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(From a photograph from life by John Mayall, London.)

GATEWAY SERIES

TENNYSON'S

IDYLLS OF THE KING

GARETH AND LYNETTE
LANCELOT AND ELAINE
THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

EDITED BY

HENRY VAN DYKE

NEW YORK ·:· CINCINNATI ·:· CHICAGO
AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

IDYLLS OF THE KING.

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PREFACE

THIS book is meant for readers who are at the gateway of English Literature. I have tried to do my work as editor in a way which will not hide the poems, but help to show what they mean and why they are good to read.

Poetry is made to give us joy, not pain. The true way to teach poetry is to keep the sense of it, and the beauty of it, and the music of it, in the foreground, and all the learned notes and curious comments in the background.

The two things most needed in our preparatory English work, just now, are simplicity and thoroughness. Only enough of the life of Tennyson is told here to give a picture of the man, and to make clear how he came to write these poems. Only enough about the main plan of the *Idylls of the King* is said here to show the place of these three idylls in the epic. Only enough notes are added to explain difficulties and point out things that are interesting. If any of the notes seem to lead away from the poem instead of throwing light upon it, I advise the teacher to skip them. The text, spelling, and punctuation are those which Tennyson gave in his last revision of his work.

HENRY VAN DYKE.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I. A Short Life of Tennyson

1. Alfred Tennyson was born on August 6, 1809: the year that saw the birth of Gladstone, Darwin, and Lincoln — four of the great men of the nineteenth century. There were twelve children in the family of the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, rector of Somersby; and Alfred, the fourth, grew up in a happy English country home full of books and music and human interests. The children played fanciful games of tournaments and knightly wars; they made up long stories of adventure, written in the form of letters and put under the dishes on the dinner table, to be read aloud when dinner was over. Sometimes, by the fireside on winter evenings, Alfred would gather the younger children about him and tell wonderful tales of dragons and witches and damsels in prison and heroes riding to rescue them. Sometimes an old play would be acted out by the family.

The country about Somersby is quiet and friendly looking. There are no high hills, no great rivers or forests; but there are beautiful gardens and fertile farms; elms and poplars and ash trees around the houses; brooks winding through the fields; flocks of sheep feed-

ing on the long, bare ridges of pasture land; birds a plenty; flowers growing everywhere. All this country the boy Tennyson knew and loved, and the man has told about it in his poetry. In the summer time he used to go down with the family for a vacation in a little cottage by the sea, not far away, on the coast of Lincolnshire. He would lie on the sand hills watching the waves for hours, and at night he liked to walk by the sea and listen to its roaring. "Somehow," said he, "water is the element I love best of all the four." You will find many beautiful lines which tell about the look and the sound of water in the *Idylls*.

When he was seven, Alfred was sent to the grammar school at Louth, a near-by town, where his grandmother lived. But the school was a poor one; the boy hated it, and soon came home again to study with his father, who was an excellent scholar. He began to write verses when he was about eight, being encouraged by his older brother Charles, who was a great rhymster. Alfred imitated the poetry which he liked best: Thomson's *The Seasons*, and Pope's translation of *The Iliad*, and Scott's *The Lady of the Lake*. Then Byron became his idol, and he tried to write in the style of the *Hebrew Melodies*. When he was seventeen, he and his brother Charles brought out a little book called *Poems by Two Brothers*, with a Latin motto which said, "We know that these pieces do not amount to anything." This judgement was about right; for though Alfred Tennyson was born a poet, he had not yet thought and felt enough to be able to write

real poetry of his own; he was only learning how to do his work, and learning by the best of all methods — imitation.

Though he was very fond of books and regarded by his family as a genius, he does not seem to have been at all priggish or inclined to become a mere bookworm. He was tall and strong, fond of fun and out-of-door life, clever with his hands, and a great walker.

2. In 1828 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, where he made many close friends among the best students in the university, among whom he soon became a leader in a way. He did well in his regular studies, except mathematics; but it was as a reader, as a talker, as a debater in the little circle of friends called "The Apostles," that he made his mark. He won the chancellor's gold medal for a poem called *Timbuctoo*. He began to work out a line of his own in poetry, — a line that showed a deep and strong sense of beauty, a keen pleasure in the free play of fancy and the weaving of new and musical metres, a fresh and original choice of subjects, a sure and delicate touch in describing nature. He went back to the lyrics of the Age of Elizabeth and to Milton's early poems for inspiration. He worked in the same spirit which had made the poems of Keats, when they first appeared, seem to some people so fanciful and trifling, and to others so vivid and charming. It was the love of pure beauty for its own sake: the delight in the colour of a flower, the flow of a stream, the song of a bird: the desire for pictures of loveliness and words of melody.

This is what has been called the æsthetic spirit. You can see its influence in Tennyson's two little volumes, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, published in 1830, while he was still in college, and *Poems*, published in 1832, soon after he had left Cambridge. It stayed with him all through his life, and enabled him to write some of the most beautiful lyrics in the world, like *The Bugle Song* and *The Throstle* and parts of *Maud*.

But at first, people did not think much of the poems which Tennyson wrote in the æsthetic manner. It was too new and strange. His friends liked them. But the world at large did not care for them, and the critics were inclined to make fun of *Mariana*, and *The Miller's Daughter*, and *The Palace of Art*, and *A Dream of Fair Women*. Tennyson had been obliged, by his father's death, to leave college in 1831, and was living at home, very much cast down, and almost ready to give up poetry, since the world did not seem to want the kind of verse that he wished to write.

3. Then came an event which had the deepest effect upon his life. His dearest friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, died suddenly in Vienna. Tennyson felt this sorrow intensely. It seemed to break up the dreaminess of his youth and thrust him into the real world. Human joy and sorrow came closer to him, meant more to him. He had a hard fight to keep his own faith in God and immortality. The story of this inward struggle is told in *In Memoriam*, an elegy for his friend, which was begun in 1833, but not finished until 1850.

Meantime Tennyson published no book for ten years. He was studying, writing, working all the time to deepen and enlarge his poetry. In 1842 two volumes of *Poems* were published, containing the best of his earlier pieces, much corrected and improved, and a number of new poems, among them some of the finest that he ever wrote. Almost at once he became a popular poet, and from this time on his fame and influence steadily grew.

If you will look into these two volumes of 1842 you will see why this happened. A soul had come into his poetry. Beauty of form, though it was still there, was no longer the chief thing; beauty of meaning, and depth of feeling, and power to touch the real secrets of life, were more important. There were ballads, like *Locksley Hall*, and *Lady Clara Vere de Vere*, and the conclusion of *The May Queen*, which came very close to the heart of man. There were poems in blank verse, like *Ulysses*, and *Dora*, and *Morte d'Arthur*, in which noble thoughts and feelings were nobly spoken.

This last poem has a special interest for us just now, because it was the beginning of that part of Tennyson's work which we are to study in this book. The *Morte d'Arthur* is the first form of that one of the *Idylls of the King* which is here given as *The Passing of Arthur*. It was written in 1834; and the introduction speaks of it, half playfully, as the eleventh of twelve books in an "epic of King Arthur" which the poet had made, but all of which, except this fragment, he had thrown into the fire. This is probably a poetic fiction. But it shows, at

least, that the idea of an epic on the subject of Arthur and the Round Table had already entered the poet's mind. How long it was before he took the plan up again and worked it out, you shall see.

4. In the interval a new element of strength was to come into the poet's life. Social and patriotic interests began to play a larger part in the growth of his mind and heart. His popularity brought him more into contact with public affairs. He began to think more of the questions that rise out of the common life of men. In 1847 he published a long poem called *The Princess*, in which he dealt, half in earnest, half in jest, with the question of woman's place in the world and the right way to educate her for it. In 1850, after the publication of *In Memoriam*, he was made Poet Laureate; an honorary office, attached to the Royal Household. In old times it carried with it the duty of writing odes in praise of the reigning sovereign; but Queen Victoria in offering it to Tennyson said that this duty would not be exacted; she only wished to keep up the ancient connexion between the Throne and the poets of the country, and to fill the office with one whose name would adorn it. It was natural, however, that people should look to the Laureate for some expression of their feelings of patriotism in connexion with public events; and Tennyson met this expectation with such poems as the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, and the dedication of his collected poems, *To the Queen*.

In 1856, being then in his maturity as a man and a

writer, and having kept his first, æsthetic impulse, (the love of beauty,) in harmony with his second, religious and humane impulse, (the desire of truth,) and with his third, social and patriotic impulse, (the love of country,) Tennyson began to seek a subject for a long poem into which he might put the fullness of his powers. He returned to the old idea of an epic of King Arthur and the Round Table. In this cycle of legends he hoped to find a field for all the beauty of description and all the play of romantic fancy that he loved, and at the same time he meant to give them human meaning and interest by making them tell the story of man's real life and show the conflict between good and evil, which is the same in every age and land. The first parts of the story that he finished were *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere*. These were published in 1859. Then came *The Coming of Arthur*, *The Holy Grail*, *Pelleas and Ettarre*, and *The Passing of Arthur*, in 1869. *Gareth and Lynette* and *The Last Tournament* were published in 1872, and in 1885 *Balin and Balan* appeared. Shortly afterward the idyll of *Geraint* was divided into two books, and in 1889, for the first time, the title was printed *Idylls of the King*, *in Twelve Books*. Thus you see how long it took to bring the whole series of poems into their present shape, — from 1834 to 1889, more than fifty years.

Now, before you go on to study the Idylls which are given in this book, a few words more must be written about the life of the poet. There was nothing in it that needs to be explained or defended. He lived peace-

fully, honourably, happily, in his winter home at Farringford, in his summer home at Aldworth, taking care of his family, studying the great books that he loved, and especially the wonderful book of Nature, keeping up his friendships with good and wise men, and writing his poems. He traveled a good deal, through the picturesque parts of England and Wales and on the Continent. He was always observing, patiently and lovingly trying to see just how things look and to feel the meaning of them, so that his poetry might be true as well as beautiful. His powers did not seem to fail much as he grew old; he was always a big, strong, true-hearted man, with a serious purpose and a warm interest in life. Some of his later poems, like *Rizpah*, *The Revenge*, and *In the Children's Hospital*, and one of the latest of all, *Crossing the Bar*, are among his best. In 1883 he was made a peer, with the title "Baron of Aldworth and Farringford," as if to say that his nobility came from his life and his work.

In 1892 he died peacefully at Aldworth, and was buried, amid the sorrow of the English-speaking world, in the Abbey Church of Westminster.

II. The Story of King Arthur and his Knights

Was King Arthur a real man? Did he ever lead the Britons in their wars? Were the Knights gathered around him in a band called the Round Table, or was the whole story a fairy tale made up by poets and romancers of the Middle Ages?

A great deal has been said on both sides of the question: but the men who have studied the old books most carefully tell us now that Arthur was probably a real person, a leader of the Celtic chiefs and tribes of Britain, who were Christians, against the Saxon invaders, who were heathen. This was in the sixth century, and Nennius the historian, writing two hundred and fifty years afterward, says that the Christian host overcame the pagan hordes in twelve great battles, in one of which nine hundred and sixty men fell by one onslaught of Arthur.

But in the long run, as we know, the Saxons conquered the Britons, and this real Arthur became the crowned hero of a vanquished race. All their poetry and legendary lore, keeping itself alive among the mountains of Wales and on the seacoast of Brittany, across the English Channel, where the same race had settled, began to centre around the name of the great king. He had fallen to defend their liberty and their faith; but the legends said that he was surely coming back again to reign over them, according to the inscription on his tomb: *Hic jacet Arthurus, rex quondam, rexque futurus.* Some of these poems and tales were probably written down, but for the most part they were spread by wandering bards and minstrels, who went about from place to place singing and telling stories.

When the Normans conquered England the Celtic spirit seems to have been much aroused. In the twelfth century we find an English writer speaking of "the frivolous tales in which the Britons rave about Arthur." A

few years later Walter of Oxford, going over to Brittany, brings back a certain "very old book in the British language," and Geoffrey of Monmouth uses it to help him in writing a Latin *History of the Kings of Britain.* At least this is the story which Geoffrey tells about the way in which he got the material for his book. One thing is certain: a great deal of it must have come from Brittany; and here for the first time we have the outline of the tale of King Arthur as it has become familiar to us, — the fountain-head of a stream of poetry.

Now, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, other men began to take up the tale and to add to it. The age of chivalry had come; people delighted in ballads, and legends in verse, and prose romances. Walter Wace wrote about Arthur in French, and brought in the story of the Round Table. Layamon translated the tale into English in a poem called the *Brut.* The stories of other knights and heroes were woven into the theme, or spun out as separate tales. Chrestien de Troyes told the legend of *Lancelot;* Wolfram von Eschenbach, of *Parzival and the Holy Grail.* All over Europe, in courts and castles, these long adventurous tales of love and war, of single combats and enchantments and perilous quests, were read and recited, for two hundred years and more, while the Crusades were going on and the age of chivalry was in full bloom. Religious faith and romantic feeling were mixed up in them, in the most wonderful and picturesque way.

Then, in the reign of Edward IV, about 1470, when

the age of chivalry was beginning to wane, an English knight, Sir Thomas Malory, took up these old romances as he had read them in the French, changed them a little, and added to them, in order to make his story complete, and wove them together in a great prose fiction. This book was published by the famous English printer, William Caxton, in 1485, at the close of the Wars of the Roses. It is called *Le Morte Darthur*, and tells the full story of Arthur: how he became king of Britain and married Queen Guenevere; how the Knights of the Round Table came to him, and of the many noble deeds that were done by them; how he fought against the heathen and against Rome and made a mighty kingdom; how Guenevere loved Sir Lancelot, and the shame that came of it; how the king was overcome by treachery and mortally wounded, and carried away in a barge by three queens, and the Round Table broken forever; yet there is no certainty of his death, but some men say that he shall return and win the holy cross.

Now you see how long it took to make this story, and how much went into it; first, a little bit of fact, the chieftain Arthur, who led the Christian tribes of Britain against the pagan Saxons; then, the memories and hopes of the conquered Celtic race in Wales and England, and their kinsmen across the sea in Brittany, making their hero into a king and putting their fancies and fairy-tales into his history; then, the myths and legends of Christianity as it spread among the French and Germans and English; then, the dreams and ideals of the age of chivalry, giving

form to all that men thought brave and fine and true, in long tales of knightly adventure and love and fighting. All this grew into the Arthurian story between the eighth century, when Nennius wrote down the beginning of it, and the fifteenth century, when Sir Thomas Malory completed the *Morte Darthur.*

III. Tennyson's Use of the Story

For a hundred and fifty years Malory's book was popular in England, and was printed again and again. Then it fell out of fashion and was read by few. Several English poets touched on the story, Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*, and Drayton in *Polyolbion;* and at least two, Milton and Dryden, thought of writing an epic of King Arthur. But the only one who carried out such a plan was Sir Richard Blackmore, a rather stupid writer, whose long, dull poems, *Prince Arthur* and *King Arthur*, are well forgotten. In the eighteenth century, a stiff and formal time, people despised the Arthurian story and made fun of it because it was so wild and romantic. But in the beginning of the nineteenth century romance came to life again, with Sir Walter Scott to make it popular. While Tennyson was a boy, Malory's book was reprinted, and people began to read it and admire it. Southey turned back to the old Welsh legends for the subject of a poem, and Wordsworth took a theme from Geoffrey of Monmouth. In France and Germany men

were studying the romances of chivalry and writing about them.

The Arthurian story attracted Tennyson, from the first, by its richness and beauty. He touched it lightly in three lyrics: *The Lady of Shalott* (which is the story of Elaine in the form of a ballad), *Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere*, and *Sir Galahad*. Then he took it up more seriously in *Morte d'Arthur* (1834), but laid it aside again for twenty-two years. Meantime a book was published in 1837 which pleased him greatly, *The Mabinogion*, a collection of old Welsh legends, translated by Lady Charlotte Guest. Tennyson traveled in Wales, and studied the language in order to be able to read a little in the original. In 1856, with Malory's book for his main guide, and with *The Mabinogion* and the English and French romances for helpers, he set to work to make an English epic poem out of the story of Arthur and the Round Table. The poem, as you have seen, was written in separate parts, not coming out in a regular order of succession, but published at long intervals. The entire epic with its present title, *Idylls of the King, in Twelve Books*, stood complete in 1889.

There were three things that drew Tennyson to this subject and made him choose it. First, there was an æsthetic impulse which made him wish to write about something beautiful and picturesque. Then, there was a religious impulse which made him feel the deep meaning of the old myths and legends, like the Quest of the Holy Grail and the Return of Arthur. Last, there was

a patriotic impulse, which made him desire to have a hero of his own country and to give in poetry his own view of the things which build up or pull down a kingdom.

Of course, with all three of these impulses at work in his mind, Tennyson could not take the story just as Malory or any one of the old writers gave it. He must be free to choose from each of them just as much of their material as suited him, and to mould and shape it in his own way. Accordingly he went to the *Le Morte Darthur* and *The Mabinogion* and the other books, as a man goes to a quarry to get the stone for a building which he has planned. And he did four things with the Arthurian story during the long time while he was at work upon it.

First, he brought order into the arrangement of the different parts. He gave the story a beginning in *The Coming of Arthur;* and carried it on through the growth of the kingdom and the building up of the Round Table; and showed how danger arose through the unlawful love of Lancelot and Guinevere; and how evil came in with Vivien to corrupt the hearts and the manners of the knights; and how superstition led them away to follow wandering fires in the Quest of the Holy Grail; and how Ettarre and Tristram were false to the law of true love; and how Guinevere was discovered and fled from the court in shame; and how at last the enemies of the king triumphed, and the Round Table was dissolved with *The Passing of Arthur.*

Second, he made the figure of Arthur stand out, clear and consistent, as the man who built up and supported the kingdom. The old writers had really made two Arthurs: one, strong and brave and wise and good; the other, weak and wicked and cruel and foolish, — a plaything in the hand of Fate. Tennyson chose the good Arthur for his hero, and left the other out.

Third, he gave to his characters the thoughts and feelings of men and women at the present day; he made them modern people inwardly, while outwardly they wore the dress and followed the customs of a past age. This was just what each successive writer had done with the story. Arthur and his knights belonged to the sixth century. But Walter Wace and Chrestien de Troyes brought them down to the twelfth century; and Sir Thomas Malory made them think and feel like people of the time of Edward IV. Tennyson did what most poets do; he expressed the ideals of his own age through the persons of his poem. Some say that this is a fault; others, that it is a necessity; others, that it is a merit.

Fourth, he gave his fancy free play to adorn his poem with all kinds of beautiful description, of scenery, of costume, of natural objects, of the looks and actions of men and women. Perhaps there is a little too much of this in some places. But it is like the carving and the coloured windows in a great cathedral. Without it the building would be bare.

