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GARETH AND LYNETTE

AND OTHER IDYLLS

BY

ALFRED TENNYSON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

EDWARD EVERETT HALE, Jr., Ph.D.

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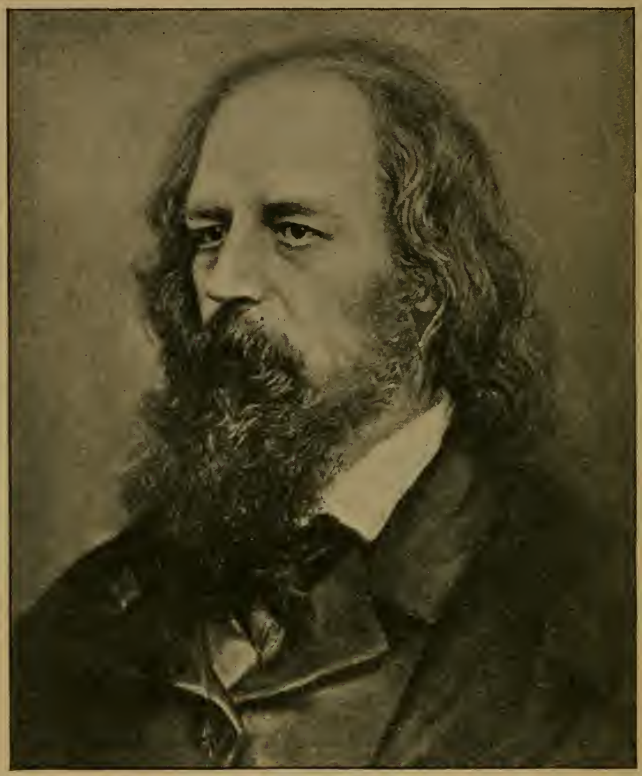

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INTRODUCTION.

The Idylls of the King.

"The Idylls of the King" is Tennyson's rendering of the story of King Arthur and the Round Table. Wherever the story really may have had its beginning, it has practically become the national legend of England, and in every century it has appeared in English literature. We need not stop to speak of early chroniclers like Nennius, who wrote in the eighth century, or Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth. They were writing history, and they wrote what they had heard about King Arthur just as we now would write about Columbus. Nor need we stop to speak of poets like Wace or Layamon in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, or the many poets, English, French and German, who followed them. Their poems are in the highest degree interesting to the student. The general reader, however, will hardly turn to them. It is the less necessary for him to do so, because we have in English a book which gives us the quintessence of the story of Arthur. The "Morte d'Arthur," by Sir Thomas Malory, is in itself a noble piece of prose, the finest thing of the fifteenth century, and it is also the storehouse or the quarry for all who would know King Arthur and the Round Table. It is practically representative of the story of Arthur in the Middle Ages.

But King Arthur has also his place in modern English literature. A hundred years after Malory, Spenser in the "Faerie Queene," gave the legend a fantastic form very characteristic of the days of Elizabeth. Milton afterward had the legend in mind as a subject for a great work, but he never wrote on it; the subject was not such as the Puritan mind could best appreciate. Of the eighteenth century poets some of the weaker

turned to King Arthur, but in the nineteenth, with the revival of romance, he became a chief figure.

As such he was often in Tennyson's mind. In "The Lady of Shalott" (1833), in "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere" (1842), and "Sir Galahad" (1842) we have an indication of the way that subjects from the legend kept a place in his mind. In the last-named year he published "Morte d'Arthur," a fragment of an epic, in twelve books, as he explained in a prelude. We need not suppose from this prelude that Tennyson at this time had really written more of the poem than he then printed, but he may well have planned some larger treatment. Sixteen years later he published "The Idylls of the King," four poems, "Enid," "Vivien," "Elaine," "Guinevere," connected together only by belonging all to the same round of legend and by certain contrasts and relations in subject-matter. But even here his intention was not to create any single poem; these poems were idylls, pictures of the life of the days of chivalry, and exhibiting also contrasting phases of character.

It was not until 1869 that Tennyson presented these four Idylls and the previous fragment to the world as a single poem. In that year he published the first four Idylls, and also "The Coming of Arthur," "The Holy Grail," "Pelleas and Ettarre," and the early fragment under the title, "The Passing of Arthur." The eight poems were gathered as a connected series. In 1871 "The Last Tournament" was added; in 1872 "Gareth and Lynette" and the concluding lines "To the Queen"; in 1885 "Balin and Balan"; in 1888 "Enid," already divided into two parts, became "The Marriage of Geraint" and "Geraint and Enid," and the poem stood as it stands to-day.

Its subject is the life, the work and the death of King Arthur. It takes its material from Sir Thomas Malory (except in one or two cases), but it tells the story in a very different way. It takes the legend for granted, as we may say,

and presents it by a dozen poems which are mostly episodes in the main story. The first and last poems and the idyll "Guinevere" are the only ones which deal chiefly with the story of Arthur himself. The others indicate it indirectly. It is well, therefore, to have an idea of the main lines of that story.

The Story and the Characters.

On the death of Uther Pendragon, King of the Britons, Arthur comes to the throne, a mysterious King, who shall right all wrong and redeem all England from evil. He begins his work with the greatest success: he overcomes all doubters and rebels; he repels the heathen Saxons and the invading Romans; he cleanses the realm from all evil-doers within; he founds the Round Table, an order of knighthood devoted to the ideal of the highest life. Now he sees and loves Guinevere, the daughter of one of the lesser kings of Britain. He marries her, confident that so only can he attain perfect success in his work.

Here begins his downfall. Guinevere is unfaithful to him, and her sin with Lancelot gradually extends its influence to the undoing of all that the King has done. It gives life to evil in ever-varying form, so that Arthur finally sees the work of his hands brought almost to naught. At the end his very kingdom is threatened. He arms and meets the attack and puts it down, but is himself wounded almost to death, and is borne away as mysteriously as he has come.

Such is the main action of the "Idylls." But instead of a continuous narrative in which the King is hero or chief actor, we have a number of separate poems, each of which, beside its independent interest, gives some indication of the main story. No one of the "Idylls," however, can be said to tell the main story, or even a part of it, except "Guinevere," and to some extent "Lancelot and Elaine," and the two

poems which are directly intended as introduction and conclusion.

The story is of the life, the work, and the death of King Arthur. But the separate poems almost all illustrate phases of Arthur's later life, and present not so much the triumphant success of the King as the gradual decline of the Round Table.

"The Coming of Arthur" tells of Arthur's birth, accession, marriage and the triumphant beginning of his work. It gives us an idea of the heroic power of Arthur and his knights at their best.

"Gareth and Lynette" also presents the court of Arthur at its height of greatness and nobility. It is an episode which gives an idea of the easy power of Arthur in the fresh days of his early reign.

"The Marriage of Geraint" and "Geraint and Enid," originally one poem, give another, episode born of the distrust which arose from the beginnings of evil life and the falling away from the first ideals.

"Balin and Balan" is the unhappy story of a brother who killed his brother. But the accident which led to the conclusion arose from the sin of Guinevere.

"Merlin and Vivien" is an almost independent story.

"Lancelot and Elaine" tells of another unhappy result of the love of Lancelot and the Queen.

"The Holy Grail" shows how Arthur's knights had so far fallen from their earlier prowess that only one or two of them could achieve a holy quest.

"Pelleas and Ettarre" is an episode of the later court of Arthur.

"The Last Tournament" shows the general disgrace and failure of the knights of the Round Table.

"Guinevere" deals more directly with the fortunes of Arthur. His Queen has been proved unfaithful, and flees to a monastery at Almesbury. Here the King finds her on his

return from an expedition against Lancelot, who has fled to his own lands of Brittany.

"The Passing of Arthur" follows directly the action of "Guinevere." In Arthur's absence Modred has raised a rebellion against the King, his uncle, and Arthur goes to quell it. A great battle follows in which the King kills the chief traitor and is himself mortally wounded.

The poems in this book, then, although each is practically complete in itself, have each their place in the general development of the idea. "Gareth and Lynette" gives a picture, especially in ll. 178–685, of the court of Arthur in the earlier days; "Lancelot and Elaine" (cf. the note on l. 1169) of the court in later days; "The Passing of Arthur" is a conclusion of the whole.

In this story the characters of the legend-cycle are taken for granted. It will be convenient to note those which are most mentioned in the "Idylls" of this book.

Arthur is the King, the type of Goodness striving with Evil. Tristram says of him, that when he first saw him,

> "He seemed to me no man,
> But Michael trampling Satan."
> —"The Last Tournament," ll. 667, 668.

Guinevere is the Queen, his wife, of whom the little maid at Almesbury says,

> "This is all woman's grief,
> That *she* is woman, whose disloyal life
> Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round."
> —"Guinevere," ll. 216–218.

Lancelot of the Lake is the chief knight of Arthur's court. He is, as we see in the two idylls in this book, all-powerful with lance and sword. Not so powerful in striving with evil, for, as he says himself,

> "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."
>
> —"The Holy Grail," 769.

Of the rest of Arthur's knights three especially must be mentioned, the sons of King Lot and Bellicent, the half-sister of Arthur—Gawain, Modred and Gareth. The last will be sufficiently known from the first of our poems. The others stand in the "Idylls," Gawain as the type of false courtesy, as we may see from "Lancelot and Elaine," ll. 549–718, and Modred as the typical traitor, as in "The Passing of Arthur," ll. 151–169.

Besides these there are others sometimes mentioned: Tristram the hunter, strong but reckless, of whom one may read in "The Last Tournament"; Galahad and Percivale, the two pure in heart, the heroes of "The Holy Grail;" Geraint, Balin, Pellcas, of whom we may read in the idylls that bear their name; Kay, the steward, who appears in "Gareth and Lynette;" and Bedivere, who was with the King at the very end.

Also we must know of Merlin the enchanter,

> "whose vast wit
> And hundred winters are but as the hands
> Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege."
>
> —"The Coming of Arthur," 279–281.

The Symbolism of the Idylls.

To the story of the "Idylls," as he turned it over in his mind, Tennyson gave in time a symbolic significance. In the earlier poems he had clearly no such idea: "Morte d'Arthur" is simply a rendering of the medieval legend; the first four idylls represent contrasting types of characters, the true and the false wife and the true and the false maiden.

But in the poems published in 1869 the evidently symbolic element appears, and in the lines "To the Queen" (1872) the idea is distinctly stated: Tennyson calls the "Idylls" an

> "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."

That is to say, in the "Idylls of the King" we have, not the attempt to present the legendary Arthur, or the Arthur of Geoffrey of Monmouth, or even of Sir Thomas Malory, but rather a new rendering of the old tale so as to represent the war of sense with soul.

King Arthur, then, represents the Soul of man, which strives in this world to better everything and bring it nearer to God. He is aided by various powers for good—the Lady of the Lake ("Gareth and Lynette," ll. 210–219), who represents Religion or the Church, who has given him the sword Excalibur (the Bible) which he uses at need, and at the end casts away, and the Three Queens ("Gareth and Lynette," l. 225, but better "The Coming of Arthur," ll. 271–278 and "The Passing of Arthur," ll. 373–379).

The King is aided by Merlin, as the Soul is aided by the Intellect.

The King weds Guinevere as the Soul is wedded to the Body. But just as the Soul does not make the Body spiritual, so Guinevere cannot remain upon the plane where the King lives. She sins and repents of her sin, but the King leaves her and passes away, whither no one knows.

