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The Man Born to be King.

Argument:

It was foretold to a great king, that he who should reign after him should be low-born and poor; which thing came to pass in the end, for all that the king could do.

A king there was in days of old
Who ruled wide lands, nor lacked for gold,
Nor honour, nor much longed for praise,
And his days were called happy days,
So peaceable his kingdoms were,
While others wrapt in war and fear
Fell ever unto worse and worse.

Therefore his city was the nurse
Of all that men then had of lore,
And none were driven from his door 10
That seemed well skilled in anything;
So of the sages was he king;
And from this learned man and that,
Little by little, lore he gat,
And many a lordless troubled land
Fell scarce loth to his dreaded hand.

Midst this it chanced that, on a day,
Clad in his glittering gold array,
He held a royal festival;
And nigh him in his glorious hall 20
Beheld his sages most and least,
Sitting much honoured at the feast,
But mid the faces so well known,
Of men he well might call his own,
He saw a little wizened man,
With face grown rather grey than wan
From lapse of years; beardless was he,
And bald as is the winter tree;
But his two deep-set, glittering eyes
Gleamed at the sight of mysteries 30

None knew but he; few words he said,
 And unto those small heed was paid;
 But the King, young, yet old in guile,
 Failed not to note a flickering smile
 Upon his face, as now and then
 He turned him from the learned men
 Toward the King's seat, so thought to know
 What new thing he might have to show;
 And presently, the meat being done,
 He bade them bring him to his throne, 40
 And when before the throne he stood,
 He said, "We deem thy coming good;
 What is thine art? canst thou in rhyme
 Tell stories of the ancient time?
 Or dost thou chronicle old wars?
 Or know'st thou of the change of stars?
 Or seek'st thou the transmuting stone?
 Or canst thou make the shattered bone
 Grow whole, and dying men arise 50
 And live as long as thou the wise?
 Or what gift dost thou bring me here,
 Where nought but men of lore are dear
 To me and mine?"

"O King," said he,
 "But few things know I certainly,
 Though I have toiled for many a day
 Along the hard and doubtful way
 That bringeth wise men to the grave.
 And now, for all the years I gave
 To know all things that man can learn, 60
 A few months' learned life I earn,
 Nor feel much liker to a God
 Than when beside my sheep I trod
 Upon the thymy, wind-swept down.
 Yet am I come unto thy town
 To tell thee somewhat that I learned
 As on the stars I gazed, and yearned
 To cast this weary body off,
 With all its chains of mock and scoff
 And creeping death—for as I read 70
 The sure decrees with joy and dread,

Somewhat I saw writ down of thee,
 And who shall have the sovereignty
 When thou art gone."

"Nay," said the King,
 "Speak quick and tell me of the thing."

"Sire," said the Sage, "thine ancient line
 Thou holdest as a thing divine,
 So long and undisturbed it is,
 But now shall there be end to this, 80
 For surely in my glittering text
 I read that he who shall sit next
 On this thine ancient throne and high,
 Shall be no better born than I
 Whose grandsire none remembereth,
 Nor where my father first drew breath."

"Yea," said the King, "and this may be;
 Yet, O Sage, ere I credit thee,
 Some token certes must thou show,
 Or tell me what I think to know 90
 Alone, among all folk alive;
 Then surely great gifts will I give
 To thee, and make thee head of all
 Who watch the planets rise and fall."

"Bid these stand backward from thy throne,"
 The Sage said, "then to thee alone
 Long hidden matters will I tell,
 And then, if thou believest, well—
 And if thou dost not, well also;
 No gift I ask, but leave to go, 100
 For strange to me is this thy state,
 And for thyself, thou well may'st hate
 My crabbed age and misery."

"Well," said the King, "let this thing be,
 And ye, my masters stand aback!
 For of the fresh air have I lack,
 And in my pleasance would I walk
 To hearken this grave elder's talk
 And gain new lore."

Therewith he rose 110
 And led the way unto a close,
 Shaded with grey-leaved olive-trees;

And when they were amidst of these
 He turned about and said, "Speak, freind,
 And of thy folly make an end,
 And take this golden chain therefore."

"Rightly thou namest my weak lore,"
 The Sage said, "therefore to the end
 Be wise, and what the fates may send
 Take thou, nor struggle in the net 120
 Wherein thine helpless feet are set !

—Hearken ! a year is well-nigh done
 Since, at the hottest of the sun,
 Stood Antony beneath this tree,
 And took a jewelled cup of thee,
 And drank swift death in guise of wine
 Since he, most trusted of all thine,
 At last too full of knowledge grew,
 And chiefly, he of all men knew 130

How the Earl Marshal Hugh had died
 Since he had drawn him on to ride
 Into a bushment of his foes,
 To die amidst the rain of blows "

"Thou knowest that by me he died,"
 The King said "how if now I cried,
 Help ! the magician slayeth me ?
 Swiftly should twenty sword-blades be
 Clashing within thy ribs, and thou
 Nearer to death than even now "

"Not thus, O King, I fear to die," 140
 The Sage said; "Death shall pass me by
 Many a year yet, because perchance
 I fear not aught his clattering dance,
 And have enough of weary days.
 But thou—farewell, and win the praise
 Of sages, by the hearkening

With heed to this most certain thing
 Fear not because this tale I know,
 For to my grey tower back I go
 High raised above the heathy hills 150
 Where the great erne the swift hare kills,
 Or stoops upon the new-vearnd lamb:

Unto few folk, who hear thy name
Indeed, but know nought of thy fame,
Nay, scarce if thou be man or beast."

So saying, back unto the feast
He turned, and went down the hall,
Nct heeding any gibe or call ;
And left the palace and the town
With face turned toward his windy down.
Back to the hall, too, the King went,
With eyes upon the pavement bent
In pensive thought, delighting not
In riches, and his kingly lot;
But thinking how his days began
And of the lonely souls of man.

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But time passed, and midst this and that
The wise man's message he forgot;
And as a king he lived his life,
And took to him a noble wife
Of the king's daughters, rich and fair
And they being wed for nigh a year,
And she now growing great with child,
It happed unto the forest wild
This king with many folk must ride
At ending of the summer-tide;
There boar and hart they brought to bay,
And had right noble prize that day;
But when the noon was now long past,
And the thick woods grew overcast,
They roused the mightiest hart of all.
Then loudly 'gan the King to call
Unto his huntsmen, not to leave
That mighty beast for dusk nor eve
Till they had won him; with which word
His horn he blew, and forth he spurred,
Taking no thought of most or least,
But only of that royal beast.
And over rough and smooth he rode,
Nor yet for anything abode,
Till dark night swallowing up the day

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With blindness his swift course must stay.
 Nor was there with him any one,
 So far his fair steed had outrun
 The best of all his hunting-folk.

So, glancing at the stars that broke
 'Twixt tne thick branches here and there,
 Backward he turned, and peered with care
 Into the darkness, but saw nought, 200
 Nor heard his folk, and therewith thought
 His bed must be the briake leaves brown.

Then in a while he lighted down,
 And felt about a little space,
 If he might find a softer place;
 But as he groped from tree to tree
 Some glimmering light he seemed to see
 'Twixt the dark stems, and thither turned,
 If yet perchance some wood-fire burned
 Within a peasant's hut, where he 210
 Might find, amidst their misery,
 Rough food, or shelter at the least.

So, leading on his wearied beast,
 Blindly he crept from tree to tree,
 Till slowly grew that light to be
 The thing he looked for, and he found
 A hut on a cleared space of ground,
 From whose half-opened door there streamed
 The light that erst far off had gleamed

Then of that shelter was he fain, 220
 But just as he made shift to gain
 The open space in front of it,
 A shadow o'er the grass did lit,
 And on the wretched threshold stood
 A big man, with a bar of wood
 In his right hand, who seemed as though
 He got him ready for a blow;
 But ere he spoke the King cried, "Friend,
 May God good hap upon thee send,
 If thou wilt give me rest this night,
 And food according to thy might." 230

"Nay," said the carle, "my wife lieth
 In labour, and is nigh her death .

Nor canst thou enter here at all,
 But near by is my asses' stall,
 Who on this night bide in the town;
 There, if thou wilt, may'st thou lie down,
 And sleep until the dawn of day,
 And I will bring thee what I may
 Of food and drink "

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Then said the King

"Thanked be thou, neither for nothing
 Shalt thou this good deed do to me "

"Nay," said the carle, "let these things be.

Surely I think before the morn,

To be too weary and forlorn

For gold much heart in me to put "

With that he turned, and from the hut

Brought out a lantern, and rye-bread,

And wine, and showed the King a shed,

Strewed with a litter of dry brake .

Withal he muttered, for his sake,

Unto Our Lady some rude prayer,

And turned about and left him there.

So when the rye-bread, nowise fire,

The King had munched, and with green wine

Had quenched his thirst, his horse he tied

Unto a post, and there beside

He fell asleep upon the brake.

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But in an hour did he awake,

Astonied with an unnamed fear,

For words were ringing in his ear

Like the last echo of a scream,

"Take ! take !" but of the vanished dream

No image was there left to him

Then, trembling sore in every limb,

Did he arise, and drew his sword,

And passed forth on the forest sward,

And cautiously about he crept;

But nought at all he heard, except

Some groaning of the woodman's wife,

And forest sounds well known, but rife

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With terror to the lonely soul.

Then he lay down again, to roll
 His limbs within his huntsman's cloak;
 And slept again, and once more woke
 To tremble with that unknown fear,
 And other echoing words to hear,
 "Give up ' give up ' " nor anything
 Showed more why these strange words should ring 280
 About him. Then he sat upright,
 Bewildered, gazing through the night,
 Until his weary eyes, grown dim,
 Showed not the starlit tree-trunks slim
 Against the black wood, grey and plain;
 And into sleep he sank again,
 And woke not soon : but sleeping dreamed
 That he awoke, nor other seemed
 The place he woke in but that shed,
 And there beside his bracken bed 290
 He seemed to see the ancient Sage
 Shrivelled yet more with untold age,
 Who bending down his head to him
 Said, with a mocking smile and grim,
 "Take, or give up; what matters it ?
 This child new-born shall surely sit
 Upon thy seat when thou art gone,
 And dwelling 'twixt straight walls of stone."

Again the King woke at that word
 And sat up, panting and afeard, 300
 And staring out into the night,
 Where yet the woods thought not of light;
 And fain he was to cast off sleep,
 Such visions from his eyes to keep.
 Heavy his head grew none the less,
 'Twist wildering thoughts and weariness,
 And soon he fell asleep once more,
 Nor dreamed, nor woke again, before
 The sun shone through the forest trees;
 And, shivering in the morning breaze, 310
 He blinked with just-awakened eyes,
 And pondering on those mysteries,
 Unto the woodman's hovel went.

Him he found kneeling down, and bent
 In moody grief above a bed,
 Whereon his wife lay stark and dead,
 Whose soul near morn had passed away;
 And 'twixt the dead and living lay
 A new-born man-child, fair and great.
 So in the door the King did wait 320
 To watch the man, who had no heed
 Of this or that, so sore did bleed
 The new-made wound within his heart.

But as the King gazed, for his part
 He did but see his threatened foe,
 And ever hard his heart did grow
 With deadly hate and wilfulness :
 And sight of that poor man's distress
 Made it the harder, as of nought
 But that unbroken line he thought 330
 Of which he was the last: withal
 His scornful troubled eyes did fall
 Upon that nest of poverty,
 Where nought of joy he seemed to see.

On straw the poor dead woman lay;
 The door alone let in the day,
 Showing the trodden earthen floor,
 A board on trestles weak and poor,
 Three stumps of tree for stool or chair,
 A half-glazed pipkin, nothing fair, 340
 A bowl of porridge by the wife,
 Untouched by lips that lacked for life,
 A platter and a bowl of wood;
 And in the further corner stood
 A bow cut from the wych-elm tree,
 A holly club, and arrows three
 Ill pointed, heavy, spliced with thread.