There is only one thing more that you need to notice

about the way in which Tennyson has used the story; that is, his division of the epic into twelve parts called *idylls*. The name comes from the Greek εἰδύλλιον, which means "a short poem descriptive of some picturesque scene or incident, chiefly in rustic life." The marked thing about this kind of poetry is the fact that it always has a central idea or feeling which colours the picture, and brings the scenery and the action into harmony with itself. Tennyson had written a number of poems of this type, dealing with rural life, which he called English *idyls*. Now he wished to use the same method in dealing with the life of the age of chivalry. He proposed, not to tell a long, unbroken story, but to present a series of pictures, each one controlled and coloured by a central idea, and each one showing a distinct stage in the course of the plot. They were all to be bound together by the main thread of narrative. But at the same time each was to have a character of its own, and to be complete in itself, as a separate scene in the drama of a kingdom. Therefore, he did not call the parts of his poem "books" or "cantos," but *idylls*, because he was using the picturesque method; and I suppose he doubled the *l* in order to distinguish them from his simpler, more rustic English *idyls*.

At this point I should advise you to stop reading this introduction and turn to the three idylls which are in this book. Read them for pleasure. Get the pictures before your imagination. And then come back, if you will, for a little further explanation.

IV. The Meaning of the Idylls

Tennyson himself has told us what the whole poem means. It is a parable of the life of man. Not an allegory (though there are allegorical passages and features in it), because an allegory presents abstract ideas, virtues and vices, dressed up in human form and going through a kind of masquerade. But a parable, because it is a story of living men and women, told so as to teach a lesson, and shadow forth a deeper truth.

"The poem," said he, "is the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. It is not the history of one man or of one generation, but of a whole cycle of generations."

Therefore he tells us that it is not to be taken as a piece of history in verse, nor merely as an attempt to retell the story of Malory or Geoffrey of Monmouth; but as a tale

> "New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul."

In the king, the hero, the victory is won by the soul; the higher nature rules the ideal man; he is true always to the best that he knows. In Lancelot and Guinevere the conflict is uncertain; the lower nature leads them astray; they are not true to their promises and bonds. In the baser characters, like Vivien and Ettarre and Tristram and Modred, the sensual side is triumphant; the lower nature rules them; they are willingly false in all things. So far as the Round Table is concerned, the weakness

and wickedness of men bring about its ruin. But Guinevere and Lancelot win pardon through repentance; and Arthur triumphs even in death, with a faith which cannot be shaken.

In each of the idylls you see a smaller picture of this same war between Sense and Soul. For example, in *The Coming of Arthur* the base and unruly knights who profess to doubt his royal birth because they do not wish to submit to him, are arrayed against the noble knights who believe in him and accept him as king. In *The Holy Grail* the conflict is between the faith of Arthur, whose religion binds him to stay at home and do his duty, and the superstition of the knights, whose religion is chiefly an affair of miracles and wonders, and leads them off on a vain quest, thus helping to break up the Round Table.

Now let us take up the three idylls which we are to study, and look at them again in the light of the main meaning of the poem.

Gareth and Lynette. — This story is taken mostly from Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, Book VII, which "treateth of a noble knight called Sir Gareth, and called by Sir Kay, Beaumains." But many changes are made by Tennyson in the telling of the tale, and the first four hundred lines are very much like the story of Peredur in *The Mabinogion*.

The central thought of the idyll is the conflict between a true ambition, which honours the spirit of knighthood and is willing to earn its right to rise by the most humble

service, and a false pride, which thinks chiefly of the outward trappings of knighthood and despises all who are not of high birth and rank. And this is the way the thought is worked out.

Gareth is the youngest son of Lot, King of Orkney, and Bellicent, the reputed half-sister of Arthur. Two of his brothers, Gawain and Modred, have already gone to court and become knights. Gareth wishes to follow them and win fame; but his fond mother keeps him at home. He begs her to let him go; she consents on condition that he will take a vow to conceal his name and serve as kitchen-boy at court for a year, supposing that this test will be too hard for him. But he accepts, and slips away in disguise, the same night, with two servants, to Camelot. They arrive at the city and are astonished at its wonders. The gateway is an allegory. While they are staring at it an old man (probably Merlin) appears and talks with them, discovering Gareth's secret. They enter the city and go into the great hall where Arthur is throned among his knights, hearing appeals for justice. Gareth sees the blazoned shields of the knights who have done noble deeds, and watches the king sending out one after another to right the wrongs which are brought before him. Then Gareth makes his request, that he may serve in the kitchen for a year, — afterwards he will tell his name and fight for knighthood. It is granted, and he is turned over to the charge of sour, surly Kay, the court steward, who dislikes and abuses him. But he serves humbly for a month, meanwhile proving his great strength in sports

among the servants, and thinking always of the day when he shall become a knight. Then his mother relents, sends him arms, and releases him from his vow. He goes to Arthur, reveals his name, and asks to be made knight in secret and to be given the first quest. The king consents, but tells Lancelot the secret, and bids him follow Gareth and see that no harm overtakes the bold young knight. Thus far, then, the story shows the training of ambition by obedience.

Now appears at court a damsel called Lynette, beautiful, high-stepping, narrow-minded, scornful, proud of her rank, — a society girl of the olden time. She tells how her sister, the Lady Lyonors, is prisoned in her Castle Perilous by four wicked knights, and asks for the greatest of Arthur's heroes, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth and set her free. But Gareth springs up among the servants and claims his right to take the first quest. Arthur grants it. Lynette is disgusted at having a kitchen knave given to her for champion. She runs from the Hall and sets out for home. Gareth follows on the horse that Arthur has provided, and catches up with her. She refuses his escort and insults him. Sir Kay, who has followed to punish the insolence of his kitchen boy, attacks Gareth and is overthrown. Lynette still mocks him as a scullion, but he answers gently and rides after her, proving his knighthood by deeds of valour. At last they come to the river that runs in three loops around the Castle Perilous. Gareth fights and conquers the first of the wicked knights, who called himself Sir Morning Star. Lynette is still

scornful, but she relents a little, and advises Gareth not to risk his life with the second knight, called Sir Noonday Sun. But the fight comes off and the Sun is beaten. Then Lynette relents a little more, and admits that if Gareth were nobly born she might like him. He overthrows the third knight, Sir Evening Star, and she relents altogether, begs Gareth's pardon, and asks him to ride beside her. They take refuge for the night in a hermit's cave, where there is an allegory carved on the rocks, of the war of Time against the human soul. Sir Lancelot, who has been delayed in riding after them, comes up, and through an error fights with Gareth and overthrows him. Lynette is again disgusted, because her champion has been beaten; but when she finds out that the victor is the great Sir Lancelot, and that her comrade is Prince Gareth, she is reconciled. The next morning they ride on to meet the fourth of the wicked knights, who calls himself Death. Lynette, loving Gareth, begs him to let Lancelot fight, for fear the combat will be too hard. But Gareth, fearless, attacks the last foe, who is horribly clad in black armour and rides a black horse. At one stroke Gareth splits his helmet, and the rosy face of a boy appears, — a little lad whom the first three knights, his brothers, had dressed up in this disguise, thinking that terror would prevent men from fighting him. This blooming boy may be a symbol of the harmlessness of death; or he may represent Cupid. At all events, Gareth goes into the castle, and wins, not only his quest, but also a fair lady to wife,— Malory says Lyonors, but Tennyson

says Lynette. Thus the second part of the story shows the victory of true nobility over false pride.

The season of the idyll is spring and early summer, in one of the years when the Round Table was new, and the court pure. The tone of the story is all bright and hopeful.

Lancelot and Elaine. — This story is taken mainly from Book XVIII of *Le Morte Darthur*. It was the first of the Arthurian legends to attract Tennyson, and he retold it in the ballad of *The Lady of Shalott*, which was published in 1832. In this form the tale comes from an Italian *novella*, entitled *La Damigella di Scalot*. Lancelot is named in it; but not Elaine. *Shalott* is Tennyson's softening of the Italian version of *Astolat*. In the idyll the story is much more fully and clearly told than in the ballad.

The central thought of the idyll is the conflict between a pure and simple love, such as Elaine offers to Lancelot, and the false, disloyal tie which binds him to the queen, and into which pride and jealousy and bitterness have already begun to enter. The keynote of the poem is in the lines: —

> "His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
> And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."

The story opens with a picture of Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat, sitting in her tower, guarding a shield which belongs to Lancelot, though she does not know the name of the knight who has left it in her care. Then the poet turns back to tell how the shield came there.

Before Arthur was king, he had found in a lonely glen a skeleton with a crown, in which were nine diamonds. After he came to the throne he made a tournament, to be held each year, with one of the diamonds for the prize. Lancelot, the mightiest of the knights, had won eight of the diamonds, and kept them until he should win the ninth, meaning to give them all to Queen Guinevere. Just before the ninth tournament she pretends to be ill, and Lancelot makes believe that he has a wound which prevents him from riding, in order that he may stay with her. Then she teases him to go to the tournament in disguise, and win the diamond without the help of his great fame, which makes men afraid of him.

Lancelot rides off and comes to the lonely old Castle of Astolat. The lord of the castle does not know him, but welcomes him as a noble guest, and when he explains that he wants to borrow a shield, offers to lend him that of Sir Torre, the oldest son of the house, who is lame, and to send Sir Lavaine, the younger son, with him to the tournament as a companion. Meanwhile Elaine, the lovely, gentle daughter of the house, who has grown up in seclusion, falls in love with the noble, nameless guest. He is most courteous to her, and unconsciously wins her love and admiration by all his words and actions. When Lavaine and he are setting out for the tournament, she begs him to wear her "favour," a red sleeve sown with pearls, on his helmet in the lists. He refuses at first, but then, thinking that this will help his disguise, and wishing to please a maid so fair and good, he consents. He gives

her his own shield to keep until his return, and so rides away with Lavaine. Thus far, then, we have the contrast between the two loves: Guinevere, royal, proud, suspicious, exacting; Elaine, gentle, pure, confiding.

Lancelot and Lavaine do mighty deeds at the tournament; but because Lancelot appears as a stranger with an unknown shield, his own kindred combine against him, and he has a hard time to win the contest, being dreadfully wounded. When the king proclaims that the prize belongs to the knight with the scarlet sleeve on his helmet, Lancelot cannot come to receive it. Lavaine has carried him from the field, half dead, to the cave of a friendly hermit. Here Lancelot lies for many a week, hovering between life and death.

Meantime there is great wonder at court over the total disappearance of the most famous knight. The king sends Sir Gawain out with the diamond to find him. The queen betrays to the king the secret that Lancelot was at the tournament in disguise. The king lets out the fact that the strange knight who won and was wounded, wore a red sleeve, a lady's favour, on his helmet. At this Guinevere's jealousy makes her secretly furious, for she judges Lancelot false to her. In contrast with this scene, Gawain, riding in search of the stranger knight, comes to Astolat, and tells Elaine that he who wore the red sleeve was sorely wounded and has vanished. Her only thought is one of pity and grief. Gawain stays at the castle and makes light love to her. One day she shows him the shield that she is keeping, and he recognizes it as Lance-

lot's. She confesses that Lancelot is the only man she can ever love. Gawain gives her the diamond and rides away.

Then she goes out to seek for Lancelot, and finds him in the hermit's cave. Here she gives him the diamond, his prize, and lovingly nurses him back to life. He sees her love, and feels that it might have made him happy, if it had come sooner; but now his secret tie binds him to the queen. At last the wound is healed; Lancelot, Lavaine, and Elaine ride back to Astolat. Lancelot, about to go away, bids her ask for the thing she wishes most. She answers "Your love." He tells her gently that this cannot be, for he will never marry; but all that he has, even to half his lands, is hers. But of this she will have nothing. Then her father begs Lancelot to use some discourtesy to break her passion. So Lancelot sends for his shield and sadly rides away without looking up or even waving his hand in farewell.

Elaine lives in her tower and pines away, wishing for death, since love is denied her. At last she makes her father and brothers promise that when she is dead they will put a letter, which she has written, in her hand, and lay her body in a boat, and let an old dumb servant row her up the river to Camelot. The strange funeral arrives beneath the palace just as Lancelot has given the diamonds to the queen, and she in a passion of jealous fury, has flung them out of the window. They flash and fall into the river; and then across the ripples floats the black boat, with the dumb oarsman and the lily maid of

Astolat, her letter in her folded hands. They carry her into the great hall; Arthur breaks the seal of the letter. It tells simply of her true love for Lancelot, which had no return, and begs him to pray for her soul. Then Arthur wonders why it was that Lancelot could not love a maid so lovable. But Lancelot in his heart ponders on the difference between this pure, tender love of Elaine, and the jealous, proud passion of Guinevere, and resolves to break the bonds that make him false to his king. So ends the tale.

The season is midsummer, and the time is the tenth year of Arthur's reign, when evil has already corrupted the court and the air is dark and heavy with doubt and suspicion.

The Passing of Arthur. — This idyll corresponds in general to Book XXI of *Le Morte Darthur*. But there are many points of difference. Some arise from the fact that Malory is closing the story of Lancelot as well as the story of Arthur, while Tennyson tells us only of the passing away of the king. Others arise from the form which Tennyson chose to give to his poem as a parable of the life of the soul. Thus he leaves out all about Modred's being the unlawful son of Arthur, and makes him simply the traitor, leading the forces of misrule and rebellion against the king, who stands for law and order. He leaves out also what Malory tells about the body which was brought by night to the hermit's chapel for burial, and which Sir Bedivere thought was the body of Arthur. Tennyson shows us only the

king sailing away across the lake in the black barge tended by the three queens.

The central thought of the idyll is the old strife between Sense and Soul. This is represented, first, in the great battle where the forces of evil and misrule under Modred fight against the loyal and true knights under Arthur. The two hosts destroy each other in a wild, dark, confused conflict hidden by a thick mist; and last of all Arthur, himself mortally wounded, strikes down the traitor Modred. Then the same strife between Sense and Soul is represented, for the second time, in Sir Bedivere, the last of the Round Table, whom Arthur commands to throw his sword Excalibur into the lake, from which it came long ago by magic. Bedivere, seeing the beauty of the jewelled hilt, cannot bear to throw it away; his love of treasure gets the better of his loyalty to the king, so he hides the sword in the reeds. But Arthur discovers his disobedience, and at last compels him to cast the sword into the water. The same strife is represented, for the third time, in the conversation between the dying king and his last follower, when the black barge appears on the lake to carry Arthur away. Bedivere is a good, plain, faithful man, but he has not the strength of spirit to resist the great disasters that have befallen the kingdom. He judges by Sense; the true old times are dead forever; there is nothing before him but sorrow and a world all dark. Arthur's faith and hope still sustain him: he judges by the Soul; the old order has passed away, but a new order will come, for

God fulfils himself in many ways. Prayer still remains, and the vision of a place of rest and healing in the island valley of Avilion. So the barge bears him across the shining water into the invisible, and the poem closes with the far-off echo of victorious music: —

> "Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
> Around a king returning from his wars."

V. The Form of the Verse

The metre in which the *Idylls of the King* are written (except the songs which you will find in them here and there) is that which is known in English as blank verse. In regular blank verse three things are to be noted.

1. Rhyme is not used.

2. The lines are not arranged in fixed groups or stanzas. They follow one another line by line, and the poet puts as many into a paragraph as he pleases.

3. The normal or standard line has ten syllables, and five stresses or accents, which fall on the even syllables. There is usually a slight break in the line, which commonly falls about the middle, but may occur almost anywhere. At the end of the line there is a pause.

Thus, the following are normal or standard blank verse lines: —

1 2′ 3 4′ 5 6′ ‖ 7 8′ 9 10′
Elaine the lily maid of Astolat.

1 2′ 3 4′ 5 ‖ 6′ 7 8′ 9 10′
The thrall in person may be free in soul.

1 2′ 3 4′ 5 6′ ‖ 7 8′ 9 10′
And God fulfils himself in many ways.

A longer name for this is *five-stress iambic unrhymed verse*.[1]

It seems a very free form, and at first you would think it easy to write. But if you will think more carefully, you will see that its very freedom and the plainness of the verse make it hard to write well; for if you had a long succession of normal or standard lines, such as those which are given above, the effect in reading would be very bad, — dull, heavy, monotonous.

The beauty of blank verse comes from the bringing in of slight changes and variations in the regular form of the lines. This makes them flow together in musical paragraphs and puts a stronger emphasis on important words, and generally breaks up the monotony.

These changes are of three principal kinds: —

1. A change (*a*) in the break in the line, or (*b*) in the pause at the end.

Examples: —

(*a*) And uttermost obedience to the King. [*No break.*]

(*a*) Gawain, surnamed the Courteous, fair and strong.
[*Two breaks.*]

(*a*) How can ye keep me tether'd to you? Shame.
[*Break before last syllable.*]

[1] It was first used in English by the Earl of Surrey (1547) in his translation from Virgil's *Æneid*. Then it became the common form in the dramas of Shakespeare and the writers of the Age of Elizabeth. Then Milton used it in his *Paradise Lost* (1667). Then it was less popular for a while, until Thomson (1726) published *The Seasons*. In modern times Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Matthew Arnold used it well. But the best blank verse since Milton is probably that of Tennyson.

(*a*) Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen.
[*Break after second syllable.*]

(*b*) Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find
My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay
Among the ashes and wedded the king's son.

[Here the first two lines have no pause at the end. They are called *run-on* lines. Those with a pause at the end are called *end-stopt.* The change from one to the other of these forms of the line is one of the most important variations in blank verse.]

2. A change in the stress, either (*a*) by shifting it from the even syllable to the odd syllable, (*b*) by omitting it altogether, or (*c*) by doubling it.

Examples: —

(*a*) What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?
(*b*) And in the blast and bray of the long horn. (4 stresses.)
(*c*) A star shot: "Lo," said Gareth, "the foe falls." (6 stresses.)

3. A change in the number of syllables in the line.

Examples: —

Down the long avenues of a boundless wood.
[11 syllables.]
Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces.
[13 syllables.]

[In reading such lines the extra syllables are lightly passed over. The effect is to enrich and prolong the line. When the extra syllable comes at the end of the line, after the final stress, it is called a feminine ending.]

Examples:—

> Bearing all down in thy precipitancy.
> Confusion and illusion and relation.

All these variations from the standard line give a changing music to blank verse, and make it, in the hand of a master like Tennyson, one of the most beautiful and powerful of English metres. The following passage illustrates the way in which the shifting of the breaks and pauses gives practically a new structure to the verse. The passage is from *Gareth and Lynette*, 210–226.

> For barefoot on the keystone,
> Which was lined and rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
> The Lady of the Lake stood:
> All her dress wept from her sides as water flowing away;
> But like the cross
> Her great and goodly arms stretch'd under all the cornice
> And upheld:
> And drops of water fell from either hand;
> And down from one a sword was hung,
> From one a censer,
> Either worn with wind and storm;
> And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish;
> And in the space to left of her, and right,
> Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,
> New things and old co-twisted,
> As if Time were nothing,
> So inveterately, that men were giddy gazing there;
> And over all high on the top
> Were those three Queens,
> The friends of Arthur,
> Who should help him at his need.

THE ORDER OF THE

IDYLLS OF THE KING

I. THE COMING OF ARTHUR
II. GARETH AND LYNETTE
III. THE MARRIAGE OF GERAINT
IV. GERAINT AND ENID
V. BALIN AND BALAN
VI. MERLIN AND VIVIEN
VII. LANCELOT AND ELAINE
VIII. THE HOLY GRAIL
IX. PELLEAS AND ETTARRE
X. THE LAST TOURNAMENT
XI. GUINEVERE
XII. THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

IDYLLS OF THE KING

GARETH AND LYNETTE

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

[1] River in flood. [2] Reward.