This symbolic representation, it should be said, is of interest to the reader of the whole poem, for it gives us an undoubted understanding of one of the ideas of the poet when

he was writing it, and so a necessary help in grasping the poem as a whole. On the other hand it is of the very slightest importance in "Gareth and Lynette" and of very little in "Lancelot and Elaine," which was written before Tennyson thought of it. Nor is it very important in "The Passing of Arthur," except in the lines now standing at the beginning (1–169) and the end (441–469), for the rest of the poem was written without any symbolic idea at all. The conception, therefore, so far as our poems are concerned, helps us to an understanding of some passages, but is hardly of great importance, for each poem has its own independent meaning. "Lancelot and Elaine" is a love-story pure and simple, but "Gareth and Lynette" has a little symbolism of its own. The knight who strives with the Morning Star, the Noonday Sun, the Evening Star and Night represents man in his struggle with temptations of early life, middle life, and later years, and his final victory over death. And this idea is wrought out with some care in the contests with the different knights. The gay apparel of the Morning Star typifies the charm of sin in youth. The blazing armor of the Noonday Sun represents the power of mature passion. The hardened skins of the Evening Star are the habits of a life-time that can be dealt with only at the closest quarters. The terror of Death finally turns out to be an empty masquerade of horror. All this we want to perceive, but we must remember that it is not of the first importance; that, indeed, the original story had nothing of it at all.

The Poetic Form: Meter.

Such is the subject, such the ideas which Tennyson presents to us in this poem. He presents it, however, as a poet; namely, in poetic form.

Poetry is distinguished from prose by a heightened feeling which finds expression in poetic style. Thus poetry has its

characteristic diction [1] and its characteristic use of figures.[2] It has also meter.

Prose is based upon the every-day language of life; it is often far more elaborate and far more striking than ordinary conversation, but it never leaves the simpler form of utterance which comes naturally to everyone. Poetry, on the other hand, is always distinguished from common speech by its form. English poetry has sometimes rhyme and rhythm, sometimes rhythm alone. The poetry of our ancestors the Anglo-Saxons, and of the Teutonic tribes of Germany, had alliteration.[3] The Greeks and Romans had an intricate system based upon the length and shortness of the syllables. The Hebrews had rhythm, and also a device called parallelism.[4]

The original aim in all cases, in part, at least, was to find some device that would help the memory. All know how much easier it is to memorize poetry than prose. In days long before the invention of printing, and indeed before the invention of writing, poetry was preserved, not in books but in men's minds: it was passed from one to another simply by word of mouth, and carried in the memory. Even in our own day, among peoples who are not experienced in the art of writing, there are professional reciters who carry in their heads

[1] For a study of poetic diction the student may consult the introduction to Scott's "Lady of the Lake," No. 9 in this series.

[2] See introduction to "Poems of Knightly Adventure," No. 26 in this series.

[3] One of the latest alliterative poems in English is the "Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman" (about 1377), which begins thus:

> "In a *s*ummer *s*eason when *s*oft was the *s*un,
> I *sh*ope me in *sh*roudes as I a *sh*ep(herd) were,
> In *h*abit as a *h*ermit un*h*oly of works,
> Went *w*ide in this *w*orld *w*onders to hear."

[4] The commonest form of parallelism is when the same general idea is repeated in different words, as in the second Psalm:

> "Why do the heathen rage
> And the people imagine a vain thing?
> The kings of the earth set themselves,
> And the rulers take counsel together,
> Against the Lord,
> And against his annointed, *saying*,
> Let us break their bands asunder,
> And cast away their cords from us."

thousands and thousands of lines of poetry. Some sort of repetition is needed to make the remembering easier.

There were other reasons for poetic form, and in our time, of course, poetic form has developed far beyond such simple necessity; yet repetition is still the basis of our poetic form—repetition of combinations of accent, which we call rhythm, and repetition of sound, which we call rhyme. These two devices have developed, far beyond any necessity of helping the memory, into means by which the poet is enabled to express his thought and feeling far more fully than he could in prose. We shall speak only of rhythm, because English blank verse has no rhyme.

The word "rhythm" denotes a certain regularity of recurrence, generally in sound, whether found in poetry or not. Thus the sound of a railroad train as it goes over the ends of the rails is rhythmical, the ticking of a clock is rhythmical; in a rougher way the breaking of the surf on the beach or the swelling of wind in the trees is rhythmical. When we speak of rhythm in poetry we mean a certain regularity of recurrence of stress or accent in the words. In prose there is recurrence of accent, but it is not regular; hence the following extract is not prose, although it may look as though it was:[1]

"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."

It is not necessary for poetry to be printed differently from prose. It is different from prose, and it is only printed differently to make the difference more obvious.

The simplest form of rhythm is an alternation of accented and unaccented syllables. That is the rhythm in the lines quoted above, although of the accented syllables, some are

[1] The preceding paragraphs are substantially reprinted from "Enoch Arden and Other Poems," by Tennyson, No. 6 in this series.

more accented than others: *by* in the second line is not heavily accented; but it is more accented than the syllables before and after it, *-ains* and *the*, so that it seems more accented than not.

Such is the general meter of the "Idylls of the King." One can read the poem fairly well by remembering that the syllables to be accented come generally the second, fourth, sixth, eighth and tenth in the line. In a general way this meter is called iambic; that is, like the classical iambic verses which had alternately a short syllable and a long one. As the lines have five of these alternations it is called iambic pentameter; that is, iambic meter of five syllables.

But if the whole poem were made up of such lines the effect would be very monotonous. So the poet varies it, and as each variation is a little noticeable, he is very apt to use these variations to call attention to something in the line. Thus in the following lines from "Gareth and Lynette:"

> "He spake; and all at fiery speed the two
> Shock'd on the central bridge, and either spear
> Bent but not brake, and either knight at once,
> Hurl'd as a stone from out a catapult
> Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,
> Fell, as if dead;"—ll. 938-943.

Here the second, third, fourth and sixth lines begin with an accented syllable instead of the usual unaccented syllable, and as a result of the slight difference from the ordinary, the accented syllables become emphatic, which is quite appropriate to the sense. Such lines occur often; not, as a rule, so many together, although there are several in "Lancelot and Elaine," ll. 50–52.

This change of accent is commonest in the beginning of the line, or in the first foot, as it is called. But it also occurs elsewhere, not infrequently, most often in the third foot, as in the following from "Gareth and Lynette":

"Back from the gate started the three, to whom," l. 235.

"And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish," l. 219.

"Our one white lie sits like a little ghost," l. 291.

"Then into hall Gareth ascending heard," l. 310.

In these cases, too, the slight change from the usual rhythm, gives a slight emphasis to the word.

This is the most usual variation of what would be monotonous in a long poem. It is not so much of a variation as to destroy the rhythmical feeling of the passage, but it is enough to call slight attention to the words in which it occurs. Another variation of a similar kind is the putting of two accented syllables together, as in the following lines in "Gareth and Lynette":

"Good' moth'er is bad mother unto me," l. 16.

"Of those tall' knights' that ranged about the throne," l. 321.

"In token of true' heart' and fealty," l. 391.

"Some blazoned and some carven and some' blank,'" l. 398.

Another variation still is the use of an extra unaccented syllable in one place or another as in the following:

> "Arise and flickering in a grimly light
> Dance on the mere," 806, 807.

Here the regular rhythm might be preserved by pronouncing *flick'ring*, but such does not seem to be Tennyson's idea, for he usually marks an elision with an apostrophe when he means it. The same thing may be said in l. 891, where there are two extra syllables. In both cases the extra syllables are to be pronounced, and in both cases it will be seen that the effect harmonizes with the idea of the line. So

"Wept from her sides as water flowing away," l. 213.

"The hoof of his horse slipped in the stream," l. 1020.

"The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said," l. 1241.

Such are the chief principles which govern the meter known as English blank verse. There are many other things whereby the poet gives more flexibility and beauty to his verse, but these are the most important. If one pay attention to these, almost any verse can be read so as to bring out its metrical character. And this is a very important thing, for without it one cannot read poetry aloud at all, nor read it to one's self with any appreciation of the poet's form.

The Poetic Form: Diction.

Besides its meter, poetry differs generally from prose in its diction. This is not always the case, for some poets prefer to use the common language of every-day life, though even here there will generally be more figurative, more concrete words than in ordinary prose. In a poem like the "Idylls," which tells of older times and manners, there will always be a corresponding difference in the language. Thus Tennyson has a good many words now hardly used, as *soilure*, l. 7;[1] *joust*, l. 61; *boon*, l. 71; *lay*, l. 112; *devoir*, l. 118; *wroth*, l. 159; *lustihood*, l. 202; *rathe*, l. 338; *anon*, l. 451; *albeit*, l. 591. This gives an archaic character which in these poems is entirely in keeping with the legendary subject. He has also examples, but fewer, of words still common used in an obsolete sense, as *wit*, l. 10; *lets*, l. 94; *so*, l. 222; *still*, l. 321; *grace*, l. 380. Such words, however, are in a modern poet not so common as the really archaic words. We may notice also old inflections, like *clave*, l. 37; *brake*, l. 50; *ye*, l. 83; *mine*, l. 93; *spake*, l. 124; *safelier*, l. 217; *bare*,

[1] All the examples of diction are taken from *Lancelot and Elaine*.

l. 244; *holpen*, l. 494; *drave*, l. 496; *hath*, l. 1065. But it will be noted that these expressions are not very common; nor are they invariable, for often when Tennyson might have used an archaic inflection he does not do so. He does use, however, not a few old locutions, as *let proclaim*, l. 76; *else had he not*, l. 146; *I dread me*, l. 511; *meseemed*, l. 671; *full ill*, l. 939, and on the whole we may say that there is a strong archaic coloring to the language of the "Idylls."

We may also remark, and especially in "The Passing of Arthur," the use of set phrases and epithets. This is in accord with the usage of the older poets of knightly times. Thus we have Bedivere, generally called "The bold Sir Bedivere" ("The Passing of Arthur," ll. 1, 50, 147, 175, etc.); "The latest left of all his knights," *ibid.*, ll. 2, 292; "the dim, rich city" of Camelot, "Lancelot and Elaine," 797, 840; "the long backs of the bushless downs," *ibid.*, ll. 398, 784. Sometimes we have repetitions, as of the lines

> "Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful."
> —"The Passing of Arthur," ll. 199, 312, 327.

> "So the next day broke from underground."
> —"Lancelot and Elaine," ll. 411, 1130.

> "Down the slope street and past without the gate."
> —"Gareth and Lynette," ll. 685, 715.

This serves to add to the archaic tone, for such epithets and repetitions belong to a time before printing, when poems were recited by poets and minstrels, who had to hold everything in their heads.

But the archaic coloring is not the only characteristic of Tennyson's diction that we may readily note. One characteristic of any poet is that his mind is usually full of concrete images. This quality gives us not only the longer figures commonly thought of as figures of speech, but it gives an especial character to his language. Thus in "Lancelot and

Elaine," ll. 47–53, Arthur *labors* up the pass and *plunges* down the scaur; in ll. 111–116 the bard *links* the names of Guinevere the *pearl* of beauty and Lancelot the *flower* of bravery; in l. 165, the track runs in *loops* and *links;* such expressions give us in condensed form, as we may say, pictures and figures. It is part of the intensity of poetic diction to present such ideas in single words, but the poet does not by any means confine himself to single words in his figured expression. Tennyson is a writer of constant imagery, but he sometimes uses a figure as well. These figures are often drawn from nature and are often singularly apt, and beautiful in themselves. For instance,

> "As a wild wave in the wild North-sea,
> Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears with all
> Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
> Down on a bark," ll. 480–483.

> "The peopled gallery which half round
> Lay like a rainbow fallen upon the grass," ll. 428, 429.

> "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," ll. 889–893.

More frequent than these longer figures are those a bit shorter of one kind or another, like "The low sun makes the color," l. 134; "I lose it as we lose the lark in heaven," l. 655; "Fire in dry stubble a nine days' wonder flared," l. 730. Such figures one might study more, but even noted in a superficial way they give us a conception of the figured, concrete, pictorial character of Tennyson's diction in our poems.