Ah ! soothly, well remembered
 Was that unblissful wretched home,
 Those four bare walls, in days to come ; 350
 And often in the coming years
 He called to mind the pattering tears
 That, on the rent old sackcloth cast

About the body, fell full fast,
 'Twixt half-meant prayers and curses wild,
 And that weak wailing of the child,
 His threatened dreaded enemy,
 The mighty king that was to be.

But as he gazed unsoftened there,
 With hate begot of scorn and care, 360
 Loudly he heard a great horn blow,
 And his own hunting call did know,
 And soon began the shouts to hear
 Of his own people drawing near.

Then lifting up his horn, he blew
 A long shrill point, but as he threw
 His head aback, beheld his folk,
 Who from the close-set thicket broke
 And o'er the cleared space swiftly passed,
 With shouts that he was found at last. 370

Then turned the carle his doleful face,
 And slowly rising in his place,
 Drew thwart his fingers strong,
 And on that gay dressed glittering throng
 Gazed stupidly, as still he heard
 The name of King; but said no word.

But his guest spoke, "Sirs, well be ye !
 This luckless woodman, whom ye see,
 Gave me good harbour through the night
 And such poor victual as he might ; 380
 Therefore shall he have more than gold
 For his reward ; since dead and cold
 His helpmate lies who last night died.
 See now the youngling by her side ;
 Him will I take and rear him so
 That he shall no more lie alow
 In straw, or from the beech-tree dinc,
 But rather use white linen fine
 And silver plate, and with the sword
 Shall learn to seive some King or Lord. 390
 How say'st thou, good man ?"

"Sire," he said,
 Weeping, but shamefaced, "since here dead
 She lies, that erst kept house for me,

E'en as thou wilt let it be;
 Though I had hoped to have a son
 To help me get the day's work done.
 And now, indeed, forth must he go
 If unto manhood he should grow,
 And lonely I must wander forth, 400
 To whom east, west, and south and north
 Are all alike: forgive it me
 If little thanks I give to thee
 Who scarce can thank great God in heaven
 For what is left of what was given."

Small heed unto him the King gave,
 But trembling in his haste to have,
 The body of his enemy,
 Said to an old squire, "Bring to me
 The babe, and give the good man this 410
 Wherewith to gain a little bliss,
 In place of all his troubles gone,
 Nor need he now be long alone "

The carle's rough face, at clink of gold,
 Lit up, though still did he behold
 The wasted body lying there;
 But stooping, a rough box, foursquare,
 Made of old wood and lined with hay,
 Wherein the helpless infant lay,
 He raised, and gave it to the squire 420
 Who on the floor cast down his hire,
 Nor sooth dared murmur aught the while,
 But turning smiled a grim hard smile
 To see the carle his pieces count
 Still weeping so did all men mount
 And turning round into the wood
 Forgat him and his drearhood,
 And soon were far off from the hut.

Then coming out, the door he shut
 Behind him, and adown a glade, 430
 Towards a rude hermitage he made
 To fetch the priest unto his need,
 To bury her and say he bede.

So when all things that he might do
 Were done aright, heavy with woe,
 He left the woodland hut behind
 To take such chance as he might find
 In other lands, forgetting all
 That in that forest did befall.

But through the wild wood rode the King, 44c
 Moody and thinking on the thing,
 And weighted yet by hovering fear;
 Till now, when they had drawn anear
 The open country, and could see
 The road run on from close to lea,
 And lastly by a wooden bridge
 A long way from that heathy ridge
 Cross over a deep lowland stream,
 Then in his eyes there came a gleam,
 And his hands fell upon his sword, 45c
 And turning round to squire and lord
 He said "Ride, sirs, the way is clear,
 Nor of my people have I fear,
 Nor do my foes range over wide,
 And for myself fain would I ride
 Right slowly homewards through the fields
 Noting what this and that one yields,
 While by my squire who bears the child
 Lightly my way shall be beguiled.
 For some nurse now he needs must have 46c
 This tender life of his to save,
 And doubtless by the stream there is
 Some house where he may dwell in bliss,
 Till he grow old enough to learn
 How gold and glory he may earn;
 And grow, perchance, to be a lord "

With downcast eyes he spoke that word;
 But forth they galloped speedily,
 And he drew rein and stood to see
 Their green coats lessening as they went. 47c
 This man unto the other bent,
 Until mid dust and haze at last
 Into a wavering mass they passed;

Then 'twixt the hedgerows vanished quite
 Just told of by the dust-cloud white
 Rolled upwards 'twixt the elm-trunks slim.

Then turned the King about to him
 Who held the child, noting again
 The thing wherein he first had lain,
 And on one side of it could see 480
 A lion painted hastily
 In red upon a ground of white,
 As though of old it had been dight
 For some lord's rough-wrought palisade;
 But naked 'mid the hay was laid
 The child, and had no mark or sign.

Then said the King, "My ancient line
 Thou and thy sires through good and ill
 Have served, and unto thee my will
 Is law enough from day to day,
 Ride nigh me hearkening what I say." 490

He shook his rein and side by side
 Down through the meadows did they ride,
 And opening all his heart, the King
 Told to the old man everything
 Both of the Sage, and of his dream;
 Withal, drawn nigh unto the stream,
 He said, "Yet this shall never be,
 For surely as thou lovest me,
 Adown this water shall he float 500
 With this rough box for ark and boat.
 Then if mine old line he must spill
 There let God save him if He will,
 While I in no case shed his blood"

"Yea," said the squire, "thy words are good,
 For the whole sin shall lie on me,
 Who greater things would do for thee
 If need there were; yet note, I pray,
 It may be he will 'scape this day
 And live; and what wouldst thou do then 510
 If thou shouldst meet him amongst men?
 I counsel thee to let him go
 Since sure to nought thy will shall grow."

"Yea, yea," the King said, "let all be
 That may he, if I once but see
 This ark whirl in the eddies swift
 Or tangled in the autumn drift
 And wrong side up " but with that word
 Their horse-hoofs on the plank he heard,
 And swift across the bridge he rode, 520
 And nigh the end of it abode,
 Then turned to watch the old squire stop,
 And leaning o'er the bridge-rail drop
 The luckless child, he heard withal
 A muttered word and splashing fall
 And from the wakened child a cry,
 And saw the cradle hurrying by,
 Whirled round and sinking, but as yet
 Holding the child, nor overset.

Now somewhat, soothly, at the sight 530
 Did the King doubt if he outright
 Had rid him of his feeble foe,
 But frowning did he turn to go
 Unto his home, nor knew indeed
 How better he might help his need;
 And as unto his house he rode
 Full little care for all he showed,
 But bade stark Samuel the squire
 Unto his bridle-hand ride nigher,
 And talk to him of careless things, 540
 As unto such will talk great kings.

But when unto his palace gate
 He came at last, thereby did wait
 The chamberlain with eager eyes
 Above his lips grown grave with lies,
 In haste to tell him that the Queen,
 While in the wild-wood he had been,
 Had borne a daughter unto him
 Strong, fair of face, and straight of limb.
 So well at ease and glad thereat 550
 His troubled dream he nigh forgot,
 His troubled waking and the ride
 Unto the fateful of river-side;
 Or thought of all as little things

Unmeet to trouble souls of kings.

So passed the days, so passed the years
 In such-like hopes, and such-like fears,
 And such-like deds in field and hall
 As unto royal men befall;
 And fourteen years have passed away 560
 Since on the huddled brake he lay
 And dreamed that dream, remembered now
 Once and again, when slow and slow
 The minutes of some sleepless night
 Crawl toward the dawning of the light,

Remembered not on this sweet morn
 When to the ringing of the horn,
 Jingle of bits and mingled shout
 Toward that same stream he rideth out
 To see his grey-winged falcons fly. 570

So long he rode he drew anigh
 A mill upon the river's brim
 That seemed a goodly place to him,
 For o'er the oily smooth millhead
 There hung the apples growing red,
 And many an ancient apple-tree
 Within the orchard could he see,
 While the smooth mill walls white and black
 Shook to the great wheel's measured clack,
 And grumble of the gear within ; 580
 While o'er the roof that duded that din
 The doves sat cooing half the day,
 And round the half-cut stack of hay
 The sparrows fluttered twittering.

There smiling stayed the joyous King,
 And since the autumn noon was hot
 Thought good anigh the pleasant spot
 To dine that day, and therewith sent
 To tell the miller his intent .

Who held the stirrup of the King 590
 Bareheaded, joyful at the thing,
 While from his horse he lit adown,
 Then led him over an elm-beam brown,
 New cut in February tide,

That crossed the stream from side to side.
 So underneath the apple-trees
 The King sat careless, well at ease
 And ate and drank right merrily.

To whom the miller drew anigh
 Among the courtiers, bringing there 600
 Such as he could of country fare,
 Green yellowing plums from off his wall,
 Wasp-bitten pears, the first to fall
 From off the wavering spire-like tree,
 Junkets, and cream and fresh honey.

Smiling the King regarded him,
 For he was round-paunched, short of limb,
 Red-faced, with long, lank flaxen hair;
 But with him was a boy, right fain,
 Grey-eyed, and yellow-haired, most like 610
 Unto some Michael who doth strike
 The dragon on a minster wall,
 So sweet-eyed was he, and withal
 So fearless of all things he seemed
 But when he saw him the King deemed
 He scarce could be the miller's kin,
 And laughing said, "Hast thou within
 Thy dusty mill the dame who bore
 This stripling in the days of yore,
 For fain were I to see her now, 620
 If she be like him than thou?"

"Sire," said the miller, "that may be,
 And thou my dame shalt surely see;
 But for the stripling, neither I
 Begat him, nor my wife did lie
 In labour when the lad was born,
 But as an outcast and forlorn
 We found him fourteen years to-day,
 So quick the time has worn away."

Then the King, hearkening what he said, 630
 A vanished day remembered,
 And troubled grew his face thereat;
 But while he thought of this and that
 The man turned from him and was gone

And by him stood the lad alone ;
 At whom he gazed, and as their eyes
 Met, a great horror 'gan arise
 Within his heart, and back he shrank
 And shuddering a deep draught he drank,
 Scarce knowing if his royal wine
 He touched, or juice of some hedge-vine. 640

But as his eyes he lifted up
 From off his jewelled golden cup,
 Once more the miller drew anigh,
 By whom his wife went timidly
 Bearing some burden in her hand;
 So when before him she did stand
 And he beheld her worn and old,
 And black-haired, then that hair of gold,
 Grey eyes, firm lips, and round cleft chin,
 Brought stronger memory of his sin. 650

But the carle spake, "Dame, tell the King
 How this befell, a little thing
 The thoughts of such great folk to hold;
 Speak out, and fear not to be bold."

"My tale," she said, "is short enow,
 For this day fourteen years ago
 Along this river-side I rode
 From market to our poor abode,
 Where dwelt we far from other men,
 Since thinner was the country then
 Than now it is, so as I went
 And weaved o'er my panniers bent,
 From out the stream a feeble cry
 I heard, and therewith presently
 From off my mule's back could I see
 This boy who standeth here by thee,
 A naked, new-born infant, laid
 In a rough ark that had been stayed
 By a thick tangled bed of weed,
 So pitying the youngling's need,
 Dismounting, did I wade for him
 Waist deep, whose ark now scarce did swim;
 And he, with cold, and misery,
 And hunger, was at point to die. 670

"Withal, I bare him to the mill
 And cherished him, and had good will
 To bring the babe up as mine own ;
 Since childless were we and alone,
 And no one came to father it. 68c
 So oft have I rejoiced to sit
 Beside the fire and watch him play.
 And now, behold him !—but some day
 I look to lose him, for, indeed,
 I deem he comes of royal seed,
 Unmeet for us, and now, my lord,
 Hast thou heard every foolish word
 About my son—this boy—whose name
 Is Michael soothly, since he came
 To us this day nigh Michaelmas. 69c
 —See, sire, the ark wherein he was !
 Which I have kept."

