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ELAINE

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ELAINE,
FROM THE
IDYLS OF THE KING.

By ALFRED TENNYSON.



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WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND WITH NOTES.

By BRAINERD KELLOGG, M.A.

PROFESSOR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN THE BROOKLYN
COLLEGIATE AND POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE.

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BIOGRAPHICAL AND GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

“ALFRED TENNYSON was born August 5, 1809, at Somersby a hamlet in Lincolnshire, England, of which, and of a neighboring parish, his father, Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, was rector. The poet's mother was Elizabeth, daughter of the Rev. Stephen Fytche, vicar of Louth. Alfred was the third of seven sons—Frederick, Charles, Alfred, Edward, Horatio, Arthur, and Septimus. A daughter, Cecilia, became the wife of Edmund Law Lushington, long professor of Greek in Glasgow University. Whether there were other daughters, the biographies of the poet do not mention.

Tennyson's career as a poet dates back as far as 1827, in which year, he being then but eighteen years of age, he published anonymously, in connection with his brother Charles (who was only thirteen months his senior, having been born July 4, 1808), a small volume, entitled *Poems by Two Brothers*. The Preface, which is dated March, 1827, states that the poems contained in the volume 'were written from the ages of fifteen to eighteen, not conjointly, but individually; which may account for the difference of style and matter.'

In 1828, or early in 1829, these two brothers entered Trinity College, Cambridge, where their eldest brother, Frederick, had already entered. At the Cambridge Commencement in 1829, Alfred took the Chancellor's gold medal, by his poem entitled *Timbuctoo*. That appears to have been the first year of his acquaintance, which soon ripened into an ardent friendship, with Arthur Henry Hallam; this friendship, as we learn from the twenty-second section of *In Memoriam*, having been, at the death of Hallam, of 'four sweet years,' duration. It is an interesting fact that Hallam was one of Tennyson's rival competitors for the Chancellor's prize. His poem is dated June, 1829. It is contained in his *Literary Remains*. Among other of Tennyson's friends at the University were John Mitchell

Kemble, the Anglo-Saxon scholar; William Henry Brookfield, long an eloquent preacher in London; James Spedding, the biographer and editor of Lord Bacon; Henry Alford, Dean of Canterbury; Richard Monckton Milnes (afterwards Lord Houghton), who united the poet and the politician, and was the biographer of Keats; and Richard Chenevix Trench, who became Dean of Westminster, in 1856, and Archbishop of Dublin, in 1864. A brilliant array of college friends!

Tennyson's prize poem was published shortly after the Cambridge Commencement of 1829, and was very favorably noticed in *The Athenæum* of July 22, 1829. In it can already be recognized much of the real Tennyson. There are, indeed, but very few poets whose earliest productions exhibit so much of their after selves. The real Byron, the most vigorous in his diction of all modern poets, hardly appears at all in his *Hours of Idleness*, which was published when he was about the age of Tennyson was when *Timbuctoo* was published.

In 1830 appeared *Poems, chiefly Lyrical, by Alfred Tennyson*. In this volume appeared, among others, the poems entitled *Ode to Memory, The Poet, The Poet's Mind, The Deserted House, and The Sleeping Beauty*, which were full of promise, and struck key-notes of future works. The reviews of the volume mingled praise and blame—the blame perhaps being predominant. In 1832 appeared *Poems by Alfred Tennyson*, among which were included *The Lady of Shalott, The Miller's Daughter, The Palace of Art, The Lotos Eaters, and A Dream of Fair Women*, all showing a great advance in workmanship and a more distinctly articulate utterance—many of the poems of the previous volumes being rather artist-studies in vowel and melody suggestiveness. It was reviewed, somewhat facetiously, in *The Quarterly*, July, 1833, (vol. 49, pp. 81-96,) by, as was generally understood, John Gibson Lockhart, the son-in-law of Sir Walter Scott, at that time editor of *The Quarterly*; and in a more earnest and generous vein, by John Stuart Mill, in *The Westminster*, July, 1835.

A silence of ten years succeeded the 1832 volume, broken only by an occasional contribution of a short poem to some magazine or collection. In 1842 appeared *Poems by Alfred Tennyson*, in two volumes, containing selections from the volumes of 1830 and 1832, and many new poems, among which were *Ulysses, Love and Duty, The Talking Oak, Godiva*, and the remarkable poems of *The Two Voices, and The Vision of*

Sin. The volumes were most enthusiastically received, and Tennyson took at once his place as England's great poet. A second edition followed in 1843, a third in 1845, a fourth in 1846, and a fifth in 1848. Then came *The Princess: A Medley*, 1847; a second edition, 1848; *In Memoriam*, 1850, three editions appearing in the same year.

The poet was married June 13, 1850, to Emily, daughter of Henry Sellwood, Esq., and niece of Sir John Franklin, of Arctic Expedition fame. Wordsworth had died April 23 of that year, and the laureateship was vacant. After some opposition, the chief coming from *The Athenæum*, which advocated the claims of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Tennyson received the appointment, his *In Memoriam*, which had appeared a short time before, and which at once laid hold of so many hearts, contributing much, no doubt, to the final decision. His presentation to the queen took place at Buckingham Palace, March 6, 1851, and in the same month appeared the seventh edition of the *Poems*, with an introductory poem *To the Queen*, in which he pays a high tribute to his predecessor in the laureateship:—

‘Victoria, since your royal grace
To one of less desert allows
This laurel greener from the brows
Of him that uttered nothing base ;’

To do much more than note the titles of his principal works since he became Poet-Laureate, the prescribed limit of this sketch will not allow. In 1855 appeared *Maud*, which, though it met with great disapprobation and but stinted praise, is, perhaps, one of his greatest poems. In July, 1859, the first of the *Idyls of the King* appeared, namely, *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere*, which were at once great favorites with all readers of the poet; in August, 1864, *Enoch Arden*, with which were published *Aylmer's Field*, *Sea Dreams*, *The Grandmother*, and *The Northern Farmer*: in December, 1869, four additional *Idyls*, under the title, *The Holy Grail and Other Poems*, namely—*The Coming of Arthur*, *The Holy Grail*, *Pelleas and Ettare*, and *The Passing of Arthur*, of which forty thousand copies were ordered in advance; in December, 1871, in *The Contemporary Review*, *The Last Tournament*; in 1872, *Gareth and Lynette*; in 1875, *Queen Mary: A Drama*; in 1877, *Harold: Drama*; in 1880, *Ballads and Other Poems*.

Tennyson's Muse has been productive of a body of lyric, idyllic, metaphysical, and narrative or descriptive poetry, the

choicest, rarest, daintiest, and of the most exquisite workmanship of any that the century has to show. In a strictly dramatic direction he can hardly be said to have been successful. His *Queen Mary* is but little short of a failure as a drama, and his *Harold* but a partial success. With action proper he has shown but little sympathy, and in the domain of vicarious thinking and feeling, in which Robert Browning is so pre-eminent, but little ability. But no one who is well acquainted with all the best poetry of the nineteenth century, will hesitate to pronounce him *facile princeps* in the domain of the lyric and idyllic; and in these departments of poetry he has developed a style at once individual and, in an artistic point of view, almost 'faultily faultless'—a style which may be traced from his earliest efforts up to the most complete perfection of his latest poetical works.

