTHUR'S BEST FRIEND

AMONG King Arthur's knights was one, Sir Lancelot of the Lake, whom he loved with a love passing that of women. Sir Lancelot was one of the first to respond to Arthur's call, and he willingly left his beautiful castle "Joyous Gard" in Northumberland, to do the will of his "blameless, white king." Chief was Lancelot among all the brave and noble knights of the Round Table; in tournaments and jousts and deeds of arms he surpassed all others, and never was he overcome except by treason or enchantment. All over the land, next to good King Arthur, Sir Lancelot was loved and honored by high and low. Always he fought next to his king in battle, and well did his strong arm serve his master.

Sir Lancelot loved excitement and the joy of the fray. He was never content to lounge at home, among the splendors of the court at Camelot. If adventure were not at hand, he went out in search of it, and many are the thrilling stories told of him. It is said that once, at a great tourney, he overthrew twenty-eight knights in quick succession, among them being the great and mighty King of North Wales.

Legend has it that once, when affairs at the court were dull, Sir Lancelot, according to his custom, determined to go in quest of adventures. He set out with only one companion, his nephew, Sir Lionel, saying that he would not return until time for the great Feast of the Pentecost, which was always observed at Camelot, with great tourneys and much rejoicing. Days passed and nothing was heard from the adventurers, and finally time drew very

near to the Pentecost. Then Lancelot's brother, Sir Ector, grew anxious, and set out in search of the two men.

Though not so strong as his brother Lancelot, Sir Ector was a brave and noble knight. So he rode boldly into the heavy forest for many miles in the direction in which his brother and his nephew had started. Finally he met a sturdy forester and inquired of him if there were any adventures to be found thereabout.

"Yea," said the forester. "If you be a brave man, you can find all that you seek about a mile farther on, in the depth of the forest. There is a strong manor with a deep moat around it, and a ford where your horse may drink. Hard by is a beautiful tree all hung with many fair shields that once belonged to bold, true knights. In the midst of these hangs a brass and copper basin. If you smite angrily upon it three times with the butt of your spear, that which you seek will appear."

Sir Ector rode forward at once. He knew well that if Sir Lancelot had passed that way, he had sought at once the adventure of which the forester told. As he came up to the tree and eagerly scanned the many shields, he recognized the shield of his nephew, Sir Lionel, and also those of several knights of the Round Table who had mysteriously disappeared. But of Sir Lancelot's shield there was no sign. Though he thanked Heaven for this, Sir Ector was both dismayed and disheartened, and very angry withal at the sight of these silent proofs of treachery done to his friends. So he smote angrily upon the basin three times, and rode his horse into the stream, to give him a drink. Scarcely had the animal satisfied himself, when a knight rode up behind Sir Ector and demanded that he come out of the water and prepare to defend himself. With a shout Sir Ector wheeled sharply, and smote the strange knight such a heavy blow that he fairly made his horse reel.

"Ha!" cried the knight. "That was well done, and more than knight has done to me these twelve years past, but, my friend, such as you can be no match for Turquine!"

As the strange knight spoke his name, Sir Ector fell a trembling, for there was scarcely a knight in all the Order of the Round Table who did not fear the great and mighty bandit, Sir Turquine. The powerful knight marked the effect of his words, and chuckled to himself as he reached out one mighty arm and plucked the fear-weakened Sir Ector from the saddle. Swiftly he bore him away to his own home, where he stripped him of his armor, beat him with cruel thorns, and threw him into a deep dungeon, where he found many men whom he knew, among them the lost Sir Lionel.

"Alas, my nephew!" cried Sir Ector, "that we should meet in this foul place! But tell me, know you aught of my brother, Lancelot?"

"No," answered Lionel. "I left him asleep in the shade of an oak tree, but whether he now lives I know not. One thing is sure: unless he does, and comes to our rescue, we shall rot in prison. For there is no man on earth but Lancelot who can overthrow our jailer."

While the knights mourned and sympathized with each other, Lancelot also drooped and languished in a distant prison cell. As he had lain in peaceful slumber under the oak tree, four Queen-witches had come by and cast a spell over him. They had borne him off to their castle and had sought by every means in their power to make him renounce the Round Table and his allegiance to King Arthur, and serve in their castle guard instead. This Sir Lancelot would not do, and the Queens declared he should die in prison if his will could not be broken.

Now it chanced that the damsel who was commanded to wait upon Sir Lancelot, and carry him his meals, was the daughter of Bagdemagus, a king whose head had been bowed low in the dust by the King of North Wales. Once in a tournament Lancelot had overthrown this great king, and the daughter of Bagdemagus, knowing this, was very kind to Lancelot. She offered to help him escape, if he would deliver her father from the tyranny of the

Welsh king. Lancelot was more than glad to consent, and at the appointed time the maiden led him safely away and hid him in her father's house. Then King Bagdemagus assembled all his brave and trusty knights and gave them into Sir Lancelot's command, and great was the victory which they won over the King of Wales and his followers.

As soon as Lancelot saw his faithful friend, the Princess Bagdemagus and her father, the King, safely settled in their own borders, he bade them a kind farewell and set forth alone to seek for Sir Lionel, marveling much as to the young man's disappearance while he himself had been sleeping beneath the oak. He made his way back to the tree, and scarcely had he ridden ten rods from it when he met a maiden riding a white mule.

"Sweet lady," said he, bowing low before her, "canst thou tell me if any adventures are to be found in this forest?"

"Yea, my lord knight," answered the maiden, smiling brightly at the handsome Lancelot, who had a manner that was pleasing to all women, "there are many adventures hereabouts, if it so happens that thou hast strength to prove them."

"And why should I not prove myself, fair maiden?" asked Sir Lancelot quickly. "It is for further trials of my strength that I have come into this strange country."

"Aye, and thou hast spoken like a true knight!" exclaimed the girl admiringly. "I doubt not that thou art powerful and brave. I will bring thee to the greatest and mightiest knight that ere was found, if thou wilt tell me thy name and serve for me a quest, if first thou art lucky enough to overthrow the great man."

"Surely," responded Sir Lancelot, with his usual gallantry. "'Twould be a pleasure to serve so fair a lady on any quest, however difficult. As to my name, I am called Sir Lancelot of the Lake, and belong to the Order of the Round Table. It may so chance that you have heard of my master, the noble King Arthur?"

"Yes, indeed," answered the maiden eagerly. "Not only of

Arthur, but of his brave friend and most trusted knight, Lancelot. Now do I know that this powerful knight be delivered into your hands. He is the great and wicked bandit, Sir Turquine. And I am told that in his dungeons are three score and four good knights of King Arthur's court. He hath taken every one that came within his reach."

"Praise the kind Providence that led me hither, fair maiden!" cried Sir Lancelot. "I will avenge my friends of the Table Round and slay the villain, or forever give up my place at Arthur's right hand! Lead on! I am anxious to meet the bold Turquine, and God will strengthen my spear."

So the damsel made haste to lead Sir Lancelot to the tree by the ford, and she showed him the mystery of the basin. He recognized at once a large number of the shields hanging upon the tree, and he was so angry that he smote the basin fiercely until the bottom fell out. But no one came. Then Sir Lancelot rode up to the gates of Sir Turquine's manor and pounded for admission, and still no one answered. So he rode up and down before the gates like a sentinel, determined not to go away until he had obtained satisfaction.

At last horses' hoofs were heard in the distance, and presently there appeared at a bend in the road a great knight, who drove before his own horse another on which lay another knight who was wounded. There was something about the wounded man which seemed strangely familiar, and as he came nearer, Lancelot saw that it was Sir Gaheris, one of the Order of the Round Table who had but lately been knighted.

Sir Lancelot grasped his spear and firmly rode forward at a gallop. "Prepare to defend thyself!" he shouted sternly. "I charge thee in the name of King Arthur and the noble Order of the Round Table!"

"If thou comest under the name of that villainous band, thou art truly welcome!" answered the knight boldly. "I defy thee and all thy noble brotherhood!"

"Thou hast too much assurance, friend," returned Sir Lancelot, calmly. "But I pray thee, before we test our strength, let us lay my wounded brother upon the ground and make him more comfortable."

The knight consented. And then began such a fight as had never been seen or heard of before in all England. Now one knight prevailed and now the other, and for full two hours they fought without either one gaining the mastery. Both were covered with wounds and their breath came in gasping sobs; yet neither would cry for quarter.

At last Sir Turquine paused.

"Hold thy hand, good knight," he cried, "and let us reason together. Thou art the best knight that hath ever crossed blades with me, and more like one other that I have never seen than any one whom I could imagine. If thou art not he, for I hate him bitterly, I will agree to set free all my prisoners and let them return to Arthur's court, providing thou wilt promise to be my friend."

"And who is it thou so hatest, Sir Turquine?" inquired Sir Lancelot. "It is meet that I should know his name ere I promise, for thou art surely a brave knight, and who knows that thou mightst not be true and loyal didst thou so mind?"

"Know then," answered Sir Turquine grimly, "it is Sir Lancelot of the Lake. He slew my beloved brother at the battle of the Towers, and to avenge him I have killed a hundred good knights and crippled many more, and there are four score and ten shut up in my dungeons. Never will I cease to slay the knights of the Round Table that come into my borders while Lancelot lives. Knowest thou him? Is he friend of thine? Tell me true."

"Aye!" answered Lancelot bravely. "Never yet have I spoken aught but truth to man. Behold! Thy hated enemy stands before thee. I am Lancelot of the Lake, son of King Ban of Benwick. And we must fight unto the death; for as thou must

avenge thy brother, so must I likewise avenge my friends and kinsmen of the Round Table. I defy thee!"

Sir Turquine's wrath now waxed high. He fought with might and main, and Sir Lancelot had all he could do to defend himself. For two hours more they fought without rest, and both were faint and sick from the pain of their wounds and the loss of blood. Both were smeared and bespattered, and the grass all about them was trodden and stained like a slaughter pen. At last Sir Turquine's splendid strength gave way, and he bore his shield low for very weariness. Then came Sir Lancelot's chance, and he seized it. Quickly he grasped his foe by the helmet and bore him to his knees, plucking off his helm as he did so, and severing his neck with one blow. Then he fell fainting by the side of the dead knight.

Now the maiden who had brought Lancelot to the ford had remained hidden in a nearby ravine to watch the duel, and as soon as she saw that Lancelot had fallen beside the slain Turquine, she rushed to his side. And it was well that she did so, for he would have died of his wounds without her ministrations. Seizing Sir Turquine's helmet she bounded to the ford and quickly returned with cool spring water and soothing herbs. Tearing her handkerchief, sash and scarf into bandages, she soon had her patient's wounds dressed as skilfully as a physician could have bound them, and set about restoring him to consciousness.

It was not long until Sir Lancelot was up and eager to set about his business. Almost immediately he inquired of the maiden as to the nature of the quest which she had wished him to undertake.

"Nay, Sir Knight," she cried pleadingly, "pray think not of it now. Stay thy hand, I beseech thee, until thou art rested and whole again."

But Sir Lancelot only laughed. "What are a few wounds, fair maiden?" he exclaimed. "Pray tell me thy wish, that I may

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keep my promise. I must be in Camelot for the Pentecost, and the time draws very near."

"Well, if thou must, Sir Knight," answered the maiden reluctantly. "I dislike to ask thee to duel more to-day; yet there is a wicked knight hereabouts who robs and distresses ladies and gentlewomen. It would be a noble act if thou couldst stay his hand, and thou wouldst have the thanks of all the ladies and damsels."

"Lead on," replied Sir Lancelot. "It is a good quest. But first let us set my wounded brother upon his feet."

So they loosed the thongs that bound the hands and feet of Sir Gaheris and removed the gag from his mouth, so that he was free to sit up and express his thanks to Lancelot and his admiration for the way Sir Lancelot had held his own in the duel with Sir Turquine. But Lancelot cut him short.

"Stay thy praise, Sir Gaheris!" said he. "I did but my duty. It was meet that I should do all I could for the Round Table and our blameless, white king. Get thee hence and finish this task for me, while I go with this maiden to redeem my promise. She hath sore need of a strong arm. I am told that at Turquine's manor hard by, there are shut up in the dungeon a large number of men from the Round Table. Their shields hang in a tree by the ford. Among them have I recognized those of my kinsmen, Sir Ector and Sir Lionel. Go then to the castle, I pray thee, and release the prisoners. Tell them to be of good cheer, and to hasten to Camelot for the great Feast of the Pentecost, when I shall be with them."

So Sir Lancelot and the maiden rode away, and as they drew near the bridge where the wicked knight usually lay in covert, Sir Lancelot bade the maiden ride on in advance. Scarcely had she gone a dozen rods, when the bandit sprang out from the thicket and dragged her from her horse. In an instant Sir Lancelot was upon him, and with one blow severed his head from his body.

"Zounds! What a dog!" he cried in disgust, as he helped the

weeping maiden to her feet. "'Tis a disgrace on knighthood that such as he lives! Hast thou aught more that I can do for thee, fair maiden? If so, thou hast but to speak, for thou hast twice saved my life, and 'tis a pleasure to serve thee."

"Nay, brave knight," answered the maiden, smiling, "thou art very kind, and better and gentler than any knight I have yet seen, but I can ask no more of thee. Go thy way, and may the good Father of all guide and preserve thee wheresoever thou goest."

They parted, and Lancelot rode forward into the forest in the direction of Camelot. That night he lodged at the hut of a poor forester. Next morning's sun found him again upon the way. Suddenly, as he rode quietly along, he beheld a knight racing toward him, pursued by two others. He reined in his horse and waited for them to come up; and he saw that the knight in distress was no other than Sir Kay, Arthur's seneschal and foster-brother. Sir Lancelot went to his aid, and in a furious fight the two robber-knights were killed. But in the fray Sir Lancelot's horse was slain.

"Ah, Sir Lancelot!" cried Sir Kay, as soon as he could speak, "'Tis a lucky coming for me that you happened to be riding this way! They would have had me in another minute! Did you find the adventures that you sought? Surely you must, for this is a land of cutthroats and robbers! Woe is me! I am sent upon a quest for my lord Arthur, and well do I know that I shall never return alive!"

"Tut, Sir Kay!" chided Lancelot, "where is your courage?" But in his heart he pitied the seneschal and felt that what he dreaded would likely come to pass. So he said: "Come, I will tell you what to do. Let us make a trade. I will exchange my armor for your horse and armor. With my shield and armor on, you are safe, for most people where you are going would not venture to try at arms with me, and you can buy a horse at the nearest manor. As for me, I shall be safe enough, for I can defend myself."

And so it came about that Lancelot and the seneschal exchanged arms, and made many hearts sorry thereby. For Sir Kay passed in peace many robbers and highwaymen who did not dare molest him thinking him Sir Lancelot, whose power as a swordsman was well known in that vicinity. Had they guessed the cowardly heart that beat under Sir Lancelot's armor and seen how the arm trembled that bore Sir Lancelot's shield, Sir Kay would surely have been slain!

As Sir Lancelot rode on toward Camelot, four of Arthur's knights espied him, and they nudged each other, saying: "Behold the sensechal, how proudly he bears himself! Verily, the honor of his position goes to his head like new wine! He rides like the great Chief of Knights, Sir Lancelot himself. Let us break his pride!"

And they laid their heads together and planned to frighten him by disguising themselves and asking him to cross swords with one of their number.

Now Lancelot knew the four at once and divined their plan, but he gave no sign. Laughing in his sleeve, he assumed the voice of Sir Kay, and challenged the party either singly or in a body. The knights were astounded, for they had expected Sir Kay to take flight instantly, and they murmured among themselves, but mirthfully accepted the challenge. Their mirth was changed to humiliation when the supposed seneschal not only defeated each in turn but all in a body! And they drew away with hanging heads, and would not even accompany this changed Sir Kay to court, as he invited them to do. Bitter as gall was the thought that they, who considered themselves among the flower of Arthur's knights, had been defeated by the seneschal, a mere farmer and keeper of grain-bins, who scarce knew one shield from another!

Great was the rejoicing when Sir Lancelot, after some further adventures, finally reached Camelot. The knights released from Turquine's dungeon and Sir Kay had all arrived before him, and loudly had they praised him. King Arthur felt that his beloved knight had indeed done him great service, and was prepared to

show Lancelot all honor. A great feast was made ready which almost rived that of the Pentecost, to be held on the morrow. Praises, jests, and merriment ran high, but probably the happiest souls in all that vast throng were the four knights who learned that they had tested swords with the champion himself instead of the King's steward. And in all the land of England there was not at this time any man, excepting the King himself, who was so loved, so honored and so worthy of all reverence as Sir Lancelot of the Lake, son of King Ban of Benwick.

CHAPTER IV

THE MARRIAGE OF ARTHUR

YOU will remember that when Arthur was crowned, many kings ruled in the isle of Britain. Ever they waged war with one another, laying in waste a great part of the land, and from time to time the heathen hosts swarmed from over the sea and harried what was left. So there came to be many great tracts of wilderness where man was never seen and where wild beasts roamed at will. In parts of the wilderness there dwelt a fearful animal known as the loup-garou, or man-wolf, a creature, half-man and half-wolf, that devoured men, women and children.

The land of Cameliard, where Leodogran was king, suffered most from the wild beasts and heathen that overran its borders. Much of the country was covered by thick, wet woods, and by day as well as by night, the wild dog, the wolf, the bear, and the boar came to root in the fields and gardens of the King, and ever and anon they would steal a child and drag him away to their foul dens. Leodogran was greatly troubled and knew not where to turn for aid, his castle guard having been wasted by heathen hordes and recent fighting with his neighbor, King Urien. At last he heard of the crowning of Arthur, and of how the new king tried faithfully to measure justice to all. So he sent word to him, saying: "Arise, and help us! For here between man and beast we die."

Arthur's tender heart was filled with compassion, and he summoned his knights around him and bade them prepare for the journey. Not once did he pause to think that he was yet but little used to battle (for this was in the early days of his reign), or of how much his own affairs needed looking after, for there was yet much bitter, smoldering revolt against him in his kingdom.

Now it chanced that as Arthur and his noble knights filed into

the gateway at Caneliard, Leodogran's daughter, the beautiful Guinevere, "fairest of all flesh on earth," was waiting by the castle wall to see them pass. She glanced up, and the King, looking deep into her eyes, felt that her lovely image was engraved upon his heart forever. The princess drew back, blushing. But as Arthur wore no symbol of his kingship, and rode as a simple knight among his followers, many of whom were in richer arms than he, she knew him not. The King paused not to reveal himself, but his pulses throbbed and he determined to fight a good battle for King Leodogran and ask him for his beautiful daughter's hand as a reward.

So Arthur pitched his tent beside the forest and drove out the heathen. Then he slew the wild beasts and felled the forest, letting in the sun, and making broad pathways for the hunter and the knight. As he was about to go to King Leodogran, a messenger from his own land came hurrying, bidding him to make haste if he would save his throne, for the rebel kings who questioned his right to reign were gathering their forces once more. And Arthur was obliged to put back the love that was stirring in his heart and hurry to the call of his country. But as he went he mused and pondered about Guinevere and his own lonely state as king without a bride, and he pondered in these words:

"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 join'd
 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 join'd 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."

When Arthur and his knights came to the field where the rebel kings were drawn up in battle ranks, the day became suddenly so bright and clear that "the smallest rock far on the faintest hill" could be plainly seen, and, though it was high day, the morning star shone brightly. As the King unfurled his banners, from both sides rose loud shouts and trumpet blasts and clarion calls that thrilled the blood. Then with drawn lances the thousand rebel hosts came thundering to meet Arthur's army. And nobly did the knights withstand the shock! There ensued a great crash and clattering of steel, and now the barons and kings prevailed and now Arthur and his knights. But at last God showed His hand on Arthur's side; for all at once "the Powers who walk the world" made lightnings and great thunders over the King, and dazed all eyes, and Arthur's hands seemed to grow mightier with every blow. Then came a deep, wonderful voice from the four winds, shouting, and the rebel hosts huddled together sore afraid, and, when the voice ceased, they broke in wild flight. But when Arthur's knights would have pursued them, dealing death on every hand, their peace-loving King cried: "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."

And he turned laughingly to Lancelot, his beloved guard, who had kept faithfully at his side throughout the battle, exclaiming: "*Thou* dost not doubt me King, so well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day."

"Sire and my Liege," cried Lancelot admiringly, "the fire of God descends upon thee in the battle-field; I *know* thee for my King!"

And the two swore there on the field of death a deathless love. And Arthur clasped the knight's hands in his own as he said solemnly: "Man's word is God in man. Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death."

As soon as he had returned to Camelot, Arthur's heart and mind again turned to the beautiful Guinevere, and he, therefore, sent three of his trusted knights, Ulfius, Brastias, and Bedivere, with a message to King Leodogran, saying: "If I in aught have served thee well, give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife."

King Leodogran was greatly troubled. He admired Arthur and was deeply grateful to him for ridding Cameliard of its enemies; also he saw that it would be of immense advantage to himself to be related to so powerful a king; but he did not feel like giving Arthur his greatest treasure, which was his only daughter. He had heard some of the murmurings of the rebel kings and feared lest Arthur as they said of him, were not of royal blood. So he pondered in his heart, being resolved never to give his daughter to any except a true king and the son of a king at that.

He summoned his old, gray-haired chamberlain, and inquired of him: "Know you aught of Arthur's birth?"

But the chamberlain, whom he trusted above all men, could give him no satisfaction, and the King rebuked him half-angrily, saying: "O friend, had I been holpen half as well by this King Arthur as by thee to-day, then beast and men had had their share of me."

Then Ulfius, Brastias, and Bedivere were summoned, and Sir Bedivere took it upon himself to satisfy the King; but Leodogran doubted still.

Now, either by chance or design, for she was wondrous wise, Queen Bellicent, wife of Lot of Orkney, and her two sons came knocking at the castle door for admittance, and Leodogran was forced to make a feast and entertain her. As they sat at meat, he remembered that she was a kinswoman of King Arthur, and so determined to question her, beginning in this wise: "A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas. You come from Arthur's court. Victor his men report him. Yea, but do you think this king—so many there are that hate him, and his knights so few, how-

ever brave they be — hath body enough to hold his foemen
of you?"

And the Queen, for reasons best known to herself, sent her
sons from the room, and told Leodogran all she knew of Arthur,
giving various stories that were afloat concerning his birth, and
telling how, when she asked Merlin concerning the shining dragon-
ship and the naked child cast up by the sea, the wizard had mocked
her in riddling rhymes, saying:

"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."

She told of Arthur's crowning and the miracles shown at that
time, and said to the King heartily: "Fear not to give Arthur
thine only child, Guinevere, for he is a true king, and Merlin hath
sworn that though men may wound him he will not die, but pass
to come again, and then or now utterly smite the heathen under-
foot, till these and all men hail him for their king."

Her words left King Leodogran as unconvinced as before, and
he decided to sleep over the matter. That night the truth came
to him in a dream, as truth so often does come to man. He be-
held as in a vision Arthur standing crowned in the heavens, while
all his foes and those who spoke against him melted away like mists
before the morning sun. And Leodogran awoke and sent word
to Sir Bedivere and his comrades, bidding them tell Arthur that
his suit was granted.

There was great joy in Arthur's heart when the good tidings
were heard, and he prepared to have the marriage take place

at once. As urgent state affairs called for his presence at home, he could not go for his bride himself; so he asked Sir Lancelot to go in his stead. And Lancelot consented right willingly, for he was pleased that the King should show so much confidence in him.

It was the latter part of April when Lancelot set out, and the May flowers were blooming when he left Cameliard on the return journey with the beautiful princess. On every hand was the breath of spring, life, and love. Blue isles of heaven glanced upon them through the fresh, shimmering green of the forest trees, sunbeams danced madly around them, the flowers gave their sweetest fragrance, and the birds fairly made the woods ring with their love anthems. The road seemingly lay through the very heart of Nature's most brilliant beauty, and endless were the enchanting pictures presented; but to Lancelot the loveliest picture of all was the Princess Guinevere. Clad in a beautiful gown of grass-green silk buckled with golden clasps, and crowned with a light green tuft of waving plumes, she seemed the very Queen of Nature and type of all that the wood-thrush sang in his dreamy notes. So charming she looked as she lightly sat her cream-white mule and swayed the rein with her dainty finger tips, that Lancelot felt a man might well give all his worldly worth for one kiss from her perfect lips, and in so thinking failed to see that the thought was treachery to the King.

At last they came to Camelot and the waiting King, who hastened eagerly forward to greet his bride. Now as yet the princess had not seen the King, and she scanned his fair, handsome face eagerly, thinking half discontentedly to herself that she preferred Lancelot's dark eyes and raven hair to her lord's curling locks of gold and eyes of laughing blue! Yet she made no sign, and knelt with Arthur on cloth-of-gold before the beautiful, white altar of Camelot, where the great St. Dubric, the holy head of the Church of Britain, spoke the solemn vows that made them one.

"Behold, thy doom is mine," said Arthur, speaking the last words of the service softly and tenderly, his voice sounding like

sweetest music. "Let chance what will, I love thee to the death!"

And the new-made queen replied with drooping eyes, "King, and my lord, I love thee to the death!"

Then the holy Dubric spread his hands in blessing. "Reign ye, and live and love," he said, "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 its King!"

The King and the Queen then left the shrine and went forth into the beautiful, white city, which seemed all on fire with sun and cloth-of-gold. Children dressed in white ran before them, strewing flowers in their pathway and leading them on to the palace. White-garbed knights, rejoicing in Arthur's joy, blew their trumpets madly, and then broke forth in one grand, rich chorus that seemed to fill the very heavens:

"Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May!
Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll'd away!
Blow thro' the living world — 'Let the King reign!'

"Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur's realm?
Flash brand and lance, fall battle-ax on helm,
Fall battle-ax, 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 battle-ax, 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 battle-ax, 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 battle-ax, and clash brand! Let the King reign!

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“Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!
Clang battle-ax, 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 battle-ax, and flash brand! Let the King reign!”

CHAPTER V

ARTHUR'S ENEMIES AT COURT

EVEN as Arthur sat at the wedding banquet, with his bride on one side and Sir Lancelot on the other, his enemies could not leave him in peace. In there came some lords from Rome — delegates of the Roman Emperor — to claim tribute as of old. But Arthur would not listen to them, saying:

“Nay, the old order changeth, yielding place to new; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom. And since ye are grown too old and weak to do your part and guard this realm from heathen enemies, there shall be no more talk of tribute.”

Then the great lords departed in anger, and Arthur was obliged to go to war with Rome to enforce his word. So he was given but little time to make the acquaintance of his beautiful queen, and it was with a sad heart that he left her in the care of Sir Lancelot and a few other trusted knights who were chosen to guard the palace and the ladies of the Court. But Arthur was mighty in battle and the excitement of the fray was music to his soul, so the time passed rapidly, after all. And in three months he was able to turn joyfully homeward, having defeated the Romans in twelve great battles and utterly put them to rout.

For a time Arthur was allowed to enjoy life in Camelot. There were no enemies without to subdue, and it seemed as though his beautiful dream of spending the rest of his days in peace was to be realized, when all at once he found that there were many traitors about him. Jealousy was beginning to creep in, and here and there were envious souls who coveted the throne. Every now and then it was whispered that Arthur was not the man to be king, that his strength lay only in his powerful sword, Excalibur, and that without it he would be as nothing. The knights, too, were slip-

ping from their high standard. Without battles to fight, time hung heavily upon their hands, and they sapped their strength with much feasting, with unseemly jousts, and bouts at the gaming tables. Also the finger of scorn was pointed secretly at Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere, and it was whispered that the beautiful queen loved Lancelot instead of the King. But of these last idle whisperings not a word did King Arthur hear. He was too pure and noble himself to see aught but good in others, and he did not even dream of doubting his wife or of questioning the loyalty of his beloved knight whom he regarded as a brother.

Now the chief whisperer of the throng at Court and the instigator of most of the mischief was one Modred, Arthur's nephew, son of Queen Bellicent of Orkney. He was a wily, oily-tongued scoundrel, who did all he could to work himself into King Arthur's good graces and then prepared to do him harm when his back was turned. It was Modred's desire to drive Arthur from the throne and seat himself upon it, and he was aided and abetted in his slander of the Queen by Vivien, the sorceress, who, you will remember, was to destroy Merlin by shutting him up in the hollow oak. She hated Arthur because he was pure and good and refused to submit to her charms, and she knew that she could hurt him most by bowing low the head of the beautiful queen whom he loved with all his heart.

There was another who hated Arthur, and despised and envied the Queen. This was Queen Morgan le Fay, sister to Queen Bellicent and half-sister, also, to Arthur. Beautiful was she beyond description, and as false as she was fair,—a very fiend among women. Mistress of many witches' charms, she determined to capture the sword Excalibur, and have Arthur put to death; then she would establish her lover on the throne as King, and reign herself as Queen.

It was not hard to get Excalibur, as Arthur had never yet realized the need of keeping it under guard. So Queen Morgan le Fay found out where it was kept, and bided her time. Soon

King Arthur and her husband, King Urien, and Sir Accolan, a brave but foolish knight who had allowed himself to become smitten with Queen Morgan le Fay's charms, felt a strange desire to go hunting in each other's company, and set out together for the deep forest. Hardly had they entered it when a young hart sprang up in their pathway and they chased it for many a weary mile. At last Sir Urien lamed his horse, and the three dismounted and gave chase on foot, as it was evident that the hart was nearly spent. Finally it disappeared completely and the men found themselves standing hopelessly bewildered by the side of a strange lake. In a moment their eyes took in what appeared to be a deserted ship riding at anchor close to the shore, and King Arthur proposed that they go aboard and explore her.

They found the ship to be a most beautiful little vessel, richly and admirably fitted up, and they spent so much time over it that night was upon them before they were aware of it. Then there was a sound as of clapping hands, and in a twinkling sailors appeared on every side, and twelve damsels, clad in white, came and bowed before the King welcoming him warmly. Then they invited the men to come out to supper in the tiny salon, where they pressed all manner of dainties upon them, and there was much feasting. Being weary with the day's chase, the men soon asked if they could stay there for the night, and were shown at once to separate sleeping apartments where they fell immediately into deep, dreamless slumber.

When King Urien awoke he found himself at home in the chamber with his wife. Sitting up, he stared about him in dismay, half wondering if the hunt and what followed had been a dream. Then, catching sight of the mocking smile on his wife's face as she watched him under half-closed lids, he at once suspected that the whole business was one of her charms, and doubted not that some treason against Arthur was intended. But he spoke never a word.

As for King Arthur, he was even at that moment lying among

some twenty knights in a distant dungeon, where he had found himself on awakening.

As soon as his first surprise was over, he began to question those about him and learned that he was imprisoned by Sir Damas, a wicked knight who falsely kept from his inheritance his younger brother, Sir Ontzlake.

"Damas causes travelers to be taken prisoners by a band of his robbers," explained a knight, "in the hope that he will one day get hold of a champion to fight and kill Sir Ontzlake for him. Damas is a coward and refuses brave Ontzlake's entreaty that he will fight him single-handed for the inheritance, or else that he will provide a knight to fight for him. Now there is not among us a knight that would fight for Damas. We would far rather starve in prison!"

"Then the Lord deliver you!" exclaimed Sir Arthur compassionately.

As he spoke a fair damsel appeared before Arthur, inquiring, "What cheer?"

"Alas," answered the King sadly, "I know not. But stay," he added quickly, as the maiden half turned away, "methinks I have seen thee at the Court of Arthur?"

"Nay," answered the maiden, smiling and dimpling, "I have not been there." Yet it was a falsehood she told, for she was one of Morgan le Fay's maidens and was secretly pleased to think that the great king remembered her. "I am of Sir Damas' household, and I am sent to tell you that you shall be delivered, if you will but consent to fight a knight for Sir Damas."

"I will do so gladly," answered Arthur, for he was of no mind to die in prison. "If only I may have a good sword, horse, and armor, and also if my fellow prisoners may be freed."

"All shall be as you require," replied the maiden. "My master will be greatly pleased. I will come for you within the hour, and shall bring with me your great sword, Excalibur." And she departed, smiling.

And now let us turn for a moment and see how it had fared with the third member of the hunting party, Sir Accolan. He awoke to find himself in the heart of a deep forest, and as he stood rubbing his eyes in amazement and wondering which way to turn, a damsel appeared before him.

"I bid you good cheer, Sir Accolan," she observed smilingly and curtsyed prettily before him. "I am come from Queen Morgan le Fay. She bids you take heart and follow me."

"Whither dost thou lead?" queried Sir Accolan, half minded to turn and run the other way, for he was sore frightened and bewildered.

"To the home of Sir Ontzlake near at hand," answered the maiden. "He will aid thee and set thee on the way."

And so perforce the knight followed the maiden and presently came to the Ontzlake castle where the lord of the manor welcomed him heartily and caused food to be set before him. As they sat at meat a messenger arrived from Sir Damas, bidding Sir Ontzlake to present himself at two o'clock near the old tower if he wished to test his strength for the inheritance.

"Alas," mourned Sir Ontzlake, "'tis the opportunity I most desire, but it has come at an ill-fated time. Here am I with a broken rib and a severe lance wound in my sword arm. How can I fight and come off victorious? Yet if I do not consent, my brother will never again make the offer and I shall forever lose my birthright! Wee is me!"

"Indeed, Sir Ontzlake," cried Sir Accolan quickly. "You are in sore straits! Allow me to offer myself in your stead. 'Twould be a pleasure to do this thing for you in return for the kindness you have shown me."

"Thank you kindly, friend, and the Lord reward you!" answered Sir Ontzlake warmly. "I am minded to accept your aid in the same spirit in which you offer it. You are a brave and noble knight, and a man after my own heart! If you will do this thing for me then you need never want for a friend so long as Harry

Ontzlake lives! And you may command me even to the half of my inheritance, and it is thine!"

"Zounds! man, say no more," cried Sir Accolan. "Is it not reward enough if I may call thee friend? Have I not heard of thy goodness and bounty and how thou art beloved of all within thy gates? Then, too, I am of the Court of Arthur and sworn to help all worthy persons in need of aid. Provide me with sword and arms at once, I pray thee. I but do my duty."

And so it came to pass that at precisely two o'clock King Arthur and Sir Accolan rushed upon each other, both having been so changed in that long, dreamless sleep that neither one recognized the other. From the very first the battle was fierce, for both were skilled swordsmen, and many were the admiring shouts drawn from the bystanders, who were composed of Sir Damas and his household, the knights from the dungeon, and Sir Ontzlake and his retainers.

Soon King Arthur was covered with blood, while his assailant showed scarce a wound, and Arthur marveled much. It seemed to him as though Excalibur swung lightly in his hand and refused to bite steel as he was wont to do. And presently he became convinced that there was treachery somewhere and felt sure that his opponent held the real Excalibur, for the two swords were seemingly alike, and he knew that his sister, Morgan le Fay, whom the damsel said had sent the sword, had played him false. All at once Arthur's sword snapped off close to the hilt, and he was weak and faint and felt that he must die, yet he was too proud and brave to cry for quarter.

"Zounds, man!" cried Sir Accolan admiringly, "you are the bravest knight that ever swung sword." And all present felt that he spoke truly and marveled how Arthur could fight as he did, being so sorely wounded. "Will you not give in, friend? I dislike to slay a defenseless man! You can fight no longer with a broken sword!" said Sir Accolan.

Then a strange thing happened. There came a sound as of the

rushing of many waters and the Lady of the Lake appeared in a cloud of mist and stood at Arthur's side. But he saw her not. At that moment he made a wild, despairing charge at Sir Accolan, striking him with the hilt of his broken sword and so dazing him that he lunged forward and dropped his own. In a moment Arthur sprang forward and caught it up, and gave a mad shout as he recognized it. For it was Excalibur which he had in his hand, and the jewels which had beamed dull in the hands of Sir Accolan now shone brightly and gave forth a light as of many torches, and the people huddled together amazed.

Then Arthur cried compassionately to his opponent, who had struggled to his feet but remained standing with his head bowed so that he saw not the miracles: "Friend, will you not ask for mercy? I care not to kill you when you are not in the wrong and fight the battle of another!"

But Sir Accolan shook his head. "Alas, brave knight, I thank you, but I can not do it. My swordsman's pride is too great. Do your duty according to custom. But first tell me from what Court are you, for I never before saw so brave a man!"

As he spoke he raised his eyes, and in that moment the Lady of the Lake made a few strange passes and the change which had disguised the faces of Arthur and Sir Accolan rolled away. Each knew the other and fell back amazed.

"Alas! my King!" cried Sir Accolan, in a voice choked with horror and tears. "Thy forgiveness I implore! I knew thee not, else had I died rather than strike thee!"

"It is freely granted, my friend and most brave knight," answered Arthur kindly. "I know you fought me blindly. 'Tis the work of my wicked sister, Morgan le Fay, the enchantress. She would fain see me slain." Then he turned angrily to Sir Dimas and flashed the light of Excalibur into his eyes so that he was sore afraid and trembled until his knees smote together. "Sir Damas there will be no more fighting to-day! I command thee to give to thy brother, Sir Ontzlake, his full share of the inheritance,

and so to live that thou shalt be an honor to thy country and the peerage! If thou dost this not, then shall thy life be the forfeit!"

So saying, the King turned about and beckoned to Sir Accolan, signifying his readiness to depart. But ere they could start, Sir Ontlake came forward and kneeled before the King, begging him and Sir Accolan to come home with him and be his guests until the morrow for darkness was even then descending upon them. This the King gladly consented to do, and when morning dawned Sir Ontlake not only provided them with horses to make the journey but petitioned King Arthur to swear him into the Order of the Round Table that he might dwell with him and his knights forever.

In this way Queen Morgan le Fay's scheme had failed, and she knew it on the instant and fled with all speed from the Court lest Arthur wreak vengeance upon her when he came home. But Arthur's knights told him where she had gone, and when Sir Accolan died from his wounds four days after reaching Camelot, Arthur caused his remains to be placed upon a bier and sent to her, under guard of six knights, with the following message:

"Behold your work! Take your lover and mourn him well! But see that you plan no more treason for I have my sword Excalibur again."

This message filled Morgan le Fay with bitter anger, but she was nearly heartbroken over the loss of Sir Accolan, and felt that she cared not to reign as queen if she could not have him on the throne beside her. So she nursed her wrath quietly, and gave no sign. And because of this Arthur was merciful and would not allow his knights to go after her and burn her at the stake, as they wished to do.

After many days there came to Arthur one of Queen Morgan le Fay's handmaidens bearing a "peace-offering." It was a most beautiful cloak, all decorated and embroidered with beautiful stones. And Arthur was pleased for he thought his sister had repented,

inasmuch as the maiden assured him solemnly that the queen desired to make amends for the wrong she had done him.

As the King extended his hands to receive the cloak, a blinding mist fell upon those who stood near, and when they could see clearly again they beheld the Lady of the Lake whispering to Arthur. And the King's brow grew black, but at the end of the conference he turned quietly to the damsel and observed softly: "Damsel, let me first see this cloak upon you, that I may the better observe it."

The damsel smilingly obeyed him and threw the cloak about her shoulders. The next moment the girl fell dead at the feet of the King. A great clamor then ensued and the knights demanded that they be allowed to go out and wreak vengeance upon the queen for the death blow which their beloved King had so narrowly escaped.

At first Arthur would not consent, but when Lancelot and Queen Guinevere had added their pleadings to the others, he gave way and allowed Lancelot and Ontlake to lead a party against her. The queen's spies informed her that they were coming, and when they reached her castle she and her castle knights had fled into the forest. But all to no purpose, for the knights pursued her hotly and eagerly, and the queen soon saw that unless she resorted to witchcraft she would be taken. So she changed herself and her knights into columns of stone. Soon Lancelot and Ontlake lost the trail nor could they find it again, and they finally paused beside the very column of stone which hid the queen and gave vent to their wrath and disappointment.

For many days the knights tarried in the forest, but they finally gave up the search and went back to Camelot. Then the queen resurrected herself and her men and they went away to the north of England; nor did she ever dare to show herself in the Court of Arthur again. But her husband, King Urien, remained one of Arthur's most faithful knights until his death, having wisely accepted the advice of Arthur when he counseled him, saying:

"Thy wife, my sister Morgan le Fay, is as false as she is fair. Cleave not unto her. I know from the mouth of Sir Accolan that she intended to do away with thee and crown him King, had she succeeded in her evil designs against me. Of course, I can have no one from her household in my Court, but I desire thee to remain if so thou hast naught to do with her, for I think thou hast never been a party to her evil doings. But there are some among her kinsmen that must be banished."

Sir Unwain and Sir Baumain, nephews of Queen Morgan le Fay, who had openly aided her, were then banished from the Court, and afterward made great trouble for Arthur by stirring up rebellions among the border kings and by annoying him in many petty ways. But the wily Modred, guiltiest soul among them, managed to escape the suspicions of Arthur and remained at Court to hatch the worst conspiracy of all — the breaking up of the Round Table and the death of the noble King.

CHAPTER VI

GARETH OF ORKNEY

QUEEN BELLICENT, wife of Lot of Orkney, and half-sister to King Arthur, was the mother of three stalwart sons. Two of them, Sir Modred and Sir Gawain, were knights of King Arthur, as we have already seen. The third and youngest, Gareth, tallest, cleanest-limbed and most noble of them all, was still at home. And though he chafed to go and help to work the will of Arthur in cleansing the world, his mother, foolish in her love and worship of him, would not consent.

"My son," she was wont to say in answer to his eager pleadings, "hast thou no pity for my loneliness? Lo, thy father, Lot, lies like a log all day beside the hearth! He is old and unfit to manage his estates, and both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall. Red berries ever charm the young bird, but stay thou with me, my best beloved! Rule well thy father's kingdom; follow the deer — sweet is the chase — and let wars and jousts and tournaments pass by. Make thy manhood mightier day by day by doing thy duty faithfully here at Orkney till I am old and passed away, and I will seek thee out some fair bride to grace thy home and halls and comfort us! Stay, my best son, thou art yet more boy than man!"

And once Gareth, overwrought, answered thus: "Aye, and as you hold me yet for a child, hear now the story of a child that might be like me: Mother, there was once a king whose 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. And one, they called her Fame; and the other one was Shame! Oh, Mother, how can you keep me here tethered to you? Man am I grown; a man's work must I do. Follow the deer? No! Follow the Christ, the King; live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King — else, wherefore born?"

And the mother sought once more to dissuade him, and spoke of the doubt in the minds of some people as to whether Arthur really were the true king, closing with the entreaty: "Stay till the cloud that settles around his birth hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son!"

Then Gareth answered quickly: "Nay, Mother, not one hour, so that you yield me. I would walk through fire, Mother, to gain your full leave to go! And who can say Arthur is not proven king? Who swept the dust of ruined Rome from off the threshold of our realm, crushed the Idolaters, and made the people free? Who should be king save he who makes us free?"

But Queen Bellicent answered not his quick questions, her keen mind having taken hold of what he was willing to endure, and seemingly shown her a way of escape. "And will you walk through fire?" she queried craftily. "He who walks through fire will hardly heed the smoke. Aye, go then, if you must, but before you ask the King to make you knight, I demand one proof of your obedience and your love of me."

And Gareth cried impatiently: "A hard one, or a hundred, so I go! Give me the proof and test me to the quick!"

"Prince," said the queen mother, speaking slowly, "thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall, and hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks among the scullions and the kitchen-knives, and those that hand the dish across the bar. Nor shalt thou tell thy name to any one. And thou shalt serve a twelve-month and a day."

In this way the queen hoped to discourage him; for she felt that if there were no way open to glory for her princely-proud

son excepting through the avenue of the kitchen-vassalage, the poorest post in the King's household, he would give up the idea. But she did not know Gareth of Orkney!

Only a moment he pondered, and then answered sadly: "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. So 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."

Great was the chagrin and grief of Queen Bellicent when he accepted her terms, and Gareth, seeing this, tarried for a few days, for he loved his mother and disliked to leave her in sorrow. And there arose in the queen's heart a hope that he would resolve to stay. But one morning, while the castle household was yet asleep, Gareth summoned his courage and clad himself like a tiller of the soil; and taking with him his two faithful serving-men, who had waited upon him since a child, he disguised them also, and quietly set out for the Court of Arthur.

For two days they journeyed to the southward and then on the third, a bright, beautiful morning near Whitsuntide, they came to the wonderful gates of Camelot, where they held their breath in amazement. And as they stood with shining eyes drinking in the beauty of the white city, they heard a blast of strange, sweet music, and an old, gray-bearded man came forth and inquired of them: "Who be ye, my sons?"

And Gareth answered straightway: "We be tillers of the soil, come to see the glories of the King. But your city moves so weirdly in the mist that these, my men, doubt if the King be king at all, or come from Fairyland; and whether this city be built by magic or by fairy kings and queens; or whether, indeed, there be any city at all, or all a vision; and this music now hath brightened them both, but do you tell them the truth."

Now the old man was really Merlin in disguise, and he saw through their pretense at once, but he answered Gareth soberly,

though his eyes twinkled, "Son, I have seen the good ship sail keel upwards in the heavens, and solid turrets topsy-turvy in the air. And here is truth; but if it pleases thee not, take thou the truth as thou hast told it to me! Truly as thou sayest, son, fairy kings and queens have built this city. They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft toward the sunrise, each with a harp in hand, and built it to the music of their harps. And as thou sayest, son, it is enchanted; for there is nothing in it as it seems, saving the King. And take thou heed of him; for thou art not what thou seemest, and thou goest up to mock the King, who can not brook the shadow of any lie!"

Then Merlin motioned toward the gates and himself turned sadly away, leaving Gareth filled with wonder and awe. And then it dawned upon the youth that he had been speaking with Merlin, and he laughed joyously and entered with his two followers. But nevertheless his heart jumped into his throat as he went onward; and when he finally came to the hall where the great Arthur Pendragon sat crowned on his throne, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth for very fear and his knees smote together. "For this half-shadow of a lie that I am acting, the truthful King will doom me when I speak," he thought sorrowfully, and timidly he glanced around half fearing that one or the other of his brothers, Gawain or Modred, would recognize and unthinkingly betray him, but he saw neither of them. Their absence gave him courage, and he glanced about eagerly, noting the many knights who stood with their eyes upon their chief in love and faith.

And as Gareth watched and waited, people came before the King with pleas for aid and justice, and the King heard their causes one by one and delivered judgment; and none who cried for succor cried in vain. And justice was meted out after this manner:

First there came a widow to the King, crying: "A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, took from my lord a field by violence. I pray thee make it right."

And Arthur asked: "What wouldst thou, woman, field or gold?"

"The field, my Lord," replied the woman, weeping, "for it was pleasant in my husband's eyes."

So Arthur, smiling, said: "Have thy pleasant field again, and thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof, according to the years. No boon is here; just common justice, so thy story be proven true. Accursed be he who from the wrongs his father did would shape himself aright!"

And so the tales went on, and as each tale of suffering was recited, some knight would cry: "A boon, Sir King! Give me the leave to right this wrong!"

The King would grant the boon, and the knight would ride away to redress the wrong, glad indeed to be of some small service in doing battle for the Christ and his most blameless King. Finally there came a messenger from King Mark of Cornwall, bearing a magnificent present of cloth-of-gold which he laid at Arthur's feet, and kneeling, he asked that Mark be made a knight of the Round Table.

"Just Heaven!" cried Arthur, rising in mighty wrath, for Mark was a traitorous, lying king, a coward who struck in the dark when his foe's back was turned. "Hear I aright? Dare that traitor ask for a place for his shield here among these my trusted knights and true?"

As he spoke, the King waved his hands toward the side walls, and Gareth observed that on either hand was a treble row of shields with a knight's name engraven beneath each. A knight standing near him explained in a low voice that it was Arthur's custom when a knight had done one noble deed to have his arms carved, and for each other knightly deed he did a jewel was added. And Arthur straightway looked for his brothers' shields and saw Gawain's all bright and shining with jewels, but Modred's was dim and blank as death.

Then Gareth's eyes wandered back to Arthur, and he saw him

rend the cloth in two and cast it upon the blazing hearth, ere he turned to the shrinking messenger. "Thy Mark hath tarnished the great name of King, and he would sully the low state of churl! But, seeing he hath sent us cloth-of-gold, return thou and hold him from our eyes lest we lap him up in cloth of lead! Craven, man of plots, craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings—" Then the great King paused, silenced, perhaps, by the frightened expression of the man who cowered before him, and said kindly: "'Tis no fault of thine, man. Seneschal, take him hence and satisfy his hunger ere he leaves the Court. Accursed be he who strikes and lets not his hand be seen!"

Gareth was next in line, and, for a moment, his heart counseled him to turn and run, but he subdued it and advanced bravely, leaning on his men. "A boon, Sir King! For see you not how weak and hunger-worn I seem, leaning on these? Grant me to serve for meat and drink among your kitchen-knives a twelve-month and a day, nor seek my name. Hereafter I will fight."

The King answered him, saying: "A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon! But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Sir Kay be thy master."

Then the King rose and departed, and the knights went their several ways. All this time Sir Lancelot's keen, dark eyes had been observing Gareth, and he now came over to Sir Kay counseling him to treat the lad kindly; for he believed him to be some noble youth in disguise, some king's son bent on having a lark.

But Sir Kay secretly despised Lancelot, so he roughly bade him mind his own business. And for this kindly meant interference he made Gareth suffer all the more. He called him Sir Fine-face and Sir Fair-hands, and gave him the rudest place in the castle for his bed, caused him to be served with the roughest food, and forced him to do work beyond his strength. But for all this Gareth never murmured. Bravely he bowed himself to obedience and wrought with kindly pleasance for the King, gracing each lowly act in the doing of it.

And when the kitchen-knaves talked among themselves, they would tell the love that bound 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,— and Gareth was glad. Or they would tell how once the wandering forester at dawn, far over the blue towns and hazy seas, found the King, a naked babe, of whom the prophet spake: "He passes to the Isle of Avalon. He passes and is healed and can not die"— and Gareth rejoiced in their tale.

But if their talk was foul, then would he whistle rapid as any lark, or carol some old song so loudly that at first they mocked, but after came to reverence him. And if a tale of knightly deeds and daring were wanted, then Gareth's was the tongue to spin it; and he held all the knaves spell-bound till Sir Kay's angry voice would be heard and they would scatter like leaves before the wind. And if, perchance, the knaves chanced to play at jousts, then Gareth easily won above all the rest. And so life went on for a month or more, until the queen, his mother, repented of the hard vows she had made her beloved boy swear, and sent arms and a kindly message to release him.