Important Dates in Tennyson's Life.

1809. August 6. Born at Somersby, Lincolnshire.
1827. "Poems by Two Brothers," by Alfred Tennyson and his brother Charles.

1828. Goes to Trinity College, Cambridge.
1829. Wins the Chancellor's Medal for a poem entitled "Timbuctoo."
1830. "Poems, Chiefly Lyrical."
1832. "Poems" ("The Lady of Shalott" and other poems).
1842. "Poems" (a revision of earlier poems and "English Idylls" including "Morte d'Arthur.")
1847. "The Princess."
1850. "In Memoriam." In this year also Tennyson was married, and on the death of Wordsworth was made Poet Laureate.
1855. "Maud" and other poems.
1859. "The Idylls of the King." There were first published four Idylls only; eight others were added at various times.
1875. "Queen Mary." In later life Tennyson wrote a number of dramas of which the most important beside this are "Harold," 1876, and "Becket," 1884.
1884. Created Baron of Aldworth and Faringford.
1892. "The Death of Œnone," "Akbar's Dream" and other poems. This was the last volume published by the poet; we have not noted above all those of his later years.
1892. October 7th. Died. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

GARETH AND LYNETTE

AND OTHER IDYLLS

GARETH AND LYNETTE

THE last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,
And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring
Stared at the spate.[1] A slender-shafted Pine
Lost footing, fell, and so was whirl'd away.
"How he went down," said Gareth, "as a false knight
Or evil king before my lance if lance
Were mine to use—O senseless cataract,
Bearing all down in thy precipitancy—
And yet thou art but swollen with cold snows
And mine is living[2] blood: thou dost His will,
The Maker's, and not knowest, and I that know,
Have strength and wit, in my good mother's hall
Linger with vacillating obedience,
Prison'd, and kept and coax'd and whistled to—
Since the good mother holds me still a child!
Good mother is bad mother unto me!
A worse were better; yet no worse would I.
Heaven yield her for it, but in me put force
To weary her ears with one 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

[1] Scotch for *spring torrent, freshet.*
[2] and therefore should run with more life than mere water.

Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,
A knight of Arthur,[1] working out his will,
To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain,[2] when he came
With Modred hither in the summer time,
Ask'd me to tilt with him, the proven knight.
Modred for want of worthier was the judge.
Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,
'Thou hast half prevail'd against me,' said so—he—
Tho' Modred biting his thin lips was mute,
For he is alway sullen: what care I?"

And Gareth went, and hovering round her chair,
Ask'd, "Mother, tho' ye count me still the child,
Sweet mother, do ye love the child?" She laugh'd,
"Thou art but a wild goose to question it."
"Then, mother, an[3] ye love the child," he said,
"Being a goose and rather tame than wild,
Hear the child's story." "Yea, my well-beloved,
An 'twere but of the goose and golden eggs."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes,
"Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine
Was finer gold than any goose can lay;
For this an Eagle, a royal Eagle, laid
Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm
As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.[4]
And there was ever haunting round the palm
A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw
The splendor sparkling from aloft, and thought
'An I could climb and lay my hand upon it,
Then were I wealthier than a leash[5] of kings.'

[1] See p. ix.

[2] Gawain and Modred were brothers of Gareth and nephews of King Arthur. The first appears in the old romances as the type of knightly courtesy, the other as the type of the treacherous, villainous knight.

[3] if.

[4] a book with devotions for different times of the day.

[5] A leash is a thong to hold dogs. Gareth uses the word here to show his contempt for kings merely as men of wealth. True kings who live to rule righteously he reveres and admires.

But ever when he reach'd a hand to climb,
One, that had loved him from his childhood, caught
And stay'd him, 'Climb not lest thou break thy neck,
I charge thee by my love,' and so the boy,
Sweet mother, neither clomb,[1] nor brake his neck,
But brake his very heart in pining for it,
And past away."

To whom the mother said,
"True love, sweet son, had risk'd himself and climb'd,
And handed down the golden treasure to him."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes,
"Gold? said I gold?—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[2] Excalibur,[3]
And lightnings play'd about it in the storm,
And all the little fowl were flurried at it,
And there were cries and clashings in the nest,
That sent him from his senses: let me go."[4]

Then Bellicent bemoan'd 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 smoulder'd out!
For ever since when traitor to the King[5]
He fought against him in the Barons' war,
And Arthur gave him back his territory,
His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there

[1] archaic past tense of *climb*.

[2] sword.

[3] the famous sword of Arthur, given him by the Lady of the Lake as told in *The Coming of Arthur*, 294–308, and in Malory, bk. I., ch. xxv.

[4] Notice the effect of the three simple words coming at the end of the impassioned exclamation.

[5] There had been those who did not allow Arthur's title and therefore banded together against him. See l. 120.

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[1] 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,[2] the wars,
Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang
Of wrench'd or broken limb—an often chance
In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,
Frights to my heart; but stay: follow the deer
By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns;[3]
So make thy manhood mightier day by day;
Sweet is the chase: and I will seek thee out
Some comfortable[4] 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;[5]
The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,
Ask'd for a bride; and thereupon the King
Set two before him. One was fair, strong, arm'd—
But to be won by force—and many men
Desired her; one, good lack,[6] no man desired.
And these were the conditions of the King:
That save[7] 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,

[1] although.
[2] friendly tournaments.
[3] Scotch for *brooks*.
[4] cheerful and agreeable.
[5] Gareth thinks of Arthur offering him such a choice.
[6] an old colloquial exclamation.
[7] except, unless.

That evermore she long'd to hide herself,
Nor fronted man or woman eye to eye—
Yea—some she cleaved to, but they died of her.
And one—they call'd her Fame; and one, O Mother,
How can ye keep me tether'd to you—Shame!
Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.
Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,[1]
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,[2]
When I was frequent with him in my youth,
And heard him Kingly speak, and doubted him
No more than he, himself; but felt him mine,
Of closest kin to me; yet—wilt thou leave
Thine easeful bidding here, and risk thine all,
Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King?
Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth
Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son."

And Gareth answer'd quickly, "Not an hour,
So[3] that ye yield me—I will walk thro' fire,
Mother, to gain it—your full leave to go.
Not proven, who swept the dust of ruin'd Rome
From off the threshold of the realm, and crush'd
The Idolaters, and made the people free?
Who should be King save him who makes us free?"[4]

[1] Arthur was preëminently a Christian king. Hence his knighthood sang "The King shall follow Christ, and we the King."

[2] Bellicent knew him for her brother, the son of Uther, the former king.

[3] if; cf. l. 37.

[4] Arthur had led the British against the Romans and against the heathen Saxons. See *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 475 to the end.

So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain
To break him from the intent to which he grew,
Found her son's will unwaveringly one,
She answer'd craftily, "Will ye walk thro' fire?[1]
Who walks thro' 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!"[2]

But slowly spake the mother, looking at him,
"Prince,[3] thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,
And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks
Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,
And those that hand the dish across the bar.
Nor shalt thou tell thy name to any one.
And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day."[4]

For so the Queen believed that when her son
Beheld his only way to glory lead
Low down thro' villain[5] kitchen-vassalage,[6]
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,

[1] Bellicent quickly takes up his offer.

[2] *Quick* originally meant *living*, as in the expression "the quick and the dead." We speak now of "the quick of the finger-nails." "To the quick" means "to the most sensitive part."

[3] being grandson of old King Uther.

[4] "A twelvemonth and a day" is a favorite expression in the old romances. It comes originally from the law.

[5] *Villain* formerly meant no more than *low*, *vulgar*.

[6] service in the kitchen.

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,[1] disguised, and hire myself
To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves;
Nor tell my name to any—no, not the King."

Gareth awhile linger'd. The mother's eye
Full of the wistful fear that he would go,
And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turn'd,
Perplext his outward purpose, till an hour,
When waken'd by the wind which with full voice
Swept bellowing thro' the darkness on to dawn,
He rose, and out of slumber calling two
That still[2] 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.[3]
The damp hill-slopes were quicken'd[4] 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 broaden'd toward the base of Camelot,[5]
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn
Rolling her smoke about the Royal mount,
That rose between the forest and the field.
At times the summit of the high city flash'd;
At times the spires and turrets half-way down
Prick'd thro' the mist; at times the great gate shone

[1] Hence will I go.
[2] continually.
[3] Notice the rhythm of the line and the alliteration; it harmonizes with the subject.
[4] brought to life. See l. 147 and note.
[5] Camelot was one of the chief cities of Arthur, and a favorite place for holding his court.

Only, that open'd on the field below:
Anon,[1] the whole fair city had disappeared.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,
One crying, "Let us go no farther, lord.
Here is a city of Enchanters, built
By fairy Kings." The second echo'd him,
"Lord, we have heard from our wise men at home
To Northward, that this King is not the King,
But only changeling[2] out of Fairyland,
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery
And Merlin's glamour."[3] Then the first again,
"Lord, there is no such city anywhere.
But all a vision."

Gareth answer'd them
With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow[4]
In his own blood, his princedom, youth and hopes,
To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea;
So push'd them all unwilling towards 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[5] stood: all her dress
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretch'd under all the cornice and upheld:
And drops of water fell from either hand;
And down from one a sword was hung, from one

[1] soon, in a little while.

[2] The old superstition was that the fairies sometimes stole away children, leaving in their place "changelings," as they were called, beings of a strange, unearthly nature.

[3] the old word for *magic*.

[4] enough.

[5] The sculpture on the gate is symbolic, as is much else in the *Idylls*. The Lady of the Lake stands for the Christian Church: her dress like water, is the sacrament of baptism; the sword and the censer typify the militant and reverent characteristics; the fish was a sacred emblem among the early Christians, for the word for *fish* in Greek is made up of the initials of the Greek words for "Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Saviour."

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,[1] as if Time
Were nothing, so inveterately,[2] that men
Were giddy gazing there; and over all
High on the top were those three Queens,[3] the friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.

Then those with Gareth for so long a space
Stared at the figures, that at last it seem'd
The dragon-boughts[4] and elvish emblemings
Began to move, seethe, twine and curl: they[5] call'd
To Gareth, "Lord, the gateway is alive."

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

Then Gareth, "We be[6] tillers of the soil,
Who leaving share[7] 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,

[1] twisted together.
[2] inextricably.
[3] See *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 271-278, and *The Passing of Arthur*, ll. 361-393.
[4] the folds (boughts) of the dragon s ....
[5] his two companions.
[6] an archaic use: see p. xix.
[7] ploughshare.

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[1]
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[2] 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.[3]
And as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
For there is nothing in it as it seems
Saving the King;[4] tho' some there be that hold
The King a shadow, and the city real:[5]
Yet take thou heed of him, for, so[6] 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;[7] 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

[1] trying him, and making game of him.

[2] in the same manner; that is, untruly. So in l. 283 Merlin mocks Gareth as Gareth had mocked him.

[3] In Greek legend the walls of Thebes arose to the music of Amphion.

[4] The king alone was what he appeared to be. The others all concealed, under their noble exterior, some touch of evil, though never so slight.

[5] Some thought the king's ways were foolishness and the way of the world about him the true way.

[6] if; as in l. 131 and elsewhere.

[7] He means that the ideals of the king are so noble that nobody could refuse them, yet so hard to attain them that everybody must make some failure. Yet Gareth, like all finer souls (not "cattle of the field," l. 270) makes the attempt.

To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built forever." [1]

Gareth spake
Anger'd, "Old Master, reverence thine own beard
That looks as white as utter [2] truth, and seems
Well nigh 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? [3]
'Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion?'
I mock thee not but as thou mockest me, [4]
And all that see thee, for thou art not who
Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art. [5]
And now thou goest up to mock the King,
Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie."