Until she let me fly discaged to sweep
In ever-highering eagle-circles up
To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop
Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,
A knight of Arthur, working out his will,
To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain, when he came
With Modred hither in the summertime,
Ask'd me to tilt[1] with him, the proven knight.
Modred for want of worthier was the judge.
Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,
"Thou hast half prevail'd against me," said so — he —
Tho' Modred biting his thin lips was mute,
For he is alway sullen: what care I?'

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

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes,
'Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine
Was finer gold than any goose can lay;
For this an Eagle, a royal Eagle, laid

[1] Contend with the lance, on horseback.

Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm
As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.[1]
And there was ever haunting round the palm
A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw
The splendour sparkling from aloft, and thought
"An I could climb and lay my hand upon it,
Then were I wealthier than a leash[2] of kings."
But ever when he reach'd a hand to climb,
One that had loved him from his childhood, caught
And stay'd him, "Climb not lest thou break thy neck,
I charge thee by my love," and so the boy,
Sweet mother, neither clomb, nor brake his neck,
And brake his very heart in pining for it,
And past away.'
To whom the mother said,
'True love, sweet son, had risk'd himself and climb'd,
And handed down the golden treasure to him.'

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes,
'Gold? said I gold? — ay then, why he, or she,
Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world
Had ventured — *had* the thing I spake of been
Mere gold — but this was all of that true steel,
Whereof they forged the brand[3] Excalibur,
And lightnings play'd about it in the storm,
And all the little fowl were flurried at it,
And there were cries and clashings in the nest,
That sent him from his senses: let me go.'

[1] Prayer-book with painted margins. [2] Three. [3] Sword.

Then Bellicent bemoan'd herself and said,
'Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness?
Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth
Lies like a log, and all but smoulder'd out!
For ever since when traitor to the King
He fought against him in the Barons' war,
And Arthur gave him back his territory,
His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there
A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburiable,
No more; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows.
And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,
Albeit[1] neither loved with that full love
I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love:
Stay therefore thou; red berries charm the bird,
And thee, mine innocent, the jousts,[2] the wars,
Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang
Of wrench'd or broken limb — an often chance
In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,[3]
Frights to my heart; but stay: follow the deer
By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns;[4]
So make thy manhood mightier day by day;
Sweet is the chase: and I will seek thee out
Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace
Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone[5] year,
Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness

[1] Although. [2] A knightly contest, usually with blunted weapons.
[3] Falls given in a tournament, where a number of knights contended.
[4] Small streams. [5] Advancing age.

I know not thee, myself, nor anything.
Stay, my best son! ye are yet more boy than man.'

Then Gareth, 'An ye hold me yet for child,
Hear yet once more the story of the child.
For, mother, there was once a King, like ours.
The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,
Ask'd for a bride; and thereupon the King
Set two before him. One was fair, strong, arm'd —
But to be won by force — and many men
Desired her; one, good lack,[1] no man desired,
And these were the conditions of the King:
That save he won the first by force, he needs
Must wed that other, whom no man desired,
A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile,
That evermore she long'd to hide herself,
Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye —
Yea — some she cleaved to, but they died of her.
And one — they call'd her Fame; and one, — O mother,
How can ye keep me tether'd to you — Shame.
Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.
Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King —
Else, wherefore born?'

To whom the mother said,
'Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,

[1] What a pity!

Or will not deem him, wholly proven King—
Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King,
When I was frequent[1] with him in my youth,
And heard him Kingly speak, and doubted him
No more than he, himself; but felt him mine,
Of closest kin to me: yet — wilt thou leave
Thine easeful biding[2] here, and risk thine all,
Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King?
Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth
Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son.'

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

So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain
To break him from the intent to which he grew,
Found her son's will unwaveringly one,
She answer'd craftily, 'Will ye walk thro' fire?
Who walks thro' fire will hardly heed the smoke.
Ay, go then, an ye must: only one proof,
Before thou ask the King to make thee knight,
Of thine obedience and thy love to me,
Thy mother, — I demand.'

[1] Accustomed to be. [2] Comfortable home.

And Gareth cried,
'A hard one, or a hundred, so I go.
Nay — quick! the proof to prove me to the quick!'[1]

But slowly spake the mother looking at him,
'Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,
And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks
Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,[2]
And those that hand the dish across the bar.[3]
Nor shalt thou tell thy name to any one.
And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day.'

For so the Queen believed that when her son
Beheld his only way to glory lead
Low down thro' villain[4] kitchen-vassalage,
Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud
To pass thereby; so should he rest with her,
Closed in her castle from the sound of arms.

Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied,
'The thrall[5] in person may be free in soul,
And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I,
And since thou art my mother, must obey.
I therefore yield me freely to thy will;
For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself
To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves;
Nor tell my name to any — no, not the King.'

[1] Try my very life. [2] Kitchen boys.
[3] Counter, dividing kitchen from eating-place.
[4] Servile. [5] A slave, one who runs of errands.

Gareth awhile linger'd. The mother's eye
Full of the wistful fear that he would go,
And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turn'd,
Perplext his outward purpose, till an hour,
When waken'd by the wind which with full voice
Swept bellowing thro' the darkness on to dawn,
He rose, and out of slumber calling two
That still had tended on him from his birth,
Before the wakeful mother heard him, went.

The three were clad like tillers of the soil.
Southward they set their faces. The birds made
Melody on branch, and melody in mid air.
The damp hill-slopes were quicken'd into green,
And the live green had kindled into flowers,
For it was past the time of Easterday.

So, when their feet were planted on the plain
That broaden'd toward the base of Camelot,
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn
Rolling her smoke about the Royal mount,
That rose between the forest and the field.
At times the summit of the high city flash'd;
At times the spires and turrets half-way down
Prick'd thro' the mist; at times the great gate shone
Only, that open'd on the field below:
Anon, the whole fair city had disappear'd.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,
One crying, 'Let us go no further, lord.

Here is a city of Enchanters, built
By fairy Kings.' The second echo'd him,
'Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home
To Northward, that this King is not the King,
But only changeling out of Fairyland,
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery
And Merlin's glamour.'[1] Then the first again,
'Lord, there is no such city anywhere,
But all a vision.'

Gareth answer'd them
With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow[2]
In his own blood, his princedom, youth and hopes,
To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea;
So push'd them all unwilling toward the gate.
And there was no gate like it under heaven.
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
The Lady of the Lake stood: all her dress
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretch'd under all the cornice and upheld:
And drops of water fell from either hand;
And down from one a sword was hung, from one
A censer, either worn with wind and storm;
And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish;
And in the space to left of her, and right,
Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,

[1] Enchantment. [2] Enough.

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

Then those with Gareth for so long a space
Stared at the figures, that at last it seem'd
The dragon-boughts[2] and elvish emblemings[3]
Began to move, seethe, twine and curl: they call'd
To Gareth, 'Lord, the gateway is alive.'

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

Then Gareth, 'We be tillers of the soil,
Who leaving share[4] in furrow come to see
The glories of our King: but these, my men,
(Your city moved so weirdly in the mist)
Doubt if the King be King at all, or come
From Fairyland; and whether this be built
By magic, and by fairy Kings and Queens;

[1] Antiquely, in an ancient manner: or perhaps, obstinately, firmly.
[2] Coils of the dragons' tails.
[3] Figures like elves or fairies.
[4] Ploughshare.

Or whether there be any city at all,
Or all a vision: and this music now
Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth.'

Then that old Seer made answer playing on him
And saying, 'Son, I have seen the good ship sail
Keel upward,[1] and mast downward, in the heavens,
And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air:
And here is truth; but an it please thee not,
Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.'
For truly as thou sayest, a Fairy King
And Fairy Queens have built the city, son;
They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft
Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,
And built it to the music of their harps.
And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
For there is nothing in it as it seems
Saving the King; tho' some there be that hold
The King a shadow, and the city real:
Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become
A thrall to his enchantments, for the King
Will bind thee by such vows, as is a shame
A man should not be bound by, yet the which
No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,
Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide
Without, among the cattle of the field.
For an ye heard a music, like enow

[1] A mirage.

They are building still, seeing the city is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever.'

Gareth spake
Anger'd, 'Old Master, reverence thine own beard
That looks as white as utter truth, and seems
Wellnigh as long as thou art statured tall!
Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been
To thee fair-spoken?'

But the Seer replied,
'Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards?[1]
"Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion"?
I mock thee not but as thou mockest me,
And all that see thee, for thou art not who
Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art.
And now thou goest up to mock the King,
Who cannot brook[2] the shadow of any lie.'

Unmockingly the mocker ending here
Turn'd to the right, and past along the plain;
Whom Gareth looking after said, 'My men,
Our one white lie sits like a little ghost
Here on the threshold of our enterprise.
Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I:
Well, we will make amends.'

[1] Mystical triplets of the old Welsh poets. [2] Endure.

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

Then into hall Gareth ascending heard
A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld
Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall
The splendour of the presence of the King
Throned, and delivering doom[3]—and look'd no more—
But felt his young heart hammering in his ears,
And thought, 'For this half-shadow of a lie
The truthful King will doom me when I speak.'
Yet pressing on, tho' all in fear to find
Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one

[1] Carved scenes from their history. [2] Master of supernatural wisdom. [3] Judgement on cases brought before him.

Nor other, but in all the listening eyes
Of those tall knights, that ranged about the throne,
Clear honour shining like the dewy star
Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure
Affection, and the light of victory,
And glory gain'd, and evermore to gain.

Then came a widow crying to the King,
'A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft[1]
From my dead lord a field with violence:
For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd gold,
Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes,
We yielded not; and then he reft us of it
Perforce, and left us neither gold nor field.'

Said Arthur, 'Whether would ye? gold or field?'
To whom the woman weeping, 'Nay, my lord,
The field was pleasant in my husband's eye.'

And Arthur, 'Have thy pleasant field again,
And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,
According to the years. No boon is here,
But justice, so thy say be proven true.
Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did
Would shape himself a right!'

And while she past,
Came yet another widow crying to him,

[1] Took away.

'A boon, Sir King! Thine enemy, King, am I.
With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord,
A knight of Uther in the Barons' war,
When Lot and many another rose and fought
Against thee, saying thou wert basely born.
I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.
Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son
Thrall'd in his castle, and hath starved him dead;
And standeth seized [1] of that inheritance
Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.
So tho' I scarce can ask it thee for hate,
Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,
Kill the foul thief, and wreak [2] me for my son.'

Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him,
'A boon, Sir King! I am her kinsman, I.
Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man.'

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried,
'A boon, Sir King! ev'n that thou grant her none,
This railer, that hath mock'd thee in full hall—
None; or the wholesome boon of gyve [3] and gag.'

But Arthur, 'We sit King, to help the wrong'd
Thro' all our realm. The woman loves her lord.
Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates!
The kings of old had doom'd thee to the flames,

[1] Is in possession. [2] Avenge. [3] Fetter.

Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead,
And Uther slit thy tongue: but get thee hence —
Lest that rough humour[1] of the kings of old
Return upon me! Thou that art her kin,
Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not,
But bring him here, that I may judge the right,
According to the justice of the King:
Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King[2]
Who lived and died for men, the man shall die.'

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,
A name of evil savour in the land,
The Cornish king. In either hand he bore
What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines
A field of charlock[3] in the sudden sun
Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,
Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,
Delivering,[4] that his lord, the vassal[5] king,
Was ev'n upon his way to Camelot;
For having heard that Arthur of his grace
Had made his goodly cousin, Tristram, knight,
And, for himself was of the greater state,
Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord
Would yield him this large honour all the more;
So pray'd him well to accept this cloth of gold,
In token of true heart and fealty.

[1] Mood, temper. [2] Christ. [3] Wild mustard, a yellow weed.
[4] Announcing. [5] Holding lands under a superior, to whom service must be rendered.

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend
In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth.
An oak-tree smoulder'd there. 'The goodly knight!
What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?'
For, midway down the side of that long hall
A stately pile,[1]— whereof along the front,
Some blazon'd,[2] some but carven, and some blank,
There ran a treble range of stony shields,—
Rose, and high-arching overbrow'd[3] the hearth.
And under every shield a knight was named:
For this was Arthur's custom in his hall;
When some good knight had done one noble deed,
His arms were carven only; but if twain
His arms were blazon'd also; but if none,
The shield was blank and bare without a sign
Saving the name beneath; and Gareth saw
The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright,
And Modred's blank as death; and Arthur cried
To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth.

'More like are we to reave[4] him of his crown
Than make him knight because men call him king.
The kings we found, ye know we stay'd their hands
From war among themselves, but left them kings;
Of whom were any bounteous, merciful,
Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enroll'd
Among us, and they sit within our hall.

[1] Building. [2] Marked with a coat of arms in colours.
[3] Hung above. [4] Deprive.

But Mark hath tarnish'd the great name of king,
As Mark would sully the low state of churl:[1]
And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold,
Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,
Lest we should lap[2] him up in cloth of lead,
Silenced for ever — craven[3] — a man of plots,
Crafts, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings —
No fault of thine: let Kay the seneschal
Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied —
Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen!'

And many another suppliant crying came
With noise[4] of ravage wrought by beast and man,
And evermore a knight would ride away.

Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily
Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men,
Approach'd between them toward the King, and ask'd,
'A boon, Sir King (his voice was all ashamed),
For see ye not how weak and hungerworn
I seem — leaning on these? grant me to serve
For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knaves
A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.
Hereafter I will fight.'

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

[1] Peasant. [2] Wrap. [3] A coward. [4] Report.

He rose and past; then Kay, a man of mien [1]
Wan-sallow [2] as the plant that feels itself
Root-bitten by white lichen,

'Lo ye now!
This fellow hath broken from some Abbey,[3] where,
God wot, he had not beef and brewis [4] enow,
However that might chance! but an he work,
Like any pigeon will I cram his crop,
And sleeker shall he shine than any hog.'

Then Lancelot standing near, 'Sir Seneschal,
Sleuth-hound [5] thou knowest, and gray, and all the hounds;
A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know:
Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,
High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands
Large, fair and fine! — Some young lad's mystery —
But, or from sheepcot or king's hall, the boy
Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,
Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him.'

Then Kay, 'What murmurest thou of mystery?
Think ye this fellow will poison the King's dish?
Nay, for he spake too fool-like: mystery!
Tut, an the lad were noble, he had ask'd
For horse and armour: fair and fine, forsooth!

[1] Looks. [2] Pale and yellow.
[3] Dwelling of a company of monks.
[4] Bread soaked in broth. [5] Blood-hound.

Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it
That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day
Undo thee not — and leave my man to me.'

So Gareth all for glory underwent
The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage;
Ate with young lads his portion by the door,
And couch'd at night with grimy kitchen-knaves.
And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,
But Kay the seneschal, who loved him not,
Would hustle and harry him, and labour him
Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set
To turn the broach,[1] draw water, or hew wood,
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bow'd himself
With all obedience to the King, and wrought
All kind of service with a noble ease
That graced the lowliest act in doing it.
And when the thralls had talk among themselves,
And one would praise the love that linkt the King
And Lancelot — how the King had saved his life
In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's —
For Lancelot was the first in Tournament,
But Arthur mightiest on the battle-field —
Gareth was glad. Or if some other told,
How once the wandering forester at dawn,
Far over the blue tarns[2] and hazy seas,
On Caer-Eryri's highest found the King,
A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,

[1] Spit, for roasting meats. [2] Small mountain-lake.

'He passes to the Isle Avilion,
He passes and is heal'd and cannot die'—
Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,
Then would he whistle rapid as any lark,
Or carol some old roundelay,[1] and so loud
That first they mock'd, but, after, reverenced him.
Or Gareth telling some prodigious tale
Of knights, who sliced a red life-bubbling way
Thro' twenty folds of twisted dragon, held
All in a gap-mouth'd circle his good mates
Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,
Charm'd; till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come
Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind
Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart.
Or when the thralls had sport among themselves,
So there were any trial of mastery,
He, by two yards in casting bar or stone
Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust,
So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go,
Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights
Clash like the coming and retiring wave,
And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy
Was half beyond himself for ecstasy.

So for a month he wrought among the thralls;
But in the weeks that follow'd, the good Queen,[2]
Repentant of the word she made him swear,
And saddening in her childless castle, sent,

[1] Simple melody. [2] Bellicent.

Between the in-crescent[1] and de-crescent[2] moon,
Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow.

This, Gareth hearing from a squire[3] of Lot
With whom he used to play at tourney once,
When both were children, and in lonely haunts
Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand,
And each at either dash from either end —
Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.
He laugh'd; he sprang. 'Out of the smoke, at once
I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee[4] —
These news be mine, none other's — nay, the King's —
Descend into the city:' whereon he sought
The King alone, and found, and told him all.

'I have stagger'd thy strong Gawain in a tilt
For pastime; yea, he said it: joust can I.
Make me thy knight — in secret! let my name
Be hidd'n, and give me the first quest,[5] I spring
Like flame from ashes.'

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

[1] Young. [2] Old. [3] A knight's attendant, armour-bearer.
[4] From hell to heaven.
[5] The act of seeking: a commission to go out on a certain errand for the king.

Make thee my knight? my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King.'

Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees,
'My King, for hardihood I can promise thee.
For uttermost obedience make demand
Of whom ye gave me to, the Seneschal,
No mellow master of the meats and drinks!
And as for love, God wot,[1] I love not yet,
But love I shall, God willing.'

And the King—
'Make thee my knight in secret? yea, but he,
Our noblest brother, and our truest man,
And one with me in all, he needs must know.'

'Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know,
Thy noblest and thy truest!'

And the King—
'But wherefore would ye men should wonder at you?
Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,
And the deed's sake my knighthood do the deed,
Than to be noised of.'

Merrily Gareth ask'd,
'Have I not earn'd my cake in baking of it?
Let be my name until I make my name!
My deeds will speak: it is but for a day.'

[1] Knows.

So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm
Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly
Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.
Then, after summoning Lancelot privily,
'I have given him the first quest: he is not proven.
Look therefore when he calls for this in hall,
Thou get to horse and follow him far away.
Cover the lions on thy shield, and see
Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain.'

Then that same day there past into the hall
A damsel of high lineage, and a brow
May-blossom,[1] and a cheek of apple-blossom,
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower;
She into hall past with her page and cried,

'O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,
See to the foe within! bridge, ford, beset
By bandits, everyone that owns a tower
The Lord for half a league. Why sit ye there?
Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,
Till ev'n the lonest hold[2] were all as free
From cursed bloodshed, as thine altar-cloth
From that best blood[3] it is a sin to spill.'

'Comfort thyself,' said Arthur, 'I nor mine
Rest: so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,

[1] White as hawthorn flowers. [2] Dwelling.
[3] The wine of the sacrament.

The wastest moorland of our realm shall be
Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall.
What is thy name? thy need?'