Then the heart of Gareth rejoiced. He laughed; he ran; he leaped, and finally presented himself all breathless before Arthur and told him all: "Sire and my Liege," he cried, "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!"

The great King smiled in sympathy with him and observed gently: "Son, thy good mother let me know of this, and asked me to yield thy wish. But, make thee my knight? Sir, my knights are sworn to vows of utter hardihood, utter gentleness, utter faithfulness in love, and utter obedience to the King."

And Gareth answered from his knees: "My King, for hardihood I can promise thee. For uttermost obedience, ask the sereschal, who, by the way, is no mellow master of meats and

drinks! For loving, I love not yet, but if it pleases fortune to send me the maiden of my dreams, I can love truly, God willing."

King Arthur was pleased with the boy's reply, and consented to make him a knight privately, providing his good friend and counselor, Sir Lancelot, did not object.

So Lancelot was sent for and entered heartily into the plan, and Gareth was knighted and danced away to the kitchen, still in disguise. Then the King turned to his favorite knight and spoke gravely, saying: "Lancelot, I have given him the first quest. He is not proven. Look, therefore, when he calls for this in the hall; get you to horse and follow him far away. Cover the lions on your shield, that no man may know you, and see as far as you may that he be not slain or taken prisoner."

Now it happened that early the next morning there came into Arthur's hall a beautiful maiden of high lineage. Like the May-blossom was her brow from which the golden-brown hair rippled back, her cheeks rivaled the bloom of the delicate apple blossom, her eyes gleamed like the starry night, her nose tip-tilted like the petal of a flower, and all about her was an airy gracefulness and perfume that made poor Gareth's head swim.

Very proud was this maiden, with opinions of her own, and she proved them straightway by daring to lecture the King. "O King," she cried, "you have driven away the foe without, why suffer you the foe within? Every bridge, ford, and tower for half a league around is beset by bandits! Why sit you there? If *I* were King, I would not rest until even the loneliest hollow were as free from bloodshed as your altar cloth!"

"Comfort thyself," said Arthur softly, though his eyes twinkled and he was secretly much amused, "neither I nor mine rest. If my knights keep the vows they swore, the meanest moorland of our realm shall in time be as safe, damsel, as the center of this hall. But pray what is thy name? And what thy need?"

Pleased by the courteous, kindly manner of the King, the maiden spoke more gently: "My name is Lynette. I am come to seek

aid for my sister, the Lady Lyonors, who is imprisoned in Castle Perilous by a wicked knight who seeks to force her to wed him. Now this castle is wound about by three loops of a river, and over it are three passings. Each passing is defended by a knight, and there is a fourth one, more powerful than all the others, who defends the castle. And I demand of thee thy chief knight, Sir Lancelot, to overcome these men, for no other can do it!"

"Ah!" observed the King, still speaking softly, but with his mind fixed upon the lad, Gareth, to whom he now regretted he had been unwise enough to promise the first quest. "Damsel, you know this Order lives to crush all wrongers of the Realm. But tell me about these four, and who they are."

"They are of the old knight-errantry," answered Lynette quickly. "No law or king have they, and courteous or bestial is their manner, as best pleases them. Proud of their strength are they, and they call themselves the Day. Morning Star, Noon Sun, and Evening Star are the three who guard the bridges, and the castle guard is a huge, savage man-beast, who names himself Night, or more often, Death. He wears a helmet mounted with a skull, and bears a skeleton figured on his arms. These are four fools, King, but mighty men; and therefore am I come for Lancelot."

Hearing this, Gareth, with kindling eyes, called from where he stood, a head taller than those about him in the throng: "A boon, Sir King, this quest!" Then, as Sir Kay, who stood near him, groaned like a wounded bull, he continued excitedly: "Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I. But I am mighty through thy meats and drinks, and I can topple over a hundred such! Thy promise, King!"

And Arthur, glancing at him with the frowning brows of perplexity, exclaimed shortly: "Go! Thou art worthy!"

And all the hearers were amazed.

As for the maiden, Lynette, anger, shame, and pride chased away the May-white of her brow. Raising high her dimpled arms,

she cried scornfully: "Fie on thee, King! I asked for thy chief knight, and thou hast given me hut a kitchen-knave!" Then, ere man could stay her, she turned and flew swiftly from the hall to her horse without the door, and galloped away through the weird white gate, never pausing until she reached the tourney field where she burst into angry tears, murmuring chokingly, "Kitchen-knave, forsooth! Fie upon him!"

In the meantime, Sir Gareth fled another way to where stood a horse, King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town, a war horse of the best, held in waiting, with spear and shield, by the two who had followed Gareth from the North. Loosening a string, his kitchen garh fell off and he stood revealed before all the kitchen thralls and curious knights who had followed him, a noble knight in glittering, jeweled armor. From all the bystanders rose a cry of admiration, and the kitchen-knaves threw up their caps, shouting lustily: "God bless the King and all his fellowship!"

Then, followed by the cheers and good wishes of all save the jealous-hearted Sir Kay, who cursed and grumbled so loudly that Lancelot rebuked him sorely, Gareth passed out from the gate and spurred his horse to where the maiden still lingered by the tourney field, murmuring: "Wherefore did the King scorn me? For, if it were impossible to send Lancelot, 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!"

When Gareth, looking full noble and handsome in his brave attire, came up and bowed low in courtly fashion before her, saying, "Maiden, the quest is mine. Lead, and I follow," she cried shrilly: "Hence! Avoid! Thou smellest all of kitchen grease! And look who comes behind!"

At this moment an angry bellowing came over Gareth's shoulder, and the voice of Sir Kay cried: "Knowest thou not me, thy master? I am Kay. We lack thee by the hearth."

Turning quickly, Gareth beheld the pompous seneschal astride a borrowed horse, and his brow grew black. "Master no more!" he cried scornfully. "Too well I know thee, the most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall." With that he quickly unseated Kay, and leaving him with a slight sword prick in his shoulder, galloped after the fast flying maiden.

When the heart of her good horse was well-nigh ready to burst with violence of the pace, the maiden perforce drew rein, and, overtaken, spoke:

"What dost thou, scullion, in my fellowship? Deemest thou that I accept thee more that by some device full cowardly thou hast overthrown thy master? Thou dish-washer and broach-turner! To me thou smellest all of the kitchen as before!"

"Damsel," Sir Gareth answered gently, refusing to be rebuked or angered by the hasty words or the scorn in her beautiful face, "whatever you will, and whatever you say, I leave not until I finish this fair quest, or die."

"Aye, wilt thou finish it?" scoffed the maiden tantalizingly. "Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks! The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it. But, knave, thou shalt be met with knave, and by such a one that thou, for all the kitchen brews that were ever supped, shalt not once dare to look him in the face."

"I shall try," said Gareth, with a smile that maddened her, and away she flashed again down the long avenues of the boundless wood.

But, after a time, she drew rein and turned hesitatingly to the despised knave at her side, and his heart bounded as it seemed to him there was less of scorn in her fair face. "Sir Kitchen-knave, I have missed the only way where Arthur's men are stationed through the wood, and this forest is nigh as full of thieves as leaves. We are lost. If both be slain, then I am rid of thee. But yet, Sir Scullion, life is sweet,—and canst thou

use that spear of thine? Fight if thou knowest how; for, thanks to Arthur's scanty grace, I have missed the road!"

And Gareth tried to reassure the maiden, but finding she would not listen to him, determined to ride bravely by her side and prove his right to knighthood if he could. They were even then climbing the long slope of a hill, and, when they came to the summit, they beheld in the valley beyond a gloomy-shaded mere, and on its banks were six strong men about to throw a bound man into its depths.

And even as Gareth and the maiden looked, a frightened serving man burst through the bracken and cried to the knight: "Help, my lord! The villains are drowning the baron, my master, a servant of King Arthur!"

Gareth needed no more words; indeed he would probably have gone to the help of the outnumbered man had no one appeared to beg aid. With a hastily murmured word of assurance to Lynette, he swooped down upon the villains and smote them hip and thigh. Three of them were stretched senseless upon the ground, and the other three ran screaming into the forest. Then Gareth loosed the stone from off the captive baron's neck, freed him of his bonds, and helped him to his feet.

"Oh, my friend," cried the baron, stretching out his hand to Gareth, "it is well that you came! Those rogues had soon made short work of me. Good cause is theirs; for it hath long been my custom, if I caught a thief, to tie a stone around his neck and drown him here. Many of them are rotting in these waters, and at night, so the servants say, they slip loose from the stone and dance upon the mere! But, now that you have saved my life, and it is worth somewhat as a cleanser of this wood, let me reward you."

"No," answered Gareth quickly. "For the deed's sake have I done this deed in uttermost obedience to the King. But wilt thou give this maiden shelter for the night?"

"Right welcome are ye both!" responded the baron heartily,

again extending his hand to Gareth. "I well believe thou art of our good Arthur's table!"

A light laugh now broke from Lynette, who had joined them as soon as the baron was freed. "Aye, of a truth he is, being Arthur's kitchen-knave!" she cried. "But do not think, scullion, that you are more welcome to me because ye have put to rout a lot of craven foresters! A thresher could have scattered them with his flail! Nay, you smell of the kitchen still!"

Gareth answered never a word, but signed for the baron to lead on, and there came to him a half-regretful wish that the baron had not crossed his path, for the maiden had been half-willing to trust him when no other protection was nigh!

The Lord Baron's home proved to be a castle rich and fair, and he eagerly spread before his guests all its hospitalities. Soon he invited them to partake of a feast that had that day been held in the castle, and placed a roasted peacock before Lynette, seating Gareth by her side.

The maiden rose at once in angry scorn. "Baron, this is too much discourtesy, putting this knave by my side. Hear me: this morning I went in all confidence to Arthur's Court and begged for his best knight, Sir Lancelot, to rescue my sister, Lady Lyonors, who is held prisoner by a man-savage in the Castle Perilous. Now, this lout, this kitchen-knave rose up and bawled out for the quest, and Arthur, suddenly gone mad, granted it. Think of it! A villain fitter to stick swine than to ride abroad redressing women's wrongs!"

"Methinks thou forgettest thyself, maiden!" answered the baron sternly. "Even a kitchen helper can be an honest man! And one can see at a glance that this man is not in his right a kitchen-knave; a knight is he, and a most brave and noble one!"

So saying, the Lord Baron turned his back none too politely upon the indignant maiden, and seating Gareth at another table placed himself beside him. "Friend, it matters not to me if thou be'st a kitchen-knave, or if the King or yonder damsel be mad.

Thou strikest a strong stroke, and thou art a goodly knight and the saver of my life! If thou harkenest to my advice, thou wilt take yonder foolish Miss back to Camelot, and let Lancelot or some other fight her battles!"

But as Gareth would not turn back for the maiden's sneering words, neither would he pause for the friendly baron's advice, and so in early morning they set out, the maiden still as scornful and unyielding as before. At last they came by a rough-thicketed road to where a small bridge spanned a deep, narrow, frothing stream. On the farther side arose a silk pavilion, gay with the golden streaks and rays of the Lent-lily, save where the dome rose high and purple. From the top floated a slender crimson banner, and beneath, a lawless warrior paced unarmed.

"Damsel," he cried, "is this the warrior bold that thou hast brought from Arthur's Court to struggle for the pass?"

"Nay, Sir Morning Star," answered the maiden, being divided in her scorn between Gareth and the warrior before her. "The King in utter scorn of thee and all thy folly hath sent his kitchen-knave. Beware lest he fall on thee suddenly and slay thee unarmed, for he is not a knight, but a knave."

Gareth flushed crimson, but made no move while the warrior called for the Daughters of the Dawn to approach and arm him, waiting patiently until three beautiful, silken-clad, bare-footed, rosy-cheeked maidens, all glistening with dew-drops, appeared and clad the warrior in a blue armor and gave him a blue shield, with the morning-star engraved thereon.

Lynette was not unmindful of her knight's gentle behavior, or of the admiration of the scene before him which lurked in his eyes, but she turned to him tauntingly, nevertheless, and asked: "Why stare you so? You shake in fear! There is yet time; flee down the valley before he gets to horse. Who will cry shame? You are not knight but knave!"

And Gareth replied quickly: "Damsel, whether knave or knight, far liefer had I fight a score of times than hear thee so

revile me. But truly thy words send a strength of anger through me. I know that I shall overthrow him!"

But now the Morning Star cried to Gareth: "A kitchen-knave sent in scorn of me, such I fight not, but answer scorn for scorn. It were a shame to do him further wrong than to set him on his feet and take his horse and arms and return him to the King! Come, leave thy lady, knave. It beseemeth not a knave to ride with a lady!"

"Do thou liest!" cried Gareth angrily. "I spring from loftier lineage than thine own."

Forthwith the two sprang angrily at each other, and Gareth lashed so fiercely with his brand that he soon had his foe groveling on the ground.

"Take not my life! I yield," cried the warrior.

"So this damsel ask it of me," answered Gareth, "I accord it easily as a grace."

"Insolent scullion!" cried the maiden, reddening. "I ask of thee! I bound to thee for any favor asked! Then shall he die." But as Gareth began to unlace the warrior's helmet, she shrieked: "Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay one nobler than thyself!"

"Damsel," returned Gareth graciously, "thy charge is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight, thy life is at her command. Arise and get thee quickly to Arthur's hall, and say his kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou cravest his pardon for breaking the laws! Thy shield is mine! Farewell! Damsel, do thou lead, and I will follow."

And fast away flew Lynette, but when he had overtaken her, she turned and spoke: "Methought, knave, when I watched thee striking on the bridge, the savor of thy kitchen came upon me a little faintlier; but the wind hath changed, I scent it twenty-fold." And then she sang a mocking little song about the beauty of the Morning Star, pausing finally to say: "But thou had best take counsel and be gone. For near here is the second brother in their fool's parable, and he will pay thee all thy wages and to boot.

Care not for shame, run! Thou art not knight but knave!"

"Parables?" queried Gareth, laughingly. "Hear a parable of the knave. When I was kitchen-knave among the rest, fierce was the hearth, and one of my mates owned a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat, saying, 'Guard it,' and there was none dared meddle with it. And such a coat art thou, and such a dog am I, and the King hath given thee to me to guard. And if knave does thee service as full knight, then he is as good as any knight towards thy sister's freeing."

"Aye, Sir Knave," replied Lynette haughtily. "But because thou strikest as a knight, being but a knave, I hate thee all the more."

"Yes, fair damsel, but in that you are grievously wrong. You should worship me the more, that, being but knave, I can overthrow thine enemies."

"Aye, aye," she cried tauntingly, "but thou shalt meet thy match!"

When they came nigh to the second river-loop, they beheld the second warrior, Noonday Sun, astride a huge, bay horse. His shield and armor were burnished so brightly that they cast sparks in the sun, and Gareth was well-nigh blinded by their blazing splendor.

"Avaunt! What dost thou, brother, in my marches here?" roared the warrior.

And Lynette answered shrilly: "Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's Hall! He hath overthrown thy brother, Morning Star, and hath his arms."

Noonday Sun cried out angrily and plunged into the foaming ford, but Gareth met him half way. No room was there in the whirling waters for lance or tourney skill, and Gareth feared he would be overcome, for his horse was frightened and hard to control. But, as the warrior raised his ponderous arm for the fifth mighty stroke, his horse slipped and went down in the stream. The Noonday Sun was now at the mercy of the waters. Gareth,

however, was too noble to let his enemy drown, and after a hard struggle succeeded in drawing him out on the rocks. Shocked and breathless, the warrior could fight no more, and so, perforce, yielded. Gareth charged him to deliver himself to King Arthur, promising to plead for him on his return, and then bade the maiden lead on.

Quietly she obeyed.

"Ah, damsel," laughed Gareth, unwise in his joy, "hath not the good wind changed again?"

"Nay," answered the maiden scornfully, "not a point! Nor art thou victor here. There is a ledge of slate across the ford, and the Noonday Sun's horse stumbled thereon. Yea, for I saw it."

Then she began to sing:

"O sun, that wakest all to bliss or pain,
O moon, that layest all to sleep again,
Shine sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.

"But what knowest thou of love song or of love?" she then demanded of Gareth, and without pausing for his reply went on singing:

"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.

"But how mayest thou know of flowers?" she queried. "Except, perchance, to garnish meats with. Hath not our good King who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom, a foolish love for flowers? What put you round the pasty? Wherewithal did you deck the boar's head? With flowers? Nay, the boar had rosemary and bay."

Gareth answered only with a smile, and his blue eyes laughed tenderly at her. Lynette sang on:

“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.

“But what canst thou know of birds?” she said. “Lark, mavis, merle, or linnet? What dreamest thou when they utter their sweet, sun-worshipping May music? Thinkest thou: ‘these be for the snare, these for the spit?’ But thou hast fried thy last one, except thou turn to fly, for yonder is the third stout fool awaiting thee!”

Gareth turned from silent admiration of his companion and gazed in amazement in the direction which she pointed. It was but too true. Over beyond a bridge of treble bow, against the rose-red western sky, stood, seemingly all naked, the knight who named himself Evening Star.

“Zounds!” cried Gareth, aghast. “Why does the madman wait naked there in the open dayshine?”

“Nay,” replied the maiden, “he is not naked; only wrapped in hardened skins that fit him like his own. If you cleave his armor, the skins will turn the blade of your sword!”

The Evening Star now shouted from the bridge: “O brother-star, why shine you here so low? Your ward is higher up. Have you slain the damsel’s champion?”

“No star of thine,” cried the maiden quickly, perceiving that the knight had mistaken Gareth for his brother on account of the Morning Sun’s shield which he bore, “but shot from Arthur’s heaven with ail disaster unto thee and thine! Both thy younger brethren have gone down before this youth, and so wilt thou, Sir Star. Art thou not old?”

“Old, princess!” cried the knight, “both old and hard. Old with the might and breath of twenty boys.”

“Old and over-bold in brag!” said Gareth angrily. “But that same strength which overthrew the Noonday Sun can throw the Evening Star!”

The Evening Star now blew a fierce and deadly blast upon his

horn, that made Lynette shudder and cover her ears. "Approach and arm me," he cried hoarsely. And straightway from out the old russet, storm-beaten, many-stained pavilion came a grizzled dame, and armed him in old arms. His helm had only a drying evergreen for a crest, and on his shield the Star of Even blazed but dimly.

The two knights rushed madly toward each other and met midway upon the bridge. At the first blow Gareth unseated his foe, and when he arose, met him with drawn sword and overthrew him again. But up like fire he started, and as oft as Gareth brought him groveling on his knees, so often he vaulted up again; till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart, foredooming all his trouble vain, labored within him.

Presently he half despaired, and Lynette, seeing this, cried out: "Well done, brave knight!" And again, "O good knight-knave, — O knave, as noble as any of all the knights, shame me not! Shame me not! For I have prophesied! Strike! Thou art worthy of the Table Round! His arms are old; he trusts his hardened skin. Strike! Strike! The wind will never change again!"

Her words put new courage into Gareth's heart and gave the strength of Samson to his arm. He hewed off great pieces of the hardened armor-skin, but could no more wholly subdue his enemy than could the loud waves, rolling ridge on ridge, submerge the springing buoy that rides at sea. At length Gareth's sword clashed with his foeman's and broke it at the hilt, and he thought to claim the victory. But the warrior, all unknightlike, sprang upon him and wrapped him in his wiry arms. Struggling, striving, panting, each sought to throw the other into the stream, until at last, straining every nerve, Gareth prevailed; then, turning, said to the maiden in a smothered voice: "Lead on. I follow."

"Nay," cried Lynette, holding out her hand. "I lead no longer. Ride thou at my side. Thou art the kingliest of all the kitchen-knaves!"

Off came Gareth's jeweled helm, as would a courtier's hat of plumes, and low he bowed until his lips touched the tips of her dainty fingers. Then, swiftly mounting his horse, he wheeled him into the path, while the maiden sang joyously: —

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

“Sir,” she then murmured, “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, and mis-said thee! Noble I am, and thought the King did but scorn me and mine. Grant now thy pardon, friend, for thou hast ever answered courteously, and wholly bold art thou, and meek withal as any of Arthur's best, but, being knave, hast mazed my wit. I marvel what thou art.”

“Damsel,” returned Gareth gently, “you are not all to blame, saving that you mistrusted our good King. You said your say; my answer was my deed. I hold he scarce is knight, yea, but half-man, nor meet to fight for gentle damsel, who lets his heart be stirred with foolish heat at the damsel's waywardness. Shamed? Care not! Your unkind sayings fought for me: and seeing now your words are fair, methinks there rides no knight, not even Lancelot, that has the force to quell me.”

So they rode in silence until nigh upon that hour when the lone heron forgets his melancholy, and twilight falls. Then the maiden turned smilingly to her companion, and told him of a cavern near at hand where the Lady of Lyonors had promised to secrete bread, baked meats, and good red wine of the Southland. Pointing the way past a narrow comb wherein were slabs of rock with sculptured figures of knights on horseback, she observed: “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. Yon four Day fools hath sucked their allegory from these damp walls, and taken but the form. Know you not these?”

And Gareth looked and read, in letters such as the Roman standard bearers carved upon the cliffs of the streaming river Gelt, "*Phosphorus, Meridies, Hesperus, Nox, Mors,*" each beneath a figure of an armed man, the faces all turned forward.

"Follow the faces, and we shall find the cave," said Lynette. "But look, who comes behind?"

Gareth turned, and in so doing let the Morning Sun's shield be seen.

"Stay, felon knight," cried the pursuer, "I avenge thee for my friend."

With that he charged at Gareth, and before the young man had time to defend himself he lay sprawled upon the grass. It was all done so suddenly and withal so neatly that a laugh of admiration broke from the unfortunate victim.

The sound of mirth, so inopportune, jarred upon Lynette. "Shamed and overthrown and tumbled back into a kitchen-knave, why laugh you?" she demanded harshly. "Have you but blown your boast in vain?"

"Nay, noble maiden," answered Gareth penitently, "but that I, son of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent of Orkney, victor of the bridges and the ford and knight of Arthur, should thus be thrown so easily! Surely it is some device of sorcery or unhappiness! Out sword; we are thrown!"

"Prizcel!" cried the strange knight joyfully, putting out his hand to stay the other. "Gareth! It was all through the mere awkwardness of one who came to help you, not to harm! I am Lancelot. Sent to give you aid by our good King, if it so chanced that you had need of a strong arm, and as glad to find you whole as you were to join our Order true!"

"Lancelot!" cried Gareth, in amazement. "Thou! O! Lancelot, thine the hand that threw me! Praise the saints! For 'tis no shame to be thrown by thee, the great Prince of Knights!"

And Lancelot laughed and cordially shook his out-stretched hand, but Lynette cried petulantly: "Lancelot, why came you not when

called? And wherefore do you come now when you are not called? I gloried in my knave, who being still rebuked, would answer as courteous still as any knight. But now, if he's a knight, the marvel dies, and leaves me fooled and tricked and only wondering why I am played upon, and whether I and mine be scorned. For where should truth be found but in Arthur's hall and in Arthur's presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool, I hate thee and forever!"

Gareth stood dumb under the maiden's last words, and so Lancelot spoke: "Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! Knight art thou to the King's best wish. O maiden, are you wise to call him shamed, who is but overthrown? Well has he striven, and he and his good horse are tired; yet I felt his manhood through all his weary lance's charge. The stream has he freed, justice wreaked on his foes, and when reviled, was answered graciously. Then, too, he makes merry when overthrown. Hail, Knight and Prince, and of our Table Round, I salute thee!"

Then he went on to explain to Gareth how the King had bade him cover his shield and follow, how he had been delayed by being obliged to see the wounded, bellowing Sir Kay home, and how he had lost them, through their losing the trail.

The maiden listened to all this moodily, and when Lancelot, half vexed, turned to her and told all the story of Gareth, she answered yet more petulantly than before: "Worse is being fooled of others than to fool one's self!" Then she brushed her brow wearily, and in so doing must have cleared her face of frowns, for she turned smilingly to Lancelot and said in a different voice: "There is a cave somewhere near with meats and drinks, forage for the horses, and flint for fire, but all about it flies the honeysuckle. Help us to find it!"

When they had sought the cave and found the comforts hidden there, Sir Gareth sank into a heavy sleep, but yet he turned and tossed and seemed uncomfortable. So the maiden took his head into her lap, softly and carefully, so as not to waken him, and she brooded tenderly over him. As she sat thus, she mused

silently: "Sound sleep be thine! Sound cause to sleep hast thou. Wake lusty! Seem I not as tender to him as any mother? Aye, but such a one as has all day long rated her child and vexed his day, but blesses him asleep. . . . 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! full merry am I to find that my goodly knave is a noble knight! But see I have sworn to the castle guard to bring you to fight with him! Now, if you go up with us, then will the rebel knight attack you, and my knight-knave will miss the full flower of his accomplishment."

Lancelot came over to her, smiling kindly, and he noted the white hand unconsciously smoothing Gareth's hair. "We must leave it to him, for the quest is his," said he. "And, peradventure, he you name may know my shield. I'll tell you, damsel! Let Gareth, if he will, change his shield for mine, and take my horse, for he is fresh and needs not to be spurred, loving the battle as well as he who rides him."

"Spoken like Lancelot!" agreed the maiden cordially.

So they talked and planned until at last Gareth showed signs of waking, and Lynette put him quietly away and slipped blushing out, leaving to Lancelot the task of persuading Gareth. Whatever he said we know not, but we are afraid the good knight told tales out of school; for when the maiden returned there was a new light in Gareth's eyes, and a joy in his heart that showed in his voice.

He was impatient to gain victory. "Come, let us go," he cried.

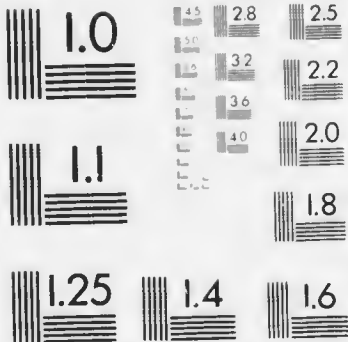
Silently the three traversed the silent field. A smile lay on Gareth's lips and his dreams were passing fair. But only two remarks did he make which would show the tenor of his thoughts to his companions:—Once, a star shot downward, and he cried: "Lo! the foe falls!" Again, an owl whooped in the forest, and he exclaimed, "Hark, the victor pealing there!"

Suddenly she who rode at his left grasped the shield which Lance-



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lot had lent him, pleading eagerly: "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 thou hast done; miracles thou canst not. Here is glory enough in having flung the three. I see thee maimed and mangled! Do not fight, I pray thee! I swear thou canst not fling the fourth!"

"But wherefore, damsel?" queried Gareth laughingly, albeit his blue eyes dwelt tenderly upon her. "Tell me all you know. You cannot frighten me. No rough face or voice, brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery will turn me from the quest."

"Nay, Prince," she answered. "I never looked upon his face, seeing he never rides abroad by day; but I have watched him pass like a phantom, chilling the night. Neither have I heard his voice. Always he made a mouthpiece of his page who came and went, and still reported him as closing in himself the strength of ten, and when very angry 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."

"Yea, my lady Lynette," laughed Gareth. "If he will joust for it and win it as the better man!"

Then Lancelot, seeing Gareth's heart was set upon finishing the quest, contented himself by offering all manner of advice on the devisings of chivalry; how best to manage horse, lance, sword and shield, and so fill up with skill the gap where force might fail.

But his words went in one ear and out the other; Gareth could not fix his attention upon the friendly counsel, and at last cried out in protest: "Alas, Sir Lancelot, here be rules, but I can master only one — to dash against mine enemy and to win. Full many a time have I watched thee victor in the joust and seen thy way, but I am not skilled like thee."

"Then Heaven help thee," sighed Lynette, greatly troubled.

A dark cloud now rose up and shrouded all the stars in gloom.

Gaily the three essayed to talk, striving thus to cheer each other, but ever the black pall seemed to sink lower and wrap them in silence. At last the maiden pressed her white palfrey close to Gareth's horse, clasped his arm, and pointing unsteadily ahead, whispered, "There!"

They had reached the goal at last. Only a short distance away stood the Castle Perilous, and right beside it was a huge, black pavilion with a trailing, black banner. Before Lancelot and Lynette had time to think, Gareth seized the long, black horn which hung conveniently near on the wall, and blew a hideous blast that went shivering through the night and echoing in all the castle walls. Lights soon twinkled here and there throughout the castle, and when Gareth, impatient, blew another blast, muffled voices could be heard and hollow tramlings up and down. Then far above them a window burst into glowing bloom and from out the radiance leaned a beautiful woman.

"Lyonors!" exclaimed Lynette eagerly. "Have courage! Here is a knight come to deliver thee!"

It is doubtful if the woman above heard the cheering message, but she undoubtedly guessed its import. Radiant smiles lighted up her face and she extended her hands in eager welcome.

"God grant you save her," cried Lynette to Gareth.

His answer was another lusty blast which raised the echoes far and near. Then the great black doors of the huge pavilion slowly folded back, and there came riding out a hideous thing with the white breast-bone, barren ribs, and grinning skull of Death. A monster thing it was, mounted on a coal black horse, with night black arms, and slowly it came out into the dim dawn, then paused and spoke no word.

"Fool," cried Gareth angrily, "men say thou hast the strength of ten. Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given thee, but must trick thyself out in ghastly imageries of that which Life hath done with, and the dull clod hides with mantling flowers for pity?"

But the thing spoke no word in reply, and all about there seemed to be gathering a swift, boundless current of horror. The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept despairingly; a handmaiden behind her swooned; Sir Gareth's skin prickled with fear; and even the bold Sir Lancelot felt all through his warm blood a chill like that of ice.

All at once the fearless steed which Gareth rode neighed fiercely, and Death's dark war-horse bounded forward. Then those that did not blink with terror, saw to their amazement that Death was cast to the ground, but slowly rose again. With two powerful blows Gareth split open the impostor's armor and then — most wonderful to relate — out sprang a beautiful, blooming boy, fresh as a new-born flower.

"O knight, slay me not!" he pleaded. "My three brothers bade me do it to make a horror all about, and stay the world from Lady Lyonors. They never dreamed the passes could be crossed."

Most graciously Gareth answered, for his heart was thrilled with wild joy: "My fair child, what madness made thee challenge the chief knight of Arthur's hall?"

"Fair Sir, they made me do it. They hate the King and Lancelot, the King's friend. They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream. They never thought harm would come near me. They did not dream the stream could be opened."

Lady Lyonors now appeared at the open house door, with hearty thanks, and a cordial welcome for her deliverer and the dear sister who had periled her life to bring him. Everything in the castle was placed at their disposal, and all the household waxed merry with dance, revel, and song over their deliverance from the grim enemy, Death.

And in the heart of Gareth joy was crowned, for he had won the quest and proven to his beloved King how well he could strike for Christ and the right. Those who told the story in the old times say that Gareth wedded Lady Lyonors, but those who told it later say it was Lynette. And to our minds the latter tale seems truer.

CHAPTER VII

THE STORY OF GERAINT AND ENID

ON a certain Whitsuntide King Arthur held a great Feast of the Pentecost at Caerleon upon Usk. In the midst of the rejoicings a forester of Dean, wet from the woods, came with the tidings that he had seen a beautiful milky-white hart in the forest near the banks of the Severn. Now King Arthur dearly loved the chase, so he immediately ordered the horns to be blown announcing a big hunt on the morrow.

The Queen was also much interested in the chase, so she eagerly petitioned and obtained leave to see the hunt. Unfortunately she slept late the next morning, and when she awoke all the eager hunters had gone. But the Queen was not to be disappointed, and set out as soon as she could make ready, with only a single maiden for a companion, intending, since she was so late, to view the scene from a certain high knoll in the woodland. As they waited, all ears listening for the hounds, there was heard a sound of galloping hoofs, and presently Prince Geraint, a knight of Arthur from the neighborhood of Devon, appeared.

"Ah, Prince," cried Queen Guinevere graciously, "thou art late, late! Later than we, if indeed," glancing doubtfully at his silken holiday attire, "thou hast intended to take part in the hunt at all?"

"Yes, noble Queen," replied the Prince, with low-bowed courtesy, "so late am I that I have left arms and hunting garb at home, and come like you only to see the hunt and not to share it."

"Then wait with me," invited the Queen pleasantly, "for on this knoll, if anywhere, we shall see the hounds. Often they break covert here at our feet."

While they stood breathlessly listening for the on-coming bay-

ing of Cavall, the King's noblest hound, there rode past them an armed knight, with a lady and a dwarf. And the Queen, desiring to know the stranger knight's name, sent her maiden to inquire of the dwarf what it might be. But the dwarf answered sharply that he would not tell, neither would he allow her to ask his master, saying that she was not worthy even to speak of him, and he lashed at her with his whip. So the maiden returned indignantly to the Queen, and Geraint loyally made after the dwarf and questioned him, but with no better success — indeed, the impudent fellow struck the knight across the face with his whip so severely that the blood started. Quickly the Prince gripped his gold-mounted sword, minded to destroy him, but not liking to pass arms with such a worm, he restrained himself and turned loyally to his Queen, saying: —

“Most noble Queen, mightily will I avenge this insult which has been put upon you through your maiden! I shall follow yon churlish dwarf and compel his master to come to you humbly and crave pardon. Though I ride only with my faithful sword, no doubt I can find armor along the way somewhere, for loan or for pledge, and, in three days, if I be not slain, I will come again. Farewell!”

“Farewell!” returned the Queen. “Be prosperous in this journey, fair Prince, 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 — yea, though she be the daughter of a king or a beggar from the hedge — and I will clothe her for her bridals like the sun.”

Half vexed at losing sight of the hunt, but more out of humor at the cause, Prince Geraint followed the three over field and dale, till they came at last to a little town hidden in the valley, on one side whereof was a newly-built fortress, and on the other an ancient castle, half in ruin. The three rode up to the fortress, entered therein, and were lost behind its walls; but Geraint felt that he had tracked them to their lair, and so rode on wearily into town, seeking shelter for the night. But it seemed too busy a place for

strangers, and every one he spoke to was so full of bustle that he scarce took time to look at him and muttered something about "The Sparrow-hawk."

Grown thoroughly incensed at last, the Prince paused before an armorer's shop, where a man sat bowed above his work, riveting a helmet on his knee. Without turning around, he answered the Prince's question thus: "Friend, he that labors for the Sparrow-hawk has little time for idle questioners."

This was the last straw, and all the Prince's anger was inflamed: "A thousand pips eat up your Sparrow-hawk!" he cried. "Tits, wrens, and all winged nothings pack him dead! Ye think the rustic cackle of your burg 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 shelter for the night? And arms, *arms*, *arms* to fight my enemy? Speak!"

On the instant the armorer had turned amazed, and seeing one clad so gaily in purple silks, started up, helmet in hand, bowing low, and waiting for a chance to speak, which he did eagerly, as soon as the Prince paused. "Pardon me, O stranger knight!" said he. "We hold a tourney here to-morrow morning, and there is scarcely time for all the work in hand. Arms? Truth, I know not; all are wanted here. Shelter? The town is full, but perhaps Earl Yniol, at the castle yonder beyond the bridge, would take you in."

So Geraint turned shortly, a little spleenful still, and rode onward to the castle where a courteous, hoary-headed Earl, in a suit of frayed magnificence, listened kindly to his queries, and replied cordially: "Enter then, and partake of the slender entertainment of a house once rich, now poor, but ever open-doored."

"Thanks, venerable friend," said Geraint laughingly. "So you do not serve me sparrow-hawk for supper, I will enter and eat with all the passion of a twelve hour fast."

The old Earl sighed, then smiled, and answered, "Graver cause

than yours is mine to curse this hedgerow thief, this Sparrow-hawk !
But enter in; for, save you yourself desire it, we will not touch
upon him even in jest."

So Geraint rode into the courtyard, and looking about him saw
that all was in ruins. The prickly thistle sprouted in the broken
stones; here was a shattered archway plumed with fern; there was
fallen a great part of a tower, and like a crag tumbled from a cliff
was gay with wild flowers, while high above a piece of turret stair,
worn by feet now silent, lay bare in the sun; and all about rose
craggy gray walls half covered with luxuriant, ambitious ivy that
sought in vain to spread an air of life and prosperity over all. And,
as Geraint stood waiting, he heard the voice of a maiden singing
in her bower; and so sweet was the voice that his heart was moved
within him, and he said to himself: "Here, by the Grace of God,
is the one voice for me!"

The song was that of Fortune and her wheel, and the maiden
sang it with spirit, as though bidding defiance to the ups and downs
of destiny: —

"Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel and lower the proud;
Turn thy wild wheel thro' 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."

The song ceased, and the singer, a beautiful maiden, fair as
a vermeil-white blossom, and clad in faded silk, came down. The

Earl presented her as his daughter, the Lady Enid, and again Geraint thought: "Here is the one maiden in the world for me."

"Enid," spoke the old Earl, "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."

The maiden came forward willingly, but Geraint could not bear to have one so daintily beautiful wait upon him as a servant might, and eagerly expressed his willingness to care for his own horse. Yniol, however, caught his purple scarf and held him back, saying: "Forbear! Rest! The good house, though ruined, my son, endures not that her guest should serve himself."

And so Geraint was obliged by courtesy to yield to the Earl, but his eyes followed the maiden and he marked her proud, quick-stepped entrance into the town and her coming forth, and always he admired her yet the more. Now the hall where they sat was perforce kitchen and dining-room: as well, so he wonderingly watched the maiden as she moved quickly about preparing and serving the meal with wondrous grace and sweet simplicity. As she stood behind the board and waited upon her father, mother, and himself, he felt within him a great longing to kiss the dainty hands that served him. And afterward as she busied herself now here, now there, about the hall at her lowly handmaid work, his eyes followed her, and he would fain have offered help, yet dared not.

At last he forced himself to turn aside and address the Earl. "Fair host and Earl, I pray your courtesy. This Sparrow-hawk, what is he? Tell me of him. But stay, tell me not his name! For if he be that knight whom I saw ride into the new fortress beyond your town this evening, I have sworn to force it from him! I am Geraint of Devon, a knight of Arthur, and this morning I heard the strange knight's dwarf offer insult to the Queen, through her maid in waiting, by refusing to tell the name of his lord at the Queen's request. You see I had ridden out but to see the hunt and could not fight him then, as I had left my armor at home.

Therefore, I followed him, hoping to find arms wherewith to break his pride and humble him before the Queen."

"Ah!" cried the old Earl, with kindling eyes, "art thou indeed Geraint, he whose name is far-sounded among men for his noble deeds? Well might I have known when first I beheld your stately presence that you were one who was wont to sit at meat in Arthur's hall at Camelot! My house is honored, and happy am I to have you beneath my crumbling roof to-night! Full often have we heard praises of your feats of arms, and this dear child will bear me witness that many a time have we discussed your noble deeds." The Earl paused to draw the fair Enid, who had just come to his side, affectionately down upon the wide arm of his chair, and then continued, while Geraint envied him his privileges: "As to this Sparrow-hawk whereof you speak, he is my nephew and sometime suitor for this fair hand," lifting Enid's hand caressingly to his lips. "But I knew his fierce, turbulent spirit, and refused him, and since — my curses be upon him! — he has contrived by foul means to lay low the house of Yniol. With false tales he raised my own town against me in the night, sacked my house, ousted me from my earldom, and built that fortress beyond the bridge to overawe my friends, for truly there are those who love me yet. He keeps me isolated in this ruined castle, and why he does not kill me I know not, unless it be that he despises me too much; and I — I sometimes despise myself, for I have submitted all too gently and failed to use my power, but in my old age I am some way very wise or very foolish, for I can not bear to fight, and so I submit patiently to my wrongs."

"Let me fight for you, friend!" cried Geraint, filled with sudden pity for the trembling old man. "My limbs are young and strong, and I am sworn to right wrong wherever found! Tell me where I may get arms, and at to-morrow's tourney I will lay the Sparrow-hawk low in the dust. Right humbly shall he apologize to our most gracious Queen, and every farthing of thine inheritance shall he restore to thee, else will I have his heart's blood!"

"Spoken like a true knight of Arthur!" exclaimed the Earl. "Aye, son, and I could furnish you with arms. Old and rusted, 'tis true, but still fit to serve you in good stead; but if I did so, you could not fight the Sparrow-hawk at the tourney; for his rules are that no man shall tilt except the lady he loves best be there. The thing is managed in this wise: two forks are fixed into the meadow ground, and over these is placed a silver wand, tipped with a golden sparrow-hawk. This is the prize of beauty, and 'tis given to the winning knight for the pleasure of his lady love. The Sparrow-hawk hath always won it for the lady with him, and so hath justly earned his name. Perforce thou seest why thou canst not tilt with him at the tourneys, but possibly thou wilt take the day following?"

"No," cried Geraint quickly, leaning eagerly toward the old man. "Thy favoring kindness, Earl Yniol! Let *me* lay lance for thy dear child, thine own fair Enid! Truly I have seen all the beauties of our time, but never yet hath mine eyes dwelt on one so sweetly fair and pure as she! If she be not unwilling, give her to me for my beloved wife, as a reward for overcoming the Sparrow-hawk — I care not for the golden bauble — and I swear to you to love and reverence her forevermore!"

"Ah!" replied the old man, looking at him with kindly, favoring eyes, "'tis an alliance most to be desired, but I know not what the maid will say!" (Enid had left the room when first they began to discuss the tourney). "I must prove her heart, for never would I rise by the sacrifice of my child. Mother," turning to the old dame who now came into the room, "this knight, Prince Geraint of Devon, wishes to tilt with the Sparrow-hawk and force him to give us restitution, desiring the hand of Enid as a reward. A maiden is a tender thing, best understood by her who bore her. Go thou and inquire of Enid concerning this."

And so the old dame hurried to Enid's room, where she found her half disrobed for the night. Kissing her upon both cheeks, she laid her hands upon her fair, shining shoulders and held her away

that she might look into her face, while she told her of Prince Geraint's desire. Red and white was Enid's fair face, and filled with amazement, as she listened to the tidings, so sudden, so unexpected that they took her breath away, and she could speak no word, nor could she rest that night. In the morning she roused her mother and together they went down into the tourney field, where they waited for her father and Geraint. And the young knight, as he came to her side, felt that beating in his heart, 'neath her father's old rusty armor, which proclaimed that, were Enid the prize of bodily force, he could win against any odds.

Soon the knights and the ladies came, and the town and country people, and they filled all the space about the lists. Then the Sparrow-hawk blew loud upon his trumpet, and bowing low before the lady at his side, said gallantly: "Advance, and take the golden prize as fairest of the fair; for I these two years past have won it for thee, most worthy lady of the prize of beauty."

"Stay!" called Prince Geraint in a loud voice. "There is one more worthy here!"

"How now!" cried the Sparrow-hawk in surprise and wrath, and turning beheld the old Earl, his uncle, and his wife and Enid, with the handsome, challenging knight beside her. "Do battle for it then!" he stammered, choked with passion at the sight, and rushed toward Geraint.

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee, my knight," murmured Enid so kindly and sweetly as Geraint bent over her hand in brief farewell, that, unmindful of the vast throng, he stooped and kissed her tenderly upon the forehead ere he rushed headlong to meet the on-coming Sparrow-hawk.

Then the strife began, and never was so great a fight seen thereabouts before. Thrice they charged, and each time broke their lances. Quickly they dismounted and made at one another with their swords. So furious were their strokes that at each one the bystanders thought to see the battle ended. Twice they rested, and then came on again, and many a wound did either give and re-

ceive, but neither had the mastery, till at last Earl Yniol cried lustily: "Remember the great insult done to the Queen." Then Geraint gathered all his force into one last blow, and so mighty was the stroke that it smote through the helmet and bit the bone and felled the Sparrow-hawk to the ground.

"Tell me thy name!" commanded the Prince sternly, setting his foot upon the fallen man's breast.

"Edyrn, son of Nudd!" moaned the Sparrow-hawk. "Woe is me! Ashamed am I to tell it to 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, with thy lady and thy dwarf in company, thou shalt ride to Arthur's court and crave lowly pardon of the Queen for the insult offered in the grove by the Severn; next thou shalt restore to the uttermost farthing all that thou hast taken of the Earl, thine uncle. These two things shalt thou do, or thou shalt die."

"Stay thy hand, Prince," answered Edyrn sadly. "These things will I do willingly. For now that thou hast broken my pride, and the fair Enid has seen my fall and rejoices, I repent. It is meet that I do works worthy of repentance."

The young knight rose humbly and journeyed to Queen Guinevere where he begged pardon on his bended knees for his traitorous life. So kindly did the beautiful Queen receive him, and so earnestly did she beseech him to turn to the right, that he swore to fight for the King and the Christ throughout all his life, and ever after kept the vow unsullied.

But Geraint returned with Yniol to the castle, and that night pleaded with Enid that she go with him to wed at the Court of Arthur on the morrow that being the day he had promised the Queen he would return. Enid blushing consented, though she would fain have postponed the date that she might replenish her faded wardrobe and so do honor to her lord, yet she dared not mention it for fear of grieving him.

"He seems so bent on going," she mused, as she sought the privacy of her chamber, "that it were little grace for me to ask a second favor of him, so much are we now beholden! But sweet Heaven! How much I shall discredit him, so noble are his acts and so splendid his attire! Did he but see fit to tarry yet a day or two, I would work eye dim and finger lame to prepare fitting raiment. O, woe is me! to appear before the great Queen in faded apparel, unfit even for a kitchen-maid!"

And so thinking, the maiden fell longing for a certain beautiful dress, all branched and flowered with gold, that her mother had given her on her birthday eve, the night Sir Edyrn sacked their house and scattered all to the four winds. "Oh," she mourned, "did I but know where it had been hid, then I might appear before the Queen in fitting raiment!"

While she sat fearing more and more the thought of going so ill-clad before the Queen and all the splendor of the Court, her mother came to her bringing a package which she said had just been brought by a villager and contained a sweet surprise. And lo! when Enid had unbound it, there rolled out the very gown for which she had been wishing.

"Aye," cried the mother, glad in her daughter's tearful joy, "don it in the morning, child. Now the beautiful Queen can not say 'the Prince hath plucked a ragged robin from the hedge!' For though I heard him call you fairest of the fair, think not, girl, that you will not be the fairer to him in new dress than in old."

But in the morning when Geraint rose early and made himself ready for the journey, calling eagerly for his bride-to-be, and Yniel told him she would be down ere long, that her mother was proudly decking her in apparel fit even for the Court of Arthur, Geraint became perplexed and troubled, and at last begged the Earl eagerly, saying: "Sir, entreat her by my love, albeit I give no reason but my wish, that she ride with me in her faded silk."

Imagine the consternation this message created in the chamber where the old dame stood admiring her beautiful daughter and

likening her unto a fair bride who was created out of flowers! But Enid, all abashed, although she knew not why, tremblingly obeyed the request and laid aside the rich robe, not daring to look at her silent mother, and so came down in silence in her faded, clinging silk.

And Geraint, when he marked her sweet submission, loved her yet the more, but, seeing her mother's brow still clouded with disappointment, made haste to her, saying: "Good mother, take it not ill that I have asked this thing. Two reasons there are — one, that our Queen Guinevere, when I left three days since, promised me that if I would bring my bride to her, whensoever I found her, she would clothe her like the sun. And I am minded to accept this sweet service, for the two bound together so graciously may learn to love each other — and where could Enid find a nobler friend? Next, I desired to make proof of her love, for if she could at a word from me put aside a thing so dear to all women, then might I be sure that her heart was wholly mine. A prophet certain of my prophecy, now am I assured that never shadow of distrust shall come between us! Some day will I make amends for my hard petition."

Then the two journeyed away to Caerleon, and from the topmost tower, where she sat on the watch, Queen Guinevere saw them coming up the vale of Usk and hastened down and out to greet them. Right royally did she welcome them and shortly had Enid arrayed in magnificent bridal splendor. Then the two were wedded by the priestly Dubric, and all that week high festival was held at Court. And for many moons Geraint and Enid dwelt at Caerleon-on-Usk, and the Queen and Enid became great friends, and Geraint rejoiced greatly at their friendship, for it pleased his pride to see his wife the favorite of the noblest lady in the land.

Now Geraint loved his wife better than life itself, and it was his pleasure to array her in splendid gowns and dazzling jewels and to delight in her exceeding great beauty. And Enid, though not caring greatly for such things, was yet glad to make herself pleas-

ing in her husband's eyes, for he was all the world to her. Daily she appeared before Geraint in some new splendor, and often the lily-white hands of Queen Guinevere helped in the adorning, nor ever did she give an envious thought to the fact that her favorite lady-in-waiting's beauty might outshine her own. But the Queen and Lady Enid could never be rivals, for they were the exact opposite in their beauty: fair as an Easter lily was Guinevere, and her golden hair, woven into rich, shining coils, made for her a crown lovelier than any turned by the hands of man; while Enid's tropical beauty glowed like the red, southern rose; and dark as midnight were the tresses that framed her brow in wavy tendrils.

Finally a little cloud arose that threatened for a time to dim the brightness of Geraint's new joy. There floated slowly through the Court an evil rumor concerning the Queen, saying that the King no longer had her heart, and, indeed, that he had never possessed it, but that it was given to Lancelot; and that Lancelot, the King's most trusted knight and closest friend, returned her love, and was thereby false to the King and to his solemn vows of knighthood. Of course Arthur knew nothing of this; neither was any one else certain, but there was much talk. And the matter troubled Geraint greatly. His dear wife, Enid, was so closely bound to the Queen by friendship that he feared she might in some degree be touched by the breath of scandal, and the thought was torture to him. At last he went to the King and begged permission to withdraw from the Court for a time to his own principedom in Devon, saying that robbers and marauders were molesting his estate and that his presence was needed to quell them. King Arthur, all unsuspecting of the true reason, although wondering greatly, consented and Geraint and Enid rode away, with fifty knights to accompany them. "And now," thought Geraint contentedly, "if ever wife were true to her lord, mine shall be to me; for in this quiet home of ours, far away from the poisonous influences of the Court, nothing can come between us."

For a time all went well, but Geraint's mind had dwelt so

long on his foolish fears that he could not think clearly, and the one thought — how to keep his wife's love — dwelt with him to the exclusion of all others. He became so absorbed in pleasing her that he scarce left her for a moment, and took no heed whatever of ruling his province, of hunting or of joining in the tourney, and no delight in the society of his peers, thereby bringing shame and ridicule upon himself and upon Enid, who was blamed for his careless sloth. And the matter grieved Enid sorely, for her lord's name was very dear to her; and she longed to tell him what people were saying, and to ask if it were her fault that he no longer cared for knightly deeds, but shame and the fear of grieving him tied her tongue.

