Idylls of the King

by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

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Idylls of the King

Flos Regum Arthurus (Joseph of Exeter)

In Twelve Books

By Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Contents

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 reverenced his conscience as his king; Whose glory was, redressing human wrong; Who spake no slander, no, nor listened to it; Who loved one only and who clave to her—" Her—over all whose realms to their last isle, Commingled with the gloom of imminent war, The shadow of His loss drew like eclipse, Darkening the world. We have lost him: he is gone: We know him now: all narrow jealousies Are silent; and we see him as he moved, How modest, kindly, all-accomplished, wise, With what sublime repression of himself, And in what limits, and how tenderly; Not swaying to this faction or to that; Not making his high place the lawless perch Of winged ambitions, nor a vantage-ground For pleasure; but through all this tract of years Wearing the white flower of a blameless life, Before a thousand peering littlenesses, In that fierce light which beats upon a throne, And blackens every blot: for where is he, Who dares foreshadow for an only son A lovelier life, a more unstained, than his? Or how should England dreaming of his sons Hope more for these than some inheritance Of such a life, a heart, a mind as thine, Thou noble Father of her Kings to be, Laborious for her people and her poor— Voice in the rich dawn of an ampler day— Far-sighted summoner of War and Waste To fruitful strifes and rivalries of peace— Sweet nature gilded by the gracious gleam Of letters, dear to Science, dear to Art, Dear to thy land and ours, a Prince indeed, Beyond all titles, and a household name, Hereafter, through all times, Albert the Good. Break

not, O woman's-heart, but still endure; Break not, for thou art Royal, but endure, Remembering all the beauty of that star Which shone so close beside Thee that ye made One light together, but has past and leaves The Crown a lonely splendour. May all love, His love, unseen but felt, o'ershadow Thee, The love of all Thy sons encompass Thee, The love of all Thy daughters cherish Thee, The love of all Thy people comfort Thee, Till God's love set Thee at his side again!

The Coming of Arthur

Leodogran, the King of Cameliard, Had one fair daughter, and none other child; And she was the fairest of all flesh on earth, Guinevere, and in her his one delight. For many a petty king ere Arthur came Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war Each upon other, wasted all the land; And still from time to time the heathen host Swarmed overseas, and harried what was left. And so there grew great tracts of wilderness, Wherein the beast was ever more and more, But man was less and less, till Arthur came. For first Aurelius lived and fought and died, And after him King Uther fought and died, But either failed to make the kingdom one. And after these King Arthur for a space, And through the puissance of his Table Round, Drew all their petty princedoms under him. Their king and head, and made a realm, and reigned. And thus the land of Cameliard was waste, Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein, And none or few to scare or chase the beast; So that wild dog, and wolf and boar and bear Came night and day, and rooted in the fields, And wallowed in the gardens of the King. And ever and anon the wolf would steal The children and devour, but now and then, Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat To human sucklings; and the children, housed In her foul den, there at their meat would growl, And mock their foster mother on four feet, Till, straightened, they grew up to wolf-like men, Worse than the wolves. And King Leodogran Groaned for the Roman legions here again, And Caesar's eagle: then his brother

king, Urien, assailed him: last a heathen horde, Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood, And on the spike that split the mother's heart Spitting the child, brake on him, till, amazed, He knew not whither he should turn for aid. But—for he heard of Arthur newly crowned, Though not without an uproar made by those Who cried, "He is not Uther's son"—the King Sent to him, saying, "Arise, and help us thou! For here between the man and beast we die." And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms, But heard the call, and came: and Guinevere Stood by the castle walls to watch him pass; But since he neither wore on helm or shield The golden symbol of his kinglihood, But rode a simple knight among his knights, And many of these in richer arms than he, She saw him not, or marked not, if she saw, One among many, though his face was bare. But Arthur, looking downward as he past, Felt the light of her eyes into his life Smite on the sudden, yet rode on, and pitched His tents beside the forest. Then he drave The heathen; after, slew the beast, and felled The forest, letting in the sun, and made Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight And so returned. For while he lingered there, A doubt that ever smouldered in the hearts Of those great Lords and Barons of his realm Flashed forth and into war: for most of these, Colleaguing with a score of petty kings, Made head against him, crying, "Who is he That he should rule us? who hath proven him King Uther's son? for lo! we look at him, And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice, Are like to those of Uther whom we knew. This is the son of Gorlois, not the King; This is the son of Anton, not the King." And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt Travail, and throes and agonies of the life, Desiring to be joined with Guinevere; And thinking as he rode, "Her father said That there between the man and beast they die. Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts Up to my throne, and side by side with me? What happiness to reign a lonely king, Vext—O ye stars that shudder over me, O earth that soundest hollow under me, Vext with waste dreams? for saving I be joined To her that is the fairest under heaven, I seem as nothing in the mighty world, And cannot will my will, nor work my work Wholly, nor make myself in mine own

realm Victor and lord. But were I joined with her, Then might we live together as one life, And reigning with one will in everything Have power on this dark land to lighten it, And power on this dead world to make it live." Thereafter—as he speaks who tells the tale— When Arthur reached a field-of-battle bright With pitched pavilions of his foe, the world Was all so clear about him, that he saw The smallest rock far on the faintest hill, And even in high day the morning star. So when the King had set his banner broad, At once from either side, with trumpet-blast, And shouts, and clarions shrilling unto blood, The long-lanced battle let their horses run. And now the Barons and the kings prevailed, And now the King, as here and there that war Went swaying; but the Powers who walk the world Made lightnings and great thunders over him, And dazed all eyes, till Arthur by main might, And mightier of his hands with every blow, And leading all his knighthood threw the kings Carados, Urien, Cradlemont of Wales, Claudias, and Clariance of Northumberland, The King Brandagoras of Latangor, With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore, And Lot of Orkney. Then, before a voice As dreadful as the shout of one who sees To one who sins, and deems himself alone And all the world asleep, they swerved and brake Flying, and Arthur called to stay the brands That hacked among the flyers, "Ho! they yield!" So like a painted battle the war stood Silenced, the living quiet as the dead, And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord. He laughed upon his warrior whom he loved And honoured most. "Thou dost not doubt me King, So well thine arm hath wrought for me today." "Sir and my liege," he cried, "the fire of God Descends upon thee in the battle-field: I know thee for my King!" Whereat the two, For each had warded either in the fight, Sware on the field of death a deathless love. And Arthur said, "Man's word is God in man: Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death." Then quickly from the foughten field he sent Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere, His new-made knights, to King Leodogran, Saying, "If I in aught have served thee well, Give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife." Whom when he heard, Leodogran in heart Debating—"How should I that am a king,

However much he holp me at my need, Give my one daughter saving to a king, And a king's son?"—lifted his voice, and called A hoary man, his chamberlain, to whom He trusted all things, and of him required His counsel: "Knowest thou aught of Arthur's birth?" Then spake the hoary chamberlain and said, "Sir King, there be but two old men that know: And each is twice as old as I; and one Is Merlin, the wise man that ever served King Uther through his magic art; and one Is Merlin's master (so they call him) Bleys, Who taught him magic, but the scholar ran Before the master, and so far, that Bleys, Laid magic by, and sat him down, and wrote All things and whatsoever Merlin did In one great annal-book, where after-years Will learn the secret of our Arthur's birth." To whom the King Leodogran replied, "O friend, had I been holpen half as well By this King Arthur as by thee today, Then beast and man had had their share of me: But summon here before us yet once more Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere." Then, when they came before him, the King said, "I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl, And reason in the chase: but wherefore now Do these your lords stir up the heat of war, Some calling Arthur born of Gorlois, Others of Anton? Tell me, ye yourselves, Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's son?" And Ulfius and Brastias answered, "Ay." Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights Knighted by Arthur at his crowning, spake— For bold in heart and act and word was he, Whenever slander breathed against the King— "Sir, there be many rumours on this head: For there be those who hate him in their hearts, Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet, And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man: And there be those who deem him more than man, And dream he dropt from heaven: but my belief In all this matter—so ye care to learn— Sir, for ye know that in King Uther's time The prince and warrior Gorlois, he that held Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea, Was wedded with a winsome wife, Ygerne: And daughters had she borne him,—one whereof, Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent, Hath ever like a loyal sister cleaved To Arthur,—but a son she had not borne. And Uther cast upon her eyes of love: But she, a stainless wife to Gorlois, So loathed the bright

dishonour of his love, That Gorlois and King Uther went to war: And overthrown was Gorlois and slain. Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men, Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls, Left her and fled, and Uther entered in, And there was none to call to but himself. So, compassed by the power of the King, Enforced was she to wed him in her tears, And with a shameful swiftness: afterward, Not many moons, King Uther died himself, Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule After him, lest the realm should go to wrack. And that same night, the night of the new year, By reason of the bitterness and grief That vext his mother, all before his time Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born Delivered at a secret postern-gate To Merlin, to be holden far apart Until his hour should come; because the lords Of that fierce day were as the lords of this, Wild beasts, and surely would have torn the child Piecemeal among them, had they known; for each But sought to rule for his own self and hand, And many hated Uther for the sake Of Gorlois. Wherefore Merlin took the child, And gave him to Sir Anton, an old knight And ancient friend of Uther; and his wife Nursed the young prince, and reared him with her own; And no man knew. And ever since the lords Have foughten like wild beasts among themselves, So that the realm has gone to wrack: but now, This year, when Merlin (for his hour had come) Brought Arthur forth, and set him in the hall, Proclaiming, ‘Here is Uther’s heir, your king,’ A hundred voices cried, ‘Away with him! No king of ours! a son of Gorlois he, Or else the child of Anton, and no king, Or else baseborn.’ Yet Merlin through his craft, And while the people clamoured for a king, Had Arthur crowned; but after, the great lords Banded, and so brake out in open war.” Then while the King debated with himself If Arthur were the child of shamefulness, Or born the son of Gorlois, after death, Or Uther’s son, and born before his time, Or whether there were truth in anything Said by these three, there came to Cameliard, With Gawain and young Modred, her two sons, Lot’s wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent; Whom as he could, not as he would, the King Made feast for, saying, as they sat at meat, “A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas. Ye

come from Arthur’s court. Victor his men Report him! Yea, but ye—think ye this king— So many those that hate him, and so strong, So few his knights, however brave they be— Hath body enow to hold his foemen down?” “O King,” she cried, “and I will tell thee: few, Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him; For I was near him when the savage yells Of Uther’s peerage died, and Arthur sat Crowned on the dais, and his warriors cried, ‘Be thou the king, and we will work thy will Who love thee.’ Then the King in low deep tones, And simple words of great authority, Bound them by so strait vows to his own self, That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some Were pale as at the passing of a ghost, Some flushed, and others dazed, as one who wakes Half-blinded at the coming of a light. “But when he spake and cheered his Table Round With large, divine, and comfortable words, Beyond my tongue to tell thee—I beheld From eye to eye through all their Order flash A momentary likeness of the King: And ere it left their faces, through the cross And those around it and the Crucified, Down from the casement over Arthur, smote Flame-colour, vert and azure, in three rays, One falling upon each of three fair queens, Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright Sweet faces, who will help him at his need. “And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit And hundred winters are but as the hands Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege. “And near him stood the Lady of the Lake, Who knows a subtler magic than his own— Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful. She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword, Whereby to drive the heathen out: a mist Of incense curled about her, and her face Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom; But there was heard among the holy hymns A voice as of the waters, for she dwells Down in a deep; calm, whatsoever storms May shake the world, and when the surface rolls, Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord. “There likewise I beheld Excalibur Before him at his crowning borne, the sword That rose from out the bosom of the lake, And Arthur rowed across and took it—rich With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt, Bewildering heart and eye—the blade so bright That men are

blinded by it—on one side, Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world, ‘Take me,’ but turn the blade and ye shall see, And written in the speech ye speak yourself, ‘Cast me away!’ And sad was Arthur’s face Taking it, but old Merlin counselled him, ‘Take thou and strike! the time to cast away Is yet far-off.’ So this great brand the king Took, and by this will beat his foemen down.” Thereat Leodogran rejoiced, but thought To sift his doubtings to the last, and asked, Fixing full eyes of question on her face, “The swallow and the swift are near akin, But thou art closer to this noble prince, Being his own dear sister;” and she said, “Daughter of Gorlois and Ygerne am I;” “And therefore Arthur’s sister?” asked the King. She answered, “These be secret things,” and signed To those two sons to pass, and let them be. And Gawain went, and breaking into song Sprang out, and followed by his flying hair Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw: But Modred laid his ear beside the doors, And there half-heard; the same that afterward Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom. And then the Queen made answer, “What know I? For dark my mother was in eyes and hair, And dark in hair and eyes am I; and dark Was Gorlois, yea and dark was Uther too, Wellnigh to blackness; but this King is fair Beyond the race of Britons and of men. Moreover, always in my mind I hear A cry from out the dawning of my life, A mother weeping, and I hear her say, ‘O that ye had some brother, pretty one, To guard thee on the rough ways of the world.’” “Ay,” said the King, “and hear ye such a cry? But when did Arthur chance upon thee first?” “O King!” she cried, “and I will tell thee true: He found me first when yet a little maid: Beaten I had been for a little fault Whereof I was not guilty; and out I ran And flung myself down on a bank of heath, And hated this fair world and all therein, And wept, and wished that I were dead; and he— I know not whether of himself he came, Or brought by Merlin, who, they say, can walk Unseen at pleasure—he was at my side, And spake sweet words, and comforted my heart, And dried my tears, being a child with me. And many a time he came, and evermore As I grew greater grew with me; and sad At times he seemed, and sad with him was I, Stern too at times, and

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

and that to thee; And truth or clothed or naked let it be. Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows: Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows? From the great deep to the great deep he goes.' "So Merlin riddling angered me; but thou Fear not to give this King thy only child, Guinevere: so great bards of him will sing Hereafter; and dark sayings from of old Ranging and ringing through the minds of men, And echoed by old folk beside their fires For comfort after their wage-work is done, Speak of the King; and Merlin in our time Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn Though men may wound him that he will not die, But pass, again to come; and then or now Utterly smite the heathen underfoot, Till these and all men hail him for their king." She spake and King Leodogran rejoiced, But musing, "Shall I answer yea or nay?" Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw, Dreaming, a slope of land that ever grew, Field after field, up to a height, the peak Haze-hidden, and thereon a phantom king, Now looming, and now lost; and on the slope The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven, Fire glimpsed; and all the land from roof and rick, In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind, Streamed to the peak, and mingled with the haze And made it thicker; while the phantom king Sent out at times a voice; and here or there Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest Slew on and burnt, crying, "No king of ours, No son of Uther, and no king of ours;" Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze Descended, and the solid earth became As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven, Crowned. And Leodogran awoke, and sent Ulfius, and Brastias and Bedivere, Back to the court of Arthur answering yea. Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved And honoured most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth And bring the Queen;—and watched him from the gates: And Lancelot past away among the flowers, (For then was latter April) and returned Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere. To whom arrived, by Dubric the high saint, Chief of the church in Britain, and before The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the King That morn was married, while in stainless white, The fair beginners of a nobler time, And glorying in their vows and him, his knights Stood

around him, and rejoicing in his joy. Far shone the fields of May through open door, The sacred altar blossomed white with May, The Sun of May descended on their King, They gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen, Rolled incense, and there past along the hymns A voice as of the waters, while the two 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 trumpets blew, And Arthur's knighthood sang before the King:— "Blow, trumpet, for the world is white with May; Blow trumpet, the long night hath rolled away! Blow through the living world—'Let the King reign.' "Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur's realm? Flash brand and lance, fall battleaxe upon helm, Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign. "Strike for the King and live! his knights have heard That God hath told the King a secret word. Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign. "Blow trumpet! he will lift us from the dust. Blow trumpet! live the strength and die the lust! Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign. "Strike for the King and die! and if thou diest, The King is King, and ever wills the highest. Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign. "Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May! Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day! Clang battleaxe, and clash brand! Let the King reign. "The King will follow Christ, and we the King In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing. Fall battleaxe, and flash brand! Let the King reign." So sang the knighthood, moving to their hall. There at the banquet those great Lords from Rome, The slowly-fading mistress of the world, Strode in, and claimed their tribute as of yore. But Arthur spake, "Behold, for these have sworn To wage my wars, and

worship me their King; The old order changeth, yielding place to new; And we that fight for our fair father Christ, Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old To drive the heathen from your Roman wall, No tribute will we pay:" so those great lords Drew back in wrath, and Arthur strove with Rome. And Arthur and his knighthood for a space Were all one will, and through that strength the King Drew in the petty princedoms under him, Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reigned.

Gareth and Lynette

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

though ye count me still the child, Sweet mother, do ye love the child?" She laughed, "Thou art but a wild-goose to question it." "Then, mother, an ye love the child," he said, "Being a goose and rather tame than wild, Hear the child's story." "Yea, my well-beloved, An 'twere but of the goose and golden eggs." And Gareth answered her with kindling eyes, "Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine Was finer gold than any goose can lay; For this an Eagle, a royal Eagle, laid Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours. And there was ever haunting round the palm A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw The splendour sparkling from aloft, and thought 'An I could climb and lay my hand upon it, Then were I wealthier than a leash of kings.' But ever when he reached a hand to climb, One, that had loved him from his childhood, caught And stayed him, 'Climb not lest thou break thy neck, I charge thee by my love,' and so the boy, Sweet mother, neither clomb, nor brake his neck, But brake his very heart in pining for it, And past away." To whom the mother said, "True love, sweet son, had risked himself and climbed, And handed down the golden treasure to him." And Gareth answered her with kindling eyes, "Gold?" said I gold?—ay then, why he, or she, Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world Had ventured—had the thing I spake of been Mere gold—but this was all of that true steel, Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur, And lightnings played about it in the storm, And all the little fowl were flurried at it, And there were cries and clashings in the nest, That sent him from his senses: let me go." Then Bellicent bemoaned herself and said, "Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness? Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth Lies like a log, and all but smouldered out! For ever since when traitor to the King He fought against him in the Barons' war, And Arthur gave him back his territory, His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburiable, No more; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows. And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall, Albeit neither loved with that full love I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love: Stay therefore thou; red berries charm the bird, And thee, mine innocent, the jousts, the

wars, Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang Of wrenched or broken limb—an often chance In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls, Frights to my heart; but stay: follow the deer By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns; So make thy manhood mightier day by day; Sweet is the chase: and I will seek thee out Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year, Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness I know not thee, myself, nor anything. Stay, my best son! ye are yet more boy than man." Then Gareth, "An ye hold me yet for child, Hear yet once more the story of the child. For, mother, there was once a King, like ours. The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable, Asked for a bride; and thereupon the King Set two before him. One was fair, strong, armed— But to be won by force—and many men Desired her; one good lack, no man desired. And these were the conditions of the King: That save he won the first by force, he needs Must wed that other, whom no man desired, A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile, That evermore she longed to hide herself, Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye— Yea—some she cleaved to, but they died of her. And one—they called her Fame; and one,—O Mother, How can ye keep me tethered to you—Shame. Man am I grown, a man's work must I do. Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King, Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King— Else, wherefore born?" To whom the mother said "Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not, Or will not deem him, wholly proven King— Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King, When I was frequent with him in my youth, And heard him Kingly speak, and doubted him No more than he, himself; but felt him mine, Of closest kin to me: yet—wilt thou leave Thine easeful biding here, and risk thine all, Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King? Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son." And Gareth answered quickly, "Not an hour, So that ye yield me—I will walk through fire, Mother, to gain it—your full leave to go. Not proven, who swept the dust of ruined Rome From off the threshold of the realm, and crushed The Idolaters, and made the people free? Who should be King save him who makes us

free?" So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain To break him from the intent to which he grew, Found her son's will unwaveringly one, She answered craftily, "Will ye walk through fire? Who walks through fire will hardly heed the smoke. Ay, go then, an ye must: only one proof, Before thou ask the King to make thee knight, Of thine obedience and thy love to me, Thy mother,—I demand. And Gareth cried, "A hard one, or a hundred, so I go. Nay—quick! the proof to prove me to the quick!" But slowly spake the mother looking at him, "Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall, And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves, And those that hand the dish across the bar. Nor shalt thou tell thy name to anyone. And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day." For so the Queen believed that when her son Beheld his only way to glory lead Low down through villain kitchen-vassalage, Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud To pass thereby; so should he rest with her, Closed in her castle from the sound of arms. Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied, "The thrall in person may be free in soul, And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I, And since thou art my mother, must obey. I therefore yield me freely to thy will; For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves; Nor tell my name to any—no, not the King." Gareth awhile lingered. The mother's eye Full of the wistful fear that he would go, And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turned, Perplext his outward purpose, till an hour, When wakened by the wind which with full voice Swept bellowing through the darkness on to dawn, He rose, and out of slumber calling two That still had tended on him from his birth, Before the wakeful mother heard him, went. The three were clad like tillers of the soil. Southward they set their faces. The birds made Melody on branch, and melody in mid air. The damp hill-slopes were quickened into green, And the live green had kindled into flowers, For it was past the time of Easterday. So, when their feet were planted on the plain That broadened toward the base of Camelot, Far off they saw the silver-misty morn Rolling her smoke about the Royal mount, That rose between the forest and the

field. At times the summit of the high city flashed; At times the spires and turrets half-way down Pricked through the mist; at times the great gate shone Only, that opened on the field below: Anon, the whole fair city had disappeared. Then those who went with Gareth were amazed, One crying, “Let us go no further, lord. Here is a city of Enchanters, built By fairy Kings.” The second echoed him, “Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home To Northward, that this King is not the King, But only changeling out of Fairyland, Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery And Merlin’s glamour.” Then the first again, “Lord, there is no such city anywhere, But all a vision.” Gareth answered them With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow In his own blood, his princedom, youth and hopes, To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea; So pushed them all unwilling toward the gate. And there was no gate like it under heaven. For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave, The Lady of the Lake stood: all her dress Wept from her sides as water flowing away; But like the cross her great and goodly arms Stretched under the cornice and upheld: And drops of water fell from either hand; And down from one a sword was hung, from one A censer, either worn with wind and storm; And o’er her breast floated the sacred fish; And in the space to left of her, and right, Were Arthur’s wars in weird devices done, New things and old co-twisted, as if Time Were nothing, so inveterately, that men Were giddy gazing there; and over all High on the top were those three Queens, the friends Of Arthur, who should help him at his need. Then those with Gareth for so long a space Stared at the figures, that at last it seemed The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings Began to move, seethe, twine and curl: they called To Gareth, “Lord, the gateway is alive.” And Gareth likewise on them fixt his eyes So long, that even to him they seemed to move. Out of the city a blast of music pealed. Back from the gate started the three, to whom From out thereunder came an ancient man, Long-bearded, saying, “Who be ye, my sons?” Then Gareth, “We be tillers of the soil, Who leaving share in furrow come to see The glories of our King: but these, my men, (Your city moved so

weirdly in the mist) Doubt if the King be King at all, or come From Fairyland; and whether this be built By magic, and by fairy Kings and Queens; Or whether there be any city at all, Or all a vision: and this music now Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth." Then that old Seer made answer playing on him And saying, "Son, I have seen the good ship sail Keel upward, and mast downward, in the heavens, And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air: And here is truth; but an it please thee not, Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me. For truly as thou sayest, a Fairy King And Fairy Queens have built the city, son; They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand, And built it to the music of their harps. And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son, For there is nothing in it as it seems Saving the King; though some there be that hold The King a shadow, and the city real: Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become A thrall to his enchantments, for the King Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame A man should not be bound by, yet the which No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear, Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide Without, among the cattle of the field. For an ye heard a music, like enow They are building still, seeing the city is built To music, therefore never built at all, And therefore built for ever." Gareth spake Angered, "Old master, reverence thine own beard That looks as white as utter truth, and seems Wellnigh as long as thou art statured tall! Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been To thee fair-spoken?" But the Seer replied, "Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards? 'Confusion, and illusion, and relation, Elusion, and occasion, and evasion'? I mock thee not but as thou mockest me, And all that see thee, for thou art not who Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art. And now thou goest up to mock the King, Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie." Unmockingly the mocker ending here Turned to the right, and past along the plain; Whom Gareth looking after said, "My men, Our one white lie sits like a little ghost Here on the threshold of our enterprise. Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I: Well, we will make amends." With all good cheer He spake and laughed, then

entered with his twain Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces And stately, rich in emblem and the work Of ancient kings who did their days in stone; Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court, Knowing all arts, had touched, and everywhere At Arthur's ordinance, tipt with lessening peak And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven. And ever and anon a knight would pass Outward, or inward to the hall: his arms Clashed; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear. And out of bower and casement shyly glanced Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love; And all about a healthful people stept As in the presence of a gracious king. Then into hall Gareth ascending heard A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall The splendour of the presence of the King Throned, and delivering doom—and looked no more— But felt his young heart hammering in his ears, And thought, "For this half-shadow of a lie The truthful King will doom me when I speak." Yet pressing on, though all in fear to find Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one Nor other, but in all the listening eyes Of those tall knights, that ranged about the throne, Clear honour shining like the dewy star Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure Affection, and the light of victory, And glory gained, and evermore to gain. Then came a widow crying to the King, "A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft From my dead lord a field with violence: For howsoe'er at first he proffered gold, Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes, We yielded not; and then he reft us of it Perforce, and left us neither gold nor field." Said Arthur, "Whether would ye? gold or field?" To whom the woman weeping, "Nay, my lord, The field was pleasant in my husband's eye." And Arthur, "Have thy pleasant field again, And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof, According to the years. No boon is here, But justice, so thy say be proven true. Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did Would shape himself a right!" And while she past, Came yet another widow crying to him, "A boon, Sir King! Thine enemy, King, am I. With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord, A knight of Uther in the Barons' war, When Lot and many another rose and fought Against thee, saying thou wert basely born. I held with

these, and loathe to ask thee aught. Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son Thralled in his castle, and hath starved him dead; And standeth seized of that inheritance Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son. So though I scarce can ask it thee for hate, Grant me some knight to do the battle for me, Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for my son." Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him, "A boon, Sir King! I am her kinsman, I. Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man." Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried, "A boon, Sir King! even that thou grant her none, This railer, that hath mocked thee in full hall— None; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag." But Arthur, "We sit King, to help the wronged Through all our realm. The woman loves her lord. Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates! The kings of old had doomed thee to the flames, Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead, And Uther slit thy tongue: but get thee hence— Lest that rough humour of the kings of old Return upon me! Thou that art her kin, Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not, But bring him here, that I may judge the right, According to the justice of the King: Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King Who lived and died for men, the man shall die." Then came in hall the messenger of Mark, A name of evil savour in the land, The Cornish king. In either hand he bore What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines A field of charlock in the sudden sun Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold, Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt, Delivering, that his lord, the vassal king, Was even upon his way to Camelot; For having heard that Arthur of his grace Had made his goodly cousin, Tristram, knight, And, for himself was of the greater state, Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord Would yield him this large honour all the more; So prayed him well to accept this cloth of gold, In token of true heart and fealty. Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth. An oak-tree smouldered there. "The goodly knight! What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?" For, midway down the side of that long hall A stately pile,—whereof along the front, Some blazoned, some but carven, and some blank, There ran a treble range of stony

shields,— Rose, and high-arching overbrowed the hearth. And under every shield a knight was named: For this was Arthur's custom in his hall; When some good knight had done one noble deed, His arms were carven only; but if twain His arms were blazoned also; but if none, The shield was blank and bare without a sign Saving the name beneath; and Gareth saw The shield of Gawain blazoned rich and bright, And Modred's blank as death; and Arthur cried To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth. "More like are we to reave him of his crown Than make him knight because men call him king. The kings we found, ye know we stayed their hands From war among themselves, but left them kings; Of whom were any bounteous, merciful, Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enrolled Among us, and they sit within our hall. But as Mark hath tarnished the great name of king, As Mark would sully the low state of churl: And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold, Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes, Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead, Silenced for ever—craven—a man of plots, Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings— No fault of thine: let Kay the seneschal Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied— Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen!" And many another suppliant crying came With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man, And evermore a knight would ride away. Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men, Approached between them toward the King, and asked, "A boon, Sir King (his voice was all ashamed), For see ye not how weak and hungerworn I seem—leaning on these? grant me to serve For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knaves A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name. Hereafter I will fight." To him the King, "A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon! But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay, The master of the meats and drinks, be thine." He rose and past; then Kay, a man of mien Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself Root-bitten by white lichen, "Lo ye now! This fellow hath broken from some Abbey, where, God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow, However that might chance! but an he work, Like any pigeon will I cram his crop, And sleeker shall he

shine than any hog." Then Lancelot standing near, "Sir Seneschal, Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the hounds; A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know: Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine, High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands Large, fair and fine!—Some young lad's mystery— But, or from sheepcot or king's hall, the boy Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace, Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him." Then Kay, "What murmurest thou of mystery? Think ye this fellow will poison the King's dish? Nay, for he spake too fool-like: mystery! Tut, an the lad were noble, he had asked For horse and armour: fair and fine, forsooth! Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day Undo thee not—and leave my man to me." So Gareth all for glory underwent The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage; Ate with young lads his portion by the door, And couched at night with grimy kitchen-knaves. And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly, But Kay the seneschal, who loved him not, Would hustle and harry him, and labour him Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood, Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bowed himself With all obedience to the King, and wrought All kind of service with a noble ease That graced the lowliest act in doing it. And when the thralls had talk among themselves, And one would praise the love that linkt the King And Lancelot—how the King had saved his life In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's— For Lancelot was the first in Tournament, But Arthur mightiest on the battle-field— Gareth was glad. Or if some other told, How once the wandering forester at dawn, Far over the blue tarns and hazy seas, On Caer-Eryri's highest found the King, A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake, "He passes to the Isle Avilion, He passes and is healed and cannot die"— Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul, Then would he whistle rapid as any lark, Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud That first they mocked, but, after, reverenced him. Or Gareth telling some prodigious tale Of knights, who sliced a red life-bubbling way Through twenty folds of twisted dragon, held All in a gap-mouthed circle his

good mates Lying or sitting round him, idle hands, Charmed; till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart. Or when the thralls had sport among themselves, So there were any trial of mastery, He, by two yards in casting bar or stone Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust, So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go, Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights Clash like the coming and retiring wave, And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy Was half beyond himself for ecstasy. So for a month he wrought among the thralls; But in the weeks that followed, the good Queen, Repentant of the word she made him swear, And saddening in her childless castle, sent, Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon, Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow. This, Gareth hearing from a squire of Lot With whom he used to play at tourney once, When both were children, and in lonely haunts Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand, And each at either dash from either end— Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy. He laughed; he sprang. “Out of the smoke, at once I leap from Satan’s foot to Peter’s knee— These news be mine, none other’s—nay, the King’s— Descend into the city:” whereon he sought The King alone, and found, and told him all. “I have staggered thy strong Gawain in a tilt For pastime; yea, he said it: joust can I. Make me thy knight—in secret! let my name Be hidden, and give me the first quest, I spring Like flame from ashes.” Here the King’s calm eye Fell on, and checked, and made him flush, and bow Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answered him, “Son, the good mother let me know thee here, And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine. Make thee my knight? my knights are sworn to vows Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness, And, loving, utter faithfulness in love, And uttermost obedience to the King.” Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees, “My King, for hardihood I can promise thee. For uttermost obedience make demand Of whom ye gave me to, the Seneschal, No mellow master of the meats and drinks! And as for love, God wot, I love not yet, But love I shall, God willing.” And the King “Make thee my knight in secret? yea,

but he, Our noblest brother, and our truest man, And one with me in all, he needs must know." "Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know, Thy noblest and thy truest!" And the King— "But wherefore would ye men should wonder at you? Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King, And the deed's sake my knighthood do the deed, Than to be noised of." Merrily Gareth asked, "Have I not earned my cake in baking of it? Let be my name until I make my name! My deeds will speak: it is but for a day." So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him. Then, after summoning Lancelot privily, "I have given him the first quest: he is not proven. Look therefore when he calls for this in hall, Thou get to horse and follow him far away. Cover the lions on thy shield, and see Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain." Then that same day there past into the hall A damsel of high lineage, and a brow May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom, Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower; She into hall past with her page and cried, "O King, for thou hast driven the foe without, See to the foe within! bridge, ford, beset By bandits, everyone that owns a tower The Lord for half a league. Why sit ye there? Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king, Till even the lonest hold were all as free From cursed bloodshed, as thine altar-cloth From that best blood it is a sin to spill." "Comfort thyself," said Arthur. "I nor mine Rest: so my knighthood keep the vows they swore, The wastest moorland of our realm shall be Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall. What is thy name? thy need?" "My name?" she said— "Lynette my name; noble; my need, a knight To combat for my sister, Lyonors, A lady of high lineage, of great lands, And comely, yea, and comelier than myself. She lives in Castle Perilous: a river Runs in three loops about her living-place; And o'er it are three passings, and three knights Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth And of that four the mightiest, holds her stayed In her own castle, and so besieges her To break her will, and make her wed with him: And but delays his purport till thou send To do the battle with him, thy chief man Sir Lancelot whom he trusts to

overthrow, Then wed, with glory: but she will not wed Save whom she loveth, or a holy life. Now therefore have I come for Lancelot." Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth asked, "Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush All wrongers of the Realm. But say, these four, Who be they? What the fashion of the men?" "They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King, The fashion of that old knight-errantry Who ride abroad, and do but what they will; Courteous or bestial from the moment, such As have nor law nor king; and three of these Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day, Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star, Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise The fourth, who alway rideth armed in black, A huge man-beast of boundless savagery. He names himself the Night and oftener Death, And wears a helmet mounted with a skull, And bears a skeleton figured on his arms, To show that who may slay or scape the three, Slain by himself, shall enter endless night. And all these four be fools, but mighty men, And therefore am I come for Lancelot." Hereat Sir Gareth called from where he rose, A head with kindling eyes above the throng, "A boon, Sir King—this quest!" then—for he marked Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull— "Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I, And mighty through thy meats and drinks am I, And I can topple over a hundred such. Thy promise, King," and Arthur glancing at him, Brought down a momentary brow. "Rough, sudden, And pardonable, worthy to be knight— Go therefore," and all hearers were amazed. But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath Slew the May-white: she lifted either arm, "Fie on thee, King! I asked for thy chief knight, And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave." Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turned, Fled down the lane of access to the King, Took horse, descended the slope street, and past The weird white gate, and paused without, beside The field of tourney, murmuring "kitchen-knave." Now two great entries opened from the hall, At one end one, that gave upon a range Of level pavement where the King would pace At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood; And down from this a lordly stairway sloped Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers; And out by this main doorway

past the King. But one was counter to the hearth, and rose High that the highest-crested helm could ride Therethrough nor graze: and by this entry fled The damsel in her wrath, and on to this Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town, A warhorse of the best, and near it stood The two that out of north had followed him: This bare a maiden shield, a casque; that held The horse, the spear; whereat Sir Gareth loosed A cloak that dropt from collar-bone to heel, A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down, And from it like a fuel-smothered fire, That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flashed as those Dull-coated things, that making slide apart Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns A jewelled harness, ere they pass and fly. So Gareth ere he parted flashed in arms. Then as he donned the helm, and took the shield And mounted horse and graspt a spear, of grain Storm-strengthened on a windy site, and tipt With trenchant steel, around him slowly prest The people, while from out of kitchen came The thralls in throng, and seeing who had worked Lustier than any, and whom they could but love, Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried, "God bless the King, and all his fellowship!" And on through lanes of shouting Gareth rode Down the slope street, and past without the gate. So Gareth past with joy; but as the cur Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause Be cooled by fighting, follows, being named, His owner, but remembers all, and growls Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door Muttered in scorn of Gareth whom he used To harry and hustle. "Bound upon a quest With horse and arms—the King hath past his time— My scullion knave! Thralls to your work again, For an your fire be low ye kindle mine! Will there be dawn in West and eve in East? Begone!—my knave!—belike and like enow Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth So shook his wits they wander in his prime— Crazed! How the villain lifted up his voice, Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave. Tut: he was tame and meek enow with me, Till peacocked up with Lancelot's noticing. Well—I will after my loud knave, and learn Whether he know me for his master yet. Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance Hold, by God's

grace, he shall into the mire— Thence, if the King awaken from his craze, Into the smoke again." But Lancelot said, "Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King, For that did never he whereon ye rail, But ever meekly served the King in thee? Abide: take counsel; for this lad is great And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword." "Tut, tell not me," said Kay, "ye are overfine To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies:" Then mounted, on through silent faces rode Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate. But by the field of tourney lingering yet Muttered the damsel, "Wherefore did the King Scorn me? for, were Sir Lancelot lackt, at least He might have yielded to me one of those Who tilt for lady's love and glory here, Rather than—O sweet heaven! O fie upon him— His kitchen-knave." To whom Sir Gareth drew (And there were none but few goodlier than he) Shining in arms, "Damsel, the quest is mine. Lead, and I follow." She thereat, as one That smells a foul-fleshed agaric in the holt, And deems it carrion of some woodland thing, Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, "Hence! Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease. And look who comes behind," for there was Kay. "Knowest thou not me? thy master? I am Kay. We lack thee by the hearth." And Gareth to him, "Master no more! too well I know thee, ay— The most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall." "Have at thee then," said Kay: they shocked, and Kay Fell shoulder-slipt, and Gareth cried again, "Lead, and I follow," and fast away she fled. But after sod and shingle ceased to fly Behind her, and the heart of her good horse Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat, Perforce she stayed, and overtaken spoke. "What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship? Deem'st thou that I accept thee aught the more Or love thee better, that by some device Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness, Thou hast overthrown and slain thy master—thou!— Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon!—to me Thou smellest all of kitchen as before." "Damsel," Sir Gareth answered gently, "say Whate'er ye will, but whatsoe'er ye say, I leave not till I finish this fair quest, Or die therefore." "Ay, wilt thou finish it? Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks! The listening rogue hath

caught the manner of it. But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave, And then by such a one that thou for all The kitchen brewis that was ever supt Shalt not once dare to look him in the face." "I shall assay," said Gareth with a smile That maddened her, and away she flashed again Down the long avenues of a boundless wood, And Gareth following was again beknaved. "Sir Kitchen-knave, I have missed the only way Where Arthur's men are set along the wood; The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves: If both be slain, I am rid of thee; but yet, Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit of thine? Fight, an thou canst: I have missed the only way." So till the dusk that followed evensong Rode on the two, reviler and reviled; Then after one long slope was mounted, saw, Bowl-shaped, through tops of many thousand pines A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink To westward—in the deeps whereof a mere, Round as the red eye of an Eagle-owl, Under the half-dead sunset glared; and shouts Ascended, and there brake a servingman Flying from out of the black wood, and crying, "They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere." Then Gareth, "Bound am I to right the wronged, But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee." And when the damsel spake contemptuously, "Lead, and I follow," Gareth cried again, "Follow, I lead!" so down among the pines He plunged; and there, blackshadowed nigh the mere, And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed, Saw six tall men haling a seventh along, A stone about his neck to drown him in it. Three with good blows he quieted, but three Fled through the pines; and Gareth loosed the stone From off his neck, then in the mere beside Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere. Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet Set him, a stalwart Baron, Arthur's friend. "Well that ye came, or else these caitiff rogues Had wreaked themselves on me; good cause is theirs To hate me, for my wont hath ever been To catch my thief, and then like vermin here Drown him, and with a stone about his neck; And under this wan water many of them Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone, And rise, and flickering in a grimly light Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood. And fain would I

reward thee worshipfully. What guerdon will ye?" Gareth sharply spake, "None! for the deed's sake have I done the deed, In uttermost obedience to the King. But wilt thou yield this damsel harbourage?" Whereat the Baron saying, "I well believe You be of Arthur's Table," a light laugh Broke from Lynette, "Ay, truly of a truth, And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave!— But deem not I accept thee aught the more, Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit Down on a rout of craven foresters. A thresher with his flail had scattered them. Nay—for thou smellest of the kitchen still. But an this lord will yield us harbourage, Well." So she spake. A league beyond the wood, All in a full-fair manor and a rich, His towers where that day a feast had been Held in high hall, and many a viand left, And many a costly cate, received the three. And there they placed a peacock in his pride Before the damsel, and the Baron set Gareth beside her, but at once she rose. "Meseems, that here is much discourtesy, Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side. Hear me—this morn I stood in Arthur's hall, And prayed the King would grant me Lancelot To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night— The last a monster unsubduable Of any save of him for whom I called— Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-knave, 'The quest is mine; thy kitchen-knave am I, And mighty through thy meats and drinks am I.' Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies, 'Go therefore,' and so gives the quest to him— Him—here—a villain fitter to stick swine Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong, Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman." Then half-ashamed and part-amazed, the lord Now looked at one and now at other, left The damsel by the peacock in his pride, And, seating Gareth at another board, Sat down beside him, ate and then began. "Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave, or not, Or whether it be the maiden's fantasy, And whether she be mad, or else the King, Or both or neither, or thyself be mad, I ask not: but thou strikest a strong stroke, For strong thou art and goodly therewithal, And saver of my life; and therefore now, For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King. Thy pardon; I but speak for thine avail, The saver of my

life." And Gareth said, "Full pardon, but I follow up the quest, Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell." So when, next morn, the lord whose life he saved Had, some brief space, conveyed them on their way And left them with God-speed, Sir Gareth spake, "Lead, and I follow." Haughtily she replied. "I fly no more: I allow thee for an hour. Lion and stout have isled together, knave, In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks Some ruth is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool? For hard by here is one will overthrow And slay thee: then will I to court again, And shame the King for only yielding me My champion from the ashes of his hearth." To whom Sir Gareth answered courteously, "Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed. Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay Among the ashes and wedded the King's son." Then to the shore of one of those long loops Wherethrough the serpent river coiled, they came. Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep; the stream Full, narrow; this a bridge of single arc Took at a leap; and on the further side Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily in hue, Save that the dome was purple, and above, Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering. And therebefore the lawless warrior paced Unarmed, and calling, "Damsel, is this he, The champion thou hast brought from Arthur's hall? For whom we let thee pass." "Nay, nay," she said, "Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here His kitchen-knave: and look thou to thyself: See that he fall not on thee suddenly, And slay thee unarmed: he is not knight but knave." Then at his call, "O daughters of the Dawn, And servants of the Morning-Star, approach, Arm me," from out the silken curtain-folds Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls In gilt and rosy raiment came: their feet In dewy grasses glistened; and the hair All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine. These armed him in blue arms, and gave a shield Blue also, and thereon the morning star. And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight, Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought, Glorying; and in the stream beneath him, shone Immingled with Heaven's azure waveringly, The gay pavilion

and the naked feet, His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star. Then she that watched him, “Wherefore stare ye so? Thou shakest in thy fear: there yet is time: Flee down the valley before he get to horse. Who will cry shame? Thou art not knight but knave.” Said Gareth, “Damsel, whether knave or knight, Far liefer had I fight a score of times Than hear thee so missay me and revile. Fair words were best for him who fights for thee; But truly foul are better, for they send That strength of anger through mine arms, I know That I shall overthrow him.” And he that bore The star, when mounted, cried from o’er the bridge, “A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me! Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn. For this were shame to do him further wrong Than set him on his feet, and take his horse And arms, and so return him to the King. Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave. Avoid: for it beseemeth not a knave To ride with such a lady.” “Dog, thou liest. I spring from loftier lineage than thine own.” He spake; and all at fiery speed the two Shocked on the central bridge, and either spear Bent but not brake, and either knight at once, Hurled as a stone from out of a catapult Beyond his horse’s crupper and the bridge, Fell, as if dead; but quickly rose and drew, And Gareth lashed so fiercely with his brand He drave his enemy backward down the bridge, The damsel crying, “Well-stricken, kitchen-knave!” Till Gareth’s shield was cloven; but one stroke Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground. Then cried the fallen, “Take not my life: I yield.” And Gareth, “So this damsel ask it of me Good—I accord it easily as a grace.” She reddening, “Insolent scullion: I of thee? I bound to thee for any favour asked!” “Then he shall die.” And Gareth there unlaced His helmet as to slay him, but she shrieked, “Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay One nobler than thyself.” “Damsel, thy charge Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight, Thy life is thine at her command. Arise And quickly pass to Arthur’s hall, and say His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave His pardon for thy breaking of his laws. Myself, when I return, will plead for thee. Thy shield is mine—farewell; and, damsel, thou, Lead, and I follow.” And fast away she fled. Then when he came upon her, spake, “Methought, Knave,

when I watched thee striking on the bridge The savour of thy kitchen came upon me A little faintlier: but the wind hath changed: I scent it twenty-fold." And then she sang, "'O morning star' (not that tall felon there Whom thou by sorcery or unhappiness Or some device, hast foully overthrown), 'O morning star that smilest in the blue, O star, my morning dream hath proven true, Smile sweetly, thou! my love hath smiled on me.' "But thou begone, take counsel, and away, For hard by here is one that guards a ford— The second brother in their fool's parable— Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot. Care not for shame: thou art not knight but knave." To whom Sir Gareth answered, laughingly, "Parables? Hear a parable of the knave. When I was kitchen-knave among the rest Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates Owned a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat, 'Guard it,' and there was none to meddle with it. And such a coat art thou, and thee the King Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I, To worry, and not to flee—and—knight or knave— The knave that doth thee service as full knight Is all as good, meseems, as any knight Toward thy sister's freeing." "Ay, Sir Knave! Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight, Being but knave, I hate thee all the more." "Fair damsel, you should worship me the more, That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies." "Ay, ay," she said, "but thou shalt meet thy match." So when they touched the second river-loop, Huge on a huge red horse, and all in mail Burnished to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower, That blows a globe of after arrowlets, Ten thousand-fold had grown, flashed the fierce shield, All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots Before them when he turned from watching him. He from beyond the roaring shallow roared, "What doest thou, brother, in my marches here?" And she athwart the shallow shrilled again, "Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms." "Ugh!" cried the Sun, and vizoring up a red And cipher face of rounded foolishness, Pushed horse across the foamings of the ford, Whom Gareth met midstream: no room was there For lance or tourney-skill: four strokes they struck With sword, and these were mighty; the new

knight Had fear he might be shamed; but as the Sun Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth, The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream Descended, and the Sun was washed away. Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford; So drew him home; but he that fought no more, As being all bone-battered on the rock, Yielded; and Gareth sent him to the King, "Myself when I return will plead for thee." "Lead, and I follow." Quietly she led. "Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again?" "Nay, not a point: nor art thou victor here. There lies a ridge of slate across the ford; His horse thereon stumbled—ay, for I saw it. "'O Sun' (not this strong fool whom thou, Sir Knave, Hast overthrown through mere unhappiness), 'O Sun, that wakenest all to bliss or pain, O moon, that layest all to sleep again, Shine sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.' What knowest thou of lovesong or of love? Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born, Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance,— "'O dewy flowers that open to the sun, O dewy flowers that close when day is done, Blow sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.' "What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike, To garnish meats with? hath not our good King Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom, A foolish love for flowers? what stick ye round The pasty? wherewithal deck the boar's head? Flowers? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay. "'O birds, that warble to the morning sky, O birds that warble as the day goes by, Sing sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.' "What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle, Linnet? what dream ye when they utter forth May-music growing with the growing light, Their sweet sun-worship? these be for the snare (So runs thy fancy) these be for the spit, Larding and basting. See thou have not now Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly. There stands the third fool of their allegory." For there beyond a bridge of treble bow, All in a rose-red from the west, and all Naked it seemed, and glowing in the broad Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight, That named himself the Star of Evening, stood. And Gareth, "Wherefore waits the madman there Naked in open dayshine?" "Nay," she cried, "Not naked, only wrapt in hardened skins That fit him like his own; and so ye cleave