'My name?' she said —
'Lynette my name; noble; my need, a knight,
To combat for my sister, Lyonors,
A lady of high lineage, of great lands,
And comely, yea, and comelier than myself.
She lives in Castle Perilous: a river
Runs in three loops about her living place;
And o'er it are three passings, and three knights
Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth
And of that four the mightiest, holds her stayed[1]
In her own castle, and so besieges her
To break her will, and make her wed with him:
And but delays his purport till thou send
To do the battle with him, thy chief man
Sir Lancelot whom he trusts to overthrow,
Then wed, with glory: but she will not wed
Save whom she loveth, or a holy life.[2]
Now therefore have I come for Lancelot.'

Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth ask'd,
'Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush
All wrongers of the Realm. But say, these four,
Who be they? What the fashion of the men?'

[1] Imprisoned. [2] The life of a nun.

'They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King,
The fashion of that old knight-errantry
Who ride abroad, and do but what they will;
Courteous or bestial from the moment, such
As have nor law nor king; and three of these
Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day,
Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,
Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise
The fourth, who always rideth arm'd in black,
A huge man-beast of boundless savagery.
He names himself the Night and oftener Death,
And wears a helmet mounted with a skull,
And bears a skeleton figured on his arms,
To show that who may slay or scape the three,
Slain by himself, shall enter endless night.
And all these four be fools, but mighty men,
And therefore am I come for Lancelot.'

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

But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath
Slew the May-white:[1] she lifted either arm,
'Fie on thee, King! I ask'd for thy chief knight,
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave.'
Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turn'd,
Fled down the lane of access to the King,
Took horse, descended the slope street, and past
The weird white gate, and paused without, beside
The field of tourney, murmuring 'kitchen-knave.'

Now two great entries open'd from the hall,
At one end one that gave upon a range
Of level pavement where the King would pace
At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood;
And down from this a lordly stairway sloped
Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers;
And out by this main doorway past the King.
But one was counter[2] to the hearth, and rose
High that the highest-crested helm could ride
Therethro' nor graze: and by this entry fled
The damsel in her wrath, and on to this
Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door
King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,
A warhorse of the best, and near it stood
The two that out of north had follow'd him:
This bare a maiden[3] shield, a casque;[4] that held
The horse, the spear; whereat Sir Gareth loosed
A cloak that dropt from collar-bone to heel,

[1] She blushed with anger. [2] Opposite. [3] Blank. [4] Helmet.

A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,
And from it like a fuel-smother'd fire,
That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flash'd as those
Dull-coated things,[1] that making slide apart
Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns
A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly.
So Gareth ere he parted flash'd in arms.
Then as he donn'd[2] the helm, and took the shield
And mounted horse and graspt a spear, of grain[3]
Storm-strengthen'd on a windy site, and tipt
With trenchant steel, around him slowly prest
The people, while from out of kitchen came
The thralls in throng, and seeing who had work'd
Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,
Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,
'God bless the King, and all his fellowship!'
And on thro' lanes of shouting Gareth rode
Down the slope street, and past without the gate.

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

'Bound upon a quest
With horse and arms — the King hath past his time —

[1] Beetles. [2] Put on. [3] The fibre of the wood.

My scullion knave! Thralls to your work again,
For an your fire be low ye kindle mine!
Will there be dawn in West and eve in East?
Begone! — my knave! — belike and like enow
Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth
So shook his wits they wander in his prime —
Crazed! How the villain lifted up his voice,
Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave.
Tut: he was tame and meek enow with me,
Till peacock'd [1] up with Lancelot's noticing.
Well — I will after my loud knave, and learn
Whether he know me for his master yet.
Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance
Hold, by God's grace, he shall into the mire —
Thence, if the King awaken from his craze,
Into the smoke again.'

But Lancelot said,
'Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King,
For that did never he whereon ye rail,
But ever meekly served the King in thee?
Abide: take counsel; for this lad is great
And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword.'
'Tut, tell not me,' said Kay, 'ye are overfine
To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies:'
Then mounted, on thro' silent faces rode
Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate.

[1] Made vain.

But by the field of tourney lingering yet
Mutter'd the damsel, 'Wherefore did the King
Scorn me? for, were Sir Lancelot lackt, at least
He might have yielded to me one of those
Who tilt for lady's love and glory here,
Rather than — O sweet heaven! O fie upon him —
His kitchen-knave.'

To whom Sir Gareth drew
(And there were none but few[1] goodlier than he)
Shining in arms, 'Damsel, the quest is mine.
Lead, and I follow.' She thereat, as one
That smells a foul-flesh'd agaric[2] in the holt,[3]
And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,
Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose
With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, 'Hence!
Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease.
And look who comes behind,' for there was Kay.
'Knowest thou not me? thy master? I am Kay.
We lack thee by the hearth.'

And Gareth to him,
'Master no more! too well I know thee, ay —
The most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall.'
'Have at thee then,' said Kay: they shock'd[4] and Kay
Fell shoulder-slipt,[5] and Gareth cried again,
'Lead, and I follow,' and fast away she fled.

[1] Only a few. [2] Toad-stool. [3] Woods.
[4] Rushed against each other. [5] Shoulder out of joint.

But after sod and shingle[1] ceased to fly
Behind her, and the heart of her good horse
Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,
Perforce she stay'd, and overtaken spoke.

'What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?
Deem'st thou that I accept thee aught the more
Or love thee better, that by some device
Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness,
Thou has overthrown and slain thy master — thou! —
Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon![2] — to me
Thou smellest all of kitchen as before.'

'Damsel,' Sir Gareth answer'd gently, 'say
Whate'er ye will, but whatsoe'er ye say,
I leave not till I finish this fair quest,
Or die therefore.'

'Ay, wilt thou finish it?
Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks!
The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it.
But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave,
And then by such a one that thou for all
The kitchen brewis that was ever supt
Shalt not once dare to look him in the face.'

'I shall assay,'[3] said Gareth with a smile
That madden'd her, and away she flash'd again
Down the long avenues of a boundless wood,
And Gareth following was again beknæved.

[1] Coarse gravel. [2] Stupid person. [3] Try.

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

So till the dusk that follow'd even-song[1]
Rode on the two, reviler and reviled;
Then after one long slope was mounted, saw,
Bowl-shaped, thro' tops of many thousand pines
A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink
To westward — in the deeps whereof a mere,[2]
Round as the red eye of an Eagle-owl,[3]
Under the half-dead sunset glared; and shouts
Ascended, and there brake a serving man
Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,
'They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere.'
Then Gareth, 'Bound am I to right the wrong'd,
But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee.'
And when the damsel spake contemptuously,
'Lead, and I follow,' Gareth cried again,
'Follow, I lead!' so down among the pines
He plunged; and there, blackshadow'd nigh the mere,
And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed,
Saw six tall men haling a seventh along,
A stone about his neck to drown him in it.

[1] The time for evening service. [2] Pond or lake.
[3] Great horned owl, *Bubo maximus.*

Three with good blows he quieted, but three,
Fled thro' the pines; and Gareth loosed the stone
From off his neck, then in the mere beside
Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.
Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet
Set him, a stalwart Baron, Arthur's friend.

'Well that ye came, or else these caitiff[1] rogues
Had wreak'd themselves on me; good cause is theirs
To hate me, for my wont[2] hath ever been
To catch my thief, and then like vermin here
Drown him, and with a stone about his neck,
And under this wan water many of them
Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone,
And rise, and flickering in a grimly[3] light
Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life
Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood.
And fain would I reward thee worshipfully.
What guerdon[4] will ye?'

Gareth sharply spake,
'None! for the deed's sake have I done the deed,
In uttermost obedience to the King.
But wilt thou yield this damsel harbourage?'[5]

Whereat the Baron saying, 'I well believe
You be of Arthur's Table,' a light laugh
Broke from Lynette, 'Ay, truly of a truth,

[1] Cowardly and wicked. [2] Custom.
[3] Hideous. [4] Reward. [5] Shelter.

And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave! —
But deem not I accept thee aught the more,
Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit
Down on a rout of craven foresters.
A thresher with his flail had scatter'd them.
Nay — for thou smellest of the kitchen still.
But an this lord will yield us harbourage, well.'

So she spake. A league beyond the wood,
All in a full-fair manor[1] and a rich,
His towers where that day a feast had been
Held in high hall, and many a viand[2] left,
And many a costly cate,[3] received the three.
And there they placed a peacock in his pride
Before the damsel, and the Baron set
Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.

'Meseems, that here is much discourtesy,
Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.
Hear me — this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,
And pray'd the King would grant me Lancelot
To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night —
The last a monster unsubduable
Of any save of him for whom I call'd —
Suddenly bawls this frontless[4] kitchen-knave,
" The quest is mine; thy kitchen-knave am I,

[1] Landed estate of a noble. [2] Provision, especially meat.
[3] Delicate food. [4] Bold, shameless.

And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I."
Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,
"Go therefore," and so gives the quest to him —
Him — here — a villain fitter to stick swine
Than ride abroad redressing woman's wrong,
Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman.'

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

'Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave, or not,
Or whether it be the maiden's fantasy,
And whether she be mad, or else the King,
Or both or neither, or thyself be mad,
I ask not: but thou strikest a strong stroke,
For strong thou art and goodly therewithal,
And saver of my life; and therefore now,
For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh
Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back
To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.
Thy pardon; I but speak for thine avail,
The saver of my life.'

And Gareth said,
'Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,
Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell.'

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

'I fly no more: I allow thee for an hour.
Lion and stoat [1] have isled together, knave,
In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks
Some ruth [2] is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool?
For hard by here is one will overthrow
And slay thee: then will I to court again,
And shame the King for only yielding me
My champion from the ashes of his hearth.'

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd courteously,
'Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.
Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find
My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay
Among the ashes and wedded the King's son.' [3]

Then to the shore of one of those long loops
Wherethro' the serpent river coil'd, they came.
Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep; the stream
Full, narrow; this a bridge of single arc
Took at a leap; and on the further side
Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold
In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily [4] in hue,
Save that the dome was purple, and above,

[1] Ermine. [2] Pity. [3] Cinderella. [4] Daffodil.

Crimson, a slender banneret[1] fluttering.
And therebefore the lawless warrior paced
Unarm'd, and calling, 'Damsel, is this he,
The champion thou hast brought from Arthur's hall?
For whom we let thee pass.' 'Nay, nay,' she said,
'Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn
Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here
His kitchen-knave: and look thou to thyself:
See that he fall not on thee suddenly,
And slay thee unarm'd: he is not knight but knave.'

Then at his call, 'O daughters of the Dawn,
And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,
Arm me,' from out the silken curtain-folds
Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls
In gilt and rosy raiment came: their feet
In dewy grasses glisten'd; and the hair
All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem
Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.[2]
These arm'd him in blue arms, and gave a shield
Blue also, and thereon the morning star.
And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,
Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,
Glorying; and in the stream beneath him, shone
Immingled with Heaven's azure waveringly,
The gay pavilion and the naked feet,
His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

[1] A small banner, borne by knights of a certain rank.
[2] Quartz with flakes of mica in it.

Then she that watch'd him, 'Wherefore stare ye so?
Thou shakest in thy fear: there yet is time:
Flee down the valley before he get to horse.
Who will cry shame? Thou art not knight but knave.'

Said Gareth, 'Damsel, whether knave or knight,
Far liefer had I fight a score of times
Then hear thee so missay me and revile.
Fair words were best for him who fights for thee;
But truly foul are better, for they send
That strength of anger thro' mine arms, I know
That I shall overthrow him.'

And he that bore
The star, then mounted, cried from o'er the bridge,
'A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me!
Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn.
For this were shame to do him further wrong
Than set him on his feet, and take his horse
And arms, and so return him to the King.
Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave.
Avoid:[1] for it beseemeth not a knave
To ride with such a lady.'

'Dog, thou liest.
I spring from loftier lineage than thine own.'
He spake; and all at fiery speed the two

[1] Go away, or dismount.

Shock'd on the central bridge, and either spear
Bent but not brake, and either knight at once,
Hurl'd as a stone from out of a catapult[1]
Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,
Fell, as if dead; but quickly rose and drew,
And Gareth lash'd so fiercely with his brand
He drave his enemy backward down the bridge,
The damsel crying, 'Well-stricken, kitchen-knave!'
Till Gareth's shield was cloven; but one stroke
Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground.

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

[1] Ancient engine of war, used for throwing stones.

And fast away she fled.
Then when he came upon her, spake, 'Methought,
Knave, when I watch'd thee striking on the bridge
The savour of thy kitchen came upon me
A little faintlier: but the wind hath changed:
I scent it twenty-fold.' And then she sang,
'"O morning star" (not that tall felon there
Whom thou by sorcery or unhappiness[1]
Or some device, hast foully[2] overthrown),
"O morning star that smilest in the blue,
O star, my morning dream hath proven true,
Smile sweetly, thou! my love hath smiled on me."

'But thou begone, take counsel, and away,
For hard by here is one that guards a ford —
The second brother in their fool's parable —
Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot.
Care not for shame: thou art not knight but knave.'

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd laughingly,
'Parables? Hear a parable of the knave.
When I was kitchen-knave among the rest
Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates
Own'd a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,
"Guard it," and there was none to meddle with it.
And such a coat art thou, and thee the King
Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I,
To worry, and not to flee — and — knight or knave —
The knave that doth thee service as full knight

[1] Mishap. [2] Unfairly.

Is all as good, meseems, as any knight
Toward thy sister's freeing.'

'Ay, Sir Knave!
Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight,
Being but knave, I hate thee all the more.'

'Fair damsel, you should worship[1] me the more,
That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies.'

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

So when they touch'd the second river-loop,
Huge on a huge red horse, and all in mail
Burnish'd to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun
Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower,[2]
That blows a globe of after arrowlets,
Ten thousand-fold had grown, flash'd the fierce shield,
All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots
Before them when he turn'd from watching him.
He from beyond the roaring shallow roar'd,
'What doest thou, brother, in my marches[3] here?'
And she athwart the shallow thrill'd again,
'Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall
Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms.'
'Ugh!' cried the Sun, and vizoring[4] up a red
And cipher face of rounded foolishness,

[1] Honour. [2] Dandelion. [3] Boundaries of land.
[4] Closing the front part of the helmet.

Push'd horse across the foamings of the ford,
Whom Gareth met midstream: no room was there
For lance or tourney-skill: four strokes they struck
With sword, and these were mighty; the new knight
Had fear he might be shamed; but as the Sun
Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,
The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream
Descended, and the Sun was wash'd away.

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford;
So drew him home; but he that fought no more,
As being all bone-batter'd on the rock,
Yielded; and Gareth sent him to the King.
'Myself when I return will plead for thee.'
'Lead, and I follow.' Quietly she led.
'Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again?'
'Nay, not a point: nor art thou victor here.
There lies a ridge of slate across the ford;
His horse thereon stumbled — ay, for I saw it.

'"O Sun" (not this strong fool whom thou, Sir Knave,
Hast overthrown thro' mere unhappiness),
"O Sun, that wakenest all to bliss or pain,
O moon, that layest all to sleep again,
Shine sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."

'What knowest thou of lovesong or of love?
Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,
Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance, —

'"O dewy flowers that open to the sun,
O dewy flowers that close when day is done,
Blow sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."

'What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike,
To garnish meats with? hath not our good King
Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom,
A foolish love for flowers? what stick ye round
The pasty? wherewithal deck the boar's head?
Flowers? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay.

'"O birds, that warble to the morning sky,
O birds that warble as the day goes by,
Sing sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me."

'What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis,[1] merle,[2]
Linnet? what dream ye when they utter forth
May-music growing with the growing light,
Their sweet sun-worship? these be for the snare
(So runs thy fancy), these be for the spit,
Larding and basting. See thou have not now
Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly.
There stands the third fool of their allegory.'

For there beyond a bridge of treble bow,
All in a rose-red from the west, and all
Naked it seem'd, and glowing in the broad
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight,
That named himself the Star of Evening, stood.

[1] Song-thrush. [2] Blackbird.

And Gareth, 'Wherefore waits the madman there
Naked in open dayshine?' 'Nay,' she cried,
'Not naked, only wrapt in harden'd skins
That fit him like his own; and so ye cleave
His armour off him, these will turn the blade.'

Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge,
'O brother-star, why shine ye here so low?
Thy ward is higher up: but have ye slain
The damsel's champion?' and the damsel cried,

'No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven
With all disaster unto thine and thee!
For both thy younger brethren have gone down
Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star;
Art thou not old?'

'Old, damsel, old and hard,
Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys.'
Saith Gareth, 'Old, and over-bold in brag!
But that same strength which threw the Morning Star
Can throw the Evening.'

Then that other blew
A hard and deadly note upon the horn.
'Approach and arm me!' With slow steps from out
An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stain'd
Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,
And arm'd him in old arms, and brought a helm
With but a drying evergreen for crest,

And gave a shield whereon the Star of Even
Half-tarnish'd and half-bright, his emblem, shone.
But when it glitter'd o'er the saddle-bow,
They madly hurl'd together on the bridge;
And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,
There met him drawn, and overthrew him again;
But up like fire he started: and as oft
As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,
So many a time he vaulted up again;
Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,
Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,
Labour'd within him, for he seem'd as one
That all in later, sadder age begins
To war against ill uses of a life,
But these from all his life arise, and cry,
'Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down!'
He half despairs; so Gareth seem'd to strike
Vainly, the damsel clamouring all the while,
'Well done, knave-knight, well stricken, O good knight-knave —
O knave, as noble as any of all the knights —
Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied —
Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round —
His arms are old, he trusts the harden'd skin —
Strike — strike — the wind will never change again.'
And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote,
And hew'd great pieces of his armour off him,
But lash'd in vain against the harden'd skin,
And could not wholly bring him under, more

Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,
The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs
For ever; till at length Sir Gareth's brand
Clash'd his, and brake it utterly to the hilt.
'I have thee now;' but forth that other sprang,
And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms
Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,
Strangled, but straining ev'n his uttermost
Cast, and so hurl'd him headlong o'er the bridge
Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,
'Lead, and I follow.'

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

'"O trefoil,[1] sparkling on the rainy plain,
O rainbow with three colours after rain,
Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me."

'Sir, — and, good faith, I fain had added — Knight,
But that I heard thee call thyself a knave, —
Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled,
Missaid thee; noble I am; and thought the King
Scorn'd me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,
For thou hast ever answer'd courteously,
And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal
As any of Arthur's best, but, being knave,
Hast mazed my wit: I marvel what thou art.'

[1] Three-leaved clover.

'Damsel,' he said, 'you be not all to blame,
Saving that you mistrusted our good King
Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one
Not fit to cope[1] your quest. You said your say;
Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold
He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet
To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets
His heart be stirr'd with any foolish heat
At any gentle damsel's waywardness.
Shamed! care not! thy foul sayings fought for me:
And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks
There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,
Hath force to quell me.'

Nigh upon that hour
When the lone hern[2] forgets his melancholy,
Lets down his other leg, and stretching, dreams
Of goodly supper in the distant pool,
Then turn'd the noble damsel smiling at him,
And told him of a cavern hard at hand,
Where bread and baken meats and good red wine
Of Southland, which the Lady Lyonors
Had sent her coming champion, waited him.

Anon they past a narrow comb[3] wherein
Were slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse
Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues.
'Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,

[1] Meet on equal terms. [2] Heron.
[3] Valley in a hill-side.

