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THE WANDERERS · BEING
THE PROLOGUE TO THE
EARTHLY PARADISE · BY
WILLIAM MORRIS

WITH NOTES

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

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INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM MORRIS, one of the most eminent imaginative writers of the Victorian age, differs from most other poets and men of letters in two ways—first, he did great work in many other things as well as in literature; secondly, he had beliefs of his own about the meaning and conduct of life, about all that men think and do and make, very different from those of ordinary people, and he carried out these views in his writings as well as in all the other work he did throughout his life.

He was born in 1834. His father, a member of a business firm in the City of London, was a wealthy man and lived in Essex, in a country house with large gardens and fields belonging to it, on the edge of Epping Forest. Until the age of thirteen Morris was at home among a large family of brothers and sisters. He delighted in the country life and especially in the Forest, which is one of the most romantic parts of England, and which he made the scene of many real and imaginary adventures. From fourteen to eighteen he was at school at Marlborough among the Wiltshire downs, in a country full of beauty and history, and close to another of the ancient forests of England, that of

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Savernake He proceeded from school to Exeter College, Oxford, where he soon formed a close friendship with a remarkable set of young men of his own age; chief among these, and Morris's closest friend for the rest of his life, was Edward Burne-Jones, the painter. Study of the works of John Ruskin confirmed them in the admiration which they already felt for the life and art of the Middle Ages. In the summer vacation of 1855 the two friends went to Northern France to see the beautiful towns and splendid churches with which that country had been filled between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries; and there they made up their minds that they cared for art more than for anything else, such as wealth or ease or the opinion of the world, and that as soon as they left Oxford they would become artists. By art they meant the making of beauty for the adornment and enrichment of human life, and as artists they meant to strive against all that was ugly or mean or untruthful in the life of their own time.

Art, as they understood it, is one single thing covering the whole of life but practised in many special forms that differ one from another. Among these many forms of art there are two of principal importance. One of the two is the art which is concerned with the making and adorning of the houses in which men and women live; that is to say, architecture, with all its attendant arts of decoration, including sculpture, painting, the designing and ornamenting of metal, wood and glass, carpets, paper-hangings, woven, dyed and embroidered cloths of all kinds, and all the furniture

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which a house may have for use or pleasure. The other is the art which is concerned with the making and adorning of stories in prose and verse. Both of these kinds of art were practised by Morris throughout his life. The former was his principal occupation; he made his living by it, and built up in it a business which alone made him famous, and which has had a great influence towards bringing more beauty into daily domestic life in England and in other countries also. His profession was thus that of a manufacturer, designer, and decorator. When he had to describe himself by a single word, he called himself a designer. But it is the latter branch of his art which principally concerns us now, the art of a maker and adorer of stories. He became famous in this kind of art also, both in prose and verse, as a romance-writer and a poet. But he spoke of it as play rather than work, and although he spent much time and great pains on it, he regarded it as relaxation from the harder and more constant work of his life, which was carrying on the business of designing, painting, weaving, dyeing, printing and other occupations of that kind. In later life he also gave much of his time to political and social work, with the object of bringing back mankind into a path from which they had strayed since the end of the Middle Ages, and creating a state of society in which art, by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user, might be naturally, easily, and universally produced.

Even as a boy Morris had been noted for his love of reading and inventing tales; but he did not begin to write any until he had been for a

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couple of years at Oxford. His earliest poems and his earliest written prose tales belong to the same year, 1855, in which he determined to make art his profession. The first of either that he published appeared in the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, which was started and managed by him and his friends in 1856. In 1858, after he had left Oxford, he brought out a volume of poems called, after the title of the first poem in the book, "The Defence of Guenevere." Soon afterwards he founded, with some of his old Oxford friends and others whom he had made in London, among whom Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the leading spirit, the firm of Morris and Company, manufacturers and decorators. His business, in which he was the principal and finally the sole partner, took up the main part of his time. He had also married, and built himself a beautiful small house in Kent, the decoration of which went busily on for several years. Among all these other occupations he almost gave up writing stories, but never ceased reading and thinking about them. In 1865 he came back to live in London, where, being close to his work, he had more leisure for other things; and between 1865 and 1870 he wrote between thirty and forty tales in verse, containing not less than seventy or eighty thousand lines in all. The longest of these tales, "The Life and Death of Jason," appeared in 1867. It is the old Greek story of the ship Argo and the voyage in quest of the Golden Fleece. Twenty-five other tales are included in "The Earthly Paradise," published in three parts between 1868 and 1870.

During these years Morris learned Icelandic, and

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his next published works were translations of some of the Icelandic sagas, writings composed from six to nine hundred years ago, and containing a mass of legends, histories and romances finely told in a noble language. These translations were followed in 1876 by his great epic poem, "Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs." In that poem he retold a story of which an Icelandic version, the "Volsunga Saga," written in the twelfth century, is one of the world's masterpieces. It is the great epic of Northern Europe, just as the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" of Homer are the chief epics of ancient Greece, and the "Æneid" of Virgil the chief epic of the Roman Empire. Morris's love for these great stories of ancient times led him to rewrite the tale of the Volsungs and Niblungs, which he reckoned the finest of them all, more fully and on a larger scale than it had ever been written before. He had already, in 1875, translated the "Æneid" into verse, and some ten years later, in 1886-87, he also made a verse translation of the "Odyssey." In 1873 he had also written another very beautiful poem, "Love is Enough," containing the story of three pairs of lovers, a countryman and country-woman, an emperor and empress, and a prince and peasant girl. This poem was written in the form of a play, not of a narrative.