His armour off him, these will turn the blade." Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge, "O brother-star, why shine ye here so low? Thy ward is higher up: but have ye slain The damsel's champion?" and the damsel cried, "No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven With all disaster unto thine and thee! For both thy younger brethren have gone down Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star; Art thou not old?" "Old, damsel, old and hard, Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys." Said Gareth, "Old, and over-bold in brag! But that same strength which threw the Morning Star Can throw the Evening." Then that other blew A hard and deadly note upon the horn. "Approach and arm me!" With slow steps from out An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stained Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came, And armed him in old arms, and brought a helm With but a drying evergreen for crest, And gave a shield whereon the Star of Even Half-tarnished and half-bright, his emblem, shone. But when it glittered o'er the saddle-bow, They madly hurled together on the bridge; And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew, There met him drawn, and overthrew him again, But up like fire he started: and as oft As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees, So many a time he vaulted up again; Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart, Foredooming all his trouble was in vain, Laboured within him, for he seemed as one That all in later, sadder age begins To war against ill uses of a life, But these from all his life arise, and cry, "Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down!" He half despairs; so Gareth seemed to strike Vainly, the damsel clamouring all the while, "Well done, knave-knight, well-stricken, O good knight-knave— O knave, as noble as any of all the knights— Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied— Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round— His arms are old, he trusts the hardened skin— Strike—strike—the wind will never change again." And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote, And hewed great pieces of his armour off him, But lashed in vain against the hardened skin, And could not wholly bring him under, more Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge, The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs For ever; till at

length Sir Gareth's brand Clashed his, and brake it utterly to the hilt. "I have thee now;" but forth that other sprang, And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms Around him, till he felt, despite his mail, Strangled, but straining even his uttermost Cast, and so hurled him headlong o'er the bridge Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried, "Lead, and I follow." But the damsel said, "I lead no longer; ride thou at my side; Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves. "'O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain, O rainbow with three colours after rain, Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me.' "Sir,—and, good faith, I fain had added—Knight, But that I heard thee call thyself a knave,— Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled, Missaid thee; noble I am; and thought the King Scorned me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend, For thou hast ever answered courteously, And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal As any of Arthur's best, but, being knave, Hast mazed my wit: I marvel what thou art." "Damsel," he said, "you be not all to blame, Saving that you mistrusted our good King Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one Not fit to cope your quest. You said your say; Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets His heart be stirred with any foolish heat At any gentle damsel's waywardness. Shamed? care not! thy foul sayings fought for me: And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self, Hath force to quell me." Nigh upon that hour When the lone hern forgets his melancholy, Lets down his other leg, and stretching, dreams Of goodly supper in the distant pool, Then turned the noble damsel smiling at him, And told him of a cavern hard at hand, Where bread and baken meats and good red wine Of Southland, which the Lady Lyonors Had sent her coming champion, waited him. Anon they past a narrow comb wherein Where slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues. "Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here, Whose holy hand hath fashioned on the rock The war of Time against the soul of man. And yon four fools have sucked their allegory From these damp walls, and taken but the

form. Know ye not these?" and Gareth lookt and read— In letters like to those the vexillary Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt— "PHOSPHORUS," then "MERIDIES"—"HESPERUS"— "NOX"—"MORS," beneath five figures, armed men, Slab after slab, their faces forward all, And running down the Soul, a Shape that fled With broken wings, torn raiment and loose hair, For help and shelter to the hermit's cave. "Follow the faces, and we find it. Look, Who comes behind?" For one—delayed at first Through helping back the dislocated Kay To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced, The damsel's headlong error through the wood— Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops— His blue shield-lions covered—softly drew Behind the twain, and when he saw the star Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried, "Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend." And Gareth crying pricked against the cry; But when they closed—in a moment—at one touch Of that skilled spear, the wonder of the world— Went sliding down so easily, and fell, That when he found the grass within his hands He laughed; the laughter jarred upon Lynette: Harshly she asked him, "Shamed and overthrown, And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave, Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?" "Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent, And victor of the bridges and the ford, And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom I know not, all through mere unhappiness— Device and sorcery and unhappiness— Out, sword; we are thrown!" And Lancelot answered, "Prince, O Gareth—through the mere unhappiness Of one who came to help thee, not to harm, Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole, As on the day when Arthur knighted him." Then Gareth, "Thou—Lancelot!—thine the hand That threw me? An some chance to mar the boast Thy brethren of thee make—which could not chance— Had sent thee down before a lesser spear, Shamed had I been, and sad—O Lancelot—thou!" Whereat the maiden, petulant, "Lancelot, Why came ye not, when called? and wherefore now Come ye, not called? I gloried in my knave, Who being still rebuked, would answer still Courteous as any knight—but now, if knight, The marvel dies, and leaves me

fooled and tricked, And only wondering wherefore played upon: And doubtful whether I and mine be scorned. Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall, In Arthur's presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool, I hate thee and for ever." And Lancelot said, "Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! knight art thou To the King's best wish. O damsel, be you wise To call him shamed, who is but overthrown? Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time. Victor from vanquished issues at the last, And overthrower from being overthrown. With sword we have not striven; and thy good horse And thou are weary; yet not less I felt Thy manhood through that wearied lance of thine. Well hast thou done; for all the stream is freed, And thou hast wreaked his justice on his foes, And when reviled, hast answered graciously, And makest merry when overthrown. Prince, Knight Hail, Knight and Prince, and of our Table Round!" And then when turning to Lynette he told The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said, "Ay well—ay well—for worse than being fooled Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave, Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks And forage for the horse, and flint for fire. But all about it flies a honeysuckle. Seek, till we find." And when they sought and found, Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life Past into sleep; on whom the maiden gazed. "Sound sleep be thine! sound cause to sleep hast thou. Wake lusty! Seem I not as tender to him As any mother? Ay, but such a one As all day long hath rated at her child, And vext his day, but blesses him asleep— Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle In the hushed night, as if the world were one Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness! O Lancelot, Lancelot"—and she clapt her hands— "Full merry am I to find my goodly knave Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I, Else yon black felon had not let me pass, To bring thee back to do the battle with him. Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first; Who doubts thee victor? so will my knight-knave Miss the full flower of this accomplishment." Said Lancelot, "Peradventure he, you name, May know my shield. Let Gareth, an he will, Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh, Not to be spurred, loving the battle as well As he that rides him." "Lancelot-like," she

said, “Courteous in this, Lord Lancelot, as in all.” And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutched the shield; “Ramp ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all spears Are rotten sticks! ye seem agape to roar! Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord!— Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you. O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these Streams virtue—fire—through one that will not shame Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield. Hence: let us go.” Silent the silent field They traversed. Arthur’s harp though summer-wan, In counter motion to the clouds, allured The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege. A star shot: “Lo,” said Gareth, “the foe falls!” An owl whoopt: “Hark the victor pealing there!” Suddenly she that rode upon his left Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying, “Yield, yield him this again: ’tis he must fight: I curse the tongue that all through yesterday Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now To lend thee horse and shield: wonders ye have done; Miracles ye cannot: here is glory enow In having flung the three: I see thee maimed, Mangled: I swear thou canst not fling the fourth.” “And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know. You cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice, Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery Appal me from the quest.” “Nay, Prince,” she cried, “God wot, I never looked upon the face, Seeing he never rides abroad by day; But watched him have I like a phantom pass Chilling the night: nor have I heard the voice. Always he made his mouthpiece of a page Who came and went, and still reported him As closing in himself the strength of ten, And when his anger tare him, massacring Man, woman, lad and girl—yea, the soft babe! Some hold that he hath swallowed infant flesh, Monster! O Prince, I went for Lancelot first, The quest is Lancelot’s: give him back the shield.” Said Gareth laughing, “An he fight for this, Belike he wins it as the better man: Thus—and not else!” But Lancelot on him urged All the devisings of their chivalry When one might meet a mightier than himself; How best to manage horse, lance, sword and shield, And so fill up the gap where force might fail With skill and fineness. Instant were his words. Then Gareth, “Here be rules. I know but one— To dash against mine enemy and win. Yet have I seen thee victor in the joust,

And seen thy way." "Heaven help thee," sighed Lynette. Then for a space, and under cloud that grew To thunder-gloom palling all stars, they rode In converse till she made her palfrey halt, Lifted an arm, and softly whispered, "There." And all the three were silent seeing, pitched Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field, A huge pavilion like a mountain peak Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge, Black, with black banner, and a long black horn Beside it hanging; which Sir Gareth graspt, And so, before the two could hinder him, Sent all his heart and breath through all the horn. Echoed the walls; a light twinkled; anon Came lights and lights, and once again he blew; Whereon were hollow tramplings up and down And muffled voices heard, and shadows past; Till high above him, circled with her maids, The Lady Lyonors at a window stood, Beautiful among lights, and waving to him White hands, and courtesy; but when the Prince Three times had blown—after long hush—at last— The huge pavilion slowly yielded up, Through those black foldings, that which housed therein. High on a nightblack horse, in nightblack arms, With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death, And crowned with fleshless laughter—some ten steps— In the half-light—through the dim dawn—advanced The monster, and then paused, and spake no word. But Gareth spake and all indignantly, "Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten, Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given, But must, to make the terror of thee more, Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod, Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers As if for pity?" But he spake no word; Which set the horror higher: a maiden swooned; The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept, As doomed to be the bride of Night and Death; Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm; And even Sir Lancelot through his warm blood felt Ice strike, and all that marked him were aghast. At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neighed, And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with him. Then those that did not blink the terror, saw That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose. But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull. Half fell to right and half to left and lay.

Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm As throughly as the skull; and out from this Issued the bright face of a blooming boy Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying, “Knight, Slay me not: my three brethren bad me do it, To make a horror all about the house, And stay the world from Lady Lyonors. They never dreamed the passes would be past.” Answered Sir Gareth graciously to one Not many a moon his younger, “My fair child, What madness made thee challenge the chief knight Of Arthur’s hall?” “Fair Sir, they bad me do it. They hate the King, and Lancelot, the King’s friend, They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream, They never dreamed the passes could be past.” Then sprang the happier day from underground; And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance And revel and song, made merry over Death, As being after all their foolish fears And horrors only proven a blooming boy. So large mirth lived and Gareth won the quest. And he that told the tale in older times Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors, But he, that told it later, says Lynette.

The Marriage of Geraint

The brave Geraint, a knight of Arthur’s court, A tributary prince of Devon, one Of that great Order of the Table Round, Had married Enid, Yniol’s only child, And loved her, as he loved the light of Heaven. And as the light of Heaven varies, now At sunrise, now at sunset, now by night With moon and trembling stars, so loved Geraint To make her beauty vary day by day, In crimsons and in purples and in gems. And Enid, but to please her husband’s eye, Who first had found and loved her in a state Of broken fortunes, daily fronted him In some fresh splendour; and the Queen herself, Grateful to Prince Geraint for service done, Loved her, and often with her own white hands Arrayed and decked her, as the loveliest, Next after her own self, in all the court. And Enid loved the Queen, and with true heart Adored her, as the stateliest and the best And loveliest of all women upon earth. And seeing them so tender and so close, Long in their common love rejoiced Geraint. But when a

rumour rose about the Queen, Touching her guilty love for Lancelot, Though yet there lived no proof, nor yet was heard The world's loud whisper breaking into storm, Not less Geraint believed it; and there fell A horror on him, lest his gentle wife, Through that great tenderness for Guinevere, Had suffered, or should suffer any taint In nature: wherefore going to the King, He made this pretext, that his princedom lay Close on the borders of a territory, Wherein were bandit earls, and caitiff knights, Assassins, and all flyers from the hand Of Justice, and whatever loathes a law: And therefore, till the King himself should please To cleanse this common sewer of all his realm, He craved a fair permission to depart, And there defend his marches; and the King Mused for a little on his plea, but, last, Allowing it, the Prince and Enid rode, And fifty knights rode with them, to the shores Of Severn, and they past to their own land; Where, thinking, that if ever yet was wife True to her lord, mine shall be so to me, He compassed her with sweet observances And worship, never leaving her, and grew Forgetful of his promise to the King, Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt, Forgetful of the tilt and tournament, Forgetful of his glory and his name, Forgetful of his princedom and its cares. And this forgetfulness was hateful to her. And by and by the people, when they met In twos and threes, or fuller companies, Began to scoff and jeer and babble of him As of a prince whose manhood was all gone, And molten down in mere uxoriousness. And this she gathered from the people's eyes: This too the women who attired her head, To please her, dwelling on his boundless love, Told Enid, and they saddened her the more: And day by day she thought to tell Geraint, But could not out of bashful delicacy; While he that watched her sadden, was the more Suspicious that her nature had a taint. At last, it chanced that on a summer morn (They sleeping each by either) the new sun Beat through the blindless casement of the room, And heated the strong warrior in his dreams; Who, moving, cast the coverlet aside, And bared the knotted column of his throat, The massive square of his heroic breast, And arms on which the standing muscle sloped, As slopes a wild brook o'er a little stone, Running too

vehemently to break upon it. And Enid woke and sat beside the couch, Admiring him, and thought within herself, Was ever man so grandly made as he? Then, like a shadow, past the people's talk And accusation of uxoriousness Across her mind, and bowing over him, Low to her own heart piteously she said: "O noble breast and all-puissant arms, Am I the cause, I the poor cause that men Reproach you, saying all your force is gone? I am the cause, because I dare not speak And tell him what I think and what they say. And yet I hate that he should linger here; I cannot love my lord and not his name. Far liefer had I gird his harness on him, And ride with him to battle and stand by, And watch his mightful hand striking great blows At caitiffs and at wrongers of the world. Far better were I laid in the dark earth, Not hearing any more his noble voice, Not to be folded more in these dear arms, And darkened from the high light in his eyes, Than that my lord through me should suffer shame. Am I so bold, and could I so stand by, And see my dear lord wounded in the strife, And maybe pierced to death before mine eyes, And yet not dare to tell him what I think, And how men slur him, saying all his force Is melted into mere effeminacy? O me, I fear that I am no true wife." Half inwardly, half audibly she spoke, And the strong passion in her made her weep True tears upon his broad and naked breast, And these awoke him, and by great mischance He heard but fragments of her later words, And that she feared she was not a true wife. And then he thought, "In spite of all my care, For all my pains, poor man, for all my pains, She is not faithful to me, and I see her Weeping for some gay knight in Arthur's hall." Then though he loved and reverenced her too much To dream she could be guilty of foul act, Right through his manful breast darted the pang That makes a man, in the sweet face of her Whom he loves most, lonely and miserable. At this he hurled his huge limbs out of bed, And shook his drowsy squire awake and cried, "My charger and her palfrey;" then to her, "I will ride forth into the wilderness; For though it seems my spurs are yet to win, I have not fallen so low as some would wish. And thou, put on thy worst and meanest dress And ride with me." And Enid asked, amazed, "If Enid errs, let Enid learn her

fault." But he, "I charge thee, ask not, but obey." Then she bethought her of a faded silk, A faded mantle and a faded veil, And moving toward a cedarn cabinet, Wherein she kept them folded reverently With sprigs of summer laid between the folds, She took them, and arrayed herself therein, Remembering when first he came on her Drest in that dress, and how he loved her in it, And all her foolish fears about the dress, And all his journey to her, as himself Had told her, and their coming to the court. For Arthur on the Whitsuntide before Held court at old Caerleon upon Usk. There on a day, he sitting high in hall, Before him came a forester of Dean, Wet from the woods, with notice of a hart Taller than all his fellows, milky-white, First seen that day: these things he told the King. Then the good King gave order to let blow His horns for hunting on the morrow morn. And when the King petitioned for his leave To see the hunt, allowed it easily. So with the morning all the court were gone. But Guinevere lay late into the morn, Lost in sweet dreams, and dreaming of her love For Lancelot, and forgetful of the hunt; But rose at last, a single maiden with her, Took horse, and forded Usk, and gained the wood; There, on a little knoll beside it, stayed Waiting to hear the hounds; but heard instead A sudden sound of hoofs, for Prince Geraint, Late also, wearing neither hunting-dress Nor weapon, save a golden-hilted brand, Came quickly flashing through the shallow ford Behind them, and so galloped up the knoll. A purple scarf, at either end whereof There swung an apple of the purest gold, Swayed round about him, as he galloped up To join them, glancing like a dragon-fly In summer suit and silks of holiday. Low bowed the tributary Prince, and she, Sweet and statelily, and with all grace Of womanhood and queenhood, answered him: "Late, late, Sir Prince," she said, "later than we!" "Yea, noble Queen," he answered, "and so late That I but come like you to see the hunt, Not join it." "Therefore wait with me," she said; "For on this little knoll, if anywhere, There is good chance that we shall hear the hounds: Here often they break covert at our feet." And while they listened for the distant hunt, And chiefly for the baying of Cavall, King Arthur's hound of deepest mouth, there rode Full

slowly by a knight, lady, and dwarf; Whereof the dwarf lagged latest, and the knight Had vizor up, and showed a youthful face, Imperious, and of haughtiest lineaments. And Guinevere, not mindful of his face In the King's hall, desired his name, and sent Her maiden to demand it of the dwarf; Who being vicious, old and irritable, And doubling all his master's vice of pride, Made answer sharply that she should not know. "Then will I ask it of himself," she said. "Nay, by my faith, thou shalt not," cried the dwarf; "Thou art not worthy even to speak of him;" And when she put her horse toward the knight, Struck at her with his whip, and she returned Indignant to the Queen; whereat Geraint Exclaiming, "Surely I will learn the name," Made sharply to the dwarf, and asked it of him, Who answered as before; and when the Prince Had put his horse in motion toward the knight, Struck at him with his whip, and cut his cheek. The Prince's blood spirted upon the scarf, Dyeing it; and his quick, instinctive hand Caught at the hilt, as to abolish him: But he, from his exceeding manfulness And pure nobility of temperament, Wroth to be wroth at such a worm, refrained From even a word, and so returning said: "I will avenge this insult, noble Queen, Done in your maiden's person to yourself: And I will track this vermin to their earths: For though I ride unarmed, I do not doubt To find, at some place I shall come at, arms On loan, or else for pledge; and, being found, Then will I fight him, and will break his pride, And on the third day will again be here, So that I be not fallen in fight. Farewell." "Farewell, fair Prince," answered the stately Queen. "Be prosperous in this journey, as in all; And may you light on all things that you love, And live to wed with her whom first you love: But ere you wed with any, bring your bride, And I, were she the daughter of a king, Yea, though she were a beggar from the hedge, Will clothe her for her bridals like the sun." And Prince Geraint, now thinking that he heard The noble hart at bay, now the far horn, A little vext at losing of the hunt, A little at the vile occasion, rode, By ups and downs, through many a grassy glade And valley, with fixt eye following the three. At last they issued from the world of wood, And climbed upon a fair and even ridge, And

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

bridge Yonder." He spoke and fell to work again. Then rode Geraint, a little spleenful yet, Across the bridge that spanned the dry ravine. There musing sat the hoary-headed Earl, (His dress a suit of frayed magnificence, Once fit for feasts of ceremony) and said: "Whither, fair son?" to whom Geraint replied, "O friend, I seek a harbourage for the night." Then Yniol, "Enter therefore and partake The slender entertainment of a house Once rich, now poor, but ever open-doored." "Thanks, venerable friend," replied Geraint; "So that ye do not serve me sparrow-hawks For supper, I will enter, I will eat With all the passion of a twelve hours' fast." Then sighed and smiled the hoary-headed Earl, And answered, "Graver cause than yours is mine To curse this hedgerow thief, the sparrow-hawk: But in, go in; for save yourself desire it, We will not touch upon him even in jest." Then rode Geraint into the castle court, His charger trampling many a prickly star Of sprouted thistle on the broken stones. He looked and saw that all was ruinous. Here stood a shattered archway plumed with fern; And here had fallen a great part of a tower, Whole, like a crag that tumbles from the cliff, And like a crag was gay with wilding flowers: And high above a piece of turret stair, Worn by the feet that now were silent, wound Bare to the sun, and monstrous ivy-stems Claspt the gray walls with hairy-fibred arms, And sucked the joining of the stones, and looked A knot, beneath, of snakes, aloft, a grove. And while he waited in the castle court, The voice of Enid, Yniol's daughter, rang Clear through the open casement of the hall, Singing; and as the sweet voice of a bird, Heard by the lander in a lonely isle, Moves him to think what kind of bird it is That sings so delicately clear, and make Conjecture of the plumage and the form; So the sweet voice of Enid moved Geraint; And made him like a man abroad at morn When first the liquid note beloved of men Comes flying over many a windy wave To Britain, and in April suddenly Breaks from a coppice gemmed with green and red, And he suspends his converse with a friend, Or it may be the labour of his hands, To think or say, "There is the nightingale;" So fared it with Geraint, who thought and said, "Here, by God's grace, is the one voice for me." It chanced the

song that Enid sang was one Of Fortune and her wheel, and Enid sang: “Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel and lower the proud; Turn thy wild wheel through sunshine, storm, and cloud; Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate. “Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown; With that wild wheel we go not up or down; Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great. “Smile and we smile, the lords of many lands; Frown and we smile, the lords of our own hands; For man is man and master of his fate. “Turn, turn thy wheel above the staring crowd; Thy wheel and thou are shadows in the cloud; Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.” “Hark, by the bird’s song ye may learn the nest,” Said Yniol; “enter quickly.” Entering then, Right o’er a mount of newly-fallen stones, The dusky-raftered many-cobwebbed hall, He found an ancient dame in dim brocade; And near her, like a blossom vermeil-white, That lightly breaks a faded flower-sheath, Moved the fair Enid, all in faded silk, Her daughter. In a moment thought Geraint, “Here by God’s rood is the one maid for me.” But none spake word except the hoary Earl: “Enid, the good knight’s horse stands in the court; Take him to stall, and give him corn, and then Go to the town and buy us flesh and wine; And we will make us merry as we may. Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.” He spake: the Prince, as Enid past him, fain To follow, strode a stride, but Yniol caught His purple scarf, and held, and said, “Forbear! Rest! the good house, though ruined, O my son, Endures not that her guest should serve himself.” And reverencing the custom of the house Geraint, from utter courtesy, forbore. So Enid took his charger to the stall; And after went her way across the bridge, And reached the town, and while the Prince and Earl Yet spoke together, came again with one, A youth, that following with a costrel bore The means of goodly welcome, flesh and wine. And Enid brought sweet cakes to make them cheer, And in her veil enfolded, manchet bread. And then, because their hall must also serve For kitchen, boiled the flesh, and spread the board, And stood behind, and waited on the three. And seeing her so sweet and serviceable, Geraint had longing in him evermore To stoop and kiss the tender little thumb, That crost the

trencher as she laid it down: But after all had eaten, then Geraint, For now the wine made summer in his veins, Let his eye rove in following, or rest On Enid at her lowly handmaid-work, Now here, now there, about the dusky hall; Then suddenly addrest the hoary Earl: “Fair Host and Earl, I pray your courtesy; This sparrow-hawk, what is he? tell me of him. His name? but no, good faith, I will not have it: For if he be the knight whom late I saw Ride into that new fortress by your town, White from the mason’s hand, then have I sworn From his own lips to have it—I am Geraint Of Devon—for this morning when the Queen Sent her own maiden to demand the name, His dwarf, a vicious under-shapen thing, Struck at her with his whip, and she returned Indignant to the Queen; and then I swore That I would track this caitiff to his hold, And fight and break his pride, and have it of him. And all unarmed I rode, and thought to find Arms in your town, where all the men are mad; They take the rustic murmur of their bourg For the great wave that echoes round the world; They would not hear me speak: but if ye know Where I can light on arms, or if yourself Should have them, tell me, seeing I have sworn That I will break his pride and learn his name, Avenging this great insult done the Queen.” Then cried Earl Yniol, “Art thou he indeed, Geraint, a name far-sounded among men For noble deeds? and truly I, when first I saw you moving by me on the bridge, Felt ye were somewhat, yea, and by your state And presence might have guessed you one of those That eat in Arthur’s hall in Camelot. Nor speak I now from foolish flattery; For this dear child hath often heard me praise Your feats of arms, and often when I paused Hath asked again, and ever loved to hear; So grateful is the noise of noble deeds To noble hearts who see but acts of wrong: O never yet had woman such a pair Of suitors as this maiden: first Limours, A creature wholly given to brawls and wine, Drunk even when he wooed; and be he dead I know not, but he past to the wild land. The second was your foe, the sparrow-hawk, My curse, my nephew—I will not let his name Slip from my lips if I can help it—he, When that I knew him fierce and turbulent Refused her to him, then his pride awoke; And since the proud

man often is the mean, He sowed a slander in the common ear, Affirming that his father left him gold, And in my charge, which was not rendered to him; Bribed with large promises the men who served About my person, the more easily Because my means were somewhat broken into Through open doors and hospitality; Raised my own town against me in the night Before my Enid's birthday, sacked my house; From mine own earldom foully ousted me; Built that new fort to overawe my friends, For truly there are those who love me yet; And keeps me in this ruinous castle here, Where doubtless he would put me soon to death, But that his pride too much despises me: And I myself sometimes despise myself; For I have let men be, and have their way; Am much too gentle, have not used my power: Nor know I whether I be very base Or very manful, whether very wise Or very foolish; only this I know, That whatsoever evil happen to me, I seem to suffer nothing heart or limb, But can endure it all most patiently." "Well said, true heart," replied Geraint, "but arms, That if the sparrow-hawk, this nephew, fight In next day's tourney I may break his pride." And Yniol answered, "Arms, indeed, but old And rusty, old and rusty, Prince Geraint, Are mine, and therefore at thy asking, thine. But in this tournament can no man tilt, Except the lady he loves best be there. Two forks are fixt into the meadow ground, And over these is placed a silver wand, And over that a golden sparrow-hawk, The prize of beauty for the fairest there. And this, what knight soever be in field Lays claim to for the lady at his side, And tilts with my good nephew thereupon, Who being apt at arms and big of bone Has ever won it for the lady with him, And toppling over all antagonism Has earned himself the name of sparrow-hawk." But thou, that hast no lady, canst not fight." To whom Geraint with eyes all bright replied, Leaning a little toward him, "Thy leave! Let me lay lance in rest, O noble host, For this dear child, because I never saw, Though having seen all beauties of our time, Nor can see elsewhere, anything so fair. And if I fall her name will yet remain Untarnished as before; but if I live, So aid me Heaven when at mine uttermost, As I will make her truly my true wife." Then, howsoever patient, Yniol's

heart Danced in his bosom, seeing better days, And looking round he saw not Enid there, (Who hearing her own name had stolen away) But that old dame, to whom full tenderly And folding all her hand in his he said, “Mother, a maiden is a tender thing, And best by her that bore her understood. Go thou to rest, but ere thou go to rest Tell her, and prove her heart toward the Prince.” So spake the kindly-hearted Earl, and she With frequent smile and nod departing found, Half disarrayed as to her rest, the girl; Whom first she kissed on either cheek, and then On either shining shoulder laid a hand, And kept her off and gazed upon her face, And told them all their converse in the hall, Proving her heart: but never light and shade Coursed one another more on open ground Beneath a troubled heaven, than red and pale Across the face of Enid hearing her; While slowly falling as a scale that falls, When weight is added only grain by grain, Sank her sweet head upon her gentle breast; Nor did she lift an eye nor speak a word, Rapt in the fear and in the wonder of it; So moving without answer to her rest She found no rest, and ever failed to draw The quiet night into her blood, but lay Contemplating her own unworthiness; And when the pale and bloodless east began To quicken to the sun, arose, and raised Her mother too, and hand in hand they moved Down to the meadow where the jousts were held, And waited there for Yniol and Geraint. And thither came the twain, and when Geraint Beheld her first in field, awaiting him, He felt, were she the prize of bodily force, Himself beyond the rest pushing could move The chair of Idris. Yniol’s rusted arms Were on his princely person, but through these Princelike his bearing shone; and errant knights And ladies came, and by and by the town Flowed in, and settling circled all the lists. And there they fixt the forks into the ground, And over these they placed the silver wand, And over that the golden sparrow-hawk. Then Yniol’s nephew, after trumpet blown, Spake to the lady with him and proclaimed, “Advance and take, as fairest of the fair, What I these two years past have won for thee, The prize of beauty.” Loudly spake the Prince, “Forbear: there is a worthier,” and the knight With some surprise and thrice as much disdain Turned, and beheld the four,

and all his face Glowed like the heart of a great fire at Yule, So burnt he was with passion, crying out, “Do battle for it then,” no more; and thrice They clashed together, and thrice they brake their spears. Then each, dishorsed and drawing, lashed at each So often and with such blows, that all the crowd Wondered, and now and then from distant walls There came a clapping as of phantom hands. So twice they fought, and twice they breathed, and still The dew of their great labour, and the blood Of their strong bodies, flowing, drained their force. But either’s force was matched till Yniol’s cry, “Remember that great insult done the Queen,” Increased Geraint’s, who heaved his blade aloft, And cracked the helmet through, and bit the bone, And felled him, and set foot upon his breast, And said, “Thy name?” To whom the fallen man Made answer, groaning, “Edyrn, son of Nudd! Ashamed am I that I should tell it thee. My pride is broken: men have seen my fall.” “Then, Edyrn, son of Nudd,” replied Geraint, “These two things shalt thou do, or else thou diest. First, thou thyself, with damsel and with dwarf, Shalt ride to Arthur’s court, and coming there, Crave pardon for that insult done the Queen, And shalt abide her judgment on it; next, Thou shalt give back their earldom to thy kin. These two things shalt thou do, or thou shalt die.” And Edyrn answered, “These things will I do, For I have never yet been overthrown, And thou hast overthrown me, and my pride Is broken down, for Enid sees my fall!” And rising up, he rode to Arthur’s court, And there the Queen forgave him easily. And being young, he changed and came to loathe His crime of traitor, slowly drew himself Bright from his old dark life, and fell at last In the great battle fighting for the King. But when the third day from the hunting-morn Made a low splendour in the world, and wings Moved in her ivy, Enid, for she lay With her fair head in the dim-yellow light, Among the dancing shadows of the birds, Woke and bethought her of her promise given No later than last eve to Prince Geraint— So bent he seemed on going the third day, He would not leave her, till her promise given— To ride with him this morning to the court, And there be made known to the stately Queen, And there be wedded with all ceremony.

At this she cast her eyes upon her dress, And thought it never yet had looked so mean. For as a leaf in mid-November is To what it is in mid-October, seemed The dress that now she looked on to the dress She looked on ere the coming of Geraint. And still she looked, and still the terror grew Of that strange bright and dreadful thing, a court, All staring at her in her faded silk: And softly to her own sweet heart she said: "This noble prince who won our earldom back, So splendid in his acts and his attire, Sweet heaven, how much I shall discredit him! Would he could tarry with us here awhile, But being so beholden to the Prince, It were but little grace in any of us, Bent as he seemed on going this third day, To seek a second favour at his hands. Yet if he could but tarry a day or two, Myself would work eye dim, and finger lame, Far liefer than so much discredit him." And Enid fell in longing for a dress All branched and flowered with gold, a costly gift Of her good mother, given her on the night Before her birthday, three sad years ago, That night of fire, when Edyrn sacked their house, And scattered all they had to all the winds: For while the mother showed it, and the two Were turning and admiring it, the work To both appeared so costly, rose a cry That Edyrn's men were on them, and they fled With little save the jewels they had on, Which being sold and sold had bought them bread: And Edyrn's men had caught them in their flight, And placed them in this ruin; and she wished The Prince had found her in her ancient home; Then let her fancy flit across the past, And roam the goodly places that she knew; And last bethought her how she used to watch, Near that old home, a pool of golden carp; And one was patched and blurred and lustreless Among his burnished brethren of the pool; And half asleep she made comparison Of that and these to her own faded self And the gay court, and fell asleep again; And dreamt herself was such a faded form Among her burnished sisters of the pool; But this was in the garden of a king; And though she lay dark in the pool, she knew That all was bright; that all about were birds Of sunny plume in gilded trellis-work; That all the turf was rich in plots that looked Each like a garnet or a turkis in it; And lords and ladies of the high court went In silver tissue talking

things of state; And children of the King in cloth of gold Glanced at the doors or gamboled down the walks; And while she thought “They will not see me,” came A stately queen whose name was Guinevere, And all the children in their cloth of gold Ran to her, crying, “If we have fish at all Let them be gold; and charge the gardeners now To pick the faded creature from the pool, And cast it on the mixen that it die.” And therewithal one came and seized on her, And Enid started waking, with her heart All overshadowed by the foolish dream, And lo! it was her mother grasping her To get her well awake; and in her hand A suit of bright apparel, which she laid Flat on the couch, and spoke exultingly: “See here, my child, how fresh the colours look, How fast they hold like colours of a shell That keeps the wear and polish of the wave. Why not? It never yet was worn, I trow: Look on it, child, and tell me if ye know it.” And Enid looked, but all confused at first, Could scarce divide it from her foolish dream: Then suddenly she knew it and rejoiced, And answered, “Yea, I know it; your good gift, So sadly lost on that unhappy night; Your own good gift!” “Yea, surely,” said the dame, “And gladly given again this happy morn. For when the jousts were ended yesterday, Went Yniol through the town, and everywhere He found the sack and plunder of our house All scattered through the houses of the town; And gave command that all which once was ours Should now be ours again: and yester-eve, While ye were talking sweetly with your Prince, Came one with this and laid it in my hand, For love or fear, or seeking favour of us, Because we have our earldom back again. And yester-eve I would not tell you of it, But kept it for a sweet surprise at morn. Yea, truly is it not a sweet surprise? For I myself unwillingly have worn My faded suit, as you, my child, have yours, And howsoever patient, Yniol his. Ah, dear, he took me from a goodly house, With store of rich apparel, sumptuous fare, And page, and maid, and squire, and seneschal, And pastime both of hawk and hound, and all That appertains to noble maintenance. Yea, and he brought me to a goodly house; But since our fortune swerved from sun to shade, And all through that young traitor, cruel need Constrained us, but a better time has

come; So clothe yourself in this, that better fits Our mended fortunes and a Prince's bride: For though ye won the prize of fairest fair, And though I heard him call you fairest fair, Let never maiden think, however fair, She is not fairer in new clothes than old. And should some great court-lady say, the Prince Hath picked a ragged-robin from the hedge, And like a madman brought her to the court, Then were ye shamed, and, worse, might shame the Prince To whom we are beholden; but I know, That when my dear child is set forth at her best, That neither court nor country, though they sought Through all the provinces like those of old That lighted on Queen Esther, has her match." Here ceased the kindly mother out of breath; And Enid listened brightening as she lay; Then, as the white and glittering star of morn Parts from a bank of snow, and by and by Slips into golden cloud, the maiden rose, And left her maiden couch, and robed herself, Helped by the mother's careful hand and eye, Without a mirror, in the gorgeous gown; Who, after, turned her daughter round, and said, She never yet had seen her half so fair; And called her like that maiden in the tale, Whom Gwydion made by glamour out of flowers And sweeter than the bride of Cassivelaun, Flur, for whose love the Roman Caesar first Invaded Britain, "But we beat him back, As this great Prince invaded us, and we, Not beat him back, but welcomed him with joy And I can scarcely ride with you to court, For old am I, and rough the ways and wild; But Yniol goes, and I full oft shall dream I see my princess as I see her now, Clothed with my gift, and gay among the gay." But while the women thus rejoiced, Geraint Woke where he slept in the high hall, and called For Enid, and when Yniol made report Of that good mother making Enid gay In such apparel as might well beseem His princess, or indeed the stately Queen, He answered: "Earl, entreat her by my love, Albeit I give no reason but my wish, That she ride with me in her faded silk." Yniol with that hard message went; it fell Like flaws in summer laying lusty corn: For Enid, all abashed she knew not why, Dared not to glance at her good mother's face, But silently, in all obedience, Her mother silent too, nor helping her, Laid from her limbs the costly-broidered gift,

And robed them in her ancient suit again, And so descended. Never man rejoiced More than Geraint to greet her thus attired; And glancing all at once as keenly at her As careful robins eye the delver's toil, Made her cheek burn and either eyelid fall, But rested with her sweet face satisfied; Then seeing cloud upon the mother's brow, Her by both hands she caught, and sweetly said, "O my new mother, be not wroth or grieved At thy new son, for my petition to her. When late I left Caerleon, our great Queen, In words whose echo lasts, they were so sweet, Made promise, that whatever bride I brought, Herself would clothe her like the sun in Heaven. Thereafter, when I reached this ruined hall, Beholding one so bright in dark estate, I vowed that could I gain her, our fair Queen, No hand but hers, should make your Enid burst Sunlike from cloud—and likewise thought perhaps, That service done so graciously would bind The two together; fain I would the two Should love each other: how can Enid find A nobler friend? Another thought was mine; I came among you here so suddenly, That though her gentle presence at the lists Might well have served for proof that I was loved, I doubted whether daughter's tenderness, Or easy nature, might not let itself Be moulded by your wishes for her weal; Or whether some false sense in her own self Of my contrasting brightness, overbore Her fancy dwelling in this dusky hall; And such a sense might make her long for court And all its perilous glories: and I thought, That could I someway prove such force in her Linked with such love for me, that at a word (No reason given her) she could cast aside A splendour dear to women, new to her, And therefore dearer; or if not so new, Yet therefore tenfold dearer by the power Of intermitted usage; then I felt That I could rest, a rock in ebbs and flows, Fixt on her faith. Now, therefore, I do rest, A prophet certain of my prophecy, That never shadow of mistrust can cross Between us. Grant me pardon for my thoughts: And for my strange petition I will make Amends hereafter by some gaudy-day, When your fair child shall wear your costly gift Beside your own warm hearth, with, on her knees, Who knows? another gift of the high God, Which, maybe, shall have learned to lisp you thanks." He spoke: the

mother smiled, but half in tears, Then brought a mantle down and wrapt her in it, And claspt and kissed her, and they rode away. Now thrice that morning Guinevere had climbed The giant tower, from whose high crest, they say, Men saw the goodly hills of Somerset, And white sails flying on the yellow sea; But not to goodly hill or yellow sea Looked the fair Queen, but up the vale of Usk, By the flat meadow, till she saw them come; And then descending met them at the gates, Embraced her with all welcome as a friend, And did her honour as the Prince's bride, And clothed her for her bridals like the sun; And all that week was old Caerleon gay, For by the hands of Dubric, the high saint, They twain were wedded with all ceremony. And this was on the last year's Whitsuntide. But Enid ever kept the faded silk, Remembering how first he came on her, Drest in that dress, and how he loved her in it, And all her foolish fears about the dress, And all his journey toward her, as himself Had told her, and their coming to the court. And now this morning when he said to her, "Put on your worst and meanest dress," she found And took it, and arrayed herself therein.

