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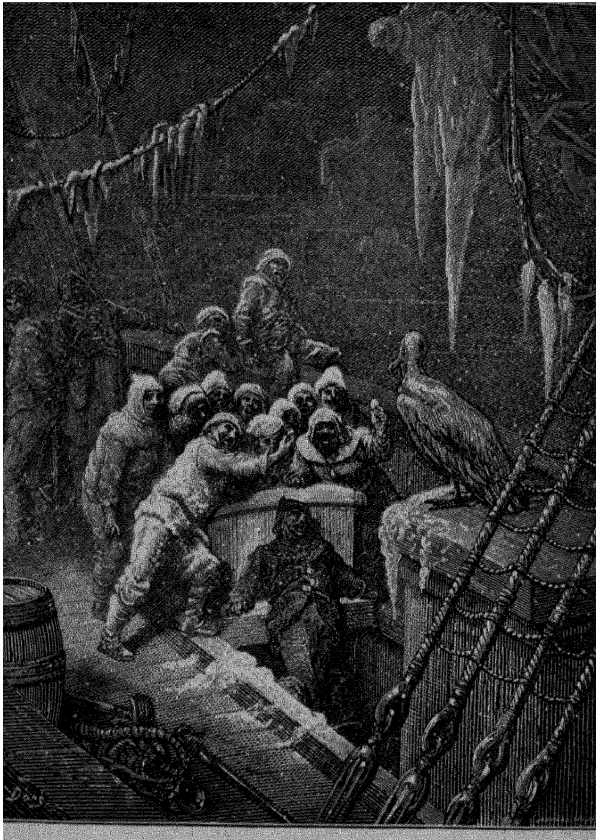
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Author Wilson. Richard.

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'It ate the food it ne'er had eat.'

(See p. 52.)

Cameos of Literature—Volume III

THE GLEEMAN

A BOOK OF STORIES IN SONG

EDITED BY

RICHARD WILSON, B.A



1920

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PREFACE

THE size of the ordinary collection of poetry for school use does not permit the inclusion of many of the longer poems which are in some respects more suitable for middle-form reading than a large number of our finest lyrics. I have therefore selected for inclusion in this volume a number of story-poems which have been found to be highly acceptable to pupils in middle forms as well as in upper standards of primary schools. Only one of the pieces is an 'extract,' namely, *The Battle of Flodden*, but enough information is given to supply the mental background necessary for the understanding and enjoyment of the famous passage. The selection from *Hiawatha* does not suffer in the least degree from being taken from its setting.

The footnotes are intended to be used in reading each poem for the first time, when the pupil is simply concerned to understand the story. The notes in the Commentary at the end of the book are supplementary, and are meant to be used in a second reading, or, if the teacher prefers, to be neglected.

From a purely literary point of view this collection is

frankly unequal. Its aim is to introduce the pupil to poetry rather than to the poets, and for this reason very little personal information is given about the writers. As every teacher of literature knows quite well, it is the story-poem which enlists the interest of boys and girls in their early youth, and remembering this, it is possible to train incidentally the ear and the æsthetic sense. The boy or girl who has learnt to love the story-poem will pass, later, to appreciation of the poem of sentiment or reflection and the lyric.

R. W.

LONDON, 1907.



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THE GLEEMAN

THE BALLAD OF CHEVY CHASE

The First Part

The Percy out of Northumberland,
And a vow to God made he,
That he would hunt in the mountains
Of Cheviot within days three,
In the mauger of doughty Douglas
And all that ever with him be.

The fattest harts in all Cheviot
He said he would kill and carry them away:
'By my faith,' said the doughty Douglas again,
'I will let that hunting, if that I may.'

Then the Percy out of Bamborough came,
With him a mighty menye,
With fifteen hundred archers bold;
They were chosen out of shires three.

This began on a Monday at morn
In Cheviot the hills so high;
The child may rue that is unborn;
It was the more pity.

In the mauger: in spite of. *Let:* prevent. *Menye:* company.

The drivers thorough the woodés went
For to raise the deer;
Bowmen bicker'd upon the bent
With their broad arrows clear.

Then the wild thorough the woodés went
On every side sheer;
Greyhounds thorough the grovés glent,
For to kill their deer.

They began in Cheviot the hills above
Early on a Monan-day;
By that it drew to the hour of noon
A hundred fat harts dead there lay.

They blew a mort upon the bent;
They sembled on sidés sheer:
To the quarry then the Percy went,
To see the brittling of the deer.

He said: 'It was the Douglas' promise
This day to meet me here,
But I wist he would fail, verament';
A great oath the Percy sware.

At the last a squire of Northumberland
Looked at his hand full nigh;
He was ware of the doughty Douglas coming
With him a mighty menye

Both with spear, bill, and brand;
It was a mighty sight to see;
Hardier men both of heart nor hand
Were not in Christiantie.

Bickered: hastened. *Bent:* coarse grass. *Brittling:* cutting up.

They were twenty hundred spearmen good
Withouten any fail;
They were borne along by the water of Tweed,
In the bounds of Tivydale.

Leave off the brittling of the deer,' he said,
And to your bows take good heed,
For never since ye were of your mothers born
Had ye never so mickle need.'

The doughty Douglas on a steed
He rode at his men beforn;
His armour glittered as a glede;
A bolder bairn was never born.

'Tell me what men ye are,' he says,
'Or whose men that ye be!
Who gave you leave to hunt in this
Cheviot Chase in the spite of me?'

The first man that ever him an answer made,
It was the good lord Percy;
'We will not tell thee what men we are
Nor whose men that we be,
But we will hunt here in this Chase
In the spite of thine and of thee.

'The fattest harts in all Cheviot
We have killed, and cast to carry them away.'
'By my troth,' said the doughty Douglas again,
'There-for the one of us shall die this day.'

Tivydale: Teviotdale. *Glede:* red-hot coal. *Cast:* intend.

Then said the doughty Douglas
Unto the lord Percy:
'To kill all these guiltless men,
Alas! it were great pitie.

'But Percy, thou art a lord of land;
I am an Earl call'd within my countrie:
Let all our men upon a parti stand,
And do the battle of thee and of me.'

'Now Christ's curse on his crown,' said the lord Percy,
'Whosoever thereto says nay!
By my troth, doughty Douglas,' he says,
'Thou shalt never see that day.

'Neither in England, Scotland, nor France,
Nor for no man of a woman born,
But, an fortune be my chance,
I dare meet him, one man for one.'

Then bespake a squire of Northumberland,—
Ric. Witherington was his name—
'It shall never be told in South-England,' he says,
'To King Harry the Fourth, for shame.

'I wot you be great lordés two;
I am a poor squire of land;
I will never see my captain fight on a field,
And stand myself and look on;
But while I may my weapon wield
I will fail not, both heart and hand.'



'Let all our men upon a parti stand.'

The Second Part

The English men had their bowés bent;
Their hearts were good enow;
The first of arrows that they shot off
Seven score spearmen they slough.

Yet bides the Earl Douglas upon the bent,
A captain good enow,
And that was seen, verament,
For he wrought the English wo.

The Douglas parted his host in three.
Like a chief chieftain of pride;
With sure spears of mighty tree
They come in on every side

Thorough our English archery,
Gave many a wound full wide;
Many a doughty they gar'd to die
Which gainèd them no pride.

The English men let their bowés be,
And pulled out brands that were bright;
It was a heavy sight to see
Bright swords on bas'nets light.

Thorough rich mail and maniple
Many stern they struck down straight;
Many a freke that was full free,
There under foot did light.

Gar'd: caused. *Freke:* warrior.

At last the Douglas and the Percy met,
Like to captains of might and main;
They swapt together till they both sweat
With swords of the fine Milan.

These worthy frekés for to fight
There-to they were full fain,
Till the blood out of their bas'nets sprent
As ever did hail or rain.

'Hold thee, Percy,' said the Douglas,
'And in faith I shall thee bring
Where thou shalt have an earl's wages
Of Jamie, our Scottish king.

'Thou shalt have thy ransom free;
I hight thee here this thing,
For the manfullest man yet art thou
That ever I conquered in field fighting.'

'Nay,' said the Lord Percy,
'I told it thee beforn
That I would never yielded be
To no man of a woman born.'

With that there came an arrow hastily
Forth of a mighty one;
It hath stricken the Earl Douglas
In at the breast bone;

Through liver and lungs both
The sharp arrow is gone,

Swapt: smote. *Bas'nets:* small helmets. *Hight:* promise.

That never after in all his life-days
He spake more words than one;
That was—'Fight ye, my merry men, while ye may,
For my life-days be gone.'

The Percy leanéd on his brand
And saw the Douglas dee;
He took the dead man by the hand
And said: 'Woe is me for thee!

'To have saved thy life I would have parted with
My landés for years three;
For a better man, of heart nor of hand,
Was not in all the north countrie.'

Of all that saw a Scottish knight,
Sir Hugh the Montgomery;
He saw the Douglas to death was dight,
He spended a spear of a trusty tree.

He rode upon a corsiare
Through a hundred archery;
He never stinted, nor never blan,
Till he came to the good lord Percy.

He set upon the lord Percy
A dint that was full sore;
With a sure spear of a mighty tree
Clean through the body he the Percy bore,

At the other side that a man might see
A large cloth-yard and mair:

Dight: destined. *Spended:* held. *Blan:* paused.

Two better captains were not in Christiantie
Than that day slain were there.

An archer of Northumberland
Saw slain was the lord Percy;
He bare a bend-bow in his hand
Was made of a trusty tree.

An arrow that a cloth-yard was long
To the hard steel haled he;
A dint that was both sad and sore
He set on Sir Hugh the Montgomery.

The dint it was both sad and sair,
That he on Montgomery set;
The swan feathers that his arrow bare
With his heart-blood they were wet.

There was never a freke one foot would flee,
But still in stour did stand,
Hewing on each other, while they might dree,
With many a baleful brand.

This battle began in Cheviot
An hour before the noon,
And when even-song bell was rung
The battle was not half done.

They took off on either hand
By the light of the moon;
Many had no strength for to stand
In Cheviot the hills aboon.

Haled: hauled. *Dree:* endure. *Aboon:* above.

Of fifteen hundred archers of England,
Went away but fifty and three;
Of twenty hundred spearmen of Scotland,
But even five and fiftie;

But all were slain Cheviot within;
They had no strength to stand on high.
The child may rue that is unborn:
It was the more pity.

There was slain with the Lord Percy,
Sir John of Agerstone;
Sir Roger, the hyndè Hartley;
Sir William, the bold Heron.

Sir George, the worthy Lovel,
A knight of great renown;
Sir Ralph, the rich Rugby;
With dints were beaten down.

For Witherington my heart was wo,
That ever he slain should be;
For when both his legs were hewn in two,
Yet he kneeled and fought on his knee.

There was slain with the doughty Douglas,
Sir Hugh the Montgomery;
Sir Davy Liddale, that worthy was,
His sister's son was he;

Sir Charles à Murray in that place,
That never a foot would flee;

Hyndè: courteous.



With dints were beaten down.

Sir Hugh Maxwell, a lord he was,
With the Douglas did he dee.

So on the morrow they made them biers
Of birch and hazel so gray;
Many widows with weeping tears
Came to fetch their makès away.

Tivydale may carp of care,
Northumberland make great moan;
For two such captains as were there slain
On the Marches shall never be none.

Word is come to Edinborough,
To Jamie the Scottish king,
That doughty Douglas, lieutenant of the Marches,
Lay slain Cheviot within.

His handés did he weal and wring;
He said, 'Alas, and woe is me!
Such another captain Scotland within,'
He said, 'I-faith should never be.'

Word is come to lovely London,
To the fourth Harry, our king,
That lord Percy, lieutenant of the Marches,
Lay slain Cheviot within.

'God have mercy on his soul,' said King Harry,
'Good Lord if Thy will it be!
I have a hundred captains in England,' he said,
'As good as ever was he;

Makès: mates.

But, Percy, an I brook my life,
Thy death well quit shall be.'

Jesus Christ our bales abate,
And into bliss us bring;
This was the Hunting of the Cheviot.
God send us all good ending!

NYMPHIDIA

The Court of Fairy

Old Chaucer doth of Topas tell,
Mad Rabelais of Pantágruél,
A later third of Dowsabel,
With such poor trifles playing;
Others the like have laboured at,
Some of this thing and some of that,
And many of they knew not what,
But what they may be saying.

Another sort there be, that will
Be talking of the Fairies still,
For never can they have their fill,
As they were wedded to them;
No tales of them their thirst can slake,
So much delight therein they take,
And some strange thing they fain would make,
Knew they the way to do them.

Then since no Muse hath been so bold,
Or of the later, or the old,
Those elvish secrets to unfold,
Which lie from others' reading;

Bales: evils.

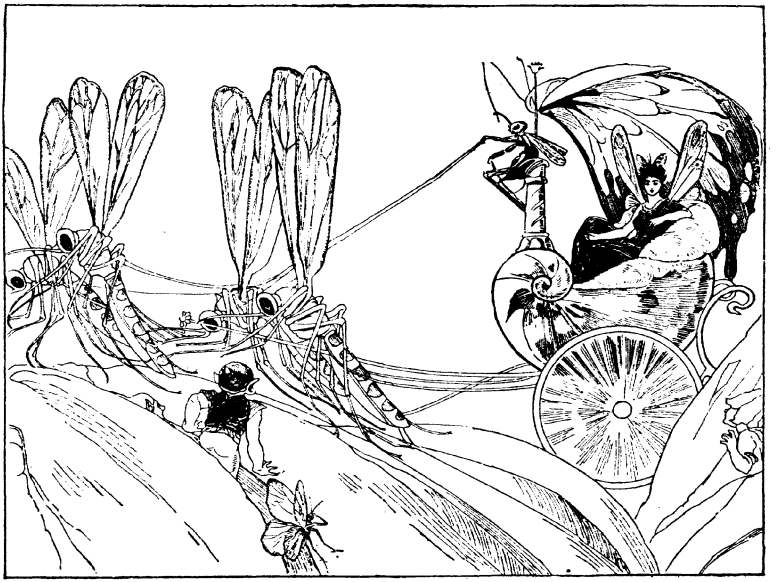
My active Muse to light shall bring
The Court of that proud Fairy King,
And tell there of the revelling.
Jove prosper my proceeding!

And thou, Nymphidia, gentle Fay,
Which, meeting me upon the way,
These secrets didst to me bewray,
Which now I am in telling;
My pretty, light, fantastic maid,
I here invoke thee to my aid,
That I may speak what thou hast said,
In numbers smoothly swelling.

This palace standeth in the air,
By necromancy placèd there,
That it no tempest needs to fear,
Which way soe'er it blow it.
And somewhat southward tow'rds the noon,
Whence lies a way up to the moon,
And thence the Fairy can as soon
Pass to the earth below it.

The walls of spiders' legs are made
Well mortisèd and finely laid;
It was the master of his trade
It curiously that builded;
The windows of the eyes of cats,
And for the roof, instead of slats,
Is covered with the skins of bats,
With moonshine that are gilded.

Slats: laths.



Her chariot ready straight is made.

Hence shadows, seeming idle shapes,
Of little frisking elves and apes
To earth do make their wanton scapes,
As hope of pastime hastes them;
Which maids think on the hearth they see
When fires well-nigh consumèd be,
There dancing hays by two and three,
Just as their fancy casts them.

These make our girls their sluttery rue,
By pinching them both black and blue,
And put a penny in their shoe
The house for cleanly sweeping;
And in their courses make that round
In meadows and in marshes found,
Of them so called the Fairy Ground,
Of which they have the keeping.

But listen, and I shall you tell
A chance in Faëry that befell,
Which certainly may please some well
In love and arms delighting,
Of Oberon that jealous grew
Of one of his own Fairy crew,
Too well, he feared, the Queen that knew,
His love but ill requiting.

Pigwiggin was this Fairy Knight,
One wondrous gracious in the sight
Of fair Queen Mab, which day and night
He amorously observèd;

Which made King Oberon suspect
His service took too good effect,
His sauciness had often checkt,
And could have wished him stervèd.

Pigwiggin gladly would commend
Some token to Queen Mab to send,
If sea or land him aught could lend
Were worthy of her wearing;
At length this lover doth devise,
A bracelet made of emmet's eyes,
A thing he thought that she would prize,
No whit her state impairing.

And to the Queen a letter writes,
Which he most curiously indites,
Conjuring her by all the rites
Of love, she would be pleasèd
To meet him, her true servant, where
They might, without suspect or fear,
Themselves to one another clear
And have their poor hearts easèd.

At midnight, the appointed hour;
'And for the Queen a fitting bower,'
Quoth he, 'is that fair cowslip flower
On Hient hill that bloweth:
In all your train there 's not a fay
That ever went to gather may
But she hath made it, in her way,
The tallest there that groweth.'

Stervèd: killed. *Emmet:* newt.

When by Tom Thumb, a Fairy Page,
He sent it, and doth him engage
By promise of a mighty wage
It secretly to carry;
Which done, the Queen her maids doth call,
And bids them to be ready all:
She would go see her summer hall,
She could no longer tarry.

Her chariot ready straight is made,
Each thing therein is fitting laid,
That she by nothing might be stayed,
For naught must be her letting;
Four nimble gnats the horses were,
Their harnesses of gossamere,
Fly Cranion the charioteer
Upon the coach-box getting.

Her chariot of a snail's fine shell,
Which for the colours did excel,
The fair Queen Mab becoming well,
So lively was the limning;
The seat the soft wool of the bee,
The cover, gallantly to see,
The wing of a pied butterfly;
I trow 'twas simple trimming.

The wheels composed of cricket's bones,
And daintily made for the nonce,
For fear of rattling on the stones
With thistle-down they shod it;

Letting: preventing. *Limning:* painting.

For all her maidens much did fear
If Oberon had chanced to hear
That Mab his Queen should have been there,
He would not have abode it.

She mounts her chariot in a trice,
Nor would she stay, for no advice,
Until her maids that were so nice
To wait on her were fitted;
But ran herself away alone,
Which when they heard, there was not one
But hasted after to be gone,
As he had been diswitted.

Hop and Mop and Drop so clear,
Pip and Trip and Skip that were
To Mab, their sovereign, ever dear,
Her special maids of honour;
Fib and Tib and Pink and Pin,
Tick and Quick and Jill and Jin,
Tit and Nit and Wap and Win,
The train that wait upon her.

Upon a grasshopper they got
And, what with amble, what with trot,
For hedge and ditch they sparèd not,
But after her they hie them;
A cobweb over them they throw,
To shield the wind if it should blow,
Themselves they wisely could bestow
Lest any should espy them.

But let us leave Queen Mab a while,
Through many a gate, o'er many a stile,
That now had gotten by this wile,
Her dear Pigwiggin kissing;
And tell how Oberon doth fare,
Who grew as mad as any hare
When he had sought each place with care
And found his Queen was missing.

By grisly Pluto he doth swear,
He rent his clothes and tore his hair,
And as he runneth here and there
An acorn cup he greeteth,
Which soon he taketh by the stalk,
About his head he lets it walk,
Nor doth he any creature balk,
But lays on all he meeteth.

The Tuscan Poet doth advance
The frantic Paladin of France,
And those more ancient do enhance
Alcides in his fury,
And others Ajax Telamon,
But to this time there hath been none
So Bedlam as our Oberon,
Of which I dare assure ye.

And first encountering with a Wasp,
He in his arms the fly doth clasp
As though his breath he forth would grasp,
Him for Pigwiggin taking:

Pluto: King of the Underworld. *Balk:* miss.
Tuscan Poet: Ariosto, who wrote the *Orlando Furioso.*

'Where is my queen, thou rogue?' quoth he;
'Pigwiggin, she is come to thee;
Restore her, or thou diest by me!'
Whereat the poor Wasp quaking

Cries, 'Oberon, great Fairy King,
Content thee, I am no such thing:
I am a Wasp, behold my sting!'
At which the Fairy started;
When soon away the Wasp doth go,
Poor wretch, was never frighted so;
He thought his wings were much too slow,
O'erjoyed they so were parted.

He next upon a Glow-worm light,
You must suppose it now was night,
Which, for her hinder part was bright,
He took to be a devil,
And furiously doth her assail
For carrying fire in her tail;
He thrashed her rough coat with his flail;
The mad King feared no evil.

'Oh!' quoth the Glow-worm, 'hold thy hand,
Thou puissant King of Fairy-land!
Thy mighty strokes who may withstand?
Hold, or of life despair I!'
Together then herself doth roll,
And tumbling down into a hole
She seemed as black as any coal;
Which vext away the Fairy.

From thence he ran into a hive:
Amongst the bees he letteth drive,
And down their combs begins to rive,
All likely to have spoilèd,
Which with their wax his face besmeared,
And with their honey daubed his beard:
It would have made a man afear'd
To see how he was moilèd.

A new adventure him betides;
He met an Ant, which he bestrides,
And post thereon away he rides,
Which with his haste doth stumble;
And came full over on her snout,
Her heels so threw the dirt about,
For she by no means could get out,
But over him doth tumble.

And being in this piteous case,
And all be-slurrèd head and face,
On runs he in this wild-goose chase,
As here and there he rambles;
Half blind, against a molehole hit,
And for a mountain taking it,
For all he was out of his wit
Yet to the top he scrambles.

And being gotten to the top,
Yet there himself he could not stop,
But down on the other side doth chop,
And to the foot came rumbling;

So that the grubs, therein that bred,
Hearing such turmoil overhead,
Thought surely they had all been dead;
So fearful was the jumbling.

And falling down into a lake,
Which him up to the neck doth take,
His fury somewhat it doth slake;
He calleth for a ferry;
Where you may some recovery note;
What was his club he made his boat,
And in his oaken cup doth float,
As safe as in a wherry.

Men talk of the adventures strange
Of Don Quixote, and of their change
Through which he armèd oft did range,
Of Sancho Pancha's travel;
But should a man tell everything
Done by this frantic Fairy King,
And them in lofty numbers sing,
It well his wits might gravel.

Scarce set on shore, but therewithal
He meeteth Puck, which most men call
Hobgoblin, and on him doth fall,
With words from frenzy spoken:
'Oh, oh,' quoth Hob, 'God save thy grace!
Who drest thee in this piteous case?
He thus that spoiled my sovereign's face,
I would his neck were broken!'

Gravel: derange. *Hob*, or Hobgoblin: another name for Puck.

This Puck seems but a dreaming dolt,
Still walking like a ragged colt,
And oft out of a bush doth bolt,
Of purpose to deceive us;
And leading us makes us to stray,
Long winter nights, out of the way;
And when we stick in mire and clay,
Hob doth with laughter leave us.

'Dear Puck,' quoth he, 'my Queen is gone:
As e'er thou lov'st King Oberon,
Let everything but this alone,
With vengeance and pursue her;
Bring her to me alive or dead,
Or that vile thief, Pigwiggin's head,
That villain hath my Queen misled;
He to this folly drew her.'

Quoth Puck, 'My liege, I 'll never lin,
But I will thorough thick and thin,
Until at length I bring her in;
My dearest lord, ne'er doubt it.'
Through brake, through briar,
Through muck, through mire,
Through water, through fire;
And thus goes Puck about it.

This thing Nymphidia overheard,
That on this mad king had a guard,
Not doubting of a great reward,
For first this business broaching;

Lin: pause.



'*Dear Puck,*' *quoth he,* '***my Queen is*** *gone.*'

And through the air away doth go,
Swift as an arrow from the bow,
To let her sovereign Mab to know
What peril was approaching.

The Queen bound with Love's powerful charm
Sate with Pigwiggin arm in arm;
Her merry maids, that thought no harm,
About the room were skipping;
A humble-bee, their minstrel, played
Upon his hautboy, every maid
Fit for this revel was arrayed,
The hornpipe neatly tripping.
In comes Nymphidia, and doth cry,
'My sovereign, for your safety fly,

For there is danger but too nigh;
I posted to forewarn you:
The King hath sent Hobgoblin out,
To seek you all the fields about,
And of your safety you may doubt,
If he but once discern you.'

When, like an uproar in a town
Before them everything went down;
Some tore a ruff, and some a gown,
'Gainst one another justling;
They flew about like chaff i' th' wind;
For haste some left their masks behind;
Some could not stay their gloves to find;
There never was such bustling.

Forth ran they, by a secret way,
Into a brake that near them lay;
Yet much they doubted there to stay,
Lest Hob should hap to find them;
He had a sharp and piercing sight,
All one to him the day and night;
And therefore they resolved, by flight,
To leave this place behind them.

At length one chanced to find a nut,
In the end of which a hole was cut,
That lay upon a hazel root,
There scattered by a squirrel
Which out the kernel gotten had;
When quoth this Fay, 'Dear Queen, be glad;
Let Oberon be ne'er so mad,
I'll set you safe from peril.

'Come all into this nut,' quoth she,
'Come closely in; be ruled by me;
Each one may here a chooser be,
For room ye need not wrastle:
Nor need ye be together heaped';
So one by one therein they crept,
And lying down they soundly slept,
And safe as in a castle.

Nymphidia, that this while doth watch,
Perceived if Puck the Queen should catch
That he should be her over-match,
Of which she well bethought her;

Found it must be some powerful charm,
The Queen against him that must arm,
Or surely he would do her harm,
For throughly he had sought her.

And listening if she aught could hear,
That her might hinder, or might fear;
But finding still the coast was clear;
Nor creature had descried her;
Each circumstance and having scanned,
She came thereby to understand,
Puck would be with them out of hand;
When to her charms she hied her.

And first her fern-seed doth bestow,
The kernel of the mistletoe;
And here and there as Puck should go,
With terror to affright him,
She night-shade strews to work him ill,
Therewith her vervain and her dill,
That hindereth witches of their will,
Of purpose to despite him.

Then sprinkles she the juice of rue,
That groweth underneath the yew;
With nine drops of the midnight dew,
From lunary distilling:
The molewarp's brain mixed therewithal;
And with the same the bitter gall:
For she in nothing short would fall,
The Fairy was so willing.

Then thrice under a briar doth creep,
Which at both ends was rooted deep,
And over it three times she leap;
Her magic much availing:
Then on Prosérpina doth call,
And so upon her spell doth fall,
Which here to you repeat I shall,
Not in one tittle failing.

'By the croaking of a frog;
By the howling of the dog;
By the crying of the hog
Against the storm arising;
By the evening curfew bell,
By the doleful dying knell,
O let this my direful spell,
Hob, hinder my surprising!

'By the mandrake's dreadful groans:
By the lubrican's sad moans;
By the noise of dead men's bones
In charnel-houses rattling;
By the hissing of the snake,
The rustling of the fire-drake,
I charge thee thou this place forsake,
Nor of Queen Mab be prattling!

'By the whirlwind's hollow sound,
By the thunder's dreadful stound,
Yells of spirits underground,
I charge thee not to fear us;

Proserpina: the Queen of the Underworld, with whom Shakespeare's Hecate is also identified.

By the screech-owl's dismal note,
By the black night-raven's throat,
I charge thee, Hob, to tear thy coat
With thorns, if thou come near us!'

Her spell thus spoke, she stept aside,
And in a chink herself doth hide,
To see thereof what would betide,
For she doth only mind him:
When presently she Puck espies,
And well she marked his gloating eyes,
How under every leaf he pries,
In seeking still to find them.

But once the circle got within,
The charms to work do straight begin,
And he was caught as in a gin;
For as he thus was busy,
A pain he in his head-piece feels,
Against a stubbèd tree he reels,
And up went poor Hobgoblin's heels,
Alas! his brain was dizzy!

At length upon his feet he gets,
Hobgoblin fumes, Hobgoblin frets;
And as again he forward sets,
And through the bushes scrambles,
A stump doth trip him in his pace;
Down comes poor Hob upon his face,
And lamentably tore his case,
Amongst the briars and brambles.

'A plague upon Queen Mab!' quoth he,
'And all her maids where'er they be:
I think the devil guided me,
To seek her so provokèd!'
Where stumbling at a piece of wood,
He fell into a ditch of mud,
Where to the very chin he stood,
In danger to be chokèd.

Now worse than e'er he was before,
Poor Puck doth yell, poor Puck doth roar,
That waked Queen Mab, who doubted sore
Some treason had been wrought her:
Until Nymphidia told the Queen,
What she had done, what she had seen,
Who then had well near cracked her spleen
With very extreme laughter.

But leave me Hob to clamber out,
Queen Mab and all her Fairy rout,
And come again to have a bout
With Oberon yet madding:
And with Pigwiggin now distraught,
Who much was troubled in his thought,
That he so long the Queen had sought,
And through the field was gadding.

And as he runs he still doth cry,
'King Oberon, I thee defy,
And dare thee here in arms to try,
For my dear lady's honour:

For that she is a Queen right good,
In whose defence I 'll shed my blood,
And that thou in this jealous mood
Hast laid this slander on her.'

And quickly arms him for the field,
A little cockle-shell his shield,
Which he could very bravely wield;
Yet could it not be percèd:
His spear a bent both stiff and strong,
And well near of two inches long:
The pile was of a horse-fly's tongue,
Whose sharpness nought reversèd.

And puts him on a coat of mail,
Which was of a fish's scale.
That when his foe should him assail,
No point should be prevailing:
His rapier was a hornet's sting;
It was a very dangerous thing,
For if he chanced to hurt the King,
It would be long in healing.

His helmet was a beetle's head,
Most horrible and full of dread,
That able was to strike one dead,
Yet did it well become him;
And for a plume a horse's hair
Which, being tossèd with the air,
Had force to strike his foe with fear,
And turn his weapon from him.

Bent: blade of stiff grass. *Pile:* point.



Together furiously they ran.

Himself he on an earwig set,
Yet scarce he on his back could get,
So oft and high he did curvét,
Ere he himself could settle:
He made him turn, and stop, and bound,
To gallop and to trot the round,
He scarce could stand on any ground,
He was so full of mettle.

When soon he met with Tomalin,
One that a valiant knight had been,
And to King Oberon of kin;
Quoth he, 'Thou manly Fairy,
Tell Oberon I come prepared,
Then bid him stand upon his guard;
This hand his baseness shall reward,
Let him be ne'er so wary.

'Say to him thus, that I defy
His slanders and his infamy,
And as a mortal enemy
Do publicly proclaim him:
Withal that if I had mine own,
He should not wear the Fairy crown,
But with a vengeance should come down,
Nor we a king should name him.'

This Tomalin could not abide,
To hear his sovereign vilified;
But to the Fairy Court him hied,
(Full furiously he posted),

With everything Pigwiggin said:
How title to the crown he laid,
And in what arms he was arrayed,
As how himself he boasted.

'Twixt head and foot, from point to point
He told the arming of each joint,
In every piece how neat and quoint,
For Tomalin could do it:
How fair he sat, how sure he rid,
As of the courser he bestrid,
How managed, and how well he did;
The King which listened to it,

Quoth he, 'Go, Tomalin, with speed,
Provide me arms, provide my steed,
And everything that I shall need;
By thee I will be guided;
To straight account call thou thy wit;
See there be wanting not a whit,
In everything see thou me fit,
Just as my foe's provided.'