The splendid poetry he has given to the world has been the product of the most patient elaboration. No English poet, with the exception of Milton, Wordsworth, and the Brownings, ever worked with a deeper sense of the divine mission of poetry than Tennyson has worked. And he has worked faithfully, earnestly, and conscientiously to realize the ideal with which he appears to have been early possessed. To this ideal he gave expression in two of his early poems, entitled *The Poet* and *The Poet's Mind*; and in another of his early poems, *The Lady of Shalott*, is mystically shadowed forth the relations which poetic genius should sustain to the world for whose spiritual redemption it labors, and the fatal consequences of its being seduced by the world's temptations—the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Great thinkers and writers owe their power among men, not necessarily so much to a wide range of ideas, or to the originality of their ideas, as to the intense vitality which they are able to impart to some one comprehensive, fructifying idea, with which, through constitution and the circumstances of their times, they have become possessed. It is only when a man is really possessed with an idea (that is, if it does not run away with him) that he can express it with a quickening power, and ring all possible changes upon it.

What may be said to be the dominant idea, and the most vitalized, in the poetry of Alfred Tennyson? It is easily noted. It glints forth everywhere in his poetry. It is, that the complete man must be a well-poised duality of the active and

the passive or receptive; must unite with an 'all-subtilizing intellect,' an 'all-comprehensive tenderness;' must 'gain in sweetness and in moral height, nor lose the wrestling thews that throw the world.'"

Thus far Dr. Corson, of Cornell University, in his Introduction to *The Two Voices*, and *A Dream of Fair Women*, poems edited by him for the *English Classics*.

"It seems to me that the only just estimate of Tennyson's position is that which declares him to be by eminence, the representative poet of the recent era. Not, like one or another of his compeers, representative of the melody, wisdom, passion, or other partial phase of the era, but of the time itself, with its diverse elements in harmonious conjunction. * * * * *

In his verse he is as truly 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form' of the Victorian generation in the nineteenth century as Spenser was of the Elizabethan court, Milton of the Protectorate, Pope of the reign of Queen Anne. During his supremacy there have been few great leaders at the head of different schools, such as belonged to the time of Byron, Wordsworth, and Keats. His poetry has gathered all the elements which find vital expression in the complex modern art."—Stedman's *Victorian Poets*.

"To describe his command of language by any ordinary terms expressive of fluency or force would be to convey an idea both inadequate and erroneous. It is not only that he knows every word in the language suited to express his every idea; he can select with the ease of magic the word that above all others is best for his purpose; nor is it that he can at once summon to his aid the best word the language affords; with an art which Shakespeare never scrupled to apply, though in our day it is apt to be counted mere Germanism, and pronounced contrary to the genius of the language, he combines old words into new epithets, he daringly mingles all colors to bring out tints that never were on sea or shore. His words gleam like pearls and opals, like rubies and emeralds. He yokes the stern vocables of the English tongue to the chariot of his imagination, and they become gracefully brilliant as the leopards of Bacchus, soft and glowing as the Cytherean doves. He must have been born with an ear for verbal sounds, an instinctive appreciation of the beautiful and delicate in words, hardly ever equaled. Though his later works speak less of the blossom-time—show less of the efflorescence and iridescence, and mere glance and gleam of colored words—they display no falling off, but rather an advance, in the mightier elements of rhythmic speech."—*Peter Bayne*.

IDYLS OF THE KING.

THE *Idyls of the King* is a group of magnificent poems—ten in number—dealing with the character and reign of King Arthur, and describing the exploits of the Knights of the Round Table, when these knights were at the height of their glory, and when they had fallen to the depths of their shame. These poems picture, also, the life of Queen Guinevere at the Court and in the Abbey, her death, and that of her lord. They were dedicated by their author to the memory of Prince Albert, and afterwards to Queen Victoria. Having to do exclusively with the Arthurian legends, which have come down to us in numberless books of prose and of poetry, these poems belong, in their subject-matter, to the past. But the legends have filtered through the poet's nature, been etherealized by his imagination, and moulded by his artistic hands into such felicitous forms that this great work is, and will forever remain, fascinating to all lovers of the beautiful in thought and expression. Tennyson himself says of it that it is

New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul
Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak.

The great hero of the *Idyls*, though not always the most active, never contending in the tournaments, is

King Arthur. Of him, as a veritable and historical personage, nothing can be said. But he is the idealized and idolized hero of British and Welsh legend; is even the *Magnificence* of Spenser's *Færie Queene* (see Spenser's dedication of the poem to Sir Walter Raleigh, and also the opening stanzas of Canto IX., Book I). He is as real, or, if you please, as mythical, a character as William Tell. He is the reputed son of a reputed king, Uther—Pendragon (dragon-head), a surname, Ritson says, taken possibly from the form of his helmet or his crest. From him Arthur inherits the title. Arthur grew up ignorant

of his high birth, was taken to London, and, there drawing from a stone, in which it was imbedded, a sword on which was inscribed, "Whoso pulleth this sword out of this stone is rightwise born King of England," was crowned King of Britain. His fabulous exploits in arms, as recorded by the Welshman Geoffrey of Monmouth, about 1138, and in a multitude of poems afterwards, put to shame the achievements of Alexander or of Cæsar. His great enemy, near at home, was the Saxons, after their invasion of the Island in 449. With them he is said to have fought twelve battles (of which Lancelot speaks in *Elaine*), in all of which he was conqueror. The battle-fields have been placed in half the shires of England, and in Wales, and their location is as certain, probably, as the battles themselves, or even as the existence of their victor! Where were

Arthur's Palaces is equally uncertain. Cærlleon-upon-Usk, the Isca Silurum of the Romans, is said to have been his chief city. But places claiming the honor of his residence are found scattered throughout the Island.

For an epitome of the facts concerning a real, historic Arthur, the basis, perhaps, of the mythical Arthur of the Romances, see "Arthur," *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

The Round Table was the famous circle of knights gathered around Arthur as their head. Who these knights were and what they were to do may as well be told in Tennyson's own lines, put into the mouth of Arthur, in *Guinevere*:

But I was first of all the kings who drew
 The knighthood-errant of this realm, and all
 The realms, together under me, their Head,
 In that fair order of my Table Round,
 A glorious company, the flower of men,
 To serve as model for the mighty world,
 And be the fair beginning of a time.
 I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
 To reverence the King, as if he were
 Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
 To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
 To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
 To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
 To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
 To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
 And worship her by years of noble deeds
 Until they won her; for, indeed, I knew

Of no more subtle master under heaven
 Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
 Not only to keep down the base in man
 But teach high thought and amiable words
 And courtliness and the desire of fame
 And love of truth and all that makes a man.

How this circle had declined in virtue the *Idyls* show. But one is grateful to Tennyson that, in the exquisite poems embraced under this title, these knights are lifted out of the grossness of their sins, in which Sir Thomas Mallory makes them wallow, in his *History of King Arthur*. Of this group

Lancelot was chief, at least in prowess, and the favorite of Arthur. He is especially prominent in *Elaine*; sinning in his love for Queen Guinevere, and yet repenting, and dying, at last, "a holy man." He is represented as born in Brittany. On the death of his father, he was carried away, then an infant, by Vivien, the lady of the lake, who fostered him; hence he was called *Lancelot du Lac*. His birth and possessions in Britany explain his offer to Elaine "of lands beyond the seas."

