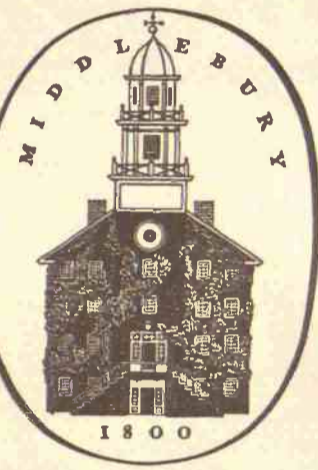
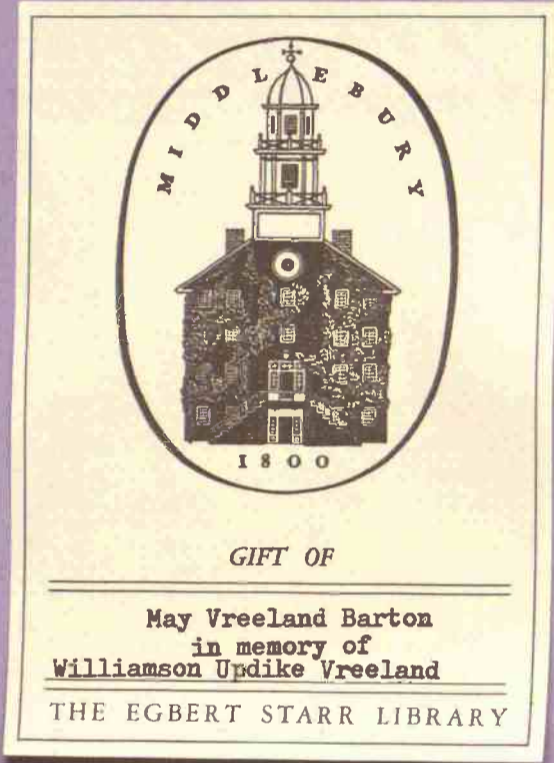


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E L A I N E .

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TENNYSON—DORÉ.



*Drawn by Gustave Doré*

*Engraved by J. S. Butler*

..... and the dead  
 Steer'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood,  
 In her right hand the lily, in her left  
 The letter—  
 ..... for she did not seem so dead  
 But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled!

E L A I N E,

BY

ALFRED TENNYSON.

ILLUSTRATED BY

G U S T A V E D O R É.



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## ILLUSTRATIONS.

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1. KING ARTHUR DISCOVERING THE SKELETONS OF THE BROTHERS.
2. LANCELOT APPROACHING THE CASTLE OF ASTOLAT.
3. LANCELOT RELATING HIS ADVENTURES.
4. LANCELOT BIDS ADIEU TO ELAINE.
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6. TORRE AND LAVAINÉ BID FAREWELL TO THE BODY OF ELAINE.
7. THE BODY OF ELAINE ON ITS WAY TO KING ARTHUR'S PALACE.
8. KING ARTHUR READING THE LETTER OF ELAINE.
9. THE REMORSE OF LANCELOT.

## 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 morning's earliest ray  
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;  
Then fearing rust or soilure fashion'd for it  
A case of silk, and braided thereupon  
All the devices blazon'd on the shield  
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,  
A border fantasy of branch and flower,  
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.



Nor rested thus content, but day by day  
Leaving her household and good father climb'd  
That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door,  
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,  
Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,  
Now made a pretty history to 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 kill'd, but God  
Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,  
And saved him: so she lived in fantasy.