Soon flew this news through Fairy-land,
Which gave Queen Mab to understand
The combat that was then in hand
Betwixt those men so mighty:
Which greatly she began to rue,
Perceiving that all Faëry knew
The first occasion from her grew
Of these affairs so weighty.

Quoint: fine.

Wherefore attended with her maids,
Through fogs, and mists, and damps she wades,
To Proserpine the Queen of Shades,
To treat, that it would please her
The cause into her hands to take,
For ancient love and friendship's sake,
And soon thereof an end to make,
Which of much care would ease her.

A while there let we Mab alone,
And come we to King Oberon,
Who, armed to meet his foe, is gone,
For proud Pigwiggin crying:
Who sought the Fairy King as fast,
And had so well his journeys cast,
That he arrivèd at the last,
His puissant foe espying.

Stout Tomalin came with the King,
Tom Thumb doth on Pigwiggin bring,
That perfect were in everything
To single fights belonging:
And therefore they themselves engage,
To see them exercise their rage,
With fair and comely equipage,
Not one the other wronging.

So like in arms these champions were,
As they had been a very pair,
So that a man would almost swear
That either had been either;

Their furious steeds began to neigh,
That they were heard a mighty way;
Their staves upon their rests they lay;
Yet ere they flew together,

Their seconds minister an oath,
Which was indifferent to them both,
That on their knightly faith and troth
No magic them supplièd;
And sought them that they had no charms,
Wherewith to work each other harms,
But came with simple open arms
To have their causes trièd.

Together furiously they ran,
That to the ground came horse and man,
The blood out of their helmets span,
So sharp were their encounters;
And though they to the earth were thrown,
Yet quickly they regained their own,
Such nimbleness was never shown,
They were two gallant mounters.

When in a second course again,
They forward came with might and main,
Yet which had better of the twain,
The seconds could not judge yet;
Their shields were into pieces cleft,
Their helmets from their heads were reft,
And to defend them nothing left,
These champions would not budge yet.

Away from them their staves they threw,
Their cruel swords they quickly drew,
And freshly they the fight renew,
They every stroke redoubled;
Which made Prosérpina take heed,
And make to them the greater speed,
For fear lest they too much should bleed,
Which wondrously her troubled.

When to the infernal Styx she goes,
She takes the fogs from thence that rose,
And in a bag doth them enclose:
When well she had them blended.
She hies her then to Lethé spring,
A bottle and thereof doth bring,
Wherewith she meant to work the thing
Which only she intended.

Now Proserpine with Mab is gone,
Unto the place where Oberon
And proud Pigwiggin, one to one,
Both to be slain were likely:
And there themselves they closely hide,
Because they would not be espied;
For Proserpine meant to decide
The matter very quickly.

Styx: the river of the Underworld across which Charon ferried departed souls.

Lethé: the spring whose waters, when drunk, caused forgetfulness of everything.

And suddenly unties the poke,
Which out of it sent such a smoke,
As ready was them all to choke,
So grievous was the pother;
So that the knights each other lost,
And stood as still as any post:
Tom Thumb nor Tomalin could boast
Themselves of any other.

But when the mist 'gan somewhat cease;
Prosérpina commandeth peace;
And that a while they should release
Each other of their peril:
'Which here,' quoth she, 'I do proclaim
To all in dreadful Pluto's name,
That as ye will eschew his blame,
You let me hear the quarrel:

'But here yourselves you must engage,
Somewhat to cool your spleenish rage;
Your grievous thirst and to assuage
That first you drink this liquor,
Which shall your understanding clear,
As plainly shall to you appear;
Those things from me that you shall hear,
Conceiving much the quicker.'

This Lethé water, you must know,
The memory destroyeth so,
That of our weal, or of our woe,
Is all remembrance blotted,

Of it nor can you ever think;
For they no sooner took this drink,
But naught into their brains could sink
Of what had them besotted.

King Oberon forgotten had
That he for jealousy ran mad,
But of his Queen was wondrous glad,
And asked how they came thither:
Pigwiggin likewise doth forget
That he Queen Mab had ever met,
Or that they were so hard beset,
When they were found together.

Nor neither of them both had thought
That e'er they each had other sought,
Much less that they a combat fought,
But such a dream were loathing.
Tom Thumb had got a little sup,
And Tomalin scarce kissed the cup,
Yet had their brains so sure locked up,
That they remembered nothing.

Queen Mab and her light maids, the while,
Amongst themselves do closely smile,
To see the King caught with this wile,
With one another jesting:
And to the Fairy Court they went,
With mickle joy and merriment,
Which thing was done with good intent,
And thus I left them feasting.

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

PART I

It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

The Bridegroom's doors are open'd wide,
And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din.'

He holds him with his skinny hand,
'There was a ship,' quoth he.
'Hold off! unhand me, greybeard loon!'
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

He holds him with his glittering eye—
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years' child:
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Marinere.

'The ship was cheer'd, the harbour clear'd,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.

The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,
Till over the mast at noon——'
The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,
For he heard the loud bassoon.

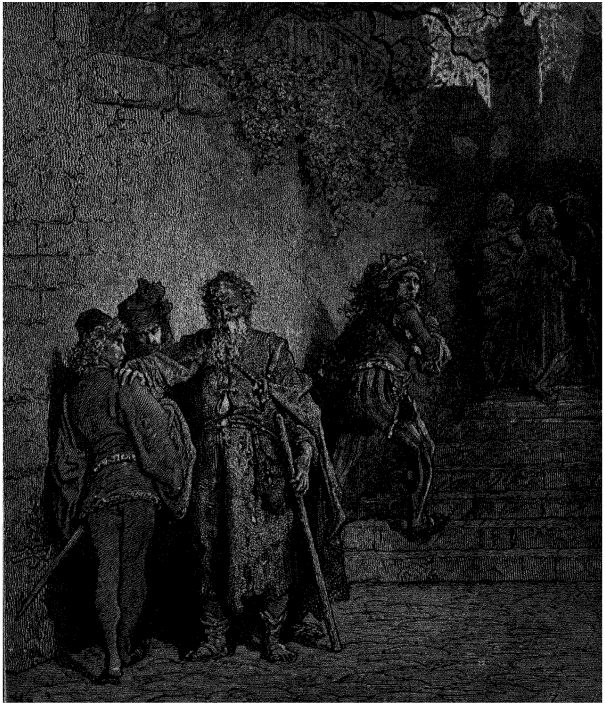
The bride hath paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes
The merry minstrelsy.

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Marinere.

'And now the Storm-blast came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
And chased us south along.

With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roar'd the blast,
And southward aye we fled.

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:



He holds him with his skinny hand.

And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd,
Like noises in a swound!

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hail'd it in God's name.

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steer'd us through!

And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariners' hollo!

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perch'd for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmer'd the white moonshine.'

'God save thee, ancient Mariner,
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
Why look'st thou so?'—'With my crossbow
I shot the Albatross.'

PART II

'The Sun now rose upon the right:
Out of the sea came he,
Still hid in mist, and on the left
Went down into the sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind.
But no sweet bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
Came to the mariners' hollo!

And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averr'd I had kill'd the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averr'd I had kill'd the bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow follow'd free;

We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Down dropt the breeze, the sail dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

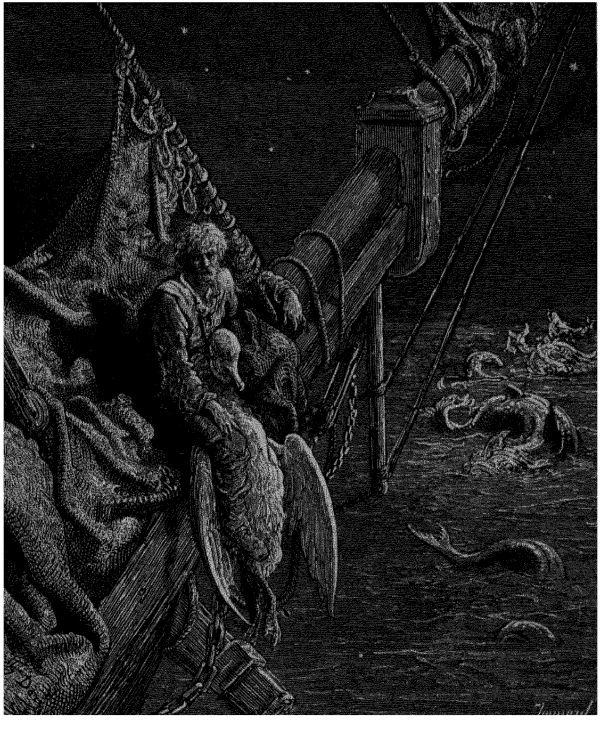
All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue, and white.



'The Albatross about my neck was hung.'

And some in dreams assurèd were
Of the Spirit that plagued us so;
Nine fathom deep he had follow'd us
From the land of mist and snow.

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was wither'd at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.'

Part III

'There passed a weary time. Each throat
Was parch'd, and glazed each eye.
A weary time! a weary time!
How glazed each weary eye!
When looking westward, I beheld
A something in the sky.

At first it seem'd a little speck,
And then it seem'd a mist;
It moved and moved, and took at last
A certain shape, I wist.

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it near'd and near'd:
As if it dodged a water-sprite,
It plunged, and tack'd, and veer'd.

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
We could nor laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
I bit my arm, I suck'd the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail!

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
Agape they heard me call:
Gramercy! they for joy did grin,
And all at once their breath drew in,
As they were drinking all.

See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!
Hither to work us weal—
Without a breeze, without a tide,
She steadies with upright keel!

The western wave was all aflame,
The day was well nigh done!
Almost upon the western wave
Rested the broad, bright Sun;
When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun.

And straight the Sun was fleck'd with bars
(Heaven's Mother send us grace!),
As if through a dungeon-grate he peer'd
With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
How fast she nears and nears!
Are those her sails that glance in the Sun,
Like restless gossameres?

Are those her ribs through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that Woman's mate?

Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

The naked hulk alongside came,
And the twain were casting dice;
"The game is done! I've won! I've won!"
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
At one stride comes the dark;
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre-bark.

We listen'd and look'd sideways up;
Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
My life-blood seem'd to sip!
The stars were dim, and thick the night,
The steersman's face by his lamp gleam'd
white;
From the sails the dew did drip—
Till clomb above the eastern bar
The hornèd Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip.

One after one, by the star-dogg'd Moon,
Too quick for groan or sigh,
Each turn'd his face with a ghastly pang,
And cursed me with his eye.

Four times fifty living men
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan),
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropp'd down one by one.

The souls did from their bodies fly—
They fled to bliss or woe!
And every soul, it pass'd me by
Like the whizz of my crossbow!'

Part IV

'I fear thee, ancient Mariner!
I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
As is the ribb'd sea-sand.

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
And thy skinny hand so brown.'—
'Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!
This body dropt not down.

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

I look'd upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I look'd upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

I look'd to heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust.

I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky,
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Nor rot nor reek did they:
The look with which they look'd on me
Had never pass'd away.

An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
Is the curse in a dead man's eye!
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die.

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And nowhere did abide;
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside—

Her beams bemock'd the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmèd water burnt alway
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watch'd the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they rear'd, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watch'd their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coil'd and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gush'd from my heart,
And I bless'd them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I bless'd them unaware.

The selfsame moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.'

Part V

'O sleep! it is a gentle thing,
Beloved from pole to pole!
To Mary Queen the praise be given!
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
That slid into my soul.

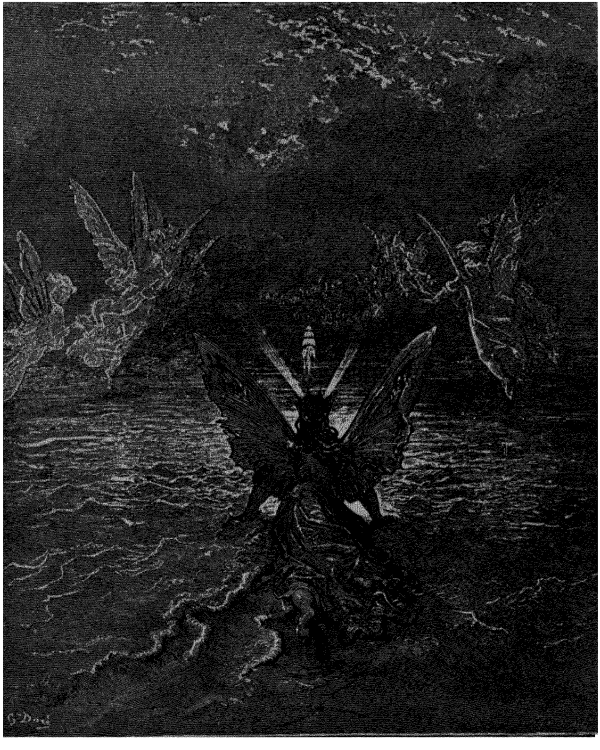
The silly buckets on the deck,
That had so long remain'd,
I dreamt that they were fill'd with dew;
And when I awoke, it rain'd.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,
My garments all were dank;
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
And still my body drank.

I moved, and could not feel my limbs:
I was so light—almost
I thought that I had died in sleep,
And was a blessèd ghost.

And soon I heard a roaring wind:
It did not come anear;
But with its sound it shook the sails,
That were so thin and sere.

The upper air burst into life;
And a hundred fire-flags sheen;
To and fro they were hurried about!
And to and fro, and in and out,
The wan stars danced between.



The upper air burst into life.

And the coming wind did roar more loud,
And the sails did sigh like sedge;
And the rain pour'd down from one black cloud;
The Moon was at its edge.

The thick black cloud was cleft, and still
The Moon was at its side;
Like waters shot from some high crag,
The lightning fell with never a jag,
A river steep and wide.

The loud wind never reach'd the ship,
Yet now the ship moved on!
Beneath the lightning and the Moon
The dead men gave a groan.

They groan'd, they stirr'd, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
It had been strange, even in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise.

The helmsman steer'd, the ship moved on;
Yet never a breeze up-blew;
The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,
Where they were wont to do;
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—
We were a ghastly crew.

The body of my brother's son
Stood by me, knee to knee:
The body and I pull'd at one rope,
But he said naught to me.'

'I fear thee, ancient Mariner!'
'Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest:
'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,
Which to their corses came again,
But a troop of spirits blest:

For when it dawn'd—they dropp'd their arms,
And cluster'd round the mast;
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,
And from their bodies pass'd.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the Sun;
Slowly the sounds came back again,
Now mix'd, now one by one.

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the skylark sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seem'd to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning!

And now 'twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song,
That makes the Heavens be mute.

It ceased; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

Till noon we quietly sail'd on,
Yet never a breeze did breathe:
Slowly and smoothly went the ship,
Moved onward from beneath.

Under the keel nine fathom deep,
From the land of mist and snow,
The Spirit slid: and it was he
That made the ship to go.
The sails at noon left off their tune,
And the ship stood still also.

The Sun, right up above the mast,
Had fix'd her to the ocean:
But in a minute she 'gan stir,
With a short uneasy motion—
Backwards and forwards half her length
With a short uneasy motion.

Then like a pawing horse let go,
She made a sudden bound:
It flung the blood into my head,
And I fell down in a swound.

How long in that same fit I lay,
I have not to declare;
But ere my living life return'd,
I heard, and in my soul discern'd
Two voices in the air.

"Is it he?" quoth one, "is this the man?
By Him who died on cross,
With his cruel bow he laid full low
The harmless Albatross.

The Spirit who bideth by himself
In the land of mist and snow,
He loved the bird that loved the man
Who shot him with his bow."

The other was a softer voice,
As soft as honey-dew:
Quoth he, "The man hath penance done,
And penance more will do."'

PART VI

First Voice:

'"But tell me, tell me! speak again,
Thy soft response renewing—
What makes that ship drive on so fast?
What is the Ocean doing?"

Second Voice:

"Still as a slave before his lord,
The Ocean hath no blast;
His great bright eye most silently
Up to the Moon is cast—

If he may know which way to go;
For she guides him smooth or grim.
See, brother, see! how graciously
She looketh down on him."

First Voice:

"But why drives on that ship so fast,
Without or wave or wind?"



'But why drives on that ship so fast?'

But soon there breathed a wind on me,
Nor sound nor motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea,
In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fann'd my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring—
It mingled strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
Yet she sail'd softly too:
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—
On me alone it blew.

O dream of joy! is this indeed
The lighthouse top I see?
Is this the hill? is this the kirk?
Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the harbour-bar.
And I with sobs did pray—
O let me be awake, my God!
Or let me sleep alway.

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
So smoothly it was strewn!
And on the bay the moonlight lay,
And the shadow of the Moon.

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less
That stands above the rock:
The moonlight steep'd in silentness
The steady weathercock.

And the bay was white with silent light,
Till rising from the same,
Full many shapes, that shadows were,
In crimson colours came.

A little distance from the prow
Those crimson shadows were:
I turn'd my eyes upon the deck—
O Christ! what saw I there!

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,
And, by the holy rood!
A man all light, a seraph-man,
On every corse there stood.

This seraph-band, each waved his hand:
It was a heavenly sight!
They stood as signals to the land,
Each one a lovely light;

This seraph-band, each waved his hand,
No voice did they impart—
No voice; but O, the silence sank
Like music on my heart.

But soon I heard the dash of oars,
I heard the Pilot's cheer;
My head was turn'd perforce away,
And I saw a boat appear.

The Pilot and the Pilot's boy,
I heard them coming fast:
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy
The dead men could not blast.

I saw a third—I heard his voice:
It is the Hermit good!
He singeth loud his godly hymns
That he makes in the wood.
He 'il shrive my soul, he 'll wash away
The Albatross's blood.'

Part VII

'This Hermit good lives in that wood
Which slopes down to the sea.
How loudly his sweet voice he rears!
He loves to talk with marineres
That come from a far countree.

He kneels at morn, and noon, and eve—
He hath a cushion plump:
It is the moss that wholly hides
The rotted old oak-stump.

The skiff-boat near'd: I heard them talk,
"Why, this is strange, I trow!
Where are those lights so many and fair,
That signal made but now?"

"Strange, by my faith!" the Hermit said—
"And they answer'd not our cheer!
The planks look warp'd! and see those sails,
How thin they are and sere!
I never saw aught like to them,
Unless perchance it were
Brown skeletons of leaves that lag
My forest-brook along;

When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,
And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,
That eats the she-wolf's young."

"Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look"—
(The Pilot made reply)
"I am a-fear'd."—"Push on, push on!"
Said the Hermit cheerily.

The boat came closer to the ship,
But I nor spake nor stirr'd;
The boat came close beneath the ship,
And straight a sound was heard.

Under the water it rumbled on,
Still louder and more dread:
It reach'd the ship, it split the bay;
The ship went down like lead.

Stunn'd by that loud and dreadful sound,
Which sky and ocean smote,
Like one that hath been seven days drown'd
My body lay afloat;
But swift as dreams, myself I found
Within the Pilot's boat.

Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,
The boat spun round and round;
And all was still, save that the hill
Was telling of the sound.

I moved my lips—the Pilot shriek'd
And fell down in a fit;

Ivy-tod: bush of ivy.

The holy Hermit raised his eyes,
And pray'd where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,
Who now doth crazy go,
Laugh'd loud and long, and all the while
His eyes went to and fro.
"Ha! ha!" quoth he, "full plain I see
The Devil knows how to row."

And now, all in my own countree,
I stood on the firm land!
The Hermit stepp'd forth from the boat,
And scarcely he could stand.

"O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!"
The Hermit cross'd his brow,
"Say quick," quoth he, "I bid thee say—
What manner of man art thou?"

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrench'd
With a woful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach.

What loud uproar bursts from that door!
The wedding-guests are there:
But in the garden-bower the bride
And bride-maids singing are:
And hark, the little vesper bell,
Which biddeth me to prayer!

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide, wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God Himself
Scarce seemèd there to be.

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company!—

To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And youths and maidens gay!

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.'

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar,
Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest
Turn'd from the bridegroom's door.

He went like one that hath been stunn'd,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man
He rose the morrow morn.

THE BATTLE OF FLODDEN[1]

From Flodden ridge
The Scots beheld the English host
Leave Barmore-wood, their evening post,
And heedful watch'd them as they cross'd
The Till by Twisel Bridge.
High sight it is, and haughty, while
They dive into the deep defile;
Beneath the cavern'd cliff they fall,

[1] This passage is taken from Sir Walter Scott's narrative poem *Marmion*. The reader who has not read the poem must remember that Marmion was a knight of the English Court who had been sent on a royal embassy to King James IV. of Scotland, and just before the battle of Flodden had set out once more for England, having been unsuccessful in his errand. He had in his train a young lady named Clare whose love he wished to gain, but who had given her heart to another knight named De Wilton. As they were on their way southward the English general, the Earl of Surrey, came within the neighbourhood of the Till ready to meet a force which was led by no less a person than King James IV. of Scotland.

Beneath the castle's airy wall.
By rock, by oak, by hawthorn-tree,
Troop after troop are disappearing;
Troop after troop their banners rearing
Upon the eastern bank you see.
Still pouring down the rocky den,
Where flows the sullen Till,
And rising from the dim-wood glen,
Standards on standards, men on men,
In slow succession still,
And, sweeping o'er the Gothic arch,
And pressing on, in ceaseless march,
To gain the opposing hill.
That morn, to many a trumpet clang,
Twisel! thy rock's deep echo rang!
And many a chief of birth and rank,
Saint Helen! at thy fountain drank.
Thy hawthorn glade, which now we see
In spring-tide bloom so lavishly,
Had then from many an axe its doom,
To give the marching columns room.

And why stands Scotland idly now,
Dark Flodden, on thy airy brow,
Since England gains the pass the while,
And struggles through the deep defile?
What checks the fiery soul of James?
Why sits that champion of the dames
Inactive on his steed,
And sees, between him and his land,
Between him and Tweed's southern strand,
His host Lord Surrey lead?

What 'vails the vain knight-errant's brand?
—O, Douglas, for thy leading wand!
Fierce Randolph, for thy speed!
O for one hour of Wallace wight
Or well-skill'd Bruce, to rule the fight,
And cry—'Saint Andrew and our right!'
Another sight had seen that morn,
From Fate's dark book a leaf been torn,
And Flodden had been Bannockbourne!—
The precious hour has pass'd in vain,
And England's host has gained the plain;
Wheeling their march, and circling still,
Around the base of Flodden hill.

Ere yet the bands met Marmion's eye,
Fitz-Eustace shouted loud and high,
'Hark! hark! my lord, an English drum!
And see ascending squadrons come
Between Tweed's river and the hill,
Foot, horse, and cannon:—hap what hap,
My basnet to a prentice cap,
Lord Surrey's o'er the Till!
Yet more! yet more!—how far array'd
They file from out the hawthorn shade,
And sweep so gallant by:
With all their banners bravely spread,
And all their armour flashing high,
St. George might waken from the dead,
To see fair England's standards fly.'
'Stint in thy prate,' quoth Blount, 'thou 'dst best,

Fitz-Eustace and Blount: knights in the train of Marmion.
Wight: strong. *Basnet:* helmet.

And listen to our lord's behest.'—
With kindling brow Lord Marmion said,—
'This instant be our band array'd;
The river must be quickly cross'd,
That we may join Lord Surrey's host.
If fight King James,—as well I trust,
That fight he will, and fight he must,—
The Lady Clare behind our lines
Shall tarry, while the battle joins.'

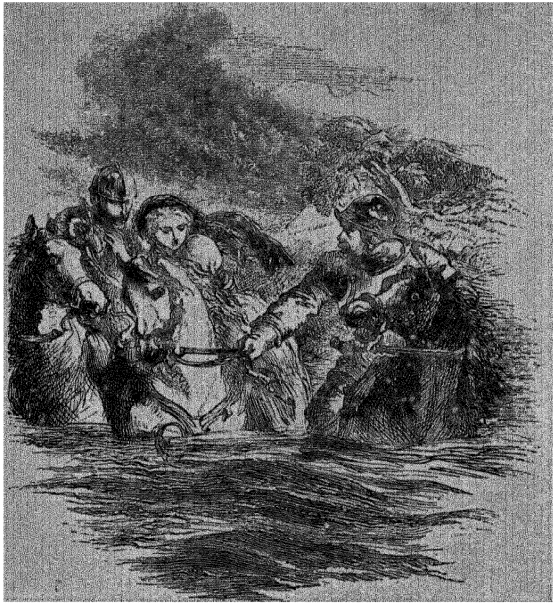
Himself he swift on horseback threw,
Scarce to the Abbot bade adieu;
Far less would listen to his prayer,
To leave behind the helpless Clare.
Down to the Tweed his band he drew,
And mutter'd as the flood they view,
'The pheasant in the falcon's claw,
He scarce will yield to please a daw:
Lord Angus may the Abbot awe,
So Clare shall bide with me.'
Then, on that dangerous ford, and deep,
Where to the Tweed Leat's eddies creep,
He ventured desperately:
And not a moment will he bide,
Till squire, or groom, before him ride;
Headmost of all he stems the tide;
And stems it gallantly.
Eustace held Clare upon her horse,
Old Hubert led her rein,

The Abbot: the head of the convent where Marmion had stayed overnight.

Lord Angus: the famous Scottish noble known as the 'Red' Douglas.

Stoutly they braved the current's course,
And though far downward driven perforce,
The southern bank they gain;
Behind them straggling, came to shore,
As best they might, the train:
Each o'er his head his yew-bow bore,
A caution not in vain;
Deep need that day that every string,
By wet unharm'd, should sharply ring.
A moment then Lord Marmion staid,
And breathed his steed, his men array'd,
Then forward moved his band,
Until, Lord Surrey's rear-guard won,
He halted by a Cross of Stone,
That, on a hillock standing lone,
Did all the field command.

Hence might they see the full array
Of either host, for deadly fray;
Their marshall'd lines stretch'd east and west,
And fronted north and south,
And distant salutation pass'd
From the loud cannon mouth;
Not in the close successive rattle,
That breathes the voice of modern battle,
But slow and far between.—
The hillock gain'd, Lord Marmion staid:
'Here, by this Cross,' he gently said,
'You well may view the scene.
Here shalt thou tarry, lovely Clare:
O! think of Marmion in thy prayer!—
Thou wilt not?—well,—no less my care



Stoutly they braved the current's course.

Shall, watchful, for thy weal prepare,—
You, Blount and Eustace, are her guard,
With ten pick'd archers of my train;
With England if the day go hard,
To Berwick speed amain.—
But if we conquer, cruel maid,
My spoils shall at your feet be laid,
When here we meet again.'
He waited not for answer there,
And would not mark the maid's despair,
Nor heed the discontented look
From either squire; but spurr'd amain,
And, dashing through the battle plain,
His way to Surrey took.

'——The good Lord Marmion, by my life!
Welcome to danger's hour!
Short greeting serves in time of strife!
Thus have I ranged my power:—
Myself will rule this central host,
Stout Stanley fronts their right,
My sons command the vanward post,
With Brian Tunstall, stainless knight,
Lord Dacre, with his horsemen light,
Shall be in rearward of the fight,
And succour those that need it most.
Now, gallant Marmion, well I know,
Would gladly to the vanguard go;
Edmund, the Admiral, Tunstall there,
With thee their charge will blithely share!
There fight thine own retainers too,
Beneath De Burg, thy steward true.'

'Thanks, noble Surrey!' Marmion said,
Nor farther greeting there he paid;
But, parting like a thunderbolt,
First in the vanguard made a halt,
Where such a shout there rose
Of 'Marmion! Marmion!' that the cry
Up Flodden mountain shrilling high,
Startled the Scottish foes.

Blount and Fitz-Eustace rested still
With Lady Clare upon the hill!
On which (for far the day was spent)
The western sunbeams now were bent.
The cry they heard, its meaning knew,
Could plain their distant comrades view;
Sadly to Blount did Eustace say,
'Unworthy office here to stay!
No hope of gilded spurs to-day.—
But see! look up—on Flodden bent
The Scottish foe has fired his tent.'
And sudden, as he spoke,
From the sharp ridges of the hill,
All downward to the banks of Till,
Was wreathed in sable smoke.
Volumed and fast, and rolling far,
The cloud enveloped Scotland's war,
As down the hill they broke;
Nor martial shout, nor minstrel tone,
Announced their march; their tread alone,
At times one warning trumpet blown,
At times a stifled hum,
Told England, from his mountain-throne
King James did rushing come.—

Scarce could they hear or see their foes,
Until at weapon-point they close.—
They close, in clouds of smoke and dust,
With sword-sway, and with lance's thrust;
And such a yell was there,
Of sudden and portentous birth,
As if men fought upon the earth,
And fiends in upper air;
O life and death were in the shout,
Recoil and rally, charge and rout,
And triumph and despair.
Long look'd the anxious squires; their eye
Could in the darkness nought descry.

At length the freshening western blast
Aside the shroud of battle cast;
And, first, the ridge of mingled spears
Above the brightening cloud appears;
And in the smoke the pennons flew,
As in the storm the white sea-mew.
Then mark'd they, dashing broad and far,
The broken billows of the war,
And plumèd crests of chieftains brave,
Floating like foam upon the wave;
But nought distinct they see:
Wide raged the battle on the plain;
Spears shook, and falchions flash'd amain;
Fell England's arrow-flight like rain;
Crests rose, and stoop'd, and rose again,
Wild and disorderly.
Amid the scene of tumult, high
They saw Lord Marmion's falcon fly;

And stainless Tunstall's banner white,
And Edmund Howard's lion bright,
Still bear them bravely in the fight;
  Although against them come,
Of gallant Gordons many a one,
And many a stubborn Highlandman,
And many a rugged Border clan,
  With Huntly, and with Home.

Far on the left, unseen the while,
Stanley broke Lennox and Argyle;
Though there the western mountaineer
Rush'd with bare bosom on the spear,
And flung the feeble targe aside,
And with both hands the broadsword plied.
'Twas vain:—But Fortune, on the right,
With fickle smile, cheer'd Scotland's fight.
Then fell that spotless banner white,
  The Howard's lion fell;
Yet still Lord Marmion's falcon flew
With wavering flight, while fiercer grew
  Around the battle-yell.
The Border slogan rent the sky!
A Home! a Gordon! was the cry:
  Loud were the clanging blows;
Advanced,—forced back,—now low, now high,
  The pennon sunk and rose;
As bends the bark's mast in the gale,
When rent are rigging, shrouds, and sail,
  It waver'd 'mid the foes.
No longer Blount the view could bear;
'By heaven, and all its saints! I swear

I will not see it lost!
Fitz-Eustace, you with Lady Clare
May bid your beads, and patter prayer,—
I gallop to the host.'
And to the fray he rode amain,
Follow'd by all the archer train.
The fiery youth, with desperate charge,
Made, for a space, an opening large—
The rescued banner rose—
But darkly closed the war around,
Like pine-tree, rooted from the ground,
It sunk among the foes.
Then Eustace mounted too:—yet staid
As loath to leave the helpless maid,
When, fast as shaft can fly,
Bloodshot his eyes, his nostrils spread,
The loose rein dangling from his head,
Housing and saddle bloody red,
Lord Marmion's steed rush'd by;
And Eustace, maddening at the sight,
A look and sign to Clara cast
To mark he would return in haste,
Then plunged into the fight.