Therewith she drew

A cloth away; but the King knew,
 Long ere she moved, what he should see,
 Nor looked, but seeming carelessly
 Leaned on the board and hid his eyes.
 But at the last did he arise
 And saw the painted lion red,
 Not faded, well remembered, 70c
 Withal he thought, "And who of these
 Were with me then amongst the trees
 To see this box?" but presently
 He thought again that none but he
 And the grey squire, old Samuel,
 That painting could have noted well,
 Since Samuel his cloak had cast
 About it, and therewith had passed
 Throughout the forest on that day,
 And not till all were well away 71c
 Had drawn it off before the King.
 But changed and downcast at the thing
 He left the lovely autumn place,
 Still haunted by the new-found face
 Of his old foe, and back he rode
 Unto his ancient rich abode

Forcing but dismal merriment
 As midst his smiling lords he went;
 Who yet faild not to note his mood,
 So changed: and some men of the wood 720
 Remembered them, but said not aught,
 Yet, trembled lest their hidden thought
 Some bird should learn and carry it.

The morrow come, the King did sit
 Alone, to talk with Samuel,
 Who yet lived, gathering wage for hell.
 He from the presence in a while
 Came forth, and with his ugly smile
 He muttered, "Well betide me, then,
 St. Peter ! they are lucky men 730
 Who serve no kings, since the indeed
 May damn themselves each for his need.
 And will not he outlive this day
 Whom the deep water could not slay,
 Ere yet his lips had tasted food ? "
 With that a horse, both strong and good,
 He gat of the King's equerry,
 And toward the mill rode speedily.

There Michael by the mill-tail lay,
 Watching the swift stream snatch away 740
 His float from midst the careless dace;
 But thinking of the thin, dark face,
 That yesterday all men he saw
 Gaze at with seeming love and awe;
 Nor had he, wondering at the lords,
 Lost one word of the housewife's words;
 And still he noted that the King
 Beheld him as a wondrous thing,
 Strange to find there : so in his heart
 He thought to play some royal part 750
 In this wild play of life, and made
 Stories, wherein great words he said,
 And did great deeds in desperate fight.
 But midst these thoughts there came in sight
 He who had carried him of yore,
 From out the woodman's broken door,

Dressed like a king's man, with fine gold
 Touching his hard brown hands and old,
 So was his sleeve embroidered;
 A plumed hat had he on his head, 760
 And by his side a cutting sword
 Fit for the girdle of a lord,
 And round his neck a knife he bore,
 The hilt whereof was figured o'er
 With green leaves on a golden ground,
 Whose stem a silver scroll enwound;
 Charged with these letters, writ in black,
Strike! for no dead man cometh back!

The boys gazed at him earnestly,
 With beating heart, as he drew nigh. 770
 And, when at last he drew his rein
 Beside him, thought that not in vain
 His dream might be. But Samuel
 Below his breath said, "Surely well
 Shalt thou fulfil thy destiny;
 And, spite of all, thou wilt not die
 Till thou hast won the arched crown."

But with that word he lighted down,
 And said aloud, "Lad, tell to me 780
 Where the good miller I may see,
 For from the King I come to day,
 And have a word of his to say,
 I think, indeed, concerning thee,
 For surely thou his lad must be."

Then Michael leapt up, nor took heed
 Of how the nibbling dace might feed
 Upon the loose ends of his bait,
 'Fair sir,' he said, "my sire doth wait
 Until men bring his mare from grass,
 For to the good town will he pass, 790
 Since he has need of household gear;
 Follow, my lord, the place is here."

Withal, the good steed being made fast,
 Unto the other side they passed,
 And by the door the miller found,
 Who bowed before him to the ground,
 And asked what he would have him do.

Then from his bosom Samuel drew
 A scroll, and said, "Good friend, read here,
 And do my bidding without fear
 Of doing ill." 800

"Sir," said the man,
 "But little lettered skill I can;
 Let my dame come, for she can read
 Well-written letters at good need"

"Nay, friend," he said, "suffice it thee
 This seal at the scroll's end to see,
 My lord the King's, and hear my word,
 That I come hither from my lord
 Thy foundling lad to have away
 To serve the King from this same day." 810

Downcast the miller looked thereat,
 And twisting round his dusty hat,
 Said, "Well, my lord, so must it be,
 Nor is he aught akin to me,
 Nor seems so none the less would I
 Have left him, when I came to die,
 All things I have, with this my mill,
 Wherein he hath no 'prentice skill,
 Young as he is and surely here
 Might he have lived, with little fear,
 A life of plenty and of bliss—
 Near by, too, a fair maid there is,
 I looked should be good wife to him." 820

Meanwhile young Michael's head 'gan swim
 With thoughts of noble life and praise,
 And he forgot the happy days
 Wherein the happy dreams he dreamed
 That now so near fulfilment seemed;
 And, looking through the open mill,
 Stared at the grey and windy hill
 And saw it not, but some fair place
 Made strange with many a changing face,
 And all his life that was to be. 830

But Samuel, laughing scornfully,
 Said, "O good soul, thou thinkest then
 This is a life for well-born men,

He turned to go, but pensively
 Stood Michael, for his broken dream 880
 Doubtful and far away did seem
 Amidst the squire's rough mockeries;
 And tears were gathering in his eyes.
 But the kind miller's rough farewell
 Rang in his ears; and Samuel
 Stamped with his foot and plucked his sleeve;
 So therewithal he turned to leave
 His old abode, the quiet place,
 Trembling, with wet and tearful face.

But even as he turned there came 890
 From out the house the simple dame
 And cast rough arms about the lad,
 Saying, "For that I have been glad
 By means of thee this many a day,
 My mourning heart this hour doth pay.
 But, fair son, mayst thou live in bliss,
 And die in peace; remembering this,
 When thou art come to high estate,
 That in our house, early and late,
 The happy house that shall be sad, 900
 Thou hadst the best of all we had
 And love unfeigned from us twain,
 Whose hearts thou madest young again,
 Hearts that the quicker old shall grow
 Now thou art gone."

"Good dame, enow,"

Quoth Samuel, "the day grows late,
 And sure the King for meat shall wait
 Until he see this new-found lord."
 He strode away upon that word: 910
 And half ashamed, and half afeard,
 Yet eager as his dream he neared,
 Shyly the lad went after him.
 They crossed the stream and by its brim
 Both mounted the great warhorse grey,
 And without word they rode away.

But as along the river's edge
 They went, and brown birds in the sedge

Twittered their sweet and formless tune
 In the fair autumn afternoon, 920
 And reach by reach the well-known stream
 They passed, again the hopeful dream
 Of one too young to think death near,
 Who scarce had learned the name of fear,
 Remorseful memories put to flight;
 Lovely the whole world showed and bright.
 Nor did the harsh voice rouse again
 The thought of mockery or of pain,
 For other thoughts held Samuel.

So, riding silently and well, 930
 They reached at last the dusty road
 That led unto the King's abode.
 But Samuel turned away his face
 Therefrom, and at a steady pace
 The great horse thundered o'er the bridge,
 And made on toward the heathy ridge,
 Wherefrom they rode that other day.
 But Michael, noting well the way,
 Why thus they went, fell wondering,
 And said aloud, "Dwells then the King, 940
 Fair sir, as now within the wood?"

"Young fool, where that it seems him good
 He dwelleth," quoth old Samuel,
 "And now it pleaseth him to dwell
 With the black monks across the wood"

Withal he muttered in his hood,
 "Curst be the King, and thou also,
 Who thrust me out such deeds to do,
 When I should bide at home to pray,
 Who draw so nigh my ending day." 950
 So saying, forth his horse he spured
 And to himself said yet this word,
 "Yea, yea, and of all days forlorn
 God curse the day when I was born"

Therewith he groaned; yet saying thus
 His case seemed hard and piteous,
 When he remembered how of old
 Another tale he might have told.

So as each thought his own thoughts still,

The horse began to breast the hill, 960
 And still they went on higher ground,
 Until as Michael turned him round
 He saw the sunny country-side
 Spread out before him far and wide,
 Golden amidst its waning green,
 Joyous with varied life unseen.

Meanwhile from side to side of them
 The trees began their way to hem,
 As still he gazed from tree to tree
 And when he turned back presently 970
 He saw before him like a wall
 Uncounted tree-trunks dim and tall.
 Then with their melancholy sound
 The odious spruce-woods met around
 Those wayfarers and when he turned
 Once more, far off the sunlight burned
 In star-like spots, while from o'erhead
 Dim twilight through the boughs was shed.

Not there as yet had Michael been,
 Nor had he left the meadows green 980
 Dotted about with spreading trees,
 And fresh with sun and rain and breeze,
 For those milk woods, and now his eyes
 Gazed round about for mysteries.
 Since many an old wife's tale he knew;
 Huge woodcutters in raiment blue,
 The remnant of a mighty race,
 The ancient masters of the place,
 And hammering trolls he looked to see,
 And dancers of the faerie, 920
 Who, as the ancient stories told,
 In front were lovely to behold,
 But empty shells seen from behind

So on they rode until the wind
 Had died out, stilled by the trees,
 And Michael 'mid those images
 Of strange things made alive by fear,
 Grew drowsy in the forest dear,
 Nor noted how the time went past

Until they nigh had reached at last 1000
 The borders of the spruce-tree wood;
 And with a tingling of the blood
 Samuel bethought him of the day
 When turnea about the other way
 He carried him he rode with now.
 For the firs ended on the brow
 Of a rough gravelly hill, and there
 Lay a small valley nowise fair
 Beneath them, clear at first of all
 But brake, till amid rushes tall 1010
 Down in the bottom alders grew
 Crabbed and rough, and winding through
 The clayey mounds a brook there was
 Oozy and foul, half choked with grass.

There now the squire awhile drew rein,
 And noted how the ground again
 Rose up upon the other side,
 And saw a green glade opening wide
 'Twixt oaks and hollies, and he knew 1020
 Full well what place it led unto;
 Withal he heard the bittern's boom,
 And though without the fir-wood's gloom
 They now were come, yet red and low
 The sun above the trees did show,
 And in despite of hardihead,
 The old squire had a mortal dread
 Of lying in the wood alone
 When that was done that should be done.

Now Michael, wakened by the wind,
 Clutched tighter at belt behind, 1030
 And with wide eyes was staring round,
 When Samuel said, "Get to the ground,
 My horse shall e'en sink deep enow
 Without thy body, in this slough;
 And haste thee or we both shall lie
 Beneath the trees, and be as dry
 As autumn dew can make us. Haste!
 The time is short for thee to waste."

Then from the horse the boy did glide,
 And slowly down the valley side 1040

They went, and Michael, wakened now,
 Sang such rude songs as he might know,
 Grown fresh and joyous of his life;
 While Samuel, clutching at the knife
 About his neck that hung, again
 Down in the bottom tightened rein,
 And turning, in a hoarse voice spake,
 'My girths are loosening, come and take
 The straps and draw them tighter, lad.'

Then Michael stayed is carol glad, 1050
 And noting little in his mirth

The other's voice, unto the girth
 Without a word straight set his hand:
 But as with bent head he did stand,
 Straining to tighten what was tight,
 In Samuel's hand the steel flashed bright.
 And fell, deep smitten in his side;
 Then, leaping back, the poor lad cried,
 As if for help, and staggering fell,
 With wide eyes fixed on Samuel;

Who none the less grown deadly pale, 1060
 Lit down, lest that should not avail
 To slay him, and beside him knelt.