Finally, there came a morning when Enid awoke before her husband, and, leaving her place at his side, drew up a chair and sat beside him marveling at his strength and beauty, for his arms and chest were bare in the bright warm sunshine which beat in upon him. "O noble breast and mighty arms," she murmured, "am I the cause that all your glory and your fame is gone, and that men reproach you, saying your manliness is no more? 'Tis true, Geraint, I am, because I dare not tell what people say. And yet, rather than have things as they are, how gladly would I gird thy harness on thee and ride by thy side to battle, and even see thee wounded — aye, wounded perhaps to death! Now, here have I the courage for this great sacrifice, and yet am not brave enough to speak the truth as a true wife should! Ah me! I fear I am no true wife."

As she spoke, her tears fell fast upon his face and breast, and he awoke, hearing by great misfortune only her last words — that she feared she was not a true wife. "Just Heaven!" he thought, "in spite of all my care, and for all my pains, she is not faithful to me, and I see her weeping for some gay knight in Arthur's hall!"

The thought goaded him so fiercely that, without a single inquiring word, which might have set all clear between them, he sprang quickly to the floor and called gruffly to his squire: "Make

ready my horse and arms and thy lady's palfrey; I will ride into the wilderness." Then, turning to Enid, he said in a voice he never had used to her before: "It seems that my spurs are yet to win! I have not fallen so low as some would wish. Do thou put on thy worst and meanest dress and ride with me."

Enid was frightened and amazed, not knowing why he was angry, and faltered tearfully. "If I have done wrong, let me at least know my fault."

"Question me not," replied Geraint harshly, "but do my bidding."

So Enid turned away sorrowfully, and as she did so she bethought her of the old and faded silk in which Geraint had first seen and loved her. Eagerly she brought out the cherished robe and donned it hopefully, saying to herself: "Surely when my lord sees this dress, his heart will soften, and he will tell me what grieves him and take me into his love again."

But, poor girl, Geraint had no eyes for gowns that morning. Perhaps he dared not look at her for fear the tempest in his heart would burst in thunder round her head. "Ride thou a good way on before," he commanded briefly, with his eyes fixed upon his saddle girths. "And I charge thee, on thy duty as a wife, whatever happens, do not speak to me — no, not a word!"

And Enid more frightened than before, silently obeyed, but scarcely three paces had they passed when Geraint cried out spleenfully. "Effeminate as I am, I will not fight my way with gilded arms; all shall be iron," and straightway foolishly threw his heavy purse toward his squire.

So the last view Enid had of her home was the marble threshold all shining with gold and scattered coin; and the insulted squire chaffing his shoulder where the purse had struck.

"To the wilds!" cried Geraint, pointing the way to the marsh lands, where bandits and savage beasts were most apt to abound. And they fared forth, each busy with his own thoughts, and it was hard to say which carried the heavier heart. A stranger meeting

them would have said at once, from their pale faces and disturbed mien, that each had suffered some exceeding wrong. Ever Enid cast about in her heart to divine her fault, and anon murmured prayers for the safety of her lord. And Geraint cursed his stupidity for wasting so much time in attending his wife, dressing her beautifully and striving to keep her true, groaning over the thoughts that would arise!

Toward noon Enid became aware of three armed knights lying in wait for them in the shadow of a rock, and she heard them say, "Look! Here comes a laggard knight who seems no bolder than a beaten hound. See how his head hangs down! Let us set upon him and slay him and his horse and armor and damsel shall be ours."

Then Enid pondered in her heart, saying: "I will go back and warn my lord of these caitiffs, lest they slay him, for he sees them not. If he is angry with me and kills me, far better had I die by his dear hand than that he should suffer shame."

Geraint received her in foolish wrath: "Did I wish your warning or your silence? Have you forgotten my command? Well, then, look — for whether you wish me victory or defeat; long for my life, or hunger for my death — you shall see my vigor is not lost."

Tears filled Enid's eyes, for she was all unused to unkind words; and she covered her face despairingly, fearing that her husband would be overthrown. But anger made Geraint all-powerful. With a savage cry as though glad to have something on which to vent his spleen, he rushed upon the bandits, and with one powerful stroke drove his spear through the first of them a cubit's length. The other two now charged upon him, but their lances splintered upon his heavy armor like straws, and in two strokes he slew them both. Then he took off their armor and bound it upon their horses, and bade Enid drive the animals on before her. She obeyed without a word, and as Geraint followed her, somewhat nearer than before, his heart smote him for his cruelty, and would fain have had

him take pity upon her and help her in her hard unlearned task. But he stolidly refused and nursed his wrath in silence.

Scarcely had they gone a mile when Enid became aware of three other mounted bandits at the edge of a wood, and one of them seemed heavier than Geraint, and filled her heart with fear by his boastings: "See, here cometh a prize — three horses armor-laden and driven by a single fair damsel. A good knight following? Aye, but a cowardly dog, else would he not put so much upon a maiden! Come, let us fall upon him and take his damsel and his goods."

"Alas," murmured Enid to herself, "I must disobey my husband again! He is not on his guard, and full weary with his former fight. Yea, though it displeases him, I must speak, for his life is dearer to me than my own."

So she waited for him to come up and faced him timidly, saying: "Have I leave to speak?" Then told him all.

Geraint listened impatiently as before, then turned upon her roughly: "If there were a 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 who do not obey me! Stand aside, and if I fall, cleave to the better man."

And Enid turned away to wait the event, not daring to watch, and scarcely feeling within herself strength to breathe in prayer. Then he she dreaded most, bore fiercely down upon her lord. But his lance missed, and Geraint's own spear drove straight through his shield and corselet, and there broke short, felling the huge robber from off his horse. His companions came on slowly, their leader's death filling all their veins with fear. Geraint, seeing this, bellowed forth a fearful battle cry, and the knaves turned and fled. But he would not suffer them to escape, and so set upon and slew them. Then, binding their armor to the horses, as before, saving the lance which pleased him most, he bade Enid to add them to her charge.

Once more the odd procession started, and Geraint followed

nearer than before, half-fascinated, despite his anger, by the skill with which his wife managed her wayward horses, six of them with their jingling arms. Indeed, after a time, he fancied that the bandit horses pricked their light ears and strove to do their best to help the good friend who directed them with firm voice and kind government, and his heart again reproached him. So that when they came to the end of the wood and found some mowers at work in the field, and a lad bearing victuals to them, he took compassion on her paleness, and stopped the boy, saying: "My son, let the damsel eat, she is so faint."

"Yea, willingly," replied the lad, "and do thou, my lord, eat also, for though the food is coarse 'twill give thee strength."

So Geraint and Enid dismounted, sitting down in the fragrant hay, while their horses grazed at will near by, and they partook of the humble fare, or rather Geraint did, for Enid was too sore at heart to eat and she only pretended to do so, fearing to rouse her lord's ire by refusal. At last Geraint, reaching into the basket for more, found to his dismay that he had eaten all. "Boy," he cried, "my appetite hath outrun my manners! I have emptied the basket. But I will reward thee fairly, for never before did food taste so good. Choose thou a horse and arms from the captive six, and take the best."

"My lord," exclaimed the boy, reddening with delight, "you overpay me fifty-fold!"

"You will be all the wealthier then," answered Prince Geraint merrily.

"I take it as a free gift, then, not as a reward; for while your damsel rests I can easily go to the Court and get more food, and, while there, I will tell the Earl about you. He loves to know when men of rank are in his territory, and will fetch you to his palace and serve you with food more fit than mower's fare."

"No, indeed," said Geraint quickly. "I ask for no better food than that which I have just eaten. And into the Earl's palace I will not go! I know, God knows, too much now of palaces! Get

thee to the inn and secure us harborage for the night. Then, if thy Earl desires to speak with me, let him seek me there."

So the lad went away happily, leading his chosen horse, with his head held high as though he fancied himself a knight, and Geraint and Enid stayed in the field; nor spoke to one another, he drowsing in the heat and albeit half-musing of his prophecy on their marriage morn that naught could ever come between them, and she thinking of their strange adventure and longing wistfully for her lord to take her into his arms again.

Finally the messenger returned, and they moved to the house he told them of, and remained till evening time, apart by all the chamber's width and silent as two moody, drooping mutes. Then came a loud discordant voice without, and their door drove suddenly backward against the wall and the Earl and a party of rioting friends bolted into their presence. Startled and withal ashamed, Enid was dismayed to recognize in the wild lord of the place the Earl Limours, a former much-scorned suitor, but she gave no sign. So Geraint welcomed him cordially, and called for wine and goodly cheer to feast the sudden guests.

When the drinking and feasting was at its height, Earl Limours, made bold by the wine which coursed madly through his veins, turned to Geraint and asked permission to cross the room and speak with his good damsel, who seemed so pale and lonely. "Aye, take my free leave," replied the Prince shortly. "Get her to speak; she doth not speak to me."

And Limours, looking at his feet, arose and crossed to Enid's side, where he bowed low and whispered admiringly, "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, and in my power? But stay, girl, fear me not; for in my heart, despite my wildness, is a touch of sweet civility. Methought that in the old days you would have favored me, but for your father. Was it so? Tell me now; make me a little happier. Do you not owe me something for

a life half lost? Yea, the whole dear debt of all you are! And, Enid, I see with joy that you and he sit apart and do not speak; you come with no page or maid to serve you — doth he love you as of old? Nay, call it not a lover's quarrel! I know men may bicker with things they love, but they do not make them laughable in the eyes of all. Your wretched dress is an insult to your person, and 'tis plain your beauty is no beauty to him now. Think not you will win him back. I know men, and a man's love once gone never returns. But here is one who loves you as of old, the one true lover whom you ever owned; speak but a word, and he shall cross our path no more! See, he sits surrounded by my followers! If I but hold up my finger they will understand. Zounds! Enid, do not look so frightened! I mean not blood; my malice is no deeper than a moat, or stronger than a wall!"

He paused for very breath, and Enid shrank timidly from the impassioned gaze of his wine-heated eyes. She longed to fly to Geraint for shelter, yet dared not in his present mood, and so was forced to trust to her woman's wit to protect her. "Earl," she murmured softly, "if, indeed, you love me as in former years, and seek not to betray me, come in the morning and snatch him from me by violence. Leave me here to-night, I pray thee, for I am weary to the death."

Low bowed the Earl till his brandished plume brushed his instep, then turned swiftly and bade the Prince good night and departed homeward, bragging to his men that the fair Enid never loved man but him, nor cared a broken egg-shell for her lord! And Enid, left alone with Prince Geraint, sat pondering how she could best break her lord's command of silence and tell him all that troubled her. As she wrestled with her thoughts, the calmness of the room bore in upon her, and turning she saw that Geraint had fallen back in deep sleep upon the couch where he sat. Swiftly she flew to his side, and, settling him in a comfortable position, hung over him in a rush of tenderness, noting his firm, deep breathing, and thanking God that he had passed

through the day's perils in safety. Finally, overcome with fatigue, she leaned against him and slept a troubled sleep till the cock, crowing at dawn, awakened her. Rising up, she endeavored to collect and arrange her husband's armor, and, while bungling at her unusual task, let it fall jangling to the floor. Immediately Geraint rose up and stared at her, and Enid broke the silence he had commanded and told him all Earl Limours had said, saving the passage touching her husband's love, and ended by craving his pardon for her own crafty reply.

Though his mind still dwelt upon her words of the previous morning, Geraint could find no fault with her now in word or deed, so he bade her order their horses brought. Quickly Enid roused the sleeping host, and then, all unasked, aided her lord to don his armor. Sallying forth Geraint bade the amazed landlord keep five horses and their armor for his pay, then, as he assisted his wife to mount, charged her, saying: "Enid, I especially ask to-day that, whatsoever you may hear or see, you warn me not. See that you obey."

"Yea, my lord," answered Enid sadly, "'tis ever my wish to obey you, but your command is a hard one, when I must ride in advance and hear the evil threats, and note the danger which you seem not to see."

"Be not too wise," answered Geraint unkindly, "seeing that you are wedded to a man who hath arms to guard his head and yours, eyes to find you out however far, and ears to hear you even in his dreams."

Forward toward the waste earldom of Doorm they traveled, and Enid's heart trembled within her; for the Earl of Doorm, whom his trembling vassals called "the bull," was known far and wide for his strength and fierceness. In a short time her straining ears heard the tramp of horses' hoofs away in their rear, and, turning, she beheld a cloud of dust. Now Geraint rode in sullen silence as though he heard them not, so she rode toward him and, lifting her hand, pointed to the oncoming cloud. Pleased with

what he termed her obedience to his command, Geraint turned and waited the onslaught.

In a moment, Limours, borne on a black horse, "like a thunder-cloud whose skirts are loosened by the breaking storm," dashed up and closed with him. But Geraint smote him heavily to the earth, and overthrew the next who followed, and charged single-handed the small brigade of knights behind. At his first cry of battle the rogues fled panic-stricken, this way and that, like a shoal of darting fish that scatters in a moment at the warning shadow of a man's hand on the stream.

"What think you of your lover now?" cried the Prince, with ill-advised humor. "Has your palfrey heart enough to bear his armor? Shall we strip him of it, and buy therewith a dinner for ourselves? Say, which shall it be, fast or dine?"

But Enid, half-angered by his coarseness, spoke never a word in reply, and led the way onward, her tear-blind eyes fixed steadily upon her bridle-reins. And so they journeyed, Geraint suffering in silence from a wound received in his late combat, and grimly determined to speak not a word of it to his wife, till his eye darkened and his helmet trembled, and, at a sudden turn in the road, he went down in a heap upon a bank of grass. In a moment, however, his wronged wife was beside him, and had swiftly unfastened his armor till she found the wound and bound it up in her faded veil. Then, fearing that perhaps he was hurt to the death, the horror of it all charged her overwrought nerves, and she sank down beside the way weeping heart-brokenly.

Many passed but none heeded them; for it was no uncommon sight in those days to see a woman weeping by the side of her fallen knight. A fugitive fleeing from the wrath of Doorm tore past, and frightened her palfrey so that he ran away into the bushes and was lost, but the noble war-horse stood by like a staunch friend, and tried to stay her grief by rubbing a sympathizing nose against her shoulder and face. At last, when her grief had worn itself low from very violence, she became aware of a body of knights

approaching. At their head rode one whom she readily divined as the great Earl Doorm himself.

Stirred by the beautiful, sorrowing face, he paused. "What! is he dead?" he called.

"No, no, not dead!" she answered, in all haste. "Would some of your kind people take him up and bear him away out of this scorching sun? Most sure am I that he is not dead."

"Well, dead or not," said the Earl heartlessly, "you mar a comely face with idiotic tears! They can avail him nothing! But, since the damsel's face is beautiful, boys, we will grant the favor. Take him up you, Jeems and Gurth, and bear him to the hall. If he lives, we will have him in our band; if he dies, we have got earth enough to cover him. And don't forget the charger, men, he is a noble one."

The great Earl passed on, and two brawny spearmen advanced to do his bidding, growling like dogs because they were thus forced to lose the bones that might by chance fall to them in the day's hunt. Roughly they tossed Geraint upon a rude litter-bier, all in the hollow of his shield, and bore him to the dark, silent hall of Doorm, where they cast him hastily down upon an oaken settle, and rushed away to join their mates in the chase. There through the long hours of the afternoon Enid sat by her husband, chafing his hands, bathing his brow, and calling upon him in endearing terms to awaken and speak to her.

At last her voice pierced through the lethargy which bound him, and he became aware of the warm tears falling on his face. "Ah, ha," thought he delightedly, "she weeps for me." And he resolved to lie still and test her to the uttermost, so he gave no sign.

As the night shades were falling, the Earl of Doorm and his spearmen came back with their plunder. Soon the great hall rang with life and light and the tumult of many voices. A score or more of handsome, well-dressed women, joined the knights, and, following them, came servants bearing food and wine. Whole

hogs and quarter beeves, large flagons of rich wines, and all manner of choice eatables made the table groan, and the bandits fell to with an eagerness not unlike that of swine. Their greediness made Enid faint and sick, and she crouched farther back into her dark corner, trembling with fear and horror.

At last the Earl of Doorm could eat no more, and, raising his eyes from his plate, he gazed indolently about the hall until his sharp eyes fell on the shrinking form of Enid. In a moment he remembered the scene of the afternoon and strode toward her. "Eat!" he commanded. "I never yet beheld a thing so pale. God's curse, it makes me mad to see you weep! Good luck had your good man, for were I dead, who in all the world would weep for me? Sweet lady, never since I first drew breath have I beheld a lady like yourself. If you had some color in your cheeks, there is not one among my gentlewomen fit to wear your slipper for a glove. Listen to me, girl, you shall share my earldom with me, and we will live like two birds in one nest. I will fetch you wonderful forage from the fields; for I compel all creatures to my will."

Great consternation followed the Earl's words. His knights stared at him with bulging cheeks, forgetting in their amazement to swallow their food. The women made grimaces at each other, and one and all hated the fair stranger who stood in their midst with sorrowing down-bent head.

"I pray you, sir," answered Enid, speaking so low and with such difficulty that the Earl heard not what she said, "my lord being as he is, kindly let me be."

"Aye," replied the Earl, in gracious, self-satisfied vanity, well-pleased at himself for having made the offer, and never thinking any woman would reject it, "eat and be glad, for you are mine."

"How can I be glad," queried Enid sadly, taking no notice of the last part of his speech, "unless my lord arise and speak to me?"

Vexed at what he termed her foolishness, the Earl caught her

by the arm and drew her by main force to the table, where he placed food before her and sternly commanded her to eat.

"No, no," cried Enid pleadingly, "I will not eat till yonder man upon the bier arises and eats with me!"

"Drink, then," answered the Earl shortly. "Here," pouring her a glass of wine, "drink this, and the wine will change your will."

"No, indeed," sobbed Enid, "I will not drink unless my dear lord bids me do it. If he rises no more, then shall I drink no wine while I live."

For a moment the Earl paced the floor angrily, gnawing his lips in perplexity, then paused before Enid. "Girl," he said warningly, "yonder man is dead. Be careful how you scorn my courtesies! A fool you are to weep for one who dressed you in rags! Doff your ragged, faded dress, and let my gentlewomen clothe you in a robe befitting your beauty."

"No," persisted Enid, "I pray you let me be. In this poor gown my dear lord first found and loved me; in this poor gown I first rode with him to Court where the beautiful Queen arrayed me for my bridal like the sun; in this poor gown he bade me clothe myself yesterday when we fared forth in search of adventure, and I will not cast it away unless he himself arises and bids me do it. I can never love any one but him; I pray you be gentle and let me be."

"Truly," cried the Earl, beside himself with rage, and seeing how his women smiled behind their hands, "it is of no use to be gentle with you! Take that for my salute!" giving her a stinging slap on the cheek with his palm.

And Enid, in her utter fear and helplessness, thinking he would not have dared do such a thing had he not felt certain Geraint was dead, gave forth a sudden sharp, bitter cry, like a wild thing in a trap.

Then a strange, terrifying thing happened. With a sudden bound the apparently lifeless knight dashed into the center of the

room, sword in hand, and with one mighty sweep severed the head from the great Earl's body, and let it roll like a russet-bearded ball upon the floor. All the knights and women ran shrieking from the room, thinking a specter had arisen in their midst, and Geraint and Enid were left alone.

"Oh, Enid, my wife," cried Geraint, catching his wife's hands in a close, warm clasp, "forgive me! I have done you more wrong than yonder villain! Forgive me, I pray you, for though my own ears heard you say yesterday morning, when you thought me sleeping, that you feared you were no true wife, I needs must believe you against yourself. I know not what you meant, neither shall I ask; but of this I am certain no man ever yet had a truer or lovelier wife! Henceforward I will die rather than doubt."

And Enid was silent for very happiness, but her starry eyes flashed back a world of answering love and she yielded herself to his embrace. Presently a sudden terror shot through her heart. "O Geraint, fly! Fly before it is too late! They will pluck up courage soon to return, and then they will surely slay you. Fly, my husband, our charger is just without the door, forgotten in the edge of the laurels; I saw him but a moment since — my palfrey is lost."

"Then shall you ride with me, dear Enid. Come!" answered Geraint, leading her forth.

Scarcely had they reached the open hall door when the noble war-horse came toward them with a low whinny. Enid threw her arms about his neck and kissed his white-starred forehead in glad welcome. Then Geraint quickly mounted and held out his hand to his wife; grasping it, she set her foot upon his and so climbed up, and Geraint leaned over and warmly kissed her. So they rode swiftly away, and the heart of Enid rejoiced.

Just without the gateway of the castle, a full-armed knight rode toward them with all speed and made as though to set upon Geraint. And Enid, fearing for her lord's hurt and loss of blood, cried loudly: "I pray thee, knight, slay not a dead man!"

"The voice of Enid!" joyfully exclaimed the strange knight. And lo! it was Edyrn, the son of Nudd, Enid's cousin whom Geraint had overthrown at the joust of the Sparrow-hawk. But Enid perceived not his gladness, and was more fearful than before, for she knew not what his spirit might be toward them.

"O cousin," she cried pleadingly, "slay him not who gave thee life!"

"My lord Geraint," said Edyrn, holding out a welcoming hand, "I greet you with all love. I took you for a bandit knight of Doorm. Fear not, Enid, that I should fall upon him who has done so much for me; for once when I was up so high in pride that I was halfway down the slope to Hell, by overthrowing me he threw me higher. Now, by his grace, I am a knight of Arthur's Round Table, and I am come, a mouth-piece of our good King, to bid the Earl of Doorm disband himself, and scatter all his powers, and come to the judgment of the King."

"Alas, thou art too late!" exclaimed Geraint. "He now hears the judgment of the great King of kings, and his powers are scattered. See! and he pointed to the frightened men and women staring from knolls here and there, and to others still fleeing in the distance. Then he told what had befallen, and how the Earl lay dead in his silent hall.

But when Edyrn prayed him to come to the camp hard by and acquaint the King of the matter, he was unwilling and ashamed, knowing all his own folly.

"Well," said Edyrn, at last, when he found no argument would move him, "if you will not come to Arthur, he will come to you."

"Enough!" cried Geraint resignedly. "Lead on, I follow."

And Enid, as they journeyed, was consumed by two fears: one from the bandits scattered along the way, and the other from Edyrn, from whom she shrank with nervous timidity each time he drew near. At last, perceiving this, he said reassuringly: "Fair and dear cousin, you no longer have need to fear me: I am changed. Since my overthrow at my last foolish Sparrow-

hawk joust, when your good husband taught me a much-needed lesson, I have sought to do better. Of course, it did not all come at once; but when I went up to the Court of Arthur, all ashamed and expecting to be treated like a wolf, I met with such courtesy, such fine reserve, and noble reticence, that I longed to be like those about me. My past life looked black indeed, and I sought the wise counsel of the holy Dubric. Often I saw you, Enid, with our beautiful Queen, but I kept myself aloof lest my presence should vex you."

His words made Enid's heart glad indeed, and, while she murmured her pleasure, they came to King Arthur's camp and the King himself advanced to greet them. For a moment he spoke apart with Edyrn, then gravely smiling, advanced and, lifting Enid from behind Geraint, set her upon her feet and kissed her brother-like, then pointed out a tent where she might rest, and watching until she entered therein, turned eagerly to Geraint:

"Ah, Prince, I welcome you back heartily. When first you prayed leave to go to your own land and defend your marshes, I was pricked with some reproof; for I felt that I had let foul wrong stagnate and delegated too much to other eyes and hands. Therefore, I am now come here with Edyrn and others to cleanse this common sewer of my realm. I thank you for the justice meted out to the wicked Earl; Edyrn has briefly told me all. And have you looked at Edyrn, and marked how nobly he is changed? Great is the thing which he hath done; for he hath changed his old life of violence to one of sanest, noblest, most valorous obedience. Verily, he that conquereth his own spirit is better than he that taketh a city. To my mind the thing which he hath done is greater and more wonderful than if he had gone out single-handed and overcome a band of powerful robbers. But come, Prince, you are wounded. Get you to shelter, and I will summon mine own physician to wait upon you."

Meekly Geraint bowed low and departed, his heart filled with remorse over his own late shortcomings. And for many days he

lay weakly upon his low cot, while his wound slowly healed. Enid lingered ever beside him, nursing and ministering unto all his wants with tender cheerfulness; and each day their love for each other grew deeper.

Now, while Geraint lay in enforced idleness, the King and his knights went up and down throughout the Doorm realm and set all in order. The slothful officers and the guilty ones, who for bribe winked at wrong, were ousted out of office, and strong, wise men set therein. For many days a thousand men moved here and there in all the waste lands, clearing out the dark places, and letting in the light and the law. Then, when Geraint was whole again, they moved slowly back to Caerleon-on-Usk.

Most joyfully did Queen Guinevere welcome her friend Enid, and clothed her once more in beautiful apparel. And Geraint, though not as proud of his friendship as he once had been, rested well content, knowing that he held all of his beautiful wife's love, nor feared he the influence of another. And so for a time they abode in the Court of Arthur; then traveled away to their home on the Severn in Devon. Here Geraint administered the King's justice so wisely and well, that all men loved him and rejoiced in his good government and his might in tournament and battle. Everywhere he was spoken of as the "Great Prince" and "Man of Men," and his wife Enid was loved and revered no less than himself, and people called her "Enid the Good." Noble children came to bless their home, and nevermore did trouble darken their doors, until Geraint's honorable life was ended in the great battle for the King against the heathen of the North Sea.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LILY MAID OF ASTOLAT

ONCE, when Arthur was but a boy, he roamed one day through the trackless realms of Lyonesse, and stumbled all unawares upon a valley which the people all about shunned. This vale was haunted by two brothers, one a king, who had fought and killed each other there, and their bones lay bleaching in the sun. And Arthur, laboring up the pass in the misty moonshine, stepped suddenly upon the skeleton that wore the crown, and the skull broke from the neck, and the crown, thus set in motion, turned on its rims and rolled down the crags like a glittering rivulet. Arthur scrambled after, and secured it at the risk of his life. Beautiful, indeed, was the prize, of richly wrought gold, all engraved in fanciful design, and decorated with nine diamonds, one in front and four on each side. "Ah!" cried Arthur, in boyish admiration and elation, setting the crown on his head, "would that I were a king!"

Years passed on and Arthur's wish came true; then he brought forth the crown and, plucking out the jewels, showed them to his knights, saying: "These jewels which I chanced upon divinely are not mine. They belong to the kingdom, and I shall devote them to 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 from out all our land."

And it came to pass as the King desired. Eight years rolled away, and eight jousts had been, and each time Lancelot had easily won the diamond, intending when he had secured all to give them to the Queen in token of his love and loyalty. The time for the

ninth and last tournament was at hand, and the prize was to be the central diamond, the largest and most beautiful of them all. But it so chanced that Queen Guinevere was just recovering from an illness, and could not be present.

"Alas," mourned the King regretfully, "I wish the time were not now; for you will miss the great deeds of Lancelot and his powers in the lists,— a sight you love to look on."

The Queen answered never a word, but lifted her eyes languidly to Lancelot, where he stood beside the King, and Lancelot, whose love for her was ever in conflict with his loyalty and love for the King, thought within himself: "Alas, she needs me here. Is not my love greater than jewels?" So, though it grieved him sorely to give up hope of winning the last diamond, he turned to the King and observed sadly: "Ah, King, I am afraid the jewel is lost to me; for my old wound that Sir Mador gave me troubles me of late, and I am scarce fit for the saddle."

For a moment a troubled doubt crossed the good King's heart, and he glanced sharply first at his wife, then at his trusted knight, Lancelot, but he turned away without a word. Scarcely had he closed the door, when the Queen burst out peevishly: "To blame, my lord Lancelot, much to blame! Why do you not go to the jousts? Half of the knights now are our enemies, and they will accuse us of shamefully staying at home and betraying the good King's trust."

And Lancelot, vexed that he had lied to the King all to no purpose, replied hastily: "My Queen, you are overlate in your wisdom; you were not so wise when first you loved me. As for the gossips, let them say what they will; but, indeed, my loyal worship is allowed by all, and no offense is thought. But is there more? Hath the King spoken, or does my loving service weary you?"

"The faultless King, my lord Arthur!" laughed Guinevere scornfully, "he cares not for me. He is so wrapped up in his foolish fancy of the Round Table, and swearing men to impos-

sible vows, that he never thinks of me. Reproached me? Indeed, no. He has never had a glimpse of mine untruth; but to-day I thought there gleamed a vague suspicion in his eyes. The pink of perfection is he,— but who can gaze on the sun in heaven? My friend, to me he is all fault who hath no fault at all! I am yours, not Arthur's, as you know, save by the bond, and therefore must you hear my words: go you to the jousts."

"But," queried Lancelot, "how can I show myself at the tournament after my lying pretext of a wound? The King himself is utter truth, and honors his own word as if it were his God's."

"Yea," sneered the Queen, "a moral child without the craft to rule, else had he not lost me. But listen, if I must find you wit: disguise yourself and go unknown pretending that, as men have said knights fall before the glamor of your name rather than the prowess of your sword, you sought in this way to test your might. This will please the King, for no keener hunter after glory lives than himself. Go, and win!"

So Lancelot perforce yielded to the Queen's wishes, and in a sorry temper got himself to horse, and set out by unfrequented ways for the tourney field. As he journeyed among the solitary downs, full often lost in fancy, it chanced that he missed his way, and towards evening drew near to the castle of Astolat, which shown from afar in the western sun. Riding up to the marble gateway, he blew a shrill blast upon the horn which hung without, and immediately an old gray-headed man, dumb as an oyster, appeared and motioned him to enter. Right willingly Lancelot obeyed, marveling much at the speechless man, who showed him to a little chamber in the turret and helped him to disarm. And straightway Lancelot came forth, and met the lord of the castle and his two stalwart sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine, while close behind came Elaine, the daughter, who for her fairness was called by the people "The Lily Maid of Astolat." There was no mother of the house to greet him, for God had called her.

"Whence comest thou, my guest?" cried the Lord of Astolat,

extending his hand in hearty greeting. "And what may be thy name? I guess from thy stately presence that thou belongest to the great Court of Arthur and the knights of the Round Table."

"Aye," answered Lancelot, "thou hast guessed truly. But ask not my name now, for I desire to ride unknown to the jousts, and may not give my reasons. Also I would ask another favor of thee: unwittingly I brought my shield with me, and I dare not carry it to the tourney, for it is widely known; I pray thee, then, lend me another shield, that my disguise may be complete, and keep this one till I come again."

"Gladly will I do so," answered the host. "You can have my son Torre's. He was lately wounded and can not ride to the tilt."

"Yea," said Sir Torre bluntly, "since I cannot use it, you may have it."

"Fie, Sir Churl," laughed the father, "is that an answer for a noble knight? Forgive him, my guest. But here is Lavaine," turning playfully to his younger son, "he is going to the Diamond Jousts, and forsooth he is so strong and brave that he will certainly do nothing less than win, in an hour's time, and has promised to bring back the diamond and set it in his sister's golden hair."

"Nay, good father," cried Lavaine, crimsoning with embarrassment, "shame me not before this knight. Thou knowest it was all a jest! Torre was vexed because he could not go, and my sister here told us how she dreamed that some one brought her the diamond, but that she let it slip through her hand and lost it in the stream. And so, Sir Knight, I said *if* I won the prize, then she must keep it better. So you see it was nothing but a joke! But, dear father, if he will have my company, I should like very much to ride to the jousts with this good knight. Win, of course, I shall not, but yet I will do my best."

"Indeed," said Lancelot heartily, "I should be glad to have your company and guidance over these moors whereon I all but lost myself. Also should I like to see you win the diamond and

bring it home to your fair sister. It is a wondrous jewel I hear."

"Aye," muttered Sir Torre bitterly, "a fair, large diamond, more fit for queen than for lily-maid."

"Nay, not so," answered Lancelot gallantly. "If the proverb, 'what is fair be but for the fair,' is true, as I think it is, then this fair maiden might wear as fair a jewel as there is on earth."

And Elaine, won by his mellow voice, thought to herself, "Surely this is the most noble knight in Arthur's Hall," and there stole into her heart a love for him which later worked her doom. Yet there was little about this knightly courtier to win a maiden's fancy, saving his kingly bearing, gracious courtesy, and pleasing converse. Twice her age was he, and his noble face was bronzed and worn with care, and scarred with the conflict between his love for Guinevere and his loyalty to Arthur, his friend and King. But still he was good to look upon, the darling of the Court, and past-master of the art of conversation, and he charmed them all, as they sat about the dinner board that evening, with his talk of Court and camp and adventures here and there. However, when Guinevere's name was mentioned, he deftly switched the tide of talk, and inquired concerning the dumb man who had admitted him.

"The heathen reft him of his tongue ten years ago," answered the host, "when he learned of their fierce design against my house, and warned me of it. With my sons and little daughter I fled to the woods and had refuge in a boatman's hut by the river for many days, till our good King drove the pagan out from Badon hill."

"O, Sir Knight," cried Lavaine eagerly, interrupting his father's tale of woe, "tell us of Arthur's famous wars, for we live apart and know so little."

Willingly Sir Lancelot complied, for he loved to tell of Arthur's prowess in battle, and his hearers sat spell-bound before his tales of knightly daring. In glowing words he told of the four loud battles by the shore of Duglas; of the terrible war that thundered in and out of the gloomy skirts of the Celidon forest; of the

struggle by Castle Gurnion, where the glorious King wore on his cuirass the famous Russian Emerald (first given by Pilate to Tiberius Cæsar), having the head of Christ engraved upon it, and how the sun splintered in silver rays, lightening as he breathed, until the Saxons were sore afraid; of the conquest at Caerleon, where the strong neighings of the wild, white horse set every gilded parapet shuddering; and of the last great battle on the mount of Badon where the King charged at the head of his Round Table and broke the heathen. "Oh," he cried in conclusion, "the King is mighty on the battle-field! There lives no greater leader! At home he seemeth mild and careth not at all for our jousts, laughing when one of his knights overthrows him easily according him the better man, but, when he faces the heathen in battle array, the fire of God descends upon him. He is transfigured and his face is wonderful to behold. There is no man like our glorious King!"

"Saving your own great self!" thought Elaine worshipfully, following the light and shade of his talk with ever deepening interest and noting the play of expression on his speaking countenance. And, perceiving an under current of sadness through all, she tried by various little attentions to bring him cheer, and succeeded each time in calling up such a "sudden-beaming tenderness of manners and nature" that, all unused to men and courtier ways, she thought the brightness beamed for her alone. All night long the dark, splendid face lived before her, speaking in silence of noble things, and it held her from sleep. At dawn she arose and went down into the courtyard, cheating herself with the belief that she went but to bid Godspeed to her young brother, Lavaine.

Now it so chanced that as she stole down the long tower stairs, Lavaine passed within to get Torre's shield for Lancelot, and so the lily-maid found the knight standing alone by his proud horse, smoothing its glossy shoulder, and humming to himself. Half-envious of the noble horse, Elaine drew nearer and stood gazing

with all her soul. And Lancelot, turning around, stood more amazed than if seven men had suddenly set upon him, for in the dewy light the maiden seemed more beautiful than the angels; yet a sort of fear stirred him as he saw that she gazed upon his face as though it were a god's. He greeted her silently, and suddenly there flashed over her a wild desire that he should wear her favor at the tilt. For it was the custom in those days for knights to wear in their helms at tournaments some glove or scarf of the lady whom they favored most. Timidly, and with madly beating heart, she made the request.

And Lancelot scarce knew how to answer her. Before his guilty soul floated the vision of Queen Guinevere's matchless beauty, and the thing Elaine asked seemed impossible. "Nay, fair lady," he said slowly, turning away to avoid her disappointment. "It has never been my custom to wear a lady's favor at the lists, therefore I cannot do it now."

"But," answered Elaine eagerly, seeking an excuse for him with ready woman's tact, "if you now wear my favor it will then aid the more in keeping your disguise."

"True, my child," agreed Lancelot, seeing much wisdom in her counsel. "Well, I will wear it. Fetch it out to me."

Delighted to obey, Elaine skipped happily to her boudoir, returning straightway with a red velvet sleeve, beautifully embroidered with shining pearls, and bound it upon his helmet. And Lancelot submitted smilingly, saying: "Never yet have I done so much for any maiden living."

The words filled Elaine's heart with delight and dyed her beautiful face a rich carmine, but the color fled quickly, leaving her paler than before, as Lavaine appeared with his brother's shield, and made ready to depart.

"Do me the grace, my child, to keep my shield till I return," said Lancelot, handing to Elaine his famous shield, whereon gleamed the azure lions in shining, jeweled splendor, and substituting Torre's plain, and as yet unblazoned one.

"The grace is mine, Sir Knight," replied Elaine, accepting the charge gladly.

Then Lavaine kissed the roses back into his sister's cheeks, "lest people think her really a lily-maid." The King's knight kissed his hand to her in true courtier fashion, and the two rode away, Elaine watching them from the castle gateway as far as she might see.

And so it came to pass that —

Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine the lily-maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east,
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot.

Elaine passed her days in sweet dreaming and vain imaginings. She placed the shield where the sun's first rays might strike the jeweled lions, and awaken her with their gleams from her dreams of their great owner. Then, as the days passed, she began to fear the shield might rust, and she furnished for it a beautiful case, all embroidered with silk after the fashion of the shield itself, and added from her needle-woman's skill a border of branch and flower, and a yellow-throated nestling a nest. And, as she worked, she mused over each cut and dint in the scarred shield and fancied what had taken place in field and tournament.

Meantime the two knights fared forward toward the lists, and, as they neared their destination, the elder said to the younger: "Would you know my name? Hear it then, but tell it not. 'Tis Lancelot of the Lake."

"Is it, truly?" gasped the lad, filled with hero-worshipping reverence. "The great Lancelot! At last, I have my wish! Our country's greatest knight! Now, if I might see the great Arthur Pendragon, Britain's King of kings, then might I die happy!"

They were already nearing the meadow where the jousts were to be held, so Lancelot made no reply further than to wave his

hand toward the lists, and watch the joy and admiration dawn on the young knight's face. It was indeed a gorgeous sight. The great half-round gallery of seats, filled with richly dressed spectators, "lay like a rainbow fallen upon the grass." And the lists were rapidly filling with knights, magnificent in their battle array. Lavaine's eyes wandered eagerly over the throng, until they rested upon the high throne, where the great King sat, robed in red samite. All about the royal seat shone and writhed carved, golden dragons, the royal crest of the great house of Pendragon. A golden dragon clung to the King's crown and writhed down his long, rich robe. Two others formed the arms of the chair of state. And just above the King's head, in the ornaments of the canopy, was a golden flower, in the center of which shone the great diamond prize of the day.

Lancelot, observing how the lad's eyes were riveted on the King, spoke solemnly, "Just now you called me great, perhaps because I have some skill in war and tourney, but, no doubt, many a youth now in the ascendant will attain to all I have and surpass me. Greatness is not in me, unless it be in the knowledge that I have it not. Yonder is the great man — our peerless, white King!"

Lavaine stared at him in wonder, not half-comprehending what was meant, but just then the bugles blew and both sides began to make ready for the jousts. The Knights of the Round Table formed the challenging party, and those who came to tilt against them were kings, princes, barons, and knights from far and near. And Lavaine was for taking sides at once and preparing for the fray, but Lancelot signaled to him and drew away out of the line of combat, and the boy followed his leader, for to his hero-worshipping heart Lancelot's slightest will was law.

The knights quickly formed into two long lines at opposite ends of the field. "With helmets crested with their ladies' favors or with nodding plumes, and long lances bedecked with pennons that danced to the tilt of the breeze, the great company of knights

awaited the signal for the onset. And no less impatient than their riders, the splendid war-horses quivered for the fray. Then suddenly the heralds blew a mighty blast on their trumpets; the knights struck spur; and riders and steeds, alike wild with the joy of the conflict, were hurled together in the center of the lists. The hard earth trembled with the shock, and the clear air of morning reverberated with the thunder of arms."

Lancelot withheld his hand for a time, until he could see which was the weaker side, then he hurled himself into the midst of the press against the stronger, which was his own order of the Round Table. In a moment it became evident that the knight with the red sleeve favor was a great acquisition to the losing side. Spurred on by cheers and shouts, he was soon at the head of the line — duke, earl, baron, and knight gave way before him, and it began to look as though the Knights of the Round Table would be overcome. Great excitement prevailed on every hand; the spectators rose in their seats in astonished admiration; the knights in the lists marveled much and questioned one another: "Who is this strange knight of the red sleeve that tilts with a daring almost equal to that of the great Lancelot himself?" And even King Arthur was fired at last by the wonderful deeds of the stranger, and cheered him lustily.

Presently there arose in the hearts of the Round Table knights a strong feeling of jealousy that there should live a knight who could outdo the chivalrous deeds of their own beloved chief. And the cousins of Lancelot — strong, mighty men of great prowess in battle — counseled together, and finally bore down upon the stranger in a body, determined to overthrow him, and thus keep their kinsman peerless still. Like a great wave of the North Sea they came on, seeking by weight of men and horses to overwhelm Lancelot and the brave knight fighting valiantly at his right hand, who was none other than the youth, Lavaine. One, with lance aimed low, lamed Lancelot's noble horse; and another struck

sharply with his spear and pierced through shield and mail, leaving the lance head buried in Sir Lancelot's side.

Then Lavaine, seeing the great danger of his beloved hero, did a most noble deed. With a well-aimed blow he overthrew a mighty warrior, took his horse, and brought it to where Sir Lancelot lay. And Lancelot, sweating with agony from the great wound in his side, got to the horse with Lavaine's aid, minded to endure as long as he might. With a great shout the knights of his party rallied round him; and stirred to fresh zeal by his courage, they smote with might and main. Ever Lancelot led them on until he had driven his kinsmen and all the knights of the Round Table back to the very extremity of the lists. Then came a wild blast of the trumpets, and the Heralds proclaimed that the victory belonged to the knight of the red sleeve, and bade him advance and get the diamond.

But Lancelot sat as if suddenly bereft of motion, and his party, seeing this, set up a deafening cheer and cried with one voice: "Advance, man, and get the prize! 'Tis well won."

"The prize!" gasped Lancelot, suddenly swaying in the saddle. "No diamond prize for me! My prize is death! For God's love give me air!"

Struck dumb with consternation were all the knights about him, and Lancelot took swift advantage of their plight and stole away from the field. And no one marked where he went, save the faithful Lavaine, who spurred his horse forward and kept him silent company till they came to a hermit's cave in a poplar grove some miles away. Then Lancelot could keep his saddle no longer, and slid to the earth, crying to Lavaine, "Draw out the lance head!"

Lavaine obeyed, though with sore misgiving, fearing the lord might die in the drawing of it; and Lancelot gave a great shriek and a ghastly groan and fainted dead away. The hermit heard the cry of suffering and came hurrying forth, and it chanced that he was once a knight and knew Lancelot well; so he caught

him up and bore him in, and tended him with great skill. But for many weary weeks Lancelot lay hidden from the world by the tall poplars and the ever-tremulous aspen trees, and Lavaine and the good hermit waited upon him faithfully, being in daily doubt as to whether he would live or die.

Now on that day when Lancelot and his young friend led the lists, there was great wonder and pity among the people assembled. And the knights whom he had led so victoriously went to the great King, saying: "Sire, our knight, through whom we won the day, hath gone away sorely wounded, and hath left his prize untaken, crying that his prize is death."

"Heaven hinder that so great a knight as we have seen to-day should pass uncared for," said the King. "He is a mighty warrior. Indeed, he seemed to me another Lancelot! Yea, twenty times I thought he was Lancelot, and I am yet in doubt."

And the King pondered for a moment, becoming more and more convinced that the disguised knight *was* Lancelot, in spite of every proof to the contrary. So he called Gawain, his nephew, son of Lot and Bellicent and brother to Gareth, and bade him take the diamond and ride forth at once, day and night, until he found the knight who had so dearly won it, and give it to him, charging Gawain also to return speedily to the Court bringing news as to the stranger's identity and how he fared.

Now Gawain was mighty and grave, and known among his comrades as "Gawain, the Courteous," because of his courtly manners; but he did not reverence his word as the King would have all men do, and often carried a treacherous heart. He accepted the quest with a smiling face but fared forth in wrath; for the feasting and merry-making were yet to come, and he loved the banquet and the company of the ladies better than he loved the service of the King. However, seeing that the knight was so sorely wounded, he hoped to find him in the nearby community, and so rode at a gallop, searching all the countryside, and stopping everywhere save at the neatly hidden hermit's cave. At length,

as he traveled in an ever widening circle, he came to the gates of Astolat, and Elaine hailed him joyfully:

"Ho, Sir Knight! What news from Camelot? What of the knight of the red sleeve?"

"He won," answered Gawain, half forgetting his courtly manners in his wonderment at the maiden's radiant beauty, "but he parted from the jousts hurt in the side."

Whereat Elaine caught her breath, and smote her hand on her own side as though she felt the lance wound therein, and well-nigh fainted. Then came the Lord of Astolat, and to him Gawain told his quest, and how he had searched the countryside at random, and was wearied of it all.

"Aye!" cried the hospitable lord warmly. "Ride no more at random, noble Prince! Abide with us; here was the knight, and here he left a shield, which he will surely send or come for. Furthermore, our son is with him, and we shall surely have news soon."

And Gawain, carelessly forgetful of the King's command, and more than willing to tarry for a time in a home containing so perfect a maiden, consented with an exaggeration even of his usual courtesy, saying to himself: "Well, if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!" So for many days he tarried, and set himself to play upon her with free flashes of courtly wit, songs, sighs, slow smiles, and golden eloquence. But the fair, lily-maid, Elaine, had no heart for his mock courtship, and soon grew very weary of him.

"O Prince!" she cried. "Loyal nephew of our noble King, why ask you not to see the shield which the knight left, and in this wise learn his name? Why do you slight your King and lose the quest he sent you on? Why be no surer than our falcon, who, yesterday when we slipped him at the horn, lost it and went to all the winds?"

"By my head," answered Gawain, "I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven, O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes! But, if you will, let me see the shield."

And when he saw the azure lions, crowned with gold, he smote his thigh, and cried mockingly: "Right was the King! Our Lancelot! that true man!"

"And right was I," answered the lily-maid merrily, not noticing his insincerity, "I, who dreamed my knight the greatest knight of all."

"And is Lancelot *your* knight?" queried Sir Gawain, still in a mocking tone. "Have I, then, wasted my time? Do you love him, fair maiden?"

"I know not," answered Elaine simply. "Perhaps I know not what love is, for my brothers are the only young men I have known; but if I love not him, there is no other man that I can ever love."

"Yea, by God's death," said Gawain, "I see you love him well, but doubt such if you would love him still if you knew what others know, or her whom they say he loves. But stay! One golden minute's grace! He wore your favor at the tourney. Can he have changed his worship? It well may be. 'Tis like our *true* man to change like a leaf at last! 'Tis no concern of mine. Far be it from me to cross our mighty Lancelot in his love! And so, fair lily-maid, if, as I doubt not, you know his hiding-place, suffer me to leave the diamond with you. Here! If you love, it will be sweet to give it; and, if he love, it will be sweet to have it from your 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 holds true, we two may meet at Court hereafter."

And so Gawain called for his horse and departed at full speed, caroling lightly as he went, well-pleased to be rid of the unwelcome quest.

In the meantime, King Arthur had cut short the festivities at the jousts and returned home, filled with misgivings over the fate of his friend, if it were Lancelot, and minded to find out for a

certainty. Almost the first question he asked of the Queen was, "Where is Lancelot?"

"Was he not with you?" cried the Queen in amazement. "Did he not win the prize?"

"Nay," answered Arthur, "but one like him,—a great and mighty knight, even greater than Lancelot."

"Ah, but that was he!" exclaimed the Queen eagerly. "No sooner had you parted from us, my King, than Lancelot told me of a common talk that men went down before his spear at a touch knowing he was Lancelot; he said that his great name conquered, and therefore would he hide his name from all men, even the King, and to this end he made the pretext of a hindering wound, that he might joust unknown of all, and learn if his old prowess were in aught decayed, saying also, 'Our true, Arthur, when he learns, will well allow my pretext, as a gain of purer glory.'"

"Aye!" replied the King sorrowfully, "but 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 are fantastical, so fine a fear in our Lancelot must needs have moved me to laughter; but now little cause remains for laughter.— Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him — for his own kin knew him not and set upon him, and he left the field, no one knows whither, most sorely wounded. Only one item of it all cheers me, and that is the hope that Lancelot no longer bears a lonely heart; for, against his usual custom — and a thing that deceived us all — he wore upon his helm a beautiful scarlet sleeve, richly brodered with pearls. The gift of some gentle maiden, I doubt not; and God grant he be with her now!"

"Yea, Lord," murmured Queen Guinevere, "thy hopes are mine," and could say no more, but turned sharply about and fled to her chamber, lest the King detect the sobs that threatened to choke her. Here she wrestled with her grief, well-nigh distraught

over the thought that Lancelot had ceased to love her and turned to another. At length pride came to her aid, and she rose and moved about the palace, pale and cold.

Days passed and still no message came from Lancelot, and the good King grew very uneasy and was exceeding wroth with the knight whom he had sent in search of him. Then came Gawain, light-hearted and courteous still, with a tale all fixed to suit the occasion.

"Sir and my liege, the knight *was* Lancelot! This much I learned certainly, but I failed to find him, though I rode the whole country over. But I lighted on the maid whose sleeve he wore. She is the beautiful daughter of the Lord of Asto'at, and known in all the country thereabouts as 'Elaine, the fair, Elaine, the good, Elaine, the lily-maid of Astolat.' Lovelier than the daintiest, purest lily in all the world is this lily-maid, and her love is given to Lancelot. And I, thinking our courtesy the truest law, gave the diamond into her keeping, charging her to deliver it at once to Lancelot; for by my head, she knows where our knight is in hiding."

But the clever speech failed to pacify Arthur, and he turned frowningly upon the over-confident Gawain: "Too courteous you are, truly! You shall go no more on quest of mine, seeing that you forget obedience is the courtesy due to kings."

So saying, the King turned shortly on his heel and left Gawain staring after him in silent anger. Then a vindictive light flashed into his cold gray eyes, and he glanced triumphantly to where the Queen leaned against a pillar, stricken to the heart with the news he had given; then tossed back his hair defiantly, and strode into the palace, there to buzz about stories of the lily-maid of Astolat and her love.