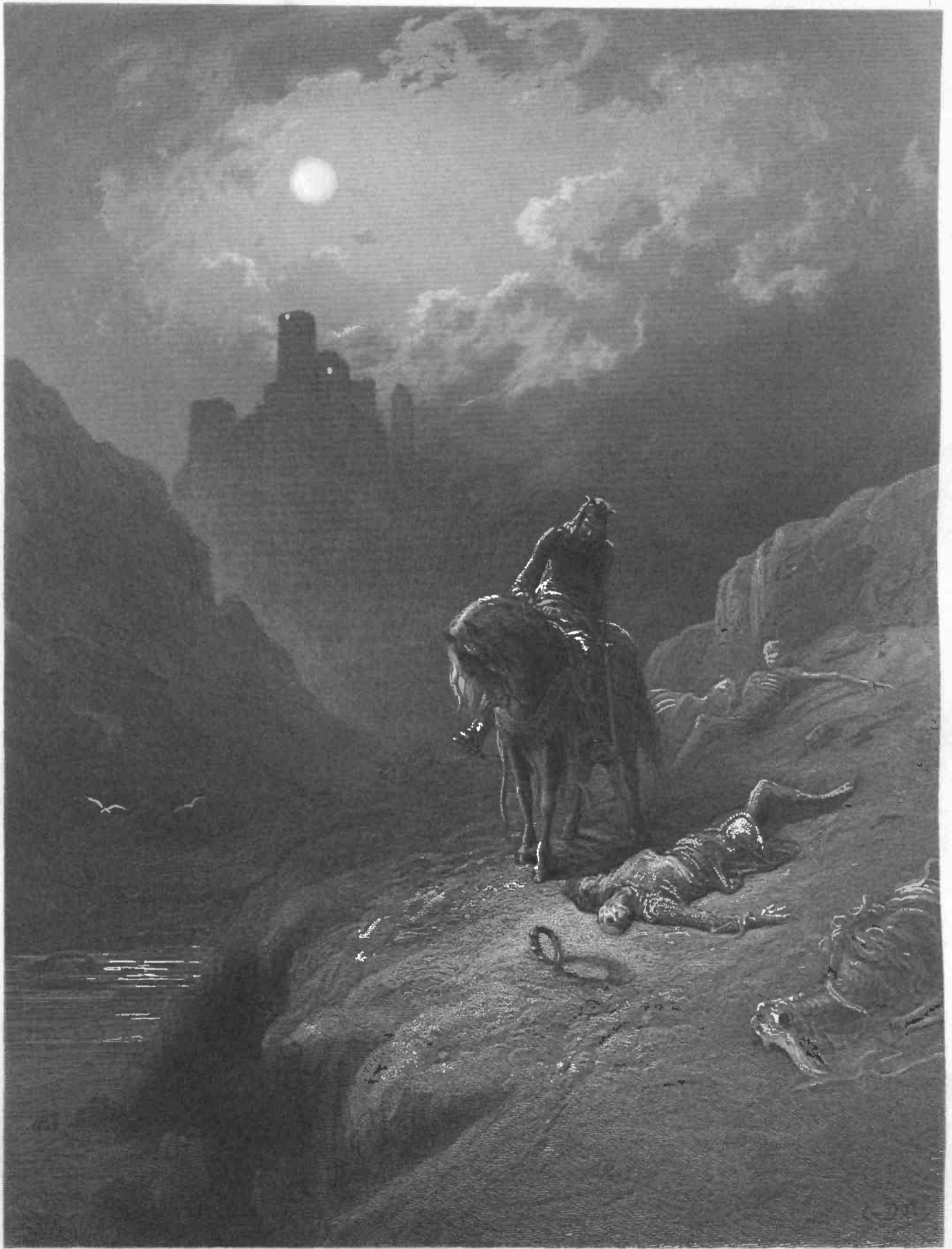
How came the lily maid by that good shield  
Of Lancelot, she that knew not ev'n his name?

He left it with her, when he rode to tilt  
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,  
Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name  
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur when none knew from whence he came,  
Long ere the people chose him for their king,  
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse,  
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.  
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave  
Like its own mists to all the mountain side:  
For here two brothers, one a king, had met  
And fought together; but their names were lost.  
And each had slain his brother at a blow,  
And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd:  
And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd  
And lichen'd 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 crown'd skeleton, and the skull  
Broke from the nape, and from the skull the crown  
Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims  
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn:  
And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,  
And set it on his head, and in his heart  
Heard murmurs 'lo, thou likewise shalt be king.'

Thereafter, when a king, he had the gems  
Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his knights,  
Saying 'these jewels, whereupon I chanced  
Divinely, are the kingdom's not the king's—  
For public use: henceforward let there be,  
Once every year, a joust for one of these:  
For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn



*Drawn by Gustave Doré.*

*Engraved by J. E. Baker.*

and from the skull the crown  
Roll'd into light, and turning on its rim  
Fled like a shimmering rivulet to the tarn."

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, 'you  
know it.'

'Then will you miss,' he answer'd, 'the great deeds  
Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,  
A sight you love to look on.' And the Queen  
Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly  
On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.  
He thinking that he read her meaning there,  
'Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more  
Than many diamonds,' yielded, and a heart,  
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen  
(However much he yearn'd to make complete  
The tale of diamonds for his destined boon)  
Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,  
'Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,  
And lets me from the saddle;' and the King  
Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.  
No sooner gone than suddenly she began.

‘To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame.  
Why go you 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 you so wise? you were not once so wise,  
My Queen, that summer, when you loved me first.  
Then of the crowd you took no more account  
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,  
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,  
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,  
Them surely can I silence with all ease.  
But now my loyal worship is allow’d  
Of all men: many a bard, without offence,  
Has link’d our names together in his lay,  
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,  
The pearl of beauty: and our knights at feast

Have pledged us in this union, while the king  
Would listen smiling. How then? is there more?  
Has Arthur spoken aught? or would yourself,  
Now weary of my service and devoir,  
Henceforth be truer to your 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 to-day  
There gleam’d a vague suspicion in his eyes:  
Some meddling rogue has tamper’d with him—else  
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,  
And swearing men to vows 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 you know, save by the bond.  
And therefore hear my words : go to the jousts :  
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream  
When sweetest ; and the vermin voices here  
May buzz so loud—we scorn them, but they sting.

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights.  
'And with what face, after my 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,  
You know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,  
No keener hunter after glory breathes.  
He loves it in his knights more than himself:  
They prove to him his work: win and return.'

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,  
Wroth at himself: not willing to be known,  
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,  
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,  
And there among the solitary downs,  
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;



*Drawn by Gustave Doré*

*Engraved by J.H. Baker*

Till as he traced a faintly shadow'd track,  
That all in loops and links among the dales  
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw  
Pierc'd from the west, far on a hill, the towers.

Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,  
That all in loops and links among the dales  
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw  
Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.  
Thither he made and wound the gateway horn.  
Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,  
Who let him into lodging and disarm'd.  
And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man ;  
And issuing found the Lord of Astolat  
With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,  
Moving to meet him in the castle court ;  
And close behind them stept the lily maid  
Elaine, his daughter : mother of the house  
There was not : some light jest among them rose  
With laughter dying down as the great knight  
Approach'd them : then the Lord of Astolat.  
' Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name  
Livest between the lips ? for by thy state

And presence I might guess thee chief of those,  
After the king, who eat in Arthur's halls.  
Him have I seen: the rest, his Table Round,  
Known as they are, to me they are unknown.'