And since his eyes were closed now, felt
 His heart that beat yet. therewithal
 His hand upon the knife did fall.

But, ere his fingers clutched it well,
 Far off he seemed to hear a bell,
 And trembling knelt upright again,
 And listening, listened not in vain, 1070

For clear he heard a tinkling sound.

Then to his horse from off the ground
 He leapt, nor reasoned with his dread

But thought the angel of the dead
 Was drawing nigh the slayer to slay,
 Ere scarce the soul had passed away.

One dreadful moment yet he heard
 That bell, then like a madman spurred
 His noble horse; that, maddened too,
 The close-set fir-wood galloped through, 1080
 Not stayed by any stock or stone,

Until, the furious race being done,
 Anigh the bridge he fell down dead;
 And Samuel, mazed with guilt and dread,
 Wandered afoot thro' the night,
 But came, at dawning of the light,
 Half-dead unto the palace gate.

There till the opening did he wait;
 Then, by the King's own signet-ring,
 He gained the chamber of the King, 1090
 And painfully what he had done
 He told, and how the thing had gone.
 And said withal. "Yet is he dead,
 And surely that which made my dread
 Shall give thee joy. for doubt not aught
 That bell the angels to him brought,
 That he in Abraham's breast might lie—
 So ends, O King, the prophecy.

Nathless the King scowled, ill content,
 And said, "I deemed that I had sent 1100
 A man of war to do my will,
 Who lacked for neither force nor skill,
 And thou com'st with a woman's face,
 Bewildered with thy desperate race,
 And made an idiot with thy fear,
 Nor bring'st me any token here!"

Therewith he rose and gat away,
 But brooding on it through that day,
 Thought that all things went not so ill 1110
 As first he deemed, and that he still
 Might leave his old line flourishing,
 Therewith both gold and many a thing
 Unto old Samuel he gave,
 But failed thereby his life to save;
 Who, not so old in years as sin,
 Died ere the winter, and within
 Then minster choir was laid asleep,
 With carven saints his head to keep.

And so the days and years went by,
 And still in great felicity 1120
 The King dwelt, wanting only this—

A son wherewith to share his bliss,
 And reign when he was dead and gone;
 Nor had he daughter, save that one
 Born on the night when Michael first,
 Forlorn, alone, and doubly cursed,
 Felt on him this world's bitter ail.

'His daughter, midst fair maids most fair,
 Was not yet wed, though at this time,
 Being come unto her maiden's prime, 1130
 She looked upon her eighteenth May.

Midst this her mother passed away,
 Not much lamented of the King,
 Who had the thought of marrying
 Some dame more fertile, and who sent
 A willy man with this intent
 To spy the countries out and find
 Some great king's daughter, wise and kind,
 And fresh, and fair in face and limb,
 In all things a fit mate for him. 1140

So in short time it came to pass
 Again the King well wedded was,
 And hoped once more to have a son.

And when this fair dame he had won,
 A year in peace he dwelt with her,
 Until the time was drawing near
 When first his eyes beheld that foe
 Dead as he deemed these years ago.
 Now at that time, as custom was,
 His daughter was about to pass 1150
 Unto a distant house of his,
 Built by some king for worldly bliss
 In ancient days: there, far removed
 From courts or towns, his dame beloved
 The dead king had been wont to see
 Play mid the summer greenery,
 Or like Erigone of old
 Stand in the vineyard girt with gold,
 To queen it o'er the vintagers,
 Half worshipping that face of hers. 1160
 Long years ago these folk were passed,
 Their crimes forgotten, or else cast

Into the glowing crucible
 Of time, that tempers all things well,
 That maketh pleasure out of pain,
 And out of ruin golden gain;
 Nathless, unshaken still, there stood
 The towers and ramparts red as blood
 Wherein their lives had passed away;
 And still the lovely gardens lay 1170
 About them, changed, but smiling still,
 As in past time, on good or ill.

Thither the Princess Cicily
 Must go awhile in peace to be,
 For now, midst care, and doubt, and toil,
 Proud words drawn back, and half-healed broil,
 The King had found one meet to wed
 His daughter, of great goodlihead,
 Wealth, and unbroken royalty.

And now he said to her, when she 1180
 Was setting out for that fair place,
 "O daughter, thou shalt see my face
 Before a month is fully gone,
 Nor wilt thou see me then alone;
 For that man shall be with me then,
 Whom I have chosen from all men
 To hold the treasure of my life.

Full sore he longs to see his wife,
 Nor needst thou fear him for thy part 1190
 Who holdeth many a woman's heart
 As the net holds the silvery fish.
 Farewell—and all that thou may'st wish
 I pray God grant thee '

Therewithal

He kissed her, and from out the hall
 She passed, not shamefaced, or afraid
 Of what might happen; though, indeed,
 Her heart of no man's heart had need
 To make her happy, as she thought.

Ever the new sun daily brought 1200
 Fresh joy of life to her bedside.
 The world before her open wide

Was spread, a place for joy and bliss.
 Her lips had trembled with no kiss,
 Wherewith love slayeth fear and shame;
 Her grey eyes, conscious of no blame,
 Beheld unmoved the eyes of men;
 He, hearing grew no dimmer when
 Some unused footstep she might hear;
 And unto no man was she dear, 1210
 But as some goddess might have been
 When Greek men worshipped many a queen.

Now with her armed folk forth she rode
 Unto that ancient fair abode,
 And while the lark sung o'er the corn,
 Love gilded not the waning morn;
 And when the sun rose high above,
 High thoughts she thought, but not of love;
 And when that sun the world did leave,
 He left no love to light the eve. 1220
 The moon no melancholy brought,
 The dawn no vain, remorseful thought.
 But all untroubled her sweet face
 Passed 'neath the gate of that old place,
 And there her bridegroom she abode.

But scarce was she upon the road
 Ere news unto the King was brought
 That Peter, the old Abbot, sought
 To see him, having newly come
 From the wild place that was his home 1230
 Across the forest, so the King
 Bade him to enter, well willing
 To hear what he might have to say;
 Who, entering the great hall straightway,
 Had with him an old, reverend man,
 The sub-prior, Father Adrian,
 And five monks more, and therewithal
 Ten of his folk, stout men and tall,
 Who bore armed staves and coats of fence.
 So, when he came to audience, 1240
 He prayed the King of this or that,

Whereof my tale-teller forgat,
 And graciously the King heard all,
 And said at last, "Well, what may fall,
 Thou go'st not hence, fair lord, to-day;
 Unless in vain a king must pray,
 Thou and thy monks shall eat with me;
 While feast thine axe-men merrily "

Withal, he eyed the Abbot's folk
 In careless mood, then once more spoke, 1250
 "Tall men thou feedest, by the rood !
 Lord Abbot; come they from the wood ?
 Dwell many more such thereabout ?
 Fain were I such should swell the shout
 When I am armed, and rank meets rank."

But as he spoke his loud voice sank
 Wavering, nor heard he aught at all
 Of the faint noises of the hall,
 Or what the monk in answer said;
 For, looking from a steel-clad head, 1260
 Those eyes again did he behold
 That erst from 'neath the locks of gold
 Kindly and bold, but soft with awe,
 Beneath the apple-boughs he saw.

But when thereof he surely knew,
 Pale to the very lips he grew;
 Till gathering heart within a while
 With the faint semblance of a smile,
 He seemed to note the Abbot's words
 That he heard not; then from the lords 1270
 He turned, and facing Michael said,
 "Raise up the steel cap from thine head,
 That I may see if thou look'st bold,
 Methinks, I know thy face of old,
 Whence com'st thou ?"

Michael lifted straight
 From off his brow the steel cap's weight,
 And showed the bright locks curling round
 His fresh and ruddy face, sun-browned,
 And in a voice clear as a bell 1280
 Told all his story, till he fell
 Sore wounded in that dismal vale,

And said withal, "My lord, the tale
Of what came after, none knoweth
Better than he, who, from ill death
Saved me that tide, and made me man,
My lord, the sub-prior Adrian."

'Speak on then, father," quoth the King,
Making as he was hearkening.

"My lord," said Adrian, "I, who then 1290
Was but a server of poor men

Outside our Abbey walls, one day
Was called by one in poor array,
A charcoal-burner's lad, who said
That soon his father would be dead,
And that of all things he would have
His rights, that he his soul might save.

I made no tarrying at that word,
But took between mine hands the Lord, 1300
And bade the boy bear forth the bell;
For though few folk there were to tell
Who passed that way, nathless, I trow
The beasts were glad that news to know.

"Well, by the pinewood's skirts v'e went
While through its twilight the bell sent
A heavenly tinkling; but the lad
'Gan telling me of fears he had
Of elves who dwell within the wood.

I chid him thereat, as was good,
Bidding him note Whom in mine hands 1310
I held, The Ransom of all Lands.

But as the firwood's dim twilight
Waxed into day, and fair and bright
The evening sun showed through the trees,
Our ears fanned by the evening breeze
The galloping of horse-hoofs heard,
Wherewith my page hung back afraid
Of elves and such-like; but I said,

'Wilt thou thy father should be dead
Ere we can reach him? O my son, 1320
Fear not that aught can stay This One.'

"Therewith I smote my mule, and he
Ran forward with me hastily

As fearing to be left behind.

Well, as we went, what should we find
Down by the stream, but this my son,
Who seemed as though his days were done;

For in his side a knife there stood
Wherefrom ran out a stream of blood,
Soaking the grass and water-mint; 1330

Then, I dismounting, we by dint
Of all our strength the poor youth laid
Upon my mule, and down a glade
Of oaks and hollies then we passed,
And reached the woodman's home at last;

A poor hut, built of wattled wood,
And by its crooked gable stood
A ruinous shed, unroofed and old,
That beasts of burden once did hold.

—Thyself, my lord, mayst know it well, 1340
Since thereabout the wild swine dwell;

And hart, and hind, and roe are there—
So the lad's wounds I staunched with care
Forthwith, and then the man I shrived,
Who none the less got well and lived

For many a day. then back I went
And the next day our leech I sent
With drugs to tend upon the lad,
Who soon was as he ne'er had had
A hurt at all: and he being well 1350

We took him in our house to dwell,
And taught him letters, and, indeed,
Before long, Latin could he read
As well as I; but hath no will
To turn unto religion still.

Yet is he good and doth no wrong;
And being thereto both hale and strong,
My lord, the Abbot, sayeth of him,
'He shall serve God with heart and limb,

Not heart and voice.' Therefore my lord, 1360
Thou seest him armed with spear and sword
For their defence who feed him still,
Teach him, and guard his soul from ill.

Ho, Michael! hast thou there with thee

The fair-wrought knife I first did see
 Deep in thy side ?—there, show it now
 Unto the King, that he may know
 Our tale is not a thing of nought."

Withal the King, with eyes distraught
 Amidst his anxious face and pale, 1370
 Sat leaning forward through this tale,
 Scarce noting here and there a word.
 But all being told, at last he heard
 His own voice changed, and harsh, and low,
 That said, "Fair lord, I fain would know,
 Since this your man-at-arms seems true,
 What thing will he be worth to you;
 For better had he wear my rose
 Than loiter in your Abbey-close,
 Poring o'er books no man can read." 1380

"O sire!" the monk said, "if thy need
 Be great of such men, let him go;
 My men-at-arms need make no show
 Of fairness, nor should ladies miss,
 E'en as thou say'st, such men as this."

Laughing he spoke; the King the while
 His pale face puckering to a smile;
 Then, as in some confused dream,
 In Michael's hand he saw the gleam
 Of that same steel remembered well, 1390
 The gift he gave to Samuel;
 Drawn from his father's ancient chest
 To do that morn his own behest
 And as he now beheld its sheen,
 The twining stem of gold and green,
 The white scroll with the letters black,
Strike ! for no dead man cometh back !
 He hardened yet his heart once more,
 And grown unhappy as before,
 When last he had that face in sight, 1400
 Now for the third time come to light,
 Once more was treacherous, fierce, and fell.