Whose holy hand hath fashion'd on the rock
The war of Time against the soul of man.
And yon four fools have suck'd their allegory
From these damp walls, and taken but the form.
Know ye not these?' and Gareth lookt and read—
In letters like to those the vexillary[1]
Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt[2]—
'PHOSPHORUS,' then 'MERIDIES'—'HESPERUS'—
'NOX'—'MORS,' beneath five figures, armed men,
Slab after slab, their faces forward all,
And running down the Soul, a Shape that fled
With broken wings, torn raiment and loose hair,
For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.
'Follow the faces, and we find it. Look,
Who comes behind!'

For one—delay'd at first
Thro' helping back the dislocated Kay
To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,
The damsel's headlong error[3] thro' the wood—
Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops—
His blue shield-lions cover'd—softly drew
Behind the twain, and when he saw the star
Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,
'Stay, felon[4] knight, I avenge me for my friend.'
And Gareth crying prick'd against the cry:

[1] Roman standard-bearer of a legion.
[2] A small river in Cumberland.
[3] Wandering. [4] Treacherous.

But when they closed — in a moment — at one touch
Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of the world —
Went sliding down so easily, and fell,
That when he found the grass within his hands
He laugh'd; the laughter jarr'd upon Lynette:
Harshly she ask'd him, 'Shamed and overthrown,
And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,
Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?'
'Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son
Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent,
And victor of the bridges and the ford,
And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom
I know not, all thro' mere unhappiness —
Device and sorcery and unhappiness —
Out, sword; we are thrown!' And Lancelot answer'd
'Prince,
O Gareth — thro' the mere unhappiness
Of one who came to help thee, not to harm,
Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole,
As on the day when Arthur knighted him.'

Then Gareth, 'Thou — Lancelot! — thine the hand
That threw me? And some chance to mar the boast
Thy brethren of thee make — which could not chance —
Had sent thee down before a lesser spear,
Shamed had I been, and sad — O Lancelot — thou!'

Whereat the maiden, petulant, 'Lancelot,
Why came ye not, when call'd? and wherefore now

Come ye, not call'd? I gloried in my knave,
Who being still rebuked, would answer still
Courteous as any knight — but now, if knight,
The marvel dies, and leaves me fool'd and tricked,
And only wondering wherefore play'd upon:
And doubtful whether I and mine be scorn'd.
Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall,
In Arthur's presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool,
I hate thee and for ever.'

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

And then when turning to Lynette he told
The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said,
'Ay well — ay well — for worse than being fool'd
Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave,

Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks
And forage for the horse, and flint for fire.
But all about it flies a honeysuckle.
Seek, till we find.' And when they sought and found,
Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life
Past into sleep; on whom the maiden gazed.
'Sound sleep be thine! sound cause to sleep hast thou.
Wake lusty! Seem I not as tender to him
As any mother? Ay, but such a one
As all day long hath rated at her child,
And vext his day, but blesses him asleep—
Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle
In the hush'd night, as if the world were one
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness!
O Lancelot, Lancelot'—and she clapt her hands—
'Full merry am I to find my goodly knave
Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I,
Else yon black felon had not let me pass,
To bring thee back to do the battle with him.
Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first;
Who doubts thee victor? so will my knight-knave
Miss the full flower of this accomplishment.'

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

And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutch'd the shield;
'Ramp[1] ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all spears
Are rotten sticks! ye seem agape to roar!
Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord!—
Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.
O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these
Streams virtue — fire — thro' one that will not shame
Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.
Hence: let us go.'

Silent the silent field
They traversed. Arthur's harp[2] tho' summer-wan,
In counter motion to the clouds, allured
The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege.
A star shot: 'Lo,' said Gareth, 'the foe falls!'
An owl whoopt: 'Hark the victor pealing there!'
Suddenly she that rode upon his left
Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying,
'Yield, yield him this again: 'tis he must fight:
I curse the tongue that all thro' yesterday
Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now
To lend thee horse and shield: wonders ye have done;
Miracles ye cannot: here is glory enow
In having flung the three: I see thee maim'd,
Mangled: I swear thou canst not fling the fourth.'

'And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know.
You cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice,

[1] Rear, stand on hind legs. [2] A constellation.

Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery
Appall me from the quest.'
'Nay, Prince,' she cried,
'God wot, I never look'd upon the face,
Seeing he never rides abroad by day;
But watch'd him have I like a phantom pass
Chilling the night: nor have I heard the voice.
Always he made his mouthpiece of a page
Who came and went, and still reported him
As closing in himself the strength of ten,
And when his anger tare him, massacring
Man, woman, lad and girl — yea, the soft babe!
Some hold that he hath swallow'd infant flesh,
Monster! O Prince, I went for Lancelot first,
The quest is Lancelot's: give him back the shield.'

Said Gareth laughing, 'An he fight for this,
Belike he wins it as the better man:
Thus — and not else!'
But Lancelot on him urged
All the devisings[1] of their chivalry
When one might meet a mightier than himself;
How best to manage horse, lance, sword and shield,
And so fill up the gap where force might fail
With skill and fineness. Instant[2] were his words.

Then Gareth, 'Here be rules. I know but one —
To dash against mine enemy and to win.

[1] Rules and tactics. [2] Pressing.

Yet have I watch'd thee victor in the joust,
And seen thy way.' 'Heaven help thee,' sigh'd Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud that grew
To thunder-gloom palling[1] all stars, they rode
In converse till she made her palfrey halt,
Lifted an arm, and softly whisper'd, 'There.'
And all the three were silent seeing, pitch'd
Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,
A huge pavilion like a mountain peak
Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge,
Black, with black banner, and a long black horn
Beside it hanging; which Sir Gareth graspt,
And so, before the two could hinder him,
Sent all his heart and breath thro' all the horn.
Echo'd the walls; a light twinkled; anon
Came lights and lights, and once again he blew;
Whereon were hollow tramplings up and down
And muffled voices heard, and shadows past;
Till high above him, circled with her maids,
The Lady Lyonors at a window stood,
Beautiful among lights, and waving to him
White hands, and courtesy; but when the Prince
Three times had blown — after long hush — at last —
The huge pavilion slowly yielded up,
Thro' those black foldings, that which housed therein.
High on a nightblack horse, in nightblack arms,

[1] Covering as with a pall.

With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,
And crown'd with fleshless laughter[1]—some ten steps—
In the half-light—thro' the dim dawn—advanced
The monster, and then paused, and spake no word.

But Gareth spake and all indignantly,
'Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,
Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,
But must, to make the terror of thee more,
Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries
Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,
Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers
As if for pity?' But he spake no word;
Which set the horror higher: a maiden swoon'd;
The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept,
As doom'd to be the bride of Night and Death;
Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm;
And ev'n Sir Lancelot thro' his warm blood felt
Ice strike, and all that mark'd him were aghast.

At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neigh'd,
And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with him.
Then those that did not blink[2] the terror, saw
That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.
But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.
Half fell to right and half to left and lay.
Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm
As throughly as the skull; and out from this

[1] A grinning skull above the helmet. [2] Shut their eyes to.

Issued the bright face of a blooming boy
Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying, 'Knight,
Slay me not: my three brethren bade me do it,
To make a horror all about the house,
And stay the world from Lady Lyonors.
They never dream'd the passes would be past.'
Answer'd Sir Gareth graciously to one
Not many a moon[1] his younger, 'My fair child,
What madness made thee challenge the chief knight
Of Arthur's hall?' 'Fair Sir, they bade me do it.
They hate the King, and Lancelot, the King's friend,
They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,
They never dream'd the passes could be past.'

Then sprang the happier day from underground;
And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance
And revel and song, made merry over Death,
As being after all their foolish fears
And horrors only proven a blooming boy.
So large mirth lived and Gareth won the quest.

And he[2] that told the tale in older times
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he,[3] that told it later, says Lynette.

[1] Month. [2] Malory. [3] Tennyson.

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

ELAINE the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred 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 [1] blazon'd on the shield
In their own tinct,[2] and added, of her wit,[3]
A border fantasy of branch and flower,
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.
Nor rested thus content, but day by day,
Leaving her household and good father, climb'd
That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door,
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,
Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,
Now made a pretty history to herself
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,
And every scratch a lance had made upon it,
Conjecturing when and where: this cut is fresh;
That ten years back; this dealt him at Caerlyle;

[1] Emblems. [2] Colour. [3] Fancy.

That at Caerleon; this at Camelot:
And ah God's mercy, what a stroke was there!
And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God
Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,
And saved him: so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield
Of Lancelot, she that knew not ev'n his name?
He left it with her, when he rode to tilt
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,
Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur, long before they crown'd him King,
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse,
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave
Like its own mists to all the mountain side:
For here two brothers, one a king, had met
And fought together; but their names were lost;
And each had slain his brother at a blow;
And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd:
And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,
And lichen'd [1] into colour with the crags:
And he, that once was king, had on a crown
Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside.[2]
And Arthur came, and labouring up the pass,
All in a misty moonshine, unawares

[1] Covered with lichens. [2] On each side.

Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull
Brake from the nape,[1] and from the skull the crown
Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn:
And down the shingly scaur[2] he plunged, and caught,
And set it on his head, and in his heart
Heard murmurs, 'Lo, thou likewise shalt be King.'

Thereafter, when a King, he had the gems
Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his knights,
Saying, 'These jewels, whereupon I chanced
Divinely,[3] are the kingdom's, not the King's —
For public use: henceforward let there be,
Once every year, a joust for one of these:
For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn
Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow
In use of arms and manhood, till we drive
The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land
Hereafter, which God hinder.' Thus he spoke:
And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still
Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,
With purpose to present them to the Queen,
When all were won; but meaning all at once
To snare her royal fancy with a boon
Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last
And largest, Arthur, holding then his court

[1] Top of the neck. [2] Steep cliff. [3] By Divine guidance.

Hard on the river nigh the place which now
Is this world's hugest,[1] let proclaim a joust
At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh
Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere,
'Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move
To these fair jousts?' 'Yea, lord,' she said, 'ye know it.'
'Then will ye miss,' he answer'd, 'the great deeds
Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,
A sight ye love to look on.' And the Queen
Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly
On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.
He thinking that he read her meaning there,
'Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more
Than many diamonds,' yielded; and a heart
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen
(However much he yearn'd to make complete
The tale[2] of diamonds for his destined boon)
Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,
'Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,
And lets[3] me from the saddle;' and the King
Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.
No sooner gone than suddenly she began:

'To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame!
Why go ye not to these fair jousts? the knights
Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd
Will murmur, "Lo, the shameless ones, who take

[1] London. [2] Full number. [3] Hinders.

Their pastime now the trustful King is gone!"'
Then Lancelot vext at having lied in vain:
'Are ye so wise? ye were not once so wise,
My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.
Then of the crowd ye took no more account
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,
Them surely can I silence with all ease.
But now my loyal worship is allow'd
Of all men: many a bard, without offence,
Has link'd our names together in his lay.
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,
The pearl of beauty: and our knights at feast
Have pledged us in this union, while the King
Would listen smiling. How then? is there more?
Has Arthur spoken aught? or would yourself,
Now weary of my service and devoir,[1]
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord?'

She broke into a little scornful laugh:
'Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord —
But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven?
He never spake word of reproach to me,
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,
He cares not for me: only here to-day
There gleam'd a vague suspicion in his eyes:

[1] Dutiful attentions.

Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him — else
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible,
To make them like himself: but, friend, to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all:
For who loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the colour: I am yours,
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond.
And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts:
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream
When sweetest; and the vermin voices here
May buzz so loud — we scorn them, but they sting.'

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

'Yea,' said the Queen,
'A moral child without the craft to rule,
Else had he not lost me: but listen to me,
If I must find you wit: we hear it said
That men go down before your spear at a touch,
But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name,
This conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown:
Win! by this kiss you will: and our true King
Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,
As all for glory; for to speak him true,

Ye know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,
No keener hunter after glory breathes.
He loves it in his knights more than himself:
They prove to him his work: win and return.'

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,
Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,
And there among the solitary downs,[1]
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;
Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,
That all in loops and links among the dales
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw
Fired from the west,[2] far on a hill, the towers.
Thither he made, and blew the gateway horn.
Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,
Who let him into lodging and disarm'd.
And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man;
And issuing found the Lord of Astolat
With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,
Moving to meet him in the castle court;
And close behind them stept the lily maid
Elaine, his daughter: mother of the house
There was not: some light jest among them rose
With laughter dying down as the great knight
Approach'd them: then the Lord of Astolat:

[1] Broad, bare hills, used for pasture.
[2] Reflecting sunset in the windows.

'Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name
Livest between the lips? for by thy state
And presence I might guess thee chief of those,
After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.
Him have I seen: the rest, his Table Round,
Known as they are, to me they are unknown.'

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

Then said the Lord of Astolat, 'Here is Torre's:
Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre.
And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.
His ye can have.' Then added plain Sir Torre,
'Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it.'
Here laugh'd the father saying, 'Fie, Sir Churl,
Is that an answer for a noble knight?
Allow[1] him! but Lavaine, my younger here,
He is so full of lustihood,[2] he will ride,
Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,
And set it in this damsel's golden hair,
To make her thrice as wilful as before.'

[1] Pardon. [2] Vigour, courage.

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

'So ye will grace[1] me,' answer'd Lancelot,
Smiling a moment, 'with your fellowship
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend:
And you shall win this diamond, — as I hear
It is a fair large diamond, — if ye may,
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will.'
'A fair large diamond,' added plain Sir Torre,
'Such be for queens, and not for simple maids.'
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,

[1] Favour.

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

He spoke and ceased: the lily maid Elaine,
Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,
Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments.
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
In battle with the love he bare his lord,
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.
Another sinning on such heights with one,
The flower of all the west and all the world,
Had been the sleeker for it: but in him
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
And drove him into wastes and solitudes
For agony, who was yet a living soul.
Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man
That ever among ladies ate in hall,
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.
However marr'd, of more than twice her years,
Seam'd with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

Then the great knight, the darling of the court,
Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall
Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain
Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,
But kindly man moving among his kind:
Whom they with meats and vintage of their best
And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.
And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,
And ever well and readily answer'd he:
But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,
Suddenly speaking of the wordless man,
Heard from the Baron that, ten years before,
The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.
'He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design
Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd;
But I, my sons, and little daughter fled
From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods
By the great river in a boatman's hut.
Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke
The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill.'

'O there, great lord, doubtless,' Lavaine said, rapt[1]
By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth
Toward greatness in its elder, 'you have fought.
O tell us — for we live apart — you know
Of Arthur's glorious wars.' And Lancelot spoke
And answer'd him at full, as having been
With Arthur in the fight which all day long

[1] Carried away.

Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem;
And in the four loud battles by the shore
Of Duglas; that on Bassa; then the war
That 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[1] worn our Lady's Head,
Carv'd of one emerald centr'd in a sun
Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed;
And at Caerleon had he help'd his lord,
When the strong neighings of the wild white Horse
Set every gilded parapet shuddering;
And up in Agned-Cathregonion too,
And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit,
Where many a heathen fell; 'and on the mount
Of Badon I myself beheld the King
Charge at the head of all his Table Round,
And all his legions crying Christ and him,
And break them; and I saw him, after, stand
High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume
Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,
And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,
"They are broken, they are broken!" for the King,
However mild he seems at home, nor cares
For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts —
For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs
Saying, his knights are better men than he —
Yet in this heathen war the fire of God

[1] Breast-plate.

Fills him: I never saw his like: there lives
No greater leader.'

While he utter'd this,
Low to her own heart said the lily maid,
'Save your great self, fair lord;' and when he fell
From talk of war to traits of pleasantry—
Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind—
She still took note that when the living smile
Died from his lips, across him came a cloud
Of melancholy severe, from which again,
Whenever in her hovering to and fro
The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,
There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness
Of manners and of nature: and she thought
That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.
And all night long his face before her lived,
As when a painter, poring on a face,
Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
The shape and colour of a mind and life,
Lives for his children, ever at its best
And fullest; so the face before her lived,
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.
Till rathe[1] she rose, half-cheated in the thought
She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.
First as in fear, step after step, she stole

[1] Early.

Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating:
Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,
'This shield, my friend, where is it?' and Lavaine
Past inward, as she came from out the tower.
There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and smooth'd
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew
Nearer and stood. He look'd, and more amazed
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
The maiden standing in the dewy light.
He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood
Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.
Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire,
That he should wear her favour at the tilt.
She braved a riotous[1] heart in asking for it.
'Fair lord, whose name I know not — noble it is,
I well believe, the noblest — will you wear
My favour at this tourney?' 'Nay,' said he,
'Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
Favour of any lady in the lists.[2]
Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know.'
'Yea, so,' she answer'd; 'then in wearing mine
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,
That those who know should know you.' And he turn'd

[1] Fast-beating.
[2] Barriers enclosing a jousting-field.

Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true, and answer'd, 'True, my child.
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:
What is it?' and she told him 'A red sleeve
Broider'd with pearls,' and brought it: then he bound
Her token on his helmet, with a smile
Saying, 'I never yet have done so much
For any maiden living,' and the blood
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight;
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine
Returning brought the yet-unblazon'd shield,
His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine:
'Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield
In keeping till I come.' 'A grace to me,'
She answer'd, 'twice to-day. I am your squire!'
Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, 'Lily maid,
For fear our people call you lily maid
In earnest, let me bring your colour back;
Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed:'
So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,
And thus they moved away: she stay'd a minute,
Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there—
Her bright hair blown about the serious face
Yet rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss—
Paused by the gateway, standing near the shield
In silence, while she watch'd their arms far-off
Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.

Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,
There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away
Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,
To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight
Not far from Camelot, now for forty years
A hermit, who had pray'd, labour'd and pray'd,
And ever labouring had scoop'd himself
In the white rock a chapel and a hall
On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,
And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry;
The green light from the meadows underneath
Struck up and lived along the milky roofs;
And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees
And poplars made a noise of falling showers.
And thither wending there that night they bode.

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

The dread Pendragon,[1] Britain's King of kings,
Of whom the people talk mysteriously,
He will be there — then were I stricken blind
That minute, I might say that I had seen.'

So spake Lavaine, and when they reach'd the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes
Run thro' the peopled[2] gallery which half round
Lay like a rainbow fall'n upon the grass,
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat
Robed in red samite,[3] easily to be known,
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,
And from the carven-work behind him crept
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found
The new design wherein they lost themselves,
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work:
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.

Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said,
'Me you call great: mine is the firmer seat,
The truer lance: but there is many a youth
Now crescent,[4] who will come to all I am

[1] Chief.
[2] Crowded.
[3] Rich silk, woven of six threads.
[4] Growing.

And overcome it; and in me there dwells
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
Of greatness to know well I am not great:
There is the man.' And Lavaine gaped[1] upon him
As on a thing miraculous, and anon
The trumpets blew; and then did either side,
They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,
Set lance in rest,[2] strike spur, suddenly move,
Meet in the midst, and there so furiously
Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,
If any man that day were left afield,[3]
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.
And Lancelot bode[4] a little, till he saw
Which were the weaker; then he hurl'd into it
Against the stronger: little need to speak
Of Lancelot in his glory! King, duke, earl,
Count, baron — whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith[5] and kin,[6]
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight
Should do and almost overdo the deeds
Of Lancelot; and one said to the other, 'Lo!
What is he? I do not mean the force alone —
The grace and versatility of the man!