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

'Yea since I cannot use it, you may have it.'  
Here laugh'd the father saying 'Fie, Sir Churl,  
Is that an answer for a noble knight?  
Allow him: but Lavaine, my younger here,  
He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,  
Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour  
And set it in this damsel's golden hair,  
To make her thrice as wilful as before.'

'Nay, father, nay good father, shame me not  
Before this noble knight' said young Lavaine  
'For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre:  
He seem'd so sullen, vext he could not go:  
A jest, no more: for, knight, the maiden dreamt  
That some one put this diamond in her hand,  
And that it was too slippery to be held,  
And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,  
The castle-well, belike; and then I said

That IF I went and IF I fought and won it  
(But all was jest and joke among ourselves)  
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.  
But father give me leave, an if he will,  
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight:  
Win shall I not, but do my best to win:  
Young as I am, yet would I do my best.'

'So you will grace me,' answer'd 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 you may,  
And yield it to this maiden, if you 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,



*Drawn by Gustave Doré*

*Engraved by H. Estlin*

He spoke and ceased: the lily maid Elaine,  
 Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,  
 Lifted her eyes and read his lineaments.



Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,  
Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement  
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,  
Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return'd.  
'If what is fair be but for what is fair,  
And only Queens are to be counted so,  
Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid  
Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,  
Not violating the bond of like to like.'

He spoke and ceased: the lily maid Elaine,  
Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,  
Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments.  
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,  
In battle with the love he bare his lord,  
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.  
Another sinning on such heights with one,  
The flower of all the west and all the world,

Had been the sleeker for it: but in him  
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose  
And drove him into wastes and solitudes  
For agony, who was yet a living soul.  
Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man,  
That ever among ladies ate in Hall,  
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.  
However marr'd, of more than twice her years,  
Seam'd with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,  
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes  
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

Then the great knight, the 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 entertain'd.  
And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,  
And ever well and readily answer'd he:  
But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,  
Suddenly speaking of the wordless man,  
Heard from the Baron that, ten years before,  
The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.  
'He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design  
Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd;  
But I my sons and little daughter fled  
From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods  
By the great river in a boatman's hut.  
Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke  
The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill.'

'O there, great Lord, doubtless,' Lavaine said, rapt  
By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth  
Toward greatness in its elder, 'you have fought.

O tell us—for we live apart—you know  
Of Arthur's glorious wars.' And Lancelot spoke  
And answer'd him at full, as having been  
With Arthur in the fight which all day long  
Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem;  
And in the four wild battles by the shore  
Of Douglas; that on Bassa; then the war  
That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts  
Of Celidon the forest; and again  
By Castle Gurnion where the glorious King  
Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,  
Carved of one emerald, center'd in a sun  
Of silver rays, that lightened as he breathed;  
And at Caerleon had he help'd his lord,  
When the strong neighings of the wild white Horse  
Set every gilded parapet shuddering;  
And up in Agned Cathregonion too,  
And down the waste sand-shores of Trath 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 utter'd this,

Low to her own heart said the lily maid

'Save your great self, fair lord;' and when he fell  
From talk of war to traits of 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 thro' 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,



*Drawn by Gustave Moreau*

*Engraved by G. H. Jones*

"He look'd and more amazed  
 Than if seven men had set upon him, saw  
 The maiden standing in the dewy light"

Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full  
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.  
Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought  
She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.  
First as in fear, step after step, she stole  
Down the long tower-stairs, 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 turn'd, and smooth'd  
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.  
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew  
Nearer and stood. He look'd, and more amazed  
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw  
The maiden standing in the dewy light.  
He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.  
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,  
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood



Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.  
Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire,  
That he should wear her 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 answer'd; 'then in wearing mine  
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,  
That those who know should know you.' And he turn'd  
Her counsel up and down within his mind,  
And found it true, and answer'd, 'true, my child.  
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:  
What is it?' and she told him 'a red sleeve  
Broider'd with pearls,' and brought it: then he bound

Her token on his helmet, with a smile  
Saying, 'I never yet have done so much  
For any maiden living,' and the blood  
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight ;  
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine  
Returning brought the yet-unblazon'd shield,  
His brother's ; which he gave to Lancelot,  
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine ;  
'Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield  
In keeping till I come.' 'A grace to me,'  
She answer'd, 'twice to-day. I am your Squire.  
Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, 'Lily maid,  
For fear our people call you lily maid  
In earnest, let me bring your colour back ;  
Once, twice, and thrice : now get you hence to bed :'  
So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,  
And thus they moved away : she stay'd a minute,  
Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there—

Her bright hair blown about the serious face  
Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss—  
Paused in the gateway, standing by the shield  
In silence, while she watch'd their arms far-off  
Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.  
Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,  
There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away  
Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,  
To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight  
Not far from Camelot, now for forty years  
A hermit, who had pray'd, labour'd and pray'd  
And ever labouring had scoop'd himself  
In the white rock a chapel and a hall  
On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,  
And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry;  
The green light from the meadows underneath

Struck up and lived along the milky roofs ;  
And in the meadows tremulous 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 thro' the cave,  
They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away :  
Then Lancelot saying, 'hear, but hold my name  
Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,'  
Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant 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 answer'd 'One,  
One have I seen—that other, our liege lord,  
The dread Pendragon, Britain's king of kings,  
Of whom the people talk mysteriously,

He will be there—then were I stricken blind  
That minute, I might say that I had seen.'