To write prose was at first for Morris more difficult than to write poetry. Verse came naturally to him, and he composed in prose only with much effort until after long practice. Except for his early tales in the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine and his translations of Icelandic sagas, he wrote

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little but poetry until the year 1882. About that time he began to give lectures and addresses, and wrote them in great numbers during the latter part of his life. A number of them were collected and published in two volumes called "Hopes and Fears for Art" and "Signs of Change," and many others have been published separately. He thus gradually accustomed himself to prose composition. For several years he was too busy with other things, which he thought more important, to spend time on story-telling; but his instinct forced itself out again, and in 1886 he began the series of romances in prose or in mixed prose and verse which went on during the next ten years. The chief of these are, "A Dream of John Ball," "The House of the Wolfings," "The Roots of the Mountains," "News from Nowhere," "The Glittering Plain," "The Wood beyond the World," "The Well at the World's End," "The Water of the Wondrous Isles," and "The Sundering Flood." During the same years he also translated, out of Icelandic and old French books, more of the stories which he had long known and admired. "The Sundering Flood" was written in his last illness, and finished by him within a few days of his death, in the autumn of 1896.

"The Earthly Paradise" is the largest and most important of all Morris's poetical works. It is also the most striking instance of what he meant by the art of poetry; that is to say, the skilfully designed construction, and the furnishing with beautiful and appropriate ornament, of a house of tales, in which the reader may find shelter, enjoy-

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ment and rest. For this purpose he selected, from among the vast number of stories he knew, those which he liked best. These he retold, redesigning them so far as he thought fit, and putting into them details and descriptions suggested by his wide knowledge, his vivid imagination, and his intense love of beauty. The idea of a series of narrative poems arranged within a single framework came to him in the first instance from "The Canterbury Tales" of Geoffrey Chaucer (1328-1400), the English poet among his predecessors whom he most loved and admired. In Chaucer the stories are supposed to be told by a company of pilgrims who are riding together from London to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas of Canterbury. Morris invented a larger and more romantic framework for his collection of tales. The story inside which the rest of the stories are set is this. Certain persons set sail, in the autumn of the year 1372, from a country then being ravaged by the terrible pestilence known as the Black Death, to try to discover among the unexplored Western seas an Earthly Paradise where there was no sickness or old age or death, of which rumours were current in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Among the crew are men from more than one country. The leader of the expedition is a Norseman, who had been born at Constantinople, where his father was serving in the famous corps of the Varangians, a bodyguard chiefly composed of Norse and English, attached to the person of the Greek Emperors. One of his companions is a scholar from Swabia in Central Germany, who knew all the German

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chronicles, and had read many books of ancient history and of magic. Another is a Breton, who had been driven from his home in the French wars. They sail out into the Atlantic through the English Channel, where they fall in with the fleet of Edward III. on its way to France with the King himself, the Black Prince, and a great English army. At last they reach America, as Columbus actually did a century later. After many wanderings and adventures, in which, however, they never succeed in finding that Earthly Paradise of which they are in search, the remnant of them, now old men, arrive at an island in a distant sea, where the people speak the Greek language and are the descendants of an ancient Greek colony which had existed there for many hundreds of years. Here they are kindly received, and settle down to spend the rest of their days in peace. It is arranged among them that they shall keep two feasts every month, and at each of these feasts a story is to be told, by one of the Greeks and one of the Wanderers alternately. The twenty-four stories which follow are told in the twelve months which pass after their arrival. Twelve of them are accordingly stories of ancient Greece. The other twelve are stories which were then current in different countries of Western Europe. Some of them are to be found in French and German romances, others in Norse or Icelandic sagas, and some in the Arabian tales, many of which had become known in Europe long before they were collected and written down in the "Book of the Thousand and One Nights."

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

O*F Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing,
I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
Or bring again the pleasures of past years,
Nor for my words shall ye forget your tears,
Or hope again for aught that I can say,
The idle singer of an empty day.*

*But rather, when aweary of your mirth,
From full hearts still unsatisfied ye sigh,
And, feeling kindly unto all the earth,
Grudge every minute as it passes by,
Made the more mindful that the sweet days die—
—Remember me a little then I pray,
The idle singer of an empty day.*

*The heavy trouble, the bewildering care
That weighs us down who live and earn our bread,
These idle verses have no power to bear;
So let me sing of nāmes remembered,
Because they, living not, can ne'er be dead,
Or long time take their memory quite away
From us poor singers of an empty day.*

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

*Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,
Why should I strive to set the crooked straight ?
Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme
Beats with light wing against the ivory gate,
Telling a tale not too importunate
To those who in the sleepy region stay,
Lulled by the singer of an empty day.*

*Folk say, a wizard to a northern king
At Christmas-tide such wondrous things did show,
That through one window men beheld the spring,
And through another saw the summer glow,
And through a third the fruited vines a-row,
While still, unheard, but in its wonted way,
Piped the drear wind of that December day.*

*So with this Earthly Paradise it is,
If ye will read aright, and pardon me,
Who strive to build a shadowy isle of bliss
Midmost the beating of the steely sea,
Where tossed about all hearts of men must be ;
Whose ravening monsters mighty men shall slay,
Not the poor singer of an empty day.*

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

ARGUMENT

CERTAIN gentlemen and mariners of Norway, having considered all that they had heard of the Earthly Paradise, set sail to find it, and after many troubles and the lapse of many years came old men to some Western land, of which they had never before heard: there they died, when they had dwelt there certain years, much honoured of the strange people.

FORGET six counties overhung with smoke,
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green;
Think, that below the bridge green lapping waves
Smite some few keels that bear Levantine staves,
Cut from the yew wood on the burnt-up hill,
And pointed jars that Greek hands toiled to fill,
And treasured scanty spice from some far sea,
Florence gold cloth, and Ypres napery,
And cloth of Bruges, and hogsheads of Guienne;
While nigh the thronged wharf Geoffrey Chaucer's pen
Moves over bills of lading—mid such times
Shall dwell the hollow puppets of my rhymes.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

A nameless city in a distant sea,
White as the changing walls of faërie,
Thronged with much people clad in ancient guise
I now am fain to set before your eyes ;
There, leave the clear green water and the quays,
And pass betwixt its marble palaces,
Until ye come unto the chiefest square ;
A bubbling conduit is set midmost there,
And round about it now the maidens throng
With jest and laughter, and sweet broken song,
Making but light of labour new begun
While in their vessels gleams the morning sun.