Now was the Abbot feasted well
 With all his folk, then went away,
 But Michael clad in rich array

Became the King's man, and was thought
 By all most happy, to be brought
 Unto such hopeful fair estate.

For ten days yet the King did wait,
 Which past, for Michael did he send, 1410
 And he being come, said to him, "Friend,
 Take now this letter from my hand
 And go unto our southern land;
 My captain Hugh shall go whith thee
 For one day's journey, then shall he
 Tell thee which way thou hast to ride;
 The third day thence about noontide
 If thou dost well, thou shouldst be close
 Unto my Castle of the Rose
 Where dwells my daughter, needs it is 1420
 That no man living should see this
 Until that thou within my wall
 Hast given it to the Seneschal;
 Be wise and wary then, that thou
 Mayst think of this that happeneth now
 As birthday to thine high estate "

So said he, knowing not that fate
 Was dealing otherwise than he.

But Michael going, presently
 Met Hugh, a big man rough and black, 1430
 And who of nought but words had lack.
 With him he mounted, and set forth
 And daylong rode on from the north.

Now if the King had hope that Hugh
 Some deed like Samuel's might do
 I know not; certes nought he said
 To that hard heart and narrow head,
 Who knew no wiles but wiles of war,
 And was as true as such men are;
 Yet had there been a tale to tell 1440
 If Michael had not held him well,
 And backward still the wrath had turned
 Where with his heart not seldom burned
 At scornful words his fellow said.

At last they reached cross-ways that led
 One west, one southward still, whereat
 Hugh, taking off his feathered hat,
 Bowed low in scorn, and said, "Fair sir,
 Unto the westward must I spur,
 While you go southward, soon to get, 1450
 I doubt not, an earl's coronet;
 Farewell, my lord, and yet beware
 Thou dost not at my lady stare
 Too hard, lest thou shouldst plumb the moat,
 Or have a halter round thy throat."

But Michael to his scoff said nought,
 But upon high things set his thought
 As his departing hooves he heard,
 And still betwixt the hedge rows spurred. 1460
 And when the twilight was o'erpast
 At a small inn drew rein at last,
 And slept that night as such folk can;
 And while next morn the thrushes ran
 Their first course through the autumn dew
 The gossamers did he dash through,
 And on his way rode steadily
 The live-long day, nor yet was he
 Alone, as well might be that day,
 Since a fair town was in his way.
 Stout hinds he passed, and yeomen good, 1470
 And friars of the heavy hood,
 And white-coifed housewives mounted high
 Above their maunds, while merrily
 The well-shod damsel trudged along
 Beside them, sending forth a song
 As little taught as is a bird's;
 And goodmen, goodwives, priests, and herds,
 And merry maids failed not to send
 Good wishes for his journey's end
 Athwart him as still on he sped, 1480
 Free from all evil thoughts or dread.

Withal again the day went by,
 And in that city's hostalry
 He slept, and by the dawn of day

Next morn again was on his way,
 And leaving the scarce wakened street
 The newly risen sun did greet
 With cheerful heart. His way wound on
 Still up and up till he had won
 Up to a great hill's chalky brow, 1490
 Whence looking back he saw below
 The town spread out, church, square, and street,
 And baily, crawling up the feet
 Of the long yew-besprinkled hill;
 And in the fragrant air and still,
 Seeming to gain new life from it,
 The doves from roof to roof did flit :
 The early fires sent up their smoke
 That seemed to him to tell of folk
 New wakened unto great delight: 1500
 For he upon that morning bright
 So joyous felt, so free from pain,
 He seemed as he were born again
 Into some new immortal state
 That knew no envy, fear or hate.

Now the road turned to his left hand
 And led him through a table land,
 Windy and barren of all grain;
 But where a hollow specked the plain
 The yew-trees hugged the sides of it, 1510
 And mid them did the woodlark flit
 Or sang well sheltered from the wind.
 And all about the sheep did find
 Sweet grass, the while the shepherd's song
 Rang clear as Michael sped along.

Long time he rode, till suddenly,
 When now the sun was broad and high,
 From out a hollow where the yew
 Still guarded patches of the dew, 1520
 He rode and saw that he had won
 That highland's edge, and gazed upon
 A valley that beneath the haze
 Of that most fair of autumn days,
 Showed glorious; fair with golden sheaves,
 Rich with the darkened autumn-leaves,

Gay with the water-meadows green,
 The bright blue streams that lay between,
 The miles of beauty stretched away
 From that bleak hill-side bare and grey,
 Till white cliffs over slopes of vine 1530
 Drew 'gainst the sky a broken line.
 And 'twixt the vineyards and the stream
 Michael saw gilded spirelets gleam;
 For, hedged with many a flowery close,
 There lay the Castle of the Rose,
 His hurried journey's aim and end.

Then downward he began to wend,
 And 'twixt the flowery hedges sweet
 He heard the hook smite down the wheat,
 And murmur of the unseen folk; 1540
 But when he reached the stream that broke
 The golden plain, but leisurely
 He passed the bridge, for he could see
 The masters of that ripening realm,
 Cast down beneath and ancient elm
 Upon a little strip of grass,
 From hand to hand the pitcher pass,
 While on the turf beside them lay
 The ashen-handled sickles grey,
 The matters of their cheer between : 1550
 Slices of white cheese, specked with green,
 And green-striped onions and ryebread,
 And summer apples faintly red
 Even beneath the crimson skin,
 And yellow grapes, well ripe and thin,
 Plucked from the cottage gable-end.'

And certes Michael felt their friend
 Hearing their voices, nor forgot
 His boyhood and the pleasant spot
 Beside the well-remembered stream ; 1560
 And friendly did this water seem
 As through its white-flowered weeds it ran
 Bearing good things to beast and man.
 Yea, as the parapet he passed,

And they a greeting toward him cast,
 Once more he felt a boy again ;
 As though beneath the harvest wain
 He was asleep, by that old stream,
 And all these things were but a dream—
 The King, the Squire, the high and noble ride 1570
 Unto the lonely quagmire side ;
 The sudden pain, the deadly swoon,
 The feverish life from noon to noon ;
 The tending of the kind old man,
 The black and white Dominican,
 The hour before the Abbot's throne,
 The poring o'er old books alone,
 In summer morns; the King again,
 The envious greetings of strange men,
 This mighty horse and rich array, 1580
 This journey on an unknown way.

Surely he thought to wake from it
 And once more by the waggon sit,
 Blinking upon the sunny mill.
 But not for either good or ill
 Shall he see one of all those days.

On through the quivering noontide haze
 He rode, and now on either hand
 Heavy with fruit the trees did stand;
 Nor had he ridden long, ere he 1590
 The red towers of the house could see
 Grey on the wind-beat southern side :
 And soon the gates thrown open wide
 He saw, the long-fixed drawbridge down,
 The moat with lilies overgrown,
 Midst which the gold-scaled fishes lay :
 Such peace was there for many a day.

And deep within the archway's shade
 The warder on his cloak was laid,
 Dozing, one hand upon a harp. 1600
 And nigh him a great golden carp
 Lay stiff, with all his troubles done,
 Drawn from the moat ere yet the sun
 Was high, and nigh him was his bane
 An angling rod of Indian cane.

Now hearing Michael's horse-hooves smite
 The causeway, shading from the light
 His eyes, as one scarce yet awake,
 He made a shift his spear to take,
 And, eyeing Michael's badge the while,
 Rose up, and with a lazy smile,
 Said, "Ho ! fair sir, abide, abide,
 And show why hitherward ye ride
 Into my lady's royal home."

1610

Said Michael, "From the King I come,
 As by my badge ye well may see;
 And letters have I here with me
 To give my lord the Sencschal."

"Yea," said the man, "but in the hall
 He feasteth now; what haste is there ?

1620

Certes full quickly cometh care;
 And sure I am he will not read
 Thy letters, or to aught give heed
 Till he has played out all the play,
 And every guest has gone away;
 So thou, O damoiseau, must wait;

He up thine horse anigh the gate,
 And sit with me, and thou shalt hear
The Kaiser lieth on his bier.'

Thou laughest—hast thou never heard
 Of this same valorous Red Beard,
 And how he died ? Well, I can sing
 Of many another dainty thing,

1630

Thou wilt not a long while forget,
 The budget is not empty yet.

-Peter ! I think thou mockest me,
 But thou art young and fair perdie,
 I wish thee luck—well, thou may'st go
 And feel the afternoon wind blow
 Within Dame Bertha's pleasance here;

1640

He who was held so lief and dear,
 All this was built but for her sake,
 Who made the hearts of men to ache;
 And dying full of years and shame
 Yet left an unforgotten name—
 Good rest her soul !"

Michael the while

Hearkened his talking with a smile,
 Then said, "O friend, I think to hear
 Both '*The King lieth on his bier*'
 And many another song of thee,
 Ere I depart ; but now show me
 The pleasance of the ancient queen;
 For these red towers above the green
 Seen like the gates of Paradise,
 That surely somewhere through them lies."

Then said the warder, "That may be
 If thou know'st what may come to thee.
 When past the drawbridge thou hast gone,
 Upon the left three steps of stone 1660
 Lead to a path beneath the wall
 Of the great court, that folk now call
 The falconer's path, nor canst thou miss
 Going thereby, to find the bliss
 Thou look'st for, since the path ends there,
 And through a wicket gilded fair
 The garden lies where thou wouldst be :
 Nor will I fail to come to thee
 Whene'er my Lord the Seneschal
 Shall pass well fed from out the hall." 1670

Then Michael, thanking him, passed on,
 And soon the gilded wicket won,
 And went into that pleasance sweet,
 And wandered there with wary feet
 And open mouth, as though he deemed
 That in some lovely dream he dreamed,
 And feared to wake to common day,
 So fair was all, and e'en decay
 Brought there but pensive loveliness,
 Where autumn those old walls did bless 1680
 With wealth of fruit, and through the grass
 Unscared the spring-born thrush did pass,
 Who yet knew nought of winter-tide.

So wandering, to a fountain's side
 He came, and o'er the basin hung,
 Watching the fishes, as he sung
 Some song remembered from of old,

Ere yet the miller won that gold,
 Ere soon made drowsy with his ride,
 And the warm hazy autumn-tide, 1690
 And many a musical sweet sound,
 He cast him down upon the ground,
 And watched the glittering water leap,
 Still singing low, nor thought to sleep.

But scarce three minutes had gone by
 Before, as if in mockery,
 The starling chattered o'er his head,
 And nothing he remembered,
 Nor dreamed of aught that he had seen.

Meanwhile unto that garden green 1700
 Had come the Princess, and with her
 A maiden that she held right dear,
 Who knew the inmost of her mind.
 Those twain, as the warm scented wind
 Played with their raiment or their hair,
 Had late been running here and there,
 Chasing each other merrily,
 As maids do, thinking no one by;
 But now, well wearied therewithal,
 Had let their gathered garments fall 1710
 About their feet, and slowly went.
 And through the leaves a murmur sent,
 As of two happy doves that sing
 The soft returning of the spring.