Geraint and Enid

O purblind race of miserable men, How many among us at this very hour Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves, By taking true for false, or false for true; Here, through the feeble twilight of this world Groping, how many, until we pass and reach That other, where we see as we are seen! So fared it with Geraint, who issuing forth That morning, when they both had got to horse, Perhaps because he loved her passionately, And felt that tempest brooding round his heart, Which, if he spoke at all, would break perforce Upon a head so dear in thunder, said: "Not at my side. I charge thee ride before, Ever a good way on before; and this I charge thee, on thy duty as a wife, Whatever happens, not to speak to me, No, not a word!" and Enid was aghast; And forth they rode, but scarce three paces on, When crying out,

“Effeminate as I am, I will not fight my way with gilded arms, All shall be iron;” he loosed a mighty purse, Hung at his belt, and hurled it toward the squire. So the last sight that Enid had of home Was all the marble threshold flashing, strown With gold and scattered coinage, and the squire Chafing his shoulder: then he cried again, “To the wilds!” and Enid leading down the tracks Through which he bad her lead him on, they past The marches, and by bandit-haunted holds, Gray swamps and pools, waste places of the hern, And wildernesses, perilous paths, they rode: Round was their pace at first, but slackened soon: A stranger meeting them had surely thought They rode so slowly and they looked so pale, That each had suffered some exceeding wrong. For he was ever saying to himself, “O I that wasted time to tend upon her, To compass her with sweet observances, To dress her beautifully and keep her true”— And there he broke the sentence in his heart Abruptly, as a man upon his tongue May break it, when his passion masters him. And she was ever praying the sweet heavens To save her dear lord whole from any wound. And ever in her mind she cast about For that unnoticed failing in herself, Which made him look so cloudy and so cold; Till the great plover’s human whistle amazed Her heart, and glancing round the waste she feared In every wavering brake an ambuscade. Then thought again, “If there be such in me, I might amend it by the grace of Heaven, If he would only speak and tell me of it.” But when the fourth part of the day was gone, Then Enid was aware of three tall knights On horseback, wholly armed, behind a rock In shadow, waiting for them, caitiffs all; And heard one crying to his fellow, “Look, Here comes a laggard hanging down his head, Who seems no bolder than a beaten hound; Come, we will slay him and will have his horse And armour, and his damsel shall be ours.” Then Enid pondered in her heart, and said: “I will go back a little to my lord, And I will tell him all their caitiff talk; For, be he wroth even to slaying me, Far liefer by his dear hand had I die, Than that my lord should suffer loss or shame.” Then she went back some paces of return, Met his full frown timidly firm, and said; “My lord, I saw three bandits by the rock Waiting to fall on you, and heard them

boast That they would slay you, and possess your horse And armour, and your damsel should be theirs." He made a wrathful answer: "Did I wish Your warning or your silence? one command I laid upon you, not to speak to me, And thus ye keep it! Well then, look—for now, Whether ye wish me victory or defeat, Long for my life, or hunger for my death, Yourself shall see my vigour is not lost." Then Enid waited pale and sorrowful, And down upon him bare the bandit three. And at the midmost charging, Prince Geraint Drave the long spear a cubit through his breast And out beyond; and then against his brace Of comrades, each of whom had broken on him A lance that splintered like an icicle, Swung from his brand a windy buffet out Once, twice, to right, to left, and stunned the twain Or slew them, and dismounting like a man That skins the wild beast after slaying him, Stript from the three dead wolves of woman born The three gay suits of armour which they wore, And let the bodies lie, but bound the suits Of armour on their horses, each on each, And tied the bridle-reins of all the three Together, and said to her, "Drive them on Before you;" and she drove them through the waste. He followed nearer; ruth began to work Against his anger in him, while he watched The being he loved best in all the world, With difficulty in mild obedience Driving them on: he fain had spoken to her, And loosed in words of sudden fire the wrath And smouldered wrong that burnt him all within; But evermore it seemed an easier thing At once without remorse to strike her dead, Than to cry "Halt," and to her own bright face Accuse her of the least immodesty: And thus tongue-tied, it made him wroth the more That she could speak whom his own ear had heard Call herself false: and suffering thus he made Minutes an age: but in scarce longer time Than at Caerleon the full-tided Usk, Before he turn to fall seaward again, Pauses, did Enid, keeping watch, behold In the first shallow shade of a deep wood, Before a gloom of stubborn-shafted oaks, Three other horsemen waiting, wholly armed, Whereof one seemed far larger than her lord, And shook her pulses, crying, "Look, a prize! Three horses and three goodly suits of arms, And all in charge of whom? a girl: set on." "Nay," said the second, "yonder

comes a knight.” The third, “A craven; how he hangs his head.” The giant answered merrily, “Yea, but one? Wait here, and when he passes fall upon him.” And Enid pondered in her heart and said, “I will abide the coming of my lord, And I will tell him all their villainy. My lord is weary with the fight before, And they will fall upon him unawares. I needs must disobey him for his good; How should I dare obey him to his harm? Needs must I speak, and though he kill me for it, I save a life dearer to me than mine.” And she abode his coming, and said to him With timid firmness, “Have I leave to speak?” He said, “Ye take it, speaking,” and she spoke. “There lurk three villains yonder in the wood, And each of them is wholly armed, and one Is larger-limbed than you are, and they say That they will fall upon you while ye pass.” To which he flung a wrathful answer back: “And if there were an hundred in the wood, And every man were larger-limbed than I, And all at once should sally out upon me, I swear it would not ruffle me so much As you that not obey me. Stand aside, And if I fall, cleave to the better man.” And Enid stood aside to wait the event, Not dare to watch the combat, only breathe Short fits of prayer, at every stroke a breath. And he, she dreaded most, bare down upon him. Aimed at the helm, his lance erred; but Geraint’s, A little in the late encounter strained, Struck through the bulky bandit’s corselet home, And then brake short, and down his enemy rolled, And there lay still; as he that tells the tale Saw once a great piece of a promontory, That had a sapling growing on it, slide From the long shore-cliff’s windy walls to the beach, And there lie still, and yet the sapling grew: So lay the man transfixt. His craven pair Of comrades making slowlier at the Prince, When now they saw their bulwark fallen, stood; On whom the victor, to confound them more, Spurred with his terrible war-cry; for as one, That listens near a torrent mountain-brook, All through the crash of the near cataract hears The drumming thunder of the huger fall At distance, were the soldiers wont to hear His voice in battle, and be kindled by it, And foemen scared, like that false pair who turned Flying, but, overtaken, died the death Themselves had wrought on many an innocent. Thereon Geraint, dismounting,

picked the lance That pleased him best, and drew from those dead wolves Their three gay suits of armour, each from each, And bound them on their horses, each on each, And tied the bridle-reins of all the three Together, and said to her, “Drive them on Before you,” and she drove them through the wood. He followed nearer still: the pain she had To keep them in the wild ways of the wood, Two sets of three laden with jingling arms, Together, served a little to disedge The sharpness of that pain about her heart: And they themselves, like creatures gently born But into bad hands fallen, and now so long By bandits groomed, pricked their light ears, and felt Her low firm voice and tender government. So through the green gloom of the wood they past, And issuing under open heavens beheld A little town with towers, upon a rock, And close beneath, a meadow gemlike chased In the brown wild, and mowers mowing in it: And down a rocky pathway from the place There came a fair-haired youth, that in his hand Bare victual for the mowers: and Geraint Had ruth again on Enid looking pale: Then, moving downward to the meadow ground, He, when the fair-haired youth came by him, said, “Friend, let her eat; the damsel is so faint.” “Yea, willingly,” replied the youth; “and thou, My lord, eat also, though the fare is coarse, And only meet for mowers;” then set down His basket, and dismounting on the sward They let the horses graze, and ate themselves. And Enid took a little delicately, Less having stomach for it than desire To close with her lord’s pleasure; but Geraint Ate all the mowers’ victual unawares, And when he found all empty, was amazed; And “Boy,” said he, “I have eaten all, but take A horse and arms for guerdon; choose the best.” He, reddening in extremity of delight, “My lord, you overpay me fifty-fold.” “Ye will be all the wealthier,” cried the Prince. “I take it as free gift, then,” said the boy, “Not guerdon; for myself can easily, While your good damsel rests, return, and fetch Fresh victual for these mowers of our Earl; For these are his, and all the field is his, And I myself am his; and I will tell him How great a man thou art: he loves to know When men of mark are in his territory: And he will have thee to his palace here, And serve thee costlier than with mowers’ fare.” Then

said Geraint, “I wish no better fare: I never ate with angrier appetite Than when I left your mowers dinnerless. And into no Earl’s palace will I go. I know, God knows, too much of palaces! And if he want me, let him come to me. But hire us some fair chamber for the night, And stalling for the horses, and return With victual for these men, and let us know.” “Yea, my kind lord,” said the glad youth, and went, Held his head high, and thought himself a knight, And up the rocky pathway disappeared, Leading the horse, and they were left alone. But when the Prince had brought his errant eyes Home from the rock, sideways he let them glance At Enid, where she droopt: his own false doom, That shadow of mistrust should never cross Betwixt them, came upon him, and he sighed; Then with another humorous ruth remarked The lusty mowers labouring dinnerless, And watched the sun blaze on the turning scythe, And after nodded sleepily in the heat. But she, remembering her old ruined hall, And all the windy clamour of the daws About her hollow turret, plucked the grass There growing longest by the meadow’s edge, And into many a listless annulet, Now over, now beneath her marriage ring, Wove and unwove it, till the boy returned And told them of a chamber, and they went; Where, after saying to her, “If ye will, Call for the woman of the house,” to which She answered, “Thanks, my lord;” the two remained Apart by all the chamber’s width, and mute As two creatures voiceless through the fault of birth, Or two wild men supporters of a shield, Painted, who stare at open space, nor glance The one at other, parted by the shield. On a sudden, many a voice along the street, And heel against the pavement echoing, burst Their drowse; and either started while the door, Pushed from without, drave backward to the wall, And midmost of a rout of roisterers, Femininely fair and dissolutely pale, Her suitor in old years before Geraint, Entered, the wild lord of the place, Limours. He moving up with pliant courtliness, Greeted Geraint full face, but stealthily, In the mid-warmth of welcome and graspt hand, Found Enid with the corner of his eye, And knew her sitting sad and solitary. Then cried Geraint for wine and goodly cheer To feed the sudden guest, and sumptuously According to his

fashion, bad the host Call in what men soever were his friends, And feast with these in honour of their Earl; “And care not for the cost; the cost is mine.” And wine and food were brought, and Earl Limours Drank till he jested with all ease, and told Free tales, and took the word and played upon it, And made it of two colours; for his talk, When wine and free companions kindled him, Was wont to glance and sparkle like a gem Of fifty facets; thus he moved the Prince To laughter and his comrades to applause. Then, when the Prince was merry, asked Limours, “Your leave, my lord, to cross the room, and speak To your good damsel there who sits apart, And seems so lonely?” “My free leave,” he said; “Get her to speak: she doth not speak to me.” Then rose Limours, and looking at his feet, Like him who tries the bridge he fears may fail, Crost and came near, lifted adoring eyes, Bowed at her side and uttered whisperingly: “Enid, the pilot star of my lone life, Enid, my early and my only love, Enid, the loss of whom hath turned me wild— What chance is this? how is it I see you here? Ye are in my power at last, are in my power. Yet fear me not: I call mine own self wild, But keep a touch of sweet civility Here in the heart of waste and wilderness. I thought, but that your father came between, In former days you saw me favourably. And if it were so do not keep it back: Make me a little happier: let me know it: Owe you me nothing for a life half-lost? Yea, yea, the whole dear debt of all you are. And, Enid, you and he, I see with joy, Ye sit apart, you do not speak to him, You come with no attendance, page or maid, To serve you—doth he love you as of old? For, call it lovers’ quarrels, yet I know Though men may bicker with the things they love, They would not make them laughable in all eyes, Not while they loved them; and your wretched dress, A wretched insult on you, dumbly speaks Your story, that this man loves you no more. Your beauty is no beauty to him now: A common chance—right well I know it—palled— For I know men: nor will ye win him back, For the man’s love once gone never returns. But here is one who loves you as of old; With more exceeding passion than of old: Good, speak the word: my followers ring him round: He sits unarmed; I hold a finger up; They understand: nay;

I do not mean blood: Nor need ye look so scared at what I say: My malice is no deeper than a moat, No stronger than a wall: there is the keep; He shall not cross us more; speak but the word: Or speak it not; but then by Him that made me The one true lover whom you ever owned, I will make use of all the power I have. O pardon me! the madness of that hour, When first I parted from thee, moves me yet." At this the tender sound of his own voice And sweet self-pity, or the fancy of it, Made his eye moist; but Enid feared his eyes, Moist as they were, wine-heated from the feast; And answered with such craft as women use, Guilty or guiltless, to stave off a chance That breaks upon them perilously, and said: "Earl, if you love me as in former years, And do not practise on me, come with morn, And snatch me from him as by violence; Leave me tonight: I am weary to the death." Low at leave-taking, with his brandished plume Brushing his instep, bowed the all-amorous Earl, And the stout Prince bad him a loud good-night. He moving homeward babbled to his men, How Enid never loved a man but him, Nor cared a broken egg-shell for her lord. But Enid left alone with Prince Geraint, Debating his command of silence given, And that she now perforce must violate it, Held commune with herself, and while she held He fell asleep, and Enid had no heart To wake him, but hung o'er him, wholly pleased To find him yet unwounded after fight, And hear him breathing low and equally. Anon she rose, and stepping lightly, heaped The pieces of his armour in one place, All to be there against a sudden need; Then dozed awhile herself, but overtoiled By that day's grief and travel, evermore Seemed catching at a rootless thorn, and then Went slipping down horrible precipices, And strongly striking out her limbs awoke; Then thought she heard the wild Earl at the door, With all his rout of random followers, Sound on a dreadful trumpet, summoning her; Which was the red cock shouting to the light, As the gray dawn stole o'er the dewy world, And glimmered on his armour in the room. And once again she rose to look at it, But touched it unawares: jangling, the casque Fell, and he started up and stared at her. Then breaking his command of silence given, She told him all that Earl Limours had

said, Except the passage that he loved her not; Nor left untold the craft herself had used; But ended with apology so sweet, Low-spoken, and of so few words, and seemed So justified by that necessity, That though he thought “was it for him she wept In Devon?” he but gave a wrathful groan, Saying, “Your sweet faces make good fellows fools And traitors. Call the host and bid him bring Charger and palfrey.” So she glided out Among the heavy breathings of the house, And like a household Spirit at the walls Beat, till she woke the sleepers, and returned: Then tending her rough lord, though all unasked, In silence, did him service as a squire; Till issuing armed he found the host and cried, “Thy reckoning, friend?” and ere he learnt it, “Take Five horses and their armours;” and the host Suddenly honest, answered in amaze, “My lord, I scarce have spent the worth of one!” “Ye will be all the wealthier,” said the Prince, And then to Enid, “Forward! and today I charge you, Enid, more especially, What thing soever ye may hear, or see, Or fancy (though I count it of small use To charge you) that ye speak not but obey.” And Enid answered, “Yea, my lord, I know Your wish, and would obey; but riding first, I hear the violent threats you do not hear, I see the danger which you cannot see: Then not to give you warning, that seems hard; Almost beyond me: yet I would obey.” “Yea so,” said he, “do it: be not too wise; Seeing that ye are wedded to a man, Not all mismated with a yawning clown, But one with arms to guard his head and yours, With eyes to find you out however far, And ears to hear you even in his dreams.” With that he turned and looked as keenly at her As careful robins eye the delver’s toil; And that within her, which a wanton fool, Or hasty judger would have called her guilt, Made her cheek burn and either eyelid fall. And Geraint looked and was not satisfied. Then forward by a way which, beaten broad, Led from the territory of false Limours To the waste earldom of another earl, Doorm, whom his shaking vassals called the Bull, Went Enid with her sullen follower on. Once she looked back, and when she saw him ride More near by many a rood than yestermorn, It wellnigh made her cheerful; till Geraint Waving an angry hand as who should say

“Ye watch me,” saddened all her heart again. But while the sun yet beat a dewy blade, The sound of many a heavily-galloping hoof Smote on her ear, and turning round she saw Dust, and the points of lances bicker in it. Then not to disobey her lord’s behest, And yet to give him warning, for he rode As if he heard not, moving back she held Her finger up, and pointed to the dust. At which the warrior in his obstinacy, Because she kept the letter of his word, Was in a manner pleased, and turning, stood. And in the moment after, wild Limours, Borne on a black horse, like a thunder-cloud Whose skirts are loosened by the breaking storm, Half ridden off with by the thing he rode, And all in passion uttering a dry shriek, Dashed down on Geraint, who closed with him, and bore Down by the length of lance and arm beyond The crupper, and so left him stunned or dead, And overthrew the next that followed him, And blindly rushed on all the rout behind. But at the flash and motion of the man They vanished panic-stricken, like a shoal Of darting fish, that on a summer morn Adown the crystal dykes at Camelot Come slipping o’er their shadows on the sand, But if a man who stands upon the brink But lift a shining hand against the sun, There is not left the twinkle of a fin Betwixt the cressy islets white in flower; So, scared but at the motion of the man, Fled all the boon companions of the Earl, And left him lying in the public way; So vanish friendships only made in wine. Then like a stormy sunlight smiled Geraint, Who saw the chargers of the two that fell Start from their fallen lords, and wildly fly, Mixt with the flyers. “Horse and man,” he said, “All of one mind and all right-honest friends! Not a hoof left: and I methinks till now Was honest—paid with horses and with arms; I cannot steal or plunder, no nor beg: And so what say ye, shall we strip him there Your lover? has your palfrey heart enough To bear his armour? shall we fast, or dine? No?—then do thou, being right honest, pray That we may meet the horsemen of Earl Doorm, I too would still be honest.” Thus he said: And sadly gazing on her bridle-reins, And answering not one word, she led the way. But as a man to whom a dreadful loss Falls in a far land and he knows it not, But coming back he learns it, and the loss So

pains him that he sickens nigh to death; So fared it with Geraint, who being pricked In combat with the follower of Limours, Bled underneath his armour secretly, And so rode on, nor told his gentle wife What ailed him, hardly knowing it himself, Till his eye darkened and his helmet wagged; And at a sudden swerving of the road, Though happily down on a bank of grass, The Prince, without a word, from his horse fell. And Enid heard the clashing of his fall, Suddenly came, and at his side all pale Dismounting, loosed the fastenings of his arms, Nor let her true hand falter, nor blue eye Moisten, till she had lighted on his wound, And tearing off her veil of faded silk Had bared her forehead to the blistering sun, And swathed the hurt that drained her dear lord's life. Then after all was done that hand could do, She rested, and her desolation came Upon her, and she wept beside the way. And many past, but none regarded her, For in that realm of lawless turbulence, A woman weeping for her murdered mate Was cared as much for as a summer shower: One took him for a victim of Earl Doorm, Nor dared to waste a perilous pity on him: Another hurrying past, a man-at-arms, Rode on a mission to the bandit Earl; Half whistling and half singing a coarse song, He drove the dust against her veilless eyes: Another, flying from the wrath of Doorm Before an ever-fancied arrow, made The long way smoke beneath him in his fear; At which her palfrey whinnying lifted heel, And scoured into the coppices and was lost, While the great charger stood, grieved like a man. But at the point of noon the huge Earl Doorm, Broad-faced with under-fringe of russet beard, Bound on a foray, rolling eyes of prey, Came riding with a hundred lances up; But ere he came, like one that hails a ship, Cried out with a big voice, "What, is he dead?" "No, no, not dead!" she answered in all haste. "Would some of your people take him up, And bear him hence out of this cruel sun? Most sure am I, quite sure, he is not dead." Then said Earl Doorm: "Well, if he be not dead, Why wail ye for him thus? ye seem a child. And be he dead, I count you for a fool; Your wailing will not quicken him: dead or not, Ye mar a comely face with idiot tears. Yet, since the face is comely—some of you, Here, take him up, and bear him to our

hall: An if he live, we will have him of our band; And if he die, why earth has earth enough To hide him. See ye take the charger too, A noble one." He spake, and past away, But left two brawny spearmen, who advanced, Each growling like a dog, when his good bone Seems to be plucked at by the village boys Who love to vex him eating, and he fears To lose his bone, and lays his foot upon it, Gnawing and growling: so the ruffians growled, Fearing to lose, and all for a dead man, Their chance of booty from the morning's raid, Yet raised and laid him on a litter-bier, Such as they brought upon their forays out For those that might be wounded; laid him on it All in the hollow of his shield, and took And bore him to the naked hall of Doorm, (His gentle charger following him unled) And cast him and the bier in which he lay Down on an oaken settle in the hall, And then departed, hot in haste to join Their luckier mates, but growling as before, And cursing their lost time, and the dead man, And their own Earl, and their own souls, and her. They might as well have blest her: she was deaf To blessing or to cursing save from one. So for long hours sat Enid by her lord, There in the naked hall, propping his head, And chafing his pale hands, and calling to him. Till at the last he wakened from his swoon, And found his own dear bride propping his head, And chafing his faint hands, and calling to him; And felt the warm tears falling on his face; And said to his own heart, "She weeps for me:" And yet lay still, and feigned himself as dead, That he might prove her to the uttermost, And say to his own heart, "She weeps for me." But in the falling afternoon returned The huge Earl Doorm with plunder to the hall. His lusty spearmen followed him with noise: Each hurling down a heap of things that rang Against his pavement, cast his lance aside, And doffed his helm: and then there fluttered in, Half-bold, half-frighted, with dilated eyes, A tribe of women, dressed in many hues, And mingled with the spearmen: and Earl Doorm Struck with a knife's haft hard against the board, And called for flesh and wine to feed his spears. And men brought in whole hogs and quarter beeves, And all the hall was dim with steam of flesh: And none spake word, but all sat down at once, And ate with tumult in the

naked hall, Feeding like horses when you hear them feed; Till Enid shrank far back into herself, To shun the wild ways of the lawless tribe. But when Earl Doorm had eaten all he would, He rolled his eyes about the hall, and found A damsel drooping in a corner of it. Then he remembered her, and how she wept; And out of her there came a power upon him; And rising on the sudden he said, “Eat! I never yet beheld a thing so pale. God’s curse, it makes me mad to see you weep. Eat! Look yourself. Good luck had your good man, For were I dead who is it would weep for me? Sweet lady, never since I first drew breath Have I beheld a lily like yourself. And so there lived some colour in your cheek, There is not one among my gentlewomen Were fit to wear your slipper for a glove. But listen to me, and by me be ruled, And I will do the thing I have not done, For ye shall share my earldom with me, girl, And we will live like two birds in one nest, And I will fetch you forage from all fields, For I compel all creatures to my will.” He spoke: the brawny spearman let his cheek Bulge with the unswallowed piece, and turning stared; While some, whose souls the old serpent long had drawn Down, as the worm draws in the withered leaf And makes it earth, hissed each at other’s ear What shall not be recorded—women they, Women, or what had been those gracious things, But now desired the humbling of their best, Yea, would have helped him to it: and all at once They hated her, who took no thought of them, But answered in low voice, her meek head yet Drooping, “I pray you of your courtesy, He being as he is, to let me be.” She spake so low he hardly heard her speak, But like a mighty patron, satisfied With what himself had done so graciously, Assumed that she had thanked him, adding, “Yea, Eat and be glad, for I account you mine.” She answered meekly, “How should I be glad Henceforth in all the world at anything, Until my lord arise and look upon me?” Here the huge Earl cried out upon her talk, As all but empty heart and weariness And sickly nothing; suddenly seized on her, And bare her by main violence to the board, And thrust the dish before her, crying, “Eat.” “No, no,” said Enid, vext, “I will not eat Till yonder man upon the bier arise, And eat with me.” “Drink, then,” he

answered. “Here!” (And filled a horn with wine and held it to her,) “Lo! I, myself, when flushed with fight, or hot, God’s curse, with anger—often I myself, Before I well have drunken, scarce can eat: Drink therefore and the wine will change thy will.” “Not so,” she cried, “by Heaven, I will not drink Till my dear lord arise and bid me do it, And drink with me; and if he rise no more, I will not look at wine until I die.” At this he turned all red and paced his hall, Now gnawed his under, now his upper lip, And coming up close to her, said at last: “Girl, for I see ye scorn my courtesies, Take warning: yonder man is surely dead; And I compel all creatures to my will. Not eat nor drink? And wherefore 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 beautifully: For see ye not my gentlewomen here, How gay, how suited to the house of one Who loves that beauty should go beautifully? Rise therefore; robe yourself in this: obey.” He spoke, and one among his gentlewomen Displayed a splendid silk of foreign loom, Where like a shoaling sea the lovely blue Played into green, and thicker down the front With jewels than the sward with drops of dew, When all night long a cloud clings to the hill, And with the dawn ascending lets the day Strike where it clung: so thickly shone the gems. But Enid answered, harder to be moved Than hardest tyrants in their day of power, With life-long injuries burning unavenged, And now their hour has come; and Enid said: “In this poor gown my dear lord found me first, And loved me serving in my father’s hall: In this poor gown I rode with him to court, And there the Queen arrayed me like the sun: In this poor gown he bad me clothe myself, When now we rode upon this fatal quest Of honour, where no honour can be gained: And this poor gown I will not cast aside Until himself arise a living man, And bid me cast it. I have griefs enough: Pray you be gentle, pray you let me be: I never loved, can never love but him: Yea, God, I pray you of your gentleness, He being as he is, to let me be.” Then strode the brute

Earl up and down his hall, And took his russet beard between his teeth; Last, coming up quite close, and in his mood Crying, “I count it of no more avail, Dame, to be gentle than ungentle with you; Take my salute,” unknightly with flat hand, However lightly, smote her on the cheek. Then Enid, in her utter helplessness, And since she thought, “He had not dared to do it, Except he surely knew my lord was dead,” Sent forth a sudden sharp and bitter cry, As of a wild thing taken in the trap, Which sees the trapper coming through the wood. This heard Geraint, and grasping at his sword, (It lay beside him in the hollow shield), Made but a single bound, and with a sweep of it Shore through the swarthy neck, and like a ball The russet-bearded head rolled on the floor. So died Earl Doorm by him he counted dead. And all the men and women in the hall Rose when they saw the dead man rise, and fled Yelling as from a spectre, and the two Were left alone together, and he said: “Enid, I have used you worse than that dead man; Done you more wrong: we both have undergone That trouble which has left me thrice your own: Henceforward I will rather die than doubt. And here I lay this penance on myself, Not, though mine own ears heard you yestermorn— You thought me sleeping, but I heard you say, I heard you say, that you were no true wife: I swear I will not ask your meaning in it: I do believe yourself against yourself, And will henceforward rather die than doubt.” And Enid could not say one tender word, She felt so blunt and stupid at the heart: She only prayed him, “Fly, they will return And slay you; fly, your charger is without, My palfrey lost.” “Then, Enid, shall you ride Behind me.” “Yea,” said Enid, “let us go.” And moving out they found the stately horse, Who now no more a vassal to the thief, But free to stretch his limbs in lawful fight, Neighed with all gladness as they came, and stooped With a low whinny toward the pair: and she Kissed the white star upon his noble front, Glad also; then Geraint upon the horse Mounted, and reached a hand, and on his foot She set her own and climbed; he turned his face And kissed her climbing, and she cast her arms About him, and at once they rode away. And never yet, since high in Paradise O’er the four rivers the first roses blew, Came purer

pleasure unto mortal kind Than lived through her, who in that perilous hour Put hand to hand beneath her husband's heart, And felt him hers again: she did not weep, But o'er her meek eyes came a happy mist Like that which kept the heart of Eden green Before the useful trouble of the rain: Yet not so misty were her meek blue eyes As not to see before them on the path, Right in the gateway of the bandit hold, A knight of Arthur's court, who laid his lance In rest, and made as if to fall upon him. Then, fearing for his hurt and loss of blood, She, with her mind all full of what had chanced, Shrieked to the stranger "Slay not a dead man!" "The voice of Enid," said the knight; but she, Beholding it was Edyrn son of Nudd, Was moved so much the more, and shrieked again, "O cousin, slay not him who gave you life." And Edyrn moving frankly forward spake: "My lord Geraint, I greet you with all love; I took you for a bandit knight of Doorm; And fear not, Enid, I should fall upon him, Who love you, Prince, with something of the love Wherewith we love the Heaven that chastens us. For once, when I was up so high in pride That I was halfway down the slope to Hell, By overthrowing me you threw me higher. Now, made a knight of Arthur's Table Round, And since I knew this Earl, when I myself Was half a bandit in my lawless hour, I come the mouthpiece of our King to Doorm (The King is close behind me) bidding him Disband himself, and scatter all his powers, Submit, and hear the judgment of the King." "He hears the judgment of the King of kings," Cried the wan Prince; "and lo, the powers of Doorm Are scattered," and he pointed to the field, Where, huddled here and there on mound and knoll, Were men and women staring and aghast, While some yet fled; and then he plainlier told How the huge Earl lay slain within his hall. But when the knight besought him, "Follow me, Prince, to the camp, and in the King's own ear Speak what has chanced; ye surely have endured Strange chances here alone;" that other flushed, And hung his head, and halted in reply, Fearing the mild face of the blameless King, And after madness acted question asked: Till Edyrn crying, "If ye will not go To Arthur, then will Arthur come to you," "Enough," he said, "I follow," and they went.

But Enid in their going had two fears, One from the bandit scattered in the field, And one from Edyrn. Every now and then, When Edyrn reined his charger at her side, She shrank a little. In a hollow land, From which old fires have broken, men may fear Fresh fire and ruin. He, perceiving, said: “Fair and dear cousin, you that most had cause To fear me, fear no longer, I am changed. Yourself were first the blameless cause to make My nature’s prideful sparkle in the blood Break into furious flame; being repulsed By Yniol and yourself, I schemed and wrought Until I overturned him; then set up (With one main purpose ever at my heart) My haughty jousts, and took a paramour; Did her mock-honour as the fairest fair, And, toppling over all antagonism, So waxed in pride, that I believed myself Unconquerable, for I was wellnigh mad: And, but for my main purpose in these jousts, I should have slain your father, seized yourself. I lived in hope that sometime you would come To these my lists with him whom best you loved; And there, poor cousin, with your meek blue eyes The truest eyes that ever answered Heaven, Behold me overturn and trample on him. Then, had you cried, or knelt, or prayed to me, I should not less have killed him. And so you came,— But once you came,—and with your own true eyes Beheld the man you loved (I speak as one Speaks of a service done him) overthrow My proud self, and my purpose three years old, And set his foot upon me, and give me life. There was I broken down; there was I saved: Though thence I rode all-shamed, hating the life He gave me, meaning to be rid of it. And all the penance the Queen laid upon me Was but to rest awhile within her court; Where first as sullen as a beast new-caged, And waiting to be treated like a wolf, Because I knew my deeds were known, I found, Instead of scornful pity or pure scorn, Such fine reserve and noble reticence, Manners so kind, yet stately, such a grace Of tenderest courtesy, that I began To glance behind me at my former life, And find that it had been the wolf’s indeed: And oft I talked with Dubric, the high saint, Who, with mild heat of holy oratory, Subdued me somewhat to that gentleness, Which, when it weds with manhood, makes a man. And you were often there about the Queen, But saw

me not, or marked not if you saw; Nor did I care or dare to speak with you, But kept myself aloof till I was changed; And fear not, cousin; I am changed indeed." He spoke, and Enid easily believed, Like simple noble natures, credulous Of what they long for, good in friend or foe, There most in those who most have done them ill. And when they reached the camp the King himself Advanced to greet them, and beholding her Though pale, yet happy, asked her not a word, But went apart with Edyrn, whom he held In converse for a little, and returned, And, gravely smiling, lifted her from horse, And kissed her with all pureness, brother-like, And showed an empty tent allotted her, And glancing for a minute, till he saw her Pass into it, turned to the Prince, and said: "Prince, when of late ye prayed me for my leave To move to your own land, and there defend Your marches, I was pricked with some reproof, As one that let foul wrong stagnate and be, By having looked too much through alien eyes, And wrought too long with delegated hands, Not used mine own: but now behold me come To cleanse this common sewer of all my realm, With Edyrn and with others: have ye looked At Edyrn? have ye seen how nobly changed? This work of his is great and wonderful. His very face with change of heart is changed. The world will not believe a man repents: And this wise world of ours is mainly right. Full seldom doth a man repent, or use Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch Of blood and custom wholly out of him, And make all clean, and plant himself afresh. Edyrn has done it, weeding all his heart As I will weed this land before I go. I, therefore, made him of our Table Round, Not rashly, but have proved him everyway One of our noblest, our most valorous, Sanest and most obedient: and indeed This work of Edyrn wrought upon himself After a life of violence, seems to me A thousand-fold more great and wonderful Than if some knight of mine, risking his life, My subject with my subjects under him, Should make an onslaught single on a realm Of robbers, though he slew them one by one, And were himself nigh wounded to the death." So spake the King; low bowed the Prince, and felt His work was neither great nor wonderful, And past to Enid's tent; and thither came The

King’s own leech to look into his hurt; And Enid tended on him there; and there Her constant motion round him, and the breath Of her sweet tendance hovering over him, Filled all the genial courses of his blood With deeper and with ever deeper love, As the south-west that blowing Bala lake Fills all the sacred Dee. So past the days. But while Geraint lay healing of his hurt, The blameless King went forth and cast his eyes On each of all whom Uther left in charge Long since, to guard the justice of the King: He looked and found them wanting; and as now Men weed the white horse on the Berkshire hills To keep him bright and clean as heretofore, He rooted out the slothful officer Or guilty, which for bribe had winked at wrong, And in their chairs set up a stronger race With hearts and hands, and sent a thousand men To till the wastes, and moving everywhere Cleared the dark places and let in the law, And broke the bandit holds and cleansed the land. Then, when Geraint was whole again, they past With Arthur to Caerleon upon Usk. There the great Queen once more embraced her friend, And clothed her in apparel like the day. And though Geraint could never take again That comfort from their converse which he took Before the Queen’s fair name was breathed upon, He rested well content that all was well. Thence after tarrying for a space they rode, And fifty knights rode with them to the shores Of Severn, and they past to their own land. And there he kept the justice of the King So vigorously yet mildly, that all hearts Applauded, and the spiteful whisper died: And being ever foremost in the chase, And victor at the tilt and tournament, They called him the great Prince and man of men. But Enid, whom her ladies loved to call Enid the Fair, a grateful people named Enid the Good; and in their halls arose The cry of children, Enids and Geraints Of times to be; nor did he doubt her more, But rested in her fealty, till he crowned A happy life with a fair death, and fell Against the heathen of the Northern Sea In battle, fighting for the blameless King.