Soon all through the palace flashed the whisper: "Lancelot loves the lily-maid of Astolat, and the lily-maid loves him." And many there were who marveled over it, and took great delight in probing the Queen, who hid her suffering as best she might.

Like fire in dry stubble the story flared, and each day some fresh item was added by the gossips; till the knights at the banquet forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen, according to custom, but pledged instead Lancelot and the lily-maid of Astolat, and smiled at each other as they did so; while the Queen listened to it all perforce, and smiled with cold, set lips, albeit she ground her feet deep into the velvet beneath the banquet board, while the meats became as wormwood to her, and she hated all who pledged.

Meantime, far away, the maid of Astolat, her guiltless rival, kept the memory of Lancelot green within her heart, and watched for him longingly day by day, but he did not come. Finally, heart-sick with waiting, she crept to her father's side and begged him to allow her to go in search of Lavaine. But her father guessed her secret; so she confessed at once that it was to find Lancelot, and give into his hand the diamond, that she wished to go. "For," said she, "in my dreams I have seen him lying pale and gaunt with wasting sickness, all for the lack of the care that I might give him."

Fain would the old man have detained her at home, saying that they would surely have news soon; but she had ever been a petted, wilful child, and now he could not say her nay. So, perforce, he gave his consent, and she set out at once under the escort of her good brother, Sir Torre. They traveled for many weary miles over the downs toward Camelot, and at last came unexpectedly upon Lavaine, practising at arms upon his horse.

"Lavaine!" cried Elaine breathlessly. "Lavaine, how fares my lord, Sir Lancelot?"

"Torre and Elaine!" ejaculated the youth, in open-mouthed amazement. "Why are ye here? Sir Lancelot! How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot?"

Elaine began eagerly to tell him of Gawain and his quest; but, before she was half through, Sir Torre, being vexed with her for coming forth, interrupted with a brief farewell, saying that Elaine could stay with Lavaine if she were so minded, but as for him-

self he would get within the gates of their kinsman, who dwelt beyond the city, for rest and shelter. And so the lily-maid went alone with Lavaine across the poplar grove to the cave of the hermit, and the first thing which she beheld was the remnant of her scarlet sleeve still bound upon the helmet, and it made her heart rejoice. Half timidly she advanced into the inner room, and there saw the great Lancelot, gaunt and pain-wasted, scarcely more than the bare skeleton of his mighty self, lying upon a low couch of wolf skins, and a faint cry of pity escaped her.

Gently she slipped to her knees beside him, and, when he turned his fever-kindled eyes upon her, she held up the gem, saying falteringly: "Your prize, the diamond sent you by the King."

Then, in a broken voice, she told him of all the events which had followed his disappearance from the lists, and ended by giving the diamond into his hand. Her beautiful, pitying face was very close to him, and Lancelot turned and kissed her lightly, as one would kiss a child who had performed some sweet service, then he passed into dreamless sleep.

Through many a weary day and many a wearier night, the lily-maid watched over King Arthur's mightiest knight, tending him with never failing love and care, though his fevering wound often made him cross and impatient; until one day the wise hermit, skilled in herbs and potions and the woes of man, told her joyfully that her tender care had saved his life. And during all this time Lancelot watched Elaine and called her sister, and saw with sorrow the secret love that burned within her heart. Often he reproached himself bitterly that he could repay her love and kindness only with a brother's love, and felt that had he met her earlier in life, before that other fatal bond had made him prisoner, perchance she might have made another world for him. But now it could not be; it was too late to change,—the shackles of his old love straitened him, his honor rooted in dishonor stood, and his unfaithful love for Guinevere needs must keep him falsely true to her. Elaine, made wise by love, felt that he could not love her

in return, and, over and over to herself, like a little helpless, innocent bird, she moaned plaintively, "If he will not love me, then I must die."

As soon as Lancelot was able to sit in the saddle, Elaine and Lavaine guided him tenderly to Astolat, and there he lingered in the comfort of the princely castle until his wound was made whole, and his strength regained. And each morning Elaine appeared before him in her loveliest robes, hoping thus to awaken his love, and saying to herself: "If I be loved, these are my festal robes. If not, these are the victim's flowers before he falls."

At last the time came when Lancelot felt it were unwise to tarry longer, and prepared to go back to the King's service. But before going he was anxious to give Elaine some present, or grant her some boon, in token of his grateful appreciation of her care for him. To this end, he besought her to tell him what she most wished for, but Elaine put him off, not liking to tell him of the one deep wish, and that only, that filled her heart. Finally, he came to her one day, as she roamed idly in the rose garden, and begged her to ask a boon, saying: "Speak your wish, sweet Elaine, for I go away to-day."

Then all Elaine's fears rose up in her throat, the garden swam before her, and she faltered out: "Going? And shall I never see you more? Must I die for want of one bold word? Nay, I shall say it: I love you. I have gone mad, methinks."

"Ah, sister," answered Sir Lancelot sorrowfully, "what is this?"

"Your love," she said, innocently extending her white arms; "your love — to be your wife."

"But, think you not, sweet Elaine, that had I chosen to wed, I would have been wedded earlier? Now there never will be wife of mine."

"Oh," wailed Elaine, deaf to all thought but that the parting had come, and that she who had loved him back from death to life could never win from him a dearer name than sister, "not to

be with you, not to see your face — alas, for me then, my good days are done!

“Dear maiden,” said Lancelot earnestly, seeking to lessen her heartache, “this is only a first fancy, a flash of youth such as is common to all, and not true love. You will smile at it yourself hereafter, when you are mated with one of your own years, not twice your age. And then will I, for you are true and sweet beyond mine old belief in womanhood, endow you, like a brother, with broad land and territory, even to the half of my realm beyond the sea, and in all your quarrels I will be your knight. But more than this I cannot.”

While he spoke, the lily-maid, deathly pale, leaned for support against the garden seat, then replied: “Of all this will I have nothing,” and so fell swooning, and the servants who came running at Lancelot’s loud call carried her away to her chamber in the tower.

Now it so happened that the Lord of Astolat, dreaming in the shrubbery near at hand, heard their talk, and could not find it in his heart to blame Lancelot. But he said to Lancelot sorrowfully: “A first flash of youth, alas! yea, a flash that I fear will strike my fair blossom dead. Too courteous are you, Lord Lancelot. If so be you could use some roughness, ere you go, to blunt or break her passion, all might yet be well.”

“That is a hard thing for me to do, my lord,” replied Lancelot, “seeing that I owe my life to her, and that I love her as I might were she my own dear sister; but I will do what I can, since you ask it.”

So, towards evening, Lancelot sent for his shield; and Elaine slipped it from its embroidered case and sent it to him, and leaned from out her casement to see him pass. She saw him ride below and noted sorrowfully that her favor was gone from off his helm. And Lancelot heard the clinking of the casement latch, and the lily-maid by tact of love saw that he heard, yet he did not look up or wave his hand, but rode swiftly away with down-bent head.

This was the only discourtesy which he could bring himself to use.

Now a great sorrow spread itself over Astolat and slowly settled down. The lily-maid who had been the light and joy of the place sorrowed and drooped in her chamber high to the east, like a pale ghost. No more did her light footstep skim through the house and garden; no more did her gay laughter bring smiles to the faces of father and brothers, and nothing that their love could devise seemed to cheer her. All day long she sat before the empty shield-case, with the voice of Lancelot in her heart and his picture obscuring her vision, mourning and praying that Death would ease her pain. Then one day the words of a little song came to her, and she wrote them down, calling it "The Song of Love and Death":

"Sweet is true love tho' 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, art thou bitter; sweet is death to me.
Oh, 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!"

Her voice rang through the castle like a wild cry, and her brothers, shuddering, whispered hoarsely, "Hark, the phantom of the house that shrieks before death! Alas, our sweet sister!" This was in accordance with a superstition of the times, for in those days every one believed that the Death Spirit gave warning

before he entered a home. The father and brothers, therefore, hastened with all speed to Elaine's room, but found that the shadow of Death had outstripped them and already lurked over the sweet face of their lily-maid, and not one of them could speak.

For a moment Elaine watched them, smiling sweetly, then gave a pale little hand to each of her brothers: "Sweet brothers," she asked, "do you remember how you used to take me, when I was a little child, up the river in the great boatmen's barge; and how you would never go beyond the cape that has the poplar on it, though I cried to go on and find the palace of the King? Last night I dreamed that I was out alone upon the swollen river, and my childish wish to find the palace still stirred in my heart, and now that I am awake the wish still remains, and I pray thee, Father, let me go up to the great Court of Arthur and there find rest."

"Peace, child!" answered the father, "you have not the strength to go so far alone. And wherefore would you look on this proud fellow again, who scorns us all?"

"Oh," cried Torre, breaking into stormy sobs, "I never loved the man, and if I can but meet him, I care not how great he be, I shall surely strike him dead, for great grief hath he wrought in this house."

"Fret not yourself, dear brother," pleaded the lily-maid gently, "nor be angry, 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?" queried her father scornfully, meaning to break her love if he could. "Daughter, I know not what you call the highest, but this I do know, for it is talked among all, he loves the queen in open shame, and she returns his love; if this be high, what is it to be low?"

"O Father," answered the lily-maid faintly. "These are slanders. Never yet was man so noble, but some made ignoble talk. He makes no friend who never made a foe. It is my glory

to have loved one peerless, without stain; so let me die, my Father, and I am not all unhappy, even though I have loved God's best and greatest knight without love in return. Thank you, Father, for wishing me to live, but you are working against your own desire; for, if I could believe the things you say, I should but die the sooner. Cease, Father, and call the priest that he may shrive me of my sins."

So the holy man was summoned and ministered to her spirit, and departed, leaving her bright and happy. Then she turned eagerly to Lavaine, her youngest and dearest, and besought him to write a letter for her.

"Is it for Lancelot?" queried the boy-knight. "If it is for my dear lord, then will I bear it to him gladly."

"Nay, dear brother," answered Elaine softly, "'tis for Lancelot and the Queen and all the world beside, and I myself must bear it."

In unbroken silence the letter was written according to her dictation. Then Elaine turned pleadingly to her father: "O good Father, tender and true, you who have always given me my will, deny not now my last request! When the breath is gone from out my body, wrap me in my richest, fairest raiment, and deck my little bed with coverings as dainty and beautiful as the Queen's own; then bear me on it to the old black barge, and drape it like a funeral pall, and let our old dumb servant row me to the Court of Arthur. But ere I die, place the letter in my hand that I may bear it with me. And let us go alone; for none of you could speak for me so eloquently as mine own silent self. Shall it be so, Father? Promise! O Father, promise me."

And the father who had never denied even her simplest request in life could not deny her in death, so promised with bitter sobs. And then Elaine grew so bright and happy that the shadow seemed to lift from her face, and her household whispered one to another that mayhap Death had stayed his hand, and that perhaps 'twas more in imagination than in the blood. But on the eleventh morn-

ing she asked her father for the letter, and, with a sweet low-murmured farewell to all, she died.

Grief reigned supreme in Astolat, and the whole house mourned uncomforted, but all was done as the dear lily-maid desired. Her brothers bore her gently to the black-samite draped barge, and laid her tenderly in a cloth of gold that wrapped her to her waist. Purest white was her shroud, and her beautiful, unbound hair framed her face and floated o'er her breast and pillow in purest gold. In one hand she bore the letter, and in the other Lavaine placed a beautiful, white lily, fitting emblem of the lily-maid. Above her head they hung the silk-embroidered cover she had wrought for Lancelot's shield, and they bent over her for the last farewell.

"Look, Torre," cried Lavaine brokenly, "she smiles as though her sleep were sweet! One scarce would call her dead, but sleeping. Oh, Elaine, sweet lily-maid of Astolat, farewell! Farewell, my sister dear! Sweet be thy rest!"

And so the brothers turned stumblingly away, blinded by their tears; and the dead, rowed by the dumb, passed up the river toward the great King's palace at Camelot.

Now it chanced that on that very day Sir Lancelot craved an audience of the Queen to present to her the diamonds won in the nine years' jousts. Coldly, like a marble statue of herself, the Queen received him in a vine-clad oriel on the river side of the palace.

"O Queen!" cried Lancelot, kneeling at her feet, "my Queen, I bring you fitting tribute of your beauty. Grant my worship, dear lady, and make me happy by accepting these jewels. I had not won but for you. Priceless are they, and yet scarce fit to match your loveliness! I pray you to twine them into an armlet for the roundest arm on earth, or make them into a necklace for a neck which shames the graceful swan! And, dear lady, rumors have I heard flying through the Court which I trust you have not given ear to. Our bond, not being the bond of man and wife, should

have in it a firmer trust. Let rumors be. When did not rumors fly? I trust that you believe me in your own nobleness."

As he spoke, the Queen half turned away and plucked from the vine-embowered window leaf after leaf, and threw them, all torn and crumpled, upon the floor, till the place was strewn with green. Then, accepted the diamonds with a cold passive hand, and laid them upon the table, ere she burst forth angrily, filled with her own fancied wrongs:

"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, and is then easier broken — this much hath it of good. For many years I have for your sake done wrong to one whom in my heart of hearts I ever acknowledged the nobler. And now, diamonds for me! To loyal hearts the value of all gifts must vary as the giver's. I want them not! Give them to her, your new fancy! I pray you add my diamonds to her pearls! Deck her in this splendor; tell her she shines me down: an armlet for an arm to which the Queen's is haggard, or a necklace for a neck, oh, as much fairer as faith once fair was richer than these diamonds! Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself, she shall not have them!" so saying, the angry Queen, beside herself with jealousy, caught up the diamonds and flung them passionately into the river, then rushed in frenzy from the room.

Lancelot staggered to the window ledge and leaned, half-sick of life and love and a' things of the world worldly, looking down upon the water where his jeweled hopes lay buried. And as he stood there, lo! there came slowly up the funeral-draped barge bearing the lily-maid of Astolat, and paused beneath his window, for the gateway of the palace was near at hand. Lancelot was stricken as dumb as Elaine's poor servitor with amazement and grief. "My pure lily-maid! Sweet Elaine of Astolat!" cried his heart reproachfully. "O woe is me! Her father judged the thing aright. Sweet Heaven, that such must be! Would to God, Elaine, I had died for thee!"

And while Lancelot stood motionless, struggling with his deep emotion, for he had loved the sweet lily-maid dearly, though not as she desired, the guards of the castle and the people stared wonderingly, whispering one to another, "Who and what is it?" Then, as the dumb man responded not to their queries, and all his face remained as motionless as though cast in stone, some one cried: "He is enchanted. He cannot speak. And she, look, more beautiful than the fairest angel is she! She sleeps! It is the Fairy Queen herself!"

Cries of dismay and grief arose on every hand, for it had been prophesied that the King would not die, but would one day pass into fairyland. And many were there who believed, indeed, that this was the fairy barge, come to carry their King away.

Soon Arthur himself heard the noise and came, with his knights, to see what it was all about. Then the dumb man arose in silent majesty and pointed first to the dead maiden, then to Arthur and next to the castle doors; and the great King understood him and signed to two of his purest knights, Sir Percivale and Sir Galahad, to lift the maiden and bear her reverently into the hall.

All the knights and ladies gathered around, and soon came the fine Gawain who had bade her a thousand farewells, crying in amazement: "The lily-maid! Sweet Elaine of Astolat!" Then came Lancelot who had taken no farewell, and stood before her as voiceless now as when she leaned from the casement gazing at him; and all his heart was lead within him, and the people marveled at his emotion and whispered one to another. Last of all came Queen Guinevere, and, when she saw the beautiful, innocent, dead face, her anger melted, and all her heart thrilled with purest pity. Then King Arthur spied the letter in her hand, and, stooping, took it gently, broke the seal, and read:

"Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake, I, sometime known as the Maid of Astolat, am come to bid farewell to thee, since thou hast taken no farewell of me. I loved thee, and my love had no return, so therefore has it been my death. And so I make

moan to Queen Guinevere and to all the ladies of the Court that ye pray for my soul and give me burial. And do thou, too, Sir Lancelot, pray for my soul, as thou art a knight peerless."

And all those who heard the letter wept for pity, and, glancing at the maiden half-fancied that her lips moved. Many eyes were turned on Lancelot reprovingly, and, seeing this, he stepped out before them all and told the lily-maid's story in a trembling voice:—

"My lord Arthur, and all ye that hear, know that I am right heavy for this gentle maiden's death, for good she was and true, and nursed me from my wound, and loved me with a love passing the love of women. God knows I gave her no cause to love me, and only showed her a brother's love in return, of this her father and brethren will bear witness. Nay, more, her father begged me, when I was leaving, to be plain and blunt and break her passion with some discourtesy. This I disliked to do, for the damsel had been very kind to me, and I loved her as though she had been my own dear sister, but, to please her father, I left her without taking farewell. And now, from the letter, it would seem that I only wounded her gentle heart in vain."

"Sir Knight," cried the Queen bitterly, her anger still working like a sea after storm, "it seems to me you might have shown her so much grace as would have kept her from her death!"

Lancelot looked up quickly, their eyes met, and her own fell: "Queen," he said slowly, "she would not be content save to be my wife or my love, and neither of these could be. I told her that her love was but the flash of youth, and would die to rise again for some one more suitable to her in age. And also did I promise that when she had put aside her thought of me and wedded some youthful love more worthy of her, I would endow them with wealth and goods from my own estate. More than this I could not do, and this she would not have, but grieving, died."

"Alas," said King Arthur, sighing heavily, "I can not see that thou art to blame, albeit, lovely as she is in death, she must have been radiant enough in life to have awakened love in the heart

of the noblest knight. But it is thy duty and mine, as head of the Round Table, to see that she be buried worshipfully."

So the King gave orders that a tomb should be opened for Elaine, among the royal dead in the richest shrine in Camelot, and he himself led the funeral train. All the knights followed in martial order, and "with gorgeous obsequies, mass, and rolling music" the lily-maid's golden head was laid low in the dust, "ashes to ashes," among the half-forgotten Kings and royal ladies. And Arthur commanded: "Let her tomb be grand and costly. Place her image thereupon, with a carved lily in her hand, and the shield of Lancelot at her feet, and blazon with gold and azure letters the story of her voyage hither, that all true hearts may read."

Then the great crowd turned homeward, in such order as pleased each, and the Queen, marking where Sir Lancelot stood apart with his eyes bent upon the ground, passed near him and murmured low: "Lancelot, forgive me; mine was jealousy in love."

"Aye," returned Lancelot, without looking up, "that is love's curse! Pass on, my Queen, forgiven."

And Arthur, the pure King, seeing his knight's clouded brow, came to him and said affectionately: "Lancelot, my Lancelot, my knight in whom I have the most joy and affection, seeing this homeless trouble in your eyes, I would to God that thou couldst have loved this maiden, so fair and pure, fashioned for thee alone it seems, who might have made for thee a happy home and given thee loving sons to inherit the name and fame of Lancelot of the Lake."

"Aye, my lord," answered Lancelot faintly, "fair and pure indeed she was, and as lovely in mind as in body, but love cometh not by force."

"No," sighed the King, "but there is nothing on this side of Heaven better than true, married love, and that she failed to win thee to this, true and gentle as thou art, is sore pity."

Lancelot could form no answer, and turned away, wandering blindly to a friendly cove beside the river. Here he lifted up his

eyes and saw the barge that brought the maid of Astolat moving afar off, a blot upon the stream. And he murmured low in grief: "Ah, sweet lily-maid, you loved me surely with a love far tenderer than my Queen's. Farewell, fair lily, now -- at last. Yea, I will indeed pray ever for thy soul, as thou didst desire me. Queen, may not your growing fear for name and fame tell truly of a love that wanes? And why did the King dwell on my name to me? Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach. *Lancelot of the Lake!* Indeed, 'twere better if the Lady of the Lake had drowned me in the mere from which they say I sprung. Alas, for Arthur's greatest knight -- a man not after Arthur's heart! Of what worth is my greatness or my name if only it makes men worse, and my example leads them to sin? I will break these sundering bonds of shame! But can I if she wills it not? Mayhap, fair lily, thou hast not died in vain! Beseech God, if I do not change, to send his angel down to seize me by the hair and bear me far, and fling me deep into that forgotten mere which lies among the tumbled fragments of the hills."

And so Lancelot mourned and wrestled with his troubled spirit throughout all the long night, not knowing he should die a holy man.

CHAPTER IX

THE SEARCH FOR THE HOLY GRAIL

THE search for the Holy Grail was the most wonderful quest in all the history of Arthur. And it began in this wise:

The gentle sister of Sir Percivale, known among the knight-hood as "Percivale the Pure," being disappointed in love, fled for peace to a convent and devoted herself to a life of prayer and praise, fasting and almsgiving. Here she learned from her Confessor, an aged man whose hair was whitened by an hundred winters, a legend concerning the time of our Lord, which had been handed down through five or six generations.

When our Lord Christ hung upon the cross, there came one of his loving followers, Joseph of Arimathæa, and caught in a cup the blood which fell from the Master's wounded side. And this cup, was called the "Holy Grail," and was the same from which our Lord had drunk at the Last Supper with his disciples. Now, in the dark days of persecution that followed, Joseph was obliged to flee from the Holy Land, and took refuge in the island of Britain, where Aviragus, the heathen prince, gave him a home in the town of Glastonbury. Here Joseph wished to found a church of the true faith, and desired from God a sign from Heaven as to the fitness of the place. So, after much fasting and prayer, he planted his hard pilgrim staff in the ground one Christmas eve, and the next morning, lo! a wonderful miracle had happened. The staff had taken root and was crowned with leaves and flowers, and Joseph took it as a symbol that the faith of Christ would thrive and blossom in that heathen land. And the staff grew into a beautiful thorn tree, and ever since that time the winter thorn has blossomed at Christmas in memory of our Lord.

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The Holy Grail remained in the possession of Joseph for many years, and was a great blessing to mankind; for whoever was suffering or afflicted in any way had but to touch it, or look at it, and their troubles fled. But the times grew so evil that so pure a thing could not remain in the sin-afflicted world, and it was caught up to Heaven. But when Joseph of Arimathæa had been sleeping under the Glastonbury thorn for about four hundred years, and the reign of Arthur, "the blameless white king," was come, pious people everywhere began to hope that the Grail might again be returned to earth to crown and glorify the good works of their noble king. Percivale's sister, the gentle sweet-eyed nun, spent all her days in fasting and in prayer that the Grail might come once more. And her great faith and constant prayer was rewarded thus:

One night as she lay sleeping in her narrow convent cell, she was awakened by a sound as of silver horns blowing over the hills in the far distance. At first she thought it some hunter's horn, but as the sound came nearer and louder, and sleep cleared from her brain, she realized that Arthur and his knights would not be abroad at that hour, and that "naught that we blow with breath or touch with hands" could make such clear, beautiful music. Wonderingly she raised herself from her rest, and then a long silver beam stole into the room, and down the beam floated the Holy Grail, "rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive," and the white walls of the room glowed with rosy colors; and when the Grail had passed, the beam faded away and the rosy quiverings died away into the night. Then the saintly maiden rose up and spent the remaining night hours in joyful prayer and thanksgiving, and, as soon as morning dawned, hurried away to her brother.

"O Percivale!" she cried, her eyes shining with beautiful light and holiness, "the Grail has come! The Holy Thing is here on earth once more! Rejoice with me, sweet brother, for I have seen it, truly." Then she told him all about the vision and beseeched him, saying: "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."

And Percivale hastened to spread the good news among men, and himself and many others fasted and prayed for weeks, expectant of the wonder that would be.

Now there dwelt in Arthur's halls a beautiful boy-knight of gentle mien, who moved about always clothed in spotless white, with a face radiant as an angel's, and he was pure as the driven snow. Sir Galahad was his name. Brothers and sisters he had not; neither did any one know who his parents were, but he had been reared by the nuns at the convent. The story of the Grail inspired him, and he went to the nun to inquire concerning it. So pleased was the gentle sister with his purity and innocence, that she cut from her shining wealth of hair enough to plait a broad, strong sword-belt, and into this she wove with silver and crimson threads a strange device of a crimson grail within a silver beam, and bound it on the youth, saying: "My knight of Heaven, whose faith and love is one with mine, round thee I bind my belt. Go forth, fast and pray, for thou shalt see what I have seen, and one will crown thee king far away in the spiritual city."

At the great Round Table in the hall at Camelot there was one vacant seat, which Merlin, the great wizard, had built. It was fashioned with strange inscriptions and devices, and was called "The Siege Perilous." No one dared occupy it, because, according to Merlin, none but the pure could sit therein safely. And the strength of the warning had been fully proven: at different times daring ones who deemed themselves above reproach, so rumor whispered, had attempted it, and been swallowed up forevermore.

Now it chanced one evening that, as the knights sat around the table, Sir Galahad announced his intention of occupying the seat called the Siege Perilous. And the knights cried out in alarm and warning, but Galahad only laughed at their fears, saying, "If I lose myself, I save myself," and straightway sat down.

Then all the knights gasped and looked to see some dreadful thing befall him, but to their amazement no judgment was meted out. Instead, a great miracle was worked in their midst. All at once there came a dreadful sound as though the roof were cracking and rending over their heads. A fearful blast of mighty wind swept down upon the castle, and terrible thunders pealed aloft; and mingled with the sound of thunder was a strange cry, such as man had never heard before. Then there burst into the room a beam of light, seven times more clear than day, and down that long, clear beam stole the Holy Grail, all enshrouded in a luminous cloud, and none could see who bore it. As it passed, the knights were stricken dumb, and each one arose and beheld his fellow's face as in a glory, and no one spoke until the light had vanished and the thunders ceased.

Then Sir Percivale found his voice and cried out, vowing that, because he had not seen the Grail plainly, he would ride in quest of it and see it without the veil, if it took a twelvemonth and a day. And many other knights also took the vow, among them being Galahad and Lancelot, and his cousin Sir Bors, and Gawain, the Courteous, who shouted louder than all the rest.

Now it chanced that King Arthur was not in the hall when the vision appeared, having ridden forth with some of his knights early in the day to storm the fastness of a horde of robbers who were working much damage along the borders. But from afar he heard the terrible thunder and saw the smoke rolling up from the roofs of Camelot, and cried out in alarm lest they had been smitten by lightning, and the wonderful work wrought by Merlin should vanish in unremorseful folds of rolling fire. With all speed he spurred toward home and entered with his smoked, grimy, blood-stained followers into the vision-swept room, and stood in wonder at the knights, all in a tumult, some vowing, some protesting.

"Percivale! Percivale!" he cried, half in amaze, half in anger, to the knight nearest him, "what means this unseemly confusion?"

And Percivale told him what had taken place, and how the knights had vowed their vows to see the Grail uncovered. Then the King's face grew dark indeed, and he cried in anguish: "Woe is me, my knights! Had I been here, ye had no sworn this vow."

"Aye!" cried Sir Percivale boldly, unlike his usual meek, quiet self, "if thou hadst been here thyself, my King, thou, too, wouldst have sworn!"

"How now!" exclaimed Arthur sternly. "Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail?"

"Nay, Lord," answered Percivale, "I heard the sound, I saw the light, but since I beheld only the shadow of the Holy Thing, I swore a vow to follow it until I saw."

The King then asked various members of the Order if they had seen the Grail, but all answered as one: "Nay, Lord, and therefore have we sworn our vows."

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

Then on a sudden the voice of Galahad came clear and sweet from the lower end of the hall: "O King, I not only saw the wondrous Grail, but heard a voice saying, 'O Galahad! O Galahad, follow me!'"

"Ah, Galahad, Galahad," said the King, "for such as thou is the vision; not for these other of my knights. No doubt your pure self and the saintly maiden have seen Christ's holy symbol. But," turning to the others, "ye are not Galahads, no, nor Percivales, not men of holiness and stainless life, but rather warriors, good and true, with strength to right the wrong, beat down violence and lawlessness, and drive the heathen from our land. But now ye wish to follow like sheep the leader's bell; one hath seen the vision and all the rest, blind though ye be, think ye will see it, too. Well, so be it! Since your vows are made, they are sacred, and ye must go. However, I know full well that many will return no more, but lose their lives in following wandering

fires! Our good hall will ring with calls for knightly quests and noble deeds, and who will respond, think you? O me! that the flower of my realm should thus turn their backs upon duty and court ruin! Ye think I am a gloomy prophet; we shall see. But, my knights, ere we part, and the fair Order of the Round Table which I made, be scattered, let us meet once more in a joyous tournament to-morrow, that I may count your ranks for the last time unbroken."

Accordingly, the next day the great joust was held, and never was such a tourney held before at Camelot. All the knights jousted well and nobly, and Galahad and Percivale, being filled with holy power, won tumultuous shouts from the people for their surprising quickness and skill. But not a knight thought of forsaking his vow, and toward evening one and all began making silent preparations to depart on the morrow. Then the veil of sorrow which had all day been hovering over Camelot, casting shadows on the merriment, fell and muffled all in gloom.

Early in the morning the knights passed from Camelot to engage in the Great Quest, and all the windows and long galleries and balconies and even the house-tops were filled with people, who rained flowers upon them and cheered and cried, "God-speed!" as they passed. But in the King's household there was great grief, and the noble King could scarcely control his voice to speak farewell. The Court ladies wept and wailed and accompanied their knights to the gateway, and Queen Guinevere, who rode by Lancelot's side, shrieked aloud in agony, crying: "Alas, this madness has come upon us for our sins!"

At the mystic gateway, where the three queens stood on guard, the company broke up, and each knight went his own way, while Arthur and his sorrowing household returned to the deserted halls of Camelot. And for a time the blameless, whole-souled King shut himself up, and mourned in exceeding grief and bitterness over what he felt to be the beginning of the end of the noble kingdom which he had wrested from wild beasts and heathen

hordes. Then he roused himself and sought to find new knights to take the places of his dearest and best, who rode at random, meeting, for the most part, with naught but distress and failure; and ever misfortune, sorrow, and treason crept nearer to him who had struggled so hard to revive in man the image of his Maker.

Now, we may not follow separately the many knights who went out in the mad quest for the Grail, so we will content ourselves with setting down the tale as told by Percivale, the Pure, to his fellow-monk, Ambrosius, in an abbey, where he secluded himself from the pomp and vanities of the world on his return from a partially successful search.

"When I left my fellows I was lifted up in heart," said Percivale, "and never yet had Heaven appeared so blue, or earth so green, and all my blood danced within me, and I knew that I should see the Holy Grail. But after a time my mind misgave me, and every evil thought and deed of times gone by seemed to rise up in judgment against me and repeat Arthur's words: 'This Quest is not for thee.'

"Soon I found myself alone in a land of sand and thorns, and I was sore athirst. All about me the air was filled with mocking visions: first, I seemed to see a stream of water, clear and cool, and goodly apples on trees hard by; but when I drew nigh hoping to eat and drink, all fell into dust and vanished. Then, as I rode on, home-like visions came to me, only to fall into dust as I approached. And presently a great warrior in golden armor, with a golden crown, riding on a war-horse also trapped in gold and jewels, came out to meet me and embrace me in his arms; but as I drew nigh unto him, he, too, fell into dust and vanished, and I was left alone and weary. Again I saw a city set high upon a hill, and by the walled gateway was a great crowd, and they cried as in one mighty voice, 'Welcome, Percivale, thou mightiest and purest of men!' Eagerly I climbed up, but found at the top no man or voice that answered me; only the crumbling ruin of a deserted city. And I cried in grief: 'Lo, if I find

the Holy Grail itself and touch it, it, too, will crumble into dust.'

"Then I dropped into a vale, low as the hill was high, and here found a holy hermit to whom I described my phantoms, and he made answer: 'O, son, thou lackest the highest virtue, the mother of them all — true humility. Thou hast been full of pride and thoughts of self and thine own advancement. Thou must needs have the mind which was in Christ Jesus, who humbled Himself that all should follow His example. Thou must, like the sinless Galahad, lose thyself to save thyself.'

"Scarcely had he finished speaking when lol Galahad himself appeared in the chapel doorway, all shining in golden armor, and we entered the holy place and knelt in prayer. Here the hermit slacked my terrible thirst, and then blessed the sacrament and offered it to us. I took the bread in silence, but Galahad turned to me in amazement, albeit his face shown with a wonderful radiance. 'Saw ye nothing, Percivale?' he queried. 'I, Galahad, saw the Grail, the Holy Grail, descend upon the shrine! I saw the face of a child that smote itself into the bread and went; and not now alone, but always is the Holy Thing with me day and night. And by its blood-red strength I have conquered the heathen everywhere, and broken their evil ways, and made their realms mine for the King and Christ. But my time is hard at hand when I shall go hence and be crowned King afar in the spiritual city; wherefore arise and follow me, for thou, too, shalt see the vision when I go.'

"His great faith filled me with power, and toward evening I followed him with difficulty up a great, tempest-swept hill. Beyond it lay an evil-smelling, blackened swamp, whitened here and there with dead men's bones, and impassable save where in ancient times a king had built a causeway of piers and arches running out into the great Sea. Over these bridges Galahad sped at once, and I would fain have followed; but every arch, as soon as he had crossed it, leapt into fire and vanished, and thrice above him I heard a thunderous sound like the joyous shoutings of all the

sons of God. And then I saw him far away on the great Sea, his armor shining like a star, and over his head hung the Holy Grail, veiled in a luminous cloud. And the boat, if boat it were — I saw not whence it came — sped with exceeding swiftness; and presently from the heavens shot a glorious light and I beheld the Holy Vessel, shining rose-red, clear and pure, over his head, and I gave a shout of joy for I knew the veil had been withdrawn. Then in the distance I saw the spires and gateways of the spiritual city, and beheld Galahad move into it like a shooting-star. And then the darkness fell, and I saw no more. How I returned to the hermitage I know not, but from thence I rode back to Camelot, filled with exceeding joy that my quest was over and that phantoms would never vex me more."

Silence ensued for a time, each one busy with his own thoughts, until the old monk turned to his companion, with a sigh: "How different our lives have been! Yours filled with Court pleasantries, noble quests, mysteries and visions; mine with homely cares among my fold — for I know every honest face as a shepherd knows his sheep — days of quiet prayer, and reading of monkish books. But tell me this, Percivale, saving this Sir Galahad, came you on none but phantoms in your quest?"

"O my brother," answered Percivale sadly, "must I tell thee how far I faltered from my vow? As I wandered about, seeking in vain for the Grail, I chanced upon a goodly town built round a stately palace, where dwelt a Princess rich and beautiful. I knocked at the gates and asked for succor in the name of our noble Arthur. Straightway I was admitted and disarmed by maidens, fair as flowers; then conducted into the presence of the noble Princess. And lo! brother, my very breath stopped, for she was one whom in my youth I had loved with my whole heart, and never since had maiden stirred my pulse, and now I had found her again, the heiress of a dead man's wealth. My heart went out to her again, as of old, and I saw that she loved me, but I made no sign, for I was poor and she rich. However, as I walked one

day in the orchard, she stole upon me and gave me her first kiss and asked if I would wed her. Now, she was very dear to me, and the Quest seemed far off, yet I hesitated, for Arthur's words came to me, and I felt that this would be 'following wandering fires' indeed. Then, the leading knights of her territory came to me and begged me to wed with her and be their Prince, and how near I was to yielding, God knoweth; but, brother, one night my vow flared up and burned within me, and I rose and fled from temptation, yet, as I went, I wept and wailed and hated myself and the Holy Grail and all things save her, my beautiful Princess. But soon after this I came to the hermit's hut and met Galahad, and thereafter cared no more for her, or anything else on earth."

"O, brother, the pity of it!" exclaimed Ambrosius. "To find thine own first love again, all but hold her a bride within thine arms, and then to cast her aside like a weed! But I sympathize with what I know not, for earthly love has never yet come nigh me. Still, brother, I am glad that you have come hither, for hope springs alive in my breast that now, at last, I have found a true friend. But stay, Percivale, saw you none of your own knight-hood as you wandered?"

"Yes," answered Percivale, "one night I met Sir Bors, the cousin of Lancelot, and most joyful was our meeting. Eagerly we questioned each other concerning the Quest, and among the first things I asked him was: 'Have you seen aught of Lancelot?' 'Aye,' answered Bors sadly. 'He dashed past me once in the fever of madness and maddening what he rode. Why ridest thou so hotly on a holy Quest?' I shouted. 'Stay me not!' was the answer. 'I have played the sluggard, and now I ride apace, for there is a lion in the way,' and so he vanished, and I am sore grieved that Heaven hath plagued him thus. You see, brother, Bors loved Lancelot faithfully, and said he would be content to give up the Quest, if by so doing he could help Lancelot to see the Holy Grail.

"Then he told me how, in his wanderings, he had fallen into

the hands of a pagan people, who worshiped the sun, moon, and stars, and when he told them of the blessed Christ and his Quest, they mocked him and made him a prisoner. For many days he lay in a foul, underground dungeon until by a miracle — what else? — a great, heavy stone, such as no wind could move, slipped and fell, letting in a rush of sweet, fresh air. As he lay gazing out upon the starlit night, the beautiful rose-red Grail stole past him on a beam of light, followed by a deafening peal of thunder. Then a maiden of his own faith, who worshiped in secret among the Pagan herd, came to him stealthily and loosening his bonds, aided him to escape."

"Aye," cried Ambrosius, "I know the knight of whom you speak! He chanced this way, and surely it was the same man. Forsooth, he gave the name of Bors; a shining pelican was engraved upon his helm, and he seemed a reverent, square-set, honest man, with eyes a-kinde and a warm smile, half shrouded in sadness, upon his lips. But saw you no knight but Bors? And when you reached Camelot what befell you there? Were all the knights returned, or had there been truth in Arthur's prophecy? And what said the knights, and what replied the King?"

"One question at a time, brother," answered Percivale, smiling at the monk's eagerness, "else I shall not be able to satisfy thee. The good Bors and I journeyed back together, and all along the way were striking evidences of the trouble and ruin that had descended upon Arthur's once orderly realm. Here and there grand castles were fallen into decay and peopled with ghosts and phantoms; we met no gaily decked, smiling knights, and our horses slipped and stumbled desperately over carcasses of hornless unicorns and once noble talbots, while all about the bones of the deadly basilisk and the hated cockatrice lay bleaching in the sun.

"We found our beloved King seated upon the throne in his lonely hall, and before him stood only one-tenth of those who had gone forth so joyously on the Quest, and they were worn and wasted. Most kindly did our King welcome me — for I had

ever been a favorite with him — saying that they had greatly feared I had been destroyed in the late fierce storm which had made sad havoc all about, and inquiring sadly if I had seen the Holy Cup that Joseph of old had brought to Glastonbury.

“Then, when I had told him all that thou hast heard and of my decision to spend my life in prayer in the seclusion of a monastery he answered me never a word, but turned sharply to his nephew, the courteous Gawain, saying, ‘Gawain, was the Quest for such as thee?’ ‘Nay, my lord,’ answered Gawain softly, ‘neither did I pursue it long, for I met a holy man who showed me plainly that it was not. Therefore, I gave myself to making merry in joyous company, and spent my twelvemonth and a day right pleasantly.’

“The King now caught sight of Bors, where he stood by Lancelot’s side, and hailed him cordially: ‘All hail, Sir Bors! Thou, I know, hast seen the Grail, if ever it could be seen by loyal man and true.’ ‘Yes, my King,’ answered Bors simply, ‘but ask me no more, for I cannot speak of it.’ And I saw that he had clasped Lancelot’s hand tightly, and that his eyes were filled with tears, in grief and sympathy for his beloved kinsman.

“Arthur then called upon others of the sorry company, but each and all spoke of naught but perils by flood and field, till only Lancelot remained, for the King had kept his mightiest till the last. ‘O Lancelot, my friend,’ he said, ‘our mightiest, hast thou achieved the Quest?’ — ‘Alas, King,’ groaned Lancelot sorrowfully, ‘Arthur, my friend, if indeed I be a friend of thine, and mightiest, methinks those are happier who welter in their sins like swine in the mud, sunk so low they cannot see their own shame! For in me evil and good strove together for the mastery, and the pure and knightly seemed the very stock round which the evil twined and grew, till neither could scarce be discerned; so that, when the knights swore together to find the Grail, I swore with them, hoping that if I might touch or see the Holy Thing I might pluck the two asunder, and cast out the evil. I went to a holy saint, and he wept and told me that unless I could separate the two, the

Quest itself was not for me. So I wrestled in prayer as he directed me, and even while I prayed my madness came again upon me, and drove me into the deep wilderness. Here I became the sport of little men who once had fled at the mere shadow of my sword. Fleeing from them, I came to the wild sea-shore, and there found a boat tossing among the dank grasses. And all the sea was lashed with foam, and drove like a cataract against the sand, and a wild thought came to me that, perchance, I might embark and lose myself in the seething waters, and thus wash away my sin in the great Sea. No sooner thought than done; I burst the chains, and sprang into the boat, and so for seven days I drifted along the dreary deep. Then, on the seventh night, when I lay well-nigh distraught for want of food and drink, I felt the boat strike sand and come to anchor, and I alighted near the enchanted castle of Carbonek. Steps led from the sea up to the great entrance way, but on either side of the gate a huge lion stood on guard. However, I was determined to enter, and so, grasping my sword firmly, I sprang toward them. Like a flash they reared themselves on their hind legs and gripped me by the shoulders, one on either side; but before I could smite them, a voice cried: "Doubt not, go forward; if thou doubtest, the beasts will tear thee piecemeal." My sword was then dashed violently to the ground, and I passed on into the empty castle hall, flooded with moonlight from a high window that looked upon the sea. And all through the quiet house sounded a sweet voice, clear as a lark's, that seemed to be singing in the topmost eastern tower,— a voice beautiful as an angel's, and it drew me toward it. Half in a dream, I climbed more than a thousand steps, and finally came to a door, through which showed chinks of light, and heard the voice chanting: "Glory and joy and honor to our Lord, and to the Holy Vessel of the Grail." Here I was perhaps at the end of my Quest! In eager frenzy I beat upon the door and it gave way beneath my hands, then such a blast of light and heat, as though seven times heated in a furnace, smote upon me that I fell blinded and well-nigh senseless. As I

lay blinking and gasping, methought I saw the Holy Grail, shrouded in crimson samite, and around it great angel-shapes, with wings and shining eyes. And indeed, but for my madness and my sin, and then my swooning away, I would have sworn that I saw it in very truth; but what I saw was veiled and covered, and so this Quest was not for me.'

"There was silence in the hall for several minutes after Lancelot ceased speaking and each knight stood with bowed head. Then Gawain, encouraged by the silence of the King, burst out recklessly and irreverently in his usual mad fashion: 'Truly, friend Percivale, this mad quest of thine and thy holy nun's hath driven men mad, even our mightiest knight of all. Never have I failed thee, King, in any quest of thine, nor shall I; but herewith I swear forevermore to be deafer than the blue-eyed cat and thrice as blind as any noonday owl to all holy virgins and their religious ecstasies.'

"And the King made answer sternly: 'Gawain, thou art already too blind and deaf to have desire either to see or hear; no need to make thy denseness greater by idle vows. But if, indeed, there came a sign from Heaven, blessed are Bors, Percivale, and Lancelot, for each has seen according as it was granted to each of them to see. And Lancelot, my friend, thou errest in saying that the good and evil had so grown together in thy heart that they could not be dissevered; be sure that apart from thy sin, whatever it may be, there grows some root of nobleness. See to it, my friend, that the plant may bear its flower.'

"Then the noble Arthur turned to the wretched, withered handful of men, all that remained of his noble Order of the Round Table, once the very flower of the realm, and addressed them in a quivering voice: 'O my knights, was I too dark a prophet when I foretold that most of those who went forth upon the Quest would follow wandering fires, and be lost in the quagmire of doubt and empty dreams? Surely not, for scarce a tenth of those who set forth in such mad eagerness have returned. And out of those to whom the vision came, Lancelot, our greatest, will scarce believe

he saw; another hath beheld the Holy Thing afar off, and is content to leave human wrongs to right themselves, and cares for naught but to pass his life in silent prayer; and Galahad, who alone has seen the vision face to face, his chair is empty, and he comes here no more; however, they may crown him victor in the spiritual city. O my knights, spake I not truly when I said the Quest was not for such as ye, and that our noble Order would only be sacrificed in vain? And some there were among ye who thought that if I, the King, had seen the Vision, I myself would have sworn the vow. But, my knights, do you not know that such could not have happened easily, for it is the King's quest to do the duty set before him in the land he rules? He is like a tiller of the soil to whom is allotted a portion of a field to plow, nor must he leave it till his work is done. Do not think, my knights, that I, the King, have no visions come to me? Nay! many a time they come, by night and by day, until sometimes I scarce know whether this earth I tread be earth at all, or the air I breathe be air or vision, but still through all I feel the strength of my purpose to serve my God and Saviour, and then, when the vision is at its highest, I know I shall never die, but live always. And so, my friends, I have my visions, and you have yours. And what we have seen, we have seen.' "

So saying, the King turned away, and all that he meant none could tell. Only it seemed that he meant to show us that the truest servant of God is he who, like himself, followed not after any great quest, but stayed faithfully at home and looked after the duties God had given him.

CHAPTER X

GUINEVERE

KING ARTHUR at once raised to knighthood men to fill the places made vacant in his noble Order by those who had lost their lives in the vain search for the Grail, and for a time everything seemed as well as at the beginning. The knights jostled and tourneyed as before, they hawked and hunted, and every now and then rode forth and assailed the heathen who frequently broke over their borders; but, though mighty deeds were still done, and brave hearts still worshiped and honored the King, there was yet the old evil at work, spreading its poisonous growth throughout the land.

The new knights were not the old, and soon faltered in their loyalty to the King. They were easily influenced by evil doings, and the King had many enemies at Court, chief among them being his nephew, Modred, brother to the flighty Gawain, to the noble Gareth, and son of Lot and Bellicent. These evil followers excused themselves by saying that the King expected too much of them, but it was not so, for the King's character was not too lofty a standard for any man who wished to be "a stainless gentleman." And many grew quickly tired of their knighthood vows; others waged long and bitter war with the evil in their hearts, only to fail at last; and very few followed the King to the end, faithful even unto death.

Sir Lancelot's wrestlings and struggles to uproot his sin died away with the vision of the Grail. He forgot all about the hermit's advice and the wise counsel of the King on his return, and became once more the Queen's most willing slave. All men knew it, save the King, for no one dared tell him of the treachery, and

he loved and trusted Lancelot as of old. However, a time came when the thing could no longer be hidden, and it happened in this wise:

Day by day Queen Guinevere came more and more to fear Sir Modred's fawning smile and mocking, persistent, gray eyes. She knew him for the cruel, ambitious man he was, and knew also that he hated her and Lancelot, and most of all the King, and that he would stop at nothing to gain his desire — the throne of Camelot. She knew, too, that he spied upon her, and she feared that one day he would track her guilt and proclaim it abroad to all men, and thus shame her forever. So great became her fear that she could not sleep at night, and started with alarm at every shadow that crossed her path. Then she begged Lancelot, saying: "O Lancelot, if thou lovest me, go away to thine own land. I fear to have thee here, and to meet thee. Go away, I pray thee, until this smoldering scandal has had time to die away in ashes. Go, Lancelot, else the wily Modred will rake all forth into a blaze before the people and our lord, the King."

And Lancelot, ever willing to do her least wish, consented reluctantly. Therefore, they set a night when they knew the good King would be absent, to meet and bid farewell forever. Now Modred heard of this in some way, and laid his plans to entrap them. As Lancelot and Guinevere sat upon the Queen's couch in her boudoir, hand clasping hand, passion-pale in a very madness of farewell, there came a triumphant shout, and Modred's voice, crying: "Come out, traitor, you are trapped at last." Then Lancelot rushed forth with a roar like a wounded lion, and leaping upon Modred hurled him head foremost down the tower stairs, where he fell in a heap among his comrades, whom he had stationed at the foot for witnesses.

"Alas!" sobbed the Queen, "now no sacrifice will avail. The end is come, and I am shamed forever."

"Nay," said Lancelot, soothingly, striving to comfort her, "mine be the shame, for mine was the sin. But rise and come away with

me to my strong castle over the sea. There will I hide thee and protect thee from all the world, till my life shall end."

"No, Lancelot," returned the Queen sorrowfully. "All is at an end, we have taken our farewells. Would to God we had taken them sooner, and that I might hide from myself! Say no more, for mine is the shame; I was a wife, but thou art unwedded. Please Heaven you had wedded the lily maid of Astolat and departed moons ago! But I must fly ere my lord Arthur returns, for great will be his just anger. I shall get me secretly into the convent at Almsbury, and there give myself to a life of prayer, hoping to receive, if possible, relief from the pain and shame that suffocate me. And I charge thee tell no man of my whereabouts."

So in the silence of the night the humbled Queen stole away to the Almsbury sanctuary, and Lancelot fled with all speed to his own land, and the courtiers, not knowing, thought that they had flown together. Loosed were all the tongues of the Court and talk ran high, but not one of the scandal-mongers had courage to tell the noble King when he returned toward morning, wearied out with an unfruitful quest. Quickly they bethought themselves of the lateness of the hour and scurried silently away to their chambers.

Slowly Arthur climbed the stairs, chilled to the bone with death-dumb, autumn-dripping gloom, and a nameless horror fell upon him, some great, over-hanging evil, which smote him three-fold as he noted with dismay that his beloved Queen's bower was dark as the night around. Then a form pressed close to him and clung sobbing at his feet, and when he questioned "What art thou?" it faltered forth: "Alas, I am Dagonet, thy fool, and I shall never make thee smile again."

It was but too true. Dagonet, the merry court-jester, he who was wont to provoke the smiles of the weary and way-worn, was at heart a sorrowing, disappointed man, and he felt keenly how deeply the thrust of unfaithfulness from wife and trusted friend would probe into his master's noble heart. In a moment, the ter-

rible truth flashed upon the King, and he saw as though blazed in fire all that he had lately tried not to believe, for some of the whispers had occasionally reached his ear. With a low moan he turned heart-brokenly and bowed his head against the cold, silent wall, well-nigh bereft of reason that the two to whom he had given all of his mighty love, with whom he had exchanged vows of faithfulness unto death, should thus prove false to him and to their God; nor did he give the slightest ear to the efforts at comfort which Dagonet, the jester, the least of all his knights, and yet the only one brave enough to come to him in his great trouble, essayed to give him.

Meanwhile, Queen Guinevere, at the convent gates, tearfully pleaded for admission: "Mine enemies pursue me. O peaceful sisterhood, I pray ye to receive me into your fold that I may spend my life in prayer and pleading, for my sins are many and most bitterly do I repent."