Unmockingly the mocker ending here
Turn'd to the right, and past along the plain;
Whom Gareth looking after, said, "My men,
Our one white lie [6] 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 laugh'd, then enter'd with his twain
Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces,
And stately, rich in emblem and the work

[1] Because Arthur's rule is founded upon noble ideals it is not easy to think of it as having been made, and yet for this same reason it cannot pass away.

[2] absolute.

[3] the ancient Welsh poets: a part of their poetry consisted of riddles in verse.

[4] See l. 253.

[5] See Luke iv. 34.

[6] The "one white lie" was pretending to be what he was not.

Of ancient Kings who did their days in stone;[1]
Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court,
Knowing all the arts, had touch'd and everywhere
At Arthur's ordinance, tipt with lessening peak
And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven.
And ever and anon a knight would pass
Outward, or inward to the hall: his arms
Clash'd; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear.
And out of bower and casement shyly glanced
Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love;
And all about a healthful people stept
As in the presence of a gracious king.[2]

Then into hall Gareth ascending heard
A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld
Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall
The splendor of the presence of the King
Throned, and delivering doom[3]—and look'd no more—
But felt his young heart hammering in his ears,
And thought, "For this half-shadow of a lie
The truthful King will doom me when I speak."
Yet pressing on, tho' all in fear to find
Sir Gawain or Sir Modred,[4] saw nor one
Nor other, but in all the listening eyes
Of those tall knights, that ranged about the throne,
Clear honor shining like the dewy star
Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure
Affection, and the light of victory,
And glory gain'd, and evermore to gain.

Then came a widow crying to the King,
"A boon,[5] Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft

[1] who had the deeds of their time carved in stone.

[2] The place was in keeping with Gareth's enthusiastic ideals.

[3] judgment.

[4] his brothers. See note on ll. 25, 26, and also ll. 408, 409.

[5] favor.

From my dead lord a field with violence:
For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd gold,
Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes,
We yielded not; and then he reft us of it
Perforce, and left us neither gold nor field."

Said Arthur, "Whether[1] 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 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,[2]
When Lot and many another rose and fought
Against thee, saying thou wert basely born.
I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.
Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son
Thrall'd in his castle, and hath starved him dead;
And standeth seized[3] of that inheritance
Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.
So tho' I scarce can ask it thee for hate,
Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,
Kill the foul thief, and wreak[4] me for my son."

[1] which of the two.

[2] the Barons' war against Arthur before his supremacy and title to the throne were acknowledged. See lines 75, 76.

[3] a legal term for *possessed of*.

[4] revenge.

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,[1] and cried,
"A boon, Sir King! ev'n that thou grant her none,
This railer, that hath mock'd thee in full hall—
None; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag."

But Arthur, "We sit King, to help the wrong'd
Thro' all our realm. The woman loves her lord.
Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates!
The kings of old had doom'd thee to the flames,
Aurelius Emrys[2] would have scourged thee dead,
And Uther slit thy tongue; but get thee hence—
Lest that rough humor of the kings of old
Return upon me! Thou that art her kin,
Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not,
But bring him here, that I may judge the right,
According to the justice of the King:
Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King
Who lived and died for men, the man shall die.'

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,[3]
A name of evil savor in the land,
The Cornish king. In either hand he bore
What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines
A field of charlock[4] in the sudden sun
Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,
Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,
Delivering,[5] that his Lord, the vassal king,

[1] Sir Kay is one of the familiar figures among Arthur's knights in the old romances. He was the seneschal or steward, the keeper of the king's castle.

[2] Aurelius Emrys and Uther were brothers. The latter was king before Arthur; the former before Uther.

[3] Mark, king of Cornwall, a "vassal king" or dependent lord of Arthur, is the type of cowardly meanness elsewhere in the poems of the *Idylls of the King*, as Modred is the type of envious cunning.

[4] the yellow wild mustard plant.

[5] giving the message.

Was ev'n upon his way to Camelot;
For having heard that Arthur of his grace
Had made his goodly cousin, Tristram, knight,[1]
And, for himself was of the greater state,
Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord
Would yield him this large honor all the more;
So pray'd him well to accept this cloth of gold,
In token of true heart and fealty.[2]

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend
In pieces and so cast it on the hearth.
An oak-tree[3] smouldered there. "The goodly knight![4]
What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?"
For midway down the side of that long hall
A stately pile,—whereof along the front
Some blazon'd,[5] some but carven, and some blank,
There ran a treble range of stony shields,—
Rose and high-arching overbrow'd the hearth.
And under every shield a knight was named;
For this was Arthur's custom in his hall;
When some good knight had done one noble deed,
His arms were carven only; but if twain
His arms were blazon'd also; but if none
The shield was blank and bare without a sign
Saving the name beneath; and Gareth saw
The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright,
And Modred's blank as death; and Arthur cried
To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth.[6]

"More like are we to reave[7] him of his crown
Than make him knight because men call him king.

[1] The king had power to raise whom he would to the order of knighthood.

[2] faithful service.

[3] The hearth was so large that the trunk of a great tree could be put in it.

[4] Arthur speaks in scorn, as though he had said, "A fine knight *he* would be."

[5] This is the word in the science of heraldry for portraying in the right colors.

[6] These words take up the story after the description.

[7] *To reave* is to *take away*. The construction is the same as after "deprive."

The kings we found, ye know we stay'd their hands
From war among themselves, but left them kings;
Of whom were any bounteous, merciful,
Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enroll'd
Among us, and they sit within our hall.
But Mark hath tarnish'd the great name of king,
As Mark would sully the low state of churl:
And seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold,
Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,
Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead,[1]
Silenced forever—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,
Approach'd between them toward the King, and ask'd,
"A boon, Sir King (his voice was all ashamed),
For see ye not how weak and hunger-worn
I seem—leaning on these? grant me to serve
For meat and drink among the kitchen-knaves
A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.
Hereafter I will fight."[2]

To him the King,
"A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon!
But an thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay,
The master of the meats and drinks be thine."[3]

[1] Lead was used for coffins; *lap* is the same word as *wrap*.

[2] He cannot help expressing his real hopes.

[3] rather a condensed construction. Kay is to be master of Gareth as well as of the meats and drinks.

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[1] 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[2] 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 ask'd
For horse and armor: fair and fine, forsooth!
Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it
That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day
Undo thee not—and leave my man to me."

So Gareth all for glory underwent
The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage;[3]

[1] Lancelot is the chief of Arthur's knights, the most courteous, the bravest, and the greatest in everything that belonged to knighthood.

[2] flowing. We say "a fluent speech," but do not often use the word for material things.

[3] See l. 157.

Ate with young lads his portion by the door,
And couch'd 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 labor him
Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set
To turn the broach,[1] draw water, or hew wood,
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bow'd himself
With all obedience to the King, and wrought
All kind of service with a noble ease
That graced the lowliest act in doing it.
And when the thralls had talk among themselves
And one would praise the love that linkt the King
And Lancelot—how the King had saved his life
In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's—
For Lancelot was the first in Tournament,
But Arthur mightiest on the battlefield—
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[2] highest found the King
A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,
"He passes to the Isle Avilion,[3]
He passes and is heal'd and cannot die"—
Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,
Then would he whistle rapid as any lark,
Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud
That first they mock'd, but, after, reverenced him.
Or Gareth telling some prodigious tale
Of knights, who sliced a red life-bubbling[4] way
Thro' twenty folds of twisted dragon, held
All in a gap-mouth'd circle his good mates
Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,

[1] the great spit.
[2] apparently Mt. Snowdon.
[3] a mythical island, a sort of paradise on earth.
[4] because the life-blood gushed out.

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

So for a month he wrought among the thralls;
But in the weeks that follow'd, the good Queen,
Repentant of the word she made him swear,
And saddening in her childless castle, sent,
Between the increscent and decrescent moon,[1]
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,[2]
And each at either dash from either end—
Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.
He laugh'd; he sprang. "Out of the smoke, at once
I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee[3]—
These news be mine, none other's—nay, the King's—
Descend into the city:" whereon he sought
The King alone, and found, and told him all.

"I have stagger'd thy strong Gawain in a tilt
For pastime; yea he said it: joust can I.

[1] increasing and decreasing. *Increscent*, like *fluent*, is nearer the Latin form.
[2] in imitation of the oval lists or enclosures in which the tournaments were held.
[3] From Hell to Heaven, of which Peter holds the keys.

Make me thy knight—in secret! let my name
Be hidd'n, and give me the first quest, I spring
Like flame from ashes."

Here the King's calm eye
Fell on, and check'd, and made him flush, and bow
Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answer'd him,
"Son, the good mother let me know thee here,
And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine.[1]
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."

[1] give you the honor which is rightly yours.

Merrily Gareth ask'd,
"Have I not earned my cake in baking of it?
Let be my name until I make my name![1]
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,[2] 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, every one that owns a tower
The Lord for half a league.[3] Why sit ye there?
Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,
Till ev'n the lonest hold[4] were all as free
From cursed bloodshed, as thine altar-cloth
From that blest 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

[1] Never mind my name till I can make one.
[2] Lancelot even in his armor was known by the device on his shield. See l. 1273.
[3] That is, master of the territory just around about his castle.
[4] castle.

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 stay'd
In her own castle and so besieges her
To break her will, and make her wed with him:
And but[1] 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.[2]
Now therefore have I come for Lancelot."

Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth ask'd,
"Damsel, ye know this Order[3] 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[4] 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,

[1] only.
[2] To "wed a holy life" was to become a nun.
[3] the order of Arthur's knights.
[4] before the time of Arthur, whose knights had higher aims.

Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,
Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise
The fourth who always rideth arm'd 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." [1]

Hereat Sir Gareth call'd from where he rose,
A head with kindling eyes above the throng,
"A boon, Sir King—this quest!" then—for he mark'd
Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull—
"Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,[2]
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I,
And I can topple over a hundred such.
Thy promise, King," and Arthur glancing at him,
Brought down a momentary brow. "Rough, sudden,
And pardonable, worthy to be knight—
Go therefore," and all hearers were amazed.

But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath,
Slew the May-white; she lifted either arm,
"Fie on thee, King! I ask'd for thy chief knight,
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave."
Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turn'd,
Fled down the lane of access to the King,
Took horse, descended the slope street,[3] and past
The weird white gate, and paused without, beside
The field of tourney, murmuring "kitchen-knave."

[1] Lynette is impetuous (ll. 579–582) and persistent.

[2] The sight of Kay makes Gareth emphasize that which he knows will disgust him most.

[3] Camelot was a "high city," and the palace was on the summit.

Now two great entries open'd from the hall,
At one end one, that gave upon a range
Of level pavement where the King could 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.[1]
And out by this main doorway past the King.
But one was counter to[2] the hearth, and rose
High that the highest-crested helm could ride
Therethro' nor graze: and by this entry fled
The damsel in her wrath, and on to this
Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door
King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,
A war-horse of the best, and near it stood
The two that out of north had follow'd him.
This[3] bare a maiden shield, a casque;[4] that held
The horse, the spear; whereat Sir Gareth loosed
A cloak that dropped from collar-bone to heel,
A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,
And from it like a fuel-smother'd fire,
That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flash'd as those
Dull-coated things, that making slide apart
Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns
A jewel'd harness, ere they pass and fly.
So Gareth ere he parted flash'd in arms.
Then while he donn'd[5] 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[6] steel, around him slowly prest
The people, and from out of kitchen came
The thralls in throng, and seeing who had work'd
Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,

[1] The hill was so steep that from above, the road seemed to run among the tops of houses.
[2] opposite.
[3] *this*, one of the two; *that*, the other.
[4] helmet.
[5] put on.
[6] good for cutting.

Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,
"God bless the King, and all his fellowship!"
And on thro' lanes of shouting Gareth rode
Down the slope street, and past without the gate.

