

VICTORIAN  
NARRATIVE VERSE

CHARLES WILLIAMS



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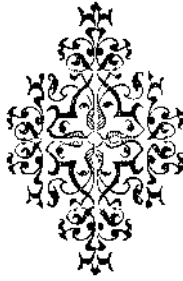
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A Book of  
VICTORIAN NARRATIVE  
VERSE

Chosen by

CHARLES WILLIAMS



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## P R E F A C E

ONE of the most interesting things about the Victorian age, which is at last taking on the full aspect of the past, is the honour paid to, and the terms used of, George Eliot. A novelist, ranking certainly very high among the writers of the period, was ranked by them with the greatest names of antiquity, with Sophocles, with Homer, with Dante. So general an agreement argues that all found in her something they recognized and admired. Is it to epigrammatize too recklessly to call that quality nobility?

All genius, at the moments of its full exercise, becomes symbolical not so much of the age in which it is produced as of the universal life of man. It is not therefore in the greater but in the lesser writings of the Victorians that their characteristics are most clearly seen, in *Romola* rather than in *Adam Bede*. It is still more in the casual phrases of a hundred novels, of minor verse and almost unnecessary essays, that the aim of the period is to be most clearly discerned. Between the two romantic ages which preceded and followed it the Victorian seems to aim, like the thirteenth century and the Augustan age, at establishing a sort of stability. But where the thirteenth century sought to base its stability on an assumed supernatural basis, and the eighteenth within accepted rational limitations of the mind, the Victorian seems rather to have settled its stability upon conduct. To Matthew Arnold, certainly not the most Victorian writer, 'conduct was three-fourths of life'; to Tennyson and Carlyle and Thackeray, to Froude and Trollope and Gladstone, it was almost the whole. George Eliot, far more than the Queen who gave her name to the period, symbolized that pre-occupation, and was unconsciously recognized as so symbolizing it.

Since conduct was to be the basis of their desired stability a particular kind of conduct was their aim. The Victorian age, like the Augustan desiring a balance of the forces of the world and a steady possession of their mental selves, retired from and disliked extremes. Sanctity and sadism were words alike unknown to it. Enthusiasm, in the earlier technical sense of the word, was an abnormal and alarming thing, a thing as alien to, say Kingsley, as to the author of that eighteenth-century tract which was entitled *The Twelve Apostles not Enthusiasts*. The famous quarrel between Kingsley and Newman might almost be described in the terms of 'enthusiasm'. To Newman a man who always had to tell the entire truth was an extremist of a dangerous and impossible kind. But though in practice Kingsley would have agreed with him, in theory he differed. For telling the truth was exactly a part of that nobility of conduct which Kingsley with all his heart admired, and from which he would not

allow that there could be any diversion. He was endeavouring, in vain, to include an enthusiastic and romantic extreme of theory in a balanced and classic stability of conduct, and it was the ill-constructed bridge between them which the guns of Newman shattered.

If Romola is a manageable type of high nobility of conduct, Tennyson's King Arthur is an example of nobility become unmanageable, and wavering between nobility and mere pomposity. No great poet has ever been betrayed into a more disastrous episode than that in which Tennyson presented Arthur deploring and exhorting the prostrate form of Guinevere; and this, not because what Arthur seems to mean is necessarily wrong or stupid or selfish, but because it is nobility become conscious of itself, and nobility cannot afford to be conscious of itself. The mortal pathos, the immortal symbolism of Arthur are lost in such words as 'I am thy husband, not a smaller soul', and others wherein the King 'mouths out his hollow o's and a's'. Tennyson recovered himself in those great and famous lines which describe the King's departure, but it was because Arthur had left off being noble, and was in process of doing something. He had forgotten conduct and was occupied with action.

For perhaps the chief trouble about Victorian literature—and certainly the chief trouble about those now somewhat underrated poems of Tennyson, the *Idylls of the King*—was that its metaphysic could not present nor its withdrawing poetic imagination conceive an end sufficient to the means. To do one's duty was a noble thing, but the only reason for doing it was that it was one's duty. This indeed is a great enough theme for a great poet, if such duty is unmistakable and if tragedy follows upon its fulfilment. But the Victorian mind, though it accepted the first condition—the subtleties of exploration, the illusions of which duty is prolific, were not for that age—rejected the second. Duty faithfully followed and therefore inevitably producing tragedy—interior as well as exterior—would have been one of those extremes of the imagination from which ages which desire a stable mind instinctively recoil. The optimism of the Victorians was an accidental result of their desire for balance; it was certainly a subdued optimism, by no means so hearty as is sometimes thought, but cheerful enough to exclude intense tragedy, though not pathos. A few witnesses—the *Mill on the Floss*, and pre-eminently the *Ring and the Book*—testified against optimism; and the *Ring and the Book* even abandoned nobility. Pompilia and Caponsacchi in that very great poem are too young, too innocent, too helpless, too 'enthusiastic' to be called noble; the black household of Guido and the slaving obscenities of the Fisc are too vile even to be called ignoble.



But in the *Idylls* Arthur is presented as the soul; and the purpose, the end, of the soul is to do its duty. The King does not reject the Quest of the Graal merely from an artistic necessity, but from the necessity of an inadequate metaphysic. The high Prince Galahad passes across the stage and is gone, and the poem is uneasy in his presence. In that pursuit all the ordinary rules of conduct seem to be left behind; the bridges break down behind the chosen knight as he runs on to the city far out on the waste. It is merely apart from Camelot and the Table; it is merely apart from Arthur and the soul of man. Conduct without any adequate end, duty without interior and eternal significance, morals without metaphysics—these are the guardian angels of the Victorian chivalry and of the King. Lancelot mourns in Tennyson, ‘not knowing he should die a holy man’. But in the end of the older story he dies, not necessarily holy but priestly; ‘and a twelvemonth he sang mass’, and so is assumed into mystery.

The weakness therefore of the Victorian age, as of the *Idylls*, is in its concern with conduct but its failure artistically to suggest an adequate significance in conduct. When, however, it had subjects which came within its scope, when the centre of a poem became no longer an exhortation but a story, when, in short, conduct became simply action, the weakness was no longer felt. Then the greatness of the time appeared, and a score of figures in high moments of triumph or disaster were presented in poignant or exalted verse. Hardly since Chaucer had stories been so well told, and our own period, though in some things it surpasses, in this has scarcely rivalled its predecessor. Mr. Kipling, Mr. Masefield, Mr. Chesterton—these and a few others—have told us stories, and told them well, but many contemporary poets are too agitated or too dull for the art. In demanding significance they set out to impose significance; Mr. Hardy and Mr. Chesterton answer one another from opposite hills of doctrine, and are equally eclectic in their choice of tales, though perhaps Mr. Chesterton would admit the eclecticism more willingly than his peer.

The poems which follow are drawn from that great period of narrative, and are all concerned chiefly with one thing—telling a story. In one or two of them a flavour of exhortation or instruction is to be distinguished—Browning’s *Donald* is the worst example. But the moral there is worked into such an admirable verbal climax that it may easily be excused. Apart from such moments the poems suggest themselves as being at once the continuance and the close of a great tradition. Here, by the chance of the selection, are many of the names of the heroes—Arthur and Olaf, Balder and Rustum, Perseus and Tristram; of dukes and kings, princes of faery and of fact, myths to which the Victorians willingly submitted themselves.

Nobility in action and unconscious of itself, seems to be visible in most of these poems; and where it is not, the variations are characteristic of all that which eventually broke up the Victorian repose. The two possibilities which chiefly disturbed it were malice and ecstasy (say Samuel Butler and Francis Thompson); and except in the *Witch's Ballad*, of William Bell Scott, neither of these appear until the admirable Christina's *Goblin Market*. Their presence determines the departure of nobility which is, in itself, incapable of either. The 'noble' hero cannot be rapt out of himself into a supernatural abandonment or betrayed into a sub-human hate. Lok, in Arnold's *Balder Dead*, is hardly convincing in his hostility; he is part of the necessity of a story which is defended by its sub-title of 'An Episode'. The old duchess in Browning's poem is not so much malicious as tyrannical and greedy; and apart from these two figures the catastrophes with which the heroes variously contend are rather of the nature of inevitable destiny. The day on which the Round Table was dissolved in battle and death was a day of thick mist; the fatal duel between Sohrab and Rostum is a strife between two unknowns; Balder dies by the destined forgetfulness of his mother as well as by the hate of Lok; in *Conary* the faery minstrels mislead the king's men who leave their lord to his doom; the vengeance of the gods pursues Andromeda, as the love of a goddess for Perseus saves her. The gipsy woman who lures the Duchess from her home is 'of another nature' than she at first appeared. In Morris's *Son of Croesus* the doom which Croesus labours in vain to avert from his son is foreshown in a dream. 'The sea hath no king but God alone', is the refrain of Rossetti's *White Ship*.

For at its best the nobility of the Victorians contended with great adversaries, with time and the nature of the gods and fate. Around it existed, as it very well knew, 'darkness and cruel habitations'. It was heroic and steadfast, and when at last, as in the *King's Tragedy* or *Heather Ale*, its doom came to it, it passed as strongly as it had lived. To explore the darkness, whether in philosophy or poetry, it did not primarily hold to be its business. Herbert Spencer called those other modes of being 'the Unknowable', but the name was rather an indication of the Victorian temper than philosophically sound. In the *Witch's Ballad* and *Judas Iscariot* some sort of imaginative exodus into the unknown is attempted, something of the strangeness of the magical dance or the seas above the sky is conveyed, as in *Goblin Market* is something of the sub-human malice of the elves.

The only incomplete poem in the book is the extract from Swinburne. Swinburne was nearly incapable of telling a story directly; in this, and



almost in this alone, he differed from the other great Victorians. It is true that he reversed their code of conduct, and praised the things that they blamed; physical love and revolution and tyrannicide. But this reversal did not alter his central concern, which was as much conduct as George Eliot's was, and lacked a satisfactory metaphysic as much as did Tennyson's. He did however, reversing the code, reverse the attitude, and nobility is not the virtue which chiefly distinguishes his characters. They are praised for the abandonment with which they give themselves to their experiences; they are praised for their conduct, but the significance of conduct is not greatly conveyed. The opening of *Tristram* is magnificent, but it does not suggest the intense interest and importance of love as much as certain Jacobean lyrics. So the magnificence of the lines given here does not succeed in presenting Palamede as the strange and exalted figure which moves through Malory. Mark lets Iseult go rather, it seems, from a sense of helplessness in the recollection of his promise than from a mad and passionate loyalty to it. But, perhaps by accident, there is also in this episode a suggestion of something beyond the Victorian age. For Palamede refrains from kissing Iseult, not only because of honour and nobility, but because

More grace might come of that sweet mouth un-kissed  
Than joy for violence done it.

There flash for a moment in those lines the silver chastity of Britomart and the Lady in *Comus*.

Nobility is at the moment an unfashionable virtue in literature. Subtlety is preferred to it, and irony, and bitterness; just as allusiveness and the lyric are preferred to the direct narrative style. But as the Victorian age recedes it is taking on the strangeness of any past century. The side-whiskers of Arnold are no more ridiculous than the long curls of Prince Rupert or the formal beards of the Pharaohs. So their characteristic attitude, for all its dangers of pomposity and insincerity, is seen to be a real method of dealing with the crises of experience, whether interior or exterior. These poems are a tribute to its endeavour and its success.

Also, of course, they can be read as stories.

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C. W.

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## THE DAY-DREAM

### PROLOGUE

O Lady Flora, let me speak:

A pleasant hour has past away  
While, dreaming on your damask cheek,

The dewy sister-eyelids lay.

As by the lattice you reclined,

5

I went thro' many wayward moods  
To see you dreaming—and, behind,  
A summer crisp with shining woods.

And I too dream'd, until at last

Across my fancy, brooding warm,  
The reflex of a legend past,

10

And loosely settled into form.

And would you have the thought I had,

And see the vision that I saw,

Then take the broidery-frame, and add

15

A crimson to the quaint Macaw,

And I will tell it. Turn your face,

Nor look with that too-earnest eye—

The rhymes are dazzled from their place,

And order'd words asunder fly.

20

### THE SLEEPING PALACE

#### I

The varying year with blade and sheaf

Clothes and reclothes the happy plains;

Here rests the sap within the leaf,

Here stays the blood along the veins.

Faint shadows, vapours lightly curl'd,

25

Faint murmurs from the meadows come,

Like hints and echoes of the world

To spirits folded in the womb.

II

Soft lustre bathes the range of urns  
    On every slanting terrace-lawn. 30  
The fountain to his place returns  
    Deep in the garden lake withdrawn.  
Here droops the banner on the tower,  
    On the hall-hearths the festal fires,  
The peacock in his laurel bower, 35  
    The parrot in his gilded wires.

III

Roof-haunting martins warm their eggs:  
    In these, in those the life is stay'd.  
The mantles from the golden pegs  
    Droop sleepily: no sound is made, 40  
Not even of a gnat that sings.  
    More like a picture seemeth all  
Than those old portraits of old kings,  
    That watch the sleepers from the wall.

IV

Here sits the Butler with a flask 45  
    Between his knees, half-drain'd; and there  
The wrinkled steward at his task,  
    The maid-of-honour blooming fair:  
The page has caught her hand in his:  
    Her lips are sever'd as to speak: 50  
His own are pouted to a kiss:  
    The blush is fix'd upon her cheek.

V

Till all the hundred summers pass,  
    The beams, that thro' the Oriel shine,  
Make prisms in every carven glass, 55  
    And beaker brimm'd with noble wine.  
Each baron at the banquet sleeps,  
    Grave faces gather'd in a ring.  
His state the king reposing keeps.

He must have been a jovial king.

60

VI

All round a hedge upshoots, and shows  
At distance like a little wood;  
Thorns, ivies, woodbine, mistletoes,  
And grapes with bunches red as blood;  
All creeping plants, a wall of green  
Close-matted, bur and brake and brier,  
And glimpsing over these, just seen,  
High up, the topmost palace-spire.

65

VII

When will the hundred summers die,  
And thought and time be born again,  
And newer knowledge, drawing nigh,  
Bring truth that sways the soul of men?  
Here all things in their place remain,  
As all were order'd, ages since.  
Come, Care and Pleasure, Hope and Pain,  
And bring the fated fairy Prince.

70

75

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

I

Year after year unto her feet,  
She lying on her couch alone,  
Across the purpled coverlet,  
The maiden's jet-black hair has grown,  
On either side her tranced form  
Forth streaming from a braid of pearl:  
The slumbrous light is rich and warm,  
And moves not on the rounded curl.

80

II

The silk star-broider'd coverlid  
Unto her limbs itself doth mould  
Languidly ever; and, amid  
Her full black ringlets downward roll'd,

85



Glows forth each softly-shadow'd arm  
With bracelets of the diamond bright: 90  
Her constant beauty doth inform  
Stillness with love, and day with light.

III

She sleeps: her breathings are not heard  
In palace chambers far apart.  
The fragrant tresses are not stirr'd 95  
That lie upon her charmed heart.  
She sleeps: on either hand upswells  
The gold-fringed pillow lightly prest:  
She sleeps, nor dreams, but ever dwells  
A perfect form in perfect rest. 100

THE ARRIVAL

I

All precious things, discover'd late,  
To those that seek them issue forth;  
For love in sequel works with fate,  
And draws the veil from hidden worth.  
He travels far from other skies— 105  
His mantle glitters on the rocks—  
A fairy Prince, with joyful eyes,  
And lighter-footed than the fox.

II

The bodies and the bones of those  
That strove in other days to pass, 110  
Are wither'd in the thorny close,  
Or scatter'd blanching on the grass.  
He gazes on the silent dead:  
'They perish'd in their daring deeds.'  
This proverb flashes thro' his head, 115  
'The many fail: the one succeeds.'

III

He comes, scarce knowing what he seeks:

He breaks the hedge: he enters there:  
The colour flies into his cheeks:  
He trusts to light on something fair; 120  
For all his life the charm did talk  
About his path, and hover near  
With words of promise in his walk,  
And whisper'd voices at his ear.

#### IV

More close and close his footsteps wind; 125  
The Magic Music in his heart  
Beats quick and quicker, till he find  
The quiet chamber far apart.  
His spirit flutters like a lark,  
He stoops—to kiss her—on his knee. 130  
'Love, if thy tresses be so dark,  
How dark those hidden eyes must be!'

#### THE REVIVAL

##### I

A touch, a kiss! the charm was snapt.  
There rose a noise of striking clocks,  
And feet that ran, and doors that clapt, 135  
And barking dogs, and crowing cocks;  
A fuller light illumined all,  
A breeze thro' all the garden swept,  
A sudden hubbub shook the hall,  
And sixty feet the fountain leapt. 140

##### II

The hedge broke in, the banner blew,  
The butler drank, the steward scrawl'd,  
The fire shot up, the martin flew,  
The parrot scream'd, the peacock squall'd,  
The maid and page renew'd their strife, 145  
The palace bang'd, and buzz'd and clackt,  
And all the long-pent stream of life  
Dash'd downward in a cataract.

### III

And last with these the king awoke,  
And in his chair himself uprear'd, 150  
And yawn'd, and rubb'd his face, and spoke,  
'By holy rood, a royal beard!  
How say you? we have slept, my lords.  
My beard has grown into my lap.'  
The barons swore, with many words, 155  
'Twas but an after-dinner's nap.

### IV

'Pardy,' return'd the king, 'but still  
My joints are something stiff or so.  
My lord, and shall we pass the bill  
I mention'd half an hour ago?' 160  
The chancellor, sedate and vain,  
In courteous words return'd reply:  
But dallied with his golden chain,  
And, smiling, put the question by.

### THE DEPARTURE

#### I

And on her lover's arm she leant, 165  
And round her waist she felt it fold,  
And far across the hills they went  
In that new world which is the old:  
Across the hills, and far away  
Beyond their utmost purple rim, 170  
And deep into the dying day  
The happy princess follow'd him.

#### II

'I'd sleep another hundred years,  
O love, for such another kiss;'  
'O wake for ever, love,' she hears, 175  
'O love, 'twas such as this and this.'  
And o'er them many a sliding star,  
And many a merry wind was borne,

And, stream'd thro' many a golden bar,  
The twilight melted into morn. 180

III

'O eyes long laid in happy sleep!  
'O happy sleep, that lightly fled!  
'O happy kiss, that woke thy sleep!  
'O love, thy kiss would wake the dead!  
And o'er them many a flowing range 185  
Of vapour buoy'd the crescent-bark,  
And, rapt thro' many a rosy change,  
The twilight died into the dark.

IV

'A hundred summers! can it be?  
And whither goest thou, tell me where?' 190  
'O seek my father's court with me,  
For there are greater wonders there.'  
And o'er the hills, and far away  
Beyond their utmost purple rim,  
Beyond the night, across the day, 195  
Thro' all the world she follow'd him.

MORAL

I

So, Lady Flora, take my lay,  
And if you find no moral there,  
Go, look in any glass and say,  
What moral is in being fair. 200  
Oh, to what uses shall we put  
The wildweed-flower that simply blows?  
And is there any moral shut  
Within the bosom of the rose?

II

But any man that walks the mead, 205  
In bud or blade, or bloom, may find,  
According as his humours lead,

A meaning suited to his mind.  
And liberal applications lie  
In Art like Nature, dearest friend; 210  
So 'twere to cramp its use, if I  
Should hook it to some useful end.

L'ENVOI

I

You shake your head. A random string  
Your finer female sense offends. 215  
Well—were it not a pleasant thing  
To fall asleep with all one's friends;  
To pass with all our social ties  
To silence from the paths of men;  
And every hundred years to rise 220  
And learn the world, and sleep again;  
To sleep thro' terms of mighty wars,  
And wake on science grown to more,  
On secrets of the brain, the stars,  
As wild as aught of fairy lore; 225  
And all that else the years will show,  
The Poet-forms of stronger hours,  
The vast Republics that may grow,  
The Federations and the Powers;  
Titanic forces taking birth 230  
In divers seasons, divers climes;  
For we are Ancients of the earth,  
And in the morning of the times.

II

So sleeping, so aroused from sleep  
Thro' sunny decads new and strange,  
Of gay quinqueniads<sup>[1]</sup> would we reap 235  
The flower and quintessence of change.

III

Ah, yet would I—and would I might!  
So much your eyes my fancy take—

Be still the first to leap to light  
That I might kiss those eyes awake! 240  
For, am I right or am I wrong,  
To choose your own you did not care;  
You'd have *my* moral from the song,  
And I will take my pleasure there:  
And, am I right or am I wrong, 245  
My fancy, ranging thro' and thro',  
To search a meaning for the song,  
Perforce will still revert to you;  
Nor finds a closer truth than this  
All-graceful head, so richly curl'd, 250  
And evermore a costly kiss  
The prelude to some brighter world.

#### IV

For since the time when Adam first  
Embraced his Eve in happy hour,  
And every bird of Eden burst 255  
In carol, every bud to flower,  
What eyes, like thine, have waken'd hopes?  
What lips, like thine, so sweetly join'd?  
Where on the double rosebud droops  
The fullness of the pensive mind; 260  
Which all too dearly self-involved,  
Yet sleeps a dreamless sleep to me;  
A sleep by kisses undissolved,  
That lets thee neither hear nor see:  
But break it. In the name of wife, 265  
And in the rights that name may give,  
Are clasp'd the moral of thy life,  
And that for which I care to live.

#### EPILOGUE

So, Lady Flora, take my lay,  
And, if you find a meaning there, 270  
O whisper to your glass, and say,  
'What wonder, if he thinks me fair?'  
What wonder I was all unwise,  
To shape the song for your delight

Like long-tail'd birds of Paradise,  
That float thro' Heaven, and cannot light?  
Or old-world trains, upheld at court  
By Cupid-boys of blooming hue—  
But take it—earnest wed with sport,  
And either sacred unto you.

275

280

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[1] quinquenniads] periods of five years.



## MORTE D'ARTHUR

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, 5  
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,  
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,  
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,  
A broken chancel with a broken cross,  
That stood on a dark strait of barren land. 10  
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one  
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.  
Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:  
'The sequel of to-day unsolders all  
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights 15  
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 20  
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 25  
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, 30  
Clothed in white samite<sup>[1]</sup>, mystic, wonderful,  
Holding the sword—and how I row'd across  
And took it, and have worn it, like a king:  
And wheresoever I am sung or told

In aftertime, this also shall be known: 35  
But now delay not: take Excalibur,  
And fling him far into the middle mere:  
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere: 40  
'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 will all perform at full,  
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept 45  
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 zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock, 50  
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: 55  
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,  
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work  
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long  
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,  
This way and that dividing the swift mind, 60  
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. 65

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: 70  
'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

Thy fēalty, nor like a noble knight: 75  
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 and dear, and do the thing 80  
I had thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time  
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,  
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought;  
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt, 85  
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote  
His palms together, and he cried aloud,  
'And if indeed I cast the brand away,  
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note, 90  
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 95  
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, 100  
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 105  
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."  
So might some old man speak in the aftertime  
To all the people, winning reverence.  
But now much honour and much fame were lost.'

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit, 110  
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: 115

'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! 120  
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, 125  
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: 130  
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,  
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,  
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged  
Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword, 135  
And strongly wheel'd 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,  
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock 140  
By night, with noises of the northern sea.  
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur:  
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him 145  
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?' 150

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, 155  
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,  
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him 160  
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 165  
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 170  
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. 175

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.' 180

But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,  
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,  
Larger than human on the frozen hills.  
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry  
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad. 185  
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves  
And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels— 190  
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,  
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,  
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,  
Beneath them; and descending they were ware 195  
That all the decks were dense with stately forms  
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these

Three Queens with crowns of gold—and from them rose  
 A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,  
 And, as it were one voice, an agony 200  
 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,'  
 And to the barge they came. There those three Queens 205  
 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, and chafed his hands,  
 And call'd him by his name, complaining loud, 210  
 And dropping bitter tears against his 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<sup>[2]</sup> and cuisses<sup>[3]</sup> dash'd with drops 215  
 Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—  
 That made his forehead like a rising sun  
 High from the dais-throne—were parch'd with dust;  
 Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,  
 Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips. 220  
 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. 225  
 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, 230  
 And every chance brought out a noble knight.  
 Such times have been not since the light that led  
 The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.  
 But now the whole ROUND TABLE is dissolved  
 Which was an image of the mighty world; 235  
 And I, the last, go forth companionless,  
 And the days darken round me, and the years,  
 Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:  
 ‘The old order changeth, yielding place to new, 240  
 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, 245  
 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 250  
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend?  
 For so the whole round earth is every way  
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God. 255  
 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, 260  
 Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies  
 Deep-meadow’d, happy, fair with orchard-lawns  
 And bowery hollows crown’d with summer sea,  
 Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.’  
 So said he, and the barge with oar and sail 265  
 Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan  
 That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,  
 Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood  
 With, swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere  
 Revolving many memories, till the hull 270  
 Look’d one black dot against the verge of dawn,  
 And on the mere the wailing died away.

ALFRED TENNYSON, 1809-92.

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[1] samite] rich silk fabric.

[2] greaves] armour for the leg below the knee.



[3] cuisses] armour for protecting the front part of the thigh.

## THE DEATH OF KING OLAF

(From *The Saga of King Olaf*).

### XVII

KING SVEND OF THE FORKED BEARD

Loudly the sailors cheered  
Svend of the Forkèd Beard,  
As with his fleet he steered  
    Southward to Vendland;  
Where with their courses hauled 5  
All were together called,  
Under the Isle of Svald  
    Near to the mainland.

After Queen Gunhild's death,  
So the old Saga saith, 10  
Plighted King Svend his faith  
    To Sigrid the Haughty;  
And to avenge his bride,  
Soothing her wounded pride,  
Over the waters wide 15  
    King Olaf sought he.

Still on her scornful face,  
Blushing with deep disgrace,  
Bore she the crimson trace  
    Of Olaf's gauntlet; 20  
Like a malignant star,  
Blazing in heaven afar,  
Red shone the angry scar  
    Under her frontlet.

Oft to King Svend she spake, 25  
'For thine own honour's sake  
Shalt thou swift vengeance take  
    On the vile coward!'

Until the King at last,  
Gusty and overcast, 30  
Like a tempestuous blast  
    Threatened and lowered.

Soon as the Spring appeared,  
Svend of the Forkèd Beard  
High his red standard reared, 35  
    Eager for battle;  
While every warlike Dane,  
Seizing his arms again,  
Left all unsown the grain,  
    Unhoused the cattle. 40

Likewise the Swedish King  
Summoned in haste a Thing,  
Weapons and men to bring  
    In aid of Denmark;  
Eric the Norseman, too, 45  
As the war-tidings flew,  
Sailed with a chosen crew  
    From Lapland and Finmark.

So upon Easter day  
Sailed the three kings away, 50  
Out of the sheltered bay,  
    In the bright season;  
With them Earl Sigvald came,  
Eager for spoil and fame;  
Pity that such a name 55  
    Stooped to such treason!

Safe under Svald at last,  
Now were their anchors cast,  
Safe from the sea and blast,  
    Plotted the three kings; 60  
While, with a base intent,  
Southward Earl Sigvald went,  
On a foul errand bent,  
    Unto the Sea-kings.

Thence to hold on his course, 65

Unto King Olaf's force,  
Lying within the hoarse  
Mouths of Stet-haven;  
Him to ensnare and bring  
Unto the Danish king, 70  
Who his dead corse would fling  
Forth to the raven!

XVIII  
KING OLAF AND EARL SIGVALD

On the gray sea-sands  
King Olaf stands,  
Northward and seaward 75  
He points with his hands.

With eddy and whirl  
The sea-tides curl,  
Washing the sandals  
Of Sigvald the Earl. 80

The mariners shout,  
The ships swing about,  
The yards are all hoisted,  
The sails flutter out.

The war-horns are played, 85  
The anchors are weighed,  
Like moths in the distance  
The sails flit and fade.

The sea is like lead,  
The harbour lies dead, 90  
As a corse on the sea-shore,  
Whose spirit has fled!

On that fatal day,  
The histories say,  
Seventy vessels 95  
Sailed out of the bay.

But soon scattered wide  
O'er the billows they ride,

While Sigvald and Olaf  
Sail side by side. 100

Cried the Earl: 'Follow me!  
I your pilot will be,  
For I know all the channels  
Where flows the deep sea!'

So into the strait 105  
Where his foes lie in wait,  
Gallant King Olaf  
Sails to his fate!

Then the sea-fog veils  
The ships and their sails; 110  
Queen Sigrid the Haughty,  
Thy vengeance prevails!

XIX

KING OLAF'S WAR-HORNS

'Strike the sails!' King Olaf said;  
'Never shall men of mine take flight;  
Never away from battle I fled, 115  
Never away from my foes!

Let God dispose  
Of my life in the fight!'

'Sound the horns!' said Olaf the King;  
And suddenly through the drifting brume 120  
The blare of the horns began to ring,  
Like the terrible trumpet shock  
Of Regnarock,  
On the Day of Doom!

Louder and louder the war-horns sang 125  
Over the level floor of the flood;  
All the sails came down with a clang,  
And there in the mist overhead

The sun hung red  
As a drop of blood. 130

Drifting down on the Danish fleet

Three together the ships were lashed,  
So that neither should turn and retreat;  
In the midst, but in front of the rest  
    The burnished crest 135  
Of the Serpent flashed.

King Olaf stood on the quarter-deck,  
With bow of ash and arrows of oak,  
His gilded shield was without a fleck,  
His helmet inlaid with gold, 140  
    And in many a fold  
Hung his crimson cloak.

On the forecastle Ulf the Red  
Watched the lashing of the ships;  
‘If the Serpent lie so far ahead, 145  
We shall have hard work of it here,’  
    Said he with a sneer  
On his bearded lips.

King Olaf laid an arrow on string,  
‘Have I a coward on board?’ said he. 150  
‘Shoot it another way, O King!’  
Sullenly answered Ulf,  
    The old sea-wolf;  
‘You have need of me!’

In front came Svend, the King of the Danes, 155  
Sweeping down with his fifty rowers;  
To the right, the Swedish king with his thanes;  
And on board of the Iron Beard  
    Earl Eric steered  
To the left with his oars. 160

‘These soft Danes and Swedes’, said the King,  
‘At home with their wives had better stay,  
Than come within reach of my Serpent’s sting:  
But where Eric the Norseman leads  
    Heroic deeds 165  
Will be done to-day!’

Then as together the vessels crashed,

Eric severed the cables of hide,  
With which King Olaf's ships were lashed,  
And left them to drive and drift 170  
    With the currents swift  
Of the outward tide.

Louder the war-horns growl and snarl  
Sharper the dragons bite and sting!  
Eric the son of Hakon Jarl 175  
A death-drink salt as the sea  
    Pledges to thee,  
Olaf the King!

XX

EINAR TAMBERSKELVER

It was Einar Tamberskelver  
    Stood beside the mast; 180  
From his yew-bow, tipped with silver,  
    Flew the arrows fast;  
Aimed at Eric unavailing,  
    As he sat concealed,  
Half behind the quarter-railing, 185  
    Half behind his shield.

First an arrow struck the tiller,  
    Just above his head;  
'Sing, O Eyvind Skaldaspiller,'  
    Then Earl Eric said. 190  
'Sing the song of Hakon dying,  
    Sing his funeral wail!'  
And another arrow flying  
    Grazed his coat of mail.

Turning to a Lapland yeoman, 195  
    As the arrow passed,  
Said Earl Eric, 'Shoot that bowman  
    Standing by the mast.'  
Sooner than the word was spoken  
    Flew the yeoman's shaft; 200  
Einar's bow in twain was broken,  
    Einar only laughed.

‘What was that?’ said Olaf, standing  
 On the quarter-deck.  
 ‘Something heard I like the stranding 205  
 Of a shattered wreck.’  
 Einar then, the arrow taking  
 From the loosened string,  
 Answered, ‘That was Norway breaking  
 From thy hand, O King!’ 210  
  
 ‘Thou art but a poor diviner,’  
 Straightway Olaf said;  
 ‘Take my bow, and swifter, Einar,  
 Let thy shafts be sped.’  
 Of his bows the fairest choosing, 215  
 Reached he from above;  
 Einar saw the blood-drops oozing  
 Through his iron glove.  
  
 But the bow was thin and narrow;  
 At the first assay, 220  
 O’er its head he drew the arrow,  
 Flung the bow away;  
 Said, with hot and angry temper  
 Flushing in his cheek,  
 ‘Olaf! for so great a Kämper 225  
 Are thy bows too weak!’  
  
 Then, with smile of joy defiant  
 On his beardless lip,  
 Scaled he, light and self-reliant,  
 Eric’s dragon-ship. 230  
 Loose his golden locks were flowing,  
 Bright his armour gleamed;  
 Like Saint Michael overthrowing  
 Lucifer he seemed.

XXI

KING OLAF’S DEATH-DRINK

All day has the battle raged, 235  
 All day have the ships engaged,  
 But not yet is assuaged



The vengeance of Eric the Earl.

The decks with blood are red,  
The arrows of death are sped, 240  
The ships are filled with the dead,  
And the spears the champions hurl.

They drift as wrecks on the tide,  
The grappling irons are plied,  
The boarders climb up the side, 245  
The shouts are feeble and few.

Ah! never shall Norway again  
See her sailors come back o'er the main;  
They all lie wounded or slain,  
Or asleep in the billows blue! 250

On the deck stands Olaf the King,  
Around him whistle and sing  
The spears that the foemen fling,  
And the stones they hurl with their hands.

In the midst of the stones and the spears, 255  
Kolbiorn, the marshal, appears,  
His shield in the air he uprears,  
By the side of King Olaf he stands.

Over the slippery wreck  
Of the Long Serpent's deck 260  
Sweeps Eric with hardly a check,  
His lips with anger are pale;

He hews with his axe at the mast,  
Till it falls, with the sails overcast,  
Like a snow-covered pine in the vast 265  
Dim forests of Orkadale.

Seeking King Olaf then,  
He rushes aft with his men,  
As a hunter into the den  
Of the bear, when he stands at bay. 270

'Remember Jarl Hakon!' he cries;

When lo! on his wondering eyes,  
Two kingly figures arise,  
    Two Olafs in warlike array!

Then Kolbiorn speaks in the ear 275  
Of King Olaf a word of cheer,  
In a whisper that none may hear,  
    With a smile on his tremulous lip;

Two shields raised high in the air,  
Two flashes of golden hair, 280  
Two scarlet meteors' glare,  
    And both have leaped from the ship.

Earl Eric's men in the boats  
Seize Kolbiorn's shield as it floats,  
And cry, from their hairy throats, 285  
    'See! it is Olaf the King!'

While far on the opposite side  
Floats another shield on the tide,  
Like a jewel set in the wide  
    Sea-current's eddying ring. 290

There is told a wonderful tale,  
How the King stripped off his mail,  
Like leaves of the brown sea-kale,  
    As he swam beneath the main;

But the young grew old and gray, 295  
And never, by night or by day,  
In his kingdom of Norroway  
    Was King Olaf seen, again!

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW, 1807-82.

## CONARY

### *Introductory Note.*

The old Irish Bardic tale of the Destruction of the House (*bruidin*) of Da-Derga—for my first acquaintance with which I am indebted to Mr. W. M. Hennessy—furnishes the ground-work of this piece; but it will not be understood that ‘Conary’ pretends to be a full reproduction of the *Togail bruidin da dergae*, or that all its incidents are drawn from that source.

The *Bruidin* is generally regarded as having been a kind of Caravanserai; and there seem good grounds for accepting the idea of the late ingenious Mr. Crowe that it represents, in the west of Europe, the *Prytaneum* or house of state-hospitality of the ancient Greeks. There appear to have been six principal places of this kind in Ireland at the commencement of the Christian era; and one of these, called Bruidin-Da-Derga, is said to have been the scene of the death of King Conary Mor, whose reign is made to synchronize with the close of the Pagan period, under the circumstances related in the tale.

The classical reader will find in the *Togail* a curious—probably an unexpected—illustration of the old eastern method of computing the losses in a military expedition. There, the forces, before departing on their campaign, cast each man an arrow into a common receptacle; from which, on their return, each man withdrew an arrow; and the weapons remaining represented the dead and missing. (*Procop. de bell. Pers.* l. i., c. ii.) The actors in the *Togail* cast, every man, a stone into a common heap, or cairn, and what remained after each survivor had withdrawn his stone, served as the census and memorial of the slain.

The singular and terrible properties ascribed to the Spear of Keltar in the *Togail* may not be without some bearing on Homer’s expression *μαίνεται ἐν παλάμῃσι* in reference to the Spear of Diomedes.

The *Togail* also contributes its evidence to the great antiquity of the leading lines of highway. There were five of these ‘Streets’ radiating from Tara, the two mentioned in the tale together corresponding pretty nearly with the old post-road from Dublin to the north. The author of the *Togail* places the site of Bruidin-Da-Derga on the River Dodder, in the ancient territory of Cualann, near Dublin, where *Bober nabreena*, or ‘Road of the Bruidin’, still preserves the name. The fact of a sea-invasion corresponding in its main features with the descent of the pirates on the coasts of Meath and Dublin, is chronicled in the Book of Howth, and still lives very vividly in local oral tradition about Balrothery and Balbriggan.

Full peace was Erin’s under Conary,  
Till—though his brethren by the tender tie  
Of fosterage—Don Dessa’s lawless sons,  
Fer-ger, Fer-gel, and vengeful Fergobar,  
For crimes that justly had demanded death,  
By judgement mild he sent in banishment;

Yet wrung his own fraternal heart the while,  
Whose brothers, Ferragon and Lomna Druth,  
Drawn by affection's ties, and thinking scorn  
To stay behind while others led the way 10  
To brave adventure, in their exile joined.

Banished the land of Erin, on the sea  
They roamed, and, roaming, with the pirate-hordes  
Of British Ingcel leagued; and this their pact:  
The spoil of Britain's and of Alba's coasts 15  
To fall to them; and Erin's counter-spoil  
To fall to Ingcel. Britain's borders first  
They ravaged; and in one pernicious raid  
Of sack and slaughter indiscriminate,  
Ingcel's own father and his brethren seven 20  
By chance sojourning with the victims, slew.  
Then, Alba sack'd, said Ingcel, 'Steer we now  
For Erin, and the promised counter-spoil.'

' 'Tis just; and welcome to our souls as well  
For outrage unavenged,' said Fergobar. 25  
' 'Tis just: it is thy right,' said Ferragon.  
' 'Tis just, and woe it is!' said Lomna Druth.

'Twas then that Conary from strife composed  
By kingly counsel, 'twixt contending lords  
Of distant Thomond, held his journey home. 30  
But, when in sight of Tara, lo, the sky  
On every side reflected rising flame  
And gleam of arms. 'What this?' cried Conary.

A certain Druid was there in the train  
Who answered, 'Often did I warn thee, King, 35  
This journey at this season was ill-timed,  
As made in violation of the *gaysh*<sup>[1]</sup>  
That King of Tara shall not judge a cause  
Except in Tara's proper judgement hall  
From Beltane-day to May-day.'

'Yea, in truth, 40  
I do remember now,' said Conary,  
'Amongst my prohibitions that is one,  
Which thoughtlessly I've broken. Strange it is

That act for speedy justice and for peace  
 Accomplished, should, with God, be disesteem'd. 45  
 But, since Religion's awful voice forbids,  
 I pray forgiveness of offended Heaven,  
 Whose anger at my fault too plain I see,  
 And vow atonement at thy own award.  
 But, which way now?'

'Ride northward to the track 50  
 Where Street Midluachra and Street Cualann join;  
 There, choice of highway waits us, north or south.'  
 Northward they rode. 'What be these moving brakes  
 Before us? Nay, 'tis but a running drove  
 Of antlered stags. Whence come they? and whence come 55  
 These darkening flights of fowl above our heads?'  
 'These the wild brood of Clane-Milcarna's dens:'  
 Replied the druid. 'It is another *gaysh*  
 For Tara's King to see them leave their lairs  
 After mid-day; and ill will come of it.' 60

'Omens of evil gather round my path,  
 Though thought of evil in my breast is none,'  
 Said Conary, and heaved a heavy sigh;  
 'Yet, since I reign by law, and holy men  
 Charged with the keeping of the law, declare 65  
 Thou shalt not so-and-so, at such a time  
 Do or leave undone, it beseems not me  
 To question for what end the law is so:  
 Though, were it but a human ordinance,  
 'Twere, haply, counted childish: but, go to, 70  
 I own another violated *gaysh*;  
 I pray forgiveness of offended Heaven;  
 And, since some fierce invading enemy—  
 Misguided brothers, that it be not you!—  
 Bars our approach to Tara, let us choose 75  
 Cualann highroad; for Cualann-ward there dwells  
 One whom I once befriended; and I know  
 His home will give me shelter for to-night,  
 Knew I aright the way that leads to it.'

'Name of the man, oh King?' demanded Cecht 80  
 (Fly ye, foes all, fly ye before the face  
 Of Cecht, the battle-sidesman of the King!),  
 The biggest man yet gentlest-countenanced

Of all that rode in Conary's company.

'Da-Derga he,' said Conary.

'Ride on,'

85

Said Cecht. 'Street Cualann whereon now we are  
Leads straight to Bru'n-Da-Derga, and leads straight

Through and beyond it. 'Tis a house of rest

For all that come and go; where ready still

The traveller finds the wind-dried fuel stack'd,

90

The cauldron slung, the ale-vat on the floor.

A strong, fast mansion. Seven good doors it has,

And seven good benches betwixt door and door

And seven good couches spread 'twixt bench and bench.

All that attend thee now, and all that come—

95

See where they come along Midluachra track,

The host of Emain, in good time I judge,

Journeying south—shall nothing want for room.

I shall go forward: for my duty it is

To enter first at nightfall, when my king

100

Comes to his lodging; and with flint and steel

Kindle the fire whose flame shall guide him home.'

Then forth, at gallop of his steeds, went Cecht;

While, slower following, Conary was aware

Of three that rode before them on the way.

105

Red were their coursers and their mantles red,

Red, too, their caps, blood-red—

'Another *gaysh*,'

Said Conary. 'I also call to mind

Amid my prohibitions this is one,

To follow three red riders on the way;

110

Injunction idle, were it not divine.

After them, Ferflath; stay them till we pass.'

Then the light lad young Ferflath, Conary's son,

Sprang forth at gallop on the red men's track,

And called his message shrilly from behind,

115

But failed to overtake them. He who rode

Last of the triad sang him back a lay—

'Water, oh youth, oh slight swift-riding youth,

On back, on neck, on shoulder lightly borne,

Water will quench: fire burn; and shocks of hair

120

At horrid tidings, upon warriors' heads

Bristle as reeds in water; water; ho!'

Ferflath returned, and told to Conary  
The lay the red man sang; ‘and sir,’ he said,  
‘I rode, I think, as seemly as himself, 125  
And know not what he meant: but sure I am  
These are not men of mankind, as we are,  
But fairy men and ministers of ill.’

‘Now then,’ said Conary, ‘let every *gaysh*  
That dread Religion with hard-knotting hand 130  
Binds on the King of Tara, for to-day  
Be broken! Let them go. They may precede;  
May tie their red steeds at the great hall door,  
And choose their seats within; and I, the King,  
May follow, and accept the traveller’s place 135  
Last to attain the inn. Well, be it so:  
Respect departs with fortune’s one-day change,  
But, friends, despond not, you. Though few we be  
In midst of these marauders (oh, my heart  
Forbid the rising thought that these be they!) 140  
Yet shall we soon be many; for they come,  
They whom on Street Midluachra late we saw,  
Now following on Street Cualann. In good time  
They join us; for, be sure such chariot-throng  
Leaves not the borders of the warlike North, 145  
But champions good come with it. Let us in.’

While thus fared Conary, the pirates’ scouts  
Who watched the coast, put off to where the fleet,  
Stay’d on the heaving ridges of the main,  
Lay off Ben-Edar. Ingcel’s galley reached, 150  
High on the prow they found him looking forth,  
As from a crag o’er-hanging grassy lands  
Where home-bred cattle graze, the lion glares  
A-hungered; and, behind, as meaner beasts  
That wait the lion’s onset for their share, 155  
Outlaw’d and reprobate of many a land,  
The ravening crew. Beside him, right and left,  
Stood Lomna, Ferragon, and Fergobar;  
Which Lomna in the closure of his cloak  
Wore a gold brooch embossed with flashing gems 160  
Choicest by far of all their spoils yet won:  
And Ingcel thus demanded of the spies—

‘What saw ye, say?’

‘A chariot-cavalcade

Along Street Cualann moving from the north.

Splendid the show of lofty-pacing steeds 165

And glittering war-cars: chariots seventeen

We counted. In the first were reverend men,

Poets, belike, or judges. After these

Heralds, it seem’d, or high apparitors

That give the world to know a great one comes. 170

He in the third car rode; an aged man,

Full-grey, majestic, of face serene,

Followed by household numerous and strong,

Cooks, butlers, door-wards, cup-bearers, and grooms.’

‘What heard ye?’

‘From a vast hall’s open doors

175

The stroke of steel on flint at kindling fire;

And every stroke so sounded as the arm

That gave it were a giant’s, and every shower

Of sparks it shed—as if a summer sky

Lightened at eve—illumined the dusk around.’ 180

‘What this, good Ferragon, who best of all  
Knowest Erin, hill and valley, things and men?’

Said Ingcel. Ferragon made answer slow,

(For, first, his soul said this within himself,

‘Oh, royal brother, that it be not thou!’)— 185

‘I know not what may be this open hall

With fire at hand unless, belike, it be

Da-Derga’s guest-house, which, for all who come

By Cualann Street, stands open, wherein still

Firewood stands stack’d and brazen cauldron hangs 190

Slung ready, and clear water running through;

Bruidin-Da-Derga.’

‘And the man who strikes

The flint and steel to kindle fire therein?’

‘I know not if it be not that he be

Some king’s fore-runner, sent before a king 195

To kindle fire ere yet the king himself

And royal household reach their resting-place.’

‘And he who in the thirdmost chariot rode,



He who is grey, serene, majesticl?’

‘I know not if it be not that he be  
Some king of Erin’s sub-kings who, to-night,  
Rests in Da-Derga’s hospitable hall.’ 200

‘Up sail! To shore!’ cried Ingcel; and the fleet,  
As flight of wild-geese startled from a fen,  
Displayed their wings of white, and made the land. 205

’Twas at Troy Furveen, and the sun was down;  
But, from Da-Derga’s hall so streamed the light,  
It shone at distance as a ruddy star;  
And thitherward the host o’er moor and fell  
Marched straight: but when behind a sheltering knoll 210  
Hard by, but still concealed, the ranks were drawn,  
‘Make now our carn,’ said Ingcel, and the host  
Defiling past him, cast, each man, his stone  
All in one heap.

‘When this night’s work is done,’  
Said Ingcel, ‘he who shall return alive 215  
Shall take his stone again. Who not returns,  
His stone shall here remain his monument.  
And now, before we make the trial of who  
Returns, and who stays yonder, let us send  
Scout Milscoth—for he bears the boast of sight 220  
And far-off hearing far above us all—  
To spy the house and bring us speedy word  
Of all he sees and hears, outside and in:  
So shall we judge how best to win the same.’

Forth went the spy: they waited by their carn, 225  
Till, gliding as a shadow, he returned:  
And round him, as he came, they drew a ring,  
Round him and Ingcel and Don Dessa’s sons,  
And round their destined stones of memory.

‘What sawest thou outward?’  
‘Outward of the house 230  
I saw, drawn up at every guarded door,  
Full seventeen chariots; and, between the spokes,  
Spying, I saw, to rings of iron tied,  
At end and side wall, thrice a hundred steeds  
Groom’d sleek, ear-active, eating corn and hay.’ 235

‘What means this concourse, think’st thou, Ferragon?’  
 ‘I know not if it be not that a host  
 Resorting, it may be, to games or fair  
 At Tara or at Taltin, rest to-night  
 In the great guest-house. ’Twill be heavier cost 240  
 Of blows and blood to win it than it seem’d.’  
 ‘A guest-house, whether many within or few,  
 Is as the travellers’ temple, and esteemed  
 In every civil land a sanctuary.  
 ’Twere woe to sack the inn,’ said Lomna Druth. 245  
 ‘Lomna,’ said Ingcel, ‘when we swore our oaths  
 We made not reservation of the inn:  
 And, for their numbers, fear not, Ferragon;  
 The more, the more the spoil. Say on, and tell  
 What heard’st thou?’  
 ‘Through the open doors I heard 250  
 A hum as of a crowd of feasting men.  
 Princely the murmur, as when voices strong  
 Of far-heard captains on the front of war  
 Sink low and sweet in company of queens.’  
 ‘What think’st thou, Ferragon?’  
 ‘The gentlest speech 255  
 Within doors gives the loudest cheer afield.  
 Methinks to spoil this house will try our strength.’  
 ‘And it shall try it: and our strength shall bear  
 That and worse trial. Say, what sawest thou next  
 Within the house? Begin from the right hand.’ 260  
 ‘To rightward of the great door in the midst  
 A bench I saw: ten warriors sat thereon.  
 The captain of the ten was thus. His brow  
 Thick and high arching o’er a grey clear eye:  
 A face long-oval, broader-boned above: 265  
 A man whose look bespoke adventure past  
 And days of danger welcome yet to come,  
 Though sadden’d somewhat, haply by remorse  
 For blood ill-spilt or broken vows or both.  
 His mantle green, his brooch and sword-hilt gold,’ 270  
 ‘What captain this, conceiv’st thou, Ferragon?’  
 ‘I know him; verily a man of might;  
 A man of name renown’d in field and hall;

Cormac Condlongas, long the banish'd son  
 Of Conor son of Nessa. When his sire 275  
 Through love of Deirdre broke his guarantees  
 Pledged to his step-sire, Fergus son of Roy,  
 For Usnach's sons' safe-conduct, Cormac, he,  
 Through love of Fergus and through stronger love  
 Of kingly-plighted honour undefiled, 280  
 Abjured his father's councils and his court,  
 And in the hostile halls of western Maeve  
 Spent many a year of heart-corroding care,  
 And many a man of Ulster, many a man  
 Of his own kin, in alien service, slew. 285  
 If he be there, methinks to-night's assault  
 Will leave the stones of some here unremoved.'

Said Ingcel, 'I shall know him, when I see  
 That pale remorseful visage by and by,  
 And that same brooch and sword-hilt shall be mine. 290  
 What of the nine?'

'The nine he sat among  
 Were men of steadfast looks, that at his word,  
 So seemed it me, would stay not to inquire  
 Whose kindred were they he might bid them slay.'

'Knowest thou, oh friend, the serviceable nine?' 295

'I know them also,' answered Ferragon.  
 'Of them 'tis said they never slew a man  
 For evil deed, and never spared a man  
 For good deed; but, as ordered, duteous, slew  
 Or slew not. Shun that nine, unless your heads 300  
 Be cased in casquets made of adamant;  
 Else shall the corpse of many a valiant man  
 Now present, on Da-Derga's threshold lie.'

'Nine for his nine!' said Ingcel. 'Think not thou  
 By tongue-drawn dangers and deterrent phrase 305  
 Exaggerate, to shake my settled soul  
 From that which is my right. Say on: what next?'

'A bench of three: thick-hair'd, and equal-long  
 The hair on poll and brow. Black cloaks they wore,  
 Black their sword-sheaths, their hafted lances black; 310  
 Fair men, withal, themselves, and ruddy-brown.'

‘Who these, oh Ferragon?’

‘I know not, I,

Unless, it may be, these be of the Picts  
Exiled from Alba, who in Conor’s house  
Have shelter; and, if these indeed be they, 315  
Three better out of Alba never came  
Or sturdier to withstand the brunt of blows.’

‘Blows they shall have,’ said Ingcel; ‘and their home,  
Rid of their presence well, shall not again  
Have need to doom them to a new exile. 320  
What further sawest thou?’

‘On the bench beside

I saw three slender, three face-shaven men,  
Robed in red mantles and with caps of red.  
No swords had they, nor bore they spear or shield,  
But each man on his knees a bagpipe held 325  
With jewelled chanter flashing as he moved,  
And mouth-piece ready to supply the wind.’

‘What pipers these?’

‘These pipers of a truth,

If so it be that I mistake them not,  
Appear not often in men’s halls of glee; 330  
Men of the *Sidhs*<sup>[2]</sup> they are; and I have heard  
When strife fell out in Tara Luachra’s hall  
Around Cuchullin and the butchering bands  
Of treacherous Maeve and Ailill, they were there.’

‘To-night their pipes shall play us to our ships 335  
With strains of triumph; or their fingers’ ends  
Shall never close the stops of music more,’  
So Ingcel; but again said Ferragon,

‘Men of the *Sidhs* they are: to strike at them  
Is striking at a shadow. If ’tis they, 340  
Shun this assault; for I have also heard  
At the first tuning of these elvish pipes  
Nor crow nor cormorant round all the coasts  
But hastens to partake the flesh of men.’

‘Flesh ye shall have, of Ingcel’s enemies, 345  
All fowl that hither flap the wing to-night!  
And music too at table, as it seems.  
What further sawest thou?’