On one side of the square a temple stands,
Wherein the gods worshipped in ancient lands
Still have their altars ; a great market-place
Upon two other sides fills all the space,
And thence the busy hum of men comes forth ;
But on the cold side looking toward the north
A pillared council-house may you behold,
Within whose porch are images of gold,
Gods of the nations who dwelt anciently
About the borders of the Grecian sea.

Pass now between them, push the brazen door,
And standing on the polished marble floor
Leave all the noises of the square behind ;
Most calm that reverent chamber shall ye find,
Silent at first, but for the noise you made
When on the brazen door your hand you laid
To shut it after you—but now behold
The city rulers on their thrones of gold,

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Clad in most fair attire, and in their hands
Long carven silver-banded ebony wands;
Then from the daïs drop your eyes and see
Soldiers and peasants standing reverently
Before those elders, round a little band
Who bear such arms as guard the English land,
But battered, rent, and rusted sore, and they,
The men themselves, are shrivelled, bent, and grey;
And as they lean with pain upon their spears
Their brows seem furrowed deep with more than
 years;
For sorrow dulls their heavy sunken eyes,
Bent are they less with time than miseries.

Pondering on them the city grey-beards gaze
Through kindly eyes, midst thoughts of other
 days,
And pity for poor souls, and vague regret
For all the things that might have happened yet,
Until, their wonder gathering to a head,
The wisest man, who long that land has led,
Breaks the deep silence, unto whom again
A wanderer answers. Slowly as in pain,
And with a hollow voice as from a tomb
At first he tells the story of his doom,
But as it grows and once more hopes and fears,
Both measureless, are ringing round his ears,
His eyes grow bright, his seeming days decrease,
For grief once told brings somewhat back of
 peace.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

THE ELDER OF THE CITY

From what unheard-of world, in what strange
keel,

Have ye come hither to our commonweal?
No barbarous folk, as these our peasants say,
But learned in memories of a long-past day,
Speaking, some few at least, the ancient tongue
That through the lapse of ages still has clung
To us, the seed of the Ionian race.

Speak out and fear not; if ye need a place
Wherein to pass the end of life away,
That shall ye gain from us from this same day,
Unless the enemies of God ye are;
We fear not you and yours to bear us war,
And scarce can think that ye will try again
Across the perils of the shifting plain
To seek your own land whereso that may be:
For folk of ours bearing the memory
Of our old land, in days past oft have striven
To reach it, unto none of whom was given
To come again and tell us of the tale,
Therefore our ships are now content to sail,
About these happy islands that we know.

THE WANDERER

Masters, I have to tell a tale of woe,
A tale of folly and of wasted life,
Hope against hope, the bitter dregs of strife,

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Ending, where all things end, in death at last ;
So if I tell the story of the past,
Let it be worth some little rest, I pray,
A little slumber ere the end of day.

No wonder if the Grecian tongue I know,
Since at Byzantium many a year ago
My father bore the twibil valiantly ;
There did he marry, and get me, and die,
And I went back to Norway to my kin,
Long ere this beard ye see did first begin
To shade my mouth, but nathless not before
Among the Greeks I gathered some small lore,
And standing midst the Væring warriors heard
From this or that man many a wondrous word ;
For ye shall know that though we worshipped
God,
And heard mass duly, still of Swithiod
The Greater, Odin and his house of gold,
The noble stories ceased not to be told ;
These moved me more than words of mine can
say
E'en while at Micklegarth my folk did stay ;
But when I reached one dying autumn-tide
My uncle's dwelling near the forest side,
And saw the land so scanty and so bare,
And all the hard things men contend with there,
A little and unworthy land it seemed,
And all the more of Asgard's days I dreamed,
And worthier seemed the ancient faith of praise.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But now, but now—when one of all those days
Like Lazarus' finger on my heart should be
Breaking the fiery fixed eternity,
But for one moment—could I see once more
The grey-roofed sea-port sloping towards the shore,
Or note the brown boats standing in from sea,
Or the great dromond swinging from the quay,
Or in the beech-woods watch the screaming jay
Shoot up betwixt the tall trunks, smooth and grey—
Yea, could I see the days before distress
When very longing was but happiness!

Within our house there was a Breton squire
Well learned, who fail'd not to blow up the fire
That evermore upholpen burned in me
Strange lands and things beyond belief to see;
Much lore of many lands this Breton knew;
And for one tale I told, he told me two.
He, counting Asgard but a new-told thing,
Yet spoke of gardens ever blossoming
Across the western sea where none grew old,
E'en as the books at Micklegarth had told,
And said moreover that an English knight
Had had the Earthly Paradise in sight,
And heard the songs of those that dwelt therein,
But entered not, being hindered by his sin.
Shortly, so much of this and that he said
That in my heart the sharp barb enteréd,
And like real life would empty stories seem,
And life from day to day an empty dream.

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Another man there was, a Swabian priest,
Who knew the maladies of man and beast,
And what things helped them ; he the stone still
sought

Whereby base metal into gold is brought,
And strove to gain the precious draught, whereby
Men live midst mortal men yet never die ;
Tales of the Kaiser Redbeard could he tell
Who neither went to Heaven nor yet to Hell,
When from that fight upon the Asian plain
He vanished, but still lives to come again
Men know not how or when ; but I listening
Unto this tale thought it a certain thing
That in some hidden vale of Swithiod
Across the golden pavement still he trod.

But while our longing for such things so grew,
And ever more and more we deemed them true,
Upon the land a pestilence there fell
Unheard of yet in any chronicle,
And, as the people died full fast of it,
With these two men it chanced me once to sit,
This learned squire whose name was Nicholas,
And Swabian Laurence, as our manner was ;
For could we help it scarcely did we part
From dawn to dusk : so heavy, sad at heart,
We from the castle-yard beheld the bay
Upon that ne'er-to-be-forgotten day,
Little we said amidst that dreary mood,
And certes nought that we could say was good.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

It was a bright September afternoon,
The parched-up beech-trees would be yellowing soon ;
The yellow flowers grown deeper with the sun
Were letting fall their petals one by one ;
No wind there was, a haze was gathering o'er
The furthest bound of the faint yellow shore ;
And in the oily waters of the bay
Scarce moving aught some fisher-cobbles lay,
And all seemed peace ; and had been peace indeed
But that we young men of our life had need,
And to our listening ears a sound was borne
That made the sunlight wretched and forlorn—
—The heavy tolling of the minster bell—
And nigher yet a tinkling sound did tell
That through the streets they bore our Saviour Christ
By dying lips in anguish to be kissed.