So Gareth past with joy; but as the cur
Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause
Be cool'd by fighting, follows, being named,
His owner, but remembers all, and growls
Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door
Mutter'd in scorn of Gareth whom he used
To harry and hustle.

"Bound upon a quest
With horse and arms—the King hath past his time[1]—
My scullion knave! Thralls to your work again.
For an your fire be low ye kindle mine![2]
Will there be dawn in West and eve in East?[3]
Begone!—my knave!—belike and like enow
Some old head-blow[4] not heeded in his youth
So shook his wits they wander in his prime—
Crazed! How the villain lifted up his voice.
Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave.
Tut: he was tame and meek enow with me,
Till peacock'd up with Lancelot's noticing.
Well—I will after my loud knave, and learn
Whether he know me for his master yet.
Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance
Hold, 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 will ye go against the King,

[1] He is in his dotage.
[2] *My fire* is metaphorical.
[3] Is the order of everything to be reversed?
[4] If not in his dotage, something is wrong with his mind: it may be that some old wound has unsettled him.

For that did never he[1] 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 over-fine
To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies."
Then mounted, on thro' silent faces[2] 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-flesh'd agaric[3] in the holt,[4]
And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,
Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose
With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling,[5] "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."

[1] Gareth.
[2] The people had no love for him as they had for Gareth (l. 684).
[3] a mushroom.
[4] the wood.
[5] crying in a shrill voice.

"Have at thee then," said Kay; they shock'd, and Kay
Fell shoulder-slipt,[1] and Gareth cried again,
"Lead, and I follow," and fast away she fled.

But after sod and shingle[2] ceased to fly
Behind her, and the heart of her good horse
Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,
Perforce she stay'd, and overtaken spoke.
"What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?
Deem'st thou that I accept thee aught the more,
Or love thee better, that by some 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 answer'd gently, "say
Whate'er ye will, but whatsoe'er ye say,
I leave not till I finish this fair quest,
Or die therefor."

"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,[3] knave,
And then by such a one that thou for all
The kitchen brewis[4] that was ever supt
Shalt not once dare to look him in the face."

"I shall assay,"[5] said Gareth with a smile
That madden'd her, and away she flash'd again
Down the long avenues of boundless wood,
And Gareth following was again beknaved.[6]

[1] His shoulder dislocated.
[2] coarse gravel.
[3] As we say "come up with."
[4] Thickened soup or broth.
[5] attempt.
[6] called a knave.

"Sir Kitchen-knave, I have miss'd the only way
Where Arthur's men are set along the wood;
The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves:
If both be slain, I am rid of thee; but yet,
Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit[1] of thine?
Fight, an thou canst: I have miss'd the only way."

So till the dusk that followed even-song
Rode on the two, reviler and reviled:
Then after one long slope was mounted, saw,
Bowl-shaped, thro' tops of many thousand pines,
A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink
To westward—in the deeps whereof a mere,[2]
Round as the red eye of an Eagle-owl,
Under the half-dead sunset glared; and cries
Ascended, and there brake a serving-man
Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,
"They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere."
Then Gareth, "Bound am I to right the wrong'd,
But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee."
And when the damsel spake contemptuously,
"Lead and I follow," Gareth cried again,
"Follow, I lead!" so down among the pines
He plunged, and there, black-shadow'd nigh the mere,
And mid-thigh-deep, in bulrushes and reed,
Saw six tall men haling[3] a seventh along,
A stone about his neck, to drown him in it.
Three with good blows he quieted, but three
Fled thro' the pines; and Gareth loosed the stone
From off his neck, then in the mere beside
Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.
Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet
Set him a stalwart Baron, Arthur's friend.

[1] She calls his lance a spit because he had been in the kitchen.

[2] a little pond.

[3] an older form of *hauling*.

"Well that ye came, or else these caitiff[1] rogues
Had wreak'd themselves on me; good cause is theirs
To hate me, for my wont hath ever been
To catch my thief, and then like 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 will ye yield this damsel harborage?"

Whereat the Baron saying, "I well believe
Ye 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[2] of craven foresters.
A thresher with his flail had scatter'd them.
Nay—for thou smellest of the kitchen still.
But an this lord will yield us harborage,
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,

[1] villainous. [2] used contemptuously, as we might say a *mob*.

And many a costly cate,[1] received the three.
And there they placed a peacock in his pride[2]
Before the damsel, and the Baron set
Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.

"Meseems[3] that here is much discourtesy,
Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.
Hear me—this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,
And pray'd the King would grant me Lancelot
To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night—
The last a monster unsubduable
Of any save of him for whom I call'd—
Suddenly bawls this frontless[4] kitchen-knave,
'The quest is mine; thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I.'
Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,
'Go therefore,' and so gives the quest to him—
Him—here—a villain[5] fitter to stick swine
Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong,
Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman."

Then half-ashamed and part amazed, the lord
Now look'd at one and now at other, left
The damsel by the peacock in his pride,
And, seating Gareth at another board,[6]
Sat down beside him, ate and then began.

"Friend, whether ye 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,

[1] an article of food.

[2] A peacock with his tail spread was called in the books of heraldry "a peacock in his pride."

[3] It seems to me.

[4] shameless.

[5] See note on l. 157, where the word is used as an adjective.

[6] a side-table.

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.[1]
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."[2]

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

"I fly no more: I allow thee for an hour.
Lion and stoat have isled[3] together, knave,
In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks
Some ruth[4] is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool?
For hard by here is one who 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 answer'd courteously,
"Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.
Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find
My fortunes all as fair as hers, who lay
Among the ashes and wedded the King's son."[5]

Then to the shore of one of those long loops
Wherethro' the serpent river coil'd, they came.

[1] To ask the king to send Lancelot.
[2] Gareth goes a step farther than the allegory, meaning that nothing shall daunt him.
[3] have climbed for safety on an islet.
[4] pity.
[5] Cinderella.

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[1] in hue,
Save that the dome was purple, and above,
Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering.
And therebefore the lawless warrior paced
Unarm'd, and calling, "Damsel, is this he,
The champion ye have 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 unarm'd: he is not knight but knave."

Then at his call, "O daughters of the Dawn,
And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,
Arm me," from out the silken curtain-folds
Barefooted and bareheaded three fair girls
In gilt and rosy raiment came: their feet
In dewy grasses glisten'd; and the hair
All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem
Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.[2]
These arm'd him in blue arms, and gave a shield
Blue also, and thereon the morning star.
And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,
Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,
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.

[1] The "Lent-lily" is the yellow daffodil. [2] a kind of quartz, containing mica.

Then she that watch'd him,[1] "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[2] me and revile.
Fair words were best for him who fights for thee;
But truly foul are better, for they send
That strength of anger thro' mine arms, I know
That I shall overthrow him."

And he that bore
The star, being 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
Shock'd on the central bridge, and either spear
Bent but not brake, and either knight at once,
Hurl'd as a stone from out of a catapult
Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,
Fell, as if dead; but quickly rose and drew,
And Gareth lash'd so fiercely with his brand
He drave his enemy backward down the bridge,

[1] Lynette. [2] speak wrongly of me.

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.[1]

Then cried the fall'n, "Take not my life: I yield."
And Gareth, "So this damsel ask it of me
Good—I accord it easily as a grace."
She reddening, "Insolent scullion: I of thee?
I bound to thee for any favor ask'd!"
"Then shall he die."[2] And Gareth there unlaced
His helmet as[3] to slay him, but she shriek'd,
"Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay
One nobler than thyself." "Damsel, thy charge
Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight,
Thy life is thine at her command. Arise
And quickly pass to Arthur's hall, and say
His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave
His pardon for thy breaking of his laws.
Myself, when I return, will plead for thee.
Thy shield is mine[4]—farewell; and, damsel, thou
Lead, and I follow."

And fast away she fled.
Then when he came upon her, spake, "Methought,[5]
Knave, when I watch'd thee striking on the bridge
The savor of thy kitchen came upon me
A little faintlier: but the wind hath changed:
I scent it twentyfold." And then she sang,
"'O morning star' (not that tall felon there
Whom thou by sorcery or unhappiness[6]

[1] The combats between Gareth and the brothers have an allegorical meaning, for which see p. xiv.
[2] That is, if you will not ask for his life.
[3] as if.
[4] He takes the shield of the Morning-Star. See ll. 1008, 1011.
[5] It seemed to me. *Me* is here the dative.
[6] mischance.

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.'[1]

"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[2]—
Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot.[3]
Care not for shame: thou art not knight but knave."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd, laughingly,
"Parables? Hear a parable of the knave.
When I was a kitchen-knave among the rest
Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates
Own'd a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,
'Guard it,' and there was none to meddle with it.[4]
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, ye should worship[5] me the more,
That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies."

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

[1] These songs of Lynette are, of course, Tennyson's way of showing the gradual change of her feeling.
[2] See l. 1169 f.
[3] in addition.
[4] No one dared to touch it.
[5] *Worship* and *honor* in the old romances have much the same sense.

So when they touch'd the second riverloop,
Huge on a huge red horse, and all in mail
Burnish'd to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun
Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower,
That blows a globe of after arrowlets,
Ten thousandfold had grown, flash'd the fierce shield,
All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots
Before them when he turn'd from watching him.
He from behind the roaring shallow roar'd
"What doest thou, brother,[1] in my marches[2] here?"
And she athwart the shallow shrill'd again,
"Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall
Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms."
"Ugh!" cried the Sun, and vizoring up[3] a red
And cipher face of rounded foolishness,
Push'd horse across the foamings of the ford,
Whom Gareth met midstream; no room was there
For lance or tourney-skill: four strokes they struck
With sword, and these were mighty; the new knight
Had fear he might be shamed; but as the Sun
Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,
The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream
Descended, and the Sun was wash'd away.

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford;
So drew him home; but he that would not fight,
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?"[4]
"Nay, not a point:[5] nor art thou victor here.

[1] He thought Gareth was the Morning-Star, because he had taken his shield.
[2] boundaries.
[3] covering by closing his visor.
[4] See l. 969.
[5] not a point of the compass, by which the wind is commonly reckoned. Lynette will not yet admit that she was wrong.

There lies a ridge of slate across the ford;
His horse thereon stumbled—ay, for I saw it.

"'O Sun' (not this strong fool who thou, Sir Knave,
Hast overthrown thro' 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[1] of lovesong or of love?
Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,
Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance,[2]——

"'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,[3] merle,[4]
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,[5]

[1] How should a scullion know anything of noble life?
[2] perhaps.
[3] thrush.
[4] blackbird.
[5] You only think whether they are suitable for the kitchen or not.

Larding and basting. See thou have not now
Larded thy last, except[1] thou turn and fly.
There stands the third fool of their allegory."

For there beyond a bridge of treble bow,
All in a rose-red from the west, and all
Naked it seem'd, and glowing in the broad
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight,
That named himself the Star of 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 armor off him, these will turn the blade."

Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge,
"O brother-star, why shine ye here so low?
Thy ward[2] 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.

[1] unless. [2] place to guard.

"Approach and arm me!" With slow steps from out
An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stain'd
Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,
And arm'd him in old arms, and brought a helm
With but a drying evergreen for crest,
And gave a shield whereon the Star of Even[1]
Half-tarnish'd and half-bright, his emblem, shone.'
But when it glittered over the saddle-bow,
They madly hurl'd together on the bridge,
And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,
There met him drawn, and overthrew him again,
But up like fire he started: and as oft
As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,
So many a time he vaulted up again;
Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,
Foredooming[2] all his trouble was in vain,
Labor'd within him, for he seem'd 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 seem'd to strike
Vainly, the damsel clamoring all the while,
"Well done, knave-knight, well-stricken, O good knight-knave—
O knave, as noble as any of all the knights—
Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied—
Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round—
His arms are old, he trusts the harden'd skin—
Strike—strike—the wind will never change again."[3]
And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote,
And hew'd great pieces of his armor off him,
But lash'd in vain against the harden'd skin,

[1] Note the difference from the arms of the Morning-Star.