‘On a broader bench

Three vast-proportioned warriors, by whose side  
The slender pipers showed as small as wrens. 350  
In their first greyness they; grey-dark their robes,  
Grey-dark their swords enormous, of an edge  
To slice the hair on water. He who sits  
The midmost of the three grasps with both hands  
A spear of fifty rivets, and so sways 355  
And swings the weapon as a man might think  
The very thing had life, and struggled strong  
To dash itself at breasts of enemies:  
A cauldron at his feet, big as the vat  
Of a king’s kitchen; in that vat a pool, 360  
Hideous to look upon, of liquor black:  
Therein he dips and cools the blade by times.’

‘Resolve us who be these three, Ferragon.’

‘Not hard to tell; though hard, perchance to hear  
For those who listen, and who now must know 365  
What foes their fortunes dooms them cope withal,  
If this assault be given while these be here.  
These three are Sencha son of Olioll,  
Called “Half-the-battle” by admiring men;  
Duftach, for fierceness named the Addercop; 370  
And Govnan son of Luigneach; and the spear  
In hands of Duftach is the famous “*lann*<sup>[3]</sup>”  
Of Keltar son of Utechar, which erst  
A wizard of the Tuath De Danaan brought  
To battle at Moy Tury, and there lost: 375  
Found after. And these motions of the spear,  
And sudden sallies hard to be restrained,  
Affect it, oft as blood of enemies  
Is ripe for spilling; and a cauldron then  
Full of witch-brewage needs must be at hand, 380  
To quench it, when the homicidal act  
Is by its blade expected; quench it not,  
It blazes up, even in the holder’s hand,  
And through the holder, and the door-planks through,  
Flies forth to sate itself in massacre. 385  
Ours is the massacre it now would make:

Our blood it maddens for: sirs, have a care  
How ye assault where champions such as these  
Armed with the *lann* of Keltar, wait within.'

'I have a certain blade,' said Ingcel, 'here;  
Steel'd by Smith Wayland in a Lochlann cave  
Whose temper has not failed me; and I mean  
To cut the foul head off this Addercop,  
And snap his gadding spear across my knee.  
Go on, and say what more thou sawest within.'

'A single warrior on a separate bench  
I saw. Methinks no man was ever born  
So stately-built, so perfect of his limbs,  
So hero-like as he. Fair-haired he is  
And yellow-bearded, with an eye of blue.  
He sits apart and wears a wistful look,  
As if he missed some friend's companionship.'

Then Ferragon, not waiting question, cried,  
'Gods! all the foremost, all the valiantest  
Of Erin's champions, gathered in one place  
For our destruction, are assembled here!  
That man is Conall Carnach; and the friend  
He looks for vainly with a wistful eye  
Is great Cuchullin: he no more shall share  
The upper bench with Conall; since the tomb  
Holds him, by hand of Conall well avenged.  
The foremost this, the mightiest champion this  
Left of the Red Branch, since Cuchullin's fall.  
Look you, as thick as fragments are of ice  
When one night's frost is crackled underfoot,  
As thick as autumn leaves, as blades of grass,  
Shall the lopp'd members and the cloven half-heads  
Of them that hear me, be, by break of day,  
Before Da-Derga's doors, if this assault  
Be given, while Conall Carnach waits within!'

'Pity to slay that man,' said Lomna Druth.  
'That is the man who, matched at fords of Clane,  
With maimed Mesgedra, though no third was near,  
Tied up his own right hand, to fight him fair.  
A man both mild and valiant, frank and wise,

A friend of men of music and of song,  
Loved of all women: were there only one  
Such hero in the house, for that one's sake  
Forgo this slaughter!

‘Lomna,’ Ingcel said,  
‘Not without reason do men call thee fool; 430  
And, Ferragon, think not that fear of man  
The bravest ever born on Irish soil  
Shall make its shameful entrance in the breast  
Of one of all who hear us. Spy, say on,  
What further sawest thou?’

‘Three brave youths I saw; 435  
Three brothers, as I judge. Their mantles wide  
Were all of Syrian silk; and needle-work  
Of gold on every hem. With ivory combs  
They smoothed the shining ridges of their hair  
That spread and rippled to their shoulder-tips, 440  
And moved with every motion of their brows.  
A slender, tender boy beside them slept,  
His head in one attendant's lap, his feet  
In lap of other one; and, couched beside,  
A hound I saw, and heard him “Ossar” called.’ 445

‘Whose be these Syrian silks shall soon be mine.  
O Ferragon? and wherefore weep'st thou, say?’  
‘Alas, too well I know them; and I weep  
To think that where they are, he must be near,  
Their father, Conary, himself, the king; 450  
And woe it is that he whose infant lips  
Suck'd the same breast as ours, should now be there!’

‘What, Conary, the arch-king of the realm  
Of Erin here? Say, sawest thou there a king?’

‘I know not if a king; but one I saw 455  
Seated apart: before his couch there hung  
A silver broidered curtain; grey he was,  
Of aspect mild, benevolent, composed.  
A cloak he wore of colour like the haze  
Of a May morning when the sun shines warm 460  
On dewy meads and fresh-ploughed tillage land,  
Variously beautiful, with border broad  
Of golden wool that glittered to his knee  
A stream of light. Before him on the floor

A juggler played his feats: nine balls he had, 465  
And flung them upward, eight in air at once,  
And one in hand: like swarm of summer bees  
They danced and circled, till his eye met mine;  
Then he could catch no more; but down they fell  
And rolled upon the floor. "An evil eye 470  
Has seen me," said the juggler; and the child  
Who slept beside, awoke, and cried aloud,  
"Ossar! good dog, hie forth and chase the thieves!"  
Then judged I longer to remain were ill,  
But, ere I left, discharged a rapid glance 475  
Around the house, beholding many a band  
Of able guardsmen corsleted and helm'd,  
Of captains, carriers, farriers, charioteers,  
Horseboys and laqueys, all in order set,  
All good men of their hands, and weapon'd well.' 480

Said Ferragon, 'If my advice were given,  
'Twould be to leave this onset unessayed.'

'Pity to slay this king,' said Lomna Druth:  
'Since he has reigned there has not fallen a year  
Of dearth, or plague, or murrain on the land: 485  
The dew has never left the blade of grass  
One day of Conary's time, before the noon;  
Nor harsh wind ruffled hair upon the side  
Of grazing beast. Since he began his reign,  
From mid-spring to mid-autumn, cloud nor storm 490  
Has dimm'd the daily-shining, bounteous sun;  
But each good year has seen its harvests three,  
Of blade, of ear, of fruit, apple and nut.  
Peace until now in all his realm has reigned,  
And terror of just laws kept men secure. 495  
What though, by love constrained, in passion's hour,  
I joined my fortunes to the desperate fates  
Of hapless kinsmen, I repent it now,  
And wish that rigorous law had had its course  
Sooner than this good king should now be slain.' 500

'Not spoken like a brother,' Ingcel said,  
'Nor one who feels for brothers by the side



Of a grey father butchered, as I feel.’

‘ ’Twas blind chance-medley, and we knew them not,  
For kin of thine,’ said Ferragon; ‘but he, 505  
This king, is kin of ours; and that thou knowest  
With seasonable warning: it were woe  
To slay him.’

‘Woe it were, perchance, to thee;  
To me, ’twere joy to slay both him and them;  
’Twere blood for blood, and what my soul desires. 510  
My father was a king: my brethren seven  
Were princely nurtured. Think’st thou I for them  
Feel not compassion? nourish not desire  
Of vengeance? No. I stand upon the oaths  
Ye swore me; I demand my spoil for spoil, 515  
My blood for blood.’

‘ ’Tis just,’ said Fergobar,  
‘We promised and will make the bargain good.’

‘Yet take the spoil we own to be thy right  
Elsewhere,’ said Ferragon; ‘not here nor now.  
We gave thee licence, and we grant it still, 520  
To take a plunder: look around and choose  
What trading port, what dealers’ burgh ye will,  
We give it, and will help you to the gain.’

‘We gave thee licence,’ Lomna said,—‘and I 525  
Grieve that we gave it, yea, or took the like,—  
To take a plunder; but we gave thee not  
Licence to take the life, the soul itself  
Of our whole nation, as you now would do.  
For, slay our reverend sages of the law,  
Slay him who puts the law they teach in act; 530  
Slay our sweet poets, and our sacred bards,  
Who keep the continuity of time  
By fame perpetual of renowned deeds;  
Slay our experienced captains who prepare  
The youth for martial manhood, and the charge 535  
Of public freedom, as befits a state  
Self-governed, self-sufficing, self-contained;  
Slay all that minister our loftier life,  
Now by this evil chance assembled here,

You leave us but the carcass of a state, 540  
A rabble ripe to rot, and yield the land  
To foreign masters and perpetual shame.'

Said Ingcel, 'This night's plunder is my own,  
And paid for. I shall take it here and now.  
I heed not Lomna's airy rhetoric; 545  
But this I say, and mark it, Ferragon:  
Let him who would turn craven, if he will,  
Take up his stone and go: and take withal  
Contempt of valiant men.'

Said Lomna Druth,  
'He is no craven, Ingcel; nor am I. 550  
His heart misgives him, not because he fears  
To match himself in manly feat of arms  
With any champion, but because he fears  
To do an impious act, as I too fear.'

'I own it true,' said Ferragon, 'my heart 555  
Is full of anguish and remorseful love  
Towards him, my sovereign, who did never wrong,  
Save in not meting justice to the full  
Against these violators of his law,  
Who now repay his clemency with death.' 560

'Call it not clemency,' said Fergobar:  
'He drove us naked from ancestral homes  
To herd with outlaws and with desperate men.'

'Outlaws we are; and so far desperate,'  
Said Ingcel, 'that we mean to sack this house, 565  
And for the very reason that he says,  
Because the richest jewels, both of men  
And gold, the land affords, are gathered there.'

Then Lomna from his mantle took the brooch,  
And said, 'Oh Ingcel, this and whatso else 570  
Of other plunder fallen to my share  
Lies in the ships, I offer. Take it all,  
But leave this house unsack'd.'

Said Ferragon,  
'Take also all my share; but spare the king.'

But Ingcel roughly pushed the brooch away, 575  
And said, 'Have done. The onset shall be given.'

'The onset shall be given, unless the earth  
Open and swallow us!' said Fergobar.

'The onset shall be given, unless the heavens  
Fall solid on us!' answered Ger and Gel. 580

'The onset shall be given!' replied they all.

Then Lomna,—laying his brooch upon the heap,—  
'Who first returns—but I shall not return—  
To take his stone again, take also this;  
And, for the rest of what my sword has gained, 585  
Share it among you. I forgive you all,  
And bid you all farewell; for nothing now  
Remains for me but death:' and with the word  
He struck his dagger in his heart, and fell.

'Kings, lords, and men of war,' said Ferragon, 590  
'Comrades till now, the man whose body lies  
Before us, though we used to call him fool  
Because his heart was softer and his speech  
More delicate than ours, I now esteem  
Both wise and brave, and noble in his death. 595

He spoke me truly, for he knew my heart  
Unspoken, when he said 'twas not through fear  
Of death I spoke dissuading; but through fear  
Of conscience: but your hearts I better knew  
Leaving unspoken what was in my own; 600  
For well indeed I knew how vain it were  
To talk of pity, love, or tenderness  
To bloody-minded and to desperate men.

Therefore I told you, and I told you true  
What loss to reckon of your wretched lives, 605  
Entering this dragons' den; but did not tell  
The horror and the anguish sharp as death  
In my own bosom entering as I knew  
The pictured presence of each faithful friend,

And of that sire revered, ye now consign 610  
To massacre and bloody butchery.  
And that 'twas love that swayed me, and not fear,

Take this for proof:’ and drew and slew himself.

‘Comrades and valiant partners,’ Ingcel cried,

‘Stand not to pause to wonder or lament 615

These scrupulous companions; rest them well!

But set your spirits to achieve the end

That brought us hither. Now that they are gone

And nothing hinders, are we all agreed

To give this onset bravely and at once?’ 620

‘I speak for all,’ said Fergobar. ‘Agreed!

Ready we are and willing, and I myself,

Having my proper vows of vengeance,

Will lead you, and be foremost of you all.’

They raised the shout of onset: from his seat 625

Leaped Cecht, leaped Cormac, Conall Carnach leaped,

And Duftach from the cauldron drew his spear;

But Conary with countenance serene

Sat on unmoved. ‘We are enough,’ he said,

‘To hold the house, though thrice our number came; 630

And little think they, whosoe’er they are,

(Grant, gracious ones of Heaven, it be not they!)

That such a welcome waits them at the hands

Of Erin’s choicest champions. Door-keepers,

Stand to your posts, and strike who enters down!’ 635

The shout came louder, and at every door

At once all round the house, the shock began

Of charging hosts and battery of blows;

And through the door that fronted Conary’s seat

A man burst headlong, reeling, full of wounds, 640

But dropped midway, smote by the club of Cecht.

‘What, thou? oh Fergobar!’ cried Conary;

‘Say, ere thou diest, that thou art alone—

That Ferragon and Lomna whom I love

Are not among you.’

‘King,’ said Fergobar, 645

‘I die without the vengeance that I vowed.

Thou never lovedst me: but the love thou gavest

My hapless brothers, well have they returned,

And both lie outside, slain by their own hands

Rather than join in this cause with me.'

650

'The gods between us judge,' said Conary.  
'Cast not his body forth. I loved him once,  
And burial he shall have, when, by and by,  
These comrades of his desperate attempt  
Are chased away.'

But swiftly answered Cecht,  
'King, they bring fire without: and, see, the stream  
Runs dry before our feet, damm'd off above.'

655

'Then, truly, lords,' said Conary, 'we may deign  
To put our swords to much unworthy use.  
Cormac Condlongas, take a troop with thee,  
And chase them from the house; and, strangers, ye  
Who rode before me without licence asked;  
I see ye be musicians; take your pipes  
And sound a royal pibroch, one of you,  
Before the chief.'

660

'Yea, mighty king,' said one,  
'The strain I play ye shall remember long,'  
And put the mouthpiece to his lips. At once—  
It seemed as earth and sky were sound alone,  
And every sound a maddening battle-call,  
So spread desire of fight through breast and brain,  
And every arm to feat of combat strung.  
Forth went the sallying hosts: the hosts within  
Heard the enlarging tumult from their doors  
Roll outward; and the clash and clamour heard  
Of falling foes before; and, over it,  
The yelling pibroch; but, anon, the din  
Grew distant and more distant; and they heard  
Instead, at every door new onset loud,  
And cry of 'Fire! Bring fire!'

665

670

675

'Behoves us make  
A champion-circuit of the house at large,'  
Said Conary. 'Thou, Duftach, who, I see,  
Can'st hardly keep the weapon in thy hand  
From flying on these caitiffs of itself,  
Lead thou, and take two cohorts of the guard,  
And let another piper play you on.'

680

685

'I fear them, these red pipers,' said the boy.

‘Peace, little Ferflath, thou art but a child,’  
Said Duftach. ‘Come, companions (—patience, spear!—),  
Blow up the pibroch; warriors, follow me!’

And forth they went, and with them rushed amain 690  
Senchad and Govnan and the thick-hair’d three  
Of Pictland with a shout; and all who heard  
Deemed that the spear of Keltar shouted too  
The loudest and the fiercest of them all.

So issued Duftach’s band: the hosts within 695  
Heard the commotion and the hurtling rout  
Half round the house, and heard the mingling scream  
Of pipes and death-cries far into the night;  
But distant and more distant grew the din,  
And Duftach came not back: but thronging back 700  
Came the assailants, and at every door  
Joined simultaneous battle once again.

Then Conall Carnach, who, at door and door,  
Swift as a shuttle from a weaver’s hand,  
Divided help, cried,

‘King, our friends are lost 705  
Unless another sally succour them!’

‘Take then thy troop,’ said Conary; ‘and thou,  
Red-capp’d companion, see thou play a strain  
So loud our comrades straying in the dark  
May hear and join you.’

‘Evil pipes are theirs. 710  
Trust not these pipers. I am but a child,’  
Said Ferflath; ‘but I know they are not men  
Of mankind, and will pipe you all to harm.’

‘Peace, little prince,’ said Conall. ‘Trust in me:  
I shall but make one circuit of the house, 715  
And presently be with thee; come, my men,  
Give me the *Brierin Conaill*, and my spear,  
And sound Cuchullin’s onset for the breach.’

And issuing, as a jet of smoke and flame  
Bursts from a fresh replenished furnace mouth, 720  
He and his cohort sallied: they within  
Heard the concussion and the spreading shock  
Through thick opposing legions overthrown,  
As, under hatches, men on shipboard hear  
The dashing and the tumbling waves without, 725

Half round the house; no more: clamour and scream  
Grew fainter in the distance; and the hosts  
Gazed on each other with misgiving eyes,  
And reckoned who were left: alack, but few!

‘Gods! can it be,’ said Conary, ‘that my chiefs  
Desert me in this peril!’ 730

‘King,’ said Cecht,  
‘Escape who will, we here desert thee not.’

‘Oh, never will I think that Conall fled,’  
Said Ferflath. ‘He is brave and kind and true,  
And promised me he would return again. 735  
It is these wicked sprites of fairy-land  
Who have beguiled the chiefs away from us.’

‘Alack,’ the druid cried; ‘he speaks the truth:  
He has the seër’s insight which the gods  
Vouchsafe to eyes of childhood. We are lost; 740  
And for thy fault, O Conary, the gods  
Have given us over to the spirits who dwell  
Beneath the earth.’

‘Deserted I may be,  
Not yet disheartened, nor debased in soul,’  
Said Conary. ‘My sons are with me still, 745  
And thou, my faithful sidesman, and you all  
Companions and partakers of my days  
Of glory and of power munificent,  
I pray the gods forgiveness if in aught,  
Weighty or trifling, I have done amiss; 750  
But here I stand, and will defend my life,  
Let come against me power of earth or hell,  
All but the gods themselves the righteous ones,  
Whom I revere.’

‘My king,’ said Cecht, ‘the knaves  
Swarm thick as gnats at every door again. 755  
Behoves us make a circuit, for ourselves,  
Around the house; for so our fortune stands  
That we have left us nothing else to choose  
But, out of doors, to beat them off, or burn  
Within doors; for they fire the house anew.’ 760

Then uprose kingly Conary himself  
And put his helmet on his sacred head,





‘My place is here,’ said Cecht, ‘by my king’s side:  
His sidesman I.’

‘Good papa Cecht, a drink,  
A drink, or I am sped!’ cried Conary.

‘Nay then,’ said Cecht, ‘it never shall be said  
My royal master craved a drink in vain, 805  
And water in a well, and life in me.

Swear ye to stand around him while ye live  
And I with but the goblet in one hand,  
And this good weapon in the other, will forth  
And fetch him drink;—alone, or say, with whom?’ 810

None answered but the little Ferflath; he  
Cried, ‘Take me with thee, papa Cecht, take me!’  
Then Cecht took up the boy and set him high  
On his left shoulder with the golden cup 815  
Of Conary in his hand; he raised his shield

High up for the protection of the child,  
And forth the great door, as a loosened rock  
(Fly ye, foes all, fly ye before the face  
Of Cecht, the battle-sidesman of the king!) 820

That from a hill-side shoots into a brake,  
Went through and through them with a hunter’s bound;  
And with another, and another, reached  
The outer rim of darkness, past their ken.  
Then down he set the lad, and hand in hand,  
They ran together till they reached the well 825  
And filled the cup.

‘My little son, stay here,’  
Said Cecht, ‘and I will carry, if I may,  
His drink to Conary.’

‘Oh, papa Cecht,  
Leave me not here,’ said Ferflath; ‘I shall run  
Beside thee, and shall follow in the lane, 830  
Thou’lt make me through them.’

‘Come then,’ answered Cecht,  
‘Bear thou the cup, and see it spill not: come!’

But ere they ran a spear-throw, Ferflath cried,  
‘Ah me, I’ve stumbled, and the water’s spilt.’

‘Alas,’ said Cecht, ‘re-fill, and let me bear.’

835

But ere they ran another spear-throw, Cecht  
Cried, ‘Woe is me; this ground is all too rough  
For hope that, running, we shall ever effect  
Our errand; and the time is deadly short.’

Again they filled the cup, and through the dawn  
Slow breaking, with impatient careful steps  
Held back their course, Cecht in his troubled mind  
Revolving how the child might bear his charge  
Behind him, when *his* turn should come for use

840

Of both his hands to clear and keep that lane;  
When, in the faint light of the growing dawn,

845

Casting his eyes to seaward, lo, the fleet  
Of Ingcel had set sail; and, gazing next  
Up the dim slope before him, on the ridge  
Between him and Da-Derga’s mansion, saw

850

Rise into view a chariot-cavalcade  
And Conall Carnach in the foremost car.

Behind him Cormac son of Conor came  
And Duftach bearing now a drooping spear,  
At head of all their sallying armament.

855

Wild, pale, and shame-faced were the looks of all,  
As men who doubted did they dream or wake,  
Or were they honest to be judged, or base.

‘Cecht, we are late,’ said Conall, ‘we and thou.  
He needs no more of drink who rides within.’

860

‘Is the king here?’

‘ ’Tis here that was the king.

We found him smothered under heaps of slain  
In middle floor.’

‘Thou, Ferflath, take the cup  
And hold it to thy father’s lips,’ said Cecht.

865

The child approached the cup; the dying king  
Felt the soft touch and smiled, and drew a sigh;  
And, as they raised him in the chariot, died.

‘A gentle and a generous king is gone,’  
Said Cecht, and wept. ‘I take to witness all  
Here present, that I did not leave his side

870

But by his own command. But how came ye,  
Choice men and champions of the warlike North,  
Tutors of old and samplars to our youth  
In loyalty and duty, how came ye  
To lose your lawful king alone to die?' 875

‘Cecht,’ answered Conall, ‘and thou, Ferflath,  
know,—  
For these be things concern both old and young—  
We live not of ourselves. The heavenly Gods  
Who give to every man his share of life  
Here in this sphere of objects visible 880  
And things prehensible by hands of men,  
Though good and just they are, are not themselves  
The only unseen beings of the world.  
Spirits there are around us in the air  
And elvish creatures of the earth, now seen, 885  
Now vanishing from sight; and we of these  
(But whether with, or whether without the will  
Of the just Gods I know not) have to-night  
By strong enchantments and prevailing spells,—  
Though mean the agents and contemptible,— 890  
Been fooled and baffled in a darkling maze  
And kept abroad despite our better selves,  
From succour of our king. We were enough  
To have brushed them off as flies; and while we made  
Our sallies through them, bursting from the doors, 895  
We quelled them flat: but when these wicked sprites,—  
For now I know, men of the *Sidhs* they were—  
Who played their pipes before us, led us on  
Into the outer margin of the night,  
No man amongst us all could stay himself, 900  
Or keep from following; and they kept us there,  
As men who walk asleep, in drowsy trance  
Listening a sweet pernicious melody,  
And following after in an idle round  
Till all was finished, and the plunderers gone. 905  
Haply they hear me, and the words I speak  
May bring their malice also upon me  
As late it fell on Conary. Yet, now  
The spell is off me, and I see the sun,

By all my nation's swearing-Gods I swear 910  
I do defy them; and appeal to you  
Beings of goodness perfect, and to Thee,  
Great unknown Being who hast made them all,  
Take Ye compassion on the race of men;  
And for this slavery of *gaysh* and *sidh* 915  
Send down some emanation of Yourselves  
To rule and comfort us! And I have heard  
There come the tidings yet may make us glad  
Of such a One new born, or soon to be.  
Now, mount beside me, that with solemn rites 920  
We give the king, at Tara, burial.'

SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON, 1810-86.

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[1] *gaysh*] ritual ordinance or prohibition.

[2] *Sidhs*] faeries.

[3] *lann*] spear.

## THE KING OF BRENTFORD'S TESTAMENT

The noble King of Brentford  
Was old and very sick,  
He summon'd his physicians  
To wait upon him quick;  
They stepp'd into their coaches 5  
And brought their best physick.

They cramm'd their gracious master  
With potion and with pill;  
They drench'd him and they bled him:  
They could not cure his ill. 10  
'Go fetch,' says he, 'my lawyer,  
I'd better make my will.'

The monarch's royal mandate  
The lawyer did obey;  
The thought of six-and-eightpence 15  
Did make his heart full gay.  
'What is't,' says he, 'your Majesty  
Would wish of me to-day?'

'The doctors have belabour'd me  
With potion and with pill: 20  
My hours of life are counted,  
O man of tape and quill!  
Sit down and mend a pen or two;  
I want to make my will.

'O'er all the land of Brentford 25  
I'm lord, and eke of Kew:  
I've three per cents and five per cents;  
My debts are but a few;  
And to inherit after me  
I have but children two. 30

‘Prince Thomas is my eldest son,  
A sober prince is he,  
And from the day we breech’d him  
Till now he’s twenty-three,  
He never caused disquiet 35  
To his poor Mamma or me.

‘At school they never flogg’d him,  
At college, though not fast,  
Yet his Little-go and Great-go  
He creditably pass’d, 40  
And made his year’s allowance  
For eighteen months to last.

‘He never owed a shilling,  
Went never drunk to bed,  
He has not two ideas 45  
Within his honest head—  
In all respects he differs  
From my second son, Prince Ned.

‘When Tom has half his income  
Laid by at the year’s end, 50  
Poor Ned has ne’er a stiver  
That rightly he may spend,  
But sponges on a tradesman,  
Or borrows from a friend.

‘While Tom his legal studies 55  
Most soberly pursues,  
Poor Ned must pass his mornings  
A-dawdling with the Muse:  
While Tom frequents his banker,  
Young Ned frequents the Jews. 60

‘Ned drives about in buggies<sup>[1]</sup>,  
Tom sometimes takes a ’bus;  
Ah, cruel fate, why made you  
My children differ thus?  
Why make of Tom a *dullard*, 65  
And Ned a *genius*?’

‘You’ll cut him with a shilling,’  
Exclaimed the man of wits:  
‘I’ll leave my wealth,’ said Brentford,  
‘Sir lawyer, as befits; 70  
And portion both their fortunes  
Unto their several wits.’

‘Your Grace knows best,’ the lawyer said,  
‘On your commands I wait.’  
‘Be silent, Sir,’ says Brentford, 75  
‘A plague upon your prate!  
Come, take your pen and paper,  
And write as I dictate.’

The will as Brentford spoke it  
Was writ and signed and closed; 80  
He bade the lawyer leave him,  
And turn’d him round and dozed;  
And next week in the churchyard  
The good old King reposed.

Tom, dress’d in crape and hatband, 85  
Of mourners was the chief;  
In bitter self-upbraidings  
Poor Edward showed his grief:  
Tom hid his fat white countenance  
In his pocket-handkerchief. 90

Ned’s eyes were full of weeping,  
He falter’d in his walk;  
Tom never shed a tear,  
But onwards he did stalk,  
As pompous, black, and solemn 95  
As any catafalque.

And when the bones of Brentford—  
That gentle King and just—  
With bell and book and candle  
Were duly laid in dust, 100  
‘Now, gentlemen,’ says Thomas,  
‘Let business be discussed.

‘When late our sire belovèd  
Was taken deadly ill,  
Sir Lawyer, you attended him  
(I mean to tax your bill);  
And, as you signed and wrote it,  
I prithee read the will.’ 105

The lawyer wiped his spectacles,  
And drew the parchment out; 110  
And all the Brentford family  
Sat eager round about:  
Poor Ned was somewhat anxious,  
But Tom had ne’er a doubt.

‘My son, as I make ready 115  
To seek my last long home,  
Some cares I had for Neddy,  
But none for thee, my Tom:  
Sobriety and order  
You ne’er departed from. 120

‘Ned hath a brilliant genius,  
And thou a plodding brain;  
On thee I think with pleasure,  
On him with doubt and pain.’  
(‘You see, good Ned,’ says Thomas, 125  
‘What he thought about us twain.’)

‘Though small was your allowance,  
You saved a little store;  
And those who save a little  
Shall get a plenty more.’ 130  
As the lawyer read this compliment,  
Tom’s eyes were running o’er.

‘The tortoise and the hare, Tom,  
Set out, at each his pace;  
The hare it was the fleeter, 135  
The tortoise won the race;  
And since the world’s beginning  
This ever was the case.



‘Ned’s genius, blithe and singing,  
Steps gaily o’er the ground; 140  
As steadily you trudge it,  
He clears it with a bound;  
But dullness has stout legs, Tom,  
And wind that’s wondrous sound.

‘O’er fruits and flowers alike, Tom, 145  
You pass with plodding feet;  
You heed not one nor t’other,  
But onwards go your beat,  
While genius stops to loiter  
With all that he may meet; 150

‘And ever as he wanders,  
Will have a pretext fine  
For sleeping in the morning,  
Or loitering to dine,  
Or dozing in the shade, 155  
Or basking in the shine.

‘Your little steady eyes, Tom,  
Though not so bright as those  
That restless round about him  
Your flashing genius throws, 160  
Are excellently suited  
To look before your nose.

‘Thank Heaven, then, for the blinkers  
It placed before your eyes;  
The stupidest are steadiest, 165  
The witty are not wise;  
Oh, bless your good stupidity,  
It is your dearest prize!

‘And though my lands are wide,  
And plenty is my gold, 170  
Still better gifts from Nature,  
My Thomas, do you hold—  
A brain that’s thick and heavy,  
A heart that’s dull and cold.

- ‘Too dull to feel depression, 175  
    Too hard to heed distress,  
Too cold to yield to passion  
    Or silly tenderness.  
March on—your road is open  
    To wealth, Tom, and success. 180
- ‘Ned sinneth in extravagance,  
    And you in greedy lust.’  
(‘I’ faith,’ says Ned, ‘our father  
    Is less polite than just.’)  
‘In you, son Tom, I’ve confidence, 185  
    But Ned I cannot trust.
- ‘Wherefore my lease and copyholds,  
    My lands and tenements,  
My parks, my farms, and orchards,  
    My houses and my rents, 190  
My Dutch stock and my Spanish stock,  
    My five and three per cents;
- ‘I leave to you, my Thomas’  
    (‘What, all?’ poor Edward said;  
‘Well, well, I should have spent them 195  
    And Tom’s a prudent head’)—  
‘I leave to you, my Thomas,—  
    To you IN TRUST for Ned.’
- The wrath and consternation  
    What poet e’er could trace 200  
That at this fatal passage  
    Came o’er Prince Tom his face;  
The wonder of the company,  
    And honest Ned’s amaze!
- ‘ ’Tis surely some mistake,’ 205  
    Good-naturedly cries Ned;  
The lawyer answered gravely,  
    ‘ ’Tis even as I said;  
’Twas thus his gracious Majesty  
    Ordain’d on his death-bed. 210

‘See, here the will is witness’d,  
And here’s his autograph;’  
‘In truth, our father’s writing,’  
Says Edward, with a laugh;  
‘But thou shalt not be a loser, Tom, 215  
We’ll share it half and half.’

‘Alas! my kind young gentleman,  
This sharing cannot be;  
’Tis written in the testament  
That Brentford spoke to me, 220  
“I do forbid Prince Ned to give  
Prince Tom a halfpenny.

‘ “He hath a store of money,  
But ne’er was known to lend it;  
He never help’d his brother; 225  
The poor he ne’er befriended;  
He hath no need of property  
Who knows not how to spend it.

‘ “Poor Edward knows but how to spend,  
And thrifty Tom to hoard; 230  
Let Thomas be the steward then,  
And Edward be the lord;  
And as the honest labourer  
Is worthy his reward,

‘ “I pray Prince Ned, my second son, 235  
And my successor dear,  
To pay to his intendant  
Five hundred pounds a year;  
And to think of his old father,  
And live and make good cheer.” ’ 240

Such was old Brentford’s honest testament,  
He did devise his moneys for the best,  
And lies in Brentford church in peaceful rest.  
Prince Edward lived, and money made and spent;  
But his good sire was wrong, it is confess’d, 245  
To say his son, young Thomas, never lent.  
He did. Young Thomas lent at interest,

And nobly took his twenty-five per cent.

Long time the famous reign of Ned endured

O'er Chiswick, Fulham, Brentford, Putney, Kew;

250

But of extravagance he ne'er was cured.

And when both died, as mortal men will do,

'Twas commonly reported that the steward

Was very much the richer of the two.

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY, 1811-63.

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[\[1\]](#) buggies] light one-horse vehicles.

## THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

### I

You're my friend:

I was the man the Duke spoke to;  
I helped the Duchess to cast off his yoke, too;  
So, here's the tale from beginning to end,  
My friend!

5

### II

Ours is a great wild country:

If you climb to our castle's top,  
I don't see where your eye can stop;  
For when you've passed the corn-field country,  
Where vineyards leave off, flocks are packed,  
And sheep-range leads to cattle-tract,  
And cattle-tract to open-chase,  
And open-chase to the very base  
Of the mountain, where, at a funeral pace,  
Round about, solemn and slow,  
One by one, row after row,  
Up and up the pine-trees go,  
So, like black priests up, and so  
Down the other side again  
To another greater, wilder country,  
That's one vast red drear burnt-up plain,  
Branched through and through with many a vein  
Whence iron's dug, and copper's dealt;  
Look right, look left, look straight before,—  
Beneath they mine, above they smelt,  
Copper-ore and iron-ore,  
And forge and furnace mould and melt,  
And so on, more and ever more,  
Till, at the last, for a bounding belt,  
Comes the salt sand hoar of the great sea-shore,

10

15

20

25

30

—And the whole is our Duke's country!

III

I was born the day this present Duke was—  
(And O, says the song, ere I was old!)  
In the castle where the other Duke was—  
(When I was happy and young, not old!) 35  
I in the Kennel, he in the Bower:  
We are of like age to an hour.  
My father was Huntsman in that day;  
Who has not heard my father say  
That, when a boar was brought to bay, 40  
Three times, four times out of five,  
With his huntspear he'd contrive  
To get the killing-place transfixed,  
And pin him true, both eyes betwixt?  
And that's why the old Duke would rather 45  
He lost a salt-pit than my father,  
And loved to have him ever in call;  
That's why my father stood in the hall  
When the old Duke brought his infant out  
To show the people, and while they passed 50  
The wondrous bantling round about,  
Was first to start at the outside blast  
As the Kaiser's courier blew his horn,  
Just a month after the babe was born.  
'And,' quoth the Kaiser's courier, 'since 55  
The Duke has got an Heir, our Prince  
Needs the Duke's self at his side:'  
The Duke looked down and seemed to wince,  
But he thought of wars o'er the world wide,  
Castles a-fire, men on their march, 60  
The toppling tower, the crashing arch;  
And up he looked, and awhile he eyed  
The row of crests and shields and banners,  
Of all achievements after all manners,  
And 'ay,' said the Duke with a surly pride. 65  
The more was his comfort when he died  
At next year's end, in a velvet suit,  
With a gilt glove on his hand, and his foot

In a silken shoe for a leather boot,  
Petticoated like a herald, 70  
In a chamber next to an ante-room,  
Where he breathed the breath of page and groom,  
What he called stink, and they, perfume:  
—They should have set him on red Berold,  
Mad with pride, like fire to manage! 75  
They should have got his cheek fresh tannage  
Such a day as to-day in the merry sunshine!  
Had they stuck on his fist a rough-foot merlin<sup>[1]</sup>!  
(Hark, the wind's on the heath at its game!  
Oh for a noble falcon-lanner<sup>[2]</sup> 80  
To flap each broad wing like a banner,  
And turn in the wind, and dance like flame!)  
Had they broached a cask of white beer from Berlin!  
—Or if you incline to prescribe mere wine  
Put to his lips when they saw him pine, 85  
A cup of our own Moldavia fine,  
Cotnar, for instance, green as May sorrel,  
And ropy with sweet,—we shall not quarrel.

#### IV

So, at home, the sick tall yellow Duchess  
Was left with the infant in her clutches, 90  
She being the daughter of God knows who:  
And now was the time to revisit her tribe,  
So, abroad and afar they went, the two,  
And let our people rail and gibe  
At the empty Hall and extinguished fire, 95  
As loud as we liked, but ever in vain,  
Till after long years we had our desire,  
And back came the Duke and his mother again.

#### V

And he came back the pertest little ape  
That ever affronted human shape; 100  
Full of his travel, struck at himself.  
You'd say, he despised our bluff old ways?  
—Not he! For in Paris they told the elf

That our rough North land was the Land of Lays,  
 The one good thing left in evil days; 105  
 Since the Mid-Age was the heroic Time,  
 And only in wild nooks like ours  
 Could you taste of it yet as in its prime,  
 And see true castles, with proper towers,  
 Young-hearted women, old-minded men, 110  
 And manners now as manners were then.  
 So, all that the old Dukes had been, without knowing it,  
 This Duke would fain know he was, without being it;  
 'Twas not for the joy's self, but the joy of his showing it,  
 Nor for the pride's self, but the pride of our seeing it, 115  
 He revived all usages thoroughly worn-out,  
 The souls of them fumed-forth, the hearts of them  
 torn-out:  
 And chief in the chase his neck he perilled,  
 On a lathy horse, all legs and length,  
 With blood for bone, all speed, no strength; 120  
 —They should have set him on red Berold,  
 With the red eye slow consuming in fire,  
 And the thin stiff ear like an abbey spire!

VI

Well, such as he was, he must marry, we heard:  
 And out of a convent, at the word, 125  
 Came the Lady, in time of spring.  
 —Oh, old thoughts they cling, they cling!  
 That day, I know, with a dozen oaths  
 I clad myself in thick hunting-clothes  
 Fit for the chase of urox<sup>[3]</sup> or buffle<sup>[4]</sup> 130  
 In winter-time when you need to muffle.  
 But the Duke had a mind we should cut a figure,  
 And so we saw the Lady arrive:  
 My friend, I have seen a white crane bigger!  
 She was the smallest Lady alive, 135  
 Made, in a piece of Nature's madness,  
 Too small, almost, for the life and gladness  
 That over-filled her, as some hive  
 Out of the bears' reach on the high trees  
 Is crowded with its safe merry bees: 140



In truth, she was not hard to please!  
 Up she looked, down she looked, round at the mead,  
 Straight at the castle, that's best indeed  
 To look at from outside the walls:  
 As for us, styled the 'serfs and thralls,' 145  
 She as much thanked me as if she had said it,  
 (With her eyes, do you understand?)  
 Because I patted her horse while I led it;  
 And Max, who rode on her other hand,  
 Said, no bird flew past but she inquired 150  
 What its true name was, nor ever seemed tired—  
 If that was an eagle she saw hover,  
 And the green and grey bird on the field was the plover.  
 When suddenly appeared the Duke:  
 And as down she sprung, the small foot pointed 155  
 On to my hand,—as with a rebuke,  
 And as if his backbone were not jointed,  
 The Duke stepped rather aside than forward,  
 And welcomed her with his grandest smile;  
 And, mind you, his mother all the while 160  
 Chilled in the rear, like a wind to Nor'ward;  
 And up, like a weary yawn, with its pullies  
 Went, in a shriek, the rusty portcullis;  
 And, like a glad sky the north-wind sullies,  
 The Lady's face stopped its play, 165  
 As if her first hair had grown grey—  
 For such things must begin some one day!

VII

In a day or two she was well again;  
 As who should say, 'You labour in vain!  
 This is all a jest against God, who meant 170  
 I should ever be, as I am, content  
 And glad in His sight; therefore, glad I will be!'  
 So, smiling as at first went she.

VIII

She was active, stirring, all fire—  
 Could not rest, could not tire— 175

To a stone she might have given life!  
 (I myself loved once, in my day)  
 —For a Shepherd's, Miner's, Huntsman's wife,  
 (I had a wife, I know what I say)  
 Never in all the world such an one! 180  
 And here was plenty to be done,  
 And she that could do it, great or small,  
 She was to do nothing at all.  
 There was already this man in his post,  
 This in his station, and that in his office, 185  
 And the Duke's plan admitted a wife, at most,  
 To meet his eye, with the other trophies,  
 Now outside the Hall, now in it,  
 To sit thus, stand thus, see and be seen,  
 At the proper place in the proper minute, 190  
 And die away the life between.  
 And it was amusing enough, each infraction  
 Of rule (but for after-sadness that came)  
 To hear the consummate self-satisfaction  
 With which the young Duke and the old Dame 195  
 Would let her advise, and criticize,  
 And, being a fool, instruct the wise,  
 And child-like parcel out praise or blame:  
 They bore it all in complacent guise,  
 As though an artificer, after contriving 200  
 A wheel-work image as if it were living,  
 Should find with delight it could motion to strike him!  
 So found the Duke, and his mother like him:  
 The Lady hardly got a rebuff—  
 That had not been contemptuous enough, 205  
 With his cursed smirk, as he nodded applause,  
 And kept off the old mother-cat's claws.

IX

So, the little Lady grew silent and thin,  
 Paling and ever paling,  
 As the way is with a hid chagrin; 210  
 And the Duke perceived that she was ailing,  
 And said in his heart, ' 'Tis done to spite me,  
 But I shall find in my power to right me!'

Don't swear, friend—the Old One, many a year,  
Is in Hell, and the Duke's self . . . you shall hear.

215

X

Well, early in autumn, at first winter-warning,  
When the stag had to break with his foot, of a morning,  
A drinking-hole out of the fresh tender ice,  
That covered the pond till the sun, in a trice,  
Loosening it, let out a ripple of gold, 220  
And another and another, and faster and faster,  
Till, dimpling to blindness, the wide water rolled:  
Then it so chanced that the Duke our master  
Asked himself what were the pleasures in season,  
And found, since the calendar bade him be hearty, 225  
He should do the Middle Age no treason  
In resolving on a hunting-party.  
Always provided, old books showed the way of it!  
What meant old poets by their strictures?  
And when old poets had said their say of it, 230  
How taught old painters in their pictures?  
We must revert to the proper channels,  
Workings in tapestry, paintings on panels,  
And gather up Woodcraft's authentic traditions:  
Here was food for our various ambitions, 235  
As on each case, exactly stated,  
—To encourage your dog, now, the properest chirrup,  
Or best prayer to St. Hubert on mounting your stirrup—  
We of the household took thought and debated.  
Blessed was he whose back ached with the jerkin 240  
His sire was wont to do forest-work in;  
Blesseder he who nobly sunk 'ohs'  
And 'ahs' while he tugged on his grandsire's trunk-hose;  
What signified hats if they had no rims on,  
Each slouching before and behind like the scallop, 245  
And able to serve at sea for a shallop<sup>[5]</sup>,  
Loaded with lacquer and looped with crimson?  
So that the deer now, to make a short rhyme on't,  
What with our Venerers, Prickers, and Verderers,  
Might hope for real hunters at length, and not murderers, 250  
And oh, the Duke's tailor—he had a hot time on't!

Now you must know, that when the first dizziness  
 Of flap-hats and buff-coats and jack-boots subsided,  
 The Duke put this question, 'The Duke's part provided,  
 Had not the Duchess some share in the business?' 255  
 For out of the mouth of two or three witnesses  
 Did he establish all fit-or-unfitnesses:  
 And, after much laying of heads together,  
 Somebody's cap got a notable feather  
 By the announcement with proper unction 260  
 That he had discovered the lady's function;  
 Since ancient authors gave this tenet,  
 'When horns wind a mort<sup>[6]</sup> and the deer is at siege<sup>[7]</sup>,  
 Let the dame of the Castle prick forth on her jennet,  
 And with water to wash the hands of her liege 265  
 In a clean ewer with a fair toweling,  
 Let her preside at the disemboweling.'  
 Now, my friend, if you had so little religion  
 As to catch a hawk, some falcon-lanner,  
 And thrust her broad wings like a banner 270  
 Into a coop for a vulgar pigeon;  
 And if day by day, and week by week,  
 You cut her claws, and sealed her eyes,  
 And clipped her wings, and tied her beak,  
 Would it cause you any great surprise 275  
 If, when you decided to give her an airing,  
 You found she needed a little preparing?  
 —I say, should you be such a curmudgeon,  
 If she clung to the perch, as to take it in dudgeon?  
 Yet when the Duke to his lady signified, 280  
 Just a day before, as he judged most dignified,  
 In what a pleasure she was to participate,—  
 And, instead of leaping wide in flashes,  
 Her eyes just lifted their long lashes,  
 As if pressed by fatigue even he could not dissipate, 285  
 And duly acknowledged the Duke's forethought,  
 But spoke of her health, if her health were worth aught,  
 Of the weight by day and the watch by night,  
 And much wrong now that used to be right,  
 So, thanking him, declined the hunting,— 290

Was conduct ever more affronting?  
With all the ceremony settled—  
With the towel ready, and the sewer  
Polishing up his oldest ewer,  
And the jennet pitched upon, a piebald, 295  
Black-barred, cream-coated and pink eye-ball'd,—  
No wonder if the Duke was nettled!  
And when she persisted nevertheless,—  
Well, I suppose here's the time to confess  
That there ran half round our Lady's chamber 300  
A balcony none of the hardest to clamber;  
And that Jacynth the tire-woman<sup>[8]</sup>, ready in waiting,  
Stayed in call outside, what need of relating?  
And since Jacynth was like a June rose, why, a fervent  
Adorer of Jacynth, of course, was your servant; 305  
And if she had the habit to peep through the casement,  
How could I keep at any vast distance?  
And so, as I say, on the Lady's persistence,  
The Duke, dumb-stricken with amazement,  
Stood for a while in a sultry smother, 310

And then, with a smile that partook of the awful,  
Turned her over to his yellow mother  
To learn what was decorous and lawful;  
And the mother smelt blood with a cat-like instinct,  
As her cheek quick whitened thro' all its quince-tinct. 315  
Oh, but the Lady heard the whole truth at once!  
What meant she?—Who was she?—Her duty  
and station,  
The wisdom of age and the folly of youth, at once,  
Its decent regard and its fitting relation—  
In brief, my friend, set all the devils in hell free 320  
And turn them out to carouse in a belfry,  
And treat the priests to a fifty-part canon,  
And then you may guess how that tongue of hers ran on!  
Well, somehow or other it ended at last  
And, licking her whiskers, out she passed; 325  
And after her,—making (he hoped) a face  
Like Emperor Nero or Sultan Saladin,  
Stalked the Duke's self with the austere grace  
Of ancient hero or modern paladin,

From door to staircase—oh, such a solemn  
Unbending of the vertebral column!

330

XII

However, at sunrise our company mustered;  
And here was the huntsman bidding unkennel,  
And there 'neath his bonnet the pricker blustered,  
With feather dank as a bough of wet fennel;  
For the court-yard's four walls were filled with fog  
You might cut as an axe chops a log.  
Like so much wool for colour and bulkiness;  
And out rode the Duke in a perfect sulkiness,  
Since, before breakfast, a man feels but queasily,  
And a sinking at the lower abdomen  
Begins the day with indifferent omen.  
And lo, as he looked around uneasily,  
The sun ploughed the fog up and drove it asunder  
This way and that from the valley under;  
And, looking through the court-yard arch,  
Down in the valley, what should meet him  
But a troop of Gipsies on their march,  
No doubt with the annual gifts to greet him.

335

340

345

XIII

Now, in your land, Gipsies reach you, only  
After reaching all lands beside;  
North they go, South they go, trooping or lonely,  
And still, as they travel far and wide,  
Catch they and keep now a trace here, a trace there,  
That puts you in mind of a place here, a place there.  
But with us, I believe they rise out of the ground,  
And nowhere else, I take it, are found  
With the earth-tint yet so freshly embrowned;  
Born, no doubt, like insects which breed on  
The very fruit they are meant to feed on.  
For the earth—not a use to which they don't turn it,  
The ore that grows in the mountain's womb,  
Or the sand in the pits like a honeycomb,  
They sift and soften it, bake it and burn it—

350

355

360

Whether they weld you, for instance, a snaffle 365  
With side-bars never a brute can baffle;  
Or a lock that's a puzzle of wards within wards;  
Or, if your colt's fore-foot inclines to curve inwards,  
Horseshoes they'll hammer which turn on a swivel  
And won't allow the hoof to shrivel. 370  
Then they cast bells like the shell of the winkle,  
That keep a stout heart in the ram with their tinkle;  
But the sand—they pinch and pound it like otters;  
Commend me to Gipsy glass-makers and potters!  
Glasses they'll blow you, crystal-clear, 375  
Where just a faint cloud of rose shall appear,  
As if in pure water you dropped and let die  
A bruise-black-blooded mulberry;  
And that other sort, their crowning pride,  
With long white threads distinct inside, 380  
Like the lake-flower's fibrous roots which dangle  
Loose such a length and never tangle,  
Where the bold sword-lily cuts the clear waters,  
And the cup-lily couches with all the white daughters:  
Such are the works they put their hand to, 385  
And the uses they turn and twist iron and sand to.  
And these made the troop, which our Duke saw sally  
Towards his castle from out of the valley,  
Men and women, like new-hatched spiders,  
Come out with the morning to greet our riders. 390  
And up they wound till they reached the ditch,  
Whereat all stopped save one, a witch,  
That I knew, as she hobbled from the group,  
By her gait, directly, and her stoop,  
I, whom Jacynth was used to importune 395  
To let that same witch tell us our fortune.  
The oldest Gipsy then above ground;  
And, so sure as the autumn season came round,  
She paid us a visit for profit or pastime,  
And every time, as she swore, for the last time. 400  
And presently she was seen to sidle  
Up to the Duke till she touched his bridle,  
So that the horse of a sudden reared up  
As under its nose the old witch peered up  
With her worn-out eyes, or rather eye-holes 405

Of no use now but to gather brine,  
And began a kind of level whine  
Such as they used to sing to their viols  
When their ditties they go grinding  
Up and down with nobody minding: 410  
And, then as of old, at the end of the humming  
Her usual presents were forthcoming  
—A dog-whistle blowing the fiercest of trebles,  
(Just a sea-shore stone holding a dozen fine pebbles,)  
Or a porcelain mouth-piece to screw on a pipe-end,— 415  
And so she awaited her annual stipend.  
But this time the Duke would scarcely vouchsafe  
A word in reply; and in vain she felt  
With twitching fingers at her belt  
For the purse of sleek pine-martin pelt, 420  
Ready to put what he gave in her pouch safe,—  
Till, either to quicken his apprehension,  
Or possibly with an after-intention,  
She was come, she said, to pay her duty  
To the new Duchess, the youthful beauty. 425  
No sooner had she named his Lady,  
Than a shine lit up the face so shady,  
And its smirk returned with a novel meaning—  
For it struck him, the babe just wanted weaning;  
If one gave her a taste of what life was and sorrow, 430  
She, foolish to-day, would be wiser to-morrow;  
And who so fit a teacher of trouble  
As this sordid crone bent wellnigh double?  
So, glancing at her wolf-skin vesture, 435  
(If such it was, for they grow so hirsute  
That their own fleece serves for natural fur-suit)  
He was contrasting, 'twas plain from his gesture,  
The life of the Lady so flower-like and delicate  
With the loathsome squalor of this helicat<sup>[9]</sup>.  
I, in brief, was the man the Duke beckoned 440  
From out of the throng, and while I drew near  
He told the crone, as I since have reckoned  
By the way he bent and spoke into her ear  
With circumspection and mystery,  
The main of the Lady's history, 445  
Her frowardness and ingratitude;



And for all the crone's submissive attitude  
 I could see round her mouth the loose plaits tightening,  
 And her brow with assenting intelligence brightening.  
 As though, she engaged with hearty goodwill 450  
 Whatever he now might enjoin to fulfil,  
 And promised the Lady a thorough frightening.  
 And so, just giving her a glimpse  
 Of a purse, with the air of a man who imp<sup>[10]</sup>  
 The wing of the hawk that shall fetch the hernshaw<sup>[11]</sup>, 455  
 He bade me take the Gipsy mother  
 And set her telling some story or other  
 Of hill or dale, oak-wood or fernshaw<sup>[12]</sup>,  
 To while away a weary hour  
 For the Lady left alone in her bower, 460  
 Whose mind and body craved exertion  
 And yet shrank from all better diversion.

XIV

Then clapping heel to his horse, the mere curveter,  
 Out rode the Duke, and after his hollo  
 Horses and hounds swept, huntsman and servitor, 465  
 And back I turned and bade the crone follow.  
 And what makes me confident what's to be told you  
 Had all along been of this crone's devising,  
 Is, that, on looking round sharply, behold you,  
 There was a novelty quick as surprising: 470  
 For first, she had shot up a full head in stature,  
 And her step kept pace with mine nor faltered,  
 As if age had foregone its usurpature,  
 And the ignoble mien was wholly altered,  
 And the face looked quite of another nature, 475  
 And the change reached too, whatever the  
 change meant,  
 Her shaggy wolf-skin cloak's arrangement:  
 For where its tatters hung loose like sedges,  
 Gold coins were glittering on the edges,  
 Like the band-roll strung with tomans<sup>[13]</sup> 480  
 Which proves the veil a Persian woman's:  
 And under her brow, like a snail's horns newly  
 Come out as after the rain he paces,

Two unmistakable eye-points duly  
Live and aware looked out of their places. 485  
So, we went and found Jacynth at the entry  
Of the Lady's chamber standing sentry;  
I told the command and produced my companion,  
And Jacynth rejoiced to admit any one,  
For since last night, by the same token, 490  
Not a single word had the Lady spoken:  
They went in both to the presence together,  
While I in the balcony watched the weather.