Ask me not what the maiden feels,
Left in that dreadful hour alone:
Perchance her reason stoops, or reels;
Perchance a courage, not her own,
Braces her mind to desperate tone.—
The scatter'd van of England wheels:—

Bid your beads: tell or count the rosary beads, uttering a prayer or invocation for each.

She only said, as loud in air
The tumult roar'd, 'Is Wilton there?'—
They fly, or, maddened by despair,
Fight but to die,—'Is Wilton there?'
With that, straight up the hill there rode
Two horsemen drench'd with gore,
And in their arms, a helpless load,
A wounded knight they bore.
His hand still strain'd the broken brand;
His arms were smear'd with blood and sand.
Dragg'd from among the horses' feet,
With dinted shield, and helmet beat,
The falcon-crest and plumage gone,
Can that be haughty Marmion! . . .
Young Blount his armour did unlace,
And, gazing on his ghastly face,
Said—'By Saint George, he's gone!
That spear-wound has our master sped,
And see the deep cut on his head!
Good-night to Marmion.'—
'Unnurtured Blount! thy brawling cease:
He opes his eyes,' said Eustace; 'peace!'

When, doff'd his casque, he felt free air,
Around 'gan Marmion wildly stare:—
'Where's Harry Blount? Fitz-Eustace where?
Linger ye here, ye hearts of hare!
Redeem my pennon,—charge again!
Cry—"Marmion to the rescue!"—Vain!
Last of my race, on battle plain
That shout shall ne'er be heard again!
Yet my last thought is England's—fly,

To Dacre bear my signet-ring:
Tell him his squadrons up to bring.—
Fitz-Eustace, to Lord Surrey hie;
Tunstall lies dead upon the field,
His life-blood stains the spotless shield.
Edmund is down:—my life is reft;
The Admiral alone is left.
Let Stanley charge with spur of fire,—
With Chester charge, and Lancashire,
Full upon Scotland's central host,
Or victory and England's lost.—
Must I bid twice?—hence, varlets! fly!
Leave Marmion here alone—to die.'
They parted, and alone he lay;
Clare drew her from the sight away,
Till pain wrung forth a lowly moan,
And half he murmur'd,—'Is there none,
Of all my halls have nurst,
Page, squire, or groom, one cup to bring
Of blessed water from the spring,
To slake my dying thirst!'

O Woman! in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made;
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou!—
Scarce were the pitying accents said,
When, with the Baron's casque, the maid
To the nigh streamlet ran:
Forgot were hatred, wrongs, and fears;



With the Baron's casque, the maid
To the nigh streamlet ran.

The plaintive voice alone she hears,
Sees but the dying man.
She stoop'd her by the runnel's side,
But in abhorrence backward drew;
For, oozing from the mountain's side,
Where raged the war, a dark-red tide
Was curdling in the streamlet blue.
Where shall she turn?—behold her mark
A little fountain cell,
Where water, clear as diamond-spark,
In a stone basin fell.
Above, some half-worn letters say,
Drink . weary . pilgrim . drink . and . pray .
For . the . kind . soul . of . Sybil . Grey .
Who . built . this . cross . and . well .
She fill'd the helm, and back she hied,
And with surprise and joy espied
A Monk supporting Marmion's head:
A pious man, whom duty brought
To dubious verge of battle fought,
To shrieve the dying, bless the dead.

Deep drank Lord Marmion of the wave,
And, as she stoop'd his brow to lave—
'Is it the hand of Clare,' he said,
'Or injured Constance,[1] bathes my head?'
Then, as remembrance rose,—
'Speak not to me of shrift or prayer!
I must redress her woes.
Short space, few words, are mine to spare;
Forgive and listen, gentle Clare!'
'Alas!' she said, 'the while,—

[1] Whom Marmion had once loved and then forsaken.

O, think of your immortal weal!
In vain for Constance is your zeal;
She——died at Holy Isle.'—
Lord Marmion started from the ground,
As light as if he felt no wound:
Though in the action burst the tide,
In torrents from his wounded side.
'Then it was truth,'—he said—'I knew
That the dark presage must be true.—
I would the Fiend, to whom belongs
The vengeance due to all her wrongs,
Would spare me but a day!
For wasting fire, and dying groan,
And priests slain on the altar-stone,
Might bribe him for delay.
It may not be!—this dizzy trance—
Curse on yon base marauder's lance,
And doubly cursed my failing brand!
A sinful heart makes feeble hand.'
Then, fainting down on earth he sunk,
Supported by the trembling Monk.

With fruitless labour, Clara bound,
And strove to stanch the gushing wound:
The Monk, with unavailing cares,
Exhausted all the Church's prayers.
Ever, he said, that, close and near,
A lady's voice was in his ear,
And that the priest he could not hear,
For that she ever sung,
'*In the lost battle, borne down by the flying,*
Where mingles war's rattle with groans of the dying!'
So the notes rung:—

'Avoid thee, Fiend!—with cruel hand,
Shake not the dying sinner's sand!—
O, look, my son, upon yon sign
Of the Redeemer's grace divine;
O, think on faith and bliss!—
By many a death-bed I have been,
And many a sinner's parting seen,
But never aught like this.'
The war, that for a space did fail,
Now trebly thundering swell'd the gale,
And—STANLEY! was the cry;
A light on Marmion's visage spread,
And fired his glazing eye;
With dying hand, above his head,
He shook the fragment of his blade,
And shouted 'Victory!—
Charge, Chester, charge! On, Stanley, on!'
Were the last words of Marmion.

By this, though deep the evening fell,
Still rose the battle's deadly swell,
For still the Scots, around their King,
Unbroken, fought in desperate ring.
Where's now their victor vaward wing,
Where Huntly, and where Home?—
O for a blast of that dread horn,
On Fontarabian echoes borne,
That to King Charles did come,
When Rowland brave, and Olivier,

King Charles, or Charlemagne, whose two brave paladins, Roland and Oliver, fought the Saracens at Roncesvalles, in Spain. When hard pressed Roland blew a blast on his famous horn, which was heard by King Charles thirty miles away.

And every paladin and peer,
On Roncesvalles died!
Such blast might warn them, not in vain,
To quit the plunder of the slain,
And turn the doubtful day again,
While yet on Flodden side,
Afar, the Royal Standard flies,
And round it toils, and bleeds, and dies,
Our Caledonian pride!
In vain the wish—for far away,
While spoil and havoc mark their way,
Near Sybil's Cross the plunderers stray.—
'O Lady,' cried the Monk, 'away!'
And placed her on her steed,
And led her to the chapel fair,
Of Tillmouth upon Tweed.
There all the night they spent in prayer,
And at the dawn of morning, there
She met her kinsman, Lord Fitz-Clare.

But as they left the dark'ning heath,
More desperate grew the strife of death.
The English shafts in volleys hail'd,
In headlong charge their horse assail'd;
Front, flank, and rear, the squadrons sweep
To break the Scottish circle deep,
That fought around their King.
But yet, though thick the shafts as snow,
Though charging knights like whirlwinds go,
Though billmen ply the ghastly blow,
Unbroken was the ring;
The stubborn spearmen still made good
Their dark impenetrable wood,

Each stepping where his comrade stood,
The instant that he fell.
No thought was there of dastard flight;
Link'd in the serried phalanx tight,
Groom fought like noble, squire like knight,
As fearlessly and well;
Till utter darkness closed her wing
O'er their thin host and wounded King.
Then skilful Surrey's sage commands
Led back from strife his shatter'd bands;
And from the charge they drew,
As mountain-waves, from wasted lands,
Sweep back to ocean blue.
Then did their loss his foemen know;
Their King, their Lords, their mightiest low,
They melted from the field as snow,
When streams are swoln and south winds blow
Dissolves in silent dew.
Tweed's echoes heard the ceaseless plash,
While many a broken band,
Disorder'd, through her currents dash,
To gain the Scottish land;
To town and tower, to down and dale,
To tell red Flodden's dismal tale,
And raise the universal wail.
Tradition, legend, tune, and song,
Shall many an age that wail prolong:
Still from the sire the son shall hear
Of the stern strife, and carnage drear,
Of Flodden's fatal field,
Where shiver'd was fair Scotland's spear
And broken was her shield!

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

A KNIGHT of gallant deeds,
And a young page at his side,
From the holy war in Palestine,
Did slow and thoughtful ride,—
As each were a palmer, and told for beads,
The dews of the eventide.

'O young page,' said the knight,
'A noble page art thou!
Thou fearest not to steep in blood
The curls upon thy brow;
And once in the tent, and twice in the fight,
Didst ward me a mortal blow.'

'O brave knight,' said the page,
'Or ere we hither came,
We talked in tent, we talked in field,
Of the bloody battle-game:
But here, below this greenwood bough,
I cannot speak the same.

'Our troop is far behind,
The woodland calm is new;
Our steeds, with slow grass-muffled hoofs,
Tread deep the shadows through:
And in my mind, some blessing kind
Is dropping with the dew.

Told: counted.

'The woodland calm is pure—
I cannot choose but have
A thought, from these, o' the beechen-trees
Which, in our England, wave;
And of the little finches fine,
Which sang there, while in Palestine
The warrior-hilt we drave.

'Methinks a moment gone,
I heard my mother pray!
I heard, Sir Knight, the prayer for *me*
Wherein she passed away;
And I know the Heavens are leaning down
To hear what I shall say.'

The page spake calm and high,
As of no mean degree;
Perhaps he felt in nature's broad
Full heart, his own was free:
And the knight looked up to his lifted eye,
Then answered smilingly:—

'Sir Page, I pray your grace!
Certes, I meant not so
To cross your pastoral mood, Sir Page,
With the crook of the battle-bow;
But a knight may speak of a lady's face,
I trow, in any mood or place,
If the grasses die or grow.

'And this, I meant to say,—
My lady's face shall shine

As ladies' faces use, to greet
My page from Palestine:
Or, speak she fair, or prank she gay,
She is no lady of mine.

'And this, I meant to fear,—
Her bower may suit thee ill!
For, sooth, in that same field and tent,
Thy *talk* was somewhat still;
And fitter thy hand for my knightly spear,
Than thy tongue for my lady's will.'

Slowly and thankfully
The young page bowed his head:
His large eyes seemed to muse a smile,
Until he blushed instead;
And no lady in her bower, pardiè,
Could blush more sudden red—
'Sir Knight,—thy lady's bower to me
Is suited well,' he said.

Beati, beati, mortui!
From the convent on the sea,—
One mile off, or scarce as nigh,
Swells the dirge as clear and high
As if that, over brake and lea,
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of St. Mary;
And the fifty tapers burning o'er it,
And the Lady Abbess dead before it,
And the chanting nuns whom yesterweek

Beati, etc.: Latin for 'Blessed, blessed (are the) dead (who die in the Lord).'

Her voice did charge and bless—
Chanting steady, chanting meek,
Chanting with a solemn breath,
Because that they are thinking less
Upon the dead than upon death!
Beati, beati, mortui!
Now the vision in the sound
Wheeleth on the wind around—
Now it sweeps aback, away—
The uplands will not let it stay
To dark the western sun.
Mortui!—away at last,—
Or ere the page's blush is past!
And the knight heard all, and the page heard none.

'A boon, thou noble knight,
If ever I servëd thee!
Though thou art a knight, and I am a page,
Now grant a boon to me—
And tell me sooth, if dark or bright,
If little loved, or loved aright,
Be the face of thy ladye.'

Gloomily looked the knight:—
'As a son thou hast servëd me:
And would to none I had granted boon,
Except to only thee!
For haply then I should love aright,—
For then I should know if dark or bright
Were the face of my ladye.

'Yet ill it suits my knightly tongue,
To grudge that granted boon!



The nuns whom yesterweek
Her voice did charge and bless.

That heavy price, from heart and life,
I paid in silence down:
The hand that claimed it, cleared in fine
My father's fame! I swear by mine,
That price was nobly won.

'Earl Walter was a brave old Earl,—
He was my father's friend;
And while I rode the lists at court,
And little guessed the end,—
My noble father in his shroud,
Against a slanderer lying loud,
He rose up to defend.

'Oh, calm below the marble grey
My father's dust was strown!
Oh, meek above the marble grey,
His image prayed alone!
The slanderer lied—the wretch was brave,—
For, looking up the minster-nave,
He saw my father's knightly glaive
Was changed from steel to stone.

'Earl Walter's glaive was steel,
With a brave old hand to wear it!
And dashed the lie back in the mouth
Which lied against a godly truth
And against the knightly merit!
The slanderer, 'neath the avenger's heel,
Struck up the dagger in appeal
From stealthy lie to brutal force—
And out upon that traitor's corse,
Was yielded the true spirit!

'I would mine hand had fought that fight,
And justified my father!
I would mine heart had caught that wound,
And slept beside him rather!
I think it were a better thing
Than murdered friend, and marriage-ring,
Forced on my life together.

'Wail shook Earl Walter's house—
His true wife shed no tear—
She lay upon her bed as mute
As the Earl did on his bier:
Till—"Ride, ride fast," she said at last,
"And bring the avengëd's son anear!
Ride fast—ride free, as a dart can flee;
For white of blee, with waiting for me,
Is the corse in the next chambère."

'I came—I knelt beside her bed—
Her calm was worse than strife—
"My husband, for thy father dear,
Gave freely, when thou wert not here,
His own and eke my life.
A boon! Of that sweet child we make
An orphan for thy father's sake,
Make thou, for ours, a wife."

'I said, "My steed neighs in the court;
My bark rocks on the brine;
And the warrior's vow I am under now,
To free the pilgrim's shrine:

White of blee: white in colour or appearance.

But fetch the ring, and fetch the priest,
And call that daughter of thine;
And rule she wide from my castle on Nyde,
While I am in Palestine."

'In the dark chambère, if the bride was fair,
Ye wis, I could not see;
But the steed thrice neighed, and the priest fast prayed,
And wedded fast were we.
Her mother smiled upon her bed,
As at its side we knelt to wed;
And the bride rose from her knee,—
And kissed the smile of her mother dead,
Or ever she kissed me.

'My page, my page, what grieves thee so,
That the tears run down thy face?'—
'Alas, alas! mine own sistèr
Was in thy lady's case!
But *she* laid down the silks she wore
And followed him she wed before,
Disguised as his true servitor,
To the very battle-place.'

And wept the page, but laughed the knight,—
A careless laugh laughed he:
'Well done it were for thy sistèr,
But not for my ladyè!
My love, so please you, shall requite
No woman, whether dark or bright,
Unwomaned if she be.'

Ye wis: the two words together mean 'of a truth,' or 'certainly.'

The page stopped weeping, and smiled cold—
'Your wisdom may declare
That womanhood is proved the best
By golden brooch and glossy vest
The mincing ladies wear:
Yet is it proved, and was of old,
Anear as well—I dare to hold—
By truth, or by despair.'

He smiled no more—he wept no more,—
But passionate he spake,—
'Oh, womanly she prayed in tent,
When none beside did wake!
Oh, womanly she paled in fright,
For one belovëd's sake!—
And her little hand defiled with blood,
Her tender tears of womanhood,
Most woman-pure, did make!'

'Well done it were for thy sistèr—
Thou tellest well her tale!
But for my lady, she shall pray
I' the kirk of Nydesdale—
Not dread for me, but love for me
Shall make my lady pale!
No casque shall hide her woman's tear—
It shall have room to trickle clear
Behind her woman's veil.'

'But what if she mistook thy mind,
And followed thee to strife;
Then kneeling, did entreat thy love,
As Paynims ask for life?'

'I would forgive, and evermore
Would love her as my servitor,
But little as my wife.

'Look up—there is a small bright cloud
Alone amid the skies!
So high, so pure, and so apart,
A woman's honour lies.'
The page looked up—the cloud was sheen—
A sadder cloud did rush, I ween,
Betwixt it and his eyes:

Then dimly dropped his eyes away
From welkin unto hill—
Ha! who rides there?—the page is 'ware,
Though the cry at his heart is still!
And the page seeth all, and the knight seeth none,
Though banner and spear do fleck the sun,
And the Saracens ride at will.

He speaketh calm, he speaketh low,—
'Ride fast, my master, ride,
Or ere within the broadening dark
The narrow shadows hide!'
'Yea, fast, my page; I will do so;
And keep thou at my side.'

'Now nay, now nay, ride on thy way,
Thy faithful page precede!

Welkin: the sky.

For I must loose on saddle-bow
My battle-casque, that galls, I trow,
The shoulder of my steed;
And I must pray, as I did vow,
For one in bitter need.

'Ere night I shall be near to thee,—
Now ride, my master, ride!
Ere night as parted spirits cleave
To mortals too beloved to leave,
I shall be at thy side.'
The knight smiled free at the fantasy,
And down the dell did ride.

Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
No smile the word had won!
Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
I ween he had never gone!
Had the knight looked back to the page's geste,
I ween he had turned anon!
For dread was the woe in the face so young;
And wild was the silent geste that flung
Casque, sword to earth—as the boy down-sprung,
And stood—alone, alone.

He clenched his hands, as if to hold
His soul's great agony—
'Have I renounced my womanhood,
For wifehood unto *thee*?
And is this the last, last look of thine,
That ever I shall see?

Geste: gesture or movement.

'Yet God thee save, and may'st thou have
A lady to thy mind;
More woman-proud, and half as true
As one thou leav'st behind!
And God me take with Him to dwell—
For Him I cannot love too well,
As I have loved my kind.'

She looketh up, in earth's despair,
The hopeful Heavens to seek!
That little cloud still floateth there,
Whereof her Loved did speak.
How bright the little cloud appears!
Her eyelids fall upon the tears,—
And the tears down either cheek.

. . . . .

The tramp of hoof, the flash of steel—
The Paynims round her coming!
The sound and sight have made her calm,—
False page, but truthful woman!
She stands amid them all unmoved:
The heart, once broken by the loved,
Is strong to meet the foeman.

'Ho, Christian page! art keeping sheep,
From pouring wine-cups resting?'—
'I keep my master's noble name,
For warring, not for feasting:
And if that here Sir Hubert were,
My master brave, my master dear,
Ye would not stay the questing.'

Stay the questing: stay to ask the question.



She stands amid them all unmoved.

'Where is thy master, scornful page,
That we may slay or bind him?'—
'Now search the lea, and search the wood,
And see if ye can find him!
Nathless, as hath been often tried,
Your Paynim heroes faster ride
Before him than behind him.'

'Give smoother answers, lying page,
Or perish in the lying.'—
'I trow that if the warrior brand
Beside my foot, were in my hand,
'Twere better at replying.'
They cursed her deep, they smote her low,
They cleft her golden ringlets through:
The Loving is the Dying.

She felt the scimitar gleam down,
And met it from beneath,
With smile more bright in victory
Than any sword from sheath,—
Which flashed across her lip serene,
Most like the spirit-light between
The darks of life and death.

Ingemisco, ingemisco!
From the convent on the sea,
Now it sweepeth solemnly,
As over wood and over lea,
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of St. Mary,

Ingemisco, etc. : Latin for 'I lament, I lament.'

And the fifty tapers paling o'er it,
And the lady Abbess stark before it,
And the weary nuns, with hearts that faintly
Beat along their voices saintly—
Ingemisco, ingemisco!
Dirge for abbess laid in shroud,
Sweepeth o'er the shroudless dead,
Page or lady, as we said,
With the dews upon her head,
All as sad if not as loud!
Ingemisco, ingemisco!
Is ever a lament begun
By any mourner under sun,
Which, ere it endeth, suits but *one*?

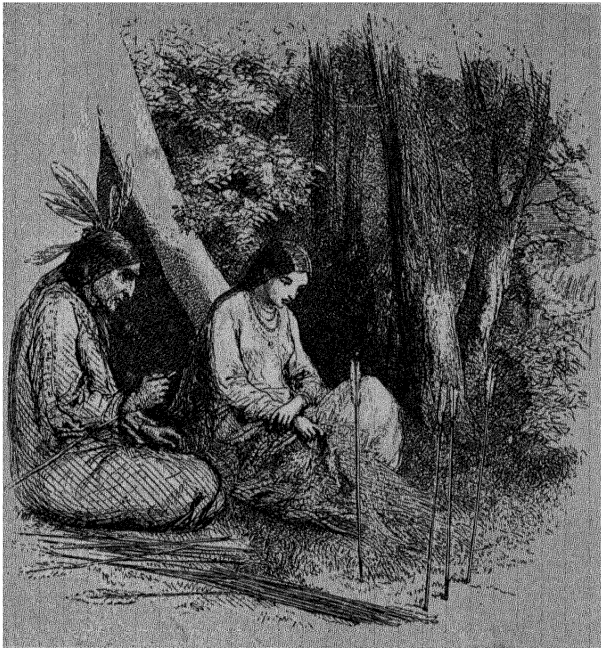
OSSEO AND OWEENEE

An Indian Legend

Once, in days no more remembered,
Ages nearer the beginning,
When the heavens were closer to us,
And the gods were more familiar,
In the North-land lived a hunter,
With ten young and comely daughters,
Tall and lithe as wands of willow;
Only Oweence, the youngest,
She the wilful and the wayward,
She the silent, dreamy maiden,
Was the fairest of the sisters.
All these women married warriors,
Married brave and haughty husbands;

Only Oweenee, the youngest,
Laughed and flouted all her lovers,
All her young and handsome suitors,
And then married old Osseo,
Old Osseo, poor and ugly,
Broken with age and weak with coughing,
Always coughing like a squirrel.
Ah, but beautiful within him
Was the spirit of Osseo,
From the Evening Star descended,
Star of Evening, Star of Woman,
Star of tenderness and passion,
All its fire was in his bosom,
All its beauty in his spirit,
All its mystery in his being,
All its splendour in his language!
And her lovers, the rejected,
Handsome men with belts of wampum,
Handsome men with paint and feathers,
Pointed at her in derision,
Followed her with jest and laughter.
But she said: 'I care not for you,
Care not for your belts of wampum,
Care not for your paint and feathers,
Care not for your jests and laughter!
I am happy with Osseo!'
Once to some great feast invited,
Through the damp and dusk of evening,
Walked together the ten sisters,
Walked together with their husbands;
Slowly followed old Osseo,

Wampum: bead work.



'I am happy with Osseo.'

With fair Oweenee beside him;
All the others chatted gaily,
These two only walked in silence.
At the Western sky Osseo
Gazed intent, as if imploring,
Often stopped and gazed imploring
At the trembling Star of Evening,
At the tender Star of Woman;
And they heard him murmur softly,
'*Ah, showain nemeshin, Nosa!*
Pity, pity me, my father!'
'Listen!' said the eldest sister,
'He is praying to his father!
What a pity that the old man
Does not stumble in the pathway,
Does not break his neck by falling!'
And they laughed till all the forest
Rang with their unseemly laughter.
On their pathway through the woodlands
Lay an oak, by storms uprooted,
Lay the great trunk of an oak-tree,
Buried half in leaves and mosses,
Mouldering, crumbling, huge and hollow.
And Osseo, when he saw it,
Gave a shout, a cry of anguish,
Leaped into its yawning cavern;
At one end went in an old man,
Wasted, wrinkled, old, and ugly;
From the other came a young man,
Tall and straight, and strong and handsome.
Thus Osseo was transfigured,
Thus restored to youth and beauty;

But, alas! for good Osseo,
And for Oweenee, the faithful!
Strangely, too, was she transfigured,
Changed into a weak old woman.
With a staff she tottered onward,
Wasted, wrinkled, old, and ugly!
And the sisters and their husbands
Laughed until the echoing forest
Rang with their unseemly laughter.

But Osseo turned not from her,
Walked with slower step beside her,
Took her hand, as brown and withered
As an oak-leaf is in Winter,
Called her sweetheart, Nenemoosha,
Soothed her with soft words of kindness,
Till they reached the lodge of feasting,
Till they sat down in the wigwam,
Sacred to the Star of Evening,
To the tender Star of Woman.

Wrapt in visions, lost in dreaming,
At the banquet sat Osseo;
All were merry, all were happy,
All were joyous but Osseo.
Neither food nor drink he tasted,
Neither did he speak nor listen,
But as one bewildered sat he,
Looking dreamily and sadly,
First at Oweenee, then upward
At the gleaming sky above them.

Then a voice was heard, a whisper,
Coming from the starry distance,
Coming from the empty vastness,

Low, and musical, and tender;
And the voice said: 'O Osseo!
O my son, my best beloved!
Broken are the spells that bound you,
All the charms of the magicians,
All the magic powers of evil;
Come to me; ascend, Osseo!
'Taste the food that stands before you:
It is blessëd and enchanted,
It has magic virtues in it,
It will change you to a spirit.
All your bowls and all your kettles
Shall be wood and clay no longer;
But the bowls be changed to wampum,
And the kettles shall be silver;
They shall shine like shells of scarlet,
Like the fire shall gleam and glimmer.
'And the women shall no longer
Bear the dreary doom of labour,
But be changed to birds, and glisten
With the beauty of the starlight,
Painted with the dusky splendours
Of the skies and clouds of evening!'
What Osseo heard as whispers,
What as words he comprehended,
Was but music to the others,
Music as of birds afar off,
Of the whippoorwill afar off,
Of the lonely Wawonaissa
Singing in the darksome forest.
Then the lodge began to tremble,
Straight began to shake and tremble,

And they felt it rising, rising,
Slowly through the air ascending,
From the darkness of the tree-tops
Forth into the dewy starlight,
Till it passed the topmost branches;
And behold! the wooden dishes
All were changed to shells of scarlet!
And behold! the earthen kettles
All were changed to bowls of silver!
And the roof-poles of the wigwam
Were as glittering rods of silver,
And the roof of bark upon them
As the shining shards of beetles.

Then Osseo gazed around him,
And he saw the nine fair sisters,
All the sisters and their husbands,
Changed to birds of various plumage;
Some were jays and some were magpies,
Others thrushes, others blackbirds;
And they hopped, and sang, and twittered,
Perked and fluttered all their feathers,
Strutted in their shining plumage,
And their tails like fans unfolded.

Only Oweenee, the youngest,
Was not changed, but sat in silence,
Wasted, wrinkled, old, and ugly,
Looking sadly at the others;
Till Osseo, gazing upward,
Gave another cry of anguish,
Such a cry as he had uttered
By the oak-tree in the forest.

Then returned her youth and beauty,

And her soiled and tattered garments
Were transformed to robes of ermine,
And her staff became a feather,
Yes, a shining silver feather!
And again the wigwam trembled,
Swayed and rushed through airy currents,
Through transparent cloud and vapour,
And amid celestial splendours
On the Evening Star alighted,
As a snowflake falls on snowflake,
As a leaf drops on a river,
As a thistle-down on water.
Forth with cheerful words of welcome
Came the father of Osseo,
He with radiant locks of silver,
He with eyes serene and tender.
And he said: 'My son Osseo,
Hang the cage of birds you bring there,
Hang the cage with rods of silver,
And the birds with glistening feathers,
At the doorway of my wigwam.'
At the door he hung the bird-cage,
And they entered in and gladly
Listened to Osseo's father,
Ruler of the Star of Evening,
As he said: 'O my Osseo!
I have had compassion on you,
Given you back your youth and beauty,
Into birds of various plumage
Changed your sisters and their husbands;
Changed them thus because they mocked you
In the figure of the old man.

In that aspect sad and wrinkled,
Could not see your heart of passion,
Could not see your youth immortal;
Only Oweenee, the faithful,
Saw your naked heart and loved you.

'In the lodge that glimmers yonder
In the little star that twinkles
Through the vapours, on the left hand,
Lives the envious Evil Spirit,
The Wabeno, the magician,
Who transformed you to an old man.
Take heed lest his beams fall on you,
For the rays he darts around him
Are the power of his enchantment,
Are the arrows that he uses.'

Many years, in peace and quiet,
On the peaceful Star of Evening
Dwelt Osseo with his father;
Many years, in song and flutter,
At the doorway of the wigwam,
Hung the cage with rods of silver.
And fair Oweenee, the faithful,
Bore a son unto Osseo,
With the beauty of his mother,
With the courage of his father.

And the boy grew up and prospered,
And Osseo, to delight him,
Made him little bows and arrows,
Opened the great cage of silver,
And let loose his aunts and uncles,
All those birds with glossy feathers,
For his little son to shoot at.

Round and round they wheeled and darted,
Filled the Evening Star with music,
With their songs of joy and freedom;
Filled the Evening Star with splendour,
With the fluttering of their plumage;
Till the boy, the little hunter,
Bent his bow and shot an arrow,
Shot a swift and fatal arrow,
And a bird, with shining feathers,
At his feet fell wounded sorely.

But, O wondrous transformation!
'Twas no bird he saw before him,
'Twas a beautiful young woman,
With the arrow in her bosom!

When her blood fell on the planet,
On the Sacred Star of Evening,
Broken was the spell of magic,
Powerless was the strange enchantment,
And the youth, the fearless bowman,
Suddenly felt himself descending,
Held by unseen hands, but sinking
Downward through the empty spaces,
Downward through the clouds and vapours,
Till he rested on an island,
On an island green and grassy,
Yonder in the Big-Sea-Water.

After him he saw descending
All the birds with shining feathers,
Fluttering, falling, wafted downward,
Like the painted leaves of Autumn;
And the lodge with poles of silver,
With its roof like wings of beetles,

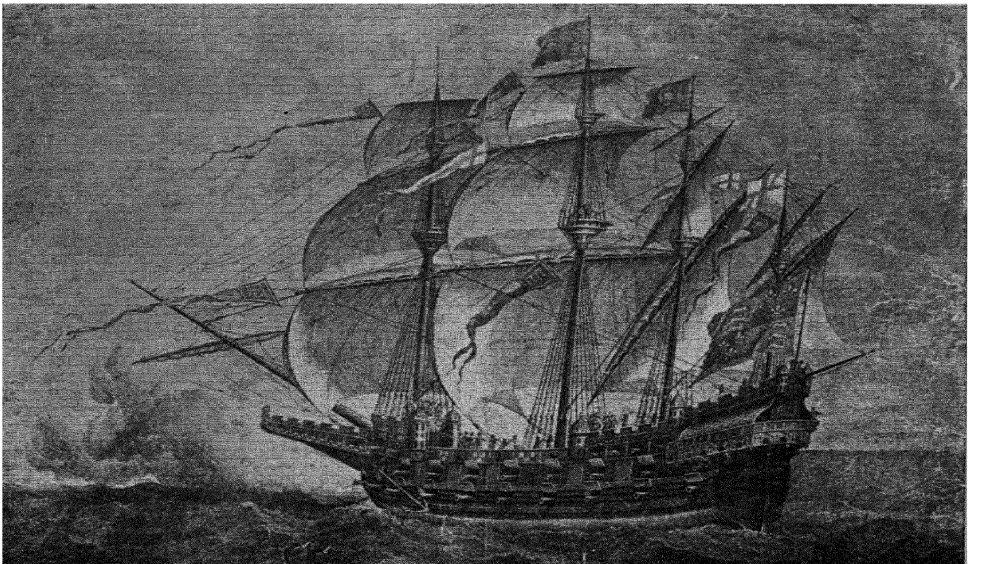
Like the shining shards of beetles,
By the winds of heaven uplifted,
Slowly sank upon the island,
Bringing back the good Osseo,
Bringing Oweenee, the faithful.
Then the birds, again transfigured,
Reassumed the shape of mortals,
Took their shape, but not their stature;
They remained as Little People,
Like the pigmies, the Puk-Wudjies,
And on pleasant nights of Summer,
When the Evening Star was shining,
Hand in hand they danced together
On the island's craggy headlands,
On the sand-beach low and level.
Still their glittering lodge is seen there,
On the tranquil Summer evenings,
And upon the shore the fisher
Sometimes hears their happy voices,
Sees them dancing in the starlight!