In his *Victorian Poets*, Stedman says: * * * * "We come at last to Tennyson's master-work, so recently brought to a completion after twenty years—during which period the separate *Idyls of the King* had appeared from time to time. Nave and transept, aisle after aisle, the Gothic minster has extended, until, with the addition of a cloister here and a chapel yonder, the structure stands complete.

I hardly think that the poet at first expected to compose an epic. It has grown insensibly under the hands of one man who has given it the best years of his life,—but somewhat as Wolf conceived the Homeric poems to have grown, chant by chant, until the time came for the whole to be welded together in heroic form.

It is the epic of chivalry, the Christian ideal of chivalry which we have deduced from a barbaric source,—our conception of what knighthood should be, rather than what it really was; but so skillfully wrought of high imaginings, fairy spells, fantastic legends, and mediæval splendors, that the whole work, suffused with the Tennysonian glamour of golden mist, seems like a chronicle illuminated by saintly hands, and often blazes with light like that which flashed from the holy wizard-book when the covers were unclaspèd."

ELAINE.*

THE ARGUMENT. — On his way to Camelot to joust, *incognito*, for the last and greatest of the nine diamonds offered as prizes by King Arthur, Lancelot spends the night at Astolat, the castle of Elaine's father. Here, unwittingly, he wins Elaine's love. At the joust, whither he is accompanied by Lavaine, Lancelot, wearing her sleeve of pearls on his helmet, is sorely wounded. Elaine learns of this, and, with her father's consent, goes to him, and nurses him through his serious illness. Recovering, he returns with her and her brother to Astolat for his shield, left with her that he might not be recognized by it. Here she confesses to him her love. Unable to give his own in return, he tenderly, yet without farewell, departs. Elaine sickens and dies; but not till her father has promised her that, with the letter she has written to Lancelot and the Queen in her dead hand, she shall be dressed in her richest white, placed on the deck of the barge and rowed up the river to the palace. This is done; and the majestic poem concludes with the appearance of her body at Court and the burial, with a painful interview between the King and Lancelot, and with Lancelot's sad reflections.

ELAINE the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot ;
Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam ;
Then, fearing rust or soilure, fashion'd for it
A case of silk, and braided thereupon
All the devices blazon'd on the shield

* "*Elaine* still remains, for pathetic sweetness and absolute beauty of narrative and rhythm, dearest to the heart of maiden, youth, or sage."—Stedman's *Victorian Poets*.

2. Lily maid, so named from the delicate hue of her face. Called, in some of the romances, Elaine *la Blanche*, the White.

4. Sacred in her eyes.

7. Soilure, soil, stain, dirt—an old word.

9. Blazon'd, applied in heraldry to the figures portrayed on the shield or other armor. Fr. *blâson*, a coat of arms.

In their own tinct, and added, of her wit, 10
 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, 15
 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, 20
 Conjecturing when and where : this cut is fresh ;
 That ten years back ; this dealt him at Cærlyle ;
 That at Cærleon ; this at Camelot :
 And ah, God's mercy, what a stroke was there !
 And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God 25
 Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,
 And saved him : so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield
 Of Lancelot, she that knew not ev'n his name?
 He left it with her when he rode to tilt 30
 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 Lyonesse, 35

12. Nestling. Elaine embroidered on the case all the figures of the shield and in the same tinct (tint, color), and added fancy pictures of branch and flower and birds. *Nestling* from *nest*, root *nas*, to go to, visit, and the double diminutive suffix *-ling*. Cf. *gosling*=*goose-l-ing*.

19. Dint, same as *dent*, a blow, the impression made by the blow. Here and ordinarily both *dint* and *dent* are metonymies, the name of the effect standing for that of the cause.

22-23. See Introduction for these traditional places.

27. Him, Lancelot. Poets, even, are ambiguous in their use of personal pronouns.

31. Diamond, same word as *adamant*. From two Gr. words, *a*, not, and *damaein*, to subdue. The thing named from its hardness; nothing, it was supposed, could wear it away, or subdue it. *Tame* same word as *damaein*, and illustrates Grimm's Law. Jousts, encounters on horseback—fully described in the poem.

35. Lyonesse, a district of Cornwall, said now to be buried under the sea.

Had found a glen, gray boulder, and black tarn.
 A horror lived about the tarn, and clave
 Like its own mists to all the mountain side :
 For here two brothers, one a king, had met,
 And fought together ; but their names were lost. 40
 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 :
 And he that once was king had on a crown 45
 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 50
 Roll'd into light, and, turning on its rims,
 Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn :
 And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,
 And set it on his head, and in his heart
 Heard murmurs, " Lo, thou likewise shalt be king." 55

Thereafter, when a king, he had the gems
 Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his knights.
 Saying, " These jewels, whereupon I chanced
 Divinely, are the kingdom's, not the king's—
 For public use : henceforward let there be, 60
 Once every year, a joust for one of these :
 For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn
 Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow
 In use of arms and manhood, till we drive

36. *Tarn*, a pool. A Norse word, as is also *boulder*. A boulder is a detached rock. The noise it makes in thundering to the plains below gives it its name, which is related, as is *bull*, to *bellow*.

44. *Lichen'd*, a participle from no verb. *Lichen* is the name of a flowerless, parasitic plant, fastening upon stones, rails, and, here, upon bones.

46. *Aside*, on each side.

53. *Shingly scaur*, both Norse words, meaning here the steep, rocky banks of the tarn, covered with a coarse gravel. *Shingle* allied to *sing*—the thing so named from the noise the foot makes in treading upon it.

62. *Needs*, necessarily, from noun *need* with an A.-S. genitive ending *s* or *es*.

The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land 65
 Hereafter, which God hinder." Thus he spoke :
 And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still
 Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,
 With purpose to present them to the Queen
 When all were won ; but, meaning all at once 70
 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 75
 Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust
 At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh
 Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere,
 "Are you so sick, my Queen, you can not move 79
 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. 85
 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 90
 The tale of diamonds for his destined boon),
 Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,

65. **Heathen**, the Anglo-Saxons, with whom Arthur was so long warring. How did the present meaning of *pagan* and *heathen* come from the old? See *Webster*.

67. **Still**, as in Shakespeare, always, constantly.

76. **World's hugest**, London, and the river, Thames. **Let proclaim**, caused to be proclaimed.

80. **Lord**. The etymology of *lord* and *lady* are worth knowing, if only to see how the words have strayed from their original meanings. *Lord* from A.-S. *hláf*, loaf, and *weard*, keeper, and hence = loaf-keeper. *Lady* from *hláf*, and *dæge* and = loaf-kneader.

91. **Tale**, number. Cf. Exodus v. 18. "There shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the *tale* of bricks." Skeat says, "The original sense was probably order, whence number, orderly arrangement of speech, narrative. **Boon**, original meaning is a petition—now means a gift, as well.

“ Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,
 And lets me from the saddle ;” and the King
 Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way. 95
 No sooner gone than suddenly she began :

“ To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame !
 Why go ye not to these fair jousts ? the knights
 Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd
 Will murmur, ‘ Lo, the shameless ones, who take 100
 Their pastime now the trustful king is gone ! ’ ”
 Then Lancelot, vexed at having lied in vain :
 “ Are ye so wise ? ye were not once so wise,
 My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.
 Then of the crowd ye took no more account 105
 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 110
 Of all men : many a bard, without offence,
 Has link’d our names together in his lay,
 Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,
 The pearl of beauty : and our knights at feast
 Have pledged us in this union, while the king 115
 Would listen smiling. How then ? is there more ?
 Has Arthur spoken aught ? or would yourself,
 Now weary of my service and devoir,

93. *Sir*, or *sire*, from *L. senior*, elder. The title of a knight, but often used in addressing a king. *Whole*, healed. *Whole*, *wholesome*, *heal*, *hail*, *health*, *holy*, are related words, meaning soundness of body or of mind. The initial *w* comparatively recent.

94. *Lets*, hinders. Two *let*'s in English: *let*, to hinder, from A.-S. *lettan*, to make *late*; and *let*, to permit, allow, from A.-S. *letan*, *letan*. *Saddle*, from a root meaning to sit.

106. *Cricket*, the name of an insect that *creaks*, an imitative word, here a collective noun. *Meadow* is but a fuller form of *mead*.

108. *Nothing*, because indistinguishable from other voices.

111. *Bard*, a Celtic word = A.-S. *gleeman* = F. *minstrcl*. The education of the minstrel poets consisted chiefly of the *lays* (lyric poems) committed to memory, or composed by himself to the music of his lyre. These he sang in the halls of the great, at their feasts. Sometimes the bard was a retainer of the chief whom he served; sometimes a wanderer, visiting the courts of princes, and never failing of welcome and of substantial reward.

118. *Devoir*, duty; *L. debere*, to owe.

Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord?"

She broke into a little scornful laugh. 120

"Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,

That passionate perfection, my good lord—

But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven?

He never spake word of reproach to me,

He never had a glimpse of mine untruth, 125

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, 130

To make them like himself: but, friend, to me

He is all fault who hath no fault at all:

For who loves me must have a touch of earth;

The low sun makes the color: I am yours,

Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond. 135

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: 140

"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?"

128. Else rapt, except in this instance, always engrossed, absorbed. Table Round, see Introduction.

130. Vows impossible. No wonder those vows of noble living (see Introduction, "Round Table,") with which Arthur bound his knights, were now impossible under a queen with a nature so earthy, and a heart so disloyal to her husband, as to permit her to utter the next five lines.

134. The low sun makes the color, the morning and evening sun paints the clouds, and colors even the air. Read Tyndall's essays on light, and learn how. Note the aptness to her condition of this incomplete comparison.

135. Save by the bond of marriage.

137. Gnat, mosquito, whose tiny-trumpeting is the buzzing of his wings.

141. Pretext, excuse for staying with the queen.

“ Yea,” said the Queen, 145

“ A moral child without the craft to rule,
 Else had he not lost me : but listen to me,
 If I must find you wit : we hear it said
 That men go down before your spear at a touch
 But knowing you are Lancelot ; your great name, 150
 This conquers : hide it, therefore ; go unknown :
 Win ! by this kiss you will : and our true King
 Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,
 As all for glory ; for, to speak him true,
 Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem, 155
 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, 160
 He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,
 Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,
 And there among the solitary downs,
 Full often lost in fancy, lost his way ;
 Till, as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track, 165
 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, 170
 Who let him into lodging, and disarm'd.
 And Lancelot marvel'd at the wordless man ;
 And, issuing, found the Lord of Astolat

146. **Craft**, skill. She is trying to shift her guilt to the shoulders of her husband.

148. **Wit**, reason.

150. **But knowing**, by simply knowing.

161. **Thorough-fare**. The old form of *thorough* was *through*. **Fare** from A.-S. *faran*, to go—the whole = the way through.

162. **Green**, grass growing in it because it was rarely trodden.

163. **Downs**, a Celtic word meaning hills. The cognate A.-S. word is *tun*, now, *town*.

168. **Fired**, lighted up by the western sun.

169. **Horn**, placed so that one seeking admission could announce his presence.

With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,
 Moving to meet him in the castle court; 175
 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: 180
 "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, 185
 Known as they are, to me they are unknown."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights:
 "Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known
 What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.
 But, since I go to joust, as one unknown, 190
 At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not.
 Hereafter you shall know me—and the shield—
 I pray you lend me one, if such you have,
 Blank, or at least with some device not mine."

Then said the Lord of Astolat, "Here is Torre's: 195
 Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre,
 And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.
 His ye can have." Then added plain Sir Torre,
 "Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it."
 Here laugh'd the father saying, "Fie, Sir Churl, 200
 Is that an answer for a noble knight?
 Allow him: but Lavaine, my younger here,
 He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,
 Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,

182. Livest, etc., art called by.

191. Blank, without device or blazon.

200. Sir Churl, a reproach to Sir Torre for his ungracious speech—that, since he could not use the shield, Lancelot might.

203. Lustihood, etc., so full of vigor that he would like to ride. We keep the good meaning of the word in *lusty*, the bad in *lust*.

204. It, the diamond.

And set it in this damsel's golden hair,
To make her thrice as wilful as before." 205

"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 : 210
A jest, no more : for, knight, the maiden dreamt
That some one put this diamond in her hand,
And that it was too slippery to be held,
And slipt, and fell into some pool or stream,
The castle-well, belike ; and then I said 215
That *if* I went, and *if* I fought and won it
(But all was jest and joke among ourselves),
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.
But, father, give me leave, an if he will,
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight : 220
Win shall I not, but do my best to win :
Young as I am, yet would I do my best."

"So ye will grace me," answer'd Lancelot,
Smiling a moment, "with your fellowship
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself, 225
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend ;
And you shall win this diamond—as I hear,
It is a fair large diamond,—if ye may ;
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will."
"A fair, large diamond," added plain Sir Torre, 230
"Such be for queens and not for simple maids."
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,
Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her 235
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,

219. An, *if*. An old word for *and*, but used in the sense of *if*, and frequent in Shakespeare. When this force of *an* was forgotten, people placed an *if* after it, as here.

Rash were my judgment, then, who deem this maid
 Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth, 240
 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, 245
 In battle with the love he bare his lord,
 Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.
 Another sinning on such heights with one,
 The flower of all the west and all the world,
 Had been the sleeker for it : but in him 250
 His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
 And drove him into wastes and solitudes
 For agony, who was yet a living soul.
 Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man
 That ever among ladies ate in hall, 255
 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. 260

Then the great knight, the darling of the court,
 Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall
 Stept with all grace, and not with half-disdain
 Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,
 But kindly man moving among his kind : 265
 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, 270
 Suddenly speaking of the wordless man

241. Not violating, because Elaine was so fair.

253 Who was yet, etc. Lancelot is not a hardened sinner. His better nature is here in revolt against the rule of his lower nature.

260. Doom, primarily judgment; then judgment adverse to one, and then, as here, the consequence—destruction, death.

264. Smaller time, when he was younger.

267. Minstrel melody, see l. 111.

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 ; 275
 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. 280

" Oh, there, great Lord, doubtless," Lavaine said, rapt
 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 285
 And answer'd him at full, as having been
 With Arthur in the fight which all day long
 Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem ;
 And in the four wild battles by the shore
 Of Duglas ; that on Bassa ; then the war 290
 That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts
 Of Celidon the forest ; and again
 By castle Gurnion, where the glorious King
 Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,
 Carved on one emerald, center'd in a sun 295
 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
 Set every gilded parapet shuddering ;
 And up in Agned-Cathregonion too, 300
 And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit,

280. Badon hill. See Introduction, for these battle fields.

281. Rapt, caught up, fascinated. L. *vapere*, to seize.

294. Lady's Head, the head of the Virgin Mary. Cuirass, from Fr. *cuir*, L. *corium*, leather—the material out of which the breast-plate was made.