XV

And now, what took place at the very first of all,  
I cannot tell, as I never could learn it: 495  
Jacynth constantly wished a curse to fall  
On that little head of hers and burn it,  
If she knew how she came to drop so soundly  
Asleep of a sudden and there continue  
The whole time sleeping as profoundly 500  
As one of the boars my father would pin you  
'Twi'x the eyes where the life holds garrison,  
—Jacynth forgive me the comparison!  
But where I begin my own narration  
Is a little after I took my station 505  
To breathe the fresh air from the balcony,  
And, having in those days a falcon eye,  
To follow the hunt thro' the open country,  
From where the bushes thinlier crested  
The hillocks, to a plain where's not one tree. 510  
When, in a moment, my ear was arrested  
By—was it singing, or was it saying,  
Or a strange musical instrument playing  
In the chamber?—and to be certain  
I pushed the lattice, pulled the curtain, 515  
And there lay Jacynth asleep,  
Yet as if a watch she tried to keep,  
In a rosy sleep along the floor  
With her head against the door;  
While in the midst, on the seat of state, 520  
Was a queen—the Gipsy woman late,

With head and face downbent  
On the Lady's head and face intent:  
For, coiled at her feet like a child at ease,  
The Lady sat between her knees 525  
And o'er them the Lady's clasped hands met,  
And on those hands her chin was set,  
And her upturned face met the face of the crone  
Wherein the eyes had grown and grown  
As if she could double and quadruple 530  
At pleasure the play of either pupil  
—Very like, by her hands, slow fanning,  
As up and down like a gor-crow's<sup>[14]</sup> flappers  
They moved to measure, or bell clappers.  
I said, is it blessing, is it banning, 535  
Do they applaud you or burlesque you—  
Those hands and fingers with no flesh on?  
But, just as I thought to spring in to the rescue,  
At once I was stopped by the Lady's expression:  
For it was life her eyes were drinking 540  
From the crone's wide pair above unwinking,  
—Life's pure fire received without shrinking,  
Into the heart and breast whose heaving  
Told you no single drop they were leaving,  
—Life, that filling her, passed redundant 545  
Into her very hair, back swerving  
Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,  
As her head thrown back showed the white throat curving,  
And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,  
Moving to the mystic measure, 550  
Bounding as the bosom bounded.  
I stopped short, more and more confounded,  
As still her cheeks burned and eyes glistened,  
And she listened and she listened:  
When all at once a hand detained me, 555  
And the selfsame contagion gained me,  
And I kept time to the wondrous chime,  
Making out words and prose and rhyme,  
Till it seemed that the music furred  
Its wings like a task fulfilled, and dropped 560  
From under the words it first had propped,  
And left them midway in the world,

And word took word as hand takes hand,  
I could hear at last, and understand,  
And when I held the unbroken thread, 565  
The Gipsy said:—

‘And so at last we find my tribe,  
And so I set thee in the midst,  
And to one and all of them describe  
What thou saidst and what thou didst, 570  
Our long and terrible journey through,  
And all thou art ready to say and do  
In the trials that remain:

I trace them the vein and the other vein  
That meet on thy brow and part again, 575  
Making our rapid and mystic mark;  
And I bid my people prove and probe  
Each eye’s profound and glorious globe  
Till they detect the kindred spark  
In those depths so dear and dark, 580  
Like the spots that snap and burst and flee,  
Circling over the midnight sea.

And on that round young cheek of thine  
I make them recognize the tinge,  
As when of the costly scarlet wine 585  
They drip so much as will impinge  
And spread in a thinnest scale afloat  
One thick gold drop from the olive’s coat  
Over a silver plate whose sheen  
Still thro’ the mixture shall be seen. 590

For so I prove thee, to one and all,  
Fit, when my people ope their breast,  
To see the sign, and hear the call,  
And take the vow, and stand the test  
Which adds one more child to the rest— 595  
When the breast is bare and the arms are wide,  
And the world is left outside.

For there is probation to decree,  
And many and long must the trials be  
Thou shalt victoriously endure, 600  
If that brow is true and those eyes are sure;  
Like a jewel-finder’s fierce assay

Of the prize he dug from its mountain tomb,—  
Let once the vindicating ray  
Leap out amid the anxious gloom, 605  
And steel and fire have done their part  
And the prize falls on its finder's heart;  
So, trial after trial past,  
Wilt thou fall at the very last  
Breathless, half in trance 610  
With the thrill of the great deliverance,  
Into our arms for evermore;  
And thou shalt know, those arms once curled  
About thee, what we knew before,  
How love is the only good in the world. 615  
Henceforth be loved as heart can love,  
Or brain devise, or hand approve!  
Stand up, look below,  
It is our life at thy feet we throw  
To step with into light and joy; 620  
Not a power of life but we'll employ  
To satisfy thy nature's want;  
Art thou the tree that props the plant,  
Or the climbing plant that seeks the tree—  
Canst thou help us, must we help thee? 625  
If any two creatures grew into one,  
They would do more than the world has done;  
Though each apart were never so weak,  
Yet vainly through the world should ye seek  
For the knowledge and the might 630  
Which in such union grew their right:  
So, to approach, at least, that end,  
And blend,—as much as may be, blend  
Thee with us or us with thee,  
As climbing-plant or propping-tree, 635  
Shall some one deck thee, over and down,  
Up and about, with blossoms and leaves?  
Fix his heart's fruit for thy garland-crown,  
Cling with his soul as the gourd-vine cleaves,  
Die on thy boughs and disappear 640  
While not a leaf of thine is sere?  
Or is the other fate in store,  
And art thou fitted to adore,

To give thy wondrous self away,  
And take a stronger nature's sway? 645  
I foresee and I could foretell  
Thy future portion, sure and well—  
But those passionate eyes speak true, speak true,  
And let them say what thou shalt do!  
Only, be sure thy daily life, 650  
In its peace, or in its strife,  
Never shall be unobserved;  
We pursue thy whole career,  
And hope for it, or doubt, or fear,—  
Lo, hast thou kept thy path or swerved, 655  
We are beside thee, in all thy ways,  
With our blame, with our praise,  
Our shame to feel, our pride to show,  
Glad, angry—but indifferent, no!  
Whether it is thy lot to go, 660  
For the good of us all, where the haters meet  
In the crowded city's horrible street;  
Or thou step alone through the morass  
Where never sound yet was  
Save the dry quick clap of the stork's bill, 665  
For the air is still, and the water still,  
When the blue breast of the dripping coot  
Dives under, and all is mute.  
So at the last shall come old age,  
Decrepit as befits that stage; 670  
How else wouldst thou retire apart  
With the hoarded memories of thy heart,  
And gather all to the very least  
Of the fragments of life's earlier feast,  
Let fall through eagerness to find 675  
The crowning dainties yet behind?  
Ponder on the entire Past  
Laid together thus at last,  
When the twilight helps to fuse  
The first fresh, with the faded hues, 680  
And the outline of the whole,  
As round eve's shades their framework roll,  
Grandly fronts for once thy soul.  
And then as, 'mid the dark, a gleam

Of yet another morning breaks, 685  
And like the hand which ends a dream,  
Death, with the might of his sunbeam  
Touches the flesh and the soul awakes,  
Then—'

Ay, then, indeed, something would happen!  
But what? For here her voice changed like a bird's; 690  
There grew more of the music and less of the words;  
Had Jacynth only been by me to clap pen  
To paper and put you down every syllable  
With those clever clerkly fingers,  
All that I've forgotten as well as what lingers 695  
In this old brain of mine that's but ill able  
To give you even this poor version  
Of the speech I spoil, as it were, with stammering  
—More fault of those who had the hammering  
Of prosody into me and syntax, 700  
And did it, not with hobnails but tintacks!  
But to return from this excursion,—  
Just, do you mark, when the song was sweetest,  
The peace most deep and the charm completest,  
There came, shall I say, a snap— 705  
And the charm vanished!  
And my sense returned, so strangely banished,  
And, starting as from a nap,  
I knew the crone was bewitching my lady,  
With Jacynth asleep; and but one spring made I, 710  
Down from the casement, round to the portal,  
Another minute and I had entered,—  
When the door opened, and more than mortal  
Stood, with a face where to my mind centred  
All beauties I ever saw or shall see, 715  
The Duchess—I stopped as if struck by palsy.  
She was so different, happy and beautiful,  
I felt at once that all was best,  
And that I had nothing to do, for the rest,  
But wait her commands, obey and be dutiful. 720  
Not that, in fact, there was any commanding,  
—I saw the glory of her eye,  
And the brow's height and the breast's expanding,  
And I was hers to live or to die.

As for finding what she wanted, 725  
You know God Almighty granted  
Such little signs should serve his wild creatures  
To tell one another all their desires,  
So that each knows what its friend requires,  
And does its bidding without teachers. 730  
I preceded her; the crone  
Followed silent and alone;  
I spoke to her, but she merely jabbered  
In the old style; both her eyes had slunk  
Back to their pits; her stature shrunk; 735  
In short, the soul in its body sunk  
Like a blade sent home to its scabbard,  
We descended, I preceding;  
Crossed the court with nobody heeding; 740  
All the world was at the chase,  
The court-yard like a desert-place,  
The stable emptied of its small fry;  
I saddled myself the very palfrey  
I remember patting while it carried her,  
The day she arrived and the Duke married her. 745  
And, do you know, though it's easy deceiving  
Oneself in such matters, I can't help believing  
The Lady had not forgotten it either,  
And knew the poor devil so much beneath her  
Would have been only too glad for her service 750  
To dance on hot ploughshares like a Turk dervise,  
But unable to pay proper duty where owing it  
Was reduced to that pitiful method of showing it:  
For though the moment I began setting  
His saddle on my own nag of Berold's begetting, 755  
(Not that I meant to be obtrusive)  
She stopped me, while his rug was shifting,  
By a single rapid finger's lifting,  
And, with a gesture kind but conclusive,  
And a little shake of the head, refused me,— 760  
I say, although she never used me,  
Yet when she was mounted, the Gipsy behind her,  
And I ventured to remind her,  
I suppose with a voice of less steadiness  
Than usual, for my feeling exceeded me, 765



—Something to the effect that I was in readiness  
 Whenever God should please she needed me,—  
 Then, do you know, her face looked down on me  
 With a look that placed a crown on me,  
 And she felt in her bosom,—mark, her bosom— 770  
 And, as a flower-tree drops its blossom,  
 Dropped me . . . ah, had it been a purse  
 Of silver, my friend, or gold that's worse,  
 Why, you see, as soon as I found myself  
 So understood,—that a true heart so may gain 775  
 Such a reward,—I should have gone home again,  
 Kissed Jacynth, and soberly drowned myself!  
 It was a little plait of hair  
 Such as friends in a convent make  
 To wear, each for the other's sake,— 780  
 This, see, which at my breast I wear,  
 Ever did (rather to Jacynth's grudgement),  
 And ever shall, till the Day of Judgement.  
 And then,—and then,—to cut short,—this is idle,  
 These are feelings it is not good to foster,— 785  
 I pushed the gate wide, she shook the bridle,  
 And the palfrey bounded,—and so we lost her.

XVI

When the liquor's out, why clink the cannakin?  
 I did think to describe you the panic in  
 The redoubtable breast of our master the mannikin, 790  
 And what was the pitch of his mother's yellowness,  
 How she turned as a shark to snap the spare-rib  
 Clean off, sailors say, from a pearl-diving Carib,  
 When she heard, what she called, the flight of the feloness  
 —But it seems such child's play, 795  
 What they said and did with the Lady away!  
 And to dance on, when we've lost the music,  
 Always made me—and no doubt makes you—sick.  
 Nay, to my mind, the world's face looked so stern  
 As that sweet form disappeared through the postern, 800  
 She that kept it in constant good humour,  
 It ought to have stopped; there seemed nothing to do  
 more.

But the world thought otherwise and went on,  
 And my head's one that its spite was spent on: 805  
 Thirty years are fled since that morning,  
 And with them all my head's adorning.  
 Nor did the old Duchess die outright,  
 As you expect, of suppressed spite,  
 The natural end of every adder  
 Not suffered to empty its poison-bladder: 810  
 But she and her son agreed, I take it,  
 That no one should touch on the story to wake it,  
 For the wound in the Duke's pride rankled fiery,  
 So, they made no search and small inquiry—  
 And when fresh Gipsies have paid us a visit, I've 815  
 Noticed the couple were never inquisitive,  
 But told them they're folks the Duke don't want here,  
 And bade them make haste and cross the frontier.  
 Brief, the Duchess was gone and the Duke was glad of it,  
 And the old one was in the young one's stead, 820  
 And took, in her place, the household's head,  
 And a blessed time the household had of it!  
 And were I not, as a man might say, cautious  
 How I trench, more than needs, on the nauseous,  
 I could favour you with sundry touches 825  
 Of the paint-smutches with which the Duchess  
 Heightened the mellowness of her cheek's yellowness  
 (To get on faster) until at last her  
 Cheek grew to be one master-plaster  
 Of mucus and fucus from mere use of ceruse 830  
 In short, she grew from scalp to udder  
 Just the object to make you shudder.

XVII

You're my friend—  
 What a thing friendship is, world without end!  
 How it gives the heart and soul a stir-up 835  
 As if somebody broached you a glorious runlet<sup>[15]</sup>,  
 And poured out, all lovelily, sparkingly, sunlit,  
 Our green Moldavia, the streaky syrup,  
 Cotnar as old as the time of the Druids—  
 Friendship may match with that monarch of fluids; 840

Each supples a dry brain, fills you its ins-and-outs,  
Gives your life's hour-glass a shake when the thin sand  
doubts

Whether to run on or stop short, and guarantees  
Age is not all made of stark sloth and arrant ease.

I have seen my little Lady once more, 845

Jacynth, the Gipsy, Berold, and the rest of it,

For to me spoke the Duke, as I told you before;

I always wanted to make a clean breast of it:

And now it is made—why, my heart's-blood, that went  
trickle,

Trickle, but anon, in such muddy dribblets, 850

Is pumped up brisk now, through the main ventricle,

And genially floats me about the giblets.

I'll tell you what I intend to do:

I must see this fellow his sad life through—

He is our Duke, after all, 855

And I, as he says, but a serf and thrall.

My father was born here, and I inherit

His fame, a chain he bound his son with:

Could I pay in a lump I should prefer it,

But there's no mine to blow up and get done with, 860

So, I must stay till the end of the chapter.

For, as to our middle-age-manners-adapter,

Be it a thing to be glad on or sorry on,

Some day or other, his head in a morion<sup>[16]</sup>,

And breast in a hauberk<sup>[17]</sup>, his heels he'll kick up, 865

Slain by an onslaught fierce of hiccup.

And then, when red doth the sword of our Duke rust,

And its leathern sheath lie o'ergrown with a blue crust,

Then, I shall scrape together my earnings;

For, you see, in the churchyard Jacynth reposes, 870

And our children all went the way of the roses:

It's a long lane that knows no turnings.

One needs but little tackle to travel in;

So, just one stout cloak shall I indue:

And for a staff, what beats the javelin 875

With which his boars my father pinned you?

And then, for a purpose you shall hear presently,

Taking some Cotnar, a tight plump skinfull,

I shall go journeying, who but I, pleasantly!

Sorrow is vain and despondency sinful. 880  
 What's a man's age? He must hurry more, that's all;  
 Cram in a day, what his youth took a year to hold:  
 When we mind labour, then only, we're too old—  
 What age had Methusalem when he begat Saul?  
 And at last, as its haven some buffeted ship sees, 885  
 (Come all the way from the north-parts with sperm oil)  
 I hope to get safely out of the turmoil  
 And arrive one day at the land of the Gipsies,  
 And find my Lady, or hear the last news of her  
 From some old thief and son of Lucifer, 890  
 His forehead chapleted green with wreathy hop,  
 Sunburned all over like an Aethiop.  
 And when my Cotnar begins to operate  
 And the tongue of the rogue to run at a proper rate,  
 And our wine-skin, tight once, shows each flaccid dent, 895  
 I shall drop in with—as if by accident—  
 'You never knew then, how it all ended,  
 What fortunes good or bad attended  
 The little Lady your Queen befriended?'  
 —And when that's told me, what's remaining? 900  
 This world's too hard for my explaining.  
 The same wise judge of matters equine  
 Who still preferred some slim four-year-old  
 To the big-boned stock of mighty Berold,  
 And, for strong Cotnar, drank French weak wine, 905  
 He also must be such a Lady's scorner!  
 Smooth Jacob still robs homely Esau:  
 Now up, now down, the world's one see-saw.  
 —So, I shall find out some snug corner  
 Under a hedge, like Orson the wood-knight, 910  
 Turn myself round and bid the world good night;  
 And sleep a sound sleep till the trumpet's blowing  
 Wakes me (unless priests cheat us laymen)  
 To a world where will be no further throwing  
 Pearls before swine that can't value them. Amen! 915

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[1] merlin, falcon-lanner] various species of falcons.

[2] Ibid.

- [3] urox] aurochs, the wild cattle of Europe, now extinct.
- [4] buffle] buffalo.
- [5] shallop] light open boat.
- [6] mort] note sounded at the death of the deer.
- [7] at siege] at bay.
- [8] tire-woman] waiting-woman.
- [9] helicat] hell-cat.
- [10] imps] engrafts feathers in the wing of a bird.
- [11] hernshaw] young heron.
- [12] fernshaw] thicket of fern.
- [13] tomans] gold coins.
- [14] gor-crow] carrion-crow.
- [15] runlet] cask.
- [16] morion] helmet with visor or beaver.
- [17] hauberk] long coat of mail.

## DONALD

‘Will you hear my story also,  
Huge Sport, brave adventure in plenty?’  
The boys were a band from Oxford,  
The oldest of whom was twenty.

The bothy<sup>[1]</sup> we held a carouse in 5  
Was bright with fire and candle;  
Tale followed tale like a merry-go-round  
Whereof Sport turned the handle.

In our eyes and noses—turf-smoke:  
In our ears a tune from the trivet, 10  
When ‘Boiling, boiling’, the kettle sang,  
‘And ready for fresh Glenlivet.’

So, feat capped feat, with a vengeance:  
Truths, though,—the lads were loyal:  
‘Grouse, five score brace to the bag! 15  
Deer, ten hours’ stalk of the Royal!’

Of boasting, not one bit, boys!  
Only there seemed to settle  
Somehow above your curly heads,  
—Plain through the singing kettle, 20

Palpable through the cloud,  
As each new-puffed Havanna  
Rewarded the teller’s well-told tale,—  
This vaunt ‘To Sport—Hosanna!

‘Hunt, fish, shoot, 25  
Would a man fulfil life’s duty!  
Not to the bodily frame alone  
Does Sport give strength and beauty

‘But character gains in—courage?  
Ay, Sir, and much beside it! 30  
You don’t sport, more’s the pity:  
You soon would find, if you tried it,

‘Good sportsman means good fellow,  
Sound-hearted he, to the centre;  
Your mealy-mouthed mild milksops  
—There’s where the rot can enter! 35

‘There’s where the dirt will breed,  
The shabbiness Sport would banish!  
Oh no, Sir, no! In your honoured case  
All such objections vanish. 40

‘ ’Tis known how hard you studied:  
A Double-First—what, the jigger!  
Give me but half your Latin and Greek,  
I’ll never again touch trigger!

‘Still, tastes are tastes, allow me! 45  
Allow, too, where there’s keenness  
For Sport, there’s little likelihood  
Of a man’s displaying meanness!’

So, put on my mettle, I interposed.  
‘Will you hear my story?’ quoth I. 50  
‘Never mind how long since it happed,  
I sat, as we sit, in a bothy;

‘With as merry a band of mates, too,  
Undergrads all on a level:  
(One’s a Bishop, one’s gone to the Bench, 55  
And one’s gone—well, to the Devil.)

‘When, lo, a scratching and tapping!  
In hobbled a ghastly visitor.  
Listen to just what he told us himself  
—No need of our playing inquisitor!’ 60

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Do you happen to know in Ross-shire  
Mount . . . Ben . . . but the name scarce matters:  
Of the naked fact I am sure enough,  
Though I clothe it in rags and tatters.

You may recognize Ben by description; 65  
Behind him—a moor’s immenseness:  
Up goes the middle mount of a range,

Fringed with its firs in denseness.

Rimming the edge, its fir-fringe, mind!  
 For an edge there is, though narrow; 70  
 From end to end of the range, a stripe  
 Of path runs straight as an arrow.

And the mountaineer who takes that path  
 Saves himself miles of journey  
 He has to plod if he crosses the moor 75  
 Through heather, peat and burnie.

But a mountaineer he needs must be,  
 For, look you, right in the middle  
 Projects bluff Ben—with an end in *ich*—  
 Why planted there, is a riddle: 80

Since all Ben's brothers little and big  
 Keep rank, set shoulder to shoulder,  
 And only this burliest out must bulge  
 Till it seems—to the beholder

From down in the gully,—as if Ben's breast 85  
 To a sudden spike diminished,  
 Would signify to the boldest foot  
 'All further passage finished!'

Yet the mountaineer who sidles on  
 And on to the very bending, 90  
 Discovers, if heart and brain be proof,  
 No necessary ending.

Foot up, foot down, to the turn abrupt  
 Having trod, he, there arriving,  
 Finds—what he took for a point was breadth, 95  
 A mercy of Nature's contriving.

So, he rounds what, when 'tis reached, proves straight,  
 From one side gains the other:  
 The wee path widens—resume the march,  
 And he foils you, Ben my brother! 100

But Donald—(that name, I hope, will do)—



I wrong him if I call ‘foiling’  
The tramp of the callant<sup>[2]</sup>, whistling the while  
As blithe as our kettle’s boiling.

He had dared the danger from boyhood up, 105  
And now,—when perchance was waiting  
A lass at the brig below,—’twixt mount  
And moor would he stand debating?

Moreover this Donald was twenty-five,  
A glory of bone and muscle: 110  
Did a fiend dispute the right of way,  
Donald would try a tussle.

Lightsomely marched he out of the broad  
On to the narrow and narrow;  
A step more, rounding the angular rock, 115  
Reached the front straight as an arrow.

He stepped it, safe on the ledge he stood,  
When—whom found he full-facing?  
What fellow in courage and wariness too,  
Had scouted ignoble pacing, 120

And left low safety to timid mates,  
And made for the dread dear danger,  
And gained the height where—who could guess  
He would meet with a rival ranger?

’Twas a gold red stag that stood and stared, 125  
Gigantic and magnificent,  
By the wonder—ay, the peril—struck  
Intelligent and pacific:

For a red deer is no fallow deer  
Grown cowardly through park-feeding; 130  
He batters you like a thunderbolt  
If you brave his haunts unheeding.

I doubt he could hardly perform *volte-face*  
Had valour advised discretion:  
You may walk on a rope, but to turn on a rope 135  
No Blondin makes profession.

Yet Donald must turn, would pride permit,  
    Though pride ill brooks retiring:  
Each eyed each—mute man, motionless beast—  
    Less fearing than admiring. 140

These are moments when quite new sense,  
    To meet some need as novel,  
Springs up in the brain: it inspired resource:  
    —‘Nor advance nor retreat but—grovel!’

And slowly, surely, never a whit 145  
    Relaxing the steady tension  
Of eye-stare which binds man to beast,—  
    By an inch and inch declension,

Sank Donald sidewise down and down:  
    Till flat, breast upwards, lying 150  
At his six-foot length, no corpse more still.  
    —‘If he cross me! The trick’s worth trying.’

Minutes were an eternity;  
    But a new sense was created  
In the stag’s brain too; he resolves! Slow, sure, 155  
    With eye-stare unabated,

Feelingly he extends a foot  
    Which tastes the way ere it touches  
Earth’s solid and just escapes man’s soft,  
    Nor hold of the same unclutches 160

Till its fellow foot, light as a feather whisk,  
    Lands itself no less finely:  
So a mother removes a fly from the face  
    Of her babe asleep supinely.

And now ’tis the haunch and hind foot’s turn 165  
    —That’s hard: can the beast quite raise it?  
Yes, traversing half the prostrate length,  
    His hoof-tip does not graze it.

Just one more lift! But Donald, you see,  
    Was a sportsman first, man after: 170  
A fancy lightened his caution through,

—He well-nigh broke into laughter.

‘It were nothing short of a miracle!  
Unrivalled, unexampled—  
All sporting feats with this feat matched 175  
Were down and dead and trampled!’

The last of the legs as tenderly  
Follows the rest: or never  
Or now is the time! His knife in reach  
And his right-hand loose—how clever! 180

For this can stab up the stomach’s soft,  
While the left-hand grasps the pastern<sup>[3]</sup>.  
A rise on the elbow, and—now’s the time  
Or never: this turn’s the last turn!

I shall dare to place myself by God 185  
Who scanned—for he does—each feature  
Of the face thrown up in appeal to Him  
By the agonizing creature.

Nay, I hear plain words: ‘Thy gift brings this!’  
Up he sprang, back he staggered, 190  
Over he fell, and with him our friend  
—At following game no laggard.

Yet he was not dead when they picked next day  
From the gulf’s depth the wreck of him;  
His fall had been stayed by the stag beneath 195  
Who cushioned and saved the neck of him.

But the rest of his body—why, the doctors said,  
Whatever could break was broken;  
Legs, arms, ribs, all of him looked like a toast  
In a tumbler of port-wine soaked. 200

‘That your life is left you, thank the stag!’  
Said they when—the slow cure ended—  
They opened the hospital door, and thence  
—Strapped, spliced, main fractures mended,

And minor damage left wisely alone,— 205

Like an old shoe clouted and cobbled,  
Out—what went in a Goliath well-nigh,—  
Some half of a David hobbled.

‘You must ask an alms from house to house:  
Sell the stag’s head for a bracket, 210  
With its grand twelve tines<sup>[4]</sup>—I’d buy it myself—  
And use the skin for a jacket!’

He was wiser, made both head and hide  
His win-penny; hands and knees on,  
Would manage to crawl—poor crab—by the roads 215  
In the misty stalking-season.

And if he discovered a bothy like this,  
Why, harvest was sure: folk listened.  
He told his tale to the lovers of Sport:  
Lips twitched, cheeks glowed, eyes glistened. 220

And when he had come to the close, and spread  
His spoils for the gazers’ wonder,  
With ‘Gentlemen, here’s the skull of the stag  
I was over, thank God, not under!’—

The company broke out in applause; 225  
‘By Jingo, a lucky cripple!  
Have a munch of grouse and a hunk of bread,  
And a tug, besides, at our tipple!’

And ‘There’s my pay for your pluck!’ cried This,  
‘And mine for your jolly story!’ 230  
Cried That, while T’other—but he was drunk—  
Hiccapped ‘A trump, a Tory!’

I hope I gave twice as much as the rest;  
For, as Homer would say, ‘within grate  
Though teeth kept tongue’, my whole soul growled 235  
‘Rightly rewarded,—Ingrate!’

ROBERT BROWNING, 1812-89.

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[1] bothy] hut or cottage.

[2] callant] youth or stripling of any age.

[3] pastern] part of animal's foot between fetlock and hoof.

[4] tines] the branches of a stag's horn.

## THE WITCH'S BALLAD

O I hae come from far away,  
From a warm land far away,  
A southern land across the sea,  
With sailor-lads about the mast,  
Merry and canny, and kind to me. 5

And I hae been to yon town  
To try my luck in yon town;  
Nort, and Mysie, Elspie too.  
Right braw we were to pass the gate,  
Wi' gowden clasps on girdles blue. 10

Mysie smiled wi' miminy<sup>[1]</sup> mouth,  
Innocent mouth, miminy mouth;  
Elspie wore a scarlet gown,  
Nort's grey eyes were unco' gleg<sup>[2]</sup>.  
My Castile comb was like a crown. 15

We walk'd abreast all up the street,  
Into the market up the street;  
Our hair with marigolds was wound,  
Our bodices with love-knots laced,  
Our merchandise with tansy<sup>[3]</sup> bound. 20

Nort had chickens, I had cocks,  
Gamesome cocks, loud-crowing cocks;  
Mysie ducks, and Elspie drakes,—  
For a wee groat or a pound;  
We lost nae time wi' gives and takes. 25

—Lost nae time, for well we knew,  
In our sleeves full well we knew,  
When the gloaming came that night,  
Duck nor drake, nor hen nor cock  
Would be found by candle-light. 30

And when our chaffering all was done,  
All was paid for, sold and done,  
We drew a glove on ilka hand,  
We sweetly curtsied, each to each,  
And deftly danced a saraband<sup>[4]</sup>. 35

The market-lassies look'd and laugh'd,  
Left their gear, and look'd and laugh'd;  
They made as they would join the game,  
But soon their mithers, wild and wud<sup>[5]</sup>,  
With whack and screech they stopp'd the same. 40

Sae loud the tongues o' randies<sup>[6]</sup> grew,  
The flytin'<sup>[7]</sup> and the skirlin'<sup>[8]</sup> grew,  
At all the windows in the place,  
Wi' spoons or knives, wi' needle or awl,  
Was thrust out every hand and face. 45

And down each stair they throng'd anon,  
Gentle, semple, throng'd anon:  
Souter<sup>[9]</sup> and tailor, frowsy Nan,  
The ancient widow young again,  
Simpering behind her fan. 50

Without a choice, against their will,  
Doited<sup>[10]</sup>, dazed, against their will,  
The market lassie and her mither,  
The farmer and his husbandman,  
Hand in hand dance a' thegither. 55

Slow at first, but faster soon,  
Still increasing, wild and fast,  
Hoods and mantles, hats and hose,  
Blindly doff'd and cast away,  
Left them naked, heads and toes. 60

They would have torn us limb from limb,  
Dainty limb from dainty limb;  
But never one of them could win  
Across the line that I had drawn  
With bleeding thumb a-widdershin<sup>[11]</sup>. 65

But there was Jeff the provost's son,

Jeff the provost's only son;  
There was Father Auld himsel',  
The Lombard frae the hostelry,  
And the lawyer Peter Fell. 70

All goodly men we singled out,  
Waled<sup>[12]</sup> them well, and singled out,  
And drew them by the left hand in;  
Mysie the priest, and Elspie won  
The Lombard, Nort the lawyer carle, 75  
I mysel' the provost's son.

Then, with cantrip<sup>[13]</sup> kisses seven,  
Three times round with kisses seven,  
Warp'd and woven there spun we  
Arms and legs and flaming hair, 80  
Like a whirlwind on the sea.

Like a wind that sucks the sea,  
Over and in and on the sea,  
Good sooth it was a mad delight;  
And every man of all the four 85  
Shut his eyes and laugh'd outright.

Laugh'd as long as they had breath,  
Laugh'd while they had sense or breath;  
And close about us coil'd a mist  
Of gnats and midges, wasps and flies, 90  
Like the whirlwind shaft it rist<sup>[14]</sup>.

Drawn up I was right off my feet,  
Into the mist and off my feet;  
And, dancing on each chimney-top,  
I saw a thousand darling imps 95  
Keeping time with skip and hop.

And on the provost's brave ridge-tile,  
On the provost's grand ridge-tile,  
The Blackamoor first to master me  
I saw, I saw that winsome smile, 100  
The mouth that did my heart beguile,  
And spoke the great Word over me,



In the land beyond the sea.

I call'd his name, I call'd aloud,  
    Alas! I call'd on him aloud; 105  
And then he fill'd his hand with stour<sup>[15]</sup>,  
And threw it towards me in the air;  
My mouse flew out, I lost my pow'r!

My lusty strength, my power were gone;  
    Power was gone, and all was gone. 110  
He will not let me love him more!  
Of bell and whip and horse's tail  
He cares not if I find a store.

But I am proud if he is fierce!  
    I am as proud as he is fierce; 115  
I'll turn about and backward go,  
If I meet again that Blackamoor,  
And he'll help us then, for he shall know  
I seek another paramour.

And we'll gang once more to yon town, 120  
    Wi' better luck to yon town;  
We'll walk in silk and cramoisie<sup>[16]</sup>,  
And I shall wed the provost's son:  
My lady of the town I'll be!

For I was born a crown'd king's child, 125  
    Born and nursed a king's child,  
King o' a land ayont<sup>[17]</sup> the sea,  
Where the Blackamoor kiss'd me first,  
And taught me art and glamourie<sup>[18]</sup>.

Each one in her wame<sup>[19]</sup> shall hide 130  
    Her hairy mouse, her wary mouse,  
Fed on madwort and agramie<sup>[20]</sup>,—  
Wear amber beads between her breasts,  
And blind-worm's skin about her knee.

The Lombard shall be Elspie's man, 135  
    Elspie's gowden husband-man;  
Nort shall take the lawyer's hand;  
The priest shall swear another vow:

We'll dance again the saraband!

WILLIAM BELL SCOTT, 1812-90.

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- [1] miminy] prim, demure.
- [2] gleg] bright, sharp.
- [3] tansy] herb used in medicine and witchcraft.
- [4] saraband] slow Spanish dance.
- [5] wud] mad.
- [6] randies] viragoes.
- [7] flytin'] scolding.
- [8] skirlin'] shrieking.
- [9] souter] cobbler.
- [10] doited] mazed.
- [11] a-widdershin] the wrong way of the sun: or E. to W. through N.
- [12] waled] chose.
- [13] cantrip] magic.
- [14] rist] rose.
- [15] stour] dust.
- [16] cramoisie] crimson.
- [17] ayont] beyond.
- [18] glamourie] wizardry.
- [19] wame] womb.
- [20] madwort and agramie] herbs used in medicine and witchcraft.

## ANDROMEDA

Over the sea, past Crete, on the Syrian shore to the  
southward,  
Dwells in the well-tilled lowland a dark-haired Aethiop  
people,  
Skilful with needle and loom, and the arts of the dyer  
and carver,  
Skilful, but feeble of heart; for they know not the lords  
of Olympus,  
Lovers of men; neither broad-browed Zeus, nor Pallas  
Athené,  
Teacher of wisdom to heroes, bestower of might  
in the battle;  
Share not the cunning of Hermes, nor list to the  
songs of Apollo.  
Fearing the stars of the sky, and the roll of the blue salt  
water,  
Fearing all things that have life in the womb of the seas  
and the rivers,  
Eating no fish to this day, nor ploughing the main, like  
the Phoenics,  
Manful with black-beaked ships, they abide in a  
sorrowful region,  
Vexed with the earthquake, and flame, and the  
sea-floods, scourge of Poseidon.  
Whelming the dwellings of men, and the toils of the  
slow-footed oxen,  
Drowning the barley and flax, and the hard-earned gold  
of the harvest,  
Up to the hill-side vines, and the pastures skirting the  
woodland,  
Inland the floods came yearly; and after the  
waters a monster,  
Bred of the slime, like the worms which are bred  
from the muds of the Nile-bank,

5

10

15

Shapeless, a terror to see; and by night it swam out to  
the seaward,  
Daily returning to feed with the dawn, and devoured of  
the fairest,  
Cattle, and children, and maids, till the terrified people  
fled inland.

20

Fasting in sackcloth and ashes they came, both  
the king and his people,  
Came to the mountain of oaks, to the house of the  
terrible sea-gods,  
Hard by the gulf in the rocks, where of old the  
world-wide deluge  
Sank to the inner abyss; and the lake where the fish of  
the goddess  
Holy, undying, abide; whom the priests feed daily with  
dainties.

25

There to the mystical fish, high-throned in her  
chamber of cedar,  
Burnt they the fat of the flock; till the flame shone  
far to the seaward.  
Three days fasting they prayed: but the fourth day the  
priests of the goddess,  
Cunning in spells, cast lots, to discover the crime of the  
people.

All day long they cast, till the house of the monarch  
was taken,

30

Cepheus, king of the land; and the faces of all  
gathered blackness.

Then once more they cast; and Cassiopoeia was  
taken,

Deep-bosomed wife of the king, whom oft far-seeing  
Apollo

Watched well-pleased from the welkin<sup>[1]</sup>, the fairest of  
Aethiop women:

Fairest, save only her daughter; for down to the ankle  
her tresses

35

Rolled, blue-black as the night, ambrosial, joy to  
beholders.

Awful and fair she arose, most like in her coming  
to Here,

Queen before whom the Immortals arise, as she comes

on Olympus,  
Out of the chamber of gold, which her son Hephaestos  
has wrought her.

Such in her stature and eyes, and the broad white light  
of her forehead,

40

Stately she came from her place, and she spoke in  
the midst of the people.

‘Pure are my hands from blood: most pure this  
heart in my bosom.

Yet one fault I remember this day; one word have I  
spoken;

Rashly I spoke on the shore, and I dread lest the sea  
should have heard it.

Watching my child at her bath, as she plunged in the  
joy of her girlhood,

45

Fairer I called her in pride than Atergati, queen of  
the ocean.

Judge ye if this be my sin, for I know none other.’

She ended;

Wrapping her head in her mantle she stood, and the  
people were silent.

Answered the dark-browed priests, ‘No word, once  
spoken, returneth,

Even if uttered unwitting. Shall gods excuse our  
rashness?

50

That which is done, that abides; and the wrath of  
the sea is against us;

Hers, and the wrath of her brother, the Sun-god,  
lord of the sheepfolds.

Fairer than her hast thou boasted thy daughter? Ah  
folly! for hateful,

Hateful are they to the gods, whoso, impious, liken a  
mortal,

Fair though he be, to their glory; and hateful is that  
which is likened,

55

Grieving the eyes of their pride, and abominate,  
doomed to their anger.

What shall be likened to gods? The unknown,  
who deep in the darkness

Ever abide, twyformed, many-handed, terrible,  
shapeless.

Woe to the queen; for the land is defiled, and the people  
accursed.

Take thou her therefore by night, thou ill-starred  
Cassiopoeia,

60

Take her with us in the night, when the moon  
sinks low to the westward;

Bind her aloft for a victim, a prey for the gorge of  
the monster,

Far on the sea-girt rock, which is washed by the surges  
for ever;

So may the goddess accept her, and so may the land  
make atonement,

Purged by her blood from its sin: so obey thou the  
doom of the rulers.'

65

Bitter in soul they went out, Cepheus and  
Cassiopoeia,

Bitter in soul; and their hearts whirled round, as  
the leaves in the eddy.

Weak was the queen, and rebelled: but the king, like a  
shepherd of people,

Willed not the land should waste; so he yielded the life  
of his daughter.

Deep in the wane of the night, as the moon sank low  
to the westward,

70

They by the shade of the cliffs, with the horror of  
darkness around them,

Stole, as ashamed, to a deed which became not  
the light of the sunshine,

Slowly, the priests, and the queen, and the virgin bound  
in the galley.

Slowly they rowed to the rocks: but Cepheus far in the  
palace

Sate in the midst of the hall, on his throne, like a  
shepherd of people,

75

Choking his woe, dry-eyed, while the slaves  
wailed loudly around him.

They on the sea-girt rock, which is washed by the  
surges for ever,

Set her in silence, the guiltless, aloft with her face to  
the eastward.

Under a crag of the stone, where a ledge sloped down

to the water;  
There they set Andromeden, most beautiful, shaped like  
a goddess,  
Lifting her long white arms wide-spread to the  
walls of the basalt,  
Chaining them, ruthless, with brass; and they  
called on the might of the Rulers.

80

‘Mystical fish of the seas, dread Queen whom  
Aethiops honour,  
Whelming the land in thy wrath, unavoidable, sharp as  
the sting-ray<sup>[2]</sup>,  
Thou, and thy brother the Sun, brain-smiting, lord of  
the sheepfold,  
Scorching the earth all day, and then resting at  
night in thy bosom,  
Take ye this one life for many, appeased by the  
blood of a maiden,  
Fairest, and born of the fairest, a queen, most priceless  
of victims.’

85

Thrice they spat as they went by the maid: but her  
mother delaying  
Fondled her child to the last, heart-crushed; and the  
warmth of her weeping  
Fell on the breast of the maid, as woe broke forth  
into wailing.

90

‘Daughter! my daughter! forgive me! O curse  
not the murderess! Curse not!  
How have I sinned, but in love? Do the gods grudge  
glory to mothers?  
Loving I bore thee in vain in the fate-cursed bride-bed  
of Cepheus,  
Loving I fed thee and tended and loving rejoiced in thy  
beauty,  
Blessing thy limbs as I bathed them, and blessing  
thy locks as I combed them;  
Decking thee, ripening to woman, I blest thee: yet  
blessing I slew thee!  
How have I sinned, but in love? O swear to me, swear  
to thy mother.  
Never to haunt me with curse, as I go to the grave in  
my sorrow,

95

Childless and lone: may the gods never send me  
another, to slay it! 100  
See, I embrace thy knees—soft knees, where no  
babe will be fondled—  
Swear to me never to curse me, the hapless one,  
not in the death-pang.’  
Weeping she clung to the knees of the maid; and the  
maid low answered—  
‘Curse thee! Not in the death-pang!’ The heart of  
the lady was lightened.  
Slowly she went by the ledge; and the maid was alone  
in the darkness. 105  
Watching the pulse of the oars die down, as her  
own died with them,  
Tearless, dumb with amaze she stood, as a  
storm-stunned nestling  
Fallen from bough or from eave lies dumb, which the  
home-going herdsman  
Fancies a stone, till he catches the light of its terrified  
eyeball.  
So through the long long hours the maid stood helpless  
and hopeless, 110  
Wide-eyed, downward gazing in vain at the black  
blank darkness.  
Feebly at last she began, while wild thoughts  
bubbled within her—  
‘Guiltless I am: why thus then? Are gods more  
ruthless than mortals?  
Have they no mercy for youth? no love for the souls  
who have loved them?  
Even as I loved thee, dread sea, as I played by thy  
margin, 115  
Blessing thy wave as it cooled me, thy wind as it  
breathed on my forehead,  
Bowing my head to thy tempest, and opening my  
heart to thy children,  
Silvery fish, wreathed shell, and the strange lithe things  
of the water,  
Tenderly casting them back, as they gasped on the  
beach in the sunshine,  
Home to their mother—in vain! for mine sits childless



in anguish! 120  
Oh dread sea! false sea! I dreamed what I  
dreamed of thy goodness;  
Dreamed of a smile in thy gleam, of a laugh in the  
plash of thy ripple:  
False and devouring thou art, and the great world dark  
and spiteful.’  
Awed by her own rash words she was still: and her  
eyes to the seaward  
Looked for an answer of wrath: far off, in the heart of  
the darkness, 125  
Bright white mists rose slowly; beneath them the  
wandering ocean  
Glimmered and glowed to the deepest abyss; and  
the knees of the maiden  
Trembled and sank in her fear, as afar, like a dawn in  
the midnight,  
Rose from their seaweed chamber the choir of the  
mystical sea-maids.  
Onward toward her they came, and her heart beat loud  
at their coming, 130  
Watching the bliss of the gods, as they wakened  
the cliffs with their laughter.  
Onward they came in their joy, and before them  
the roll of the surges  
Sank, as the breeze sank dead, into smooth green  
foam-flecked marble,  
Awed; and the crags of the cliff, and the pines of the  
mountain were silent.  
Onward they came in their joy, and around them the  
lamps of the sea nymphs, 135  
Myriad fiery globes, swam panting and heaving;  
and rainbows  
Crimson and azure and emerald, were broken in  
star-showers, lighting  
Far through the wine-dark depths of the crystal, the  
gardens of Nereus,  
Coral and sea-fan and tangle, the blooms and the palms  
of the ocean.  
Onward they came in their joy, more white than the  
foam which they scattered, 140

Laughing and singing, and tossing and twining,  
while eager, the Tritons  
Blinded with kisses their eyes, unreprieved, and  
above them in worship  
Hovered the terns, and the seagulls swept past them on  
silvery pinions  
Echoing softly their laughter; around them the  
wantoning dolphins  
Sighed as they plunged, full of love; and the great  
sea-horses which bore them 145  
Curved up their crests in their pride to the delicate  
arms of the maidens,  
Pawing the spray into gems, till a fiery rainfall,  
unharming,  
Sparkled and gleamed on the limbs of the nymphs, and  
the coils of the mermen.  
Onward they went in their joy, bathed round with  
the fiery coolness,  
Needing nor sun nor moon, self-lighted, immortal: but  
others, 150  
Pitiful, floated in silence apart; in their bosoms  
the sea-boys,  
Slain by the wrath of the seas, swept down by the  
anger of Nereus;  
Hapless, whom never again on strand or on quay shall  
their mothers  
Welcome with garlands and vows to the temple, but  
wearily pining  
Gaze over island and bay for the sails of the sunken;  
they heedless 155  
Sleep in soft bosoms for ever, and dream of the  
surge and the sea-maids.  
Onward they past in their joy; on their brows  
neither sorrow nor anger;  
Self-sufficing, as gods, never heeding the woe of the  
maiden.  
She would have shrieked for their mercy: but shame  
made her dumb; and their eyeballs  
Stared on her careless and still, like the eyes in the  
house of the idols. 160  
Seeing they saw not, and passed, like a dream, on

the murmuring ripple.  
Stunned by the wonder she gazed, wide-eyed,  
as the glory departed.  
'Oh fair shapes! far fairer than I! Too fair to be  
ruthless!  
Gladden mine eyes once more with your splendour,  
unlike to my fancies;  
You, then, smiled in the sea-gleam, and laughed in the  
plash of the ripple. 165  
Awful I deemed you and formless; inhuman,  
monstrous as idols;  
Lo, when ye came, ye were women, more loving  
and lovelier, only;  
Like in all else; and I blest you: why blest ye not me  
for my worship?  
Had you no mercy for me, thus guiltless? Ye pitied the  
sea-boys,  
Why not me, then, more hapless by far? Does your  
sight and your knowledge 170  
End with the marge of the waves? Is the world  
which ye dwell in not our world?'

Over the mountain aloft ran a rush and a roll and a  
roaring;  
Downward the breeze came indignant, and leapt with a  
howl to the water,  
Roaring in cranny and crag, till the pillars and clefts of  
the basalt  
Rang like a god-swept lyre, and her brain grew mad  
with the noises; 175  
Crashing and lapping of waters, and sighing and  
tossing of weed-beds,  
Gurgle and whisper and hiss of the foam, while  
thundering surges  
Boomed in the wave-worn halls, as they champed at the  
roots of the mountain.  
Hour after hour in the darkness the wind rushed fierce  
to the landward,  
Drenching the maiden with spray; she shivering, weary  
and drooping, 180  
Stood with her heart full of thoughts, till the

foamcrests gleamed in the twilight,  
Leaping and laughing around, and the east grew  
red with the dawning.

Then on the ridge of the hills rose the broad bright  
sun in his glory,  
Hurling his arrows abroad on the glittering crests of the  
surges,  
Gilding the soft round bosoms of wood, and the downs  
of the coastland,  
Gilding the weeds at her feet, and the foam-laced  
teeth of the ledges,  
Showing the maiden her home through the veil of  
her locks, as they floated  
Glistening, damp with the spray, in a long black cloud  
to the landward.

185

High in the far-off glens rose thin blue curls from the  
homesteads;  
Softly the low of the herds, and the pipe of the outgoing  
herdsman,

190

Slid to her ear on the water, and melted her heart  
into weeping.  
Shuddering, she tried to forget them; and straining  
her eyes to the seaward,  
Watched for her doom, as she wailed, but in vain, to the  
terrible Sun-god.

‘Dost thou not pity me, Sun, though thy wild dark  
sister be ruthless,  
Dost thou not pity me here, as thou seest me desolate,  
weary,

195

Sickened with shame and despair, like a kid torn  
young from its mother?

What if my beauty insult thee, then blight it: but  
me—Oh spare me!

Spare me yet, ere he be here, fierce, tearing,  
unbearable! See me,

See me, how tender and soft, and thus helpless! See  
how I shudder,

Fancying only my doom. Wilt thou shine thus bright,  
when it takes me?

200

Are there no deaths save this, great Sun? No fiery  
arrow,

Lightning, or deep-mouthed wave? Why thus?

What music in shrieking,

Pleasure in warm live limbs torn slowly? And dar'st  
thou behold them!

Oh, thou hast watched worse deeds! All sights are alike  
to thy brightness!

What if thou waken the birds to their song, dost thou  
waken no sorrow;

205

Waken no sick to their pain; no captive to wrench  
at his fetters?

Smile on the garden and fold, and on maidens who  
sing at the milking;

Flash into tapestried chambers, and peep in the eyelids  
of lovers,

Showing the blissful their bliss—Dost love, then, the  
place where thou smilest?

Lovest thou cities aflame, fierce blows, and the shrieks  
of the widow?

210

Lovest thou corpse-strewn fields, as thou lightest  
the path of the vulture?

Lovest thou these, that thou gazest so gay on my  
tears, and my mother's,

Laughing alike at the horror of one, and the bliss of  
another?

What dost thou care, in thy sky, for the joys and the  
sorrows of mortals?

Colder art thou than the nymphs: in thy broad bright eye  
is no seeing.

215

Hadst thou a soul—as much soul as the slaves in  
the house of my father,

Wouldst thou not save? Poor thralls! they pitied  
me, clung to me weeping,

Kissing my hands and my feet—What, are gods more  
ruthless than mortals?

Worse than the souls which they rule? Let me die: they  
war not with ashes!'

Sudden she ceased, with a shriek: in the spray, like a  
hovering foam-bow,

220

Hung, more fair than the foam-bow, a boy in the  
bloom of his manhood,

Golden-haired, ivory-limbed, ambrosial; over his

shoulder  
Hung for a veil of his beauty the gold-fringed folds of  
the goat-skin,  
Bearing the brass of his shield, as the sun flashed clear  
on its clearness.  
Curved on his thigh lay a falchion; and under the gleam  
of his helmet 225  
Eyes more blue than the main shone awful, around  
him Athené  
Shed in her love such grace, such state, and  
terrible daring.  
Hovering over the water he came, upon glittering  
pinions,  
Living, a wonder, outgrown from the tight-laced gold of  
his sandals;  
Bounding from billow to billow, and sweeping the  
crests like a sea-gull; 230  
Leaping the gulfs of the surge, as he laughed in  
the joy of his leaping.  
Fair and majestic he sprang to the rock; and the  
maiden in wonder  
Gazed for awhile, and then hid in the dark-rolling wave  
of her tresses,  
Fearful, the light of her eyes; while the boy (for her  
sorrow had awed him)  
Blushed at her blushes, and vanished, like mist on the  
cliffs at the sunrise. 235  
Fearful at length she looked forth: he was gone:  
she, wild with amazement,  
Wailed for her mother aloud: but the wail of the  
wind only answered.  
Sudden he flashed into sight, by her side; in his pity and  
anger  
Moist were his eyes; and his breath like a rose-bed, as  
bolder and bolder,  
Hovering under her brows, like a swallow that haunts  
by the house-eaves, 240  
Delicate-handed, he lifted the veil of her hair;  
while the maiden  
Motionless, frozen with fear, wept loud; till his  
lips unclosing

Poured from their pearl-strung portal the musical wave  
of his wonder.

‘Ah, well spoke she, the wise one, the grey-eyed  
Pallas Athené,—

Known to Immortals alone are the prizes which lie for  
the heroes

245

Ready prepared at their feet; for requiring a little,  
the rulers

Pay back the loan tenfold to the man who, careless  
of pleasure,

Thirsting for honour and toil, fares forth on a perilous  
errand

Led by the guiding of gods, and strong in the strength of  
Immortals.

Thus have they led me to thee: from afar, unknowing, I  
marked thee,

250

Shining, a snow-white cross on the dark-green  
walls of the sea-cliff;

Carven in marble I deemed thee, a perfect work of  
the craftsman,

Likeness of Amphitrité, or far-famed Queen Cythereia.  
Curious I came, till I saw how thy tresses streamed in  
the sea-wind,

Glistening, black as the night, and thy lips moved slow  
in thy wailing.

255

Speak again now—Oh speak! For my soul is  
stirred to avenge thee;

Tell me what barbarous horde, without law,  
unrighteous and heartless,

Hateful to gods and to men, thus have bound thee, a  
shame to the sunlight,

Scorn and prize to the sailor: but my prize now; for a  
coward,

Coward and shameless were he, who so finding a  
glorious jewel

260

Cast on the wayside by fools, would not win it and  
keep it and wear it,

Even as I will thee; for I swear by the head of my  
father,

Bearing thee over the sea-wave, to wed thee in Argos  
the fruitful,

Beautiful, meed of my toil no less than this head which  
I carry,  
Hidden here fearful—Oh speak!’

But the maid, still dumb with  
amazement,

265

Watered her bosom with weeping, and longed for  
her home and her mother.

Beautiful, eager, he wooed her, and kissed off  
her tears as he hovered,

Roving at will, as a bee, on the brows of a rock  
nymph-haunted,

Garlanded over with vine, and acanthus, and clambering  
roses,

Cool in the fierce still noon, where streams glance clear  
in the mossbeds,

270

Hums on from blossom to blossom, and mingles  
the sweets as he tastes them.

Beautiful, eager, he kissed her, and clasped her yet  
closer and closer,

Praying her still to speak—

‘Not cruel nor rough did my

mother

Bear me to broad-browed Zeus in the depths of the  
brass-covered dungeon;

Neither in vain, as I think, have I talked with the  
cunning of Hermes,

275

Face unto face, as a friend; or from grey-eyed  
Pallas Athené

Learnt what is fit, and respecting myself, to  
respect in my dealings

Those whom the gods should love; so fear not: to chaste  
espousals

Only I woo thee, and swear, that a queen, and alone  
without rival

By me thou sittest in Argos of Hellas, throne of my  
fathers,

280

Worshipped by fair-haired kings: why callest thou  
still on thy mother?