THE BUILDING OF THE SHIP

'BUILD me straight, O worthy Master!
Staunch and strong, a goodly vessel,
That shall laugh at all disaster,
And with wave and whirlwind wrestle!'

The merchant's word
Delighted the Master heard;

For his heart was in his work, and the heart
Giveth grace unto every Art.
A quiet smile played round his lips,
As the eddies and dimples of the tide
Play round the bows of ships,
That steadily at anchor ride.
And with a voice that was full of glee,
He answered, 'Ere long we will launch
A vessel as goodly, and strong, and staunch,
As ever weathered a wintry sea!'
And first with nicest skill and art,
Perfect and finished in every part,
A little model the Master wrought,
Which should be to the larger plan
What the child is to the man,
Its counterpart in miniature;
That with a hand more swift and sure
The greater labour might be brought
To answer to his inward thought.
And as he laboured, his mind ran o'er
The various ships that were built of yore,
And above them all, and strangest of all
Towered the Great Harry, crank and tall,
Whose picture was hanging on the wall,
With bows and stern raised high in air,
And balconies hanging here and there,
And signal lanterns and flags afloat,
And eight round towers, like those that frown
From some old castle, looking down
Upon the drawbridge and the moat.
And he said with a smile, 'Our ship, I wis,
Shall be of another form than this!'



The Great Harry.

It was of another form, indeed;
Built for freight, and yet for speed;
A beautiful and gallant craft;
Broad in the beam, that the stress of the blast,
Pressing down upon sail and mast,
Might not the sharp bows overwhelm;
Broad in the beam, but sloping aft
With graceful curve and slow degrees,
That she might be docile to the helm,
And that the currents of parted seas,
Closing behind, with mighty force,
Might aid and not impede her course.

In the shipyard stood the Master,
With the model of the vessel,
That should laugh at all disaster,
And with wave and whirlwind wrestle!

Covering many a rood of ground,
Lay the timber piled around;
Timber of chestnut, and elm, and oak,
And scattered here and there, with these,
The knarred and crooked cedar knees;
Brought from regions far away,
From Pascagoula's sunny bay,
And the banks of the roaring Roanoke!
Ah! what a wondrous thing it is
To note how many wheels of toil
One thought, one word, can set in motion!
There 's not a ship that sails the ocean,
But every climate, every soil,
Must bring its tribute, great or small,
And help to build the wooden wall!

The sun was rising o'er the sea,
And long the level shadows lay,
As if they, too, the beams would be
Of some great, airy argosy,
Framed and launched in a single day.
That silent architect, the sun,
Had hewn and laid them every one,
Ere the work of man was yet begun.
Beside the Master, when he spoke,
A youth, against an anchor leaning,
Listened, to catch his slightest meaning.
Only the long waves, as they broke
In ripples on the pebbly beach,
Interrupted the old man's speech.

Beautiful they were, in sooth,
The old man and the fiery youth!
The old man, in whose busy brain
Many a ship that sailed the main
Was modelled o'er and o'er again;—
The fiery youth, who was to be
The heir of his dexterity,
The heir of his house, and his daughter's hand,
When he had built and launched from land
What the elder head had planned.

'Thus,' said he, 'will we build this ship!
Lay square the blocks upon the slip,
And follow well this plan of mine.
Choose the timbers with greatest care;
Of all that is unsound beware;
For only what is sound and strong
To this vessel shall belong.

Cedar of Maine and Georgia pine
Here together shall combine.
A goodly frame, and a goodly fame,
And the UNION be her name!
For the day that gives her to the sea
Shall give my daughter unto thee!'

The Master's word
Enraptured the young man heard;
And as he turned his face aside,
With a look of joy and a thrill of pride
Standing before
Her father's door,
He saw the form of his promised bride.
The sun shone on her golden hair,
And her cheek was glowing fresh and fair,
With the breath of morn and the soft sea air.
Like a beauteous barge was she,
Still at rest on the sandy beach,
Just beyond the billow's reach;
But he
Was the restless, seething, stormy sea!
Ah, how skilful grows the hand
That obeyeth Love's command!
It is the heart, and not the brain,
That to the highest doth attain,
And he who followeth Love's behest
Far excelleth all the rest!

Thus with the rising of the sun
Was the noble task begun,
And soon throughout the shipyard's bounds
Were heard the intermingled sounds

Of axes and of mallets, plied
With vigorous arms on every side;
Plied so deftly and so well,
That, ere the shadows of evening fell,
The keel of oak for a noble ship,
Scarfed and bolted, straight and strong,
Was lying ready, and stretched along
The blocks, well placed upon the slip.
Happy, thrice happy, every one
Who sees his labour well begun,
And not perplexed and multiplied,
By idly waiting for time and tide!

And when the hot, long day was o'er,
The young man at the Master's door
Sat with the maiden calm and still,
And within the porch, a little more
Removed beyond the evening chill,
The father sat, and told them tales
Of wrecks in the great September gales,
Of pirates coasting the Spanish Main,
And ships that never came back again,
The chance and change of a sailor's life,
Want and plenty, rest and strife,
His roving fancy, like the wind,
That nothing can stay and nothing can bind,
And the magic charm of foreign lands,
With shadows of palms, and shining sands,
Where the tumbling surf,
O'er the coral reefs of Madagascar,
Washes the feet of the swarthy Lascar,
As he lies alone and asleep on the turf.

And the trembling maiden held her breath
At the tales of that awful, pitiless sea,
With all its terror and mystery,
The dim, dark sea, so like unto Death,
That divides and yet unites mankind!
And whenever the old man paused, a gleam
From the bowl of his pipe would awhile illume
The silent group in the twilight gloom,
And thoughtful faces, as in a dream;
And for a moment one might mark
What had been hidden by the dark,
That the head of the maiden lay at rest,
Tenderly, on the young man's breast!

Day by day the vessel grew,
With timbers fashioned strong and true,
Stemson and keelson and sternson-knee,
Till, framed with perfect symmetry,
A skeleton ship rose up to view!
And around the bows and along the side
The heavy hammers and mallets plied,
Till after many a week, at length,
Wonderful for form and strength,
Sublime in its enormous bulk,
Loomed aloft the shadowy hulk!
And around it columns of smoke, upwreathing,
Rose from the boiling, bubbling, seething
Cauldron, that glowed,
And overflowed
With the black tar, heated for the sheathing.
And amid the clamours
Of clattering hammers,

He who listened heard now and then
The song of the Master and his men:—

'Build me straight, O worthy Master,
Staunch and strong, a goodly vessel,
That shall laugh at all disaster,
And with wave and whirlwind wrestle!'

With oaken brace and copper band,
Lay the rudder on the sand,
That, like a thought, should have control
Over the movement of the whole;
And near it the anchor, whose giant hand
Would reach down and grapple with the land,
And immovable and fast
Hold the great ship against the bellowing blast!
And at the bows an image stood,
By a cunning artist carved in wood,
With robes of white, that far behind
Seemed to be fluttering in the wind.
It was not shaped in a classic mould,
Not like a Nymph or Goddess of old,
Or Naiad rising from the water,
But modelled from the Master's daughter!
On many a dreary and misty night,
'Twill be seen by the rays of the signal light,
Speeding along through the rain and the dark,
Like a ghost in its snow-white sark,
The pilot of some phantom bark,
Guiding the vessel, in its flight,
By a path none other knows aright!

Behold, at last,
Each tall and tapering mast
Is swung into its place;
Shrouds and stays
Holding it firm and fast!

Long ago,
In the deer-haunted forests of Maine.
When upon mountain and plain
Lay the snow,
They fell,—those lordly pines!
Those grand, majestic pines!
'Mid shouts and cheers
The jaded steers,
Panting beneath the goad,
Dragged down the weary, winding road
Those captive kings so straight and tall,
To be shorn of their streaming hair,
And naked and bare,
To feel the stress and the strain
Of the wind and the reeling main,
Whose roar
Would remind them for evermore
Of their native forests they should not see again.

And everywhere
The slender, graceful spars
Poise aloft in the air,
And at the masthead,
White, blue, and red,
A flag unrolls the stripes and stars.
Ah! when the wanderer, lonely, friendless,

In foreign harbours shall behold
That flag unrolled,
'Twill be as a friendly hand
Stretched out from his native land,
Filling his heart with memories sweet and endless!

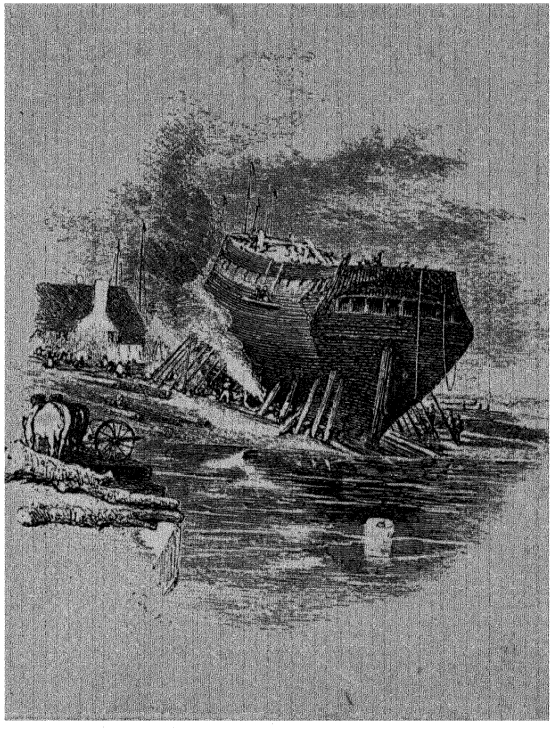
All is finished! and at length
Has come the bridal day
Of beauty and of strength.
To-day the vessel shall be launched!
With fleecy clouds the sky is blanched,
And o'er the bay,
Slowly, in all his splendours dight,
The great sun rises to behold the sight.

The ocean old,
Centuries old,
Strong as youth, and as uncontrolled,
Paces restless to and fro,
Up and down the sands of gold.
His beating heart is not at rest;
And far and wide,
With ceaseless flow,
His beard of snow
Heaves with the heaving of his breast
He waits impatient for his bride.
There she stands,
With her foot upon the sands,
Decked with flags and streamers gay,
In honour of her marriage day,
Her snow-white signals fluttering, blending,
Round her like a veil descending,

Ready to be
The bride of the grey old sea.

On the deck another bride
Is standing by her lover's side.
Shadows from the flags and shrouds,
Like the shadows cast by clouds,
Broken by many a sudden fleck,
Fall around them on the deck.

The prayer is said,
The service read,
The joyous bridegroom bows his head;
And in tears the good old Master
Shakes the brown hand of his son,
Kisses his daughter's glowing cheek
In silence, for he cannot speak,
And ever faster
Down his own the tears begin to run.
The worthy pastor—
The shepherd of that wandering flock,
That has the ocean for its wold,
That has the vessel for its fold,
Leaping ever from rock to rock—
Spake, with accents mild and clear,
Words of warning, words of cheer,
But tedious to the bridegroom's ear.
He knew the chart
Of the sailor's heart,
All its pleasures and its griefs,
All its shallows and rocky reefs,
All those secret currents, that flow
With such resistless undertow,



She seems to feel
The thrill of life along her keel.

And lift and drift, with terrible force,
The will from its moorings and its course.
Therefore he spake, and thus said he:—

'Like unto ships far off at sea,
Outward or homeward bound, are we.
Before, behind, and all around,
Floats and swings the horizon's bound,
Seems at its distant rim to rise
And climb the crystal wall of the skies,
And then again to turn and sink,
As if we could slide from its outer brink.
Ah! it is not the sea,
It is not the sea that sinks and shelves,
But ourselves
That rock and rise
With endless and uneasy motion,
Now touching the very skies,
Now sinking into the depths of ocean.
Ah! if our souls but poise and swing
Like the compass in its brazen ring,
Ever level and ever true
To the toil and the task we have to do,
We shall sail securely, and safely reach
The Fortunate Isles, on whose shining beach
The sights we see, and the sounds we hear,
Will be those of joy and not of fear!'

Then the Master,
With a gesture of command,
Waved his hand;

The Fortunate Isles of the Greeks were supposed to lie beyond the Pillars of Hercules (Straits of Gibraltar) in mid-Atlantic.

And at the word,
Loud and sudden there was heard,
All around them and below,
The sound of hammers, blow on blow,
Knocking away the shores and spurs.
And see! she stirs!
She starts,—she moves,—she seems to feel
The thrill of life along her keel,
And, spurning with her foot the ground,
With one exulting, joyous bound,
She leaps into the ocean's arms!

And lo! from the assembled crowd
There rose a shout, prolonged and loud,
That to the ocean seemed to say,
'Take her, O bridegroom, old and grey,
Take her to thy protecting arms,
With all her youth and all her charms!'

How beautiful she is! How fair
She lies within those arms, that press
Her form with many a soft caress
Of tenderness and watchful care!
Sail forth into the sea, O ship!
Through wind and wave, right onward steer
The moistened eye, the trembling lip,
Are not the signs of doubt or fear.

Sail forth into the sea of life,
O gentle, loving, trusting wife,
And safe from all adversity
Upon the bosom of that sea
Thy comings and thy goings be!

For gentleness and love and trust
Prevail o'er angry wave and gust;
And in the wreck of noble lives
Something immortal still survives!

Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!
Sail on, O UNION, strong and great!
Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!
We know what Master laid thy keel,
What Workmen wrought thy ribs of steel,
Who made each mast, and sail, and rope,
What anvils rang, what hammers beat,
In what a forge and what a heat
Were shaped the anchors of thy hope!
Fear not each sudden sound and shock,
'Tis of the wave and not the rock;
'Tis but the flapping of the sail,
And not a rent made by the gale!
In spite of rock and tempest's roar,
In spite of false lights on the shore,
Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea!
Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee,
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
Are all with thee,—are all with thee!

Ship of State: the reader must not forget that the poet was an American, and that the reference is to the United States.

KING ROBERT OF SICILY

ROBERT of Sicily, brother of Pope Urbane
And Valmond, Emperor of Allemaine,
Apparelled in magnificent attire,
With retinue of many a knight and squire,
On St. John's eve, at vespers, proudly sat
And heard the priests chant the Magnificat.
And as he listened, o'er and o'er again
Repeated, like a burden or refrain,
He caught the words, '*Deposuit potentes*
De sede, et exaltavit humiles';
And slowly lifting up his kingly head
He to a learned clerk beside him said,
'What mean these words?' The clerk made answer meet,
'He has put down the mighty from their seat,
And has exalted them of low degree.'
Thereat King Robert muttered scornfully,
''Tis well that such seditious words are sung
Only by priests and in the Latin tongue;
For unto priests and people be it known,
There is no power can push me from my throne!'
And leaning back, he yawned and fell asleep,
Lulled by the chant monotonous and deep.

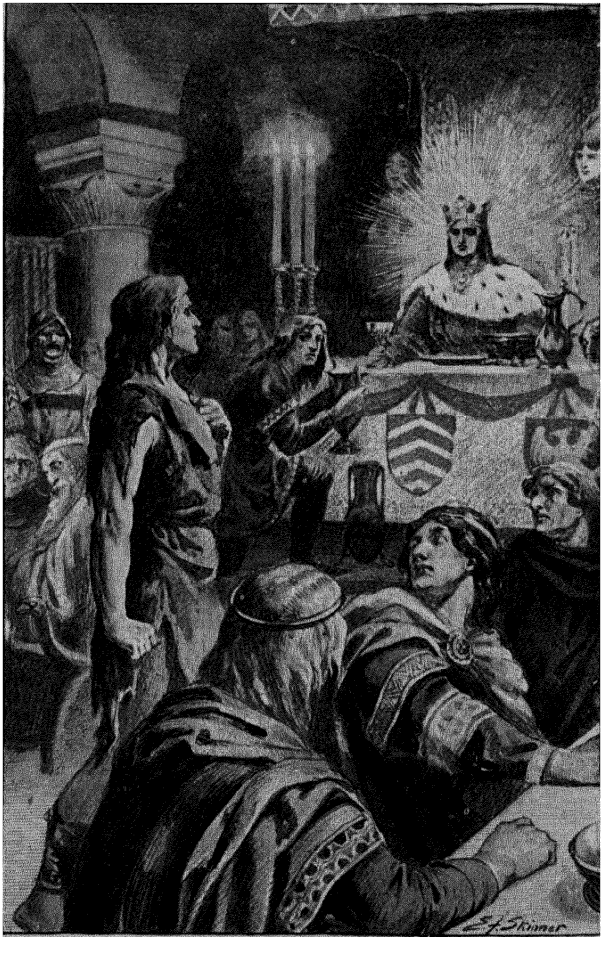
When he awoke, it was already night;
The church was empty, and there was no light,
Save where the lamps, that glimmered few and faint,
Lighted a little space before some saint.

Allemaine: Germany. This is a story of the Middle Ages.

He started from his seat and gazed around,
But saw no living thing and heard no sound.
He groped towards the door, but it was locked;
He cried aloud, and listened, and then knocked,
And uttered awful threatenings and complaints,
And imprecations upon men and saints.
The sounds re-echoed from the roof and walls
As if dead priests were laughing in their stalls.

At length the sexton, hearing from without
The tumult of the knocking and the shout,
And thinking thieves were in the house of prayer,
Came with his lantern, asking, 'Who is there?'
Half choked with rage, King Robert fiercely said,
'Open: 'tis I, the King! Art thou afraid?'
The frightened sexton, muttering, with a curse,
'This is some drunken vagabond, or worse!'
Turned the great key and flung the portal wide;
A man rushed by him at a single stride,
Haggard, half naked, without hat or cloak,
Who neither turned, nor looked at him, nor spoke,
But leaped into the blackness of the night,
And vanished like a spectre from his sight.

Robert of Sicily, brother of Pope Urbane
And Valmond, Emperor of Allemaine,
Despoiled of his magnificent attire,
Bareheaded, breathless, and besprent with mire,
With sense of wrong and outrage desperate,
Strode on and thundered at the palace gate;
Rushed through the courtyard, thrusting in his rage
To right and left each seneschal and page,



There on the dais sat another king.

And hurried up the broad and sounding stair,
His white face ghastly in the torches' glare.
From hall to hall he passed with breathless speed;
Voices and cries he heard, but did not heed,
Until at last he reached the banquet-room,
Blazing with light, and breathing with perfume.

There on the dais sat another king,
Wearing his robes, his crown, his signet-ring,
King Robert's self in features, form, and height,
But all transfigured with angelic light!
It was an Angel; and his presence there
With a divine effulgence filled the air,
An exaltation, piercing the disguise,
Though none the hidden Angel recognise.

A moment speechless, motionless, amazed,
The throneless monarch on the Angel gazed,
Who met his look of anger and surprise
With the divine compassion of his eyes;
Then said, 'Who art thou? and why com'st thou here?'
To which King Robert answered with a sneer,
'I am the King, and come to claim my own
From an impostor, who usurps my throne!'
And suddenly, at these audacious words,
Up sprang the angry guests, and drew their swords;
The Angel answered, with unruffled brow,
'Nay, not the King, but the King's Jester, thou
Henceforth shalt wear the bells and scalloped cape,
And for thy counsellor shalt lead an ape;
Thou shalt obey my servants when they call,
And wait upon my henchmen in the hall!'

Deaf to King Robert's threats and cries and prayers,
They thrust him from the hall and down the stairs;
A group of tittering pages ran before,
And as they opened wide the folding-door,
His heart failed, for he heard, with strange alarms,
The boisterous laughter of the men-at-arms,
And all the vaulted chamber roar and ring
With the mock plaudits of 'Long live the King!'

Next morning, waking with the day's first beam,
He said within himself, 'It was a dream!'
But the straw rustled as he turned his head,
There were the cap and bells beside his bed,
Around him rose the bare, discoloured walls,
Close by, the steeds were champing in their stalls,
And in the corner, a revolting shape,
Shivering and chattering sat the wretched ape.
It was no dream; the world he loved so much
Had turned to dust and ashes at his touch!

Days came and went; and now returned again
To Sicily the old Saturnian reign;
Under the Angel's governance benign
The happy island danced with corn and wine,
And deep within the mountain's burning breast
Enceladus, the giant, was at rest.

Saturnian reign: the fabulous reign of Saturn—the golden age.

Enceladus: the giant who for rebellion against Jupiter was struck with a thunderbolt and buried alive beneath the heap of earth known as Mount Etna. The smoke of the volcano was supposed to be the breath of the giant.

Meanwhile King Robert yielded to his fate,
Sullen and silent and disconsolate.
Dressed in the motley garb that Jesters wear,
With look bewildered and a vacant stare,
Close shaven above the ears, as monks are shorn,
By courtiers mocked, by pages laughed to scorn,
His only friend the ape, his only food
What others left,—he still was unsubdued.
And when the Angel met him on his way,
And half in earnest, half in jest, would say,
Sternly, though tenderly, that he might feel
The velvet scabbard held a sword of steel,
'Art thou the King?' the passion of his woe
Burst from him in resistless overflow,
And, lifting high his forehead, he would fling
The haughty answer back, 'I am, I am the King!'

Almost three years were ended; when there came
Ambassadors of great repute and name
From Valmond, Emperor of Allemaine,
Unto King Robert, saying that Pope Urbane
By letter summoned them forthwith to come
On Holy Thursday to his city of Rome.
The Angel with great joy received his guests,
And gave them presents of embroidered vests,
And velvet mantles with rich ermine lined,
And rings and jewels of the rarest kind.
Then he departed with them o'er the sea
Into the lovely land of Italy,
Whose loveliness was more resplendent made
By the mere passing of that cavalcade,

With plumes, and cloaks, and housings, and the stir
Of jewelled bridle and of golden spur.
And lo! among the menials, in mock state,
Upon a piebald steed, with shambling gait,
His cloak of fox-tails flapping in the wind,
The solemn ape demurely perched behind,
King Robert rode, making huge merriment
In all the country towns through which they went.

The Pope received them with great pomp and blare
Of bannered trumpets, on Saint Peter's square,
Giving his benediction and embrace,
Fervent, and full of apostolic grace.
While with congratulations and with prayers
He entertained the Angel unawares,
Robert, the Jester, bursting through the crowd,
Into their presence rushed, and cried aloud,
'I am the King! Look, and behold in me
Robert, your brother, King of Sicily!
This man, who wears my semblance to your eyes,
Is an impostor in a king's disguise.
Do you not know me? does no voice within
Answer my cry, and say we are akin?'

The Pope in silence, but with troubled mien,
Gazed at the Angel's countenance serene;
The Emperor, laughing, said, 'It is strange sport
To keep a madman for thy Fool at court!'
And the poor, baffled Jester in disgrace
Was hustled back among the populace.

In solemn state the Holy Week went by,
And Easter Sunday gleamed upon the sky;

The presence of the Angel, with its light,
Before the sun rose, made the city bright,
And with new fervour filled the hearts of men,
Who felt that Christ indeed had risen again.
Even the Jester, on his bed of straw,
With haggard eyes the unwonted splendour saw,
He felt within a power unfelt before,
And, kneeling humbly on his chamber floor,
He heard the rushing garments of the Lord
Sweep through the silent air, ascending heavenward.

And now the visit ending, and once more
Valmond returning to the Danube's shore,
Homeward the Angel journeyed, and again
The land was made resplendent with his train,
Flashing along the towns of Italy
Unto Salerno, and from thence by sea.
And when once more within Palermo's wall,
And, seated on the throne in his great hall,
He heard the Angelus from convent towers,
As if the better world conversed with ours,
He beckoned to King Robert to draw nigher,
And with a gesture bade the rest retire;
And when they were alone, the Angel said,
'Art thou the King?' Then, bowing down his head,
King Robert crossed both hands upon his breast,
And meekly answered him: 'Thou knowest best!
My sins as scarlet are; let me go hence,
And in some cloister's school of penitence,
Across those stones, that pave the way to heaven,
Walk barefoot, till my guilty soul be shriven!'

The Angel smiled, and from his radiant face
A holy light illumined all the place,
And through the open window, loud and clear,
They heard the monks chant in the chapel near,
Above the stir and tumult of the street:
'He has put down the mighty from their seat,
And has exalted them of low degree!'
And through the chant a second melody
Rose like the throbbing of a single string:
'I am an Angel, and thou art the King!'

King Robert, who was standing near the throne,
Lifted his eyes, and lo! he was alone!
But all apparelled as in days of old,
With ermined mantle and with cloth of gold;
And when his courtiers came, they found him there
Kneeling upon the floor, absorbed in silent prayer.

HORATIUS

Lars Porsena of Clusium
  By the Nine Gods he swore
That the great house of Tarquin
  Should suffer wrong no more.
By the Nine Gods he swore it,
  And named a trysting day,
And bade his messengers ride forth,
East and west and south and north,
  To summon his array.

Driven from Rome, Tarquinius Superbus, the last of the kings of that city, took refuge in Etruria with Lars Porsena.

East and west and south and north
  The messengers ride fast,
And tower and town and cottage
  Have heard the trumpet's blast.
Shame on the false Etruscan
  Who lingers in his home,
When Porsena of Clusium
  Is on the march for Rome.

The horsemen and the footmen
  Are pouring in amain
From many a stately market-place,
  From many a fruitful plain;
From many a lonely hamlet,
  Which, hid by beech and pine,
Like an eagle's nest, hangs on the crest
  Of purple Apennine.

From lordly Volaterræ,
  Where scowls the far-famed hold
Piled by the hands of giants
  For godlike kings of old:
From seagirt Populonia,
  Whose sentinels descry
Sardinia's snowy mountain-tops
  Fringing the southern sky;

From the proud mart of Pisæ,
  Queen of the western waves,
Where ride Massilia's triremes
  Heavy with fair-haired slaves;

From where sweet Clanis wanders
Through corn and vine and flowers;
From where Cortona lifts to heaven
Her diadem of towers.

Tall are the oaks whose acorns
Drop in dark Auser's rill;
Fat are the stags that champ the boughs
Of the Ciminian hill;
Beyond all streams Clitumnus
Is to the herdsman dear;
Best of all pools the fowler loves
The great Volsinian mere.

But now no stroke of woodman
Is heard by Auser's rill;
No hunter tracks the stag's green path
Up the Ciminian hill;
Unwatched along Clitumnus
Grazes the milk-white steer;
Unharmed the water-fowl may dip
In the Volsinian mere.

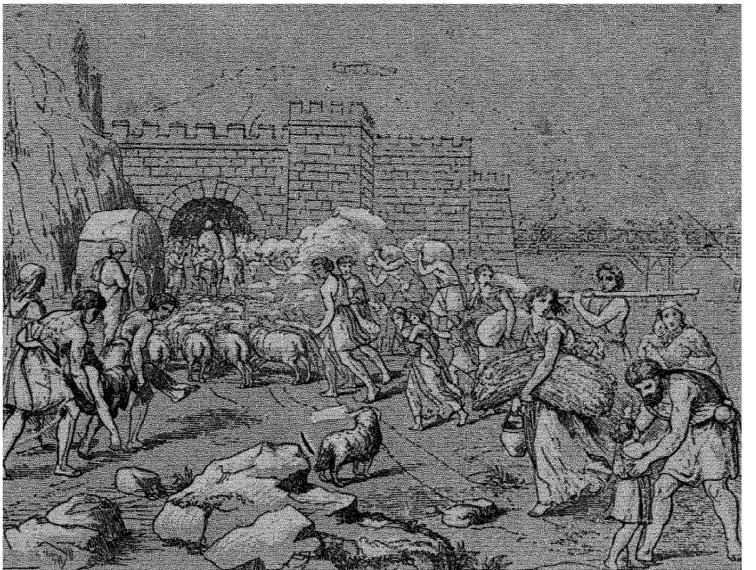
The harvests of Arretium,
This year, old men shall reap;
This year, young boys in Umbro
Shall plunge the struggling sheep;
And in the vats of Luna,
This year, the must shall foam
Round the white feet of laughing girls
Whose sires have marched to Rome.

There be thirty chosen prophets,
The wisest of the land,
Who alway by Lars Porsena
Both morn and evening stand:
Evening and morn the Thirty
Have turned the verses o'er,
Traced from the right on linen white
By mighty seers of yore.

And with one voice the Thirty
Have their glad answer given:
'Go forth, go forth, Lars Porsena;
Go forth, beloved of Heaven;
Go, and return in glory
To Clusium's royal dome;
And hang round Nurscia's altars
The golden shields of Rome.'

And now hath every city
Sent up her tale of men;
The foot are fourscore thousand,
The horse are thousands ten:
Before the gates of Sutrium
Is met the great array.
A proud man was Lars Porsena
Upon the trysting day.

For all the Etruscan armies
Were ranged beneath his eye,
And many a banished Roman,
And many a stout ally;



The throng stopped up the ways.

And with a mighty following
To join the muster came
The Tusculan Mamilius,
Prince of the Latian name.

But by the yellow Tiber
Was tumult and affright:
From all the spacious champaign
To Rome men took their flight.
A mile around the city,
The throng stopped up the ways;
A fearful sight it was to see
Through two long nights and days.

For aged folks on crutches,
And woman, maid and child,
And mothers sobbing over babes
That clung to them and smiled,
And sick men borne in litters
High on the necks of slaves,
And troops of sun-burned husbandmen
With reaping-hooks and staves,

And droves of mules and asses
Laden with skins of wine,
And endless flocks of goats and sheep,
And endless herds of kine,
And [illegible] of waggons
That creake
Of corn-sacks [illegible]neath the weight
Choked [illegible]d of household goods,
[illegible]y roaring gate.

Champaign: plain.

Now, from the rock Tarpeian,
Could the wan burghers spy
The line of blazing villages
Red in the midnight sky.
The Fathers of the City,
They sat all night and day,
For every hour some horseman came
With tidings of dismay.

To eastward and to westward
Have spread the Tuscan bands;
Nor house, nor fence, nor dovecote
In Crustumerium stands.
Verbenna down to Ostia
Hath wasted all the plain;
Astur hath stormed Janiculum,
And the stout guards are slain.

I-wis, in all the Senate,
There was no heart so bold,
But sore it ached and fast it beat,
When that ill news was told.
Forthwith up rose the Consul,
Up rose the Fathers all;
In haste they girded up their gowns,
And hied them to the wall.

Rock Tarpeian: a precipitous rock outside Rome.
Janiculum: one of the hills on the outskirts of Rome.
I-wis: assuredly.

They held a council standing
Before the River-Gate;
Short time was there, ye well may guess,
For musing or debate.
Out spake the Consul roundly:
'The bridge must straight go down;
For, since Janiculum is lost,
None else can save the town.'

Just then a scout came flying,
All wild with haste and fear:
'To arms! to arms! Sir Consul:
Lars Porsena is here.'
On the low hills to westward
The Consul fixed his eye,
And saw the swarthy storm of dust
Rise fast along the sky.