295. Center'd, the emerald was in the center of a pictured sun.

296. Lighten'd, etc., gleamed as the rise and fall of his breast in breathing changed the emerald's position.

298. White Horse. The White Horse was the standard, or national emblem of the Danish chief. In Berkshire is the famous White Horse Hill. Twice in *Guinevere* the heathen are called "Lords of the White Horse."

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, 305
 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, 310
 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 315
 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 320
 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, 325
 Whenever, in her hovering to and fro,
 The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,
 There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness
 Of manners and of nature : and she thought
 That all was nature, all, perchance, for her. 330
 And all that night long his face before her lived.
 As when a painter, poring on a face,
 Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
 Behind it, and so paints him that his face,

306. Break them, put the heathen to flight.

310. For the King is here pleonastic, has no connection with what follows.

327. To make him cheer, to entertain him. Cheer, F. *chere*, L. *cara*, face, look. Be of good cheer = be of happy countenance, look pleased.

331. Lived, appearing in her dreams, and recalled in her waking hours.

The shape and color of a mind and life, 335
 Lives for his children, ever at its best
 And fullest ; so the face before her lived,
 Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
 Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.
 Till rathe she rosè, half-cheated in the thought 340
 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 345
 Past inward, as she came from out the tower.
 There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and smooth'd
 The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
 Half-jealous of the flattering hand, she drew
 Nearer and stood. He look'd, and more amazed 350
 Then 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 355
 Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.
 Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire
 That he should wear her favor at the tilt.
 She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
 " Fair lord, whose name I know not—noble it is, 360
 I well believe, the noblest—will you wear
 My favor at this tourney ? " " Nay," said he,

340. *Rathe*, early. Our comparative *rather* (*rathe* and *rathest* have perished, and the initial *h* is lost) once expressed a pure time relation. Earle instances a threatening letter written, in 1420, by Sir Hugh Luttrell, in which he says he "shall come home, and that *rather* [earlier] than some men wolde" wish to see him. *Rather*, expressing preference, even now really denotes time. I would rather go than stay = I would sooner go than stay = I would take the going sooner than I would take the staying. *Half-cheated*, half-deluding herself with, and half-deluded by, the thought that she wanted to bid Lavaine, and not Lancelot, farewell. A fine touch of nature in Tennyson.

349. *Flattering*, an instance of Tennyson's delicate use of words. It is from a base *flak*, meaning to stroke, to pet.

351. *Set upon him*, in attack, in the tournament.

352. *Dewy light*, the air yet chargèd with the moisture of the dew.

358. *Favor*, something worn as a token of regard. What it indicated when worn by a knight is seen farther on in the poem.

"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." 365
 "Yea, so," she answer'd; "then in wearing mine
 Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,
 That those who know should know you." And he turn'd
 Her counsel up and down within his mind,
 And found it true, and answer'd, "True, my child. 370
 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 375
 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, 380
 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, 385
 For fear our people call you lily maid
 In earnest, let me bring your color back;
 Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed:"
 So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his hand,
 And thus they moved away; she stay'd a minute, 390
 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 395

365. *Wont*, custom, habit; A.-S. *wunian* to dwell, to continue in.

367. *Lesser likelihood*, less probability—*lesser*, a double comparative, still used. A keen argument, as he acknowledges. He wished to fight unknown; and wearing a favor, contrary to his custom, would help to disguise him.

384. *Squire*, a young noble before he attained the dignity of knight-hood, here a shield-bearer. Knights were thus attended.

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, 400
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 405
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 410
And poplars made a noise of falling showers.
And, thither wending, there that night they bode.

But when the next day broke from underground,
And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,
They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away: 415
Then Lancelot, saying, "Hear, but hold my name
Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,"
Abash'd Lavine, whose instant reverence,
Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,
But left him leave to stammer, "Is it indeed?" 420
And after muttering, "The great Lancelot,"
At last he got his breath and answer'd, "One,
One have I seen—that other, our liege lord,
The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,
Of whom the people talk mysteriously, 425

399. *Companions*. The etymology of the word gives its best meaning—*L. cum*, together, and *panis*, bread—those eating bread together.

411. *Made a noise*. The rustling leaves made the noise of showers.

413. *Broke from underground*, sun rose above the horizon.

415. *Mass*, from *L. missa, mittere*, in the command given by the priest to those who were not yet allowed to remain during the celebration of the Eucharist. *Ita, missa est*, Go, the congregation is dismissed. Then it came to name the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, itself. Used as a termination in *Christmas, Candlemas*, etc.

424. *Pendragon*, see Introduction, "Arthur."

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

So spake Lavaine, and, when they reach'd the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes
Run thro' the peopled gallery, which half round 430
Lay like a rainbow fall'n upon the grass,
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung.
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold, 435
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 440
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, 445
“ Me you call great : mine is the firmer seat,
The truer lance : but there is many a youth,
Now crescent, who will come to all I am
And overcome it ; and in me there dwells
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch 450
Of greatness to know well I am not great :
There is the man.” And Lavaine gaped upon him
As on a thing miraculous, and anon
The trumpets blew ; and then did either side,
They that assail'd, and they that held the lists, 455
Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,

428. *Lists*, the ground enclosed for the combats.

433. *Samite*, a rich silk cloth.

443. *Canopy*, from a Gr. word meaning a mosquito. Applied to the bed furnished with over-hangings to protect the sleeper against the insect ; then to whatever overarched one, now even to the sky.

444. *Nameless King*, see l. 39.

448. *Crescent*, growing. The good in Lancelot here shows itself.

452. *Gaped*, looked open-mouthed.

453. *Anon*, A.-S. *on an*, in one, moment.

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. 460
 And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw
 Which were the weaker ; then he hurl'd into it
 Against the stronger : little need to speak
 Of Lancelot in his glory ! King, duke, earl,
 Count, baron—whom he smote he overthrew. 465

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,
 Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,
 Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight
 Should do and almost overdo the deeds
 Of Lancelot ; and one said to the other, " Lo ! 470
 What is he ? I do not mean the force alone—
 The grace and versatility of the man.
 Is it not Lancelot ? " " When has Lancelot worn
 Favor of any lady in the lists ?
 Not such his wont, as we, who know him, know." 475
 " How then ? who then ? " a fury seized all them
 A fiery family passion for the name
 Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.
 They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds and
 thus, 479
 Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made
 In moving, all together down upon him
 Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,
 Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
 Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
 Down on a bark, and overbears the bark, 485
 And him that helms it, so they overbore
 Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear,

458. *Shock*, came together, collided—an unusual meaning of the verb.

459. This line is parenthetical. If there was any one left on horseback to perceive. The objects of *perceive* are in the next line.

461. *Bode*, waited.

484. *Smoke*, the tops of the waves are caught up by the wind and tossed about in spray.

486. *Helms*, steers the bark, or boat.