Why did she leave thee thus here? For no foeman  
has bound thee; no foeman

Winning with strokes of the sword such a prize, would



so leave it behind him.’  
Just as at first some colt, wild-eyed, with quivering  
nostril,  
Plunges in fear of the curb, and the fluttering robes of  
the rider; 285  
Soon, grown bold by despair, submits to the will  
of his master,  
Tamer and tamer each hour, and at last, in the  
pride of obedience,  
Answers the heel with a curvet, and arches his neck to  
be fondled,  
Cowed by the need that maid grew tame; while the hero  
indignant  
Tore at the fetters which held her: the brass, too  
cunningly tempered, 290  
Held to the rock by the nails, deep wedged; till the  
boy, red with anger,  
Drew from his ivory thigh, keen flashing, a  
falchion of diamond—  
‘Now let the work of the smith try strength with the  
arms of Immortals!’  
Dazzling it fell; and the blade, as the vine-hook shears  
off the vine-bough,  
Carved through the strength of the brass, till her arms  
fell soft on his shoulder. 295  
Once she essayed to escape: but the ring of the  
water was round her,  
Round her the ring of his arms: and despairing she  
sank on his bosom.  
Then, like a fawn when startled, she looked with a  
shriek to the seaward.  
‘Touch me not, wretch that I am! For accursed, a  
shame and a hissing,  
Guiltless, accurst no less, I await the revenge of the  
sea-gods. 300  
Yonder it comes! Ah go! Let me perish unseen, if I  
perish!  
Spare me the shame of thine eyes, when merciless  
fangs must tear me  
Piecemeal! Enough to endure by myself in the light of  
the sunshine

Guiltless, the death of a kid!

But the boy still lingered

around her,

Loath, like a boy, to forgo her, and wakened the cliffs  
with his laughter.

305

‘Yon is the foe, then? A beast of the sea? I had  
deemed him immortal;

Titan, or Proteus’ self, or Nereus, foeman of  
sailors:

Yet would I fight with them all, but Poseidon, shaker of  
mountains,

Uncle of mine, whom I fear, as is fit; for he haunts on  
Olympus,

Holding the third of the world; and the gods all rise at  
his coming.

310

Unto none else will I yield, god-helped: how then  
to a monster,

Child of the earth and of night, unreasoning,  
shapeless, accursed?’

‘Art thou, too, then a god?’

‘No god I,’ smiling he answered,

‘Mortal as thou, yet divine: but mortal the herds of the  
ocean,

Equal to men in that only, and less in all else; for they  
nourish

315

Blindly the life of the lips, untaught by the gods,  
without wisdom:

Shame if I fled before such!’

In her heart new life was enkindled,

Worship and trust, fair parents of love: but she answered  
him sighing.

‘Beautiful, why wilt thou die? Is the light of the sun,  
then, so worthless,

Worthless to sport with thy fellows in flowery glades of  
the forest,

320

Under the broad green oaks, where never again  
shall I wander,

Tossing the ball with my maidens, or wreathing  
the altar in garlands,

Careless, with dances and songs, till the glens rang loud  
to our laughter.

Too full of death the great earth is already; the halls full  
of weepers,

Quarried by tombs all cliffs, and the bones gleam white  
on the sea-floor,

325

Numberless, gnawn by the herds who attend on  
the pitiless sea-gods,

Even as mine will be soon: and yet noble it seems  
to me, dying,

Giving my life for the people, to save to the arms of  
their lovers

Maidens and youths for awhile: thee, fairest of all, shall  
I slay thee?

Add not thy bones to the many, thus angering idly the  
dread ones!

330

Either the monster will crush, or the sea-queen's  
self overwhelm thee,

Vengeful, in tempest and foam, and the thundering  
walls of the surges.

Why wilt thou follow me down? can we love in the  
black blank darkness?

Love in the realms of the dead, in the land where all is  
forgotten?

Why wilt thou follow me down? is it joy, on the  
desolate oozes,

335

Meagre to flit, grey ghosts in the depths of the  
grey salt water?

Beautiful! why wilt thou die, and defraud fair girls  
of thy manhood?

Surely one waits for thee longing, afar in the isles of the  
ocean.

Go thy way; I mine; for the gods grudge pleasure to  
mortals.'

Sobbing she ended her moan, as her neck, like a  
storm-bent lily,

340

Drooped with the weight of her woe, and her  
limbs sank, weary with watching,

Soft on the hard-ledged rock; but the boy, with his  
eye on the monster,

Clasped her, and stood, like a god; and his lips curved  
proud as he answered—

'Great are the pitiless sea-gods: but greater the Lords

of Olympus;  
Greater the Aegis-wielder, and greater is she who  
attends him. 345  
Clear-eyed Justice her name is, the counsellor,  
loved of Athené;  
Helper of heroes, who dare, in the god-given  
might of their manhood  
Greatly to do and to suffer, and far in the fens and the  
forests  
Smite the devourers of men, Heaven-hated, brood of the  
giants,  
Twyformed, strange, without like, who obey not the  
golden-haired Rulers. 350  
Vainly rebelling they rage, till they die by the  
swords of the heroes,  
Even as this must die; for I burn with the wrath of  
my father,  
Wandering, led by Athené; and dare whatsoever betides  
me.  
Led by Athené I won from the grey-haired terrible  
sisters  
Secrets hidden from men, when I found them asleep on  
the sand-hills, 355  
Keeping their eye and their tooth, till they showed  
me the perilous pathway  
Over the waterless ocean, the valley that led to the  
Gorgon.  
Her too I slew in my craft, Medusa, the beautiful horror;  
Taught by Athené I slew her, and saw not herself, but  
her image,  
Watching the mirror of brass, in the shield which a  
goddess had lent me; 360  
Cleaving her brass-scaled throat, as she lay with  
her adders around her,  
Fearless I bore off her head, in the folds of the  
mystical goat-skin,  
Hide of Amaltheié, fair nurse of the Aegis-wielder.  
Hither I bear it, a gift to the gods, and a death to my  
foemen,  
Freezing the seer to stone; so hide thine eyes from the  
horror. 365

Kiss me but once, and I go.'

Then lifting her neck,

like a seabird

Peering up over the wave, from the foam-white swells  
of her bosom,

Blushing she kissed him: afar, on the topmost Idalian  
summit

Laughed in the joy of her heart, far-seeing, the queen  
Aphrodité.

Loosing his arms from her waist he flew upward,  
awaiting the sea-beast.

370

Onward it came from the southward, as bulky and  
black as a galley,

Lazily coasting along, as the fish fled leaping  
before it;

Lazily breasting the ripple, and watching by sandbar  
and headland,

Listening for laughter of maidens at bleaching, or song  
of the fisher,

Children at play on the pebbles, or cattle that pawed on  
the sand-hills.

375

Rolling and dripping it came, where bedded in  
glistening purple

Cold on the cold sea-weeds lay the long white  
sides of the maiden,

Trembling, her face in her hands, and her tresses afloat  
on the water.

As when an osprey aloft, dark-eyebrowed, royally  
crested,

Flags on by creek and by cove, and in scorn of the anger  
of Nereus

380

Ranges, the king of the shore; if he see on a  
glittering shallow,

Chasing the bass and the mullet, the fin of a  
wallowing dolphin,

Halting, he wheels round slowly, in doubt at the weight  
of his quarry,

Whether to clutch it alive, or to fall on the wretch like a  
plummet,

Stunning with terrible talon the life of the brain in the  
hindhead:

385

Then rushes up with a scream, and stooping the  
wrath of his eyebrows  
Falls from the sky, like a star, while the wind  
rattles hoarse in his pinions.  
Over him closes the foam for a moment; and then from  
the sand-bed  
Rolls up the great fish, dead, and his side gleams white  
in the sunshine.

Thus fell the boy on the beast, unveiling the face of the  
Gorgon;

390

Thus fell the boy on the beast; thus rolled up the  
beast in his horror,

Once, as the dead eyes glared into his; then his  
sides, death-sharpened,

Stiffened and stood, brown rock, in the wash of the  
wandering water.

Beautiful, eager, triumphant, he leapt back again to his  
treasure;

Leapt back again, full blest, toward arms spread wide to  
receive him.

395

Brimful of honour he clasped her, and brimful of  
love she caressed him,

Answering lip with lip; while above them the  
queen Aphrodité

Poured on their foreheads and limbs, unseen, ambrosial  
odours,

Givers of longing, and rapture, and chaste content in  
espousals.

Happy whom ere they be wedded anoints she, the Queen  
Aphrodité!

400

Laughing she called to her sister, the chaste  
Tritonid Athené,

‘Seest thou yonder thy pupil, thou maid of the  
Aegis-wielder,

How he has turned himself wholly to love, and caresses  
a damsel,

Dreaming no longer of honour, or danger, or Pallas  
Athené?

Sweeter, it seems, to the young my gifts are; so yield me  
the stripling;

405

Yield him me now, lest he die in his prime, like

hapless Adonis.’  
Smiling she answered in turn, that chaste  
Tritonid Athené:  
‘Dear unto me, no less than to thee, is the wedlock of  
heroes;  
Dear, who can worthily win him a wife not unworthy;  
and noble,  
Pure with the pure to beget brave children, the like of  
their father. 410  
Happy, who thus stands linked to the heroes who  
were, and who shall be;  
Girdled with holiest awe, not sparing of self; for  
his mother  
Watches his steps with the eyes of the gods; and his wife  
and his children  
Move him to plan and to do in the farm and the camp  
and the council.  
Thence comes weal to a nation: but woe upon woe,  
when the people 415  
Mingle in love at their will, like the brutes, not  
heeding the future.’  
Then from her gold-strung loom, where she  
wrought in her chamber of cedar,  
Awful and fair she arose; and she went by the glens of  
Olympus;  
Went by the isles of the sea, and the wind never ruffled  
her mantle;  
Went by the water of Crete, and the black-beaked fleets  
of the Phoenics; 420  
Came to the sea-girt rock which is washed by the  
surges for ever,  
Bearing the wealth of the gods, for a gift to the  
bride of hero.  
There she met Andromeden and Persea, shaped like  
Immortals;  
Solemn and sweet was her smile, while their hearts beat  
loud at her coming;  
Solemn and sweet was her smile, as she spoke to the pair  
in her wisdom. 425  
‘Three things hold we, the Rulers, who sit by the  
founts of Olympus,

Wisdom, and prowess, and beauty; and freely we  
pour them on mortals;  
Pleased at our image in man, as father at his in his  
children.

One thing only we grudge to mankind, when a hero,  
unthankful,

Boasts of our gifts as his own, stiffnecked, and  
dishonours the givers,

430

Turning our weapons against us. Him Até follows  
avenging;

Slowly she tracks him and sure, as a  
lyme-hound<sup>[3]</sup>; sudden she grips him,

Crushing him, blind in his pride, for a sign and a terror  
to folly.

This we avenge, as is fit; in all else never weary of  
giving.

Come then, damsel, and know if the gods grudge  
pleasure to mortals.'

435

Loving and gentle she spoke: but the maid stood  
in awe, as the goddess

Plaited with soft swift finger her tresses, and  
decked her in jewels,

Armlet and anklet and earbell; and over her shoulders a  
necklace,

Heavy, enamelled, the flower of the gold and the brass of  
the mountain.

Trembling with joy she gazed, so well Hephaistos had  
made it,

440

Deep in the forges of Aetna, while Charis his lady  
beside him,

Mingled her grace in his craft, as he wrought for  
his sister Athené.

Then on the brows of the maiden a veil bound Pallas  
Athené;

Ample it fell to her feet, deep-fringed, a wonder of  
weaving.

Ages and ages ago it was wrought on the heights of  
Olympus,

445

Wrought in the gold-strung loom, by the finger of  
cunning Athené.

In it she wove all creatures that teem in the womb



of the ocean;  
Nereid, siren, and triton, and dolphin, and arrowy fishes  
Glittering round, many-hued, on the flame-red folds of  
the mantle.

In it she wove, too, a town where grey-haired kings sat  
in judgement;

450

Sceptre in hand in the market they sat, doing right  
by the people,

Wise: while above watched Justice, and near,  
far-seeing Apollo.

Round it she wove for a fringe all herbs of the earth and  
the water,

Violet, asphodel, ivy, and vine-leaves, roses and lilies,  
Coral and sea-fan and tangle, the blooms and the palms  
of the ocean:

455

Now from Olympus she bore it, a dower to the  
bride of a hero.

Over the limbs of the damsel she wrapt it: the maid  
still trembled,

Shading her face with her hands; for the eyes of the  
goddess were awful.

Then, as a pine upon Ida when southwest winds blow  
landward,

Stately she bent to the damsel, and breathed on her:  
under her breathing

460

Taller and fairer she grew; and the goddess spoke  
in her wisdom.

‘Courage I give thee; the heart of a queen, and  
the mind of Immortals,

Godlike to talk with the gods, and to look on their eyes  
unshrinking;

Fearing the sun and the stars no more, and the blue salt  
water;

Fearing us only, the Lords of Olympus, friends of the  
heroes;

465

Chastely and wisely to govern thyself and thy  
house and thy people,

Bearing a god-like race to thy spouse, till dying I  
set thee

High for a star in the heavens, a sign and a hope to the  
seamen,

Spreading thy long white arms all night in the heights of  
the aether,  
Hard by thy sire and the hero thy spouse, while near thee  
thy mother

470

Sits in her ivory chair, as she plaits ambrosial  
tresses.

All night long thou wilt shine; all day thou wilt  
feast on Olympus,  
Happy, the guest of the gods, by thy husband, the  
god-begotten.'

Blissful, they turned them to go: but the fair-tressed  
Pallas Athené

Rose, like a pillar of tall white cloud, toward silver  
Olympus;

475

Far above ocean and shore, and the peaks of the  
isles and the mainland;

Where no frost nor storm is, in clear blue windless  
abysses,

High in the home of the summer, the seats of the happy  
Immortals,

Shrouded in keen deep blaze, unapproachable; there ever  
youthful

Hebé, Harmonié, and the daughter of Jove, Aphrodité,

480

Whirled in the white-linked dance with the  
gold-crowned Hours and the Graces,

Hand within hand, while clear piped Phoebe,  
queen of the woodlands.

All day long they rejoiced: but Athené still in her  
chamber

Bent herself over her loom, as the stars rang loud to her  
singing,

Chanting of order and right, and of foresight, warden of  
nations;

485

Chanting of labour and craft, and of wealth in the  
port and the garner;

Chanting of valour and fame, and the man who can  
fall with the foremost,

Fighting for children and wife, and the field which his  
father bequeathed him.

Sweetly and solemnly sang she, and planned new  
lessons for mortals:

Happy, who hearing obey her, the wise unsullied  
Athené.

490

CHARLES KINGSLEY, 1819-75.

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[1] welkin] sky.

[2] sting-ray] sea scorpion.

[3] lyme-hound] bloodhound.

## SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

### AN EPISODE

And the first grey of morning fill'd the east,  
And the fog rose out of the Oxus stream.  
But all the Tartar camp along the stream  
Was hush'd, and still the men were plunged in sleep:  
Sohrab alone, he slept not: all night long 5  
He had lain wakeful, tossing on his bed;  
But when the grey dawn stole into his tent,  
He rose, and clad himself, and girt his sword,  
And took his horseman's cloak, and left his tent,  
And went abroad into the cold wet fog, 10  
Through the dim camp to Peran-Wisa's tent.  
    Through the black Tartar tents he pass'd, which  
    stood  
Clustering like bee-hives on the low flat strand  
Of Oxus, where the summer floods o'erflow  
When the sun melts the snows in high Pamere: 15  
Through the black tents he pass'd, o'er that low strand,  
And to a hillock came, a little back  
From the stream's brink, the spot where first a boat,  
Crossing the stream in summer, scrapes the land.  
The men of former times had crown'd the top 20  
With a clay fort: but that was fall'n; and now  
The Tartars built there Peran-Wisa's tent,  
A dome of laths, and o'er it felts were spread.  
And Sohrab came there, and went in, and stood  
Upon the thick-pil'd carpets in the tent, 25  
And found the old man sleeping on his bed  
Of rugs and felts, and near him lay his arms.  
And Peran-Wisa heard him, though the step  
Was dull'd; for he slept light, an old man's sleep;  
And he rose quickly on one arm, and said:— 30  
    'Who art thou? for it is not yet clear dawn.  
Speak! is there news, or any night alarm?'

But Sohrab came to the bedside, and said:—

‘Thou know’st me, Peran-Wisa: it is I.

The sun is not yet risen, and the foe 35

Sleep; but I sleep not; all night long I lie

Tossing and wakeful, and I come to thee.

For so did King Afrasiab bid me seek

Thy counsel, and to heed thee as thy son,

In Samarcand, before the army march’d; 40

And I will tell thee what my heart desires.

Thou know’st if, since from Ader-baijan first

I came among the Tartars, and bore arms,

I have still serv’d Afrasiab well, and shown,

At my boy’s years, the courage of a man. 45

This too thou know’st, that, while I still bear on

The conquering Tartar ensigns through the world,

And beat the Persians back on every field,

I seek one man, one man, and one alone—

Rustum, my father; who, I hop’d, should greet, 50

Should one day greet, upon some well-fought field,

His not unworthy, not inglorious son.

So I long hop’d, but him I never find.

Come then, hear now, and grant me what I ask.

Let the two armies rest to-day: but I 55

Will challenge forth the bravest Persian lords

To meet me, man to man: if I prevail,

Rustum will surely hear it; if I fall—

Old man, the dead need no one, claim no kin.

Dim is the rumour of a common fight, 60

Where host meets host, and many names are sunk:

But of a single combat Fame speaks clear.’

He spoke: and Peran-Wisa took the hand

Of the young man in his, and sigh’d, and said:—

‘O Sohrab, an unquiet heart is thine! 65

Canst thou not rest among the Tartar chiefs,

And share the battle’s common chance with us

Who love thee, but must press for ever first,

In single fight incurring single risk,

To find a father thou hast never seen? 70

That were far best, my son, to stay with us

Unmurmuring; in our tents, while it is war,

And when ’tis truce, then in Afrasiab’s towns.

But, if this one desire indeed rules all,  
 To seek out Rustum—seek him not through fight: 75  
 Seek him in peace, and carry to his arms,  
 O Sohrab, carry an unwounded son!  
 But far hence seek him, for he is not here.  
 For now it is not as when I was young,  
 When Rustum was in front of every fray: 80  
 But now he keeps apart, and sits at home,  
 In Seistan, with Zal, his father old.  
 Whether that his own mighty strength at last  
 Feels the abhorr'd approaches of old age;  
 Or in some quarrel with the Persian King. 85  
 There go:—Thou wilt not? Yet my heart forebodes  
 Danger or death awaits thee on this field.  
 Fain would I know thee safe and well, though lost  
 To us: fain therefore send thee hence, in peace  
 To seek thy father, not seek single fights 90  
 In vain:—but who can keep the lion's cub  
 From ravening? and who govern Rustum's son?  
 Go: I will grant thee what thy heart desires.'

So said he, and dropp'd Sohrab's hand, and left  
 His bed, and the warm rugs whereon he lay, 95  
 And o'er his chilly limbs his woollen coat  
 He pass'd, and tied his sandals on his feet,  
 And threw a white cloak round him, and he took  
 In his right hand a ruler's staff, no sword;  
 And on his head he plac'd his sheep-skin cap, 100  
 Black, glossy, curl'd, the fleece of Kara-Kul;  
 And rais'd the curtain of his tent, and call'd  
 His herald to his side, and went abroad.

The sun, by this, had risen, and clear'd the fog  
 From the broad Oxus and the glittering sands: 105  
 And from their tents the Tartar horsemen fil'd  
 Into the open plain; so Haman bade;  
 Haman, who next to Peran-Wisa rul'd  
 The host, and still was in his lusty prime.  
 From their black tents, long files of horse, they stream'd: 110  
 As when, some grey November morn, the files,  
 In marching order spread, of long-neck'd cranes  
 Stream over Casbin, and the southern slopes  
 Of Elburz, from the Aralian estuaries,

Or some frore<sup>[1]</sup> Caspian reed-bed, southward bound 115  
 For the warm Persian sea-board: so they stream'd  
 The Tartars of the Oxus, the King's guard,  
 First, with black sheep-skin caps and with long spears;  
 Large men, large steeds; who from Bokhara come  
 And Khiva, and ferment the milk of mares. 120  
 Next the more temperate Toorkmuns of the south,  
 The Turkas, and the lances of Salore,  
 And those from Attruck and the Caspian sands;  
 Light men, and on light steeds, who only drink  
 The acrid milk of camels, and their wells. 125  
 And then a swarm of wandering horse, who came  
 From far, and a more doubtful service own'd;  
 The Tartars of Ferghana, from the banks  
 Of the Jaxartes, men with scanty beards  
 And close-set skull-caps; and those wilder hordes 130  
 Who roam o'er Kipchak and the northern waste,  
 Kalmuks and unkemp'd Kuzzaks, tribes who stray  
 Nearest the Pole, and wandering Kirghizzes,  
 Who come on shaggy ponies from Pamere.  
 These all fil'd out from camp into the plain. 135  
 And on the other side the Persians form'd:  
 First a light cloud of horse, Tartars they seem'd,  
 The Ilyats of Khorassan: and behind,  
 The royal troops of Persia, horse and foot,  
 Marshall'd battalions bright in burnish'd steel. 140  
 But Peran-Wisa with his herald came  
 Threading the Tartar squadrons to the front,  
 And with his staff kept back the foremost ranks.  
 And when Ferood, who led the Persians, saw  
 That Peran-Wisa kept the Tartars back, 145  
 He took his spear, and to the front he came,  
 And check'd his ranks, and fix'd them where they  
 stood.  
 And the old Tartar came upon the sand  
 Betwixt the silent hosts, and spake, and said:—  
 'Ferood, and ye, Persians and Tartars, hear!  
 Let there be truce between the hosts to-day.  
 But choose a champion from the Persian lords  
 To fight our champion Sohrab, man to man.'  
 As, in the country, on a morn in June,

When the dew glistens on the pearled ears, 155  
A shiver runs through the deep corn for joy—  
So, when they heard what Peran-Wisa said,  
A thrill through all the Tartar squadrons ran  
Of pride and hope for Sohrab, whom they lov'd.

But as a troop of pedlars, from Cabool, 160  
Cross underneath the Indian Caucasus,  
That vast sky-neighbouring mountain of milk snow;  
Winding so high, that, as they mount, they pass  
Long flocks of travelling birds dead on the snow,  
Chok'd by the air, and scarce can they themselves 165  
Slake their parch'd throats with sugar'd mulberries—  
In single file they move, and stop their breath,  
For fear they should dislodge the o'erhanging snows—  
So the pale Persians held their breath with fear.

And to Ferood his brother Chiefs came up 170  
To counsel: Gudurz and Zoarrah came,  
And Feraburz, who rul'd the Persian host  
Second, and was the uncle of the King:  
These came and counsell'd; and then Gudurz said:—

'Ferood, shame bids us take their challenge up, 175  
Yet champion have we none to match this youth.  
He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart.  
But Rustum came last night; aloof he sits  
And sullen, and has pitch'd his tents apart:  
Him will I seek, and carry to his ear 180  
The Tartar challenge, and this young man's name.  
Haply he will forget his wrath, and fight.  
Stand forth the while, and take their challenge up.'

So spake he; and Ferood stood forth and said:— 185  
'Old man, be it agreed as thou hast said.  
Let Sohrab arm, and we will find a man.'

He spoke; and Peran-Wisa turn'd, and strode  
Back through the opening squadrons to his tent.  
But through the anxious Persians Gudurz ran,  
And cross'd the camp which lay behind, and reach'd, 190  
Out on the sands beyond it, Rustum's tents.  
Of scarlet cloth they were, and glittering gay,  
Just pitch'd: the high pavilion in the midst  
Was Rustum's, and his men lay camp'd around.  
And Gudurz enter'd Rustum's tent, and found 195



Rustum: his morning meal was done, but still  
The table stood beside him, charg'd with food;  
A side of roasted sheep, and cakes of bread,  
And dark green melons; and there Rustum sate  
Listless, and held a falcon on his wrist, 200  
And play'd with it; but Gudurz came and stood  
Before him; and he look'd, and saw him stand;  
And with a cry sprang up, and dropp'd the bird,  
And greeted Gudurz with both hands, and said:—  
    'Welcome! these eyes could see no better sight. 205  
What news? but sit down first, and eat and drink.'  
    But Gudurz stood in the tent door, and said:—  
    'Not now: a time will come to eat and drink,  
But not to-day: to-day has other needs.  
The armies are drawn out, and stand at gaze: 210  
For from the Tartars is a challenge brought  
To pick a champion from the Persian lords  
To fight their champion—and thou know'st his name—  
Sohrab men call him, but his birth is hid.  
O Rustum, like thy might is this young man's! 215  
He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart.  
And he is young, and Iran's Chiefs are old,  
Or else too weak; and all eyes turn to thee.  
Come down and help us, Rustum, or we lose.'  
    He spoke: but Rustum answer'd with a smile:— 220  
    'Go to! if Iran's Chiefs are old, then I  
Am older: if the young are weak, the King  
Errs strangely: for the King, for Kai-Khosroo,  
Himself is young, and honours younger men,  
And lets the agèd moulder to their graves. 225  
Rustum he loves no more, but loves the young—  
The young may rise at Sohrab's vaunts, not I.  
For what care I, though all speak Sohrab's fame?  
For would that I myself had such a son,  
And not that one slight helpless girl I have, 230  
A son so fam'd, so brave, to send to war,  
And I to tarry with the snow-hair'd Zal,  
My father, whom the robber Afghans vex,  
And clip his borders short, and drive his herds,  
And he has none to guard his weak old age. 235  
There would I go, and hang my armour up,

And with my great name fence that weak old man,  
And spend the goodly treasures I have got,  
And rest my age, and hear of Sohrab's fame,  
And leave to death the hosts of thankless kings, 240  
And with these slaughterous hands draw sword  
no more.'

He spoke, and smil'd; and Gudurz made reply:—  
'What then, O Rustum, will men say to this,  
When Sohrab dares our bravest forth, and seeks  
Thee most of all, and thou, whom most he seeks, 245  
Hidest thy face? Take heed, lest men should say,  
*Like some old miser, Rustum hoards his fame,*  
*And shuns to peril it with younger men.'*

And, greatly mov'd, then Rustum made reply:—  
'O Gudurz, wherefore dost thou say such words? 250  
Thou knowest better words than this to say.  
What is one more, one less, obscure or fam'd,  
Valiant or craven, young or old, to me?  
Are not they mortal, am not I myself?  
But who for men of naught would do great deeds? 255  
Come, thou shalt see how Rustum hoards his fame.  
But I will fight unknown, and in plain arms;  
Let not men say of Rustum, he was match'd  
In single fight with any mortal man.'

He spoke, and frown'd; and Gudurz turn'd, and ran 260  
Back quickly through the camp in fear and joy,  
Fear at his wrath, but joy that Rustum came.  
But Rustum strode to his tent door, and call'd  
His followers in, and bade them bring his arms,  
And clad himself in steel: the arms he chose 265  
Were plain, and on his shield was no device,  
Only his helm was rich, inlaid with gold,  
And from the fluted spine atop a plume  
Of horsehair wav'd, a scarlet horsehair plume.  
So arm'd he issued forth; and Ruksh, his horse, 270  
Follow'd him, like a faithful hound, at heel,  
Ruksh, whose renown was nois'd through all the earth,  
The horse, whom Rustum on a foray once  
Did in Bokhara by the river find  
A colt beneath its dam, and drove him home, 275  
And rear'd him; a bright bay, with lofty crest;

Dight with a saddle-cloth of broider'd green  
 Crusted with gold, and on the ground were work'd  
 All beasts of chase, all beasts which hunters know:  
 So follow'd, Rustum left his tents, and cross'd 280  
 The camp, and to the Persian host appear'd.  
 And all the Persians knew him, and with shouts  
 Hail'd; but the Tartars knew not who he was.  
 And dear as the wet diver to the eyes  
 Of his pale wife who waits and weeps on shore, 285  
 By sandy Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf,  
 Plunging all day in the blue waves, at night,  
 Having made up his tale of precious pearls,  
 Rejoins her in their hut upon the sands—  
 So dear to the pale Persians Rustum came. 290  
 And Rustum to the Persian front advanc'd,  
 And Sohrab arm'd in Haman's tent, and came.  
 And as afield the reapers cut a swathe  
 Down through the middle of a rich man's corn,  
 And on each side are squares of standing corn, 295  
 And in the midst a stubble, short and bare;  
 So on each side were squares of men, with spears  
 Bristling, and in the midst, the open sand.  
 And Rustum came upon the sand, and cast  
 His eyes towards the Tartar tents, and saw 300  
 Sohrab come forth, and ey'd him as he came.  
 As some rich woman, on a winter's morn,  
 Eyes through her silken curtains the poor drudge  
 Who with numb blacken'd fingers makes her fire—  
 At cock-crow, on a starlit winter's morn, 305  
 When the frost flowers the whiten'd window panes—  
 And wonders how she lives, and what the thoughts  
 Of that poor drudge may be; so Rustum ey'd  
 The unknown adventurous Youth, who from afar 310  
 Came seeking Rustum, and defying forth  
 All the most valiant chiefs: long he perus'd  
 His spirited air, and wonder'd who he was.  
 For very young he seem'd, tenderly rear'd;  
 Like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and straight,  
 Which in a queen's secluded garden throws 315  
 Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,  
 By midnight, to a bubbling fountain's sound—

So slender Sohrab seem'd, so softly rear'd.  
 And a deep pity enter'd Rustum's soul  
 As he beheld him coming; and he stood, 320  
 And beckon'd to him with his hand, and said:  
 'O thou young man, the air of Heaven is soft,  
 And warm, and pleasant; but the grave is cold.  
 Heaven's air is better than the cold dead grave.  
 Behold me: I am vast, and clad in iron, 325  
 And tried; and I have stood on many a field  
 Of blood, and I have fought with many a foe:  
 Never was that field lost, or that foe sav'd.  
 O Sohrab, wherefore wilt thou rush on death?  
 Be govern'd: quit the Tartar host, and come 330  
 To Iran, and be as my son to me,  
 And fight beneath my banner till I die.  
 There are no youths in Iran brave as thou.'

So he spake, mildly: Sohrab heard his voice,  
 The mighty voice of Rustum; and he saw 335  
 His giant figure planted on the sand,  
 Sole, like some single tower, which a chief  
 Has builded on the waste in former years  
 Against the robbers; and he saw that head,  
 Streak'd with its first grey hairs: hope fill'd his soul; 340  
 And he ran forwards and embrac'd his knees,  
 And clasp'd his hand within his own and said:—  
 'Oh, by thy father's head! by thine own soul!  
 Art thou not Rustum? Speak! art thou not he?'

But Rustum ey'd askance the kneeling youth, 345  
 And turn'd away, and spoke to his own soul:—  
 'Ah me, I muse what this young fox may mean.  
 False, wily, boastful, are these Tartar boys.  
 For if I now confess this thing he asks,  
 And hide it not, but say—*Rustum is here*— 350  
 He will not yield indeed, nor quit our foes,  
 But he will find some pretext not to fight,  
 And praise my fame, and proffer courteous gifts,  
 A belt or sword perhaps, and go his way.  
 And on a feast-tide, in Afrasiab's hall, 355  
 In Samarcand, he will arise and cry—  
 "I challeng'd once, when the two armies camp'd  
 Beside the Oxus, all the Persian lords

To cope with me in single fight; but they  
Shrank; only Rustum dar'd; then he and I 360  
Chang'd gifts, and went on equal terms away."  
So will he speak, perhaps, while men applaud.  
Then were the chiefs of Iran sham'd through me.'

And then he turn'd, and sternly spake aloud:— 365  
'Rise! wherefore dost thou vainly question thus  
Of Rustum? I am here, whom thou hast call'd  
By challenge forth: make good thy vaunt, or yield.  
Is it with Rustum only thou wouldst fight?  
Rash boy, men look on Rustum's face and flee.  
For well I know, that did great Rustum stand 370  
Before thy face this day, and were reveal'd,  
There would be then no talk of fighting more.  
But being what I am, I tell thee this;  
Do thou record it in thine inmost soul:  
Either thou shalt renounce thy vaunt, and yield; 375  
Or else thy bones shall strew this sand, till winds  
Bleach them, or Oxus with his summer floods,  
Oxus in summer wash them all away.'

He spoke: and Sohrab answer'd, on his feet:— 380  
'Art thou so fierce? Thou wilt not fright me so.  
I am no girl, to be made pale by words.  
Yet this thou hast said well, did Rustum stand  
Here on this field, there were no fighting then.  
But Rustum is far hence, and we stand here.  
Begin: thou art more vast, more dread than I, 385  
And thou art prov'd, I know, and I am young—  
But yet Success sways with the breath of Heaven.  
And though thou thinkest that thou knowest sure  
Thy victory, yet thou canst not surely know.  
For we are all, like swimmers in the sea, 390  
Pois'd on the top of a huge wave of Fate,  
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.  
And whether it will heave us up to land,  
Or whether it will roll us out to sea,  
Back out to sea, to the deep waves of death, 395  
We know not, and no search will make us know:  
Only the event will teach us in its hour.'

He spoke; and Rustum answer'd not, but hurl'd  
His spear: down from the shoulder, down it came,

As on some partridge in the corn a hawk 400  
That long has tower'd in the airy clouds  
Drops like a plummet: Sohrab saw it come,  
And sprang aside, quick as a flash: the spear  
Hiss'd, and went quivering down into the sand,  
Which it sent flying wide:—then Sohrab threw 405  
In turn, and full struck Rustum's shield: sharp rang,  
The iron plates rang sharp, but turn'd the spear.  
And Rustum seiz'd his club, which none but he  
Could wield: an unlopp'd trunk it was, and huge,  
Still rough; like those which men in treeless plains 410  
To build them boats fish from the flooded rivers,  
Hyphasis or Hydaspes, when, high up  
By their dark springs, the wind in winter-time  
Has made in Himalayan forests wrack,  
And strewn the channels with torn boughs; so huge 415  
The club which Rustum lifted now, and struck  
One stroke; but again Sohrab sprang aside  
Lithe as the glancing snake, and the club came  
Thundering to earth, and leapt from Rustum's hand.  
And Rustum follow'd his own blow, and fell 420  
To his knees, and with his fingers clutch'd the sand:  
And now might Sohrab have unsheath'd his sword,  
And pierc'd the mighty Rustum while he lay  
Dizzy, and on his knees, and chok'd with sand:  
But he look'd on, and smil'd, nor bar'd his sword, 425  
But courteously drew back, and spoke, and said:—  
    'Thou strik'st too hard: that club of thine will float  
Upon the summer floods, and not my bones.  
But rise, and be not wroth; not wroth am I:  
No, when I see thee, wrath forsakes my soul. 430  
Thou say'st, thou art not Rustum: be it so.  
Who art thou then, that canst so touch my soul?  
Boy as I am, I have seen battles too;  
Have waded foremost in their bloody waves,  
And heard their hollow roar of dying men; 435  
But never was my heart thus touch'd before.  
Are they from Heaven, these softenings of the heart?  
O thou old warrior, let us yield to Heaven!  
Come, plant we here in earth our angry spears,  
And make a truce, and sit upon this sand, 440

And pledge each other in red wine, like friends,  
And thou shalt talk to me of Rustum's deeds.  
There are enough foes in the Persian host  
Whom I may meet, and strike, and feel no pang; 445  
Champions enough Afrasiab has, whom thou  
Mayst fight; fight them, when they confront thy spear.  
But oh, let there be peace 'twixt thee and me!'

He ceas'd: but while he spake, Rustum had risen,  
And stood erect, trembling with rage: his club  
He left to lie, but had regain'd his spear, 450  
Whose fiery point now in his mail'd right-hand  
Blaz'd bright and baleful, like that autumn Star,  
The baleful sign of fevers: dust had soil'd  
His stately crest, and dimm'd his glittering arms.  
His breast heav'd; his lips foam'd; and twice his voice 455  
Was chok'd with rage: at last these words broke way:—

'Girl! nimble with thy feet, not with thy hands!  
Curl'd minion, dancer, coiner of sweet words!  
Fight; let me hear thy hateful voice no more!  
Thou art not in Afrasiab's gardens now 460  
With Tartar girls, with whom thou art wont to dance;  
But on the Oxus sands, and in the dance  
Of battle, and with me, who make no play  
Of war: I fight it out, and hand to hand.  
Speak not to me of truce, and pledge, and wine! 465  
Remember all thy valour: try thy feints  
And cunning: all the pity I had is gone:  
Because thou hast sham'd me before both the hosts  
With thy light skipping tricks, and thy girl's wiles.'

He spoke; and Sohrab kindled at his taunts, 470  
And he too drew his sword: at once they rush'd  
Together, as two eagles on one prey  
Come rushing down together from the clouds,  
One from the east, one from the west: their shields  
Dash'd with a clang together, and a din 475  
Rose, such as that the sinewy woodcutters  
Make often in the forest's heart at morn,  
Of hewing axes, crashing trees: such blows  
Rustum and Sohrab on each other hail'd.  
And you would say that sun and stars took part 480  
In that unnatural conflict; for a cloud

Grew suddenly in Heaven, and dark'd the sun  
Over the fighters' heads; and a wind rose  
Under their feet, and moaning swept the plain,  
And in a sandy whirlwind wrapp'd the pair. 485  
In gloom they twain were wrapp'd, and they alone;  
For both the on-looking hosts on either hand  
Stood in broad daylight, and the sky was pure,  
And the sun sparkled on the Oxus stream.  
But in the gloom they fought, with bloodshot eyes 490  
And labouring breath; first Rustum struck the shield  
Which Sohrab held stiff out: the steel-spik'd spear  
Rent the tough plates, but fail'd to reach the skin,  
And Rustum pluck'd it back with angry groan.  
Then Sohrab with his sword smote Rustum's helm, 495  
Nor clove its steel quite through; but all the crest  
He shore away, and that proud horsehair plume  
Never till now defil'd, sunk to the dust;  
And Rustum bow'd his head; but then the gloom  
Grew blacker: thunder rumbled in the air, 500  
And lightnings rent the cloud; and Ruksh, the horse,  
Who stood at hand, utter'd a dreadful cry:  
No horse's cry was that, most like the roar  
Of some pain'd desert lion, who all day  
Has trail'd the hunter's javelin in his side, 505  
And comes at night to die upon the sand:—  
The two hosts heard that cry, and quak'd for fear,  
And Oxus curdled as it cross'd his stream.  
But Sohrab heard, and quail'd not, but rush'd on,  
And struck again; and again Rustum bow'd 510  
His head; but this time all the blade, like glass,  
Sprang in a thousand shivers on the helm,  
And in his hand the hilt remain'd alone.  
Then Rustum rais'd his head: his dreadful eyes  
Glar'd, and he shook on high his menacing spear, 515  
And shouted, *Rustum!* Sohrab heard that shout,  
And shrank amaz'd: back he recoil'd one step,  
And scann'd with blinking eyes the advancing Form:  
And then he stood bewilder'd; and he dropp'd  
His covering shield, and the spear pierc'd his side. 520  
He reel'd, and staggering back, sunk to the ground.  
And then the gloom dispers'd, and the wind fell,



And the bright sun broke forth, and melted all  
The cloud; and the two armies saw the pair;  
Saw Rustum standing, safe upon his feet, 525  
And Sohrab, wounded, on the bloody sand.

Then, with a bitter smile, Rustum began:—  
‘Sohrab, thou thoughtest in thy mind to kill  
A Persian lord this day, and strip his corpse,  
And bear thy trophies to Afrasiab’s tent. 530

Or else that the great Rustum would come down  
Himself to fight, and that thy wiles would move  
His heart to take a gift, and let thee go.  
And then that all the Tartar host would praise  
Thy courage or thy craft, and spread thy fame, 535  
To glad thy father in his weak old age.  
Fool! thou art slain, and by an unknown man!  
Dearer to the red jackals shalt thou be,  
Than to thy friends, and to thy father old.’

And, with a fearless mien, Sohrab replied:— 540  
‘Unknown thou art; yet thy fierce vaunt is vain.  
Thou dost not slay me, proud and boastful man!  
No! Rustum slays me, and this filial heart.  
For were I match’d with ten such men as thou,  
And I were he who till to-day I was, 545  
They should be lying here, I standing there.

But that belovèd name unnerv’d my arm—  
That name, and something, I confess, in thee,  
Which troubles all my heart, and made my shield  
Fall; and thy spear transfix’d an unarm’d foe. 550  
And now thou boastest, and insult’st my fate.  
But hear thou this, fierce Man, tremble to hear!  
The mighty Rustum shall avenge my death!  
My father, whom I seek through all the world,  
He shall avenge my death, and punish thee!’ 555

As when some hunter in the spring hath found  
A breeding eagle sitting on her nest,  
Upon the craggy isle of a hill lake,  
And pierc’d her with an arrow as she rose,  
And follow’d her to find her where she fell 560  
Far off;—anon her mate comes winging back  
From hunting, and a great way off descries  
His huddling young left sole; at that, he checks

His pinion, and with short uneasy sweeps  
Circles above his eery, with loud screams 565  
Chiding his mate back to her nest; but she  
Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,  
In some far stony gorge out of his ken,  
A heap of fluttering feathers: never more  
Shall the lake glass her, flying over it; 570  
Never the black and dripping precipices  
Echo her stormy scream as she sails by:—  
As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss—  
So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood  
Over his dying son, and knew him not. 575  
But with a cold, incredulous voice, he said:—  
‘What prate is this of fathers and revenge?  
The mighty Rustum never had a son.’  
And, with a failing voice, Sohrab replied:—  
‘Ah yes, he had! and that lost son am I. 580  
Surely the news will one day reach his ear,  
Reach Rustum, where he sits, and tarries long,  
Somewhere, I know not where, but far from here;  
And pierce him like a stab, and make him leap  
To arms, and cry for vengeance upon thee. 585  
Fierce Man, bethink thee, for an only son!  
What will that grief, what will that vengeance be!  
Oh, could I live, till I that grief had seen!  
Yet him I pity not so much, but her,  
My mother, who in Ader-baijan dwells 590  
With that old King, her father, who grows grey  
With age, and rules over the valiant Koords.  
Her most I pity, who no more will see  
Sohrab returning from the Tartar camp,  
With spoils and honour, when the war is done. 595  
But a dark rumour will be bruited up,  
From tribe to tribe, until it reach her ear;  
And then will that defenceless woman learn  
That Sohrab will rejoice her sight no more;  
But that in battle with a nameless foe, 600  
By the far-distant Oxus, he is slain.’  
He spoke; and as he ceas’d he wept aloud,  
Thinking of her he left, and his own death.  
He spoke; but Rustum listen’d, plung’d in thought.

Nor did he yet believe it was his son 605  
Who spoke, although he call'd back names he knew;  
For he had had sure tidings that the babe,  
Which was in Ader-baijan born to him,  
Had been a puny girl, no boy at all:  
So that sad mother sent him word, for fear 610  
Rustum should take the boy, to train in arms;  
And so he deem'd that either Sohrab took,  
By a false boast, the style of Rustum's son;  
Or that men gave it him, to swell his fame.  
So deem'd he; yet he listen'd, plung'd in thought; 615  
And his soul set to grief, as the vast tide  
Of the bright rocking Ocean sets to shore  
At the full moon: tears gather'd in his eyes;  
For he remember'd his own early youth,  
And all its bounding rapture; as, at dawn, 620  
The Shepherd from his mountain lodge describes  
A far bright City, smitten by the sun,  
Through many rolling clouds;—so Rustum saw  
His youth; saw Sohrab's mother, in her bloom;  
And that old King, her father, who lov'd well 625  
His wandering guest, and gave him his fair child  
With joy; and all the pleasant life they led,  
They three, in that long-distant summer-time—  
The castle, and the dewy woods, and hunt  
And hound, and morn on those delightful hills 630  
In Ader-baijan. And he saw that Youth,  
Of age and looks to be his own dear son,  
Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand,  
Like some rich hyacinth, which by the scythe  
Of an unskilful gardener has been cut, 635  
Mowing the garden grass-plots near its bed,  
And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,  
On the mown, dying grass;—so Sohrab lay,  
Lovely in death, upon the common sand.  
And Rustum gaz'd on him with grief, and said:— 640  
‘O Sohrab, thou indeed art such a son  
Whom Rustum, wert thou his, might well have lov'd!  
Yet here thou errest, Sohrab, or else men  
Have told thee false;—thou art not Rustum's son.  
For Rustum had no son: one child he had— 645

But one—a girl: who with her mother now  
Plies some light female task, nor dreams of us—  
Of us she dreams not, nor of wounds, nor war.’

But Sohrab answer’d him in wrath; for now  
The anguish of the deep-fix’d spear grew fierce, 650  
And he desired to draw forth the steel,  
And let the blood flow free, and so to die;  
But first he would convince his stubborn foe—  
And rising sternly on one arm, he said:—

‘Man, who art thou who dost deny my words? 655  
Truth sits upon the lips of dying men,  
And Falsehood, while I liv’d, was far from mine.  
I tell thee, prick’d upon this arm I bear  
That seal which Rustum to my mother gave,  
That she might prick it on the babe she bore.’ 660

He spoke: and all the blood left Rustum’s cheeks;  
And his knees totter’d, and he smote his hand  
Against his breast, his heavy mailed hand,  
That the hard iron corslet clank’d aloud:  
And to his heart he press’d the other hand, 665  
And in a hollow voice he spake, and said:—

‘Sohrab, that were a proof which could not lie.  
If thou shew this, then art thou Rustum’s son.’

Then, with weak hasty fingers, Sohrab loos’d  
His belt, and near the shoulder bar’d his arm, 670  
And shew’d a sign in faint vermilion points  
Prick’d: as a cunning workman, in Pekin,  
Pricks with vermilion some clear porcelain vase,  
An emperor’s gift—at early morn he paints,  
And all day long, and, when night comes, the lamp 675  
Lights up his studious forehead and thin hands:—  
So delicately prick’d the sign appear’d

On Sohrab’s arm, the sign of Rustum’s seal.  
It was that Griffin, which of old rear’d Zal,  
Rustum’s great father, whom they left to die, 680  
A helpless babe, among the mountain rocks.

Him that kind Creature found, and rear’d, and lov’d—  
Then Rustum took it for his glorious sign.  
And Sohrab bar’d that figure on his arm,  
And himself scann’d it long with mournful eyes, 685  
And then he touch’d it with his hand and said:—

‘How say’st thou? Is that sign the proper sign  
Of Rustum’s son, or of some other man’s?’

He spoke: but Rustum gaz’d, and gaz’d, and stood  
Speechless; and then he utter’d one sharp cry—

690

*O Boy—thy Father!*—and his voice chok’d there.

And then a dark cloud pass’d before his eyes,  
And his head swam, and he sunk down to earth.

But Sohrab crawl’d to where he lay, and cast

His arms about his neck, and kiss’d his lips,

695

And with fond faltering fingers strok’d his cheeks,

Trying to call him back to life: and life

Came back to Rustum, and he op’d his eyes,

And they stood wide with horror; and he seiz’d

In both his hands the dust which lay around,

700

And threw it on his head, and smirch’d his hair,

His hair, and face, and beard, and glittering arms:

And strong convulsive groanings shook his breast,

And his sobs chok’d him; and he clutch’d his sword,

To draw it, and for ever let life out.

705

But Sohrab saw his thought, and held his hands,

And with a soothing voice he spoke, and said:—

‘Father, forbear: for I but meet to-day

The doom that at my birth was written down

In Heaven, and thou art Heaven’s unconscious hand.

710

Surely my heart cried out that it was thou,

When first I saw thee; and thy heart spoke too,

I know it: but Fate trod those promptings down

Under its iron heel; Fate, Fate engag’d

The strife, and hurl’d me on my father’s spear.

715

But let us speak no more of this: I find

My father; let me feel that I have found.

Come, sit beside me on this sand, and take

My head betwixt thy hands, and kiss my cheeks,

And wash them with thy tears, and say, *My Son!*

720

Quick! quick! for number’d are my sands of life,

And swift; for like the lightning to this field

I came, and like the wind I go away—

Sudden, and swift, and like a passing wind.

But it was writ in Heaven that this should be.’

725

So said he: and his voice releas’d the heart  
Of Rustum, and his tears broke forth; he cast

His arms round his son's neck, and wept aloud,  
 And kiss'd him. And awe fell on both the hosts  
 When they saw Rustum's grief: and Ruksh, the horse, 730  
 With his head bowing to the ground, and mane  
 Sweeping the dust, came near, and in mute woe  
 First to the one then to the other mov'd  
 His head, as if inquiring what their grief  
 Might mean; and from his dark, compassionate eyes, 735  
 The big warm tears roll'd down, and cak'd the sand.  
 But Rustum chid him with a stern voice, and said:—  
 'Ruksh, now thou grievest; but, O Ruksh, thy feet  
 Should then have rotted on thy nimble joints,  
 When first they bore thy Master to this field.' 740  
 But Sohrab look'd upon the horse and said:—  
 'Is this then Ruksh? How often, in past days,  
 My mother told me of thee, thou brave Steed!  
 My terrible father's terrible horse; and said,  
 That I should one day find thy lord and thee. 745  
 Come, let me lay my hand upon thy mane.  
 O Ruksh, thou art more fortunate than I;  
 For thou hast gone where I shall never go,  
 And snuff'd the breezes of my father's home.  
 And thou hast trod the sands of Seistan, 750  
 And seen the River of Helmund, and the Lake  
 Of Zirrah; and the aged Zal himself  
 Has often strok'd thy neck, and given thee food,  
 Corn in a golden platter soak'd with wine,  
 And said—"O Ruksh! bear Rustum well!"—but I 755  
 Have never known my grandsire's furrow'd face,  
 Nor seen his lofty house in Seistan,  
 Nor slak'd my thirst at the clear Helmund stream:  
 But lodg'd among my father's foes, and seen  
 Afrasiab's cities only, Samarcand, 760  
 Bokhara, and lone Khiva in the waste,  
 And the black Toorkmun tents; and only drunk  
 The desert rivers, Moorghab and Tejend,  
 Kohik, and where the Kalmuks feed their sheep,  
 The northern Sir; and this great Oxus stream— 765  
 The yellow Oxus, by whose brink I die.'  
 And with a heavy groan, Rustum replied:—  
 'Oh that its waves were flowing over me!

Oh that I saw its grains of yellow silt  
 Roll tumbling in the current o'er my head! 770  
 And with a grave mild voice, Sohrab replied:—  
 'Desire not that, my father; thou must live.  
 For some are born to do great deeds, and live,  
 As some are born to be obscur'd, and die.  
 Do thou the deeds I die too young to do, 775  
 And reap a second glory in thine age.  
 Thou art my father, and thy gain is mine.  
 But come: thou seest this great host of men  
 Which follow me; I pray thee, slay not these:  
 Let me entreat for them: what have they done? 780  
 They follow'd me, my hope, my fame, my star.  
 Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace.  
 But me thou must bear hence, not send with them,  
 But carry me with thee to Seistan,  
 And place me on a bed, and mourn for me, 785  
 Thou, and the snow-hair'd Zal, and all thy friends.  
 And thou must lay me in that lovely earth,  
 And heap a stately mound above my bones,  
 And plant a far-seen pillar over all:  
 That so the passing horseman on the waste 790  
 May see my tomb a great way off, and say—  
*Sohrab, the mighty Rustum's son, lies there,*  
*Whom his great father did in ignorance kill—*  
 And I be not forgotten in my grave.'

And, with a mournful voice, Rustum replied:— 795  
 'Fear not; as thou hast said, Sohrab, my son,  
 So shall it be: for I will burn my tents,  
 And quit the host, and bear thee hence with me,  
 And carry thee away to Seistan,  
 And place thee on a bed, and mourn for thee, 800  
 With the snow-headed Zal, and all my friends.  
 And I will lay thee in that lovely earth,  
 And heap a stately mound above thy bones,  
 And plant a far-seen pillar over all:  
 And men shall not forget thee in thy grave. 805  
 And I will spare thy host: yea, let them go:  
 Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace.  
 What should I do with slaying any more?  
 For would that all whom I have ever slain

Might be once more alive; my bitterest foes, 810  
 And they who were call'd champions in their time,  
 And through whose death I won that fame I have;  
 And I were nothing but a common man,  
 A poor, mean soldier, and without renown,  
 So thou mightest live too, my Son, my Son! 815  
 Or rather would that I, even I myself,  
 Might now be lying on this bloody sand,  
 Near death, and by an ignorant stroke of thine,  
 Not thou of mine; and I might die, not thou;  
 And I, not thou, be borne to Seistan; 820  
 And Zal might weep above my grave, not thine;  
 And say—*O son, I weep thee not too sore,*  
*For willingly, I know, thou met'st thine end.*—  
 But now in blood and battles was my youth,  
 And full of blood and battles is my age; 825  
 And I shall never end this life of blood.'