[2] judging beforehand.

[3] See ll. 969, 1028.

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
Forever; till at length Sir Gareth's brand
Clash'd his, and brake it utterly to the hilt.
"I have thee now;" but forth that other sprang,
And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms
Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,
Strangled, but straining ev'n his uttermost
Cast, and so hurl'd him headlong o'er the bridge
Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,
"Lead, and I follow."

But the damsel said,
"I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;
Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves.[1]

"'O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,
O rainbow with three colors after rain,
Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me.'[2]

"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
Scorn'd me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,
For thou hast ever answer'd 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, "ye be not all to blame,
Saving that ye mistrusted our good King
Would handle scorn, or yield thee, asking, one

[1] scullions. [2] See l. 976.

Not fit to cope thy quest.' Ye said your say;
Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold
He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet
To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets
His heart be stirr'd with any foolish heat
At any gentle damsel's waywardness.
Shamed? care not! thy foul sayings fought for me:
And seeing now my words are fair, methinks,
There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,[2]
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 turn'd 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[3] wherein
Were slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse
Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues.
"Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,
Whose holy hand hath fashion'd on the rock
The war of Time against the soul of man.
And yon four fools have suck'd their allegory
From these damp walls, and taken but the form.[4]
Know ye not these?" and Gareth lookt and read—
In letters like to those the vexillary

[1] to accomplish your adventure.

[2] Lancelot was the most powerful of the Knights of the Round Table.

[3] A *comb* is a hollow in a hillside.

[4] The allegory as inscribed on the rock had a meaning. The brothers took but the names and forms, having no conception of the thought at bottom.

Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt[1]—
"PHOSPHORUS," then "MERIDIES"—"HESPERUS"—
"NOX"—"MORS,[2]" 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.[3]
"Follow the faces, and we find it. Look,
Who comes behind?"

For one—delay'd at first
Thro' helping back the dislocated Kay
To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,
The damsel's headlong error[4] thro' the wood—
Sir Lancelot having swum the river-loops—
His blue shield-lions cover'd—softly drew
Behind the twain, and when he saw the star[5]
Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,
"Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend."
And Gareth crying prick'd against the cry;
But when they closed—in a moment—at one touch
Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of the world—
Went sliding down so easily, and fell,
That when he found the grass within his hands
He laugh'd; the laughter jarr'd upon Lynette:
Harshly she ask'd him, "Shamed and overthrown,
And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,
Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?"

[1] There are Roman inscriptions cut in a rock above the Gelt, a small stream in Cumberland. One of them has mention of a *vexillatio*, or detachment of one of the old Roman legions. The *vexillary* would have been a soldier in such a detachment.

[2] These are Latin names for "Morning Star," "Midday," "Evening Star," "Night," "Death."

[3] The hermit's idea emphasized the struggle of the soul in the world. The soul, pursued by Youth, Middle Age, Old Age, and Death, seeks refuge in Religion.

[4] wandering from the path.

[5] Lancelot, on seeing the shield of the Morning-Star, thought Gareth had been overcome. A knight was known by his shield.

"Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son
Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent,
And victor of the bridges and the ford,
And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom
I know not, all thro' mere unhappiness—
Device and sorcery and unhappiness—
Out, sword; we are thrown!" and Lancelot answer'd,
"Prince,
O Gareth—thro' 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? And 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 call'd? and wherefore now
Come ye, not call'd? I gloried in my knave,
Who being still[1] rebuked, would answer still
Courteous as any knight—but now, if knight,
The marvel dies, and leaves me fool'd and trick'd,
And only wondering wherefore play'd upon:
And doubtful whether I and mine be scorn'd.
Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall,[2]
In Arthur's presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool,
I hate thee and forever."

And Lancelot said,
"Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! knight art thou

[1] continually.
[2] Yet even in the court of Arthur, Gareth had appeared deceitfully. See l. 291.

To the King's best wish. O damsel, be ye wise
To call him shamed, who is but overthrown?
Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.
Victor from vanquish'd issues at the last,
And overthrower from being overthrown.
With sword we have not striven;[1] and thy good horse
And thou art weary; yet not less I felt
Thy manhood thro' that wearied lance of thine.
Well hast thou done: for all the stream is freed,
And thou hast wreak'd his justice on his foes,
And when reviled, hast answer'd graciously,
And makest merry, when overthrown. Prince, Knight,
Hail, Knight and Prince, and of our Table Round!"

And then when turning to Lynette he told
The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said,
"Ay well—ay well—for worse than being fool'd
Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave,
Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks
And forage for the horse, and flint for fire.
But all about it flies a honeysuckle.
Seek, till we find." And when they sought and found,
Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life
Past into sleep; on whom the maiden gaz'd.
"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 hush'd night, as if the world were one
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness!
O Lancelot, Lancelot"—and she clapt her hands—

[1] The meeting on horseback, lance in rest, was generally followed by combat with sword on foot.

"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,[1]
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."[2]

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

And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutch'd the shield;
"Ramp, ye lance-splintering lions,[3] on whom all spears
Are rotten sticks! ye seem agape to roar!
Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord!—
Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.
O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these
Streams virtue—fire—thro' one that will not shame
Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.
Hence let us go."

Silent the silent field
They traversed. Arthur's harp[4] tho' summer-wan,
In counter-motion[5] 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!"

[1] See ll. 604, 605.
[2] deed accomplished.
[3] on Lancelot's shield.
[4] "Arthur's Harp" was the name of a constellation or of a star. It is pale in summer because in summer the nights are not so dark as in winter, so that the stars seem less bright.
[5] The clouds passing over the star made it seem as though it were going in the contrary direction. *Counter-motion* means motion the other way.

Suddenly she that rode upon his left
Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him crying,
"Yield, yield him this again: 'tis he must fight:'
I curse the tongue that all thro' 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 maim'd,
Mangled: I swear thou canst not fling the fourth."

"And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know.
Ye cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice,
Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery
Appall me from the quest."

"Nay, Prince," she cried,
"God wot, I never look'd upon the face,
Seeing he never rides abroad by day;
But watch'd him have I like a 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 swallow'd infant flesh,
Monster! O Prince, I went for Lancelot first,
The quest is Lancelot's: give him back the shield."

Said Gareth laughing, "An he fight for this,
Belike he wins it as the better man:
Thus—and not else?"

But Lancelot on him urged
All the devisings of their chivalry

[1] Lynette was seized with sudden fear; she had wished that Gareth should have all the honor; now she fears the danger so much that she wishes Lancelot to take the adventure.

Where 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.[1] Instant[2] were his words.

Then Gareth, "Here be rules. I know but one—
To dash against mine enemy and to win.
Yet have I watch'd thee victor in the joust,
And seen thy way."[3] "Heaven help thee," sigh'd
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 whisper'd, "There."
And all the three were silent seeing, pitch'd
Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,
A huge pavilion like a mountain peak
Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge,
Black, with black banner, and a long black horn
Beside it hanging; which Sir Gareth graspt,
And so, before the two could hinder him,
Sent all his heart and breath thro' all the horn.
Echo'd the walls; a light twinkled; anon
Came lights and lights, and once again he blew;
Whereon were hollow 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,

[1] delicacy.
[2] pressing.
[3] In spite of his headlong dash, Gareth had noticed Lancelot carefully.

Thro' those black foldings, that which housed [1] therein.
High on a nightblack horse, in nightblack arms,
With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,
And crown'd 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?" [2] But he spake no word;
Which set the horror higher: a maiden swoon'd;
The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept,
As doom'd to be the bride of Night and Death;
Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm;
And ev'n Sir Lancelot thro' his warm blood felt
Ice strike, and all that mark'd him were aghast.

At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neigh'd—
At once the black 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 cleft the helm
As throughly [3] 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 bade me do it,

[1] dwelt.
[2] Even the earth hides the dead with flowers rather than with signs of mourning.
[3] entirely.

To make a horror all about the house,
And stay the world from Lady Lyonors.
They never dream'd the passes would be past."
Answer'd Sir Gareth graciously to one
Not many a moon his younger, "My fair child,
What madness made thee challenge the chief knight
Of Arthur's hall?" "Fair Sir, they bade me do it.
They hate the King, and Lancelot, the King's friend,
They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,
They never dream'd the passes could be past."

Then sprang the happier day from under-ground;
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 prov'n 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.[1]

[1] "He that told the tale in older times" is Malory (p. 9). But Tennyson feels that Gareth had really fought for Lynette, and that it is Lynette whom he should win.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE.

ELAINE the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred [1] 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,[2] fashion'd for it
A case of silk, and braided [3] thereupon
All the devices blazon'd [4] on the shield
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,[5]
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 Cærlyle;
That at Cærleon; this at Camelot:[6]
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.

[1] in her thoughts. [2] an archaic word. [3] embroidered.
[4] The *device* was, in heraldry, the especial figure belonging to a knight or family. For *blazon*, see *Gareth and Lynette*, l. 405. [5] out of her head; for *wit* see l. 147.
[6] the chief towns where Arthur held court, and, therefore, tournaments.

How came the lily maid by that good shield
Of Lancelot, she that knew not ev'n his name?[1]
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, long before they crown'd him king,
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonnesse,[2]
Had found a glen, gray boulder, and black tarn.[3]
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave[4]
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 color with the crags:[5]
And he that once was king had on a crown
Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside.
And Arthur came, and laboring up the pass
All in a misty moonshine, unawares
Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull
Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown
Roll'd into light, and, turning on its rims,
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn:[6]
And down the shingly scaur[7] he plunged, and caught,
And set it on his head, and in his heart
Heard murmurs, "Lo, thou likewise shalt be king."

[1] The poem has begun with the chief figure; it now goes back a long way in time, and does not reach the point of beginning until l. 395.

[2] An ancient land beyond Cornwall, according to the legend, now buried deep beneath the sea; see *The Passing of Arthur*, ll. 81–87.

[3] a deep pool.

[4] an archaic preterite.

[5] The lichen grew over them, and they became of one color with the rocks.

[6] Note the rapidity of the line.

[7] *Shingle* is the English name for a pebbly beach; a *scaur* is a bare, steep bank.

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,[1] 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[2] shall grow
In use of arms and manhood, till we drive
The heathen,[3] who, some say, shall rule the land
Hereafter, which God hinder." Thus he spoke:
And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still[4]
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,[5] let[6] 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 can not move[7]
To these fair jousts?" "Yea, lord," she said, "ye know it."
"Then will ye miss," he answer'd, "the great deeds
Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,
A sight ye love to look on." And the Queen
Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly
On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.

[1] by divine guidance.
[2] The use of a reflexive, as though a subject comes from the omission of the true subject.
[3] The Anglo-Saxons, who followed the Celts in England, were at first heathen.
[4] in the old meaning of "always."
[5] London.
[6] *Let* with a verb is an archaic idiom.
[7] to go to Camelot.

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[1] 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[2] 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,[3] and the crowd
Will murmur, 'Lo, the shameless ones, who take
Their pastime now the trustful King is gone!'"
Then Lancelot, vexed at having lied in vain:
"Are ye so wise? ye were not once so wise,
My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.
Then of the crowd[4] ye took no more account
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,
Them surely can I silence with all ease.
But now my loyal worship is allow'd[5]
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

[1] The full number.
[2] hinders; the word anciently seems to have had two contrary meanings, probably distinguished by context or gesture.
[3] A party had sprung up in the court, opposed to the Queen because they opposed the King, and to Lancelot because he was so constantly successful.
[4] of other people and what they said. [5] recognized.