Balin and Balan

Pellam the King, who held and lost with Lot In that first war, and had his realm restored But rendered tributary, failed of late To send his tribute; wherefore Arthur called His treasurer, one of many years, and spake, “Go thou with him and him and bring it to us, Lest we should set one truer on his throne. Man’s word is God in man.” His Baron said “We go but harken: there be two strange knights Who sit near Camelot at a fountain-side, A mile beneath the forest, challenging And overthrowing every knight who comes. Wilt thou I undertake them as we pass, And send them to thee?” Arthur laughed upon him. “Old friend, too old to be so young, depart, Delay not thou for aught, but let them sit, Until they find a lustier than themselves.” So these departed. Early, one fair dawn, The light-winged spirit of his youth returned On Arthur’s heart; he armed himself and went, So coming to the fountain-side beheld Balin and Balan sitting statuelike, Brethren, to right and left the spring, that down, From underneath a plume of lady-fern, Sang, and the sand danced at the bottom of it. And on the right of Balin Balin’s horse Was fast beside an alder, on the left Of Balan Balan’s near a poplartree. “Fair Sirs,” said Arthur, “wherefore sit ye here?” Balin and Balan answered “For the sake Of glory; we be mightier men than all In Arthur’s court; that also have we proved; For whatsoever knight against us came Or I or he have easily overthrown.” “I too,” said Arthur, “am of Arthur’s hall, But rather proven in his Paynim wars Than famous jousts; but see, or proven or not, Whether me likewise ye can overthrow.” And Arthur lightly smote the brethren down, And lightly so returned, and no man knew. Then Balin rose, and Balan, and beside The carolling water set themselves again, And spake no word until the shadow turned; When from the fringe of coppice round them burst A spangled pursuivant, and crying “Sirs, Rise, follow! ye be sent for by the King,” They followed; whom when Arthur seeing asked “Tell me your names; why sat ye by the well?” Balin the stillness of a minute broke Saying “An unmelodious name to thee, Balin, ‘the Savage’—that addition thine— My brother and my better, this man here, Balan. I smote upon the naked skull A thrall of thine in open hall, my hand Was

gauntleted, half slew him; for I heard He had spoken evil of me; thy just wrath Sent me a three-years' exile from thine eyes. I have not lived my life delightsomely: For I that did that violence to thy thrall, Had often wrought some fury on myself, Saving for Balan: those three kingless years Have past—were wormwood-bitter to me. King, Methought that if we sat beside the well, And hurled to ground what knight soever spurred Against us, thou would'st take me gladlier back, And make, as ten-times worthier to be thine Than twenty Balins, Balan knight. I have said. Not so—not all. A man of thine today Abashed us both, and brake my boast. Thy will?" Said Arthur "Thou hast ever spoken truth; Thy too fierce manhood would not let thee lie. Rise, my true knight. As children learn, be thou Wiser for falling! walk with me, and move To music with thine Order and the King. Thy chair, a grief to all the brethren, stands Vacant, but thou retake it, mine again!" Thereafter, when Sir Balin entered hall, The Lost one Found was greeted as in Heaven With joy that blazed itself in woodland wealth Of leaf, and gayest garlandage of flowers, Along the walls and down the board; they sat, And cup clashed cup; they drank and some one sang, Sweet-voiced, a song of welcome, whereupon Their common shout in chorus, mounting, made Those banners of twelve battles overhead Stir, as they stirred of old, when Arthur's host Proclaimed him Victor, and the day was won. Then Balan added to their Order lived A wealthier life than heretofore with these And Balin, till their embassage returned. "Sir King" they brought report "we hardly found, So bushed about it is with gloom, the hall Of him to whom ye sent us, Pellam, once A Christless foe of thine as ever dashed Horse against horse; but seeing that thy realm Hath prospered in the name of Christ, the King Took, as in rival heat, to holy things; And finds himself descended from the Saint Arimathaean Joseph; him who first Brought the great faith to Britain over seas; He boasts his life as purer than thine own; Eats scarce enow to keep his pulse abeat; Hath pushed aside his faithful wife, nor lets Or dame or damsel enter at his gates Lest he should be polluted. This gray King Showed us a shrine wherein were wonders—yea— Rich arks with priceless

bones of martyrdom, Thorns of the crown and shivers of the cross, And therewithal (for thus he told us) brought By holy Joseph thither, that same spear Wherewith the Roman pierced the side of Christ. He much amazed us; after, when we sought The tribute, answered 'I have quite foregone All matters of this world: Garlon, mine heir, Of him demand it,' which this Garlon gave With much ado, railing at thine and thee. "But when we left, in those deep woods we found A knight of thine spear-stricken from behind, Dead, whom we buried; more than one of us Cried out on Garlon, but a woodman there Reported of some demon in the woods Was once a man, who driven by evil tongues From all his fellows, lived alone, and came To learn black magic, and to hate his kind With such a hate, that when he died, his soul Became a Fiend, which, as the man in life Was wounded by blind tongues he saw not whence, Strikes from behind. This woodman showed the cave From which he sallies, and wherein he dwelt. We saw the hoof-print of a horse, no more." Then Arthur, "Let who goes before me, see He do not fall behind me: foully slain And villainously! who will hunt for me This demon of the woods?" Said Balan, "I"! So claimed the quest and rode away, but first, Embracing Balin, "Good my brother, hear! Let not thy moods prevail, when I am gone Who used to lay them! hold them outer fiends, Who leap at thee to tear thee; shake them aside, Dreams ruling when wit sleeps! yea, but to dream That any of these would wrong thee, wrongs thyself. Witness their flowery welcome. Bound are they To speak no evil. Truly save for fears, My fears for thee, so rich a fellowship Would make me wholly blest: thou one of them, Be one indeed: consider them, and all Their bearing in their common bond of love, No more of hatred than in Heaven itself, No more of jealousy than in Paradise." So Balan warned, and went; Balin remained: Who—for but three brief moons had glanced away From being knighted till he smote the thrall, And faded from the presence into years Of exile—now would strictlier set himself To learn what Arthur meant by courtesy, Manhood, and knighthood; wherefore hovered round Lancelot, but when he marked his high sweet smile In passing, and a transitory word Make knight or

churl or child or damsel seem From being smiled at happier in themselves— Sighed, as a boy lame-born beneath a height, That glooms his valley, sighs to see the peak Sun-flushed, or touch at night the northern star; For one from out his village lately climed And brought report of azure lands and fair, Far seen to left and right; and he himself Hath hardly scaled with help a hundred feet Up from the base: so Balin marvelling oft How far beyond him Lancelot seemed to move, Groaned, and at times would mutter, “These be gifts, Born with the blood, not learnable, divine, Beyond my reach. Well had I foughten—well— In those fierce wars, struck hard—and had I crowned With my slain self the heaps of whom I slew— So—better!—But this worship of the Queen, That honour too wherein she holds him—this, This was the sunshine that hath given the man A growth, a name that branches o’er the rest, And strength against all odds, and what the King So prizes—overprizes—gentleness. Her likewise would I worship an I might. I never can be close with her, as he That brought her hither. Shall I pray the King To let me bear some token of his Queen Whereon to gaze, remembering her—forget My heats and violences? live afresh? What, if the Queen disdained to grant it! nay Being so stately-gentle, would she make My darkness blackness? and with how sweet grace She greeted my return! Bold will I be— Some goodly cognizance of Guinevere, In lieu of this rough beast upon my shield, Langued gules, and toothed with grinning savagery.” And Arthur, when Sir Balin sought him, said “What wilt thou bear?” Balin was bold, and asked To bear her own crown-royal upon shield, Whereat she smiled and turned her to the King, Who answered “Thou shalt put the crown to use. The crown is but the shadow of the King, And this a shadow’s shadow, let him have it, So this will help him of his violences!” “No shadow” said Sir Balin “O my Queen, But light to me! no shadow, O my King, But golden earnest of a gentler life!” So Balin bare the crown, and all the knights Approved him, and the Queen, and all the world Made music, and he felt his being move In music with his Order, and the King. The nightingale, full-toned in middle May, Hath ever and anon a note

so thin It seems another voice in other groves; Thus, after some quick burst of sudden wrath, The music in him seemed to change, and grow Faint and far-off. And once he saw the thrall His passion half had gauntleted to death, That causer of his banishment and shame, Smile at him, as he deemed, presumptuously: His arm half rose to strike again, but fell: The memory of that cognizance on shield Weighted it down, but in himself he moaned: “Too high this mount of Camelot for me: These high-set courtesies are not for me. Shall I not rather prove the worse for these? Fierier and stormier from restraining, break Into some madness even before the Queen?” Thus, as a hearth lit in a mountain home, And glancing on the window, when the gloom Of twilight deepens round it, seems a flame That rages in the woodland far below, So when his moods were darkened, court and King And all the kindly warmth of Arthur’s hall Shadowed an angry distance: yet he strove To learn the graces of their Table, fought Hard with himself, and seemed at length in peace. Then chanced, one morning, that Sir Balin sat Close-bowered in that garden nigh the hall. A walk of roses ran from door to door; A walk of lilies crost it to the bower: And down that range of roses the great Queen Came with slow steps, the morning on her face; And all in shadow from the counter door Sir Lancelot as to meet her, then at once, As if he saw not, glanced aside, and paced The long white walk of lilies toward the bower. Followed the Queen; Sir Balin heard her “Prince, Art thou so little loyal to thy Queen, As pass without good morrow to thy Queen?” To whom Sir Lancelot with his eyes on earth, “Fain would I still be loyal to the Queen.” “Yea so” she said “but so to pass me by— So loyal scarce is loyal to thyself, Whom all men rate the king of courtesy. Let be: ye stand, fair lord, as in a dream.” Then Lancelot with his hand among the flowers “Yea—for a dream. Last night methought I saw That maiden Saint who stands with lily in hand In yonder shrine. All round her prest the dark, And all the light upon her silver face Flowed from the spiritual lily that she held. Lo! these her emblems drew mine eyes—away: For see, how perfect-pure! As light a flush As hardly tints the blossom of the quince Would mar their charm of

stainless maidenhood." "Sweeter to me" she said "this garden rose Deep-hued and many-folded! sweeter still The wild-wood hyacinth and the bloom of May. Prince, we have ridden before among the flowers In those fair days—not all as cool as these, Though season-earlier. Art thou sad? or sick? Our noble King will send thee his own leech— Sick? or for any matter angered at me?" Then Lancelot lifted his large eyes; they dwelt Deep-tranced on hers, and could not fall: her hue Changed at his gaze: so turning side by side They past, and Balin started from his bower. "Queen? subject? but I see not what I see. Damsel and lover? hear not what I hear. My father hath begotten me in his wrath. I suffer from the things before me, know, Learn nothing; am not worthy to be knight; A churl, a clown!" and in him gloom on gloom Deepened: he sharply caught his lance and shield, Nor stayed to crave permission of the King, But, mad for strange adventure, dashed away. He took the selfsame track as Balan, saw The fountain where they sat together, sighed "Was I not better there with him?" and rode The skyless woods, but under open blue Came on the hoarhead woodman at a bough Wearily hewing. "Churl, thine axe!" he cried, Descended, and disjointed it at a blow: To whom the woodman uttered wonderingly "Lord, thou couldst lay the Devil of these woods If arm of flesh could lay him." Balin cried "Him, or the viler devil who plays his part, To lay that devil would lay the Devil in me." "Nay" said the churl, "our devil is a truth, I saw the flash of him but yestereven. And some do say that our Sir Garlon too Hath learned black magic, and to ride unseen. Look to the cave." But Balin answered him "Old fabler, these be fancies of the churl, Look to thy woodcraft," and so leaving him, Now with slack rein and careless of himself, Now with dug spur and raving at himself, Now with droopt brow down the long glades he rode; So marked not on his right a cavern-chasm Yawn over darkness, where, nor far within, The whole day died, but, dying, gleamed on rocks Roof-pendent, sharp; and others from the floor, Tusklike, arising, made that mouth of night Whereout the Demon issued up from Hell. He marked not this, but blind and deaf to all Save that chained rage, which ever yelpt

within, Past eastward from the falling sun. At once He felt the hollow-beaten mosses thud And tremble, and then the shadow of a spear, Shot from behind him, ran along the ground. Sideways he started from the path, and saw, With pointed lance as if to pierce, a shape, A light of armour by him flash, and pass And vanish in the woods; and followed this, But all so blind in rage that unawares He burst his lance against a forest bough, Dishorsed himself, and rose again, and fled Far, till the castle of a King, the hall Of Pellam, lichen-bearded, grayly draped With streaming grass, appeared, low-built but strong; The ruinous donjon as a knoll of moss, The battlement overtopt with ivytods, A home of bats, in every tower an owl. Then spake the men of Pellam crying “Lord, Why wear ye this crown-royal upon shield?” Said Balin “For the fairest and the best Of ladies living gave me this to bear.” So stalled his horse, and strode across the court, But found the greetings both of knight and King Faint in the low dark hall of banquet: leaves Laid their green faces flat against the panes, Sprays grated, and the cankered boughs without Whined in the wood; for all was hushed within, Till when at feast Sir Garlon likewise asked “Why wear ye that crown-royal?” Balin said “The Queen we worship, Lancelot, I, and all, As fairest, best and purest, granted me To bear it!” Such a sound (for Arthur’s knights Were hated strangers in the hall) as makes The white swan-mother, sitting, when she hears A strange knee rustle through her secret reeds, Made Garlon, hissing; then he sourly smiled. “Fairest I grant her: I have seen; but best, Best, purest? thou from Arthur’s hall, and yet So simple! hast thou eyes, or if, are these So far besotted that they fail to see This fair wife-worship cloaks a secret shame? Truly, ye men of Arthur be but babes.” A goblet on the board by Balin, bossed With holy Joseph’s legend, on his right Stood, all of massiest bronze: one side had sea And ship and sail and angels blowing on it: And one was rough with wattling, and the walls Of that low church he built at Glastonbury. This Balin graspt, but while in act to hurl, Through memory of that token on the shield Relaxed his hold: “I will be gentle” he thought “And passing gentle” caught his hand away, Then fiercely to Sir Garlon

“Eyes have I That saw today the shadow of a spear, Shot from behind me, run along the ground; Eyes too that long have watched how Lancelot draws From homage to the best and purest, might, Name, manhood, and a grace, but 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!” But not the less by night The scorn of Garlon, poisoning all his rest, Stung him in dreams. At length, and dim through leaves Blinkt the white morn, sprays grated, and old boughs Whined in the wood. He rose, descended, met The scorner in the castle court, and fain, For hate and loathing, would have past him by; But when Sir Garlon uttered mocking-wise; “What, wear ye still that same crown-scandalous?” His countenance blackened, and his forehead veins Bloated, and branched; and tearing out of sheath The brand, Sir Balin with a fiery “Ha! So thou be shadow, here I make thee ghost,” Hard upon helm smote him, and the blade flew Splintering in six, and clinkt upon the stones. Then Garlon, reeling slowly backward, fell, And Balin by the banneret of his helm Dragged him, and struck, but from the castle a cry Sounded across the court, and—men-at-arms, A score with pointed lances, making at him— He dashed the pummel at the foremost face, Beneath a low door dipt, and made his feet Wings through a glimmering gallery, till he marked The portal of King Pellam’s chapel wide And inward to the wall; he stept behind; Thence in a moment heard them pass like wolves Howling; but while he stared about the shrine, In which he scarce could spy the Christ for Saints, Beheld before a golden altar lie The longest lance his eyes had ever seen, Point-painted red; and seizing thereupon Pushed through an open casement down, leaned on it, Leapt in a semicircle, and lit on earth; Then hand at ear, and harkening from what side The blindfold rummage buried in the walls Might echo, ran the counter path, and found His charger, mounted on him and away. An arrow whizzed to the right, one to the left, One overhead; and Pellam’s feeble cry “Stay, stay him! he defileth heavenly things With earthly uses”—made him quickly dive Beneath the boughs, and race through many a mile Of dense and open, till his

goodly horse, Arising wearily at a fallen oak, Stumbled headlong, and cast him face to ground. Half-wroth he had not ended, but all glad, Knightlike, to find his charger yet unlamed, Sir Balin drew the shield from off his neck, Stared at the priceless cognizance, and thought “I have shamed thee so that now thou shamest me, Thee will I bear no more,” high on a branch Hung it, and turned aside into the woods, And there in gloom cast himself all along, Moaning “My violences, my violences!” But now the wholesome music of the wood Was dumbed by one from out the hall of Mark, A damsel-errant, warbling, as she rode The woodland alleys, Vivien, with her Squire. “The fire of Heaven has killed the barren cold, And kindled all the plain and all the wold. The new leaf ever pushes off the old. The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell. “Old priest, who mumble worship in your quire— Old monk and nun, ye scorn the world’s desire, Yet in your frosty cells ye feel the fire! The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell. “The fire of Heaven is on the dusty ways. The wayside blossoms open to the blaze. The whole wood-world is one full peal of praise. The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell. “The fire of Heaven is lord of all things good, And starve not thou this fire within thy blood, But follow Vivien through the fiery flood! The fire of Heaven is not the flame of Hell!” Then turning to her Squire “This fire of Heaven, This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again, And beat the cross to earth, and break the King And all his Table.” Then they reached a glade, Where under one long lane of cloudless air Before another wood, the royal crown Sparkled, and swaying upon a restless elm Drew the vague glance of Vivien, and her Squire; Amazed were these; “Lo there” she cried—“a crown— Borne by some high lord-prince of Arthur’s hall, And there a horse! the rider? where is he? See, yonder lies one dead within the wood. Not dead; he stirs!—but sleeping. I will speak. Hail, royal knight, we break on thy sweet rest, Not, doubtless, all unearned by noble deeds. But bounden art thou, if from Arthur’s hall, To help the weak. Behold, I fly from shame, A lustful King, who sought to win my love Through evil ways: the knight, with whom I rode, Hath suffered misadventure, and my squire Hath in him

small defence; but thou, Sir Prince, Wilt surely guide me to the warrior King, Arthur the blameless, pure as any maid, To get me shelter for my maidenhood. I charge thee by that crown upon thy shield, And by the great Queen's name, arise and hence." And Balin rose, "Thither no more! nor Prince Nor knight am I, but one that hath defamed The cognizance she gave me: here I dwell Savage among the savage woods, here die— Die: let the wolves' black maws ensepulchre Their brother beast, whose anger was his lord. O me, that such a name as Guinevere's, Which our high Lancelot hath so lifted up, And been thereby uplifted, should through me, My violence, and my villainy, come to shame." Thereat she suddenly laughed and shrill, anon Sighed all as suddenly. Said Balin to her "Is this thy courtesy—to mock me, ha? Hence, for I will not with thee." Again she sighed "Pardon, sweet lord! we maidens often laugh When sick at heart, when rather we should weep. I knew thee wronged. I brake upon thy rest, And now full loth am I to break thy dream, But thou art man, and canst abide a truth, Though bitter. Hither, boy—and mark me well. Dost thou remember at Caerleon once— A year ago—nay, then I love thee not— Ay, thou rememberest well—one summer dawn— By the great tower—Caerleon upon Usk— Nay, truly we were hidden: this fair lord, The flower of all their vestal knighthood, knelt In amorous homage—knelt—what else?—O ay Knelt, and drew down from out his night-black hair And mumbled that white hand whose ringed caress Had wandered from her own King's golden head, And lost itself in darkness, till she cried— I thought the great tower would crash down on both— 'Rise, my sweet King, and kiss me on the lips, Thou art my King.' This lad, whose lightest word Is mere white truth in simple nakedness, Saw them embrace: he reddens, cannot speak, So bashful, he! but all the maiden Saints, The deathless mother-maidenhood of Heaven, Cry out upon her. Up then, ride with me! Talk not of shame! thou canst not, an thou would'st, Do these more shame than these have done themselves." She lied with ease; but horror-stricken he, Remembering that dark bower at Camelot, Breathed in a dismal whisper "It is truth." Sunnily she

smiled “And even in this lone wood, Sweet lord, ye do right well to whisper this. Fools prate, and perish traitors. Woods have tongues, As walls have ears: but thou shalt go with me, And we will speak at first exceeding low. Meet is it the good King be not deceived. See now, I set thee high on vantage ground, From whence to watch the time, and eagle-like Stoop at thy will on Lancelot and the Queen.” She ceased; his evil spirit upon him leapt, He ground his teeth together, sprang with a yell, Tore from the branch, and cast on earth, the shield, Drove his mailed heel athwart the royal crown, Stampt all into defacement, hurled it from him Among the forest weeds, and cursed the tale, The told-of, and the teller. That weird yell, Unearthlier than all shriek of bird or beast, Thrilled through the woods; and Balan lurking there (His quest was unaccomplished) heard and thought “The scream of that Wood-devil I came to quell!” Then nearing “Lo! he hath slain some brother-knight, And tramples on the goodly shield to show His loathing of our Order and the Queen. My quest, meseems, is here. Or devil or man Guard thou thine head.” Sir Balin spake not word, But snatched a sudden buckler from the Squire, And vaulted on his horse, and so they crashed In onset, and King Pellam’s holy spear, Reputed to be red with sinless blood, Redded at once with sinful, for the point Across the maiden shield of Balan pricked The hauberk to the flesh; and Balin’s horse Was wearied to the death, and, when they clashed, Rolling back upon Balin, crushed the man Inward, and either fell, and swooned away. Then to her Squire muttered the damsel “Fools! This fellow hath wrought some foulness with his Queen: Else never had he borne her crown, nor raved And thus foamed over at a rival name: But thou, Sir Chick, that scarce hast broken shell, Art yet half-yolk, not even come to down— Who never sawest Caerleon upon Usk— And yet hast often pleaded for my love— See what I see, be thou where I have been, Or else Sir Chick—dismount and loose their casques I fain would know what manner of men they be.” And when the Squire had loosed them, “Goodly!—look! They might have cropt the myriad flower of May, And butt each other here, like brainless bulls, Dead for one heifer! Then the gentle Squire “I

hold them happy, so they died for love: And, Vivien, though ye beat me like your dog, I too could die, as now I live, for thee." "Live on, Sir Boy," she cried. "I better prize The living dog than the dead lion: away! I cannot brook to gaze upon the dead." Then leapt her palfrey o'er the fallen oak, And bounding forward "Leave them to the wolves." But when their foreheads felt the cooling air, Balin first woke, and seeing that true face, Familiar up from cradle-time, so wan, Crawled slowly with low moans to where he lay, And on his dying brother cast himself Dying; and he lifted faint eyes; he felt One near him; all at once they found the world, Staring wild-wide; then with a childlike wail And drawing down the dim disastrous brow That o'er him hung, he kissed it, moaned and spake; "O Balin, Balin, I that fain had died To save thy life, have brought thee to thy death. Why had ye not the shield I knew? and why Trampled ye thus on that which bare the Crown?" Then Balin told him brokenly, and in gasps, All that had chanced, and Balan moaned again. "Brother, I dwelt a day in Pellam's hall: This Garlon mocked me, but I heeded not. And one said 'Eat in peace! a liar is he, And hates thee for the tribute!' this good knight Told me, that twice a wanton damsel came, And sought for Garlon at the castle-gates, Whom Pellam drove away with holy heat. I well believe this damsel, and the one Who stood beside thee even now, the same. 'She dwells among the woods' he said 'and meets And dallies with him in the Mouth of Hell.' Foul are their lives; foul are their lips; they lied. Pure as our own true Mother is our Queen." "O brother" answered Balin "woe is me! My madness all thy life has been thy doom, Thy curse, and darkened all thy day; and now The night has come. I scarce can see thee now. Goodnight! for we shall never bid again Goodmorrow—Dark my doom was here, and dark It will be there. I see thee now no more. I would not mine again should darken thine, Goodnight, true brother. Balan answered low "Goodnight, true brother here! goodmorrow there! We two were born together, and we die Together by one doom:" and while he spoke Closed his death-drowsing eyes, and slept the sleep With Balin, either locked in either's arm.

Merlin and Vivien

A storm was coming, but the winds were still, And in the wild woods of Broceliande, Before an oak, so hollow, huge and old It looked a tower of ivied masonwork, At Merlin's feet the wily Vivien lay. For he that always bare in bitter grudge The slights of Arthur and his Table, Mark The Cornish King, had heard a wandering voice, A minstrel of 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 followed, Sir, In Arthur's household?"—answered innocently: "Ay, by some few—ay, truly—youths that hold It more beseems the perfect virgin knight To worship woman as true wife beyond All hopes of gaining, than as maiden girl. They place their pride in Lancelot and the Queen. So passionate for an utter purity Beyond the limit of their bond, are these, For Arthur bound them not to singleness. Brave hearts and clean! and yet—God guide them—young." Then Mark was half in heart to hurl his cup Straight at the speaker, but forbore: he rose To leave the hall, and, Vivien following him, Turned to her: "Here are snakes within the grass; And you methinks, O Vivien, save ye fear The monkish manhood, and the mask of pure Worn by this court, can stir them till they sting." And Vivien answered, smiling scornfully, "Why fear? because that fostered at thy court I savour of thy—virtues? fear them? no. As Love, if Love is perfect, casts out fear, So Hate, if Hate is perfect, casts out fear. My father died in battle against the King, My mother on his corpse in open field; She bore me there, for born from death was I Among the dead and sown upon the wind— And then on thee! and shown the truth betimes, That old true filth, and bottom of the well Where Truth is hidden. Gracious lessons thine And maxims of the mud! 'This Arthur pure!

Great Nature through the flesh herself hath made Gives him the lie! There is no being pure, My cherub; saith not Holy Writ the same?'— If I were Arthur, I would have thy blood. Thy blessing, stainless King! I bring thee back, When I have ferreted out their burrowings, The hearts of all this Order in mine hand— Ay—so that fate and craft and folly close, Perchance, one curl of Arthur's golden beard. To me this narrow grizzled fork of thine Is cleaner-fashioned—Well, I loved thee first, That warps the wit." Loud laughed the graceless Mark, But Vivien, into Camelot stealing, lodged Low in the city, and on a festal day When Guinevere was crossing the great hall Cast herself down, knelt to the Queen, and wailed. "Why kneel ye there? What evil hath ye wrought? Rise!" and the damsel bidden rise arose And stood with folded hands and downward eyes Of glancing corner, and all meekly said, "None wrought, but suffered much, an orphan maid! My father died in battle for thy King, My mother on his corpse—in open field, The sad sea-sounding wastes of Lyonnesse— Poor wretch—no friend!—and now by Mark the King For that small charm of feature mine, pursued— If any such be mine—I fly to thee. Save, save me thou—Woman of women—thine The wreath of beauty, thine the crown of power, Be thine the balm of pity, O Heaven's own white Earth-angel, stainless bride of stainless King— Help, for he follows! take me to thyself! O yield me shelter for mine innocency Among thy maidens! Here her slow sweet eyes Fear-tremulous, but humbly hopeful, rose Fixt on her hearer's, while the Queen who stood All glittering like May sunshine on May leaves In green and gold, and plumed with green replied, "Peace, child! of overpraise and overblame We choose the last. Our noble Arthur, him Ye scarce can overpraise, will hear and know. Nay—we believe all evil of thy Mark— Well, we shall test thee farther; but this hour We ride a-hawking with Sir Lancelot. He hath given us a fair falcon which he trained; We go to prove it. Bide ye here the while." She past; and Vivien murmured after "Go! I bide the while." Then through the portal-arch Peering askance, and muttering broken-wise, As one that labours with an evil dream, Beheld the Queen and Lancelot get to horse. "Is that the

Lancelot? goodly—ay, but gaunt: Courteous—amends for gauntness—takes her hand— That glance of theirs, but for the street, had been A clinging kiss—how hand lingers in hand! Let go at last!—they ride away—to hawk For waterfowl. Royaller game is mine. For such a supersensual sensual bond As that gray cricket chirpt of at our hearth— Touch flax with flame—a glance will serve—the liars! Ah little rat that borest in the dyke Thy hole by night to let the boundless deep Down upon far-off cities while they dance— Or dream—of thee they dreamed not—nor of me These—ay, but each of either: ride, and dream The mortal dream that never yet was mine— Ride, ride and dream until ye wake—to me! Then, narrow court and lubber King, farewell! For Lancelot will be gracious to the rat, And our wise Queen, if knowing that I know, Will hate, loathe, fear—but honour me the more." Yet while they rode together down the plain, Their talk was all of training, terms of art, Diet and seeling, jesses, leash and lure. "She is too noble" he said "to check at pies, Nor will she rake: there is no baseness in her." Here when the Queen demanded as by chance "Know ye the stranger woman?" "Let her be," Said Lancelot and unhooded casting off The goodly falcon free; she towered; her bells, Tone under tone, shrilled; and they lifted up Their eager faces, wondering at the strength, Boldness and royal knighthood of the bird Who pounced her quarry and slew it. Many a time As once—of old—among the flowers—they rode. But Vivien half-forgotten of the Queen Among her damsels broidering sat, heard, watched And whispered: through the peaceful court she crept And whispered: then as Arthur in the highest Leavened the world, so Vivien in the lowest, Arriving at a time of golden rest, And sowing one ill hint from ear to ear, While all the heathen lay at Arthur's feet, And no quest came, but all was joust and play, Leavened his hall. They heard and let her be. Thereafter as an enemy that has left Death in the living waters, and withdrawn, The wily Vivien stole from Arthur's court. She hated all the knights, and heard in thought Their lavish comment when her name was named. For once, when Arthur walking all alone, Vext at a rumour issued from herself Of some corruption crept

among his knights, Had met her, Vivien, being greeted fair, Would fain have wrought upon his cloudy mood With reverent eyes mock-loyal, shaken voice, And fluttered adoration, and at last With dark sweet hints of some who prized him more Than who should prize him most; at which the King Had gazed upon her blankly and gone by: But one had watched, and had not held his peace: It made the laughter of an afternoon That Vivien should attempt the blameless King. And after that, she set herself to gain Him, the most famous man of all those times, Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts, Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls, Was also Bard, and knew the starry heavens; The people called him Wizard; whom at first She played about with slight and sprightly talk, And vivid smiles, and faintly-venomed points Of slander, glancing here and grazing there; And yielding to his kindlier moods, the Seer Would watch her at her petulance, and play, Even when they seemed unloveable, and laugh As those that watch a kitten; thus he grew Tolerant of what he half disdained, and she, Perceiving that she was but half disdained, Began to break her sports with graver fits, Turn red or pale, would often when they met Sigh fully, or all-silent gaze upon him With such a fixt devotion, that the old man, Though doubtful, felt the flattery, and at times Would flatter his own wish in age for love, And half believe her true: for thus at times He wavered; but that other clung to him, Fixt in her will, and so the seasons went. Then fell on Merlin a great melancholy; He walked with dreams and darkness, and he found A doom that ever poised itself to fall, An ever-moaning battle in the mist, World-war of dying flesh against the life, Death in all life and lying in all love, The meanest having power upon the highest, And the high purpose broken by the worm. So leaving Arthur’s court he gained the beach; There found a little boat, and stept into it; And Vivien followed, but he marked her not. She took the helm and he the sail; the boat Drave with a sudden wind across the deeps, And touching Breton sands, they disembarked. And then she followed Merlin all the way, Even to the wild woods of Broceliande. For Merlin once had told her of a charm, The which if any

wrought on anyone With woven paces and with waving arms, The man so wrought on ever seemed to lie Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower, From which was no escape for evermore; And none could find that man for evermore, Nor could he see but him who wrought the charm Coming and going, and he lay as dead And lost to life and use and name and fame. And Vivien ever sought to work the charm Upon the great Enchanter of the Time, As fancying that her glory would be great According to his greatness whom she quenched. There lay she all her length and kissed his feet, As if in deepest reverence and in love. A twist of gold was round her hair; a robe Of samite without price, that more exprest Than hid her, clung about her lissome limbs, In colour like the satin-shining palm On sallows in the windy gleams of March: And while she kissed them, crying, “Trample me, Dear feet, that I have followed through the world, And I will pay you worship; tread me down And I will kiss you for it;” he was mute: So dark a forethought rolled about his brain, As on a dull day in an Ocean cave The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall In silence: wherefore, when she lifted up A face of sad appeal, and spake and said, “O Merlin, do ye love me?” and again, “O Merlin, do ye love me?” and once more, “Great Master, do ye love me?” he was mute. And lissome Vivien, holding by his heel, Writhed toward him, slided up his knee and sat, Behind his ankle twined her hollow feet Together, curved an arm about his neck, Clung like a snake; and letting her left hand Droop from his mighty shoulder, as a leaf, Made with her right a comb of pearl to part The lists of such a 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 answered quick, “I saw the little elf-god eyeless once In Arthur’s arras hall at Camelot: But neither eyes nor tongue—O stupid child! Yet you are wise who say it; let me think Silence is wisdom: I am silent then, And ask no kiss;” then adding all at once, “And lo, I clothe myself with wisdom,” drew The vast and shaggy mantle of his beard Across her neck and bosom to her knee, And called herself a gilded summer fly Caught in a great old tyrant spider’s web, Who meant to eat her up in

that wild wood Without one word. So Vivien called herself, But rather seemed a lovely baleful star Veiled in gray vapour; till he sadly smiled: “To what request for what strange boon,” he said, “Are these your pretty tricks and fooleries, O Vivien, the preamble? yet my thanks, For these have broken up my melancholy.” And Vivien answered smiling saucily, “What, O my Master, have ye found your voice? I bid the stranger welcome. Thanks at last! But yesterday you never opened lip, Except indeed to drink: no cup had we: In mine own lady palms I culled the spring That gathered trickling dropwise from the cleft, And made a pretty cup of both my hands And offered you it kneeling: then you drank And knew no more, nor gave me one poor word; O no more thanks than might a goat have given With no more sign of reverence than a beard. And when we halted at that other well, And I was faint to swooning, and you lay Foot-gilt with all the blossom-dust of those Deep meadows we had traversed, did you know That Vivien bathed your feet before her own? And yet no thanks: and all through this wild wood And all this morning when I fondled you: Boon, ay, there was a boon, one not so strange— How had I wronged you? surely ye are wise, But such a silence is more wise than kind.” And Merlin locked his hand in hers and said: “O did ye never lie upon the shore, And watch the curled white of the coming wave Glassed in the slippery sand before it breaks? Even such a wave, but not so pleasurable, Dark in the glass of some presageful mood, Had I for three days seen, ready to fall. And then I rose and fled from Arthur’s court To break the mood. You followed me unasked; And when I looked, and saw you following me still, My mind involved yourself the nearest thing In that mind-mist: for shall I tell you truth? You seemed that wave about to break upon me And sweep me from my hold upon the world, My use and name and fame. Your pardon, child. Your pretty sports have brightened all again. And ask your boon, for boon I owe you thrice, Once for wrong done you by confusion, next For thanks it seems till now neglected, last For these your dainty gambols: wherefore ask; And take this boon so strange and not so strange.” And Vivien answered smiling mournfully: “O not so

strange as my long asking it, Not yet so strange as you yourself are strange, Nor half so strange as that dark mood of yours. I ever feared ye were not wholly mine; And see, yourself have owned ye did me wrong. The people call you prophet: let it be: But not of those that can expound themselves. Take Vivien for expounder; she will call That three-days-long presageful gloom of yours No presage, but the same mistrustful mood That makes you seem less noble than yourself, Whenever I have asked this very boon, Now asked again: for see you not, dear love, That such a mood as that, which lately gloomed Your fancy when ye saw me following you, Must make me fear still more you are not mine, Must make me yearn still more to prove you mine, And make me wish still more to learn this charm Of woven paces and of waving hands, As proof of trust. O Merlin, teach it me. The charm so taught will charm us both to rest. For, grant me some slight power upon your fate, I, feeling that you felt me worthy trust, Should rest and let you rest, knowing you mine. And therefore be as great as ye are named, Not muffled round with selfish reticence. How hard you look and how denyingly! O, if you think this wickedness in me, That I should prove it on you unawares, That makes me passing wrathful; then our bond Had best be loosed for ever: but think or not, By Heaven that hears I tell you the clean truth, As clean as blood of babes, as white as milk: O Merlin, may this earth, if ever I, If these unwitty wandering wits of mine, Even in the jumbled rubbish of a dream, Have tript on such conjectural treachery— May this hard earth cleave to the Nadir hell Down, down, and close again, and nip me flat, If I be such a traitress. Yield my boon, Till which I scarce can yield you all I am; And grant my re-reiterated wish, The great proof of your love: because I think, However wise, ye hardly know me yet.” And Merlin loosed his hand from hers and said, “I never was less wise, however wise, Too curious Vivien, though you talk of trust, Than when I told you first of such a charm. Yea, if ye talk of trust I tell you this, Too much I trusted when I told you that, And stirred this vice in you which ruined man Through woman the first hour; for howsoe’er In children a great curiousness be well, Who

have to learn themselves and all the world, In you, that are no child, for still I find Your face is practised when I spell the lines, I call it,—well, I will not call it vice: But since you name yourself the summer fly, I well could wish a cobweb for the gnat, That settles, beaten back, and beaten back Settles, till one could yield for weariness: But since I will not yield to give you power Upon my life and use and name and fame, Why will ye never ask some other boon? Yea, by God's rood, I trusted you too much." And Vivien, like the tenderest-hearted maid That ever bided tryst at village stile, Made answer, either eyelid wet with tears: "Nay, Master, be not wrathful with your maid; Caress her: let her feel herself forgiven Who feels no heart to ask another boon. I think ye hardly know the tender rhyme Of 'trust me not at all or all in all.' I heard the great Sir Lancelot sing it once, And it shall answer for me. Listen to it. 'In Love, if Love be Love, if Love be ours, Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers: Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all. 'It is the little rift within the lute, That by and by will make the music mute, And ever widening slowly silence all. 'The little rift within the lover's lute Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit, That rotting inward slowly moulders all. 'It is not worth the keeping: let it go: But shall it? answer, darling, answer, no. And trust me not at all or all in all.' O Master, do ye love my tender rhyme?" And Merlin looked and half believed her true, So tender was her voice, so fair her face, So sweetly gleamed her eyes behind her tears Like sunlight on the plain behind a shower: And yet he answered half indignantly: "Far other was the song that once I heard By this huge oak, sung nearly where we sit: For here we met, some ten or twelve of us, To chase a creature that was current then In these wild woods, the hart with golden horns. It was the time when first the question rose About the founding of a Table Round, That was to be, for love of God and men And noble deeds, the flower of all the world. And each incited each to noble deeds. And while we waited, one, the youngest of us, We could not keep him silent, out he flashed, And into such a song, such fire for fame, Such trumpet-glowings in it, coming down To such a stern and iron-clashing close, That when he stopt we longed

to hurl together, And should have done it; but the beauteous beast Scared by the noise upstarted at our feet, And like a silver shadow slipt away Through the dim land; and all day long we rode Through the dim land against a rushing wind, That glorious roundel echoing in our ears, And chased the flashes of his golden horns Till they vanished by the fairy well That laughs at iron—as our warriors did— Where children cast their pins and nails, and cry, 'Laugh, little well!' but touch it with a sword, It buzzes fiercely round the point; and there We lost him: such a noble song was that. But, Vivien, when you sang me that sweet rhyme, I felt as though you knew this cursed charm, Were proving it on me, and that I lay And felt them slowly ebbing, name and fame." And Vivien answered smiling mournfully: "O mine have ebbed away for evermore, And all through following you to this wild wood, Because I saw you sad, to comfort you. Lo now, what hearts have men! they never mount As high as woman in her selfless mood. And touching fame, howe'er ye scorn my song, Take one verse more—the lady speaks it—this: "'My name, once mine, now thine, is closelier mine, For fame, could fame be mine, that fame were thine, And shame, could shame be thine, that shame were mine. So trust me not at all or all in all.' "Says she not well? and there is more—this rhyme Is like the fair pearl-necklace of the Queen, That burst in dancing, and the pearls were spilt; Some lost, some stolen, some as relics kept. But nevermore the same two sister pearls Ran down the silken thread to kiss each other On her white neck—so is it with this rhyme: It lives dispersedly in many hands, And every minstrel sings it differently; Yet is there one true line, the pearl of pearls: 'Man dreams of Fame while woman wakes to love.' Yea! Love, though Love were of the grossest, carves A portion from the solid present, eats And uses, careless of the rest; but Fame, The Fame that follows death is nothing to us; And what is Fame in life but half-disfame, And counterchanged with darkness? ye yourself Know well that Envy calls you Devil's son, And since ye seem the Master of all Art, They fain would make you Master of all vice." And Merlin locked his hand in hers and said, "I once was looking for a magic weed, And