At last spoke Nicholas, “ How long shall we
Abide here, looking forth into the sea
Expecting when our turn shall come to die ?
Fair fellows, will ye come with me and try
Now at our worst that long-desired quest,
Now—when our worst is death, and life our best.”

“ Nay, but thou know'st,” I said, “ that I but wait
The coming of some man, the turn of fate,
To make this voyage—but I die meanwhile,
For I am poor, though my blood be not vile,
Nor yet for all his lore doth Laurence hold
Within his crucibles aught like to gold ;
And what hast thou, whose father driven forth
By Charles of Blois, found shelter in the North ?

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

But little riches as I needs must deem."

"Well," said he, "things are better than they seem,
For 'neath my bed an iron chest I have
That holdeth things I have made shift to save
E'en for this end; moreover, hark to this,
In the next firth a fair long ship there is
Well victualled, ready even now for sea,
And I may say it 'longeth unto me;
Since Marcus Erling, late its owner, lies
Dead at the end of many miseries,
And little Kirstin, as thou well mayst know,
Would be content throughout the world to go
If I but took her hand, and now still more
Hath heart to leave this poor death-stricken shore.
Therefore my gold shall buy us Bordeaux swords
And Bordeaux wine as we go oceanwards.

"What say ye, will ye go with me to-night,
Setting your faces to undreamed delight,
Turning your backs unto this troublous hell,
Or is the time too short to say farewell?"

"Not so," I said, "rather would I depart
Now while thou speakest, never has my heart
Been set on anything within this land."

Then said the Swabian, "Let us now take hand
And swear to follow evermore this quest
Till death or life have set our hearts at rest."

So with joined hands we swore, and Nicholas said,
"To-night, fair friends, be ye apparelléd
To leave this land, bring all the arms ye can
And such men as ye trust; my own good man

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Guards the small postern looking towards St. Bride,
And good it were ye should not be espied,
Since mayhap freely ye should not go hence,
Thou Rolf in special, for this pestilence
Makes all men hard and cruel, nor are they
Willing that folk should 'scape if they must stay :
Be wise ; I bid you for a while farewell,
Leave ye this stronghold when St. Peter's bell
Strikes midnight, all will surely then be still,
And I will bide you at King Tryggvi's hill
Outside the city gates."

Each went his way
Therewith, and I the remnant of that day
Gained for the quest three men that I deemed true,
And did such other things as I must do,
And still was ever listening for the chime
Half maddened by the lazy lapse of time,
Yea, scarce I thought indeed that I should live
Till the great tower the joyful sound should give
That set us free : and so the hours went past,
Till startled by the echoing clang at last
That told of midnight, armed from head to heel
Down to the open postern did I steal,
Bearing small wealth—this sword that yet hangs here
Worn thin and narrow with so many a year,
My father's axe that from Byzantium,
With some few gems my pouch yet held, had come,
Nought else that shone with silver or with gold.

But by the postern gate could I behold
Laurence the priest all armed as if for war,
And my three men were standing not right far

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

From off the town-wall, having some small store
Of arms and furs and raiment : then once more
I turned, and saw the autumn moonlight fall
Upon the new-built bastions of the wall,
Strange with black shadow and grey flood of light,
And further off I saw the lead shine bright
On tower and turret-roof against the sky,
And looking down I saw the old town lie
Black in the shade of the o'er-hanging hill,
Stricken with death, and dreary, but all still
Until it reached the water of the bay,
That in the dead night smote against the quay
Not all unheard, though there was little wind.
But as I turned to leave the place behind,
The wind's light sound, the slowly falling swell,
Were hushed at once by that shrill-tinkling bell,
That in that stillness jarring on mine ears,
With sudden jangle checked the rising tears,
And now the freshness of the open sea
Seemed ease and joy and very life to me.

So greeting my new mates with little sound,
We made good haste to reach King Tryggvi's
mound,

And there the Breton Nicholas beheld,
Who by the hand fair Kirstin Erling held,
And round about them twenty men there stood,
Of whom the more part on the holy rood
Were sworn till death to follow up the quest,
And Kirstin was the mistress of the rest.

Again betwixt us was there little speech,
But swiftly did we set on toward the beach,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And coming there our keel, the Fighting Man,
We boarded, and the long oars out we ran,
And swept from out the firth, and sped so well
That scarcely could we hear St. Peter's bell
Toll one, although the light wind blew from land ;
Then hoisting sail southward we 'gan to stand,
And much I joyed beneath the moon to see
The lessening land that might have been to me
A kindly giver of wife, child, and friend,
And happy life, or at the worser end
A quiet grave till doomsday rend the earth.

Night passed, day dawned, and we grew full of mirth
As with the ever-rising morning wind
Still further lay our threatened death behind,
Or so we thought : some eighty men we were,
Of whom but fifty knew the shipman's gear,
The rest were uplanders ; midst such of these
As knew not of our quest, with promises
Went Nicholas dealing florins round about,
With still a fresh tale for each new man's doubt,
Till all were fairly won or seemed to be
To that strange desperate voyage o'er the sea.

Now if ye ask me from what land I come
With all my folly,—Wick was once my home,
Where Tryggvi Olaf's son and Olaf's sire
Lit to the ancient Gods the sacred fire,
Unto whose line am I myself akin,
Through him who Astrid in old time did win,
King Olaf's widow : let all that go by,
Since I was born at least to misery.

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

Now Nicholas came to Laurence and to me
To talk of what he deemed our course should be,
To whom agape I listened, since I knew
Nought but old tales, nor aught of false and true
Midst these, for all of one kind seemed to be
The Vineland voyage o'er the unknown sea
And Swegdir's search for Godhome, when he found
The entrance to a new world underground ;
But Nicholas o'er many books had pored
And this and that thing in his mind had stored,
And idle tales from true report he knew.
—Would he were living now, to tell to you
This story that my feeble lips must tell !