Then, at the point of death, Sohrab replied:—  
 'A life of blood indeed, thou dreadful Man!  
 But thou shalt yet have peace; only not now:  
 Not yet: but thou shalt have it on that day, 830  
 When thou shalt sail in a high-masted Ship,  
 Thou and the other peers of Kai-Khosroo,  
 Returning home over the salt blue sea,  
 From laying thy dear Master in his grave.'

And Rustum gaz'd on Sohrab's face, and said:— 835  
 'Soon be that day, my Son, and deep that sea!  
 Till then, if Fate so wills, let me endure.'

He spoke; and Sohrab smil'd on him, and took  
 The spear, and drew it from his side, and eas'd  
 His wound's imperious anguish: but the blood 840  
 Came welling from the open gash, and life  
 Flow'd with the stream: all down his cold white side  
 The crimson torrent ran, dim now, and soil'd,  
 Like the soil'd tissue of white violets  
 Left, freshly gather'd, on their native bank, 845  
 By romping children, whom their nurses call  
 From the hot fields at noon: his head droop'd low,  
 His limbs grew slack; motionless, white, he lay—  
 White, with eyes closed; only when heavy gasps,  
 Deep, heavy gasps, quivering through all his frame, 850



Convuls'd him back to life, he open'd them,  
And fix'd them feebly on his father's face:  
Till now all strength was ebb'd, and from his limbs  
Unwillingly the spirit fled away,  
Regretting the warm mansion which it left, 855  
And youth and bloom, and this delightful world.

So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead.  
And the great Rustum drew his horseman's cloak  
Down o'er his face, and sate by his dead son.  
As those black granite pillars, once high-rear'd 860  
By Jemshid in Persepolis, to bear  
His house, now, mid their broken flights of steps,  
Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side—  
So in the sand lay Rustum by his son.

And night came down over the solemn waste, 865  
And the two gazing hosts, and that sole pair,  
And darken'd all; and a cold fog, with night,  
Crept from the Oxus. Soon a hum arose,  
As of a great assembly loos'd, and fires  
Began to twinkle through the fog: for now 870  
Both armies mov'd to camp, and took their meal:  
The Persians took it on the open sands  
Southward; the Tartars by the river marge:  
And Rustum and his son were left alone.

But the majestic River floated on, 875  
Out of the mist and hum of that low land,  
Into the frosty starlight, and there mov'd,  
Rejoicing, through the hush'd Chorasmian waste,  
Under the solitary moon: he flow'd  
Right for the Polar Star, past Orgunjè, 880  
Brimming, and bright, and large: then sands begin  
To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,  
And split his currents; that for many a league  
The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along  
Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles— 885  
Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had  
In his high mountain cradle in Pamere,  
A foil'd circuitous wanderer:—till at last  
The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide  
His luminous home of waters opens, bright 890  
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bath'd stars

Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

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[1] frore] frozen.

# BALDER DEAD

## *An Episode*

### I

#### SENDING

So on the floor lay Balder dead; and round  
Lay thickly strewn swords axes darts and spears  
Which all the Gods in sport had idly thrown  
At Balder, whom no weapon pierc'd or clove:  
But in his breast stood fixt the fatal bough 5  
Of mistletoe, which Lok the Accuser gave  
To Hoder, and unwitting Hoder threw:  
'Gainst that alone had Balder's life no charm.  
And all the Gods and all the Heroes came  
And stood round Balder on the bloody floor 10  
Weeping and wailing; and Valhalla rang  
Up to its golden roof with sobs and cries:  
And on the tables stood the untasted meats,  
And in the horns and gold-rimm'd skulls the wine:  
And now would Night have fall'n, and found them yet 15  
Wailing; but otherwise was Odin's will:  
And thus the Father of the Ages spake:—

'Enough of tears, ye Gods, enough of wail!  
Not to lament in was Valhalla made.  
If any here might weep for Balder's death 20  
I most might weep, his Father; such a son  
I lose to-day, so bright, so lov'd a God.  
But he has met that doom which long ago  
The Nornies, when his mother bare him, spun,  
And Fate set seal, that so his end must be. 25  
Balder has met his death, and ye survive:  
Weep him an hour; but what can grief avail?  
For you yourselves, ye Gods, shall meet your doom,  
All ye who hear me, and inhabit Heaven,  
And I too, Odin too, the Lord of all; 30  
But ours we shall not meet, when that day comes,

With woman's tears and weak complaining cries—  
Why should we meet another's portion so?  
Rather it fits you, having wept your hour,  
With cold dry eyes, and hearts compos'd and stern, 35  
To live, as erst, your daily life in Heaven:  
By me shall vengeance on the murderer Lok,  
The Foe, the Accuser, whom, though Gods, we hate,  
Be strictly car'd for, in the appointed day.  
Meanwhile, to-morrow, when the morning dawns, 40  
Bring wood to the seashore to Balder's ship,  
And on the deck build high a funeral pile,  
And on the top lay Balder's corpse, and put  
Fire to the wood, and send him out to sea  
To burn; for that is what the dead desire.' 45

So having spoke, the King of Gods arose  
And mounted his horse Sleipner, whom he rode,  
And from the hall of Heaven he rode away  
To Lidskialf, and sate upon his throne,  
The Mount, from whence his eye surveys the world. 50  
And far from Heaven he turn'd his shining orbs  
To look on Midgard, and the earth, and men:  
And on the conjuring Lapps he bent his gaze  
Whom antler'd reindeer pull over the snow;  
And on the Finns, the gentlest of mankind, 55  
Fair men, who live in holes under the ground:  
Nor did he look once more to Ida's plain,  
Nor towards Valhalla, and the sorrowing Gods;  
For well he knew the Gods would heed his word,  
And cease to mourn, and think of Balder's pyre. 60

But in Valhalla all the Gods went back  
From around Balder, all the Heroes went;  
And left his body stretch'd upon the floor.  
And on their golden chairs they sate again,  
Beside the tables, in the hall of Heaven; 65  
And before each the cooks who serv'd them plac'd  
New messes of the boar Serimner's flesh,  
And the Valkyries crown'd their horns with mead.  
So they, with pent-up hearts and tearless eyes,  
Wailing no more, in silence ate and drank, 70

While Twilight fell, and sacred Night came on.

But the blind Hoder left the feasting Gods  
In Odin's hall, and went through Asgard streets,  
And past the haven where the Gods have moor'd  
Their ships, and through the gate, beyond the wall. 75  
Though sightless, yet his own mind led the God,  
Down to the margin of the roaring sea  
He came, and sadly went along the sand  
Between the waves and black o'erhanging cliffs  
Where in and out the screaming seafowl fly; 80  
Until he came to where a gully breaks  
Through the cliff wall, and a fresh stream runs down  
From the high moors behind, and meets the sea.  
There in the glen Fensaler stands, the house  
Of Frea, honour'd Mother of the Gods, 85  
And shows its lighted windows to the main  
There he went up, and pass'd the open doors:  
And in the hall he found those women old,  
The Prophetesses, who by rite eterne  
On Frea's hearth feed high the sacred fire 90  
Both night and day; and by the inner wall  
Upon her golden chair the Mother sate,  
With folded hands, revolving things to come:  
To her drew Hoder near, and spake, and said:—

'Mother, a child of bale thou bar'st in me. 95  
For, first, thou barest me with blinded eyes,  
Sightless and helpless, wandering weak in Heaven;  
And, after that, of ignorant witless mind  
Thou barest me, and unforeseeing soul:  
That I alone must take the branch from Lok, 100  
The Foe, the Accuser, whom, though Gods, we hate,  
And cast it at the dear-lov'd Balder's breast  
At whom the Gods in sport their weapons threw—  
'Gainst that alone had Balder's life no charm.  
Now therefore what to attempt, or whither fly? 105  
For who will bear my hateful sight in Heaven?—  
Can I, O Mother, bring them Balder back?  
Or—for thou know'st the Fates, and things allow'd—  
Can I with Hela's power a compact strike,

And make exchange, and give my life for his?’

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He spoke: the Mother of the Gods replied:—

‘Hoder, ill-fated, child of bale, my son,  
Sightless in soul and eye, what words are these?

That one, long portion’d with his doom of death,

Should change his lot, and fill another’s life,

And Hela yield to this, and let him go!

On Balder Death hath laid her hand, not thee;

Nor doth she count this life a price for that.

For many Gods in Heaven, not thou alone,

Would freely die to purchase Balder back,

And wend themselves to Hela’s gloomy realm.

For not so gladsome is that life in Heaven

Which Gods and Heroes lead, in feast and fray,

Waiting the darkness of the final times,

That one should grudge its loss for Balder’s sake,

Balder their joy, so bright, so lov’d a God.

But Fate withstands, and laws forbid this way.

Yet in my secret mind one way I know,

Nor do I judge if it shall win or fail:

But much must still be tried, which shall but fail.’

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And the blind Hoder answer’d her, and said:—

‘What way is this, O Mother, that thou show’st?

Is it a matter which a God might try?’

And straight the Mother of the Gods

replied:—

‘There is a way which leads to Hela’s realm,

Untrodden, lonely, far from light and Heaven.

Who goes that way must take no other horse

To ride, but Sleipner, Odin’s horse, alone.

Nor must he choose that common path of Gods

Which every day they come and go in Heaven,

O’er the bridge Bifrost, where is Heimdall’s watch,

Past Midgard Fortress, down to Earth and men;

But he must tread a dark untravell’d road

Which branches from the north of Heaven, and ride

Nine days, nine nights, towards the northern ice,

Through valleys deep-engulph’d, with roaring streams.

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And he will reach on the tenth morn a bridge  
Which spans with golden arches Giall's stream,  
Not Bifrost, but that bridge a Damsel keeps, 150  
Who tells the passing troops of dead their way  
To the low shore of ghosts, and Hela's realm.  
And she will bid him northward steer his course:  
Then he will journey through no lighted land,  
Nor see the sun arise, nor see it set;  
But he must ever watch the northern Bear 155  
Who from her frozen height with jealous eye  
Confronts the Dog and Hunter in the south,  
And is alone not dipt in Ocean's stream.  
And straight he will come down to Ocean's strand;  
Ocean, whose watery ring enfolds the world, 160  
And on whose marge the ancient Giants dwell.  
But he will reach its unknown northern shore,  
Far, far beyond the outmost Giant's home,  
At the chink'd fields of ice, the waste of snow:  
And he will fare across the dismal ice 165  
Northward, until he meets a stretching wall  
Barring his way, and in the wall a grate.  
But then he must dismount, and on the ice  
Tighten the girths of Sleipner, Odin's horse,  
And make him leap the grate, and come within. 170  
And he will see stretch round him Hela's realm,  
The plains of Niflheim, where dwell the dead,  
And hear the roaring of the streams of Hell.  
And he will see the feeble shadowy tribes,  
And Balder sitting crown'd, and Hela's throne 175  
Then he must not regard the wailful ghosts  
Who all will flit, like eddying leaves, around;  
But he must straight accost their solemn Queen,  
And pay her homage, and entreat with prayers,  
Telling her all that grief they have in Heaven 180  
For Balder, whom she holds by right below:  
If haply he may melt her heart with words,  
And make her yield, and give him Balder back.'

She spoke: but Hoder answer'd her and said:—  
'Mother, a dreadful way is this thou show'st, 185  
No journey for a sightless God to go.'

And straight the Mother of the Gods replied:—  
‘Therefore thyself thou shalt not go, my son.  
But he whom first thou meetest when thou com’st  
To Asgard, and declar’st this hidden way, 190  
Shall go, and I will be his guide unseen.’

She spoke, and on her face let fall her veil,  
And bow’d her head, and sate with folded hands.  
But at the central hearth those Women old,  
Who while the Mother spake had ceased their toil, 195  
Began again to heap the sacred fire:  
And Hoder turn’d, and left his mother’s house,  
Fensaler, whose lit windows look to sea;  
And came again down to the roaring waves,  
And back along the beach to Asgard went, 200  
Pondering on that which Frea said should be.

But Night came down, and darken’d Asgard streets.  
Then from their loathèd feast the Gods arose,  
And lighted torches, and took up the corpse  
Of Balder from the floor of Odin’s hall, 205  
And laid it on a bier, and bare him home  
Through the fast-darkening streets to his own house  
Bleidablik, on whose columns Balder grav’d  
The enchantments, that recall the dead to life:  
For wise he was, and many curious arts, 210  
Postures of runes, and healing herbs he knew;  
Unhappy: but that art he did not know  
To keep his own life safe, and see the sun:—  
There to his hall the Gods brought Balder home,  
And each bespake him as he laid him down:— 215  
‘Would that ourselves, O Balder, we were borne  
Home to our halls, with torchlight, by our kin,  
So thou might’st live, and still delight the Gods.’

They spake: and each went home to his own house.  
But there was one, the first of all the Gods 220  
For speed, and Hermod was his name in Heaven;  
Most fleet he was, but now he went the last,  
Heavy in heart for Balder, to his house  
Which he in Asgard built him, there to dwell,



Against the harbour, by the city wall: 225  
Him the blind Hoder met, as he came up  
From the sea cityward, and knew his step;  
Nor yet could Hermod see his brother's face,  
For it grew dark; but Hoder touch'd his arm:  
And as a spray of honeysuckle flowers 230  
Brushes across a tired traveller's face  
Who shuffles through the deep dew-moisten'd dust,  
On a May evening, in the darken'd lanes,  
And starts him, that he thinks a ghost went by—  
So Hoder brush'd by Hermod's side, and said:— 235

‘Take Sleipner, Hermod, and set forth with dawn  
To Hela's kingdom, to ask Balder back;  
And they shall be thy guides, who have the power.’

He spake, and brush'd soft by, and disappear'd.  
And Hermod gaz'd into the night, and said:— 240

‘Who is it utters through the dark his hest  
So quickly, and will wait for no reply?  
The voice was like the unhappy Hoder's voice.  
Howbeit I will see, and do his hest;  
For there rang note divine in that command.’ 245

So speaking, the fleet-footed Hermod came  
Home, and lay down to sleep in his own house,  
And all the Gods lay down in their own homes.  
And Hoder too came home, distraught with grief,  
Loathing to meet, at dawn, the other Gods: 250  
And he went in, and shut the door, and fixt  
His sword upright, and fell on it, and died.

But from the hill of Lidskialf Odin rose,  
The throne, from which his eye surveys the world;  
And mounted Sleipner, and in darkness rode 255  
To Asgard. And the stars came out in Heaven,  
High over Asgard, to light home the King.  
But fiercely Odin gallop'd, mov'd in heart;  
And swift to Asgard, to the gate, he came:  
And terribly the hoofs of Sleipner rang 260  
Along the flinty floor of Asgard streets;

And the Gods trembled on their golden beds  
Hearing the wrathful Father coming home;  
For dread, for like a whirlwind, Odin came:  
And to Valhalla's gate he rode, and left  
Sleipner; and Sleipner went to his own stall: 265  
And in Valhalla Odin laid him down.

But in Breidablik Nanna, Balder's wife,  
Came with the Goddesses who wrought her will,  
And stood round Balder lying on his bier: 270  
And at his head and feet she station'd Scalds<sup>[1]</sup>  
Who in their lives were famous for their song;  
These o'er the corpse inton'd a plaintive strain,  
A dirge; and Nanna and her train replied.  
And far into the night they wail'd their dirge: 275  
But when their souls were satisfied with wail,  
They went, and laid them down, and Nanna went  
Into an upper chamber, and lay down;  
And Frea seal'd her tired lids with sleep.

And 'twas when Night is bordering hard on Dawn, 280  
When air is chilliest, and the stars sunk low,  
Then Balder's spirit through the gloom drew near,  
In garb, in form, in feature as he was  
Alive, and still the rays were round his head  
Which were his glorious mark in Heaven; he stood 285  
Over against the curtain of the bed,  
And gaz'd on Nanna as she slept, and spake:—

'Poor lamb, thou sleepest, and forgett'st thy woe.  
Tears stand upon the lashes of thine eyes,  
Tears wet the pillow by thy cheek; but thou, 290  
Like a young child, hast cried thyself to sleep.  
Sleep on: I watch thee, and am here to aid.  
Alive I kept not far from thee, dear soul,  
Neither do I neglect thee now, though dead.  
For with to-morrow's dawn the Gods prepare 295  
To gather wood, and build a funeral pile  
Upon my ship, and burn my corpse with fire,  
That sad, sole honour of the dead; and thee  
They think to burn, and all my choicest wealth,

With me, for thus ordains the common rite: 300  
But it shall not be so: but mild, but swift,  
But painless shall a stroke from Frea come,  
To cut thy thread of life, and free thy soul,  
And they shall burn thy corpse with mine, not thee.  
And well I know that by no stroke of death, 305  
Tardy or swift, wouldst thou be loath to die,  
So it restor'd thee, Nanna, to my side,  
Whom thou so well hast lov'd; but I can smooth  
Thy way, and this at least my prayers avail.  
Yes, and I fain would altogether ward 310  
Death from thy head, and with the Gods in Heaven  
Prolong thy life, though not by thee desir'd:  
But Right bars this, not only thy desire.  
Yet dreary, Nanna, is the life they lead  
In that dim world, in Hela's mouldering realm; 315  
And doleful are the ghosts, the troops of dead,  
Whom Hela with austere control presides;  
For of the race of Gods is no one there  
Save me alone, and Hela, solemn Queen:  
And all the nobler souls of mortal men 320  
On battle-field have met their death, and now  
Feast in Valhalla, in my Father's hall;  
Only the inglorious sort are there below,  
The old, the cowards, and the weak are there,  
Men spent by sickness, or obscure decay. 325  
But even there, O Nanna, we might find  
Some solace in each other's look and speech,  
Wandering together through that gloomy world,  
And talking of the life we led in Heaven,  
While we yet liv'd, among the other Gods.' 330

He spake, and straight his lineaments began  
To fade: and Nanna in her sleep stretch'd out  
Her arms towards him with a cry; but he  
Mournfully shook his head, and disappear'd.  
And as the woodman sees a little smoke 335  
Hang in the air, afield, and disappear—  
So Balder faded in the night away.  
And Nanna on her bed sunk back: but then  
Freya, the Mother of the Gods, with stroke

Painless and swift, set free her airy soul,  
Which took, on Balder's track, the way below:  
And instantly the sacred Morn appear'd.

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II

JOURNEY TO THE DEAD

Forth from the East, up the ascent of Heaven,  
Day drove his courser with the Shining Mane;  
And in Valhalla, from his gable perch,  
The golden-crested Cock began to crow:  
Hereafter, in the blackest dead of night,  
With shrill and dismal cries that Bird shall crow,  
Warning the Gods that foes draw nigh to Heaven;  
But now he crew at dawn, a cheerful note,  
To wake the Gods and Heroes to their tasks.  
And all the Gods, and all the Heroes, woke.  
And from their beds the Heroes rose, and donn'd  
Their arms, and led their horses from the stall,  
And mounted them, and in Valhalla's court  
Were rang'd; and then the daily fray began.  
And all day long they there are hack'd and hewn  
'Mid dust, and groans, and limbs lopp'd off, and blood;  
But all at night return to Odin's hall  
Woundless and fresh: such lot is theirs in Heaven.  
And the Valkyries on their steeds went forth  
Toward Earth and fights of men; and at their side  
Skulda, the youngest of the Nornies, rode:  
And over Bifrost, where is Heimdall's watch,  
Past Midgard Fortress, down to Earth they came:  
There through some battle-field, where men fall fast,  
Their horses fetlock-deep in blood, they ride,  
And pick the bravest warriors out for death,  
Whom they bring back with them at night to Heaven,  
To glad the Gods, and feast in Odin's hall.

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But the Gods went not now, as otherwhile,  
Into the Tilt-Yard, where the Heroes fought,  
To feast their eyes with looking on the fray:  
Nor did they to their Judgement-Place repair

By the ash Igdrasil, in Ida's plain, 375  
Where they hold council, and give laws for men:  
But they went, Odin first, the rest behind,  
To the hall Gladheim, which is built of gold;  
Where are in circle rang'd twelve golden chairs,  
And in the midst one higher, Odin's throne: 380  
There all the Gods in silence sate them down;  
And thus the Father of the Ages spake:—

'Go quickly, Gods, bring wood to the seashore,  
With all, which it beseems the dead to have,  
And make a funeral pile on Balder's ship. 385  
On the twelfth day the Gods shall burn his corpse.  
But Hermod, thou, take Sleipner, and ride down  
To Hela's kingdom, to ask Balder back.'

So said he; and the Gods arose, and took 390  
Axes and ropes, and at their head came Thor,  
Shouldering his Hammer, which the Giants know:  
Forth wended they, and drove their steeds before:  
And up the dewy mountain tracks they far'd  
To the dark forests, in the early dawn;  
And up and down and side and slant they roam'd: 395  
And from the glens all day an echo came  
Of crashing falls; for with his hammer Thor  
Smote 'mid the rocks the lichen-bearded pines  
And burst their roots; while to their tops the Gods  
Made fast the woven ropes, and hal'd them down, 400  
And lopp'd their boughs, and clove them on the sward,  
And bound the logs behind their steeds to draw,  
And drove them homeward; and the snorting steeds  
Went straining through the crackling brushwood down,  
And by the darkling forest paths the Gods 405  
Follow'd, and on their shoulders carried boughs.  
And they came out upon the plains, and pass'd  
Asgard, and led their horses to the beach,  
And loos'd them of their loads on the seashore,  
And rang'd the wood in stacks by Balder's ship; 410  
And every God went home to his own house.

But when the Gods were to the forest gone

Hermod led Sleipner from Valhalla forth  
And saddled him; before that, Sleipner brook'd  
No meaner hand than Odin's on his mane, 415  
On his broad back no lesser rider bore:  
Yet docile now he stood at Hermod's side,  
Arching his neck, and glad to be bestrode,  
Knowing the God they went to seek, how dear.  
But Hermod mounted him, and sadly far'd, 420  
In silence, up the dark untravell'd road  
Which branches from the north of Heaven, and went  
All day; and Daylight wan'd, and Night came on.  
And all that night he rode, and journey'd so,  
Nine days, nine nights, towards the northern ice, 425  
Through valleys deep-engulph'd, by roaring streams:  
And on the tenth morn he beheld the bridge  
Which spans with golden arches Giall's stream,  
And on the bridge a Damsel watching arm'd,  
In the strait passage, at the further end, 430  
Where the road issues between walling rocks.  
Scant space that Warder left for passers by;  
But, as when cowerds in October drive  
Their kine across a snowy mountain pass  
To winter pasture on the southern side, 435  
And on the ridge a wagon chokes the way,  
Wedg'd in the snow; then painfully the hinds  
With goad and shouting urge their cattle past,  
Plunging through deep untrodden banks of snow  
To right and left, and warm steam fills the air— 440  
So on the bridge that Damsel block'd the way,  
And question'd Hermod as he came, and said:—

‘Who art thou on thy black and fiery horse  
Under whose hoofs the bridge o'er Giall's stream  
Rumbles and shakes? Tell me thy race and home. 445  
But yestermorn five troops of dead pass'd by  
Bound on their way below to Hela's realm,  
Nor shook the bridge so much as thou alone.  
And thou hast flesh and colour on thy cheeks  
Like men who live and draw the vital air; 450  
Nor look'st thou pale and wan, like men deceas'd,  
Souls bound below, my daily passers here.’

And the fleet-footed Hermod answer'd her:—  
'O Damsel, Hermod am I call'd, the son  
Of Odin; and my high-roof'd house is built 455  
Far hence, in Asgard, in the City of Gods:  
And Sleipner, Odin's horse, is this I ride.  
And I come, sent this road on Balder's track:  
Say then, if he hath cross'd thy bridge or no?'

He spake; the Warder of the bridge replied:— 460  
'O Hermod, rarely do the feet of Gods  
Or of the horses of the Gods resound  
Upon my bridge; and, when they cross, I know.  
Balder hath gone this way, and ta'en the road  
Below there, to the north, toward Hela's realm. 465  
From here the cold white mist can be discern'd,  
Not lit with sun, but through the darksome air  
By the dim vapour-blotted light of stars,  
Which hangs over the ice where lies the road.  
For in that ice are lost those northern streams 470  
Freezing and ridging in their onward flow,  
Which from the fountain of Vergelmer run,  
The spring that bubbles up by Hela's throne.  
There are the joyless seats, the haunt of ghosts,  
Hela's pale swarms; and there was Balder bound. 475  
Ride on; pass free: but he by this is there.'

She spake, and stepp'd aside, and left him room.  
And Hermod greeted her, and gallop'd by  
Across the bridge; then she took post again.  
But northward Hermod rode, the way below: 480  
And o'er a darksome tract, which knows no sun,  
But by the blotted light of stars, he far'd;  
And he came down to Ocean's northern strand  
At the drear ice, beyond the Giants' home:  
Thence on he journey'd o'er the fields of ice 485  
Still north, until he met a stretching wall  
Barring his way, and in the wall a grate.  
Then he dismounted, and drew tight the girths,  
On the smooth ice, of Sleipner, Odin's horse,  
And made him leap the grate, and came within. 490  
And he beheld spread round him Hela's realm,

The plains of Niflheim, where dwell the dead,  
And heard the thunder of the streams of Hell.  
For near the wall the river of Roaring flows,  
Outmost: the others near the centre run— 495  
The Storm, the Abyss, the Howling, and the Pain:  
These flow by Hela's throne, and near their spring.  
And from the dark flock'd up the shadowy tribes:  
And as the swallows crowd the bulrush-beds  
Of some clear river, issuing from a lake, 500  
On autumn days, before they cross the sea;  
And to each bulrush-crest a swallow hangs  
Swinging, and others skim the river streams,  
And their quick twittering fills the banks and shores—  
So around Hermod swarm'd the twittering ghosts. 505  
Women, and infants, and young men who died  
Too soon for fame, with white ungraven shields;  
And old men, known to Glory, but their star  
Betray'd them, and of wasting age they died,  
Not wounds: yet, dying, they their armour wore, 510  
And now have chief regard in Hela's realm.  
Behind flock'd wrangling up a piteous crew,  
Greeted of none, disfeatur'd and forlorn—  
Cowards, who were in sloughs interr'd alive:  
And round them still the wattled hurdles hung 515  
Wherewith they stamp'd them down, and trod them deep,  
To hide their shameful memory from men.  
But all he pass'd unhail'd, and reach'd the throne  
Of Hela, and saw, near it, Balder crown'd,  
And Hela sat thereon, with countenance stern; 520  
And thus bespake him first the Solemn Queen:—

'Unhappy, how hast thou endur'd to leave  
The light, and journey to the cheerless land  
Where idly flit about the feeble shades?  
How didst thou cross the bridge o'er Giall's stream, 525  
Being alive, and come to Ocean's shore?  
Or how o'erleap the grate that bars the wall?'

She spake: but down off Sleipner Hermod sprang,  
And fell before her feet, and clasped her knees;  
And spake, and mild entreated her, and said:— 530



‘O Hela, wherefore should the Gods declare  
Their errands to each other, or the ways  
They go? the errand and the way is known.  
Thou know’st, thou know’st, what grief we have in Heaven  
For Balder, whom thou hold’st by right below: 535  
Restore him, for what part fulfils he here?  
Shall he shed cheer over the cheerless seats  
And touch the apathetic ghosts with joy?  
Not for such end, O Queen, thou hold’st thy realm.  
For Heaven was Balder born, the City of Gods 540  
And Heroes, where they live in light and joy:  
Thither restore him, for his place is there.’

He spoke; and grave replied the solemn Queen:—  
‘Hermod, for he thou art, thou Son of Heaven!  
A strange unlikely errand, sure, is thine. 545  
Do the Gods send to me to make them blest?  
Small bliss my race hath of the Gods obtain’d.  
Three mighty children to my Father Lok  
Did Angerbode, the Giantess, bring forth—  
Fenris the Wolf, the Serpent huge, and Me: 550  
Of these the Serpent in the sea ye cast,  
Who since in your despite hath wax’d amain,  
And now with gleaming ring enfolds the world:  
Me on this cheerless nether world ye threw  
And gave me nine unlighted realms to rule: 555  
While on his island in the lake, afar,  
Made fast to the bor’d crag, by wile not strength  
Subdu’d, with limber<sup>[2]</sup> chains lives Fenris bound.  
Lok still subsists in Heaven, our Father wise,  
Your mate, though loath’d, and feasts in Odin’s hall; 560  
But him too foes await, and netted snares,  
And in a cave a bed of needle rocks,  
And o’er his visage serpents dropping gall.  
Yet he shall one day rise, and burst his bonds,  
And with himself set us his offspring free, 565  
When he guides Muspel’s children to their bourne.  
Till then in peril or in pain we live,  
Wrought by the Gods: and ask the Gods our aid?  
Howbeit we abide our day: till then,  
We do not as some feebler haters do, 570

Seek to afflict our foes with petty pangs,  
Helpless to better us, or ruin them.  
Come then; if Balder was so dear belov'd,  
And this is true, and such a loss is Heaven's—  
Hear, how to Heaven may Balder be restor'd. 575  
Show me through all the world the signs of grief:  
Fails but one thing to grieve, here Balder stops:  
Let all that lives and moves upon the earth  
Weep him, and all that is without life weep:  
Let Gods, men, brutes, bewep him; plants and stones. 580  
So shall I know the lost was dear indeed,  
And bend my heart, and give him back to Heaven.'

She spake; and Hermod answer'd her, and said:—  
'Hela, such as thou say'st, the terms shall be.  
But come, declare me this, and truly tell: 585  
May I, ere I depart, bid Balder hail?  
Or is it here withheld to greet the dead?'

He spake; and straightway Hela answer'd him:—  
'Hermod, greet Balder if thou wilt, and hold  
Converse: his speech remains, though he be dead.' 590

And straight to Balder Hermod turn'd, and spake:—  
'Even in the abode of Death, O Balder, hail!  
Thou hear'st, if hearing, like as speech, is thine,  
The terms of thy releasement hence to Heaven:  
Fear nothing but that all shall be fulfill'd. 595  
For not unmindful of thee are the Gods  
Who see the light, and blest in Asgard dwell;  
Even here they seek thee out, in Hela's realm.  
And sure of all the happiest far art thou  
Who ever have been known in Earth or Heaven: 600  
Alive, thou wert of Gods the most belov'd:  
And now thou sittest crown'd by Hela's side,  
Here, and hast honour among all the dead.'

He spake; and Balder utter'd him reply,  
But feebly, as a voice far off; he said:— 605

'Hermod the nimble, gild me not my death.  
Better to live a slave, a captur'd man,

Who scatters rushes in a master's hall,  
Than be a crown'd king here, and rule the dead.  
And now I count not of these terms as safe 610  
To be fulfill'd, nor my return as sure,  
Though I be lov'd, and many mourn my death:  
For double-minded ever was the seed  
Of Lok, and double are the gifts they give.  
Howbeit, report thy message; and therewith, 615  
To Odin, to my Father, take this ring,  
Memorial of me, whether sav'd or no:  
And tell the Heaven-born Gods how thou hast seen  
Me sitting here below by Hela's side,  
Crown'd, having honour among all the dead.' 620

He spake, and rais'd his hand, and gave the ring.  
And with inscrutable regard the Queen  
Of Hell beheld them, and the ghosts stood dumb.  
But Hermod took the ring, and yet once more  
Kneel'd and did homage to the solemn Queen; 625  
Then mounted Sleipner, and set forth to ride  
Back, through the astonish'd tribes of dead, to Heaven.  
And to the wall he came, and found the grate  
Lifted, and issued on the fields of ice;  
And o'er the ice he far'd to Ocean's strand, 630  
And up from thence, a wet and misty road,  
To the arm'd Damsel's bridge, and Giall's stream.  
Worse was that way to go than to return,  
For him: for others all return is barr'd.  
Nine days he took to go, two to return; 635  
And on the twelfth morn saw the light of Heaven.  
And as a traveller in the early dawn  
To the steep edge of some great valley comes  
Through which a river flows, and sees beneath  
Clouds of white rolling vapours fill the vale, 640  
But o'er them, on the farther slope, descries  
Vineyards, and crofts, and pastures, bright with sun—  
So Hermod, o'er the fog between, saw Heaven.  
And Sleipner snorted, for he smelt the air  
Of Heaven: and mightily, as wing'd, he flew. 645  
And Hermod saw the towers of Asgard rise:  
And he drew near, and heard no living voice

In Asgard; and the golden halls were dumb.  
Then Hermod knew what labour held the Gods:  
And through the empty streets he rode, and pass'd 650  
Under the gate-house to the sands, and found  
The Gods on the seashore by Balder's ship.

### III

#### FUNERAL

The Gods held talk together, group'd in knots,  
Round Balder's corpse, which they had thither borne;  
And Hermod came down towards them from the gate. 655  
And Lok, the Father of the Serpent, first  
Beheld him come, and to his neighbour spake:—

'See, here is Hermod, who comes single back  
From Hell; and shall I tell thee how he seems?  
Like as a farmer, who hath lost his dog, 660  
Some morn, at market, in a crowded town—  
Through many streets the poor beast runs in vain,  
And follows this man after that, for hours;  
And, late at evening, spent and panting, falls  
Before a stranger's threshold, not his home, 665  
With flanks a-tremble, and his slender tongue  
Hangs quivering out between his dust-smear'd jaws,  
And piteously he eyes the passers by:  
But home his master comes to his own farm,  
Far in the country, wondering where he is— 670  
So Hermod comes to-day unfollow'd home.'

And straight his neighbour, mov'd with wrath, replied:—  
'Deceiver, fair in form, but false in heart,  
Enemy, Mocker, whom, though Gods, we hate—  
Peace, lest our Father Odin hear thee gibe. 675  
Would I might see him snatch thee in his hand,  
And bind thy carcass, like a bale, with cords,  
And hurl thee in a lake, to sink or swim.  
If clear from plotting Balder's death, to swim  
But deep, if thou devisedst it, to drown, 680  
And perish, against fate, before thy day!'

So they two soft to one another spake.  
But Odin look'd toward the land, and saw  
His messenger; and he stood forth, and cried:  
And Hermod came, and leapt from Sleipner down, 685  
And in his Father's hand put Sleipner's rein,  
And greeted Odin and the Gods, and said:—

'Odin, my Father, and ye, Gods of Heaven!  
Lo, home, having perform'd your will, I come.  
Into the joyless kingdom have I been, 690  
Below, and look'd upon the shadowy tribes  
Of ghosts, and commun'd with their solemn Queen;  
And to your prayer she sends you this reply:—  
*Show her through all the world, the signs of grief:*  
*Fails but one thing to grieve, there Balder stops.* 695  
*Let Gods, men, brutes, bewep him, plants and stones.*  
*So shall she know your loss was dear indeed,*  
*And bend her heart, and give you Balder back.'*

He spoke; and all the Gods to Odin look'd:  
And straight the Father of the Ages said:— 700

'Ye Gods, these terms may keep another day.  
But now, put on your arms, and mount your steeds,  
And in procession all come near, and weep  
Balder; for that is what the dead desire.  
When ye enough have wept, then build a pile 705  
Of the heap'd wood, and burn his corpse with fire  
Out of our sight; that we may turn from grief,  
And lead, as erst, our daily life in Heaven.'

He spoke; and the Gods arm'd: and Odin donn'd  
His dazzling corslet and his helm of gold, 710  
And led the way on Sleipner: and the rest  
Follow'd, in tears, their Father and their King.  
And thrice in arms around the dead they rode,  
Weeping; the sands were wetted, and their arms,  
With their thick-falling tears: so good a friend 715  
They mourn'd that day, so bright, so lov'd a God.  
And Odin came, and laid his kingly hands  
On Balder's breast, and thus began the wail:—

'Farewell, O Balder, bright and lov'd, my Son!

In that great day, the Twilight of the Gods, 720  
When Muspel's children shall beleaguer Heaven,  
Then we shall miss thy counsel and thy arm.'

Thou camest near the next, O Warrior Thor!  
Shouldering thy Hammer, in thy chariot drawn,  
Swaying the long-hair'd Goats with silver'd rein; 725  
And over Balder's corpse these words didst say:—

'Brother, thou dwellest in the darksome land,  
And talkest with the feeble tribes of ghosts,  
Now, and I know not how they prize thee there,  
But here, I know, thou wilt be miss'd and mourned. 730  
For haughty spirits and high wraths are rife  
Among the Gods and Heroes here in Heaven,  
As among those, whose joy and work is war:  
And daily strifes arise, and angry words:  
But from thy lips, O Balder, night or day, 735  
Heard no one ever an injurious word  
To God or Hero, but thou keptest back  
The others, labouring to compose their brawls.  
Be ye then kind, as Balder too was kind:  
For we lose him, who smooth'd all strife in Heaven.' 740

He spake: and all the Gods assenting wail'd.  
And Freya next came nigh, with golden tears:  
The loveliest Goddess she in Heaven, by all  
Most honour'd after Frea, Odin's wife:  
Her long ago the wandering Oder took 745  
To mate, but left her to roam distant lands;  
Since then she seeks him, and weeps tears of gold:  
Names hath she many; Vanadis on earth  
They call her; Freya is her name in Heaven:  
She in her hands took Balder's head, and spake:— 750

'Balder, my brother, thou art gone a road  
Unknown and long, and haply on that way  
My long-lost wandering Oder thou hast met,  
For in the paths of Heaven he is not found.  
Oh, if it be so, tell him what thou wert 755  
To his neglected wife, and what he is,  
And wring his heart with shame, to hear thy word.

For he, my husband, left me here to pine,  
Not long a wife, when his unquiet heart  
First drove him from me into distant lands. 760  
Since then I vainly seek him through the world,  
And weep from shore to shore my golden tears,  
But neither god nor mortal heeds my pain.  
Thou only, Balder, wert for ever kind,  
To take my hand, and wipe my tears, and say:— 765  
*Weep not, O Freya, weep no golden tears!*  
*One day the wandering Oder will return,*  
*Or thou wilt find him in thy faithful search*  
*On some great road, or resting in an inn,*  
*Or at a ford, or sleeping by a tree.—* 770  
So Balder said; but Oder, well I know,  
My truant Oder I shall see no more  
To the world's end; and Balder now is gone;  
And I am left uncomforted in Heaven.'

She spake; and all the Goddesses bewail'd. 775  
Last, from among the Heroes one came near,  
No God, but of the Hero-troop the chief—  
Regner, who swept the northern sea with fleets,  
And rul'd o'er Denmark and the heathy isles,  
Living; but Ella captur'd him and slew: 780  
A king, whose fame then fill'd the vast of Heaven,  
Now time obscures it, and men's later deeds:  
He last approach'd the corpse, and spake, and said:—

'Balder, there yet are many Scalds<sup>[3]</sup> in Heaven  
Still left, and that chief Scald, thy brother Brage, 785  
Whom we may bid to sing, though thou art gone;  
And all these gladly, while we drink, we hear,  
After the feast is done, in Odin's hall:  
But they harp ever on one string, and wake  
Remembrance in our soul of wars alone, 790  
Such as on earth we valiantly have wag'd,  
And blood, and ringing blows, and violent death:  
But when thou sangest, Balder, thou didst strike  
Another note, and, like a bird in spring,  
Thy voice of joyance minded us, and youth, 795  
And wife, and children, and our ancient home.

Yes, and I too remember'd then no more  
My dungeon, where the serpents stung me dead,  
Nor Ella's victory on the English coast;  
But I heard Thora laugh in Gothland Isle; 800  
And saw my shepherdess, Aslauga, tend  
Her flock along the white Norwegian beach:  
Tears started to mine eyes with yearning joy:  
Therefore with grateful heart I mourn thee dead.'

So Regner spake, and all the Heroes groan'd. 805  
But now the sun had pass'd the height of Heaven,  
And soon had all that day been spent in wail;  
But then the Father of the Ages said:—

'Ye Gods, there well may be too much of wail.  
Bring now the gather'd wood to Balder's ship; 810  
Heap on the deck the logs, and build the pyre.'

But when the Gods and Heroes heard, they brought  
The wood to Balder's ship, and built a pile,  
Full the deck's breadth, and lofty; then the corpse  
Of Balder on the highest top they laid, 815  
With Nanna on his right, and on his left  
Hoder, his brother, whom his own hand slew.  
And they set jars of wine and oil to lean  
Against the bodies, and stuck torches near,  
Splinters of pine-wood, soak'd with turpentine; 820  
And brought his arms and gold, and all his stuff,  
And slew the dogs which at his table fed,  
And his horse, Balder's horse, whom most he lov'd,  
And threw them on the pyre, and Odin threw  
A last choice gift thereon, his golden ring. 825  
They fixt the mast, and hoisted up the sails,  
Then they put fire to the wood; and Thor  
Set his stout shoulder hard against the stern  
To push the ship through the thick sand: sparks flew  
From the deep trench she plough'd—so strong a God 830  
Furrow'd it—and the water gurgled in.  
And the Ship floated on the waves, and rock'd:  
But in the hills a strong East-Wind arose,  
And came down moaning to the sea; first squalls



Ran black o'er the sea's face, then steady rush'd 835  
The breeze, and fill'd the sails, and blew the fire.  
And, wreath'd in smoke, the Ship stood out to sea.  
Soon with a roaring rose the mighty fire,  
And the pile crackled; and between the logs  
Sharp quivering tongues of flame shot out, and leapt, 840  
Curling and darting, higher, until they lick'd  
The summit of the pile, the dead, the mast,  
And ate the shrivelling sails; but still the Ship  
Drove on, ablaze, above her hull, with fire.  
And the Gods stood upon the beach, and gaz'd: 845  
And, while they gaz'd, the Sun went lurid down  
Into the smoke-wrapt sea, and Night came on.  
Then the wind fell, with night, and there was calm.  
But through the dark they watch'd the burning Ship  
Still carried o'er the distant waters on 850  
Farther and farther, like an Eye of Fire.  
And as in the dark night a travelling man  
Who bivouacs in a forest 'mid the hills,  
Sees suddenly a spire of flame shoot up  
Out of the black waste forest, far below, 855  
Which woodcutters have lighted near their lodge  
Against the wolves; and all night long it flares:—  
So flar'd, in the far darkness, Balder's pyre.  
But fainter, as the stars rose high, it burn'd;  
The bodies were consum'd, ash chok'd the pile: 860  
And as in a decaying winter fire  
A charr'd log, falling, makes a shower of sparks—  
So, with a shower of sparks, the pile fell in,  
Reddening the sea around; and all was dark.

But the Gods went by starlight up the shore 865  
To Asgard, and sate down in Odin's hall  
At table, and the funeral-feast began.  
All night they ate the boar Serimner's flesh,  
And from their horns, with silver rimm'd, drank mead,  
Silent, and waited for the sacred Morn. 870

And Morning over all the world was spread.  
Then from their loathèd feast the Gods arose,  
And took their horses, and set forth to ride

O'er the bridge Bifrost, where is Heimdall's watch,  
To the ash Igdrasil, and Ida's plain: 875  
Thor came on foot; the rest on horseback rode.  
And they found Mimir sitting by his Fount  
Of Wisdom, which beneath the ashtree springs;  
And saw the Normies watering the roots  
Of that world-shadowing tree with Honey-dew: 880  
There came the Gods, and sate them down on stones:  
And thus the Father of the Ages said:—

'Ye Gods, the terms ye know, which Hermod brought.  
Accept them or reject them; both have grounds.  
Accept them, and they bind us, unfulfill'd, 885  
To leave for ever Balder in the grave,  
An unrecover'd prisoner, shade with shades.  
But how, ye say, should the fulfilment fail?—  
Smooth sound the terms, and light to be fulfill'd;  
For dear-belov'd was Balder while he liv'd 890  
In Heaven and Earth, and who would grudge him tears?  
But from the traitorous seed of Lok they come,  
These terms, and I suspect some hidden fraud.  
Bethink ye, Gods, is there no other way?—  
Speak, were not this a way, the way for Gods? 895  
If I, if Odin, clad in radiant arms,  
Mounted on Sleipner, with the Warrior Thor  
Drawn in his car beside me, and my sons,  
All the strong brood of Heaven, to swell my train,  
Should make irruption into Hela's realm, 900  
And set the fields of gloom ablaze with light,  
And bring in triumph Balder back to Heaven?'

He spake; and his fierce sons applauded loud.  
But Frea, Mother of the Gods, arose,  
Daughter and wife of Odin; thus she said:— 905

'Odin, thou Whirlwind, what a threat is this!  
Thou threatenest what transcends thy might, even thine.  
For of all powers the mightiest far art thou,  
Lord over men on Earth, and Gods in Heaven;  
Yet even from thee thyself hath been withheld 910  
One thing; to undo what thou thyself hast rul'd.

For all which hath been fixt, was fixt by thee:  
 In the beginning, ere the Gods were born,  
 Before the Heavens were builded, thou didst slay  
 The Giant Ymir, whom the Abyss brought forth, 915  
 Thou and thy brethren fierce, the Sons of Bor,  
 And threw his trunk to choke the abysmal void:  
 But of his flesh and members thou didst build  
 The Earth and Ocean, and above them Heaven:  
 And from the flaming world, where Muspel reigns, 920  
 Thou sent'st and fetched'st fire, and madest lights,  
 Sun Moon and Stars, which thou hast hung in Heaven,  
 Dividing clear the paths of night and day:  
 And Asgard thou didst build, and Midgard Fort:  
 Then me thou mad'st; of us the Gods were born: 925  
 Then, walking by the sea, thou foundest spars  
 Of wood, and framed'st men, who till the earth,  
 Or on the sea, the field of pirates, sail:  
 And all the race of Ymir thou didst drown,  
 Save one, Bergelmer; he on shipboard fled 930  
 Thy deluge, and from him the Giants sprang;  
 But all that brood thou hast remov'd far off,  
 And set by Ocean's utmost marge to dwell:  
 But Hela into Niflheim thou threw'st,  
 And gav'st her nine unlighted worlds to rule, 935  
 A Queen, and empire over all the dead.  
 That empire wilt thou now invade, light up  
 Her darkness, from her grasp a subject tear?—  
 Try it; but I, for one, will not applaud.  
 Nor do I merit, Odin, thou should'st slight 940  
 Me and my words, though thou be first in Heaven:  
 For I too am a Goddess, born of thee,  
 Thine eldest, and of me the Gods are sprung;  
 And all that is to come I know, but lock  
 In my own breast, and have to none reveal'd. 945  
 Come then; since Hela holds by right her prey,  
 But offers terms for his release to Heaven,  
 Accept the chance;—thou canst no more obtain.  
 Send through the world thy messengers: entreat  
 All living and unliving things to weep 950  
 For Balder; if thou haply thus may'st melt  
 Hela, and win the lov'd one back to Heaven.'

She spake, and on her face let fall her veil,  
And bow'd her head, and sate with folded hands.  
Nor did the all-ruling Odin slight her word; 955  
Straightway he spake, and thus address'd the Gods:

'Go quickly forth through all the world, and pray  
All living and unliving things to weep  
Balder, if haply he may thus be won.'

When the Gods heard, they straight arose, and took 960  
Their horses, and rode forth through all the world.  
North south east west they struck, and roam'd the world,  
Entreating all things to weep Balder's death:  
And all that liv'd, and all without life, wept.  
And as in winter, when the frost breaks up, 965  
At winter's end, before the spring begins,  
And a warm west wind blows, and thaw sets in—  
After an hour a dripping sound is heard  
In all the forests, and the soft-strewn snow  
Under the trees is dibbled thick with holes, 970  
And from the boughs the snowloads shuffle down;  
And in fields sloping to the south dark plots  
Of grass peep out amid surrounding snow,  
And widen, and the peasant's heart is glad—  
So through the world was heard a dripping noise 975  
Of all things weeping to bring Balder back:  
And there fell joy upon the Gods to hear.

But Hermod rode with Niord, whom he took  
To show him spits and beaches of the sea  
Far off, where some unwarn'd might fail to weep— 980  
Niord, the God of storms, whom fishers know:  
Not born in Heaven; he was in Vanheim rear'd,  
With men, but lives a hostage with the Gods:  
He knows each frith, and every rocky creek  
Fring'd with dark pines, and sands where seafowl scream:— 985  
They two scour'd every coast, and all things wept.  
And they rode home together through the wood  
Of Jarnvid, which to east of Midgard lies  
Bordering the Giants, where the trees are iron;  
There in the wood before a cave they came 990

Where sate, in the cave's mouth, a skinny Hag,  
Toothless and old; she gibes the passers by:  
Thok is she call'd; but now Lok wore her shape:  
She greeted them the first, and laugh'd, and said:—

‘Ye Gods, good lack, is it so dull in Heaven, 995  
That ye come pleasuring to Thok's Iron Wood?  
Lovers of change ye are, fastidious sprites.  
Look, as in some boor's yard a sweet-breath'd cow  
Whose manger is stuff'd full of good fresh hay  
Snuffs at it daintily, and stoops her head 1000  
To chew the straw, her litter, at her feet—  
So ye grow squeamish, Gods, and sniff at Heaven.’

She spake; but Hermod answer'd her and said:—  
‘Thok, not for gibes we come, we come for tears.  
Balder is dead, and Hela holds her prey, 1005  
But will restore, if all things give him tears.  
Begrudge not thine; to all was Balder dear.’

But, with a louder laugh, the Hag replied:—  
‘Is Balder dead? and do ye come for tears?  
Thok with dry eyes will weep o'er Balder's pyre. 1010  
Weep him all other things, if weep they will—  
I weep him not: let Hela keep her prey!’

She spake; and to the cavern's depth she fled,  
Mocking: and Hermod knew their toil was vain.  
And as seafaring men, who long have wrought 1015  
In the great deep for gain, at last come home,  
And towards evening see the headlands rise  
Of their own country, and can clear descry  
A fire of wither'd furze which boys have lit  
Upon the cliffs, or smoke of burning weeds 1020  
Out of a till'd field inland;—then the wind  
Catches them, and drives out again to sea:  
And they go long days tossing up and down  
Over the grey sea ridges; and the glimpse  
Of port they had makes bitterer far their toil— 1025  
So the Gods' cross was bitterer for their joy.

Then, sad at heart, to Niord Hermod spake:—

‘It is the Accuser Lok, who flouts us all.  
Ride back, and tell in Heaven this heavy news.  
I must again below, to Hela’s realm.’ 1030

He spoke; and Niord set forth back to Heaven.  
But northward Hermod rode, the way below;  
The way he knew: and travers’d Giall’s stream,  
And down to Ocean grop’d, and cross’d the ice,  
And came beneath the wall, and found the grate 1035  
Still lifted; well was his return foreknown.  
And once more Hermod saw around him spread  
The joyless plains, and heard the streams of Hell.  
But as he enter’d, on the extremest bound  
Of Niflheim, he saw one Ghost come near, 1040  
Hovering, and stopping oft, as if afraid;  
Hoder, the unhappy, whom his own hand slew:  
And Hermod look’d, and knew his brother’s ghost,  
And call’d him by his name, and sternly said:—

‘Hoder, ill-fated, blind in heart and eyes! 1045  
Why tarriest thou to plunge thee in the gulph  
Of the deep inner gloom, but flittest here,  
In twilight, on the lonely verge of Hell,  
Far from the other ghosts, and Hela’s throne?  
Doubtless thou fearest to meet Balder’s voice, 1050  
Thy brother, whom through folly thou didst slay.’

He spoke; but Hoder answer’d him, and said:—  
‘Hermod the nimble, dost thou still pursue  
The unhappy with reproach, even in the grave?  
For this I died, and fled beneath the gloom, 1055  
Not daily to endure abhorring Gods,  
Nor with a hateful presence cumber Heaven—  
And canst thou not, even here, pass pitying by?  
No less than Balder have I lost the light  
Of Heaven, and communion with my kin: 1060  
I too had once a wife, and once a child,  
And substance, and a golden house in Heaven:  
But all I left of my own act, and fled  
Below, and dost thou hate me even here?  
Balder upbraids me not, nor hates at all, 1065

Though he has cause, have any cause; but he,  
When that with downcast looks I hither came,  
Stretch'd forth his hand, and, with benignant voice,  
*Welcome*, he said, *if there be welcome here,*  
*Brother and fellow-sport of Lok with me.* 1070  
And not to offend thee, Hermod, nor to force  
My hated converse on thee, came I up  
From the deep gloom, where I will now return;  
But earnestly I long'd to hover near,  
Not too far off, when that thou camest by, 1075  
To feel the presence of a brother God,  
And hear the passage of a horse of Heaven,  
For the last time: for here thou com'st no more.'

He spake, and turn'd to go to the inner gloom.  
But Hermod stay'd him with mild words, and said:— 1080

'Thou doest well to chide me, Hoder blind.  
Truly thou say'st, the planning guilty mind  
Was Lok's; the unwitting hand alone was thine.  
But Gods are like the sons of men in this—  
When they have woe, they blame the nearest cause. 1085  
Howbeit stay, and be pleas'd; and tell—  
Sits Balder still in pomp by Hela's side,  
Or is he mingled with the unnumber'd dead?'

And the blind Hoder answer'd him and spake:—  
'His place of state remains by Hela's side, 1090  
But empty: for his wife, for Nanna came  
Lately below, and join'd him; and the Pair  
Frequent the still recesses of the realm  
Of Hela, and hold converse undisturb'd.  
But they too doubtless, will have breath'd the balm 1095  
Which floats before a visitant from Heaven,  
And have drawn upwards to this verge of Hell.'