[1] Stared with open mouth.
[2] Support, used to hold the lance in fighting.
[3] *I.e.* at home, in his fields.
[4] Waited.
[5] Friends.
[6] Relations.

Is it not Lancelot?' 'When has Lancelot worn
Favour of any lady in the lists?
Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know.'
'How then? who then?' a fury seized them all,
A fiery family passion for the name
Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.
They couch'd[1] their spears and prick'd[2] their steeds, and thus,
Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made
In moving, all together down upon him
Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,
And him that helms[3] it, so they overbore
Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear
Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear
Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head
Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt, and remain'd.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully[4];
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[5] while he might yet endure,
And being lustily holpen[6] by the rest,
His party, — tho' it seem'd half-miracle

[1] Lowered into the rest. [2] Spurred. [3] Steers.
[4] With honour. [5] Act while his strength lasted. [6] Helped.

To those he fought with, — drave his kith and kin,
And all the Table Round that held the lists,
Back to the barrier; then the trumpets blew
Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve
Of scarlet, and the pearls; and all the knights,
His party, cried, 'Advance and take thy prize
The diamond;' but he answer'd, 'Diamond me
No diamonds![1] for God's love, a little air!
Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!
Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not.'

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field
With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.
There from his charger[2] down he slid, and sat,
Gasping to Sir Lavaine, 'Draw the lance-head:'
'Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot,' said Lavaine,
'I dread me, if I draw it, you will die.'
But he, 'I die already with it: draw —
Draw,' — and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave
A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,
And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank
For the pure[3] pain, and wholly swoon'd away.
Then came the hermit out and bare him in,
There stanch'd his wound; and there, in daily doubt
Whether to live or die, for many a week
Hid from the wide world's rumour by the grove
Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,
And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

[1] Talk not of diamonds. [2] War-horse. [3] Mere.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,
His party, knights of utmost North and West,
Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles,
Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,
'Lo, Sire, our knight, thro' whom we won the day,
Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize
Untaken, crying that his prize is death.'
'Heaven hinder,' said the King, 'that such an one,
So great a knight as we have seen to-day—
He seem'd to me another Lancelot—
Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot—
He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore, rise,
O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight.
Wounded and wearied needs must he be near.
I charge you that you get at once to horse.
And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you
Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given:
His prowess[1] was too wondrous. We will do him
No customary honour: since the knight
Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,
Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take
This diamond, and deliver it, and return,
And bring us[2] where he is, and how he fares,
And cease not from your quest until ye find.'

So saying, from the carven flower above,
To which it made a restless heart, he took,
And gave, the diamond: then from where he sat,

[1] Bravery and force. [2] Bring us news.

At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,
With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince
In the mid might and flourish of his May,[1]
Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint,
And Gareth, a good knight, but therewithal
Sir Modred's brother, and the child of Lot,
Nor often loyal to his word, and now
Wroth that the King's command to sally forth
In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave
The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings.

So all in wrath he got to horse and went;
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,
Past, thinking, 'Is it Lancelot who hath come
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain
Of glory, and hath added wound to wound,
And ridd'n away to die?' So fear'd the King,
And, after two days' tarriance[2] there, return'd.
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,
'Love, are you yet so sick?' 'Nay, lord,' she said.
'And where is Lancelot?' Then the Queen amazed,
'Was he not with you? won he not your prize?'
'Nay, but one like him.' 'Why that like was he.'
And when the King demanded how she knew,
Said, 'Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk
That men went down before his spear at a touch,

[1] Youthful beauty. [2] Delay.

But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name
Conquer'd; and therefore would he hide his name
From all men, ev'n the King, and to this end
Had made the pretext of a hindering wound,
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn
If his old prowess were in aught decay'd;
And added, "Our true Arthur, when he learns,
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain
Of purer glory."'

Then replied the King: —
'Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.
Surely his King and most familiar friend
Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed,
Albeit[1] I know my knights fantastical,[2]
So fine[3] a fear in our large Lancelot
Must needs have moved my laughter: now remains
But little cause for laughter: his own kin —
Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, this! —
His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him;
So that he went sore wounded from the field:
Yet good news too: for goodly hopes are mine
That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.
He wore, against his wont, upon his helm
A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,
Some gentle maiden's gift.'

[1] Although. [2] Full of fancies. [3] Over-sensitive.

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

Gawain the while thro' all the region round
Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,
Touch'd at all points, except the poplar grove,
And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat:
Whom glittering in enamell'd arms the maid
Glanced at, and cried, 'What news from Camelot, lord?
What of the knight with the red sleeve?' 'He won.'
'I knew it,' she said. 'But parted from the jousts
Hurt in the side,' whereat she caught her breath;
Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go;
Thereon she smote her hand: wellnigh she swoon'd:
And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came
The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince
Reported who he was, and on what quest
Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find
The victor, but had ridd'n a random[1] round
To seek him, and had wearied of the search.
To whom the Lord of Astolat, 'Bide with us,

[1] Aimless.

And ride no more at random, noble Prince!
Here was the knight, and here he left a shield;
This will he send or come for: furthermore
Our son is with him; we shall hear anon,
Needs must we hear.' To this the courteous Prince
Accorded with his wonted courtesy,
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,
And stay'd; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine:
Where could be found face daintier? then her shape
From forehead down to foot, perfect — again
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd:
'Well — if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!'
And oft they met among the garden yews,
And there he set himself to play upon her
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence
And amorous adulation, till the maid
Rebell'd against it, saying to him, 'Prince,
O loyal nephew of our noble King,
Why ask you not to see the shield he left,
Whence you might learn his name? Why slight your King,
And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove
No surer than our falcon yesterday,
Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went
To all the winds?'[1] '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;

[1] Did not return.

But an ye will it let me see the shield.'
And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,
Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd:
'Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true man!'
'And right was I,' she answer'd merrily, 'I,
Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all.'
'And if *I* dream'd,' said Gawain, 'that you love
This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, ye know it!
Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?'
Full simple was her answer, 'What know I?
My brethren have been all my fellowship;
And I, when often they have talk'd of love,
Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd,
Meseem'd, of what they knew not; so myself—
I know not if I know what true love is,
But if I know, then, if I love not him,
I know there is none other I can love.'
'Yea, by God's death,'[1] said he, 'ye love him well,
But would not, knew ye what all others know,
And whom he loves.' 'So be it,' cried Elaine,
And lifted her fair face and moved away:
But he pursued her, calling, 'Stay a little!
One golden minute's grace! he wore your sleeve:
Would he break faith with one I may not name?
Must our true man change like a leaf at last?
Nay—like enow: why then, far be it from me
To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves!

[1] By the cross.

And, damsel, for I deem you know full well
Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave
My quest with you; the diamond also: here!
For if you love, it will be sweet to give it;
And if he love, it will be sweet to have it
From your own hand; and whether he love or not,
A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well
A thousand times! — a thousand times farewell!
Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two
May meet at court hereafter: there, I think,
So ye will learn the courtesies of the court,
We two shall know each other.'

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

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

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied,
'Too courteous truly! ye shall go no more

On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings.'

He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,
For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word,
Linger'd that other, staring after him;
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.
All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed:
'The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat.'
Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all
Had marvel what the maid might be, but most
Predoom'd[1] her as unworthy. One old dame
Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.
She, that had heard the noise of it before,
But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,
Marr'd her friend's aim[2] with pale tranquillity.
So ran the tale like fire about the court,
Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared:
Till ev'n the knights at banquet twice or thrice
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,
And pledging[3] Lancelot and the lily maid
Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat
With lips severely placid, felt the knot
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen
Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor

[1] Judged her before they knew her. [2] Purpose.
[3] Drinking a health.

Beneath the banquet, where the meats became
As wormwood,[1] and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat,
Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept
The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,
Crept to her father, while he mused alone,
Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,
'Father, you call me wilful, and the fault
Is yours who let me have my will, and now,
Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?'
'Nay,' said he, 'surely.' 'Wherefore, let me hence,'
She answer'd, 'and find out our dear Lavaine.'
'Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine:
Bide,' answer'd he: 'we needs must hear anon
Of him, and of that other.' 'Ay,' she said,
'And of that other, for I needs must hence
And find that other, wheresoe'er he be,
And with mine own hand give his diamond to him,
Lest I be found as faithless in the quest
As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me.
Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid.
The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,
My father, to be sweet and serviceable
To noble knights in sickness, as ye know
When these have worn their tokens: let me hence

[1] A bitter herb.

I pray you.' Then her father nodding said,
'Ay, ay, the diamond: wit[1] ye well, my child,
Right fain[2] were I to learn this knight were whole,[3]
Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it —
And sure I think this fruit is hung too high
For any mouth to gape for save a queen's —
Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,
Being so very wilful you must go.'

Lightly, her suit[4] allow'd, she slipt away,
And while she made her ready for her ride,
Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,
'Being so very wilful you must go,'
And changed itself and echo'd in her heart,
'Being so very wilful you must die.'
But she was happy enough and shook it off,
As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us;
And in her heart she answer'd it and said,
'What matter, so I help him back to life?'
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide
Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs
To Camelot, and before the city-gates
Came on her brother with a happy face
Making a roan[5] horse caper and curvet[6]
For pleasure all about a field of flowers:
Whom when she saw, 'Lavaine,' she cried, 'Lavaine,
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?' He amazed,

[1] Know. [2] Glad. [3] In health. [4] Request.
[5] Bay thickly interspersed with white. [6] Leap.

'Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot!
How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot?'
But when the maid had told him all her tale,
Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods
Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,
Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,
Past up the still rich city to his kin,
His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot;
And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove
Led to the caves: there first she saw the casque[1]
Of Lancelot on the wall: her scarlet sleeve,
Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
Stream'd from it still; and in her heart she laugh'd,
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.
And when they gain'd the cell wherein he slept,
His battle-writhen[2] arms and mighty hands
Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream
Of dragging down his enemy made them move.
Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn,
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.
The sound not wonted in a place so still
Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,
'Your prize the diamond sent you by the King:'
His eyes glisten'd: she fancied 'Is it for me?'
And when the maid had told him all the tale

[1] Helmet. [2] Twisted.

Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest
Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt
Full lowly by the corners of his bed,
And laid the diamond in his open hand.
Her face was near, and as we kiss the child
That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.
At once she slipt like water to the floor.
'Alas,' he said, 'your ride hath wearied you.
Rest must you have.' 'No rest for me,' she said;
'Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest.'
What might she mean by that? his large black eyes,
Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt upon her,
Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself
In the heart's colours on her simple face;
And Lancelot look'd and was perplext in mind,
And being weak in body said no more;
But did not love the colour; woman's love,
Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd
Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,
And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates
Far up the dim rich city to her kin;
There bode the night: but woke with dawn, and past
Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,
Thence to the cave: so day by day she past
In either twilight ghost-like to and fro
Gliding, and every day she tended him.

And likewise many a night: and Lancelot
Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times
Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem
Uncourteous, even he: but the meek maid
Sweetly forebore him ever, being to him
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,
Milder than any mother to a sick child,
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love
Upbore her; till the hermit, skill'd in all
The simples[1] and the science of that time,
Told him that her fine care had saved his life.
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,
Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,
Would listen for her coming and regret
Her parting step, and held her tenderly,
And loved her with all love except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death
In any knightly fashion for her sake.
And peradventure had he seen her first
She might have made this[2] and that other world[3]
Another world for the sick man; but now
The shackles of an old love straiten'd[4] him,
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

[1] Medicinal plants. [2] Earth. [3] Heaven.
[4] Held him fast.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made
Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.
These, as but born of sickness, could not live:
For when the blood ran lustier in him again,
Full often the bright image of one face,[1]
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.
Then if the maiden, while that ghostly[2] grace
Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well
What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant
She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,
And drave her ere her time across the fields
Far into the rich city, where alone
She murmur'd, 'Vain, in vain: it cannot be.
He will not love me: how then? must I die?'
Then as a little helpless innocent bird,
That has but one plain passage of few notes,
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
For all an April morning, till the ear
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid
Went half the night repeating, 'Must I die?'
And now to right she turn'd, and now to left,
And found no ease in turning or in rest;
And 'Him or death,' she mutter'd, 'death or him,'
Again and like a burthen, 'Him or death.'

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,

[1] Guinevere. [2] Spiritual, imaginary.

To Astolat returning rode the three.
There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self
In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought
'If I be loved, these are my festal robes,
If not, the victim's flowers before he fall.'
And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid
That she should ask some goodly gift of him
For her own self or hers; 'and do not shun
To speak the wish most near to your true heart;
Such service have ye done me, that I make
My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I
In mine own land, and while I will I can.'
Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,
But like a ghost without the power to speak.
And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,
And bode among them yet a little space
Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced
He found her in among the garden yews,
And said, 'Delay no longer, speak your wish,
Seeing I go to-day:' then out she brake:
'Going? and we shall never see you more.
And I must die for want of one bold word.'
'Speak: that I live to hear,' he said, 'is yours.'[1]
Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:
'I have gone mad. I love you: let me die.'
'Ah, sister,' answer'd Lancelot, 'what is this?'
And innocently extending her white arms,

[1] Your care has kept me alive to hear you.

'Your love,' she said, 'your love — to be your wife.'
And Lancelot answer'd, 'Had I chosen to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine:
But now there never will be wife of mine.'
'No, no,' she cried, 'I care not to be wife,
But to be with you still, to see your face,
To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world.'
And Lancelot answer'd, 'Nay, the world, the world,
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
To blare its own interpretation — nay,
Full ill then should I quit[1] your brother's love,
And your father's kindness.' And she said,
'Not to be with you, not to see your face —
Alas for me then, my good days are done.'
'Nay, noble maid,' he answer'd, 'ten times nay!
This is not love: but love's first flash in youth,
Most common: yea, I know it of mine own self:
And you yourself will smile at your own self
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age:
And then will I, for true you are and sweet
Beyond mine old belief in womanhood,
More specially should your good knight be poor,
Endow you with broad land and territory
Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,
So that would make you happy: furthermore,
Ev'n to the death, as tho' ye were my blood,[2]

[1] Reward. [2] Of my family.

In all your quarrels will I be your knight.
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,
And more than this I cannot.'

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

Then spake, to whom thro' those black walls of yew
Their talk had pierced, her father: 'Ay, a flash,
I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead.
Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.
I pray you, use some rough discourtesy
To blunt or break her passion.'

Lancelot said,
'That were against[1] me: what I can I will;'
And there that day remain'd, and toward even
Sent for his shield: full meekly rose the maid,
Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield;
Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,
Unclasping flung the casement back, and look'd
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound;
And she by tact[2] of love was well aware
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,

[1] Contrary to my nature. [2] Quick feeling or insight.

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 labour, left.
But still she heard him, still his picture form'd
And grew between her and the pictured wall.
Then came her father, saying in low tones,
'Have comfort,' whom she greeted quietly.
Then came her brethren saying, 'Peace to thee,
Sweet sister,' whom she answer'd with all calm.
But when they left her to herself again,
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd; the owls
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt
Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms [1]
Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

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

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

'Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

[1] Cloudy skies with yellow streaks of light between.

'Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die.'

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought
With shuddering, 'Hark the Phantom of the house
That ever shrieks before a death,' and call'd
The father, and all three in hurry and fear
Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn
Flared on her face, she shrilling, 'Let me die!'

As when we dwell upon a word we know,
Repeating, till the word we know so well
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,
So dwelt the father on her face, and thought
'Is this Elaine?' till back the maiden fell,
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.
At last she said, 'Sweet brothers, yesternight
I seem'd a curious[1] little maid again,
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,
And when ye used to take me with the flood
Up the great river in the boatman's boat.

[1] Inquisitive.

Only ye would not pass beyond the cape
That has the poplar on it: there ye fixt
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.
And yet I cried because ye would not pass
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood
Until we found the palace of the King.
And yet ye would not; but this night I dream'd
That I was all alone upon the flood,
And then I said, "Now shall I have my will:"
And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.
So let me hence that I may pass at last
Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,
Until I find the palace of the King.
There will I enter in among them all,
And no man there will dare to mock at me;
But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,
And there the great Sir Lancelot muse[1] at me;
Gawain, who bade a thousand farewells to me,
Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bade me one:
And there the King will know me and my love,
And there the Queen herself will pity me,
And all the gentle court will welcome me,
And after my long voyage I shall rest!'

'Peace,' said her father, 'O my child, ye seem
Light-headed, for what force[2] is yours to go
So far, being sick? and wherefore would ye look
On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all?'

[1] Wonder. [2] Strength.

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move,
And bluster into stormy sobs and say,
'I never loved him: an I meet with him,
I care not howsoever great he be,
Then will I strike at him and strike him down,
Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,
For this discomfort he hath done the house.'

To whom the gentle sister made reply,
'Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,
Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault
Not to love me, than it is mine to love
Him of all men who seems to me the highest.'

'Highest?' the father answer'd, echoing 'highest?'
(He meant to break the passion in her) 'nay,
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;
But this I know, for all the people know it,
He loves the Queen, and in an open shame:
And she returns his love in open shame;
If this be high, what is it to be low?'

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat:
'Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I
For anger: these are slanders: never yet
Was noble man but made ignoble talk.
He makes no friend who never made a foe.
But now it is my glory to have loved
One peerless,[1] without stain: so let me pass,

[1] Unequalled.

My father, howsoe'er I seem to you,
Not all unhappy, having loved God's best
And greatest, tho' my love had no return:
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,
Thanks, but you work against your own desire;
For if I could believe the things you say
I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease,
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly[1] man
Hither, and let me shrive[2] me clean, and die.'

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,
She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven,
Besought Lavaine to write as she devised
A letter, word for word; and when he ask'd
'Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord?
Then will I bear it gladly;' she replied,
'For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,
But I myself must bear it.' Then he wrote
The letter she devised; which being writ
And folded, 'O sweet father, tender and true,
Deny me not,' she said — 'ye never yet
Denied my fancies — this, however strange,
My latest: lay the letter in my hand
A little ere I die, and close the hand
Upon it; I shall guard it even in death.
And when the heat is gone from out my heart,
Then take the little bed on which I died

[1] Spiritual, the priest.
[2] Make confession and receive absolution.

For Lancelot's love, and deck[1] 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[2]
To take me to the river, and a barge
Be ready on the river, clothed in black.
I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.
There surely I shall speak for mine own self,
And none of you can speak for me so well.
And therefore let our dumb old man alone
Go with me, he can steer and row, and he
Will guide me to that palace, to the doors.'

She ceased: her father promised; whereupon
She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.
But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh
Her father laid the letter in her hand,
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.
So that day there was dole[3] in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground,
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows,
Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier
Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,
Pall'd[4] all its length in blackest samite, lay.
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,

[1] Adorn. [2] Funeral-carriage. [3] Grief. [4] Covered.

Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face,
So those two brethren from the chariot took
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung
The silken case with braided blazonings,
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her,
'Sister, farewell for ever,' and again
'Farewell, sweet sister,' parted all in tears.
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,
Oar'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood —
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter — all her bright hair streaming down —
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white
All but her face, and that clear-featured face
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,
With deaths of others, and almost his own,
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds: for he saw
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed
With such and so unmoved a majesty
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,

Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye
The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel[1] on the summer[2] side,
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,
They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd, 'Queen,
Lady, my liege,[3] in whom I have my joy,
Take, what I had not won except for you,
These jewels, and make me happy, making them
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
Is tawnier than her cygnet's[4]: these are words:
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words
Perchance, we both can pardon: but, my Queen,
I hear of rumours flying thro' your court.
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,
Should have in it an absoluter trust
To make up that defect: let rumours be:
When did not rumours fly? these, as I trust
That you trust me in your own nobleness,
I may not well believe that you believe.'