And nearer fast and nearer
Doth the red whirlwind come;
And louder still and still more loud,
From underneath that rolling cloud,
Is heard the trumpet's war-note proud,
The trampling, and the hum.
And plainly and more plainly
Now through the gloom appears,
Far to left and far to right,
In broken gleams of dark-blue light,
The long array of helmets bright,
The long array of spears.

And plainly and more plainly,
Above that glimmering line,
Now might we see the banners
Of twelve fair cities shine;
But the banner of proud Clusium
Was highest of them all,
The terror of the Umbrian,
The terror of the Gaul.

And plainly and more plainly
Now might the burghers know,
By port and vest, by horse and crest,
Each warlike Lucumo.
There Cilnius of Arretium
On his fleet roan was seen;
And Astur of the fourfold shield,
Girt with the brand none else may wield,
Tolumnius with the belt of gold,
And dark Verbenna from the hold
By reedy Thrasymene.

Fast by the royal standard,
O'erlooking all the war,
Lars Porsena of Clusium
Sat in his ivory car.
By the right wheel rode Mamilius,
Prince of the Latian name;
And by the left false Sextus,
That wrought the deed of shame.

And when the face of Sextus
Was seen among the foes,
A yell that rent the firmament
From all the town arose.

On the housetops was no woman
But spat towards him, and hissed;
No child but screamed out curses,
And shook its little fist.

But the Consul's brow was sad,
And the Consul's speech was low,
And darkly looked he at the wall,
And darkly at the foe.
'Their van will be upon us
Before the bridge goes down;
And if they once may win the bridge,
What hope to save the town?'

Then out spake brave Horatius,
The Captain of the Gate:
'To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late.
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his Gods.

'And for the tender mother
Who dandled him to rest,
And for the wife who nurses
His baby at her breast,
And for the holy maidens
Who feed the eternal flame,
To save them from false Sextus,
That wrought the deed of shame?

The Holy Maidens: the Vestal Virgins who kept alight the sacred fire of Vesta, the goddess of the hearth, in her temple.

'Hew down the bridge, Sir Consul,
With all the speed ye may;
I, with two more to help me,
Will hold the foe in play.
In yon strait path a thousand
May well be stopped by three.
Now who will stand on either hand,
And keep the bridge with me?'

Then out spake Spurius Lartius;
A Ramnian proud was he:
'Lo, I will stand at thy right hand,
And keep the bridge with thee.'
And out spake strong Herminius;
Of Titian blood was he:
'I will abide on thy left side,
And keep the bridge with thee.'

'Horatius,' quoth the Consul,
'As thou sayest, so let it be.'
And straight against that great array
Forth went the dauntless Three.
For Romans in Rome's quarrel
Spared neither land nor gold,
Nor son nor wife, nor limb nor life,
In the brave days of old.

Then none was for a party;
Then all were for the state;
Then the great man helped the poor,
And the poor man loved the great:

Then lands were fairly portioned;
  Then spoils were fairly sold:
The Romans were like brothers
  In the brave days of old.

Now Roman is to Roman
  More hateful than a foe,
And the Tribunes beard the high,
  And the Fathers grind the low.
As we wax hot in faction,
  In battle we wax cold:
Wherefore men fight not as they fought
  In the brave days of old.

Now while the Three were tightening
  Their harness on their backs,
The Consul was the foremost man
  To take in hand an axe:
And Fathers mixed with Commons
  Seized hatchet, bar, and crow,
And smote upon the planks above
  And loosed the props below.

Meanwhile the Tuscan army,
  Right glorious to behold,
Came flashing back the noonday light,
Rank behind rank, like surges bright
  Of a broad sea of gold.
Four hundred trumpets sounded
  A peal of warlike glee,

Now Roman is to Roman. The poem is supposed to be written about one hundred and twenty years after the war which it celebrates.



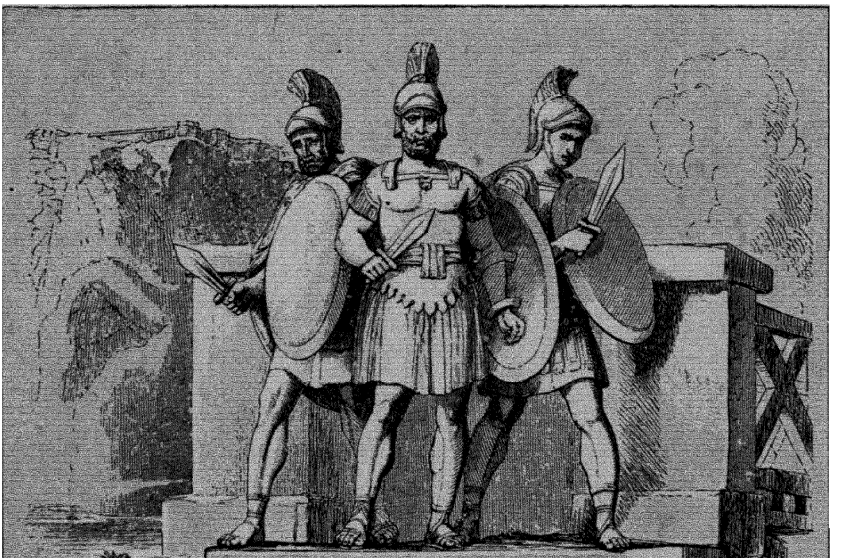
Smote upon the planks above
And loosed the props below.

As that great host with measured tread,
And spears advanced, and ensigns spread,
Rolled slowly towards the bridge's head,
Where stood the dauntless Three.

The Three stood calm and silent,
And looked upon the foes,
And a great shout of laughter
From all the vanguard rose:
And forth three chiefs came spurring
Before that deep array;
To earth they sprang, their swords they drew,
And lifted high their shields, and flew
To win the narrow way;

Aunus from green Tifernum,
Lord of the Hill of Vines;
And Seius, whose eight hundred slaves
Sicken in Ilva's mines;
And Picus, long to Clusium
Vassal in peace and war,
Who led to fight his Umbrian powers
From that grey crag where, girt with towers,
The fortress of Nequinum lowers
O'er the pale waves of Nar.

Stout Lartius hurled down Aunus
Into the stream beneath;
Herminius struck at Seius,
And clove him to the teeth:



The Three stood calm and silent.

At Picus brave Horatius
  Darted one fiery thrust;
And the proud Umbrian's gilded arms
  Clashed in the bloody dust.

Then Ocnus of Falerii
  Rushed on the Roman Three;
And Lausulus of Urgo,
  The rover of the sea;
And Aruns of Volsinium,
  Who slew the great wild boar,
The great wild boar that had his den
  Amidst the reeds of Cosa's fen,
And wasted fields, and slaughtered men,
  Along Albinia's shore.

Herminius smote down Aruns:
  Lartius laid Ocnus low:
Right to the heart of Lausulus
  Horatius sent a blow.
'Lie there,' he cried, 'fell pirate!
  No more, aghast and pale,
From Ostia's walls the crowd shall mark
The track of thy destroying bark.
No more Campania's hinds shall fly
To woods and caverns when they spy
  Thy thrice-accursed sail.'

But now no sound of laughter
  Was heard among the foes.
A wild and wrathful clamour
  From all the vanguard rose.

Six spears' lengths from the entrance
Halted that deep array,
And for a space no man came forth
To win the narrow way.

But hark! the cry is Astur:
And lo! the ranks divide;
And the great Lord of Luna
Comes with his stately stride.
Upon his ample shoulders
Clangs loud the fourfold shield,
And in his hand he shakes the brand
Which none but he can wield.

He smiled on those bold Romans
A smile serene and high;
He eyed the flinching Tuscans,
And scorn was in his eye.
Quoth he, 'The she-wolf's litter
Stand savagely at bay:
But will ye dare to follow,
If Astur clears the way?'

Then, whirling up his broadsword
With both hands to the height,
He rushed against Horatius,
And smote with all his might.
With shield and blade Horatius
Right deftly turned the blow.

The she-wolf's litter. Romulus and Remus, the ancestors of the Romans, were nursed in their infancy by a she-wolf.

The blow, though turned, came yet too nigh;
It missed his helm, but gashed his thigh:
The Tuscans raised a joyful cry
To see the red blood flow.

He reeled, and on Herminius
He leaned one breathing-space;
Then, like a wild cat mad with wounds,
Sprang right at Astur's face.
Through teeth, and skull, and helmet,
So fierce a thrust he sped,
The good sword stood a hand-breadth out
Behind the Tuscan's head.

And the great Lord of Luna
Fell at that deadly stroke,
As falls on Mount Alvernus
A thunder-smitten oak.
Far o'er the crashing forest
The giant arms lie spread;
And the pale augurs, muttering low,
Gaze on the blasted head.

On Astur's throat Horatius
Right firmly pressed his heel,
And thrice and four times tugged amain,
Ere he wrenched out the steel.
'And see,' he cried, 'the welcome,
Fair guests, that waits you here!
What noble Lucumo comes next
To taste our Roman cheer?'

Augurs: prophets.

'What noble Lucumo comes next?'

But at his haughty challenge
A sullen murmur ran,
Mingled of wrath, and shame, and dread,
Along that glittering van.
There lacked not men of prowess,
Nor men of lordly race;
For all Etruria's noblest
Were round the fatal place.

But all Etruria's noblest
Felt their hearts sink to see
On earth the bloody corpses,
In the path the dauntless Three:
And, from the ghastly entrance,
Where those bold Romans stood,
All shrank, like boys who unaware,
Ranging the woods to start a hare,
Come to the mouth of the dark lair
Where, growling low, a fierce old bear
Lies amidst bones and blood.

Was none who would be foremost
To lead such dire attack:
But those behind cried 'Forward!'
And those before cried 'Back!'
And backward now and forward
Wavers the deep array;
And on the tossing sea of steel,
To and fro the standards reel;
And the victorious trumpet-peal
Dies fitfully away.

Yet one man for one moment
Stood out before the crowd;
Well known was he to all the Three,
And they gave him greeting loud:
'Now welcome, welcome, Sextus!
Now welcome to thy home!
Why dost thou stay, and turn away?
Here lies the road to Rome.'

Thrice looked he at the city;
Thrice looked he at the dead;
And thrice came on in fury,
And thrice turned back in dread:
And, white with fear and hatred,
Scowled at the narrow way
Where, wallowing in a pool of blood,
The bravest Tuscans lay.

But meanwhile axe and lever
Have manfully been plied;
And now the bridge hangs tottering
Above the boiling tide.
'Come back, come back, Horatius!'
Loud cried the Fathers all.
'Back, Lartius! back, Herminius!
Back, ere the ruin fall!'

Back darted Spurius Lartius;
Herminius darted back:
And, as they passed, beneath their feet
They felt the timbers crack.

But when they turned their faces,
And on the farther shore
Saw brave Horatius stand alone,
They would have crossed once more.

But with a crash like thunder
Fell every loosened beam,
And, like a dam, the mighty wreck
Lay right athwart the stream:
And a long shout of triumph
Rose from the walls of Rome,
As to the highest turret-tops
Was splashed the yellow foam.

And, like a horse unbroken
When first he feels the rein,
The furious river struggled hard,
And tossed his tawny mane,
And burst the curb, and bounded,
Rejoicing to be free,
And whirling down, in fierce career,
Battlement, and plank, and pier,
Rushed headlong to the sea.

Alone stood brave Horatius,
But constant still in mind;
Thrice thirty thousand foes before,
And the broad flood behind.
'Down with him!' cried false Sextus,
With a smile on his pale face.
'Now yield thee,' cried Lars Porsena,
'Now yield thee to our grace.'



With his harness on his back,
Plunged headlong in the tide.

Round turned he, as not deigning
Those craven ranks to see;
Nought spake he to Lars Porsena,
To Sextus nought spake he;
But he saw on Palatinus
The white porch of his home;
And he spake to the noble river
That rolls by the towers of Rome.

'O Tiber! father Tiber!
To whom the Romans pray,
A Roman's life, a Roman's arms,
Take thou in charge this day!'
So he spake, and speaking sheathed
The good sword by his side,
And with his harness on his back,
Plunged headlong in the tide.

No sound of joy or sorrow
Was heard from either bank;
But friends and foes in dumb surprise,
With parted lips and straining eyes,
Stood gazing where he sank;
And when above the surges
They saw his crest appear,
All Rome sent forth a rapturous cry,
And even the ranks of Tuscany
Could scarce forbear to cheer.

But fiercely ran the current,
Swollen high by months of rain:
And fast his blood was flowing;
And he was sore in pain,

Palatinus: one of the seven hills on which Rome was built.

And heavy with his armour,
And spent with changing blows:
And oft they thought him sinking,
But still again he rose.

Never, I ween, did swimmer,
In such an evil case,
Struggle through such a raging flood
Safe to the landing place;
But his limbs were borne up bravely
By the brave heart within,
And our good father Tiber
Bore bravely up his chin.

'Curse on him!' quoth false Sextus;
'Will not the villain drown?
But for this stay ere close of day
We should have sacked the town!'
'Heaven help him!' quoth Lars Porsena,
'And bring him safe to shore;
For such a gallant feat of arms
Was never seen before.'

And now he feels the bottom;
Now on dry earth he stands;
Now round him throng the Fathers
To press his gory hands;
And now, with shouts and clapping,
And noise of weeping loud,
He enters through the River-Gate,
Borne by the joyous crowd.

They gave him of the corn-land,
That was of public right,
As much as two strong oxen
Could plough from morn till night;
And they made a molten image,
And set it up on high,
And there it stands unto this day
To witness if I lie.

It stands in the Comitium
Plain for all folk to see;
Horatius in his harness,
Halting upon one knee:
And underneath is written,
In letters all of gold,
How valiantly he kept the bridge
In the brave days of old.

And still his name sounds stirring
Unto the men of Rome,
As the trumpet-blast that cries to them
To charge the Volscian home;
And wives still pray to Juno
For boys with hearts as bold
As his who kept the bridge so well
In the brave days of old.

And in the nights of winter,
When the cold north winds blow,
And the long howling of the wolves
Is heard amidst the snow;

When round the lonely cottage
Roars loud the tempest's din,
And the good logs of Algidus
Roar louder yet within;

When the oldest cask is opened,
And the largest lamp is lit;
When the chestnuts glow in the embers,
And the kid turns on the spit;
When young and old in circle
Around the firebrands close:
When the girls are weaving baskets,
And the lads are shaping bows;

When the goodman mends his armour,
And trims his helmet's plume;
When the goodwife's shuttle merrily
Goes flashing through the loom;
With weeping and with laughter
Still is the story told,
How well Horatius kept the bridge
In the brave days of old.

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

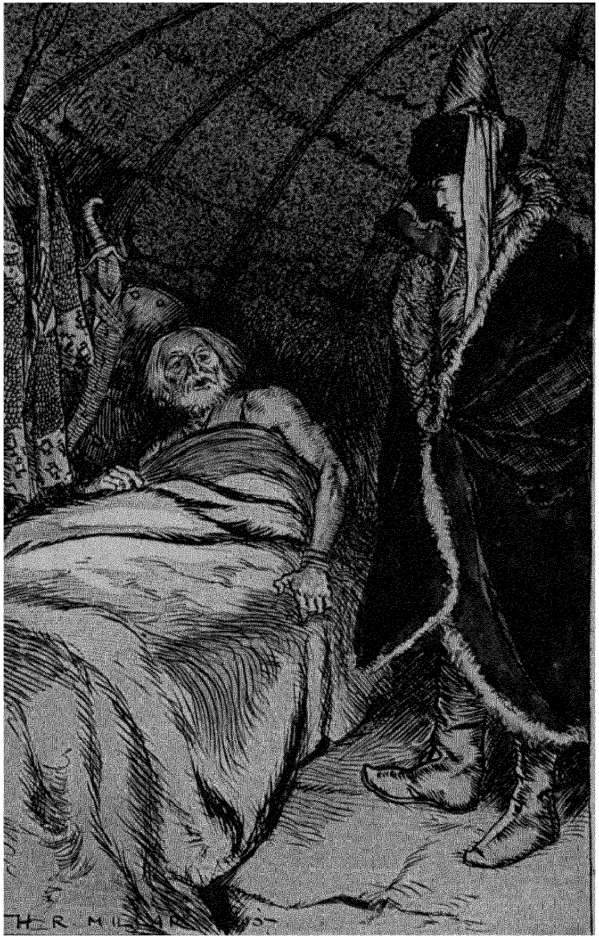
AN EPISODE

And the first grey of morning fill'd the east,
And the fog rose out of the Oxus stream.
But all the Tartar camp along the stream
Was hush'd, and still the men were plunged in sleep:

Sohrab alone, he slept not: all night long
He had lain wakeful, tossing on his bed;
But when the grey dawn stole into his tent,
He rose, and clad himself, and girt his sword,
And took his horseman's cloak, and left his tent,
And went abroad into the cold wet fog,
Through the dim camp to Peran-Wisa's tent.

Through the black Tartar tents he pass'd, which stood
Clustering like beehives on the low flat strand
Of Oxus, where the summer floods o'erflow
When the sun melts the snows in high Pamere:
Through the black tents he pass'd, o'er that low strand,
And to a hillock came, a little back
From the stream's brink, the spot where first a boat,
Crossing the stream in summer, scrapes the land.
The men of former times had crown'd the top
With a clay fort: but that was fall'n, and now
The Tartars built there Peran-Wisa's tent,
A dome of laths, and o'er it felts were spread.
And Sohrab came there, and went in, and stood
Upon the thick pil'd carpets in the tent,
And found the old man sleeping on his bed
Of rugs and felts, and near him lay his arms.
And Peran-Wisa heard him, though the step
Was dull'd; for he slept light, an old man's sleep;
And he rose quickly on one arm, and said:—
'Who art thou? for it is not yet clear dawn.
Speak! is there news, or any night alarm?'

But Sohrab came to the bedside, and said:—
'Thou know'st me, Peran-Wisa: it is I.
The sun is not yet risen, and the foe
Sleep; but I sleep not; all night long I lie



He rose quickly on one arm.

Tossing and wakeful, and I come to thee.
For so did King Afrasiab bid me seek
Thy counsel, and to heed thee as thy son,
In Samarcand, before the army march'd;
And I will tell thee what my heart desires.
Thou knowest if, since from Ader-baijan first
I came among the Tartars, and bore arms,
I have still serv'd Afrasiab well, and shown,
At my boy's years, the courage of a man.
This too thou know'st, that, while I still bear on
The conquering Tartar ensigns through the world,
And beat the Persians back on every field,
I seek one man, one man, and one alone—
Rustum, my father; who, I hop'd, should greet,
Should one day greet, upon some well-fought field
His not unworthy, not inglorious son.
So I long hop'd, but him I never find.
Come then, hear now, and grant me what I ask.
Let the two armies rest to-day: but I
Will challenge forth the bravest Persian lords
To meet me, man to man: if I prevail,
Rustum will surely hear it; if I fall—
Old man, the dead need no one, claim no kin.
Dim is the rumour of a common fight,
Where host meets host, and many names are sunk:
But of a single combat Fame speaks clear.'

He spoke, and Peran-Wisa took the hand
Of the young man in his, and sigh'd, and said:—
'O Sohrab, an unquiet heart is thine!
Canst thou not rest among the Tartar chiefs,
And share the battle's common chance with us

Who love thee, but must press for ever first,
In single fight incurring single risk,
To find a father thou hast never seen?
That were far best, my son, to stay with us
Unmurmuring; in our tents, while it is war,
And when 'tis truce, then in Afrasiab's towns.
But, if this one desire indeed rules all,
To seek out Rustum—seek him not through fight:
Seek him in peace, and carry to his arms,
O Sohrab, carry an unwounded son!
But far hence seek him, for he is not here.
For now it is not as when I was young,
When Rustum was in front of every fray:
But now he keeps apart and sits at home,
In Seistan, with Zal, his father old,
Whether that his own mighty strength at last
Feels the abhorr'd approaches of old age;
Or in some quarrel with the Persian King.
There go:—Thou wilt not? Yet my heart forebodes
Danger or death awaits thee on this field.
Fain would I know thee safe and well, though lost
To us: fain therefore send thee hence, in peace
To seek thy father, not seek single fights
In vain:—but who can keep the lion's cub
From ravening? and who govern Rustum's son?
Go: I will grant thee what thy heart desires.'

So said he, and dropp'd Sohrab's hand, and left
His bed, and the warm rugs whereon he lay,
And o'er his chilly limbs his woollen coat
He pass'd, and tied his sandals on his feet,
And threw a white cloak round him, and he took

In his right hand a ruler's staff, no sword;
And on his head he plac'd his sheep-skin cap,
Black, glossy, curl'd, the fleece of Kara-Kul;
And rais'd the curtain of his tent, and call'd
His herald to his side, and went abroad.

The sun, by this, had risen, and clear'd the fog
From the broad Oxus and the glittering sands:
And from their tents the Tartar horsemen fil'd
Into the open plain; so Haman bade;
Haman, who next to Peran-Wisa rul'd
The host, and still was in his lusty prime.
From their black tents, long files of horse, they stream'd
As when, some grey November morn, the files,
In marching order spread, of long-neck'd cranes,
Stream over Casbin, and the southern slopes
Of Elburz, from the Aralian estuaries,
Or some froze Caspian reed-bed, southward bound
For the warm Persian sea-board: so they stream'd.
The Tartars of the Oxus, the King's guard,
First, with black sheep-skin caps and with long spears;
Large men, large steeds; who from Bokhara come
And Khiva, and ferment the milk of mares.
Next the more temperate Toorkmuns of the south,
The Tukas, and the lances of Salore,
And those from Attruck and the Caspian sands;
Light men, and on light steeds, who only drink
The acrid milk of camels, and their wells.
And then a swarm of wandering horse, who came
From far, and a more doubtful service own'd;
The Tartars of Ferghana, from the banks
Of the Jaxartes, men with scanty beards

And close-set skull-caps; and those wilder hordes
Who roam o'er Kipchak and the northern waste,
Kalmuks and unkemp'd Kuzzaks, tribes who stray
Nearest the pole, and wandering Kirghizzes,
Who come on shaggy ponies from Pamere.
These all fil'd out from camp into the plain.
And on the other side the Persians form'd:
First a light cloud of horse, Tartars they seem'd,
The Ilyats of Khorassan: and behind,
The royal troops of Persia, horse and foot,
Marshall'd battalions bright in burnish'd steel.
But Peran-Wisa with his herald came
Threading the Tartar squadrons to the front,
And with his staff kept back the foremost ranks.
And when Ferood, who led the Persians, saw
That Peran-Wisa kept the Tartars back,
He took his spear, and to the front he came,
And check'd his ranks, and fix'd them where they stood.

And the old Tartar came upon the sand
Betwixt the silent hosts, and spake, and said:—
'Ferood, and ye, Persians and Tartars, hear!
Let there be truce between the hosts to-day,
But choose a champion from the Persian lords
To fight our champion Sohrab, man to man.'
As, in the country, on a morn in June,
When the dew glistens on the pearled ears,
A'shiver runs through the deep corn for joy—
So, when they heard what Peran-Wisa said,
A thrill through all the Tartar squadrons ran
Of pride and hope for Sohrab, whom they lov'd.

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

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

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

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

He spoke; and Peran-Wisa turn'd, and strode
Back through the opening squadrons to his tent.

But through the anxious Persians Gudurz ran,
And cross'd the camp which lay behind, and reach'd,
Out on the sands beyond it, Rustum's tents.
Of scarlet cloth they were, and glittering gay,
Just pitch'd: the high pavilion in the midst
Was Rustum's, and his men lay camped around.
And Gudurz enter'd Rustum's tent, and found
Rustum: his morning meal was done, but still
The table stood beside him, charg'd with food;
A side of roasted sheep, and cakes of bread,
And dark-green melons; and there Rustum sate
Listless, and held a falcon on his wrist,
And play'd with it; but Gudurz came and stood
Before him; and he looked, and saw him stand;
And with a cry sprang up, and dropp'd the bird,
And greeted Gudurz with both hands, and said:—
'Welcome! these eyes could see no better sight.
What news? but sit down first, and eat and drink.'

But Gudurz stood in the tent door, and said:—
'Not now: a time will come to eat and drink,
But not to-day: to-day has other needs.
The armies are drawn out, and stand at gaze:
For from the Tartars is a challenge brought
To pick a champion from the Persian lords
To fight their champion—and thou know'st his name—
Sohrab men call him, but his birth is hid.
O Rustum, like thy might is this young man's!
He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart;
And he is young, and Iran's chiefs are old,
Or else too weak; and all eyes turn to thee.
Come down and help us, Rustum, or we lose.'

He spoke: but Rustum answered with a smile:—
Go to! if Iran's chiefs are old, then I
Am older: if the young are weak, the King
Errs strangely: for the King, for Kai Khosroo,
Himself is young, and honours younger men,
And lets the aged moulder to their graves.
Rustum he loves no more, but loves the young—
The young may rise at Sohrab's vaunts, not I.
For what care I, though all speak Sohrab's fame?
For would that I myself had such a son,
And not that one slight helpless girl I have,
A son so fam'd, so brave, to send to war,
And I to tarry with the snow-hair'd Zal,
My father, whom the robber Afghans vex,
And clip his borders short, and drive his herds,
And he has none to guard his weak old age.
There would I go, and hang my armour up,
And with my great name fence that weak old man,
And spend the goodly treasures I have got,
And rest my age, and hear of Sohrab's fame,
And leave to death the hosts of thankless kings,
And with these slaughterous hands draw sword no more.'

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

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

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

So follow'd, Rustum left his tents, and cross'd
The camp, and to the Persian host appear'd.
And all the Persians knew him, and with shouts
Hail'd; but the Tartars knew not who he was.
And dear as the wet diver to the eyes
Of his pale wife who waits and weeps on shore,
By sandy Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf,
Plunging all day in the blue waves, at night,
Having made up his tale of precious pearls,
Rejoins her in their hut upon the sands—
So dear to the pale Persians Rustum came.

And Rustum to the Persian front advanc'd,
And Sohrab arm'd in Haman's tent, and came.
And as afield the reapers cut a swathe
Down through the middle of a rich man's corn,
And in the midst a stubble, short and bare;
So on each side were squares of men, with spears
Bristling, and in the midst, the open sand.
And Rustum came upon the sand, and cast
His eyes towards the Tartar tents, and saw
Sohrab come forth, and eyed him as he came.

As some rich woman, on a winter's morn,
Eyes through her silken curtains the poor drudge
Who with numb blacken'd fingers makes her fire—
At cock-crow, on a starlit winter's morn,
When the frost flowers the whiten'd window-panes—
And wonders how she lives, and what the thoughts
Of that poor drudge may be; so Rustum ey'd
The unknown adventurous youth, who from afar
Came seeking Rustum, and defying forth

All the most valiant chiefs: long he perus'd
His spirited air, and wonder'd who he was.
For very young he seem'd, tenderly rear'd,
Like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and straight,
Which in a queen's secluded garden throws
Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,
By midnight, to a bubbling fountain's sound—
So slender Sohrab seemed, so softly rear'd.
And a deep pity entered Rustum's soul
As he beheld him coming; and he stood,
And beckon'd to him with his hand, and said:—

'O thou young man, the air of Heaven is soft,
And warm, and pleasant; but the grave is cold.
Heaven's air is better than the cold dead grave.
Behold me: I am vast, and clad in iron,
And tried: and I have stood on many a field
Of blood, and I have fought with many a foe:
Never was that field lost, or that foe sav'd.
O Sohrab, wherefore wilt thou rush on death?
Be govern'd: quit the Tartar host, and come
To Iran, and be as my son to me,
And fight beneath my banner till I die.
There are no youths in Iran brave as thou.'

So he spake, mildly: Sohrab heard his voice,
The mighty voice of Rustum; and he saw
His giant figure planted on the sand,
Sole, like some single tower, which a chief
Has builded on the waste in former years
Against the robbers; and he saw that head,
Streak'd with its first grey hairs; hope fill'd his soul;

And he ran forwards and embrac'd his knees,
And clasp'd his hand within his own, and said:—

'Oh, by thy father's head! by thine own soul!
Art thou not Rustum? Speak! art thou not he!'
But Rustum ey'd askance the kneeling youth,
And turn'd away, and spoke to his own soul:—

'Ah me, I muse what this young fox may mean.
False, wily, boastful, are these Tartar boys.
For if I now confess this thing he asks,
And hide it not, but say—*Rustum is here*—
He will not yield indeed, nor quit our foes.
But he will find some pretext not to fight,
And praise my fame, and proffer courteous gifts,
A belt or sword perhaps, and go his way.
And on a feast day, in Afrasiab's hall,
In Samarcand, he will arise and cry—
"I challeng'd once, when the two armies camp'd
Beside the Oxus, all the Persian lords
To cope with me in single fight; but they
Shrank; only Rustum dar'd: then he and I
Chang'd gifts, and went on equal terms away."
So will he speak, perhaps, while men applaud.
Then were the chiefs of Iran sham'd through me.'

And then he turn'd, and sternly spake aloud:—
'Rise! wherefore dost thou vainly question thus
Of Rustum? I am here, whom thou hast call'd
By challenge forth: make good thy vaunt, or yield.
Is it with Rustum only thou wouldst fight?
Rash boy, men look on Rustum's face and flee.



'Art thou not Rustum?'

For well I know, that did great Rustum stand
Before thy face this day, and were reveal'd,
There would be then no talk of fighting more.
But being what I am, I tell thee this;
Do thou record it in thine inmost soul:
Either thou shalt renounce thy vaunt, and yield;
Or else thy bones shall strew this sand, till winds
Bleach them, or Oxus with his summer floods,
Oxus in summer wash them all away.'

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

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

As on some partridge in the corn a hawk
That long has tower'd in the airy clouds
Drops like a plummet: Sohrab saw it come,
And sprang aside, quick as a flash: the spear
Hiss'd, and went quivering down into the sand,
Which it sent flying wide:—then Sohrab threw
In turn, and full struck Rustum's shield: sharp rang,
The iron plates rang sharp, but turn'd the spear.
And Rustum seiz'd his club, which none but he
Could wield: an unlopp'd trunk it was, and huge,
Still rough; like those which men in treeless plains
To build them boats fish from the flooded rivers,
Hyphasis or Hydaspes, when, high up
By their dark springs, the wind in winter-time
Has made in Himalayan forests wrack,
And strewn the channels with torn boughs; so huge
The club which Rustum lifted now, and struck
One stroke; but again Sohrab sprang aside
Lithe as the glancing snake, and the club came
Thundering to earth, and leapt from Rustum's hand.
And Rustum follow'd his own blow, and fell
To his knees, and with his fingers clutched the sand:
And now might Sohrab have unsheath'd his sword,
And pierc'd the mighty Rustum while he lay
Dizzy, and on his knees, and chok'd with sand:
But he look'd on, and smil'd, nor bar'd his sword,
But courteously drew back, and spoke, and said:—

'Thou strik'st too hard; that club of thine will float
Upon the summer floods, and not my bones.
But rise, and be not wroth; not wroth am I:
No, when I see thee, wrath forsakes my soul.