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

love." And Vivien answered smiling as in wrath: "Have I not sworn? I am not trusted. Good! Well, hide it, hide it; I shall find it out; And being found take heed of Vivien. A woman and not trusted, doubtless I Might feel some sudden turn of anger born Of your misfaith; and your fine epithet Is accurate too, for this full love of mine Without the full heart back may merit well Your term of overstrained. So used as I, My daily wonder is, I love at all. And as to woman's jealousy, O why not? O to what end, except a jealous one, And one to make me jealous if I love, Was this fair charm invented by yourself? I well believe that all about this world Ye cage a buxom captive here and there, Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower From which is no escape for evermore." Then the great Master merrily answered her: "Full many a love in loving youth was mine; I needed then no charm to keep them mine But youth and love; and that full heart of yours Whereof ye prattle, may now assure you mine; So live uncharmed. For those who wrought it first, The wrist is parted from the hand that waved, The feet unmortised from their ankle-bones Who paced it, ages back: but will ye hear The legend as in guerdon for your rhyme? "There lived a king in the most Eastern East, Less old than I, yet older, for my blood Hath earnest in it of far springs to be. A tawny pirate anchored in his port, Whose bark had plundered twenty nameless isles; And passing one, at the high peep of dawn, He saw two cities in a thousand boats All fighting for a woman on the sea. And pushing his black craft among them all, He lightly scattered theirs and brought her off, With loss of half his people arrow-slain; A maid so smooth, so white, so wonderful, They said a light came from her when she moved: And since the pirate would not yield her up, The King impaled him for his piracy; Then made her Queen: but those isle-nurtured eyes Waged such unwilling though successful war On all the youth, they sickened; councils thinned, And armies waned, for magnet-like she drew The rustiest iron of old fighters' hearts; And beasts themselves would worship; camels knelt Unbidden, and the brutes of mountain back That carry kings in castles, bowed black knees Of homage, ringing with their serpent hands, To make her smile,

her golden ankle-bells. What wonder, being jealous, that he sent His horns of proclamation out through all The hundred under-kingdoms that he swayed To find a wizard who might teach the King Some charm, which being wrought upon the Queen Might keep her all his own: to such a one He promised more than ever king has given, A league of mountain full of golden mines, A province with a hundred miles of coast, A palace and a princess, all for him: But on all those who tried and failed, the King Pronounced a dismal sentence, meaning by it To keep the list low and pretenders back, Or like a king, not to be trifled with— Their heads should moulder on the city gates. And many tried and failed, because the charm Of nature in her overbore their own: And many a wizard brow bleached on the walls: And many weeks a troop of carrion crows Hung like a cloud above the gateway towers." And Vivien breaking in upon him, said: "I sit and gather honey; yet, methinks, Thy tongue has tript a little: ask thyself. The lady never made unwilling war With those fine eyes: she had her pleasure in it, And made her good man jealous with good cause. And lived there neither dame nor damsel then Wroth at a lover's loss? were all as tame, I mean, as noble, as the Queen was fair? Not one to flirt a venom at her eyes, Or pinch a murderous dust into her drink, Or make her paler with a poisoned rose? Well, those were not our days: but did they find A wizard? Tell me, was he like to thee? She ceased, and made her lithe arm round his neck Tighten, and then drew back, and let her eyes Speak for her, glowing on him, like a bride's On her new lord, her own, the first of men. He answered laughing, "Nay, not like to me. At last they found—his foragers for charms— A little glassy-headed hairless man, Who lived alone in a great wild on grass; Read but one book, and ever reading grew So grated down and filed away with thought, So lean his eyes were monstrous; while the skin Clung but to crate and basket, ribs and spine. And since he kept his mind on one sole aim, Nor ever touched fierce wine, nor tasted flesh, Nor owned a sensual wish, to him the wall That sunders ghosts and shadow-casting men Became a crystal, and he saw them through it, And heard their voices talk behind the wall, And

learnt their elemental secrets, powers And forces; often o'er the sun's bright eye Drew the vast eyelid of an inky cloud, And lashed it at the base with slanting storm; Or in the noon of mist and driving rain, When the lake whitened and the pinewood roared, And the cairned mountain was a shadow, sunned The world to peace again: here was the man. And so by force they dragged him to the King. And then he taught the King to charm the Queen In such-wise, that no man could see her more, Nor saw she save the King, who wrought the charm, Coming and going, and she lay as dead, And lost all use of life: but when the King Made proffer of the league of golden mines, The province with a hundred miles of coast, The palace and the princess, that old man Went back to his old wild, and lived on grass, And vanished, and his book came down to me." And Vivien answered smiling saucily: "Ye have the book: the charm is written in it: Good: take my counsel: let me know it at once: For keep it like a puzzle chest in chest, With each chest locked and padlocked thirty-fold, And whelm all this beneath as vast a mound As after furious battle turfs the slain On some wild down above the windy deep, I yet should strike upon a sudden means To dig, pick, open, find and read the charm: Then, if I tried it, who should blame me then?" And smiling as a master smiles at one That is not of his school, nor any school But that where blind and naked Ignorance Delivers brawling judgments, unashamed, On all things all day long, he answered her: "Thou read the book, my pretty Vivien! O ay, it is but twenty pages long, But every page having an ample marge, And every marge enclosing in the midst A square of text that looks a little blot, The text no larger than the limbs of fleas; And every square of text an awful charm, Writ in a language that has long gone by. So long, that mountains have arisen since With cities on their flanks—thou read the book! And ever margin scribbled, crost, and crammed With comment, densest condensation, hard To mind and eye; but the long sleepless nights Of my long life have made it easy to me. And none can read the text, not even I; And none can read the comment but myself; And in the comment did I find the charm. O, the results are simple; a mere child Might

use it to the harm of anyone, And never could undo it: ask no more: For though you should not prove it upon me, But keep that oath ye sware, ye might, perchance, Assay it on some one of the Table Round, And all because ye dream they babble of you." And Vivien, frowning in true anger, said: "What dare the full-fed liars say of me? They ride abroad redressing human wrongs! They sit with knife in meat and wine in horn! They bound to holy vows of chastity! Were I not woman, I could tell a tale. But you are man, you well can understand The shame that cannot be explained for shame. Not one of all the drove should touch me: swine!" Then answered Merlin careless of her words: "You breathe but accusation vast and vague, Spleen-born, I think, and proofless. If ye know, Set up the charge ye know, to stand or fall!" And Vivien answered frowning wrathfully: "O ay, what say ye to Sir Valence, him Whose kinsman left him watcher o'er his wife And two fair babes, and went to distant lands; Was one year gone, and on returning found Not two but three? there lay the reckling, one But one hour old! What said the happy sire?" A seven-months' babe had been a truer gift. Those twelve sweet moons confused his fatherhood." Then answered Merlin, "Nay, I know the tale. Sir Valence wedded with an outland dame: Some cause had kept him sundered from his wife: One child they had: it lived with her: she died: His kinsman travelling on his own affair Was charged by Valence to bring home the child. He brought, not found it therefore: take the truth." "O ay," said Vivien, "overtrue a tale. What say ye then to sweet Sir Sagramore, That ardent man? 'to pluck the flower in season,' So says the song, 'I trow it is no treason.' O Master, shall we call him overquick To crop his own sweet rose before the hour?" And Merlin answered, "Overquick art thou To catch a loathly plume fallen from the wing Of that foul bird of rapine whose whole prey Is man's good name: he never wronged his bride. I know the tale. An angry gust of wind Puffed out his torch among the myriad-roomed And many-corridored complexities Of Arthur's palace: then he found a door, And darkling felt the sculptured ornament That wreathen round it made it seem his own; And wearied out made for the couch and

slept, A stainless man beside a stainless maid; And either slept, nor knew of other there; Till the high dawn piercing the royal rose In Arthur's casement glimmered chastely down, Blushing upon them blushing, and at once He rose without a word and parted from her: But when the thing was blazed about the court, The brute world howling forced them into bonds, And as it chanced they are happy, being pure." "O ay," said Vivien, "that were likely too. What say ye then to fair Sir Percivale And of the horrid foulness that he wrought, The saintly youth, the spotless lamb of Christ, Or some black wether of St Satan's fold. What, in the precincts of the chapel-yard, Among the knightly brasses of the graves, And by the cold Hic Jacets of the dead!" And Merlin answered careless of her charge, "A sober man is Percivale and pure; But once in life was flustered with new wine, Then paced for coolness in the chapel-yard; Where one of Satan's shepherdesses caught And meant to stamp him with her master's mark; And that he sinned is not believable; For, look upon his face!—but if he sinned, The sin that practice burns into the blood, And not the one dark hour which brings remorse, Will brand us, after, of whose fold we be: Or else were he, the holy king, whose hymns Are chanted in the minster, worse than all. But is your spleen frothed out, or have ye more?" And Vivien answered frowning yet in wrath: "O ay; what say ye to Sir Lancelot, friend Traitor or true? that commerce with the Queen, I ask you, is it clamoured by the child, Or whispered in the corner? do ye know it?" To which he answered sadly, "Yea, I know it. Sir Lancelot went ambassador, at first, To fetch her, and she watched him from her walls. A rumour runs, she took him for the King, So fixt her fancy on him: let them be. But have ye no one word of loyal praise For Arthur, blameless King and stainless man?" She answered with a low and chuckling laugh: "Man! is he man at all, who knows and winks? Sees what his fair bride is and does, and winks? By which the good King means to blind himself, And blinds himself and all the Table Round To all the foulness that they work. Myself Could call him (were it not for womanhood) The pretty, popular cause such manhood earns, Could call him the main cause of all their

crime; Yea, were he not crowned King, coward, and fool." Then Merlin to his own heart, loathing, said: "O true and tender! O my liege and King! O selfless man and stainless gentleman, Who wouldst against thine own eye-witness fain Have all men true and leal, all women pure; How, in the mouths of base interpreters, From over-fineness not intelligible To things with every sense as false and foul As the poached filth that floods the middle street, Is thy white blamelessness accounted blame!" But Vivien, deeming Merlin overborne By instance, recommenced, and let her tongue Rage like a fire among the noblest names, Polluting, and imputing her whole self, Defaming and defacing, till she left Not even Lancelot brave, nor Galahad clean. Her words had issue other than she willed. He dragged his eyebrow bushes down, and made A snowy penthouse for his hollow eyes, And muttered in himself, "Tell her the charm! So, if she had it, would she rail on me To snare the next, and if she have it not So will she rail. What did the wanton say? 'Not mount as high;' we scarce can sink as low: For men at most differ as Heaven and earth, But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell. I know the Table Round, my friends of old; All brave, and many generous, and some chaste. She cloaks the scar of some repulse with lies; I well believe she tempted them and failed, Being so bitter: for fine plots may fail, Though harlots paint their talk as well as face With colours of the heart that are not theirs. I will not let her know: nine tithes of times Face-flatterer and backbiter are the same. And they, sweet soul, that most impute a crime Are pronest to it, and impute themselves, Wanting the mental range; or low desire Not to feel lowest makes them level all; Yea, they would pare the mountain to the plain, To leave an equal baseness; and in this Are harlots like the crowd, that if they find Some stain or blemish in a name of note, Not grieving that their greatest are so small, Inflate themselves with some insane delight, And judge all nature from her feet of clay, Without the will to lift their eyes, and see Her godlike head crowned with spiritual fire, And touching other worlds. I am weary of her." He spoke in words part heard, in whispers part, Half-suffocated in the hoary fell And

many-wintered fleece of throat and chin. But Vivien, gathering somewhat of his mood, And hearing “harlot” muttered twice or thrice, Leapt from her session on his lap, and stood Stiff as a viper frozen; loathsome sight, How from the rosy lips of life and love, Flashed the bare-grinning skeleton of death! White was her cheek; sharp breaths of anger puffed Her fairy nostril out; her hand half-clenched Went faltering sideways downward to her belt, And feeling; had she found a dagger there (For in a wink the false love turns to hate) She would have stabbed him; but she found it not: His eye was calm, and suddenly she took To bitter weeping like a beaten child, A long, long weeping, not consolable. Then her false voice made way, broken with sobs: “O crueller than was ever told in tale, Or sung in song! O vainly lavished love! O cruel, there was nothing wild or strange, Or seeming shameful—for what shame in love, So love be true, and not as yours is—nothing Poor Vivien had not done to win his trust Who called her what he called her—all her crime, All—all—the wish to prove him wholly hers.” She mused a little, and then clapt her hands Together with a wailing shriek, and said: “Stabbed through the heart’s affections to the heart! Seethed like the kid in its own mother’s milk! Killed with a word worse than a life of blows! I thought that he was gentle, being great: O God, that I had loved a smaller man! I should have found in him a greater heart. O, I, that flattering my true passion, saw The knights, the court, the King, dark in your light, Who loved to make men darker than they are, Because of that high pleasure which I had To seat you sole upon my pedestal Of worship—I am answered, and henceforth The course of life that seemed so flowery to me With you for guide and master, only you, Becomes the sea-cliff pathway broken short, And ending in a ruin—nothing left, But into some low cave to crawl, and there, If the wolf spare me, weep my life away, Killed with inutterable unkindliness.” She paused, she turned away, she hung her head, The snake of gold slid from her hair, the braid Slipt and uncoiled itself, she wept afresh, And the dark wood grew darker toward the storm In silence, while his anger slowly died Within him, till he let his wisdom go For ease of heart, and half believed her

true: Called her to shelter in the hollow oak, “Come from the storm,” and having no reply, Gazed at the heaving shoulder, and the face Hand-hidden, as for utmost grief or shame; Then thrice essayed, by tenderest-touching terms, To sleek her ruffled peace of mind, in vain. At last she let herself be conquered by him, And as the cageling newly flown returns, The seeming-injured simple-hearted thing Came to her old perch back, and settled there. There while she sat, half-falling from his knees, Half-nestled at his heart, and since he saw The slow tear creep from her closed eyelid yet, About her, more in kindness than in love, The gentle wizard cast a shielding arm. But she dislinked herself at once and rose, Her arms upon her breast across, and stood, A virtuous gentlewoman deeply wronged, Upright and flushed before him: then she said: “There must now be no passages of love Betwixt us twain henceforward evermore; Since, if I be what I am grossly called, What should be granted which your own gross heart Would reckon worth the taking? I will go. In truth, but one thing now—better have died Thrice than have asked it once—could make me stay— That proof of trust—so often asked in vain! How justly, after that vile term of yours, I find with grief! I might believe you then, Who knows? once more. Lo! what was once to me Mere matter of the fancy, now hath grown The vast necessity of heart and life. Farewell; think gently of me, for I fear My fate or folly, passing gayer youth For one so old, must be to love thee still. But ere I leave thee let me swear once more That if I schemed against thy peace in this, May yon just heaven, that darkens o’er me, send One flash, that, missing all things else, may make My scheming brain a cinder, if I lie.” Scarce had she ceased, when out of heaven a bolt (For now the storm was close above them) struck, Furrowing a giant oak, and javelining With darted spikes and splinters of the wood The dark earth round. He raised his eyes and saw The tree that shone white-listed through the gloom. But Vivien, fearing heaven had heard her oath, And dazzled by the livid-flickering fork, And deafened with the stammering cracks and claps That followed, flying back and crying out, “O Merlin, though you do not love me, save, Yet save me!” clung to him

and hugged him close; And called him dear protector in her fright, Nor yet forgot her practice in her fright, But wrought upon his mood and hugged him close. The pale blood of the wizard at her touch Took gayer colours, like an opal warmed. She blamed herself for telling hearsay tales: She shook from fear, and for her fault she wept Of petulancy; she called him lord and liege, Her seer, her bard, her silver star of eve, Her God, her Merlin, the one passionate love Of her whole life; and ever overhead Bellowed the tempest, and the rotten branch Snapt in the rushing of the river-rain Above them; and in change of glare and gloom Her eyes and neck glittering went and came; Till now the storm, its burst of passion spent, Moaning and calling out of other lands, Had left the ravaged woodland yet once more To peace; and what should not have been had been, For Merlin, overtalked and overworn, Had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept. Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm Of woven paces and of waving hands, And in the hollow oak he lay as dead, And lost to life and use and name and fame. Then crying “I have made his glory mine,” And shrieking out “O fool!” the harlot leapt Adown the forest, and the thicket closed Behind her, and the forest echoed “fool.”

Lancelot and Elaine

Elaine the fair, Elaine the loveable, Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat, High in her chamber up a tower to the east Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot; Which first she placed where the morning’s earliest ray Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam; Then fearing rust or soilure fashioned for it A case of silk, and braided thereupon All the devices blazoned on the shield In their own tinct, and added, of her wit, A border fantasy of branch and flower, And yellow-throated nestling in the nest. Nor rested thus content, but day by day, Leaving her household and good father, climbed That eastern tower, and entering barred her door, Stript off the case, and read the naked shield, Now guessed a hidden meaning in his arms, Now made a

pretty history to herself Of every dint a sword had beaten in it, And every scratch a lance had made upon it, Conjecturing when and where: this cut is fresh; That ten years back; this dealt him at Caerlyle; That at Caerleon; this at Camelot: And ah God's mercy, what a stroke was there! And here a thrust that might have killed, but God Broke the strong lance, and rolled his enemy down, And saved him: so she lived in fantasy. How came the lily maid by that good shield Of Lancelot, she that knew not even his name? He left it with her, when he rode to tilt For the great diamond in the diamond jousts, Which Arthur had ordained, and by that name Had named them, since a diamond was the prize. For Arthur, long before they crowned him King, Roving the trackless realms of Lyonnesse, Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn. A horror lived about the tarn, and clave Like its own mists to all the mountain side: For here two brothers, one a king, had met And fought together; but their names were lost; And each had slain his brother at a blow; And down they fell and made the glen abhorred: And there they lay till all their bones were bleached, And lichened into colour with the crags: And he, that once was king, had on a crown Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside. And Arthur came, and labouring up the pass, All in a misty moonshine, unawares Had trodden that crowned skeleton, and the skull Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown Rolled into light, and turning on its rims Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn: And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught, And set it on his head, and in his heart Heard murmurs, "Lo, thou likewise shalt be King." Thereafter, when a King, he had the gems Plucked from the crown, and showed them to his knights, Saying, "These jewels, whereupon I chanced Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the King's— For public use: henceforward let there be, Once every year, a joust for one of these: For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow In use of arms and manhood, till we drive The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land Hereafter, which God hinder." Thus he spoke: And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,

With purpose to present them to the Queen, When all were won; but meaning all at once To snare her royal fancy with a boon Worth half her realm, had never spoken word. Now for the central diamond and the last And largest, Arthur, holding then his court Hard on the river nigh the place which now Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere, "Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move To these fair jousts?" "Yea, lord," she said, "ye know it." "Then will ye miss," he answered, "the great deeds Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists, A sight ye love to look on." And the Queen Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King. He thinking that he read her meaning there, "Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more Than many diamonds," yielded; and a heart Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen (However much he yearned to make complete The tale of diamonds for his destined boon) Urged him to speak against the truth, and say, "Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole, And lets me from the saddle;" and the King Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way. No sooner gone than suddenly she began: "To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame! Why go ye not to these fair jousts? the knights Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd Will murmur, 'Lo the shameless ones, who take Their pastime now the trustful King is gone!'" Then Lancelot 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 allowed Of all men: many a bard, without offence, Has linked our names together in his lay, Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere, The pearl of beauty: and our knights at feast Have pledged us in this union, while the King Would listen smiling. How then? is there more? Has Arthur spoken aught? or would yourself, Now weary of my service and devoir, Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord?" She broke into a little scornful

laugh: “Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King, That passionate perfection, my good lord— But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven? He never spake word of reproach to me, He never had a glimpse of mine untruth, He cares not for me: only here today There gleamed a vague suspicion in his eyes: Some meddling rogue has tampered with him—else Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round, And swearing men to vows impossible, To make them like himself: but, friend, to me He is all fault who hath no fault at all: For who loves me must have a touch of earth; The low sun makes the colour: I am yours, Not Arthur’s, as ye know, save by the bond. And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts: The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream When sweetest; and the vermin voices here May buzz so loud—we scorn them, but they sting.” Then answered Lancelot, the chief of knights: “And with what face, after my pretext made, Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I Before a King who honours his own word, As if it were his God’s?” “Yea,” said the Queen, “A moral child without the craft to rule, Else had he not lost me: but listen to me, If I must find you wit: we hear it said That men go down before your spear at a touch, But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name, This conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown: Win! by this kiss you will: and our true King Will then allow your pretext, O my knight, As all for glory; for to speak him true, Ye know right well, how meek soe’er he seem, No keener hunter after glory breathes. He loves it in his knights more than himself: They prove to him his work: win and return.” Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse, Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known, He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare, Chose the green path that showed the rarer foot, And there among the solitary downs, Full often lost in fancy, lost his way; Till as he traced a faintly-shadowed track, That all in loops and links among the dales Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers. Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn. Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man, Who let him into lodging and disarmed. And Lancelot marvelled at the wordless man; And issuing found the Lord of Astolat With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir

Lavaine, Moving to meet him in the castle court; And close behind them stept the lily maid Elaine, his daughter: mother of the house There was not: some light jest among them rose With laughter dying down as the great knight Approached them: then the Lord of Astolat: “Whence comes thou, my guest, and by what name Livest thou between the lips? for by thy state And presence I might guess thee chief of those, After the King, who eat in Arthur’s halls. Him have I seen: the rest, his Table Round, Known as they are, to me they are unknown.” Then answered Sir Lancelot, the chief of knights: “Known am I, and of Arthur’s hall, and known, What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield. But since I go to joust as one unknown At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not, Hereafter ye shall know me—and the shield—I pray you lend me one, if such you have, Blank, or at least with some device not mine.” Then said the Lord of Astolat, “Here is Torre’s: Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre. And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough. His ye can have.” Then added plain Sir Torre, “Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it.” Here laughed the father saying, “Fie, Sir Churl, Is that answer for a noble knight? Allow him! but Lavaine, my younger here, He is so full of lustihood, he will ride, Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour, And set it in this damsel’s golden hair, To make her thrice as wilful as before.” “Nay, father, nay good father, shame me not Before this noble knight,” said young Lavaine, “For nothing. Surely I but played on Torre: He seemed so sullen, vext he could not go: A jest, no more! for, knight, the maiden dreamt That some one put this diamond in her hand, And that it was too slippery to be held, And slipt and fell into some pool or stream, The castle-well, belike; and then I said That if I went and if I fought and won it (But all was jest and joke among ourselves) Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest. But, father, give me leave, an if he will, To ride to Camelot with this noble knight: Win shall I not, but do my best to win: Young as I am, yet would I do my best.” “So will ye grace me,” answered Lancelot, Smiling a moment, “with your fellowship O’er these waste downs whereon I lost myself, Then were I glad of you as guide and friend: And you shall

win this diamond,—as I hear It is a fair large diamond,—if ye may, And yield it to this maiden, if ye will." "A fair large diamond," added plain Sir Torre, "Such be for queens, and not for simple maids." Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground, Elaine, and heard her name so tost about, Flushed slightly at the slight disparagement Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her, Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus returned: "If what is fair be but for what is fair, And only queens are to be counted so, Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth, Not violating the bond of like to like." He spoke and ceased: the lily maid Elaine, Won by the mellow voice before she looked, Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments. The great and guilty love he bare the Queen, In battle with the love he bare his lord, Had marred his face, and marked it ere his time. Another sinning on such heights with one, The flower of all the west and all the world, Had been the sleeker for it: but in him His mood was often like a fiend, and rose And drove him into wastes and solitudes For agony, who was yet a living soul. Marred as he was, he seemed the goodliest man That ever among ladies ate in hall, And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes. However marred, of more than twice her years, Seamed with an ancient swordcut on the cheek, And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes And loved him, with that love which was her doom. Then the great knight, the darling of the court, Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain Hid under grace, as in a smaller time, But kindly man moving among his kind: Whom they with meats and vintage of their best And talk and minstrel melody entertained. And much they asked of court and Table Round, And ever well and readily answered he: But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere, Suddenly speaking of the wordless man, Heard from the Baron that, ten years before, The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue. "He learnt and warned me of their fierce design Against my house, and him they caught and maimed; But I, my sons, and little daughter fled From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods By the great river in a boatman's hut. Dull days were those, till our good Arthur

broke The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill." "O there, great lord, doubtless," Lavaine said, rapt By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth Toward greatness in its elder, "you have fought. O tell us—for we live apart—you know Of Arthur's glorious wars." And Lancelot spoke And answered him at full, as having been With Arthur in the fight which all day long Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem; And in the four loud battles by the shore Of Duglas; that on Bassa; then the war That thundered in and out the gloomy skirts Of Celidon the forest; and again By castle Gurnion, where the glorious King Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head, Carved of one emerald centered in a sun Of silver rays, that lightened as he breathed; And at Caerleon had he helped his lord, When the strong neighings of the wild white Horse Set every gilded parapet shuddering; And up in Agned-Cathregonion too, And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit, Where many a heathen fell; "and on the mount Of Badon I myself beheld the King Charge at the head of all his Table Round, And all his legions crying Christ and him, And break them; and I saw him, after, stand High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume Red as the rising sun with heathen blood, And seeing me, with a great voice he cried, 'They are broken, they are broken!' for the King, However mild he seems at home, nor cares For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts— For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs Saying, his knights are better men than he— Yet in this heathen war the fire of God Fills him: I never saw his like: there lives No greater leader." While he uttered this, Low to her own heart said the lily maid, "Save your own great self, fair lord;" and when he fell From talk of war to traits of pleasantry— Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind— She still took note that when the living smile Died from his lips, across him came a cloud Of melancholy severe, from which again, Whenever in her hovering to and fro The lily maid had striven to make him cheer, There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness Of manners and of nature: and she thought That all was nature, all, perchance, for her. And all night long his face before her lived, As when a painter, poring on a face, Divinely through all hindrance finds the man Behind it, and so

paints him that his face, The shape and colour of a mind and life, Lives for his children, ever at its best And fullest; so the face before her lived, Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full Of noble things, and held her from her sleep. Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine. First in fear, step after step, she stole Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating: Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court, “This shield, my friend, where is it?” and Lavaine Past inward, as she came from out the tower. There to his proud horse Lancelot turned, and smoothed The glossy shoulder, humming to himself. Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew Nearer and stood. He looked, and more amazed Than if seven men had set upon him, saw The maiden standing in the dewy light. He had not dreamed she was so beautiful. Then came on him a sort of sacred fear, For silent, though he greeted her, she stood Rapt on his face as if it were a God’s. Suddenly flashed on her a wild desire, That he should wear her favour at the tilt. She braved a riotous heart in asking for it. “Fair lord, whose name I know not—noble it is, I well believe, the noblest—will you wear My favour at this tourney?” “Nay,” said he, “Fair lady, since I never yet have worn Favour of any lady in the lists. Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know.” “Yea, so,” she answered; “then in wearing mine Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord, That those who know should know you.” And he turned Her counsel up and down within his mind, And found it true, and answered, “True, my child. Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me: What is it?” and she told him “A red sleeve Broidered with pearls,” and brought it: then he bound Her token on his helmet, with a smile Saying, “I never yet have done so much For any maiden living,” and the blood Sprang to her face and filled her with delight; But left her all the paler, when Lavaine Returning brought the yet-unblazoned shield, His brother’s; which he gave to Lancelot, Who parted with his own to fair Elaine: “Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield In keeping till I come.” “A grace to me,” She answered, “twice today. I am your squire!” Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, “Lily maid, For fear our people call you

lily maid In earnest, let me bring your colour back; Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed:" So kissed her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand, And thus they moved away: she stayed a minute, Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there— Her bright hair blown about the serious face Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss— Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield In silence, while she watched their arms far-off Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs. Then to her tower she climbed, and took the shield, There kept it, and so lived in fantasy. Meanwhile the new companions past away Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs, To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight Not far from Camelot, now for forty years A hermit, who had prayed, laboured and prayed, And ever labouring had scooped himself In the white rock a chapel and a hall On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave, And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry; The green light from the meadows underneath Struck up and lived along the milky roofs; And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees And poplars made a noise of falling showers. And thither wending there that night they bode. But when the next day broke from underground, And shot red fire and shadows through the cave, They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away: Then Lancelot saying, "Hear, but hold my name Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake," Abashed young Lavaine, whose instant reverence, Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise, But left him leave to stammer, "Is it indeed?" And after muttering "The great Lancelot, At last he got his breath and answered, "One, One have I seen—that other, our liege lord, The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings, Of whom the people talk mysteriously, He will be there—then were I stricken blind That minute, I might say that I had seen." So spake Lavaine, and when they reached the lists By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes Run through the peopled gallery which half round Lay like a rainbow fallen upon the grass, Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat Robed in red samite, easily to be known, Since to his crown the golden dragon clung, And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold, And from the carven-work behind him crept Two

dragons gilded, sloping down to make Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them Through knots and loops and folds innumerable Fled ever through the woodwork, till they found The new design wherein they lost themselves, Yet with all ease, so tender was the work: And, in the costly canopy o'er him set, Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king. Then Lancelot answered young Lavaine and said, "Me you call great: mine is the firmer seat, The truer lance: but there is many a youth Now crescent, who will come to all I am And overcome it; and in me there dwells No greatness, save it be some far-off touch Of greatness to know well I am not great: There is the man." And Lavaine gaped upon him As on a thing miraculous, and anon The trumpets blew; and then did either side, They that assailed, and they that held the lists, Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move, Meet in the midst, and there so furiously Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive, If any man that day were left afield, The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms. And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw Which were the weaker; then he hurled into it Against the stronger: little need to speak Of Lancelot in his glory! King, duke, earl, Count, baron—whom he smote, he overthrew. But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin, Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists, Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight Should do and almost overdo the deeds Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, "Lo! What is he? I do not mean the force alone— The grace and versatility of the man! Is it not Lancelot?" "When has Lancelot worn Favour of any lady in the lists? Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know." "How then? who then?" a fury seized them all, A fiery family passion for the name Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs. They couched their spears and pricked their steeds, and thus, Their plumes driven backward by the wind they made In moving, all together down upon him Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea, Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies, Down on a bark, and overbears the bark, And him that helms it, so they overbore Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear Down-glancing lamed the

charger, and a spear Pricked sharply his own cuirass, and the head Pierced through his side, and there snapt, and remained. Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully; He bore a knight of old repute to the earth, And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay. He up the side, sweating with agony, got, But thought to do while he might yet endure, And being lustily holpen by the rest, His party,—though it seemed half-miracle To those he fought with,—drave his kith and kin, And all the Table Round that held the lists, Back to the barrier; then the trumpets blew Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve Of scarlet, and the pearls; and all the knights, His party, cried "Advance and take thy prize The diamond;" but he answered, "Diamond me No diamonds! for God's love, a little air! Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death! Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not." He spoke, and vanished suddenly from the field With young Lavaine into the poplar grove. There from his charger down he slid, and sat, Gasping to Sir Lavaine, "Draw the lance-head:" "Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot," said Lavaine, "I dread me, if I draw it, you will die." But he, "I die already with it: draw— Draw,"—and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan, And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank For the pure pain, and wholly swooned away. Then came the hermit out and bare him in, There stanched his wound; and there, in daily doubt Whether to live or die, for many a week Hid from the wide world's rumour by the grove Of poplars with their noise of falling showers, And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay. But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists, His party, knights of utmost North and West, Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles, Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him, "Lo, Sire, our knight, through whom we won the day, Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize Untaken, crying that his prize is death." "Heaven hinder," said the King, "that such an one, So great a knight as we have seen today— He seemed to me another Lancelot— Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot— He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore, rise, O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight. Wounded and wearied needs must he be

near. I charge you that you get at once to horse. And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given: His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him No customary honour: since the knight Came not to us, of us to claim the prize, Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take This diamond, and deliver it, and return, And bring us where he is, and how he fares, And cease not from your quest until ye find." So saying, from the carven flower above, To which it made a restless heart, he took, And gave, the diamond: then from where he sat At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose, With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince In the mid might and flourish of his May, Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong, And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot, Nor often loyal to his word, and now Wroth that the King's command to sally forth In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings. So all in wrath he got to horse and went; While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood, Past, thinking "Is it Lancelot who hath come Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain Of glory, and hath added wound to wound, And ridden away to die?" So feared the King, And, after two days' tarriance there, returned. Then when he saw the Queen, embracing asked, "Love, are you yet so sick?" "Nay, lord," she said. "And where is Lancelot?" Then the Queen amazed, "Was he not with you? won he not your prize?" "Nay, but one like him." "Why that like was he." And when the King demanded how she knew, Said, "Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us, Than Lancelot told me of a common talk That men went down before his spear at a touch, But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name Conquered; and therefore would he hide his name From all men, even the King, and to this end Had made a pretext of a hindering wound, That he might joust unknown of all, and learn If his old prowess were in aught decayed; And added, 'Our true Arthur, when he learns, Will well allow me pretext, as for gain Of purer glory.'" Then replied the King: "Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been, In lieu of idly dallying with the truth, To have trusted

me as he hath trusted thee. Surely his King and most familiar friend Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed, Albeit I know my knights fantastical, So fine a fear in our large Lancelot Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains But little cause for laughter: his own kin— Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this!— His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him; So that he went sore wounded from the field: Yet good news too: for goodly hopes are mine That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart. He wore, against his wont, upon his helm A sleeve of scarlet, broidered with great pearls, Some gentle maiden's gift." "Yea, lord," she said, "Thy hopes are mine," and saying that, she choked, And sharply turned about to hide her face, Past to her chamber, and there flung herself Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it, And clenched her fingers till they bit the palm, And shrieked out "Traitor" to the unhearing wall, Then flashed into wild tears, and rose again, And moved about her palace, proud and pale. Gawain the while through all the region round Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest, Touched at all points, except the poplar grove, And came at last, though late, to Astolat: Whom glittering in enamelled arms the maid Glanced at, and cried, "What news from Camelot, lord? What of the knight with the red sleeve?" "He won." "I knew it," she said. "But parted from the jousts Hurt in the side," whereat she caught her breath; Through her own side she felt the sharp lance go; Thereon she smote her hand: wellnigh she swooned: And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince Reported who he was, and on what quest Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find The victor, but had ridden a random round To seek him, and had wearied of the search. To whom the Lord of Astolat, "Bide with us, And ride no more at random, noble Prince! Here was the knight, and here he left a shield; This will he send or come for: furthermore Our son is with him; we shall hear anon, Needs must hear." To this the courteous Prince Accorded with his wonted courtesy, Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it, And stayed; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine: Where could be found face daintier? then her shape From forehead down to foot,

perfect—again From foot to forehead exquisitely turned: “Well—if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!” And oft they met among the garden yews, And there he set himself to play upon her With sallying wit, free flashes from a height Above her, graces of the court, and songs, Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence And amorous adulation, till the maid Rebelled 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, crowned with gold, Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mocked: “Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true man!” “And right was I,” she answered merrily, “I, Who dreamed my knight the greatest knight of all.” “And if I dreamed,” said Gawain, “that you love This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, ye know it! Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?” Full simple was her answer, “What know I? My brethren have been all my fellowship; And I, when often they have talked of love, Wished it had been my mother, for they talked, Meseemed, of what they knew not; so myself— I know not if I know what true love is, But if I know, then, if I love not him, I know there is none other I can love.” “Yea, by God’s death,” said he, “ye love him well, But would not, knew ye what all others know, And whom he loves.” “So be it,” cried Elaine, And lifted her fair face and moved away: But he pursued her, calling, “Stay a little! One golden minute’s grace! he wore your sleeve: Would he break faith with one I may not name? Must our true man change like a leaf at last? Nay—like enow: why then, far be it from me To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves! And, damsel, for I deem you know full well Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave My quest with you; the diamond also: here! For if you love, it will be sweet to give it; And if he love, it will be sweet to have it From your own

hand; and whether he love or not, A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well A thousand times!—a thousand times farewell! Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two May meet at court hereafter: there, I think, So ye will learn the courtesies of the court, We two shall know each other." Then he gave, And slightly kissed the hand to which he gave, The diamond, and all wearied of the quest Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went A true-love ballad, lightly rode away. Thence to the court he past; there told the King What the King knew, "Sir Lancelot is the knight." And added, "Sire, my liege, so much I learnt; But failed to find him, though I rode all round The region: but I lighted on the maid Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him; and to her, Deeming our courtesy is the truest law, I gave the diamond: she will render it; For by mine head she knows his hiding-place." The seldom-frowning King frowned, and replied, "Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget Obedience is the courtesy due to kings." He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe, For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word, Lingered that other, staring after him; Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzzed abroad About the maid of Astolat, and her love. All ears were pricked at once, all tongues were loosed: "The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot, Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat." Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all Had marvel what the maid might be, but most Predoomed her as unworthy. One old dame Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news. She, that had heard the noise of it before, But sorrowing Lancelot should have stooped so low, Marred her friend's aim with pale tranquillity. So ran the tale like fire about the court, Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared: Till even the knights at banquet twice or thrice Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen, And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat With lips severely placid, felt the knot Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen Crushed the wild passion out against the floor Beneath the banquet, where all the meats became As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged. But far away the maid in Astolat, Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept

The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart, Crept to her father, while he mused alone, Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said, “Father, you call me wilful, and the fault Is yours who let me have my will, and now, Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?” “Nay,” said he, “surely.” “Wherefore, let me hence,” She answered, “and find out our dear Lavaine.” “Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine: Bide,” answered he: “we needs must hear anon Of him, and of that other.” “Ay,” she said, “And of that other, for I needs must hence And find that other, wheresoe’er he be, And with mine own hand give his diamond to him, Lest I be found as faithless in the quest As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me. Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself, Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden’s aid. The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound, My father, to be sweet and serviceable To noble knights in sickness, as ye know When these have worn their tokens: let me hence I pray you.” Then her father nodding said, “Ay, ay, the diamond: wit ye well, my child, Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole, Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it— And sure I think this fruit is hung too high For any mouth to gape for save a queen’s— Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone, Being so very wilful you must go.” Lightly, her suit allowed, she slipt away, And while she made her ready for her ride, Her father’s latest word hummed in her ear, “Being so very wilful you must go,” And changed itself and echoed in her heart, “Being so very wilful you must die.” But she was happy enough and shook it off, As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us; And in her heart she answered it and said, “What matter, so I help him back to life?” Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide Rode o’er the long backs of the bushless downs To Camelot, and before the city-gates Came on her brother with a happy face Making a roan horse caper and curvet For pleasure all about a field of flowers: Whom when she saw, “Lavaine,” she cried, “Lavaine, How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?” He amazed, “Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot! How know ye my lord’s name is Lancelot?” But when the maid had told him all her tale, Then

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

many a night: and Lancelot Would, though he called his wound a little hurt Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem Uncourteous, even he: but the meek maid Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him Meeker than any child to a rough nurse, Milder than any mother to a sick child, And never woman yet, since man's first fall, Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love Upbore her; till the hermit, skilled in all The simples and the science of that time, Told him that her fine care had saved his life. And the sick man forgot her simple blush, Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine, Would listen for her coming and regret Her parting step, and held her tenderly, And loved her with all love except the love Of man and woman when they love their best, Closest and sweetest, and had died the death In any knightly fashion for her sake. And peradventure had he seen her first She might have made this and that other world Another world for the sick man; but now The shackles of an old love straitened him, His honour rooted in dishonour stood, And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true. Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made Full many a holy vow and pure resolve. These, as but born of sickness, could not live: For when the blood ran lustier in him again, Full often the bright image of one face, Making a treacherous quiet in his heart, Dispersed his resolution like a cloud. Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace Beamed on his fancy, spoke, he answered not, Or short and coldly, and she knew right well What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant She knew not, and the sorrow dimmed her sight, And drave her ere her time across the fields Far into the rich city, where alone She murmured, "Vain, in vain: it cannot be. He will not love me: how then? must I die?" Then as a little helpless innocent bird, That has but one plain passage of few notes, Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er For all an April morning, till the ear Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid Went half the night repeating, "Must I die?" And now to right she turned, and now to left, And found no ease in turning or in rest; And "Him or death," she muttered, "death or him," Again and like a burthen, "Him or death." But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,

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

you with broad land and territory Even to the half my realm beyond the seas, So that would make you happy: furthermore, Even to the death, as though ye were my blood, In all your quarrels will I be your knight. This I will do, dear damsel, for your sake, And more than this I cannot." While he spoke She neither blushed nor shook, but deathly-pale Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied: "Of all this will I nothing;" and so fell, And thus they bore her swooning to her tower. Then spake, to whom through those black walls of yew Their talk had pierced, her father: "Ay, a flash, I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead. Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot. I pray you, use some rough discourtesy To blunt or break her passion." Lancelot said, "That were against me: what I can I will;" And there that day remained, and toward even Sent for his shield: full meekly rose the maid, Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield; Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones, Unclasping flung the casement back, and looked Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone. And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound; And she by tact of love was well aware That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him. And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand, Nor bad farewell, but sadly rode away. This was the one discourtesy that he used. So in her tower alone the maiden sat: His very shield was gone; only the case, Her own poor work, her empty labour, left. But still she heard him, still his picture formed And grew between her and the pictured wall. Then came her father, saying in low tones, "Have comfort," whom she greeted quietly. Then came her brethren saying, "Peace to thee, Sweet sister," whom she answered with all calm. But when they left her to herself again, Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field Approaching through the darkness, called; the owls Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms Of evening, and the moanings of the wind. And in those days she made a little song, And called her song "The Song of Love and Death," And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing. "Sweet is true love though given in vain, in vain; And sweet is death who puts an end to pain: I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

“Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be: Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me. O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die. “Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away, Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay, I know not which is sweeter, no, not I. “I fain would follow love, if that could be; I needs must follow death, who calls for me; Call and I follow, I follow! let me die.” High with the last line scaled her voice, and this, All in a fiery dawning wild with wind That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought With shuddering, “Hark the Phantom of the house That ever shrieks before a death,” and called The father, and all three in hurry and fear Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn Flared on her face, she shrilling, “Let me die!” As when we dwell upon a word we know, Repeating, till the word we know so well Becomes a wonder, and we know not why, So dwelt the father on her face, and thought “Is this Elaine?” till back the maiden fell, Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay, Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes. At last she said, “Sweet brothers, yesternight I seemed a curious little maid again, As happy as when we dwelt among the woods, And when ye used to take me with the flood Up the great river in the boatman’s boat. Only ye would not pass beyond the cape That has the poplar on it: there ye fixt Your limit, oft returning with the tide. And yet I cried because ye would not pass Beyond it, and far up the shining flood Until we found the palace of the King. And yet ye would not; but this night I dreamed That I was all alone upon the flood, And then I said, ‘Now shall I have my will:’ And there I woke, but still the wish remained. So let me hence that I may pass at last Beyond the poplar and far up the flood, Until I find the palace of the King. There will I enter in among them all, And no man there will dare to mock at me; But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me, And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me; Gawain, who bad a thousand farewells to me, Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bad me one: And there the King will know me and my love, And there the Queen herself will pity me, And all the gentle court will welcome me, And after my long voyage I shall rest!” “Peace,” said her father, “O my child, ye seem Light-headed, for what

force is yours to go So far, being sick? and wherefore would ye look On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all?" Then the rough Torre began to heave and move, And bluster into stormy sobs and say, "I never loved him: an I meet with him, I care not howsoever great he be, Then will I strike at him and strike him down, Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead, For this discomfort he hath done the house." To whom the gentle sister made reply, "Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth, Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault Not to love me, than it is mine to love Him of all men who seems to me the highest." "Highest?" the father answered, echoing "highest?" (He meant to break the passion in her) "nay, Daughter, I know not what you call the highest; But this I know, for all the people know it, He loves the Queen, and in an open shame: And she returns his love in open shame; If this be high, what is it to be low?" Then spake the lily maid of Astolat: "Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I For anger: these are slanders: never yet Was noble man but made ignoble talk. He makes no friend who never made a foe. But now it is my glory to have loved One peerless, without stain: so let me pass, My father, howsoe'er I seem to you, Not all unhappy, having loved God's best And greatest, though my love had no return: Yet, seeing you desire your child to live, Thanks, but you work against your own desire; For if I could believe the things you say I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease, Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die." So when the ghostly man had come and gone, She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven, Besought Lavaine to write as she devised A letter, word for word; and when he asked "Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord? Then will I bear it gladly;" she replied, "For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world, But I myself must bear it." Then he wrote The letter she devised; which being writ And folded, "O sweet father, tender and true, Deny me not," she said—"ye never yet Denied my fancies—this, however strange, My latest: lay the letter in my hand A little ere I die, and close the hand Upon it; I shall guard it even in death. And when the heat is gone from out my heart, Then take the little bed on which I died For

Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's For richness, and me also like the Queen In all I have of rich, and lay me on it. And let there be prepared a chariot-bier To take me to the river, and a barge Be ready on the river, clothed in black. I go in state to court, to meet the Queen. There surely I shall speak for mine own self, And none of you can speak for me so well. And therefore let our dumb old man alone Go with me, he can steer and row, and he Will guide me to that palace, to the doors." She ceased: her father promised; whereupon She grew so cheerful that they deemed her death Was rather in the fantasy than the blood. But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh Her father laid the letter in her hand, And closed the hand upon it, and she died. So that day there was dole in Astolat. But when the next sun brake from underground, Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier Past like a shadow through the field, that shone Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge, Palled all its length in blackest samite, lay. There sat the lifelong creature of the house, Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck, Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face. So those two brethren from the chariot took And on the black decks laid her in her bed, Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung The silken case with braided blazonings, And kissed her quiet brows, and saying to her "Sister, farewell for ever," and again "Farewell, sweet sister," parted all in tears. Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead, Oared by the dumb, went upward with the flood— In her right hand the lily, in her left The letter—all her bright hair streaming down— And all the coverlid was cloth of gold Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white All but her face, and that clear-featured face Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead, But fast asleep, and lay as though she smiled. That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved Audience of Guinevere, to give at last, The price of half a realm, his costly gift, Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow, With deaths of others, and almost his own, The nine-years-fought-for diamonds: for he saw One of her house, and sent him to the Queen Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed With such and so unmoved a majesty She might have

seemed her statue, but that he, Low-drooping till he wellnigh kissed her feet For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye The shadow of some piece of pointed lace, In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls, And parted, laughing in his courtly heart. All in an oriel on the summer side, Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream, They met, and Lancelot kneeling uttered, "Queen, Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy, Take, what I had not won except for you, These jewels, and make me happy, making them An armlet for the roundest arm on earth, Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words: Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words Perchance, we both can pardon: but, my Queen, I hear of rumours flying through your court. Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife, Should have in it an absoluter trust To make up that defect: let rumours be: When did not rumours fly? these, as I trust That you trust me in your own nobleness, I may not well believe that you believe." While thus he spoke, half turned away, the Queen Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off, Till all the place whereon she stood was green; Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand Received at once and laid aside the gems There on a table near her, and replied: "It may be, I am quicker of belief Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake. Our bond is not the bond of man and wife. This good is in it, whatsoe'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 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 himself, Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will— She shall not have them." Saying which she seized, And, through the casement standing wide for heat, Flung them, and down they flashed, and smote the stream. Then from the smitten surface flashed, as it were, Diamonds to meet them, and they past away. Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain At love, life, all things, on the window ledge, Close underneath his eyes, and right across Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge. Whereon the lily maid of Astolat Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night. But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away To weep and wail in secret; and the barge, On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused. There two stood armed, and kept the door; to whom, All up the marble stair, tier over tier, Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that asked "What is it?" but that oarsman's haggard face, As hard and still as is the face that men Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks On some cliff-side, appalled them, and they said "He is enchanted, cannot speak—and she, Look how she sleeps—the Fairy Queen, so fair! Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood? Or come to take the King to Fairyland? For some do hold our Arthur cannot die, But that he passes into Fairyland." While thus they babbled of the King, the King Came girt with knights: then turned the tongueless man From the half-face to the full eye, and rose And pointed to the damsel, and the doors. So Arthur bad the meek Sir Percivale And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid; And reverently they bore her into hall. Then came the fine Gawain and wondered at her, And Lancelot later came and mused at her, And last the Queen herself, and pitied her: But Arthur spied the letter in her hand, Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all: "Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake, I, sometime called the maid of Astolat, Come, for you left me taking no farewell, Hither, to take my last farewell of you. I loved you, and my love had no return, And therefore my true love has been my death. And

therefore to our Lady Guinevere, And to all other ladies, I make moan: Pray for my soul, and yield me burial. Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot, As thou art a knight peerless." Thus he read; And ever in the reading, lords and dames Wept, looking often from his face who read To hers which lay so silent, and at times, So touched were they, half-thinking that her lips, Who had devised the letter, moved again. Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all: "My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear, Know that for this most gentle maiden's death Right heavy am I; for good she was and true, But loved me with a love beyond all love In women, whomsoever I have known. Yet to be loved makes not to love again; Not at my years, however it hold in youth. I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave No cause, not willingly, for such a love: To this I call my friends in testimony, Her brethren, and her father, who himself Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use, To break her passion, some discourtesy Against my nature: what I could, I did. I left her and I bad her no farewell; Though, had I dreamt the damsel would have died, I might have put my wits to some rough use, And helped her from herself." Then said the Queen (Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm) "Ye might at least have done her so much grace, Fair lord, as would have helped her from her death." He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell, He adding, "Queen, she would not be content Save that I wedded her, which could not be. Then might she follow me through the world, she asked; It could not be. I told her that her love Was but the flash of youth, would darken down To rise hereafter in a stiller flame Toward one more worthy of her—then would I, More specially were he, she wedded, poor, Estate them with large land and territory In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas, To keep them in all joyance: more than this I could not; this she would not, and she died." He pausing, Arthur answered, "O my knight, It will be to thy worship, as my knight, And mine, as head of all our Table Round, To see that she be buried worshipfully." So toward that shrine which then in all the realm Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went The marshalled Order of their Table Round, And Lancelot sad beyond his

wont, to see The maiden buried, not as one unknown, Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies, And mass, and rolling music, like a queen. And when the knights had laid her comely head Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings, Then Arthur spake among them, “Let her tomb Be costly, and her image thereupon, And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet Be carven, and her lily in her hand. And let the story of her dolorous voyage For all true hearts be blazoned on her tomb In letters gold and azure!” which was wrought Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames And people, from the high door streaming, brake Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen, Who marked Sir Lancelot where he moved apart, Drew near, and sighed in passing, “Lancelot, Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love.” He answered with his eyes upon the ground, “That is love’s curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven.” But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows, Approached him, and with full affection said, “Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have Most joy and most affiance, for I know What thou hast been in battle by my side, And many a time have watched thee at the tilt Strike down the lusty and long practised knight, And let the younger and unskilled go by To win his honour and to make his name, And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man Made to be loved; but now I would to God, Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes, Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems, By God for thee alone, and from her face, If one may judge the living by the dead, Delicately pure and marvellously fair, Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons Born to the glory of thine name and fame, My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake.” Then answered Lancelot, “Fair she was, my King, Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be. To doubt her fairness were to want an eye, To doubt her pureness were to want a heart— Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love Could bind him, but free love will not be bound.” “Free love, so bound, were freest,” said the King. “Let love be free; free love is for the best: And, after heaven, on our dull side of death, What should be best, if not so pure a love Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee She failed to bind, though being, as I

think, Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know." And Lancelot answered nothing, but he went, And at the inrunning of a little brook Sat by the river in a cove, and watched The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes And saw the barge that brought her moving down, Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said Low in himself, "Ah simple heart and sweet, Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul? Ay, that will I. Farewell too—now at last— Farewell, fair lily. 'Jealousy in love?' Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride? Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love, May not your crescent fear for name and fame Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes? Why did the King dwell on my name to me? Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach, Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake Caught from his mother's arms—the wondrous one Who passes through the vision of the night— She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn She kissed me saying, 'Thou art fair, my child, As a king's son,' and often in her arms She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere. Would she had drowned me in it, where'er it be! For what am I? what profits me my name Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it: Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain; Now grown a part of me: but what use in it? To make men worse by making my sin known? Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great? Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break These bonds that so defame me: not without She wills it: would I, if she willed it? nay, Who knows? but if I would not, then may God, I pray him, send a sudden Angel down To seize me by the hair and bear me far, And fling me deep in that forgotten mere, Among the tumbled fragments of the hills." So groaned Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain, Not knowing he should die a holy man.