He spake; and, as he ceas'd, a puff of wind  
Roll'd heavily the leaden mist aside  
Round where they stood, and they beheld Two Forms 1100  
Make towards them o'er the stretching cloudy plain.  
And Hermod straight perceiv'd them, who they were,  
Balder and Nanna; and to Balder said:—

‘Balder, too truly thou foresaw’st a snare.  
Lok triumphs still, and Hela keeps her prey. 1105  
No more to Asgard shalt thou come, nor lodge  
In thy own house, Breidablik, nor enjoy  
The love all bear towards thee, nor train up  
Forset, thy son, to be belov’d like thee.  
Here must thou lie, and wait an endless age. 1110  
Therefore for the last time, O Balder, hail!’

He spake; and Balder answer’d him and said:—  
‘Hail and farewell, for here thou com’st no more.  
Yet mourn not for me, Hermod, when thou sitt’st  
In Heaven, nor let the other Gods lament, 1115  
As wholly to be pitied, quite forlorn:  
For Nanna hath rejoin’d me, who, of old,  
In Heaven, was seldom parted from my side;  
And still the acceptance follows me, which crown’d  
My former life, and cheers me even here. 1120  
The iron frown of Hela is relax’d  
When I draw nigh, and the wan tribes of dead  
Trust me, and gladly bring for my award  
Their ineffectual feuds and feeble hates,  
Shadows of hates, but they distress them still.’ 1125

And the fleet-footed Hermod made reply:—  
‘Thou hast then all the solace death allows,  
Esteem and function: and so far is well.  
Yet here thou liest, Balder, underground,  
Rusting for ever: and the years roll on, 1130  
The generations pass, the ages grow,  
And bring us nearer to the final day  
When from the south shall march the Fiery Band  
And cross the Bridge of Heaven, with Lok for guide,  
And Fenris at his heel with broken chain: 1135  
While from the east the Giant Rymer steers  
His ship, and the great Serpent makes to land;  
And all are marshall’d in one flaming square  
Against the Gods, upon the plains of Heaven.  
I mourn thee, that thou canst not help us then.’ 1140

He spake; but Balder answer’d him and said:—



‘Mourn not for me: Mourn, Hermod, for the Gods:  
Mourn for the men on Earth, the Gods in Heaven,  
Who live, and with their eyes shall see that day.  
The day will come, when Asgard’s towers shall fall, 1145  
And Odin, and his Sons, the seed of Heaven:  
But what were I, to save them in that hour?  
If strength could save them, could not Odin save,  
My Father, and his pride, the Warrior Thor,  
Vidar the Silent, the Impetuous Tyr? 1150  
I, what were I, when these can naught avail?  
Yet, doubtless, when the day of battle comes,  
And the two Hosts are marshall’d, and in Heaven  
The golden-crested Cock shall sound alarm,  
And his black Brother-Bird from hence reply, 1155  
And bucklers clash, and spears begin to pour—  
Longing will stir within my breast, though vain.  
But not to me so grievous, as, I know,  
To other Gods it were, is my enforc’d  
Absence from fields where I could nothing aid: 1160  
For I am long since weary of your storm  
Of carnage, and find, Hermod, in your life  
Something too much of war and broils, which make  
Life one perpetual fight, a bath of blood.  
Mine eyes are dizzy with the arrowy hail; 1165  
Mine ears are stunn’d with blows, and sick for calm.  
Inactive therefore let me lie, in gloom,  
Unarm’d, inglorious: I attend the course  
Of ages, and my late return to light,  
In times less alien to a spirit mild, 1170  
In new-recover’d seats, the happier day.’

He spake; and the fleet Hermod thus replied:—  
‘Brother, what seats are these, what happier day?  
Tell me, that I may ponder it when gone.’

And the ray-crowned Balder answer’d him:— 1175  
‘Far to the south, beyond The Blue, there spreads  
Another Heaven, The Boundless: no one yet  
Hath reach’d it: there hereafter shall arise  
The second Asgard, with another name.  
Thither, when o’er this present Earth and Heavens 1180

The tempest of the latter days hath swept,  
And they from sight have disappear'd, and sunk,  
Shall a small remnant of the Gods repair:  
Hoder and I shall join them from the grave.  
There re-assembling we shall see emerge 1185  
From the bright Ocean at our feet an Earth  
More fresh, more verdant than the last, with fruits  
Self-springing, and a seed of man preserv'd,  
Who then shall live in peace, as now in war.  
But we in Heaven shall find again with joy 1190  
The ruin'd palaces of Odin, seats  
Familiar, halls where we have supp'd of old;  
Re-enter them with wonder, never fill  
Our eyes with gazing, and rebuild with tears.  
And we shall tread once more the well-known plain 1195  
Of Ida, and among the grass shall find  
The golden dice with which we play'd of yore;  
And that will bring to mind the former life  
And pastime of the Gods, the wise discourse  
Of Odin, the delights of other days. 1200  
O Hermod, pray that thou mayst join us then!  
Such for the future is my hope: meanwhile,  
I rest the thrall of Hela, and endure  
Death, and the gloom which round me even now  
Thickens, and to its inner gulph recalls. 1205  
Farewell, for longer speech is not allow'd.'

He spoke, and wav'd farewell, and gave his hand  
To Nanna; and she gave their brother blind  
Her hand, in turn, for guidance; and The Three  
Departed o'er the cloudy plain, and soon 1210  
Faded from sight into the interior gloom.  
But Hermod stood beside his drooping horse,  
Mute, gazing after them in tears: and fain,  
Fain had he follow'd their receding steps,  
Though they to Death were bound, and he to Heaven, 1215  
Then; but a Power he could not break withheld.  
And as a stork which idle boys have trapp'd,  
And tied him in a yard, at autumn sees  
Flocks of his kind pass flying o'er his head  
To warmer lands, and coasts that keep the sun; 1220

He strains to join their flight, and, from his shed,  
Follows them with a long complaining cry—  
So Hermod gaz'd, and yearn'd to join his kin.

At last he sigh'd, and set forth back to Heaven.

MATTHEW ARNOLD, 1822-88.

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[1] Scalds] poets and singers.

[2] limber] flexible.

[3] Scalds] singers.

## THE YERL O' WATERYDECK

The wind it blew, and the ship it flew,  
And it was 'Hey for hame!'  
But up an' cried the skipper til his crew,  
'Haud her oot ower the saut sea faem.'

Syne up an' spak the angry king: 5  
'Haud on for Dumferline!'  
Quo' the skipper, 'My lord, this maunna be—  
I'm king on this boat o' mine.'

He tuik the helm intil his han', 10  
He left the shore un'er the lee;  
Syne croodit<sup>[1]</sup> sail, an', east an' south,  
Stude awa richt oot to sea.

Quo' the king, 'Leise-majesty, I trow!  
Here lies some ill-set plan!  
'Bout ship!' Quo' the skipper, 'Yer grace forgets 15  
Ye are king but o' the lan'!'

Oot he heild to the open sea  
Quhill the north wind flaughtered<sup>[2]</sup> an' fell;  
Syne the east had a bitter word to say  
That waukent<sup>[3]</sup> a watery hell. 20

He turnt her heid intil the north:  
Quo' the nobles, 'He's droon, by the mass!'  
Quo' the skipper, 'Haud aff yer lady-han's  
Or ye'll never see the Bass.'

The king creepit down the cabin-stair 25  
To drink the gude French wine;  
An' up cam his dochter, the princess fair,  
An' luikit ower the brine.

She turnt her face to the drivin snaw,

To the snaw but and<sup>[4]</sup> the weet; 30  
It claucht<sup>[5]</sup> her snood<sup>[6]</sup>, an' awa like a clud<sup>[7]</sup>  
Her hair drave oot i' the sleet.

She turnt her face frae the drivin win'—  
'Quhat's that aheid?' quo' she.  
The skipper he threw himsel frae the win' 35  
An' he brayt<sup>[8]</sup> the helm alee<sup>[9]</sup>.

'Put to yer han', my lady fair!  
Haud up her heid!' quo' he;  
'Gien she dinna face the win' a wee mair  
It's faurweel to you an' me!' 40

To the tiller the lady she laid her han',  
An' the ship brayt her cheek to the blast;  
They joukit<sup>[10]</sup> the berg, but her quarter scraped,  
An' they luikit at ither aghast.

Quo' the skipper, 'Ye are a lady fair, 45  
An' a princess gran' to see,  
But war ye a beggar, a man wud sail  
To the hell i' yer company.'

She liftit a pale an' a queenly face,  
Her een flashed, an' syne they swam: 50  
'An' what for no to the hevin?' she says,  
An' she turnt awa frae him.

Bot she tuik na her han' frae the gude ship's helm  
Till the day begouth<sup>[11]</sup> to daw<sup>[12]</sup>;  
An' the skipper he spak, but what was said 55  
It was said atween them twa.

An' syne the gude ship she lay to,  
Wi' Scotlan' hyne<sup>[13]</sup> un'er the lee;  
An' the king cam up the cabin-stair  
Wi' wan face an' bluidshot ee. 60

Laigh loutit<sup>[14]</sup> the skipper upo' the deck;  
'Stan' up, stan' up,' quo' the king;  
'Ye're an honest loun<sup>[15]</sup>—an' beg me a boon  
Quhan ye gie me back this ring.'

Lowne<sup>[16]</sup> blew the win'; the stars cam oot; 65  
The ship turnt frae the north;  
An' or ever the sun was up an' aboot,  
They war intil the firth o' Forth.

Quhan the gude ship lay at the pier-heid,  
And the king stude steady o' the lan',— 70  
'Doon wi' ye, skipper—doon!' he said,  
'Hoo daur ye afore me stan'!'

The skipper he loutit on his knee;  
The king his blade he drew:  
Quo' the king, 'Noo mynt ye to contre<sup>[17]</sup> me! 75  
I'm aboard *my* vessel noo!

'Gien I hadna been yer verra gude lord  
I wud hae thrawn<sup>[18]</sup> yer neck!  
Bot—ye wha loutit Skipper o' Doon,  
Rise up Yerl o' Waterydeck.' 80

The skipper he rasena<sup>[19]</sup>: 'Yer grace is Great.  
Yer wull<sup>[20]</sup> it can heize<sup>[21]</sup> or ding<sup>[22]</sup>:  
Wi' ae wee word ye hae made me a yerl—  
Wi' anither mak me a king.'

'I canna mak ye a king,' quo' he, 85  
'The Lord alane can do that!  
I snowk<sup>[23]</sup> leise-majesty, my man!  
Quhat the Sathan wad ye be at?'

Glowert at the skipper the doutsum<sup>[24]</sup> king  
Jalousin aneth<sup>[25]</sup> his croon; 90  
Quo' the skipper, 'Here is yer Grace's ring—  
An' yer dochter is my boon!'

The black blude shot intil the king's face—  
He wasna bonny to see:  
'The rascal skipper! he lichtlies<sup>[26]</sup> oor grace!— 95  
Gar hang him heigh on yon tree.'

Up sprang the skipper an' aboard his ship,  
Cleikit<sup>[27]</sup> up a bytin blade  
An' hackit at the cable that held her to the pier,

An' thought it 'maist ower weel made. 100

The king he blew shill<sup>[28]</sup> in a siller whustle;  
An' tramp, tramp, doon the pier  
Cam twenty men on twenty horses,  
Clankin wi' spur an' spear.

At the king's fute fell his dochter fair: 105  
'His life ye wadna spill!'  
'Ye daur stan' twixt my hert an' my hate?'  
'I daur, wi' a richt gude will!'

'Ye was aye to yer faither a thrawart bairn<sup>[29]</sup>,  
But, my lady, here stan's the king! 110  
Luikna *him* i' the angry face—  
A monarch's anither thing!'

'I lout to my father for his grace  
Low on my bendit knee;  
But I stan' an' luik the king i' the face, 115  
For the skipper is king o' me!'

She turnt, she sprang upo' the deck,  
The cable splashed i' the Forth  
Her wings sae braid the gude ship spread  
And flew east, an' syne flew north. 120

Now was not this a king's dochter—  
A lady that feared no skaith<sup>[30]</sup>?—  
A woman wi' quhilk a man nicht sail  
Prood intil the Port o' Death?

GEORGE MACDONALD, 1824-1905.

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[1] croodit] crowded.

[2] flaughtered] fluttered.

[3] waukent] awoke.

[4] but and] and also.

[5] claucht] clutched.

[6] snood] ribbon worn round the hair by unmarried girls.

- [7] clud] cloud.
- [8] brayt] brought.
- [9] alee] away from the wind.
- [10] joukit] dodged.
- [11] begouth] began.
- [12] daw] dawn.
- [13] hyne] away.
- [14] loutit] knelt.
- [15] loun] fellow.
- [16] lowne] gently.
- [17] contre] go against.
- [18] thrawn] twisted.
- [19] rasena] did not rise.
- [20] wull] will.
- [21] heize] raise up.
- [22] ding] beat.
- [23] snowk] sniff.
- [24] doutsum] doubtful.
- [25] jalousin aneth] guessing about, with his mind on.
- [26] lichtlies] slights.
- [27] Cleikit] clutched.
- [28] shill] shrill.
- [29] thrawart bairn] wayward child.
- [30] skaith] harm, hurt.



## THE WHITE SHIP

HENRY I OF ENGLAND.—25TH NOVEMBER 1120

By none but me can the tale be told,  
The butcher of Rouen, poor Berold.

*(Lands are swayed by a King on a throne.)*

'Twas a royal train put forth to sea,  
Yet the tale can be told by none but me.

5

*(The sea hath no King but God alone.)*

King Henry held it as life's whole gain  
That after his death his son should reign.

'Twas so in my youth I heard men say,  
And my old age calls it back to-day.

10

King Henry of England's realm was he,  
And Henry Duke of Normandy.

The times had changed when on either coast  
'Clerkly Harry' was all his boast.

Of ruthless strokes full many an one  
He had struck himself and his son;  
And his elder brother's eyes were gone.

15

And when to the chase his court would crowd,  
The poor flung ploughshares on his road,  
And shrieked: 'Our cry is from King to God!'

20

But all the chiefs of the English land  
Had knelt and kissed the Prince's hand.

And next with his son he sailed to France  
To claim the Norman allegiance:

And every baron in Normandy  
Had taken the oath of fealty.

25

'Twas sworn and sealed, and the day had come  
When the King and the Prince might journey home:

For Christmas cheer is to home hearts dear,  
And Christmas now was drawing near. 30

Stout Fitz-Stephen came to the King,—  
A pilot famous in seafaring;

And he held to the King, in all men's sight,  
A mark of gold for his tribute's right.

'Liege Lord! my father guided the ship 35  
From whose boat your father's foot did slip  
When he caught the English soil in his grip,

'And cried: "By this clasp I claim command  
O'er every rood of English land!"

'He was borne to the realm you rule o'er now 40  
In that ship with the anchor carved at her prow:

'And thither I'll bear, an it be my due,  
Your father's son and his grandson too.

'The famed White Ship is mine in the bay;  
From Harfleur's harbour she sails to-day, 45

'With masts fair-pennoned as Norman spears  
And with fifty well-trying mariners.'

Quoth the King: 'My ships are chosen each one,  
But I'll not say nay to Stephen's son.

'My son and daughter and fellowship 50  
Shall cross the water in the White Ship.'

The King set sail with the eve's south wind,  
And soon he left that coast behind.

The Prince and all his, a princely show,  
Remained in the good White Ship to go. 55

With noble knights and with ladies fair,  
With courtiers and sailors gathered there,

Three hundred living souls we were:

And I Berold was the meanest hind  
In all that train to the Prince assign'd. 60

The Prince was a lawless shameless youth;  
From his father's loins he sprang without ruth:

Eighteen years till then he had seen,  
And the devil's dues in him were eighteen.

And now he cried: 'Bring wine from below;  
Let the sailors revel ere yet they row: 65

'Our speed shall o'ertake my father's flight  
Though we sail from the harbour at midnight.'

The rowers made good cheer without check;  
The lords and ladies obeyed his beck; 70  
The night was light, and they danced on the deck.

But at midnight's stroke they cleared the bay,  
And the White Ship furrowed the water-way.

The sails were set, and the oars kept tune  
To the double flight of the ship and the moon: 75

Swifter and swifter the White Ship sped  
Till she flew as the spirit flies from the dead:

As white as a lily glimmered she  
Like a ship's fair ghost upon the sea.

And the Prince cried, 'Friends, 'tis the hour to sing!  
Is a songbird's course so swift on the wing?' 80

And under the winter stars' still throng,  
From brown throats, white throats, merry and strong,  
The knights and the ladies raised a song.

A song,—nay, a shriek that rent the sky, 85  
That leaped o'er the deep!—the grievous cry  
Of three hundred living that now must die.

An instant shriek that sprang to the shock

As the ship's keel felt the sunken rock.

'Tis said that afar—a shrill strange sigh— 90  
The King's ships heard it and knew not why.

Pale Fitz-Stephen stood by the helm  
'Mid all those folk that the waves must whelm.

A great King's heir for the waves to whelm,  
And the helpless pilot pale at the helm! 95

The ship was eager and sucked athirst,  
By the stealthy stab of the sharp reef pierc'd:

And like the moil round a sinking cup  
The waters against her crowded up.

A moment the pilot's senses spin,— 100  
The next he snatched the Prince 'mid the din,  
Cut the boat loose, and the youth leaped in.

A few friends leaped with him, standing near.  
'Row! the sea's smooth and the night is clear!'

'What! none to be saved but these and I?' 105  
'Row, row as you'd live! All here must die!'

Out of the churn of the choking ship,  
Which the gulf grapples and the waves strip,  
They struck with the strained oars' flash and dip.

'Twas then o'er the splitting bulwarks' brim 110  
The Prince's sister screamed to him.

He gazed aloft, still rowing apace,  
And through the whirled surf he knew her face.

To the toppling decks clave one and all  
As a fly cleaves to a chamber-wall. 115

I Berold was clinging anear;  
I prayed for myself and quaked with fear,  
But I saw his eyes as he looked at her.

He knew her face and he heard her cry,

And he said, 'Put back! she must not die!' 120

And back with the current's force they reel  
Like a leaf that's drawn to a water-wheel.

'Neath the ship's travail they scarce might float,  
But he rose and stood in the rocking boat.

Low the poor ship leaned on the tide: 125  
O'er the naked keel as she best might slide,  
The sister toiled to the brother's side.

He reached an oar to her from below,  
And stiffened his arms to clutch her so.

But now from the ship some spied the boat, 130  
And 'Saved!' was the cry from many a throat.

And down to the boat they leaped and fell:  
It turned as a bucket turns in a well,  
And nothing was there but the surge and swell.

The Prince that was and the King to come, 135  
There in an instant gone to his doom,

Despite of all England's bended knee  
And maugre the Norman fealty!

He was a Prince of lust and pride;  
He showed no grace till the hour he died. 140

When he should be King, he oft would vow,  
He'd yoke the peasant to his own plough.  
O'er him the ships score their furrows now.

God only knows where his soul did wake,  
But I saw him die for his sister's sake. 145

By none but me can the tale be told,  
The butcher of Rouen, poor Berold.

*(Lands are swayed by a King on a throne.)*

'Twas a royal train put forth to sea,  
Yet the tale can be told by none but me, 150  
*(The sea hath no King but God alone.)*

And now the end came o'er the waters' womb  
Like the last great Day that's yet to come.

With prayers in vain and curses in vain,  
The White Ship Sundered on the mid-main; 155

And what were men and what was a ship  
Were toys and splinters in the sea's grip.

I Berold was down in the sea;  
And passing strange though the thing may be,  
Of dreams then known I remember me. 160

Blithe is the shout on Harfleur's strand  
When morning lights the sails to land:

And blithe is Honfleur's echoing gloam  
When mothers call the children home:

And high do the bells of Rouen beat 165  
When the Body of Christ goes down the street.

These things and the like were heard and shown  
In a moment's trance 'neath the sea alone;

And when I rose, 'twas the sea did seem,  
And not these things, to be all a dream. 170

The ship was gone and the crowd was gone,  
And the deep shuddered and the moon shone,

And in a strait grasp my arms did span  
The mainyard rent from the mast where it ran;  
And on it with me was another man. 175

Where lands were none 'neath the dim sea-sky,  
We told our names, that man and I.

'O I am Godefroy de l'Aigle hight,  
And son I am to a belted knight.'

'And I am Berold the butcher's son 180  
Who slays the beasts in Rouen town.'

Then cried we upon God's name, as we

Did drift on the bitter winter sea.

But lo! a third man rose o'er the wave,  
And we said, 'Thank God! us three may He save!' 185

He clutched to the yard with panting stare,  
And we looked and knew Fitz-Stephen there.

He clung, and 'What of the Prince?' quoth he.  
'Lost, lost!' we cried. He cried, 'Woe on me!'  
And loosed his hold and sank through the sea. 190

And soul with soul again in that space  
We two were together face to face:

And each knew each, as the moments sped,  
Less for one living than for one dead:

And every still star overhead 195  
Seemed an eye that knew we were but dead.

And the hours passed; till the noble's son  
Sighed, 'God be thy help! my strength's fordone!

'O farewell, friend, for I can no more!'  
'Christ take thee!' I moaned; and his life was o'er. 200

Three hundred souls were all lost but one,  
And I drifted over the sea alone.

At last the morning rose on the sea  
Like an angel's wing that beat tow'rds me.

Sore numbed I was in my sheepskin coat; 205  
Half dead I hung, and might nothing note,  
Till I woke sun-warmed in a fisher-boat.

The sun was high o'er the eastern brim  
As I praised God and gave thanks to Him.

That day I told my tale to a priest, 210  
Who charged me, till the shrift were releas'd,  
That I should keep it in mine own breast.

And with the priest I thence did fare

To King Henry's court at Winchester.

We spoke with the King's high chamberlain, 215  
And he wept and mourned again and again,  
As if his own son had been slain:

And round us ever there crowded fast  
Great men with faces all aghast:

And who so bold that might tell the thing 220  
Which now they knew to their lord the King?  
Much woe I learnt in their communing.

The King had watched with a heart sore stirred  
For two whole days, and this was the third:

And still to all his court would he say, 225  
'What keeps my son so long away?'

And they said: 'The ports lie far and wide  
That skirt the swell of the English tide;

'And England's cliffs are not more white 230  
Than her women are, and scarce so light  
Her skies as their eyes are blue and bright;

'And in some port that he reached from France  
The Prince has lingered for his pleasaunce.'

But once the King asked: 'What distant cry 235  
Was that we heard 'twixt the sea and sky?'

And one said: 'With suchlike shouts, pardie!  
Do the fishers fling their nets at sea.'

And one: 'Who knows not the shrieking quest  
When the sea-mew misses its young from the nest?'

'Twas thus till now they had soothed his dread, 240  
Albeit they knew not what they said:

But who should speak to-day of the thing  
That all knew there except the King?

Then pondering much they found a way,



And met round the King's high seat that day: 245

And the King sat with a heart sore stirred,  
And seldom he spoke and seldom heard.

'Twas then through the hall the King was 'ware  
Of a little boy with golden hair,

As bright as the golden poppy is 250  
That the beach breeds for the surf to kiss:

Yet pale his cheek as the thorn in Spring,  
And his garb black like the raven's wing.

Nothing heard but his foot through the hall,  
For now the lords were silent all. 255

And the King wondered, and said, 'Alack!  
Who sends me a fair boy dressed in black?

'Why, sweet heart, do you pace through the hall  
As though my court were a funeral?'

Then lowly knelt the child at the dais, 260  
And looked up weeping in the King's face.

'O wherefore black, O King, ye may say,  
For white is the hue of death to-day.

'Your son and all his fellowship  
Lie low in the sea with the White Ship.' 265

King Henry fell as a man struck dead;  
And speechless still he stared from his bed  
When to him next day my rede<sup>[1]</sup> I read.

There's many an hour must needs beguile  
A King's high heart that he should smile,— 270

Full many a lordly hour, full fain  
Of his realm's rule and pride of his reign:—

But this King never smiled again.

By none but me can the tale be told,

The butcher of Rouen, poor Berold.

*(Lands are swayed by a King on a throne.)*

'Twas a royal train put forth to sea,

Yet the tale can be told by none but me.

*(The sea hath no King but God alone.)*

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[1] rede] tale.

## THE KING'S TRAGEDY

JAMES I OF SCOTS.—20TH FEBRUARY 1437

### *Note*

[Tradition says that Catherine Douglas, in honour of her heroic act when she barred the door with her arm against the murderers of James the First of Scots, received popularly the name of 'Barlass'. This name remains to her descendants, the Barlas family, in Scotland, who bear for their crest a broken arm. She married Alexander Lovell of Bolunnie.

A few stanzas from King James's lovely poem, known as *The King's Quair*, are quoted in the course of this ballad. The writer must express regret for the necessity which has compelled him to shorten the ten-syllabled lines to eight syllables, in order that they might harmonize with the ballad metre.]

I Catherine am a Douglas born,  
A name to all Scots dear;  
And Kate Barlass they've called me now  
Through many a waning year.

This old arm's withered now. 'Twas once 5  
Most deft 'mong maidens all  
To rein the steed, to wing the shaft,  
To smite the palm-play ball.

In hall adown the close-linked dance 10  
It has shone most white and fair;  
It has been the rest for a true lord's head,  
And many a sweet babe's nursing-bed,  
And the bar to a King's chambère.

Aye, lasses, draw round Kate Barlass, 15  
And hark with bated breath  
How good King James, King Robert's son,  
Was foully done to death.

Through all the days of his gallant youth  
The princely James was pent,  
By his friends at first and then by his foes, 20

In long imprisonment.

For the elder Prince, the kingdom's heir,  
By treason's murderous brood  
Was slain; and the father quaked for the child  
With the royal mortal blood. 25

I' the Bass Rock fort, by his father's care,  
Was his childhood's life assured;  
And Henry the subtle Bolingbroke,  
Proud England's King, 'neath the southron yoke  
His youth for long years immured. 30

Yet in all things meet for a kingly man  
Himself did he approve;  
And the nightingale through his prison-wall  
Taught him both lore and love.

For once, when the bird's song drew him close 35  
To the opened window-pane,  
In her bower beneath a lady stood,  
A light of life to his sorrowful mood,  
Like a lily amid the rain.

And for her sake, to the sweet bird's note, 40  
He framed a sweeter Song,  
More sweet than ever a poet's heart  
Gave yet to the English tongue.

She was a lady of royal blood;  
And when, past sorrow and teen, 45  
He stood where still through his crownless years  
His Scottish realm had been,  
At Scone were the happy lovers crowned,  
A heart-wed King and Queen.

But the bird may fall from the bough of youth, 50  
And the song be turned to moan,  
And Love's storm-cloud be the shadow of Hate,  
When the tempest-waves of a troubled State  
Are beating against a throne.

Yet well they loved; and the god of Love, 55

Whom well the King had sung,  
Might find on the earth no truer hearts  
His lowliest swains among.

From the days when first she rode abroad  
With Scottish maids in her train, 60  
I Catherine Douglas won the trust  
Of my mistress sweet Queen Jane.

And oft she sighed, 'To be born a King!'  
And oft along the way  
When she saw the homely lovers pass 65  
She has said, 'Alack the day!'

Years waned,—the loving and toiling years:  
Till England's wrong renewed  
Drove James, by outrage cast on his crown,  
To the open field of feud. 70

'Twas when the King and his host were met  
At the leaguer of Roxbro' hold,  
The Queen o' the sudden sought his camp  
With a tale of dread to be told.

And she showed him a secret letter writ 75  
That spoke of treasonous strife,  
And how a band of his noblest lords  
Were sworn to take his life.

'And it may be here or it may be there,  
In the camp or the court,' she said: 80  
'But for my sake come to your people's arms  
And guard your royal head.'

Quoth he, ' 'Tis the fifteenth day of the siege,  
And the castle's nigh to yield.'  
'O face your foes on your throne,' she cried, 85  
'And show the power you wield;  
And under your Scottish people's love  
You shall sit as under your shield.'

At the fair Queen's side I stood that day  
When he bade them raise the siege, 90

And back to his Court he sped to know  
How the lords would meet their Liege.

But when he summoned his Parliament,  
The louring brows hung round,  
Like clouds that circle the mountain-head 95  
Ere the first low thunders sound.

For he had tamed the nobles' lust  
And curbed their power and pride,  
And reached out an arm to right the poor  
Through Scotland far and wide; 100  
And many a lordly wrong-doer  
By the headsman's axe had died.

'Twas then upspoke Sir Robert Græme,  
The bold o'ermastering man:—  
'O King, in the name of your Three Estates 105  
I set you under their ban!

'For, as your lords made oath to you  
Of service and fealty,  
Even in like wise you pledged your oath  
Their faithful sire to be:— 110

'Yet all we here that are nobly sprung  
Have mourned dear kith and kin  
Since first for the Scottish Barons' curse  
Did your bloody rule begin.'

With that he laid his hands on his King:— 115  
'Is this not so, my lords?'  
But of all who had sworn to league with him  
Not one spake back to his words.

Quoth the King:—'Thou speak'st but for one Estate,  
Nor doth it avow thy gage. 120  
Let my liege lords hale this traitor hence!'  
The Græme fired dark with rage:—  
'Who works for lesser men than himself,  
He earns but a witless wage!'

But soon from the dungeon where he lay 125

He won by privy plots,  
And forth he fled with a price on his head  
To the country of the Wild Scots.

And word there came from Sir Robert Græme  
To the King at Edinbro':— 130  
'No Liege of mine thou art; but I see  
From this day forth alone in thee  
God's creature, my mortal foe.

'Through thee are my wife and children lost,  
My heritage and lands; 135  
And when my God shall show me a way,  
Thyself my mortal foe will I slay  
With these my proper hands.'

Against the coming of Christmastide  
That year the King bade call 140  
I' the Black Friars' Charterhouse of Perth  
A solemn festival.

And we of his household rode with him  
In a close-ranked company;  
But not till the sun had sunk from his throne 145  
Did we reach the Scottish Sea.

That eve was clenched for a boding storm,  
'Neath a toilsome moon half seen;  
The cloud stooped low and the surf rose high;  
And where there was a line of the sky, 150  
Wild wings loomed dark between.

And on a rock of the black beach-side,  
By the veiled moon dimly lit,  
There was something seemed to heave with life  
As the King drew nigh to it. 155

And was it only the tossing furze  
Or brake of the waste sea-wold?  
Or was it an eagle bent to the blast?  
When near we came, we knew it at last  
For a woman tattered and old. 160

But it seemed as though by a fire within  
Her writhen limbs were wrung;  
And as soon as the King was close to her,  
She stood up gaunt and strong.

'Twas then the moon sailed clear of the rack 165  
On high in her hollow dome;  
And still as aloft with hoary crest  
Each clamorous wave rang home,  
Like fire in snow the moonlight blazed  
Amid the champing foam 170

And the woman held his eyes with her eyes:—  
'O King, thou art come at last;  
But thy wraith has haunted the Scottish Sea  
To my sight for four years past.

'Four years it is since first I met, 175  
'Twixt the Duchray and the Dhu,  
A shape whose feet clung close in a shroud,  
And that shape for thine I knew.

'A year again, and on Inchkeith Isle 180  
I saw thee pass in the breeze,  
With the cerecloth<sup>[1]</sup> risen above thy feet  
And wound about thy knees.

'And yet a year, in the Links of Forth, 185  
As a wanderer without rest,  
Thou cam'st with both thine arms i' the shroud  
That clung high up thy breast.

'And in this hour I find thee here, 190  
And well mine eyes may note  
That the winding-sheet hath passed thy breast  
And risen round thy throat.

'And when I meet thee again, O King, 195  
That of death hast such sore drouth,—  
Except thou turn again on this shore,—  
The winding-sheet shall have moved once more  
And covered thine eyes and mouth.



‘O King, whom poor men bless for their King,  
Of thy fate be not so fain;  
But these my words for God’s message take,  
And turn thy steed, O King, for her sake  
Who rides beside thy rein!’ 200

While the woman spoke, the King’s horse reared  
As if it would breast the sea,  
And the Queen turned pale as she heard on the gale  
The voice die dolorously.

When the woman ceased, the steed was still, 205  
But the King gazed on her yet,  
And in silence save for the wail of the sea  
His eyes and her eyes met.

At last he said:—‘God’s ways are His own;  
Man is but shadow and dust. 210  
Last night I prayed by His altar-stone;  
To-night I wend to the Feast of His Son;  
And in Him I set my trust.

‘I have held my people in sacred charge,  
And have not feared the sting 215  
Of proud men’s hate,—to His will resign’d  
Who has but one same death for a hind  
And one same death for a King.

‘And if God in His wisdom have brought close  
The day when I must die, 220  
That day by water or fire or air  
My feet shall fall in the destined snare  
Wherever my road may lie.

‘What man can say but the Fiend hath set  
Thy sorcery on my path, 225  
My heart with the fear of death to fill,  
And turn me against God’s very will  
To sink in His burning wrath?’

The woman stood as the train rode past,  
And moved nor limb nor eye; 230  
And when we were shipped, we saw her there

Still standing against the sky.

As the ship made way, the moon once more  
Sank slow in her rising pall;  
And I thought of the shrouded wraith of the King, 235  
And I said, 'The Heavens know all.'

And now, ye lasses, must ye hear  
How my name is Kate Barlass:—  
But a little thing, when all the tale  
Is told of the weary mass 240  
Of crime and woe which in Scotland's realm  
God's will let come to pass.

'Twas in the Charterhouse of Perth  
That the King and all his Court  
Were met, the Christmas Feast being done, 245  
For solace and disport.

'Twas a wind-wild eve in February,  
And against the casement-pane  
The branches smote like summoning hands,  
And muttered the driving rain. 250

And when the wind swooped over the lift<sup>[2]</sup>  
And made the whole heaven frown,  
It seemed a grip was laid on the walls  
To tug the housetop down.

And the Queen was there, more stately fair 255  
Than a lily in garden set;  
And the King was loth to stir from her side;  
For as on the day when she was his bride,  
Even so he loved her yet.

And the Earl of Athole, the King's false friend, 260  
Sat with him at the board;  
And Robert Stuart the chamberlain  
Who had sold his sovereign Lord.

Yet the traitor Christopher Chaumber there  
Would fain have told him all, 265  
And vainly four times that night he strove

To reach the King through the hall.

But the wine is bright at the goblet's brim  
    Though the poison lurk beneath;  
And the apples still are red on the tree 270  
Within whose shade may the adder be  
    That shall turn thy life to death.

There was a knight of the King's fast friends  
    Whom he called the King of Love;  
And to such bright cheer and courtesy 275  
    That name might best behave.

And the King and Queen both loved him well  
    For his gentle knightliness;  
And with him the King, as that eve wore on,  
    Was playing at the chess. 280

And the King said, (for he thought to jest  
    And soothe the Queen thereby;—  
'In a book 'tis writ that this same year  
    A King shall in Scotland die.

'And I have pondered the matter o'er,  
    And this have I found, Sir Hugh,—  
There are but two Kings on Scottish ground,  
    And those Kings are I and you. 285

'And I have a wife and a newborn heir,  
    And you are yourself alone; 290  
So stand you stark at my side with me  
    To guard our double throne.

'For here sit I and my wife and child,  
    As well your heart shall approve,  
In full surrender and soothfastness, 295  
    Beneath your Kingdom of Love.'

And the Knight laughed, and the Queen too smiled;  
    But I knew her heavy thought,  
And I strove to find in the good King's jest  
    What cheer might thence be wrought. 300

And I said, 'My Liege, for the Queen's dear love  
Now sing the song that of old  
You made, when a captive Prince you lay,  
And the nightingale sang sweet on the spray,  
In Windsor's castle-hold.' 305

Then he smiled the smile I knew so well  
When he thought to please the Queen;  
The smile which under all bitter frowns  
Of fate that rose between  
For ever dwelt at the poet's heart 310  
Like the bird of love unseen.

And he kissed her hand and took his harp,  
And the music sweetly rang;  
And when the song burst forth, it seemed  
'Twas the nightingale that sang. 315

*'Worship, ye lovers, on this May:  
Of bliss your kalends are begun:  
Sing with us, Away, Winter, away!  
Come, Summer, the sweet season and sun!  
Awake for shame,—your heaven is won,— 320  
And amorously your heads lift all:  
Thank Love, that you to his grace doth call!'*

But when he bent to the Queen, and sang  
The speech whose praise was hers,  
It seemed his voice was the voice of the Spring 325  
And the voice of the bygone years.

*'The fairest and the freshest flower  
That ever I saw before that hour,  
The which o' the sudden made to start  
The blood of my body to my heart. 330*

*· · · · ·  
Ah sweet, are ye a worldly creature  
Or heavenly thing inform of nature?'*

And the song was long, and richly stored  
With wonder and beauteous things;  
And the harp was tuned to every change 335

Of minstrel ministerings;  
But when he spoke of the Queen at the last,  
Its strings were his own heart-strings.

*'Unworthy but only of her grace,  
Upon Love's rock that's easy and sure,* 340  
*In guerdon of all my love's space  
She took me her humble creature.  
Thus fell my blissful aventure  
In youth of love that from day to day  
Flowereth aye new, and further I say.* 345

*'To reckon all the circumstance  
As it happed when lessen gan my sore,  
Of my rancour and woful chance,  
It were too long,—I have done therefor.  
And of this flower I say no more,* 350  
*But unto my help her heart hath tended  
And even from death her man defended.'*

'Aye, even from death,' to myself I said;  
For I thought of the day when she  
Had borne him the news, at Roxbro' siege, 355  
Of the fell confederacy.

But Death even then took aim as he sang  
With an arrow deadly bright;  
And the grinning skull lurked grimly aloof,  
And the wings were spread far over the roof 360  
More dark than the winter night.

Yet truly along the amorous song  
Of Love's high pomp and state,  
There were words of Fortune's trackless doom  
And the dreadful face of Fate. 365

And oft have I heard again in dreams  
The voice of dire appeal  
In which the King then sang of the pit  
That is under Fortune's wheel.

*'And under the wheel beheld I there* 370  
*An ugly Pit as deep as hell,*

*That to behold I quaked for fear:  
And this I heard, that who therein fell  
Came no more up, tidings to tell:  
Whereat, astound of the fearful sight,* 375  
*I wist not what to do for fright.'*

And oft has my thought called up again  
These words of the changeful song:—  
*'Wist thou thy pain and thy travail  
To come, well might'st thou weep and wail!'* 380  
And our wail, O God! is long.

But the song's end was all of his love;  
And well his heart was grac'd  
With her smiling lips and her tear-bright eyes  
As his arm went round her waist. 385

And on the swell of her long fair throat  
Close clung the necklet-chain  
As he bent her pearl-tir'd head aside,  
And in the warmth of his love and pride  
He kissed her lips full fain. 390

And her true face was a rosy red,  
The very red of the rose  
That, couched on the happy garden-bed,  
In the summer sunlight glows.

And all the wondrous things of love 395  
That sang so sweet through the song  
Were in the look that met their eyes,  
And the look was deep and long.

'Twas then a knock came at the outer gate,  
And the usher sought the King. 400  
'The woman you met by the Scottish Sea,  
My Liege, would tell you a thing;  
And she says that her present need for speech  
Will bear no gainsaying.'

And the King said: 'The hour is late;  
To-morrow will serve, I ween.' 405  
Then he charged the usher strictly, and said:

‘No word of this to the Queen.’

But the usher came back to the King.

‘Shall I call her back?’ quoth he:

410

‘For as she went on her way, she cried,

“Woe! Woe! then the thing must be!”’

And the King paused, but he did not speak.

Then he called for the Voidee-cup:

And as we heard the twelfth hour strike,

415

There by true lips and false lips alike

Was the draught of trust drained up.

So with reverence meet to King and Queen,

To bed went all from the board;

And the last to leave of the courtly train

420

Was Robert Stuart the chamberlain

Who had sold his sovereign lord.

And all the locks of the chamber-door

Had the traitor riven and brast;

And that Fate might win sure way from afar,

425

He had drawn out every bolt and bar

That made the entrance fast.

And now at midnight he stole his way

To the moat of the outer wall,

And laid strong hurdles closely across

430

Where the traitors’ tread should fall.

But we that were the Queen’s bower-maids

Alone were left behind;

And with heed we drew the curtains close

435

Against the winter wind.

And now that all was still through the hall,

More clearly we heard the rain

That clamoured ever against the glass

And the boughs that beat on the pane.

But the fire was bright in the ingle-nook,

440

And through empty space around

The shadows cast on the arras’d wall

'Mid the pictured kings stood sudden and tall  
Like spectres sprung from the ground.

And the bed was dight in a deep alcove; 445  
And as he stood by the fire  
The King was still in talk with the Queen  
While he doffed his goodly attire.

And the song had brought the image back 450  
Of many a bygone year;  
And many a loving word they said  
With hand in hand and head laid to head;  
And none of us went anear.

But Love was weeping outside the house, 455  
A child in the piteous rain;  
And as he watched the arrow of Death,  
He wailed for his own shafts close in the sheath  
That never should fly again.

And now beneath the window arose 460  
A wild voice suddenly:  
And the King reared straight, but the Queen fell back  
As for bitter dule to dree<sup>[3]</sup>;  
And all of us knew the woman's voice  
Who spoke by the Scottish Sea.

'O King,' she cried, 'in an evil hour 465  
They drove me from thy gate;  
And yet my voice must rise to thine ears;  
But alas! it comes too late!

'Last night at mid-watch, by Aberdour, 470  
When the moon was dead in the skies,  
O King, in a death-light of thine own  
I saw thy shape arise.

'And in full season, as erst I said, 475  
The doom had gained its growth;  
And the shroud had risen above thy neck  
And covered thine eyes and mouth.

'And no moon woke, but the pale dawn broke,



And still thy soul stood there;  
And I thought its silence cried to my soul  
As the first rays crowned its hair. 480

‘Since then have I journeyed fast and fain  
In very despite of Fate,  
Lest Hope might still be found in God’s will:  
But they drove me from thy gate.

‘For every man on God’s ground, O King, 485  
His death grows up from his birth  
In a shadow-plant perpetually;  
And thine towers high, a black yew-tree,  
O’er the Charterhouse of Perth!’

That room was built far out from the house; 490  
And none but we in the room  
Might hear the voice that rose beneath,  
Nor the tread of the coming doom.

For now there came a torchlight-glare,  
And a clang of arms there came; 495  
And not a soul in that space but thought  
Of the foe Sir Robert Græme.

Yea, from the country of the Wild Scots,  
O’er mountain, valley, and glen,  
He had brought with him in murderous league 500  
Three hundred armèd men.

The King knew all in an instant’s flash;  
And like a King did he stand;  
But there was no armour in all the room,  
Nor weapon lay to his hand. 505

And all we women flew to the door  
And thought to have made it fast;  
But the bolts were gone and the bars were gone  
And the locks were riven and brast.

And he caught the pale pale Queen in his arms 510  
As the iron footsteps fell,—  
Then loosed her, standing alone, and said,

‘Our bliss was our farewell!’

And ’twixt his lips he murmured a prayer,  
And he crossed his brow and breast; 515  
And proudly in royal hardihood  
Even so with folded arms he stood,—  
The prize of the bloody quest.

Then on me leaped the Queen like a deer:—  
‘O Catherine, help!’ she cried. 520  
And low at his feet we clasped his knees  
Together side by side.  
‘Oh! even a King, for his people’s sake,  
From treasonous death must hide!’

‘For *her* sake most!’ I cried, and I marked 525  
The pang that my words could wring.  
And the iron tongs from the chimney-nook  
I snatched and held to the king:—  
‘Wrench up the plank! and the vault beneath  
Shall yield safe harbouring.’ 530

With brows low-bent, from my eager hand  
The heavy heft<sup>[4]</sup> did he take;  
And the plank at his feet he wrenched and tore;  
And as he frowned through the open floor,  
Again I said, ‘For her sake!’ 535

Then he cried to the Queen, ‘God’s will be done!’  
For her hands were clasped in prayer.  
And down he sprang to the inner crypt;  
And straight we closed the plank he had ripp’d  
And toiled to smooth it fair. 540

(Alas! in that vault a gap once was  
Wherethro’ the King might have fled:  
But three days since close-walled had it been  
By his will; for the ball would roll therein  
When without at the palm he play’d.) 545

Then the Queen cried, ‘Catherine, keep the door,  
And I to this will suffice!’  
At her word I rose all dazed to my feet,

And my heart was fire and ice.

And louder ever the voices grew, 550  
And the tramp of men in mail;  
Until to my brain it seemed to be  
As though I tossed on a ship at sea  
In the teeth of a crashing gale.

Then back I flew to the rest; and hard 555  
We strove with sinews knit  
To force the table against the door;  
But we might not compass it.

Then my wild gaze sped far down the hall 560  
To the place of the hearthstone-sill;  
And the Queen bent ever above the floor,  
For the plank was rising still.

And now the rush was heard on the stair,  
And 'God, what help?' was our cry.  
And was I frenzied or was I bold? 565  
I looked at each empty stanchion-hold,  
And no bar but my arm had I!

Like iron felt my arm, as through  
The staple I made it pass:—  
Alack! it was flesh and bone—no more! 570  
'Twas Catherine Douglas sprang to the door,  
But I fell back Kate Barlass.

With that they all thronged into the hall,  
Half dim to my failing ken;  
And the space that was but a void before 575  
Was a crowd of wrathful men.

Behind the door I had fall'n and lay,  
Yet my sense was wildly aware,  
And for all the pain of my shattered arm  
I never fainted there. 580

Even as I fell, my eyes were cast  
Where the King leaped down to the pit;  
And lo! the plank was smooth in its place,

And the Queen stood far from it.

And under the litters and through the bed 585  
And within the presses all  
The traitors sought for the King, and pierced  
The arras around the wall.

And through the chamber they ramped and stormed  
Like lions loose in the lair, 590  
And scarce could trust to their very eyes,—  
For behold! no King was there.

Then one of them seized the Queen, and cried,—  
'Now tell us, where is thy lord?'  
And he held the sharp point over her heart: 595  
She dropped not her eyes nor did she start  
But she answered never a word.

Then the sword half pierced the true true breast:  
But it was the Græme's own son  
Cried, 'This is a woman,—we seek a man!' 600  
And away from her girdle zone  
He struck the point of the murderous steel;  
And that foul deed was not done.

And forth flowed all the throng like a sea  
And 'twas empty space once more; 605  
And my eyes sought out the wounded Queen  
As I lay behind the door.

And I said: 'Dear Lady, leave me here,  
For I cannot help you now:  
But fly while you may, and none shall reckon 610  
Of my place here lying low.'

And she said, 'My Catherine, God help thee!'  
Then she looked to the distant floor,  
And clasping her hands, 'O God help *him*,'  
She sobbed, 'for we can no more!' 615

But God He knows what help may mean,  
If it mean to live or to die;  
And what sore sorrow and mighty moan

On earth it may cost ere yet a throne  
Be filled in His house on high. 620

And now the ladies fled with the Queen;  
And through the open door  
The night-wind wailed round the empty room  
And the rushes shook on the floor.

And the bed drooped low in the dark recess 625  
Whence the arras was rent away;  
And the firelight still shone over the space  
Where our hidden secret lay.

And the rain had ceased, and the moonbeams lit  
The window high in the wall,— 630  
Bright beams that on the plank that I knew  
Through the painted pane did fall,  
And gleamed with the splendour of Scotland's crown  
And shield armorial.

But then a great wind swept up the skies 635  
And the climbing moon fell back;  
And the royal blazon fled from the floor,  
And nought remained on its track;  
And high in the darkened window-pane  
The shield and the crown were black. 640

And what I say next I partly saw  
And partly I heard in sooth,  
And partly since from the murderers' lips  
The torture wrung the truth.

For now again came the armèd tread, 645  
And fast through the hall it fell;  
But the throng was less; and ere I saw,  
By the voice without I could tell  
That Robert Stuart had come with them  
Who knew that chamber well. 650

And over the space the Græme strode dark  
With his mantle round him flung;  
And in his eye was a flaming light  
But not a word on his tongue.

And Stuart held a torch to the floor, 655  
And he found the thing he sought;  
And they slashed the plank away with their swords;  
And O God! I fainted not!

And the traitor held his torch in the gap, 660  
All smoking and smouldering;  
And through the vapour and fire, beneath  
In the dark crypt's narrow ring,  
With a shout that pealed to the room's high roof  
They saw their naked King.

Half naked he stood, but stood as one 665  
Who yet could do and dare:  
With the crown, the King was stript away,—  
The Knight was 'reft of his battle-array,—  
But still the Man was there.

From the rout then stepped a villain forth,— 670  
Sir John Hall was his name;  
With a knife unsheathed he leapt to the vault  
Beneath the torchlight-flame.

Of his person and stature was the King 675  
A man right manly strong,  
And mightily by the shoulder-blades  
His foe to his feet he flung.

Then the traitor's brother, Sir Thomas Hall, 680  
Sprang down to work his worst;  
And the King caught the second man by the neck  
And flung him above the first.

And he smote and trampled them under him;  
And a long month thence they bare  
All black their throats with the grip of his hands  
When the hangman's hand came there. 685

And sore he strove to have had their knives,  
But the sharp blades gashed his hands.  
Oh James! so armed, thou hadst battled there  
Till help had come of thy bands;  
And oh! once more thou hadst held our throne 690

And ruled thy Scottish lands!

But while the King o'er his foes still raged

With a heart that nought could tame,  
Another man sprang down to the crypt;  
And with his sword in his hand hard-gripp'd,  
There stood Sir Robert Græme.

695

(Now shame on the recreant traitor's heart

Who durst not face his King  
Till the body unarmed was wearied out  
With twofold combating!

700

Ah! well might the people sing and say,

As oft ye have heard aright:—  
*'O Robert Græme, O Robert Græme,  
Who slew our King, God give thee shame!'*  
For he slew him not as a knight.)

705

And the naked King turned round at bay,

But his strength had passed the goal,  
And he could but gasp:—'Mine hour is come;  
But oh! to succour thine own soul's doom,  
Let a priest now shrive my soul!'

710

And the traitor looked on the King's spent strength,

And said:—'Have I kept my word?—  
Yea, King, the mortal pledge that I gave?  
No black friar's shrift thy soul shall have,  
But the shrift of this red sword!'

715

With that he smote his King through the breast;

And all they three in that pen  
Fell on him and stabbed and stabbed him there  
Like merciless murderous men.

Yet seemed it now that Sir Robert Græme,

Ere the King's last breath was o'er,  
Turned sick at heart with the deadly sight  
And would have done no more.

720

But a cry came from the troop above:—

'If him thou do not slay,

725

The price of his life that thou dost spare  
Thy forfeit life shall pay!’

O God! what more did I hear or see,  
Or how should I tell the rest?  
But there at length our King lay slain 730  
With sixteen wounds in his breast.

O God! and now did a bell boom forth,  
And the murderers turned and fled;—  
Too late, too late, O God, did it sound!—  
And I heard the true men mustering round, 735  
And the cries and the coming tread.

But ere they came, to the black death-gap  
Somewise did I creep and steal;  
And lo! or ever I swooned away,  
Through the dusk I saw where the white face lay 740  
In the Pit of Fortune’s Wheel.

---

And now, ye Scottish maids who have heard  
Dread things of the days grown old,—  
Even at the last, of true Queen Jane  
May somewhat yet be told, 745  
And how she dealt for her dear lord’s sake  
Dire vengeance manifold.

’Twas in the Charterhouse of Perth,  
In the fair-lit Death-chapelle,  
That the slain King’s corpse on bier was laid 750  
With chaunt and requiem-knell.

And all with royal wealth of balm  
Was the body purified;  
And none could trace on the brow and lips  
The death that he had died. 755

In his robes of state he lay asleep  
With orb and sceptre in hand;  
And by the crown he wore on his throne  
Was his kingly forehead spann’d.

And, girls, ’twas a sweet sad thing to see 760



How the curling golden hair,  
As in the day of the poet's youth,  
From the King's crown clustered there.

And if all had come to pass in the brain  
That throbbed beneath those curls, 765  
Then Scots had said in the days to come  
That this their soil was a different home  
And a different Scotland, girls!

And the Queen sat by him night and day,  
And oft she knelt in prayer, 770  
All wan and pale in the widow's veil  
That shrouded her shining hair.

And I had got good help of my hurt:  
And only to me some sign  
She made; and save the priests that were there, 775  
No face would she see but mine.

And the month of March wore on apace;  
And now fresh couriers fared  
Still from the country of the Wild Scots  
With news of the traitors snared. 780

And still as I told her day by day,  
Her pallor changed to sight,  
And the frost grew to a furnace-flame  
That burnt her visage white.

And evermore as I brought her word, 785  
She bent to her dead King James,  
And in the cold ear with fire-drawn breath  
She spoke the traitors' names.

But when the name of Sir Robert Græme  
Was the one she had to give, 790  
I ran to hold her up from the floor;  
For the froth was on her lips, and sore  
I feared she could not live.

And the month of March wore nigh to its end,  
And still was the death-pall spread; 795

For she would not bury her slaughtered lord  
Till his slayers all were dead.