So spake Lavaine, and when they reach'd the lists  
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes  
Run thro' the peopled gallery which half round  
Lay like a rainbow fall'n upon the grass,  
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat  
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,  
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,  
And down his robe the dragon 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  
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable  
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found  
The new design wherein they lost themselves,  
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work:

And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,  
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.  
Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said,  
'Me you call great: mine is the firmer seat,  
The truer lance: but there is many a youth  
Now crescent, who will come to all I am  
And overcome it; and in me there dwells  
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch  
Of greatness to know well I am not great:  
There is the man.' And Lavaine gaped upon him  
As on a thing miraculous, and anon  
The trumpets blew; and then did either side,  
They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,  
Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,  
Meet in the midst, and there so furiously  
Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,  
If any man that day were left afield,  
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.

And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw  
Which were the weaker; then he hurl'd into it  
Against the stronger: little need to speak  
Of Lancelot in his glory; King, duke, earl,  
Count, baron—whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,  
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,  
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight  
Should do and almost overdo the deeds  
Of Lancelot; and one said to the other 'Lo!  
What is he? I do not mean the force alone,  
The grace and versatility of the man—  
Is it not Lancelot!' 'When has Lancelot worn  
Favour of any lady in the lists?  
Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know.'  
'How then? who then?' a fury seized on them,  
A fiery family passion for the name

Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.  
They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds and  
    thus,  
Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made  
In moving, all together down upon him  
Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,  
Green-glimmering toward the 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  
Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head  
Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt, and remain'd.

    Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully ;  
He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,  
And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.



He up the side, sweating with agony, got,  
But thought to do while he might yet endure,  
And being lustily holpen by the rest,  
His party,—tho' it 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 heralds blew  
Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve  
Of scarlet, and the pearls; and all the knights,  
His party, cried 'Advance, and take your prize  
The diamond;' but he answer'd, 'diamond me  
No diamonds! for God's love, a little air!  
Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!  
Hence will I and I charge you, follow me not.'

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field  
With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.  
There from his charger down he slid, and sat,

Gasping to Sir Lavaine, 'draw the lance head :'  
'Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot,' said Lavaine,  
'I dread me, if I draw it, you will die.'  
But he 'I die already with it : draw—  
Draw,'—and Lavaine drew and that other gave  
A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,  
And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank  
For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.  
Then came the hermit out and bare him in,  
There stanch'd his wound ; and there, in daily doubt  
Whether to live or die, for many a week  
Hid from the wide world's 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 thro' whom we won the day  
Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize  
Untaken, crying that his prize is death.'

'Heaven hinder,' said the King 'that such an one,  
So great a knight as we have seen to-day—

He seem'd to me another Lancelot—

Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot—

He must not pass uncared for. Gawain, rise,  
My nephew, 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. Wherefore take

This diamond, and deliver it, and return,  
And bring us what he is and how he fares,  
And cease not from your quest, until you 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 Lamorack, a good knight, but therewithal  
Sir Modred's brother, of a crafty house,  
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 has come  
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain  
Of glory, and has added wound to wound,  
And ridd'n away to die?' So fear'd the King,  
And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.  
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,  
'Love, are you yet so sick?' 'Nay, Lord,' she said.  
'And where is Lancelot?' Then the Queen amazed  
'Was he not with you? won he not your prize?'  
'Nay, but one like him.' 'Why that like was he.'  
And when the King demanded how she knew,  
Said 'Lord, no sooner had you parted from us,  
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk  
That men went down before his spear at a touch,  
But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name  
Conquer'd; and therefore would he hide his name

From all men, ev'n the king, and to this end  
Had made the pretext of a hindering wound,  
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn  
If his old prowess were in aught decay'd:  
And added, "our true Arthur, when he learns,  
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain  
Of purer glory."'

Then replied the King:

'Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,  
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,  
To have trusted me as he has trusted you.  
Surely his king and most familiar friend  
Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed,  
Albeit I know my knights fantastical,  
So fine a feat 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, these!

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,  
' Your hopes are mine,' and saying that she choked,  
And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,  
Moved to her chamber, and there flung herself  
Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,  
And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,  
And shriek'd out ' traitor ' to the unhearing wall,  
Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,  
And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

Gawain the while thro' all the region round

Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,  
Touch'd at all points, except the poplar grove,  
And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat:  
Whom glittering in enamell'd arms the maid  
Glanced at, and cried 'What news from Camelot, lord?  
'What of the knight with the red sleeve?' 'He won.'  
'I knew it,' she said. 'But parted from the jousts  
Hurt in the side,' whereat she caught her breath;  
Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go;  
Thereon she smote her hand: well-nigh she swoon'd:  
And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came  
The lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince  
Reported who he was, and on what quest  
Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find  
The victor, but had ridden wildly round  
To seek him, and was wearied of the search.  
To whom the lord of Astolat 'Bide with us,  
And ride no longer wildly, noble Prince!