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,[1]
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—[2]
But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven?[3]
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[4] loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the color:[5] I am yours,
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond.
And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts:
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream
When sweetest; and the vermin voices here
May buzz so loud—we scorn them, but they sting."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights:
"And with what face, after my pretext made,
Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I
Before a king who honors his own word,
As if it were his God's?"

[1] The old word for knightly duty.

[2] Guinevere, who has ceased to love the King, falls into the idea of lower souls that one can be too good; so good as to be stupid; that, as in l. 134, one must be bad to be interesting. [3] She breaks off into a figure. [4] common in older English for "whoever."

[5] The figure is true to nature, as any sunset will show.

"Yea," said the Queen,
"A moral child[1] without the craft to rule,
Else had he not lost me: but listen to me,
If I must find you wit:[2] we hear it said
That men go down before your spear at a touch
But[3] 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[4] your pretext, O my knight,
As all for glory; for, to speak him true,
Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,
No keener hunter after glory breathes.
He loves it in his knights more than himself:
They prove to him his work: win and return."

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,
Wroth at himself: not willing to be known,
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,
And there among the solitary downs,[5]
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;
Till, as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,
That all in loops and links among the dales
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw
Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.
Thither he made, and wound the gateway horn.
Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,
Who let him into lodging,[6] and disarm'd.
And Lancelot marvel'd at the wordless man;
And, issuing, found the Lord of Astolat
With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,

[1] He certainly did have the simplicity and directness of a child.
[2] as in l. 10. [3] only. [4] as in l. 110.
[5] bare, rounded hills; cf. l. 398.
[6] He was received into the castle as a matter of course, for free hospitality was one of the necessities of the time, and was afterward presented to his host.

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."[1]

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—[2]
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.[3]
His ye can have." Then added plain Sir Torre,
"Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it."
Here laugh'd the father saying, "Fie, Sir Churl,
Is that an answer for a noble knight?
Allow him:[4] 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,

[1] This speech has something of the epic sententiousness of Homer, especially in ll. 181, 185. [2] He would have been known by his shield; cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, l. 1267.
[3] The device on a knight's shield often referred to feats he had himself performed.
[4] A half apology to Lancelot.

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,[1] no more: for, knight, the maiden dreamt
That some one put this diamond[2] 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[3] 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[4] ye 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 ye may;[5]
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."[6]
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,
Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement

[1] This was the jest of l. 177.
[2] Here, as in l. 230, there is a hint at Lancelot himself, under the mention of the diamond. [3] Lancelot. [4] if. [5] The modern use would be *can*
[6] This is the poet's irony; Torre does not know how near he hits the mark.

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[1] 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.[2]
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,[3]
But kindly man moving among his kind:

[1] A man of less nobility of nature. [2] The idea of right was not dead in him.
[3] In an age less noble, where people cared more for show and observance than for real worth.

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[1]
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.[2]

"Oh, there, great lord, doubtless," Lavaine said, rapt[3]
By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth
Toward greatness in its elder, "you have fought.
Oh, 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;[4]
And in the four wild battles by the shore
Of Duglas; 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

[1] He changed the subject.

[2] The legend was that Arthur conquered the Saxons in twelve great battles. Of these that of Badon Hill was the last and greatest, as in ll. 301-307. The others are named in Lancelot's relation. The earliest mention of these battles is found in the account of Arthur given by Nennius, a historian of the ninth century, in whose work fact and fiction can be separated only by great labor.

[3] seized and absorbed.

[4] The names come from Nennius, but are far beyond our identification. Tennyson however, gives each its character.

Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,
Carved on one emerald, center'd in a sun
Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed;
And at Cærleon had he help'd his lord,
When the strong neighings of the wild White Horse[1]
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,[2]
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,

[1] The standard of the Saxons.
[2] The knights shouted the names of Christ and of the King as a war cry.

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,[1] all, perchance, for her.
And all night long his face before her lived.
As when a painter,[2] poring on a face,
Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
The shape and color of a mind and life,
Lives for his children, ever at its best
And fullest; so the face before her lived,
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.
Till rathe[3] she rose, half-cheated[4] 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 dreamed she was so beautiful.
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood
Rapt[5] on his face as if it were a god's.

[1] She could not know the true causes of Lancelot's emotions.
[2] This figure is worth thinking over; it is fine in itself, and also expresses more fully the thought of Elaine. [3] early; the old word of which *rather* is the comparative.
[4] She really wished to see Lancelot, but would hardly acknowledge it to herself.
[5] Cf. l. 280.

Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire
That he should wear her favor[1] at the tilt.
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
"Fair lord, whose name I know not—noble it is,
I well believe, the noblest—will you wear
My favor at this tourney?" "Nay," said he,
"Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
Favor of any lady in the lists.
Such is my wont, as those who know me know."
"Yea, so," she answer'd; "then in wearing mine
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,
That those who know should know you." And he turn'd
Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true,[2] and answer'd, "True, my child,
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:
What is it?" and she told him, "A red sleeve
Broider'd with pearls," and brought it: then he bound
Her token on his helmet, with a smile
Saying, "I never yet have done so much
For any maiden living," and the blood
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight;
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine,
Returning, brought the yet-unblazon'd shield,
His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine;
"Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield
In keeping till I come." "A grace to me,"
She answer'd, "twice to-day. I am your Squire."
Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, "Lily maid,
For fear our people call you lily maid
In earnest, let me bring your color back;
Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed:"

[1] Something she should give him.

[2] He forgot that his remaining unrecognized was but a pretext. His wearing the sleeve brought about trouble.

So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his 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 two 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, labor'd, and pray'd,
And, ever laboring, had scoop'd himself,
In the white rock, a chapel and a hall
On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,
And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry;
The green light from the meadows underneath
Struck up and lived along the milky roofs;
And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees
And poplars made a noise of falling showers.[1]
And, thither wending, there that night they bode.

But when the next day broke from underground,[2]
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,

[1] The leaves of the poplar rustle with the sound of light rain.
[2] Cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, l. 1386.

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,[1]
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."[2]

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[3] fall'n upon the grass,
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat
Robed in red samite,[4] 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,[5] 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:

[1] One of the two he most honored. [2] i. e., the greatest things and most worth seeing.
[3] The bright dresses of the ladies. [4] a heavy silk.
[5] Cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, l. 519.

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,[1]
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,[2] 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,[3]
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight
Should do and almost overdo the deeds
Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, "Lo!
What is he? I do not mean the force alone—
The grace and versatility of the man.
Is it not Lancelot?" "When has Lancelot worn
Favor of any lady in the lists?[4]
Not such his wont, as we, who 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 couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds and thus,
Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made

[1] It was the custom for certain knights to challenge all comers; they were said to hold the lists.

[2] He waited awhile to see which side to take.

[3] The knights of the court held the lists; the assailants were outsiders, ll. 524, 525.

[4] The argument of Elaine was all too good.

In moving, all together down upon him
Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,[1]
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;[2]
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[3] while he might yet endure,
And, being lustily holpen[4] 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 trumpets blew
Proclaiming his the prize who wore the sleeve
Of scarlet, and the pearls; and all the knights,
His party, cried, "Advance, and take thy prize,
The diamond;" but he answer'd, "Diamond me
No diamonds! for God's love, a little air!
Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!
Hence will I, and, I charge you, follow me not."

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field
With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.
There from his charger down he slid, and sat,
Gasping to Sir Lavaine, "Draw the lance-head:"

[1] A fine figure full of fire and motion. [2] A common word in the romances.
[3] to act; to do an act of prowess.
[4] an archaic inflection, like *drave* just below.

"Ah, my sweet lord Sir Lancelot," said Lavaine,
"I dread me, if I draw it, ye shall die."
But he, "I die already with it: draw—
Draw,"—and Lavaine drew, and that other gave
A marvelous great shriek and ghastly groan,
And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank
For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.
Then came the hermit out and bare him in,
There stanch'd his wound; and there, in daily doubt
Whether to live or die, for many a week,
Hid from the wide world's rumor by the grove
Of poplars, with their noise of falling showers,
And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,
His party, knights of utmost North and West,
Lords of waste 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 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 honor: since the knight
Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,
Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take

This diamond and deliver it and return
And bring us where he is and how he fares,
And cease not from your quest until you find."

So saying, from the carven flower above,[1]
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,[2] surnamed the Courteous, fair and strong,
And after Lancelot, Tristram,[3] and Geraint,[4]
And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal
Sir Modred's[5] 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.[6]
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,

[1] Cf. l. 441.
[2] Cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, l. 25.
[3] We do not hear much of Tristram in the Idylls here selected. He is the chief figure in *The Last Tournament*.
[4] Geraint is the hero of the earlier Idyll *Enid*, now divided into two.
[5] Cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, l. 409.
[6] To London, where Guinevere had remained.

"Was he not with you? won he not your prize?"
"Nay, but one like him." "Why that like was he."
And when the King demanded how she knew,
Said, "Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk
That men went down before his spear at a touch
But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name
Conquer'd: and therefore would he hide his name
From all men, ev'n the King, and to this end
Had made the pretext of a hindering wound
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn
If his old prowess were in aught decay'd:
And added, 'Our true Arthur, when he learns,
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain
Of purer glory.'"

Then replied the King,
"Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
To have trusted me as he hath trusted 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 fear in our large Lancelot
Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains
But little cause for laughter: his own kin—
Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this!—
His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him;
So that he went sore wounded from the field:
Yet good news too: for goodly hopes are mine
That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.
He wore, against his wont, upon his helm
A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,
Some gentle maiden's gift."

"Yea, lord," she said,
"Your hopes are mine," [1] and, saying that, she choked,
And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,
Past to her chamber, and there flung herself
Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,
And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,
And shriek'd out "Traitor" to the unhearing wall,
Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,
And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

Gawain the while [2] 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 enamel'd arms, the maid
Glanced at, and cried, "What news from Camelot, lord?
What of the knight with the red sleeve?" "He won."
"I knew it," she said. "But parted from the jousts
Hurt in the side," whereat she caught her breath;
Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go;
Thereon she smote her hand: well-nigh she swoon'd;
And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came
The lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince
Reported who he was, and on what quest
Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find
The victor, but had ridden wildly round
To seek him, and was wearied of the search.
To whom the lord of Astolat, [3] "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

[1] She spoke shortly, for the words threw her into a passion of jealousy.
[2] meanwhile. [3] The verb of speaking is omitted, as in l. 179.

Accorded with his wonted courtesy,—[1]
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it.
And stay'd; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine:
Where could be found face daintier? then her shape,—
From forehead down to foot, perfect—again
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd:
"Well—if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!"
And oft they met among the garden yews,
And there he set himself to play upon her
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence,
And amorous adulation, till the maid
Rebell'd against it, saying to him, "Prince,
O loyal nephew of our noble King,
Why ask you not to see the shield he left,
Whence you might learn his name? Why slight your King,
And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove
No surer than our falcon yesterday,
Who lost the hern we slipt 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 ye will it, let me see the shield."
And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,
Ramp[2] 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

[1] Gawain was reputed among all the knights the master of courtesy.

[2] The obsolete verb from which came *rampant*, the proper heraldic term for standing on the hind legs.

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,[1]
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, "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 enough: why then, far be it from me
To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves![2]
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 loves, 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 kissed the hand to which he gave,

[1] My only companions. [2] He assumes that the sleeve was a true-love token.

The diamond, and, all wearied of the quest,
Leapt on his horse, and, caroling, as he went,
A true-love ballad, lightly rode away.

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

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, 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,
Linger'd that other, staring after him;
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad [1]
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 [2] 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.

[1] began telling everybody. [2] prejudged.

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."
"Ye 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.[1]
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.

[1] She, as well as Arthur, saw through Gawain's excuse.

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 you well, my child,
Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,[1]
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[2] 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[3]
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?"