Now he indeed of Vineland knew full well,
Both from my tales where truth perchance touched
lies,
And from the ancient written histories ;
But now he said, " The land was good enow
That Leif the son of Eric came unto,
But this was not our world, nay scarce could be
The door into a place so heavenly
As that we seek, therefore my rede is this,
That we to gain that sure abode of bliss
Risk dying in an unknown landless sea ;
Although full certainly it seems to me
All that we long for there we needs must find.

" Therefore, O friends, if ye are of my mind,
When we are passed the French and English strait
Let us seek news of that desired gate
To immortality and blessed rest
Within the landless waters of the west,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But still a little to the southward steer.
Certes no Greenland winter waits us there,
No year-long night, but rather we shall find
Spice-trees set waving by the western wind,
And gentle folk who know no guile at least,
And many a bright-winged bird and soft-skinned
beast,

For gently must the year upon them fall.

“Now since the Fighting Man is over small
To hold the mighty stores that we shall need,
To turn as now to Bremen is my rede,
And there to buy a new keel with my gold,
And fill her with such things as she may hold ;
And thou thenceforward, Rolf, her lord shalt be,
Since thou art not unskilled upon the sea.”

But unto me most fair his saying seemed,
For of a land unknown to all I dreamed,
And certainly by some warm sea I thought
That we the soonest thereto should be brought
Therefore with mirth enow passed every day
Till in the Weser stream at last we lay
Hearkening the bells of Bremen ring to mass,
For on a Sunday morn our coming was.

There in a while to chaffer did we fall,
And of the merchants bought a dromond tall
They called the Rose-Garland, and her we stored
With such-like victuals as we well might hoard,
And arms and raiment ; also there we gained
Some few men more by stories true and feigned,

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

And by that time, now needing nought at all,
We weighed, well armed, with good hope not to fa
Into the hands of rovers of the sea,
Since at that time had we heard certainly
Edward of England drew all men to him,
And that his fleet held whatso keel could swim
From Jutland to Land's End; for all that, we
Thought it but wise to keep the open sea
And give to warring lands a full wide berth;
Since unto all of us our lives seemed worth
A better purchase than they erst had been.

So it befell that we no sail had seen
Till the sixth day at morn, when we drew near
The land at last and saw the French coast clear,—
The high land over Guines our pilot said.
There at the day-break, we, apparelled
Like merchant ships in seeming, now perforce
Must meet a navy drawing thwart our course,
Whose sails and painted hulls not far away
Rolled slowly o'er the leaden sea and grey,
Beneath the night-clouds by no sun yet cleared;
But we with anxious hearts this navy neared,
For we sailed deep and heavy, and to fly
Would nought avail since we were drawn so nigh,
And fighting, must we meet but certain death.

Soon with amazement did I hold my breath
As from the wide bows of the Rose-Garland,
I saw the sun, new risen o'er the land,
Light up the shield-hung side of keel on keel,
Their sails like knights' coats, and the points of ste

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Glittering from waist and castle and high top.
And well indeed awhile my heart might stop
As heading all the crowded van I saw,
Huge, swelling out without a crease or flaw,
A sail where, on the quartered blue and red,
In silk and gold right well apparelled,
The lilies gleamed, the thin gaunt leopards glared
Out toward the land where even now there flared
The dying beacons. Ah, with such an one
Could I from town to town of France have run
To end my life upon some glorious day
Where stand the banners brighter than the May
Above the deeds of men, as certainly
This king himself has full oft wished to die.

And who knows now beneath what field he lies,
Amidst what mighty bones of enemies?
Ah, surely it had been a glorious thing
From such a field to lead forth such a king,
That he might live again with happy days,
And more than ever win the people's praise.
Nor had it been an evil lot to stand
On the worse side, with people of the land
'Gainst such a man, when even this might fall,
That it might be my luck some day to call
My battle-cry o'er his low-lying head,
And I be evermore remembered.

Well as we neared and neared, such thoughts I had
Whereby perchance I was the less a-drad
Of what might come, and at the worst we deemed
They would not scorn our swords; but as I dreamed
Of fair towns won and desperate feats of war,

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

And my old follies now were driven afar
By that most glorious sight, a loud halloo
Came down the wind, and one by me who knew
The English tongue cried that they bade us run
Close up and board, nor was there any one
Who durst say nay to that, so presently
Both keels were underneath the big ship's lee ;
While Nicholas and I together passed
Betwixt the crowd of archers by the mast
Unto the poop, where 'neath his canopy
The king sat, eyeing us as we drew nigh.

Broad-browed he was, hook-nosed, with wide grey
eyes

No longer eager for the coming prize,
But keen and steadfast, many an ageing line,
Half hidden by his sweeping beard and fine,
Ploughed his thin cheeks, his hair was more than grey
And like to one he seemed whose better day
Is over to himself, though foolish fame
Shouts louder year by year his empty name.
Unarmed he was, nor clad upon that morn
Much like a king, an ivory hunting-horn
Was slung about him, rich with gems and gold,
And a great white ger-falcon did he hold
Upon his fist ; before his feet there sat
A scrivener making notes of this or that
As the king bade him, and behind his chair
His captains stood in armour rich and fair ;
And by his side unhelmed, but armed, stood one
I deemed none other than the prince his son ;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For in a coat of England was he clad,
And on his head a coronel he had.
Tall was he, slim, made apt for feats of war,
A splendid lord, yea, he seemed prouder far
Than was his sire, yet his eyes therewithal
With languid careless glance seemed wont to fall
On things about, as though he deemed that nought
Could fail unbidden to do all his thought.
But close by him stood a war-beaten knight,
Whose coat of war bore on a field of white
A sharp red pile, and he of all men there
Methought would be the one that I should fear
If I led men.