[1] A window built out from a wall, on a bracket.
[2] Southern. [3] Sovereign. [4] Young swan.

While thus he spoke, half-turn'd away, the Queen
Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine
Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,
Till all the place whereon she stood was green;
Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand
Received at once and laid aside the gems
There on a table near her, and replied:

'It may be, I am quicker of belief
Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.
Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.
This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill,
It can be broken easier. I for you
This many a year have done despite and wrong
To one whom ever in my heart of hearts
I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?
Diamonds for me! they had been thrice their worth
Being your gift, had you not lost your own.[1]
To loyal hearts the value of all gifts
Must vary as the giver's. Not for me!
For her! for your new fancy.[2] Only this
Grant me, I pray you: have your joys apart.[3]
I doubt not that however changed, you keep
So much of what is graceful: and myself
Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy
In which as Arthur's Queen I move and rule:
So cannot speak my mind. An end to this!

[1] Your own worth. [2] The lady of the red sleeve.
[3] Away from me.

A strange one! yet I take it with Amen.
So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls;
Deck her with these; tell her she shines me down:
An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's
Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck
O as much fairer — as a faith once fair
Was richer than these diamonds — hers not mine —
Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,
Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will —
She shall not have them.'

Saying which she seized,
And, thro' the casement[1] standing wide for heat,
Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the stream.
Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,
Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.
Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain
At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,
Close underneath his eyes, and right across
Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge
Whereon the lily maid of Astolat
Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away
To weep and wail in secret; and the barge,
On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.
There two stood arm'd, and kept the door; to whom,

[1] Window opening on a hinge.

All up the marble stair, tier over tier,
Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd
'What is it?' but that oarsman's haggard face,
As hard and still as is the face that men
Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks
On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said,
'He is enchanted, cannot speak — and she,
Look how she sleeps — the Fairy Queen, so fair!
Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and blood?
Or come to take the King to Fairyland?
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,
But that he passes into Fairyland.'

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
Came girt[1] with knights: then turn'd the tongueless man
From the half-face[2] to the full eye,[3] and rose
And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.
So Arthur bade the meek Sir Percivale
And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;
And reverently they bore her into hall.
Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,
And Lancelot later came and mused at her,
And last the Queen herself, and pitied her:
But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

'Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,

[1] Surrounded. [2] Profile. [3] Fronting them.

Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return,
And therefore my true love has been my death.
And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,
And to all other ladies, I make moan:
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
As thou art a knight peerless.'

Thus he read;
And ever in the reading, lords and dames
Wept, looking often from his face who read
To hers which lay so silent, and at times,
So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips,
Who had devised the letter, moved again.
Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all:
'My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,
Know that for this most gentle maiden's death
Right heavy am I; for good she was and true,
But loved me with a love beyond all love
In women, whomsoever I have known.
Yet to be loved makes not to love again;
Not at my years, however it hold in youth.
I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave
No cause, not willingly, for such a love:
To this I call my friends in testimony,
Her brethren, and her father, who himself
Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,

To break her passion, some discourtesy
Against my nature: what I could, I did.
I left her and I bade her no farewell;
Tho', had I dreamt the damsel would have died,
I might have put my wits to some rough use,
And help'd her from herself.'

Then said the Queen
(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm),
'Ye might at least have done her so much grace,
Fair lord, as would have help'd[1] her from her death.'
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,
He adding,
'Queen, she would not be content
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.
Then might she follow me thro' the world, she ask'd;
It could not be. I told her that her love
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame
Toward one more worthy of her — then would I,
More specially were he, she wedded, poor,
Estate[2] them with large land and territory
In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,[3]
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,

[1] Hindered. [2] Provide, endow. [3] The English Channel.

It will be to thy worship,[1] as my knight,
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,
To see that she be buried worshipfully.'

So toward that shrine[2] which then in all the realm
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went
The marshall'd Order of their Table Round,
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,
Not meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,
And mass, and rolling music, like a queen.
And when the knights had laid her comely head
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,
Then Arthur spake among them, 'Let her tomb
Be costly, and her image thereupon,
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.
And let the story of her dolorous voyage
For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb
In letters gold and azure[3] !' which was wrought
Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames
And people, from the high door streaming, brake
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,
Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,
Drew near, and sigh'd in passing, 'Lancelot,
Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love.'
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,
'That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven.'

[1] Honour. [2] Westminster. [3] Blue.

But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,
Approach'd him, and with full affection said,

'Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have
Most joy and most affiance,[1] for I know
What thou hast been in battle by my side,
And many a time have watch'd thee at the tilt
Strike down the lusty and long-practised knight,
And let the younger and unskill'd go by
To win his honour and to make his name,
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man
Made to be loved; but now I would to God,
Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,
Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems,
By God for thee alone, and from her face,
If one may judge the living by the dead,
Delicately pure and marvellously fair,
Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man
Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons
Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake.'

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

[1] Trust.

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

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,
And at the inrunning of a little brook
Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd
The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes
And saw the barge that brought her moving down,
Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said
Low in himself, 'Ah, simple heart and sweet,
Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love
Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?
Ay, that will I. Farewell too — now at last —
Farewell, fair lily. "Jealousy in love?"
Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?
Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,
May not your crescent fear for name and fame
Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes?
Why did the King dwell on my name to me?
Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake
Caught from his mother's arms — the wondrous one
Who passes thro' the vision of the night —
She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns

Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn
She kiss'd me saying, "Thou art fair, my child,
As a king's son," and often in her arms
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.
Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!
For what am I? what profits me my name
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?
To make men worse by making my sin known?
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break
These bonds that so defame me: not without
She[1] wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,
Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,
I pray him, send a sudden Angel down
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.'

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

[1] Guinevere.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

THAT story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
First made and latest left of all the knights,
Told, when the man was no more than a voice
In the white winter of his age, to those
With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
Heard in his tent the moanings of the King:

'I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I mark'd Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, and now I pass[1] and die.
O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?
Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
And have not power to see it as it is:

[1] Depart.

Perchance, because we see not to the close; —
For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain;
And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast,[1] and is no more.
My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death:
Nay — God my Christ — I pass but shall not die.'

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain kill'd
In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
Went shrilling,[2] 'Hollow, hollow all delight!
Hail, King! to-morrow thou shalt pass away.
Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
And I am blown along a wandering wind,
And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.'
And fainter onward, like wild birds that change
Their season[3] in the night and wail their way
From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream
Shrill'd; but in going mingled with dim cries
Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
As of some lonely city sack'd by night,
When all is lost, and wife and child with wail[4]
Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and call'd,
'Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,

[1] Sinks into wild disorder.
[2] Crying shrilly.
[3] Migrate.
[4] Cries of mourning.

Thine, Gawain, was the voice — are these dim cries
Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?'

This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake:
'O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
Elves,[1] and the harmless glamour of the field;
But in their stead thy name and glory cling
To all high places like a golden cloud
For ever: but as yet thou shalt not pass.
Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;
And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise —
I hear the steps of Modred in the west,
And with him many of thy people, and knights
Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.'

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'Far other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him thro' the north. Ill doom is mine
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.

[1] Fairies.

And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Thro' this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One[1] lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes[2] of the world.'

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever push'd Sir Modred, league by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse —
A land of old upheaven[3] from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast
Of ever-shifting[4] sand, and far away
The phantom circle[5] of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King;
And there, that day when the great light of heaven
Burn'd at his lowest[6] in the rolling year,
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea:
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold

[1] The Queen.
[2] Befogged the roads.
[3] By volcanic action.
[4] Quicksands.
[5] Distant horizon.
[6] December 22.

With formless fear; and ev'n on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle; and in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base,
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail[1] hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battleaxes on shatter'd helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
Of suffering, silence follows, or thro' death
Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew

[1] Armour.

The mist aside, and with that wind the tide
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field
Of battle: but no man was moving there;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen; only the wan wave
Brake in among dead faces, to and fro
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shiver'd brands that once had fought with Rome,
And rolling far along the gloomy shores
The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,
And whiter than the mist that all day long
Had held the field of battle was the King:

'Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as tho' they had not died for me?—
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fall'n
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King,
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.'

Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: 'My King,
King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as King.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live

Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred unharm'd, the traitor of thine house.'[1]

Then spake the King: 'My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house
Who hath but dwelt beneath one roof with me.
My house are rather they who sware my vows,
Yea, even while they brake them, own'd me King.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
When all the purport[2] of my throne hath fail'd,
That quick[3] or dead thou holdest me for King.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;
And one last act of knighthood shalt thou see
Yet, ere I pass.' And uttering this the King
Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege
Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,

[1] Family. [2] Aim of my kingship. [3] Living.

And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel[1] with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait[2] of barren land:
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water,[3] and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'The sequel of to-day unsolders[4] all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep — the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made, —
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more; but, let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword — and how I row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king;

[1] Part of chapel which contains the altar.
[2] Narrow strip. [3] Lake. [4] Dissolves.

And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere:
Watch what thou seëst, and lightly[1] bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
'It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm—
A little thing may harm a wounded man;
Yet I thy hest[2] will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long

[1] Quickly. [2] Command.

That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

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

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
'Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd[1]
Thy fëalty,[2] nor like a noble knight:
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
As thou art lief[3] and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,

[1] Befitted. [2] Loyalty. [3] Beloved.

Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased,[1] he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud:

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?
What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumours of a doubt? But were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honour and much fame were lost.'

[1] Engraved.

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,[1]
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged

[1] Notion.

Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd[1] and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,[2]
Seen where the moving isles[3] of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt[4] the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

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

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

[1] Swung it round.
[2] Aurora borealis.
[3] Icebergs.
[4] Touched.

That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

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

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

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath,[1] and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry

[1] Surrounded by his frosty breath.

Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based [1]
His feet on juts [2] of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels —
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove [3] a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware [4]
That all the decks were dense [5] with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream — by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge.'
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, [6] and chafed his hands,

[1] Set. [2] Points. [3] Came in sight. [4] Aware.
[5] Crowded. [6] Helmet.

And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves[1] and cuisses[2] dash'd with drops
Of onset;[3] and the light and lustrous curls —
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the daïs-throne[4] — were parch'd with dust;
Or clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
'Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,[5]
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved

[1] Armour for the lower part of the legs.
[2] Armour for the thighs.
[3] Blood drawn in battle.
[4] Throne set on a platform.
[5] Opportunity.

Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind[1] life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest — if indeed I go
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt) —
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow.
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies

[1] Unconscious.

Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume,[1] and takes the flood
With swarthy webs.[2] Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving[3] many memories, till the hull[4]
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,[5]
And on the mere the wailing died away.

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

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag;
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried,
'He passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound
He comes again; but — if he come no more —
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we gazed

[1] Lifts her wings. [2] Black feet. [3] Turning over in mind.
[4] Body of the barge. [5] The barge went eastward.

On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?'

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

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

TO THE QUEEN

[This second dedication of the *Idylls* to the Queen was printed in the Library Edition, 1872–1873. It is given here because it explains the meaning of the whole epic.]

O LOYAL to the royal in thyself,
And loyal to the land, as this to thee —
Bear witness, that rememberable day,
When, pale as yet, and fever-worn, the Prince
Who scarce had pluck'd his flickering life again
From halfway down the shadow of the grave,
Past with thee thro' thy people and their love,
And London roll'd one tide of joy thro' all
Her trebled millions, and loud leagues of man
And welcome! witness, too, the silent cry,
The prayer of many a race and creed, and clime —
Thunderless lightnings striking under sea
From sunset and sunrise of all thy realm,
And that true North, whereof we lately heard
A strain to shame us 'keep you to yourselves;
So loyal is too costly! friends — your love
Is but a burthen: loose the bond, and go.'
Is this the tone of empire? here the faith
That made us rulers? this, indeed, her voice
And meaning, whom the roar of Hougoumont

Left mightiest of all peoples under heaven?
What shock has fool'd her since, that she should speak
So feebly? wealthier — wealthier — hour by hour!
The voice of Britain, or a sinking land,
Some third-rate isle half-lost among her seas?
There rang her voice, when the full city peal'd
Thee and thy Prince! The loyal to their crown
Are loyal to their own far sons, who love
Our ocean-empire with her boundless homes
For ever-broadening England, and her throne
In our vast Orient, and one isle, one isle,
That knows not her own greatness: if she knows
And dreads it we are fall'n. — But thou, my Queen,
Not for itself, but thro' thy living love
For one to whom I made it o'er his grave
Sacred, accept this old imperfect tale,
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,
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still; or him
Of Geoffrey's book, or him of Malleor's, one
Touch'd by the adulterous finger of a time
That hover'd between war and wantonness,
And crownings and dethronements: take withal
Thy poet's blessing, and his trust that Heaven
Will blow the tempest in the distance back
From thine and ours: for some are scared, who mark,
Or wisely or unwisely, signs of storm,
Waverings of every vane with every wind,

And wordy trucklings to the transient hour,
And fierce or careless looseners of the faith,
And Softness breeding scorn of simple life,
Or Cowardice, the child of lust for gold,
Or Labour, with a groan and not a voice,
Or Art with poisonous honey stol'n from France,
And that which knows, but careful for itself,
And that which knows not, ruling that which knows
To its own harm: the goal of this great world
Lies beyond sight: yet — if our slowly-grown
And crown'd Republic's crowning common-sense,
That saved her many times, not fail — their fears
Are morning shadows huger than the shapes
That cast them, not those gloomier which forego
The darkness of that battle in the West,
Where all of high and holy dies away.

NOTES

GARETH AND LYNETTE

1. **Lot.** King of Orkney; one of those who betrayed Arthur and fought against him in the barons' war (cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 115). A crafty and cold-hearted man.

1. **Bellicent.** Daughter of Gorlois and Ygerne (cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 189 ff. and 358 ff.), according to the old legends a reputed half-sister of Arthur (which would make Gawain, Modred, and Gareth his nephews); but Tennyson says no relation (*The Passing of Arthur*, 155; *Guinevere*, 570).

21–25. Here is the key-note of the poem: the noble quality of Gareth's ambition.

25. **Gawain.** Eldest brother of Gareth, surnamed "the Courteous," for his fine manners. He takes half after his father, half after his mother; being brave and polite, but not trustworthy.

26. **Modred.** Second son of Lot and Bellicent: a mean traitor. He takes wholly after his father.

40. **Goose and golden eggs.** An old nursery tale (cf. Tennyson's poem, *The Goose*).

66. **Excalibur.** Arthur's sword, wrought by magic in the Lake, (cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 294); symbol of sacred authority.

119. Alludes to the doubts in regard to Arthur's birth and right to the throne (cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 140–236).

133. Arthur's war with the Roman emperor (*The Coming of Arthur*, 476, 503 ff.).

135. Arthur's war with the Saxon invaders of Britain (*The Coming of Arthur*, 35–120).

185. **Camelot.** Arthur's capital, according to Tennyson, prob-

ably the site of Queen-Camel in Somerset; but some identify it with Winchester.

186–193. This passage is intended to show the mystical and dreamlike nature of the story.

199. To Northward. The Orkney Islands lie north of Scotland.

209–226. The gateway is symbolical. The statue of the Lady of the Lake symbolizes Religion: her dress ripples away like water, to show that the forms of Religion are always changing: her arms, like the cross, support the cornice, to show that the substance of Religion is unchanging. The sword signifies Divine Justice; the censer, human worship; the sacred fish is the ancient emblem of Christ, because the letters of the Greek word ΙΧΘΥΣ are the initials of Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτήρ, "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour." Arthur's wars are carved around her to show that the warfare of the ideal centres about Religion: new and old things are mingled because the ancient conflicts are always repeating themselves in new forms, so that it confuses us to study them, unless we remember that the difference of time is nothing, the principles of the strife are always the same. The three queens are Faith, Hope, and Charity, the handmaids of Religion. This mystical Lady of the Lake takes no part in the action of the *Idylls*, but she appears in the background as a person of the greatest power. She gives Arthur his sword, Excalibur (*i.e.* the authority and power of the King are derived from Divine Justice; *The Coming of Arthur*, 294 ff.). She is present at his coronation, clothed in white (*i.e.* the exaltation of the Soul above the Sense is sanctioned by Religion; *The Coming of Arthur*, 284 ff.). She takes back the sword when he is dying, and the barge that carries him away to Avilion is sent by her (*i.e.* Religion presides over the resignation of mortal life and the hope of immortality).

236. Ancient Man. Probably Merlin, the old magician, Arthur's protector and teacher. He represents human knowledge: philosophy, art, and science.

249–274. Merlin's speech represents the doctrine of philosophy

that the senses deceive us and things are not what they seem. The fairy king and queens coming from the East are probably symbols of the old mythologies from which poetry and the arts were derived. The city built to music is civilization adorned and changed by the arts of the successive centuries. The dispute as to whether the King is a shadow and the city real, or *vice versa*, is the old conflict between the materialists and the idealists. Merlin holds with the idealists, that the reality is the King, *i.e.* the Soul. He says that it is a shame for a man not to be bound by Arthur's vows, because man's duty is to live by the law of the ideal; but at the same time no man can keep the vows, because the ideal is always above us. If a man refuses to accept the ideal as his law, he lives as an animal, among the cattle of the field. The progress of civilization is never completed and never ceases: as long as the music lasts the city is building.

275. Gareth's plain, matter-of-fact character is shown by his speech. He thinks Merlin is mocking him with nonsense.

283. Merlin's wisdom penetrates Gareth's disguise.

293. This sentence is at fault in grammar, "let not *she* nor *I* be blamed." But Gareth's honest, loyal nature comes out again.

305. Note the strong effect of the break in this line, coming after the first word.

322. Note the purity of the court at this time.

340. Arthur condemns so-called "rights of property" based on old deeds of injustice: one of Tennyson's modern touches.

359. Sir Kay. The steward of Arthur's household, his major-domo; a sharp-tempered, suspicious, rough-tongued old knight, but faithful.

362. Gyve and gag. An allusion to the old punishment for a scolding woman, who was tied in a ducking-stool with a muzzle on her head.

367. Aurelius Emrys. A descendant of the last Roman general who claimed the purple as Emperor in Britain; he was poisoned, and Uther succeeded him.

376. **Mark.** The wicked, cowardly, old King of Cornwall, whose court is full of evil, as represented by Vivien (*Merlin and Vivien*, 17 ff.), and by Tristram (*The Last Tournament*, 748).

422. **Lap him up in cloth of lead.** Sheet-lead was used to wrap around the dead.

430. **And evermore a knight,** etc. The King would send him out to right the wrong and help the suppliant.

451. **Lancelot.** The greatest of Arthur's knights, called Lancelot of the Lake, because he was under protection of the Lady of the Lake (*Lancelot and Elaine*, 1393). Arthur loves and trusts him (*The Coming of Arthur*, 124 ff.); sends him to bring Guinevere to the marriage (*The Coming of Arthur*, 446 ff.). Lancelot yields to love for Guinevere and betrays Arthur; but this comes after the present idyll.