Wrought upon by her grace and beauty, the gentle nuns consented, and at her request even forbore to ask her name. So for many weeks the Queen dwelt among them unknown, wrapped in grief, and communing only with a little maid, who, pleased by the strange lady's great beauty and pleasing manner, loved ever to hover near and wait upon her. But even in the quiet peacefulness of the convent the Queen did not find the oblivion and forgetfulness of the world which she sought; forever and anon there floated through the sanctuary bits of news from the outside world, which the little maid loved to babble. First, after she had been there but a few days, the news came that the King was waging war against Lancelot in the fastness of his strong tower; then, and the Queen's very soul writhed within her, the cry was waged that while the King was absent, Sir Modred had leagued himself with the heathen and usurped the throne.

"Woe is me!" moaned the Queen to herself. "With what a hate the people and the King must hate me! 'Tis all my fault. Had I been the true queen that Arthur thought me — aye! and

deserved — then might the noble Order of the Round Table still be bright and flourishing, and goodness, purity, and beauty be reigning abroad in all the land! Peace be to my soul that knew not, or cared not, to distinguish the false from the true! O my maiden," turning beseechingly to the girl loitering near, "sing, I pray thee, something sad and sweet enough to unlock the sorrow that grips my heart. Sing, that the tears may come and cool my burning brain ere I go mad indeed!"

And the little maid, half frightened by the wild words and manner of her beloved lady, lifted up her sweet voice and sang:

"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, tho' late, to kiss his feet!
No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now."

Memories fraught with the sweetness that might have been, concerning the time when first she came a bride to Camelot, pressed upon the Queen, and she bowed her head low upon her hands and shook with passionate, remorseful sobs.

"Oh, I pray you, noble lady," cried the maiden, ceasing her song abruptly, more alarmed than ever, "weep no more. Let my words comfort your sorrows, for they do not flow from evil done; right sure am I of that, seeing your tender grace and stateliness. Weigh your sorrows with the King's, my lady, and see how much less they

be, for gone is he to wage grim war against Sir Lancelot in his strong castle by the sea where he holds our guilty Queen; and Modred, whom he left in charge of all, his own nephew, has turned traitor. O sweet lady, the King's grief for his own self, and his own Queen and realm must needs be thrice as great as any grief of ours! Think, no matter how much he may desire to weep in silence, as we do here in quiet Almsbury, he cannot, for he is King, and all the world knows his grief and shame. He could not veil his Queen's wickedness if he would."

"Sweet Heaven!" thought the Queen, "will the child kill me with her innocent talk?" But aloud she answered, "Must not I, if the false traitor has displeased his lord, grieve in common with all his realm?"

"Yea," replied the maiden sadly. "It is a grief for all women that *she* is a woman, whose disloyal life hath wrought confusion in the Round Table which good King Arthur founded long years ago, with signs and miracles and wonders, at Camelot, ere the Queen came."

The Queen writhed in anguish, as one upon a rack, and queried bitterly: "O little maid, shut in by nunnery walls, what canst thou know of kings and Round Tables, of signs and wonders, except it be the signs and simple miracles of the sanctuary?"

"O my lady," answered the girl quickly, "I have not always lived here. My father was a friend of Arthur and rode to Camelot from Lyonesse to be knighted at the founding of the Order. He told me many wonderful things, for in those days the land was full of signs and miracles straight from Heaven. He said that when he reached the turning, an hour, or perhaps two, after sunset, he looked back in farewell along the coast toward Lyonesse and saw white-clad spirits spring forth, with beacon-stars upon their heads and wild sea-light about their feet, until all the headlands shone in flame like 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

echoes made answer like a distant sounding horn. And furthermore, the next morning, as he passed through dim-lit woods, he beheld three spirits mad with joy come dashing down on a tall wayside flower, that shook beneath their weight as a thistle shakes when three gray linnets wrangle for the seed. And in the evenings, the flickering fairy circle wheeled and broke in front of him, then flew and linked and broke again, and ever sped before him. And when at last he arrived at Camelot, a wreath of airy dancers hand in hand swung round the lighted lantern in the hall; and there was spread such a feast as never man had dreamed; for every knight was served with what he longed for most by hands unseen, and down in the cellars merry bloated things shouldered the spigot while the wine ran high. This you see was Arthur's realm, my lady, before the coming of the sinful Queen."

"Aye," said the Queen, still bitterly, "if they were all so happy, and the land so full of signs, why was not some miracle shown foretelling the doom in store if Guinevere came into the land? Why did not thy wise father, who was so apt in reading signs, foresee this?"

"O my lady," exclaimed the girl softly, "such wisdom was far beyond my gentle father. But there was one, a bard, well-skilled in making songs, who sang before the knights a glorious song of Arthur's wars, picturing the King as more than man, and railing at those who called him the false son of Gorlois.— For no man knows, my lady, from whence Arthur came. He was found one morning, after a great tempest, a naked child upon the sands of dark Tintagil by the Cornish sea. And they fostered him, and he grew up, and was proven the true King by a miracle, and so crowned.— The bard wove in all of this, my lady, and said that the King's grave, like his birth, should be a mystery from all men. Furthermore, he said that if the King could find a woman as great in her womanhood as he was in his manhood, they two might change the world. Then, in the midst of his song, he faltered and turned pale and well-nigh swooned away, and when he was recovered

would sing no more, neither would he tell to any one his vision — but, can you doubt, my lady, that he did not foresee the evil work of Lancelot and the Queen?”

“Lo!” thought the Queen miserably, “our simple-seeming abbess and the nuns have found me out, and have sent this maiden to play upon me.” Whereat she bowed her head in her hands and spoke no more.

“Ah, sweet lady,” murmured the maiden, breaking the silence, for to her, silence was made only to be broken, “have I vexed thee with my garrulous talk? If so, bid me be silent; for I do not wish to be a prattler and vex my father’s memory — my father who was ever the noblest in manners, though indeed he would have it that Sir Lancelot’s was the nobler. Pray check me, lady, if I ask amiss, but when you moved at Court — for I know by your grace and beauty you must sometime have dwelt in the halls of Arthur — which was the noblest, Lancelot or our lord the King?”

Whiter, if possible, than before grew the Queen’s sad face, but she made answer composedly: “Sir Lancelot, as became a noble knight, was gracious to all ladies, and in open battle or in the tourney-field always forebore to press his own advantage; and the King also did the same, and these two were the most noble mannered men of all; for manners are not idle, but the fruit of loyal nature and of noble mind.”

“If so,” observed the maiden musingly, “then Lancelot must in truth be a thousand-fold less noble than his King, for, as rumor has it, he is the most disloyal friend in all the world.”

“Aye, maiden,” replied the Queen mournfully, “closed about by narrowing nunnery walls, thou knowest little of the world’s lights and shadows, or of its wealth and woes. If ever Lancelot, that most noble knight, were for one hour less noble than himself, pray for him that he escapes the doom of fire, and weep for her who drew him to his doom.”

“I do indeed pray for both, sweet lady,” answered the novice earnestly. “But I could as soon believe Sir Lancelot as noble as

his King as that you, my lady, could be as sinful as the hiding Queen."

So, like many another babbler, the maiden hurt where she would soothe, and harmed where she would heal. But her last words proved a straw too many, and the Queen's anger broke beneath the load.

"Traitor!" stormed Guinevere, with flushing face and stamping foot. "Petty spy! Tool, set upon to plague and harry me! May such as thou become even as the Queen. Get thee hence!"

The last words roused the frightened maiden, who stood before the Queen white as her veil and as tremulous as foam upon the windy beach, and she turned and fled as though pursued by phantoms.

Then Guinevere sank back upon her couch, hiding her face in her hands, her anger gone, saying to herself reproachfully: "The poor child meant nothing, but my own too fearful guilt betrays itself. Heaven help me, for surely I repent! And what is true repentance but in thought — never again to think of the things that made the past so pleasant? And I have sworn never to see him more — never to see his face again. Ah, me!"

So sighing, and off her guard for the moment, the Queen's memory, from old habit, slipped back to the days when she had first met Sir Lancelot. How noble and true he had seemed when he came that day, reputed the best and goodliest man in the hall of Arthur, to act as ambassador to his King, and lead her forth to be a bride — the bride of the great King, Arthur Pendragon, whom as yet she had not seen! How pleasant was the trip through the leafy woods and over the blossoming fields, where the mating birds sang joyously, and all the heavens seemed upbreaking through the earth! How she had enjoyed the company of the handsome, brilliant knight, and how pleasant had been their talk of sport and field and all the sweet thoughts of youth! Ah, me! if life could have been one long ramble over blue hyacinths and 'neath whispering pines by the side of the courtly dark-haired Lancelot; if they

could have wandered for aye and never come near the great, golden Pendragonship and the waiting, golden-haired King, who had proven such a high, self-contained lover! For Guinevere had never loved her husband. Hers was then a soul incapable of understanding the great height and purity he had reached, and she had early tired of his lofty ideals.

So she sat immersed in trance, moving through the past unconsciously, till on a sudden rang a cry throughout the quiet nunnery: "The King! The King!" Stricken stiff, the Queen listened to the mailed feet as they rang along the corridor, then fell from her seat prone upon the floor and veiled her face in her white arms, her golden hair unbound and floating all about her. Not once did the feet pause until they reached her side, then came a long silence, and at last, when she felt she could bear the suspense no longer, a voice spoke, so low, monotonous, hollow, and changed, that she scarce knew it for her lord's:

"Liest thou here so low, the child of one I honored, dead before thy shame? Well it is that no child is born of thee! Thine offspring 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! Knowest thou from whence I have come? From waging bitter war with Lancelot, my mightiest knight and erstwhile brother; and he that did not hesitate to smite me in the worst way, had yet the grace of courtesy left in him to stay his hand against the King who made him knight. But many a noble knight was slain, and all Lancelot's kith and kin have gone to abide with him; Modred has raised a revolt with many more who have chosen to forget their troth and fealty and cleave unto him, so I have only a remnant of my once glorious Round Table remaining. But of this remnant who still love and serve me I will spare enough to guard thee safely here, for there are wild times in store for the land.

"Unless ancient prophecies err, I march now to meet my doom, as it has been foretold that one of mine own blood shall overthrow

me. But 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. Oh, Guinevere, I was first of all the kings to raise the knight errantry of the realm and bind them into one company, the fair Order of the Round Table, a glorious band composed of the flower of men, and one well-fitted to serve as a model for the mighty world. I bound them to me with vows strait and severe; 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 honor their own word as if their God's, and lead sweet lives of purest chastity; to love one maiden only, cleave to her, and worship her with years of noble deeds, for I know of no more subtle master under heaven than a loving maiden to keep down the base in man and teach him high thought, amiable words, courtliness, desire for fame, and all that makes a man. And Guinevere, all this throve before I wedded thee, believing thee one to feel my purpose and be a true helpmate. But thy shameful sin with Lancelot corrupted all my Court, and smote all that my heart most desired; so that now I care not greatly if I lose my life. Think how sad it would be for me to sit within my lonely halls missing my noble knights and their accustomed tales of goodly deeds, as in the golden days before thy sin; and at Camelot and Usk thy darkened bowers would ever speak of thee and I should always hear thy light footfalls on the stairs and see thy shadow glide from room to room. For, Guinevere, think not because thou didst not love thy lord, that he has wholly lost his love for thee. I am not made of so slight elements, yet I must leave thee, woman, to thy shame. Better the King's waste hearth and aching heart, than thou re-seated in thy place of light, the mockery of my people and their bane!"

For a moment the King paused, his voice too choked for speech, and the miserable Queen crept forward and laid her hands about his feet, but she did not speak or unveil her saddened, tear-swept face.

The King had no idea of the great sea of remorse and repentance that seethed in her soul and paralyzed her tongue. In the distance a solitary trumpet blew, and the waiting war-horse below neighed joyfully, as though recognizing the voice of a friend. The sound roused the King, and he continued sorrowfully:—

“Yet think not, Guinevere, that I have come to curse thee. I, whose vast pity almost makes me die to see thee laying thy golden head, that was once my pride, at my feet. Past is my flaming wrath and the pangs which made my tears burn, and lo, I forgive thee, as Eternal God forgives! Do thou for thine own soul the rest.

“But how shall I take leave of all I loved? O golden hair, with which I used to play, not knowing! O beautiful womanhood — a kingdom’s curse to Camelot! 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. Nevertheless, O Guinevere, in spite of all, I love thee still! Let no man dream but that I love thee still! Perchance, if so thou purify thy soul and 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 thy husband. Leave me this last hope, I charge thee.

“Now I must get me hence. Through the thick night I hear the trumpet blow. They summon me, their King, to lead to a 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 traitor knight! But I shall strike him dead, and meet myself with mine own mysterious doom, concerning which you shall hear in due time. Hither I shall never come again, never see thee more — Farewell!”

Then Guinevere felt the King’s breath upon her neck, and knew that he bent low over her and spread his hands in unspoken blessing. Choking with sobs he turned and passed from the room, and still the heartbroken Queen made no sign. Low she groveled in

despair till the last faint sound of the mailed feet had passed; then suddenly sprang into life, consumed with the desire to see his face and yet herself keep hidden. And lo! the King sat on his horse beneath her window, and round him was a group of nuns, each with a candle, listening eagerly, with glad compliance, to his charges concerning his beloved Queen, and how they were to guard and foster her forevermore. And as he spake to them his helm was lowered so that his face, which then was as an angel's was hidden from her; while above him, in his crest, the great Dragon of the Pendragonship blazed so brightly that all the night seemed a stream of fire, and the moony vapor rolled about the King and wound him in a sea of mist until his very form was hidden from the sight of her who gazed so yearningly. Then the blameless, white King moved away ghostlike to his doom, and the Queen's numbed tongue made a great effort at speech.

"O Arthur," she called, extending her arms toward him beseechingly, but so hoarse and faint was her voice that it carried not even to the nuns below, and they gazed after the noble form of their King, unmindful of the stricken woman above them, who well-nigh died as the great remorseful waves of her sin swept over her, and she realized at last what Arthur was, and knew, too, that she loved him better than all else on earth. Who can measure the despair that was hers as she gazed in the direction her lord had gone? Only those, perhaps, who have drained to the dregs the bitter draught *Too Late*.

"Gone, my lord," she moaned. "Gone through my sin, to slay and to be slain! And he forgave me, and I could not speak! Sweet heaven, I should have answered him, but his mercy choked me. How can it be *farewell*? Gone, my lord the King, my own true lord! But how dare I call him mine? The shadow of Lancelot cleaves to me, and the King called me polluted. Woe is me! What shall I do? . . . Shall I kill myself? But 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 the defeat of fame. Let the world be; but what else have I? He spoke of a hope, unless it be he mocked me, his hope he called it; but he never mocks, for mockery is the fume of little hearts. Blessed be the King, who hath forgiven my wickedness, and left me hope that in mine own heart I can live down sin, and be his noble mate hereafter in the heavens before high God!

"Ah, great and gentle Arthur, lord to whom my false pride would not look up, I half despised the height to which I would not, or could not, climb. I thought I could not breathe in that fine air, that pure severity of perfect light; I yearned for the warmth and color which Lancelot gave me, but now I see thee as thou art. Thou art the highest and the most human, too! Oh, is there none to tell the King I love him, though so late? Now — ere he goes to the battle? Sweet heaven, none! I must live so that I myself may tell him in that purer life; 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. Always we needs must love the highest when we see it."

Here some one grasped her hands in warm supplication, and lifting her bowed head the Queen beheld the little novice weeping at her feet. "Yea, little maid," she said softly. "Arise, I forgive thee willingly, for am I not forgiven?"

Then she became aware that the holy nuns were gathered around her, weeping, and her heart was loosed within her, and she wept with them, saying: "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, and keep me from the voices crying, 'Shame!' Yet let me not scorn myself, for he loves me still — let no one dream but that he loves me still. And, holy maidens,

if so ye do not shudder at me nor scorn to call me sister, let me dwell with you. I would wear the black and white, and be a nun like you,—fasting with your fasts, but not feasting with your feasts; grieving with your griefs; not grieving at your joys but still not rejoicing with them; mingling with all your sacred rites. I would pray and be prayed for. I would do each low office of your holy house,—walk your dim cloister, distribute dole to poor, sick people, and so wear out in alms-deed and in prayer the life which wrought the ruin of my lord, the King.”

And it came to pass as the Queen petitioned. The nuns gladly took her unto themselves, and she, half hoping, half fearing, praying always, sought to free herself from sin. Finally the good abbess died, and Guinevere, because of her kindly deeds, her repentant life, and noble rank, was chosen to fill her place. For three years she ruled wisely and well, beloved by all, and then passed to that better land, where sin cannot enter in, her heart filled with the message she meant to deliver to Arthur.

CHAPTER XI

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

WHEN King Arthur rode forth from his farewell of the humbled Queen in the convent at Almsbury, his heart lay dead within him. He had lost faith in the world, and in himself, and, as he told the Queen, he did not greatly care to live. So he joined the main body of his faithful followers and moved with them toward that battle which was destined to take place in the West, and where it had been foretold that he would meet his doom. A great restlessness was upon him. He could not eat, and, though worn with the day's marches, he could not sleep, and spent the time listening in vain for the answer to that bitter cry echoed from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

One night Sir Bedivere, the first of all the knights whom he had knighted, a faithful, trusty follower who never for one moment doubted his King, and one of the three whom Arthur sent to Leodogran with the request for his daughter's hand in marriage, being himself unable to sleep, came out and wandered among the pitched tents of the hosts. Something drew him near to the tent of his lord, and here he heard the King lamenting to himself over the failure of his life's work and purpose, saying that surely God had forsaken him, if, indeed, God cared for the world of men at all, for he, the King, had wrought and fought for God's cause all his life, and now wife, friend and people had betrayed him, and there was no sign that Heaven took any heed. And the heart of Bedivere was heavy within him, and he sought in vain for some comforting thought to offer. But, while he cudged his brains, Arthur himself stammered forth the words that had once given comfort to the Psalmist when the bitterness and heaviness of death

was upon him: " 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.' O Christ, I pass, but shall not die."

And the King slept, but not in peace, for there came to him, blown lightly along the wind, the ghost of Gawain, who was killed in the war with Lancelot. As the frail phantom passed, it cried to him:

"Hail, King! To-morrow thou shalt pass away. Farewell! There is an isle of rest for thee, but I am blown along a wandering wind. Hollow, hollow, hollow is all delight!"

The King waked with a start, crying: "Who spake? 'Twas the voice of Gawain in the wind. Was it a dream? Or doth all that haunt the wastes and wilds mourn, knowing that the end of the Round Table is at hand?"

Sir Bedivere made quick to answer: "My King, let pass whatever will, elves and the harmless glamor of the field, for yet *thou* shalt not pass. Light was Gawain in life, and light is he in death, for the ghost is as the man; care not thou for dreams of him, but rise. I hear the steps of Modred in the West, and with him are many of the knights, once thine, whom thou hast loved, but who are now grown grosser than the heathen, spitting on their vows and on thee. Right well in heart they know thee for the King. Arise, go forth and conquer as of old!"

But the King answered him sadly, saying: "Far other is this battle whereto we move than when we strove in youth, and brake the petty things, and fought with Rome. Ill doom is mine to war against my people and my knights. The King who fights his people fights himself. The stroke that strikes them dead is as my death to me. But let us hence, and find or feel our way through this blind haze, which, ever since I left one lying in the dust at Almsbury, hath folded the paths of the world in darkness for me."

So the King arose and girded on his armor while it was yet night, and summoned his willing hosts, and by their powerful aid pushed the forces of Modred, league by league, back to the western boundary of Lyonesse. Here the long mountains ended in a

coast of shifting sand, and beyond this was the ever-restless sea. The traitors could flee no more, so turned on the waste sands by the hungry sea and there closed with the Knights of the Round Table in that last "weird battle of the West."

Arthur had fought in many a battle, but never in one like this. A death-white mist swept over land and sea, and chilled the blood of friend and foe until their hearts were 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 all fought as men possessed; some were haunted by visions of golden youth, others were met by the faces of old ghosts upon the battle-field, and in the mist was done many a noble, knightly deed, and also many a base one. All the air was filled with the crash of splintering spears and the shattering of helm and harness under the blows of sword and battle-axe, and the shouts of those who prevailed mingled with the shrieks of the fallen, who looked to Heaven for the Christ, and saw only the mist, and heard only the oaths, insults, and blasphemies of the wounded heathen and traitorous knights, the prayers and cries for light, and the moans of the dying.

All day long the forces swayed and struggled, until toward evening a dead hush fell upon the scene. Then a bitter wind came out from the North and blew the traitorous mist aside, and the moon rose clear and full over the battle-field. King Arthur got upon his feet, pale and unsteady, and glanced searchingly over the field, but no man was moving there, nor was any voice, either of Christian or heathen, heard thereon; all was deathly still, save the wild waves of the ocean. For the relentless tide was coming in, and surged among the dead faces, swaying the helpless hands to and fro and tumbling the hollow helmets of the dead. And the King swayed and would have fallen, but for the timely hand of Sir Bedivere, who alone of all his once glorious Round Table remained by his side.

"Ah, Bedivere," cried the King, clinging gladly to his faithful

follower, whom he had not before observed, "thou art true and loyal still! Hearest thou the voice of the sea as it beats upon the faces of the dead who died for me? Alas! on my heart hath fallen a great confusion; I know not what I am, or where I am, or whether I be King. Behold, I seem but King among the dead."

"Aye," answered Bedivere boldly, "my King, King everywhere! If the dead have kings, there also will I worship thee. But still thy life is whole, and still I live who love thee; but as for him who hates thee, he that brought the heathen back among us, behold yonder he stands unharmed,—Modred, the traitor of thy house," and he pointed scornfully to where Modred had lifted himself victoriously above a heap of slain.

All the great King's heart was shaken by one last wild burst of wrath. "Call him not one of my house," he cried fiercely, grasping his sword, Excalibur. "No kin of mine is he who hath lifted up his hand against me in treachery. But thou sayest well in this dark hour of mine that for thee I still am King. Yea, I *am* the King, and thou shalt see one more deed worthy of a King before I go hence and am seen no more."

Like a lion roused, he rushed upon the traitor. But Modred was ready and waiting, and gave him back blow for blow, inflicting many grievous wounds upon his head. Then Arthur, summoning all his strength for a fatal blow, brought down Excalibur with mighty force and laid the rebel Modred dead at his feet, but he was well-nigh dead himself.

In a trice Sir Bedivere was at the side of his fainting King, and bore him tenderly to a ruined chapel in a field near by. It stood on a narrow strip of waste land, out of reach of the grasping sea, which sought in vain to over-wash it from one side, while on the other a great mere shone brightly in the moonlight. Here at the foot of a broken cross, Bedivere gently laid the King and ministered unto him.

Soon Arthur opened his blue eyes, and said weakly: "The sequel of to-day unsolders all the goodliest fellowship of famous



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knights whereof this world holds record. They sleep — the men I loved —," and a little later he whispered brokenly, "I perish by this people which I made."

Then presently he seemed to gather strength, and roused himself to talk to the sorrowful Bedivere. "Ah, Bedivere, my faithful knight and true, first and last of all my noble Round Table, never more shall we meet in joyous converse in the halls and gardens of Camelot! All are dead, the men I loved. I made this realm and people, and they have been my death, though yet I hold by Merlin's prophecy that I shall come again to rule once more. But heed not thou the future. Urgent is the present need, for my wound is so deep that except some aid come I cannot live till morning. Do thou, therefore, take my good sword, Excalibur, which long ago was given me by the Lady of the Lake — thou rememberest how the mystic arm rose up from the surface of the water, and gave the sword into my hand; and thou knowest also how Merlin bade me: 'Take thou and strike; the time to cast away is yet far off,' and I took it and did strike, not for my own glory, but for the glory of Christ, my Master; and now the time is at hand to cast away — therefore take Excalibur, I say, and haste thee to the brink of the mere, fling him therein as far as thou mayest, watch what befalls, and quickly bring me word again."

"My King," answered Sir Bedivere earnestly, "it is not meet to leave thee here alone, for a little thing may harm a wounded man. Yet, if thou commandest, I can but obey. Quickly will I go, watch and see, and bring thee word."

With all haste Sir Bedivere went forth from the ruined shrine, passing among the tombs that stood around it, where the bones of many mighty men lay moldering, and climbing by a rugged, zigzag path down the juts of pointed rock, he reached at last the shining levels of the lake. Here he drew the sword, Excalibur, and prepared to fling it into the lake. But, as he brandished it aloft, the moon came out from behind a cloud and sparkled in the keen frosty air upon the hilt, for the hilt was all encrusted with

gems,— sapphire, topaz, diamond, and jacinth, a miracle of jewel-work. And Bedivere was dazzled by the blinding light, and his purpose wavered for he could not bring himself to cast away a thing so precious. Therefore, he determined to leave Excalibur hidden among the many-knotted waterflags that whistled stiff and dry beside the water's edge, and so strode slowly back to the wounded King.

"Hast thou performed my mission?" questioned Arthur quickly. "What hast thou seen or heard?"

And Bedivere made answer, saying: "I heard the waters lapping on the rocks, and washing among the reeds."

"Thou hast betrayed thy nature and thy name, not rendering true answer like a noble knight!" cried the King faintly. "It is a shameful thing for men to lie. Hadst thou done as I bade thee, there had been some sign, either hand or voice or motion of the water. But now I charge thee, as thou art lief and dear to me, go again quickly, and spare not to fling the sword. Watch what thou seest and bring me word."

So Sir Bedivere went the second time across the ridge. But no sooner had he drawn Excalibur from the reeds, than it again seemed to him to be a sin and a shame to cast away so noble a sword. "What good can follow if I do this thing?" he asked himself. "What harm if I do it not? Much harm in disobedience, doubtless; but would it be greatly wrong to disobey the King, now? Surely he is sick with his wound, and knows not what he says. And if I throw the sword away, what relic or record of my lord is left to after ages? Whereas, if Excalibur is kept stored in a King's treasure-house, it will be much to King Arthur's worship and honor. It will prove an inspiration to men in the ages to come, and folks will marvel at it and say, 'King Arthur's sword, wrought by the maiden of the Lake in nine years' time!'" Therefore, he hid Excalibur a second time, and went slowly back to the King.

And Arthur, breathing heavily, asked him again: "What is it thou hast seen or heard?"

"I heard the water lapping on the crag, and the long ripple washing in the reeds," answered Sir Bedivere as before.

Then was King Arthur wroth indeed. "Ah, traitor, unkind, untrue!" he cried scornfully. "Woe is me! Authority forgets a dying King. I see thee what thou art, for thou, the last of all my knights left to me, who should compass the love and loyal obedience of all, thou wouldst betray me for the sake of the precious hilt, either for the lust of the eyes or the lust of gold. But now, get thee hence once more, for though a man has twice failed in his duty, yet he may prosper the third time. Begone; only if this time thou sparest to fling Excalibur, I will arise and slay thee with mine own hands."

Sir Bedivere was filled with shame, and, rising quickly, he leaped down the path to the water's edge, snatched Excalibur from the bulrushes, and wheeling with shut eyes that he might not again be tempted, threw it with all his strength straight into the middle of the mere. Round and round the great brand flashed, making lightnings in the splendors of the moon, and whirling over in an arch like a streamer of light from the great Aurora of the North. But lo! ere the sword could dip the wave, a mighty arm, clothed in mystic white samite, rose up from the bosom of the waters, caught the hilt, and, brandishing Excalibur three times, drew it under into the mere. Then was Sir Bedivere filled with wonder and amazement, and he hurried to the King.

"Aye!" cried Arthur, before he could find breath for speech, "I know by thine eyes that thou hast done my command. Tell me: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?" And he listened quietly while Sir Bedivere told the wonder. Then he murmured heavily: "My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone. Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight, and bear me to the mere. I fear my wound hath taken cold, and that I shall die."

Sir Bedivere's eyes filled with tears, and he would have spoken but could find no words in which to clothe his remorse that his disobedience should have in any way placed his lord's life in

jeopardy. Carefully he kneeled on one knee and taking the King's languid hands gently in his own, drew them over his shoulders, and so, rising, bore him upon his own broad back down to the water's edge. As they came near to the great mere, all shining in the winter moon's radiant glow, they beheld a dusky barge moving toward them. Dark as a funeral scarf it was, from stem to stern, and the decks were thronged with black-clad forms whose faces were hidden in black hoods. And among them were three queens in crowns of gold—the same three queens who often came to Arthur in his hour of need—and from them rose a wailing cry of lamentation “that shivered to the tingling stars.”

“Place me in the barge,” said the King faintly, as the vessel came close to the shore.

The bold Sir Bedivere obeyed wonderingly, giving up his precious charge to the three queens, who stretched forth eager arms to receive their wounded King. The tallest and fairest of the queens took his head in her lap and unbound his casque, and all three fell to chafing his hands, calling him by name, and bathing his white face with bitter tears. And, indeed, the sight of him was very piteous, so pale and blood-stained was he, with his glorious curls all parched with dust and hanging with clotted points,—a very different King from the Arthur of old who rode in shining armor, like a star, leading his knights to the charge in war or tournament!

Then the barge put off from the shore, and Bedivere was left alone. “Ah, my lord Arthur,” he cried heart-brokenly, “whither shall I go? Where shall I hide myself? For the old days are dead and knightly glory is no more; the Round Table is gone forever. There have been no such times as these since the Star led the three Wise Men to Bethlehem. But now they are gone, and thou, too, art leaving me, and I—must I go forth into the darkened days and live my life among strange men who know me not?”

Slowly the King answered him from the barge: “The old or-

der changeth, yielding place to new, and God has many ways of accomplishing his purposes. Comfort thyself, for in me there is no comfort to trust in. My life's work is done, and I pray God to accept and purify it for Himself. And thou, if thou seest me no more, pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of; it is the golden chain that links this earth to Heaven and the throne of God. Men are little better than sheep and goats, if, knowing God, they lift not their heads in prayer. But now farewell. I am going a long way with these friends of mine. My mind is all dim, but methinks I go to the island-valley of Avalon, where never comes hail or snow or wind-storms, neither does the sun's heat burn there, but all things rest and thrive amid wooded meadows ringed round with the summer sea. And there will I heal myself of my grievous wounds."

As the King ceased speaking, the barge moved away with oar and sail, "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 Sir Bedivere stood and gazed until the hull looked like one black dot against the verge of dawn, and the wailing had died away. Many memories crowded each other, but, chief of all, he pondered on Merlin's weird rhyme: "From the great deep to the great deep he goes." And he wondered whether Arthur would ever come again, and whether the three dark queens in the black barge were not the same three who had stood beside Arthur, clothed in light, when he was crowned King.

Then the stillness of the winter dawn oppressed him, and he groaned aloud: "The King is gone." But, as he climbed the jutting crags, he saw, or thought he saw, away in the distance, the barge, a mere speck on the verge of dawn. And as he looked, there was borne to his ears, from the far borders of the world, a triumphant sound of joyful welcome, as though the people of a great city, with one mighty voice, were rejoicing with music and singing over the coming of their King. As he strained his eyes beneath his arched hand, the speck vanished, and the sun burst forth

in all his glory, bringing the new year, with its new chances and triumphs. But Bedivere's heart was too sore for welcome, and he trudged away over the sands, himself also journeying into the unknown.



IDYLLS OF THE KING



IDYLLS OF THE KING

IN TWELVE BOOKS

"*Flos Regum Arthurus*" — JOSEPH OF EXETER

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
listen'd 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 im-
minent 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 jeal-
ousies
Are silent; and we see him as he
moved,
How modest, kindly, all-accomplish'd,
wise,

With what sublime repression of him-
self,
And in what limits, and how ten-
derly;
Not swaying to this faction or to
that;
Not making his high place the lawless
perch
Of wing'd ambitions, nor a vantage-
ground
For pleasure; but thro' all this tract
of years
Wearing the white flower of a blame-
less 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 unstain'd, than
his?
Or how should England dreaming of
his sons
Hope more for these than some in-
heritance
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 —	Break not, for thou art Royal, but endure,
Far-sighted summoner of War and Waste	Remembering all the beauty of that star
To fruitful strifes and rivalries of peace —	Which shone so close beside Thee that ye made
Sweet nature gilded by the gracious gleam	One light together, but has past and leaves
Of letters, dear to Science, dear to Art,	The Crown a lonely splendor. May all love,
Dear to thy land and ours, a Prince indeed,	His love, unseen but felt, o'ershadow Thee,
Beyond all titles, and a household name,	The love of all Thy sons encompass Thee,
Hereafter, thro' all times, Albert the Good.	The love of all Thy daughters cher- ish Thee,
	The love of all Thy people comfort Thee,
Break not, O woman's-heart, but still endure;	Till God's love set Thee at his side again!

THE COMING OF ARTHUR

LEODOGRAN, the King of Cameli- ard,	But man was less and less, till Arthur came.
Had one fair daughter, and none other child;	For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,
And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,	And after him King Uther fought and died,
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.	But either fail'd to make the kingdom one.
	And after these King Arthur for a space,
For many a petty king ere Arthur came	And thro' the puissance of his Table Round,
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war	Drew all their petty princedoms under him,
Each upon other, wasted all the land; And still from time to time the heathen host	Their king and head, and made a realm, and reign'd.
Swarm'd overseas, and harried what was left.	
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,	And thus the land of Cameliard was waste,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,	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 wallow'd 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 chil-
 dren, housed
 In her foul den, there at their meat
 would growl,
 And mock their foster-mother on four
 feet,
 Till, straighten'd, they grew up to
 wolf-like men,
 Worse than the wolves. And King
 Leodogran
 Groan'd for the Roman legions here
 again,
 And Cæsar's eagle: then his brother
 king,
 Urien, assail'd 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 crown'd,
 Tho' 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 nor
 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 mark'd not, if
 she saw,
 One among many, tho' 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
 pitch'd
 His tents beside the forest. Then he
 drave
 The heathen; after, slew the beast,
 and fell'd
 The forest, letting in the sun, and
 made
 Broad pathways for the hunter and
 the knight
 And so return'd.

For while he linger'd there,
 A doubt that ever smolder'd in the
 hearts
 Of those great Lords and Barons of
 his realm
 Flash'd forth and into war: for most
 of these,
 Colleguing 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 bat-
 tle, felt
 Travail, and throes and agonies of
 the life,
 Desiring to be join'd with Guine-
 vere;
 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 join'd
 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 join'd
 with her,
 Then might we live together as one
 life,
 And reigning with one will in every-
 thing

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 reach'd a field-of-bat-
 tle bright

With pitch'd 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
 prevail'd,

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, Cradle-mont of
 Wales,

Claudias, and Clariance of Northum-
 berland,

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 call'd to stay the
 brands
 That hack'd 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 laugh'd upon his warrior whom
 he loved
 And honor'd most. "Thou dost not
 doubt me King,
 So well thine arm hath wrought for
 me to-day."
 "Sir and my liege," he cried, "the
 fire of God
 Descends upon thee in the battle-
 field:
 I know thee for my King!" Where-
 at the two,
 For each had warded either in the
 fight,
 Swore on the field of death a death-
 less 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
 Ulfus, and Brastias, and Bedivere,
 His new-made knights, to King Leo-
 dogran,
 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 call'd
 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 thro' 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 re-
 plied,
 "O friend, had I been holpen half as
 well
 By this King Arthur as by thee to-
 day,
 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 where-
 fore now
 Do these your lords stir up the heat
 of war,
 Some calling Arthur born of Gorlois,
 Others of Anton? Tell me, ye your-
 selves,
 Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's
 son?"

And Ulfius and Brastias answer'd,
 "Aye."
 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 rumors 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 dishonor 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 enter'd
 in,
 And there was none to call to but
 himself.
 So, compass'd by the power of the
 King,
 Enforced she was 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
 Deliver'd 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 rear'd
 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 thro'
 his craft,
 And while the people clamor'd for a
 king,
 Had Arthur crown'd; 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 shame-
 fulness,
 Or born the son of Gorlois, after
 death,
 Or Uther's son, and born before his
 time,
 Or whether there were truth in any-
 thing
 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. Vic-
 tor 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
 Crown'd on the daïs, and his war-
 riors 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 flush'd, and others dazed, as
one who wakes
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.

“But when he spake and cheer'd
his Table Round
With large, divine, and comfortable
words,
Beyond my tongue to tell thee — I
beheld
From eye to eye thro' all their Order
flash
A momentary likeness of the King:
And ere it left their faces, thro' the
cross
And those around it and the Cruci-
fied,
Down from the casement over
Arthur, smote
Flame-color, 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, won-
derful.

She gave the King his huge cross-
hilted sword,
Whereby to drive the heathen out:
a mist
Of incense curl'd 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 row'd 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 counsel'd
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 foe-
men down.”

Thercat Leodogran rejoiced, but
thought
To sift his doubtings to the last, and
ask'd,
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?"
ask'd the King.

She answer'd, "These be secret
things," and sign'd

To those two sons to pass, and let
them be.

And Gawain went, and breaking into
song

Sprang out, and follow'd by his fly-
ing 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.

Morcover, 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.'

"Aye," 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 truc:

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 wish'd 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 com-
forted my heart,

And dried my tears, being a child
with me.

And many a time he came, and ever-
more

As I grew greater grew with me;
and sad

At times he seem'd, 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 enter'd 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 thro' the dismal night —
 a night
 In which the bounds of heaven and
 earth were lost —
 Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
 It seem'd in heaven, a ship, the shape
 thereof
 A dragon wing'd, and all from stem
 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 watch'd 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 horne
 A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's
 feet,
 Who stoopt and caught the bahe, and
 cried 'The King!
 Here is an heir for Uther!' And
 the fringe
 Of that great breaker, sweeping up
 the strand,
 Lash'd 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 follow'd
 calm,
 Free sky and stars: 'And this
 same child,' he said,
 'Is he who reigns; nor could I part
 in peace
 Till this were told.' And saying
 this the seer
 Went thro' the strait and dreadful
 pass of death,
 Not ever to be question'd any more
 Save on the further side; but when
 I met
 Merlin, and ask'd him if these things
 were truth —
 The shining dragon and the naked
 child
 Descending in the glory of the seas —
 He laugh'd as is his wont, and an-
 swer'd 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 anger'd me;
but thou
Fear not to give this King thine only
child,
Guinevere: so great bards of him
will sing
Hereafter; and dark sayings from of
old
Ranging and ringing thro' the minds
of men,
And echo'd 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
Tho' 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 re-
joiced,
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,
Stream'd to the peak, and mingled
with the haze
And made it thicker; while the phan-
tom 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 be-
came
As nothing, but the King stood out
in heaven,
Crown'd. And Leodogran awoke,
and sent
Ulfus, and Brastias and Bedivere,
Back to the court of Arthur answer-
ing yea.

Then Arthur charged his warrior
whom he loved
And honor'd most, Sir Lancelot, to
ride forth
And bring the Queen; — and watch'd
him from the gates.
And Lancelot past away among the
flowers,

(For then was latter April) and re-
 turn'd
 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 round him, and rejoicing in his
 joy.
 Far shone the fields of May thro' open
 door,
 The sacred altar blossom'd white with
 May,
 The Sun of May descended on their
 King,
 They gazed on all earth's beauty in
 their Queen,
 Roll'd incense, and there past along
 the hymns
 A voice as of the waters, while the
 two
 Sware 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 trum-
 pets blew,
 And Arthur's knighthood sang be-
 fore the King:—

"Blow trumpet, for the world is
 white with May;
 Blow trumpet, the long night hath
 roll'd away!
 Blow thro' the living world — 'Let
 the King reign.'

"Shall Rome or Heathen rule in
 Arthur's realm?
 Flash brand and lance, fall battleax
 upon helm,
 Fall battleax, 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 battleax, 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 battleax, 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 battleax, 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 battleax, 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 battleax, 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 claim'd 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 thro' that
strength the King

Drew in the petty principedoms under
him,

Fought, and in twelve great battles
overcame

The heathen hordes and made a
realm and reign'd.

THE ROUND TABLE

GARETH AND LYNETTE
THE MARRIAGE OF GERAINT
GERAINT AND ENID
BALIN AND BALAN
MERLIN AND VIVIEN

LANCELOT AND ELAINE
THE HOLY GRAIL
PELLEAS AND ETTARRE
THE LAST TOURNAMENT
GUINEVERE

GARETH AND LYNETTE

THE last tall son of Lot and Belli-
cent,
And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful
spring
Stared at the spate. A slender-
shafted Pine
Lost footing, fell, and so was whirl'd
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 cata-
ract,

Bearing all down in thy precipi-
tancy —

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,
 Prison'd, and kept and coax'd 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 continu-
 ous prayer,
 Until she let me fly discharg'd 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, Ga-
 wain, when he came
 With Modred hither in the summer-
 time,
 Ask'd 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 prevail'd against
 me,' said so — he —
 Tho' Modred biting his thin lips was
 mute,
 For he is always sullen: what care I?"

And Gareth went, and hovering
 round her chair
 Ask'd, "Mother, tho' ye count me
 still the child,
 Sweet mother, do ye love the child?"
 She laugh'd,

"Thou art but a wild-goose to ques-
 tion 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 answer'd 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 splendor 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 reach'd a hand to
 climb,

One, that had loved him from his
 childhood, caught

And stay'd 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 risk'd
 himself and climb'd,
 And handed down the golden treasure
 to him."

And Gareth answer'd her with
 kindling eyes,
 "Gold? said I gold?—aye, 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 play'd 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 bemoan'd herself
 and said,
 "Hast thou no pity upon my loneli-
 ness?
 Lo, where thy father Lot beside the
 hearth
 Lies like a log, and all but smolder'd
 out!
 For ever since when traitor to the
 King
 He fought against him in the Barons'
 war,
 And Arthur gave him back his terri-
 tory,
 His age hath slowly droopt, and now
 lies there
 A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburi-
 able,
 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 wrench'd 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 any-
 thing.
 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,
 Ask'd for a bride; and thereupon the
 King
 Set two before him. One was fair,
 strong, arm'd—
 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 hride who knew herself
so vile,
That evermore she long'd to hide her-
self,
Nor fronted man or woman, eye to
eye —
Yea — some she cleaved to, but they
died of her.
And one — they call'd her Fame;
and one, — O Mother,
How can ye keep me tether'd 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 answer'd quickly,
"Not an hour,
So that ye yield me — I will walk
thro' fire,
Mother, to gain it — your full leave
to go.
Not proven, who swept the dust of
ruin'd Rome
From off the threshold of the realm,
and crush'd
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 answer'd craftily, "Will ye walk
thro' fire?
Who walks thro' fire will hardly heed
the smoke.
Aye, 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 look-
ing 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 any-
one.
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 thro' villain kitchen-
vassalage,
Her own true Gareth was too prince-
ly-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-knives;
Nor tell my name to any — no, not
the King."

Gareth awhile linger'd. The moth-
er's eye
Full of the wistful fear that he would
go,
And turning toward him wheresoe'er
he turn'd,
Perplex his outward purpose, till an
hour,
When waken'd by the wind which
with full voice

Swept bellowing thro' 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 quicken'd
into green,
And the live green had kindled into
flowers,
For it was past the time of Easter-
day.

So, when their feet were planted
on the plain
That broaden'd 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
flash'd;
At times the spires and turrets half-
way down
Prick'd thro' the mist; at times the
great gate shone
Only, that open'd on the field be-
low:
Anon, the whole fair city had dis-
appear'd.

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 echo'd
 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 Fairy-
 land,
 Who drave the heathen hence by
 sorcery
 And Merlin's glamour." Then the
 first again,
 "Lord, there is no such city any-
 where,
 But all a vision."

Gareth answer'd them
 With laughter, swearing, he had gla-
 mour enow
 In his own blood, his princedom,
 youth and hopes,
 To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian
 sea;
 So push'd 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
 Stretch'd under all 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
 seem'd
 The dragon-boughts and elvish em-
 blemings
 Began to move, seethe, twine and
 curl: they call'd
 To Gareth, "Lord, the gateway is
 alive."

And Gareth likewise on them fixt
 his eyes
 So long, that ev'n to him they seem'd
 to move.
 Out of the city a blast of music
 peal'd.
 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 moun-
 tain-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; tho' 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 forever."

Gareth spake
 Anger'd, "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 rela-
 tion,
 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
 Turn'd 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 enter-
 prise.
 Let love be blamed for it, not she,
 nor I:
 Well, we will make amends."

With all good cheer

He spake and laugh'd, then enter'd
 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 touch'd, 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
 Clash'd; 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 be-
 held
 Far over heads in that long-vaulted
 hall
 The splendor of the presence of the
 King

Throned, and delivering doom — and
 look'd 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, tho' 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 honor shining like the dewy
 star
 Of dawn, and faith in their great
 King, with pure
 Affection, and the light of victory,
 And glory gain'd, 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 vio-
 lence:
 For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd
 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 hus-
 band'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
Thrall'd in his castle, and hath
starved him dead;
And standeth seized of that inherit-
ance
Which thou that slewest the sire hast
left the son.
So tho' I scarce can ask it thee for
hate,
Grant me some knight to do the bat-
tle for me,
Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for
my son."

Then strode a good knight for-
ward, crying to him,
"A boon, Sir King! I am her kins-
man, I.
Give me to right her wrong, and
slay the man."

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal,
and cried,

"A boon, Sir King! ev'n that thou
grant her none,
This railer, that hath mock'd thee in
full hall —
None; or the wholesome boon of
gyve and gag."

But Arthur, "We sit King, to
help the wrong'd
Thro' all our realm. The woman
loves her lord.
Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves
and hates!
The kings of old had doom'd thee to
the flames,
Aurelius Emrys would have scourged
thee dead,
And Uther slit thy tongue: but get
thee hence —
Lest that rough humor 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 savor 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 ev'n upon his way to Camelot;
 For having heard that Arthur of his
 grace
 Had made his goodly cousin, Tris-
 tram, knight,
 And, for himself was of the greater
 state,
 Being a king, he trusted his liege-
 lord
 Would yield him this large honor all
 the more;
 So pray'd him well to accept this
 cloth of gold,
 In token of true heart and fealty.

Then Arthur to rend the
 cloth, to rend
 In pieces, and so cast it on the
 hearth.
 An oak-tree smolder'd 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 blazon'd, some but carven,
 and some blank,
 There ran a treble range of stony
 shields,—
 Rose, and high-arching overbrow'd
 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 blazon'd also; but if
 none,
 The shield was blank and bare with-
 out a sign
 Saving the name beneath; and Gar-
 eth saw

The shie'd of Gawain blazon'd 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
 stay'd their hands
 From war among themselves, but left
 them kings;
 Of whom were any bounteous, mer-
 ciful,
 Truth-speaking, brave, good livers,
 them we enroll'd
 Among us, and they sit within our
 hall.
 But Mark hath tarnish'd 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 forever — craven — a man
 of plots,
 Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside
 ambushings —
 No fault of thine: let Kay the senes-
 chal
 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,
Approach'd between them toward the
King, and ask'd,
"A boon, Sir King (his voice was
all ashamed),
For see ye not how weak and hun-
ger-worn
I seem — leaning on these? grant me
to serve
For meat and drink among thy
kitchen-knives
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 shepcot 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
ask'd
For horse and armor: 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 couch'd at night with grimy
kitchen-knives.
And Lancelot ever spake him pleas-
antly,
But Kay the seneschal, who loved him
not,
Would hustle and harry him, and
labor him
Beyond his comrade of the hearth,
and set
To turn the broach, draw water, or
hew wood,

Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bow'd
 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 Tour-
 nament,
 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 heal'd 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 mock'd, but, after,
 revered him.
 Or Gareth telling some prodigious
 tale
 Of knights, who sliced a red life-
 bubbling way
 Thro' twenty folds of twisted drag-
 on held
 All in a gap-mouth'd circle his good
 mates

Lying or sitting round him, idle
 hands,
 Charm'd; 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 follow'd, the
 good Queen,
 Repentant of the word she made him
 swear,
 And saddening in her childless cas-
 tle, sent,
 Between the in-crescent and de-cres-
 cent 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 tour-
 ney 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 laugh'd; 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 stagger'd 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 hidd'n, and give me the first quest,
I spring

Like flame from ashes."

Here the King's calm eye
Fell on, and check'd, and made him
flush, and bow

Lowly, to kiss his hand, who an-
swer'd 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 de-
mand

Of whom ye gave me to, the Senes-
chal,

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 ask'd,
"Have I not earn'd my cake in bak-
ing 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-un-
willingly

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 ev'n 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 center 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 stay'd

In her own castle, and so besieges
 her

To hreak 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 over-
 throw,

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 ask'd,

"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 mo-
 ment, 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 alway rideth arm'd
 in black,
 A huge man-beast of boundless sav-
 agery.
 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 Lance-
 lot."

Hereat Sir Gareth call'd from
 where he rose
 A head with kindling eyes above the
 throng,
 "A boon, Sir King — this quest!"
 then — for he mark'd
 Kay near him groaning like a
 wounded bull —
 "Yea, King, thou knowest thy
 kitchen-knave am I,
 And mighty thro' 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 ask'd for thy
 chief knight,
 And thou hast given me but a
 kitchen-knave."
 Then ere a man in hall could stay
 her, turn'd,
 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 open'd
 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 stair-
 way 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
 Therethro' 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 fol-
 low'd 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-smother'd
 fire,
 That lookt half-dead, brake bright,
 and flash'd as those
 Dull-coated things, that making slide
 apart
 Their dusk wing-cases, all henceath
 there hurns
 A jewel'd harness, ere they pass and
 fly.
 So Gareth ere he parted flash'd in
 arms.
 Then as he donn'd the helm, and took
 the shield
 And mounted horse and graspt a
 spear, of grain
 Storm-strengthen'd 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 work'd
 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 thro' lanes of shouting
 Gareth rode
 Down the slope street, and past with-
 out the gate.

So Gareth past with joy; hut as
 the cur
 Pluckt from the cur he fights with,
 ere his cause

Be cool'd by fighting, follows, being
 named,
 His owner, but remembers all, and
 growls
 Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the
 door
 Mutter'd 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 peacock'd 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, hy 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 thro' silent faces
 rode
 Down the slope city, and out beyond
 the gate.

But by the field of tourney linger-
 ing yet
 Mutter'd 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-flesh'd agaric in
 the holt,
 And deems it carrion of some wood-
 land thing,
 Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender
 nose
 With petulant thumb and finger,
 shrilling, "Hence!
 Avoid, thou smellst 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, aye —
 The most ungentle knight in Arthur's
 hall."
 "Have at thee then," said Kay:
 they shock'd, 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 stay'd, 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 de-
 vice
 Full cowardly, or by mere unhappi-
 ness,
 Thou hast overthrown and slain thy
 master — thou! —
 Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon!
 — to me
 Thou smellst all of kitchen as be-
 fore."