But midst my thoughts I heard
The king's voice as the high seat now we neared,
And knew his speech because in French it was,
That erewhile I had learnt of Nicholas.
“Fair sirs, what are ye? for on this one day,
I rule the narrow seas mine ancient way.
Me seemeth in the highest bark I know
The Flemish handiwork, but yet ye show
Unlike to merchants, though your ships are deep
And slowly through the water do ye creep;
And thou, fair sir, seem'st journeying from the north
With peltries Bordeaux-ward? Nay then go forth,
Thou wilt not harm us: yet if ye be men
Well-born and warlike, these are fair days, when
The good heart wins more than the merchant keeps,
And safest still in steel the young head sleeps;
And here are banners thou mayest stand beneath
And not be shamed either in life or death—

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

What, man, thou reddenest, wouldst thou say
me no,

If underneath my banner thou shouldst go?
Nay, thou mayest speak, or let thy fellow say
What he is stuffed with, be it yea or nay."

For as he spoke my fellow gazed on me
With something like to fear, and hurriedly
As I bent forward, thrust me on one side,
And scarce the king's last word would he abide
But 'gan to say, "Sire, from the north we come,
Though as for me far nigher is my home.
Thy foes, my Lord, drove out my kin and me,
Ere yet thine armed hand was upon the sea;
Chandos shall surely know my father's name,
Loys of Dinan, which ill-luck, sword, and flame,
Lord Charles of Blois, the French king, and the pest
In this and that land now have laid to rest,
Except for me alone. And now, my Lord,
If I shall seem to speak an idle word
To such as thou art, pardon me therefore;
But we, part taught by ancient books and lore,
And part by what, nor yet so long ago,
This man's own countrymen have come to do,
Have gathered hope to find across the sea
A land where we shall gain felicity
Past tongue of man to tell of; and our life
Is not so sweet here, or so free from strife,
Or glorious deeds so common, that, if we
Should think a certain path at last to see
To such a place, men then could think us wise
To turn away therefrom, and shut our eyes,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Because at many a turning here and there
Swift death might lurk, or unaccustomed fear.
O King, I pray thee in this young man's face
Flash not thy banner, nor with thy frank grace
Tear him from life; but go thy way, let us
Find hidden death, or life more glorious
Than thou durst think of, knowing not the gate
Whereby to flee from that all-shadowing fate.

“O King, since I could walk a yard or twain
Or utter anything but cries of pain,
Death was before me; yea, on the first morn
That I remember aught, among the corn
I wandered with my nurse, behind us lay
The walls of Vannes, white in the summer day,
The reapers whistled, the brown maidens sung,
As on the wain the topmost sheaf they hung,
The swallow wheeled above high up in air,
And midst the labour all was sweet and fair;
When on the winding road between the fields
I saw a glittering line of spears and shields,
And pleased therewith called out to some one by
E'en as I could; he scarce for fear could cry
'The French, the French!' and turned and ran
his best

Toward the town gates, and we ran with the rest,
I wailing loud who knew not why at all,
But ere we reached the gates my nurse did fall,
I with her, and I wondered much that she
Just as she fell should still lie quietly;
Nor did the coloured feathers that I found
Stuck in her side, as frightened I crawled round,

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Tell me the tale, though I was sore afeard
At all the cries and wailing that I heard.

“I say, my Lord, that arrow-flight now seems
The first thing rising clear from feeble dreams,
And that was death; and the next thing was
death,

For through our house all spoke with bated breath
And wore black clothes, withal they came to me
A little child, and did off hastily
My shoon and hosen, and with that I heard
The sound of doleful singing, and afeard
Forbore to question, when I saw the feet
Of all were bare, like mine, as toward the street
We passed, and joined a crowd in such-like guise,
Who through the town sang woeful litanies,
Pressing the stones with feet unused and soft,
And bearing images of saints aloft,
In hope 'gainst hope to save us from the rage
Of that fell pest, that as an unseen cage
Hemmed France about, and me and such as me
They made partakers of their misery.

“Lo death again, and if the time served now
Full many another picture could I show
Of death and death, and men who ever strive
Through every misery at least to live.
The priest within the minster preaches it,
And brooding o'er it doth the wise man sit
Letting life's joys go by. Well, blame me then,
If I who love this changing life of men,
And every minute of whose life were bliss
Too great to long for greater, but for this—

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Mock me, who take this death-bound life in hand
And risk the rag to find a happy land,
Where at the worst death is so far away
No man need think of him from day to day—
Mock me, but let us go, for I am fain
Our restless road, the landless sea, to gain.”

His words nigh made me weep, but while he spoke
I noted how a mocking smile just broke
The thin line of the Prince's lips, and he
Who carried the afore-named armoury
Puffed out his wind-beat cheeks and whistled low :
But the king smiled, and said, “ Can it be so ?
I know not, and ye twain are such as find
The things whereto old kings must needs be blind.
For you the world is wide—but not for me,
Who once had dreams of one great victory
Wherein that world lay vanquished by my throne,
And now, the victor in so many an one,
Find that in Asia Alexander died
And will not live again ; the world is wide
For you I say,—for me a narrow space
Betwixt the four walls of a fighting place.

“ Poor man, why should I stay thee ? live thy fill,
Of that fair life, wherein thou seest no ill
But fear of that fair rest I hope to win
One day, when I have purged me of my sin.

“ Farewell, it yet may hap that I a king
Shall be remembered but by this one thing,
That on the morn before ye crossed the sea
Ye gave and took in common talk with me ;

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

But with this ring keep memory of the morn,
O Breton, and thou Northman, by this horn
Remember me, who am of Odin's blood,
As heralds say: moreover it were good
Ye had some lines of writing 'neath my seal,
Or ye might find it somewhat hard to deal
With some of mine, who pass not for a word
Whate'er they deem may hold a hostile sword."