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. 490

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully ;
 He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,
 And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.
 He up the side, sweating with agony, got,
 But thought to do while he might yet endure, 495
 And, being lustily holpen by the rest,
 His party,—tho' it seemed half-miracle
 To those he fought with—drave his kith and kin,
 And all the Table Round that held the lists,
 Back to the barrier ; then the trumpets blew 500
 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 ! 505
 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, 510
 Gasping to Sir Lavaine, " Draw the lance-head : "
 " 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 515
 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, 519
 There stanch'd his wound ; and there, in daily doubt
 Whether to live or die, for many a week,

491. *Worshipfully*, short form of *worthshipfully*, worthily, honorably.

504. *Diamond me*. The noun used as a verb, as *prize* in l. 32.

513. *Me* is pleonastic—poetic use.

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, 525
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 530
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— 535
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 540
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 545
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,
To which it made a restless heart, he took, 550
And gave, the diamond : then, from where he sat,
At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,

527. *Marches*, A.-S. *mearc*, a boundary, or border, of the land allotted to the families of the same blood. *Mark* came to be applied to the land within the boundary. This division of land, separating those akin, from strangers, was brought by the Anglo-Saxons into England. The coalescence of marks made shires.

532. *That such an one*—should die. He is so agitated as to forget to finish the sentence.

547. *Bring us back word*,

With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince
 In the mid might and flourish of his May,
 Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong, 555
 And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint,
 And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal
 Sir Modred's brother, of a crafty house,
 Nor often loyal to his word, and now
 Wroth that the king's command to sally forth
 In quest of whom he knew not made him leave
 The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings.

So all in wrath he got to horse and went ;
 While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,
 Past, thinking, " Is it Lancelot who has come, 565
 Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain
 Of glory, and has added wound to wound,
 And ridd'n away to die ?" So fear'd the King,
 And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.
 Then, when he saw the Queen, embracing, ask'd, 570
 " Love, are you yet so sick ?" " Nay, lord," she said.
 " And where is Lancelot ?" Then the Queen, amazed,
 " Was he not with you ? won he not your prize ?"
 " Nay, but one like him." " Why that like was he."
 And when the King demanded how she knew, 575
 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 580
 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, 585
 Will well allow my pretext, as for gain of purer glory.' "

554. Mid might, in the full vigor of his youth.

558. Sir Modred's, a nephew of the King and a traitor to him.

569. Tarriance, stay.

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. 590
 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 595
 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 600
 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, 605
 "Your hopes are mine," and, saying that, she choked,
 And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,
 Past to her chamber, and there flung herself
 Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,
 And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm, 610
 And shriek'd out "Traitor" to the unhearing wall,
 Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,
 And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

Gawain the while thro' all the region round
 Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest, 615
 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." 620
 "I knew it," she said. "But parted from the jousts

610. Bit the palm, nails cut into it. Jealousy the cause.

616. Poplar grove, where Lancelot was with the hermit.

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 625
 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. 63
 To whom the lord of Astolat, " Bide with us,
 And ride no longer wildly, noble Prince !
 Here was the knight, and here he left a shield ;
 This will he send or come for : furthermore
 Our son is with him : we shall hear anon, 635
 Needs must we hear." To this the courteous Prince
 Accorded with his wonted courtesy,—
 Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it.
 And stay'd ; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine :
 Where could be found face daintier ? then her shape,—
 From forehead down to foot, perfect—again 641
 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 645
 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, 650
 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, 655

655. Falcon, pronounced *fawk'n*, the name of a bird of strong beak and claws, trained to hunt other birds and even foxes and hares. Falconry came into Europe, from the East, very early, and was for centuries a great amusement of kings and nobles. Has now disappeared.

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." 660
 And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
 Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,
 Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd ;
 "Right was the King ! our Lancelot ! that true man !"
 "And right was I," she answer'd merrily, "I, 665
 Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all."
 "And if *I* dream'd," said Gawain, "that you love
 This greatest knight, your pardon ! lo, you know it !
 Speak therefore : shall I waste myself in vain ?"
 Full simple was her answer, "What know I ? 670
 My brethren have been all my fellowship,
 And I, when often they have talk'd of love,
 Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd,
 Meseem'd, of what they knew not ; so myself—
 I know not if I know what true love is, 675
 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, 680
 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 ?

from Europe. The sportsman rode with the falcon resting on his wrist. When game was discovered, the hood was taken from the head of the falcon; and, rising high above his destined prey, the bird swooped down upon it, seized it, and bore it away to the sportsman.

656. *Hern*, heron, one of the wading birds.

657. *To all the winds*, in every direction.

663. *Ramp*, rampant, standing upright on his hind legs, in the field, or blank surface, of the shield; but not in the posture of springing, which would be *salient*.

674. *Meseem'd*, it seem'd to me, = the past tense of *methinks*. This is from A.-S. *thyncan* to appear, not *thencan* to think. The *me* is dative object.

684. *May not name*, the queen. How unconscious is Elaine of Gawain's charms or even of his meaning! She is the one foil of all the chief characters of the poem except Arthur.

Must our true man change like a leaf at last ? 685
 Nay—like enough : why then, far be it from me
 To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves !
 And, damsel, for I deem you know full well
 Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave
 My quest with you ; the diamond also : here ! 690
 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 ! 695
 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, 700

And slightly kissed the hand to which he gave,
 The diamond, and, all wearied of the quest,
 Leapt on his horse, and, caroling, as he went,
 A true-love ballad, lightly rode away.

Thence to the court he past ; there told the King 705
 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, 710
 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 715
 On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
 Obedience is the courtesy due to kings."

697. *May meet*, if Lancelot brings her as his bride to court.

707. *Liege*, first applied, Skeat says, as here, to the lord and not to the vassal. Means free ; and liege lord = lord of a free band, privileged men.

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 ; 720
 Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad
 About the maid of Astolat and her love.
 All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed :
 "The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,
 Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat." 725
 Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all
 Had marvel what the maid might be; but most
 Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame
 Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.
 She, that had heard the noise of it before, 730
 But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,
 Marr'd her friend's point with pale tranquillity.
 So ran the tale, like fire about the court,
 Fire in dry stubble a nine days' wonder flared :
 Till ev'n the knights at banquet twice or thrice 735
 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 740
 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,

719. Twenty strokes of the blood, twenty beats of the pulse, fifteen seconds or so.

723. Ears were pricked. An equine figure. The horse pricks his ears, thrusts them toward the sound it hears or the startling sight it sees.

728. Predoomed, prejudged. The people are here illustrating the tendency to judge harshly, rather than kindly, of one—the tendency which has caused the degeneracy of the word—doom meaning at first only judgment, decision.

731. Note the point to this line.

734. Nine days' wonder. A wonder was popularly supposed to last nine days. Cf. "It was seven of the nine days out of the wonder before you came," in *As You Like It*.

739. Felt the knot, felt herself choking with the passion of jealousy as they pledged, drank to, Lancelot and Elaine.

743. Wormwood has no connection with *worm* or with *wood*. It is from A.-S. *wernöd*, ware-mood, mind-preserver; and points, says Skeat, to

Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept 745
 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, 750
 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 755
 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 760
 As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me.
 Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams
 Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
 Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid.
 The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound, 765
 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, 770
 Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,
 Being our greatest; yea, and you must give it—
 And sure I think this fruit is hung too high
 For any mouth to gape for save a Queen's—
 Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone, 775
 Being so very wilful you must go."