Thou say'st thou art not Rustum: be it so.
Who art thou, then, that canst so touch my soul?
Boy as I am, I have seen battles too;
Have waded foremost in their bloody waves,
And heard their hollow roar of dying men;
But never was my heart thus touch'd before.
Are they from Heaven, these softenings of the heart?
O thou old warrior, let us yield to Heaven!
Come, plant we here in earth our angry spears,
And make a truce, and sit upon this sand,
And pledge each other in red wine, like friends,
And thou shalt talk to me of Rustum's deeds.
There are enough foes in the Persian host
Whom I may meet, and strike, and feel no pang;
Champions enough Afrasiab has, whom thou
Mayst fight; fight them, when they confront thy spear,
But oh, let there be peace 'twixt thee and me!'

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

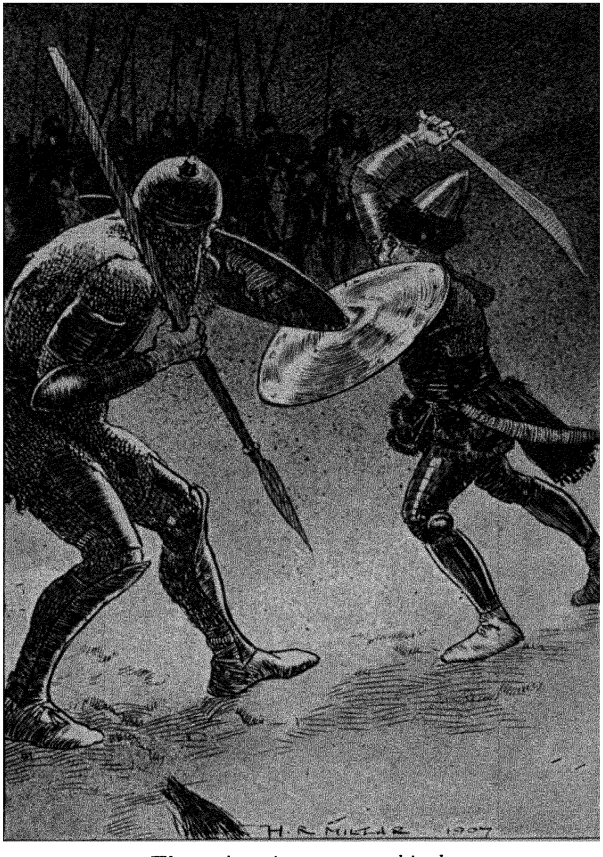
'Girl! nimble with thy feet, not with thy hands!
Curl'd minion, dancer, coiner of sweet words!
Fight; let me hear thy hateful voice no more!
Thou art not in Afrasiab's gardens now

With Tartar girls, with whom thou art wont to dance;
But on the Oxus sands, and in the dance
Of battle, and with me, who make no play
Of war: I fight it out, and hand to hand.
Speak not to me of truce, and pledge, and wine!
Remember all thy valour: try thy feints
And cunning: all the pity I had is gone:
Because thou hast sham'd me before both the hosts
With thy light skipping tricks, and thy girl's wiles.'

He spoke; and Sohrab kindled at his taunts,
And he too drew his sword: at once they rush'd
Together, as two eagles on one prey
Come rushing down together from the clouds,
One from the east, one from the west: their shields
Dash'd with a clang together, and a din
Rose, such as that the sinewy woodcutters
Make often in the forest's heart at morn,
Of hewing axes, crashing trees; such blows
Rustum and Sohrab on each other hail'd.
And you would say that sun and stars took part
In that unnatural conflict; for a cloud
Grew suddenly in Heaven, and dark'd the sun
Over the fighters' heads; and a wind rose
Under their feet, and moaning swept the plain,
And in a sandy whirlwind wrapp'd the pair.
In gloom they twain were wrapp'd, and they alone;
For both the onlooking hosts on either hand
Stood in broad daylight, and the sky was pure,
And the sun sparkled on the Oxus stream.
But in the gloom they fought, with bloodshot eyes
And labouring breath; first Rustum struck the shield

Which Sohrab held stiff out: the steel-spiked spear
Rent the tough plates, but fail'd to reach the skin,
And Rustum pluck'd it back with angry groan.
Then Sohrab with his sword smote Rustum's helm,
Nor clove its steel quite through; but all the crest
He shore away, and that proud horsehair plume,
Never till now defil'd, sunk to the dust;
And Rustum bow'd his head; but then the gloom
Grew blacker: thunder rumbled in the air,
And lightnings rent the cloud; and Ruksh, the horse,
Who stood at hand, utter'd a dreadful cry:
No horse's cry was that, most like the roar
Of some pain'd desert lion, who all day
Has trail'd the hunter's javelin in his side,
And comes at night to die upon the sand:—
The two hosts heard that cry, and quak'd for fear,
And Oxus curdled as it cross'd his stream.
But Sohrab heard, and quail'd not, but rushed on,
And struck again; and again Rustum bow'd
His head; but this time all the blade, like glass,
Sprang in a thousand shivers on the helm,
And in his hand the hilt remain'd alone.

Then Rustum rais'd his head: his dreadful eyes
Glar'd, and he shook on high his menacing spear,
And shouted '*Rustum!*' Sohrab heard that shout,
And shrank amaz'd: back he recoil'd one step,
And scann'd with blinking eyes the advancing form:
And then he stood bewilder'd; and he dropp'd
His covering shield, and the spear pierced his side.
He reel'd, and staggering back, sunk to the ground.
And then the gloom dispers'd, and the wind fell,



Then the gloom grew blacker.

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

Then, with a bitter smile, Rustum began:—
'Sohrab, thou thoughtest in thy mind to kill
A Persian lord this day, and strip his corpse,
And bear thy trophies to Afrasiab's tent.
Or else that the great Rustum would come down
Himself to fight, and that thy wiles would move
His heart to take a gift, and let thee go.
And then that all the Tartar host would praise
Thy courage or thy craft, and spread thy fame,
To glad thy father in his weak old age.
Fool! thou art slain, and by an unknown man
Dearer to the red jackals shalt thou be,
Than to thy friends, and to thy father old.'

And, with a fearless mien, Sohrab replied:—
'Unknown thou art; yet thy fierce vaunt is vain,
Thou dost not slay me, proud and boastful man.
No! Rustum slays me, and this filial heart;
For were I match'd with ten such men as thou,
And I were he who till to-day I was,
They should be lying here, I standing there.
But that beloved name unnerv'd my arm—
That name, and something, I confess, in thee,
Which troubles all my heart, and made my shield
Fall; and thy spear transfix'd an unarm'd foe.
And now thou boastest, and insult'st my fate.
But hear thou this, fierce man, tremble to hear!

The mighty Rustum shall avenge my death!
My father, whom I seek through all the world,
He shall avenge my death, and punish thee!'

As when some hunter in the spring hath found
A breeding eagle sitting on her nest,
Upon the craggy isle of a hill lake,
And pierc'd her with an arrow as she rose,
And follow'd her to find her where she fell
Far off;—anon her mate comes winging back
From hunting, and a great way off descries
His huddling young left sole; at that, he checks
His pinion, and, with short, uneasy sweeps
Circles above his eyry, with loud screams
Chiding his mate back to her nest; but she
Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,
In some far stony gorge out of his ken,
A heap of fluttering feathers: never more
Shall the lake glass her, flying over it;
Never the black and dripping precipices
Echo her stormy scream as she sails by:—
As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss—
So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood
Over his dying son, and knew him not.

But with a cold, incredulous voice, he said:—
'What prate is this of fathers and revenge?
The mighty Rustum never had a son.'

And, with a failing voice, Sohrab replied:—
'Ah yes, he had! and that lost son am I.
Surely the news will one day reach his ear,

Reach Rustum, where he sits, and tarries long,
Somewhere, I know not where, but far from here;
And pierce him like a stab, and make him leap
To arms, and cry for vengeance upon thee.
Fierce man, bethink thee, for an only son!
What will that grief, what will that vengeance be!
Oh, could I live, till I that grief had seen!
Yet him I pity not so much, but her,
My mother, who in Ader-baijan dwells
With that old King, her father, who grows grey
With age, and rules over the valiant Koords.
Her most I pity, who no more will see
Sohrab returning from the Tartar camp,
With spoils and honour, when the war is done,
But a dark rumour will be bruited up,
From tribe to tribe, until it reach her ear;
And then will that defenceless woman learn
That Sohrab will rejoice her sight no more:
But that in battle with a nameless foe,
By the far distant Oxus, he is slain.'

He spoke; and as he ceas'd he wept aloud,
Thinking of her he left, and his own death.
He spoke; but Rustum listen'd, plung'd in thought.
Nor did he yet believe it was his son
Who spoke, although he call'd back names he knew;
For he had had sure tidings that the babe,
Which was in Ader-baijan born to him,
Had been a puny girl, no boy at all:
So that sad mother sent him word, for fear
Rustum should take the boy, to train in arms;
And so he deem'd that either Sohrab took,

By a false boast, the style of Rustum's son;
Or that men gave it him, to swell his fame.
So deem'd he; yet he listen'd, plung'd in thought;
And his soul set to grief, as the vast tide
Of the bright rocking ocean sets to shore
At the full moon: tears gather'd in his eyes;
For he remember'd his own early youth,
And all its bounding rapture; as, at dawn,
The Shepherd from his mountain lodge descries
A far bright City, smitten by the sun,
Through many rolling clouds;—so Rustum saw
His youth, saw Sohrab's mother, in her bloom;
And that old King, her father, who lov'd well
His wandering guest, and gave him his fair child
With joy; and all the pleasant life they led,
They three, in that long-distant summer-time—
The castle, and the dewy woods, and hunt
And hound, and morn on those delightful hills
In Ader-baijan. And he saw that Youth,
Of age and looks to be his own dear son,
Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand,
Like some rich hyacinth, which by the scythe
Of an unskilful gardener has been cut,
Mowing the garden grass-plots near its bed,
And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,
On the mown, dying grass;—so Sohrab lay,
Lovely in death, upon the common sand.
And Rustum gaz'd on him with grief, and said:—

'O Sohrab, thou indeed art such a son
Whom Rustum, wert thou his, might well have lov'd!
Yet here thou errest, Sohrab, or else men

Have told thee false;—thou art not Rustum's son.
For Rustum had no son: one child he had—
But one—a girl; who with her mother now
Plies some light female task, nor dreams of us—
Of us she dreams not, nor of wounds, nor war.'

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

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

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

'Sohrab, that were a proof which could not lie;
If thou show this, then art thou Rustum's son.'

Then with weak, hasty fingers, Sohrab loos'd
His belt, and near the shoulder bar'd his arm,

And show'd a sign in faint vermilion points
Prick'd: as a cunning workman, in Pekin,
Pricks with vermilion some clear porcelain vase,
An emperor's gift—at early morn he paints,
And all day long, and when night comes, the lamp
Lights up his studious forehead and thin hands:—
So delicately prick'd the sign appear'd
On Sohrab's arm, the sign of Rustum's seal.
It was that Griffin, which of old rear'd Zal,
Rustum's great father, whom they left to die,
A helpless babe, among the mountain rocks.
Him that kind creature found, and rear'd, and lov'd—
Then Rustum took it for his glorious sign.
And Sohrab bared that figure on his arm,
And himself scann'd it long with mournful eyes,
And then he touch'd it with his hand and said:—

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

He spoke: but Rustum gaz'd, and gaz'd, and stood
Speechless, and then he utter'd one short cry—
O Boy—thy Father!—and his voice chok'd there.
And then a dark cloud pass'd before his eyes,
And his head swam, and he sunk down to earth.
But Sohrab crawl'd to where he lay, and cast
His arms about his neck, and kiss'd his lips,
And with fond faltering fingers strok'd his cheeks,
Trying to call him back to life: and life
Came back to Rustum, and he op'd his eyes,
And they stood wide with horror; and he seiz'd
In both his hands the dust which lay around,

And threw it on his head, and smirch'd his hair,
His hair, and face, and beard, and glittering arms:
And strong convulsive groanings shook his breast,
And his sobs chok'd him; and he clutch'd his sword,
To draw it, and for ever let life out.
But Sohrab saw his thought, and held his hands,
And with a soothing voice he spoke, and said:—

'Father, forbear: for I but meet to-day
The doom that at my birth was written down
In Heaven, and thou art Heaven's unconscious hand.
Surely my heart cried out that it was thou,
When first I saw thee; and thy heart spoke too,
I know it: but Fate trod those promptings down
Under its iron heel; Fate, Fate engag'd
The strife, and hurl'd me on my father's spear.
But let us speak no more of this: I find
My father; let me feel that I have found.
Come, sit beside me on this sand, and take
My head betwixt thy hands, and kiss my cheeks,
And wash them with thy tears, and say, "My son!"
Quick! quick! for number'd are my sands of life,
And swift; for like the lightning to this field
I came, and like the wind I go away—
Sudden, and swift, and like a passing wind.
But it was writ in Heaven that this should be.'

So said he: and his voice releas'd the heart
Of Rustum, and his tears broke forth; he cast
His arms around his son's neck, and wept aloud,
And kiss'd him. And awe fell on both the hosts
When they saw Rustum's grief: and Ruksh, the horse

With his head bowing to the ground, and mane
Sweeping the dust, came near, and in mute woe
First to the one then to the other mov'd
His head, as if enquiring what their grief
Might mean; and from his dark, compassionate eyes,
The big warm tears roll'd down, and cak'd the sand.
But Rustum chid him with stern voice, and said:—

'Ruksh, now thou grievest; but, O Ruksh, thy feet
Should then have rotted on thy nimble joints,
When first they bore thy Master to this field.'

But Sohrab looked upon the horse and said:—
'Is this then Ruksh? How often, in past days,
My mother told me of thee, thou brave steed!
My terrible father's terrible horse; and said,
That I should one day find thy lord and thee.
Come, let me lay my hand upon thy mane.
O Ruksh, thou art more fortunate than I;
For thou hast gone where I shall never go,
And snuff'd the breezes of my father's home.
And thou hast trod the sands of Seistan,
And seen the River of Helmund, and the Lake
Of Zirrah; and the aged Zal himself
Has often strok'd thy neck, and given thee food,
Corn in a golden platter soak'd with wine,
And said—"O Ruksh! bear Rustum well!"—but I
Have never known my grandsire's furrow'd face,
Nor seen his lofty house in Seistan,
Nor slak'd my thirst at the clear Helmund stream:
But lodg'd among my father's foes, and seen
Afrasiab's cities only, Samarcand,

Bokhara, and lone Khiva in the waste,
And the black Toorkmun tents; and only drunk
The desert rivers, Moorghab and Tejend,
Kohik, and where the Kalmuks feed their sheep,
The northern Sir; and this great Oxus stream—
The yellow Oxus, by whose brink I die.'

And, with a heavy groan, Rustum replied:—
'Oh that its waves were flowing over me,
Oh that I saw its grains of yellow silt
Roll tumbling in the current o'er my head!'

And, with a grave mild voice, Sohrab replied:—
'Desire not that, my father; thou must live.
For some are born to do great deeds, and live,
As some are born to be obscur'd, and die.
Do thou the deeds I die too young to do,
And reap a second glory in thine age.
Thou art my father, and thy gain is mine.
But come: thou seest this great host of men
Which follow me; I pray thee, slay not these:
Let me entreat for them: what have they done?
They follow'd me, my hope, my fame, my star.
Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace.
But me thou must bear hence, not send with them,
But carry me with thee to Seistan,
And place me on a bed, and mourn for me,
Thou, and the snow-hair'd Zal, and all thy friends.
And thou must lay me in that lovely earth,
And heap a stately mound above my bones,
And plant a far-seen pillar over all:
That so the passing horseman on the waste

May see my tomb a great way off, and say—
Sohrab, the mighty Rustum's son, lies there,
Whom his great father did in ignorance kill—
And I be not forgotten in my grave.'

And, with a mournful voice, Rustum replied:—
'Fear not; as thou hast said, Sohrab, my son,
So shall it be: for I will burn my tents,
And quit the host, and bear thee hence with me,
And carry thee away to Seistan,
And place thee on a bed, and mourn for thee,
With the snow-headed Zal, and all my friends.
And I will lay thee in that lovely earth,
And heap a stately mound above thy bones,
And plant a far-seen pillar over all:
And men shall not forget thee in thy grave.
And I will spare thy host: yea, let them go:
Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace.
What should I do with slaying any more?
For would that all whom I have ever slain
Might be once more alive; my bitterest foes,
And they who were call'd champions in their time,
And through whose death I won that fame I have;
And I were nothing but a common man,
A poor, mean soldier, and without renown;
So thou mightest live too, my son, my son!
Or rather would that I, even I myself,
Might now be lying on this bloody sand,
Near death, and by an ignorant stroke of thine,
Not thou of mine; and I might die, not thou;
And I, not thou, be borne to Seistan;
And Zal might weep above my grave, not thine;

And say—*O son, I weep thee not too sore*
For willingly, I know, thou met'st thine end.—
But now in blood and battles was my youth,
And full of blood and battles is my age;
And I shall never end this life of blood.'

Then, at the point of death, Sohrab replied:—
'A life of blood indeed, thou dreadful man;
But thou shalt yet have peace; only not now,
Not yet: but thou shalt have it on that day,
When thou shalt sail in a high-masted ship,
Thou and the other peers of Kai-Khosroo,
Returning home over the salt blue sea.'

And Rustum gaz'd on Sohrab's face, and said:—
'Soon be that day, my son, and deep that sea!
Till then, if Fate so wills, let me endure.'

He spoke; and Sohrab smil'd on him, and took
The spear, and drew it from his side, and eas'd
His wound's imperious anguish: but the blood
Came welling from the open gash, and life
Flow'd with the stream: all down his cold white side
The crimson torrent ran, dim now, and soil'd,
Like the soil'd tissue of white violets
Left, freshly gather'd, on their native bank,
By romping children, whom their nurses call
From the hot fields at noon: his head droop'd low,
His limbs grew slack; motionless, white, he lay—
White, with eyes clos'd; only when heavy gasps,
Deep, heavy gasps, quivering through all his frame,
Convuls'd him back to life, he open'd them,

And fix'd them feebly on his father's face:
Till now all strength was ebb'd, and from his limbs
Unwillingly the spirit fled away,
Regretting the warm mansion which it left,
And youth and bloom, and this delightful world.

So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead.
And the great Rustum drew his horseman's cloak
Down o'er his face, and sate by his dead son.
As those black granite pillars, once high-rear'd
By Jemshîd in Persepolis, to bear
His house, now, 'mid their broken flights of steps,
Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side—
So in the sand Rustum lay by his son.

And night came down over the solemn waste,
And the two gazing hosts, and that sole pair,
And darken'd all; and a cold fog, with night,
Crept from the Oxus. Soon a hum arose,
As of a great assembly loos'd, and fires
Began to twinkle through the fog; for now
Both armies mov'd to camp, and took their meal:
The Persians took it on the open sands
Southward; the Tartars by the river marge:
And Rustum and his son were left alone.

But the majestic river floated on,
Out of the mist and hum of that low land,
Into the frosty starlight, and there mov'd,
Rejoicing, through the hush'd Chorasmian waste,
Under the solitary moon: he flow'd
Right for the Polar Star, past Orgunjè,
Brimming, and bright, and large: then sands begin

To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,
And split his currents; that for many a league
The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along
Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—
Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
In his high mountain cradle in Pamere,
A foil'd circuitous wanderer:—till at last
The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bath'd stars
Emerge and shine upon the Aral Sea.

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT[1]

I

TRISTRAM

Tristram

Is she not come? The messenger was sure.
Prop me upon the pillows once again—
Raise me, my page! this cannot long endure.
—Heaven, what a night! how the sleet whips the pane!
What lights will those out to the northward be?

[1] This is the tale of a piteous misfortune which befell the Princess Iseult of Ireland and King Arthur's brave knight Tristram of Lyoness, and of the effect which it had upon their lives. The details of the story can be readily picked out from the poem itself.

The Page

The lanterns of the fishing-boats at sea.

Tristram

Soft—who is that, stands by the dying fire?

The Page

Iseult.

Tristram

Ah! not the Iseult I desire.

. . . . . .

What Knight is this so weak and pale,
Though the locks are yet brown on his noble head,
Propt on pillows in his bed,
Gazing seaward for the light
Of some ship that fights the gale
On this wild December night?
Over the sick man's feet is spread
A dark green forest-dress:
A gold harp leans against the bed,
Ruddy in the fire's light.
I know him by his harp of gold,
Famous in Arthur's court of old;
I know him by his forest-dress—
The peerless hunter, harper, knight,
Tristram of Lyoness.

What Lady is this, whose silk attire
Gleams so rich in the light of the fire?
The ringlets on her shoulders lying
In their flitting lustre vying
With the clasp of burnish'd gold
Which her heavy robe doth hold.

Her looks are mild, her fingers slight
As the driven snow are white;
But her cheeks are sunk and pale.
Is it that the bleak sea-gale
Beating from the Atlantic sea
On this coast of Brittany,
Nips too keenly the sweet flower?
Is it that a sweet fatigue
Hath come on her, a chilly fear,
Passing all her youthful hour
Spinning with her maidens here,
Listlessly through the window-bars
Gazing seawards many a league,
From her lonely shore-built tower,
While the knights are at the wars?
Or, perhaps, has her young heart
Felt already some deeper smart,
Of those that in secret the heart-strings rive,
Leaving her sunk and pale, though fair?
Who is this snowdrop by the sea?—
I know her by her mildness rare,
Her snow-white hands, her golden hair;
I know her by her rich silk dress,
And her fragile loveliness—
The sweetest Christian soul alive,
Iseult of Brittany.

Iseult of Brittany?—but where
Is that other Iseult fair,
That proud, first Iseult, Cornwall's queen?
She, whom Tristram's ship of yore
From Ireland to Cornwall bore,

To Tyntagel, to the side
Of King Marc, to be his bride?
She who, as they voyaged, quaff'd
With Tristram that spiced magic draught,
Which since then for ever rolls
Through their blood, and binds their souls,
Working love, but working teen?—
There were two Iseults who did sway
Each her hour of Tristram's day;
But one possess'd his waning time,
The other his resplendent prime.
Behold her here, the patient flower,
Who possess'd his darker hour!
Iseult of the Snow-White Hand
Watches pale by Tristram's bed.
She is here who had his gloom,
Where art thou who hadst his bloom?
Does the love-draught work no more?
Art thou cold, or false, or dead,
Iseult of Ireland?

. . . . . .

Loud howls the wind, sharp patters the rain,
And the knight sinks back on his pillows again.
He is weak with fever and pain,
And his spirit is not clear.
Hark! he mutters in his sleep,
As he wanders far from here,
Changes place and time of year.
And his closéd eye doth sweep
O'er some fair unwintry sea,
Not this fierce Atlantic deep,
While he mutters brokenly:—

Tristram

The calm sea shines, loose hang the vessel's sails;
Before us are the sweet green fields of Wales,
And overhead the cloudless sky of May.—
'*Ah, would I were in those green fields at play,*
Not pent on ship-board this delicious day!
Tristram, I pray thee, of thy courtesy,
Reach me my golden phial stands by thee,
But pledge me in it first for courtesy.—'
Ha! dost thou start? are thy lips blanch'd like mine?
Child, 'tis no true draught this, 'tis poison'd wine!
Iseult! . . .

. . . . . .

Ah, sweet angels, let him dream!
Keep his eyelids! let him seem
Not this fever-wasted wight
Thinn'd and paled before his time,
But the brilliant youthful knight
In the glory of his prime,
Sitting in the gilded barge,
At thy side, thou lovely charge,
Bending gaily o'er thy hand,
Iseult of Ireland!
And she too, that princess fair
If her bloom be now less rare,
Let her have her youth again—
Let her be as she was then!
Let her have her proud dark eyes,
And her petulant quick replies—
Let her sweep her dazzling hand
With its gesture of command,



'Pledge me in my golden cup.'

And shake back her raven hair
With the old imperious air!
As of old, so let her be,
That first Iseult, princess bright,
Chatting with her youthful knight
As he steers her o'er the sea,
Quitting at her father's will
The green isle where she was bred,
And her bower in Ireland,
For the surge-beat Cornish strand;
Where the prince whom she must wed
Dwells on loud Tyntagel's hill,
High above the sounding sea.
And that potion rare her mother
Gave her, that her future lord,
Gave her, that King Marc and she,
Might drink it on their marriage-day,
And for ever love each other—
Let her, as she sits on board,
Ah, sweet saints, unwittingly!
See it shine, and take it up,
And to Tristram laughing say:
'Sir Tristram, of thy courtesy,
Pledge me in my golden cup!'
Let them drink it—let their hands
Tremble, and their cheeks be flame,
As they feel the fatal bands
Of a love they dare not name,
With a wild delicious pain,
Twine about their hearts again!
Let the early summer be
Once more round them, and the sea

Blue, and o'er its mirror kind
Let the breath of the May-wind,
Wandering through their drooping sails,
Die on the green fields of Wales!
Let a dream like this restore
What his eye must see no more!

Tristram

Chill blows the wind, the pleasaunce-walks are drear—
Madcap, what jest was this, to meet me here?
Were feet like those made for so wild a way?
The southern winter-parlour, by my fay,
Had been the likeliest trysting-place to-day!
'Tristram!—nay, nay—thou must not take my hand!—
Tristram!—sweet love!—we are betray'd—out-plann'd.
Fly—save thyself—save me!—I dare not stay.'—
. . . . . .

Ah! sweet saints, his dream doth move
Faster surely than it should,
From the fever in his blood!
All the spring-time of his love
Is already gone and past,
And instead thereof is seen
Its winter, which endureth still—
Tyntagel on its surge-beat hill,
The pleasaunce-walks, the weeping queen,
And this rough December-night,
And his burning fever-pain,

Mingle with his hurrying dream,
Till they rule it, till he seem
The press'd fugitive again,
The love-desperate banish'd knight
With a fire in his brain
Flying o'er the stormy main.
—Whither does he wander now?
Haply in his dreams the wind
Wafts him here, and lets him find
The lovely orphan child again
In her castle by the coast;
The youngest, fairest chatelaine,
Whom this realm of France can boast,
Our snowdrop by the Atlantic sea,
Iseult of Brittany.
And—for through the haggard air,
The stain'd arms, the matted hair
Of that stranger-knight ill-starr'd,
There gleam'd something, which recall'd
The Tristram who in better days
Was Launcelot's guest at Joyous Gard—
Welcomed here, and here install'd,
Tended of his fever here,
Haply he seems again to move
His young guardian's heart with love;
In his exiled loneliness,
In his stately, deep distress,
Without a word, without a tear.
—Ah! 'tis well he should retrace
His tranquil life in this lone place;
His gentle bearing at the side
Of his timid youthful bride;

His long rambles by the shore
On winter-evenings, when the roar
Of the near waves came, sadly grand,
Through the dark, up the drown'd sand,
Or his endless reveries
In the woods, where the gleams play
On the grass under the trees,
Passing the long summer's day,
Idle as a mossy stone
In the forest-depths alone,
The chase neglected, and his hound
Couch'd beside him on the ground.
—Ah! what trouble's on his brow?
Hither let him wander now;
Hither, to the quiet hours
Pass'd among those heaths of ours
By the grey Atlantic sea;
Hours, if not of ecstasy,
From violent anguish surely free!

Tristram

All red with blood the whirling river flows,
The wide plain rings, the dazed air throbs with blows.
Upon us are the chivalry of Rome—
Their spears are down, their steeds are bathed in foam.
'Up, Tristram, up,' men cry, 'thou moonstruck knight!
What foul fiend rides thee? On into the fight!'
—Above the din her voice is in my ears;
I see her form glide through the crossing spears.—
Iseult! . . .

. . . . . .

Ah! he wanders forth again;
We cannot keep him; now, as then,

There 's a secret in his breast
Which will never let him rest.
These musing fits in the green wood
They cloud the brain, they dull the blood!
--His sword is sharp, his horse is good;
Beyond the mountains will he see
The famous towns of Italy,
And label with the blessed sign
The heathen Saxons on the Rhine.
At Arthur's side he fights once more
With the Roman Emperor.
There 's many a gay knight where he goes
Will help him to forget his care;
The march, the leaguer, Heaven's blithe air,
The neighing steeds, the ringing blows—
Sick pining comes not where these are.
Ah! what boots it, that the jest
Lightens every other brow,
What, that every other breast
Dances as the trumpets blow,
If one's own heart beats not light
On the waves of the toss'd fight,
If oneself cannot get free
From the clog of misery?
Thy lovely youthful wife grows pale
Watching by the salt sea-tide
With her children at her side
For the gleam of thy white sail.
Home, Tristram, to thy halls again!
To our lonely sea complain,
To our forests tell thy pain!

Tristram

All round the forest sweeps off, black in shade,
But it is moonlight in the open glade;
And in the bottom of the glade shine clear
The forest-chapel and the fountain near.
—I think, I have a fever in my blood;
Come, let me leave the shadow of this wood,
Ride down, and bathe my hot brow in the flood.
—Mild shines the cold spring in the moon's clear light!
God! 'tis *her* face plays in the water bright.
'Fair love,' she says, 'canst thou forget so soon,
At this soft hour, under this sweet moon?'—
Iseult! . . .

. . . . . .

Ah, poor soul! if this be so,
Only death can balm thy woe.
The solitudes of the green wood
Had no medicine for thy mood;
The rushing battle clear'd thy blood
As little as did solitude.
—Ah! his eyelids slowly break
Their hot seals, and let him wake;
What new change shall we now see?
A happier? Worse it cannot be.

Tristram

Is my page here? Come, turn me to the fire!
Upon the window-panes the moon shines bright;
The wind is down—but she'll not come to-night.
Ah no! she is asleep in Cornwall now,
Far hence; her dreams are fair—smooth is her brow;
Of me she recks not, nor my vain desire.

—I have had dreams, I have had dreams, my page,
Would take a score years from a strong man's age;
And with a blood like mine, will leave, I fear,
Scant leisure for a second messenger.
—My princess, art thou there? Sweet! do not wait!
To bed, and sleep! my fever is gone by;
To-night my page shall keep me company.
Where do the children sleep? kiss them for me!
Poor child, thou art almost as pale as I;
This comes of nursing long and watching late.
To bed—good night!

. . . . . .

She left the gleam-lit fireplace,
She came to the bed-side;
She took his hands in hers—her tears
Down on his wasted fingers rain'd.
She raised her eyes upon his face—
Not with a look of wounded pride,
A look as if the heart complained—
Her look was like a sad embrace;
The gaze of one who can divine
A grief, and sympathise.
Sweet flower! thy children's eyes
Are not more innocent than thine.
But they sleep in shelter'd rest,
Like helpless birds in the warm nest,
On the castle's southern side;
Where feebly comes the mournful roar
Of buffeting wind and surging tide
Through many a room and corridor.
—Full on their window the moon's ray
Makes their chamber as bright as day.