So as we kneeled this royal man to thank,
A clerk brought forth two passes sealed and blank,
And when we had them, with the horn and ring,
With few words did we leave the noble king,
And as adown the gangway steps we passed,
We saw the yards swing creaking round the mast,
And heard the shipman's ho, for one by one
The van outsailed before, by him had run
E'en as he stayed for us, and now indeed
Of his main battle must he take good heed:
But as from off the mighty side we pushed,
And in between us the green water rushed,
I heard his scalds strike up triumphantly
Some song that told not of the weary sea,
But rather of the mead and fair green-wood,
And as we leaned o'er to the wind, I stood
And saw the bright sails leave us, and soon lost
The pensive music by the strong wind tossed
From wave to wave, then turning I espied
Glittering and white upon the weather side
The land he came from, o'er the bright green sea,
Scarce duller than the land upon our lee,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For now the clouds had fled before the sun
And the bright autumn day was well begun
Then I cried out for music too, and heard
The minstrels sing some well-remembered word,
And while they sung, before me still I gazed,
Silent with thought of many things, and mazed
With many longings; when I looked again
To see those lands, nought but the restless plain
With some far-off small fisher-boat was left;
A little hour for evermore had reft
The sight of Europe from my helpless eyes,
And crowned my store of hapless memories.

THE ELDER OF THE CITY

Sit, friends, and tell your tale which seems to us
Shall be a strange tale and a piteous,
Nor shall it lack our pity for its woe,
Nor ye due thanks for all the things ye show
Of kingdoms nigh forgot that once were great,
And small lands come to glorious estate.

But, sirs, ye faint, behold those maidens stand
Bearing the blood of this our sunburnt land
In well-wrought cups,—drink now of this, that while
Ye poor folk wandered, hid from fortune's smile
Abode your coming, hidden none the less
Below the earth from summer's happiness.

THE WANDERERS

Fair sirs, we thank you, hoping we have come
Through many wanderings to a quiet home

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Befitting dying men—Good health and peace
To you and to this land, and fair increase
Of everything that ye can wish to have !

But to my tale : A fair south-east wind drave
Our ships for ten days more, and ever we
Sailed mile for mile together steadily,
But the tenth day I saw the Fighting Man
Brought up to wait me, and when nigh I ran
Her captain hailed me, saying that he thought
That we too far to northward had been brought,
And we must do our southing while we could,
So as his will to me was ever good
In such-like things, we changed our course straightway,
And as we might till the eleventh day
Stretched somewhat south ; then baffling grew the wind
But as we still were ignorant and blind
Nor knew our port, we sailed on helplessly
O'er a smooth sea, beneath a lovely sky,
And westward ever, but no signs of land
All through these days we saw on either hand,
Nor indeed hoped to see, because we knew
Some watery desert we must journey through,
That had been huge enough to keep all men
From gaining that we sought for until then.

Yet when I grew downcast, I did not fail
To call to mind, how from our land set sail
A certain man, and, after he had passed
Through many unknown seas, did reach at last
A rocky island's shore one foggy day,
And while a little off the land he lay

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

As in a dream he heard the folk call out
In his own tongue, but mazed and all in doubt
He turned therefrom, and afterwards in strife
With winds and waters, much of precious life
He wasted utterly, for when again
He reached his port after long months of pain,
Unto Biarmeland he chanced to go,
And there the isle he left so long ago
He knew at once, where many Northmen were.

And such a fate I could not choose but fear
For us sometimes; and sometimes when at night
Beneath the moon I watched the foam fly white
From off our bows, and thought how weak and
small

Showed the Rose-Garland's mast that looked so tall
Beside the quays of Bremen; when I saw
With measured steps the watch on toward me draw,
And in the moon the helmsman's peering face,
And 'twixt the cordage strained across my place
Beheld the white sail of the Fighting Man
Lead down the pathway of the moonlight wan—
Then when the ocean seemed so measureless
The very sky itself might well be less,
When midst the changeless piping of the wind,
The intertwined slow waves pressed on behind
Rolled o'er our wake and made it nought again,
Then would it seem an ill thing and a vain
To leave the hopeful world that we had known,
When all was o'er, hopeless to die alone
Within this changeless world of waters grey.

But hope would come back to me with the day,

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

The talk of men, the viol's quivering strings,
Would bring my heart to think of better things.
Nor were our folk down-hearted through all this ;
For partly with the hope of that vague bliss
Were they made happy, partly the soft air
And idle days wherethrough we then did fare
Were joy enow to rude sea-faring folk.

But this our ease at last a tempest broke
And we must scud before it helplessly,
Fearing each moment lest some climbing sea
Should topple o'er our poop and end us there,
Nathless we 'scaped, and still the wind blew fair
For what we deemed was our right course ; but when
On the third eve, we, as delivered men,
Took breath because the gale was now blown out,
And from our rolling deck we looked about
Over the ridges of the dark grey seas,
And saw the sun, setting in golden ease,
Smile out at last from out the just-cleared sky
Over the ocean's weltering misery,
Still nothing of the Fighting Man we saw,
Which last was seen when the first gusty flaw
Smote them and us ; but nothing would avail
To mend the thing, so onward did we sail,
But slowly, through the moonlit night and fair,
With all sails set that we could hoist in air,
And rolling heavily at first, for still
Each wave came on a glittering rippled hill,
And lifting us aloft, showed from its height
The waste of waves, and then to lightless night

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Dropped us adown, and much ado had we
To ride unspilt the wallow of the sea.

But the sun rose up in a cloudless sky,
And from the east the wind blew cheerily,
And south-west still we steered ; till on a day
As nigh the mast deep in dull thoughts I lay,
I heard a shout, and turning could I see
One of the shipmen hurrying fast to me
With something in his hand, who cast adown
Close to my hand a mass of sea-weed brown
Without more words, then knew I certainly
The wrack, that oft before I had seen lie
In sandy bights of Norway, and that eve
Just as the sun the ridgy sea would leave,
Shore birds we saw, that flew so nigh, we heard
Their hoarse loud voice that seemed a heavenly word.

Then all were glad, but I a fool and young
Slept not that night, but walked the deck and sung
Snatches of songs, and verily I think
I thought next morn of some fresh stream to drink.
What say I? next morn did I think to be
Set in my godless fair eternity.