Here was the knight, and here he left a shield;  
This will he send or come for: furthermore  
Our son is with him; we shall hear anon,  
Needs must we hear.' To this the courteous Prince  
Accorded with his wonted courtesy,  
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,  
And stay'd; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine:  
Where could be found face daintier? than her shape  
From forehead down to foot perfect—again  
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd:  
'Well—if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!  
And oft they met among the garden yews,  
And there he set himself to play upon her  
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height  
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,  
Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence  
And amorous adulation, till the maid  
Rebell'd against it, saying to him, 'Prince,

O loyal nephew of our noble King,  
Why ask ye 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 him 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 you will it let me see the shield.'  
And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw  
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,  
Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd;  
'Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true man!'  
'And right was I,' she answer'd merrily, 'I,  
Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all.'  
'And if *I* dream'd,' said Gawain, 'that you love  
This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, you know it!

Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?'  
Full simple was her answer 'What know I?  
My brethren have been all my fellowship,  
And I, when often they have talk'd of love,  
Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd,  
Meseem'd, of what they knew not; so myself—  
I know not if I know what true love is,  
But if I know, then, if I love not him,  
Methinks there is none other I can love.'  
'Yea, by God's death,' said he, 'you love him well,  
But would not, knew you 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 enough: 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 you will learn the courtesies of the court,  
We two shall know each other.'

Then he gave,  
And slightly kiss'd the hand to which he gave,  
The diamond, and all wearied of the quest  
Leapt on his horse, and 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 fail'd to find him tho' I rode all round  
The region: but I lighted on the maid,  
Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him; and to her,  
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,  
I gave the diamond: she will render it;  
For by mine head she knows his hiding-place.'

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied,  
'Too courteous truly! you shall go no more  
On quest of mine, seeing that you 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,  
Linger'd that other, staring after him;

Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad  
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.  
All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed:  
'The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,  
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat.'  
Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all  
Had marvel what the maid might be, but most  
Predoom'd her as unworthy. One 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 stoop'd so low,  
Marr'd her friend's point with pale tranquillity.  
So ran the tale like fire about the court,  
Fire in dry stubble a nine days' wonder flared:  
Till ev'n the knights at banquet twice or thrice  
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,  
And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid  
Smiled at each other, while the Queen who sat

With lips severely placid felt the knot  
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen  
Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor  
Beneath the banquet, where the meats became  
As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat,  
Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept  
The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,  
Crept to her father, while he mused alone,  
Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,  
'Father, you call me wilful, and the fault  
Is yours who let me have my will, and now,  
Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?'  
'Nay,' said he, 'surely.' 'Wherefore, let me hence,'  
She answer'd, 'and find out our dear Lavaine.'  
'You will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine:  
Bide,' answer'd 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 you know,  
When these have worn their tokens: let me hence  
I pray you.' Then her father nodding said,  
'Ay, ay, the diamond: wit you well, my child,  
Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,  
Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it—  
And sure I think this fruit is hung too high