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

"Aye, 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 madden'd her, and away she
flash'd again
Down the long avenues of a bound-
less wood,
And Gareth, following was again be-
knaved.

"Sir Kitchen-knave, I have miss'd
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 miss'd
the only way."

So till the dusk that follow'd even-
song
Rode on the two, reviler and reviled;
Then after one long slope was
mounted, saw,
Bowl-shaped, thro' 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 serving-
man
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 wrong'd,
But straitlier bound am I to bide
with thee."
And when the damsel spake con-
temptuously,
"Lead, and I follow," Gareth cried
again,
"Follow, I lead!" so down among
the pines
He plunged; and there, black-
shadow'd nigh the mere,
And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and
reed,
Saw six tall men hailing a seventh
along,
A stone about his neck to drown him
in it.
"I die with good blows he quieted,
but three
Fled thro' 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 wreak'd themselves on me;
good cause is theirs
To hate me, for my wont hath ever
been
To catch my thief, and then like ver-
min 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 wor-
shipfully.
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 har-
borage?"

Whereat the Baron saying, "I
well believe
You be of Arthur's Table," a light
laugh
Broke from Lynette, "Aye, 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 scat-
ter'd them.
Nay — for thou smell'st of the
kitchen still.
But an this lord will yield us harbor-
age,
Well."

So 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 dis-
courtesy,
Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at
my side.
Hear me — this morn I stood in
Arthur's hall,
And pray'd 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
call'd —
Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-
knave,
'The quest is mine; thy kitchen-
knave am I,
And mighty thro' 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 look'd 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 fan-
tasy,
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 there-
withal,
And saver of my life; and therefore
now,
For here be mighty men to joust
with, weigh
Whether thou wilt not with thy dam-
sel 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,
"F 'l 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, convey'd 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 stoat 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 over-
throw
And slay thee: then will I to court
again,
And shame the King for only yield-
ing me
My champion from the ashes of his
hearth."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd
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
Wherethro' the serpent river coil'd,
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 flutter-
ing.
And therebefore the lawless warrior
paced
Unarm'd, and calling, "Damsel, is
his he,
The champion thou hast brought
from Arthur's hall?"

For whom we let thee pass." "Nay, Flee down the valley before he get to
 nay," she said, horse.
 "Sir Morning-Star. The King in Who will cry shame? Thou art not
 utter scorn knight but knave."
 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 sud-
 denly,
 And slay thee unarm'd: 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 cur-
 tain-folds
 Bare-footed and bare-headed three
 fair girls
 In gilt and rosy raiment came: their
 feet
 In dewy grasses glisten'd; and the
 hair
 All over glanced with dewdrop or
 with gem
 Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.
 These arm'd 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,
 Glorifying; and in the stream beneath
 him, shore
 Immingled with Heaven's azure
 waveringly,
 The gay pavilion and the naked feet,
 His arms, the rosy raiment, and the
 star.

Then she that watch'd him,
 "Wherefore stare ye so?
 Thou shakest in thy fear: there yet
 is time:

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 thro' 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 scot 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 beseecheth not a knave
 To ride with such a lord."

"Dog, thou liest.
 I spring from loftier lineage than
 thine own."
 He spake; and all at fiery speed the
 two
 Shock'd on the central bridge, and
 either spear
 Bent but not brake, and either knight
 at once,
 Hurl'd 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 lash'd 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 groveling on
 the ground.

Then cried the fall'n, "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 favor
 ask'd!"
 "Then shall he die." And Gareth
 there unlaced
 His helmet as to slay him, but she
 shriek'd,
 "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 watch'd thee striking
 on the bridge
 The savor 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 unhappi-
 ness
 Or some device, hast foully over-
 thrown),
 '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 answer'd,
 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
 Own'd 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."

"Aye, Sir Knave!
Aye, 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."

"Aye, aye," she said, "but thou
shalt meet thy match"

So when they touch'd the second
riverloop,
Huge on a huge red horse, and all in
mail
Burnish'd to blinding, shone the
Noonday Sun
Beyond a raging shallow. As if the
flower,
That blows a globe of after arrow-
lets,
Ten thousand-fold had grown, flash'd
the fierce shield,
All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying
blots
Before them when he turn'd from
watching him.
He from beyond the roaring shallow
roar'd,
"What doest thou, brother, in my
marches here?"
And she athwart the shallow shrill'd
again,

"Here is a kitchen-knave from
Arthur's hall
Hath overthrown thy brother, and
hath his arms."
"Ugh!" cried the Sun, and visoring
up a red
And cipher face of rounded foolish-
ness,
Push'd 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 wash'd
away.

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart
the ford;
So drew him home; but he that
fought no more,
As being all bone-batter'd 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 vic-
tor here.
There lies a ridge of slate across the
ford;
His horse thereon stumbled — aye,
for I saw it.
"O Sun' (not this strong fool
whom thou, Sir Knave,

Hast overthrown thro' mere unhappi-
ness),
' 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
nohly 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 rose-
maries 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 seem'd, and glowing in the
broad
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the
knight,
That named himself the Star of Even-
ing, stood.

And Gareth, "Wherefore waits the
madman there
Naked in open dayshine?" "Nay,"
she cried,
"Not naked, only wrapt in harden'd
skins
That fit him like his own; and so ye
cleave
His armor 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-
stain'd
Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel
came,
And arm'd 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-tarnish'd and half-bright, his
emblem, shone.
But when it glitter'd o'er the saddle-
bow,
They madly hur!d 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 groveling 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,
Labor'd within him, for he seem'd
as one
That all in later, sadder age be-
gins
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 seem'd
to strike
Vainly, the damsel clamoring 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
harden'd skin —
Strike — strike — the wind will
never change again."
And Gareth hearing ever stronglier
smote,
And hew'd great pieces of his armor
off him,
But lash'd in vain against the har-
den'd skin,
And could not wholly bring him
under, more
Than loud Southwestern, rolling
ridge on ridge,
The buoy that rides at sea, and dips
and springs
For ever; till at length Sir Gareth's
brand
Clash'd his, and brake it utterly to
the hilt.
"I have thee now;" but forth that
other sprang,
And, all unknighthlike, writhed his
wiry arms

Around him, till he felt, despite his
mail,
Strangled, but straining ev'n his
uttermost
Cast, and so hurl'd 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 colors 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, re-
viled,
Missaid thee; noble I am; and
thought the King
Scorn'd me and mine; and now thy
pardon, friend,
For thou hast ever answer'd court-
eously,
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 stirr'd with any foolish
heat
At any gentle damsel's wayward-
ness.
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 stretch-
ing, dreams
Of goodly supper in the distant pool,
Then turn'd the noble damsel! smil-
ing 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
Were 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 fashion'd on
the rock

The war of Time against the soul of
 man.
 And yon four fools have suck'd 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 fig-
 ures, 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 — delay'd at first
 Thro' helping back the dislocated
 Kay
 To Camelot, then by what thereafter
 chanced,
 The damsel's headlong error thro'
 the wood —
 Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-
 loops —
 His blue shield-lions cover'd — 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 prick'd against
 the cry;
 But when they closed — in a mo-
 ment — at one touch

Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of
 the world —
 Went sliding down so easily, and
 fell,
 That when he found the grass with-
 in his hands
 He laugh'd; the laughter jarr'd
 upon Lynette:
 Harshly she ask'd 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 thro' mere unhappi-
 ness —
 Device and sorcery and unhappi-
 ness —
 Out, sword; we are thrown!" And
 Lancelot answer'd, "Prince,
 O Gareth — thro' the mere unhappi-
 ness
 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 — Lance-
 lot! — 'hine 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 heen, and sad — O
 Lancelot — thou!"

Whereat the maiden, petulant.
 "Lancelot,
 Why came ye not, when call'd? and
 wherefore now
 Come ye, not call'd? I gloried in
 my knave,
 Who being still rebuked, would an-
 swer still
 Courteous as any knight — but now,
 if knight,
 The marvel dies, and leaves me
 fool'd and trick'd,
 And only wondering wherefore
 play'd upon:
 And doubtful whether I and mine
 be scorn'd.
 Where should be truth if not in
 Arthur's hall,
 In Arthur's presence? Knight,
 knave, prince and fool,
 I hate thee and forever."

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 over-
 thrown?
 Thrown have I been, nor once, but
 many a time.
 Victor from vanquish'd issues at the
 last,
 And overthrower from being over-
 thrown.
 With sword we have not striven;
 and thy good horse
 And thou are weary; yet not less I
 felt
 Thy manhood thro' that wearied
 lance of thine.
 Well hast thou done; for all the
 stream is freed,
 And thou hast wreak'd his justice on
 his foes,
 And when reviled, hast answer'd
 graciously,

And makest merry when overthrown.
 Prince, Knight,
 Hail, Knight and Prince, and of our
 Table Round!"

And then when turning to Lyn-
 ette he told
 The tale of Gareth, petulantly she
 said,
 "Aye, well — aye, well — for worse
 than being fool'd
 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? Aye, 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 hush'd night, as if the world
 were one
 Of utter peace, and love, and gentle-
 ness!
 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 and thou goest, he will fight
thee first;
Who doubts thee victor? so will my
knight-knave
Miss the full flower of this accom-
plishment."

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 spurr'd, 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
clutch'd 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 — thro' 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 tho'
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 thro' yes-
terday
Reviled thee, and hath wrought on
Lancelot now
To lend thee horse and shield: won-
ders ye have done;
Miracles ye cannot: here is glory
enow
In having flung the three: I see thee
maim'd,
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 look'd upon the
face,
Seeing he never rides abroad by
day;
But watch'd him have I like a phan-
tom pass
Chilling the night: nor have I heard
the voice.
Always he made his mouthpiece of a
page
Who came and went, and still re-
ported him
As closing in himself the strength of
ten,
And when his anger tare him, mas-
sacring

Man, woman, lad and girl — yea,
 the soft babe!
 Some hold that he hath swallow'd
 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 to
 win.
 Yet have I watch'd thee victor in
 the joust,
 And seen thy way." "Heaven help
 thee," sigh'd Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud
 that grev
 To thunder-gloom palling all stars,
 they rode
 In converse till she made her palfrey
 halt,
 Lifted an arm, and softly whisper'd
 "There."
 And all the three were silent seeing,
 pitch'd
 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 thro' all
 the horn.
 Echo'd 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 shad-
 ows 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,
 Thro' those black foldings, that
 which housed therein.
 High on a nightblack horse, in night-
 black arms,
 With white breast-bone, and barren
 ribs of Death,
 And crown'd with fleshless laughter
 — some ten steps —
 In the half-light — thro' the dim
 dawn — advanced
 The monster, and then paused, and
 spake no word.

But Gareth spake and all indig-
 nantly,
 "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 image-
 ries
 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 swoon'd;
 The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands
 and wept,
 As doom'd to be the bride of Night
 and Death;
 Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath
 his helm;
 And ev'n Sir Lancelot thro' his warm
 blood felt
 Ice strike, and all that mark'd him
 were aghast.

At once Sir Lancelot's charger
 fiercely neigh'd
 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 thoroughly as the skull; and out
 from this
 Issued the bright face of a blooming
 boy
 Fresh as a flower new-born, and cry-
 ing, "Knight,
 Slay me not: my three brethren bade
 me do it,
 To make a horror all about the
 house,

And stay the world from Lady Lyon-
 ors.
 They never dream'd the passes would
 be past."
 Answer'd 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
 bade me do it.
 They hate the King, and Lancelot,
 the King's friend,
 They hoped to slay him somewhere
 on the stream,
 They never dream'd 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 Lyon-
 ors,
 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
 genuis.
 And Enid, but to please her hus-
 band's eye,
 Who first had found and loved her
 in a state
 Of broken fortunes, daily fronted
 him
 In some fresh splendor; and the
 Queen herself,
 Grateful to Prince Geraint for serv-
 ice done,
 Loved her, and often with her own
 white hands
 Array'd and deck'd her, as the love-
 liest,
 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 rumor rose about the
 Queen,
 Touching her guilty love for Lance-
 lot,
 Tho' 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,
 'Tiro' that great tenderness for
 Guinevere,
 Had suffer'd, or should suffer any
 taint
 In nature: wherefore going to the
 King,
 He made this pretext, that his prince-
 dom 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 de-
 part,
 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 compass'd her with sweet ob-
 servances
 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 principedom 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 gather'd 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 sadden'd her the more:

And day by day she thought to tell Geraint,

But could not out of bashful delicacy;

While he that watch'd 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 thro' 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 darken'd from the high light in his eyes,

Than that my lord thro' me should suffer shame.

Am I so bold, and could I so stand
 by,
 And see my dear lord wounded in
 the strife,
 Or 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 fear'd 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 tho' he loved and revered
 her too much
 To dream she could be guilty of foul
 act,
 Right thro' 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 hurl'd 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 wilder-
 ness;
 For tho' it seems my spurs are yet
 to win,
 I have not fall'n so low as some
 would wish.
 And thou, put on thy worst and
 meanest dress
 And ride with me." And Enid
 ask'd, 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 cabi-
 net,
 Wherein she kept them folded rever-
 ently
 With sprigs of summer laid between
 the folds,
 She took them, and array'd 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 him-
 self
 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 mor-
 row-morn.
 And when the Queen petition'd for
 his leave
 To see the hunt, allow'd 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
 gain'd the wood;
 There, on a little knoll beside it,
 stay'd
 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 thro' the
 shallow ford
 Behind them, and so gallop'd up the
 knoll.
 A purple scarf, at either end
 whereof
 There swung an apple of the purest
 gold,
 Sway'd round about him, as he
 gallop'd up
 To join them, glancing like a dragon-
 fly
 In summer suit and silks of holiday.
 Low how'd the tributary Prince, and
 she,

Sweetly and stately, and with all
 grace
 Of womanhood and queenhood,
 answer'd him:
 "Late, late, Sir Prince," she said,
 "later than we!"
 "Yea, noble Queen," he answer'd,
 "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 any-
 where,
 There is good chance that we shall
 hear the hounds:
 Here often they break covert at our
 feet."

And while they listen'd 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 lagg'd latest,
 and the knight
 Had visor up, and show'd a youthful
 face,
 Imperious, and of haughtiest linea-
 ments.
 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 ev'n to speak
 of him;"
 And when she put her horse toward
 the knight,
 Struck at her with his whip, and she
 return'd
 Indignant to the Queen; whereat
 Geraint
 Exclaiming, "Surely I will learn the
 name,"
 Made sharply to the dwarf, and
 ask'd it of him,
 Who answer'd 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 manful-
 ness
 And pure nobility of temperament,
 Wroth to be wroth at such a worm,
 refrain'd
 From ev'n 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 tho' I ride unarm'd, 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 fall'n in sight.
 Farewell."

"Farewell, fair Prince," answer'd
 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, tho' she were a beggar from
 the hedge,
 Will clothe her for her bridals like
 the sun."

And Prince Geraint, now think-
 ing that he heard
 The noble hart at bay, now the far
 horn,
 A little vext at losing of the hunt,
 A little at the vile occasion, rode,
 By ups and downs, thro' many a
 grassy glade
 And valley, with fixt eye following
 the three.
 At last they issued from the world of
 wood,
 And climb'd upon a fair and even
 ridge,
 And show'd themselves against the
 sky, and sank.
 And thither came Geraint, and un-
 derneath
 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 spann'd 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 clamor of the
 rooks
 At distance, ere they settle for the
 night.

And onward to the fortress rode
 the three,
 And enter'd, and were lost behind
 the walls.
 "So," thought Geraint, "I have
 track'd him to his earth."
 And down the long street riding
 wearily,
 Found every hostel full, and every-
 where
 Was hammer laid to hoof, and the
 hot hiss
 And bustling whistle of the youth
 who scour'd
 His master's armor; and of such a
 one
 He ask'd, "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,
 Ask'd yet once more what meant the
 hubbub here?
 Who answer'd gruffly, "Ugh! the
 sparrow-hawk."
 Then riding further past an armor-
 er's,
 Who, with back turn'd, and bow'd
 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 labors for the
 sparrow-hawk
 Has little time for idle questioners."
 Whereat Geraint flash'd into sudden
 spleen:
 "A thousand pips eat up your spar-
 row-hawk!
 Tits, wrens, and all wing'd 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 harborage for
 the night?
 And arms, arms, arms to fight my
 enemy? Speak!"
 Whereat the armorer turning all
 amazed
 And seeing one so gay in purple
 silks,
 Came forward with the helmet yet
 in hand
 And answer'd, "Pardon me, O
 stranger knight;
 We hold a tourney here to-morrow
 morn,
 And there is scanty time for half
 the work.
 Arms? truth! I know not: all are
 wanted here.
 Harborage? 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 spieen-
 ful yet,
 Across the bridge that spann'd the
 dry ravine.

There musing sat the hoary-headed
Earl,
(His dress a suit of fray'd magnifi-
cence,
Once fit for feasts of ceremony) and
said:

"Whither, fair son?" to whom
Geraint replied,

"O friend, I seek a harborage for
the night."

Then Yniol, "Enter therefore and
partake

The slender entertainment of a
house

Once rich, now poor, but ever open-
door'd."

"Thanks, venerable friend," replied
Geraint;

"So that ye do not serve me spar-
row-hawks

For supper, I will enter, I will eat
With all the passion of a twelve
hours' fast."

Then sigh'd and smiled the hoary-
headed Earl,

And answer'd, "Graver cause than
yours is mine

To curse this hedgerow thief, the
sparrow-hawk:

But in, go in; for save yourself de-
sire it,

We will not touch upon him ev'n in
jest."

Then rode Geraint into the castle
court,

His charger trampling many a
prickly star

Of sprouted thistle on the broken
stones.

He look'd and saw that all was
ruinous.

Here stood a shatter'd archway
plumed with fern;

And here had fall'n a great part of a
tower,

Whole, like a crag that tumbles
from the cliff,

And like a crag was gay with wild-
ing 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-
fibered arms,

And suck'd the joining of the stones,
and look'd

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 thro' 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 gemm'd with

green and red,
And he suspends his converse with a
friend,

Or it may be the labor 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 thro' 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 mount of newly-fallen stones,
The dusky-rafter'd many-cobweb'd 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, tho' ruin'd, 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 reach'd 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, boil'd the flesh, and
 spread the board,
 And stood behind, and waited on the
 three.
 And seeing her so sweet and service-
 able,
 Geraint had longing in him ever-
 more
 To stoop and kiss the tender little
 thumb,
 That crost the trencher as she laid it
 down:
 But after all had eaten, then Ger-
 aint,
 For now the wine made summer in
 his veins,
 Let his eye rove in following, or
 rest
 Or Enid at her lowly handmaid-
 work,
 Now here, now there, about the
 dusky hall;
 Then suddenly address the hoary
 Earl:

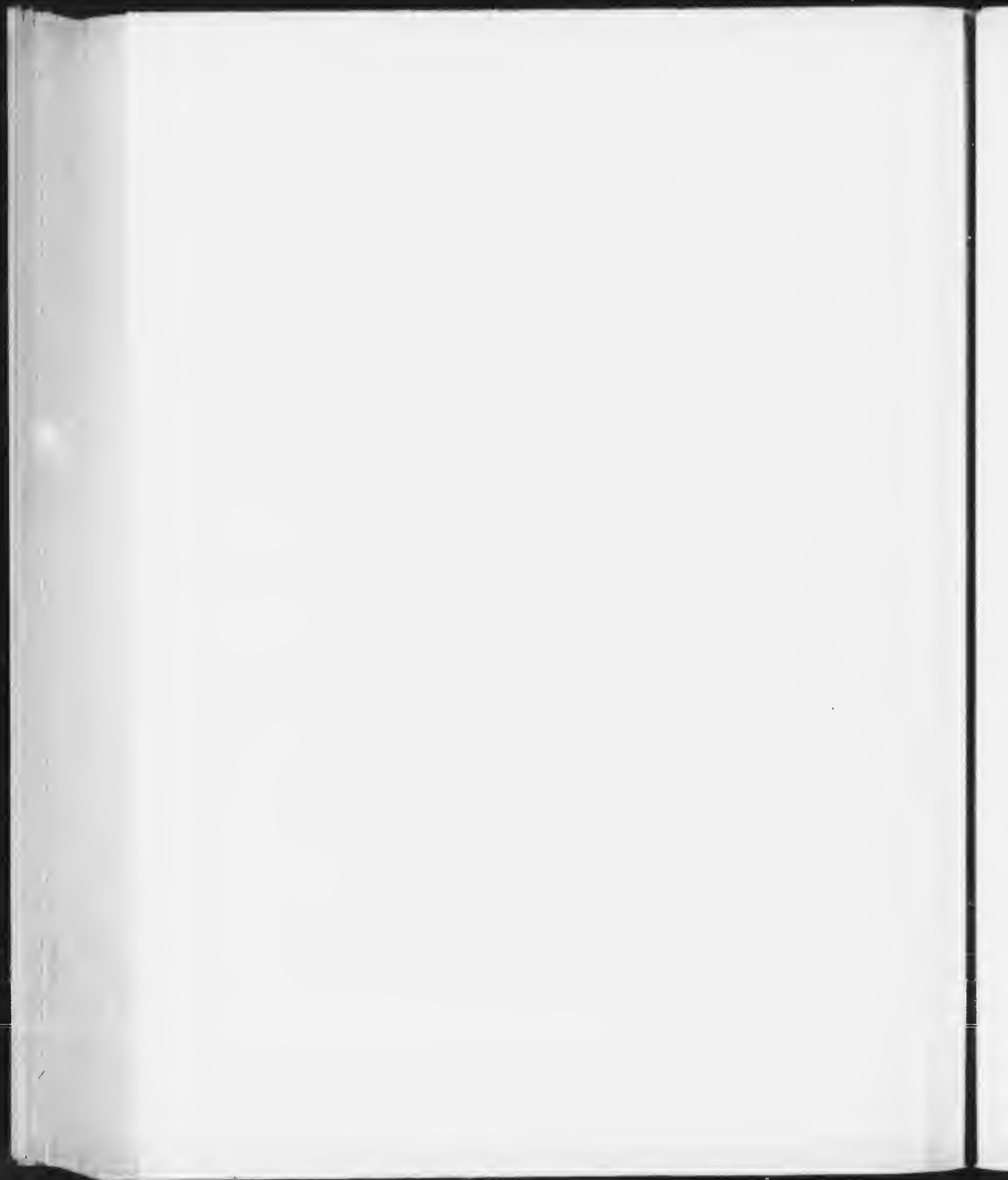
"Fair Host and Earl, I pray your
 courtesy;
 This sparrow-hawk, what is he? tell
 me of him.
 His name? but no, good faith, I will
 not have it:
 For if he be the knight whom late
 I saw
 Ride into that new fortress by your
 town,
 White from the mason's hand, then
 have I sworn
 From his own lips to 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
 return'd
 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 unarm'd 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 guess'd you
 one of those
 That eat in Arthur's hall at Came-
 lot.
 Nor speak I now from foolish flat-
 tery;



"HERE BY GOD'S ROOD IS THE ONE MAID FOR ME!"—Page 225



For this dear child hath often heard
 me praise
 Your feats of arms, and often when
 I paused
 Hath ask'd 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 woo'd; and be
 he dead
 I know not, but he past to the wild
 land.
 The second was your foe, the spar-
 row-hawk,
 My curse, my nephew — I will not
 let his name
 Slip from my lips if I can help it —
 he,
 When I that knew him fierce and
 turbulent
 Refused her to him, then his pride
 awoke;
 And since the proud man often is the
 mean,
 He sow'd a slander in the common
 ear,
 Affirming that his father left him
 gold,
 And in my charge, which was not
 render'd to him;
 Bribed with large promises the men
 who served
 About my person, the more easily
 Because my means were somewhat
 broken into
 Thro' open doors and hospitality;
 Raised my own town against me in
 the night
 Before my Enid's birthday, sack'd
 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 my-
 self;
 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 answer'd, "Arms, in-
 deed, but old
 And rusty, old and rusty, Prince
 Geraint,
 Are mine, and therefore at thine ask-
 ing, 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 earn'd himself the name of spar-
row-hawk.
But thou, that hast no lady, caust
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,
Tho' having seen all beauties of our
time,
Nor can see elsewhere, anything so
fair.
And if I fall her name will yet re-
main
Untarnish'd 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
stol'n away —

But that old dame, to whom full
tenderly
And fondling all her hand in his he
said,
"Mother, a maiden is a tender thing,
And best by her that bore her under-
stood.
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 depart-
ing found,
Half disarray'd as to her rest, the
girl;
Whom first she kiss'd on either
cheek, and then
On either shining shoulder laid a
hand,
And kept her off and gazed upon her
face,
And told her 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 fail'd 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 heyond the rest pushing could move
 The chair of Idris. Yniol's rusted arms
 Were on his princely person, but thro' these
 Princelike his hearing shone; and errant knights
 And ladies came, and by and by the town
 Flow'd 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 sparrowhawk.
 Then Yniol's nephew, after trumpet blown,
 Spake to the lady with him and proclaim'd,
 "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
 Turn'd, and beheld the four, and all his face
 Glow'd 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 clash'd together, and thrice they brake their spears.
 Then each, dishorsed and drawing, lash'd at each
 So often and with such blows, that all the crowd
 Wonder'd, 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 labor, and the blood
 Of their strong bodies, flowing, drain'd their force.
 But either's force was match'd till Yniol's cry,
 "Remember that great insult done the Queen,"
 Increased Geraint's, who heaved his blade aloft,
 And crack'd the helmet thro', and bit the bone,
 And fell'd 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 answer'd, "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 splendor 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 seem'd 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 look'd so mean.
 For as a leaf in mid-November is
 To what it was in mid-October, seem'd
 The dress that now she look'd on to the dress
 She look'd on ere the coming of Geraint.
 And still she look'd, 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 seem'd on going this third day,
 To seek a second favor at his hands.
 Yea 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 branch'd and flower'd 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
 sack'd their home,
 And scatter'd all they had to all the
 winds:
 For while the mother show'd it, and
 the two
 Were turning and admiring it, the
 work
 To both appear'd 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 wish'd
 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 patch'd and blurr'd
 and iusterless
 Among his burnish'd brethren of the
 pool;
 And half asleep she made compari-
 son

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 burnish'd sisters of the
 pool;
 But this was in the garden of a
 king;
 And tho' 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 look'd
 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 doo- or gambol'd
 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 overshadow'd 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 exult-
ingly:

“See here, my child, how fresh
the colors look,
How fast they hold like colors 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 tel' me if ye
know it.”

And Eild look'd, but all confused
at first,
Could scarce divide it from her
foolish dream:
Then suddenly she knew it and
rejoiced,
And answer'd, “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 thro' the town, and
everywhere
He found the sack and plunder of
our house
All scatter'd thro' the houses of the
town;
And gave command that all which
once was ours
Should now be ours again: and yes-
ter-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 favor 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, sumptu-
ous fare,
And page, and man, and squire, and
seneschal,
And pastime both of hawk and
hound, and all
That appertains to noble mainte-
nance.
Yea, and he brought me to a goodly
house;
But since our fortune swerved from
sun to shade,
And all thro' that young traitor,
cruel need
Constrain'd us, but a better time has
come;
So clothe yourself in this, that bet-
ter fits
Our mended fortunes and a Prince's
bride:
For tho' ye won the prize of fairest
fair,
And tho' 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 pick'd 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,
 When my dear child is set forth at
 her best,
 That neither court nor country, tho'
 they sought
 Thro' 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 listen'd 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,
 Help'd by the mother's careful hand
 and eye,
 Without a mirror, in the gorgeous
 gown;
 Who, after, turn'd her daughter
 round, and said,
 She never yet had seen her half so
 fair;
 And call'd her like that maiden in
 the tale,
 Whom Gwydion made by glamor
 out of flowers,
 And sweeter than the bride of Cas-
 sive-laun,
 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 shal'
 dream
 I see my princess as I see her now,
 Clothed with my gift, and gay among
 the gay."

But while the women thus re-
 joiced, Geraint
 Woke where he slept in the high
 hall, and call'd
 For Enid, and when Yniol made
 report
 Of that good mother making Enid
 gay
 In such apparel as might well be-
 seem
 His princess, or indeed the stately
 Queen,
 He answer'd: "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 abash'd 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-
 broider'd gift,
 And robed them in her ancient suit
 again,
 And so descended. Never man re-
 joiced

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 eye-
lid fall,
But rested with her sweet face satis-
fied;
Then seeing cloud upon the mother's
brow,
Her by both hands he 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 reach'd this
ruin'd hall,
Beholding one so bright in dark
estate,
I vow'd 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 tho' her gentle presence at the
lists

Might well have served for proof
that I was loved,
I doubted whether daughter's ten-
derness,
Or easy nature, might not let
itself
Be molded by your wishes for her
weal;
Or whether some false sense in her
own self
Of my contrasting brightness, over-
bore
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 someway prove such
force in her
Link'd with such love for me, that
at a word
(No reason given her) she could
cast aside
A splendor 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 learn'd 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 kiss'd her, and they
rode away.

Now thrice that morning Guine-
vere had climb'd
The giant tower, from whose high
crest, they say,
Men saw the goodly hills of Somer-
set,
And white sails flying on the yellow
sea;
But not to goodly hill or yellow sea
Look'd 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 honor 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 array'd 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 our-
selves,
By taking true for false, or false for
true;
Here, thro' 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 pas-
sionately,
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 hurl'd it
 toward the squire.
 So the last sight that Enid had of
 home
 Was all the marble threshold flash-
 ing, strown
 With gold and scatter'd coinage, and
 the squire
 Chafing his shoulder: then he cried
 again,
 "To the wilds!" and Enid leading
 down the tracks
 Thro' which he bade 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
 slacken'd soon:
 A stranger meeting them had surely
 thought
 They rode so slowly and they look'd
 so pale,
 That each had suffer'd some exceed-
 ing wrong.
 For he was ever saying to him-
 self,
 "O I that wasted time to tend upon
 her,
 To compass her with sweet observ-
 ances,
 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 fear'd
 () every wavering brake an ambus-
 cade.
 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 arm'd, behind
 a rock
 In shadow, waiting for them, caitiffs
 all;
 And heard one crying to his fellows,
 "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 armor, and his damsel shall be
 ours."

Then Enid ponder'd 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 pos-
sess your horse
And armor, 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 de-
feat,
Long for my life, or hunger for my
death,
Yourself shall see my vigor is not
lost."

Then Enid waited pale and sor-
rowful,
And down upon him bare the bandit
three.
And at the midmost charging,
Prince Geraint
Drave the long spear a cubit thro'
his breast
And out beyond; and then against
his brace
Of comrades, each of whom had
broken on him
A lance that splinter'd like an icicle,

Swung from his brand a windy buf-
fet out
Once, twice, to right, to left, and
stunn'd the twain
Or slew them, and dismounting like
a man
That skins the wild beast after slay-
ing him,
Stript from the three dead wolves of
woman born
The three gay suits of armor which
they wore,
And let the bodies lie, but bound
the suits
Of armor 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
thro' the waste.

He follow'd nearer: ruth began to
work
Against his anger in him, while he
watch'd
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 smolder'd wrong that burnt
him all within;
But evermore it seem'd 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 arm'd,
 Whereof one seem'd 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 answer'd merrily, "Yea,
 but one?
 Wait here, and when he passes fall
 upon him."

And Enid ponder'd 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 be-
 fore,
 And they will fall upon him un-
 awares.
 I needs must disobey him for his
 good;
 How should I dare obey him to his
 harm?
 Needs must I speak, and tho' 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 arm'd,
 and one
 Is larger-limb'd 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-limb'd
 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.
 Aim'd at the helm, his lance err'd;
 but Geraint's,
 A little in the late encounter
 strain'd,
 Struck thro' the bulky bandit's corse-
 let home,

And then brake short, and down his
 enemy roll'd,
 And there lay still; as he that tells
 the tale
 Saw once a great piece of a promon-
 tory,
 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 sap-
 ling 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,
 Spu' d with his terrible war-cry;
 for as one,
 That listens near a torrent moun-
 tain-brook,
 All thro' the crash of the near cata-
 ract hears
 The drumming thunder of the huger
 fall
 At distance, where the soldiers went
 to hear
 His voice in battle, and be kindled
 by it,
 And foemen scared, like that false
 pair who turn'd
 Flying, but, overtaken, died the death
 Themselves had wrought on many
 an innocent.

Thercon Geraint, dismounting,
 pick'd the lance
 That pleased him best, and drew
 from those dead wolves
 Their three gay suits of armor, 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
 thro' the wood.

He follow'd nearer still: the pain
 she had
 To keep them in the wild ways of
 the wood,
 Two sets of three laden with jing-
 ling 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 fall'n, and now
 so long
 By bandits groom'd, prick'd their
 light ears, and felt
 Her low firm voice and tender gov-
 ernment.

So thro' 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 gem-
 like chased
 In the brown wild, and mowers
 mowing in it:
 And down a rocky pathway from the
 place
 There came a fair-hair'd 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-hair'd 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, tho' 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 un-
 awares,
 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 de-
 light,
 "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, re-
 turn, 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 terri-
 tory:
 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 din-
 nerless.
 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 disap-
 pear'd,
 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 sigh'd;
 Then with another humorous ruth
 remark'd
 The lusty mowers laboring dinner-
 less,
 And watch'd the sun blaze on the
 turning scythe,
 And after nodded sleepily in the
 heat.
 But she, remembering her old ruin'd
 hall,
 And all the windy clamor of the
 daws

About her hollow turret, pluck'd the
 grass
 There growing longest by the mead-
 ow's edge,
 And into many a listless annulet,
 Now over, now beneath her mar-
 riage ring,
 Wove and unwove it, till the boy
 return'd
 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 answer'd, "Thanks, my lord;"
 the two remain'd
 Apart by all the chamber's width,
 and mute
 As creatures voiceless thro' 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 echo-
 ing, burst
 Their drowse; and either started
 while the door,
 Push'd from without, drave back-
 ward to the wall,
 And midmost of a rout of roisterers,
 Femininely fair and dissolutely pale,
 Her suitor in old years before Ger-
 aint,
 Enter'd, the wild lord of the place,
 Limours.
 He moving up with pliant courtli-
 ness,
 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 soli-
 tary.
 Then cried Geraint for wine and
 goodly cheer
 To feed the sudden guest, and sump-
 tuously
 According to his fashion, bade the
 host
 Call in what men soever were his
 friends,
 And feast with these in honor 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
 play'd upon it,
 And made it of two colors; 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,
 ask'd 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,

Crost and came near, lifted adoring
eyes,
Bow'd at her side and utter'd whis-
peringly:

"Enid, the pilot star of my lone
life,
Enid, my early and my only love,
Enid, the loss of whom hath turn'd
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 and waste of wil-
derness.
I thought, but that your father came
between,
In former days you saw me favor-
ably.
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
Tho' men may bicker with the things
they love,
They would not make them laugh-
able 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 — pall'd —
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 unarm'd; 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
own'd,
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
fear'd his eyes,
Moist as they were, wine-heated
from the feast;

And answer'd 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 to-night: I am weary to
the death."

Low at leave-taking, with his
brandish'd plume
Brushing his instep, bow'd the all-
amorous Earl,
And the stout Prince bade 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,
heap'd
The pieces of his armor in one place,

All to be there against a sudden
need;
Then dozed awhile herself, but over-
toil'd
By that day's grief and travel, ever-
more
Seen'd 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 fol-
lowers,
Sound on a dreadful trumpet, sum-
moning her;
Which was the red cock shouting to
the light,
As the gray dawn stole o'er the
dewy world,
And glimmer'd on his armor in the
room.
And once again she rose to look at
it,
But touch'd 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 seem'd
So justified by that necessity,
That tho' 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
 return'd:
 Then tending her rough lord, tho'
 all unask'd,
 In silence, did him service as a
 squire;
 Till issuing arm'd he found the host
 and cried,
 "Thy reckoning, friend?" and ere
 he learnt it, "Take
 Five horses and their armors;" and
 the host
 Suddenly honest, answer'd 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
 to-day
 I charge you, Enid, more especially,
 What thing soever ye may hear, or
 see,
 Or fancy (tho' I count it of small
 use
 To charge you) that ye speak not
 but obey."

And Enid answer'd, "Yea, my
 lord, I know
 Your wish, and would obey; but rid-
 ing 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 turn'd and look'd as
 keenly at her
 As careful robins eye the delver's
 toil;
 And that within her, which a wan-
 ton fool,
 Or hasty judger would have call'd
 her guilt,
 Made her cheek burn and either eye-
 lid fall.
 And Geraint look'd and was not
 satisfied.

Then forward by a way which,
 beaten broad,
 Led from the territory of false
 Linours
 To the waste earldom of another
 earl,
 Doorm, whom his shaking vassals
 call'd the Bull,
 Went Enid with her sullen follower
 on.
 Once she look'd back, and when she
 saw him ride
 More near by many a rood than yes-
 ter-morn,
 It well-nigh made her cheerful; till
 Geraint
 Waving an angry hand as who
 should say
 "Ye watch me," sadden'd 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 a moment after, wild Limours,
 Borne on a black horse, like a thunder-cloud
 Whose skirts are loosen'd by the breaking storm,
 Half ridden off with by the thing he rode,
 And all in passion uttering a dry shriek,
 Dash'd on Geraint, who closed with him, and bore
 Down by the length of lance and arm beyond
 The crupper, and so left him stunn'd or dead,
 And overthrew the next that follow'd him,
 And blindly rush'd on all the rout behind.
 But at the flash and motion of the man
 They vanish'd 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 armor? 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
prick'd
In combat with the follower of
Limours,
Bled underneath his armor secretly,
And so rode on, nor told his gentle
wife
What ail'd him, hardly knowing it
himself,
Till his eye darken'd and his helmet
wagg'd;
And at a sudden swerving of the
road,
Tho' 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 blis-
tering sun,
And swathed the hurt that drain'd
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 re-
garded her,
For in that realm of lawless turbu-
lence,
A woman weeping for her murder'd
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 veil-
less 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 scour'd 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 answer'd
in all haste.

"Would some of your kind 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 pluck'd 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 growl'd,

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 call-
ing to him.

Till at the last he waken'd from his
swoon,

And found his own dear bride prop-
ping 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 feign'd 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 return'd
The huge Earl Doorm: with plunder to the hall.
His lusty spearmen follow'd him with noise:
Each hurling down a heap of things that rang
Against the pavement, cast his lance aside,
And doff'd his helm: and then there flutter'd in,
Half-bold, half-frightened, with dilated eyes,
A tribe of women, dress'd in many hues,
And mingled with the spearmen: and Earl Doorm
Struck with a knife's haft hard against the board,
And call'd 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 roll'd his eyes about the hall, and found
A damsel drooping in a corner of it.
Then he remember'd 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 color 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 unswallow'd piece, and turning stared;

While some, whose souls the old serpent long had drawn

Down, as the worm draws in the wither'd leaf

And makes it earth, hiss'd 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 help'd him to it: and all at once

GERAINT AND ENID

249

They hated her, who took no thought
of them,
But answer'd in low voice, her meek
head yet
Drooping, "I pray you of your cour-
tesy,
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 gra-
ciously,
Assumed that she had thank'd him,
adding, "Yea,
Eat and be glad, for I account you
mine."

She answer'd meekly, "How
should I be glad
Henceforth in all the world at any-
thing,
Until my lord arise and look upon
me?"

Here the huge Earl cried out upon
her talk,
As all but empty heart and wear-
iness
And sickly nothing; suddenly seized
on her,
And bare her by main violence to the
board,
And thrust the dish before her, cry-
ing, "Eat."

"No, no," said Enid, vext, "I
will not eat
Till yonder man upon the bier arise,
And eat with me." "Drink, then,"
he answer'd. "Here!"
(And fill'd a horn with wine and
held it to her),
"Lo! I, myself, when flush'd 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 your 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 turn'd all red and paced
his hall,
Now gnaw'd his under, now his
upper lip,
And coming up close to her, said at
last:
"Girl, for I see ye scorn my cour-
tesies,
Take warning: yonder man is surely
dead;
And I compel all creatures to my
will.
Not eat nor drink? And wherefore
wail 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 beauti-
fully:
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 gentle-women
Display'd a splendid silk of foreign loom,
Where like a shoaling sea the lovely blue
Play'd 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 answer'd, harder to be moved
Than hardest tyrants in their day of power,
With lifelong 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 array'd me like the sun:
In this poor gown he bade me clothe myself,
When now we rode upon this fatal quest
Of honor, where no honor can be gain'd:
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 a trap,
Which sees the trapper coming thro' 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 thro' the swarthy neck, and like a ball

The russet-bearded head roll'd on the floor.

So died Earl Doorm by him he counted dead.

And all the men and women in the hall

GERAINT AND ENID

251

Rose when they saw the dead man
rise, and fled
Yelling as from a specter, 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 my-
self,
Not, tho' 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 your-
self,
And will henceforward rather die
than doubt."

And Enid could not say one ten-
der word,
She felt so blunt and stupid at the
heart:
She only pray'd 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 law-
ful fight,

Neigh'd with all gladness as they
came, and stoop'd
With a low whinny toward the pair:
and she
Kiss'd the white star upon his noble
front,
Glad also; then Geraint upon the
horse
Mounted, and reach'd a hand, and
on his foot
She set her own and climb'd; he
turn'd his face
And kiss'd her climbing, and she
cast her arms
About him, and at once they rode
away.

And never yet, since high in Para-
dise
O'er the four rivers the first roses
blew,
Came purer pleasure unto mortal
kind
Than lived thro' her, who in that
perilous hour
Put hand to hand beneath her hus-
band'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,

Shriek'd 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
 shriek'd 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 some-
 thing 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) bid-
 ding 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 scatter'd," 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 flush'd,
 And hung his head, and halted in
 reply,
 Fearing the mild face of the blame-
 less King,
 And after madness acted question
 ask'd:
 '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 scatter'd in the
 field,
 And one from Edyrn. Every now
 and then,
 When Edyrn rein'd 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, perceiv-
 ing, 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 re-
 pulsed
 By Yniol and yourself, I schemed
 and wrought
 Until I overturn'd him; then set up
 (With one main purpose ever at my
 heart)
 My haughty jousts, and took a para-
 mour;
 Did her mock-honor as the fairest
 fair,
 And, toppling over all antagonism,
 So wax'd in pride, that I believed
 myself
 Unconquerable, for I was well-nigh
 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 answer'd
 Heaven,
 Behold me overturn and trample on
 him.
 Then, had you cried, or knelt, or
 pray'd to me,
 I should not less have kill'd him.
 And 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) over-
 throw
 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:
 Tho' 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 talk'd with Dubric, the
 high saint,
 Who, with mild heat of holy oratory,
 Subdued me somewhat to that gen-
 tleness,
 Which, when it weds with man-
 hood, makes a man.
 And you were often there about the
 Queen,
 But saw me not, or mark'd 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 be-
 lieved,
 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 reach'd the camp the
 King himself
 Advanced to greet them, and behold-
 ing her
 Tho' pale, yet happy, ask'd her not
 a word,
 But went apart with Edyrn, whom
 he held
 In converse for a little, and return'd,
 And, gravely smiling, lifted her from
 horse,
 And kiss'd her with all pureness,
 brotherlike,
 And show'd an empty tent allotted
 her,
 And glancing for a minute, till he
 saw her
 Pass into it, turn'd to the Prince,
 and said:

“ Prince, when of late ye pray'd
 me for my leave
 To move to your own land, and
 there defend
 Your marches, I was prick'd with
 some reproof,
 As one that let foul wrong stagnate
 and be,
 By having look'd too much thro'
 alien eyes,
 And wrought too long with dele-
 gated hands,
 Not used mine own: but now be-
 hold me come
 To cleanse this common sewer of all
 my realm,
 With Edyrn and with others: have
 ye look'd
 At Edyrn? have ye seen how nobly
 changed?
 This work of his is great and won-
 derful.
 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 valor-
 ous,
 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 won-
 derful
 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, tho' he slew them one by
 one,
 And were himself nigh wounded to
 the death.”
 So spake the King; low bow'd the
 Prince, and felt
 His work was neither great nor won-
 derful,
 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,
 Fill'd 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 look'd 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 wink'd
 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 every-
 where
 Clear'd 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 tho' 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 tourna-
 ment,
 They call'd 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 Ger-
 aints
 Of times to be; nor did he doubt her
 more,
 But rested in her fēalty, till he
 crown'd
 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 render'd tributary, fail'd of late
To send his tribute; wherefore Ar-
thur call'd
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 laugh'd upon him.
"Old friend, too old to be so young,
depart,
Delay not thou for ought, but let
them sit,
Until they find a lustier than them-
selves."

So these departed. Early, one fair
dawn,
The light-wing'd spirit of his youth
return'd
On Arthur's heart; he arm'd 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 bot-
tom of it.
And on the right of Bal' Balin's
horse
Was fast beside an alder, on the left
Of Balan Balan's near a poplartree.
"Fair Sirs," said Arthur, "where-
fore sit ye here?"
Balin and Balan answer'd, "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 over-
throw."
And Arthur lightly smote the breth-
ren down,
And lightly so return'd, and no man
knew.

Then Balin rose, and Balan, and
beside
The caroling water set themselves
again,
And spake no word until the shadow
turn'd;
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 follow'd; whom when Arthur
seeing ask'd:
"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 delight-somely:
 For I that did that violence to thy thrall,
 Had often wrought some fury on myself,
 Saving for Balan: those three king-less years
 Have past—were wormwood-bitter to me. King,
 Methought that if we sat beside the well,
 And hurl'd to ground what knight soever spurr'd
 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 to-day
 Abash'd 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 enter'd 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 clash'd cup; they drank and someone sang,
 Sweet-voiced, a song of welcome, whereupon
 Their common shout in chorus, mounting, made
 Those banners of twelve battles overhead
 Stir, as they stirr'd of old, when Arthur's host
 Proclaim'd 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 return'd.

"Sir King," they brought report,
 "we hardly found,
 So bush'd about it is with gloom, the hall
 Of him to whom ye sent us, Pellam, once
 A Christless foe of thine as ever dash'd
 Horse against horse; but seeing that thy realm



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Hath prosper'd in the name of
 Christ, the King
 Took, as in rival heat, to holy
 things;
 And finds himself descended from
 the Saint
 Arimathæan 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 push'd aside his faithful wife,
 nor lets
 Or dame or damsel enter at his
 gates
 Lest he should be polluted. This
 gray King
 Show'd 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 hither, that same
 spear
 Wherewith the Roman pierced the
 side of Christ.
 He much amazed us; after, when
 we sought
 The tribute, answer'd, 'I have quite
 foregone
 All matters of this world: Garlon,
 mine heir,
 Of him demand it,' which this Gar-
 lon 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 wood-
 man 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 wood-
 man show'd 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 be-
 fore me, see
 He do not fail behind me: foully
 slain
 And villainously! who will hunt for
 me
 This demon of the woods?" Said
 Balin, "I!"
 So claim'd 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 safe for
 fears,
 My fears for thee, so rich a fellow-
 ship
 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 Para-
 dise."

So Balan warn'd, and went; Balin
 remain'd:
 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; where-
 fore hover'd round
 Lancelot, but when he mark'd 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 —
 Sigh'd, as a boy lame-born beneath a
 height,
 That glooms his valley, sighs to see
 the peak
 Sun-flush'd, or touch at night the
 northern star;
 For one from out his village lately
 climb'd
 And brought report of azure lands
 and fair,
 Far seen to left and right; and he
 himself

Hath hardly scaled with help a hun-
 dred feet
 Up from the base: so Balin marvel-
 ing oft
 How far beyond him Lancelot
 seem'd to move,
 Groan'd, 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 crown'd
 With my slain self the heaps of
 whom I slew —
 So — better! — But this worship of
 the Queen,
 That honor, 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 disdain'd 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 Guine-
 vere,

In lieu of this rough beast upon my shield,
Langued gules, and tooth'd with grinning savagery."

And Arthur, when Sir Balin sought him, said:
"What wilt thou bear?" Balin was bold, and ask'd
To bear her own crown-royal upon shield,
Whereat she smiled and turn'd her to the King,
Who answer'd, "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 seem'd 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 deem'd, presumptuously:
His arm half rose to strike again, but fell:
The memory of that cognizance on shield
Weighted it down, but in himself he moan'd:

"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 ev'n 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 darken'd, court and King
And all the kindly warmth of Arthur's hall
Shadow'd an angry distance: yet he strove
To learn the graces of their Table, fought
Hard with himself, and seem'd at length in peace.

Then chanced, one morning, that Sir Balin sat
Close-bower'd 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.
 Follow'd 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 wou'd 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
 Flow'd 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 ridd'n before among the flowers
 In those fair days — not all as cool as these,
 Tho' season-earlier. Art thou sad? or sick?
 Our noble King will send thee his own leech —
 Sick? or for any matter anger'd 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
 Deepen'd: he sharply caught his lance and shield,

Nor stay'd to crave permission of the king,
 But, mad for strange adventure,
 dash'd away.

He took the selfsame track as Balin, saw
 The fountain where they sat together, sigh'd,
 "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 ax!" he cried,
 Descended, and disjointed it at a blow:
 To whom the woodman utter'd 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 yestern-even.
 And some *do* say that our Sir Garlon, too
 Hath learn'd black magic, and to ride unseen.
 Look to the cave." But Balin answer'd 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 mark'd not on his right a cavern-chasm
 Yawn over darkness, where, nor far within,
 The whole day died, but dying, gleam'd on rocks
 Roof-pendent, sharp; and others from the floor,
 Tusklake, arising, made that mouth of night
 Whereout the Demon issued up from Hell.
 He mark'd not this, but blind and deaf to all
 Save that chain'd rage, which ever yelp'd 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 armor by him flash, and pass
 And vanish in the woods; and follow'd this,
 But all so blind in rage that un-awares
 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, appear'd, low-built but strong;
 The ruinous donjon as a knoll of moss,

The battlement overtopt with ivy-
tods,
A home of bats, in every tower an
owl.