But of the two the Princess spoke
 The less, but into laughter broke
 Not seldom, and would redden oft,
 As on her lips her fingers soft
 She laid, as still the other maid,
 Half grave, half smiling, follies said. 1720

So in their walk they drew anigh
 That fountain in the midst, whereby
 Lay Michael sleeping, dreaming nought
 Of such fair things so nigh him brought.
 They, when the fountain shaft was past,
 Beheld him on the ground down-cast,
 And stopped at first, until the maid

Stepped lightly forward to the shade,
 And when she had gazed there awhile
 Came running back again, a smile
 Parting her lips, and her bright eyes
 A fire with many fantasies;
 And ere the Lady Cecily
 Could speak a word, "Hush ! hush !" said she;
 "Did I not say that he would come
 To woo thee in thy peaceful home
 Before thy father brought him here ?
 Come, and behold him, have no fear !
 The great bell would not wake him now,
 Right in his ears."
 1730
 1740

"Nay, what dost thou ?"
 The Princess said; "let us go hence;
 Thou know'st I give obedience
 To what my father bids, but I
 A maid full fain would live and die,
 Since I am born to be a queen."
 "Yea, yea, for such as thou hast seen,
 That may be well," the other said.
 "But come now, come; for by my head
 This one must be from Paradise;
 Come swiftly then, if thou art wise
 Ere aught can snatch him back again."
 1750

She caught her hand, and not in vain
 She prayed; for now some kindly thought
 To Cecily's brow fair colour brought,
 And quickly 'gan her heart to beat
 As love drew near those eyes to greet,
 Who knew him not till that sweet hour.

So over the fair, pink-edged flower,
 Softly she stepped; but when she came
 Anigh the sleeper, lovely shame
 Cast a soft mist before her eyes
 Full filled of many fantasies.
 But when she saw him lying there
 She smiled to see her mate so fair ;
 And in her heart did Love begin
 To tell his tale, nor thought she sin
 1760

To gaze on him that was her own,
 Not doubting he was come alone
 To woo her, whom midst arms and gold
 1770 She deemed she should at first behold;
 And with that thought love grew again
 Until departing was a pain,
 Though fear grew with that growing love,
 And with her lingering footsteps strove
 As from the place she turned to go,
 Sighing and murmuring words but low.
 But as her raiment's hem she raised,
 And for her merry fellow gazed
 Shamefaced and changed, she met her eyes
 1780 Turned grave and sad with ill surprise;
 Who while the Princess mazed did stand
 Had drawn from Michael's loosened band
 The King's scroll, which she held out now
 To Cecily, and whispered low,
 "Read, and do quickly what thou wilt
 Sad, sad ! such fair life to be spilt :
 Come further first."

With that they stepped

A pace or two from where he slept,
 1790 And then she read,

"Lord Seneschal,
On thee and thine may all good fall;
Greeting hereby the King sendeth,
And biddeth thee to put to death
His enemy who beareth this,
And as thou lovest life and bliss,
And all thy goods thou holdest dear,
Set thou his head upon a spear
A good half furlong from the gate.
 1800 *Our coming hitherward to wait—*
So perish the King's enemies!"

She read, and scarcely had her eyes
 Seen clear her father's name and seal,
 Ere all love's power her heart did feel,
 That drew her back in spite of shame,
 To him who was not e'en a name
 To her a little hour agoe.

Panting she said, "Wait thou alone
 Beside him, watch him carefully 1810
 And let him sleep if none draw nigh ;
 If of himself he waketh, then
 Hide him until I come again,
 When thou has told him of the snare—
 If thou betrayest me beware !
 For death shall be the least of all
 The ills that on thine head shall fall.
 —What say I ? thou art dear to me,
 And doubly dear now shalt thou be,
 Thou shalt have power and majesty, 1820
 And be more queen in all than I.
 Few words are best, be wise, be wise !"

Withal she turned about her eyes
 Once more, and swiftly as a man
 Betwixt the garden trees she ran,
 Until, her own bower reached at last
 She made good haste, and quickly passed
 Unto her secret treasury.
 There, hurrying since the time was nigh
 For folk to come from meat, she took 1830
 From 'twixt the leaves of a great book
 A royal scroll, signed, sealed, but blank,
 Then, with a hand that never shrank
 Or trembled, she the scroll did fill
 With these words, writ with clerkly skill,—
*"Unto the Seneschal, Sir Rafe,
 Who holdeth our fair castle safe,
 Greeting and health ! O well-beloved,
 Know that at this time we are moved
 To wed our daughter, so we send 1840
 Him who bears this, our perfect friend,
 To be her bridegroom, so do thou
 Ask nought of him since well we know
 His race and great nobility,
 And how he is most fit to be
 Our son; therefore make no delay,
 But wed the tuan upon the day
 Thou readest this and see that all*

*Take oath to him, whate'er shall fall,
To do his bidding as our heir,
So doing still be life and dear
As I have held thee yet to be."* 1850

She cast the pen down hastily
At that last letter, for she heard
How even now the people stirred
Within the hall: nor dared she think
What bitter potion she must drink
If now she failed, so falsely bold
That life or death did she enfold
Within its cover, making shift 1860
To seal it with her father's gift,
A signet of cornelian.

Then swiftly down the stairs she ran
And reached the garden; but her fears
Brought shouts and thunder to her ears,
That were but lazy words of men
Full-fed, far off; nay, even when
Her limbs caught up her flying gown
The noise seemed loud enough to drown
The twitter of the autumn birds, 1870
And her own muttered breathless words
That to her heart seemed loud indeed.

Yet therewithal she made good speed
And reached the fountain seen of none,
Where yet abode her friend alone,
Watching the sleeper, who just now
Turned in his sleep and muttered low.
Therewith fair Agnes saying nought
From out her hand the letter caught; 1880
And, while she leaned against the stone,
Stole up to Michael's side alone,
And with a cool, unshrinking hand
Thrust the new scroll deep in his band
And turned about unto her friend;
Who having come unto the end
Of all her courage, trembled there
With face upturned for fresher air,
And parted lips grown grey and pale,

And limbs that now began to fail,
 And hands wherefrom all strength had gone, 1890
 Scarce fresher than the blue-veined stone
 That quivering still she strove to clutch.

But when she felt her lady's touch,
 Feebly she said, "Go! let me die
 And end this sudden misery
 That in such wise has wrapped my life.
 I am too weak for such a strife,
 So sick I am with shame and fear;
 Would thou hadst never brought me here!"

But Agnes took her hand and said, 1900
 "Nay, queen, and must we three be dead
 Because thou fearest? all is safe
 If boldly thou wilt face Sir Rafe"

So saying, did she draw her hence,
 Past tree and bower and high pleached fence
 Unto the garden's further end,
 And left her there and back did wend,
 And from the house made haste to get
 A gilded maund wherein she set
 A flask of ancient island wine, 1910
 Ripe fruits and wheaten manchets fine,
 And many such a delicate
 As goddesses in old time ate,
 Ere Helen was a Trojan queen;
 So passing through the garden green
 She cast her eager eyes again
 Upon the spot where he had lain,
 But found it empty, so sped on
 Till she at last the place had won
 Where Cecily lay faint, weak and white 1920
 Within that fair bower of delight.

Her straight she made to eat and drink,
 And said, "See now thou dost not shrink
 From this thy deed, let love slay fear
 Now, when thy life shall grow so dear,
 Each minute should seem loss to thee
 If thou for thy felicity
 Couldst stay to count them; for I say,
 This day shall be thy happy day."

Therewith she smiled to see the wine
Embraced by her fair fingers fine,
And her sweet face grow bright again
With sudden pleasure after pain. 1930

Again she spoke, "What is this word
That dreaming, I perchance have heard,
But certainly remember well?
That some old soothsayer did tell
Strange things unto my lord the King,
That on thy hand the spousal ring
No Kaiser's son, no King should set,
But one a peasant did beget— 1940
What say'st thou?"

But the Queen flushed red;
"Such fables I have heard," she said;
"And thou—is it a scathe to me,
The bride of such a man to be?"

"Nay", said she, "God will have him King;
How shall we do a better thing
With this or that one than He can?
God's friend must be a goodly man." 1950

But with that word she heard the sound
Of folk who through the mazes wound
Bearing the message; then she said,
"Be strong, pluck up thine hardihead,
Speak little, so shall all be well,
For now our own tale will they tell."

And even as she spoke they came,
And all the green place was aflame
With golden raiment of the lords;
While Cecily, noting not their words, 1060
Rose up to go; and for her part
By this had fate so steeled her heart,
Scarce otherwise she seemed, than when
She passed before the eyes of men
At tourney or high festival
But when they now had reached the hall,
And up its very steps they went,
Her head a little down she bent;

Nor raised it till the dais was gained
 For fear that love some monster feigned 1970
 To be a God, and she should be
 Struck by her own bolt wretchedly.
 But at the rustling, crowded dais
 She gathered heart her eyes to raise,
 And there beheld her love indeed,
 Clad in her father's serving weed,
 But proud, and flushed, and calm withal;
 Fearless of aught that might befall,
 Nor too astonished, for he thought—
 "From point to point my life is brought 1980
 Through wonders till it comes to this;
 And trouble cometh after bliss,
 And I will bear all as I may,
 And ever as day passeth day,
 My life will hammer from the twain,
 Forging a long enduring chain."

But midst these thoughts their young eyes met,
 And every word did he forget
 Wherewith men name unhappiness
 As read again those words did bless 1990
 With double blessings his glad ears,
 And if she trembled with her fears
 And if with doubt, and love, and shame,
 The rosy colour went and came
 In her sweet cheeks and smooth bright brow,
 Little did folk think of it now,
 But as of maiden modesty,
 Shamefaced to see the bridegroom nigh.

And now when Rafe the Seneschal
 Had read the message down the hall, 2000
 And turned to her, quite calm again
 Her face had grown, and with no pain
 She raised her serious eyes to his
 Grown soft and pensive with his bliss,
 And said,

"Prince, thou art welcome here,
 Where all my father loves is dear,
 And full trust do I put in thee,
 For that so great nobility

He knoweth in thee; be as kind
 As I would be to thee, and find
 A happy life from day to day,
 Till all our days are past away." 2010

What more than found the bystanders
 He found within this speech of hers,
 I know not; some faint quivering
 In the last words: some little thing
 That checked the cold words' even flow
 But yet they set his heart aglow,
 And he in turn said eagerly.—

"Surely I count it nought to die 2020
 For him who brought me unto this;
 For thee, who givest me this bliss;
 Yea, even dost me such a grace
 To look with kind eyes in my face,
 And send sweet music to my ears."

But at his words she, mazed with tears,
 Seemed faint, and failing quickly, when
 Above the low hum of the men
 Uprose the sweet bells' sudden clang,
 As men unto the chapel rang; 2030
 While just outside the singing folk
 Into most heavenly carols broke;
 And going softly up the hall
 Boys bore aloft the verges tall
 Before the Bishop's gold-clad head.

Then forth his bride young Michael led,
 And nought to him seemed good or bad
 Except the lovely hand he had,
 But she the while was murmuring low,
 "If he could know, if he could know, 2040
 What love, what love, his love should be!"

But while mid mirth and minstrelsy
 The ancient Castle of the Rose
 Such pageant to the autumn shows,
 The King sits ill at ease at home,
 For in these days the tidings come
 That he who in his line should wed

He knoweth in thee; be as kind
 As I would be to thee, and find
 A happy life from day to day,
 Till all our days are past away." 2010

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 "If he could know, if he could know, 2040
 What love, what love, his love should be!"

But while mid mirth and minstrelsy
 The ancient Castle of the Rose
 Such pageant to the autumn shows,
 The King sits ill at ease at home,
 For in these days the tidings come
 That he who in his line should wed

Lies in his own town stark and dead,
Slain in a tumult of the street.

Brooding on this he deemed it meet. 2050

Since nigh the day was come, when she
Her bridegroom's visage looked to see,
To hold the settled day with her,
And bid her at the least to wear
Dull mourning guise for gold and white.

So on another morning bright,
When the whole promised month was past,
He drew anigh the place at last
Where Michael's dead head, looking down
Upon the highway with a frown, 2060
He doubted not at last to see.