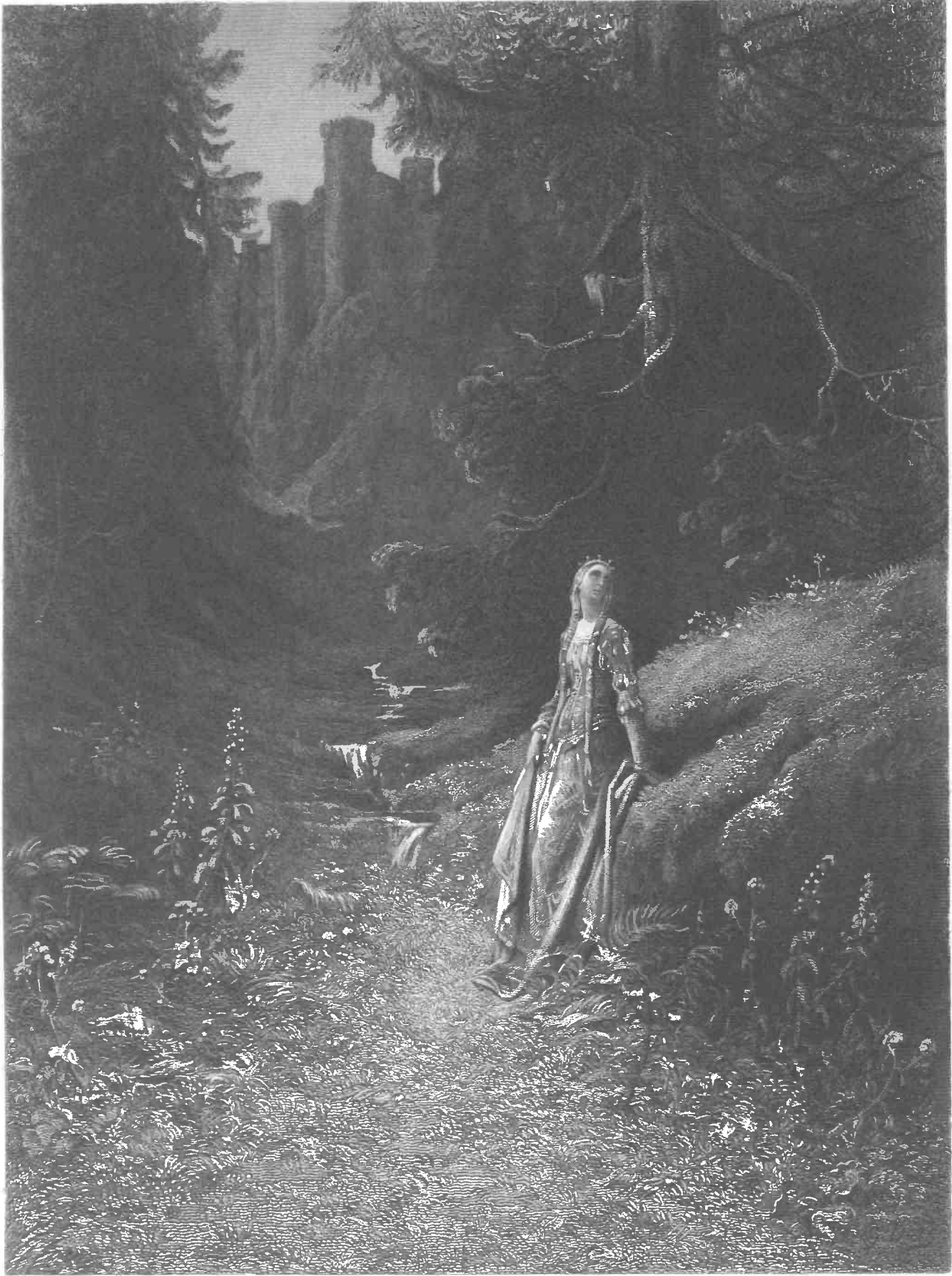


For any mouth to gape for save a Queen's—  
Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,  
Being so very wilful you must go.'

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipt away,  
And while she made her ready for her ride,  
Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,  
'Being so very wilful you must go,'  
And changed itself and 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 answer'd it and said,  
'What matter, so I help him back to life?'  
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide  
Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs  
To Camelot, and before the city-gates  
Came on her brother with a happy face

Making a roan horse caper and curvet  
For pleasure all about a field of flowers :  
Whom when she saw, 'Lavaine,' she cried, 'Lavaine,  
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?' He amazed,  
'Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot!  
How know you my lord's name is Lancelot?'  
But when the maid had told him all her tale,  
Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods  
Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,  
Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,  
Past up the still rich city to his kin,  
His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot ;  
And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove  
Led to the caves : there first she saw the casque  
Of Lancelot on the wall : her scarlet sleeve,  
Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,  
Stream'd from it still ; and in her heart she laugh'd,  
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,

But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.  
And when they gain'd the cell in which 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 roll'd his eyes  
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying  
'Your prize the diamond sent you by the King :'  
His eyes glisten'd : she fancied 'is it for me ?'  
And when the maid had told him all the tale  
Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest  
Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt  
Full lowly by the corners of his bed,  
And laid the diamond in his open hand.



*Scene to Wallace's Tomb.*

*Engraved by J.H. Baker.*

"Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,

As day by day she past  
In better twilight, ghost-like to and fro  
Gleaming"

Her face was near, and as we kiss the child  
That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.  
At once she slipt like water to the floor.  
'Alas,' he said, 'your ride has 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 thro' 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 look'd 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 turn'd  
Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,  
And past beneath the wildly-sculptured gates

Far up the dim rich city to her kin ;  
There bode the night : but woke with dawn, and past  
Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,  
Thence to the cave : so day by day she past  
In either twilight ghost-like to and fro  
Gliding, and every day she tended him,  
And likewise many a night : and Lancelot  
Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt  
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times  
Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem  
Uncourteous, even he : but the meek maid  
Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him  
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,  
Milder than any mother to a sick child,  
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,  
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love  
Upbore her ; till the hermit, skill'd in all  
The simples and the science of that time,

Told him that her fine care had saved his life.  
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,  
Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,  
Would listen for her coming and 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 straiten'd 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 sweet image of one face,  
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,  
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.  
Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace  
Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,  
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well  
What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant  
She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,  
And drave her ere her time across the fields  
Far into the rich city, where alone  
She murmur'd 'vain, in vain: it 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 turn'd, and now to left,  
And found no ease in turning or in rest;  
And 'him or death' she mutter'd, 'death or him,'  
Again and like a burthen, 'him or death.'

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,  
To Astolat returning rode the three.  
There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self  
In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,  
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought  
'If I be loved, these are my festal robes,  
If not, the victim's flowers before he fall.'  
And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid  
That she should ask some goodly gift of him  
For her own self or hers; 'and do not shun  
To speak the wish most near to your true heart;

Such service have you 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 must go to-day:' then out she brake;  
'Going? and we shall never see you more.  
And I must die for want of one bold word.'  
'Speak; that I live to hear,' he said, 'is yours.'  
Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:  
'I have gone mad. I love you: let me die.'  
'Ah sister,' answer'd Lancelot, 'what is this?'  
And innocently extending her white arms,

'Your love,' she said, 'your love—to be your wife.'  
And Lancelot answer'd, 'Had I chos'n to wed,  
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine :  
But now there never will be wife of mine.'  
'No, no,' she cried, 'I care not to be wife,  
But to be with you still, to see your face,  
To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world.'  
And Lancelot answer'd, 'Nay, the world, the world,  
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart  
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue  
To blare its own interpretation—nay,  
Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,  
And your good father's kindness.' And she said  
'Not to be with you, not to see your face—  
Alas for me then, my good days are done.'  
'Nay, noble maid,' he answer'd, 'ten times nay!  
This is not love : but love's first flash in youth,  
Most common : yea I know it of mine own self :

And you yourself will smile at your own self  
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life  
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age :  
And then will I, for true you are and sweet  
Beyond mine old belief in 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,  
Ev'n to the death, as tho' you were my blood,  
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.  
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,  
And more than this I cannot.'