It shines upon the blank white walls,
And on the snowy pillow falls,
And on two angel-heads doth play
Turn'd to each other—the eyes closed,
The lashes on the cheeks reposed.
Round each sweet brow the cap close-set
Hardly lets peep the golden hair;
Through the soft-open'd lips the air
Scarcely moves the coverlet.
One little wandering arm is thrown
At random on the counterpane,
And often the fingers closed in haste
As if their baby-owner chased
The butterflies again.
This stir they have, and this alone;
But else they are so still!
—Ah, tired madcaps! you lie still;
But were you at the window now,
To look forth on the fairy sight
Of your illumined haunts by night,
To see the park-glades where you play
Far lovelier than they are by day,
To see the sparkle on the eaves,
And upon every giant-bough
Of those old oaks, whose wet red leaves
Are jewell'd with bright drops of rain—
How would your voices run again!
And far beyond the sparkling trees
Of the castle-park one sees
The bare heaths spreading, clear as day,
Moor behind moor, far, far away,
Into the heart of Brittany.

And here and there, lock'd by the land,
Long inlets of smooth glittering sea,
And many a stretch of watery sand
All shining in the white moon-beams—
But you see fairer in your dreams!

What voices are these on the clear night-air?
What lights in the court—what steps on the stair?

II

Iseult of Ireland

Tristram

Raise the light, my page! that I may see her.—
Thou art come at last, then, haughty Queen!
Long I've waited, long I've fought my fever;
Late thou comest, cruel thou hast been.

Iseult

Blame me not, poor sufferer! that I tarried;
Bound I was, I could not break the band.
Chide not with the past, but feel the present!
I am here—we meet—I hold thy hand.

Tristram

Thou art come, indeed—thou hast rejoin'd me;
Thou hast dared it—but too late to save.
Fear not now that men should tax thine honour!
I am dying: build—(thou may'st)—my grave!

Iseult

Tristram, ah, for love of Heaven, speak kindly!
What, I hear these bitter words from thee?
Sick with grief I am, and faint with travel—
Take my hand—dear Tristram, look on me!

Tristram

I forgot, thou comest from thy voyage—
Yes, the spray is on thy cloak and hair.
But thy dark eyes are not dimm'd, proud Iseult!
And thy beauty never was more fair.

Iseult

Ah, harsh flatterer! let alone my beauty!
I, like thee, have left my youth afar.
Take my hand, and touch these wasted fingers—
See my cheek and lips, how white they are!

Tristram

Thou art paler—but thy sweet charm, Iseult!
Would not fade with the dull years away.
Ah, how fair thou standest in the moonlight!
I forgive thee, Iseult!—thou wilt stay?

Iseult

Fear me not, I will be always with thee;
I will watch thee, tend thee, soothe thy pain;
Sing thee tales of true, long-parted lovers,
Join'd at evening of their days again.

Tristram

No, thou shalt not speak! I should be finding
Something alter'd in thy courtly tone.
Sit—sit by me! I will think, we 've lived so
In the green wood, all our lives, alone.

Iseult

Alter'd, Tristram? Not in courts, believe me,
Love like mine is alter'd in the breast;
Courtly life is light and cannot reach it—
Ah! it lives, because so deep-suppress'd!

What, thou think'st men speak in courtly chambers
Words by which the wretched are consoled?
What, thou think'st this aching brow was cooler,
Circled, Tristram, by a band of gold?

Royal state with Marc, my deep-wrong'd husband—
That was bliss to make my sorrows flee!
Silken courtiers whispering honied nothings—
Those were friends to make me false to thee!

Ah, on which, if both our lots were balanced,
Was indeed the heaviest burden thrown—
Thee, a pining exile in thy forest,
Me, a smiling queen upon my throne?

Vain and strange debate, where both have suffer'd
Both have pass'd a youth consumed and sad,
Both have brought their anxious day to evening,
And have now short space for being glad!

Join'd we are henceforth; nor will thy people,
Nor thy younger Iseult take it ill,
That a former rival shares her office,
When she sees her humbled, pale, and still.

I, a faded watcher by thy pillow,
I, a statue on thy chapel-floor,
Pour'd in prayer before the Virgin-Mother,
Rouse no anger, make no rivals more.

She will cry: 'Is this the foe I dreaded?
This his idol? this that royal bride?
Ah, an hour of health would purge his eyesight!
Stay, pale queen! for ever by my side.'

Hush, no words! that smile, I see, forgives me.
I am now thy nurse, I bid thee sleep.
Close thine eyes—this flooding moonlight blinds them!—
Nay, all 's well again! thou must not weep.

Tristram

I am happy! yet I feel, there 's something
Swells my heart, and takes my breath away.
Through a mist I see thee; near—come nearer!
Bend—bend down!—I yet have much to say.

Iseult

Heaven! his head sinks back upon the pillow—
Tristram! Tristram! let thy heart not fail!
Call on God and on the holy angels!
What, love, courage!—Christ! he is so pale.

Tristram

I am dying.—Start not, nor look wildly!
Me, thy living friend, thou canst not save.
But, since living we were ununited,
Go not far, O Iseult! from my grave.

Close mine eyes, then seek the princess Iseult;
Speak her fair, she is of royal blood!
Say, I will'd so, that thou stay beside me—
She will grant it; she is kind and good.

Now to sail the seas of death I leave thee—
One last kiss upon the living shore!

Iseult

Tristram! — Tristram! — stay — receive me with thee!
Iseult leaves thee, Tristram! never more.

. . . . . .

You see them clear—the moon shines bright.
Slow, slow and softly, where she stood,
She sinks upon the ground;—her hood
Had fallen back; her arms outspread
Still held her lover's hand; her head
Is bow'd, half-buried, on the bed.
O'er the blanch'd sheet her raven hair
Lies in disorder'd streams; and there,
Strung like white stars, the pearls still are,
And the golden bracelets, heavy and rare,
Flash on her white arms still.
The very same which yesternight
Flash'd in the silver sconces' light,
When the feast was gay and the laughter loud
In Tyntagel's palace proud.
But then they deck'd a restless ghost
With hot-flushed cheeks and brilliant eyes,
And quivering lips on which the tide
Of courtly speech abruptly died,
And a glance which over the crowded floor,
The dancers, and the festive host,
Flew ever to the door.
That the knights eyed her in surprise,
And the dames whispered scoffingly:

'Her moods, good lack, they pass like showers!
But yesternight and she would be
As pale and still as wither'd flowers,
And now to-night she laughs and speaks
And has a colour in her cheeks;
Christ keep us from such fantasy!'—

Yes, now the longing is o'erpast,
Which, dogg'd by fear and fought by shame,
Shook her weak bosom day and night,
Consumed her beauty like a flame,
And dimm'd it like the desert-blast.
And though the bed-clothes hide her face,
Yet were it lifted to the light,
The sweet expression of her brow
Would charm the gazer, till his thought
Erased the ravages of time,
Fill'd up the hollow cheek, and brought
A freshness back as of her prime—
So healing is her quiet now.
So perfectly the lines express
A tranquil, settled loveliness,
Her younger rival's purest grace.

The air of the December-night
Steals coldly around the chamber bright,
Where those lifeless lovers be;
Swinging with it, in the light
Flaps the ghostlike tapestry.
And on the arras wrought you see
A stately Huntsman clad in green,
And round him a fresh-forest scene.

On that clear forest-knoll he stays,
With his pack round him, and delays.
He stares and stares, with troubled face,
At this huge, gleam-lit fireplace,
At that bright, iron-figured door,
And those blown rushes on the floor.
He gazes down into the room
With heated cheeks and flurried air,
And to himself he seems to say:
'What place is this, and who are they?
Who is that kneeling Lady fair?
And on his pillows that pale Knight
Who seems of marble on a tomb?
How comes it here, this chamber bright,
Through whose mullion'd windows clear
The castle-court all wet with rain,
The drawbridge and the moat appear,
And then the beach, and, mark'd with spray,
The sunken reefs, and far away
The unquiet bright Atlantic plain?
—What, has some glamour made me sleep,
And sent me with my dogs to sweep,
By night, with boisterous bugle-peal,
Through some old, sea-side, knightly hall,
Not in the free green wood at all?
That Knight's asleep, and at her prayer
That Lady by the bed doth kneel—
Then hush, thou boisterous bugle-peal!'
—The wild boar rustles in his lair;
The fierce hounds snuff the tainted air,
But lords and hounds keep rooted there.

Cheer, cheer thy dogs into the brake,
O Hunter! and without a fear
Thy golden-tasselled bugle blow,
And through the glades thy pastime take—
For thou wilt rouse no sleepers here!
For these thou seest are unmoved;
Cold, cold as those who lived and loved
A thousand years ago.

III

Iseult of Brittany

A year had flown, and o'er the sea away,
In Cornwall, Tristram and Queen Iseult lay;
In King Marc's chapel, in Tyntagel old—
There in a ship they bore those lovers cold.

The young surviving Iseult, one bright day,
Had wander'd forth. Her children were at play
In a green circular hollow in the heath
Which borders the sea-shore—a country path
Creeps over it from the till'd fields behind.
The hollow's grassy banks are soft-inclined,
And to one standing on them, far and near
The lone unbroken view spreads bright and clear
Over the waste. This cirque of open ground
Is light and green; the heather, which all round
Creeps thickly, grows not here; but the pale grass
Is strewn with rocks, and many a shiver'd mass
Of vein'd white-gleaming quartz, and here and there
Dotted with holly-trees and juniper.

In the smooth centre of the opening stood
Three hollies side by side, and made a screen,
Warm with the winter-sun, of burnish'd green
With scarlet berries gemm'd, the fell-fare's food.
Under the glittering hollies Iseult stands,
Watching her children play: their little hands
Are busy gathering spars of quartz, and streams
Of stagshorn for their hats; anon, with screams
Of mad delight they drop their spoils, and bound
Among the holly-clumps and broken ground
Racing full speed, and startling in their rush
The fell-fares and the speckled missel-thrush
Out of their glossy coverts;—but when now
Their cheeks were flush'd, and over each hot brow,
Under the feather'd hats of the sweet pair,
In blinding masses shower'd the golden hair—
Then Iseult call'd them to her, and the three
Cluster'd under the holly-screen, and she
Told them an old-world Breton history.

Warm in their mantles wrapt the three stood there,
Under the hollies, in the clear still air—
Mantles with those rich furs deep glistering
Which Venice ships do from swart Egypt bring.
Long they stay'd still—then, pacing at their ease,
Moved up and down under the glossy trees.
But still, as they pursued their warm dry road,
From Iseult's lips the unbroken story flow'd,
And still the children listen'd, their blue eyes
Fix'd on their mother's face in wide surprise;

Nor did their looks stray once to the sea-side,
Nor to the brown heaths round them, bright and wide,
Nor to the snow, which, though 't was all away
From the open heath, still by the hedgerows lay,
Nor to the shining sea-fowl, that with screams
Bore up from where the bright Atlantic gleams,
Swooping to landward; nor to where, quite clear,
The fell-fares settled on the thickets near.
And they would still have listen'd, till dark night
Came keen and chill down on the heather bright;
But, when the red glow on the sea grew cold,
And the grey turrets of the castle old
Look'd sternly through the frosty evening-air,
Then Iseult took by the hand those children fair,
And brought her tale to an end, and found the path,
And led them home over the darkening heath.

And is she happy? Does she see unmoved
The days in which she might have lived and loved
Slip without bringing bliss slowly away,
One after one, to-morrow like to-day?
Joy has not found her yet, nor ever will—
Is it this thought which makes her mien so still,
Her features so fatigued, her eyes, though sweet,
So sunk, so rarely lifted save to meet
Her children's? She moves slow; her voice alone
Hath yet an infantine and silver tone,
But even that comes languidly; in truth,
She seems one dying in a mask of youth.
And now she will go home, and softly lay
Her laughing children in their beds, and play

Awhile with them before they sleep; and then
She 'll light her silver lamp, which fishermen
Dragging their nets through the rough waves afar,
Along this iron coast, know like a star,
And take her broidery-frame, and there she 'll sit
Hour after hour, her gold curls sweeping it;
Lifting her soft-bent head only to mind
Her children, or to listen to the wind.
And when the clock peals midnight, she will move
Her work away, and let her fingers rove
Across the shaggy brows of Tristram's hound
Who lies, guarding her feet, along the ground;
Or else she will fall musing, her blue eyes
Fixt, her slight hands clasp'd on her lap; then rise,
And at her prie-dieu kneel, until she have told
Her rosary-beads of ebony tipp'd with gold,
Then to her soft sleep—and to-morrow 'll be
To-day's exact repeated effigy.

Yes, it is lonely for her in her hall.
The children, and the grey-hair'd seneschal,
Her women, and Sir Tristram's aged hound,
Are there the sole companions to be found.
But these she loves: and noisier life than this
She would find ill to bear, weak as she is.
She has her children, too, and night and day
Is with them; and the wide heaths where they play,
The hollies, and the cliff, and the sea-shore,
The sands, the sea-birds, and the distant sails,
These are to her dear as to them; the tales
With which this day the children she beguiled

She gleaned from Breton grandames, when a child,
In every hut along this sea-coast wild.
She herself loves them still, and, when they are told,
Can forget all to hear them, as of old.

Dear saints, it is not sorrow, as I hear,
Not suffering, which shuts up eye and ear
To all that has delighted them before,
And lets us be what we were once no more.
No, we may suffer deeply, yet retain
Power to be moved and soothed, for all our pain,
By what of old pleased us, and will again.
No, 'tis the gradual furnace of the world,
In whose hot air our spirits are upcurl'd
Until they crumble, or else grow like steel—
Which kills in us the bloom, the youth, the spring—
Which leaves the fierce necessity to feel,
But takes away the power—this can avail,
By drying up our joy in everything,
To make our former pleasures all seem stale.
This, or some tyrannous single thought, some fit
Of passion, which subdues our souls to it,
Till for its sake alone we live and move—
Call it ambition, or remorse, or love—
This too can change us wholly, and make seem
All which we did before, shadow and dream.

And yet, I swear, it angers me to see
How this fool passion gulls men potently;
Being, in truth, but a diseased unrest,
And an unnatural overheat at best.

How they are of languor and distress
Not having it; which when they do possess,
They straightway are burnt up with fume and care,
And spend their lives in posting here and there
Where this plague drives them; and have little ease,
Are furious with themselves, and hard to please.
Like that bold Cæsar, the famed Roman wight,
Who wept at reading of a Grecian knight
Who made a name at younger years than he;
Or that renown'd mirror of chivalry,
Prince Alexander, Philip's peerless son,
Who carried the great war from Macedon
Into the Soudan's realm, and thundered on
To die at thirty-five in Babylon.

What tale did Iseult to the children say,
Under the hollies, that bright winter's day?

She told them of the fairy-haunted land
Away the other side of Brittany,
Beyond the heaths, edged by the lonely sea;
Of the deep forest-glades of Broce-liande,
Through whose green boughs the golden sunshine creeps,
Where Merlin by the enchanted thorn-tree sleeps.
For here he came with the fay Vivian,
One April, when the warm days first began.
He was on foot, and that false fay, his friend,
On her white palfrey; here he met his end,
In these lone sylvan glades, that April-day.
This tale of Merlin and the lovely fay

Was the one Iseult chose, and she brought clear
Before the children's fancy him and her.

Blowing between the stems, the forest-air
Had loosen'd the brown locks of Vivian's hair,
Which play'd on her flush'd cheek, and her blue eyes
Sparkled with mocking glee and exercise.
Her palfrey's flanks were mired and bathed in sweat,
For they had travell'd far and not stopp'd yet.
A brier in that tangled wilderness
Had scored her white right hand, which she allows
To rest ungloved on her green riding-dress;
The other warded off the drooping boughs.
But still she chatted on, with her blue eyes
Fix'd full on Merlin's face, her stately prize.
Her 'haviour had the morning's fresh clear grace,
The spirit of the woods was in her face.
She look'd so witching fair, that learned wight
Forgot his craft, and his best wits took flight;
And he grew fond, and eager to obey
His mistress, use her empire as she may.

They came to where the brushwood ceased, and day
Peer'd 'twixt the stems; and the ground broke away,
In a sloped sward down to a brawling brook;
And up as high as where they stood to look
On the brook's farther side was clear, but then
The underwood and trees began again.

This open glen was studded thick with thorns
Then white with blossom; and you saw the horns,
Through last year's fern, of the shy fallow-deer
Who come at noon down to the water here.
You saw the bright-eyed squirrels dart along
Under the thorns on the green sward; and strong
The blackbird whistled from the dingles near,
And the weird chipping of the woodpecker
Rang lonelily and sharp; the sky was fair,
And a fresh breath of spring stirr'd everywhere.
Merlin and Vivian stopp'd on the slope's brow,
To gaze on the light sea of leaf and bough
Which glistering plays all round them, lone and mild,
As if to itself the quiet forest smiled.
Upon the brow-top grew a thorn, and here
The grass was dry and moss'd, and you saw clear
Across the hollow; white anemones
Starr'd the cool turf, and clumps of primroses
Ran out from the dark underwood behind.
No fairer resting-place a man could find.
'Here let us halt,' said Merlin then; and she
Nodded, and tied her palfrey to a tree.

They sate them down together, and a sleep
Fell upon Merlin, more like death, so deep.
Her finger on her lips, then Vivian rose,
And from her brown-lock'd head the wimple throws,
And takes it in her hand, and waves it over
The blossom'd thorn-tree and her sleeping lover.
Nine times she waved the fluttering wimple round,
And made a little plot of magic ground.

And in that daisied circle, as men say,
Is Merlin prisoner till the judgment-day;
But she herself whither she will can rove—
For she was passing weary of his love.

MORTE D'ARTHUR

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonnesse about their lord,
King Arthur: then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land;
On one side lay the ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.
Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made,—
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more—but let what will be, be,

I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword—and how I row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king:
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere:
Watch what thou seëst, and lightly bring me word.'

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

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

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt;
For all the haft twinkled with diamond studs,

Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded king.

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

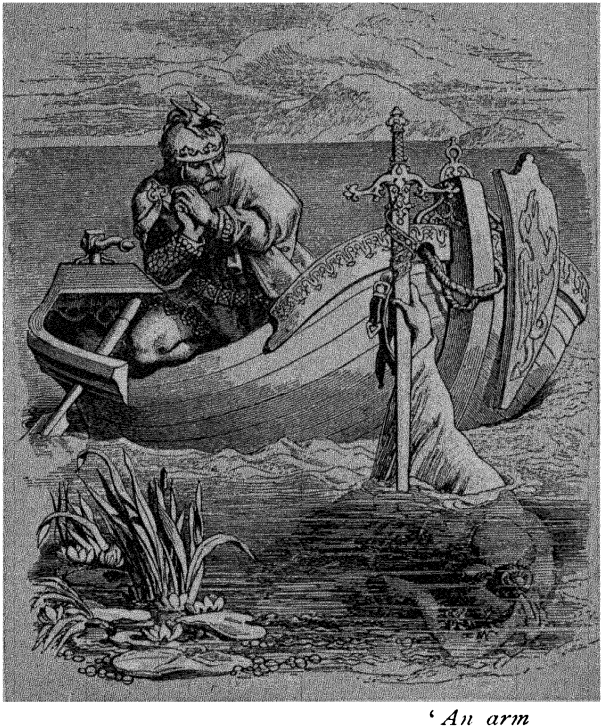
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

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

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

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,

Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?
What harm, undone? deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumours of a doubt? but were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honour and much fame were lost.'
So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.
Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'
To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!



'An arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake.'

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

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

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

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems

Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

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

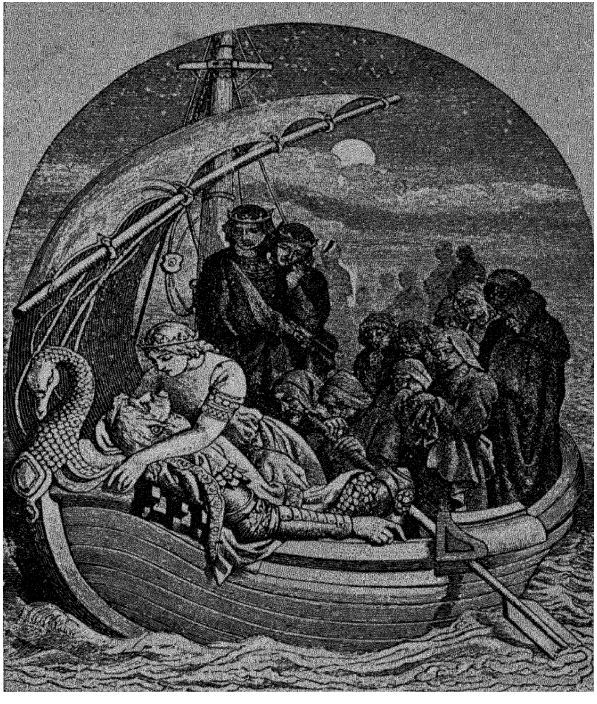
So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words,
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both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

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

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

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

Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge,'
And to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against his brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;



For all his face
Was white and colourless.

And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the daïs-throne—were parch'd with dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere,
'Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole ROUND TABLE is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,

Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seëst—if indeed I go—
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

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

THE BROOK

AN IDYL

'HERE, by this brook, we parted; I to the East
And he for Italy—too late—too late:

One whom the strong sons of the world despise;
For lucky rhymes to him were scrip and share.
And mellow metres more than cent for cent;
Nor could he understand how money breeds,
Thought it a dead thing; yet himself could make
The thing that is not as the thing that is.
O had he lived! In our schoolbooks we say,
Of those that held their heads above the crowd,
They flourish'd then or then; but life in him
Could scarce be said to flourish, only touch'd
On such a time as goes before the leaf,
When all the wood stands in a mist of green,
And nothing perfect: yet the brook he loved,
For which, in branding summers of Bengal,
Or ev'n the sweet half-English Neilgherry air,
I panted, seems, as I re-listen to it,
Prattling the primrose fancies of the boy,
To me that loved him; for "O brook," he says,
"O babbling brook," says Edmund in his rhyme,
"Whence come you?" and the brook, why not? replies.

I come from haunts of coot and hern,
I make a sudden sally,
And sparkle out among the fern,
To bicker down a valley.

By thirty hills I hurry down,
Or slip between the ridges,
By twenty thorps, a little town,
And half a hundred bridges.

Till last by Philip's farm I flow
To join the brimming river:
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever.

'Poor lad, he died at Florence, quite worn out,
Travelling to Naples. There is Darnley bridge,
It has more ivy; there the river; and there
Stands Philip's farm where brook and river meet.

I chatter over stony ways,
In little sharps and trebles,
I bubble into eddying bays,
I babble on the pebbles.

With many a curve my banks I fret
By many a field and fallow,
And many a fairy foreland set
With willow-weed and mallow.

I chatter, chatter, as I flow
To join the brimming river:
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever.

'But Philip chatter'd more than brook or bird;
Old Philip; all about the fields you caught
His weary daylong chirping, like the dry
High-elbow'd grigs that leap in summer grass

I wind about, and in and out,
With here a blossom sailing,
And here and there a lusty trout,
And here and there a grayling,

And here and there a foamy flake
Upon me, as I travel
With many a silvery waterbreak
Above the golden gravel,

And draw them all along, and flow
To join the brimming river:
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever.

'O darling Katie Willows, his one child!
A maiden of our century, yet most meek;
A daughter of our meadows, yet not coarse;
Straight, but as lissome as a hazel wand;
Her eyes a bashful azure, and her hair
In gloss and hue the chestnut, when the shell
Divides threefold to show the fruit within.

Sweet Katie, once I did her a good turn,
Her and her far-off cousin and betrothed,
James Willows, of one name and heart with her.
For here I came, twenty years back—the week
Before I parted with poor Edmund; cross'd
By that old bridge which, half in ruins then,
Still makes a hoary eyebrow for the gleam
Beyond it, where the waters marry—cross'd,
Whistling a random bar of Bonnie Doon,
And push'd at Philip's garden-gate. The gate,
Half-parted from a weak and scolding hinge,
Stuck; and he clamour'd from a casement, "Run,"
To Katie somewhere in the walks below—
"Run, Katie!" Katie never ran: she moved
To meet me, winding under woodbine bowers,
A little flutter'd, with her eyelids down,
Fresh apple-blossom, blushing for a boon.

'What was it? less of sentiment than sense
Had Katie; not illiterate; nor of those
Who dabbling in the fount of fictive tears,
And nursed by mealy-mouth'd philanthropies,
Divorce the Feeling from her mate the Deed.

'She told me. She and James had quarrell'd. Why?



'A daughter of our meadows.'

What cause of quarrel? None, she said, no cause;
James had no cause: but when I press'd the cause,
I learnt that James had flickering jealousies
Which anger'd her. Who anger'd James? I said.
But Katie snatch'd her eyes at once from mine,
And sketching with her slender pointed foot
Some figure like a wizard's pentagram
On garden gravel, let my query pass
Unclaim'd, in flushing silence, till I ask'd
If James were coming. "Coming every day,"
She answer'd, "ever longing to explain,
But evermore her father came across
With some long-winded tale, and broke him short;
And James departed vext with him and her."
How could I help her? "Would I—was it wrong?"
(Clasp'd hands and that petitionary grace
Of sweet seventeen subdued me ere she spoke)
"O would I take her father for one hour,
For one half-hour, and let him talk to me!"
And even while she spoke, I saw where James
Made toward us, like a wader in the surf,
Beyond the brook, waist-deep in meadow-sweet.

'O Katie, what I suffer'd for your sake!
For in I went, and call'd old Philip out
To show the farm: full willingly he rose:
He led me through the short sweet-smelling lanes
Of his wheat-suburb, babbling as he went.
He praised his land, his horses, his machines;
He praised his ploughs, his cows, his hogs, his dogs;
He praised his hens, his geese, his guinea-hens;
His pigeons, who in session on their roofs

Approved him, bowing at their own deserts:
Then from the plaintive mother's teat he took
Her blind and shuddering puppies, naming each,
And naming those, his friends, for whom they were:
Then cross'd the common into Darnley chase
To show Sir Arthur's deer. In copse and fern
Twinkled the innumerable ear and tail.
Then, seated on a serpent-rooted beech,
He pointed out a pasturing colt, and said,
"That was the four-year-old I sold the Squire."
And there he told a long long-winded tale
Of how the Squire had seen the colt at grass,
And how it was the thing his daughter wish'd,
And how he sent the bailiff to the farm
To learn the price, and what the price he ask'd,
And how the bailiff swore that he was mad,
But he stood firm; and so the matter hung;
He gave them line: and five days after that
He met the bailiff at the Golden Fleece,
Who then and there had offer'd something more,
But he stood firm; and so the matter hung;
He knew the man; the colt would fetch its price;
He gave them line: and how by chance at last
(It might be May or April, he forgot,
The last of April or the first of May)
He found the bailiff riding by the farm,
And, talking from the point, he drew him in,
And there he mellow'd all his heart with ale,
Until they closed a bargain, hand in hand.

'Then, while I breathed in sight of haven, he—
Poor fellow, could he help it?—recommenced,

And ran through all the coltish chronicle,
Wild Will, Black Bess, Tantivy, Tallyho,
Reform, White Rose, Bellerophon, the Jilt,
Arbaces, and Phenomenon, and the rest,
Till, not to die a listener, I arose,
And with me Philip, talking still; and so
We turn'd our foreheads from the falling sun,
And following our own shadows thrice as long
As when they follow'd us from Philip's door,
Arrived, and found the sun of sweet content
Re-risen in Katie's eyes, and all things well.

I steal by lawns and grassy plots,
I slide by hazel covers;
I move the sweet forget-me-nots
That grow for happy lovers.

I slip, I slide, I gloom, I glance,
Among my skimming swallows;
I make the netted sunbeam dance
Against my sandy shallows.

I murmur under moon and stars
In brambly wildernesses;
I linger by my shingly bars;
I loiter round my cresses:

And out again I curve and flow
To join the brimming river:
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever.

Yes, men may come and go; and these are gone,
All gone. My dearest brother, Edmund, sleeps,
Not by the well-known stream and rustic spire,
But unfamiliar Arno, and the dome
Of Brunelleschi; sleeps in peace: and he,

Poor Philip, of all his lavish waste of words
Remains the lean P. W. on his tomb:
I scraped the lichen from it: Katie walks
By the long wash of Australasian seas
Far off, and holds her head to other stars,
And breathes in converse seasons. All are gone.

So Lawrence Aylmer, seated on a stile
In the long hedge, and rolling in his mind
Old waifs of rhyme, and bowing o'er the brook
A tonsured head in middle age forlorn,
Mused, and was mute. On a sudden a low breath
Of tender air made tremble in the hedge
The fragile bindweed-bells and briony rings;
And he look'd up. There stood a maiden near,
Waiting to pass. In much amaze he stared
On eyes a bashful azure, and on hair
In gloss and hue the chestnut, when the shell
Divides threefold to show the fruit within:
Then, wondering, ask'd her, 'Are you from the farm?'
'Yes,' answer'd she. 'Pray stay a little: pardon me;
What do they call you?' 'Katie.' 'That were strange.
What surname?' 'Willows.' 'No!' 'That is my name.'
'Indeed!' and here he look'd so self-perplex'd,
That Katie laugh'd, and laughing blush'd, till he
Laugh'd also, but as one before he wakes,
Who feels a glimmering strangeness in his dream.
Then looking at her; 'Too happy, fresh and fair,
Too fresh and fair in our sad world's best bloom,
To be the ghost of one who bore your name
About these meadows, twenty years ago.'

'Have you not heard?' said Katie, 'we came back.
We bought the farm we tenanted before.
Am I so like her? so they said on board.
Sir, if you knew her in her English days,
My mother, as it seems you did, the days
That most she loves to talk of, come with me.
My brother James is in the harvest field:
But she—you will be welcome—O, come in!'

GOBLIN MARKET

MORNING and evening
Maids heard the goblins cry:
'Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:
Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpecked cherries,
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries,
Wild free-born cranberries,
Crab-apples, dewberries,
Pine-apples, blackberries,
Apricots, strawberries;—
All ripe together
In summer weather,—
Morns that pass by,
Fair eves that fly;
Come buy, come buy:
Our grapes fresh from the vine,

Pomegranates full and fine,
Dates and sharp bullaces,
Rare pears and greengages,
Damsons and bilberries,
Taste them and try:
Currants and gooseberries,
Bright-fire-like barberries,
Figs to fill your mouth,
Citrons from the South,
Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;
Come buy, come buy.'

Evening by evening
Among the brookside rushes,
Laura bowed her head to hear,
Lizzie veiled her blushes:
Crouching close together
In the cooling weather,
With clasping arms and cautioning lips,
With tingling cheeks and finger tips.
'Lie close,' Laura said,
Pricking up her golden head:
'We must not look at goblin men,
We must not buy their fruits:
Who knows upon what soil they fed
Their hungry thirsty roots?'
'Come buy,' call the goblins
Hobbling down the glen.
'Oh,' cried Lizzie, 'Laura, Laura,
You should not peep at goblin men.'
Lizzie covered up her eyes,
Covered close lest they should look;

Laura reared her glossy head,
And whispered like the restless brook:
'Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie,
Down the glen tramp little men
One hauls a basket,
One bears a plate,
One lugs a golden dish
Of many pounds' weight.
How fair the vine must grow
Whose grapes are so luscious;
How warm the wind must blow
Through those fruit bushes.'
'No,' said Lizzie: 'No, no, no;
Their offers should not charm us,
Their evil gifts would harm us.'
She thrust a dimpled finger
In each ear, shut eyes and ran:
Curious Laura chose to linger
Wondering at each merchant man.
One had a cat's face,
One whisked a tail,
One tramped at a rat's pace,
One crawled like a snail,
One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,
One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry.
She heard a voice like voice of doves
Cooing all together:
They sounded kind and full of loves
In the pleasant weather.