Then spake the men of Fellam
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 stall'd his horse, and strode
across the court,
But found the greetings both of
knight and King
Faint in the low dark hall of ban-
quet: leaves
Laid their green faces flat against
the panes,
Sprays grated, and the canker'd
boughs without
Whined in the wood; for all was
hush'd within,
Till when at feast Sir Garlon like-
wise ask'd,
"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 thro' 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 simplest 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,
boss'd
With holy Joseph's legend, on his
right
Stood, all of massiest bronze: one
side had sea
And ship and sail and angels blow-
ing on it:
And one was rough with wattling,
and the walls
Of that low church he built at Glas-
tonbury.
This Balin graspt, but while in act
to hurl,
Thro' memory of that token on the
shield
Relax'd his hold: "I will be gen-
tle," he thought
"And passing gentle" caught his
hand away.
Then fiercely to Sir Garlon, "Eyes
have I
That saw to-day the shadow of a
spear,
Shot from behind me, run along the
ground;
Eyes, too, that long have watch'd
how Lancelot draws
From homage to the best and purest,
might,
Name, manhood, and a grace, but
scantly 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!"

night
 But not the less by And inward to the wall; he stept
 The scorn of Garlon, poisoning all behind;
 his rest, Thence in a moment heard them pass
 Stung him in dreams. At length, like wolves
 and dim thro' leaves Howling; but while he stared about
 Blink the white morn, sprays grated, the shrine,
 and old boughs In which he scarce could spy the
 Whined in the wood. He rose, de- Christ for Saints,
 scended, met Beheld before a golden altar lie
 The scorner in the castle court, and The longest lance his eyes had ever
 fain, seen,
 For hate and loathing, would have Point-painted red; and seizing there-
 past him by; upon
 But when Sir Garlon utter'd mock- Push'd thro' an open casement down,
 ing-wise; lean'd on it,
 "What, wear ye still that same Leapt in a semicircle, and lit on
 crown-scandalous?" earth;
 His countenance blacken'd, and his Then hand at ear, and harkening
 forehead veins from what side
 Bloated, and branch'd; and tearing The blindfold rummage buried in
 out of sheath the walls
 The brand, Sir Balin with a fiery, Might echo, ran the counter path,
 "Ha! and found
 So thou be shadow, here I make His charger, mounted on him and
 thee ghost," away.
 Hard upon helm smote him, and the An arrow whizz'd to the right, one
 blade flew to the left,
 Splintering in six, and clinkt upon One overhead; and Pellam's feeble
 the stones. cry,
 Then Garlon, reeling slowly back- "Stay, stay him! he defileth heavenly
 ward, fell, things
 And Balin by the banneret of his With earthly uses"—made him
 helm quickly dive
 Dragg'd him, and struck, but from Beneath the boughs, and race thro'
 the castle a cry many a mile
 Sounded across the court, and — Of dense and open, till his goodly
 men-at-arms, horse,
 A score with pointed lances, making Arising wearily at a fallen oak,
 at him — Stumbled headlong, and cast him
 He dash'd the pummel at the fore- face to ground.
 most face,
 Beneath a low door dipt, and made Half-wroth he had not ended, but
 his feet all glad,
 Wings thro' a glimmering gallery, Knightlike, to find his charger yet
 till he mark'd unlam'd,
 The portal of King Pellam's chapel Sir Balin drew the shield from off
 wide 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 turn'd aside into the
 woods,
 And there in gloom cast himself all
 along,
 Moaning, "My violences, my vio-
 lences!"

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 kil'd 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 thro' 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 reach'd a glade,
 Where under one long lane of cloud-
 less air
 Before another wood, the royal
 crown
 Sparkled, and swaying upon a rest-
 less 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 unearn'd 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
 Thro' evil ways: the knight, with
 whom I rode,

Hath suffer'd misadventure, and my
 squire
 Hath in him small defense; 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 maiden-
 hood.
 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 en-
 sepulcher
 Their brother beast, whose anger
 was his lord.
 O me, that such a name as Guine-
 vere's,
 Which our high Lancelot hath so
 lifted up,
 And been thereby uplifted, should
 thro' me,
 My violence, and my villainy, come
 to shame."

Thereat she suddenly laugh'd and
 shrill, anon
 Sigh'd all as suddenly. Said Balin
 to her,
 "Is this thy courtesy — to mock me,
 ha?
 Hence, for I will not with thee."
 Again she sigh'd,
 "Pardon, sweet lord! we maidens
 often laugh
 When sick at heart, when rather we
 should weep.

I knew thee wrong'd. I brake upon
 thy rest,
 And now full loth am I to break
 thy dream,
 But thou art man, and canst abide a
 truth,
 Tho' bitter. Hitler, boy — and
 mark me well.
 Dost thou remember at Caerleon
 once —
 A year ago — nay, then I love thee
 not —
 Aye, 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 knight-
 hood, knelt
 In amorous homage — knelt — what
 else? — O aye,
 Knelt, and drew down from out his
 night-black hair
 And mumbled that white hand
 whose ring'd caress
 Had wander'd 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 naked-
 ness,
 Saw them embrace: he reddens, can-
 not 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 de-
ceived.
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 mail'd heel athwart the
royal crown,
Stamp'd all into defacement, hurl'd it
from him
Among the forest weeds, and curs'd
the tale,
The told-of, and the teller.

That weird yell,
Unearthlier than all shriek of bird
or beast,
Thrill'd thro' the woods; and Balan
lurking there

(His quest was unaccomplish'd)
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 snatch'd a sudden buckler from
the Squire,

And vaulted on his horse, and so they
crash'd

In onset, and King Pellam's holy
spear,

Reputed to be red with sinless blood,
Redden'd at once with sinful, for the
point

Across the maiden shield of Balan
prick'd

The hauberk to the flesh; and Balin's
horse

Was wearied to the death, and, when
they clash'd,

Rolling back upon Balin, crush'd the
man

Inward, and either fell, and swoon'd
away.

Then to her Squire mutter'd the
damsel, "Fools!

This fellow hath wrought some foul-
ness with his Queen:

Else never had he borne her crown,
nor raved

And thus foam'd 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 brain-
less hulls,
Dead for one heifer!"

Then the gentle Squire,
"I hold them happy, so they died for
love:
And, Vivien, tho' 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,
Crawl'd slowly with low moans to
where he lay,
And on his dying brother cast him-
self
Dying; and *he* lifted faint eyes; he
felt

One near him; all at once they
found the world,
Staring wild-wide; then with a child-
like wail,
And drawing down the dim disas-
trous brow
That o'er him hung, he kiss'd it,
moan'd 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 Balin
moan'd again.

"Brother, I dwelt a day in Pel-
lam's hall:
This Garlon mock'd 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 dam-
sel 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 to our Queen."

"O brother," answer'd Balin,
 "woe is me!
 My madness all thy life has been thy doom,
 Thy curse, and darken'd all thy day;
 and now
 The night has come. I scarce can see thee now.
 Good-night! for we shall never bid again
 Good-morrow — 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,
 Good-night, true brother."

Balan answer'd low
 "Good-night, true brother here!
 good-morrow 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 lock'd in either's arms.

MERLIN AND VIVIEN

A STORM was coming, hut the winds were still,
 And in the wild woods of Brocc-liande,
 Before an oak, so hollow, huge and old
 It look'd a tower of ivied mason-work,
 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 Caerleon 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 follow'd, Sir,
 In Arthur's household?" — answer'd innocently:

"Aye, hy some few — aye, 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 forebore:
 he rose
 To leave the hall, and, Vivien follow-
 ing him,
 Turn'd 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 answer'd, smiling
 scornfully,
 "Why fear? because that foster'd at
 thy court
 I savor of thy — virtues? fear them?
 no.
 As Love, if Love be perfect, casts out
 fear,
 So Hate, if Hate be 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 thro' the flesh herself
 hath made
 Gives him the lie! There is no be-
 ing 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 bur-
 rowings,
 The hearts of all this Order in mine
 hand —
 Aye — 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-fashion'd — Well, I loved
 thee first,
 That warps the wit."

Loud laugh'd 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 wail'd.

"Why kneel ye there? What evil
 have 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 suffer'd 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 Lyon-
 nesse —
 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 stain-
 less King —
 Help, for he follows! take me to thy-
 self!
 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 over-
 blame
 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 Lance-
 lot.
 He hath given us a fair falcon which
 he train'd;
 We go to prove it. Bide ye here the
 while."

She past; and Vivien murmur'd
 after "Go!
 I bide the while." Then thro' the
 portal-arch
 Peering askance, and muttering bro-
 kenwise,
 As one that labors with an evil dream,
 Beheld the Queen and Lancelot get to
 horse.

"Is that the Lancelot? goodly —
 aye, 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 dream'd
 not — nor of me
 These — aye, 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 honor
 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 paces,

Nor will she rake: there is no base-
ness 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 tower'd;
her bells,
Tone under tone, shrill'd, 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, watch'd
And whisper'd: thro' the peaceful
court she crept
And whisper'd: then as Arthur in the
highest
Leaven'd 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,
Leaven'd his hall. They heard and
let her be.

Thereafter as an enemy that has
left
Death in the living waters, and with-
drawn,
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 rumor issued from her-
self
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 flutter'd 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 watch'd, and had not
held his peace:
It made the laughter of an after-
noon
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 call'd him Wizard; whom
at first
She play'd about with slight and
sprightly talk,
And vivid smiles, and faintly-venom'd
points
Of slander, glancing here and grazing
there;
And yielding to his kindlier moods,
the Seer

Would watch her at her petulance,
 and play,
 Ev'n when they seem'd unloveable,
 and laugh
 As those that watch a kitten; thus he
 grew
 Tolerant of what he half disdain'd,
 and she,
 Perceiving that she was but half dis-
 dain'd,
 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,
 Tho' 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 waver'd; but that other clung to
 him,
 Fixt in her will, and so the seasons
 went.

Then fell on Merlin a great melan-
 choly;
 He walk'd with dreams and dark-
 ness, 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 gain'd
 the beach;
 There found a little boat, and stept
 into it;

And Vivien follow'd, but he mark'd
 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 dis-
 embark'd.
 And then she follow'd Merlin all the
 way,
 Ev'n to the wild woods of Broce-
 liande,
 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 seem'd
 to lie
 Closed in the four walls of a hollow
 tower,
 From which was no escape for ever-
 more;
 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
 quench'd.

There lay she all her length and
 kiss'd 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
 express
 Than hid her, clung about her lissome
 limbs,

In color like the satin-shining palm
 On sallows in the windy gleams of
 March:
 And while she kiss'd them, crying,
 "Trample me,
 Dear feet, that I have follow'd thro'
 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 roll'd 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, slid 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 beard 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 an-
 swer'd 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 wis-
 dom," drew
 The vast and shaggy mantle of his
 beard
 Across her neck and bosom to her
 knee,
 And call'd 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 call'd
 herself,
 But rather seem'd a lovely baleful
 star
 Veil'd in gray vapor; 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 melan-
 choly."
 And Vivien answer'd smiling sau-
 cily,
 "What, O my Master, have ye found
 your voice?
 I bid the stranger welcome. Thanks
 at last!
 But yesterday you never open'd lip,
 Except indeed to drink: no cup had
 we:
 In mine own lady palms I cull'd the
 spring
 That gather'd trickling dropwise
 from the cleft,

And made a pretty cup of both my
 hands
 And offer'd 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 thro' this
 wild wood
 And all this morning when I fondled
 you:
 Boon, aye, there was a boon, one not
 so strange —
 How had I wrong'd you? surely ye
 are wise,
 But such a silence is more wise than
 kind."

And Merlin lock'd his hand in hers
 and said:
 "O did ye never lie upon the shore,
 And watch the curl'd white of the
 coming wave
 Glass'd in the slippery sand before it
 breaks?
 Ev'n such a wave, but not so pleasur-
 able,
 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 follow'd
 me unask'd;

And when I look'd, and saw you
 following still,
 My mind involved yourself the near-
 est thing
 In that mind-mist, for shall I tell you
 truth?
 You seem'd 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 brighten'd all
 again.
 And ask your boon, for boon I owe
 you thrice,
 Once for wrong done you by confu-
 sion, 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 answer'd 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 fear'd ye were not wholly
 mine;
 And see, yourself have own'd 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 ask'd this very
boon,
Now ask'd again: for see you not,
dear love,
That such a mood as that, which
lately gloom'd
Your fancy when ye saw me follow-
ing 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, know-
ing you mine.
And therefore be as great as ye are
named,
Not muffled round with selfish reti-
cence.
How hard you look and how deny-
ingly!
O, if you think this wickedness in
me,
That I should prove it on you un-
aware,
That makes me passing wrathful;
then our bond
Had best be loosed forever: 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,

Ev'n 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: be-
cause 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, tho' 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 stirr'd this vice in you which
ruin'd man
Thro' 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 sum-
mer 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 garner'd fruit,

That rotting inward slowly molders 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 look'd and half believed her true,
 So tender was her voice, so fair her face,
 So sweetly gleam'd her eyes behind her tears
 Like sunlight on the plain behind a shower:
 And yet he answer'd 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 flash'd,

And into such a song, such fire for
fame,
Such trumpet-blowings in it, coming
down
To such a stern and iron-clashing
close,
That when he stopt we long'd to
hurl together,
And should have done it; but the
beauteous beast
Scared by the noise upstart'd at our
feet,
And like a silver shadow slipt away
Thro' the dim land; and all day
long we rode
Thro' the dim land against a rushing
wind,
That glorious roundel echoing in our
ears,
And chased the flashes of his golden
horns
Until they vanish'd by the fairy well
That laughs at iron — as our war-
riors 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 tho' you knew this cursed
charm,
Were proving it on me, and that I
lay
And felt them slowly ebbing, name
and fame."

And Vivien answer'd smiling
mournfully:
"O mine have ebb'd away for ever-
more,
And all thro' 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 differ-
ently:
Yet is there one true line, the pearl
of pearls:
Man dreams of Fame while woman
wakes to love.'
Yea! Love, tho' 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 lock'd 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,
 Wit' 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, miss'd, 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
 Brake 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 chil-
 dren, 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 thro'
 this charm,
 That you might play me falsely, hav-
 ing power,
 However well ye think ye love me
 now
 (As sons of kings loving in pupilage
 Have turn'd 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 overstrain'd affection, it may be,
 To keep me all to your own self,—
 or else
 A sudden spurt of woman's jeal-
 ousy,—
 Should try this charm on whom ye
 say ye love."

And Vivien answer'd 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 overstrain'd. 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 ever-
 more."

Then the great Master merrily
 answer'd 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 uncharm'd. 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 anchor'd in his port,
 Whose bark had plunder'd 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 scatter'd 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 tho' success-
 ful war
 On all the youth, they sicken'd;
 councils thinn'd,
 And armies waned, for magnet-like
 she drew
 The rustiest iron of old fighters'
 hearts;
 And beasts themselves would wor-
 ship; camels knelt
 Unbidden, and the brutes of moun-
 tain back
 That carry kings in castles, bow'd
 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 thro'
 all
 The hundred under-kingdoms that
 he sway'd
 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 fail'd,
 the King
 Pronounced a dismal sentence, mean-
 ing by it
 To keep the list low and pretenders
 back,
 Or like a king, not to be trifled
 with —
 Their heads should molder on the
 city gates.
 And many tried and fail'd, because
 the charm
 Of nature in her overbore their own:
 And many a wizard brow bleach'd
 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, me-
 thinks,
 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 their 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 poison'd
 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 litle
 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 answer'd 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 touch'd fierce wine, nor
 tasted flesh,
 Nor own'd a sensual wish, to him the
 wall
 That sunders ghosts and shadow-
 casting men
 Became a crystal, and he saw them
 thro' 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 lash'd it at the base with slant-
 ing storm;
 Or in the noon of mist and driving
 rain,
 When the lake whiten'd and the pine-
 wood roar'd,
 And the cairn'd mountain was a
 shadow, sunn'd
 The world to peace again: here was
 the man.
 And so by force they dragg'd 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 answer'd 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 lock'd and padlock'd
 thirty-fold,
 And whelm all this beneath as vast
 a mound
 As after a 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 answer'd her:

"Thou read the book, my pretty Vivien!
 O aye, 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 every margin scribbled, crost, and cramm'd
 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 tho' you should not prove it upon me,
 But keep that oath ye sware, ye might, perchance,
 Assay it on someone 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 explain'd for shame.
 Not one of all the drove should touch me: swine!"

Then answer'd 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 answer'd frowning
wrathfully:
"O aye, what say ye to Sir Valence,
him
Whose kinsman left him watcher
o'er his wife
And two fair babes, and went to dis-
tant lands;
Was one year gone, and on return-
ing 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 answer'd Merlin, "Nay,
I know the tale.
Sir Valence wedded with an outland
dame:
Some cause had kept him sunder'd
from his wife.
One child they had: it lived with
her: she died:
His kinsman traveling on his own
affair
Was charged by Valence to bring
home the child.
He brought, not found it therefore:
take the truth."

"O aye," said Vivien, "overtrue a
tale.
What say ye then to sweet Sir Sagra-
more,
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 over-
quick
To crop his own sweet rose before
the hour?"

And Merlin answer'd, "Over-
quick art thou
To catch a loathly plume fall'n from
the wing
Of that foul bird of rapine whose
whole prey
Is man's good name: he never
wrong'd his bride.
I know the tale. An angry gust of
wind
Puff'd out his torch among the
myriad-room'd
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 glimmer'd
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 aye," said Vivien, "that were
likely, too.
What say ye then to fair Sir Perci-
vale
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 answer'd careless of
her charge,
"A sober man is Percivale and pure;
But once in life was fluster'd 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
sinn'd,
The sin that practise 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 froth'd out, or
have ye more?"

And Vivien answer'd frowning
yet in wrath:
"O aye; what say ye to Sir Lancelot,
friend
Traitor or true? that commerce with
the Queen,
I ask you, is it clamor'd by the child,
Or whisper'd in the corner: do ye
know it?"

To which he answer'd sadly,
"Yea, I know it.

Sir Lancelot went ambassador, at
first,
To fetch her, and she watch'd him
from her walls.
A rumor 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 answer'd 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 name such man-
hood earns,
Could call him the main cause of all
their crime;
Yea, were he not crown'd 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 gentle-
man,
Who wouldst against thine own eye-
witness fain
Have all men true and leal, all
women pure;
How, in the mouths of base interpre-
ters,
From over-fineness not intelligible

To things with every sense as false
and foul
As the poach'd filth that floods the
middle street,
Is thy white blamelessness accounted
blame!"

But Vivien, deeming Merlin over-
borne
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 Gala-
had clean.

Her words had issue other than
she will'd.
He dragg'd his eyebrow bushes
down, and made
A snowy penthouse for his hollow
eyes,
And mutter'd 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 wan-
ton 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
fail'd,

Being so bitter: for fine plots may
fail,
Tho' harlots paint their talk as well
as face
With colors 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 im-
pute a crime
Are pronest to it, and impute them-
selve,
Wantin 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 crown'd with spir-
itual 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-winter'd fleece of throat
and chin.
But Vivien, gathering somewhat of
his mood,
And hearing "harlot" mutter'd
twice or thrice,

Leapt from her session on his lap,
 and sto'
 Stiff as a viper frozen; loathsome
 sight,
 How from the rosy lips of life and
 love,
 Flash'd the bare-grinning skeleton of
 death!
 White was her cheek; sharp breaths
 of anger puff'd
 Her fairy nostril out; her hand half-
 clench'd
 Went faltering sideways downward
 to her belt,
 And feeling; had she found a dag-
 ger there
 (For in a wink the false love turns
 to hate)
 She would have stabb'd 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 consol-
 able.
 Then her false voice made way,
 broken with sobs:

“O crueller than was ever told in
 tale,
 Or sung in song! O vainly
 lavish'd 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 call'd her what he call'd 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:
 “Stabb'd through the heart's affec-
 tions to the heart!
 Seethed like the kid in its own moth-
 er's milk!
 Kill'd 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 answer'd, and
 henceforth
 The course of life that seem'd 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,
 Kill'd with inutterable unkindli-
 ness.”

She paused, she turn'd away, she
 hung her head,
 The snake of gold slid from her
 hair, the braid
 Slipt and uncoil'd 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:
 Call'd her to shelter in the hollow
 oak,
 "Come from the storm," and hav-
 ing no reply,
 Gazed at the heaving shoulder, and
 the face
 Hand-hidden, as for utmost grief or
 shame;
 Then thrice essay'd, by tenderest-
 touching terms,
 To sleek her ruffled pearl mind,
 in vain.
 At last she let herself be conquer'd
 by him,
 And as the cageling newly flown re-
 turns,
 The seeming-injured simple-hearted
 thing
 Came to her old perch back, and set-
 tled 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 dislink'd herself at once and
 rose,
 Her arms upon her breast across,
 and stood,
 A virtuous gentlewoman deeply
 wrong'd,
 Upright and flush'd before him:
 then she said:

 "There must be now no passages
 of love
 Betwixt us twain henceforward ever-
 more;
 Since, if I be what I am grossly
 call'd,
 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 ask'd it once —
 could make me stay —
 That proof of trust — so often ask'd
 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 oolt
 (For now the storm was close above
 them) struck,
 Furrowing a giant oak, and javelin-
 ing
 With darted spikes and splinters of
 the wood
 The dark earth round. He raised
 his eyes and saw

The tree that shone white-listed
 thro' the gloom.
 But Vivien, fearing heaven had
 heard her oath,
 And dazzled by the livid-flickering
 fork,
 And deafen'd with the stammering
 cracks and claps
 That follow'd, flying back and cry-
 ing out,
 "O Merlin, tho' you do not love me,
 save,
 Yet save me!" clung to him and
 hugg'd him close;
 And call'd him dear protector in her
 fright,
 Nor yet forgot her practise in her
 fright,
 But wrought upon his mood and
 hugg'd him close.
 The pale blood of the wizard at her
 touch
 Took gayer colors, like an opal
 warm'd.
 She blam'd herself for telling hear-
 say tales:
 She shook from fear, and for her
 fault she wept
 Of petulancy; she call'd him lord
 and liege,
 Her seer, her bard, her silver star of
 eve,
 Her God, her Merlin, the one pas-
 sionate love
 Of her whole life; and ever over-
 head
 Bellow'd 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 pas-
 sion 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, overtalk'd and over-
 worn,
 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 echo'd
 "fool."
 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 Lance-
 lot;
 Which first she placed where morn-
 ing's earliest ray
 Might strike it, and awake her with
 the gleam;
 Then fearing rust or soilure fashion'd
 for it
 A case of silk, and braided there-
 upon
 All the devices blazon'd 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, climb'd
 That eastern tower, and entering
 barr'd her door,
 Stript off the case, and read the
 naked shield,
 Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his
 arms,
 Now made a pretty history to her-
 self
 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
 kill'd, but God
 Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his
 enemy down,
 And saved him: so she lived in fan-
 tasy.

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

For Arthur, long before they
 crown'd him King,
 Roving the trackless realms of Lyon-
 nesse,
 Had found a glen, gray boulder and
 black tarn.
 A horror lived about the tarn, and
 clave
 Like its own mists to all the moun-
 tain 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 abhorr'd:
 And there they lay till all their bones
 were bleach'd,
 And lichen'd into color with the
 crag:
 And he, that once was king, had on
 a crown
 Of diamonds, one in front, and four
 aside.
 And Arthur came, and laboring up
 the pass,
 All in a misty moonshine, unawares
 Had trodden that crown'd skeleton,
 and the skull
 Brake from the nape, and from the
 skull the crown
 Roll'd 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
 Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd
 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 answer'd, "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 yearn'd 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 vext 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
 allow'd
 Of all men: many a bard, without
 offense,
 Has link'd 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 fault-
 less lord?"

She broke into a little scornful
 laugh:
 "Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the fault-
 less King,
 That passionate perfection, my god'
 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
 to-day
 There gleam'd a vague suspicion in
 his eyes:
 Some meddling rogue has tamper'd
 with him — else

Rapt in this fancy of his Table
 Round,
 And swearing men to vows impossi-
 ble,
 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 color: 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 answer'd Lancelot, the chief
 of knights:
 "And with what face, after my pre-
 text made,
 Shall I appear, O Queen, at Came-
 lot, I
 Before a King who honors 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 show'd the rarer foot,
 And there among the solitary downs,
 Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;
 Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd 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 disarm'd.
 And Lancelot marvel'd 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
 Approach'd them: then the Lord of Astolat:
 "Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name
 Livest 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 answer'd 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 laugh'd the father, saying,
 "Fie, Sir Churl,
 Is that an 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 be-
 fore."

"Nay, father, nay, good father,
 shame me not
 Before this noble knight," said young
 Lavaine,
 "For nothing. Surely I but play'd
 on Torre:
 He seem'd 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 ye will grace me," answer'd
 Lancelot,
 Smiling a moment, "with your fel-
 lowship
 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,
 Flush'd slightly at the slight dispar-
 agement
 Before the stranger knight, who,
 looking at her,
 Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus
 return'd:
 "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
 look'd,
 Lifted her eyes, and read his linea-
 ments.
 The great and guilty love he bare the
 Queen,

In battle with the love he bare his
 lord,
 Had marr'd his face, and mark'd 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 soli-
 tudes
 For agony, who was yet a living
 soul.
 Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the
 goodliest man
 That ever among ladies ate in hall,
 And noblest, when she lifted up her
 eyes.
 However marr'd, of more than twice
 her years,
 Seem'd 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 dar-
 ling 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 enter-
 tain'd.
 And much they ask'd of court and
 Table Round,
 And ever well and readily answer'd
 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 warn'd me of their
 fierce design
 Against my house, and him they
 caught and maim'd;
 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 answer'd him at full, as having
 been
 With Arthur in the fight which all
 day long
 Rang by the white mouth of the vio-
 lent Glem;
 And in the four loud battles by the
 shore
 Of Douglas; that on Bassa; then the
 war
 That thunder'd in and out the gloomy
 skirts
 Of Celidon the forest; and again
 By castle Gurnion, where the glori-
 ous King

Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's
 Head,
 Carved of one emerald center'd in a
 sin
 Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he
 breathed;
 And at Caerleon had he help'd 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 Treoit,
 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 utter'd this,
 Low to her own heart said the lily
 maid,

"Save your great self, fair lord;"
 and when he fell
 From talk of war to traits of pleas-
 antry —
 Being mirthful he, but in a stately
 kind —
 She still took note that when the liv-
 ing 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 ten-
 derness
 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 thro' all hindrance finds the
 man
 Behind it, and so paints him that his
 face,
 The shape and color 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 as in fear, step after step, she
 stole
 Down the long tower-stairs, hesita-
 ting:
 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 turn'd, and smooth'd
 The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
 Half-jealous of the flattering hand, she drew
 Nearer and stood. He look'd, and more amazed
 Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
 The maiden standing in the dewy light.
 He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.
 Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
 For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood
 Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.
 Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire,
 That he should wear her favor 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 favor at this tourney?" "Nay," said he,
 "Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
 Favor of any lady in the lists.
 Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know."
 "Yea, so," she answer'd; "then in wearing mine
 Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,
 That those who know should know you." And he turn'd
 Her counsel up and down within his mind,
 And found it true, and answer'd,
 "True, my child.
 Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:
 What is it?" and she told him, "A red sleeve
 Broider'd 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 fill'd her with delight;
 But left her all the paler, when Lavaine
 Returning brought the yet-unblazon'd 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 answer'd, "twice to-day. I am your squire!"
 Whereat Lavaine said, laughing,
 "Lily maid,
 For fear our people call you lily maid
 In earnest, let me bring your color back;
 Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed:"
 So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,
 And thus they moved away: she stay'd 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 watch'd their
arms far-off
Sparkle, until they dipt below the
downs.
Then to her tower she climb'd, 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 bush-
less downs,
To where Sir Lancelot knew there
lived a knight
Not far from Camelot, now for forty
years
A hermit, who had pray'd, labor'd and
pray'd,
And ever laboring had scoop'd 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 as-
pen tree-
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 thro'
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."
Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant rever-
ence,

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 answer'd,
"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
reach'd the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his
eyes
Run thro' the peopled gallery which
half round
Lay like a rainbow fall'n 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
writhe'd 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
Thro' knots and loops and folds innu-
merable
Fled ever thro' 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 name-
less king.

Then Lancelot answer'd 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 assail'd, 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
hurl'd 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
Favor 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 wit'
theirs.
They couch'd their spears and prick'd
their steeds, and thus,
Their plumes driv'n 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 sum-
mit, bears, with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against
the skies,
Down on a bark, and overbear'd the
bark,
And him that helms it, so they over-
bore
Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a
spear
Down-glancing lamed the charger,
and a spear
Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and
the head
Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt,
and remain'd.

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,—tho' it seem'd half-
 miracle
 To those he fought with,—dave 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 answer'd,
 "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 vanish'd 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 marvelous great shriek and ghastly
 groan,
 And half his blood burst forth, and
 down he sank
 For the pure pain, and wholly
 swoon'd 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 rumor 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 marshes, kings of
 desolate isles,
 Came round their great Pendragon,
 saying to him,
 'Lo, Sire, our knight, thro' 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 to-
 day—
 He seem'd 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 honor: 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 night 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 ridd'n away to die?" So
 fear'd the King,
 And, after two days' tarriance there,
 return'd.
 Then when he saw the Queen, em-
 bracing ask'd,
 "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
 Conquer'd; and therefore would he
 hide his name
 From all men, ev'n the King, and to
 this end
 Had made the pretext of a hindering
 wound,
 That he might joust unknown of all,
 and learn
 If his old prowess were in aught
 decay'd;
 And added, 'Our true Arthur, when
 he learns,
 Will well allow my 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, broider'd with
great pearls,

Some gentle maiden's gift.”

“ Yea, lord,” she said,
“ Thy hopes are mine,” and saying
that, she choked,

And sharply turn'd 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 clench'd her fingers till they bit
the palm,

And shriek'd out, “ Traitor ” to the
unhearing wall,

Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose
again,

And moved about her palace, proud
and pale.

Gawain the while thro' all the
region round

Rode with his diamond, wearied of
the quest,

Touch'd at all points, except the
poplar grove,

And came at last, tho' late, to Asto-
lat:

Whom glittering in enamel'd 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;

Thro' her own side she felt the sharp
lance go;

Thereon she smote her hand: well-
nigh she swoon'd:

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 ridd'n 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 we hear." To this the courteous Prince
 Accorded with his wonted courtesy,
 Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,
 And stay'd; 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 turn'd:
 "Well — if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!"
 And oft they met among the garden yews,
 And there he set himself to 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
 Rebell'd 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 hern we slipt 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, crown'd with gold,
 Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh,
 and mock'd:
 "Right was the King! our Lancelot!
 that true man!"
 "And right was I," she answer'd merrily, "I,
 Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all."
 "And if I dream'd," 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 talk'd of love,
 Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd,
 Meseem'd, 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 dearn," 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 ynu
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 kiss'd the hand to which
he gave,

The diamond, and all wearied of the
quest

Leapt on his horse, and caroling 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 fail'd to find him tho' I rode all
round

The region: but I lighted on the maid

Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him;
and to her,

Deeming our courtesy is the truest
law,

I gave the diamond: she will render
it;

For by mine head she knows his hid-
ing-place."

The seldom-frowning King frown'd,
and replied,

"Too courteous truly! ye shall go no
more

On quest of mine, seeing that ye for-
get

Obedience is the courtesy due to
kings."

He spake and parted. Wroth, but
all in awe,

For twenty strokes of the blood, with-
out a word,

Linger'd that other, staring after
him;

Then shook his hair, strode off, and
buzz'd abroad

About the maid of Astolat, and her
love.

All ears were prick'd at once, all
tongues were loosed.

"The maid of Astolat loves Sir
Lancelot,

Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Asto-
lat."

Some read the King's face, some the
Queen's, and all

Had marvel what the maid might be,
but most

Predoom'd her as unworthy. One
nld dame

Came suddenly on the Queen with the
sharp news.

She, that had heard the noise of it
before,

But sorrowing Lancelot should have
stoop'd so low,

Marr'd 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 ev'n 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
 Crush'd the wild passion out against
 the floor
 Beneath the banquet, where 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." "Where-
 fore, let me hence,"
 She answer'd, "and find out our dear
 Lavaine."
 "Ye will not lose your wits for dear
 Lavaine:
 Bide," answer'd he: "we needs must
 near anon
 Of him, and of that other." "Aye,"
 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 maid-
 en's aid,
 The gentler-horn 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 nod-
 ding said,
 "Aye, aye, 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 allow'd, she slipt
 away,
 And while she made her ready for her
 ride,
 Her father's latest word humm'd in
 her ear,
 "Being so very wilful you must go,"
 And changed itself and echo'd in her
 heart,

" Being so very wilful you mus' 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 answer'd 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 turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods
 Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,
 Where Arthur's wars were render'd 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,
 Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
 Stream'd from it still; and in her heart she laugh'd,
 Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
 But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.
 And when they gain'd 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,
 Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.
 The sound not wonted in a place so still
 Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes
 Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,
 " Your prize the diamond sent you by the King:"
 His eyes glisten'd: 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
 Assign'd 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 assign'd, he kiss'd 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."

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

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What might she mean by that? his
 large black eyes,
 Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt
 upon her,
 Till all her heart's sad secret blazed
 itself
 In the heart's colors on her simple
 face;
 And Lancelot look'd and was per-
 plext in mind,
 And being weak in body said no
 more;
 But did not love the color; woman's
 love,
 Save one, he not regarded, and so
 turn'd
 Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he
 slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro'
 the fields,
 And past beneath the weirdly-sculp-
 tured gates
 Far up the dim rich city to her kin;
 There bode the night: but woke with
 dawn, and past
 Down thro' 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, tho' he call'd 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, skill'd 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 re-
 gret
 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 straiten'd
 him,
 His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
 And faith unfaithful kept him falsely
 true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-
 sickness made
 Full many a holy vow and pure re-
 solve.
 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
Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he an-
swer'd 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 dimm'd
her sight,
And drave her ere her time across the
fields
Far into the rich city, where alone
She murmur'd, "Vain, in vain: it can-
not 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 turn'd, and now
to left,
And found no ease in turning or in
rest;
And "Him or death," she mutter'd,
"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 deem'd she look'd
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 to-day:" 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," answer'd Lancelot,
 "what is this?"
 And innocently extending her white
 arms,
 "Your love," she said, "your love —
 to be your wife."
 And Lancelot answer'd, "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 thro'
 the world."
 And Lancelot answer'd, "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 answer'd,
 "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 woman-
 hood,
 More specially should your good
 knight be poor,
 Endow you with broad land and terri-
 tory
 Even to the half my realm beyond the
 seas,
 So that would make you happy: fur-
 thermore,
 Ev'n to the death, as tho' ye were my
 blood,
 In all your quarrels will I be your
 knight.
 This will I do, dear damsel, for your
 sake,
 And more than this I cannot."

While he spoke
 She neither blush'd 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 when thro' those
 black walls of yew
 Their talk had pierced, her father:
 "Aye, a flash,
 I fear me, that will strike ray blossom
 dead.
 Too courteous are ye, fair Lord
 Lancelot.
 I pray you, use some rough discour-
 tesy
 To blunt or break her passion."

Lancelot said,
 "That were against me: what I can I
 will;"
 And there that day remain'd, and to-
 ward 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 look'd
 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 bade 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 labor,
 left.
 But still she heard him, still his pic-
 ture form'd
 And grew between her and the pic-
 tured 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 answer'd
 with all calm.
 But when they left her to herself
 again,
 Death, like a friend's voice from a dis-
 tant field
 Approaching thro' the darkness,
 call'd; the owls
 Wailing had power upon her, and
 she mixt

Her fancies with the sorrow-rifted
 glooms
 Of evening, and the moanings of the
 wind.

And in those days she made a little
 song,
 And call'd her song, "The Song of
 Love and Death,"
 And sang it: sweetly could she make
 and sing.

"Sweet is true love tho' 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 bit-
 ter 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 Phan-
 tom of the house

That ever shrieks before a death,"
and call'd
The father, and all three in hurry
and fear
Ran to her, and lol 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 seem'd 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 dream'd
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
remain'd.
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 won-
der at me,
And there the great Sir Lancelot
muse at me;
Gawain, who bade a thousand fare-
wells to me,
Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bade
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 answer'd,
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 Asto-
lat:
"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, tho' 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; where-
fore 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 ask'd,
"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

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

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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
deem'd 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 thro' the field,
that shone
Full-summer, to that stream where-
on the barge,

Pall'd 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 blazon-
ings,
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and say-
ing to her,
"Sister, farewell forever," and
again,
"Farewell, sweet sister," parted all
in tears.
Then rose the dumb old servitor,
and the dead,
Oar'd 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-fea-
tured face
Was lovely, for she did not seem as
dead,
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' 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 seem'd her statue,
 but that he,
 Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd
 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 ut-
 ter'd, "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 rumors flying thro' your
 court
 Our bond, as not the bond of man
 and wife,
 Should have in it an absoluter trust
 To make up that defect: let rumors
 be:
 When did not rumors 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 turn'd
 away, the Queen
 Brake from the vast oriel-embower-
 ing 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, whatso'er 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

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

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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 armlet 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 him-
self,
Or hers or mine, mine now to work
my will
She shall not have them.”

Saying which she seized,
And, thro' the casement standing
wide for heat,
Flung them, and down they flash'd,
and smote the stream.
Then from the smitten surface
flash'd, 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 arm'd, and kept the
door; to whom,
All up the marble stair, tier over
tier,
Were added mouths that gaped, and
eyes that ask'd,
“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, appall'd 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 Fairy-
land?
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 turn'd
the tongueless man
From the half-face to the full eye,
and rose
And pointed to the damsel, and the
doors.

So Arthur bade 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
 wonder'd 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 call'd the maid of Asto-
 lat,
 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 Guine-
 vere,
 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 touch'd 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 maid-
 en'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 testi-
 mony,
 Her brethren, and her father, who
 himself
 Besought me to be plain and blunt,
 and use,
 To break her passion, some discour-
 tesy
 Against my nature: what I could, I
 did.
 I left her and I bade her no farewell;
 Tho' had I dreamt the damsel would
 have died,
 I might have put my wits to some
 rough use,
 And help'd 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 help'd her
 from her death."

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

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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 thro' the
 world, she ask'd;
 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 ter-
 ritory
 In mine own realm beyond the nar-
 row seas,
 To keep them in all joyance: more
 than this
 I could not; this she would not, and
 she died."

He pausing, Arthur answer'd,
 "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 worship-
 fully."

So toward that shrine which then
 in all the realm
 Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly
 went
 The marshal'd Order of their Table
 Round,
 And Lancelot sad beyond his wont,
 to see
 The maiden buried, not as one un-
 known,
 Nor meanly, but with gorgeous ob-
 sequies,

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 there-
 upon,
 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 blazon'd 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 mark'd Sir Lancelot where he
 moved apart,
 Drew near, and sigh'd in passing,
 "Lancelot,
 Forgive me; mine was jealousy in
 love."
 He answer'd with his eyes upon the
 ground,
 "That is love's curse; pass on, my
 Queen, forgiven."
 But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy
 brows,
 Approach'd him, and with full affec-
 tion 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 watch'd thee
 at the tilt

Strike down the lusty and long practised knight,
 And let the younger and unskill'd go
 by
 To win his honor 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 marvelously fair,
 Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man
 Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons
 Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
 My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake."

Then answer'd 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 fail'd to bind, tho' being, as I think,
 Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know."

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,
 And at the inrunning of a little brook
 Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd
 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?
 Aye, 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 thro' the vision of the
 night —
 She chanted snatches of mysterious
 hymns
 Heard on the winding waters, eve
 and morn
 She kiss'd 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 drown'd 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 will'd 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 groan'd Sir Lancelot in re-
 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
 call'd The Pure,
 Had pass'd 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 honor'd him, and wrought into
 his heart
 A way by love that waken'd love
 within,
 To answer that which came: and as
 they sat
 Beneath a world-old yew-tree, dark-
 ening half
 The cloisters, on a gustful April
 morn
 That puff'd the swaying branches
 into smoke
 Above them, ere the summer when
 he died,
 The monk Ambrosius question'd
 Percivale:

"O brother, I have seen this yew-
 tree smoke,
 Spring after spring, for half a hun-
 dred years:
 For never have I known the world
 without,
 Nor ever stray'd beyond the pale:
 but thee,

When first thou camest—such a
courtesy
Spake thro' 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
Stamp'd 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 vain glories, rival-
ries,
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 offer'd up to
Heaven."

To whom the monk: "The Holy
Grail!—I trust
We are green in Heaven's eyes; but
here too much
We molder—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?"
answer'd 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 Aro-
mat—
After the day of darkness, when the
dead
Went wandering o'er Moriah—the
good saint
Arimathæan 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 heal'd
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
disappear'd."

To whom the monk: "From our
old books I know
That Joseph came of old to Glaston-
bury,
And there the heathen Prince, Arvi-
ragus,
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 to-
day?"

"A woman," answer'd 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; tho' never maiden
 glow'd,
 But that was in her earlier maiden-
 hood,
 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 adulter-
 ous race,
 Across the iron grating of her cell
 Beat, and she pray'd 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 well-nigh a hundred winters
 old,
 Spake often with her of the Holy
 Grail,
 A legend handed down thro' 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 pray'd and fasted, till
 the sun
 Shone, and the wind blew, thro' 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, beauti-
 ful,
 Beyond all knowing of them, won-
 derful,
 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

Stream'd thro' 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 colors leaping on the wall:
 And then the music faded, and the
 Grail
 Past, and the beam decay'd, 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 heal'd.'

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

"And one there was among us,
 ever moved
 Among us in white armor, Galahad.
 'God make thee good as thou art
 beautiful,'
 Said Arthur, when he dubb'd 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, fill'd me with
 amaze;
 His eyes became so like her own,
 they seem'd
 Hers, and himself her brother more
 than I.

"Sister or brother none had he;
 but some
 Call'd him a son of Lancelot, and
 some said
 Begotten by enchantment — chatter-
 ers they,
 Like birds of passage piping up and
 down,
 That gape for flies — we know not
 whence they come;
 For when was Lancelot wander-
 ingly 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 thro' all, till one will
 crown thee king
 Far in the spiritual city: ' and as she
 spake

She sent the deathless passion in her
eyes
Thro' him, and made him hers, and
laid her mind
On him, and he believed in her be-
lief.

"Then came a year of miracle: O
brother,
In our great hall there stood a va-
cant chair,
Fashion'd 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 call'd it 'The Siege per-
ilous,'
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 my-
self!'

"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 over-
head
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 cover'd 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 Perci-
vale, "the King,
Was not in hall: for early that same
day,
Scaped thro' a cavern from a bandit
hold,

An outraged maiden sprang into the
 hall
 Crying on help: for all her shining
 hair
 Was smear'd 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 'ittle of this marvel he too
 saw,
 Returning o'er the plain that then
 began
 Toarken under Camelot; whence
 the King
 Look'd up, calling aloud, 'Lo, there!
 the roofs
 Of our great hall are roll'd in thun-
 der-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 Came-
 lot,
 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 Mer-
 lin 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, per-
 fect men,
 And on the fourth are men with
 growing wings,
 And over all one statue in the mold
 Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a
 crown,
 And peak'd 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 thro' the twelve great bat-
 tles 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 Ex-
 calibur.
 And also one to the west, and coun-
 ter 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
 Hack'd, and their foreheads grimed
 with smoke, and sear'd,
 Follow'd, 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
 Darken'd, as I have seen it more
 than once,
 When some brave deed seem'd 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 swear a vow to follow it till I
 saw.’

“Then when he ask'd 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,
 call'd,
 ‘But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy
 Grail,
 I saw the Holy Grail and heard a
 cry —
 “O Galahad, and O Galahad, fol-
 low 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 over-
borne
Five knights at once, and every
younger knight,
Unproven, holds himself as Lance-
lot,
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
wrong'd, of power
To lay the sudden heads of violence
flat,
Knights that in twelve great battles
splash'd 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, be-
ing made:
Yet — for ye know the cries of all
my realm
Pass thro' 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 wan-
dering 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 clash'd in such a tourney and so
full,
So many lances broken — never yet
Had Camelot seen a like, since
Arthur came;
And I myself and Galahad, for a
strength
Was in us from the vision, overthrew
So many knights that all the people
cried,
And almost burst the barriers in
their heat,
Shouting, 'Sir Galahad and Sir Per-
civale!'

"But when the next day brake
from under ground —
O brother, had you known our Cam-
elot,
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
Totter'd toward each other in the
sky,
Met foreheads all along the street of
those
Who watch'd us pass; and lower,
and where the long
Rich galleries, lady-laden, weigh'd
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, wail'd and shriek'd 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 render'd 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 appear'd 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
 Play'd 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 touch'd 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 flash'd 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 glitter'd on her pail,
 The milkmaid left her milking, and fell down
 Before it, and I knew not why, but thought
 'The sun is rising,' tho' the sun had risen.
 Then was I ware of one that on me moved
 In golden armor with a crown of gold
 About a casque all jewels; and his horse
 In golden armor jewel'd everywhere:
 And on the splendor came, flashing me blind;
 And seem'd 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,
 Open'd his arms to embrace me as he came,

And up I went and touch'd 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 wall'd: the spires
 Prick'd with incredible pinnacles into heaven.

And by the gateway stirr'd 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 thro' 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 gasp'd,

'Whence and what art thou?' and even as he spoke

Fell into dust, and disappear'd, 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 hu-
mility,
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
Follow'd Him down, and like a fly-
ing star
Led on the gray-hair'd 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 armor suddenly Galahad
shone
Before us, and against the chapel
door
Laid lance, and enter'd, 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, fail'd from my
side, nor come
Cover'd, but moving with me night
and day,
Fainter by day, but always in the
night
Blood-red, and sliding down the
blacken'd marsh
Blood-red, and on the naked moun-
tain top
Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere
below
Blood-red. And in the strength of
this I rode,
Shattering all evil customs every-
where,
And past thro' Pagan realms, and
made them mine,
And clash'd with Pagan hordes, and
bore them down,
And broke thro' 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,
Scarr'd with a hundred wintry
water-courses —

Storm at the top, and when we
 gain'd it, storm
 Round us and death; for every
 moment glanced
 His silver arms and gloom'd: 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 whiten'd with the
 bones of men,
 Not to be crost, save that some
 ancient king
 Had built a way, where, link'd 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 vanish'd, tho' I
 yearn'd
 To follow; and thrice above him all
 the heavens
 Open'd and blazed with thunder
 such as seem'd
 Shoutings of all the sons of God:
 and first
 At once I saw him far on the great
 Sea,
 In silver-shining armor starry-clear;
 And o'er his head the Holy Vessel
 hung
 Clothed in white samite or a lumi-
 nous cloud.
 And with exceeding swiftness ran
 the boat,
 If boat it were — I saw not whence
 it came.
 And when the heavens open'd 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, tho' 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 drown-
 ing the deep.
 And how my feet recrost the death-
 ful ridge
 No memory in me lives; but that I
 touch'd
 The chapel-doors at dawn I know;
 and thence
 Taking my war-horse from the holy
 man,
 Glad that no phantom vex me
 more, return'd

To whence I came, the gate of No man, no woman?"
Arthur's wars."

"O brother," ask'd 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 plaster'd 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, saying this Sir Galahad,
Came ye on none but phantoms in
your quest,

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 falter'd 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 meager, and the vision had not
come;
And then I chanced upon a goodly
town
With one great dwelling in the mid-
dle of it;
Thither I made, and there was I dis-
arm'd
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 kiss'd a kiss, or vow'd 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 be-
 fore
 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 flash'd across her orchard
 underneath
 Her castle-walls, she stole upon my
 walk,
 And calling me the greatest of all
 knights,
 Embraced me, and so kiss'd me the
 first time,
 And gave herself and all her wealth
 to me.
 Then I remember'd Arthur's warn-
 ing word,
 That most of us would follow wan-
 dering 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 be-
 lieve:
 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 wail'd and wept, and hated mine
 own self,
 And ev'n the Holy Quest, and all
 but her;
 Then after I was join'd with Gala-
 had

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 earthly-
 wise,

Seeing I never stray'd 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 spurr'd, and hail'd
 him, and he me,
 And each made joy of either; then
 he ask'd,
 'Where is he? hast thou seen him —
 Lancelot? — Once,'
 Said good Sir Bors, 'He dash'd
 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 vanish'd.'

"Then, Sir Bors had' ridden on
 Softly, and sorrowing for our Lance-
 lot,
 Because his former madness, once the
 talk
 And scandal of our table, had re-
 turn'd;
 For Lancelot's kith and kin so wor-
 ship 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, in-
 deed,
 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
 scoff'd at him
 And this high Quest as at a simple
 thing:
 Told him he follow'd — 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 warm'd?'
 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 thro' 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
 thro' the gap
 Glimmer'd the streaming scud: then
 came a night
 Still as the day was loud; and thro'
 the gap
 The seven clear stars of Arthur's
 Table Round —

For, brother, so one night, because
 they roll
 Thro' such a round in heaven, we
 named the stars,
 Rejoicing in ourselves and in our
 King —
 And these, like bright eyes of famil-
 iar friends,
 In on him shone: 'And then to me,
 to me,'
 Said good Sir Bors, 'Beyond all
 hopes of mine,
 Who scarce had pray'd or ask'd it
 for myself —
 Across the seven clear stars — O
 grace to me —
 In color like the fingers of a hand
 Before a burning taper, the sweet
 Grail
 Glided and past, and close upon it
 peal'd
 A sharp quick thunder.' After-
 wards, 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 be-
 neath a cloud,
 But heaven had meant it for a sunny
 one:
 Aye, aye, Sir Bors, who else? But
 when ye reach'd
 The city, found ye all your knights
 return'd,

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

Then answer'd 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 reach'd
 The city, our horses stumbling as
 they trode
 On heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,
 Crack'd basilisks, and splinter'd
 cockatrices,
 And shatter'd 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
 bade me hail,
 Saying, 'A welfare in thine eye re-
 proves
 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 molded
 for us
 Half-wrench'd a golden wing; but
 now — the Quest,
 This vision — hast thou seen the
 Holy Cup,
 That Joseph brought of old to Glas-
 tonbury?

"So when I told him all thyself
 hast heard,
 Ambrosius, and my fresh but fixt
 resolve
 To pass away into the quiet life,
 He answer'd not, but, sharply turn-
 ing, ask'd
 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 turn'd
 to whom at first
 He saw not, for Sir Bors, on enter-
 ing, push'd
 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 remain'd but Lance-
 lot, 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,' ask'd the
 King, 'my friend,
 Our mightiest, hath this Quest
 avail'd for thee?'