The Holy Grail

From noiseful arms, and acts of prowess done In tournament or tilt, Sir Percivale,

Whom Arthur and his knighthood called The Pure, Had passed into the silent life of prayer, Praise, fast, and alms; and leaving for the cowl The helmet in an abbey far away From Camelot, there, and not long after, died. And one, a fellow-monk among the rest, Ambrosius, loved him much beyond the rest, And honoured him, and wrought into his heart A way by love that wakened love within, To answer that which came: and as they sat Beneath a world-old yew-tree, darkening half The cloisters, on a gustful April morn That puffed the swaying branches into smoke Above them, ere the summer when he died The monk Ambrosius questioned Percivale: "O brother, I have seen this yew-tree smoke, Spring after spring, for half a hundred years: For never have I known the world without, Nor ever strayed beyond the pale: but thee, When first thou camest—such a courtesy Spake through the limbs and in the voice—I knew For one of those who eat in Arthur's hall; For good ye are and bad, and like to coins, Some true, some light, but every one of you Stamped with the image of the King; and now Tell me, what drove thee from the Table Round, My brother? was it earthly passion crost?" "Nay," said the knight; "for no such passion mine. But the sweet vision of the Holy Grail Drove me from all vainglories, rivalries, And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out Among us in the jousts, while women watch Who wins, who falls; and waste the spiritual strength Within us, better offered up to Heaven." To whom the monk: "The Holy Grail!—I trust We are green in Heaven's eyes; but here too much We moulder—as to things without I mean— Yet one of your own knights, a guest of ours, Told us of this in our refectory, But spake with such a sadness and so low We heard not half of what he said. What is it? The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?" "Nay, monk! what phantom?" answered Percivale. "The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord Drank at the last sad supper with his own. This, from the blessed land of Aromat— After the day of darkness, when the dead Went wandering o'er Moriah—the good saint Arimathaean Joseph, journeying brought To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord. And there awhile it bode; and if a man

Could touch or see it, he was healed at once, By faith, of all his ills. But then the times Grew to such evil that the holy cup Was caught away to Heaven, and disappeared." To whom the monk: "From our old books I know That Joseph came of old to Glastonbury, And there the heathen Prince, Arviragus, Gave him an isle of marsh whereon to build; And there he built with wattles from the marsh A little lonely church in days of yore, For so they say, these books of ours, but seem Mute of this miracle, far as I have read. But who first saw the holy thing today?" "A woman," answered Percivale, "a nun, And one no further off in blood from me Than sister; and if ever holy maid With knees of adoration wore the stone, A holy maid; though never maiden glowed, But that was in her earlier maidenhood, With such a fervent flame of human love, Which being rudely blunted, glanced and shot Only to holy things; to prayer and praise She gave herself, to fast and alms. And yet, Nun as she was, the scandal of the Court, Sin against Arthur and the Table Round, And the strange sound of an adulterous race, Across the iron grating of her cell Beat, and she prayed and fasted all the more. "And he to whom she told her sins, or what Her all but utter whiteness held for sin, A man wellnigh a hundred winters old, Spake often with her of the Holy Grail, A legend handed down through five or six, And each of these a hundred winters old, From our Lord's time. And when King Arthur made His Table Round, and all men's hearts became Clean for a season, surely he had thought That now the Holy Grail would come again; But sin broke out. Ah, Christ, that it would come, And heal the world of all their wickedness! 'O Father!' asked the maiden, 'might it come To me by prayer and fasting?' 'Nay,' said he, 'I know not, for thy heart is pure as snow.' And so she prayed and fasted, till the sun Shone, and the wind blew, through her, and I thought She might have risen and floated when I saw her. "For on a day she sent to speak with me. And when she came to speak, behold her eyes Beyond my knowing of them, beautiful, Beyond all knowing of them, wonderful, Beautiful in the light of holiness. And 'O my brother Percivale,' she said, 'Sweet brother, I have seen the Holy Grail: For, waked at dead of night, I

heard a sound As of a silver horn from o'er the hills Blown, and I thought, "It is not Arthur's use To hunt by moonlight;" and the slender sound As from a distance beyond distance grew Coming upon me—O never harp nor horn, Nor aught we blow with breath, or touch with hand, Was like that music as it came; and then Streamed through my cell a cold and silver beam, And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail, Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive, Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed With rosy colours leaping on the wall; And then the music faded, and the Grail Past, and the beam decayed, and from the walls The rosy quiverings died into the night. So now the Holy Thing is here again Among us, brother, fast thou too and pray, And tell thy brother knights to fast and pray, That so perchance the vision may be seen By thee and those, and all the world be healed.' "Then leaving the pale nun, I spake of this To all men; and myself fasted and prayed Always, and many among us many a week Fasted and prayed even to the uttermost, Expectant of the wonder that would be. "And one there was among us, ever moved Among us in white armour, Galahad. 'God make thee good as thou art beautiful,' Said Arthur, when he dubbed him knight; and none, In so young youth, was ever made a knight Till Galahad; and this Galahad, when he heard My sister's vision, filled me with amaze; His eyes became so like her own, they seemed Hers, and himself her brother more than I. "Sister or brother none had he; but some Called him a son of Lancelot, and some said Begotten by enchantment—chatterers they, Like birds of passage piping up and down, That gape for flies—we know not whence they come; For when was Lancelot wanderingly lewd? "But she, the wan sweet maiden, shore away Clean from her forehead all that wealth of hair Which made a silken mat-work for her feet; And out of this she plaited broad and long A strong sword-belt, and wove with silver thread And crimson in the belt a strange device, A crimson grail within a silver beam; And saw the bright boy-knight, and bound it on him, Saying, 'My knight, my love, my knight of heaven, O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine, I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt. Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen, And

break through all, till one will crown thee king Far in the spiritual city:' and as she spake She sent the deathless passion in her eyes Through him, and made him hers, and laid her mind On him, and he believed in her belief. "Then came a year of miracle: O brother, In our great hall there stood a vacant chair, Fashioned by Merlin ere he past away, And carven with strange figures; and in and out The figures, like a serpent, ran a scroll Of letters in a tongue no man could read. And Merlin called it 'The Siege perilous,' Perilous for good and ill; 'for there,' he said, 'No man could sit but he should lose himself:' And once by misadvertence Merlin sat In his own chair, and so was lost; but he, Galahad, when he heard of Merlin's doom, Cried, 'If I lose myself, I save myself!' "Then on a summer night it came to pass, While the great banquet lay along the hall, That Galahad would sit down in Merlin's chair. "And all at once, as there we sat, we heard A cracking and a riving of the roofs, And rending, and a blast, and overhead Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry. And in the blast there smote along the hall A beam of light seven times more clear than day: And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail All over covered with a luminous cloud. And none might see who bare it, and it past. But every knight beheld his fellow's face As in a glory, and all the knights arose, And staring each at other like dumb men Stood, till I found a voice and sware a vow. "I sware a vow before them all, that I, Because I had not seen the Grail, would ride A twelvemonth and a day in quest of it, Until I found and saw it, as the nun My sister saw it; and Galahad sware the vow, And good Sir Bors, our Lancelot's cousin, sware, And Lancelot sware, and many among the knights, And Gawain sware, and louder than the rest." Then spake the monk Ambrosius, asking him, "What said the King? Did Arthur take the vow?" "Nay, for my lord," said Percivale, "the King, Was not in hall: for early that same day, Scaped through a cavern from a bandit hold, An outraged maiden sprang into the hall Crying on help: for all her shining hair Was smeared with earth, and either milky arm Red-rent with hooks of bramble, and all she wore Torn as a sail that leaves the rope is torn In tempest: so the King arose and went To smoke the

scandalous hive of those wild bees That made such honey in his realm. Howbeit Some little of this marvel he too saw, Returning o'er the plain that then began To darken under Camelot; whence the King Looked up, calling aloud, 'Lo, there! the roofs Of our great hall are rolled in thunder-smoke! Pray Heaven, they be not smitten by the bolt.' For dear to Arthur was that hall of ours, As having there so oft with all his knights Feasted, and as the stateliest under heaven. "O brother, had you known our mighty hall, Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago! For all the sacred mount of Camelot, And all the dim rich city, roof by roof, Tower after tower, spire beyond spire, By grove, and garden-lawn, and rushing brook, Climbs to the mighty hall that Merlin built. And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall: And in the lowest beasts are slaying men, And in the second men are slaying beasts, And on the third are warriors, perfect men, And on the fourth are men with growing wings, And over all one statue in the mould Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown, And peaked wings pointed to the Northern Star. And eastward fronts the statue, and the crown And both the wings are made of gold, and flame At sunrise till the people in far fields, Wasted so often by the heathen hordes, Behold it, crying, 'We have still a King.' "And, brother, had you known our hall within, Broader and higher than any in all the lands! Where twelve great windows blazon Arthur's wars, And all the light that falls upon the board Streams through the twelve great battles of our King. Nay, one there is, and at the eastern end, Wealthy with wandering lines of mount and mere, Where Arthur finds the brand Excalibur. And also one to the west, and counter to it, And blank: and who shall blazon it? when and how?— O there, perchance, when all our wars are done, The brand Excalibur will be cast away. "So to this hall full quickly rode the King, In horror lest the work by Merlin wrought, Dreamlike, should on the sudden vanish, wrapt In unremorseful folds of rolling fire. And in he rode, and up I glanced, and saw The golden dragon sparkling over all: And many of those who burnt the hold, their arms Hacked, and their foreheads grimed with smoke, and seared, Followed,

and in among bright faces, ours, Full of the vision, prest: and then the King Spake to me, being nearest, ‘Percivale,’ (Because the hall was all in tumult—some Vowing, and some protesting), ‘what is this?’ “O brother, when I told him what had chanced, My sister’s vision, and the rest, his face Darkened, as I have seen it more than once, When some brave deed seemed to be done in vain, Darken; and ‘Woe is me, my knights,’ he cried, ‘Had I been here, ye had not sworn the vow.’ Bold was mine answer, ‘Had thyself been here, My King, thou wouldst have sworn.’ ‘Yea, yea,’ said he, ‘Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail?’ “‘Nay, lord, I heard the sound, I saw the light, But since I did not see the Holy Thing, I sware a vow to follow it till I saw.’ “Then when he asked us, knight by knight, if any Had seen it, all their answers were as one: ‘Nay, lord, and therefore have we sworn our vows.’ “‘Lo now,’ said Arthur, ‘have ye seen a cloud? What go ye into the wilderness to see?’ “Then Galahad on the sudden, and in a voice Shrilling along the hall to Arthur, called, ‘But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail, I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry— “O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me.”‘ “‘Ah, Galahad, Galahad,’ said the King, ‘for such As thou art is the vision, not for these. Thy holy nun and thou have seen a sign— Holier is none, my Percivale, than she— A sign to maim this Order which I made. But ye, that follow but the leader’s bell’ (Brother, the King was hard upon his knights) ‘Taliessin is our fullest throat of song, And one hath sung and all the dumb will sing. Lancelot is Lancelot, and hath overborne Five knights at once, and every younger knight, Unproven, holds himself as Lancelot, Till overborne by one, he learns—and ye, What are ye? Galahads?—no, nor Percivales’ (For thus it pleased the King to range me close After Sir Galahad); ‘nay,’ said he, ‘but men With strength and will to right the wronged, of power To lay the sudden heads of violence flat, Knights that in twelve great battles splashed and dyed The strong White Horse in his own heathen blood— But one hath seen, and all the blind will see. Go, since your vows are sacred, being made: Yet—for ye know the cries of all my realm Pass through this hall—how often, O my knights, Your places being vacant at my side,

This chance of noble deeds will come and go Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires Lost in the quagmire! Many of you, yea most, Return no more: ye think I show myself Too dark a prophet: come now, let us meet The morrow morn once more in one full field Of gracious pastime, that once more the King, Before ye leave him for this Quest, may count The yet-unbroken strength of all his knights, Rejoicing in that Order which he made.' "So when the sun broke next from under ground, All the great table of our Arthur closed And clashed in such a tourney and so full, So many lances broken—never yet Had Camelot seen the like, since Arthur came; And I myself and Galahad, for a strength Was in us from this vision, overthrew So many knights that all the people cried, And almost burst the barriers in their heat, Shouting, 'Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale!' "But when the next day brake from under ground— O brother, had you known our Camelot, Built by old kings, age after age, so old The King himself had fears that it would fall, So strange, and rich, and dim; for where the roofs Tottered toward each other in the sky, Met foreheads all along the street of those Who watched us pass; and lower, and where the long Rich galleries, lady-laden, weighed the necks Of dragons clinging to the crazy walls, Thicker than drops from thunder, showers of flowers Fell as we past; and men and boys astride On wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan, At all the corners, named us each by name, Calling, 'God speed!' but in the ways below The knights and ladies wept, and rich and poor Wept, and the King himself could hardly speak For grief, and all in middle street the Queen, Who rode by Lancelot, wailed and shrieked aloud, 'This madness has come on us for our sins.' So to the Gate of the three Queens we came, Where Arthur's wars are rendered mystically, And thence departed every one his way. "And I was lifted up in heart, and thought Of all my late-shown prowess in the lists, How my strong lance had beaten down the knights, So many and famous names; and never yet Had heaven appeared so blue, nor earth so green, For all my blood danced in me, and I knew That I should light upon the Holy Grail. "Thereafter, the dark warning of our King, That most of us would follow

wandering fires, Came like a driving gloom across my mind. Then every evil word I had spoken once, And every evil thought I had thought of old, And every evil deed I ever did, Awoke and cried, ‘This Quest is not for thee.’ And lifting up mine eyes, I found myself Alone, and in a land of sand and thorns, And I was thirsty even unto death; And I, too, cried, ‘This Quest is not for thee.’ “And on I rode, and when I thought my thirst Would slay me, saw deep lawns, and then a brook, With one sharp rapid, where the crisping white Played ever back upon the sloping wave, And took both ear and eye; and o’er the brook Were apple-trees, and apples by the brook Fallen, and on the lawns. ‘I will rest here,’ I said, ‘I am not worthy of the Quest;’ But even while I drank the brook, and ate The goodly apples, all these things at once Fell into dust, and I was left alone, And thirsting, in a land of sand and thorns. “And then behold a woman at a door Spinning; and fair the house whereby she sat, And kind the woman’s eyes and innocent, And all her bearing gracious; and she rose Opening her arms to meet me, as who should say, ‘Rest here;’ but when I touched her, lo! she, too, Fell into dust and nothing, and the house Became no better than a broken shed, And in it a dead babe; and also this Fell into dust, and I was left alone. “And on I rode, and greater was my thirst. Then flashed a yellow gleam across the world, And where it smote the plowshare in the field, The plowman left his plowing, and fell down Before it; where it glittered on her pail, The milkmaid left her milking, and fell down Before it, and I knew not why, but thought ‘The sun is rising,’ though the sun had risen. Then was I ware of one that on me moved In golden armour with a crown of gold About a casque all jewels; and his horse In golden armour jewelled everywhere: And on the splendour came, flashing me blind; And seemed to me the Lord of all the world, Being so huge. But when I thought he meant To crush me, moving on me, lo! he, too, Opened his arms to embrace me as he came, And up I went and touched him, and he, too, Fell into dust, and I was left alone And wearying in a land of sand and thorns. “And I rode on and found a mighty hill, And on the top, a city walled: the spires Pricked with incredible pinnacles into

heaven. And by the gateway stirred a crowd; and these Cried to me climbing, ‘Welcome, Percivale! Thou mightiest and thou purest among men!’ And glad was I and clomb, but found at top No man, nor any voice. And thence I past Far through a ruinous city, and I saw That man had once dwelt there; but there I found Only one man of an exceeding age. ‘Where is that goodly company,’ said I, ‘That so cried out upon me?’ and he had Scarce any voice to answer, and yet gasped, ‘Whence and what art thou?’ and even as he spoke Fell into dust, and disappeared, and I Was left alone once more, and cried in grief, ‘Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself And touch it, it will crumble into dust.’ “And thence I dropt into a lowly vale, Low as the hill was high, and where the vale Was lowest, found a chapel, and thereby A holy hermit in a hermitage, To whom I told my phantoms, and he said: “‘O son, thou hast not true humility, The highest virtue, mother of them all; For when the Lord of all things made Himself Naked of glory for His mortal change, “Take thou my robe,” she said, “for all is thine,” And all her form shone forth with sudden light So that the angels were amazed, and she Followed Him down, and like a flying star Led on the gray-haired wisdom of the east; But her thou hast not known: for what is this Thou thoughtest of thy prowess and thy sins? Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself As Galahad.’ When the hermit made an end, In silver armour suddenly Galahad shone Before us, and against the chapel door Laid lance, and entered, and we knelt in prayer. And there the hermit slaked my burning thirst, And at the sacring of the mass I saw The holy elements alone; but he, ‘Saw ye no more? I, Galahad, saw the Grail, The Holy Grail, descend upon the shrine: I saw the fiery face as of a child That smote itself into the bread, and went; And hither am I come; and never yet Hath what thy sister taught me first to see, This Holy Thing, failed from my side, nor come Covered, but moving with me night and day, Fainter by day, but always in the night Blood-red, and sliding down the blackened marsh Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below Blood-red. And in the strength of this I rode, Shattering all evil customs everywhere, And past through

Pagan realms, and made them mine, And clashed with Pagan hordes, and bore them down, And broke through all, and in the strength of this Come victor. But my time is hard at hand, And hence I go; and one will crown me king Far in the spiritual city; and come thou, too, For thou shalt see the vision when I go.' "While thus he spake, his eye, dwelling on mine, Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew One with him, to believe as he believed. Then, when the day began to wane, we went. "There rose a hill that none but man could climb, Scarred with a hundred wintry water-courses— Storm at the top, and when we gained it, storm Round us and death; for every moment glanced His silver arms and gloomed: so quick and thick The lightnings here and there to left and right Struck, till the dry old trunks about us, dead, Yea, rotten with a hundred years of death, Sprang into fire: and at the base we found On either hand, as far as eye could see, A great black swamp and of an evil smell, Part black, part whitened with the bones of men, Not to be crost, save that some ancient king Had built a way, where, linked with many a bridge, A thousand piers ran into the great Sea. And Galahad fled along them bridge by bridge, And every bridge as quickly as he crost Sprang into fire and vanished, though I yearned To follow; and thrice above him all the heavens Opened and blazed with thunder such as seemed Shoutings of all the sons of God: and first At once I saw him far on the great Sea, In silver-shining armour starry-clear; And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung Clothed in white samite or a luminous cloud. And with exceeding swiftness ran the boat, If boat it were—I saw not whence it came. And when the heavens opened and blazed again Roaring, I saw him like a silver star— And had he set the sail, or had the boat Become a living creature clad with wings? And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung Redder than any rose, a joy to me, For now I knew the veil had been withdrawn. Then in a moment when they blazed again Opening, I saw the least of little stars Down on the waste, and straight beyond the star I saw the spiritual city and all her spires And gateways in a glory like one pearl— No larger, though the goal of all the saints— Strike from the sea; and from the star there shot A rose-red sparkle to the

city, and there Dwelt, and I knew it was the Holy Grail, Which never eyes on earth again shall see. Then fell the floods of heaven drowning the deep. And how my feet recrost the deathful ridge No memory in me lives; but that I touched The chapel-doors at dawn I know; and thence Taking my war-horse from the holy man, Glad that no phantom vext me more, returned To whence I came, the gate of Arthur's wars." "O brother," asked Ambrosius,—"for in sooth These ancient books—and they would win thee—teem, Only I find not there this Holy Grail, With miracles and marvels like to these, Not all unlike; which oftentime I read, Who read but on my breviary with ease, Till my head swims; and then go forth and pass Down to the little thorpe that lies so close, And almost plastered like a martin's nest To these old walls—and mingle with our folk; And knowing every honest face of theirs As well as ever shepherd knew his sheep, And every homely secret in their hearts, Delight myself with gossip and old wives, And ills and aches, and teethings, lyings-in, And mirthful sayings, children of the place, That have no meaning half a league away: Or lulling random squabbles when they rise, Chafferings and chatterings at the market-cross, Rejoice, small man, in this small world of mine, Yea, even in their hens and in their eggs— O brother, saving this Sir Galahad, Came ye on none but phantoms in your quest, No man, no woman?" Then Sir Percivale: "All men, to one so bound by such a vow, And women were as phantoms. O, my brother, Why wilt thou shame me to confess to thee How far I faltered from my quest and vow? For after I had lain so many nights A bedmate of the snail and eft and snake, In grass and burdock, I was changed to wan And meagre, and the vision had not come; And then I chanced upon a goodly town With one great dwelling in the middle of it; Thither I made, and there was I disarmed By maidens each as fair as any flower: But when they led me into hall, behold, The Princess of that castle was the one, Brother, and that one only, who had ever Made my heart leap; for when I moved of old A slender page about her father's hall, And she a slender maiden, all my heart Went after her with longing: yet we twain Had never kissed a kiss, or

vowed a vow. And now I came upon her once again, And one had wedded her, and he was dead, And all his land and wealth and state were hers. And while I tarried, every day she set A banquet richer than the day before By me; for all her longing and her will Was toward me as of old; till one fair morn, I walking to and fro beside a stream That flashed across her orchard underneath Her castle-walls, she stole upon my walk, And calling me the greatest of all knights, Embraced me, and so kissed me the first time, And gave herself and all her wealth to me. Then I remembered Arthur's warning word, That most of us would follow wandering fires, And the Quest faded in my heart. Anon, The heads of all her people drew to me, With supplication both of knees and tongue: 'We have heard of thee: thou art our greatest knight, Our Lady says it, and we well believe: Wed thou our Lady, and rule over us, And thou shalt be as Arthur in our land.' O me, my brother! but one night my vow Burnt me within, so that I rose and fled, But wailed and wept, and hated mine own self, And even the Holy Quest, and all but her; Then after I was joined with Galahad Cared not for her, nor anything upon earth." Then said the monk, "Poor men, when yule is cold, Must be content to sit by little fires. And this am I, so that ye care for me Ever so little; yea, and blest be Heaven That brought thee here to this poor house of ours Where all the brethren are so hard, to warm My cold heart with a friend: but O the pity To find thine own first love once more—to hold, Hold her a wealthy bride within thine arms, Or all but hold, and then—cast her aside, Foregoing all her sweetness, like a weed. For we that want the warmth of double life, We that are plagued with dreams of something sweet Beyond all sweetness in a life so rich,— Ah, blessed Lord, I speak too earthlywise, Seeing I never strayed beyond the cell, But live like an old badger in his earth, With earth about him everywhere, despite All fast and penance. Saw ye none beside, None of your knights?" "Yea so," said Percivale: "One night my pathway swerving east, I saw The pelican on the casque of our Sir Bors All in the middle of the rising moon: And toward him spurred, and hailed him, and he me, And each made joy of either; then he asked, 'Where is he?

hast thou seen him—Lancelot?—Once,' Said good Sir Bors, 'he dashed across me—mad, And maddening what he rode: and when I cried, "Ridest thou then so hotly on a quest So holy," Lancelot shouted, "Stay me not! I have been the sluggard, and I ride apace, For now there is a lion in the way." So vanished.' "Then Sir Bors had ridden on Softly, and sorrowing for our Lancelot, Because his former madness, once the talk And scandal of our table, had returned; For Lancelot's kith and kin so worship him That ill to him is ill to them; to Bors Beyond the rest: he well had been content Not to have seen, so Lancelot might have seen, The Holy Cup of healing; and, indeed, Being so clouded with his grief and love, Small heart was his after the Holy Quest: If God would send the vision, well: if not, The Quest and he were in the hands of Heaven. "And then, with small adventure met, Sir Bors Rode to the lonest tract of all the realm, And found a people there among their crags, Our race and blood, a remnant that were left Paynim amid their circles, and the stones They pitch up straight to heaven: and their wise men Were strong in that old magic which can trace The wandering of the stars, and scoffed at him And this high Quest as at a simple thing: Told him he followed—almost Arthur's words— A mocking fire: 'what other fire than he, Whereby the blood beats, and the blossom blows, And the sea rolls, and all the world is warmed?' And when his answer chafed them, the rough crowd, Hearing he had a difference with their priests, Seized him, and bound and plunged him into a cell Of great piled stones; and lying bounden there In darkness through innumerable hours He heard the hollow-ringing heavens sweep Over him till by miracle—what else?— Heavy as it was, a great stone slipt and fell, Such as no wind could move: and through the gap Glimmered the streaming scud: then came a night Still as the day was loud; and through the gap The seven clear stars of Arthur's Table Round— For, brother, so one night, because they roll Through such a round in heaven, we named the stars, Rejoicing in ourselves and in our King— And these, like bright eyes of familiar friends, In on him shone: 'And then to me, to me,' Said good Sir Bors, 'beyond all hopes of mine, Who scarce had

prayed or asked it for myself— Across the seven clear stars—O grace to me— In colour like the fingers of a hand Before a burning taper, the sweet Grail Glided and past, and close upon it pealed A sharp quick thunder.' Afterwards, a maid, Who kept our holy faith among her kin In secret, entering, loosed and let him go." To whom the monk: "And I remember now That pelican on the casque: Sir Bors it was Who spake so low and sadly at our board; And mighty reverent at our grace was he: A square-set man and honest; and his eyes, An out-door sign of all the warmth within, Smiled with his lips—a smile beneath a cloud, But heaven had meant it for a sunny one: Ay, ay, Sir Bors, who else? But when ye reached The city, found ye all your knights returned, Or was there sooth in Arthur's prophecy, Tell me, and what said each, and what the King?" Then answered Percivale: "And that can I, Brother, and truly; since the living words Of so great men as Lancelot and our King Pass not from door to door and out again, But sit within the house. O, when we reached The city, our horses stumbling as they trode On heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns, Cracked basilisks, and splintered cockatrices, And shattered talbots, which had left the stones Raw, that they fell from, brought us to the hall. "And there sat Arthur on the dais-throne, And those that had gone out upon the Quest, Wasted and worn, and but a tithe of them, And those that had not, stood before the King, Who, when he saw me, rose, and bad me hail, Saying, 'A welfare in thine eye reproves Our fear of some disastrous chance for thee On hill, or plain, at sea, or flooding ford. So fierce a gale made havoc here of late Among the strange devices of our kings; Yea, shook this newer, stronger hall of ours, And from the statue Merlin moulded for us Half-wrenched a golden wing; but now—the Quest, This vision—hast thou seen the Holy Cup, That Joseph brought of old to Glastonbury?' "So when I told him all thyself hast heard, Ambrosius, and my fresh but fixt resolve To pass away into the quiet life, He answered not, but, sharply turning, asked Of Gawain, 'Gawain, was this Quest for thee?' "'Nay, lord,' said Gawain, 'not for such as I. Therefore I communed with a saintly man, Who made me sure the Quest was not for me; For I

was much awearied of the Quest: But found a silk pavilion in a field, And merry maidens in it; and then this gale Tore my pavilion from the tenting-pin, And blew my merry maidens all about With all discomfort; yea, and but for this, My twelvemonth and a day were pleasant to me.' "He ceased; and Arthur turned to whom at first He saw not, for Sir Bors, on entering, pushed Athwart the throng to Lancelot, caught his hand, Held it, and there, half-hidden by him, stood, Until the King espied him, saying to him, 'Hail, Bors! if ever loyal man and true Could see it, thou hast seen the Grail;' and Bors, 'Ask me not, for I may not speak of it: I saw it;' and the tears were in his eyes. "Then there remained but Lancelot, for the rest Spake but of sundry perils in the storm; Perhaps, like him of Cana in Holy Writ, Our Arthur kept his best until the last; 'Thou, too, my Lancelot,' asked the king, 'my friend, Our mightiest, hath this Quest availed for thee?' "'Our mightiest!' answered Lancelot, with a groan; 'O King!'—and when he paused, methought I spied A dying fire of madness in his eyes— 'O King, my friend, if friend of thine I be, Happier are those that welter in their sin, Swine in the mud, that cannot see for slime, Slime of the ditch: but in me lived a sin So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure, Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower And poisonous grew together, each as each, Not to be plucked asunder; and when thy knights Sware, I sware with them only in the hope That could I touch or see the Holy Grail They might be plucked asunder. Then I spake To one most holy saint, who wept and said, That save they could be plucked asunder, all My quest were but in vain; to whom I vowed That I would work according as he willed. And forth I went, and while I yearned and strove To tear the twain asunder in my heart, My madness came upon me as of old, And whipt me into waste fields far away; There was I beaten down by little men, Mean knights, to whom the moving of my sword And shadow of my spear had been enow To scare them from me once; and then I came All in my folly to the naked shore, Wide flats, where nothing but coarse grasses grew; But such a blast, my King, began to blow, So loud a blast along the

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

which I saw; but what I saw was veiled And covered; and this Quest was not for me.' "So speaking, and here ceasing, Lancelot left The hall long silent, till Sir Gawain—nay, Brother, I need not tell thee foolish words,— A reckless and irreverent knight was he, Now boldened by the silence of his King,— Well, I will tell thee: 'O King, my liege,' he said, 'Hath Gawain failed in any quest of thine? When have I stinted stroke in foughten field? But as for thine, my good friend Percivale, Thy holy nun and thou have driven men mad, Yea, made our mightiest madder than our least. But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear, I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat, And thrice as blind as any noonday owl, To holy virgins in their ecstasies, Henceforward.' "'Deafer,' said the blameless King, 'Gawain, and blinder unto holy things Hope not to make thyself by idle vows, Being too blind to have desire to see. But if indeed there came a sign from heaven, Blessed are Bors, Lancelot and Percivale, For these have seen according to their sight. For every fiery prophet in old times, And all the sacred madness of the bard, When God made music through them, could but speak His music by the framework and the chord; And as ye saw it ye have spoken truth. "'Nay—but thou errest, Lancelot: never yet Could all of true and noble in knight and man Twine round one sin, whatever it might be, With such a closeness, but apart there grew, Save that he were the swine thou spakest of, Some root of knighthood and pure nobleness; Whereto see thou, that it may bear its flower. "'And spake I not too truly, O my knights? Was I too dark a prophet when I said To those who went upon the Holy Quest, That most of them would follow wandering fires, Lost in the quagmire?—lost to me and gone, And left me gazing at a barren board, And a lean Order—scarce returned a tithe— And out of those to whom the vision came My greatest hardly will believe he saw; Another hath beheld it afar off, And leaving human wrongs to right themselves, Cares but to pass into the silent life. And one hath had the vision face to face, And now his chair desires him here in vain, However they may crown him otherwhere. "'And some among you held, that if the King Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow: Not easily,

seeing that the King must guard That which he rules, and is but as the hind To whom a space of land is given to plow. Who may not wander from the allotted field Before his work be done; but, being done, Let visions of the night or of the day Come, as they will; and many a time they come, Until this earth he walks on seems not earth, This light that strikes his eyeball is not light, This air that smites his forehead is not air But vision—yea, his very hand and foot— In moments when he feels he cannot die, And knows himself no vision to himself, Nor the high God a vision, nor that One Who rose again: ye have seen what ye have seen.' "So spake the King: I knew not all he meant."