Laura stretched her gleaming neck
Like a rush-imbedded swan,



"Buy from us with a golden curl"

Like a lily from the beck,
Like a moonlit poplar branch,
Like a vessel at the launch
When its last restraint is gone.

Backwards up the mossy glen
Turned and trooped the goblin men,
With their shrill repeated cry,
'Come buy, come buy.'
When they reached where Laura was
They stood stock still upon the moss,
Leering at each other,
Brother with queer brother;
Signalling each other,
Brother with sly brother.
One set his basket down,
One reared his plate;
One began to weave a crown
Of tendrils, leaves, and rough nuts brown
(Men sell not such in any town);
One heaved the golden weight
Of dish and fruit to offer her:
'Come buy, come buy,' was still their cry.
Laura stared but did not stir,
Longed but had no money.
The whisk-tailed merchant bade her taste
In tones as smooth as honey,
The cat-fac'd purred,
The rat-paced spoke a word
Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was heard;
One parrot-voiced and jolly
Cried 'Pretty Goblin' still for 'Pretty Polly';

One whistled like a bird.
But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste:
'Good Folk, I have no coin;
To take were to purloin:
I have no copper in my purse,
I have no silver either,
And all my gold is on the furze
That shakes in windy weather
Above the rusty heather.'
'You have much gold upon your head,'
They answered all together:
'Buy from us with a golden curl.'
She clipped a precious golden lock,
She dropped a tear more rare than pearl,
Then sucked their fruit globes fair or red.
Sweeter than honey from the rock,
Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,
Clearer than water flowed that juice;
She never tasted such before,
How should it cloy with length of use?
She sucked and sucked and sucked the more
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;
She sucked until her lips were sore;
Then flung the emptied rinds away
But gathered up one kernel stone,
And knew not was it night or day
As she turned home alone.

Lizzie met her at the gate
Full of wise upbraidings:
'Dear, you should not stay so late,
Twilight is not good for maidens;

Should not loiter in the glen
In the haunts of goblin men.
Do you not remember Jeanie,
How she met them in the moonlight,
Took their gifts both choice and many,
Ate their fruits and wore their flowers
Plucked from bowers
Where summer ripens at all hours?
But ever in the moonlight
She pined and pined away;
Sought them by night and day,
Found them no more, but dwindled and grew grey;
Then fell with the first snow,
While to this day no grass will grow
Where she lies low:
I planted daisies there a year ago
That never blow.
You should not loiter so.'
'Nay, hush,' said Laura:
'Nay, hush, my sister:
I ate and ate my fill,
Yet my mouth waters still:
To-morrow night I will
Buy more'; and kissed her.
'Have done with sorrow;
I 'll bring you plums to-morrow
Fresh on their mother twigs,
Cherries worth getting;
You cannot think what figs
My teeth have met in,
What melons icy-cold

Piled on a dish of gold
Too huge for me to hold,
What peaches with a velvet nap,
Pellucid grapes without one seed:
Odorous indeed must be the mead
Whereon they grow, and pure the wave they drink
With lilies at the brink,
And sugar-sweet their sap.'

Golden head by golden head,
Like two pigeons in one nest
Folded in each other's wings,
They lay down in their curtained bed:
Like two blossoms on one stem,
Like two flakes of new fall'n snow,
Like two wands of ivory
Tipped with gold for awful kings.
Moon and stars gazed in at them,
Wind sang to them lullaby,
Lumbering owls forebore to fly,
Not a bat flapped to and fro
Round their nest:
Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
Locked together in one nest.

Early in the morning
When the first cock crowed his warning,
Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
Laura rose with Lizzie:
Fetched in honey, milked the cows,
Aired and set to rights the house,

Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
Next churned butter, whipped up cream,
Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;
Talked as modest maidens should:
Lizzie with an open heart,
Laura in an absent dream,
One content, one sick in part;
One warbling for the mere bright day's delight,
One longing for the night.

At length slow evening came:
They went with pitchers to the reedy brook;
Lizzie most placid in her look,
Laura most like a leaping flame.
They drew the gurgling water from its deep.
Lizzie plucked purple and rich golden flags,
Then turning homeward said: 'The sunset flushes
Those furthest loftiest crags;
Come, Laura, not another maiden lags.
No wilful squirrel wags,
The beasts and birds are fast asleep.'
But Laura loitered still among the rushes,
And said the bank was steep.
And said the hour was early still,
The dew not fall'n, the wind not chill:
Listening ever, but not catching
The customary cry,
'Come buy, come buy,'
With its iterated jingle
Of sugar-baited words:

Not for all her watching
Once discerning even one goblin
Racing, whisking, tumbling, hobbling—
Let alone the herds
That used to tramp along the glen,
In groups or single,
Of brisk fruit-merchant men.

Till Lizzie urged, 'O Laura, come;
I hear the fruit-call, but I dare not look:
You should not loiter longer at this brook:
Come with me home.
The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,
Each glow-worm winks her spark,
Let us get home before the night grows dark:
For clouds may gather
Though this is summer weather,
Put out the lights and drench us through;
Then if we lost our way what should we do?'

Laura turned cold as stone
To find her sister heard that cry alone,
That goblin cry,
'Come buy our fruits, come buy.'
Must she then buy no more such dainty fruit?
Must she no more such succous pasture find,
Gone deaf and blind?
Her tree of life drooped from the root:
She said not one word in her heart's sore ache:
But peering thro' the dimness, nought discerning,
Trudged home, her pitcher dripping all the way;
So crept to bed, and lay

Silent till Lizzie slept;
Then sat up in a passionate yearning,
And gnashed her teeth for baulked desire, and wept
As if her heart would break.

Day after day, night after night,
Laura kept watch in vain
In sullen silence of exceeding pain.
She never caught again the goblin cry,
'Come buy, come buy';—
She never spied the goblin men
Hawking their fruit along the glen:
But when the moon waxed bright
Her hair grew thin and grey;
She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn
To swift decay and burn
Her fire away.

One day remembering her kernel-stone
She set it by a wall that faced the south;
Dewed it with tears, hoped for a root,
Watched for a waxing shoot,
But there came none.
It never saw the sun,
It never felt the trickling moisture run:
While with sunk eyes and faded mouth
She dreamed of melons, as a traveller sees
False waves in desert drouth
With shade of leaf-crowned trees,
And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze.
She no more swept the house,
Tended the fowls or cows,

Fetched honey, kneaded cakes of wheat,
Brought water from the brook:
But sat down listless in the chimney-nook
And would not eat.

Tender Lizzie could not bear
To watch her sister's cankerous care,
Yet not to share.
She night and morning
Caught the goblins' cry:
'Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy':—
Beside the brook, along the glen,
She heard the tramp of goblin men,
The voice and stir
Poor Laura could not hear;
Longed to buy fruit to comfort her,
But feared to pay too dear.
She thought of Jeanie in her grave,
Who should have been a bride;
But who for joys brides hope to have
Fell sick and died
In her gay prime,
In earliest winter time,
With the first glazing rime,
With the first snow-fall of crisp winter time.

Till Laura dwindling
Seemed knocking at Death's door.
Then Lizzie weighed no more
Better and worse;

But put a silver penny in her purse,
Kissed Laura, crossed the heath with clumps of furze
At twilight, halted by the brook:
And for the first time in her life
Began to listen and look.

Laughed every goblin
When they spied her peeping:
Came towards her hobbling,
Flying, running, leaping,
Puffing and blowing,
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
Clucking and gobbling,
Mopping and mowing,
Full of airs and graces,
Pulling wry faces,
Demure grimaces,
Cat-like and rat-like,
Ratel- and wombat-like,
Snail-paced in a hurry,
Parrot-voiced and whistler,
Helter skelter, hurry skurry,
Chattering like magpies,
Fluttering like pigeons,
Gliding like fishes,—
Hugged her and kissed her:
Squeezed and caressed her:
Stretched up their dishes,
Panniers, and plates:
'Look at our apples
Russet and dun,

Bob at our cherries,
Bite at our peaches,
Citrons and dates,
Grapes for the asking,
Pears red with basking
Out in the sun,
Plums on their twigs;
Pluck them and suck them,—
Pomegranates, figs.'

'Good folk,' said Lizzie,
Mindful of Jeanie:
'Give me much and many':
Held out her apron,
Tossed them her penny.
'Nay, take a seat with us,
Honour and eat with us,'
They answered grinning:
'Our feast is but beginning.
Night yet is early,
Warm and dew-pearly,
Wakeful and starry:
Such fruits as these
No man can carry;
Half their bloom would fly,
Half their dew would dry,
Half their flavour would pass by.
Sit down and feast with us,
Be welcome guest with us,
Cheer you and rest with us.'—
'Thank you,' said Lizzie: 'But one waits
At home alone for me:

So without further parleying,
If you will not sell me any
Of your fruits though much and many,
Give me back my silver penny
I tossed you for a fee.'—
They began to scratch their pates,
No longer wagging, purring,
But visibly demurring,
Grunting and snarling.
One called her proud,
Cross-grained, uncivil;
Their tones waxed loud,
Their looks were evil.
Lashing their tails
They trod and hustled her,
Elbowed and jostled her,
Clawed with their nails,
Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,
Tore her gown and soiled her stocking,
Twitched her hair out by the roots,
Stamped upon her tender feet,
Held her hands and squeezed their fruits
Against her mouth to make her eat.

White and golden Lizzie stood,
Like a lily in a flood,—
Like a rock of blue-veined stone
Lashed by tides obstreperously,—
Like a beacon left alone
In a hoary roaring sea,
Sending up a golden fire,—
Like a fruit-crowned orange-tree

White with blossoms honey-sweet
Sore beset by wasp and bee,—
Like a royal virgin town
Topped with gilded dome and spire
Close beleagured by a fleet
Mad to tug her standard down.
One may lead a horse to water,
Twenty cannot make him drink.
Though the goblins cuffed and caught her,
Coaxed and fought her,
Bullied and besought her,
Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,
Kicked and knocked her,
Mauled and mocked her,
Lizzie uttered not a word;
Would not open lip from lip
Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
But laughed in heart to feel the drip
Of juice that syruped all her face,
And lodged in dimples of her chin,
And streaked her neck which quaked like curd.
At last the evil people,
Worn out by her resistance,
Flung back her penny, kicked their fruit
Along whichever road they took,
Not leaving root or stone or shoot;
Some writhed into the ground,
Some dived into the brook
With ring and ripple,
Some scudded on the gale without a sound,
Some vanished in the distance.

In a smart, ache, tingle,
Lizzie went her way;
Knew not was it night or day;
Sprang up the bank, tore thro' the furze,
Threaded copse and dingle,
And heard her penny jingle
Bouncing in her purse,—
Its bounce was music to her ear.
She ran and ran
As if she feared some goblin man
Dogged her with gibe or curse
Or something worse:
But not one goblin skurried after,
Nor was she pricked by fear;
The kind heart made her windy-paced
That urged her home quite out of breath with haste
And inward laughter.

She cried, 'Laura,' up the garden,
'Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me;
For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant men.'

Laura started from her chair,
Flung her arms up in the air,

Clutched her hair:
'Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted
For my sake the fruit forbidden?
Must your light like mine be hidden,
Your young life like mine be wasted,
Undone in mine undoing,
And ruined in my ruin,
Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden?'—
She clung about her sister,
Kissed and kissed and kissed her:
Tears once again
Refreshed her shrunken eyes,
Dropping like rain
After long sultry drouth;
Shaking with anguish, fear, and pain,
She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth.
Her lips began to scorch,
That juice was wormwood to her tongue,
She loathed the feast:
Writhing as one possessed she leaped and sung,
Rent all her robe, and wrung
Her hands in lamentable haste,
And beat her breast.
Her locks streamed like the torch
Borne by a racer at full speed,
Or like the mane of horses in their flight,
Or like an eagle when she stems the light
Straight towards the sun,
Or like a caged thing freed,
Or like a flying flag when armies run.

Swift fire spread through her veins, knocked at
her heart,

Met the fire smouldering there
And overbore its lesser flame;
She gorged on bitterness without a name:
Ah fool, to choose such part
Of soul-consuming care!
Sense failed in the mortal strife:
Like the watch-tower of a town
Which an earthquake shatters down,
Like a lightning-stricken mast,
Like a wind-uprooted tree
Spun about,
Like a foam-topped waterspout
Cast down headlong in the sea,
She fell at last;
Pleasure past and anguish past,
Is it death or is it life?
Life out of death.
That night long, Lizzie watched by her,
Counted her pulse's flagging stir,
Felt for her breath,
Held water to her lips, and cooled her face
With tears and fanning leaves.
But when the first birds chirped about their eaves,
And early reapers plodded to the place
Of golden sheaves,
And dew-wet grass
Bowed in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
And new buds with new day
Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream,
Laura awoke as from a dream,
Laughed in the innocent old way,
Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice;



Her gleaming locks showed not one thread of grey,
Her breath was sweet as May,
And light danced in her eyes.

Days, weeks, months, years
Afterwards, when both were wives
With children of their own;
Their mother-hearts beset with fears,
Their lives bound up in tender lives;
Laura would call the little ones
And tell them of her early prime,
Those pleasant days long gone
Of not-returning time:
Would talk about the haunted glen,
The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,
Their fruits like honey to the throat
But poison in the blood
(Men sell not such in any town):
Would tell them how her sister stood
In deadly peril to do her good,
And win the fiery antidote:
Then joining hands to little hands
Would bid them cling together,—
'For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands.'

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY

Page 9. *THE BALLAD OF CHEVY CHASE.*—This well-known story-poem is taken from Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, published in 1765. The volume contains, with other poems, a collection of ballads such as used to be sung or recited in a kind of monotone by strolling performers who went from house to house with their sorgs old and new. 'The song or chant,' we read, 'when given by a professed performer was usually accompanied by a harp, guitar, fiddle, or other suitable instrument. . . . The ballad would be given in the huge chimney-nook of a farm-house or on the bench of a village green, to some casual knot of listeners, in such irregular and imperfect fashion as the memory and voice of some old woman or peasant youth could attain. But the printer encroached more and more on the power and privileges of the minstrel, whose profession grew ever poorer and poorer, till at last he is described in an Act of the time of Elizabeth as among "rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars."' The version of *Chevy Chase* here given is said to differ from the original old song, but is here adopted as being the best-known form of the ballad. The poem is, of course, historical, but only in a restricted sense. Some of the incidents and verses are borrowed from the ballads on 'The Battle of Otterbourne' relating to an encounter between Percy and Douglas in 1388. But for the rest all is confusion, and the historical value of the ballad lies in its presentment of a typical picture of Border warfare.

Page 21. *Nymphidia.*—Michael Drayton, the author of this

poem, lived in the time of Shakespeare, and was, moreover, a native of the same county—namely, Warwickshire. He endeavoured to make poetry of history and geography, for he wrote several long poems on various events in our national story, and in 1613 published his *Polyolbion*, a poetical description of his native land in nearly sixteen thousand lines, with maps of counties and topographical notes. But he is now chiefly remembered for his fine *Ballad of Agincourt* and the poem *Nymphidia*, which is, however, not so well known as it ought to be. Not only does this latter poem possess intrinsic interest and charm, but it is connected with (1) Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which Drayton's Queen Mab is named Titania, and with (2) the old nursery story of Tom Thumb, King Arthur's dwarf. Those readers who are familiar with Shakespeare's play, and with the facts of the nursery tale, will be interested to trace the connections and to unravel the fairy mythology from which Shakespeare and other Elizabethans derived a considerable amount of inspiration.

Page 49. *THE ANCIENT MARINER.*—Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in 1772 and died in 1834. 'All that he did as a poet,' writes a well-known critic, 'might be bound in twenty pages, but it should be bound in pure gold.' This is an extreme opinion, but it will serve to remind us that Coleridge's output as a poet was by no means large when compared with that of other poets of equivalent rank.

After having tried to make out the story of the *Ancient Mariner* by himself, the student may find useful the following summary by Professor Dowden :—

'Throughout the poem the horror is either itself a form of beauty or is constantly relieved by the presence of strangeness in beauty. From the freshness and fairness of the bride, red as a rose, and the mirth of the bridal minstrelsy, we pass by swift and yet gentle gradations to the tyranny of the storm-blast (but this is a lordly winged thing), to the gleam of the iceberg mast-high

and "as green as emerald," to the moonshine glimmering white through the midnight haze, to the stagnant ocean with its glare by day, and at night the reeling death-fires, green, white, and blue. Even the nightmare Life-in-Death has a beauty in horror. Even the water-snakes, seen under the moving moon, rearing and coiling in shining tracks and throwing off the hoary light in elvish flakes, are so beautiful and so joyous that they enforce an instant and a redeeming blessing. And then there comes the gentleness of sleep, and the refreshment of rain, and the quickening of wind. The shipmen may be a ghastly crew, but it is happy spirits that lift up the bodies, and with what melodious sounds they fill the air as they depart at dawn:

> "Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
> I heard the sky-lark sing;
> Sometimes all little birds that are,
> How they seemed to fill the sea and air
> With their sweet jargoning!"

'At last, after all the stress and strain, with what a soft subsidence of pain and what a sweet surprise of joy, lighthouse and harbour-bar, the familiar hill, the little kirk are once more seen, while a new wonder of beauty is added to all that is familiar by the luminous seraphs who stand and signal to the land.'

The poem is one of the most musical in the language, and the student ought to read it aloud in order to catch the cadence of the syllables. Those who enjoy *The Ancient Mariner* should read next Coleridge's poem entitled *Christabel.*

Page 76. *THE BATTLE OF FLODDEN.*—It is hoped that this passage from one of the best of Sir Walter Scott's poetical works will lead the student to make acquaintance with the whole poem. *Marmion* was published in 1808, so that it belongs to the earlier and more vigorous period of the poet, who was born in 1771 and died in 1832.

Many poets of the first rank have given us stirring battle-pieces,

but this of Sir Walter Scott is one of the finest of all. A great critic has said: 'Of all the poetical battles which have been fought, from the days of Homer onward, there is none at all comparable, for interest and animation—for breadth of drawing and magnificence of effect, with this of Scott's. . . . From the moment the author gets in sight of Flodden field he does not once flag or grow tedious. . . . There is a flight of five or six hundred lines in which he never stoops his wing nor wavers in his course, but carries the reader forward with a more rapid, sustained and lofty movement than any epic bard that we can at present remember.

The battle was fought on September 9, 1513. Scott's account of the fight is, on the whole, in accordance with those of the most trustworthy chroniclers. James had a force of 50,000 men, well appointed, especially in artillery. The Earl of Surrey, who commanded the English in the absence of the King, who was in France, had collected at Wooler a strong force of billmen, archers, and infantry, but had comparatively few nobles. He found King James posted on Flodden Hill, facing southwards, and by crossing the Till which defended the Scottish position on their left, cut off the King from Scotland. James faced about and led his men down the hill to meet the foe, so that the battle took place to the north of Flodden Edge.

'The right of the English,' writes a historian, 'was under Surrey's sons, the Admiral, and Edmund Howard; the centre under Surrey himself, and the left under Stanley. Dacre was with the horse in reserve. Of the Scots, Huntley and Home with the Borderers (left wing) opposed Surrey's sons; James was in the centre, and Lennox and Argyle fronted Stanley. The English right came first into action, and was rudely shaken, but Home's men separated and began to plunder. This enabled the Admiral to rally, and he attacked and threw into confusion Crawford and Montrose on the Scottish left centre; meanwhile

the fire of the archers on the English left had broken the Highlanders, and Stanley, sweeping them away, made a decisive charge on the flank and rear of the Scots centre which was pressing Surrey hard. This formed into a rough circle round the King, and was attacked on all sides till nightfall, when the few survivors escaped.'

Page 95. *THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE.*—Mrs. Browning, whose maiden name was Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, was born in 1806 and died in 1861. She married the poet Robert Browning in 1846. Her finest work was done after her marriage. In her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* she tells of the wonderful change which love brought into her life. The married poets lived in Italy, and many of their poems were inspired by their connection with that country. Mrs. Browning's longest poem, *Aurora Leigh*, has been described as 'a novel in verse,' and many of the incidents in the story are founded upon events in the life of the authoress.

The Romaunt of the Page is written in imitation of the old poems of a ballad character, and contains, as we have seen, a few archaic or old-fashioned expressions such as are found in poems of that kind (see *Chevy Chase*). It is not offered as one of the best specimens of the poet's work, but because of its simple and pathetic narrative.

Those who like the story of this poem here given are recommended to read *The Rhyme of the Duchess May*, *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, *The Romance of the Swan's Nest*, and *Cowper's Grave*, before commencing *Aurora Leigh*.

Page 109. *OSSEO AND OWEENEE.*—This story-poem is taken from what is regarded by many as the finest poem written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, namely, *The Song of Hiawatha*. It will be seen that it has no internal connection with the tale of Hiawatha, the Indian chief. Indeed, it is supposed to have been

told at his wedding-feast by the native story-teller, and is an excellent example of the poetic Indian legends, of which Longfellow makes good use in his poem. Many of them he drew from the work of H. R. Schoolcraft, who made a special study of Indian folk-lore. Concerning *The Song of Hiawatha*, which the student ought to read in its entirety, one writer says: 'It has a unique beauty and fascination. As charming as a fairy-tale, there is a chord of wild melancholy vibrating through it. Figures strange, beautiful, and terrible peer at us out of the tameless wilderness that is the background; savage beasts enter into the story and play their part like the human characters; Nature itself is humanised, and the human creatures seem at times to be resolved into the forces of Nature.'

Though Longfellow is an American poet, he is better known to English readers than the majority of their own writers of verse. This is partly because of the simplicity of his work, and partly because he appeals to the interests and affections of ordinary people. His shorter poems, such as *The Village Blacksmith*, *The Psalm of Life*, *The Wreck of the Hesperus*, etc., are among the first to be learned in childhood.

Page 135. *KING ROBERT OF SICILY.*—This poem, founded upon an old legend, is one of the many to be found in the works of Longfellow which bear evidence of the poet's close and continued study of the history and literature of mediæval Europe.

Not long before the Normans conquered England they succeeded in gaining a foothold in the south of Italy, where they established a feudal state which ultimately included the island of Sicily, and had its centre in the city of Naples. The chief city of Sicily under Norman rule was Palermo.

Page 143. *HORATIUS.*—This poem is one of the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, written by Lord Macaulay, who was born in 1800

and died in 1859. In his preface to the poem he writes: 'The following ballad is supposed to have been made about a hundred and twenty years after the war which it celebrates, and just before the taking of Rome by the Gauls. The author seems to have been an honest citizen, proud of the military glory of his country, sick of the disputes of factions, and much given to pining after good old times which had never really existed.'

The story of Horatius is one of the early Roman legends, of which several versions are in existence. A more ancient account than that followed by Macaulay, makes Horatius perish in the waters of the river. The legend was a favourite one among the Romans, and was often recited in funeral orations delivered at the obsequies of members of the noble family which traced its descent from the hero of the bridge.

A full understanding of the details of this poem is only possible to those who are familiar with early Roman history and geography. The central idea and the course of action can, however, be perfectly understood without this knowledge.

Page 169. *SOHRAB AND RUSTUM.*—Matthew Arnold, the author of this and the poem immediately following, was born in 1822 and died in 1885. He was the son of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, who has been described as 'the prince of schoolmasters,' and was educated at Winchester, Rugby, and Oxford. He became an Inspector of Schools, and was made Professor of Poetry at Oxford. His poetic output was not large, but his work is for the most part of excellent quality, and *Sohrab and Rustum* is one of his best poems. It was published in 1853 along with the following note:—

'The story of Sohrab and Rustum is told in Sir John Malcolm's *History of Persia* as follows: The young Sohrab was the fruit of one of Rustum's early alliances. He had left his mother and sought fame under the banners of Afrasiab, whose armies he commanded, and soon obtained a renown beyond that of all con-

temporary heroes but his father. He had carried death and dismay into the ranks of the Persians, and had terrified the boldest warriors of that country, before Rustum encountered him, which at last that hero resolved to do under a feigned name. They met three times. The first time they parted by mutual consent, though Sohrab had the advantage; the second, the youth obtained a victory, but granted life to his unknown father; the third was fatal to Sohrab, who when writhing in the pangs of death, warned his conqueror to shun the vengeance that is inspired by parental woes, and bade him dread the rage of the mighty Rustum, who must soon learn that he had slain his son Sohrab. These words, we are told, were as death to the aged hero; and when he recovered from a trance, he called in despair for proofs of what Sohrab had said. The afflicted and dying youth tore open his mail, and showed his father a seal which his mother had placed on his arm when she discovered to him the secret of his birth, and bade him seek his father. The sight of his own signet rendered Rustum quite frantic; he cursed himself, attempting to put an end to his existence, and was only prevented by the efforts of his expiring son. After Sohrab's death he burnt his tents and all his goods, and carried the corpse to Seistan where it was interred. The army of Turan was, agreeably to the last request of Sohrab, permitted to cross the Oxus unmolested. To reconcile us to the improbability of this tale, we are informed that Rustum could have no idea his son was in existence. The mother of Sohrab had written to tell him her child was a daughter, fearing to lose her darling infant if she revealed the truth; and Rustum, as before stated, fought under a feigned name, a usage not uncommon in the chivalrous combats of those days.'

The story of the poem belongs to the semi-mythical period of Persian history. Rustum embodies all the national ideals of a hero and distinguishes himself especially in the combats of the Persians with Afrasiab, the leader of the wild Turanians, or

Scythians or Tartars. The 'history' of the period is not material to the understanding and appreciation of the poem, which makes its appeal to us because of the moving situation that is described so well by the poet.

The student should note in his second reading of the poem (1) the vivid word-pictures, in the delineation of which Arnold excels; (2) the many striking similes, some of which have little connection with the course of the narrative, but are of great intrinsic beauty; (3) the felicity of the language and the frequent matching of the sound with the sense—*e.g.*

'Their shields
Dash'd with a clang together, and a din
Rose, such as that the sinewy woodcutters
Make often in the forest's heart at morn,
Of hewing axes, crashing trees.'

'As on some partridge in the corn a hawk,
That long has tower'd in the airy clouds,
Drops like a plummet.'

Page 202. *TRISTRAM AND ISEULT.*—Matthew Arnold's note to this poem runs as follows:—

'In the court of his uncle, King Marc, the King of Cornwall, who at this time resided at the Castle of Tyntagel, Tristram became expert in all knightly exercises. The King of Ireland, at Tristram's solicitations, promised to bestow his daughter Iseult in marriage on King Marc. The mother of Iseult gave to her daughter's confidante a philtre, or love-potion, to be administered on the day of her nuptials. Of this beverage Tristram and Iseult, on their voyage to Cornwall, unfortunately partook. Its influence, during the remainder of their lives, regulated the affections and destiny of the lovers. After the arrival of Tristram and Iseult in Cornwall, and the nuptials of the latter with King Marc, a great part of the romance is occupied with their contrivances to procure secret interviews. Tristram, being forced to leave Cornwall on account of the

displeasure of his uncle, repaired to Brittany, where lived Iseult of the White Hands. He married her more out of gratitude than love. Afterwards he proceeded to the dominions of Arthur, which became the theatre of unnumbered exploits.

'Tristram, subsequent to these events, returned to Brittany, and to his long-neglected wife. There, being wounded and sick, he was soon reduced to the lowest ebb. In this situation, he despatched a confidant to the Queen of Cornwall, to try if he could induce her to follow him to Brittany.'

This story is not told directly in Arnold's poem, but the careful reader can readily put it together. The unity of the poem is marred by the concluding portion, which is somewhat long drawn out and not relevant to the central idea; though in parts it has a certain pictorial beauty of its own, as in the account of the children at play.

Tennyson also tells of the famous lovers in the idyll known as *The Last Tournament*, but he ends the story in a different manner. After his marriage with Iseult of Brittany, Tristram crossed the sea, and in a tournament at the Court of King Arthur won a ruby carcanet, which he carried to Iseult of Cornwall as a love gift. The Queen hazards the guess that the ornament is

> 'The collar of some Order, which our King
> Hath newly founded, all for thee, my soul,
> For thee, to yield thee grace beyond thy peers.
>
> '"Not so, my Queen," he said, "but the red fruit
> Grown on a magic oak-tree in mid-heaven,
> And won by Tristram as a tourney-prize,
> And hither brought by Tristram for his last
> Love-offering and peace-offering unto thee."
>
> 'He rose, he turn'd, then, flinging round her neck,
> Claspt it, and cried "Thine Order, O my Queen!"
> But, while he bow'd to kiss the jewell'd throat,
> Out of the dark, just as the lips had touch'd,
> Behind him rose a shadow and a shriek—
> "Mark's way," said Mark, and clove him thro' the brain.'

Page 231. *MORTE D'ARTHUR.*—Alfred, Lord Tennyson,

the author of this and the following poem, belongs properly to the mid-Victorian time. He was born in 1808 and died in 1892. This poem was first published in 1842, and its presence here will serve to remind us that the poet's longest and most sustained work is a series of 'idylls' in which are pictured the times of Arthur, the semi-mythical King who reigned in the southern portion of Britain in the early days.

Tennyson himself said of these poems that they were 'faint Homeric echoes, nothing worth.' Like Homer, he keeps certain epithets for certain people and things—*e.g.* Sir Bedivere is always 'the bold'—and he repeats phrases and sentences with little or no alteration—*e.g.* the arm which rose from the bosom of the lake is

> 'Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful';

and we have a recurrence of the lines—

> 'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
> And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

This poem deals, of course, with the closing scene in the life of the great King after his final battle with a traitor knight, Sir Modred. The careful reader can piece together from it a good deal of the story of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

Tennyson wrote a note on this poem which ran as follows:—

'How much of history we have in the story of Arthur is doubtful. Let not my readers press too hardly on details, whether for history or for allegory. Some think that King Arthur may be taken to typify Conscience. He is, anyhow, meant to be a man who spent himself in the cause of honour, duty, and self-sacrifice, who felt and aspired with his nobler knights, though with a stronger and a clearer conscience than any of them "reverencing his conscience as his King." "There was no such perfect man since Adam," as an old writer says, "Major praeteritis majorque futuris Regibus."'

Page 241. *THE BROOK.*—The lyric which runs through this poem is usually printed alone in books of Tennysonian selections. It is here given in its original setting—a story-poem of English life, not of very high poetic value or absorbing interest as narrative, but possessing a certain amount of rustic charm, and adorned with a few lines and phrases which are often quoted—*e.g.*

'By the long wash of Australasian seas.'

Page 250. *GOBLIN MARKET.*—This poem is from the pen of Christina G. Rossetti, who was born in 1830 and died in 1899. She belonged to a distinguished family, and was the sister of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the famous poet and painter. Her poetic work is not great in quantity, but she takes high rank among women writers of verse.

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