And now of their dooms dread tidings came,  
And of torments fierce and dire;  
And nought she spake,—she had ceased to speak,— 800  
But her eyes were a soul on fire.

But when I told her the bitter end  
Of the stern and just award,  
She leaned o'er the bier, and thrice three times 805  
She kissed the lips of her lord.

And then she said,—‘My King, they are dead!’  
And she knelt on the chapel-floor,  
And whispered low with a strange proud smile,—  
‘James, James, they suffered more!’

Last she stood up to her queenly height, 810  
But she shook like an autumn leaf,  
As though the fire wherein she burned  
Then left her body, and all were turned  
To winter of life-long grief.

And ‘O James!’ she said,—‘My James!’ she said,— 815  
‘Alas for the woful thing,  
That a poet true and a friend of man,  
In desperate days of bale and ban,  
Should needs be born a King!’

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, 1828-82.

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[1] cerecloth] winding-sheet.

[2] lift] sky.

[3] dule to dree] fate to endure.

[4] heft] haft, handle.

## GOBLIN MARKET

Morning and evening  
Maids heard the goblins cry:  
‘Come buy our orchard fruits,  
Come buy, come buy:  
Apples and quinces, 5  
Lemons and oranges,  
Plump unpecked cherries,  
Melons and raspberries,  
Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,  
Swart-headed mulberries, 10  
Wild free-born cranberries,  
Crab-apples, dewberries,  
Pine-apples, blackberries,  
Apricots, strawberries;—  
All ripe together 15  
In summer weather,—  
Morns that pass by,  
Fair eves that fly;  
Come buy, come buy:  
Our grapes fresh from the vine, 20  
Pomegranates full and fine,  
Dates and sharp bullaces<sup>[1]</sup>,  
Rare pears and greengages,  
Damsons and bilberries,  
Taste them and try: 25  
Currants and gooseberries,  
Bright-fire-like barberries,  
Figs to fill your mouth,  
Citrons from the South,  
Sweet to tongue and sound to eye; 30  
Come buy, come buy.’

Evening by evening  
Among the brookside rushes,

Laura bowed her head to hear,  
Lizzie veiled her blushes: 35  
Crouching close together  
In the cooling weather,  
With clasping arms and cautioning lips,  
With tingling cheeks and finger tips.  
'Lie close,' Laura said, 40  
Pricking up her golden head:  
'We must not look at goblin men,  
We must not buy their fruits:  
Who knows upon what soil they fed  
Their hungry thirsty roots?' 45  
'Come buy,' call the goblins  
Hobbling down the glen.  
'Oh,' cried Lizzie, 'Laura, Laura,  
You should not peep at goblin men.'  
Lizzie covered up her eyes, 50  
Covered close lest they should look;  
Laura reared her glossy head,  
And whispered like the restless brook:  
'Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie,  
Down the glen tramp little men. 55  
One hauls a basket,  
One bears a plate,  
One lugs a golden dish  
Of many pounds weight.  
How fair the vine must grow 60  
Whose grapes are so luscious;  
How warm the wind must blow  
Through those fruit bushes.'  
'No,' said Lizzie: 'No, no, no;  
Their offers should not charm us, 65  
Their evil gifts would harm us.'  
She thrust a dimpled finger  
In each ear, shut eyes and ran:  
Curious Laura chose to linger  
Wondering at each merchant man. 70  
One had a cat's face,  
One whisked a tail,  
One tramped at a rat's pace,  
One crawled like a snail,

One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry, 75  
One like a ratel<sup>[2]</sup> tumbled hurry skurry.  
She heard a voice like voice of doves  
Cooing all together:  
They sounded kind and full of loves  
In the pleasant weather. 80

Laura stretched her gleaming neck  
Like a rush-imbedded swan,  
Like a lily from the beck,  
Like a moonlit poplar branch,  
Like a vessel at the launch 85  
When its last restraint is gone.

Backwards up the mossy glen  
Turned and trooped the goblin men,  
With their shrill repeated cry,  
'Come buy, come buy.' 90

When they reached where Laura was  
They stood stock still upon the moss,  
Leering at each other,  
Brother with queer brother;  
Signalling each other, 95  
Brother with sly brother.

One set his basket down,  
One reared his plate;  
One began to weave a crown  
Of tendrils, leaves, and rough nuts brown 100  
(Men sell not such in any town);

One heaved the golden weight  
Of dish and fruit to offer her:  
'Come buy, come buy,' was still their cry.  
Laura stared but did not stir, 105  
Longed but had no money:

The whisk-tailed merchant bade her taste  
In tones as smooth as honey,  
The cat-faced purr'd,  
The rat-paced spoke a word 110  
Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was heard;  
One parrot-voiced and jolly  
Cried 'Pretty Goblin' still for 'Pretty Polly;'—

One whistled like a bird.

But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste: 115  
'Good folk, I have no coin;  
To take were to purloin:  
I have no copper in my purse,  
I have no silver either,  
And all my gold is on the furze 120  
That shakes in windy weather  
Above the rusty heather.'  
'You have much gold upon your head,'  
They answered all together:  
'Buy from us with a golden curl.' 125  
She clipped a precious golden lock,  
She dropped a tear more rare than pearl,  
Then sucked their fruit globes fair or red:  
Sweeter than honey from the rock,  
Stronger than man-rejoicing wine, 130  
Clearer than water flowed that juice;  
She never tasted such before,  
How should it cloy with length of use?  
She sucked and sucked and sucked the more  
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore; 135  
She sucked until her lips were sore;  
Then flung the emptied rinds away  
But gathered up one kernel stone,  
And knew not was it night or day  
As she turned home alone. 140

Lizzie met her at the gate  
Full of wise upbraidings:  
'Dear, you should not stay so late,  
Twilight is not good for maidens;  
Should not loiter in the glen 145  
In the haunts of goblin men.  
Do you not remember Jeanie,  
How she met them in the moonlight,  
Took their gifts both choice and many,  
Ate their fruits and wore their flowers 150  
Plucked from bowers  
Where summer ripens at all hours?

But ever in the moonlight  
She pined and pined away;  
Sought them by night and day, 155  
Found them no more but dwindled and grew grey;  
Then fell with the first snow,  
While to this day no grass will grow  
Where she lies low:  
I planted daisies there a year ago 160  
That never blow.  
You should not loiter so.’  
‘Nay, hush,’ said Laura:  
‘Nay, hush, my sister:  
I ate and ate my fill, 165  
Yet my mouth waters still;  
To-morrow night I will  
Buy more:’ and kissed her:  
‘Have done with sorrow;  
I’ll bring you plums to-morrow 170  
Fresh on their mother twigs,  
Cherries worth getting;  
You cannot think what figs  
My teeth have met in,  
What melons icy-cold 175  
Piled on a dish of gold  
Too huge for me to hold,  
What peaches with a velvet nap,  
Pellucid grapes without one seed:  
Odorous indeed must be the mead 180  
Whereon they grow, and pure the wave they drink  
With lilies at the brink,  
And sugar-sweet their sap.’

Golden head by golden head,  
Like two pigeons in one nest 185  
Folded in each other’s wings,  
They lay down in their curtained bed:  
Like two blossoms on one stem,  
Like two flakes of new-fall’n snow,  
Like two wands of ivory 190  
Tipped with gold for awful kings.  
Moon and stars gazed in at them,

Wind sang them to lullaby,  
Lumbering owls forbore to fly,  
Not a bat flapped to and fro 195  
Round their nest:  
Cheek to cheek and breast to breast  
Locked together in one nest.

Early in the morning  
When the first cock crowed his warning, 200  
Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,  
Laura rose with Lizzie:  
Fetched in honey, milked the cows,  
Aired and set to rights the house,  
Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat, 205  
Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,  
Next churned butter, whipped up cream,  
Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;  
Talked as modest maidens should:  
Lizzie with an open heart, 210  
Laura in an absent dream,  
One content, one sick in part;  
One warbling for the mere bright day's delight,  
One longing for the night.

At length slow evening came: 215  
They went with pitchers to the reedy brook;  
Lizzie most placid in her look,  
Laura most like a leaping flame.  
They drew the gurgling water from its deep;  
Lizzie plucked purple and rich golden flags, 220  
Then turning homewards said: 'The sunset flushes  
Those furthest loftiest crags;  
Come, Laura, not another maiden lags,  
No wilful squirrel wags,  
The beasts and birds are fast asleep.' 225  
But Laura loitered still among the rushes  
And said the bank was steep.

And said the hour was early still,  
The dew not fall'n, the wind not chill:  
Listening ever, but not catching 230



The customary cry,  
'Come buy, come buy,'  
With its iterated jingle  
Of sugar-baited words: 235  
Not for all her watching  
Once discerning even one goblin  
Racing, whisking, tumbling, hobbling;  
Let alone the herds  
That used to tramp along the glen,  
In groups or single, 240  
Of brisk fruit-merchant men.

Till Lizzie urged, 'O Laura, come;  
I hear the fruit-call but I dare not look:  
You should not loiter longer at this brook:  
Come with me home. 245  
The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,  
Each glowworm winks her spark,  
Let us get home before the night grows dark:  
For clouds may gather  
Though this is summer weather, 250  
Put out the lights and drench us through;  
Then if we lost our way what should we do?'

Laura turned cold as stone  
To find her sister heard that cry alone,  
That goblin cry, 255  
'Come buy our fruits, come buy.'  
Must she then buy no more such dainty fruit?  
Must she no more such succous<sup>[3]</sup> pasture find,  
Gone deaf and blind?  
Her tree of life drooped from the root: 260  
She said not one word in her heart's sore ache;  
But peering thro' the dimness, nought discerning,  
Trudged home, her pitcher dripping all the way;  
So crept to bed, and lay  
Silent till Lizzie slept; 265  
Then sat up in a passionate yearning,  
And gnashed her teeth for balked desire, and wept  
As if her heart would break.

Day after day, night after night,  
Laura kept watch in vain 270  
In sullen silence of exceeding pain.  
She never caught again the goblin cry:  
'Come buy, come buy;'—  
She never spied the goblin men  
Hawking their fruits along the glen: 275  
But when the moon waxed bright  
Her hair grew thin and grey;  
She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn  
To swift decay and burn  
Her fire away. 280

One day remembering her kernel-stone  
She set it by a wall that faced the south;  
Dewed it with tears, hoped for a root,  
Watched for a waxing shoot, 285  
But there came none;  
It never saw the sun,  
It never felt the trickling moisture run:  
While with sunk eyes and faded mouth  
She dreamed of melons, as a traveller sees  
False waves in desert drouth 290  
With shade of leaf-crowned trees,  
And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze.

She no more swept the house,  
Tended the fowls or cows,  
Fetched honey, kneaded cakes of wheat, 295  
Brought water from the brook:  
But sat down listless in the chimney nook  
And would not eat.

Tender Lizzie could not bear  
To watch her sister's cankerous care 300  
Yet not to share.  
She night and morning  
Caught the goblins' cry:  
'Come buy our orchard fruits,  
Come buy, come buy:'— 305  
Beside the brook, along the glen,

She heard the tramp of goblin men,  
The voice and stir  
Poor Laura could not hear;  
Longed to buy fruit to comfort her, 310  
But feared to pay too dear.  
She thought of Jeanie in her grave,  
Who should have been a bride;  
But who for joys brides hope to have  
Fell sick and died 315  
In her gay prime,  
In earliest Winter time,  
With the first glazing rime,  
With the first snow-fall of crisp Winter time.

Till Laura dwindling 320  
Seemed knocking at Death's door:  
Then Lizzie weighed no more  
Better and worse;  
But put a silver penny in her purse,  
Kissed Laura, crossed the heath with clumps of furze 325  
At twilight, halted by the brook:  
And for the first time in her life  
Began to listen and look.

Laughed every goblin 330  
When they spied her peeping:  
Came towards her hobbling,  
Flying, running, leaping,  
Puffing and blowing,  
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,  
Clucking and gobbling, 335  
Mopping and mowing,  
Full of airs and graces,  
Pulling wry faces,  
Demure grimaces,  
Cat-like and rat-like, 340  
Ratel- and wombat-like,  
Snail-paced in a hurry,  
Parrot-voiced and whistler,  
Helter skelter, hurry skurry,  
Chattering like magpies, 345

Fluttering like pigeons,  
Gliding like fishes,—  
Hugged her and kissed her:  
Squeezed and caressed her:  
Stretched up their dishes, 350  
Panniers, and plates:  
‘Look at our apples  
Russet and dun,  
Bob at our cherries,  
Bite at our peaches, 355  
Citrons and dates,  
Grapes for the asking,  
Pears red with basking  
Out in the sun,  
Plums on their twigs; 360  
Pluck them and suck them,  
Pomegranates, figs.’—

‘Good folk,’ said Lizzie,  
Mindful of Jeanie:  
‘Give me much and many:’— 365  
Held out her apron,  
Tossed them her penny.  
‘Nay, take a seat with us,  
Honour and eat with us,’  
They answered grinning: 370  
‘Our feast is but beginning.  
Night yet is early,  
Warm and dew-pearly,  
Wakeful and starry:  
Such fruits as these 375  
No man can carry;  
Half their bloom would fly,  
Half their dew would dry,  
Half their flavour would pass by.  
Sit down and feast with us, 380  
Be welcome guest with us,  
Cheer you and rest with us.’—  
‘Thank you,’ said Lizzie: ‘But one waits  
At home alone for me:  
So without further parleying, 385

If you will not sell me any  
Of your fruits though much and many,  
Give me back my silver penny  
I tossed you for a fee.'—

They began to scratch their pates, 390

No longer wagging, purring,  
But visibly demurring,

Grunting and snarling

One called her proud,

Cross-grained, uncivil; 395

Their tones waxed loud,

Their looks were evil.

Lashing their tails

They trod and hustled her,

Elbowed and jostled her, 400

Clawed with their nails,

Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,

Tore her gown and soiled her stocking,

Twitched her hair out by the roots,

Stamped upon her tender feet, 405

Held her hands and squeezed their fruits

Against her mouth to make her eat.

White and golden Lizzie stood,

Like a lily in a flood,—

Like a rock of blue-veined stone 410

Lashed by tides obstreperously,—

Like a beacon left alone

In a hoary roaring sea,

Sending up a golden fire,—

Like a fruit-crowned orange-tree 415

White with blossoms honey-sweet

Sore beset by wasp and bee,—

Like a royal virgin town

Topped with gilded dome and spire

Close beleaguered by a fleet 420

Mad to tug her standard down.

One may lead a horse to water,

Twenty cannot make him drink.

Though the goblins cuffed and caught her,

Coaxed and fought her, 425  
Bullied and besought her,  
Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,  
Kicked and knocked her,  
Mauled and mocked her,  
Lizzie uttered not a word; 430  
Would not open lip from lip  
Lest they should cram a mouthful in:  
But laughed in heart to feel the drip  
Of juice that syrugged all her face,  
And lodged in dimples of her chin, 435  
And streaked her neck which quaked like curd.  
At last the evil people  
Worn out by her resistance  
Flung back her penny, kicked their fruit  
Along whichever road they took, 440  
Not leaving root or stone or shoot;  
Some writhed into the ground,  
Some dived into the brook  
With ring and ripple,  
Some scudded on the gale without a sound, 445  
Some vanished in the distance.

In a smart, ache, tingle,  
Lizzie went her way;  
Knew not was it night or day;  
Sprang up the bank, tore thro' the furze, 450  
Threaded copse and dingle,  
And heard her penny jingle  
Bouncing in her purse,—  
Its bounce was music to her ear.  
She ran and ran 455  
As if she feared some goblin man  
Dogged her with gibe or curse  
Or something worse:  
But not one goblin scurried after,  
Nor was she pricked by fear; 460  
The kind heart made her windy-paced  
That urged her home quite out of breath with haste  
And inward laughter.

She cried 'Laura,' up the garden,  
'Did you miss me?' 465  
Come and kiss me.  
Never mind my bruises,  
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices  
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,  
Goblin pulp and goblin dew. 470  
Eat me, drink me, love me;  
Laura, make much of me:  
For your sake I have braved the glen  
And had to do with goblin merchant men.'

Laura started from her chair, 475  
Flung her arms up in the air,  
Clutched her hair:  
'Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted  
For my sake the fruit forbidden?  
Must your light like mine be hidden, 480  
Your young life like mine be wasted,  
Undone in mine undoing  
And ruined in my ruin,  
Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden?' —  
She clung about her sister, 485  
Kissed and kissed and kissed her:  
Tears once again  
Refreshed her shrunken eyes,  
Dropping like rain  
After long sultry drouth; 490  
Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,  
She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth.

Her lips began to scorch,  
That juice was wormwood to her tongue,  
She loathed the feast: 495  
Writhing as one possessed she leaped and sung,  
Rent all her robe, and wrung  
Her hands in lamentable haste,  
And beat her breast.  
Her locks streamed like the torch 500  
Borne by a racer at full speed,  
Or like the mane of horses in their flight,

Or like an eagle when she stems the light  
Straight toward the sun,  
Or like a caged thing freed, 505  
Or like a flying flag when armies run.

Swift fire spread through her veins, knocked at  
her heart,  
Met the fire smouldering there  
And overbore its lesser flame;  
She gorged on bitterness without a name: 510  
Ah! fool, to choose such part  
Of soul-consuming care!  
Sense failed in the mortal strife:  
Like the watch-tower of a town  
Which an earthquake shatters down, 515  
Like a lightning-stricken mast,  
Like a wind-uprooted tree  
Spun about,  
Like a foam-topped waterspout  
Cast down headlong in the sea, 520  
She fell at last;  
Pleasure past and aguish past,  
Is it death or is it life?

Life out of death.  
That night long Lizzie watched by her, 525  
Counted her pulse's flagging stir,  
Felt for her breath,  
Held water to her lips, and cooled her face  
With tears and fanning leaves:  
But when the first birds chirped about their eaves, 530  
And early reapers plodded to the place  
Of golden sheaves,  
And dew-wet grass  
Bowed in the morning winds so brisk to pass,  
And new buds with new day 535  
Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream,  
Laura awoke as from a dream,  
Laughed in the innocent old way,  
Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice;  
Her gleaming locks showed not one thread of grey, 540



Her breath was sweet as May  
And light danced in her eyes.

Days, weeks, months, years  
Afterwards, when both were wives  
With children of their own; 545  
Their mother-hearts beset with fears,  
Their lives bound up in tender lives;  
Laura would call the little ones  
And tell them of her early prime,  
Those pleasant days long gone 550  
Of not-returning time:  
Would talk about the haunted glen,  
The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,  
Their fruits like honey to the throat  
But poison in the blood; 555  
(Men sell not such in any town:)  
Would tell them how her sister stood  
In deadly peril to do her good,  
And win the fiery antidote:  
Then joining hands to little hands 560  
Would bid them cling together,  
'For there is no friend like a sister  
In calm or stormy weather;  
To cheer one on the tedious way,  
To fetch one if one goes astray, 565  
To lift one if one totters down,  
To strengthen whilst one stands.'

CHRISTINA GEORGINA ROSSETTI, 1830-94.

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[1] bullaces] wild plums.

[2] ratel] badger.

[3] succous] juicy.

## JUDAS ISCARIOT'S PARADISE

*De Sancto Brendando Filio Finloch*

*Qui descendunt mare in navibus,*

'Tis David the Prophet who speaketh thus,

*Vidunt opera Domini:—*

And lo, forthwith he telleth us why;

For skyward up with a sudden sweep,

Then down they are borne to the yawning deep;—

Therefore he that hath sailed in a ship can tell

Of the things of Heaven and things of Hell.

5

Saint Brendon, Abbot of Inisfail,

Listened, we read, and wept at the tale

That was told in his cell by Beryn the sage,

Of Mernoc his godson's pilgrimage:

How he sailed and sailed far away to the East,

Till he came to the land of the Lord's behest,

The promised land of the Saints, that lies

Full in front of the Gates of Paradise,

Where Enoch waits for the days of Doom

With Elias alone till the Lord shall come;—

A land of glory and life and light,

Where never is storm, nor winter, nor night,

And the air with holy wings astir,

Breathes bridal incense of balm and myrrh,

And the strands are of ruby and diamond,

With cliffs of the virgin gold beyond,

Cloven by streams from the sheeny glades

Of fair palm copses and cedarn shades,

Where the herbs are all flower and the trees all fruit—

Heaven over the head, heaven under the foot—

Where the summers fly so swift, so sweet,

So happy that none may feel them fleet;

And the child might change to the dotard gray

Ere he weened he had dwelt there a single day.

10

15

20

25

30

And Brendon the Abbot heard and wept—  
And lo that night by his couch as he slept,  
Stood one with wings, who looked to the North, 35  
And pointed two fingers, and bade—‘Go forth!’

And the Saint uprose, and two by two,  
He called twelve brothers, trusty and true;  
And, ‘Brothers,’ he said, ‘will ye sail with me,  
For the love of God and His dear Ladye?’ 40  
And, ‘Father,’ they answered, ‘all earthly good  
We have left for His sake who died on rood;  
Master art thou, and captain, and friend—  
We will sail with thee to the Mid-world’s End!’

And they prayed evermore, and kept a fast, 45  
With penance, till forty days were past;  
And dight them a ship with tackle and gear,  
And sails and anchors and helms to steer,  
And seven years’ provender, wine, and bread,  
And prayed and toiled till the whole was sped. 50

And lo, as they marched with banners before,  
And *Domine dirige* forth to the shore,  
Two brethren knelt and prayed by the road—  
‘Let us sail with you for the love of God!’  
And the Abbot said, ‘Yea, ye may sail with us, 55  
Sith Christ the Father ordaineth it thus:  
Yet, mark!—of ye twain, there is one shall flit,  
Ere the bark turn homeward, alive to the Pit!’  
So forth they sailed whither God might send,  
Were it even to fare to the Mid-world’s End. 60  
And the wind blew fair and the waves rolled bright,  
And they trusted in God and their hearts were light.

Now the marvels they met on the yeasty deep—  
Of the fiends and fish, and the Land of Sheep,  
And the fruits and the flowers and gems therein; 65  
Of the Worm of the world, hight Jascomyn,  
Who wrestles and gnashes ever again  
To grasp his tail in his teeth in vain,  
So huge, that the mariners landed awhile

On the ridge of his spine, and deemed it an isle, 70  
Till they lit them a fire, and felt it creep  
And shudder and shrink to the whirling deep;  
Of the Paradise isle, where the soft wing-beat  
Of God's white fowl maketh music sweet;  
Of the wondrous stead in the summer sea, 75  
Where the sharks lie slumbering peacefully,  
Shoaled as close as the drifted snow,  
Like a floor on the hidden strands below,  
Of beast, and man, and vision divine,  
And peril, and tempest, and holy sign; 80  
Of lands and seas in a world unknown,  
And all that they saw betwixt zone and zone,  
I pass to tell for the time would fail  
Ere complines ring to finish the tale.  
But to prove that the Psalmist's words be true 85  
When he saith in my text that the mariner crew  
Both mount to Heaven and sink to Hell,  
Ye shall hear how the same to the Saint befell.

*Incipit de Juda Iscariote.*

Mightily ever the South wind blew,  
And North, ever North, the good ship drew 90  
With the holy Brandon, and Brandon's crew.

North, ever North, till a glimmering dun  
That lighted the icebergs, one by one,  
Was all they knew of the noon-day sun.

On, through the darkness, and mist and snow, 95  
Or a grisly moonlight, that served to show  
How the sea snakes writhed in the deep below.

They heard, in the night, the icebulks crash  
With a thundering shock, and grind, and gnash,  
And the waves hiss back with a seething splash. 100

Nor anchor was cast, nor sail was furled,  
Till they neared and saw where the fringe of the world  
Its arrows of flame through the welkin hurled.

And at Christmas, so near as they could count,  
They came to an isle where a mighty mount  
Spouted fire and smoke in a blazing fount. 105

Full many a mile there was smoke on the sea,  
And the blaze ever leapt to the cloudracks free,  
Rumbling and bellowing hideously.

And one cried, ‘Satanas calls—farewell!  
For yonder mount is the mouth of Hell!’  
And they saw him no more, but heard fiends yell. 110

And northward still, on that Christmas Day  
They fared, till they saw where an iceberg lay  
On the left, and the Saint bade steer that way. 115

And they saw One, naked, sit on a stone,  
Worn by the waves to sinew and bone,  
Wringing his hands with a dolorous moan.

A long loose cloth was thonged by his chin,  
That flapped in the wind on his wet bare skin,  
And ox tongues two were tied to his shin. 120

And now in the wave, and now in the wind,  
Drenched, and pinched, and beaten, and blind,  
The wretch ever sat on his stone and pined.

And the Saint said, ‘Speak, be thou man or ghost,  
And tell what thou art, for a thing so lost  
Never greeted I yet by wave or coast!’ 125

And he answered:—‘I, ere I went to pain,  
Was the Lord’s Iscariot chamberlain,  
Judas, who sold the Christ for gain!’ 130

Then the shipmates all were aghast for fear,  
But the good Saint bade cast anchor near,  
And asked of the ghost: ‘What dost thou here?’

And Judas answered: ‘By Christ’s dear grace  
This day am I loosed from mine own due place  
With Herod and Pilate and Caiaphas; 135

‘For He whom the Gates of the Hells obey  
Each winter hath granted me here to stay  
From Christmas Eve for a night and a day.

‘And this is my Paradise, here alone 140  
To sit with my cloth and tongues and stone,  
The sole three things in the world mine own.

‘This cloth I bought from the Lord’s privy purse,  
But gave to a leper.—It hath this curse,  
That it beats on my skin, but it saves from worse. 145

‘These tongues I gave to the poor for meat  
In the name of Christ,—and the fish that eat  
Thereon as they list, forbear my feet.

‘This stone I found by a road where it lay  
And set for a step in a miry way, 150  
Therefore sit I on stone, not ice, this day!’

Then a rout of Fiends came flying amain  
With a roar and a rush like a hurricane  
To bear the Iscariot back to pain.

But their might was nought, for the Saint was nigh, 155  
And round and round with a ghastly cry  
And clapping of wings they flew harmless by.

‘Flee hence, flee hence!’ they howled and hissed:  
‘Already in Hell is its darling missed!  
Wilt thou save the traitor who sold the Christ?’ 160

And the Saint said, ‘Nay, my might is none,  
But if Jesus will that ye leave him alone  
For another night, God’s will be done!’

And they screamed and fled to their Hell once more.  
And Judas thanked Brandon o’er and o’er 165  
So piteously that all wept sore.

And they bided there through the dreary night,  
And they knew ’twas morn by a fiendish flight  
And the shriek as they fled of a tortured sprite.

And mightily, lo, the North Wind blew, 170  
And South, ever South, the good ship drew  
With the holy Brandon and Brandon's crew.

*Explicit de Juda Iscariote.*

In a year and a day Saint Brandon's sail  
Was furled in the harbour of Inisfail,  
And merrily thronged the brotherhood all, 175  
Sacristan, Cellarer, great and small,  
With welcome of laughter and welcome of tears  
For the mariner Saint and his holy peers.  
And huge was the feasting far and wide  
Through the minster lands that Christmastide. 180  
And the Saint sat at meat on the twelfth Yule-day,  
And spake of the sea and the perilous way,  
And told, with the rest, of the rock of ice,  
And Judas Iscariot's Paradise;  
And how for a night they had anchored by, 185  
Lest the fiends who waited and watched should spy.

And the Sacristan spake: ' 'Twas the very morn  
Next after the day that Christ was born,  
As I stepped in the gloaming to toll the bell  
For matins, behold, I stumbled and fell, 190  
With a broken shin and an arm bruised sore,  
On an anchor that clung by the chapel door.  
And I shouted, and, lo, at the noise of my shout,  
The half-clad brothers ran starting out;  
And there as we stood in a scared suspense, 195  
A cable, that hung from none knew whence,  
Hauled the anchor again up into the sky,  
And we deemed that we heard thy shipmates cry!'

And Saint Brandon answered: 'It well may be,  
For I deem that we sailed in that upper sea 200  
Of waters which Moyses saith were pent  
At the first o'er-arching firmament.  
For the firmament standeth fast, we know,  
'Twixt the waters above and the waters below;  
And, certes, above the sphere of the sun 205

We sailed that voyage, for day was none,  
Save a glimmer of grey in the misty air,  
Though I marvel much how the moon came there.

Yet beware how ye seek too curiously  
To fathom Creation's mystery; 210  
For Science, ye know, is the cub that is yeaned  
By human Pride to the great Arch-Fiend;  
But Faith, an Angel born in the shrine  
Of the child-like heart, by a grace Divine!  
Wherefore pray ye for faith, and the God of Love, 215  
After life's strange voyage, give rest above!  
*Ut in aeternali gaudio*  
*Benedicamus Domino!*

AMEN.

SEBASTIAN EVANS, 1830-1909.



## CONCERNING GEFFRAY TESTE NOIRE

And if you meet the Canon of Chimay,  
As going to Ortaise you well may do,  
Greet him from John of Castel Neuf, and say,  
All that I tell you, for all this is true.

This Geffray Teste Noir was a Gascon thief, 5  
Who, under shadow of the English name,  
Pilled<sup>[1]</sup> all such towns and countries as were lief  
To King Charles and St. Dennis; thought it blame

If anything escaped him; so my lord,  
The Duke of Berry, sent Sir John Bonne Lance, 10  
And other knights, good players with the sword,  
To check this thief, and give the land a chance.

Therefore we set our bastides<sup>[2]</sup> round the tower  
That Geffray held, the strong thief! like a king,  
High perch'd upon the rock of Ventadour, 15  
Hopelessly strong by Christ! it was mid spring,

When first I joined the little army there  
With ten good spears; Auvergne is hot, each day  
We sweated armed before the barrier,  
Good feats of arms were done there often—eh? 20

Your brother was slain there? I mind me now,  
A right good man-at-arms, God pardon him!  
I think 'twas Geffray smote him on the brow  
With some spiked axe, and while he totter'd, dim

About the eyes, the spear of Alleyne Roux 25  
Slipped through his camaille<sup>[3]</sup> and his throat;  
well, well!  
Alleyne is paid now; your name Alleyne too?  
Mary! how strange—but this tale I would tell—

For spite of all our bastides, damned Blackhead  
Would ride abroad whene'er he chose to ride, 30  
We could not stop him; many a burgher bled  
Dear gold all round his girdle; far and wide

The villaynes dwelt in utter misery  
'Twixt us and thief Sir Geffray; hauled this way  
By Sir Bonne Lance at one time, he gone by, 35  
Down comes this Teste Noire on another day.

And therefore they dig up the stone, grind corn,  
Hew wood, draw water, yea, they lived, in short,  
As I said just now, utterly forlorn,  
Till this our knave and blackhead was out-fought. 40

So Bonne Lance fretted, thinking of some trap  
Day after day, till on a time he said:  
'John of Newcastle, if we have good hap,  
We catch our thief in two days.' 'How?' I said.

'Why, Sir, to-day he rideth out again, 45  
Hoping to take well certain sumpter mules  
From Carcassonne, going with little train,  
Because, forsooth, he thinketh us mere fools;

'But if we set an ambush in some wood,  
He is but dead; so, Sir, take thirty spears 50  
To Verville forest, if it seem you good.'  
Then felt I like the horse in Job, who hears

The dancing trumpet sound, and we went forth;  
And my red lion on the spear-head flapped,  
As faster than the cool wind we rode North, 55  
Towards the wood of Verville; thus it happened.

We rode a soft space on that day while spies  
Got news about Sir Geffray; the red wine  
Under the road-side bush was clear; the flies,  
The dragon-flies I mind me most, did shine 60

In brighter arms than ever I put on;  
So—'Geffray,' said our spies, 'would pass that way  
Next day at sundown;' then he must be won;

And so we enter'd Verville wood next day,  
 In the afternoon; through it the highway runs, 65  
     'Twixt copses of green hazel, very thick,  
 And underneath, with glimmering of suns,  
     The primroses are happy; the dews lick  
 The soft green moss. 'Put cloths about your arms  
     Lest they should glitter; surely they will go 70  
 In a long thin line, watchful for alarms,  
     With all their carriages of booty, so—  
 'Lay down my pennon in the grass—Lord God!  
     What have we lying here? will they be cold,  
 I wonder, being so bare, above the sod, 75  
     Instead of under? This was a knight too, fold  
 'Lying on fold of ancient rusted mail;  
     No plate at all, gold rowels to the spurs,  
 And see the quiet gleam of turquoise pale  
     Along the ceinture<sup>[4]</sup>; but the long time blurs 80  
 'Even the tinder of his coat to nought,  
     Except these scraps of leather; see how white  
 The skull is, loose within the coif<sup>[5]</sup>! He fought  
     A good fight, maybe, ere he was slain quite.  
 'No armour on the legs too; strange in faith— 85  
     A little skeleton for a knight though—ah!  
 This one is bigger, truly without scathe  
     His enemies escaped not—ribs driven out far,—  
 'That must have reach'd the heart, I doubt—how now,  
     What say you, Aldovrand—a woman? why? 90  
 'Under the coif a gold wreath on the brow,  
     Yea, see the hair not gone to powder, lie,  
 'Golden, no doubt, once—yea, and very small—  
     This for a knight; but for a dame, my lord,  
 These loose-hung bones seem shapely still, and tall,— 95  
     Didst ever see a woman's bones, my lord?'

Often, God help me! I remember when

I was a simple boy, fifteen years old,  
The Jacquerie froze up the blood of men  
With their fell deeds, not fit now to be told: 100

God help again! we enter'd Beauvais town,  
Slaying them fast, whereto I help'd, mere boy  
As I was then; we gentles cut them down,  
These burners and defilers, with great joy

Reason for that, too, in the great church there 105  
These fiends had lit a fire, that soon went out,  
The church at Beauvais being so great and fair—  
My father, who was by me, gave a shout

Between a beast's howl and a woman's scream,  
Then, panting, chuckled to me: 'John, look! look! 110  
Count the dames' skeletons!' From some bad dream  
Like a man just awaked, my father shook;

And I, being faint with smelling the burnt bones,  
And very hot with fighting down the street,  
And sick of such a life, fell down, with groans 115  
My head went weakly nodding to my feet.—

—An arrow had gone through her tender throat,  
And her right wrist was broken; then I saw  
The reason why she had on that war-coat,  
Their story came out clear without a flaw; 120

For when he knew that they were being waylaid,  
He threw it over her, yea, hood and all;  
Whereby he was much hack'd, while they were stay'd  
By those their murderers; many a one did fall

Beneath his arm, no doubt, so that he clear'd 125  
Their circle, bore his death-wound out of it;  
But as they rode, some archer least afar'd  
Drew a strong bow, and thereby she was hit.

Still as he rode he knew not she was dead,  
Thought her but fainted from her broken wrist, 130  
He bound with his great leathern belt—she bled?  
Who knows! he bled too, neither was there miss'd

The beating of her heart, his heart beat well  
For both of them, till here, within this wood,  
He died scarce sorry; easy this to tell; 135  
After these years the flowers forget their blood.—

How could it be? never before that day,  
However much a soldier I might be,  
Could I look on a skeleton and say  
I care not for it, shudder not—now see, 140

Over those bones I sat and pored for hours,  
And thought, and dream'd, and still I scarce could see  
The small white bones that lay upon the flowers,  
But evermore I saw the lady; she

With her dear gentle walking leading in, 145  
By a chain of silver twined about her wrists,  
Her loving knight, mounted and arm'd to win  
Great honour for her, fighting in the lists.

O most pale face, that brings such joy and sorrow  
Into men's hearts—yea, too, so piercing sharp 150  
That joy is, that it marcheth nigh to sorrow  
For ever—like an overwinded harp.

Your face must hurt me always; pray you now,  
Doth it not hurt you too? seemeth some pain  
To hold you always, pain to hold your brow 155  
So smooth, unwrinkled ever; yea again,

Your long eyes where the lids seem like to drop,  
Would you not, lady, were they shut fast, feel  
Far merrier? there so high they will not stop,  
They are most sly to glide forth and to steal 160

Into my heart; *I kiss their soft lids there,*  
*And in green garden scarce can stop my lips*  
*From wandering on your face, but that your hair*  
*Falls down and tangles me, back my face slips.*

Or say your mouth—I saw you drink red wine 165  
Once at a feast; how slowly it sank in,  
As though you fear'd that some wild fate might twine

Within that cup, and slay you for a sin.

And when you talk your lips do arch and move  
In such wise that a language new I know 170  
Besides their sound; they quiver, too, with love  
When you are standing silent; know this, too,

I saw you kissing once, like a curved sword  
That bites with all its edge, did your lips lie,  
Curled gently, slowly, long time could afford 175  
For caught-up breathings; like a dying sigh

They gather'd up their lines and went away,  
And still kept twitching with a sort of smile,  
As likely to be weeping presently,—  
Your hands too—how I watch'd them all the while! 180

'Cry out St. Peter now,' quoth Aldovrand;  
I cried, 'St. Peter,' broke out from the wood  
With all my spears; we met them hand to hand,  
And shortly slew them; natheless, by the rood,

We caught not Blackhead then, or any day; 185  
Months after that he died at last in bed,  
From a wound pick'd up at a barrier-fray;  
That same year's end a steel bolt in the head,

And much bad living kill'd Teste Noire at last;  
John Froissart knoweth he is dead by now, 190  
No doubt, but knoweth not this tale just past;  
Perchance then you can tell him what I show.

In my new castle, down beside the Eure,  
There is a little chapel of squared stone,  
Painted inside and out; in green nook pure 195  
There did I lay them, every wearied bone;

And over it they lay, with stone-white hands  
Clasped fast together, hair made bright with gold  
This Jaques Picard, known through many lands,  
Wrought cunningly; he's dead now—I am old. 200

[1] Pilled] Robbed.

[2] bastide] temporary hut or tower erected for besieging purposes.

[3] camaille] piece of chain mail armour attached to the head-piece and protecting the neck.

[4] ceinture] girdle.

[5] coif] head covering.

# THE SON OF CROESUS

## ARGUMENT

[Croesus, King of Lydia, dreamed that he saw his son slain by an iron weapon, and though by every means he strove to avert this doom from him, yet thus it happened, for his son was slain by the hand of the man who seemed least of all likely to do the deed.]

Of Croesus tells my tale, a king of old  
In Lydia, ere the Mede fell on the land,  
A man made mighty by great heaps of gold,  
Feared for the myriads strong of heart and hand  
That 'neath his banners wrought out his command, 5  
And though his latter ending happed on ill,  
Yet first of every joy he had his fill.

Two sons he had, and one was dumb from birth;  
The other one, that Atys had to name,  
Grew up a fair youth, and of might and worth, 10  
And well it seemed the race wherefrom he came  
From him should never get reproach or shame:  
But yet no stroke he struck before his death,  
In no war-shout he spent his latest breath.

Now Croesus, lying on his bed anight, 15  
Dreamed that he saw this dear son laid a-low,  
And folk lamenting he was slain outright,  
And that some iron thing had dealt the blow;  
By whose hand guided he could nowise know,  
Or if in peace by traitors it were done, 20  
Or in some open war not yet begun.

Three times one night this vision broke his sleep,  
So that at last he rose up from his bed,  
That he might ponder how he best might keep  
The threatened danger from so dear a head; 25  
And, since he now was old enough to wed,  
The King sent men to search the lands around,  
Until some matchless maiden should be found;

That in her arms this Atys might forget



The praise of men, and fame of history, 30  
Whereby full many a field has been made wet  
With blood of men, and many a deep green sea  
Been reddened therewithal, and yet shall be;  
That her sweet voice might drown the people's praise,  
Her eyes make bright the uneventful days. 35

So when at last a wonder they had brought,  
From some sweet land down by the ocean's rim,  
Than whom no fairer could by man be thought,  
And ancient dames, scanning her limb by limb,  
Had said that she was fair enough for him, 40  
To her was Atys married with much show,  
And looked to dwell with her in bliss enow.

And in meantime afield he never went,  
Either to hunting or the frontier war,  
No dart was cast, nor any engine bent 45  
Anigh him, and the Lydian men afar  
Must rein their steeds, and the bright blossoms mar  
If they have any lust of tourney now;  
And in far meadows must they bend the bow.

And also through the palace everywhere 50  
The swords and spears were taken from the wall  
That long with honour had been hanging there,  
And from the golden pillars of the hall;  
Lest by mischance some sacred blade should fall,  
And in its falling bring revenge at last 55  
For many a fatal battle overpast.

And every day King Croesus wrought with care  
To save his dear son from that threatened end,  
And many a beast he offered up with prayer  
Unto the gods, and much of wealth did spend, 60  
That they so prayed might yet perchance defend  
That life, until at least that he were dead,  
With earth laid heavy on his unseeing head.

But in the midst even of the wedding feast  
There came a man, who by the golden hall 65  
Sat down upon the steps, and man or beast

He heeded not, but there against the wall  
He leaned his head, speaking no word at all,  
Till, with his son and son's wife, came the King,  
And then unto his gown the man did cling. 70

'What man art thou?' the King said to him then,  
'That in such guise thou prayest on thy knee;  
Hast thou some fell foe here among my men?  
Or hast thou done an ill deed unto me? 75  
Or has thy wife been carried over sea?  
Or hast thou on this day great need of gold?  
Or say, why else thou now art grown so bold.'

'O King,' he said, 'I ask no gold to-day.  
And though indeed thy greatness drew me here,  
No wrong have I that thou couldst wipe away; 80  
And nought of mine the pirate folk did bear  
Across the sea; none of thy folk I fear:  
But all the gods are now mine enemies,  
Therefore I kneel before thee on my knees.

'For as with mine own brother on a day 85  
Within the running place at home I played,  
Unwittingly I smote him such-a-way  
That dead upon the green grass he was laid;  
Half-dead myself I fled away dismayed,  
Wherefore I pray thee help me in my need, 90  
And purify my soul of this sad deed.

'If of my name and country thou wouldst know,  
In Phrygia yet my father is a king,  
Gordius, the son of Midas, rich enow  
In corn and cattle, golden cup and ring; 95  
And mine own name before I did this thing  
Was called Adrastus, whom, in street and hall,  
The slayer of his brother men now call.'

'Friend,' said the King, 'have thou no fear of me;  
For though, indeed, I am right happy now, 100  
Yet well I know this may not always be,  
And I may chance some day to kneel full low,  
And to some happy man mine head to bow

With prayers to do a greater thing than this,  
Dwell thou with us, and win again thy bliss. 105

‘For in this city men in sport and play  
Forget the trouble that the gods have sent;  
Who therewithal send wine, and many a may<sup>[1]</sup>  
As fair as she for whom the Trojan went;  
And many a dear delight besides have lent, 110  
Which, whoso is well loved of them shall keep  
Till in forgetful death he falls asleep.

‘Therefore to-morrow shall those rites be done  
That kindred blood demands that thou hast shed,  
That if the mouth of thine own mother’s son 115  
Did hap to curse thee ere he was quite dead,  
The curse may lie the lighter on thine head,  
Because the flower-crowned head of many a beast  
Has fallen voiceless in our glorious feast.’

Then did Adrastus rise and thank the King, 120  
And the next day when yet low was the sun,  
The sacrifice and every other thing  
That unto these dread rites belonged, was done;  
And there Adrastus dwelt, hated of none,  
And loved of many, and the King loved him, 125  
For brave and wise he was and strong of limb.

But chiefly amongst all did Atys love  
The luckless stranger, whose fair tales of war  
The Lydian’s heart abundantly did move,  
And much they talked of wandering out afar 130  
Some day, to lands where many marvels are,  
With still the Phrygian through all things to be  
The leader unto all felicity.

Now at this time folk came unto the King  
Who on a forest’s borders dwelling were, 135  
Wherein there roamed full many a dangerous thing,  
As wolf and wild bull, lion and brown bear;  
But chiefly in that forest was the lair  
Of a great boar that no man could withstand,  
And many a woe he wrought upon the land. 140

Since long ago that men in Calydon  
Held chase, no beast like him had once been seen.  
He ruined vineyards lying in the sun,  
After his harvesting the men must glean  
What he had left; right glad they had not been 145  
Among the tall stalks of the ripening wheat,  
The fell destroyer's fatal tusks to meet.

For often would the lonely man entrapped,  
In vain from his dire fury strive to hide  
In some thick hedge, and other whiles it happed 150  
Some careless stranger by his place would ride,  
And the tusks smote his fallen horse's side,  
And what help then to such a wretch could come  
With sword he could not draw, and far away from home?

Or else girls, sent their water-jars to fill, 155  
Would come back pale, too terrified to cry,  
Because they had but seen him from the hill;  
Or else again with side rent wretchedly,  
Some hapless damsel midst the brake would lie.  
Shortly to say, there neither man nor maid 160  
Was safe afield whether they wrought or played.

Therefore were come these dwellers by the wood  
To pray the King brave men to them to send,  
That they might live; and if he deemed it good,  
That Atys with the other knights should wend, 165  
They thought their grief the easier should have end;  
For both by gods and men they knew him loved,  
And easily by hope of glory moved.

'O Sire,' they said, 'thou know'st how Hercules  
Was not content to wait till folk asked aid, 170  
But sought the pests among their guarded trees;  
Thou know'st what name the Theban Cadmus made,  
And how the bull of Marathon was laid  
Dead on the fallows of the Athenian land,  
And how folk worshipped Atalanta's hand. 175

'Fair would thy son's name look upon the roll  
Wherein such noble deeds as this are told;

And great delight shall surely fill thy soul,  
Thinking upon his deeds when thou art old,  
And thy brave heart is waxen faint and cold: 180  
Dost thou not know, O King, how men will strive  
That they, when dead, still in their sons may live?'

He shuddered as they spoke, because he thought,  
Most certainly a winning tale is this  
To draw him from the net where he is caught, 185  
For hearts of men grow weary of all bliss;  
Nor is he one to be content with his,  
If he should hear the trumpet-blast of fame  
And far-off people calling on his name.

'Good friends,' he said, 'go, get ye back again, 190  
And doubt not I will send you men to slay  
This pest ye fear: yet shall your prayer be vain  
If ye with any other speak to-day;  
And for my son, with me he needs must stay,  
For mighty cares oppress the Lydian land. 195  
Fear not, for ye shall have a noble band.'

And with that promise they must be content,  
And so departed, having feasted well.  
And yet some god or other ere they went,  
If they were silent, this their tale must tell 200  
To more than one man; therefore it befell,  
That at last Prince Atys knew the thing,  
And came with angry eyes unto the King.

'Father,' he said, 'since when am I grown vile?'  
Since when am I grown helpless of my hands? 205  
Or else what folk, with words enwrought with guile,  
Thine ears have poisoned; that when far-off lands  
My fame might fill, by thy most strange commands  
I needs must stay within this slothful home,  
Whereto would God that I had never come? 210

'What! wilt thou take mine honour quite away?  
Wouldst thou, that, as with her I just have wed  
I sit among thy folk at end of day,  
She should be ever turning round her head

To watch some man for war apparellèd, 215  
Because he wears a sword that he may use,  
Which grace to me thou ever wilt refuse?

‘Or dost thou think, when thou hast run thy race  
And thou art gone, and in thy stead I reign,  
The people will do honour to my place, 220  
Or that the lords leal men will still remain,  
If yet my father’s sword be sharp in vain?  
If on the wall his armour still hang up,  
While for a spear I hold a drinking-cup?’

‘O Son!’ quoth Croesus, ‘well I know thee brave, 225  
And worthy of high deeds of chivalry;  
Therefore the more thy dear life would I save,  
Which now is threatened by the gods on high;  
Three times one night I dreamed I saw thee die,  
Slain by some deadly iron-pointed thing, 230  
While weeping lords stood round thee in a ring.’

Then loud laughed Atys, and he said again,  
‘Father, and did this ugly dream tell thee  
What day it was on which I should be slain?  
As may the gods grant I may one day be, 235  
And not from sickness die right wretchedly,  
Groaning with pain, my lords about my bed  
Wishing to God that I were fairly dead;

‘But slain in battle, as the Lydian kings 240  
Have died ere now, in some great victory,  
While all about the Lydian shouting rings  
Death to the beaten foemen as they fly.  
What death but this, O father! should I die?  
But if my life by iron shall be done,  
What steel to-day shall glitter in the sun? 245

‘Yea, father, if to thee it seemeth good  
To keep me from the bright steel-bearing throng,  
Let me be brave at least within the wood;  
For surely, if thy dream be true, no wrong  
Can hap to me from this beast’s tushes strong: 250  
Unless perchance the beast is grown so wise,

He haunts the forest clad in Lydian guise.'

Then Croesus said: 'O Son, I love thee so,  
That thou shalt do thy will upon this tide:  
But since unto this hunting thou must go, 255  
A trusty friend along with thee shall ride,  
Who not for anything shall leave thy side.  
I think, indeed, he loves thee well enow  
To thrust his heart 'twixt thee and any blow.

'Go then, O Son, and if by some short span 260  
Thy life be measured, how shall it harm thee,  
If while life last thou art a happy man?  
And thou art happy; only unto me  
Is trembling left, and infelicity:  
The trembling of the man who loves on earth; 265  
But unto thee is hope and present mirth.

'Nay, be thou not ashamed, for on this day  
I fear not much: thou read'st my dream aright,  
No teeth or claws shall take thy life away.  
And it may chance, ere thy last glorious fight, 270  
I shall be blinded by the endless night;  
And brave Adrastus on this day shall be  
Thy safeguard, and shall give good heart to me.

'Go then, and send him hither, and depart;  
And as the heroes did, so mayst thou do, 275  
Winning such fame as well may please thine heart.'  
With that word from the King did Atys go,  
Who, left behind, sighed, saying, 'May it be so,  
Even as I hope; and yet I would to God  
These men upon my threshold ne'er had trod.' 280

So when Adrastus to the King was come  
He said unto him, 'O my Phrygian friend,  
We in this land have given thee a home,  
And 'gainst all foes thy life will we defend:  
Wherefore for us that life thou shouldest spend, 285  
If any day there should be need therefor;  
And now a trusty friend I need right sore.

‘Doubtless ere now thou hast heard many say  
There is a doom that threatens my son’s life;  
Therefore this place is stript of arms to-day, 290  
And therefore still bides Atys with his wife,  
And tempts not any god by raising strife;  
Yet none the less by no desire of his,  
To whom would war be most abundant bliss.

‘And since to-day some glory he may gain 295  
Against a monster bestial enemy  
And that the meaning of my dream is plain;  
That saith that he by steel alone shall die,  
His burning wish I may not well deny,  
Therefore afield to-morrow doth he wend 300  
And herein mayst thou show thyself my friend—

‘For thou as captain of his band shalt ride,  
And keep a watchful eye of everything,  
Nor leave him, whatsoever may betide,  
Lo, thou art brave, the son of a great king, 305  
And with thy praises doth this city ring,  
Why should I tell thee what a name those gain,  
Who dying for their friends, die not in vain?’

Then said Adrastus, ‘Now were I grown base  
Beyond all words, if I should spare for aught 310  
In guarding him; so sit with smiling face,  
And of this matter take no further thought,  
Because with my life shall his life be bought,  
If ill should hap; and no ill fate it were,  
If I should die for what I hold so dear.’ 315

Then went Adrastus, and next morn all things  
That ’longed unto the hunting were well dight,  
And forth they went clad as the sons of kings.  
Fair was the morn, as through the sunshine bright  
They rode, the Prince half wild with great delight, 320  
The Phrygian smiling on him soberly,  
And ever looking round with watchful eye.

So through the city all the rout rode fast,  
With many a great black-muzzled yellow hound;



And then the teeming country-side they passed, 325  
Until they came to sour and rugged ground,  
And there rode up a little heathy mound,  
That overlooked the scrubby woods and low,  
That of the beast's lair somewhat they might know.

And there a good man of the country-side 330  
Showed them the places where he mostly lay;  
And they descending, through the wood did ride,  
And followed on his tracks for half the day.  
And at the last they brought him well to bay,  
Within an oozy space amidst the wood, 335  
About the which a ring of alders stood.

So when the hounds' changed voices clear they heard,  
With hearts aflame on towards him straight they drew,  
Atys the first of all, of nought afeard,  
Except that folk should say some other slew 340  
The beast; and lustily his horn he blew,  
Going afoot; then, mighty spear in hand,  
Adrastus headed all the following band.

Now when they came unto the plot of ground  
Where stood the boar, hounds dead about him lay 345  
Or sprawled about, bleeding from many a wound,  
But still the others held him well at bay,  
Nor had he been bestead thus ere that day.  
But yet, seeing Atys, straight he rushed at him,  
Speckled with foam, bleeding in flank and limb. 350

Then Atys stood and cast his well-steeled spear  
With a great shout, and straight and well it flew;  
For now the broad blade cutting through the ear,  
A stream of blood from out the shoulder drew.  
And therewithal another, no less true, 355  
Adrastus cast, whereby the boar had died:  
But Atys drew the bright sword from his side,

And to the tottering beast he drew anigh:  
But as the sun's rays ran adown the blade  
Adrastus threw a javelin hastily, 360  
For of the mighty beast was he afraid,

Lest by his wounds he should not yet be stayed,  
But with a last rush cast his life away,  
And dying there, the son of Croesus slay.

But even as the feathered dart he hurled, 365  
His strained, despairing eyes beheld the end,  
And changed seemed all the fashion of the world,  
And past and future into one did blend,  
As he beheld the fixed eyes of his friend,  
That no reproach had in them, and no fear, 370  
For Death had seized him ere he thought him near.