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipt away;
 And, while she made her ready for her ride,

the supposed curative properties of the plant in mental affections.
 The bitterness of the plant is that to which Tennyson here refers.
 773. This fruit, etc. He is above your level. Cf. Laertes' talk to
 Ophelia concerning Hamlet.

Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,
 " Being so very wilful you must go," 780
 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, 785
 " What matter, so I help him back to life ?"
 Then far away, with good Sir Torre for guide,
 Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs
 To Camelot, and, before the city-gates,
 Came on her brother with a happy face 790
 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 ! 795
 How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot ?"
 But when the maid had told him all her tale,
 Then turn'd Sir Torre, and, being in his moods,
 Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,
 Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically, 800
 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, 805
 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, 810
 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,

791. Roan, a mixed color, white and red blended.

802. Far blood, those distantly related.

804. Casque, helm or helmet, a covering for the head in battle.

Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself, 815
 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 : " 820
 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, 825
 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. 830
 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 835
 In the heart's colors on her simple face ;
 And Lancelot look'd, and was perplex't 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, 840
 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 845
 Down thro' the dim, rich city to the fields,
 Thence to the cave : so day by day she past
 In either twilight, ghost-like to and fro

817. The sound, to which the still place was unaccustomed.

819. Blank, no intelligence yet in them.

834. Larger thro', seemingly larger, as his face had shrunk away.

848. Either morning and evening.

Gliding, and every day she tended him,
 And likewise many a night : and Lancelot 850
 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 855
 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 860
 The simples and the science of that time,
 Told him that her fine care had saved his life.
 And the sick man forgot her simple blush,
 Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,
 Would listen for her coming, and regret 865
 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 knighly fashion for her sake. 870
 And, peradventure, had he seen her first,
 She might have made this and that other world
 Another world for the sick man ; but now
 The shackles of an old love straiten'd him,
 His honor rooted in dishonor stood, 875
 And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made
 Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.
 These, as but born of sickness, could not live :

861. *Simples*, medicinal herbs. Webster says, "So called because each vegetable is supposed to possess its particular virtue and therefore to constitute a *simple* remedy."

869. *Had died*, would have died.

874. *Straiten'd*, confined, prevented him.

876. *And faith*, etc., his love for the Queen, cherished in disregard of his and her relations to the King, kept him true to her, but false to his lord.

879. *Could not live*. The feebleness of vows to live better, made in sickness and under fear of death, is a common theme of writers. Repeat the couplet beginning, "When the devil was sick,"

For, when the blood ran lustier in him again, 880
 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, 885
 Or short and coldly, and she knew right well
 What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant
 She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,
 And drave her ere her time across the fields
 Far into the rich city, where alone 890
 She murmur'd, "Vain, in vain : it cannot be,
 He will not love me : how then ? must I die ?"
 Then as a little, helpless, innocent bird,
 That has but one plain passage of few notes,
 Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er 895
 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 ; 900
 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 905
 In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,
 She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought,
 "If I be loved, these are my festal robes ;
 If not, the victim's flowers before he fall."
 And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid 910
 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 ;

884. Ghostly grace, the grace of the queen seen by him vaguely and in memory.

889. Ere her time, before the evening twilight.

902. Burthen, like the refrain of a song, the part often repeated.

Such service have ye done me that I make
 My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I 915
 In mine own land, and what I will I can."
 Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,
 But like a ghost without the power to speak.
 And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,
 And bode among them yet a little space 920
 Till he should learn it ; and one morn it chanced
 He found her in among the garden yews,
 And said, " Delay no longer, speak your wish,
 Seeing I must go to-day : " then out she brake,
 " Going ? and we shall never see you more. 925
 And I must die for want of one bold word."
 " Speak : that I live to hear," he said, " is yours."
 Then suddenly and passionately she spoke :
 " I have gone mad. I love you : let me die."
 " Ah, sister," answer'd Lancelot, " what is this ? " 930
 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." 935
 " 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 940
 To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
 To blare its own interpretation—nay,
 Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,
 And your good father's kindness." And she said,
 " Not to be with you, not to see your face— 945
 Alas for me, then, my good days are done."
 " Nay, noble maid," he answer'd, " ten times nay !

916. Can do.

927. That I am alive to hear is due to your nursing care.

942. Blare, roar; used generally of trumpets. The root the same as that of *blazon*.943. Quit, to repay, to be discharged of; L. *quietus*, free, satisfied.

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 950
 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, 955
 Endow you with broad land and territory,
 Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,
 So that would make you happy ; furthermore,
 Ev'n to the death, as tho' ye were my blood,
 In all your quarrels will I be your knight. 960
 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, 965
 "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. 970
 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 ;" 975
 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 ;

951. Your flower of life, your heart.

957. Realm beyond the seas. See Introduction, "Lancelot."

958. So that, if that.

960. In all your quarrels, the knights of chivalry rode about, avenging wrongs, especially of the gentler sex.

968. Then spake he.

975. That were against me, I cannot do it.

Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,
 Unclasping, flung the casement back, and look'd 980
 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, 985
 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. 990
 But still she heard him, still his picture form'd
 And grew between her and the pictured wall.
 Then came her father, saying in low tones,
 "Have comfort," whom she greeted quietly.
 Then came her brethren, saying, "Peace to thee, 995
 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 1000
 Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms
 Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,
 And call'd her song "The song of Love and Death."
 And sang it : sweetly could she make and sing. 1005

"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. 1010
 O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

990. What figure in labor ?

1001. Sallow-rifted glooms, the glooms of evening streaked with pale yellow.

1009. Death must be bitter. The little song overflows with pathos.

“ 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 ; 1015
I needs must follow death, who calls for me ;
Call and I follow, I follow ! let me die.”

High with the last line scaled her voice ; and this,
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind,
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought
With shuddering, “ Hark the Phantom of the house 1021
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 !” 1025

As when we dwell upon a word we know,
Repeating, till the word we know so well
Becomes a wonder and we know not why,
So dwelt the father on her face and thought,
“ Is this Elaine ?” till back the maiden fell, 1030
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.
At last she said, “ Sweet brothers, yester night
I seem'd a curious, little, maid again,
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods, 1035
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. 1040
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

1018. Scaled, ran up the scale, rose in pitch.

1019. Fiery dawning, early, the clouds still of a fiery red.

1021. Phantom, etc., a superstitious belief.

1034. I seem'd to be.

That I was all alone upon the flood, 1045
 And then I said, 'Now shall I have my will :'
 And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.
 So let me hence that I may pass at last
 Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,
 Until I find the palace of the king, 1050
 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, 1055
 Lancelot, who coldly went nor bade me one :
 And there the King will know me and my love,
 And there the Queen herself will pity me,
 And all the gentle court will welcome me,
 And after my long voyage I shall rest !" 1060

"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, 1065
 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, 1070
 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 1075
 Him of all men who seems to me the highest."
 "Highest ?" the father answer'd, echoing "highest ?"
 (He meant to break the passion in her) "nay,

1047. The wish to go beyond the poplar, up to the palace of the King.
 1067. An I, see l. 219.

Daughter, I know not what you call the highest ;
 But this I know, for all the people know it, 1080
 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 1085
 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, 1090
 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 ; 1095
 For, if I could believe the things ye say,
 I should but die the sooner ; wherefore cease,
 Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man
 Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die.”