So 'twixt the fruitful greenery
He rode, scarce touched by care the while,
Humming a roundel with a smile.
Withal, ere yet he drew anigh,
He heard their watch-horn sound from high,
Nor wondered, for their wont was so,
And well his banner they might know
Amidst the stubble lands afar:

But now a distant point of war 2070

He seemed to hear, and bade draw rein,
But listening cried, "Push on again!"
They do but send forth minstrelsy
Because my daughter thinks to see
The man who lieth on his bier"

So on they passed, till sharp and clear
They heard the pipe and shrill fife sound,
And restlessly the King glanced round
To see what he had striven for,
The crushing of that Sage's lore, 2080
The last confusion of that fate

But drawn still nigher to the gate
They turned a sharp bend of the road,
And saw the pageant that abode
The solemn coming of the King

For first on each side, maids did sing,
Dressed in gold raiment; then there came

The minstrels in their coats of flame ;
 And then the many-coloured lords,
 The knights' spears, and the swordmen's swords, 2090
 Backed by the glittering wood of bills,

So now, presaging many ills
 The King drew rein, yet none the less
 He shrank not from his hardiness,
 But thought, "Well, at the worst I die,
 And yet perchance long life may lie
 Before me—I will hold my peace;
 The dumb man's borders still increase."

But as he strengthened thus his heart
 He saw the crowd before him part, 2110
 And down the long melodious lane,
 Hand locked in hand there passed the twain,
 As fair as any earth has found,
 Clad as kings' children are, and crowned.
 Behind them went the chiefest lords,
 And two old knights with sheathed swords
 The banners of the kingdom bore

But now the King had pondered sore,
 By when they reached him, though, indeed
 The time was short unto his need, 2120
 Betwixt his heart's first startled pang
 And those old banner-bearers' clang
 Anigh his saddle-bow: but he
 Across their heads scowled heavily,
 Not saying aught awhile. at last,
 Ere any glance at them he cast,
 He said, "Whence come ye ? what are ye ?
 What play is this ye play to me ?"

None answered. Cecily, faint and white,
 The rather Michael's hand clutched tight, 2130
 And seemed to speak, but not one word
 The nearest to her could have heard.
 Then the King spoke again, "Sir Rafe,
 Meseems this youngling came here safe
 A week ago ?"

"Yea, sir," he said;
 "Therefore the twain I straight did wed,
 E'en as thy letters bound me to."

“And thus thou diddest well to do,”
 The King said. “Tell me on what day
 Her maiden life she put away.” 2140

• “Sire, the eleventh day this is
 Since that they gained their earthly bliss,”
 Quoth old Sir Rafe The King said nought,
 But with his head bowed down-in thought
 Stood a long while; but at the last
 Upward a smiling face he cast,
 And cried aloud above the folk,
 “Shout for the joining of the yoke
 Betwixt these twain ! And thou, fair lord, 2150
 Who dost so well my every word,
 Nor makest doubt of anything,
 Wear thou the collar of thy King;
 And a duke’s banner, cut foursquare,
 Henceforth shall men before thee bear
 In tourney and in stricken field.

‘ But this mine heir shall bear my shield,
 Carry my banner wear my crown,
 Ride equal with me through my town,
 Sit on the same step of the throne, 2160
 In nothing will I rein alone;
 Nor be ye with him discontent,
 For that with little ornament
 Of gold and folk to you he came,
 For he is of an ancient name
 That needeth not the clink of gold—
 The ancientest the world doth hold.
 For in the fertile Asian land,
 Where great Damascus now doth stand,
 A long ago his line was born, 2170
 Ere yet men knew the gift of corn;
 And there, anigh to Paradise,
 His ancesters grew stout and wise;
 And certes he from Asia bore
 No little of their piercing lore.

• “Lock then to have great happiness,
 For every wrong shall he redress.”

Then did the people's shouting drown
 His clatter as he leapt adown,
 And taking in each hand a hand 2180
 Of the two lovers, now did stand
 Betwixt them on the flower-strewn way¹
 And to himself meanwhile 'gan say,—

“How many an hour might I have been
 Right merry in the gardens green;
 How many a glorious day had I
 Made happy with some victory;
 What noble deeds I might have done,
 What bright renown my deeds have won;
 What blessings would have made me glad; 2190
 What little burdens had I had,
 What calmness in the hope of praise,
 What joy of well-accomplished days,
 If I had let these things alone;
 Nor sought to sit upon my throne
 Like God between the cherubim.
 But now—but now, my days wax dim,
 And all this fairness have I tossed
 Unto the winds, and all have lost
 For nought, for nought ' yet will I strive 2200
 My little end of life to live :
 Nor will I look behind me more,
 Nor forward to the doubtful shore.”

With that he made the sign to turn,
 And straight the autumn air did burn
 With many a point of steel and gold;
 And through the trees the carol rolled
 Once more, until the autumn thrush
 Far off 'gan twittering on his bush,
 Made mindful of the long-lived spring. 2210

So mid sweet song and tabouring,
 And shouts amid the apple-grove,
 And soft caressing of his love,
 Began the new King Michael's reign.
 Nor will the poor folk see again
 A king like him on any throne,

Or such good deeds to all men done:
For then, as saith the chronicle,
It was the time, as all men tell,
When scarce a man would stop to gaze
At gold crowns hung above the ways.

2220



Poetical Selections.

—I—

THE MAID OF NEIDPATH.

O lovers' eyes are sharp to see,
And lovers' ears in hearing;
And love, in life's extremity,
Can lend an hour of cheering.
Disease had been in Mary's bower,
And slow decay from mourning,
Though now she sits on Neidpath's tower,
To watch her love's returning. 8

All sunk and dim her eyes so bright,
Her form decay'd by pining,
Till through her wasted hand, at night,
You saw the taper shining;
By fits, a sultry hectic hue
Across her cheek was flying;
By fits, so ashy pale she grew,
Her maidens thought her dying. 16

Yet keenest powers to see and hear
Seem'd in her frame residing;
Before the watch-dog prick'd his ear
She heard her lover's riding;
Ere scarce a distant form was ken'd,
She knew, and waved to greet him;
And o'er the battlement did bend,
As on the wing to meet him. 24

He came—he pass'd—an heedless gaze,
As o'er some stranger glancing;
Her welcome, spoke in faltering phrase,
Lost in his courser's prancing.

The castle arch, whose hollow tone
 Returns each whisper spoken,
 Could scarcely catch the feeble moan
 Which told her heart was broken.

SIR W. SCOTT.

—2—

THE LOSS OF THE BIRKENHEAD.

Right on our flank the crimson sun went down;
 The deep sea roll'd around in dark repose;
 When, like the wild shriek from some captured town
 A cry of women rose.

The stout ship *Birkenhead* lay hard and fast,
 Caught without hope upon a hidden rock;
 Her timbers thrill'd as nerves, when through them
 pass'd
 The spirit of that shock. 8

And ever like base cowards, who leave their ranks
 In danger's hour, before the rush of steel,
 Drifted away disorderly the planks
 From underneath her keel.

So calm the air, so calm and still the flood,
 That low down in its blue translucent glass
 We saw the great fierce fish, that thirst for blood,
 Pass slowly, then repass. 16

They tarried, the waves tarried, for their prey !
 The sea turn'd one clear smile ! Like things asleep
 Those dark shapes in the azure silence lay,
 As quiet as the deep.

Then amidst oath, and prayer, and rush, and wreck,
 Faint screams, faint questions waiting no reply,

Our Colonel gave the word, and on the deck
Form'd us in line to die. 24

To die !—'twas hard, whilst the sleek ocean glow'd
Beneath a sky as fair as summer flowers —
All to the boats ! cried one .—he was, thank God,
No officer of ours !

Our English hearts beat true .—we would not stir:
That base appeal we heard, but heeded not :
On land, on sea, we had our Colours, sir,
To keep without a spot ! ' 32

They shall not say in England, that we fought
With shameful strength, unhonour'd life to seek;
Into mean safety, mean deserters, brought
By trampling down the weak.

So we made women with their children go,
The oars ply back again, and yet again;
Whilst, inch by inch, the drowning ship sank low,
Still under steadfast men. 40

—What follows, why recall ?—The brave who died,
Died without flinching in the bloody surf,
They sleep as well beneath that purple tide,
As others under turf.—

They sleep as well ! and, roused from their wild grave,
Wearing their wounds like stars, shall rise again,
Joint-heirs with Christ, because they bled to save
His weak ones, not in vain

SIE F. H. DOYLE.

—3—

THE SCHOLAR.

My days among the dead are past;
Around me I behold,

Where'er these casual eyes are cast,
 The mighty minds of old,
 My never failing friends are they,
 With whom I converse day by day. 6

With them I take delight in weal,
 And seek relief in woe,
 And while I understand and feel
 How much to them I owe,
 My cheeks have often been bedewed
 With tears of thoughtful gratitude. 12

My thoughts are with the dead, with them
 I live in long past years,
 Their virtues love, their faults condemn,
 Partake their hopes and fears,
 And from their lessons seek and find
 Instruction with an humble mind. 18

My hopes are with the dead, anon
 My place with them will be,
 And I with them shall travel on
 Through all futurity,
 Yet leaving here a name, I trust,
 That will not perish in the dust 24

R. SOUTHEY

—4—

TO A SKY-LARK.

Up with me ! up with me into the clouds !
 For thy song, lark, is strong,
 Up with me, up with me into the clouds !
 Singing, singing,
 With clouds and sky about thee ringing,
 • Lift me, guide me till I find
 That spot which seems so to thy mind; 6

I have walked through wildernesses dreary,
 And today my heart is weary;
 Had I now the wings of a faery
 Up to thee would I fly

11

There is madness about thee, and joy divine
 In that song of thine,
 Up with me, up with me, high and high
 To thy banqueting-place in the sky!

16

Joyous as morning,
 Thou art laughing and scorning;
 Thou hast a nest for thy love and thy rest,
 And, though little troubled with sloth,
 Drunken lark! thou wouldst be loth
 To be such a traveller as I

21

Happy, happy liver,
 With a soul as strong as a mountain river
 Pouring out praise to the almighty Giver,
 Joy and jollity be with us both!

26

Alas! my journey, rugged and uneven,
 Through prickly moors or dusty ways must wind;
 But hearing thee, or others of thy kind,
 As full of gladness and as free of heaven,
 I, with my fate contented, will plod on,
 And hope for higher raptures, when life's day is
 done.

WORDSWORTH

—5—

TO THE SKYLARK.

Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!
 Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
 Or, while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
 Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground?

Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
Those quivering wings composed, that music still! 6

To the last point of vision, and beyond,
Mount, daring warbler!—that love-prompted strain
(’TwiXt thee and thine a never-failing bond)
Thrills not the less the bosom of the plain :
Yet mightst thou seem, proud privilege ! to sing
All independent of the leafy spring 12

Leave to the nightingale her shady wood :
A privacy of glorious light is thine,
Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
Of harmony, with instinct more divine :
Type of the wise who soar, but never roam ,
True to the kindred points of heaven and home.

W. WORDSWORTH.

—6—

THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE.

I

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred
“Forward, the Light Brigade !
Charge for the guns !” he said :
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

II

“Forward, the Light Brigade !”
Was there a man dismay’d ?
Not tho’ the soldier knew
Some one had blunder’d :
Their’s not to make reply,
Their’s not to reason why,

10

Their's but to do and die :
 Into the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.

III

Cannon to right of them,
 Cannon to left of them,
 Cannon in front of them, 20
 Volley'd and thunder'd;
 Storm'd at with shot and shell,
 Boldly they rode and well,
 Into the jaws of Death,
 Into the mouth of Hell
 Rode the six hundred.