Pelleas and Ettarre

King Arthur made new knights to fill the gap Left by the Holy Quest; and as he sat In hall at old Caerleon, the high doors Were softly sundered, and through these a youth, Pelleas, and the sweet smell of the fields Past, and the sunshine came along with him. "Make me thy knight, because I know, Sir King, All that belongs to knighthood, and I love." Such was his cry: for having heard the King Had let proclaim a tournament—the prize A golden circlet and a knightly sword, Full fain had Pelleas for his lady won The golden circlet, for himself the sword: And there were those who knew him near the King, And promised for him: and Arthur made him knight. And this new knight, Sir Pelleas of the isles— But lately come to his inheritance, And lord of many a barren isle was he— Riding at noon, a day or twain before, Across the forest called of Dean, to find Caerleon and the King, had felt the sun Beat like a strong knight on his helm, and reeled Almost to falling from his horse; but saw Near him a mound of even-sloping side, Whereon a hundred stately beeches grew, And here and there great hollies under them; But for a mile all round was open space, And fern and heath: and slowly Pelleas drew To that dim day, then binding his good horse To a tree, cast himself down; and as he lay At random

looking over the brown earth Through that green-glooming twilight of the grove, It seemed to Pelleas that the fern without Burnt as a living fire of emeralds, So that his eyes were dazzled looking at it. Then o'er it crost the dimness of a cloud Floating, and once the shadow of a bird Flying, and then a fawn; and his eyes closed. And since he loved all maidens, but no maid In special, half-awake he whispered, "Where? O where? I love thee, though I know thee not. For fair thou art and pure as Guinevere, And I will make thee with my spear and sword As famous—O my Queen, my Guinevere, For I will be thine Arthur when we meet." Suddenly wakened with a sound of talk And laughter at the limit of the wood, And glancing through the hoary boles, he saw, Strange as to some old prophet might have seemed A vision hovering on a sea of fire, Damsels in divers colours like the cloud Of sunset and sunrise, and all of them On horses, and the horses richly trapt Breast-high in that bright line of bracken stood: And all the damsels talked confusedly, And one was pointing this way, and one that, Because the way was lost. And Pelleas rose, And loosed his horse, and led him to the light. There she that seemed the chief among them said, "In happy time behold our pilot-star! Youth, we are damsels-errant, and we ride, Armed as ye see, to tilt against the knights There at Caerleon, but have lost our way: To right? to left? straight forward? back again? Which? tell us quickly." Pelleas gazing thought, "Is Guinevere herself so beautiful?" For large her violet eyes looked, and her bloom A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens, And round her limbs, mature in womanhood; And slender was her hand and small her shape; And but for those large eyes, the haunts of scorn, She might have seemed a toy to trifle with, And pass and care no more. But while he gazed The beauty of her flesh abashed the boy, As though it were the beauty of her soul: For as the base man, judging of the good, Puts his own baseness in him by default Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend All the young beauty of his own soul to hers, Believing her; and when she spake to him, Stammered, and could not make her a reply. For out of the waste islands had he come, Where saving his own sisters he had known Scarce any

but the women of his isles, Rough wives, that laughed and screamed against the gulls, Makers of nets, and living from the sea. Then with a slow smile turned the lady round And looked upon her people; and as when A stone is flung into some sleeping tarn, The circle widens till it lip the marge, Spread the slow smile through all her company. Three knights were thereamong; and they too smiled, Scorning him; for the lady was Ettarre, And she was a great lady in her land. Again she said, "O wild and of the woods, Knowest thou not the fashion of our speech? Or have the Heavens but given thee a fair face, Lacking a tongue?" "O damsel," answered he, "I woke from dreams; and coming out of gloom Was dazzled by the sudden light, and crave Pardon: but will ye to Caerleon? I Go likewise: shall I lead you to the King?" "Lead then," she said; and through the woods they went. And while they rode, the meaning in his eyes, His tenderness of manner, and chaste awe, His broken utterances and bashfulness, Were all a burthen to her, and in her heart She muttered, "I have lighted on a fool, Raw, yet so stale!" But since her mind was bent On hearing, after trumpet blown, her name And title, "Queen of Beauty," in the lists Cried—and beholding him so strong, she thought That peradventure he will fight for me, And win the circlet: therefore flattered him, Being so gracious, that he wellnigh deemed His wish by hers was echoed; and her knights And all her damsels too were gracious to him, For she was a great lady. And when they reached Caerleon, ere they past to lodging, she, Taking his hand, "O the strong hand," she said, "See! look at mine! but wilt thou fight for me, And win me this fine circlet, Pelleas, That I may love thee?" Then his helpless heart Leapt, and he cried, "Ay! wilt thou if I win?" "Ay, that will I," she answered, and she laughed, And straitly nipt the hand, and flung it from her; Then glanced askew at those three knights of hers, Till all her ladies laughed along with her. "O happy world," thought Pelleas, "all, meseems, Are happy; I the happiest of them all." Nor slept that night for pleasure in his blood, And green wood-ways, and eyes among the leaves; Then being on the morrow knighted, sware To love one only. And as he came away, The men who met him rounded on

their heels And wondered after him, because his face Shone like the countenance of a priest of old Against the flame about a sacrifice Kindled by fire from heaven: so glad was he. Then Arthur made vast banquets, and strange knights From the four winds came in: and each one sat, Though served with choice from air, land, stream, and sea, Oft in mid-banquet measuring with his eyes His neighbour's make and might: and Pelleas looked Noble among the noble, for he dreamed His lady loved him, and he knew himself Loved of the King: and him his new-made knight Worshipt, whose lightest whisper moved him more Than all the ranged reasons of the world. Then blushed and brake the morning of the jousts, And this was called "The Tournament of Youth:" For Arthur, loving his young knight, withheld His older and his mightier from the lists, That Pelleas might obtain his lady's love, According to her promise, and remain Lord of the tourney. And Arthur had the jousts Down in the flat field by the shore of Usk Holden: the gilded parapets were crowned With faces, and the great tower filled with eyes Up to the summit, and the trumpets blew. There all day long Sir Pelleas kept the field With honour: so by that strong hand of his The sword and golden circlet were achieved. Then rang the shout his lady loved: the heat Of pride and glory fired her face; her eye Sparkled; she caught the circlet from his lance, And there before the people crowned herself: So for the last time she was gracious to him. Then at Caerleon for a space—her look Bright for all others, cloudier on her knight— Lingered Ettarre: and seeing Pelleas droop, Said Guinevere, "We marvel at thee much, O damsel, wearing this unsunny face To him who won thee glory!" And she said, "Had ye not held your Lancelot in your bower, My Queen, he had not won." Whereat the Queen, As one whose foot is bitten by an ant, Glanced down upon her, turned and went her way. But after, when her damsels, and herself, And those three knights all set their faces home, Sir Pelleas followed. She that saw him cried, "Damsels—and yet I should be shamed to say it— I cannot bide Sir Baby. Keep him back Among yourselves. Would rather that we had Some rough old knight who knew the worldly way, Albeit grizzlier than a bear, to

ride And jest with: take him to you, keep him off, And pamper him with papmeat, if ye will, Old milky fables of the wolf and sheep, Such as the wholesome mothers tell their boys. Nay, should ye try him with a merry one To find his mettle, good: and if he fly us, Small matter! let him." This her damsels heard, And mindful of her small and cruel hand, They, closing round him through the journey home, Acted her hest, and always from her side Restrained him with all manner of device, So that he could not come to speech with her. And when she gained her castle, upsprang the bridge, Down rang the grate of iron through the groove, And he was left alone in open field. "These be the ways of ladies," Pelleas thought, "To those who love them, trials of our faith. Yea, let her prove me to the uttermost, For loyal to the uttermost am I." So made his moan; and darkness falling, sought A priory not far off, there lodged, but rose With morning every day, and, moist or dry, Full-armed upon his charger all day long Sat by the walls, and no one opened to him. And this persistence turned her scorn to wrath. Then calling her three knights, she charged them, "Out! And drive him from the walls." And out they came But Pelleas overthrew them as they dashed Against him one by one; and these returned, But still he kept his watch beneath the wall. Thereon her wrath became a hate; and once, A week beyond, while walking on the walls With her three knights, she pointed downward, "Look, He haunts me—I cannot breathe—besieges me; Down! strike him! put my hate into your strokes, And drive him from my walls." And down they went, And Pelleas overthrew them one by one; And from the tower above him cried Ettarre, "Bind him, and bring him in." He heard her voice; Then let the strong hand, which had overthrown Her minion-knights, by those he overthrew Be bounden straight, and so they brought him in. Then when he came before Ettarre, the sight Of her rich beauty made him at one glance More bondsman in his heart than in his bonds. Yet with good cheer he spake, "Behold me, Lady, A prisoner, and the vassal of thy will; And if thou keep me in thy donjon here, Content am I so that I see thy face But once a day: for I have sworn my vows, And thou hast given thy promise, and I know That all these pains are trials of

my faith, And that thyself, when thou hast seen me strained And sifted to the utmost, wilt at length Yield me thy love and know me for thy knight." Then she began to rail so bitterly, With all her damsels, he was stricken mute; But when she mocked his vows and the great King, Lighted on words: "For pity of thine own self, Peace, Lady, peace: is he not thine and mine?" "Thou fool," she said, "I never heard his voice But longed to break away. Unbind him now, And thrust him out of doors; for save he be Fool to the midmost marrow of his bones, He will return no more." And those, her three, Laughed, and unbound, and thrust him from the gate. And after this, a week beyond, again She called them, saying, "There he watches yet, There like a dog before his master's door! Kicked, he returns: do ye not hate him, ye? Ye know yourselves: how can ye bide at peace, Affronted with his fulsome innocence? Are ye but creatures of the board and bed, No men to strike? Fall on him all at once, And if ye slay him I 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 couched their spears, Three against one: and Gawain passing by, Bound upon solitary adventure, saw Low down beneath the shadow of those towers A villainy, three to one: and through his heart The fire of honour and all noble deeds Flashed, and he called, "I strike upon thy side— The caitiffs!" "Nay," said Pelleas, "but forbear; He needs no aid who doth his lady's will." So Gawain, looking at the villainy done, Forbore, but in his heat and eagerness Trembled and quivered, as the dog, withheld A moment from the vermin that he sees Before him, shivers, ere he springs and kills. And Pelleas overthrew them, one to three; And they rose up, and bound, and brought him in. Then first her anger, leaving Pelleas, burned Full on her knights in many an evil name Of craven, weakling, and thrice-beaten hound: "Yet, take him, ye that scarce are fit to touch, Far less to bind, your victor, and thrust him out, And let who will release him from his bonds. And if he comes again"—there she brake short; And Pelleas answered, "Lady, for indeed I loved you and I deemed you beautiful, I cannot brook to see your beauty marred Through evil spite: and if ye

love me not, I cannot bear to dream you so forsworn: I had liefer ye were worthy of my love, Than to be loved again of you—farewell; And though ye kill my hope, not yet my love, Vex not yourself: ye will not see me more." While thus he spake, she gazed upon the man Of princely bearing, though in bonds, and thought, "Why have I pushed him from me? this man loves, If love there be: yet him I loved not. Why? I deemed him fool? yea, so? or that in him A something—was it nobler than myself? Seemed my reproach? He is not of my kind. He could not love me, did he know me well. Nay, let him go—and quickly." And her knights Laughed not, but thrust him bounden out of door. Forth sprang Gawain, and loosed him from his bonds, And flung them o'er the walls; and afterward, Shaking his hands, as from a lazar's rag, "Faith of my body," he said, "and art thou not— Yea thou art he, whom late our Arthur made Knight of his table; yea and he that won The circlet? wherefore hast thou so defamed Thy brotherhood in me and all the rest, As let these caitiffs on thee work their will?" And Pelleas answered, "O, their wills are hers For whom I won the circlet; and mine, hers, Thus to be bounden, so to see her face, Marred though it be with spite and mockery now, Other than when I found her in the woods; And though she hath me bounden but in spite, And all to flout me, when they bring me in, Let me be bounden, I shall see her face; Else must I die through mine unhappiness." And Gawain answered kindly though in scorn, "Why, let my lady bind me if she will, And let my lady beat me if she will: But an she send her delegate to thrall These fighting hands of mine—Christ kill me then But I will slice him handless by the wrist, And let my lady sear the stump for him, Howl as he may. But hold me for your friend: Come, ye know nothing: here I pledge my troth, Yea, by the honour of the Table Round, I will be leal to thee and work thy work, And tame thy jailing princess to thine hand. Lend me thine horse and arms, and I will say That I have slain thee. She will let me in To hear the manner of thy fight and fall; Then, when I come within her counsels, then From prime to vespers will I chant thy praise As prowest knight and truest lover, more Than any have sung thee living, till she long

To have thee back in lusty life again, Not to be bound, save by white bonds and warm, Dearer than freedom. Wherefore now thy horse And armour: let me go: be comforted: Give me three days to melt her fancy, and hope The third night hence will bring thee news of gold." Then Pelleas lent his horse and all his arms, Saving the goodly sword, his prize, and took Gawain's, and said, "Betray me not, but help— Art thou not he whom men call light-of-love?" "Ay," said Gawain, "for women be so light." Then bounded forward to the castle walls, And raised a bugle hanging from his neck, And winded it, and that so musically That all the old echoes hidden in the wall Rang out like hollow woods at hunting-tide. Up ran a score of damsels to the tower; "Avaunt," they cried, "our lady loves thee not." But Gawain lifting up his vizor said, "Gawain am I, Gawain of Arthur's court, And I have slain this Pelleas whom ye hate: Behold his horse and armour. Open gates, And I will make you merry." And down they ran, Her damsels, crying to their lady, "Lo! Pelleas is dead—he told us—he that hath His horse and armour: will ye let him in? He slew him! Gawain, Gawain of the court, Sir Gawain—there he waits below the wall, Blowing his bugle as who should say him nay." And so, leave given, straight on through open door Rode Gawain, whom she greeted courteously. "Dead, is it so?" she asked. "Ay, ay," said he, "And oft in dying cried upon your name." "Pity on him," she answered, "a good knight, But never let me bide one hour at peace." "Ay," thought Gawain, "and you be fair enow: But I to your dead man have given my troth, That whom ye loathe, him will I make you love." So those three days, aimless about the land, Lost in a doubt, Pelleas wandering Waited, until the third night brought a moon With promise of large light on woods and ways. Hot was the night and silent; but a sound Of Gawain ever coming, and this lay— Which Pelleas had heard sung before the Queen, And seen her sadden listening—vext his heart, And marred his rest—"A worm within the rose." "A rose, but one, none other rose had I, A rose, one rose, and this was wondrous fair, One rose, a rose that gladdened earth and sky, One rose, my rose, that sweetened all mine air— I cared not for the

thorns; the thorns were there. “One rose, a rose to gather by and by, One rose, a rose, to gather and to wear, No rose but one—what other rose had I? One rose, my rose; a rose that will not die,— He dies who loves it,—if the worm be there.” This tender rhyme, and evermore the doubt, “Why lingers Gawain with his golden news?” So shook him that he could not rest, but rode Ere midnight to her walls, and bound his horse Hard by the gates. Wide open were the gates, And no watch kept; and in through these he past, And heard but his own steps, and his own heart Beating, for nothing moved but his own self, And his own shadow. Then he crost the court, And spied not any light in hall or bower, But saw the postern portal also wide Yawning; and up a slope of garden, all Of roses white and red, and brambles mixt And overgrowing them, went on, and found, Here too, all hushed below the mellow moon, Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave Came lightening downward, and so spilt itself Among the roses, and was lost again. Then was he ware of three pavilions reared Above the bushes, gilden-peakt: in one, Red after revel, droned her lurdane knights Slumbering, and their three squires across their feet: In one, their malice on the placid lip Frozen by sweet sleep, four of her damsels lay: And in the third, the circlet of the jousts Bound on her brow, were Gawain and Ettarre. Back, as a hand that pushes through the leaf To find a nest and feels a snake, he drew: Back, as a coward slinks from what he fears To cope with, or a traitor proven, or hound Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame Creep with his shadow through the court again, Fingering at his sword-handle until he stood There on the castle-bridge once more, and thought, “I will go back, and slay them where they lie.” And so went back, and seeing them yet in sleep Said, “Ye, that so dishallow the holy sleep, Your sleep is death,” and drew the sword, and thought, “What! slay a sleeping knight? the King hath bound And sworn me to this brotherhood;” again, “Alas that ever a knight should be so false.” Then turned, and so returned, and groaning laid The naked sword athwart their naked throats, There left it, and them sleeping; and she lay, The circlet of her tourney round her brows, And the sword of the tourney across her

throat. And forth he past, and mounting on his horse Stared at her towers that, larger than themselves In their own darkness, thronged into the moon. Then crushed the saddle with his thighs, and clenched His hands, and maddened with himself and moaned: “Would they have risen against me in their blood At the last day? I might have answered them Even before high God. O towers so strong, Huge, solid, would that even while I gaze The crack of earthquake shivering to your base Split you, and Hell burst up your harlot roofs Bellowing, and charred you through and through within, Black as the harlot’s heart—hollow as a skull! Let the fierce east scream through your eyelet-holes, And whirl the dust of harlots round and round In dung and nettles! hiss, snake—I saw him there— Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell. Who yells Here in the still sweet summer night, but I— I, the poor Pelleas whom she called her fool? Fool, beast—he, she, or I? myself most fool; Beast too, as lacking human wit—disgraced, Dishonoured all for trial of true love— Love?—we be all alike: only the King Hath made us fools and liars. O noble vows! O great and sane and simple race of brutes That own no lust because they have no law! For why should I have loved her to my shame? I loathe her, as I loved her to my shame. I never loved her, I but lusted for her— Away—” He dashed the rowel into his horse, And bounded forth and vanished through the night. Then she, that felt the cold touch on her throat, Awaking knew the sword, and turned herself To Gawain: “Liar, for thou hast not slain This Pelleas! here he stood, and might have slain Me and thyself.” And he that tells the tale Says that her ever-veering fancy turned To Pelleas, as the one true knight on earth, And only lover; and through her love her life Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain. But he by wild and way, for half the night, And over hard and soft, striking the sod From out the soft, the spark from off the hard, Rode till the star above the wakening sun, Beside that tower where Percivale was cowled, Glanced from the rosy forehead of the dawn. For so the words were flashed into his heart He knew not whence or wherefore: “O sweet star, Pure on the virgin forehead of the dawn!” And there he would have wept, but felt his eyes

Harder and drier than a fountain bed In summer: thither came the village girls And lingered talking, and they come no more Till the sweet heavens have filled it from the heights Again with living waters in the change Of seasons: hard his eyes; harder his heart Seemed; but so weary were his limbs, that he, Gasping, “Of Arthur’s hall am I, but here, Here let me rest and die,” cast himself down, And gulfed his griefs in inmost sleep; so lay, Till shaken by a dream, that Gawain fired The hall of Merlin, and the morning star Reeled in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell. He woke, and being ware of some one nigh, Sent hands upon him, as to tear him, crying, “False! and I held thee pure as Guinevere.” But Percivale stood near him and replied, “Am I but false as Guinevere is pure? Or art thou mazed with dreams? or being one Of our free-spoken Table hast not heard That Lancelot”—there he checked himself and paused. Then fared it with Sir Pelleas as with one Who gets a wound in battle, and the sword That made it plunges through the wound again, And pricks it deeper: and he shrank and wailed, “Is the Queen false?” and Percivale was mute. “Have any of our Round Table held their vows?” And Percivale made answer not a word. “Is the King true?” “The King!” said Percivale. “Why then let men couple at once with wolves. What! art thou mad?” But Pelleas, leaping up, Ran through the doors and vaulted on his horse And fled: small pity upon his horse had he, Or on himself, or any, and when he met A cripple, one that held a hand for alms— Hunched as he was, and like an old dwarf-elm That turns its back upon the salt blast, the boy Paused not, but overrode him, shouting, “False, And false with Gawain!” and so left him bruised And battered, and fled on, and hill and wood Went ever streaming by him till the gloom, That follows on the turning of the world, Darkened the common path: he twitched the reins, And made his beast that better knew it, swerve Now off it and now on; but when he saw High up in heaven the hall that Merlin built, Blackening against the dead-green stripes of even, “Black nest of rats,” he groaned, “ye build too high.” Not long thereafter from the city gates Issued Sir Lancelot riding airily, Warm with a gracious parting from the Queen, Peace at his heart, and

gazing at a star And marvelling what it was: on whom the boy, Across the silent seeded meadow-grass Borne, clashed: and Lancelot, saying, “What name hast thou That ridest here so blindly and so hard?” “No name, no name,” he shouted, “a scourge am I To lash the treasons of the Table Round.” “Yea, but thy name?” “I have many names,” he cried: “I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame, And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen.” “First over me,” said Lancelot, “shalt thou pass.” “Fight therefore,” yelled the youth, and either knight Drew back a space, and when they closed, at once The weary steed of Pelleas floundering flung His rider, who called out from the dark field, “Thou art as false as Hell: slay me: I have no sword.” Then Lancelot, “Yea, between thy lips—and sharp; But here I will disedge it by thy death.” “Slay then,” he shrieked, “my will is to be slain,” And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fallen, Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake: “Rise, weakling; I am Lancelot; say thy say.” And Lancelot slowly rode his warhorse back To Camelot, and Sir Pelleas in brief while Caught his unbroken limbs from the dark field, And followed to the city. It chanced that both Brake into hall together, worn and pale. There with her knights and dames was Guinevere. Full wonderingly she gazed on Lancelot So soon returned, and then on Pelleas, him Who had not greeted her, but cast himself Down on a bench, hard-breathing. “Have ye fought?” She asked of Lancelot. “Ay, my Queen,” he said. “And hast thou overthrown him?” “Ay, my Queen.” Then she, turning to Pelleas, “O young knight, Hath the great heart of knighthood in thee failed So far thou canst not bide, unfrowardly, A fall from him?” Then, for he answered not, “Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen, May help them, loose thy tongue, and let me know.” But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce She quailed; and he, hissing “I have no sword,” Sprang from the door into the dark. The Queen Looked hard upon her lover, he on her; And each foresaw the dolorous day to be: And all talk died, as in a grove all song Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey; Then a long silence came upon the hall, And Modred thought, “The time is hard at hand.”

The Last Tournament

Dagonet, the fool, whom Gawain in his mood Had made mock-knight of Arthur's Table Round, At Camelot, high above the yellowing woods, Danced like a withered leaf before the hall. And toward him from the hall, with harp in hand, And from the crown thereof a carcanet Of ruby swaying to and fro, the prize Of Tristram in the jousts of yesterday, Came Tristram, saying, "Why skip ye so, Sir Fool?" For Arthur and Sir Lancelot riding once Far down beneath a winding wall of rock Heard a child wail. A stump of oak half-dead, From roots like some black coil of carven snakes, Clutched at the crag, and started through mid air Bearing an eagle's nest: and through the tree Rushed ever a rainy wind, and through the wind Pierced ever a child's cry: and crag and tree Scaling, Sir Lancelot from the perilous nest, This ruby necklace thrice around her neck, And all unscarred from beak or talon, brought A maiden babe; which Arthur pitying took, Then gave it to his Queen to rear: the Queen But coldly acquiescing, in her white arms Received, and after loved it tenderly, And named it Nestling; so forgot herself A moment, and her cares; till that young life Being smitten in mid heaven with mortal cold Past from her; and in time the carcanet Vext her with plaintive memories of the child: So she, delivering it to Arthur, said, "Take thou the jewels of this dead innocence, And make them, an thou wilt, a tourney-prize." To whom the King, "Peace to thine eagle-borne Dead nestling, and this honour after death, Following thy will! but, O my Queen, I muse Why ye not wear on arm, or neck, or zone Those diamonds that I rescued from the tarn, And Lancelot won, methought, for thee to wear." "Would rather you had let them fall," she cried, "Plunge and be lost—ill-fated as they were, A bitterness to me!—ye look amazed, Not knowing they were lost as soon as given— Slid from my hands, when I was leaning out Above the river—that unhappy child Past in her barge: but rosier luck will go With these rich jewels, seeing that they came Not from the skeleton of a brother-slayer, But the sweet body of a maiden babe.

Perchance—who knows?—the purest of thy knights May win them for the purest of my maids." She ended, and the cry of a great jousts With trumpet-blowings ran on all the ways From Camelot in among the faded fields To furthest towers; and everywhere the knights Armed for a day of glory before the King. But on the hither side of that loud morn Into the hall staggered, his visage ribbed From ear to ear with dogwhip-weals, his nose Bridge-broken, one eye out, and one hand off, And one with shattered fingers dangling lame, A churl, to whom indignantly the King, "My churl, for whom Christ died, what evil beast Hath drawn his claws athwart thy face? or fiend? Man was it who marred heaven's image in thee thus?" Then, sputtering through the hedge of splintered teeth, Yet strangers to the tongue, and with blunt stump Pitch-blackened sawing the air, said the maimed churl, "He took them and he drave them to his tower— Some hold he was a table-knight of thine— A hundred goodly ones—the Red Knight, he— Lord, I was tending swine, and the Red Knight Brake in upon me and drave them to his tower; And when I called upon thy name as one That doest right by gentle and by churl, Maimed me and mauled, and would outright have slain, Save that he sware me to a message, saying, 'Tell thou the King and all his liars, that I Have founded my Round Table in the North, And whatsoever his own knights have sworn My knights have sworn the counter to it—and say My tower is full of harlots, like his court, But mine are worthier, seeing they profess To be none other than themselves—and say My knights are all adulterers like his own, But mine are truer, seeing they profess To be none other; and say his hour is come, The heathen are upon him, his long lance Broken, and his Excalibur a straw.'" Then Arthur turned to Kay the seneschal, "Take thou my churl, and tend him curiously Like a king's heir, till all his hurts be whole. The heathen—but that ever-climbing wave, Hurled back again so often in empty foam, Hath lain for years at rest—and renegades, Thieves, bandits, leavings of confusion, whom The wholesome realm is purged of otherwhere, Friends, through your manhood and your fealty,—now Make their last head like Satan in the North. My younger knights, new-made, in whom

your flower Waits to be solid fruit of golden deeds, Move with me toward their quelling, which achieved, The loneliest ways are safe from shore to shore. But thou, Sir Lancelot, sitting in my place Enchaired tomorrow, arbitrate the field; For wherefore shouldst thou care to mingle with it, Only to yield my Queen her own again? Speak, Lancelot, thou art silent: is it well?" Thereto Sir Lancelot answered, "It is well: Yet better if the King abide, and leave The leading of his younger knights to me. Else, for the King has willed it, it is well." Then Arthur rose and Lancelot followed him, And while they stood without the doors, the King Turned to him saying, "Is it then so well? Or mine the blame that oft I seem as he Of whom was written, 'A sound is in his ears'? The foot that loiters, bidden go,—the glance That only seems half-loyal to command,— A manner somewhat fallen from reverence— Or have I dreamed the bearing of our knights Tells of a manhood ever less and lower? Or whence the fear lest this my realm, upreared, By noble deeds at one with noble vows, From flat confusion and brute violences, Reel back into the beast, and be no more?" He spoke, and taking all his younger knights, Down the slope city rode, and sharply turned North by the gate. In her high bower the Queen, Working a tapestry, lifted up her head, Watched her lord pass, and knew not that she sighed. Then ran across her memory the strange rhyme Of bygone Merlin, "Where is he who knows? From the great deep to the great deep he goes." But when the morning of a tournament, By these in earnest those in mockery called The Tournament of the Dead Innocence, Brake with a wet wind blowing, Lancelot, Round whose sick head all night, like birds of prey, The words of Arthur flying shrieked, arose, And down a streetway hung with folds of pure White samite, and by fountains running wine, Where children sat in white with cups of gold, Moved to the lists, and there, with slow sad steps Ascending, filled his double-dragoned chair. He glanced and saw the stately galleries, Dame, damsel, each through worship of their Queen White-robed in honour of the stainless child, And some with scattered jewels, like a bank Of maiden snow mingled with sparks of fire. He looked but once, and vailed his eyes again.

The sudden trumpet sounded as in a dream To ears but half-awaked, then one low roll Of Autumn thunder, and the jousts began: And ever the wind blew, and yellowing leaf And gloom and gleam, and shower and shorn plume Went down it. Sighing weariedly, as one Who sits and gazes on a faded fire, When all the goodlier guests are past away, Sat their great umpire, looking o'er the lists. He saw the laws that ruled the tournament Broken, but spake not; once, a knight cast down Before his throne of arbitration cursed The dead babe and the follies of the King; And once the laces of a helmet cracked, And showed him, like a vermin in its hole, Modred, a narrow face: anon he heard The voice that billowed round the barriers roar An ocean-sounding welcome to one knight, But newly-entered, taller than the rest, And armoured all in forest green, whereon There tript a hundred tiny silver deer, And wearing but a holly-spray for crest, With ever-scattering berries, and on shield A spear, a harp, a bugle—Tristram—late From overseas in Brittany returned, And marriage with a princess of that realm, Isolt the White—Sir Tristram of the Woods— Whom Lancelot knew, had held sometime with pain His own against him, and now yearned to shake The burthen off his heart in one full shock With Tristram even to death: his strong hands gript And dinted the gilt dragons right and left, Until he groaned for wrath—so many of those, That ware their ladies' colours on the casque, Drew from before Sir Tristram to the bounds, And there with gibes and flickering mockeries Stood, while he muttered, "Craven crests! O shame! What faith have these in whom they sware to love? The glory of our Round Table is no more." So Tristram won, and Lancelot gave, the gems, Not speaking other word than "Hast thou won? Art thou the purest, brother? See, the hand Wherewith thou takest this, is red!" to whom Tristram, half plagued by Lancelot's languorous mood, Made answer, "Ay, but wherefore toss me this Like a dry bone cast to some hungry hound? Lest be thy fair Queen's fantasy. Strength of heart And might of limb, but mainly use and skill, Are winners in this pastime of our King. My hand—belike the lance hath dript upon it— No blood of mine, I trow; but O chief knight, Right arm of

Arthur in the battlefield, Great brother, thou nor I have made the world; Be happy in thy fair Queen as I in mine." And Tristram round the gallery made his horse Caracole; then bowed his homage, bluntly saying, "Fair damsels, each to him who worships each Sole Queen of Beauty and of love, behold This day my Queen of Beauty is not here." And most of these were mute, some angered, one Murmuring, "All courtesy is dead," and one, "The glory of our Round Table is no more." Then fell thick rain, plume droopt and mantle clung, And pettish cries awoke, and the wan day Went glooming down in wet and weariness: But under her black brows a swarthy one Laughed shrilly, crying, "Praise the patient saints, Our one white day of Innocence hath past, Though somewhat draggled at the skirt. So be it. The snowdrop only, flowering through the year, Would make the world as blank as Winter-tide. Come—let us gladden their sad eyes, our Queen's And Lancelot's, at this night's solemnity With all the kindlier colours of the field." So dame and damsel glittered at the feast Variously gay: for he that tells the tale Likened them, saying, as when an hour of cold Falls on the mountain in midsummer snows, And all the purple slopes of mountain flowers Pass under white, till the warm hour returns With veer of wind, and all are flowers again; So dame and damsel cast the simple white, And glowing in all colours, the live grass, Rose-campion, bluebell, kingcup, poppy, glanced About the revels, and with mirth so loud Beyond all use, that, half-amazed, the Queen, And wroth at Tristram and the lawless jousts, 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 withered leaf before the hall. Then Tristram saying, "Why skip ye so, Sir Fool?" Wheeled round on either heel, Dagonet replied, "Belike for lack of wiser company; Or being fool, and seeing too much wit Makes the world rotten, why, belike I skip To know myself the wisest knight of all." "Ay, fool," said Tristram, "but 'tis eating dry To dance without a catch, a roundelay To dance to." Then he twangled on his harp, And while he twangled little Dagonet stood Quiet as any water-sodden log Stayed in the

wandering warble of a brook; But when the twangling ended, skipt again; And being asked, “Why skipt ye not, Sir Fool?” Made answer, “I had liefer twenty years Skip to the broken music of my brains Than any broken music thou canst make.” Then Tristram, waiting for the quip to come, “Good now, what music have I broken, fool?” And little Dagonet, skipping, “Arthur, the King’s; For when thou playest that air with Queen Isolt, Thou makest broken music with thy bride, Her daintier namesake down in Brittany— And so thou breakest Arthur’s music too.” “Save for that broken music in thy brains, Sir Fool,” said Tristram, “I would break thy head. Fool, I came too late, the heathen wars were o’er, The life had flown, we sware but by the shell— I am but a fool to reason with a fool— Come, thou art crabbed and sour: but lean me down, Sir Dagonet, one of thy long asses’ ears, And harken if my music be not true. “‘Free love—free field—we love but while we may: The woods are hushed, their music is no more: The leaf is dead, the yearning past away: New leaf, new life—the days of frost are o’er: New life, new love, to suit the newer day: New loves are sweet as those that went before: Free love—free field—we love but while we may.’ “Ye might have moved slow-measure to my tune, Not stood stockstill. I made it in the woods, And heard it ring as true as tested gold.” But Dagonet with one foot poised in his hand, “Friend, did ye mark that fountain yesterday Made to run wine?—but this had run itself All out like a long life to a sour end— And them that round it sat with golden cups To hand the wine to whosoever came— The twelve small damosels white as Innocence, In honour of poor Innocence the babe, Who left the gems which Innocence the Queen Lent to the King, and Innocence the King Gave for a prize—and one of those white slips Handed her cup and piped, the pretty one, ‘Drink, drink, Sir Fool,’ and thereupon I drank, Spat—pish—the cup was gold, the draught was mud.” And Tristram, “Was it muddier than thy gibes? Is all the laughter gone dead out of thee?— Not marking how the knighthood mock thee, fool— ‘Fear God: honour the King—his one true knight— Sole follower of the vows’—for here be they Who knew thee swine enow

before I came, Smuttier than blasted grain: but when the King Had made thee fool, thy vanity so shot up It frighted all free fool from out thy heart; Which left thee less than fool, and less than swine, A naked aught—yet swine I hold thee still, For I have flung thee pearls and find thee swine." And little Dagonet mincing with his feet, "Knight, an ye fling those rubies round my neck In lieu of hers, I'll hold thou hast some touch Of music, since I care not for thy pearls. Swine? I have wallowed, I have washed—the world Is flesh and shadow—I have had my day. The dirty nurse, Experience, in her kind Hath fouled me—an I wallowed, then I washed— I have had my day and my philosophies— And thank the Lord I am King Arthur's fool. Swine, say ye? swine, goats, asses, rams and geese Trooped round a Paynim harper once, who thrummed On such a wire as musically as thou Some such fine song—but never a king's fool." And Tristram, "Then were swine, goats, asses, geese The wiser fools, seeing thy Paynim bard Had such a mastery of his mystery That he could harp his wife up out of hell." Then Dagonet, turning on the ball of his foot, "And whither harp'st thou thine? down! and thyself Down! and two more: a helpful harper thou, That harpest downward! Dost thou know the star We call the harp of Arthur up in heaven?" And Tristram, "Ay, Sir Fool, for when our King Was victor wellnigh day by day, the knights, Glorying in each new glory, set his name High on all hills, and in the signs of heaven." And Dagonet answered, "Ay, and when the land Was freed, and the Queen false, ye set yourself To babble about him, all to show your wit— And whether he were King by courtesy, Or King by right—and so went harping down The black king's highway, got so far, and grew So witty that ye played at ducks and drakes With Arthur's vows on the great lake of fire. Tuwhoo! do ye see it? do ye see the star?" "Nay, fool," said Tristram, "not in open day." And Dagonet, "Nay, nor will: I see it and hear. It makes a silent music up in heaven, And I, and Arthur and the angels hear, And then we skip." "Lo, fool," he said, "ye talk Fool's treason: is the King thy brother fool?" Then little Dagonet clapt his hands and shrilled, "Ay, ay, my brother fool, the king of fools! Conceits himself as God that he

can make Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk From burning spurge, honey from hornet-combs, And men from beasts—Long live the king of fools!" And down the city Dagonet danced away; But through the slowly-mellowing avenues And solitary passes of the wood Rode Tristram toward Lyonnesse and the west. Before him fled the face of Queen Isolt With ruby-circled neck, but evermore Past, as a rustle or twitter in the wood Made dull his inner, keen his outer eye For all that walked, or crept, or perched, or flew. Anon the face, as, when a gust hath blown, Unruffling waters re-collect the shape Of one that in them sees himself, returned; But at the slot or fewmets of a deer, Or even a fallen feather, vanished again. So on for all that day from lawn to lawn Through many a league-long bower he rode. At length A lodge of intertwisted beechen-boughs Furze-crammed, and bracken-rooft, the which himself Built for a summer day with Queen Isolt Against a shower, dark in the golden grove Appearing, sent his fancy back to where She lived a moon in that low lodge with him: Till Mark her lord had past, the Cornish King, With six or seven, when Tristram was away, And snatched her thence; yet dreading worse than shame Her warrior Tristram, spake not any word, But bode his hour, devising wretchedness. And now that desert lodge to Tristram lookt So sweet, that halting, in he past, and sank Down on a drift of foliage random-blown; But could not rest for musing how to smoothe And sleek his marriage over to the Queen. Perchance in lone Tintagil far from all The tonguesters of the court she had not heard. But then what folly had sent him overseas After she left him lonely here? a name? Was it the name of one in Brittany, Isolt, the daughter of the King? "Isolt Of the white hands" they called her: the sweet name Allured him first, and then the maid herself, Who served him well with those white hands of hers, And loved him well, until himself had thought He loved her also, wedded easily, But left her all as easily, and returned. The black-blue Irish hair and Irish eyes Had drawn him home—what marvel? then he laid His brows upon the drifted leaf and dreamed. He seemed to pace the strand of Brittany Between Isolt of Britain and his bride, And showed them both the

ruby-chain, and both Began to struggle for it, till his Queen Graspt it so hard, that all her hand was red. Then cried the Breton, “Look, her hand is red! These be no rubies, this is frozen blood, And melts within her hand—her hand is hot With ill desires, but this I gave thee, look, Is all as cool and white as any flower.” Followed a rush of eagle’s wings, and then A whimpering of the spirit of the child, Because the twain had spoiled her carcanet. He dreamed; but Arthur with a hundred spears Rode far, till o’er the illimitable reed, And many a glancing plash and sallowy isle, The wide-winged sunset of the misty marsh Glared on a huge machicolated tower That stood with open doors, whereout was rolled A roar of riot, as from men secure Amid their marshes, ruffians at their ease Among their harlot-brides, an evil song. “Lo there,” said one of Arthur’s youth, for there, High on a grim dead tree before the tower, A goodly brother of the Table Round Swung by the neck: and on the boughs a shield Showing a shower of blood in a field noir, And therebeside a horn, inflamed the knights At that dishonour done the gilded spur, Till each would clash the shield, and blow the horn. But Arthur waved them back. Alone he rode. Then at the dry harsh roar of the great horn, That sent the face of all the marsh aloft An ever upward-rushing storm and cloud Of shriek and plume, the Red Knight heard, and all, Even to tipmost lance and topmost helm, In blood-red armour sallying, howled to the King, “The teeth of Hell flay bare and gnash thee flat!— Lo! art thou not that eunuch-hearted King Who fain had clipt free manhood from the world— The woman-worshipper? Yea, God’s curse, and I! Slain was the brother of my paramour By a knight of thine, and I that heard her whine And snivel, being eunuch-hearted too, Sware by the scorpion-worm that twists in hell, And stings itself to everlasting death, To hang whatever knight of thine I fought And tumbled. Art thou King? —Look to thy life!” He ended: Arthur knew the voice; the face Wellnigh was helmet-hidden, and the name Went wandering somewhere darkling in his mind. And Arthur deigned not use of word or sword, But let the drunkard, as he stretched from horse To strike him, overbalancing his bulk, Down from the causeway heavily to the

swamp Fall, as the crest of some slow-arching wave, Heard in dead night along that table-shore, Drops flat, and after the great waters break Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves, Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud, From less and less to nothing; thus he fell Head-heavy; then the knights, who watched him, roared And shouted and leapt down upon the fallen; There trampled out his face from being known, And sank his head in mire, and slimed themselves: Nor heard the King for their own cries, but sprang Through open doors, and swording right and left Men, women, on their sodden faces, hurled The tables over and the wines, and slew Till all the rafters rang with woman-yells, And all the pavement streamed with massacre: Then, echoing yell with yell, they fired the tower, Which half that autumn night, like the live North, Red-pulsing up through Alioth and Alcor, Made all above it, and a hundred meres About it, as the water Moab saw Came round by the East, and out beyond them flushed The long low dune, and lazy-plunging sea. So all the ways were safe from shore to shore, But in the heart of Arthur pain was lord. Then, out of Tristram waking, the red dream Fled with a shout, and that low lodge returned, Mid-forest, and the wind among the boughs. He whistled his good warhorse left to graze Among the forest greens, vaulted upon him, And rode beneath an ever-showering leaf, Till one lone woman, weeping near a cross, Stayed him. “Why weep ye?” “Lord,” she said, “my man Hath left me or is dead;” whereon he thought— “What, if she hate me now? I would not this. What, if she love me still? I would not that. I know not what I would”—but said to her, “Yet weep not thou, lest, if thy mate return, He find thy favour changed and love thee not”— Then pressing day by day through Lyonnesse Last in a roky hollow, belling, heard The hounds of Mark, and felt the goodly hounds Yelp at his heart, but turning, past and gained Tintagil, half in sea, and high on land, A crown of towers. Down in a casement sat, A low sea-sunset glorying round her hair And glossy-throated grace, Isolt the Queen. And when she heard the feet of Tristram grind The spiring stone that scaled about her tower, Flushed, started, met him at the doors, and there Belted his body

with her white embrace, Crying aloud, “Not Mark—not Mark, my soul! The footstep fluttered me at first: not he: Catlike through his own castle steals my Mark, But warrior-wise thou stridest through his halls Who hates thee, as I him—even to the death. My soul, I felt my hatred for my Mark Quicken within me, and knew that thou wert nigh.” To whom Sir Tristram smiling, “I am here. Let be thy Mark, seeing he is not thine.” And drawing somewhat backward she replied, “Can he be wronged who is not even his own, But save for dread of thee had beaten me, Scratched, bitten, blinded, marred me somehow—Mark? What rights are his that dare not strike for them? Not lift a hand—not, though he found me thus! But harken! have ye met him? hence he went Today for three days’ hunting—as he said— And so returns belike within an hour. Mark’s way, my soul!—but eat not thou with Mark, Because he hates thee even more than fears; Nor drink: and when thou passest any wood Close vizor, lest an arrow from the bush Should leave me all alone with Mark and hell. My God, the measure of my hate for Mark Is as the measure of my love for thee.” So, plucked one way by hate and one by love, Drained of her force, again she sat, and spake To Tristram, as he knelt before her, saying, “O hunter, and O blower of the horn, Harper, and thou hast been a rover too, For, ere I mated with my shambling king, Ye twain had fallen out about the bride Of one—his name is out of me—the prize, If prize she were—(what marvel—she could see)— Thine, friend; and ever since my craven seeks To wreck thee villainously: but, O Sir Knight, What dame or damsel have ye kneeled to last?” And Tristram, “Last to my Queen Paramount, Here now to my Queen Paramount of love And loveliness—ay, lovelier than when first Her light feet fell on our rough Lyonnesse, Sailing from Ireland.” Softly laughed Isolt; “Flatter me not, for hath not our great Queen My dole of beauty trebled?” and he said, “Her beauty is her beauty, and thine thine, And thine is more to me—soft, gracious, kind— Save when thy Mark is kindled on thy lips Most gracious; but she, haughty, even to him, Lancelot; for I have seen him wan enow To make one doubt if ever the great Queen Have yielded him her love.” To whom Isolt,

“Ah then, false hunter and false harper, thou Who brakest through the scruple of my bond, Calling me thy white hind, and saying to me That Guinevere had sinned against the highest, And I—misyoked with such a want of man— That I could hardly sin against the lowest.” He answered, “O my soul, be comforted! If this be sweet, to sin in leading-strings, If here be comfort, and if ours be sin, Crowned warrant had we for the crowning sin That made us happy: but how ye greet me—fear And fault and doubt—no word of that fond tale— Thy deep heart-yearnings, thy sweet memories Of Tristram in that year he was away.” And, saddening on the sudden, spake Isolt, “I had forgotten all in my strong joy To see thee—yearnings?—ay! for, hour by hour, Here in the never-ended afternoon, O sweeter than all memories of thee, Deeper than any yearnings after thee Seemed those far-rolling, westward-smiling seas, Watched from this tower. Isolt of Britain dashed Before Isolt of Brittany on the strand, Would that have chilled her bride-kiss? Wedded her? Fought in her father’s battles? wounded there? The King was all fulfilled with gratefulness, And she, my namesake of the hands, that healed Thy hurt and heart with unguent and caress— Well—can I wish her any huger wrong Than having known thee? her too hast thou left To pine and waste in those sweet memories. O were I not my Mark’s, by whom all men Are noble, I should hate thee more than love.” And Tristram, fondling her light hands, replied, “Grace, Queen, for being loved: she loved me well. Did I love her? the name at least I loved. Isolt?—I fought his battles, for Isolt! The night was dark; the true star set. Isolt! The name was ruler of the dark—Isolt? Care not for her! patient, and prayerful, meek, Pale-blooded, she will yield herself to God.” And Isolt answered, “Yea, and why not I? Mine is the larger need, who am not meek, Pale-blooded, prayerful. Let me tell thee now. Here one black, mute midsummer night I sat, Lonely, but musing on thee, wondering where, Murmuring a light song I had heard thee sing, And once or twice I spake thy name aloud. Then flashed a levin-brand; and near me stood, In fuming sulphur blue and green, a fiend— Mark’s way to steal behind one in the dark— For

there was Mark: ‘He has wedded her,’ he said, Not said, but hissed it: then this crown of towers So shook to such a roar of all the sky, That here in utter dark I swooned away, And woke again in utter dark, and cried, ‘I will flee hence and give myself to God’— And thou wert lying in thy new leman’s arms.” Then Tristram, ever dallying with her hand, “May God be with thee, sweet, when old and gray, And past desire!” a saying that angered her. “‘May God be with thee, sweet, when thou art old, And sweet no more to me!’ I need Him now. For when had Lancelot uttered aught so gross Even to the swineherd’s malkin in the mast? The greater man, the greater courtesy. Far other was the Tristram, Arthur’s knight! But thou, through ever harrying thy wild beasts— Save that to touch a harp, tilt with a lance Becomes thee well—art grown wild beast thyself. How darest thou, if lover, push me even In fancy from thy side, and set me far In the gray distance, half a life away, Her to be loved no more? Unsay it, unswear! Flatter me rather, seeing me so weak, Broken with Mark and hate and solitude, Thy marriage and mine own, that I should suck Lies like sweet wines: lie to me: I believe. Will ye not lie? not swear, as there ye kneel, And solemnly as when ye sware to him, The man of men, our King—My God, the power Was once in vows when men believed the King! They lied not then, who sware, and through their vows The King prevailing made his realm:—I say, Swear to me thou wilt love me even when old, Gray-haired, and past desire, and in despair.” Then Tristram, pacing moodily up and down, “Vows! did you keep the vow you made to Mark More than I mine? Lied, say ye? Nay, but learnt, The vow that binds too strictly snaps itself— My knighthood taught me this—ay, being snapt— We run more counter to the soul thereof Than had we never sworn. I swear no more. I swore to the great King, and am forsworn. For once—even to the height—I honoured him. ‘Man, is he man at all?’ methought, when first I rode from our rough Lyonnesse, and beheld That victor of the Pagan throned in hall— His hair, a sun that rayed from off a brow Like hillsnow high in heaven, the steel-blue eyes, The golden beard that clothed his lips with light— Moreover, that weird legend of

his birth, With Merlin's mystic babble about his end Amazed me; then, his foot was on a stool Shaped as a dragon; he seemed to me no man, But Michael trampling Satan; so I sware, Being amazed: but this went by— The vows! O ay—the wholesome madness of an hour— They served their use, their time; for every knight Believed himself a greater than himself, And every follower eyed him as a God; Till he, being lifted up beyond himself, Did mightier deeds than elsewise he had done, And so the realm was made; but then their vows— First mainly through that sullying of our Queen— Began to gall the knighthood, asking whence Had Arthur right to bind them to himself? Dropt down from heaven? washed up from out the deep? They failed to trace him through the flesh and blood Of our old kings: whence then? a doubtful lord To bind them by inviolable vows, Which flesh and blood perforce would violate: For feel this arm of mine—the tide within Red with free chase and heather-scented air, Pulsing full man; can Arthur make me pure As any maiden child? lock up my tongue From uttering freely what I freely hear? Bind me to one? The wide world laughs at it. And worldling of the world am I, and know The ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour Woos his own end; we are not angels here Nor shall be: vows—I am woodman of the woods, And hear the garnet-headed yaffingale Mock them: my soul, we love but while we may; And therefore is my love so large for thee, Seeing it is not bounded save by love." Here ending, he moved toward her, and she said, "Good: an I turned away my love for thee To some one thrice as courteous as thyself— For courtesy wins woman all as well As valour may, but he that closes both Is perfect, he is Lancelot—taller indeed, Rosier and comelier, thou—but say I loved This knightliest of all knights, and cast thee back Thine own small saw, 'We love but while we may,' Well then, what answer?" He that while she spake, Mindful of what he brought to adorn her with, The jewels, had let one finger lightly touch The warm white apple of her throat, replied, "Press this a little closer, sweet, until— Come, I am hungered and half-angered—meat, Wine, wine—and I will love thee to the death, And out beyond into the dream to come." So

then, when both were brought to full accord, She rose, and set before him all he willed; And after these had comforted the blood With meats and wines, and satiated their hearts— Now talking of their woodland paradise, The deer, the dews, the fern, the founts, the lawns; Now mocking at the much ungainliness, And craven shifts, and long crane legs of Mark— Then Tristram laughing caught the harp, and sang: "Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that bend the brier! A star in heaven, a star within the mere! Ay, ay, O ay—a star was my desire, And one was far apart, and one was near: Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that bow the grass! And one was water and one star was fire, And one will ever shine and one will pass. Ay, ay, O ay—the winds that move the mere." Then in the light's last glimmer Tristram showed And swung the ruby carcanet. She cried, "The collar of some Order, which our King Hath newly founded, all for thee, my soul, For thee, to yield thee grace beyond thy peers." "Not so, my Queen," he said, "but the red fruit Grown on a magic oak-tree in mid-heaven, And won by Tristram as a tourney-prize, And hither brought by Tristram for his last Love-offering and peace-offering unto thee." He spoke, he turned, then, flinging round her neck, Claspt it, and cried, "Thine Order, O my Queen!" But, while he bowed to kiss the jewelled throat, Out of the dark, just as the lips had touched, Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek— "Mark's way," said Mark, and clove him through the brain. That night came Arthur home, and while he climbed, All in a death-dumb autumn-dripping gloom, The stairway to the hall, and looked and saw The great Queen's bower was dark,—about his feet A voice clung sobbing till he questioned it, "What art thou?" and the voice about his feet Sent up an answer, sobbing, "I am thy fool, And I shall never make thee smile again."