So when the ghostly man had come and gone, 1100
 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, 1105
 “ 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 1110

1087. This poem, like all of Tennyson's, is gemmed with epigrammatic lines, full of wisdom.

1090. *Pass*, go on, die. We call the funeral-bell the *passing*-bell. The last poem of the *Idyls of the King* is the *Passing of Arthur*.

1098. *Ghostly man*, the priest. *Ghostly* (the *h* inserted) from A.-S. *geist*, the spirit, or soul.

1099. *Shrive me*, hear my confession, and absolve me from all sin.

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, 1115
 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 1120
 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. 1125
 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 1130
 Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.
 But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh
 Her father laid the letter in her hand,
 And closed the hand upon it, and she died.
 So that day there was dole in Astolat. 1135

But when the next sun brake from underground,
 Then, those two brethren slowly, with bent brows,
 Accompanying the sad chariot-bier,
 Past like a shadow through the field, that shone
 Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge, 1140
 Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay.
 There sat the lifelong creature of the house,
 Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,

1118. For richness, in point of richness.

1120. Chariot-bier, a wheeled vehicle on which a dead body is borne,

1135. Dole, grief.

1137. Bent brows, heads bent in sorrow.

1140. Full-summer, in the light of mid-summer,

1141. Pall'd, draped.

Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.
 So those two brethren from the chariot took 1145
 And on the black decks laid her in her bed,
 Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung
 The silken case with braided blazonings,
 And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her,
 "Sister, farewell for ever," and again, 1150
 "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— 1155
 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. 1160

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved
 Audience of Guinevere, to give at last
 The price of half a realm, his costly gift,
 Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,
 With deaths of others, and almost his own,— 1165
 The nine-years-fought-for diamonds: for he saw
 One of her house, and sent him to the Queen
 Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed
 With such and so unmoved a majesty
 She might have seem'd her statue, but that he, 1170
 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,
 In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,
 And parted, laughing in his courtly heart. 1175

All in an oriel on the summer side, .

1174. *Vibrate*, she might have seemed a statue, but, by the vibration of the shadow of the lace, the courtier knew she was trembling with emotion.

1176. *Oriel*, a windowed recess in a room. Any small room more private and better adorned than the rest of the house. *Summer-side*, sunny-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, 1180
 These jewels, and make me happy, making them
 An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
 Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
 Is tawnier than her cygnet's : these are words :
 Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin 1185
 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, 1190
 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." 1195

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen
 Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine
 Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,
 Till all the place whereon she stood was green ;
 Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand 1200
 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. 1205

1182. *Armlet*, literally a small arm, and then an ornament for the arm.

1184. *Tawnier*. *Tawny* is another spelling for *tawny*, brown, sun-burnt. The passage seems to mean that the necklace into which she was to make the diamonds would be as much browner than her neck as the mother swan's neck is browner than her young swan's, the cygnet's.

1187. *Words, etc.*, allow me to put my feeling into words, as we allow one in grief to cry.

1189. *Rumors flying*, that her regard for him was waning. He argues that he and she were not bound together by the marriage tie ; and that to compensate for this lack, they should *voluntarily* trust each other more completely.

This good is in it, whatso'er of ill,
 It can be broken easier. I for you
 This many a year have done despite and wrong
 To one whom ever in my heart of hearts
 I did acknowledge nobler. What are these? 1210
 Diamonds for me? they had been thrice their worth
 Being your gift, had you not lost your own.
 To loyal hearts the value of all gifts
 Must vary as the giver's. Not for me!
 For her! for your new fancy. Only this 1215
 Grant me, I pray you: have you joys apart.
 I doubt not that, however changed, you keep
 So much of what is graceful: and myself
 Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy
 In which, as Arthur's queen, I move and rule: 1220
 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 1225
 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— 1230
 She shall not have them."

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, 1235

1210. Acknowledge nobler. We are grateful that this confession is extorted from her. Read *Guinevere* to see how sinful she afterwards became, and then how sincerely penitent.

1212. Your own worth.

1213. Another golden line.

1221. Cannot speak, etc., as queen I cannot reprove you if you and Elaine exhibit your love before me, so have your joys apart from me—elsewhere.

1229. The woman's heart here speaks.

1233. Standing wide, open on account of the heat.

Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.
 Then, while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disgust
 At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,
 Close underneath his eyes, and right across
 Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge 1240
 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. 1245
 There two stood arm'd, and kept the door ; to whom,
 All up the marble stair, tier over tier,
 Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd,
 "What is it?" But that oarsman's haggard face,
 As hard and still as is the face that men 1250
 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 ? 1255
 Or come to take the King to fairy land ?
 For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,
 But that he passes into fairy land."

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
 Came girt with knights : then turn'd the tongueless man
 From the half-face to the full eye, and rose 1261
 And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.
 So Arthur bade the meek Sir Percivale
 And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid ;
 And reverently they bore her into hall. 1265
 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 :

1242. Like a star, etc., the body in white relieved upon the pall of the samite.

1261. To the full eye, turning from a side view to look the king full in the eye.

But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it ; this was all : 1270

“ Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return, 1275
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, 1280
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 1285
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 1290
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. 1295
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, 1300
To break her passion, some discourtesy
Against my nature : what I could, I did.

1272. Sometime, formerly.

1297. Not. The second negative here strengthens the first.

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, 1305
 And help'd her from herself."

Then said the Queen,
 (Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)
 "Ye might at least have done her so much grace,
 Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her death."
 He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell, 1311
 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 1315
 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 1320
 In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,
 To keep them in all joyance ; more than this
 I could not ; this she would not, and she died."

He pausing, Arthur answer'd, "O my knight,
 It will be to thy worship, as my knight, 1325
 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, 1330
 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 1335
 Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,

1308. *Sea was her wrath*, her wrath raged like the sea after a storm.
 1325. *Worship*, honor. See l. 491.

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. 1340
 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 1345
 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, 1350
 " That is love's curse ; pass on, my Queen, forgiven."
 But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,
 Approach'd him, and with full affection flung
 One arm about his neck, and spake and said :

" Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have 1355
 Most love and most affiancé, for I know
 What thou hast been in battle by my side,
 And many a time have watched thee at the tilt
 Strike down the lusty and long-practised knight,
 And let the younger and unskill'd go by 1360
 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, 1366
 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 1370
 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, 1375
 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: 1380
 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." 1385

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, 1390
 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— 1395
 Farewell, fair lily. 'Jealousy in love?'
 Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?
 Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,
 May not your crescent fear for name and fame
 Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes? 1400
 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.

1381. *After heaven*, next to heaven.

1391. *A blot*, a speck.

1395. *Now at last*, he had not bidden her farewell on leaving Astolat.

1398. *Jealousy in love* did the Queen call her feeling? Is it not rather *jealous pride*, which comes only when love is dead?

1399. *Crescent*, growing.

1400. *Waxes*, grows—obsolescent.

She chanted snatches of mysterious song 1405
 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 ! 1410
 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? 1415
 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, 1420
 Who knows? but, if I would not, then may God,
 I pray Him, send a sudden angel down
 To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
 And fling me deep into that forgotten mere,
 Among the tumbled fragments of the hills." 1425

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

1409. *Mere*, sea; *L. mare*. Kept in our *mermaid*, *mermaid*, and in *merman*

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