IV

Flash'd all their sabres bare,
 Flash'd as they turn'd in air,
 Sabring the gunners there,
 Charging an army, while 30
 All the world wonder'd :
 Plunged in the battery-smoke
 Right thro' the line they broke;
 Cossack and Russian
 Reel'd from the sabre-stroke
 Shatter'd and sunder'd.
 Then they rode back, but not,
 Not the six hundred.

V

Cannon to right of them,
 Cannon to left of them, 40
 Cannon behind them
 Volley'd and thunder'd;
 Storm'd at with shot and shell,
 While horse and hero fell,
 They that had fought so well
 Came thro' the jaws of Death
 Back from the mouth of Hell,

All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

VI

When can their glory fade ? 50
O the wild charge they made !
All the world wonder 'd
Honour the charge they made !
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred !

LORD TENNYSON

—7—

“O CAPTAIN ! MY CAPTAIN !”

O Captain ! my Captain ! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we
sought is won ;
The port is near, the bells I hear the people all
exulting,
While follow. eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and
daring,
But O heart ! heart ! heart !
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead 8

O Captain ! my Captain ! rise up and hear the bells ;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle
trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the
shores a-crowding ;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager
faces turning ;
There, Captain ! dear father !
This arm beneath your head !

It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead. 16

My captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor
will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage
closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with
object won;
 Exult O shores, and ring O bells !
 But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

WALT WHITMAN

—8—

COLUMBUS.

Behind him lay the gray Azores,
 Behind the Gates of Hercules,
Before him not the ghost of shores;
 Before him only shoreless seas.
The good mate said "Now must we pray,
 For lo ! the very stars are gone
Brave adm'r'l, speak ; what shall I say ?"
 "Why say, "Sail on ! sail on ! and on !" 8

"My men grow mutinous day by day;
 My men grow ghastly wan and weak."
The stout mate thought of home, a spray
 Of salt waves washed his swarthy cheek.
"What shall I say, brave Adm'r'l, say,
 "If we sight naught but seas at dawn ?"
"Why, you shall say at break of day :
 "Sail on ! sail on ! sail on ! and on !" 16

They sailed and sailed, as winds might blow,
 Until at last the blanched mate said :

'Why, now not even God would know
 Should I and all my men fall dead
 These very winds forget their way,
 For God from these dread seas is gone.
 Now speak, brave Adm'r'l, speak and say"
 He said "Sail on ! sail on ! and on !" 24

They sailed They sailed Then spake the mate,
 "This mad sea shows his teeth to-night,
 He curls his lip, he lies in wait,
 With lifted teeth, as if to bite
 Brave Adm'r'l, say but one good word,
 What shall we do when hope is gone ?
 The words leapt like a leaping sword
 "Sail on ! Sail on ! Sail on ! and on !" 32

"Then, pale and worn, he kept his deck,
 And peered through darkness. Ah, that night
 Of all dark nights ! And then a speck—
 A light ! A light ! A light ! A light !
 It grew, a starlit flag unfurled !
 It grew to be Time's burst of dawn
 He gained a world, he gave that world
 Its grandest lesson. "On ! sail on !" 40

JOAQUIN MILLER

—9—

THE DAFFODILS

I wandered lonely as a cloud
 That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
 When all at once I saw a crowd,
 A host, of golden daffodils—
 Beside the lake beneath the trees,
 Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
 And twinkle on the milky way

They stretched in never-ending line
 Along the margin of a bay
 Ten thousand saw I at a glance
 Tossing their heads in sprightly dance. 12

The waves beside them danced, but they
 Out-did the sparkling waves in glee :
 A poet could not but be gay
 In such a jocund company !
 I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
 What wealth the show to me had brought; 18

For oft, when on my couch I lie
 In vacant or in pensive mood,
 They flash upon that inward eye
 Which is the bliss of solitude;
 And then my heart with pleasure fills
 And dances with the daffodils. 24

W. WORDSWORTH

—10—

SAY NOT, THE STRUGGLE NAUGHT
 AVAILETH.

Say not, the struggle naught availeth,
 The labour and the wounds are vain,
 The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
 And as things have been they remain. 4

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
 It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
 Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
 And, but for you, possess the field. 8

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
 Seem here no painful inch to gain,
 Far back, through creeks and inlets making
 Comes silent, flooding in, the main. 12

And not by eastern windows only,
 When daylight comes, comes in the light;
 In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly !
 But westward, look, the land is bright ! 16

A. H. CLOUGH

—II—

I REMEMBER, I REMEMBER.

I remember, I remember
 The house where I was born,
 The little window where the sun
 Came peeping in at morn;
 He never came a wink too soon,
 Nor brought too long a day,
 But now I often wish the night
 Had borne my breath away ! 8

I remember I remember
 The roses, red and white,
 The violets and the lily-cups,
 Those flowers made of light !
 The lilacs where the robin built,
 And where my brother set
 The laburnum on his birthday,—
 The tree is living yet ! 16

I remember, I remember,
 Where I was used to swing,
 And thought the air must rush as fresh
 To swallows on the wing,
 My spirit grew in feathers then,
 That is so heavy now,
 And summer pools could hardly cool
 The fever on my brow ! 24

I remember, I remember
 The fir-trees dark and high;

I used to think their slender tops
 Were close against the sky:
 It was a childish ignorance,
 But now 'tis little joy
 To know I'm farther off from heaven
 Than when I was a boy. 32

T. HOOD.

—12—

THE RED THREAD OF HONOUR.

Eleven men of England
 A breast-work charged in vain;
 Eleven men of England
 Lie stripped and gashed and slain,—
 Slain, but of foes that guarded
 Their rock-built fortress well,
 Some twenty had been mastered
 When the last soldier fell 8

Whilst Napier piloted his wondrous way
 Across the sand-waves of the desert sea,
 Then dashed at once on each fierce clan dismay
 Lord of their wild Truckee

These missed the glen to which their steps were bent,
 Mistook a mandate, from afar half heard,
 And, in that glorious error, calmly went
 To death without a word. 16

The robber-chief mused deeply
 Above those daring dead:
 "Bring here," at length he shouted,
 "Bring quick the battle-thread.
 Let Eblis blast for ever
 Their souls if Allah will;

But we must keep unbroken
The old rules of the Hill. 24

'Before the Ghuznee tiger
Leaped forth to bunn and slay ;
Before the holy Prophet
Taught our grim tribes to pry,
Before Secunder's lances
Pierced through each Indian glen,
The mountain laws of honour
Were famed for fearless men 32

"Still, when a chief dies bravely,
We bind with green one wrist—
Green for the brave, for heroes
One crimson thread we twist.
Say ye, oh gallant Hillmen,
For these, whose life has fled,
Which is the fitting colour,
The green one, or the red ?" 40

"Our brethren, laid in honoured graves, may wear
Their green reward," each noble savage said;
"To these, whom hawks and hungry wolves shall tear
Who dares deny the red ?"

Thus conquering hate, and steadfast to the right,
Fresh from the heart that haughty verdict came;
Beneath a waning moon each spectral height
Rolled back its loud acclaim 48

Once more the chief gazed keenly
Down on those daring dead,
From his good sword then heart's blood
Crept to that crimson thread.
Once more he cried "The judgment,
Good friends, is wise and true,
But though the red be given,
Have we not more to do ?" 56

"These were not stirred by anger,
Nor yet by lust made bold;

Renown they thought above them,
 Nor did they look for gold
 To them their leader's signal
 Was as the voice of God,
 Unmoved and uncomplaining,
 The path it showed they trod 64

"As, without sound or struggle,
 The stars unhurrying march
 Where Allah's finger guides them,
 Through yonder purple arch,
 These Franks, sublimely silent,
 Without a quickened breath,
 Went in the strength of duty,
 Straight to their goal of death. 72

"If I were now to ask you
 To name our bravest man,
 Ye all at once would answer,
 They call him Mehrab Khan.
 He sleeps among his fathers,
 Dear to our native land,
 With the bright mark he bled for,
 Firm round his faithful hand 80

"The songs they sing of Rustum
 Fill all the past with light,
 If truth be in their music,
 He was a noble knight
 But were these heroes living
 And strong for battle still,
 Would Mehrab Khan or Roostum
 Have climbed, like these, the hill?" 88

And they replied. "Though Mehrab Khan was brave,
 As chief he chose himself what risks to run;
 Prince Roostum lied, his forfeit life to save,
 Which these had never done!"

"Enough!" he shouted fiercely;
 "Doomed though they be to hell,

Bind fast the crimson trophy
 Round both wrists,—bind it well. 96
 Who knows but that great Allah
 May grudge such matchless men,
 With none so decked in heaven,
 To the fiends' flaming den?"

Then all those gallant robbers
 Shouted a stern "Amen!"
 They raised the slaughtered sergeant,
 They raised his mangled ten 104
 And when we found their bodies
 Left bleaching in the wind,
 Around both wrists in glory
 That crimson thread was twined.

Then Napier's knightly heart, touched to the core,
 Rang like an echo to that knightly deed;
 He bade its memory live for evermore,
 That those who run may read. 112
 SIR F. H. DOYLE.

—13—

THE LAST MAN.

All worldly shapes shall melt in gloom,
 The Sun himself must die,
 Before this mortal shall assume
 Its Immortality !
 I saw a vision in my sleep,
 That gave my spirit strength to sweep
 Adown the gulph of Time !
 I saw the last of human mould,
 That shall Creation's death behold,
 As Adam saw her prime ! 110

The Sun's eve had a sickly glare,
 The earth with age was wan,

The skeletons of nations were
 Around that lonely man !
 Some had expired in fight,—the brands
 Still rested in their bony hands ,
 In plague and famine some !
 Earth's cities had no sound nor tread ,
 And ships were drifting with the dead
 To shores where all was dumb !

20

Yet, prophet-like, that lone one stood
 With dumbless words and high,
 That shook the sere leaves from the wood
 As if a storm passed by,
 Saying, "We are twins in death, proud Sun !
 Thy face is cold, thy race is run,
 His Mercy bids thee go,
 For thou ten thousand thousand years
 Hast seen the tide of human tears,
 That shall no longer flow

30

"What though beneath thee man put forth
 His pomp, his pride, his skill ;
 And arts that made fire, flood and earth,
 The vassals of his will ;—
 Yet mourn I not thy parted sway,
 Thou dim discrowned king of day :
 For all those trophied arts
 And triumphs that beneath thee sprang,
 Heal'd not a passion or a pang
 Entail'd on human hearts

40

"Go, let oblivion's curtain fall
 Upon the stage of men,
 Nor with thy rising beams recall
 Life's tragedy again
 Its piteous pageants bring not back
 Nor waken flesh, upon the rack
 Of pain anew to withe ;
 Stretched in disease's shapes abhorr'd,
 Or mown in battle by the sword,
 Like grass beneath the scythe.

50

"E'en I am weary in yon skies
 To watch thy fading line,
 Test of all sunless agonies,
 Behold not me expire
 My lip that speak thy dirge of death—
 Then rounded gasp and gulging breath
 To see thou shalt not boast
 The eclipse of Nature spreads my pall,—
 The majesty of Darkness shall
 Receive my parting ghost!

6c

"This spirit shall return to Him
 That gave its heavenly spark,
 Yet think not, Sun, it shall be dim
 When thou thyself art dark!
 No! it shall live again, and shine
 In bliss unknown to beams of thine,
 By Him recalled to breath,
 Who captive led captivity,
 Who robb'd the grave of Victory—
 And took the sting from Death!

7c

"Go, Sun, while Mercy holds me up
 On Nature's awful waste
 To drink this last and bitter cup
 Of grief that man shall taste—
 Go, tell the night that hides thy face,
 Thou saw'st the last of Adam's race,
 On Earth's sepulchral clod
 The darkening universe defy
 To quench his Immortality,
 Or shake his trust in God!"

8c

T. CAMPBELL.