[1] The old word of the romances, meaning that all wounds were healed.
[2] request; an absolute construction. [3] an epic repetition; see l. 398.

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,[1]
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,[2]
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.
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.

[1] See *Gareth and Lynette*, l. 221. [2] An epic repetition.

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 colors 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 color; woman's love,
Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd,
Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,
And past beneath the wierdly-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[1] to the fields,
Thence to the cave: so day by day she past
In either twilight,[2] ghost-like to and fro
Gliding, and every day she tended him,[3]
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,

[1] Camelot was high on a hill; see *Gareth and Lynette*, ll. 189, 685.

[2] Morning and evening.

[3] In an age without professional doctors and nurses, their duties were taken by hermits and ladies, as well as others.

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 kingly fashion for her sake.
And, peradventure, had he seen her first,[1]
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man; but now
The shackles of an old love straiten'd him,
His honor rooted in dishonor stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.[2]

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,[3] 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,

[1] Before Guinevere.

[2] One of the antithetic lines, of which there were several in the original Idylls; cf. *Vivien*, ll. 385–396.

[3] She had had experience of physical ailment, but she did not know the symptoms of a sick soul.

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."[1]
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 dear 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,[2] 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,

[1] She thought of the garlands which adorned animals coming to the sacrifice.
[2] Lancelot was lord of lands in Brittany or Little Britain; cf. l. 953.

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."[1]
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[2] 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,

[1] is due to you. [2] requite.

So that would make you happy; furthermore,
Ev'n to the death, as tho' ye were my blood,
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,
And more than this I cannot."

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

Then spake, to 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 bade farewell, but sadly rode away.
This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat:
His very shield was gone; only the case,
Her own poor work, her empty labor, left.
But still she heard him, still his picture form'd
And grew between her and the pictured wall.[1]
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 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[2] 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."

[1] pictured in tapestry. [2] The word *poet* is from the Greek word meaning "maker."

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 blood-red light of dawn
Flared on her face, she shrilling, "Let me die!"[1]

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,[2]
So dwelt the father on her face and thought,
"Is this Elaine?" till back the maiden fell,
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.
At last she said, "Sweet brothers, yesternight
I seem'd a curious little maid again,
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,
And when ye used to take me with the flood
Up the great river in the boatman's boat.
Only, ye would not pass beyond the cape
That has the poplar on it: there ye fixt
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.
And yet I cried because ye would not pass
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood
Until we found the palace of the King.
And yet ye would not; but this night I dream'd
That I was all alone upon the flood,
And then I said, 'Now shall I have my will:'
And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.
So let me hence that I may pass at last

[1] A romantic, even hectic, picture.

[2] If one tries the experiment, any word repeated over and over again will seem quite meaningless.

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 bade a thousand farewells to me,
Lancelot, who coldly went nor bade me one:
And there the King will know me and my love,
And there the Queen herself will pity me,[1]
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 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)[2] "nay,
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;

[1] The poet's irony again. [2] He thought he might do away with her love.

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,[1]
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 ye desire your child to live,
Thanks, but ye work against your own desire;
For, if I could believe the things ye say,
I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease,
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly[2] man
Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die."

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,
She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven,
Besought Lavaine to write, as she devised,
A letter, word for word; and, when he ask'd,
"Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord?
Then will I bear it gladly;" she replied,
"For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,
But I myself must bear it." Then he wrote
The letter she devised; which, being writ
And folded, "O sweet father, tender and true,
Deny me not," she said—"ye never yet

[1] The word is common in the Idylls, meaning "to go"; here, to pass from earth, as in *The Passing of Arthur*.
[2] the spiritual one, the priest.

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[1] 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[2] in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground,[3]
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,
Pall'd[4] all its length in blackest samite, lay.

[1] the same word originally as *fancy*. [2] grief. [3] Cf. l. 411. [4] draped as in a pall.

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,[1]
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 though she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last
The price of half a realm,[2] 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,[3] 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 well nigh kiss'd her feet
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye
The shadow of a piece of pointed lace,

[1] Cf. ll. 8, 9. [2] Cf. l. 72. [3] one of her gentlemen in waiting.

In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.[1]

All in an oriel[2] 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:[3] these are words:[4]
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words
Perchance we both can pardon: but, my Queen,
I hear of rumors flying 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 rumors be:
When did not rumors fly? these, as I trust
That you trust me in your own nobleness,
I may not well believe that you believe."

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen
Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine
Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,[5]
Till all the place whereon she stood was green;
Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand

[1] The mention of court and courtiers always shows us polished deceit, which contrasts with the simple truth of Astolat.

[2] A window projecting from a wall; this one overlooked the river toward the south and was covered with vines.

[3] Her neck was as much whiter than the swan's as the swan's is whiter than the cygnet's, or young swan's.

[4] They certainly were, and extravagant words at that.

[5] She picked nervously at the vine.

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.[1] 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.[2] 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[3] of what is graceful: and myself
Would shun to break those bonds 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."

[1] One should read *Guinevere* to see how she sometimes felt.
[2] So Ophelia: "Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind."—*Hamlet*, III, i, 101.
[3] as much as that.

Saying which she seized,
And, through 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.[1]
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[2] 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."[3]

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
Came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongueless man

[1] Note how the diamonds disappear unregretted; they were of real value only according to that they stood for.

[2] everybody came running.

[3] as we shall see in the next poem.

From the half-face to the full eye, and rose
And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.
So Arthur bade the meek Sir Percivale
And pure Sir Galahad[1] to uplift the maid;
And reverently they bore her into hall.
Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,
And Lancelot later came and mused at her,
And last the Queen herself and pitied her:
But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

"Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I, sometime[2] 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

[1] Two knights, the purest and best of the Round Table, of whom we hear most in *The Holy Grail*. [2] formerly.

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 bade her no farewell.
Though, 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) [1]
"Ye 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 through 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."

[1] She was not yet calm.

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

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went
The marshal'd order of their Table Round,
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont to see
The maiden buried, not as one 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 said:

"Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have
Most love and most affiance,[1] for I know

[1] trust, confidence.

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 unskill'd go by
To win his honor and to make his name,
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man
Made to be loved; but now I would to God,
For the wild people say wild things of thee,
Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems,
By God for thee alone, and from her face,
If one may judge the living by the dead,
Delicately pure and marvelously fair,
Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man,
Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons
Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake."

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

"Free love, so bound, were freest," said the King.
"Let love be free; free love is for the best:
And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,
What should be best, if not so pure a love
Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee
She fail'd to bind, though 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,[1]
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?[2]
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
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,

[1] Astolat was below Camelot, on the river.
[2] He probably judged the queen more correctly than she had herself.

I pray Him, send a sudden angel down
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
And fling me deep into 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.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

THAT story[1] 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,[2]
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is:
Perchance, because we see not to the close;—
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain;
And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend[3]

[1] Lines 1–169 are additions to the original *Morte d'Arthur*, published in 1842. It will be seen that they are chiefly of such a nature as to explain what was episodical and connect it with *Guinevere*.

[2] Lines 9–28 are expressive of the King's mind at the apparent failure of his great purpose (p. ix); ll. 407–432, especially 409, 410, give us the truer conception which came to him later.

[3] Guinevere and Lancelot.

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[1] but shall not die."

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain[2] kill'd
In Lancelot's war,[3] the ghost of Gawain blown
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
Went shrilling, "Hollow, hollow all delight!
Hail, King! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all 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
Shrill'd; but in going mingled with dim cries
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
As of some lonely city sack'd by night,
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and call'd,
"Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,
Thine, Gawain, was the voice—are these dim cries
Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?"

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake:
"O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
Elves, and the harmless glamour[4] of the field:

[1] Tennyson uses the word often for "go away," sometimes in the sense of death. Here, however, it means to pass from earth without dying.

[2] Gawain was the one of Arthur's knights most famed for outward courtesy (*Gareth and Lynette*, l. 25, and note), but not for solid worth; see l. 56 below, and *Lancelot and Elaine*, l. 553.

[3] as told in *Guinevere*.

[4] enchantment; it is the same word as *gramarye*.

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 [1] in the west,
And with him many of thy people, and knights
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old."

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"Far other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom [2] is mine
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Thro' this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,[3]
Hath folded in the passes of the world."

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonnesse—

[1] Modred, the traitor (*Gareth and Lynette*, l. 26), while Arthur was absent in war with Lancelot, had raised a rebellion against the king, who was his uncle.

[2] fate.

[3] Guinevere, when she fled from the king, took refuge in a nunnery at Almesbury, as is told in *Guinevere*.

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
Burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year,[1]
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea:
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
With formless fear; and ev'n on 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 shatter'd helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,[2]

[1] The time of this idyll is mid-winter, just as that of *Gareth and Lynette* is spring, and that of *Lancelot and Elaine* is summer.

[2] Modred and the other rebels had allied themselves with the Anglo-Saxon invaders.

Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, laboring of the lungs
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death
Or 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 shiver'd brands that once had fought with Rome,[1]
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 tho' they had not died for me?—
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fall'n
Confusion, till I know not what I am,

[1] Arthur had conquered Roman invaders as well as the Anglo-Saxons.

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[1] the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as King.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live
Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharm'd, the traitor of thine house."

Then spake the King: "My house[2] 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, own'd me King.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
When all the purport of my throne hath fail'd,
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;
And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass." And uttering this the King
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,[3]
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,

[1] This expression, like *an if* (*Lancelot and Elaine*, l. 218), is a reduplication, meaning *if*, as *an*, *and* or *so* would alone.

[2] those of my family. [3] The sword of Arthur; cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, l. 66.

Had fall'n 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 to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made,—
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more; but, let what will to be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' 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 row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king;
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere:
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word."

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
"It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm—
A little thing may harm a wounded man;
Yet I thy hest[1] will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word."

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the seawind 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 jewelry.[2] He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw. but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-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 perform'd my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

[1] behest, command.

[2] Excalibur, according to the story, "gave light like thirty torches."

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping[1] on the crag."

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
"Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight:
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
As thou are lief and dear,[2] and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word."

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought:
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud:

"And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good shall 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

[1] The word imitates the sound.
[2] The words have the same meaning; the repetition is in the spirit of older poetry.

Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumors of a doubt? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, 'King Arthur's sword, 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 honor and much fame were lost."

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,[1]
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 widow'd of the power in his eye
That bowed the will. I see thee what thou art,[2]
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.

[1] his own idea. [2] See *Gareth and Lynette*, l. 285 and note.

Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands."

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,[1]
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
So flash'd 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 brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
"Now see I by thine eyes that this is done,
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;[2]
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,

[1] The Aurora Borealis.

[2] Bedivere speaks of the sword as a person; it had a name and a character of its own.

Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere."

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
"My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die."

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words;
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die."
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—

And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three Queens[1] with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, "Place me in the barge."
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shattered casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colorless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the daïs-throne—were parch'd with dust,
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King:
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,

[1] See *Gareth and Lynette*, l. 225.

From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
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[1] 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 answer'd Arthur from the barge:
"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.[2]
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?

[1] The Wise Men of the East, who brought gifts to the infant Jesus.
[2] The King begins to understand why he could not make everything quite perfect.

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;[1]
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past forevermore,[2]
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groan'd, "The King is gone."
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
"From the great deep to the great deep he goes."[3]

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb,
The last hard footstep of that iron crag;
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried,
"He passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound

[1] Malory calls it the vale of Avilion and thinks of it as near Glastonbury. But the earlier conception was a mystic island to the west, as is described in the lines following.

[2] The end, from this point on, was added in the later version.

[3] See *The Coming of Arthur*, l. 410, and ll. 358-393.

He comes again; but—if he come no more—
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?" [1]

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Ev'n to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

[1] See *The Coming of Arthur*, ll. 272-278.

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