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

Then spake, to whom thro' 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 you, 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 remain'd, 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 look'd  
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.  
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound;  
And she by tact of love was well aware  
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.

And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,  
Nor 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 form'd  
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 answer'd with all calm.  
But when they left her to herself again,  
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field  
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd ; 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 call'd her song 'The Song of Love and Death,'  
And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing.

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

"Love, art thou sweet? then 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 call’d  
The father, and all three in hurry and fear  
Ran to her, and lo ! the bloodred light of dawn  
Flared on her face, she shrilling ‘ Let me die !’

As when we dwell upon a word we know  
Repeating, till the word we know so well  
Becomes a wonder and we know not why,  
So dwelt the father on her face and thought  
‘ Is this Elaine ?’ till back the maiden fell,



Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,  
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.  
At last she said ' Sweet brothers, yesternight  
I seem'd a curious little maid again,  
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,  
And when you used to take me with the flood  
Up the great river in the boatman's boat.  
Only you would not pass beyond the cape  
That has the poplar on it: there you fixt  
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.  
And yet I cried because you would not pass  
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood  
Until we found the palace of the king.  
And yet you would not; but this night I dream'd  
That I was all alone upon the flood,  
And then I said " Now shall I have my will: "  
And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.  
So let me hence that I may pass at last

Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,  
Until I find the palace of the king.  
There will I enter in among them all,  
And no man there will dare to mock at me ;  
But there the fine Gawain will 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, you seem  
Light-headed, for what force is yours to go,  
So far, being sick? and wherefore would you 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 which the gentle sister made reply,  
'Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,  
Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault  
Not to love me, than it is mine to love  
Him of all men who seems to me the highest.'

'Highest?' the Father answer'd, echoing 'highest?'  
(He meant to break the passion in her) 'nay,  
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;  
But this I know, for all the people know it,

He loves the Queen, and in an open shame :  
And she returns his love in open shame.  
If this be high, what is it to be low ?'

Then spake the lily maid of 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, tho' my love had no return :  
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,  
Thanks, but you work against your own desire ;  
For if I could believe the things you say  
I should but die the sooner ; 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 ask'd  
'Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord?  
Then will I bear it gladly;' she replied,  
'For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,  
But I myself must bear it.' Then he wrote  
The letter she devised; which being writ  
And folded, 'O sweet father, tender and true,  
Deny me not,' she said—'you 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 deem'd her death  
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.



Scene by the River Side

Engraved by J. H. Baker

So that the brethren from the chariot took  
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,  
Set to her head a lily, over her hung  
The silken case with braided blazonings.

But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh  
Her father laid the letter in her hand,  
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.  
So that day there was dole in Astolat.

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



And kiss'd 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  
Steer'd by the dumb went upward with the flood—  
In her right hand the lily, in her left  
The letter—all her bright hair streaming down—  
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold  
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white  
All but her face, and that clear-featured face  
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead  
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved  
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last  
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,  
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,  
With deaths of others, and almost his own,

The nine-years-fought-for diamonds: for he saw  
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen  
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed  
With such and so unmoved a majesty  
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,  
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet  
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye  
The shadow of a 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 utter'd, ' Queen,  
Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,  
Take, what I had not won except for you,  
These jewels, and make me happy, making them  
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,

Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's  
Is tawnier than her cygnet's: these are words:  
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin  
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it  
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words  
Perchance, we both can pardon: but, my Queen,  
I hear of rumours flying thro' your court.  
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,  
Should have in it an absoluter trust  
To make up that defect: let 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 turn'd 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 givers. 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, thro' the casement standing wide for heat,  
Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the stream.

Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,  
Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.  
Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disgust  
At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,  
Close underneath his eyes, and right across  
Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge  
Whereon the lily maid of Astolat  
Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away  
To weep and wail in secret; and the barge,  
On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.  
There two stood arm'd, and kept the door; to whom  
All up the marble stair, tier over tier,  
Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd  
'What is it?' but that oarsman's haggard face,  
As hard and still as is the face that men  
Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks

On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said,  
'He is enchanted, cannot speak—and she,  
Look how she sleeps—the Fairy Queen, so fair!  
Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood?  
Or come to take the King to fairy land?  
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,  
But that he passes into fairy land.'

While thus they babbled of the King, the King  
Came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongueless man  
From the half-face to the full eye, and rose  
And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.  
So Arthur bad the meek Sir Percivale  
And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;  
And reverently they bore her into hall.  
Then came the fine Gawaine and wonder'd at her,  
And Lancelot later came and mused at her,  
And last the Queen herself and pitied her:



Painted by Gustave Doré

Engraved by W. Wood

"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."



But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,  
Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all.

‘Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,  
I, sometime call’d the maid of 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 touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips,  
Who had devised the letter, moved again.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all ;  
' My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,  
Know that for this most gentle 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.  
Tho', had I dreamt the damsel would have died,  
I might have put my wits to some rough use,  
And help'd her from herself.'

Then said the Queen

(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)  
'You might at least have done her so much grace,  
Fair lord, as would have help'd 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 thro' the world, she ask'd;  
It could not be. I told her that her love  
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down  
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame  
Toward one more worthy of her—then would I,  
More specially were he, she wedded, poor,

Estate them with large land and 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 answer'd, 'O my knight,  
It will be to your 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 marshall'd 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 blazon'd on her tomb  
In letters gold and azure!' which was wrought  
Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames  
And people, from the high door streaming, brake  
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,  
Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,  
Drew near, and sigh'd in passing 'Lancelot,  
Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love.'  
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,  
'That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven.'  
But Arthur who beheld his cloudy brows  
Approach'd him, and with full affection flung

One arm about his neck, and spake and said.