455. **Hands.** From his large, fair hands Gareth, in Malory's story, receives from Sir Kay the nickname of *Beaumains*.

490. **Caer-Eryri.** Snowdon, the highest mountain of Britain.

492. **Avilion.** The Earthly Paradise of the Britons. The name means "place of apples"; it was identified later with Glastonbury.

536. It appears the King has known who Gareth was all the time.

610. **This Order.** The first definite mention, in this idyll, of the Round Table. Malory connects this order of knights with a certain round table which Merlin made for Uther, signifying the round world (*Le Morte Darthur*, xvi. 2); this table was in possession of King Leodogran, who sent it with his daughter Guinevere, when she was married to Arthur, with the hundred good knights who sat around it. The full number of seats is one hundred and fifty; and Arthur proceeds to fill up the number (*Le Morte Darthur*, ii. 1, 2). All this previous history of the Round Table, Tennyson omits. He makes it an order founded by Arthur, to bring together the knights-errant of the realm and bind them by vows to obey King and conscience, to uphold Christianity, to redress human wrongs, to speak no slander but always the truth, and to be faithful in love (*Guinevere*, 457 ff.).

614. **That old knight-errantry.** The independent and lawless

knights who roamed the country before Arthur founded the Round Table.

618. That is, these knights make themselves into a little allegory, a masquerade, of human life, claiming to rule over Youth, Manhood, Old Age, and Death.

671. **Dull-coated things.** Beetles (cf. *The Foresters*, "Beetles' jewel armour"; also *The Two Voices*, 10, description of the dragon-fly).

731. At times the wild vermin give off a disagreeable scent.

796. Note how the sound of this line fits the sense.

829. A roasted peacock was served at splendid feasts. The guests took a vow before it: the knights promising to be brave; the ladies to be loving and faithful (Stanley's *History of Birds*, 281). This peacock was an unconscious rebuke to Lynette's discourtesy and harshness.

871. In floods, animals of all kinds, driven by fear, take refuge together on the islands.

970. Lynette now begins to change her mind about Gareth; but she is too proud still to confess outright her feelings, so she puts them into her song.

1067. **Harden'd skins.** The evil habits of old age, which fit closely as the skin, and are hard to break.

1112. Lynette has now entirely changed her mind about Gareth; and in her excitement lets it out.

1133. This is Lynette's confession of her fault, and praise of Gareth's nobility.

1156. The heron stands resting with one leg tucked up under him; but before he can fly he must let it down in order to make a little jump into the air and launch himself on his wings.

1172. The letters of the inscription are like those found on a cliff beside the river Gelt, probably carved by a Roman soldier in the third century: VEXL. LEG. II. AUG.

1174. The old allegory in stone is deeper than the perversion of it by the four caitiff knights. *Phosphorus* is the morning-star;

Meridies is the noon-day; *Hesperus* is the evening-star. *Night* and *Death* are distinct figures. The soul takes refuge from the power of Time to waste and mar the life, in the hiding-place of Religion, the hermit's cave.

1186. Lancelot's coat of arms: lions rampant, azure, and crowned, gold (but in *The Lady of Shalott*, 78,

> "A red-cross knight forever kneel'd
> To a lady in his shield").

He rode with shield covered because the King had ordered him to follow Gareth secretly (cf. 571).

1187. Gareth was carrying the shield which he took from Sir Morning-Star.

1196. Lynette slips back again into petulance and pride; she still thinks, and probably will always think, too much of outward honour; but her anger is not very deep, she is half-playful.

1281. The Celtic legends connected the name of Arthur with the signs of heaven and with the mountains (cf. *The Last Tournament*, 332 ff.). Arthur's Hufe, or haunt, was the name given among the Britons to Arcturus and the constellation Bootes. When the clouds are moving, the stars appear to move in the opposite direction.

1288. Lynette is now so much in love with Gareth that she cannot bear to have him run into what she thinks a mortal peril. She would rather risk Lancelot.

Note the humorous and playful element in this idyll. No one is killed outright: even the three robbers (793) are only "quieted," and Sir Evening-Star is thrown into the river, "sink or swim" (1126).

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

1. Elaine. A Celtic form of Helen. Malory calls her "Elaine le Blank," the white Elaine.

2. Astolat. Identified with Guildford, in Surrey.

23. Caerleon. A place in Monmouthshire, on the river Usk. Malory makes it Arthur's capital.

35. Lyonesse. A tract of land formerly stretching from Cornwall to the Scilly Isles, but now covered by the sea. The country where Arthur was reared.

72. Note in Lancelot's silence a possible reason why the Queen began to be suspicious and jealous.

78. Guinevere. The daughter of Leodogran, King of Cameliard (Scotland? cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 1–4), whom Arthur loved at first sight (55–57, 76–93) and married (446–474).

104. Cf. *Balin and Balan*, 235–270.

169. This old, dumb servant is introduced into the story by Tennyson, in order that he may row the funeral barge at the close of the idyll, and not tell the courtiers who Elaine is.

172. Malory says the name of the Lord of Astolat is Sir Bernard.

185. This shows the seclusion in which the household of Astolat lived.

210. Elaine's dream is a prophecy of what happens to the diamond at last (cf. 1228 ff.).

220. Lavaine is of the same type as Gareth: simple, bold, faithful; but not of such high blood or fine nature.

251. Compare this with the description of the man who had a devil, *St. Luke*, viii. 29.

279. Badon hill. The scene of Arthur's great battle, where he overthrew nine hundred and sixty of the invaders in one onslaught. It is commonly identified with a hill near Bath; but some say it was near Linlithgow in Scotland.

287. In this account of the twelve battles Tennyson follows the passage in the history of Nennius, which may be found in Bohn's Translation, *Six Chronicles*, p. 408.

293. Our Lady's Head. This description of the image of the Virgin Mary's head is taken in part from Nennius, and in part from Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, i. vii. 29, 30.

297. The Wild White Horse. A white horse was the national

emblem of the Saxons. It was kept in the temple of their war-god; and the legend says that when the Saxons were at war the god rode the white horse by night against their enemies.

304. Their war-cry was "Christ and King Arthur."

341. Note the effect of the shifted stress on *hesitating*, which seems to make the verse pause.

356. **Favour.** A token given by a lady to her chosen knight, to wear in tournament or battle, as a sign that he fought for her.

396. Here Tennyson finishes his explanation of how the shield came into Elaine's care, closing with the same words which he uses in line 27. Now he moves forward with the story.

398. Note the length of this line, which has six accented syllables.

406. This reflection of the green light from the grass, on the chalk-rock in the roof of the cave, is a remarkable bit of description.

408. The aspen-tree is a poplar (*populus tremula*). Perhaps Tennyson means both the trembling poplar and the silver poplar (*populus alba*).

411. This line is a "Homeric echo." The ancients conceived the sun as rising from an underworld.

422. **Pendragon.** A title conferred on several British chiefs in times of danger, when they were given supreme power: from two Celtic words meaning *head ruler*. A legend says that when the title was first given to Uther, Arthur's father, a star appeared in the sky, shaped like a dragon; hence the crest.

453. **Held the lists.** In a tournament, one party was supposed to defend the field against the other party, which tried to drive them out. Lancelot joins the attacking party.

480. This splendid picture of a wave was noted down by Tennyson on his voyage to Norway when crossing the German ocean.

524. **His party.** The attacking party in the tournament, composed of knights outside the Round Table, men from distant regions.

553. Note the description of Gawain in this passage, as a type of the outward form of chivalry at its best, without the inward spirit

of loyalty. Tennyson hints at an inherited taint in his blood, by mentioning Lot as his father (cf. note on *Gareth and Lynette*, 1).

575. **Lancelot told me.** In saying this the Queen spoke falsely. It was she who suggested this idea (cf. 147 ff.).

602. Note how the unsuspecting King brings out the thought that Lancelot has fallen in love with some lady. This fills the Queen with a passion of jealousy; and yet she herself is the one who by her suspicions has brought about the situation.

653. **Her.** Originally this word was *him*. But this was not accurate, as the female falcon is the bird used in hawking, being larger and fiercer than the male. Tennyson's revision of the line illustrates his truthfulness in natural description.

655. The lark flies upward into the blue sky until it becomes invisible.

713. Here Arthur touches the lack in Gawain of the inward spirit of true chivalry: absolute fidelity to a promise; perfect surrender to a quest.

796. Cf. *Gareth and Lynette*, 209 ff.

841. **There bode the night.** This is a touch of modern propriety, making Elaine spend each night with her relatives in the city. In Malory's book, as in the French romances, she watches by Lancelot all the time (*Le Morte Darthur*, xviii. 15).

842. **Dim rich city.** Note that Tennyson always gives a mystical dreamlike atmosphere to Camelot.

846. Here Tennyson seems to make an exception to the rule that Elaine must spend the night in Camelot, remembering perhaps that a man in fever needs a nurse's care at night most of all.

871. Observe here the three pairs of conflicting words: *honour — dishonour; faith — unfaithful; falsely — true.* The strife arises from the war between Sense, which controls his passion for Guinevere, and Soul, which rules his loyalty to Arthur. The victory now turns towards the lower side of his nature; but there are hours of repentance, and the final result is still uncertain.

924. The reader should notice in this passage the delicacy with

which Tennyson has represented Elaine's love; bold, because it is so innocent. It must be remembered that she knows nothing of Lancelot's relation to the Queen. She has also misinterpreted his courtesy and kindness as marks of his fondness for her. And she does not speak her love until his oft-repeated question practically forces her confession.

966. **Too courteous.** This idea of a purposed discourtesy on the part of Lancelot, to cure Elaine of her hopeless love, is introduced by Tennyson into the story.

1000. The metre of this song is five-stress iambic, three-line stanzas. The first two lines in each stanza are rhymed in couplet; the third line forms a burthen, repeated, and ending in stanzas 1 and 3, with "no, not I"; in stanzas 2 and 4 with "let me die."

1015. **The Phantom of the house.** An allusion to the Celtic legend of the Banshee, a female spectre who always appears and laments when a member of the family is about to die (cf. Croker, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland;* Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, Series 2, pp. 215, 225).

1029. **Among the woods.** Refers to 271 ff.

1031. **The great river.** The Thames, which flows by London, where Arthur is now holding his court (cf. 76). Guildford is only thirty miles southwest of London; and if the Castle of Astolat was in this region, it would be only a few miles from the Thames, in which the sea-tide ebbs and flows for about twenty miles above London Bridge.

1079. In this passage the contrast between the trustfulness of Elaine and the suspicious jealousy of the Queen comes to light most clearly.

1168. The Queen is trembling with concealed passion, so that the lace on her bosom quivers, and the shadow vibrates on the wall.

1178. **Tawnier than her cygnet's.** The colour of the young swan is a yellowish dun. Lancelot says that the swan's neck is less white than Guinevere's, by as much as the cygnet's neck is less white than the swan's.

1254. Half-face. As he sat at the oars the dumb man was in profile; as he rose to leave the boat he turned his full face to the palace.

1256. Sir Percivale. The two knights most pure and holy of all the Round Table were Percivale and Galahad (cf. *The Holy Grail*, 293–308). They are therefore most fit to carry the lily maid into the Hall.

1285. Lancelot now sees that the love of Elaine is the purest and the most unselfish that he has ever known.

1319. That shrine. According to history, Westminster Abbey was not founded until 616, by a Saxon king.

1327. This is a fine line, but it is distinctly modern in feeling, having reference to the Westminster Abbey of to-day.

1334. Gold and blue, Lancelot's colours.

1375. Unbound as yet. The King is the one person at the court who does not know anything of the relation between Lancelot and Guinevere.

1390. Lancelot means that the growth of jealousy signifies the dying-out of love.

1393. The Lady of the Lake. See the note on Lancelot, *Gareth and Lynette*, 451. The meaning of this, interpreted as a parable, is that Religion (the Lady of the Lake) encouraged and nurtured the spirit of Chivalry (Sir Lancelot). This is what makes Lancelot ashamed of his fall from virtue and duty.

1418. After Lancelot's parting with the Queen, in the convent of Almesbury, he "went and took his horse, and rode all that day and all that night in a forest, weeping. And at the last he was ware of an hermitage and a chapel stood betwixt two cliffs, and then he heard a little bell ring to mass, and thither he rode and alight, and tied his horse to the gate, and heard mass. And he that sang mass was the bishop of Canterbury. . . . And then he kneeled down on his knees, and prayed the bishop to shrive and assoil him. And then he besought the bishop that he might be his brother. Then the bishop said, I will gladly: and there he put an habit

upon Sir Launcelot, and there he served God day and night with prayers and fastings. . . . Thus they endured in great penance six year. . . . And thus upon a night there came a vision to Sir Launcelot, and charged him, in remission of his sins, to haste him unto Almesbury, — And by then thou come there, thou shalt find queen Guenever dead. . . . And when Sir Launcelot was come to Almesbury, within the nunnery, queen Guenever died but half an hour before. . . . And when she was put in the earth, Sir Launcelot swooned, and lay long still. . . . Then Sir Launcelot never after eat but little meat, nor drank, till he was dead: for then he sickened more and more, and dried and dwined away. . . . So at a season of the night they [the company of hermits] went all to their beds, for they all lay in one chamber. And so after midnight against day, — the bishop that was hermit, as he lay in his bed asleep, he fell upon a great laughter; and there with all the fellowship awoke, and came to the bishop and asked him what he ailed. Alas, said the bishop, why did ye awake me? I was never in all my life so merry and so well at ease. Wherefore? said Sir Bors. Truly, said the bishop, here was Sir Launcelot with me, with more angels than ever I saw men upon one day; and I saw the angels heave Sir Launcelot unto heaven, and the gates of heaven opened against him. . . . So when Sir Bors and his fellows came to his [Launcelot's] bed, they found him stark dead, and he lay as he had smiled, and the sweetest savour about him that ever they felt." Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, xxi. 10, 11, 12.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

1. **Sir Bedivere.** Knighted by Arthur at his coronation (*The Coming of Arthur*, 172 ff.); called by Geoffrey of Monmouth the King's cup-bearer; mentioned in three books of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*.

6. **March to westward.** The King has come home from his

war with Lancelot in Brittany (*Guinevere*, 430 ff.), and is now going westward to meet Modred at the head of his rebellious host.

26. Reels back into the beast. This refers to the condition of savage disorder from which Arthur had rescued Britain by his strong and wise rule (*The Coming of Arthur*, 5–12).

29. That last weird battle. Geoffrey of Monmouth calls it the battle of Camlan and says that it was fought in Cornwall, by the river Cambula. Tennyson adopts this view, rather than that of Malory, who places the battle at Salisbury (cf. 173, which says the battle was in or near Lyonesse).

50. This speech of Bedivere, contrasting the passing away of fairies and enchantments with the permanence of Arthur's name and form, is one of Tennyson's modern additions. An ancient knight would have had no such ideas.

69. Roman wall. A line of forts and a massive stone wall built across the island from the Solway to the Tyne, to repel the Picts and Scots.

91. Note that Tennyson, carrying out the symbolism of the seasons, places this battle in the dead of winter, at the close of the year. Malory puts it in the spring: "on a Monday after Trinity Sunday" (*Le Morte Darthur*, xxi. 3).

99. This is an image of the confusion in the moral warfare of the world, where good is often mistaken for evil, and where those who are on the same side hurt one another. This battle is the first form in which the war of Sense and Soul is represented in this idyll.

144. I know not what I am. This strange feeling of unreality, a kind of waking trance in which everything becomes dreamlike and confused, was a state of mind to which Tennyson himself was subject. He represents it as a frequent experience of King Arthur (cf. *The Holy Grail*, 907 ff.).

153. Modred. The old legend made Modred the unlawful son of Arthur, or his nephew, by Queen Bellicent (cf. *Le Morte Darthur*, i. 19; Geoffrey, *Hist. Brit.*, 238). But Tennyson does away with all this, and makes him simply a wicked and traitorous knight.

170. This is the line with which Tennyson's first poem on the *Morte d'Arthur* begins. It is one of his best lines; note the long sound of the *o*'s and *a*'s.

191. This was the prophecy of Merlin (*The Coming of Arthur*, 418–423), and the legendary hope of the Britons (cf. Introduction, p. 17), said to be still alive among the peasants of Brittany.

205. This is a sign of the resignation of the kingly authority to the Power who gave it. Some say that it signifies the passing away of the temporal authority of the church.

219. **Shining levels.** The long, bright reflection of the moon in the water is seen best when one comes down to the shore.

220. In the conflict of Bedivere's mind the idyll shows us, for the second time, the war of Sense with Soul.

228. **Dividing the swift mind.** This is from Virgil, *Æneid*, iv. 285, "*Atque Animum nunc huc celerem, nunc dividit illuc.*"

238. **The ripple washing.** Note the difference in sound between the soft hissing of the ripples among the reeds, and the lapping of the water upon the rocks.

272. **Maiden of the Lake.** In the *Idylls*, the Lady of the Lake is the allegorical figure of Religion (cf. *The Coming of Arthur*, 282–293; *Gareth and Lynette*, 210–219; *Lancelot and Elaine*, 1393–1400).

287. Compare this speech of Arthur with the version in Malory, xxi. 5: "Ah traitor, untrue, said king Arthur, now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have wend that thou that hast been to me so lief and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of the sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee, I shall slay thee with mine own hands, for thou wouldest for my rich sword see me dead."

311. **Rose an arm.** This, of course, is the arm of the Lady of the Lake, who remains unseen in the depths.

354. **Dry clash'd.** The adjective "dry" is not often used of

sounds. It describes a noise which is harsh and grating, made by something which is dry.

366. **Three Queens.** Faith, Hope, and Charity (cf. note 209–226, *Gareth and Lynette*).

375. **The tallest.** Charity.

394. In the parting dialogue between Bedivere and Arthur the idyll shows us, for the third time, the war between Sense and Soul; or rather, between Doubt and Faith.

401. **The holy Elders.** The Magi who were led by a star to Christ (*St. Matthew*, ii. 2–11).

415. Tennyson believed strongly in the power of prayer. He called it "the highest aspiration of the soul" (*Memoir*, i. 324), and expressed his conviction, from experience, that God "can and does answer every earnest prayer" (*Contemporary Review*, March, 1893).

420. **Hands of prayer.** The ancient attitude of prayer was standing, with hands stretched upwards.

422. The figure of Nature's chain binding the world to the foot of the throne of the supreme deity is used by many writers (cf. Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, i; and Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ii. 1051). But Tennyson, so far as I know, is the first to apply the figure to prayer.

428. **Where falls not hail**, etc. This is like a passage from Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, iii. 18–22: "Their tranquil abodes which neither winds do shake, nor clouds drench with rains, nor snow congealed by sharp frost harms with heavy fall." (Munro's Translation.)

435. **Ere her death.** It was an old notion that swans sang sweetly just before dying. Plato (in his *Phædo*, 84) explains that "because they are sacred to Apollo, and have the gift of prophecy, and anticipate the good things of another world, therefore they sing and rejoice in that day more than they even did before."

445. Repeated from *The Coming of Arthur*, 410.

466. The mere is a salt-water lake which runs into the sea.

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(S. 137)