Adrastus shrieked, and running up he caught  
The falling man, and from his bleeding side  
Drew out the dart, and seeing that death had brought  
Deliverance to him, he thereby had died; 375  
But ere his hand the luckless steel could guide,  
And he the refuge of poor souls could win,  
The horror-stricken huntsmen had rushed in.

And these, with blows and cries he heeded nought,  
His unresisting hands made haste to bind; 380  
Then of the alder-boughs a bier they wrought,  
And laid the corpse thereon, and 'gan to wind  
Homeward amidst the tangled wood and blind,  
And going slowly, at the eventide,  
Some leagues from Sardis did that day abide. 385

Onward next morn the slaughtered man they bore,  
With him that slew him, and at end of day  
They reached the city, and with mourning sore  
Toward the King's palace did they take their way.  
He in an open western chamber lay 390  
Feasting, though inwardly his heart did burn  
Until that Atys should to him return.

And when those wails first smote upon his ear  
He set the wine-cup down, and to his feet  
He rose, and bitter all-consuming fear 395  
Swallowed his joy, and nigh he went to meet  
That which was coming through the weeping street:  
But in the end he thought it good to wait,

And stood there doubting all the ills of fate.

But when at last up to that royal place 400  
Folk brought the thing he once had held so dear,  
Still stood the King, staring with a ghastly face  
As they brought forth Adrastus and the bier,  
But spoke at last, slowly without a tear,  
'O Phrygian man, that I did purify, 405  
Is it through thee that Atys came to die?'

'O King,' Adrastus said, 'take now my life,  
With whatso torment seemeth good to thee,  
As my word went, for I would end this strife,  
And underneath the earth lie quietly; 410  
Nor is it my will here alive to be:  
For as my brother, so Prince Atys died,  
And this unlucky hand some god did guide.'

Then as a man constrained, the tale he told 415  
From end to end, nor spared himself one whit:  
And as he spoke, the wood did still behold,  
The trodden grass, and Atys dead on it;  
And many a change o'er the King's face did flit  
Of kingly rage, and hatred and despair,  
As on the slayer's face he still did stare. 420

At last he said, 'Thy death avails me nought,  
The gods themselves have done this bitter deed,  
That I was all too happy was their thought,  
Therefore thy heart is dead and mine doth bleed, 425  
And I am helpless as a trodden weed:  
Thou art but as the handle of the spear,  
The caster sits far off from any fear.

'Yet, if thy hurt they meant, I can do this,—  
—Loose him and let him go in peace from me—  
I will not slay the slayer of all my bliss; 430  
Yet go, poor man, for when thy face I see  
I curse the gods for their felicity.  
Surely some other slayer they would have found,  
If thou hadst long ago been under ground.

‘Alas, Adrastus! in my inmost heart  
I knew the gods would one day do this thing  
But deemed indeed that it would be thy part  
To comfort me amidst my sorrowing;  
Make haste to go, for I am still a King!  
Madness may take me, I have many hands  
Who will not spare to do my worst commands.’

With that Adrastus’ bonds were done away,  
And forthwith to the city gates he ran,  
And on the road where they had been that day  
Rushed through the gathering night; and some lone man  
Beheld next day his visage wild and wan,  
Peering from out a thicket of the wood  
Where he had spilt that well-belovéd blood.

And now the day of burial pomp must be,  
And to those rites all lords of Lydia came  
About the King, and that day, they and he  
Cast royal gifts of rich things on the flame;  
But while they stood and wept, and called by name  
Upon the dead, amidst them came a man  
With raiment rent, and haggard face and wan:

Who when the marshals would have thrust him out  
And men looked strange on him, began to say,  
‘Surely the world is changed since ye have doubt  
Of who I am; nay, turn me not away,  
For ye have called me princely ere to-day—  
Adrastus, son of Gordius, a great king,  
Where unto Pallas Phrygian maidens sing.

‘O Lydians, many a rich thing have ye cast  
Into this flame, but I myself will give  
A greater gift, since now I see at last  
The gods are wearied for that still I live,  
And with their will, why should I longer strive?  
Atys, O Atys, thus I give to thee  
A life that lived for thy felicity.’

And therewith from his side a knife he drew,  
And, crying out, upon the pile he leapt,

And with one mighty stroke himself he slew.  
So there these princes both together slept,  
And their light ashes, gathered up, were kept  
Within a golden vessel wrought all o'er  
With histories of this hunting of the boar.

475

WILLIAM MORRIS, 1834-96.

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[1] may] maiden.

## THE DELIVERY OF ISEULT

For the knight  
Forth, was once ridden toward some frontier fight  
Against the lewd folk of the Christless lands  
That warred with wild and intermittent hands  
Against the king's north border; and there came 5  
A knight unchristened yet of unknown name,  
Swart Palamede, upon a secret quest,  
To high Tintagel, and abode as guest  
In likeness of a minstrel with the king.  
Nor was there man could sound so sweet a string, 10  
Save Tristram only, of all held best on earth.  
And one loud eve, being full of wine and mirth,  
Ere sunset left the walls and waters dark,  
To that strange minstrel strongly swore King Mark,  
By all that makes a knight's faith firm and strong, 15  
That he for guerdon of his harp and song  
Might crave and have his liking. Straight there came  
Up the swart cheek a flash of swarthier flame,  
And the deep eyes fulfilled of glittering night  
Laughed out in lightnings of triumphant light 20  
As the grim harper spake: 'O king, I crave  
No gift of man that king may give to slave,  
But this thy crowned queen only, this thy wife,  
Whom yet unseen I loved, and set my life  
On this poor chance to compass, even as here, 25  
Being fairer famed than all save Guenevere.'  
Then as the noise of seaward storm that mocks  
With roaring laughter from reverberate rocks  
The cry from ships near shipwreck, harsh and high  
Rose all the wrath and wonder in one cry 30  
Through all the long roof's hollow depth and length  
That hearts of strong men kindled in their strength  
May speak in laughter lion-like, and cease,  
Being wearied: only two men held their peace

And each glared hard on other: but King Mark 35  
Spake first of these: 'Man, though thy craft be dark  
And thy mind evil that begat this thing,  
Yet stands the word once plighted of a king  
Fast: and albeit less evil it were for me  
To give my life up than my wife, or be 40  
A landless man crowned only with a curse,  
Yet this in God's and all men's sight were worse,  
To live soul-shamed, a man of broken troth,  
Abhorred of men as I abhor mine oath  
Which yet I may forswear not.' And he bowed 45  
His head, and wept: and all men wept aloud,  
Save one, that heard him weeping: but the queen  
Wept not: and statelier yet than eyes had seen  
That ever looked upon her queenly state  
She rose, and in her eyes her heart was great 50  
And full of wrath seen manifest and scorn  
More strong than anguish to go thence forlorn  
Of all men's comfort and her natural right.  
And they went forth into the dawn of night.  
Long by wild ways and clouded light they rode, 55  
Silent; and fear less keen at heart abode  
With Iseult than with Palamede: for awe  
Constrained him, and the might of love's high law,  
That can make lewd men loyal; and his heart  
Yearned on her, if perchance with amorous art 60  
And soothfast skill of very love he might  
For courtesy find favour in her sight  
And comfort of her mercies: for he wist  
More grace might come of that sweet mouth unkissed  
Than joy for violence done it, that should make 65  
His name abhorred for shame's disloyal sake.  
And in the stormy starlight clouds were thinned  
And thickened by short gusts of changing wind  
That panted like a sick man's fitful breath:  
And like a moan of lions hurt to death 70  
Came the sea's hollow noise along the night.  
But ere its gloom from aught but foam had light  
They halted, being aweary: and the knight  
As reverently forbore her where she lay  
As one that watched his sister's sleep till day. 75

Nor durst he kiss or touch her hand or hair  
For love and shamefast pity, seeing how fair  
She slept, and fenceless from the fitful air.  
And shame at heart stung nigh to death desire,  
But grief at heart burned in him like a fire 80  
For hers and his own sorrowing sake, that had  
Such grace for guerdon as makes glad men sad,  
To have their will and want it. And the day  
Sprang: and afar along the wild waste way  
They heard the pulse and press of hurrying horse hoofs play: 85  
And like the rushing of a ravenous flame  
Whose wings make tempest of the darkness, came  
Upon them headlong as in thunder borne  
Forth of the darkness of the labouring morn  
Tristram: and up forthright upon his steed 90  
Leapt, as one blithe of battle, Palamede,  
And mightily with shock of horse and man  
They lashed together: and fair that fight began  
As fair came up that sunrise: to and fro,  
With knees nigh staggered and stout heads bent low 95  
From each quick shock of spears on either side,  
Reeled the strong steeds heavily, haggard-eyed  
And heartened high with passion of their pride  
As sheer the stout spears shocked again, and flew  
Sharp-splintering: then, his sword as each knight drew, 100  
They flashed and foined<sup>[1]</sup> full royally, so long  
That but to see so fair a strife and strong  
A man might well have given out of his life  
One year's void space forlorn of love or strife.  
As when a bright north-easter, great of heart, 105  
Scattering the strengths of squadrons, hurls apart  
Ship from ship labouring violently, in such toil  
As earns but ruin—with even so strong recoil  
Back were the steeds hurled from the spear-shock, fain  
And foiled of triumph: then with tightened rein 110  
And stroke of spur, inveterate, either knight  
Bore in again upon his foe with might,  
Heart-hungry for the hot-mouthed feast of fight  
And all athirst of mastery: but full soon  
The jarring notes of that tempestuous tune 115  
Fell, and its mighty music made of hands



Contending, clamorous through the loud waste lands,  
Broke at once off; and shattered from his steed  
Fell, as a mainmast ruining, Palamede,  
Stunned: and those lovers left him where he lay,  
And lightly through green lawns they rode away.

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ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE, 1837-1909.

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[1] foined] thrust.

## HEATHER ALE

### *A Galloway Legend*

From the bonny bells of heather  
They brewed a drink long-syne,  
Was sweeter far than honey,  
Was stronger far than wine.  
They brewed it and they drank it, 5  
And lay in a blessed swound  
For days and days together  
In their dwellings underground.

There rose a king in Scotland,  
A fell man to his foes, 10  
He smote the Picts in battle,  
He hunted them like roes.  
Over miles of the red mountain  
He hunted as they fled,  
And strewed the dwarfish bodies 15  
Of the dying and the dead.

Summer came in the country,  
Red was the heather bell;  
But the manner of the brewing  
Was none alive to tell. 20  
In the graves that were like children's  
On many a mountain head,  
The Brewsters of the Heather  
Lay numbered with the dead.

The king in the red moorland 25  
Rode on a summer's day;  
And the bees hummed, and the curlews  
Cried beside the way.  
The king rode, and was angry,  
Black was his brow and pale, 30

To rule in a land of heather  
And lack the Heather Ale.

It fortune'd that his vassals,  
Riding free on the heath,  
Came on a stone that was fallen 35  
And vermin hid beneath.

Rudely plucked from their hiding,  
Never a word they spoke:  
A son and his aged father—  
Last of the dwarfish folk. 40

The king sat high on his charger,  
He looked on the little men;  
And the dwarfish and swarthy couple  
Looked at the king again.  
Down by the shore he had them; 45  
And there on the giddy brink—  
'I will give you life, ye vermin,  
For the secret of the drink.'

There stood the son and father  
And they looked high and low; 50  
The heather was red around them,  
The sea rumbled below.  
And up and spoke the father,  
Shrill was his voice to hear:  
'I have a word in private, 55  
A word for the royal ear.

'Life is dear to the aged,  
And honour a little thing;  
I would gladly sell the secret,'  
Quoth the Pict to the King. 60  
His voice was small as a sparrow's,  
And shrill and wonderful clear:  
'I would gladly sell my secret,  
Only my son I fear.

'For life is a little matter, 65  
And death is nought to the young;  
And I dare not sell my honour

Under the eye of my son.  
Take him, O king, and bind him,  
And cast him far in the deep: 70  
And it's I will tell the secret  
That I have sworn to keep.'

They took the son and bound him,  
Neck and heels in a thong,  
And a lad took him and swung him 75  
And flung him far and strong,  
And the sea swallowed his body,  
Like that of a child of ten;—  
And there on the cliff stood the father,  
Last of the dwarfish men. 80

'True was the word I told you:  
Only my son I feared;  
For I doubt the sapling courage  
That goes without the beard.  
But now in vain is the torture, 85  
Fire shall never avail:  
Here dies in my bosom  
The secret of Heather Ale.'

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, 1850-94.

## NOTES

### ALFRED TENNYSON

BORN at Somersby, Lincolnshire, on 6 August 1809. At Cambridge he won the chancellor's medal for English verse; his first volume was published in 1830. It was not until 1842, however, that his reputation was secured by the issue of *Poems* (in two volumes), which contains some of his finest work. *The Princess* appeared in 1847, and was followed in 1850 by *In Memoriam*, a poem caused by the death of his friend Arthur Hallam (in 1833). In the same year he was made Laureate. In 1859 began the publication of the *Idylls of the King*, a series of blank verse poems on the Arthurian cycle of legends. He continued to write until his death on 6 October 1892.

P. 11. *Morte D'Arthur*. The poem as given here formed part of a longer poem *The Epic*. Tennyson afterwards (1869) removed it from its setting, added another 145 lines, and made it the concluding Idyll. It is concerned with the last battle which Arthur fought, between himself and the rebel knights under Modred. In the symbolism of the *Idylls*, where Arthur represents the soul, this battle is the time of the death of the body and the passage of the soul into darkness.

The Arthurian stories form one of the great groups of medieval tales, and attracted to themselves the other groups of the Grail and Iseult themes until the whole formed one magnificent cycle. The best and most popular expression of it in English literature is the *Morte D'Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory (c. 1470). Tennyson chose and adapted incidents from this for his own purposes.

l. 4. *Lyonnesse*: a name given to the submerged land beyond Cornwall, of which the Scilly Isles only remain above water, but also generally to the western dominions of Arthur's kingdom.

l. 6. *Sir Bedivere*: one of the knights of the Table; in some accounts he was the King's butler.

l. 21. *Camelot*: the city of Arthur, built by Merlin. Malory identified it with Winchester.

l. 23. *Merlin*: one of the most famous magicians of romance, and the King's friend and councillor.

P. 14, l. 104. *maiden of the Lake*: the Lady of the Lake is one of those personages who move in mystery through the Arthurian story. Her office and deeds vary in different accounts, but she is always beautiful and faerie.

P. 16, l. 198. *Three Queens*: Malory says that the three were Arthur's sister, Morgan le Fay; the Queen of Northgalis; and the Queen of the Waste Lands.

P. 17, l. 233. *The holy Elders*: the wise men who came to the birth of Christ (St. Matthew ii. 11).

P. 18, l. 259. *Avilion*: the name apparently comes from the British name for Glastonbury, Ynys yr Avallon, the island of apples; but here it is of course a place of physical and spiritual healing.

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Born at Portland, Maine, U.S.A., on 27 February 1807. After travelling for three years in Europe he was appointed to the Chair of Modern Languages, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine; and afterwards to a similar chair at Harvard. He resigned this in 1854 to devote himself to writing. He died at Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1882. His popularity was, and has remained, immense; his poetry is limited but actual.

*The Saga of King Olaf* is taken from the *Heimskringla*, a chronicle-history of the Norse kings. Olaf (956-1000) reigned from 996 and converted the land to Christianity by force.

P. 20, heading: *King Svend*: King of Denmark (986-1014), who had married Sigrid the Haughty of Sweden. A meeting—with a view to marriage—had taken place at an earlier date between Sigrid and Olaf, but the queen had refused to become a Christian, and Olaf had struck her in the face with his glove. The story is given in section XVII of the complete poem.

l. 4. *Vendland*: the southern seaboard on the Baltic.

l. 5. *courses hauled*: directions changed.

l. 7. *Isle of Svald*: identification is not possible.

l. 9. *Queen Gunhild*: Svend's former wife, whom he had been forced to marry.

l. 12. *Sigrid the Haughty*: see note on the heading.

P. 21, l. 42. *Thing*: meeting of the chief men.

l. 45. *Eric the Norseman*: son of Earl Haakon, who had been mighty in Norway till he was overthrown and slain by Olaf.

l. 48. *Finmark*: a northern province of Norway.

l. 53. *Earl Sigvald*: one of King Svend's nobles, and brother-in-law to King Olaf's wife. He made friends with Olaf in order to lead him into the ambush.

P. 22, l. 68. *Stet-haven*: the North German bay into which the Oder flows.

P. 24, l. 123. *Regnarock*: the day of the final things. See Note on p. 185, ll. 549-58.

l. 136. *Serpent*: Olaf's ship was called *The Long Serpent*, and was said to be the best ship ever made in Norway.

l. 143. *Ulf the Red*: Olaf's standard-bearer.

l. 175. *Hakon Jarl*: Hakon the Earl.

P. 26, heading: *Einar Tamberskelver*: a famous archer, and one of Olaf's household. He was only eighteen years old.

l. 189. *Eyvind Skaldaspiller*: a Scandinavian poet.

P. 27, l. 225. *Kämper*: warrior.

P. 28, l. 256. *Kolbiorn*: King Olaf's marshal, a handsome man, who was rescued and brought before Earl Eric, but not put to death.

P. 29, l. 266. *Orkadale*: a forest of central Norway, on the Orka River.

## SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON

Born 10 March 1810 in Belfast. He was called to the Irish Bar in 1838, but in 1867 he retired from practice on his appointment as deputy keeper of the public records of Ireland; for his services in this office he was knighted in 1878. He was an antiquarian of repute, and produced a good deal of prose and verse dealing with the old Irish tales of heroes and saints, of which the poem that follows is one of the best. In 1882 he was elected president of the Royal Irish Academy; he died at Howth, in the county of Dublin, on 9 August 1886.

P. 31, l. 5. *Mr. W. M. Hennessy*: William Maunsell Hennessy, Irish scholar, 1829-89.

l. 7. *Togail*: Destruction.

1. 11. *Mr. Crowe*: O'Beirne Crowe, an Irish scholar of the nineteenth century.

1. 23. *Procop. de bell. Pers.*: Procopius, a Greek historian c. 500-65. He wrote, among other works, two books *de bello Persico*, *On the Persian War*.

1. 30. *μαίνεται*, etc.: lit. 'went mad in the palms of the hands', 'saw red'.

1. 33. *Tara*: in Meath, the old centre of Ireland, a royal residence and the place of popular meetings.

P. 32. *Book of Howth*: an Irish MS. chronicle now in the library of Lambeth Palace.

*Balrothery*: in Co. Dublin.

*Balbriggan*: a seaport 22 miles north of Dublin.

1. 1. *Conary*: one of the heroic and mythological kings of Ireland.

1. 3. *Don Dessa*: a famous warrior, whose great grandsons were foster-brothers to the king. They became marauders and were exiled.

1. 14. *Ingcel*: Ingcel the One-eyed, said to be the son of the King of Britain. He had only one eye, which contained three pupils.

1. 15. *Alba*: Scotland.

P. 33, l. 30. *Thomond*: County Clare, a principality of Munster.

1. 40. *Beltane-day*: the feast of Beltane appears to have been divided into three periods—May Day, Midsummer Day, and All Souls Day.

1. 51. *Street Midluachra and Street Cualann*: see Introductory Note, p. 31.

1. 57. *Clane-Milcarna*: a district in the north-east of Ireland.

P. 35, l. 97. *Emain*: Emain Macha, now Naran Rath, the capital of ancient Ulster.

P. 36, l. 150. *Ben-Edar*: on the coast of Ireland, near Howth.

P. 37, l. 169. *apparitors*: heralds, ushers.

P. 38, l. 206. *Troy Furveen*: Tracht Fuirbthen or Muirbthen, i. e. Merrion Strand on the Dublin coast.

P. 39, l. 239. *Taltin*: Teltown, Co. Meath.

P. 40, l. 274. *Cormac Condlongas*: son of the high king Conchobar, who for the love of Deirdre broke the safe-conduct and caused her husband to be slain.

1. 282. *Maeve*: Queen of Connaught.



P. 43, l. 374. *Tuath De Danaan*: strictly, people of the god of Dana, the gods of day, light, and life; but colloquially the fairy people.

P. 44, l. 391. *Smith Wayland*: Wayland Smith was a mythical shoer of horses and worker in iron and steel, whose work was faerie.

*Lochlann*: Scandinavia.

P. 45, ll. 409, 413. The heroes of the Red Branch, so called from the Redbranch Hall at Emain Macha, were the paladins or round table of the old Irish heroic cycle, the most celebrated of them being the young Cuchullin.

P. 47, ll. 502-3. *butchered*: in the compact between Ingcel and the Irish exiles the first pirate raid was made on Britain and in the fighting Ingcel's father and brothers were killed.

P. 54, l. 717. *Brierin Conaill*: the shield of Conaill.

P. 57, l. 796. *Tiprad-Casra*: the well of Casair, an unidentified spring, near Bohernabreena, Co. Dublin.

## WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

Born at Calcutta on 18 July 1811, the son of a secretary of the East India Company. After leaving Cambridge he read some law, but by 1837 he was making a living by literary hack-work. In 1842 he became a contributor to *Punch* (which had been started in the previous year), and achieved his first marked success by *The Snob Papers*, published in it in 1846. The great novels which established his position appeared from 1847 to 1855. He died on 21 December 1863. His verse in general is negligible, but an occasional poem has a lightness which is worth enjoying.

P. 62, l. 1. *Brentford*: a town in Middlesex.

P. 63, l. 39. *Little-go*: the first examination for the degree of B.A.; *Great-go*: the final examination for the same degree.

l. 51. *stiver*: originally a small Dutch silver coin, now meaning any of small value.

P. 65, l. 96. *catafalque*: a marble structure to carry a coffin, a movable hearse.

l. 106. *tax*: challenge, dispute.

P. 68, l. 187. *lease and copyholds*: estates held by different kinds of tenure.

l. 188. *tenements*: freehold possessions such as houses.

P. 69, l. 237. *intendant*: manager, steward.

P. 70, l. 250. *Chiswick, &c.*: suburbs of London.

## ROBERT BROWNING

Born in Southampton Street, Camberwell, London, on 7 May 1812. He had no profession but poetry, nor any rivals to it in his mind, since his wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, was its ratification, as it was hers. He married her in 1846, and eloped with her seven days after the marriage. Browning's life was spent mostly in Italy or in England, and he died, twenty-eight years after Elizabeth, in Venice on 12 December 1889. He rivalled Tennyson in reputation, though his was for a subtlety of thought which perhaps time has not quite justified. His greatest poem, the *Ring and the Book* (1868), was (unusually enough) the one that insured his triumph.

### THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS.

P. 73, ll. 86-7. *Moldavia . . . Cotnar*: wines from Roumania.

P. 78, l. 245. *scallop*: a shell-fish, a rounded projection.

P. 79, l. 249. *Venerers, Prickers, and Verderers*: various names for huntsmen, yeomen in attendance, and forest officials.

P. 80, l. 293. *sewer*: an attendant at meals, a steward.

P. 81, l. 322. *canon*: a musical composition in which the various parts are taken up one after the other.

l. 327. *Nero*: A.D. 37-68, emperor of Rome, 54-68; *Saladin*, 1138-93, was sultan of Egypt 1175, became the leader of Islam through Syria and destroyed the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. He is one of the traditional chivalrous heroes of romance. The Duke's anxiety to form his face after his or Nero's type was presumably only to express the same unquestioned sovereignty which those great princes exercised.

l. 334. *pricker*: see note on l. 249.

P. 84, l. 420. *pine-martin*: a small animal of the weasel kind.

P. 88, l. 558. *prose*: the word was used originally for a piece of rhythmical prose sung in church between the epistle and the gospel.

P. 95, l. 792. *spare-rib*: upper part of ribs.

l. 793. *Carib*: an aboriginal inhabitant of southern West Indies.

P. 97, l. 851. *ventricle*: a hollow chamber in the heart.

P. 98, l. 884. *Methusalem*: Methuselah, according to Genesis v. 21, begat Lamech at the age of 187 years, and afterwards ‘sons and daughters’, but there is no mention of any son of the name of Saul.

l. 886. *sperm oil*: oil from a particular kind of whale, used for candles and ointments.

P. 99, l. 907. *Jacob*: the reference is to the story in Genesis xxvii. 6-40. ‘Smooth’ both physically (see verse 11) and because of his plausibility.

l. 910. *Orson*: one of the heroes of the medieval tale of Valentine and Orson. He was suckled by a bear, became the terror of France, and was known as the Wild Man of the Forest.

#### DONALD.

P. 99, l. 12. *Glenlivet*: a Scotch whisky.

P. 100, l. 16. *Royal*: a stag having antlers of twelve points or more.

l. 22. *Havanna*: a cigar made in Cuba, a West Indian island, from the name of the capital.

l. 42. *Double-First*: first-class University honours in two subjects.

*what, the jigger*: an exclamation used in Victorian days as a substitute for an oath.

P. 103, l. 133. *volte-face*: a right about face.

l. 136. *Blondin*: the pseudonym of Jean-François Gravelet, a noted tightrope walker (1824-97).

P. 106, ll. 207-8. *Goliath . . . David*: I Samuel xvii.

P. 107, l. 232. *Tory*: an epithet originally applied to the King’s party in politics as opposed to the aristocratic; hence, a supporter of traditional things; hence, a sound fellow, which seems to be the meaning Browning, from his need for a rhyme, imposed upon it here.

l. 234. *Homer*: the hypothetical author of the two oldest Greek poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

#### WILLIAM BELL SCOTT

Born on 12 September 1811, at St. Leonards, Edinburgh. In 1837 he came to London and supported himself by etching, engraving, and painting, till in 1843 he received a mastership in the government schools of design at Newcastle-on-Tyne. On his return to London in 1864 he renewed his acquaintance with the chief literary and artistic circles, especially with

Rossetti and his group. He died on 22 November 1890, at Penhill Castle, Ayrshire, where he had painted a series of designs illustrating the 'King's Quhair' (see note on p. 222, title).

P. 108, l. 24. *groat*: small silver coin worth about fourpence.

P. 110, l. 69. *Lombard*: a native of Lombardy, a district of North Italy conquered in the 6th century by Germanic invaders.

P. 111, l. 99. *Blackamoor*: in the records of sorcery, the devil often appeared to the witch (actual or elect) as a tall black man.

## CHARLES KINGSLEY

Born on 12 June 1819 at Holne Vicarage, Devonshire. He was ordained in 1842 to the curacy of Eversley, Hampshire; became vicar there in 1844, and died there on 23 January 1875. In 1860 he was professor of history at Cambridge; in 1869 he was canon of Chester and in 1873 of Westminster. He was one of the leaders of the 'Christian Socialist' movement for reform, and certain of his novels (*Yeast* and *Alton Locke*) are full of this spirit. Others are concerned with historic conflicts between Paganism and Christianity in Alexandria, between Spain and England in the Elizabethan age, between Normans and Saxons at the time of the Conquest. His verse is less attractive, except in one or two short lyrics and in the poem which follows.

P. 113, l. 1. *Crete*: one of the largest islands of the Mediterranean.

l. 4. *Olympus*: a mountain in Thessaly on the summit of which, according to the Greek myths, were the dwelling-places of the gods.

l. 5. *Zeus*: chief of the gods, according to Greek myth. He was saved from his father Saturn by his mother and hidden on mount Ida in Crete, where he was nourished by milk from the goat Amalthea. Afterwards he overthrew his father and divided the universe between himself and his two brothers: hell to Pluto, the sea to Poseidon, and earth and heaven to himself.

*Pallas Athené*: holy and virginal goddess of wisdom.

l. 7. *Hermes*: the messenger of the gods, and the patron of travellers, shepherds, orators, and thieves. He conducted the souls of the dead to the shores of the river Styx, beyond which was the place of shades.

*Apollo*: the god of the sun, medicine, and poetry.

l. 10. *Phoenics*: the Phoenicians, a country to the north of Palestine, whose inhabitants were the greatest navigators and traders of the ancient

world.

l. 12. *Poseidon*: the brother of Zeus, who in the division of the universe between the three, received the ocean for his dominion.

P. 114, l. 17. *worms*: crocodiles.

P. 115, l. 34. *Aethiop*: Aethiopia lay to the south of Egypt, and was reported to be the home of the first inhabitants of the earth. Men and women were alike dark in colour, but the men were just and the women beautiful.

l. 37. *Hera*: or Hera, sister and wife of Zeus, chief of the goddesses and queen of heaven.

l. 39. *Hephaestos*: a lame god, patron of all who worked in metal; his forge was reputed to be under the volcano Etna (see note on l. 441). His name among the Romans was Vulcan.

l. 46. *Atergati*: Atargates, a Syrian fish-goddess.

P. 121, l. 138. *Nereus*: one of the lesser sea-gods.

l. 141. *Tritons*: dwellers in the sea, who had the form half of man and half of fish.

P. 127, l. 253. *Amphitrité*: the wife of Neptune.

*Cythereia*: a name given to Aphrodite (see note on l. 369), from the island Cythera near Greece, where the goddess first rose from the sea.

P. 128, l. 263. *Argos*: one of the great cities of the heroic age in Greek mythology.

P. 130, l. 307. *Titan*: a name given to an ancient race of giants, the enemies of the gods.

*Proteus*: one of the lesser sea-gods, who had the gift of prophecy.

P. 131, l. 310. *the third of the world*: see note on l. 12.

P. 133, l. 345. *the Aegis-wielder*: the *Aegis* was the shield of Zeus, covered with the skin of the goat Amalthea, by whom he had been nourished.

l. 357. *the Gorgon*: there were three Gorgons, of whom the youngest, Medusa, was slain by Perseus. Her hair was adders, and the glance of her eyes turned those who met it to stone, and Pallas therefore gave to the hero a shield of brass, in which he watched her movements.

P. 134, l. 363. *Amaltheié*: see notes on ll. 5, 345.

l. 368. *Idalian summit*: Idalus, a mountain of Cyprus, sacred to Aphrodite.

l. 369. *Aphrodite*: goddess of beauty and love. She was born from the foam of the sea.

P. 136, l. 401. *Tritonid*: a name given to Pallas, who had a temple near Tritonis, a lake in N. Africa.

l. 406. *Adonis*: a lover of Aphrodite, killed by a wild boar.

P. 138, l. 431. *Até*: the goddess of anger, strife, and destruction.

l. 441. *Aetna*: a volcano in Sicily.

*Charis*: a goddess and the wife of Hephaistos.

P. 140, l. 480. *Hebé*: goddess of youth.

*Harmonié*: one of the lesser deities.

l. 482. *Phoebe*: a name given to Artemis, goddess of virginity, the moon, and the hunt.

## MATTHEW ARNOLD

Born on 24 December 1822 at Laleham, near Staines. He was the son of the famous head master of Rugby, where for a short time he was a master. In 1851 he became an inspector of schools, a post which he held till 1883. He was professor of poetry at Oxford 1857-67. He died at Liverpool on 15 April 1888, 'leaving', it has been said, 'the English mind more accessible to ideas than he found it'. This work was performed by his critical essays and lectures; in poetry his work is more difficult to estimate. It suffered from too much reflection and too many italics, but there is no verse of the 19th century to which it is easier or more satisfying to return, and though there are greater poets there are none who are so rarely out of place.

## SOHRAB AND RUSTUM.

Rustum was a semi-mythical Persian hero, fabled to have lived for four hundred years, c. 900-500 B.C. He performed many heroic acts, slew dragons, and delivered Persia from the Tartars. He was married to the daughter of the King of Ader-baijan, who died a year after Sohrab from sorrow at the death of her son. The episode recounted in the poem took place during one of the campaigns between the Tartars and the Persians.

P. 142, l. 2. *Oxus*: a Central Asian river, now called the Jihun, rising on the Pamir plateau, and flowing past Afghanistan, and past Bokhara through Turkestan into the Aral Sea.

l. 11. *Peran-Wisa*: general of the Tartar King Afrasiab, who invaded Persia three times, and was slain by the Persian king Kai-Khosrou (see note on l. 223).

P. 143, l. 40. *Samarcand*: a town of West Turkestan, once the capital of the conqueror Timur or Tamerlane.

l. 42. *Ader-baijan*: a province of Persia, near the Caspian Sea.

P. 144, l. 82. *Seistan*: a province on the Afghan frontier, on a lake of that name in which the River Helmund empties itself.

*Zal*: Rustum's father, who was said to have been born with white hair (cf. l. 232), and was therefore abandoned to die on Mt. Elburz. He was there reared by a griffin, an animal half-lion and half-eagle.

P. 145, l. 101. *Kara-Kul*: a town in Bokhara, famous for sheep and camels.

l. 113. *Casbin*, or Kazvin, a district south of the Caspian Sea.

l. 114. *Elburz*: the mountains south of the Caspian Sea.

*Aralian estuaries*: the mouths of the rivers, which, like the Oxus, empty themselves into the Aral Sea.

ll. 119-20. *Bokhara* . . *Khiva*: trading cities of Turkestan.

l. 121. *Toorkmuns of the south*: Turkomans from the desert south of Bokhara.

l. 122. *Turkas*: from the north of Persia west of Merv.

*Salore*: possibly the tribe known as 'Salors' south of Merv.

l. 123. *Attruck*: a river flowing into the Caspian Sea.

l. 128. *Ferghana*: a district east of Bokhara.

l. 129. *Jaxartes*: the Sir Daria, a Central Asian river flowing into the Caspian Sea.

P. 146, l. 131. *Kipchak*: the central part of the great steppe between the River Ural and the Pamir Plateau.

l. 132. *Kalmuks*: a scattered Central Asian tribe.

*Kuzzaks*: a Tartar tribe.

l. 133. *Kirghizzes*: a Tartar tribe from Pamir.

l. 138. *Ilyats of Khorassan*: the tribes (from *ili*, a tribe) from the Persian province between the Caspian Sea and Afghanistan.

l. 160. *Cabool*: a city of Afghanistan.

l. 161. *the Indian Caucasus*: the Hindu Kush mountains.

P. 147, l. 171. *Gudurz* was a Persian hero and leader; *Zorrah* was Rustum's brother.

P. 148, l. 221. *Iran*: Persia.

l. 223. *Kai-Khosroo*: supposed to be Cyrus the Great, King of Persia 558-528 B.C., one of the great Persian conquerors.

l. 230. *girl*: Rustum had been told that his child was a girl, and not a boy, because his wife feared that he would train a son to arms.

P. 150, l. 270. *Ruksh*: 'Lightning'.

l. 286. *Bahrein*: an island on the west side of the Persian Gulf.

P. 154, l. 412. *Hyphasis or Hydaspes*: the Sutlej and Jhelum, rivers in the Punjab.

P. 155, l. 452. *Star*: the Dog-Star, Sirius.

P. 159, l. 592. *Koords*: Kurds, a tribe of Central Asia, to the north-west of Persia.

P. 161, l. 672. *Prick'd*: tattooed.

P. 162, l. 679. *Griffin*: see note on p. 144, l. 82.

P. 164, l. 750. *Seistan*: see note on p. 144, l. 82.

l. 752. *Zirrah*: south of Lake Seistan.

ll. 760-2. See previous notes on p. 143, l. 40; p. 145, ll. 119-21.

l. 763. *Moorghab and Tejend*: rivers north-west of Afghanistan.

l. 764. *Kohik*: a river north of Bokhara, sometimes called the Zerafshan.

l. 765. *Sir*: another name for the Jaxartes, see note on p. 145, l. 129.

P. 167, l. 861. *Jemshid in Persepolis*: Persepolis was the ancient capital of Persia, built by the semi-mythical King Jemshid; its ruins still remain.

P. 168, l. 878. *Chorasmian waste*: the district of Khiva, so named from its inhabitants, the Chorasmii.

l. 880. *Orgunjè*: a town on the Oxus.

#### BALDER DEAD.

This tale is taken from Norse mythology. Balder, one of the youngest and most beautiful of the gods, was the son of Odin and Freya. On his birth his mother took an oath from all things that they would not hurt him, and in consequence when he was grown it became one of the pastimes of the gods to strike at him with their swords and axes, because the steel turned aside. But one thing—the mistletoe—she overlooked, and of this



Lok, the most cunning and malicious of the Immortals, framed a dart which he persuaded the blind god Hoder to throw at him. Thus Balder died and the poem relates the sequel.

P. 168, l. 11 *Valhalla* was the banquet-hall of the Immortals, standing among their houses in Asgard, their home in the centre of the universe.

P. 169, l. 16. *Odin*: the father of the gods, and the wisest and greatest among them.

l. 24. *Nornies*: the weavers of destiny, who control even the gods themselves; the names of the three chief were Urd, Verdandi, and Skulda.

P. 170, l. 47. *Sleipner* was eight-footed and swifter than any other horse in the world.

l. 49. *Lidskialf*, the hill from which Odin beholds heaven and earth and all that passes in them.

l. 52. *Midgard*, the fortress built by the gods which encompasses the middle region of the earth.

l. 57. *Ida's plain* was in the midst of Asgard, and here were the houses of the gods.

l. 67. *Serimner*: whatever the number of the company of Valhalla, the flesh of this boar always supplies them with meat.

l. 68. *Valkyries*: beautiful maidens who were sent by Odin to 'choose the slain' or the heroes who were doomed to die in battle. They served also as cupbearers at the divine feast.

l. 73. *Asgard*: see note on p. 168, l. 11.

P. 171, l. 85. *Frea*, or Frigg, wife of Odin and Mother of the Gods.

l. 109. *Hela*, daughter of Lok, whom the gods, foreknowing that she would help to work them evil, thrust into Niflheim, the place of mist and cold, where those go who die of age or sickness or otherwise than in battle.

P. 172, l. 141. *Bifrost*, the Rainbow, or bridge between heaven and earth.

*Heimdall*, the guardian of Bifrost against the Giants who are the enemies of the gods.

P. 173, l. 148. *Giall's stream*, the river which flows round Niflheim.

l. 155. *the northern Bear*: the constellation of the Great Bear.

l. 157. *the Dog and Hunter*: the star Sirius and the constellation Orion.

P. 174, l. 208. *Breidablik*, the house of Balder, where nothing impure may enter; the name means 'gleaming far and wide.'

P. 175, l. 221. *Hermod*, the son of Odin and the messenger of the Gods.

P. 179, l. 363. *Skulda*, see note on p. 169, l. 24.

P. 180, l. 375. *the ash Igrasil*, the tree of the universe, which had three roots, one among the gods, one among the giants, and one in the depths of Niflheim. Under its boughs the gods held their solemn assemblies.

l. 378. *Gladheim*: one of the halls of Asgard.

P. 183, l. 472. *Vergelmer*, the fountain (or, alternatively, the well) in the midst of Niflheim, beside the root of the ash Igrasil.

P. 185, ll. 549-58. Lok and Angerbode had three children, Fenris the Wolf, Jormungard the Serpent, and Hela. These the gods knew would do them harm. Hela was sent to Niflheim. Fenris they pretended to bind in sport, but actually secured him with an unbreakable chain forged by the Dwarfs, and left him on an island in Asgard. Jormungard was flung into the sea of the universe where he grew so huge that he lies encircling Midgard and biting his own tail. In the end of this universe all three will break loose and with Lok will lead the infernal hosts against the gods. They will be destroyed in the last great battle before the creation of a new order of things.

ll. 561-3. After the death of Balder, Lok had a dispute with the gods, and was compelled to fly from Asgard. He was caught at last outside the bounds of any hallowed place, and fastened to three stones, one under his shoulders, one under his loins, and one under his knees. Over him was a poisonous serpent, the venom of which would have dropped on his face, had not Sigyn his wife stood beside him to catch it in a basin. When, however, she goes away to empty the basin, the poison drops on Loki, and it is his convulsions which cause earthquakes.

P. 186, l. 566. *Muspel's children*: the giants.

P. 191, l. 723. *Thor*: the greatest and strongest of the gods after Odin. His weapon was the hammer Mjollnir, with which in the last battle he will kill the great serpent, being himself overcome by its venom. He rides in a chariot drawn by two goats; the sound of its movement is like thunder.

l. 742. *Freya*: originally came from the Vanir (hence her name Vanadis), another class of supernatural beings who seem to have directed the forces of nature, but was accepted and numbered among the gods. Beyond the fact that Oder, or Od, was her husband, and a wanderer, nothing seems to be known of him.

P. 192, l. 778. *Regner*, or Ragnar, Lodbrok, son of King Sigurd, King of Denmark. He was a great hero and viking, who invaded England and

was defeated by Ella, King of Northumbria; he was put to death by being cast into a pit of serpents.

l. 785. *Brage*, the god of eloquence and poetry.

P. 193, l. 800. *Thora*, Regner's first wife, to gain whom he slew a huge serpent. She was the daughter of the Earl of Gothland.

l. 801. *Aslauga*, or *Kraka*, Regner's second wife, a maiden of heroic descent who lived in bondage on a small farm.

P. 195, l. 877. *Mimir*, one of the giants, who lived under the ash Igdrasil in Asgard, by a well the waters of which communicated wisdom.

l. 879. *Nornies*: see note on p. 169, l. 24. They lived by Igdrasil in Asgard.

P. 196, ll. 915-35. The Norse myth of the creation. In the beginning was only the profound abyss of space, one side (Niflheim) darkness, mists, and cold; the other (Muspelsheim) heat and desolation. The beams from this called forth the first living being, the giant Ymir, and the cow Audhumla, who, by licking icy boulders of salt, brought forth Buri. Buri's son Bor was the father of Odin, who slew Ymir and all his race with the exception of Bergelmer, who escaped in a boat.

P. 198, l. 978. *Njord*: one of the Vanir (see note on p. 191, l. 742), but afterwards accepted as a god. He guides the winds and governs sea and fire. He was the father of Freya.

P. 203, ll. 1133-9. See note on p. 185, ll. 549-58. Rymer was one of the giants.

P. 204, l. 1150. *Vidar*, the strongest of the gods after Odin and Thor. In the last battle he will slay Fenris the Wolf after it has destroyed Odin. He is called 'The God of Few Words'.

*Tyr*: a god of war; his right hand was bitten off by the Wolf.

l. 1154. *golden-crested Cock*: Gullinkambi, the cock of the gods, having a golden comb; in Hela's keeping was a similar cock, but of dun colour.

P. 205, l. 1183. *a small remnant*: After the final battle a new earth and heaven will arise, from which all evil and war will have passed. Vidar, Balder, and Hoder, with a few other of the gods, will return there.

## GEORGE MACDONALD

Born 10 December 1824 at Huntly, West Aberdeenshire. He was ordained a Congregational minister in London in 1850, but resigned, retired to

Manchester, and gave himself up to literature in 1853. His most famous work was his novels, both those which deal with humble Scottish life and those which are fantastic and semi-mystical. But he also wrote a good deal of verse which sometimes achieved poetry. He died at Ashted on 18 September 1905.

P. 207, l. 6. *Dunfermline*: a town in Fife near the Firth of Forth.

l. 24. *the Bass*: a rock, off the east coast of Scotland, in the entrance to the Firth of Forth, used as a fortress and prison.

## DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

Born 12 May 1828 at 38 Charlotte Street, Portland Place, London, the son of an Italian political refugee. He became a leader among that group of artists who revived medieval subjects and created a new mode to express them, known as the Pre-Raphaelites; he became also one of the most markedly individual, and one of the most famous, poets of the second part of the century. In 1861 he issued a translation of Dante's *New Life* and of poems by other Italian poets of that period; in 1870 his own *Poems*, and in 1881 a volume of *Ballads and Sonnets*, from which the two following poems are taken. He died at Birchington, near Margate, on 9 April 1882.

### THE WHITE SHIP.

P. 212, l. 2. *Rouen*: an ancient city of France, 87 miles north-west of Paris, the capital of the old duchy of Normandy, held by the Kings of England till 1204.

P. 213, l. 45. *Harfleur*: a port of France, about six miles east of Havre.

P. 217, l. 163. *Honfleur*: a port of France, seven miles from Havre.

l. 166. *the Body of Christ*: the Host in a procession of the Blessed Sacrament.

### THE KING'S TRAGEDY.

P. 222, *title*: James I. of Scotland (1394-1437) was kept a prisoner in England from about 1406 to 1424, during which period he saw, loved, and praised in his poem *The King's Quair*, the Lady Jane Beaufort. He married her in 1424. On his return to reign in Scotland he developed a policy of attack on the great nobles and of advancement of the royal authority. This policy led to his murder.

P. 223, l. 26. *the Bass Rock*: see note on p. 208, l. 24.

l. 28. *Henry*: Henry IV of England.

l. 48. *Scone*: in Perthshire, where the kings of the Scots were crowned.

P. 224, l. 72. *Roxbro'*: Roxborough, a fortress in south-east Scotland, then in the possession of the English.

P. 225, l. 103. *Sir Robert Græme*: In pursuance of his policy of suppressing the great nobles, the king had seized the earldom of Strathearn, the rightful holder of which was the nephew of Graham.

P. 226, l. 141. *Perth*: 48 miles north-east of Edinburgh. James had founded the Carthusian monastery there.

P. 228, l. 176. *the Duchray and the Dhu*: the two streams which when they meet make the Forth river.

l. 179. *Inchkeith Isle*: a small fortified island in the Firth of Forth.

l. 183. *Links of Forth*: The Forth is a river running into an inlet of south-eastern Scotland. Links are level sandy ground near the sea.

P. 230, l. 260. *Earl of Athole*: or Atholl; Walter, Earl of Atholl, was of the king's house and had some claim to the crown.

l. 262. *Robert Stuart*: grandson to the Earl of Atholl.

l. 264. *Christopher Chaumber*: or Chambers (Lang, *History of Scotland*).

P. 235, l. 414. *Voidee-cup*: a cup of spiced wine taken before retiring to rest.

P. 237, l. 469. *Aberdour*: Aberdeen, 130 miles north of Edinburgh, the fourth largest city of Scotland.

## CHRISTINA GEORGINA ROSSETTI

Born at 38 Charlotte Street, Portland Place, on 5 December 1830, the younger sister of D. G. Rossetti. She is the third name among English poetesses, ranking after (but only after) Elizabeth Browning and Alice Meynell. Her life was absorbed into her religion, and her poetry was the expression of it. 'Goblin Market' (1862) is the best of her very few narrative poems, and is not excelled by any of her more subjective. She died of cancer in Torrington Square, London, on 29 December 1894.

SEBASTIAN EVANS

Born 30 March 1830, at Market Bosworth, Leicestershire. He took a great interest in many forms of art, spent ten years in managing the art department of a glass works, and practised wood-carving, painting, engraving, book-binding, and writing in prose and verse. He assisted in the revival of medieval studies and translated (under the title of *The High History of the Holy Graal*) the old French romance of Percival le Gallois. He died at Abbot's Barton, Canterbury, on 19 December 1909. The poem which follows is from *Brother Fabian's Manuscript* (1865).

P. 268. *De Sancto Brendando Filio Finloch*: Of (or about) Saint Brendan (484-577) the son of Finloch; so called to distinguish him from another Brendan of the same period. He was abbot of a monastery at Clonfert in eastern Galway. The story of his voyage was among the most famous of medieval tales and has also been put into verse by Matthew Arnold.

ll. 1, 3. *Qui descendunt*, &c.: Psalm cvii. 23, 24, 'They that go down to the sea in ships . . . see the works of the Lord.'

ll. 17, 18. *Enoch* . . . *Elias*: See Genesis v. 24 and 2 Kings ii. 11. These two are the only living beings who passed into Paradise without dying.

P. 269, l. 52 *Domine dirige*: 'O Lord, direct' [us].

P. 270, l. 66. *Jascomyn*: Cf. Jormungard in the Norse mythology (note on p. 185, ll. 549-58).

l. 75. *stead*: farm.

l. 84. *complines*: the last service of the day.

P. 271. *Incipit*, &c.: 'Here beginneth [the tale] of Judas Iscariot'.

P. 274. *Explicit*, &c.: 'Here finisheth [the tale] of Judas Iscariot'.

l. 201. *Moyses*: Moses. The reference is to Genesis. The writing of Genesis, and the following four books, was ascribed to Moses.

P. 275, l. 217. *Ut in*, &c.: 'that we may bless the Lord in eternal joy'.

## WILLIAM MORRIS

Born in Walthamstow, London, on 24 March 1834. At Oxford he formed a friendship with the painter Edward Burne-Jones, and these two did much to create the movement which succeeded to the Pre-Raphaelite. His interest in all forms of art led to the formation in 1861 of a business firm in which he was the chief partner and which took for scope all kinds of furnishing and decoration, ecclesiastical and civil. Besides these he was personally occupied with poetry, prose, and social and industrial reform.

In 1890 he established the Kelmscott Press, for which he designed three founts of type. He died at Hammersmith on 3 October 1896. Less great than some of his contemporaries, he was far wider in interest; and aesthetic decoration of life—whether by poems or wallpapers—was in his eyes a thing as normal as water and as necessary as food.

#### GEFFRAY TESTE NOIRE.

P. 276, l. 1. *the Canon of Chimay*: Jean Froissart (1338-1410?), the great French chronicler. Chimay is a town now in the province of Hainault, Belgium. Froissart was made a canon c. 1374, and is said to be buried in the church of St. Monegunda there.

l. 5. *Gascon*: native of Gascony, a district of South-western France. Its inhabitants gained a reputation for boasting, but of things done and not pretended.

l. 15. *Ventadour*: a viscounty of central France and its chief town.

l. 18. *Auvergne*: a south-central province of France.

P. 277, l. 33. *villaynes*: a class of serfs, especially a peasant occupier subject to a lord.

l. 47. *Carcassonne*: a city in South-western France, on the river Aude.

l. 52. *the horse in Job*: Job xxxix. 19-25.

P. 279, l. 99. *Jacquerie*: the rising of the peasants in France in 1357-8; from Jacques Bonhomme, the slang French name for a peasant.

l. 101. *Beauvais*: an ancient and famous city north-west of Paris, near which the Jacquerie broke out.

P. 281, ll. 145. *her gentle . . . By a chain of silver*: an allusion to certain customs in the days of tournaments and courtly love, when the knight was treated as the servant of his lady.

P. 282, l. 190. *John Froissart*: see note on p. 276, l. 1.

P. 283, l. 193. *the Eure*: a river of Northern France.

#### THE SON OF CROESUS.

P. 283, l. 1. *Croesus*: c. 550 B.C. He was reputed to be the richest of mankind, but was defeated by Cyrus, King of Persia, and his capital burnt. Lydia, originally a kingdom in Asia Minor, became thereafter a province of Persia.

P. 286, l. 93. *Phrygia*: a country of Asia Minor, west of Lydia.

l. 94. *Gordius, the son of Midas*: Morris seems to have reversed the classical relationship, in which Gordius, a Phrygian peasant who was raised to the throne, was the father of Midas.

P. 287, l. 141. *Calydon*: a district of Greece, ravaged by a wild boar sent by Artemis because her deity had been neglected. It was slain in an expedition of the heroes.

P. 288, l. 169. *Hercules*: one of the mythical Greek heroes, and the strongest of men. He killed many fierce beasts; it is uncertain which particular exploit is alluded to in the text.

l. 172. *Cadmus*: a Greek hero, who destroyed a dragon.

l. 173. *the bull of Marathon*: slain by Theseus, a hero and King of Athens.

l. 175. *Atalanta*: a maiden who took part in the hunting of the Calydonian boar, which she was the first to wound.

P. 295, l. 385. *Sardis*: the capital of Lydia.

P. 298, l. 462. *Pallas*: the goddess of wisdom.

## ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

Born in Chester Street, Grosvenor Place, London, on 5 April 1837. Of his genius and place opinion remains uncertain. He was friendly with the Pre-Raphaelites, but his own work is distinguishable from theirs, not only by its style but by its continual preoccupation with philosophy. His fluency, not only in number but in length of poems, prevented him from expressing, and prevents his readers from appreciating, the value of his ideas. He died on 10 April 1909.

P. 299, title: *Iseult*: The incident dealt with in the extract comes from the story of Iseult, a princess of Ireland, whom Tristram brought to Cornwall to marry King Mark. On the voyage they drank of a love-potion and loved each other. In the end Tristram died in Brittany through the agency of another Iseult, and the queen, arriving too late to save him, died also. Palomides, one of the great Arthurian figures who awaits his due in verse, was an unbaptized knight from the East, who endured a hopeless passion for Iseult.

## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



Born at 8 Howard Place, Edinburgh, on 13 November 1850. After attending classes at Edinburgh University he was called to the Bar in 1875. In the winter of 1874-5 he made the acquaintance of W. E. Henley, and in 1878 of George Meredith; in 1876 he began to contribute to the *Cornhill Magazine*. His health was always bad, and after attempts to improve it by various journeys and visits in Europe and America he went in 1890 to Samoa and settled there for the rest of his life. His reputation among the general public was gained by *Treasure Island* (1882) and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). He died on 3 December 1894.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Verse line numbers have been maintained and appear on the right side of the verse. Verse line numbers for .txt format also appear on the right side of the verse, but separated by two spaces from the verse line.

Glosses for words in the verse are treated as footnotes and are linked (pdf, epub, mobi and html format only) to the verse line and found at the end of each poem.

[The end of *Victorian Narrative Verse* by Charles Williams]