Guinevere

Queen Guinevere had fled the court, and sat There in the holy house at Almesbury Weeping, none with her save a little maid, A novice: one low light betwixt them

burned Blurred by the creeping mist, for all abroad, Beneath a moon unseen albeit at full, The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face, Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still. For hither had she fled, her cause of flight Sir Modred; he that like a subtle beast Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne, Ready to spring, waiting a chance: for this He chilled the popular praises of the King With silent smiles of slow disparagement; And tampered with the Lords of the White Horse, Heathen, the brood by Hengist left; and sought To make disruption in the Table Round Of Arthur, and to splinter it into feuds Serving his traitorous end; and all his aims Were sharpened by strong hate for Lancelot. For thus it chanced one morn when all the court, Green-suited, but with plumes that mocked the may, Had been, their wont, a-maying and returned, That Modred still in green, all ear and eye, Climbed to the high top of the garden-wall To spy some secret scandal if he might, And saw the Queen who sat betwixt her best Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court The wiliest and the worst; and more than this He saw not, for Sir Lancelot passing by Spied where he couched, and as the gardener's hand Picks from the colewort a green caterpillar, So from the high wall and the flowering grove Of grasses Lancelot plucked him by the heel, And cast him as a worm upon the way; But when he knew the Prince though marred with dust, He, reverencing king's blood in a bad man, Made such excuses as he might, and these Full knightly without scorn; for in those days No knight of Arthur's noblest dealt in scorn; But, if a man were halt or hunched, in him By those whom God had made full-limbed and tall, Scorn was allowed as part of his defect, And he was answered softly by the King And all his Table. So Sir Lancelot holp To raise the Prince, who rising twice or thrice Full sharply smote his knees, and smiled, and went: But, ever after, the small violence done Rankled in him and ruffled all his heart, As the sharp wind that ruffles all day long A little bitter pool about a stone On the bare coast. But when Sir Lancelot told This matter to the Queen, at first she laughed Lightly, to think of Modred's dusty fall, Then shuddered, as the village wife who cries "I shudder, some one steps across

my grave;" Then laughed again, but faintlier, for indeed She half-foresaw that he, the subtle beast, Would track her guilt until he found, and hers Would be for evermore a name of scorn. Henceforward rarely could she front in hall, Or elsewhere, Modred's narrow foxy face, Heart-hiding smile, and gray persistent eye: Henceforward too, the Powers that tend the soul, To help it from the death that cannot die, And save it even in extremes, began To vex and plague her. Many a time for hours, Beside the placid breathings of the King, In the dead night, grim faces came and went Before her, or a vague spiritual fear— Like to some doubtful noise of creaking doors, Heard by the watcher in a haunted house, That keeps the rust of murder on the walls— Held her awake: or if she slept, she dreamed An awful dream; for then she seemed to stand On some vast plain before a setting sun, And from the sun there swiftly made at her A ghastly something, and its shadow flew Before it, till it touched her, and she turned— When lo! her own, that broadening from her feet, And blackening, swallowed all the land, and in it Far cities burnt, and with a cry she woke. And all this trouble did not pass but grew; Till even the clear face of the guileless King, And trustful courtesies of household life, Became her bane; and at the last she said, "O Lancelot, get thee hence to thine own land, For if thou tarry we shall meet again, And if we meet again, some evil chance Will make the smouldering scandal break and blaze Before the people, and our lord the King." And Lancelot ever promised, but remained, And still they met and met. Again she said, "O Lancelot, if thou love me get thee hence." And then they were agreed upon a night (When the good King should not be there) to meet And part for ever. Vivien, lurking, heard. She told Sir Modred. Passion-pale they met And greeted. Hands in hands, and eye to eye, Low on the border of her couch they sat Stammering and staring. It was their last hour, A madness of farewells. And Modred brought His creatures to the basement of the tower For testimony; and crying with full voice "Traitor, come out, ye are trapt at last," aroused Lancelot, who rushing outward lionlike Leapt on him, and hurled him headlong, and he fell Stunned, and his

creatures took and bare him off, And all was still: then she, “The end is come, And I am shamed for ever;” and he said, “Mine be the shame; mine was the sin: but rise, And fly to my strong castle overseas: There will I hide thee, till my life shall end, There hold thee with my life against the world.” She answered, “Lancelot, wilt thou hold me so? Nay, friend, for we have taken our farewells. Would God that thou couldst hide me from myself! Mine is the shame, for I was wife, and thou Unwedded: yet rise now, and let us fly, For I will draw me into sanctuary, And bide my doom.” So Lancelot got her horse, Set her thereon, and mounted on his own, And then they rode to the divided way, There kissed, and parted weeping: for he past, Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen, Back to his land; but she to Almesbury Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald, And heard the Spirits of the waste and weald Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan: And in herself she moaned “Too late, too late!” Till in the cold wind that foreruns the morn, A blot in heaven, the Raven, flying high, Croaked, and she thought, “He spies a field of death; For now the Heathen of the Northern Sea, Lured by the crimes and frailties of the court, Begin to slay the folk, and spoil the land.” And when she came to Almesbury she spake There to the nuns, and said, “Mine enemies Pursue me, but, O peaceful Sisterhood, Receive, and yield me sanctuary, nor ask Her name to whom ye yield it, till her time To tell you:” and her beauty, grace and power, Wrought as a charm upon them, and they spared To ask it. So the stately Queen abode For many a week, unknown, among the nuns; Nor with them mixed, nor told her name, nor sought, Wrapt in her grief, for housel or for shrift, But communed only with the little maid, Who pleased her with a babbling heedlessness Which often lured her from herself; but now, This night, a rumour wildly blown about Came, that Sir Modred had usurped the realm, And leagued him with the heathen, while the King Was waging war on Lancelot: then she thought, “With what a hate the people and the King Must hate me,” and bowed down upon her hands Silent, until the little maid, who brooked No silence, brake it, uttering, “Late! so late! What hour, I

wonder, now?" and when she drew No answer, by and by began to hum An air the nuns had taught her; "Late, so late!" Which when she heard, the Queen looked up, and said, "O maiden, if indeed ye list to sing, Sing, and unbind my heart that I may weep." Whereat full willingly sang the little maid. "Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill! Late, late, so late! but we can enter still. Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now. "No light had we: for that we do repent; And learning this, the bridegroom will relent. Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now. "No light: so late! and dark and chill the night! O let us in, that we may find the light! Too late, too late: ye cannot enter now. "Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet? O let us in, though late, to kiss his feet! No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now." So sang the novice, while full passionately, Her head upon her hands, remembering Her thought when first she came, wept the sad Queen. Then said the little novice prattling to her, "O pray you, noble lady, weep no more; But let my words, the words of one so small, Who knowing nothing knows but to obey, And if I do not there is penance given— Comfort your sorrows; for they do not flow From evil done; right sure am I of that, Who see your tender grace and stateliness. But weigh your sorrows with our lord the King's, And weighing find them less; for gone is he To wage grim war against Sir Lancelot there, Round that strong castle where he holds the Queen; And Modred whom he left in charge of all, The traitor—Ah sweet lady, the King's grief For his own self, and his own Queen, and realm, Must needs be thrice as great as any of ours. For me, I thank the saints, I am not great. For if there ever come a grief to me I cry my cry in silence, and have done. None knows it, and my tears have brought me good: But even were the griefs of little ones As great as those of great ones, yet this grief Is added to the griefs the great must bear, That howsoever much they may desire Silence, they cannot weep behind a cloud: As even here they talk at Almesbury About the good King and his wicked Queen, And were I such a King with such a Queen, Well might I wish to veil her wickedness, But were I such a King, it could not be." Then to her own sad heart muttered the Queen, "Will the

child kill me with her innocent talk?" But openly she answered, "Must not I, If this false traitor have displaced his lord, Grieve with the common grief of all the realm?" "Yea," said the maid, "this is all woman's grief, That she is woman, whose disloyal life Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round Which good King Arthur founded, years ago, With signs and miracles and wonders, there At Camelot, ere the coming of the Queen." Then thought the Queen within herself again, "Will the child kill me with her foolish prate?" But openly she spake and said to her, "O little maid, shut in by nunnery walls, What canst thou know of Kings and Tables Round, Or what of signs and wonders, but the signs And simple miracles of thy nunnery?" To whom the little novice garrulously, "Yea, but I know: the land was full of signs And wonders ere the coming of the Queen. So said my father, and himself was knight Of the great Table—at the founding of it; And rode thereto from Lyonnesse, 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 Lyonnesse, Each with a beacon-star upon his head, And with a wild sea-light about his feet, He saw them—headland after headland flame Far on into the rich heart of the west: And in the light the white mermaiden swam, And strong man-breasted things stood from the sea, And sent a deep sea-voice through all the land, To which the little elves of chasm and cleft Made answer, sounding like a distant horn. So said my father—yea, and furthermore, Next morning, while he past the dim-lit woods, Himself beheld three spirits mad with joy Come dashing down on a tall wayside flower, That shook beneath them, as the thistle shakes When three gray linnets wrangle for the seed: And still at evenings on before his horse The flickering fairy-circle wheeled and broke Flying, and linked again, and wheeled and broke Flying, for all the land was full of life. And when at last he came to Camelot, A wreath of airy dancers hand-in-hand Swung round the lighted lantern of the hall; And in the hall itself was such a feast As never man had dreamed; for every knight Had whatsoever meat he longed for served By hands unseen; and even as he said

Down in the cellars merry bloated things Shouldered the spigot, straddling on the butts While the wine ran: so glad were spirits and men Before the coming of the sinful Queen." Then spake the Queen and somewhat bitterly, "Were they so glad? ill prophets were they all, Spirits and men: could none of them foresee, Not even thy wise father with his signs And wonders, what has fallen upon the realm?" To whom the novice garrulously again, "Yea, one, a bard; of whom my father said, Full many a noble war-song had he sung, Even in the presence of an enemy's fleet, Between the steep cliff and the coming wave; And many a mystic lay of life and death Had chanted on the smoky mountain-tops, When round him bent the spirits of the hills With all their dewy hair blown back like flame: So said my father—and that night the bard Sang Arthur's glorious wars, and sang the King As wellnigh more than man, and railed at those Who called him the false son of Gorlois: For there was no man knew from whence he came; But after tempest, when the long wave broke All down the thundering shores of Bude and Bos, There came a day as still as heaven, and then They found a naked child upon the sands Of dark Tintagil by the Cornish sea; And that was Arthur; and they fostered him Till he by miracle was approven King: And that his grave should be a mystery From all men, like his birth; and could he find A woman in her womanhood as great As he was in his manhood, then, he sang, The twain together well might change the world. But even in the middle of his song He faltered, and his hand fell from the harp, And pale he turned, and reeled, and would have fallen, But that they stayed him up; nor would he tell His vision; but what doubt that he foresaw This evil work of Lancelot and the Queen?" Then thought the Queen, "Lo! they have set her on, Our simple-seeming Abbess and her nuns, To play upon me," and bowed her head nor spake. Whereat the novice crying, with clasped hands, Shame on her own garrulity garrulously, Said the good nuns would check her gadding tongue Full often, "and, sweet lady, if I seem To vex an ear too sad to listen to me, Unmannerly, with prattling and the tales Which my good father told me, check me too Nor let me shame my father's memory, one Of noblest

manners, though himself would say Sir Lancelot had the noblest; and he died, Killed in a tilt, come next, five summers back, And left me; but of others who remain, And of the two first-famed for courtesy— And pray you check me if I ask amiss— But pray you, which had noblest, while you moved Among them, Lancelot or our lord the King?" Then the pale Queen looked up and answered her, "Sir Lancelot, as became a noble knight, Was gracious to all ladies, and the same In open battle or the tilting-field Forbore his own advantage, and the King In open battle or the tilting-field Forbore his own advantage, and these two Were the most nobly-mannered men of all; For manners are not idle, but the fruit Of loyal nature, and of noble mind." "Yea," said the maid, "be manners such fair fruit?" Then Lancelot's needs must be a thousand-fold Less noble, being, as all rumour runs, The most disloyal friend in all the world." To which a mournful answer made the Queen: "O closed about by narrowing nunnery-walls, What knowest thou of the world, and all its lights And shadows, all the wealth and all the woe? If ever Lancelot, that most noble knight, Were for one hour less noble than himself, Pray for him that he scape the doom of fire, And weep for her that drew him to his doom." "Yea," said the little novice, "I pray for both; But I should all as soon believe that his, Sir Lancelot's, were as noble as the King's, As I could think, sweet lady, yours would be Such as they are, were you the sinful Queen." So she, like many another babbler, hurt Whom she would soothe, and harmed where she would heal; For here a sudden flush of wrathful heat Fired all the pale face of the Queen, who cried, "Such as thou art be never maiden more For ever! thou their tool, set on to plague And play upon, and harry me, petty spy And traitress." When that storm of anger brake From Guinevere, aghast the maiden rose, White as her veil, and stood before the Queen As tremulously as foam upon the beach Stands in a wind, ready to break and fly, And when the Queen had added "Get thee hence," Fled frighted. Then that other left alone Sighed, and began to gather heart again, Saying in herself, "The simple, fearful child Meant nothing, but my own too-fearful guilt, Simpler than any child,

betrays itself. But help me, heaven, for surely I repent. For what is true repentance but in thought— Not even in inmost thought to think again The sins that made the past so pleasant to us: And I have sworn never to see him more, To see him more." And even in saying this, Her memory from old habit of the mind Went slipping back upon the golden days In which she saw him first, when Lancelot came, Reputed the best knight and goodliest man, Ambassador, to lead her to his lord Arthur, and led her forth, and far ahead Of his and her retinue moving, they, Rapt in sweet talk or lively, all on love And sport and tilts and pleasure, (for the time Was maytime, and as yet no sin was dreamed,) Rode under groves that looked a paradise Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth That seemed the heavens upbreaking through the earth, And on from hill to hill, and every day Beheld at noon in some delicious dale The silk pavilions of King Arthur raised For brief repast or afternoon repose By couriers gone before; and on again, Till yet once more ere set of sun they saw The Dragon of the great Pendragonship, That crowned the state pavilion of the King, Blaze by the rushing brook or silent well. But when the Queen immersed in such a trance, And moving through the past unconsciously, Came to that point where first she saw the King Ride toward her from the city, sighed to find Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold, High, self-contained, and passionless, not like him, "Not like my Lancelot"—while she brooded thus And grew half-guilty in her thoughts again, There rode an armed warrior to the doors. A murmuring whisper through the nunnery ran, Then on a sudden a cry, "The King." She sat Stiff-stricken, listening; but when armed feet Through the long gallery from the outer doors Rang coming, prone from off her seat she fell, And grovelled with her face against the floor: There with her milkwhite arms and shadowy hair She made her face a darkness from the King: And in the darkness heard his armed feet Pause by her; then came silence, then a voice, Monotonous and hollow like a Ghost's Denouncing judgment, but though changed, the King's: "Liest thou here so low, the child of one I honoured, happy, dead before thy shame? Well is it that no child is born of thee. The children

born of thee are sword and fire, Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws, The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea; Whom I, while yet Sir Lancelot, my right arm, The mightiest of my knights, abode with me, Have everywhere about this land of Christ In twelve great battles ruining overthrown. And knowest thou now from whence I come—from him From waging bitter war with him: and he, That did not shun to smite me in worse way, Had yet that grace of courtesy in him left, He spared to lift his hand against the King Who made him knight: but many a knight was slain; And many more, and all his kith and kin Clave to him, and abode in his own land. And many more when Modred raised revolt, Forgetful of their troth and fealty, clave To Modred, and a remnant stays with me. And of this remnant will I leave a part, True men who love me still, for whom I live, To guard thee in the wild hour coming on, Lest but a hair of this low head be harmed. Fear not: thou shalt be guarded till my death. Howbeit I know, if ancient prophecies Have erred not, that I march to meet my doom. Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me, That I the King should greatly care to live; For thou hast spoilt the purpose of my life. Bear with me for the last time while I show, Even for thy sake, the sin which thou hast sinned. For when the Roman left us, and their law Relaxed its hold upon us, and the ways Were filled with rapine, here and there a deed Of prowess done redressed a random wrong. But I was first of all the kings who drew The knighthood-errant of this realm and all The realms together under me, their Head, In that fair Order of my Table Round, A glorious company, the flower of men, To serve as model for the mighty world, And be the fair beginning of a time. I made them lay their hands in mine and swear To reverence the King, as if he were Their conscience, and their conscience as their King, To break the heathen and uphold the Christ, To ride abroad redressing human wrongs, To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it, To honour his own word as if his God's, To lead sweet lives in purest chastity, To love one maiden only, cleave to her, And worship her by years of noble deeds, Until they won her; for indeed I knew Of no more subtle master under

heaven Than is the maiden passion for a maid, Not only to keep down the base in man, But teach high thought, and amiable words And courtliness, and the desire of fame, And love of truth, and all that makes a man. And all this throve before I wedded thee, Believing, 'lo mine helpmate, one to feel My purpose and rejoicing in my joy.' Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot; Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt; Then others, following these my mightiest knights, And drawing foul ensample from fair names, Sinned also, till the loathsome opposite Of all my heart had destined did obtain, And all through thee! so that this life of mine I guard as God's high gift from scathe and wrong, Not greatly care to lose; but rather think How sad it were for Arthur, should he live, To sit once more within his lonely hall, And miss the wonted number of my knights, And miss to hear high talk of noble deeds As in the golden days before thy sin. For which of us, who might be left, could speak Of the pure heart, nor seem to glance at thee? And in thy bowers of Camelot or of Usk Thy shadow still would glide from room to room, And I should evermore be vext with thee In hanging robe or vacant ornament, Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair. For think not, though thou wouldst not love thy lord, Thy lord hast wholly lost his love for thee. I am not made of so slight elements. Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame. I hold that man the worst of public foes Who either for his own or children's sake, To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife Whom he knows false, abide and rule the house: For being through his cowardice allowed Her station, taken everywhere for pure, She like a new disease, unknown to men, Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd, Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young. Worst of the worst were that man he that reigns! Better the King's waste hearth and aching heart Than thou reseated in thy place of light, The mockery of my people, and their bane." He paused, and in the pause she crept an inch Nearer, and laid her hands about his feet. Far off a solitary trumpet blew. Then waiting by the doors the warhorse neighed At a friend's voice, and he spake again:

“Yet think not that I come to urge thy crimes, I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere, I, whose vast pity almost makes me die To see thee, laying there thy golden head, My pride in happier summers, at my feet. The wrath which forced my thoughts on that fierce law, The doom of treason and the flaming death, (When first I learnt thee hidden here) is past. The pang—which while I weighed thy heart with one Too wholly true to dream untruth in thee, Made my tears burn—is also past—in part. And all is past, the sin is sinned, and I, Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God Forgives: do thou for thine own soul the rest. But how to take last leave of all I loved? O golden hair, with which I used to play Not knowing! O imperial-moulded form, And beauty such as never woman wore, Until it became a kingdom’s curse with thee— I cannot touch thy lips, they are not mine, But Lancelot’s: nay, they never were the King’s. I cannot take thy hand: that too is flesh, And in the flesh thou hast sinned; and mine own flesh, Here looking down on thine polluted, cries ‘I loathe thee:’ yet not less, O Guinevere, For I was ever virgin save for thee, My love through flesh hath wrought into my life So far, that my doom is, I love thee still. Let no man dream but that I love thee still. Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul, And so thou lean on our fair father Christ, Hereafter in that world where all are pure We two may meet before high God, and thou Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know I am thine husband—not a smaller soul, Nor Lancelot, nor another. Leave me that, I charge thee, my last hope. Now must I hence. Through the thick night I hear the trumpet blow: They summon me their King to lead mine hosts Far down to that great battle in the west, Where I must strike against the man they call My sister’s son—no kin of mine, who leagues With Lords of the White Horse, heathen, and knights, Traitors—and strike him dead, and meet myself Death, or I know not what mysterious doom. And thou remaining here wilt learn the event; But hither shall I never come again, Never lie by thy side; see thee no more— Farewell!” And while she grovelled at his feet, She felt the King’s breath wander o’er her neck, And in the darkness o’er her fallen head, Perceived the waving of his hands that blest. Then,

listening till those armed steps were gone, Rose the pale Queen, and in her anguish found The casement: “peradventure,” so she thought, “If I might see his face, and not be seen.” And lo, he sat on horseback at the door! And near him the sad nuns with each a light Stood, and he gave them charge about the Queen, To guard and foster her for evermore. And while he spake to these his helm was lowered, To which for crest the golden dragon clung Of Britain; so she did not see the face, Which then was as an angel’s, but she saw, Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights, The Dragon of the great Pendragonship Blaze, making all the night a steam of fire. And even then he turned; and more and more The moony vapour rolling round the King, Who seemed the phantom of a Giant in it, Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray And grayer, till himself became as mist Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom. Then she stretched out her arms and cried aloud “Oh Arthur!” there her voice brake suddenly, Then—as a stream that spouting from a cliff Fails in mid air, but gathering at the base Re-makes itself, and flashes down the vale— Went on in passionate utterance: “Gone—my lord! Gone through my sin to slay and to be slain! And he forgave me, and I could not speak. Farewell? I should have answered his farewell. His mercy choked me. Gone, my lord the King, My own true lord! how dare I call him mine? The shadow of another cleaves to me, And makes me one pollution: he, the King, Called me polluted: shall I kill myself? What help in that? I cannot kill my sin, If soul be soul; nor can I kill my shame; No, nor by living can I live it down. The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months The months will add themselves and make the years, The years will roll into the centuries, And mine will ever be a name of scorn. I must not dwell on that defeat of fame. Let the world be; that is but of the world. What else? what hope? I think there was a hope, Except he mocked me when he spake of hope; His hope he called it; but he never mocks, For mockery is the fume of little hearts. And blessed be the King, who hath forgiven My wickedness to him, and left me hope That in mine own heart I can live down sin And be his mate hereafter in the heavens Before high God. Ah great and gentle lord,

Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint Among his warring senses, to thy knights— To whom my false voluptuous pride, that took Full easily all impressions from below, Would not look up, or half-despised the height To which I would not or I could not climb— I thought I could not breathe in that fine air That pure severity of perfect light— I yearned for warmth and colour which I found In Lancelot—now I see thee what thou art, Thou art the highest and most human too, Not Lancelot, nor another. Is there none Will tell the King I love him though so late? Now—ere he goes to the great Battle? none: Myself must tell him in that purer life, But now it were too daring. Ah my God, What might I not have made of thy fair world, Had I but loved thy highest creature here? It was my duty to have loved the highest: It surely was my profit had I known: It would have been my pleasure had I seen. We needs must love the highest when we see it, Not Lancelot, nor another." Here her hand Grasped, made her vail her eyes: she looked and saw The novice, weeping, suppliant, and said to her, "Yea, little maid, for am I not forgiven?" Then glancing up beheld the holy nuns All round her, weeping; and her heart was loosed Within her, and she wept with these and said, "Ye know me then, that wicked one, who broke The vast design and purpose of the King. O shut me round with narrowing nunnery-walls, Meek maidens, from the voices crying 'shame.' I must not scorn myself: he loves me still. Let no one dream but that he loves me still. So let me, if you do not shudder at me, Nor shun to call me sister, dwell with you; Wear black and white, and be a nun like you, Fast with your fasts, not feasting with your feasts; Grieve with your griefs, not grieving at your joys, But not rejoicing; mingle with your rites; Pray and be prayed for; lie before your shrines; Do each low office of your holy house; Walk your dim cloister, and distribute dole To poor sick people, richer in His eyes Who ransomed us, and haler too than I; And treat their loathsome hurts and heal mine own; And so wear out in almsdeed and in prayer The sombre close of that voluptuous day, Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King." She said: they took her to themselves; and she Still hoping, fearing "is it yet too late?"

Dwelt with them, till in time their Abbess died. Then she, for her good deeds and her pure life, And for the power of ministration in her, And likewise for the high rank she had borne, Was chosen Abbess, there, an Abbess, lived For three brief years, and there, an Abbess, past To where beyond these voices there is peace.

The Passing of Arthur

That story which the bold Sir Bedivere, First made and latest left of all the knights, Told, when the man was no more than a voice In the white winter of his age, to those With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds. For on their march to westward, Bedivere, Who slowly paced among the slumbering host, Heard in his tent the moanings of the King: “I found Him in the shining of the stars, I marked Him in the flowering of His fields, But in His ways with men I find Him not. I waged His wars, and now I pass and die. O me! for why is all around us here As if some lesser god had made the world, But had not force to shape it as he would, Till the High God behold it from beyond, And enter it, and make it beautiful? Or else as if the world were wholly fair, But that these eyes of men are dense and dim, And have not power to see it as it is: Perchance, because we see not to the close;— For I, being simple, thought to work His will, And have but stricken with the sword in vain; And all whereon I leaned in wife and friend Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm Reels back into the beast, and is no more. My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death; Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die.” Then, ere that last weird battle in the west, There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain killed In Lancelot’s war, the ghost of Gawain blown Along a wandering wind, and past his ear Went shrilling, “Hollow, hollow all delight! Hail, King! tomorrow thou shalt pass away. Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee. And I am blown along a wandering wind, And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.” And fainter onward, like wild birds that change Their season in the night and wail their way From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream

Shrilled; but in going mingled with dim cries Far in the moonlit haze among the hills, As of some lonely city sacked by night, When all is lost, and wife and child with wail Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and called, “Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind, Thine, Gawain, was the voice—are these dim cries Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?” This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake: “O me, my King, let pass whatever will, Elves, and the harmless glamour of the field; But in their stead thy name and glory cling To all high places like a golden cloud For ever: but as yet thou shalt not pass. Light was Gawain in life, and light in death Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man; And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise— I hear the steps of Modred in the west, And with him many of thy people, and knights Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee. Right well in heart they know thee for the King. Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.” Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere: “Far other is this battle in the west Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth, And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome, Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall, And shook him through the north. Ill doom is mine To war against my people and my knights. The king who fights his people fights himself. And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke That strikes them dead is as my death to me. Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way Through this blind haze, which ever since I saw One lying in the dust at Almesbury, Hath folded in the passes of the world.” Then rose the King and moved his host by night, And ever pushed Sir Modred, league by league, Back to the sunset bound of Lyonnesse— A land of old upheaven from the abyss By fire, to sink into the abyss again; Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt, And the long mountains ended in a coast Of ever-shifting sand, and far away The phantom circle of a moaning sea. There the pursuer could pursue no more, And he that fled no further fly the King; And there, that day when the great light of heaven Burned at his lowest in the rolling year, On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed. Nor ever

yet had Arthur fought a fight Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west. A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea: Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold With formless fear; and even on Arthur fell Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought. For friend and foe were shadows in the mist, And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew; And some had visions out of golden youth, And some beheld the faces of old ghosts Look in upon the battle; and in the mist Was many a noble deed, many a base, And chance and craft and strength in single fights, And ever and anon with host to host Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn, Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash Of battleaxes on shattered helms, and shrieks After the Christ, of those who falling down Looked up for heaven, and only saw the mist; And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights, Oaths, insults, filth, and monstrous blasphemies, Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs In that close mist, and cryings for the light, Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead. Last, as by some one deathbed after wail Of suffering, silence follows, or through death Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore, Save for some whisper of the seething seas, A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew The mist aside, and with that wind the tide Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field Of battle: but no man was moving there; Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon, Nor yet of heathen; only the wan wave Brake in among dead faces, to and fro Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen, And shivered brands that once had fought with Rome, And rolling far along the gloomy shores The voice of days of old and days to be. Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere, And whiter than the mist that all day long Had held the field of battle was the King: “Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world, And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move, And beats upon the faces of the dead, My dead, as though they had not died for me?— O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fallen Confusion, till I know not what I am, Nor

whence I am, nor whether I be King. Behold, I seem but King among the dead." Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: "My King, King everywhere! and so the dead have kings, There also will I worship thee as King. Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought The heathen back among us, yonder stands, Modred, unharmed, the traitor of thine house." Then spake the King: "My house hath been my doom. But call not thou this traitor of my house Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me. My house are rather they who sware my vows, Yea, even while they brake them, owned me King. And well for thee, saying in my dark hour, When all the purport of my throne hath failed, That quick or dead thou holdest me for King. King am I, whatsoever be their cry; And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see Yet, ere I pass." And uttering this the King Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow, Striking the last stroke with Excalibur, Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell. So all day long the noise of battle rolled Among the mountains by the winter sea; Until King Arthur's Table, man by man, Had fallen in Lyonnesse about their lord, King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep, The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him, And bore him to a chapel nigh the field, A broken chancel with a broken cross, That stood on a dark strait of barren land: On one side lay the Ocean, and on one Lay a great water, and the moon was full. Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere: "The sequel of today unsolders all The goodliest fellowship of famous knights Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we Shall never more, at any future time, Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds, Walking about the gardens and the halls Of Camelot, as in the days that were. I perish by this people which I made,— Though Merlin sware that I should come again To rule once more; but, let what will be, be, I am so deeply smitten through the helm That without help I cannot last till morn. Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur, Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how In those old days, one summer noon, an arm Rose up from out the

bosom of the lake, Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful, Holding the sword—and how I rowed across And took it, and have worn it, like a king; And, wheresoever I am sung or told In aftertime, this also shall be known: But now delay not: take Excalibur, And fling him far into the middle mere: Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word." To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere: "It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus, Aidless, alone, and smitten through the helm— A little thing may harm a wounded man; Yet I thy hest will all perform at full, Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word." So saying, from the ruined shrine he stept, And in the moon athwart the place of tombs, Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men, Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock, Came on the shining levels of the lake. There drew he forth the brand Excalibur, And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon, Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt: For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks, Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood, This way and that dividing the swift mind, In act to throw: but at the last it seemed Better to leave Excalibur concealed There in the many-knotted waterflags, That whistled stiff and dry about the marge. So strode he back slow to the wounded King. Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere: "Hast thou performed my mission which I gave? What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?" And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere: "I heard the ripple washing in the reeds, And the wild water lapping on the crag." To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale: "Thou hast betrayed thy nature and thy name, Not rendering true answer, as beseemed Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight: For surer sign had followed, either hand, Or voice, or else a motion of the mere. This is a shameful thing for men to lie. Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again, As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word." Then went Sir Bedivere the second time Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere, Counting the dewy pebbles, fixed

in thought; But when he saw the wonder of the hilt, How curiously and strangely chased, he smote His palms together, and he cried aloud: “And if indeed I cast the brand away, Surely a precious thing, one worthy note, Should thus be lost for ever from the earth, Which might have pleased the eyes of many men. What good should follow this, if this were done? What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey, Seeing obedience is the bond of rule. Were it well to obey then, if a king demand An act unprofitable, against himself? The King is sick, and knows not what he does. What record, or what relic of my lord Should be to aftertime, but empty breath And rumours of a doubt? But were this kept, Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings, Some one might show it at a joust of arms, Saying, ‘King Arthur’s sword, Excalibur, Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake. Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps Upon the hidden bases of the hills.’ So might some old man speak in the aftertime To all the people, winning reverence. But now much honour and much fame were lost.” So spake he, clouded with his own conceit, And hid Excalibur the second time, And so strode back slow to the wounded King. Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily: “What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?” And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere: “I heard the water lapping on the crag, And the long ripple washing in the reeds.” To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath: “Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue, Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me! Authority forgets a dying king, Laid widowed of the power in his eye That bowed the will. I see thee what thou art, For thou, the latest-left of all my knights, In whom should meet the offices of all, Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt; Either from lust of gold, or like a girl Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes. Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice, And the third time may prosper, get thee hence: But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur, I will arise and slay thee with my hands.” Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran, And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged Among the bulrush beds, and clutched the sword, And strongly wheeled and threw it. The great brand Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon, And flashing

round and round, and whirled in an arch, Shot like a streamer of the northern morn, Seen where the moving isles of winter shock By night, with noises of the Northern Sea. So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur: But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful, And caught him by the hilt, and brandished him Three times, and drew him under in the mere. And lightly went the other to the King. Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath: “Now see I by thine eyes that this is done. Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?” And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere: “Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems Should blind my purpose, for I never saw, Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die, Not though I live three lives of mortal men, So great a miracle as yonder hilt. Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him; But when I looked again, behold an arm, Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful, That caught him by the hilt, and brandished him Three times, and drew him under in the mere.” And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard: “My end draws nigh; ’tis time that I were gone. Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight, And bear me to the margin; yet I fear My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.” So saying, from the pavement he half rose, Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm, And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere Remorsefully regarded through his tears, And would have spoken, but he found not words; Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee, O’er both his shoulders drew the languid hands, And rising bore him through the place of tombs. But, as he walked, King Arthur panted hard, Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed When all the house is mute. So sighed the King, Muttering and murmuring at his ear, “Quick, quick! I fear it is too late, and I shall die.” But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge, Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walked, Larger than human on the frozen hills. He heard the deep behind him, and a cry Before. His own thought drove him like a goad. Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves And barren chasms, and all to left and right The bare black cliff clanged round him, as he based His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang

Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels— And on a sudden, lo! the level lake, And the long glories of the winter moon. Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge, Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern, Beneath them; and descending they were ware That all the decks were dense with stately forms, Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose A cry that shivered to the tingling stars, And, as it were one voice, an agony Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills All night in a waste land, where no one comes, Or hath come, since the making of the world. Then murmured Arthur, "Place me in the barge." So to the barge they came. There those three Queens Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept. But she, that rose the tallest of them all And fairest, laid his head upon her lap, And loosed the shattered casque, and chafed his hands, And called him by his name, complaining loud, And dropping bitter tears against a brow Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white And colourless, and like the withered moon Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east; And all his greaves and cuisses dashed with drops Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls— That made his forehead like a rising sun High from the dais-throne—were parched with dust; Or, clotted into points and hanging loose, Mixed with the knightly growth that fringed his lips. So like a shattered column lay the King; Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest, From spur to plume a star of tournament, Shot through the lists at Camelot, and charged Before the eyes of ladies and of kings. Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere: "Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go? Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes? For now I see the true old times are dead, When every morning brought a noble chance, And every chance brought out a noble knight. Such times have been not since the light that led The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh. But now the whole Round Table is dissolved Which was an image of the mighty world, And I, the last, go forth companionless, And the days darken round me, and the years, Among new men, strange faces, other minds." And slowly answered Arthur from the barge: "The old order changeth,

yielding place to new, And God fulfils himself in many ways, Lest one good custom should corrupt the world. Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me? I have lived my life, and that which I have done May He within himself make pure! but thou, If thou shouldst never see my face again, Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice Rise like a fountain for me night and day. For what are men better than sheep or goats That nourish a blind life within the brain, If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer Both for themselves and those who call them friend? For so the whole round earth is every way Bound by gold chains about the feet of God. But now farewell. I am going a long way With these thou seest—if indeed I go (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)— To the island-valley of Avilion; Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea, Where I will heal me of my grievous wound." So said he, and the barge with oar and sail Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan That, fluting a wild carol ere her death, Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere Revolving many memories, till the hull Looked one black dot against the verge of dawn, And on the mere the wailing died away. But when that moan had past for evermore, The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn Amazed him, and he groaned, "The King is gone." And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme, "From the great deep to the great deep he goes." Whereat he slowly turned and slowly clomb The last hard footstep of that iron crag; Thence marked the black hull moving yet, and cried, "He passes to be King among the dead, And after healing of his grievous wound He comes again; but—if he come no more— O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat, Who shrieked and wailed, the three whereat we gazed On that high day, when, clothed with living light, They stood before his throne in silence, friends Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?" Then from the dawn it seemed there came, but faint As from beyond the limit of the world, Like the last

echo born of a great cry, Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice Around a king returning from his wars. Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb Even to the highest he could climb, and saw, Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand, Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King, Down that long water opening on the deep Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go From less to less and vanish into light. And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

To the Queen

O loyal to the royal in thyself, And loyal to thy land, as this to thee— Bear witness, that rememberable day, When, pale as yet, and fever-worn, the Prince Who scarce had plucked his flickering life again From halfway down the shadow of the grave, Past with thee through thy people and their love, And London rolled one tide of joy through all Her trebled millions, and loud leagues of man And welcome! witness, too, the silent cry, The prayer of many a race and creed, and clime— Thunderless lightnings striking under sea From sunset and sunrise of all thy realm, And that true North, whereof we lately heard A strain to shame us “keep you to yourselves; So loyal is too costly! friends—your love Is but a burthen: loose the bond, and go.” Is this the tone of empire? here the faith That made us rulers? this, indeed, her voice And meaning, whom the roar of Hougoumont Left mightiest of all peoples under heaven? What shock has fooled her since, that she should speak So feebly? wealthier—wealthier—hour by hour! The voice of Britain, or a sinking land, Some third-rate isle half-lost among her seas? There rang her voice, when the full city pealed Thee and thy Prince! The loyal to their crown Are loyal to their own far sons, who love Our ocean-empire with her boundless homes For ever-broadening England, and her throne In our vast Orient, and one isle, one isle, That knows not her own greatness: if she knows And dreads it we are fallen. —But thou, my Queen, Not for itself, but through thy living love For one to whom I made it o’er his grave

Sacred, accept this old imperfect tale, New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul, Ideal manhood closed in real man, Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost, Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak, And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still; or him Of Geoffrey's book, or him of Malleor's, one Touched by the adulterous finger of a time That hovered between war and wantonness, And crownings and dethronements: take withal Thy poet's blessing, and his trust that Heaven Will blow the tempest in the distance back From thine and ours: for some are 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 simple life, Or Cowardice, the child of lust for gold, Or Labour, with a groan and not a voice, Or Art with poisonous honey stolen from France, And that which knows, but careful for itself, And that which knows not, ruling that which knows To its own harm: the goal of this great world Lies beyond sight: yet—if our slowly-grown And crowned Republic's crowning common-sense, That saved her many times, not fail—their fears Are morning shadows huger than the shapes That cast them, not those gloomier which forego The darkness of that battle in the West, Where all of high and holy dies away.

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