‘Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have  
Most love and most affiance, for I know  
What thou hast been in battle by my side,  
And many a time have watch’d thee at the tilt  
Strike down the lusty and long-practised knight,  
And let the younger and unskill’d go by  
To win his honour and to make his name,  
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man  
Made to be loved; but now I would to God,  
For the wild people say wild things of thee,  
Thou could’st 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

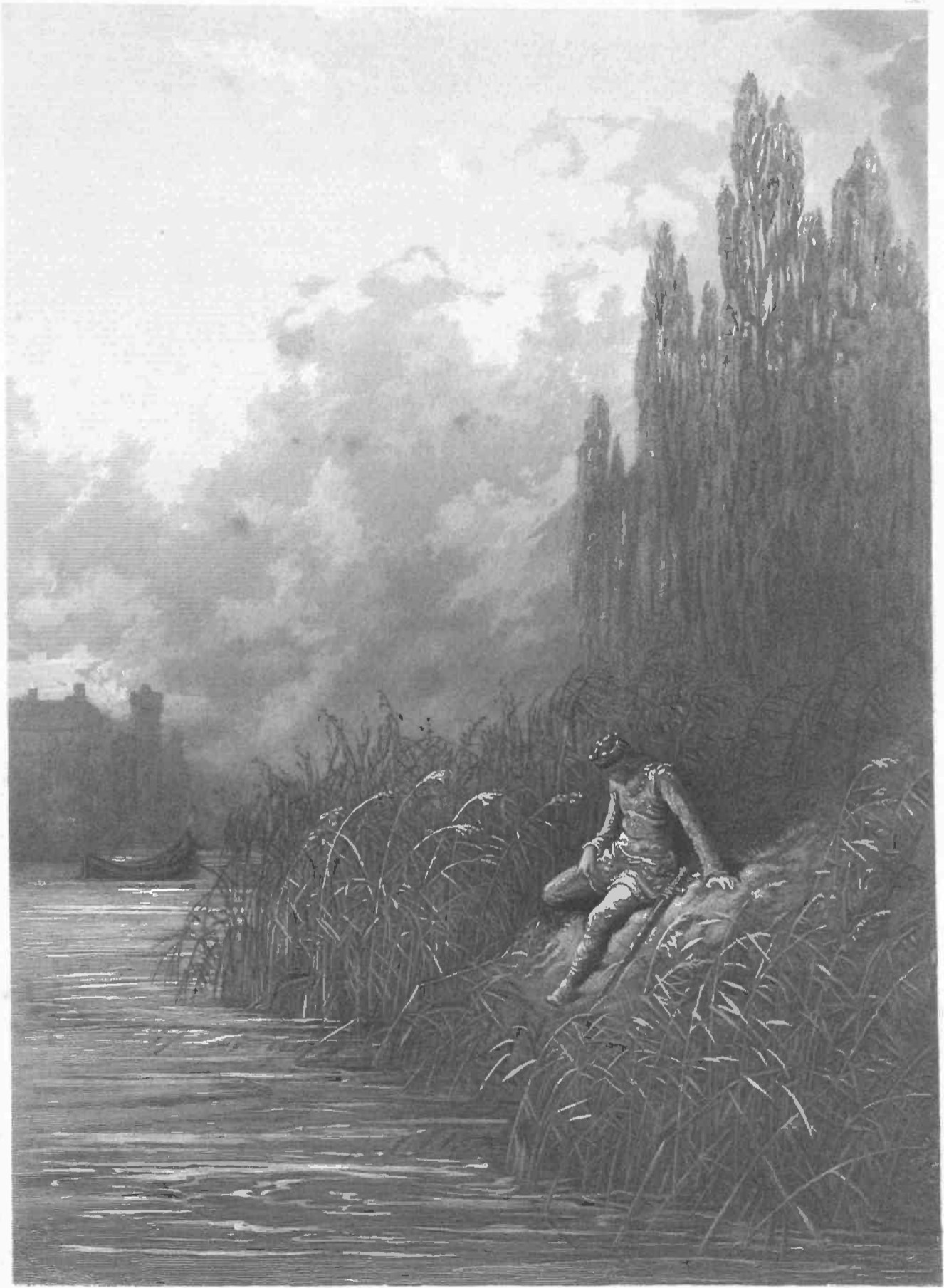
Born to the glory of thy name and fame,  
My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake.'

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

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

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,  
And at the inrunning of a little brook  
Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd  
The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes  
And saw the barge that brought her moving down,  
Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said  
Low in himself ' Ah simple heart and sweet,  
You 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





*Drawn by Gustave Doré.*

*Engraved by J. J. Sauer.*

"And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,  
 And at the inrunning of a little brook  
 Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd  
 The high reed wave."

Stole from his mother—as the story runs—  
She chanted snatches of mysterious song  
Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn  
She kiss'd me saying thou art fair, my child,  
As a king's son, and often in her arms  
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.  
Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!  
For what am I? what profits me my name  
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:  
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;  
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?  
To make men worse by making my sin known?  
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?  
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man  
Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break  
These bonds that so defame me: not without  
She wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,  
Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,

I pray him, send a sudden Angel down  
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,  
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,  
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.'

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