"'Our mightiest!' answer'd
 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 whole-
 some flower
 And poisonous grew together, each
 as each,
 Not to be pluck'd 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 pluck'd asunder.
 Then I spake
 To one most holy saint, who wept
 and said,
 That save they could be pluck'd
 asunder, all
 My quest were but in vain; to
 whom I vow'd
 That I would work according as
 he will'd.
 And forth I went, and while I
 yearn'd 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,
 Tho' 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
 sway'd a boat,
 Half-swallow'd in it, anchor'd with
 a chain;
 And in my madness to myself I said,
 "I will embark and I will lose my-
 self,
 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 Car-
 bonek,
 A castle like a rock upon a rock,
 With chasm-like portals open to the
 sea,
 And steps that met the breaker I
 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 sud-
 den-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 dash'd 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
 Thro' 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 climb'd a
 thousand steps
 With pain: as in a dream I seem'd to
 climb
 For ever: at the last I reach'd a
 door,
 A light was in the crannies, and I
 heard,
 "Glory and joy and honor to our
 Lord
 And to the Holy Vessel of the
 Grail."
 Then in my madness I essay'd the
 door;
 It gave; and thro' 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
 swoon'd away —
 O, yet methought I saw the Holy
 Grail,
 All pall'd 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 veil'd
 And cover'd; 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 bolden'd by the silence of his
 King,—

Well, I will tell thee: 'O King, my
 liege,' he said,

'Hath Gawain fail'd in any quest of
 thine?

When have I stinted stroke in
 foughten field?

But as for thine, my good friend Per-
 civale,

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 Per-
 civale,

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 thro' 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, Lance-
lot: 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 return'd
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 other-
where.

“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 allot-
ted field

Before his work be done; but, be-
ing 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 can-
not die,

And knows himself no vision to him-
self,

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 sunder'd, and thro'
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 be-
fore,
Across the forest call'd of Dean, to
find
Caerleon and the King, had felt the
sun
Beat like a strong knight on his
helm, and reel'd

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
Thro' that green-glooming twilight
of the grove,
It seem'd to Pelleas that the fern
without
Burnt as a living fire of emeralds,
So that his eyes were dazzled look-
ing 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 whisper'd,
"Where?
O where? I love thee, tho' I know
thee not.
For fair thou art and pure as Guin-
evere,
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 waken'd with a sound
of talk

And laughter at the limit of the
wood,
And glancing thro' the hoary boles,
he saw,
Strange as to some old prophet
might have seem'd
A vision hovering on a sea of fire,
Damsels in divers colors 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 talk'd con-
fusedly,
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 seem'd the chief
among them said,
"In happy time behold our pilot-
star!
Youth, we are damsels-errant, and
we ride,
Arm'd 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 beauti-
ful?"
For large her violet eyes look'd, 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 seem'd a toy to trifle
with,
And pass and care no more. But
while he gazed
The beauty of her flesh abash'd the
boy,
As tho' 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,
Stammer'd, 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 laugh'd and
scream'd against the gulls,
Makers of nets, and living from the
sea.

Then with a slow smile turn'd the
lady round
And look'd 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 thro' all her
company.
Three knights were thereamong;
and they too smiled,
Scorning him; for the lady was
Ettarre,

PELLEAS AND ETTARRE

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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," answer'd 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 thro' 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 mutter'd, "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 flatter'd him,
Being so gracious, that he well-nigh deem'd
His wish by hers was echo'd; and her knights

And all her damsels too were gracious to him,
For she was a great lady.

And when they reach'd 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, "Aye! wilt thou if I win?"
"Aye, that will I," she answer'd, and she laugh'd,
And straitly nipt the hand, and flung it from her;
Then glanced askew at those three knights of hers,
Till all her ladies laugh'd 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 wonder'd 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,
Tho' served with choice from air,
land, stream, and sea,
Oft in mid-banquet measuring with
his eyes
His neighbor's make and might: and
Pelleas look'd
Noble among the noble, for he
dream'd
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 blush'd and brake the morn-
ing of the jousts,
And this was call'd "The Tourna-
ment 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 re-
main
Lord of the tourney. And Arthur
had the jousts
Down in the flat field by the shore
of Usk
Holden: the gilded parapets were
crown'd
With faces, and the great tower fill'd
with eyes
Up to the summit, and the trumpets
blew.
There all day long Sir Pelleas kept
the field

With honor: 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 crown'd
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 —
Linger'd 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, turn'd and
went her way.

But after, when her damsels, and
herself,
And those three knights all set their
faces home,
Sir Pelleas follow'd. She that saw
him cried,
"Damsels — and ye: 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 thro' 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 gain'd her castle, up-
sprang the bridge,
Down rang the grate of iron thro'
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 utter-
most,
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, inoist
or dry,
Full-arm'd upon his charger all day
long

Sat by the walls, and no one open'd
to him.

And this persistence turn'd 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
dash'd
Against him one by one; and these
return'd,
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 strain'd
 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 mock'd 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 long'd 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,
 Laugh'd, and unbound, and thrust
 him from the gate.

And after this, a week beyond,
 again
 She call'd them, saying, "There he
 watches yet,
 There like a dog before his master's
 door!

Kick'd, he returns: do ye not hate
 him, ye?
 Ye know yourselves: how can ye bide
 at peace,
 Affronted with his fulsome in-
 nocence?
 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 reck 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
 couch'd their spears,
 Three against one: and Gawain pass-
 ing by,
 Bound upon solitary adventure, saw
 Low down beneath the shadow of
 those towers
 A villainy, three to one: and thro'
 his heart
 The fire of honor and all noble deeds
 Flash'd, and he call'd, "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 eager-
 ness
 Trembled and quiver'd, 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, burn'd
 Full on her knights in many an evil name
 Of craven, weakling, and thrice-beater hound:
 "Yet, take him, ye that scarce are it 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 answer'd, "Lady, for indeed
 I loved you and I deem'd you beautiful,
 I cannot brook to see your beauty marr'd
 Thro' 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 tho' 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, tho' in bonds, and thought,
 "Why have I push'd him from me? this man loves,
 If love there be: yet him I loved not. Why?
 I deem'd him fool? yea, so? or that in him

A something — was it nobler than myself? —
 Seem'd 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
 Laugh'd 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 answer'd, "O, their wills are hers
 For whom I won the circlet; and mine, hers,
 Thus to be bounden, so to see her face,
 Marr'd tho' it be with spite and mockery now,
 Other than when I found her in the woods;
 And tho' 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 thro' mine unhappiness."

And Gawain answer'd kindly tho'
 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 honor 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 armor: let me go: be con-
 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?"

"Aye," 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 music-
 ally
 That all the old echoes hidden in the
 wall
 Rang out like hollow woods at hunt-
 ing-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 armor. 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 armor: 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
thro' open door
Rode Gawain, whom she greeted
courteously.
"Dead, is it sn?" she ask'd. "Aye,
aye," said he,
"And nft in dying cried upon your
name."
"Pity on him," she answer'd, "a
good knight,
But never let me bide one hour at
peace."
"Aye," 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 marr'd his rest — "A worm
witnin the rose."
"A rose, but one, none other rose
had I,
A rose, one rose, and this was won-
drous fair,
One rose, a rose that gladden'd earth
and sky,
One rose, my rose, that sweeten'd 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
nnt die,—
He dies whn 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 thro'
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 slnpe of garden,
all
Of roses white and red, and brambles
mixt
And overgrowing them, went on, and
found,
Here too, all hush'd below the mel-
low 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 pa-
vilions rear'd

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
 Froz'n 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 thro'
 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 thro' the
 court again,
 Fingering at his sword-handle until
 he stood
 There on the castle-bridge once more,
 and thought,
 "I will go hack, 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 turn'd, and so return'd, and
 groaning laid

The naked sword athwart their naked
 throats,
 There left it, and them sleeping; and
 she lay,
 The circlet of the tourney round her
 brows,
 And the sword of the 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, throng'd into
 the moon.
 Then crush'd the saddle with his
 thighs, and clench'd
 His hands, and madden'd with him-
 self and moan'd:

"Would they have risen against me
 in their blood
 At the last day? I might have an-
 swer'd 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 charr'd you thro' and
 thro' within,
 Black as the harlot's heart — hollow
 as a skull!
 Let the fierce east scream thro' 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 call'd
 her fool?"

PELLEAS AND ETTARRE

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Fool, beast — he, she, or I? myself most fool;	And over hard and soft, striking the sod
Beast too, as lacking human wit — disgraced,	From out the soft, the spark from off the hard,
Dishonor'd all for trial of true love —	Rode till the star above the awakening sun,
Love? we be all alike: only the King	Beside that tower where Percivale was cowl'd,
Hath made us fools and liars. O noble vows!	Glanced from the rosy forehead of the dawn.
O great and sane and simple race of brutes	For so the words were flash'd into his heart
That own no lust because they have no law!	He knew not whence or wherefore: "O sweet star,
For why should I have loved her to my shame?	Pure on the virgin forehead of the dawn!"
I loathe her, as I loved her to my shame.	And there he would have wept, but felt his eyes
I never loved her, I but lusted for her —	Harder and drier than a fountain bed
Away —"	In summer: thither came the village girls
He dash'd the rowel into his horse,	And linger'd talking, and they come no more
And bounded forth and vanish'd thro' the night.	Till the sweet heavens have fill'd it from the heights
Then she, that felt the cold touch on her throat,	Again with living waters in the change
Awaking knew the sword, and turn'd herself	Of seasons: hard his eyes; harder his heart
To Gawain: "Liar, for thou hast not slain	Seem'd; but so weary were his limbs, that he,
This Pelleas! here he stood, and might have slain	Gaspings, "Of Arthur's hall am I, but here,
Me and thyself." And he that tells the tale	Here let me rest and die," cast him- self down,
Says that her ever-veering fancy turn'd	And gulf'd his griefs in inmost sleep; so lay,
To Pelleas, as the one true knight on earth,	Till shaken by a dream, that Gawain fired
And only lover; and thro' her love her life	The hall of Merlin, and the morning star
Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain.	Reel'd in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell.
But he by wild and way, for half the night,	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 check'd
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 thro' the wound
again,
And pricks it deeper: and he shrank
and wail'd,
"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 thro' 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—
Hunch'd as he was, and like an old
dwarf-elm

That turns its back on the salt blast,
the boy
Paused not, but overrode him, shout-
ing, "False,
And false with Gawain!" and so le-
him bruised
And batter'd, and fled on, and hill
and wood
Went ever streaming by him till the
gloom,
That follows on the turning of the
world,
Darken'd the common path: he
twich'd 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 groan'd
"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 marveling what it was: on
whom the boy,
Across the silent seeded meadow-
grass
Borne, clash'd: 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."

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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," yell'd 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 call'd out from the dark field,
 "Thou art false as Hell: slay me: I have no sword."
 Then Lancelot, "Yea, between thy lips — and sharp;
 But here will I disedge it by thy death."
 "Slay then," he shriek'd, "my will is to be slain,"
 And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fall'n,
 Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake:
 "Rise, weakling; I am Lancelot; say thy say."

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And Lancelot slowly rode his war-horse back
 To Camelot, and Sir Pelleas in brief while
 Caught his unbroken limbs from the dark field,
 And follow'd 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 return'd, and then on Pelleas, him
 Who had not greeted her, but cast himself

Down on a bench, hard-breathing.
 "Have ye fought?"
 She ask'd of Lancelot. "Aye, my Queen," he said.
 "And thou hast overthrown him?"
 "Aye, my Queen."
 Then she, turning to Pelleas, "O young knight,
 Hath the great heart of knighthood in thee fail'd
 So far thou canst not bide, unfro-wardly,
 A fall from *him*?" Then, for he answer'd not,
 "Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen,
 May help them, loose thy tongue, and let me know."
 But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce
 She quail'd; and he, hissing "I have no sword,"
 Sprang from the door into the dark.
 The Queen
 Look'd 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 wither'd leaf before the hall.



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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 yester-
 day,
 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,
 Clutch'd at the crag, and started
 thro' mid air
 Bearing an eagle's nest: and thro' the
 tree
 Rush'd ever a rainy wind, and thro'
 the wind
 Pierced ever a child's cry: and crag
 and tree
 Scaling, Sir Lancelot from the peril-
 ous nest,
 This ruby necklace thrice around her
 neck,
 And all unscarr'd 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 carca-
 net

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 tour-
 ney-prize."

To whom the King, "Peace to
 thine eagle-borne
 Dead nestling, and this honor 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 pur-
 est of thy knights
 May win them for the purest of my
 maids."

She ended, and the cry of a great
 joust
 With trumpet-blowings ran on all the
 ways

From Camelot in among the faded
fields
To furthest towers; and everywhere
the knights
Arm'd for a day of glory before the
King.

But on the hither side of that loud
morn
Into the hall stagger'd, his visage
ribb'd
From ear to ear with dogwhip-weals,
his nose
Bridge-broken, one eye out, and one
hand off,
And one with shatter'd fingers dan-
gling 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 marr'd heaven's im-
age in thee thus?"

Then, sputtering thro' the hedge of
splinter'd teeth,
Yet strangers to the tongue, and with
blunt stump
Pitch-blacken'd sawing the air, said
the maim'd 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
Brake in upon me and drave them
to his tower;
And when I call'd upon thy name as
one
That doest right by gentle and by
churl,

Maim'd me and maul'd, 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 pro-
fess
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 turn'd 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-climb-
ing wave,
Hurl'd back again so often in empty
foam,
Hath lain for years at rest — and
renegades,
Thieves, bandits, leavings of confu-
sion, whom
The wholesome realm is purged of
otherwhere,
Friends, thro' your manhood and
your féalty, — 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 quell-
ing, which achieved,
The loneliest ways are safe from
shore to shore.
But thou, Sir Lancelot, sitting in my
place
Enchair'd to-morrow, 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 answer'd,
"It is well:
Yet better if the King abide, and
leave
The leading of his younger knights to
me.
Else, for the King has will'd it, it is
well."

Then Arthur rose and Lancelot
follow'd him,
And while they stood without the
doors, the King
Turn'd 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 com-
mand,—
A manner somewhat fall'n from
reverence —
Or have I dream'd the bearing of our
knights
'Tells of a manhood ever less and
lower?

Or whence the fear lest this my
realm, uprear'd,
By noble deeds at one with noble
vows,
From flat confusion and brute vio-
lences,
Reel back into the beast, and be no
more?"

He spoke, and taking all his
younger knights,
Down the slope city rode, and
sharply turn'd
North by the gate. In her high
bower the Queen,
Working a tapestry, lifted up her
head,
Watch'd her lord pass, and knew not
that she sigh'd.
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 tour-
nament,
By these in earnest those in mockery
call'd
The Tournament of the Dead Inno-
cence,
Brake with a wet wind blowing,
Lancelot,
Round whose sick head all night, like
birds of prey,
The words of Arthur flying shriek'd,
arose,
And down a streetway hung with
folds of pure
White samite, and by fountains run-
ning wine,
Where children sat in white with cups
of gold,
Moved to the lists, and there, with
slow sad steps
Ascending, fill'd his double-dragon'd
chair.

He glanced and saw the stately galleries,
 Dame, damsel, each thro' worship of their Queen
 White-robed in honor of the stainless child,
 And some with scatter'd jewels, like a bank
 Of maiden snow mingled with sparks of fire.
 He look'd but once, and vail'd 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 crack'd,
 And show'd him, like a vermin in its hole,
 Modred, a narrow face: anon he heard
 The voice that billow'd round the barriers roar
 An ocean-sounding welcome to one knight,

But newly-enter'd, taller than the rest,
 And armor'd 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 or shield
 A spear, a harp, a bugle — Tristram — late
 From overseas in Brittany return'd,
 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 yearn'd to shake
 The burthen off his heart in one full shock
 With Tristram ev'n to death: his strong hands gript
 And dinted the gilt dragons right and left,
 Until he groan'd for wrath — so many of those,
 That ware their ladies' colors on the casque,
 Drew from before Sir Tristram to the bounds,
 And there with gibes and flickering mockeries
 Stood, while he mutter'd, "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, "Aye, but wherefore
toss me this

Like a dry bone cast to some hungry
hound?

Let 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 battie-
field,

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 bow'd his homage,
bluntly saying,

"Fair damsels, each to him who wor-
ships each

Sole Queen of Beauty and of love, be-
hold

This day my Queen of Beauty is not
here."

And most of these were mute, some
anger'd, 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

Laugh'd shrilly, crying, "Praise the
patient saints,

Our one white day of Innocence hath
past,

Tho' somewhat draggled at the skirt.
So be it.

The snowdrop only, flowering thro'
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 so-
lemnity

With all the kindlier colors of the
field."

So dame and damsel glitter'd at the
feast

Variouly gay: for he that tells the
tale

Liken'd 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 flow-
ers again;

So dame and damsel cast the simple
white,

And glowing in all colors, 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 law-
less jousts,

Brake 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 wither'd leaf before the
hall.

Then Tristram saying, "Why skip
ye so, Sir Fool?"

Wheel'd round on either heel, Dag-
onet 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."

"Aye, fool," said Tristram, "but 'tis
eating dry
To dance without a catch, a rounde-
lay
To dance to." Then he twangled
on his harp,
And while he twangled little Dag-
onet stood
Quiet as any water-sodden log
Stay'd in the wandering warble of a
brook;
But when the twangling ended, skipt
again;
And being ask'd, "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, "Ar-
thur, the King's;

For when thou playest that air with
Queen Isolt,
Thou makest broken music with thy
bride,
Her daintier namesake down in Brit-
tany —
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 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 crabb'd 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 hush'd, 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-meas-
ure 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 damsels white as
Innocence,
In honor 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 there-
upon 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: honor 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 wallow'd, I have
wash'd — the world
Is flesh and shadow — I have had my
day.
The dirty nurse, Experience, in her
kind
Hath foul'd me — an I wallow'd,
then I wash'd —
I have had my day and my philoso-
phies —
And thank the Lord I am King Ar-
thur's fool.
Swine, say ye? swine, goats, asses,
rams and geese
Troop'd round a Paynim harper once,
who thrumm'd
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, "Aye, Sir Fool, for
when our King
Was victor well-nigh 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 answer'd, "Aye, 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 cour-
tesy,
Or King by right — and so went
harping down
The black king's highway, got so far,
and grew
So witty that ye play'd 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 shrill'd,

"Aye, aye, 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
hernet-combs,
And men from heasts — Long live
the king of fools!"

And down the city Dagonet danced
away;
But thro' the slowly-mellowing ave-
nues
And solitary passes of the wood
Rode Tristram toward Lyonnesse and
the west.
Before him fled the face of Queen
Isolt
With ruby-circled neck, but ever-
more
Past, as a rustle or twitter in the
wood
Made duli his inner, keen his outer
eye
For all that walk'd, or crept, or
perch'd, or flew.
Anon the face, as, when a gust hath
blown,
Unruffling waters re-collect the
shape
Of one that in them sees himself, re-
turn'd;
But at the slot or fewmets of a deer,
Or ev'n a fall'n feather, vanish'd
again.

So on for all that day from lawn to
lawn
Thro' many a league-long bower he
rode. At length
A lodge of intertwined beechen-
boughs
Furze-cramm'd, 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 Cor-
 nish King,
 With six or seven, when Tristram
 was away,
 And snatch'd her thence; yet dreading
 worse than shame
 Her warrior Tristram, spake not any
 word,
 But bode his hour, devising wretched-
 ness.

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
 smooth
 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 call'd 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 re-
 turn'd.
 The black-blue Irish hair and Irish
 eyes
 Had drawn him home — what
 marvel? then he laid
 His brows upon the drifted leaf and
 dream'd.

He seem'd to pace the strand of
 Brittany
 Between Isolt of Britain and his
 bride,
 And show'd 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."
 Follow'd a rush of eagle's wings, and
 then
 A whimpering of the spirit of the
 child,
 Because the twain had spoil'd her car-
 canet.

He dream'd; but Arthur with a
 hundred spears
 Rode far, till o'er the illimitable reed,
 And many a glancing plash and sal-
 lowy isle,
 The wide-wing'd sunset of the misty
 marsh
 Glared on a huge machicolated tower
 That stood with open doors, where-
 out was roll'd
 A roar of riot, as from men secure

Amid their marshes, ruffians at their
 case
 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 there beside a horn, inflamed the
 knights
 At that dishonor 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 hood-red armor, sallying, howl'd
 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-worshiper? Yea, God's
 curse, and I!
 Slain was the brother of my para-
 mour
 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
 Well-nigh was helmet-hidden, and
 the name
 Went wandering somewhere darkling
 in his mind.
 And Arthur deign'd not use of word
 or sword,
 But let the drunkard, as he stretch'd
 from horse
 To strike him, overbalancing his
 bulk,
 Down from the causeway heavily to
 the swamp
 Fall, as the crest of some slow-arch-
 ing 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
 watch'd him, roar'd
 And shouted and leapt down upon
 the fall'n;
 There trampled out his face from be-
 ing known,
 And sank his head in mire, and
 slimed themselves:
 Nor heard the King for their own
 cries, but sprang
 Thro' open doors, and swording right
 and left
 Men, women, on their sodden faces,
 hurl'd

The tables over and the wines, and
 slew
 Till all the rafters rang with woman-
 yells,
 And all the pavement stream'd with
 massacre;
 Then, echoing yell with yell, they
 fired the tower,
 Which half that autumn night, like
 the live North,
 Red-pulsing up thro' Alioth and
 Alcor,
 Made all above it, and a hundred
 meres
 About it, as the water Moab saw
 Come round by the East, and out be-
 yond them flush'd
 The long low dune, and lazy-plun-
 ging 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
 return'd,
 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,
 Stay'd 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 favor changed and love
 thee not"—
 Then pressing day by day thro' Lyon-
 nesse
 Last in a roky hollow, helling, heard
 The hounds of Mark, and felt the
 goodly hounds
 Yelp at his heart, but turning, past
 and gain'd
 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 Tris-
 tram grind
 The spiring stone that scaled about
 her tower,
 Flush'd, started, met him at the
 doors, and there
 Belted his body with her white em-
 brace,
 Crying aloud, "Not Mark— not
 Mark, my soul!
 The footstep flutter'd me at first: not
 he:
 Catlike thro' his own castle steals my
 Mark,
 But warrior-wise thou stridest thro'
 his halls
 Who hates thee, as I him— ev'n 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 wrong'd who is not ev'n
 his own,
 But save for dread of thee had beaten
 me,
 Scratch'd, bitten, blinded, marr'd me
 somehow — Mark?
 • What rights are his that dare not
 strike for them?
 Not lift a hand — not, tho' he found
 me thus!
 But harken! have ye met him? hence
 he went
 To-day 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 vizard, lest an arrow from the
 bush
 Should leave me all alone with Mark
 and heli.
 My God, the measure of my hate for
 Mark
 Is as the measure of my love for
 thee."

So, pluck'd one way by hate and
 one by love,
 Drain'd 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 — (but ~~mark'd~~ —
 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 kneel'd
 to last?"

And Tristram, "Last to my Queen
 Paramount,
 Here now to my Queen Paramount
 of love
 And loveliness — aye, lovelier than
 when first
 Her light feet fell on our rough Lyon-
 nesse,
 Sailing from Ireland."

Softly laugh'd 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, gra-
 cious, kind —
 Save when thy Mark is kindled on
 thy lips
 Most gracious; but she, haughty, ev'n
 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 thro' the scruple of my
 bond,
 Calling me thy white hind, and say-
 ing to me
 That Guinevere had sinn'd against
 the highest,

And I — misjoked with such a want
of man —
That I could hardly sin against the
lowest.”

He answer'd, “O my soul, be comforted!
If this be sweet, to sin in leading-
strings,
If here be comfort, and if ours be sin,
Crown'd 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? — aye! for,
hour by hour,
Here in the never-ended afternoon,
O sweeter than all memories of thee,
Deeper than any yearnings after thee
Seem'd those far-rolling, westward-
smiling seas,
Watch'd from this tower. Isolt of
Britain dash'd
Before Isolt of Brittany on the
strand,
Would that have chill'd her bride-
kiss? Wedded her?
Fought in her father's battles?
wounded there?
The King was all fulfill'd with grate-
fulness,
And she, my namesake of the hands,
that heal'd
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 prayer-
ful, meek,
Pale-blooded, she will yield herself to
God.”

And Isolt answer'd, “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, wonder-
ing where,
Murmuring a light song I had heard
thee sing,
And once or twice I spake thy name
aloud.
Then flash'd 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 wed-
ded her,’ he said,

Not said, but hiss'd it: the. this
 crown of towers
 So shook to such a roar of at the
 sky,
 That here in utter dark I swoon'd
 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 le-
 man'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 an-
 gered 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 utter'd aught
 so gross
 Ev'n to the swineherd's malkin in the
 mast?
 The greater man, the greater cour-
 tesy.
 Far other was the Tristram, Arthur's
 knight!
 But thou, thro' ever harrying thy wild
 beasts—
 Save that to touch a harp, titt 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 soli-
 tude,
 Thy marriage and mine own, that I
 shou'd suc-

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
 thro' their vows
 The King prevailing made his
 realm:—I say,
 Swear to me thou wilt love me ev'n
 when old,
 Gray-hair'd, 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—aye,
 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—ev'n to the height—I
 honor'd 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 ray'd from off a
 brow
 Like hill-snow 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 seem'd to me
 no man,
 But Michaël trampling Satan; so I
 sware,
 Being amazed: but this went by —
 The vows!
 O aye — the wholesome madness of an
 hour —
 They served their use, their time;
 for every knight
 Believed himself a greater than him-
 self,
 And every follower eyed him as a
 God;
 Till he, being lifted up beyond him-
 self,
 Did mightier deeds than otherwise he
 had done,
 And so the realm was made; but then
 their vows —
 First mainly thro' that sullyng of our
 Queen —
 Began to gall the knighthood, asking
 whence
 Had Arthur right to bind them to
 himself?
 Dropt down from heaven? wash'd up
 from out the deep?
 They fail'd to trace him thro' 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 yaffin-
 gale
 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 turn'd away my love for
 thee
 To someone thrice as courteous as
 thyself —
 For courtesy wins woman all as well
 As valor 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, un-
til —
Come, I am hunger'd and half-an-
ger'd — 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
will'd;
And after these had comforted the
blood
With meats and wines, and satiated
their hearts —
Now talking of their woodland para-
dise,
The deer, the dews, the fern, the
founts, the lawns;
Now mocking at the much ungainli-
ness,
And craven shifts, and long crane
legs of Mark —
Then Tristram laughing caught the
harp, and sang:

" Aye, aye, O aye — the winds
that bend the brier!
A star in heaven, a star within the
mere!
Aye, aye, O aye — a star was my de-
sire,
And one was far apart, and one was
near:
Aye, aye, O aye — the winds that
bow the grass!
And one was water and one star was
fire,
And one will ever shine and one will
pass.
Aye, aye, O aye — the winds that
move the mere."

Then in the light's last glimmer
Tristram show'd
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 turn'd, then, fling-
ing round her neck,
Claspt it, and cried, " Thine Order,
O my Queen!"
But, while he bow'd to kiss the jew-
el'd throat,
Out of the dark, just as the lips had
touch'd,
Behind him rose a shadow and a
shriek —
" Mark's way," said Mark, and clove
him thro' the brain.

That night came Arthur home, and
while he climb'd,
All in a death-dumb autumn-dripping
gloom,
The stairway to the hall, and look'd
and saw
The great Queen's bower was dark,—
about his feet
A voice clung sobbing till he ques-
tion'd 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 Almes-
bury
Weeping, none with her save a little
maid,
A novice: one low light betwixt them
burn'd
Blurr'd by the creeping mist, for all
aboard,
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 chill'd the popular praises of the
King
With silent smiles of slow disparage-
ment;
And tamper'd 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 sharpen'd by strong hate for
Lancelot.

For thus it chanced one morn when
all the court,
Green-suited, but with plumes that
mock'd the may,
Had been, their wot, a-maying and
return'd,
That Modred still in green, all ear
and eye,
Climb'd to the high top of the gar-
den-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 williest and the worst; and more
than this
He saw not, for Sir Lancelot passing
by
Spied where he couch'd, and as the
gardener's hand
Picks from the colewort a green cater-
pillar,
So from the high wall and the flower-
ing grove
Of grasses Lancelot pluck'd him by
the heel,
And cast him as a worm upon the
way;
But when he knew the Prince tho'
marr'd 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 hunch'd,
in him
By those whom God had made full-
limb'd and tall,
Scorn was allow'd as part of his de-
fect,
And he was answer'd 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
 laugh'd
 Lightly, to think of Modred's dusty
 fall,
 Then shudder'd as the village wife
 who cries
 "I shudder, some one steps across my
 grave;"
 Then laugh'd 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 persist-
 ent 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 creak-
 ing 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
 dream'd
 An awful dream; for then she seem'd
 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 touch'd her, and she
 turn'd—
 When lo! her own, that broadening
 from her feet,
 And blackening, swallow'd 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 ev'n 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 smoldering scandal
 break and blaze
 Before the people, and our lord the
 King."
 And Lancelot ever promised, but re-
 main'd,

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 Mod-
 red 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 lion-
 like
 Leapt on him, and hurl'd him head-
 long, and he fell
 Stunn'd, 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 over-
 seas:
 There will I hide thee, till my life
 shall end,
 There hold thee with my life against
 the world."
 She answer'd, "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 kiss'd, and parted weeping: for
 he past,
 Love-loyal to the least wish of the
 Queen,
 Back to his land; but she to Almes-
 bury
 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 moan'd "Too
 late, too late!"
 Till in the cold wind that foreruns
 the morn,
 A blot in heaven, the Raven, flying
 high,
 Croak'd, and she thought, "He spies
 a field of death;
 For now the Heathen of the North-
 ern 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 Sister-
 hood,
 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 mix'd, 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 rumor wildly blown
 about
 Came, that Sir Modred had usurp'd
 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 bow'd down
 upon her hands
 Silent, until the little maid, who
 brook'd
 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
 look'd 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 bride-
 groom is so sweet?
 O let us in, tho' late, to kiss his feet!
 No, no, too late! ye cannot enter
 now."

So sang the novice, while full pas-
 sionately,
 Her head upon her hands, remember-
 ing
 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 state-
 liness.
 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 Lance-
 lot 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 de-
 sire
 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 wicked-
 ness,
 But were I such a King, it could not
 be."

Then to her own sad heart mut-
 ter'd the Queen,
 "Will the child kill me with her in-
 nocent talk?"
 But openly she answer'd, "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 wond-
 ers, there
 At Camelot, ere the coming of the
 Queen."

Then thought the Queen within
 herself again,
 "Will the child kill me with her fool-
 ish prate?"
 But openly she spake and said to
 her,
 "O little maid, shut in 'n nunnery
 walls,
 What canst thou know of King and
 Tables Round,
 Or what of signs and wonders, but
 the signs
 And simple miracles of thy nun-
 nery?"

To whom the little novice garru-
 lously,
 "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,
 nesse,
 Each with a beacon-star upon his
 head,
 And with a wild sea-light about his
 feet,
 He saw them — headland after head-
 land flame
 Far on into the rich heart of the
 west:
 And in the light the white mer-
 maid swam,
 And strong man-breasted things stood
 from the sea,
 And sent a deep sea-voice thro' 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 further-
 more,
 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 this-
 tle snakes
 When three gray linnets wrangle for
 the seed:
 And still at evenings on before his
 horse
 The flickering fairy-circle wheel'd
 and broke
 Flying, and link'd again, and wheel'd
 and broke

Flying, for all the land was full of
 life.
 And when at last he came to Came-
 lot,
 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 dream'd; for every
 knight
 Had whatsoever meat he long'd for
 served
 By hands unseen; and even as he
 said
 Down in the cellars merry bloated
 things
 Shoulder'd 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 some-
 what 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 fall'n upon
 the realm?"

To whom the novice garrulously
 again,
 "Yea, one, a bard; of whom my fa-
 ther said,
 Full many a noble war-song had he
 sung,
 Ev'n in the presence of an enemy's
 fleet,
 Between the steep cliff and the com-
 ing 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 well-nigh more than man, and rail'd at those
 Who call'd 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 foster'd him
 Till he by miracle was approv'n 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 falter'd, and his hand fell from the harp,
 And pale he turn'd, and reel'd, and would have fall'n,
 But that they stay'd 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 bow'd her head nor spake.
 Whereat the novice crying, with clasp'd 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, tho' himself would say
 Sir Lancelot had the noblest; and he died,
 Kill'd 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 look'd up and answer'd 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-manner'd 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 rumor runs,
The most disloyal friend in all the
world."

To which a mournful answer made
the Queen:

"O closed about by narrowing nun-
nery-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 who 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 harm'd
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

Sigh'd, and began to gather heart
again,

Saying in herself, "The simple, fear-
ful child

Meant nothing, but my own too-fear-
ful guilt,

Simpler than any child, betrays itself.
But help me, heaven, for surely I

repent.
For what is true repentance but in
thought —

Not ev'n in inmost thought to think
again

The sins that made the past so pleas-
ant to us:

And I have sworn never to see him
more,

To see him more."

And ev'n 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
dream'd),
Rode under groves that look'd a par-
adise
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth
That seem'd the heavens upbreking
thro' 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 Pendragon-
ship,
That crown'd state pavilion of the
King,
Blaze by the rushing brook or silent
well.

But when the Queen immersed in
such a trance,
And moving thro' the past uncon-
sciously,
Came to that point where first she
saw the King
Ride toward her from the city, sigh'd
to find

Her journey done, glanced at him,
thought him cold,
High, self-contain'd, 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 thro' the nun-
nery ran,
Then on a sudden a cry, "The King."
She sat
Stiff-stricken, listening; but when
armed feet
Thro' the long gallery from the outer
doors
Rang coming, prone from off her seat
she fell,
And grovel'd 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 tho'
changed, the King's:

"Liest thou here so low, the child
of one
I honor'd, 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 North-
 ern 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 over-
 thrown.
 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 com-
 ing on,
 Lest but a hair of this low head be
 harm'd.
 Fear not: thou shalt be guarded till
 my death.
 Howbeit I know, if ancient prophes-
 cies
 Have err'd 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,
 Ev'n for thy sake, the sin which thou
 hast sinn'd.
 For when the Roman left us, and
 their law
 Relax'd its hold upon us, and the
 ways
 Were fill'd with rapine, here and
 there a deed
 Of prowess done redress'd 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 honor 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,
 Sinn'd also, till the loathsome oppo-
 site
 Of all my heart had destined did
 obtain,
 And all thro' 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 vext with
 thee
 In hanging robe or vacant ornament,
 Or ghostly footfall echoing on the
 stair.
 For think not, tho' thou wouldst not
 love thy lord,
 Thy lord hast wholly lost his love for
 thee,
 I am not made of so slight ele-
 ments.
 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 thro' his cowardice allow'd
 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 war-
horse neigh'd
As 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, Guine-
vere,
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 weigh'd
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 sinn'd,
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-molded
form,
And beauty such as never woman
wore,

Until it came 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 sinn'd; 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 thro' 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.
Thro' 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 mysteri-
 ous 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 grovel'd 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 ever-
 more.
 And while he spake to these his helm
 was lower'd,
 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 Pendragon-
 ship
 Blaze, making all the night a stear-
 of fire.
 And even then he turn'd; and more
 and more
 The moony vapor rolling round the
 King,
 Who seem'd 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 stretch'd 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 thro' my sin to slay and to be
 slain!
 And he forgave me, and I could not
 speak.
 Farewell? I should have answer'd
 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,
 Call'd me polluted: shall I kill my-
 self?
 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 mock'd me when he spake of hope;
 His hope he call'd 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 yearn'd for warmth and color 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 tho' 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
 Grasp'd, made her vail her eyes: she look'd 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 cry-
ing '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 pray'd for; lie before
your shrines;
Do each low office of your holy
house;
Walk your dim cloister, and dis-
tribute dole
To poor sick people, richer in His
eyes
Who ransom'd us and haler too than
I;

And treat their loathsome hurts and
heal mine own;
And so wear out in almsdeed and in
prayer
The somber close of that voluptuous
day,
Which wrought the ruin of my lord
the King."

She said: they took her to them-
selves; 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.

End of "The Round Table."

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

THAT story which the bold Sir Bedi-
vere,
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 slum-
bering host,
Heard in his tent the moanings of
the King:

"I found Him in the shining of
the stars,
I mark'd 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.



“YEA, LITTLE MAID, FOR AM I NOT FORGIVEN?”—*Page 381*



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 lean'd 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 kill'd
 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! to-morrow 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 de-
 light."

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
 Shrill'd; but in going mingled with
 dim cries
 Far in the moonlit haze among the
 hills,
 As of some lonely city sack'd by night,
 When all is lost, and wife and child
 with wail
 Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke
 and call'd,
 "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 thro' 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
Thro' 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 push'd Sir Modred, league
by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyon-
nesse —
A land of old upheaven from the
abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten peo-
ples 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
Burn'd 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 ev'n on Ar-
thur 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 shatter'd helms, and
shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling
down

Look'd up for heaven, and only saw
 the mist;
 And shouts of heathen and the traitor
 knights,
 Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous
 blasphemies,
 Sweat, writhings, anguish, laboring
 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 thro'
 death
 Or death-like swoon, thus over all
 that shore,
 Save for some whisper of the seeth-
 ing seas,
 A dead hush fell; but when the dolor-
 ous day,
 Grew drearier toward twilight fall-
 ing, 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 shiver'd brands that once had
 fought with Rom;
 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:

"Hearst thou this great voice that
 shakes the world,
 And wastes the narrow realm where-
 on we move,
 And beats upon the faces of the dead,
 My dead, as tho' they had not died
 for me?—
 O Bedivere, for on my heart hath
 fall'n
 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, unharm'd, 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 swear
 my vows,
 Yea, even while they brake them,
 own'd me King.
 And well for thee, saying in my dark
 hour,
 When all the purport of my throne
 hath fail'd,
 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 Excali-
 bur,
 Slew him, and all but slain himself,
 he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle
 roll'd
 Among the mountains by the winter
 sea;
 Until King Arthur's Table, man by
 man,
 Had fall'n 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 to-day 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,—
 Tho' Merlin sware that I should
 come again
 To rule once more; but, let what will
 be, be,
 I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
 That without help I cannot last till
 morn.
 Thou therefore take my brand Ex-
 calibur,
 Which was my pride: for thou re-
 memberest how
 In those old days, one summer noon,
 an arm
 Rose up from out the bosom of the
 lake,
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, won-
 derful,
 Holding the sword—and how I
 row'd 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 Bedi-
 vere:

"It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' 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 ruin'd 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 subtler jewelry. 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 seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd

There in the many-kuotted water-flags,
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 perform'd 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 betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as be seem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight:
For surer sign had follow'd, 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, fix'd 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 forever 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 him-
self?
The King is sick, and knows not
what he does.
What record - what relic of my
lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty
breath
And rumors 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, Ex-
calibur,
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 honor 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 spake King Arthur, breath-
ing 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,
I aid widow'd of the power in his
eye

That bow'd 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
 clutch'd the sword,
 And strongly wheel'd and threw it.
 The great brand
 Made lightnings in the splendor of
 the moon,
 And flashing round and round, and
 whirl'd in an arch,
 Shot like a streamer of the northern
 morn,
 Seen where the moving isles of win-
 ter shock
 By night, with noises of the North-
 ern Sea.
 So flash'd and fell the brand Excal-
 ibur:
 But ere he dipt the surface, rose an
 arm
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, won-
 derful,
 And caught him by the hilt, and
 brandish'd 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 tho' 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 look'd again, behold an
 arm,
 Clothed in white samite, mystic,
 wonderful,
 That caught him by the hilt, and
 brandish'd 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 thro' 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 lan-
 guid hands,
 And rising bore him thro' the place
 of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur
 panted hard,
 Like one that feels a nightmare on
 his bed
 When all the house is mute. So
 sigh'd 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 walk'd,
 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 clash'd his harness in the icy
 caves
 And barren chasms, and all to left
 and right
 The bare black cliff clang'd 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 shiver'd 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 murmur'd 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 shatter'd casque, and
 chafed his hands,
 And call'd him by his name, com-
 plaining loud,
 And dropping bitter tears against a
 brow
 Striped with dark blood: for all his
 face was white
 And colorless, and like the wither'd
 moon
 Smote by the fresh beam of the
 springing east;
 And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd
 with drops
 Of onset; and the light and lustrous
 curls —
 That made his forehead like a rising
 sun
 High from the daïs-throne — were
 parch'd with dust;
 Or, clotted into points and hanging
 loose,
 Mix'd with the knightly growth
 that fringed his lips.
 So like a shatter'd column lay the
 King;
 Not like that Arthur who, with lance
 in rest,
 From spur to plume a star of tourna-
 ment,
 Shot thro' 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?"

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

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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 companion-
 less,
 And the days darken round me, and
 the years,
 Among new men, strange faces, other
 minds."

And slowly answer'd 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-meadow'd, happy, fair with
 orchard lawns
 And bowery hollows crown'd 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
 Look'd 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 groan'd, "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 turn'd and
slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron
crag;
Thence mark'd the black hull mov-
ing yet, and cried,
"He passes to be King among the
dead,
And after healing of his grievous
wound
He comes again; but — if he comes
no more —
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon
black boat,
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three
whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed
with living light,
They stood before his throne in si-
lence, friends

Of Arthur, who should help him at
his need?"

Then from the dawn it seem'd
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
Ev'n 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

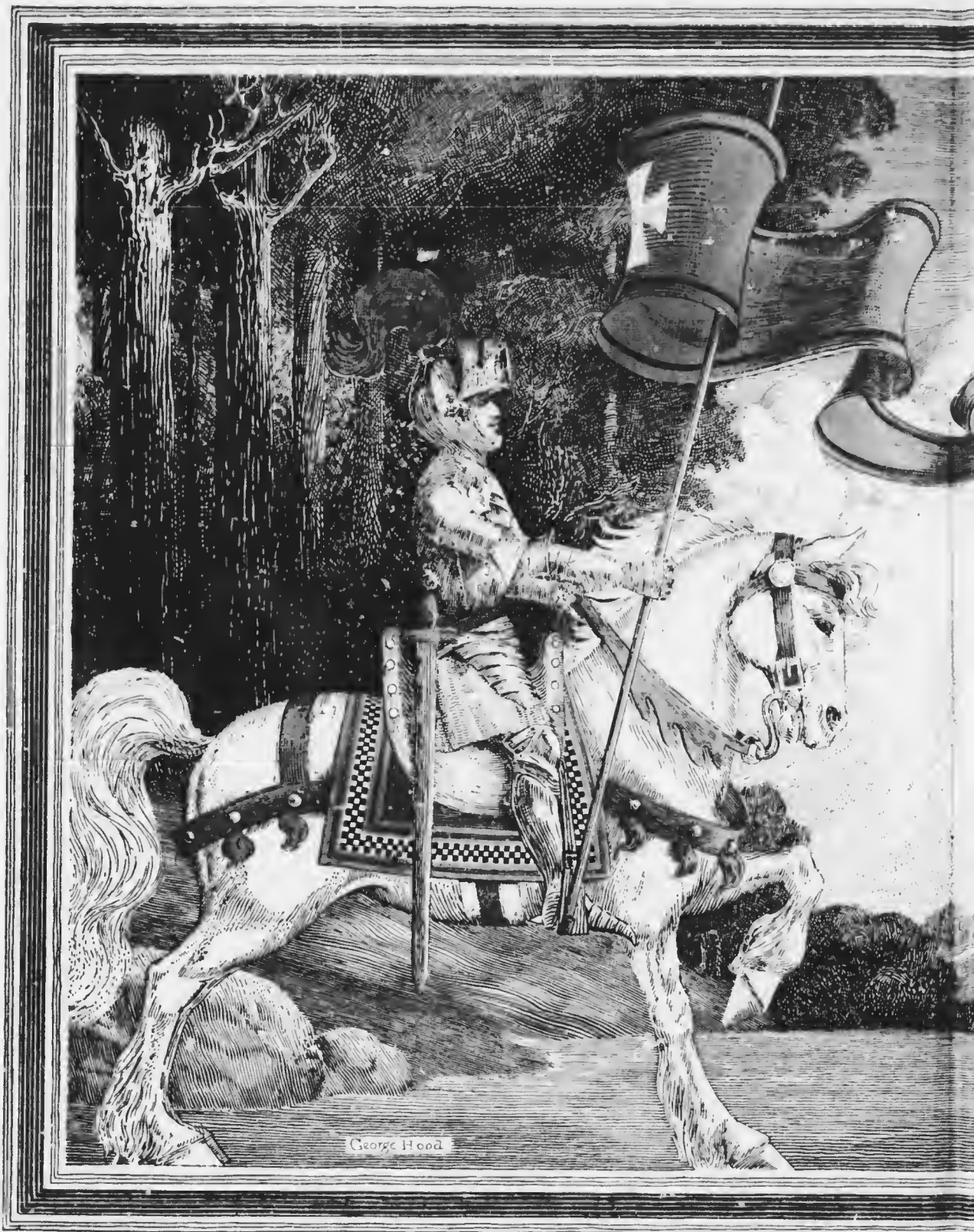
O LOYAL to the royal in thyself,
And loyal to thy land, as this to
thee —
Bear witness, that rememberable
day,
When, pale as yet, and fever-worn,
the Prince
Who scarce had pluck'd his flicker-
ing life again
From halfway down the shadow of
the grave,
Past with thee thro' thy people and
their love,

And London roll'd one tide of joy
thro' all
Her trebled millions, and loud
leagues of man
And welcome! witness, too, the si-
lent cry,
The prayer of many a race and creed,
and clime —
Thunderless lightnings striking under
sea
From sunset and sunrise of all thy
realm,

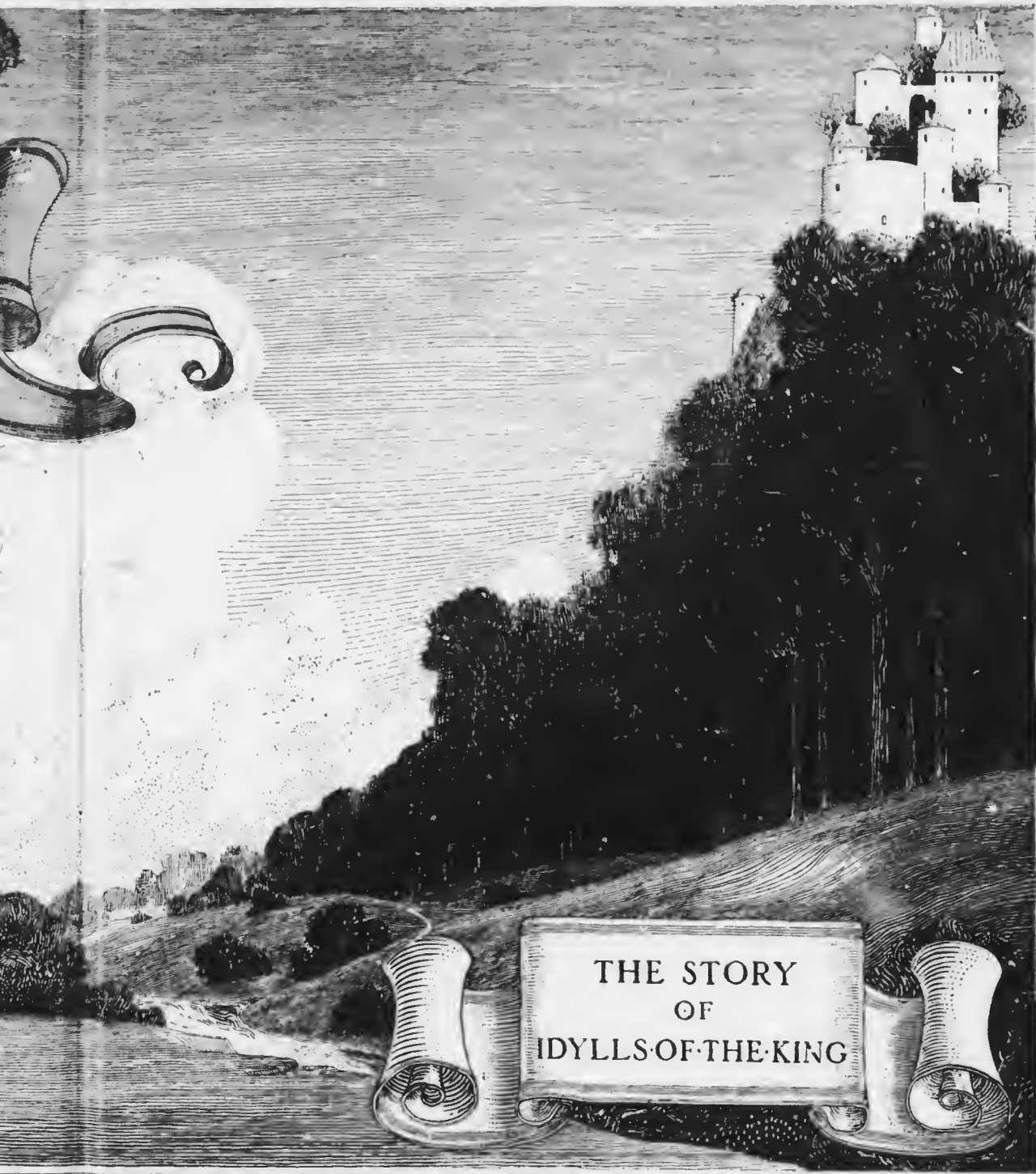
And that true North, whereof we
 lately heard
 A strain to shame us, "Keep you to
 yourselves;
 So loyal is too costly! friends — your
 love
 Is but a burthen: loose the bond, and
 go."
 Is this the tone of empire? here the
 faith
 That made us rulers? this, indeed,
 her voice
 And meaning, whom the roar of
 Hougoumont
 Left mightiest of all peoples under
 heaven?
 What shock has fool'd 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 peal'd
 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 fall'n.— But
 thou, my Queen,
 Not for itself, but thro' thy living
 love
 For one to whom I made it o'er his
 grave
 Sacred, except 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 Mall-
 cor's, one
 Touch'd by the adulterous finger of
 a time
 That hover'd between war and wan-
 tonness,
 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
 scared, 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 sim-
 ple life,
 Or Cowardice, the child of lust for
 gold,
 Or Labor, with a groan and not a
 voice,
 Or Art with poisonous honey stol'n
 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 crown'd Republic's crowning
 common-sense,
 That saved her many times, not fail
 — their fears

Are morning shadows huger than The darkness of that battle in the
the shapes West,
That cast them, not those gloomier Where all of high and holy dies
which forego away.



George Hood



THE STORY
OF
IDYLLS OF THE KING