Sirs, ye are old, and ye have seen perchance
Some little child for very gladness dance
Over a scarcely-noticed worthless thing,
Worth more to him than ransom of a king,
Did not a pang of more than pity take
Your heart thereat, not for the youngling's sake,
But for your own, for man that passes by,
So like to God, so like the beasts that die.—

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Lo, sirs, my pity for myself is such,
When like an image that my hand can touch
My old self grows unto myself grown old
—Sirs, I forget my story is not told.

Next morn more wrack we saw, more birds, but still
No land as yet either for good or ill,
But with the light increased the favouring breeze,
And smoothly did we mount the ridgy seas.
Then as a-nigh the good ship's stern I stood
Gazing adown, a piece of rough-hewn wood
On a wave's crest I saw, and loud I cried,
“Drift-wood! drift-wood!” and one from by my side,
Maddened with joy, made for the shrouds, and clomb
Up to the top to look on his new home,
For sure he thought the green earth soon to see;
But gazing thence about him, presently
He shouted out, “A sail astern, a sail!”
Freshening the hope that now had 'gun to fail
Of seeing our fellows with the earth new found;
Wherefore we shortened sail, and sweeping round
The hazy edges of the sea and sky
Soon from the deck could see that sail draw nigh,
Half fearful lest she yet might chance to be
The floating house of some strange enemy,
Till on her sail we could at last behold
The ruddy lion with the axe of gold,
And Marcus Erling's sign set corner-wise,
The green, gold-fruited tree of Paradise.
—Ah, what a meeting as she drew a-nigh,
Greeted with ringing shouts and minstrelsy;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Alas, the joyful fever of that day,
When all we met still told of land that lay
Not far ahead ! Yet at our joyous feast
A word of warning spoke the Swabian priest
To me and Nicholas, for, " O friends," he said,
" Right welcome is the land that lies ahead
To us who cannot turn, and in this air,
Washed by this sea, it cannot but be fair,
And good for us poor men I make no doubt ;
Yet, fellows, must I warn you not to shout
Ere we have left the troublous wood behind
Wherein we wander desperate and blind :
Think what may dwell there ! Call to mind the tale
We heard last winter o'er the yule-tide ale,
When that small, withered, black-eyed Genoese
Told of the island in the outer seas
He and his fellows reached upon a tide,
And how, as lying by a streamlet's side,
With ripe fruits ready unto every hand,
And lacking not for women of the land,
The devils came and slew them, all but him,
Who, how he scarce knew, made a shift to swim
Off to his ship : nor must ye, fellows, fear
Such things alone, for mayhap men dwell here
Who worship dreadful gods, and sacrifice
Poor travellers to them in such horrid wise
As I have heard of ; or let this go by,
Yet we may chance to come to slavery,
Or all our strength and weapons be too poor
To conquer such beasts as the unknown shore
May breed ; or set all these ill things aside,

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

It yet may be our lot to wander wide
Through many lands before at last we come
Unto the gates of our enduring home."

But what availed such warning unto us
Who by this change made nigh delirious
Spake wisdom outward from the teeth, but thought
That in a little hour we should be brought
Unto that bliss our hearts were set upon,
That more than very heaven we now had won.

Well, the next morn unto our land we came,
And even now my cheeks grow red with shame,
To think what words I said to Nicholas,
(Since on that night in the great ship I was,)
Asking him questions, as if he were God,
Or at the least in that fair land had trod,
And knew it well, and still he answered me
As some great doctor in theology
Might his poor scholar, asking him of heaven.

But unto me next morn the grace was given
To see land first, and when men certainly
That blessed sight of all sights could descry,
All hearts were melted, and with happy tears,
Born of the death of all our doubts and fears,
Yea, with loud weeping, each did each embrace
For joy that we had gained the glorious place.
Then must the minstrels sing, then must they play
Some joyous strain to welcome in the day,
But for hot tears could see nor bow nor string,
Nor for the rising sobs make shift to sing ;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Yea, some of us in that first ecstasy
For joy of 'scaping death went near to die.

Then might be seen how hard is this world's lot
When such a marvel was our grief forgot,
And what a thing the world's joy is to bear,
When on our hearts the broken bonds of care
Had left such scars, no man of us could say
The burning words upon his lips that lay ;
Since, trained to hide the depths of misery,
Amidst that joy no more our tongues were free.
Ah, then it was indeed when first I knew,
When all our wildest dreams seemed coming true,
And we had reached the gates of Paradise
And endless bliss, at what unmeasured price
Man sets his life, and drawing happy breath,
I shuddered at the once familiar death.

Alas, the happy day ! the foolish day !
Alas, the sweet time, too soon passed away !

Well, in a while I gained the Rose-Garland,
And as toward shore we steadily did stand
With all sail set, the wind, which had been light
Since the beginning of the just past night,
Failed utterly, and the sharp ripple slept,
Then toiling hard forward our keels we swept,
Making small way, until night fell again,
And then, although of landing we were fain,
Needs must we wait, but when the sun was set
Then the cool night a light air did beget,
And 'neath the stars slowly we moved along,
And found ourselves within a current strong

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

At daybreak, and the land beneath our lee.

There a long line of breakers could we see,
That on a yellow sandy beach did fall,
And then a belt of grass, and then a wall
Of green trees, rising dark against the sky.
Not long we looked, but anchored presently
A furlong from the shore, and then, all armed,
Into the boats the most part of us swarmed,
And pulled with eager hands unto the beach,
But when the seething surf our prow did reach,
From off the bows I leapt into the sea
Waist deep, and, wading, was the first to be
Upon that land ; then to the flowers I ran,
And cried aloud like to a drunken man
Words without meaning, whereof none took
heed,

For all across the yellow beach made speed
To roll among the fair flowers and the grass.

But when our folly somewhat tempered was,
And we could talk like men, we thought it good
To try if we could pierce the thick black wood,
And see what men might dwell in that new land ;
But when we entered it, on either hand
Uprose the trunks, with underwood entwined
Making one thicket, thorny, dense, and blind ;
Where with our axes, labouring half the day,
We scarcely made some half a rod of way ;

Therefore, we left that place and tried again,
Yea, many times, but yet was all in vain ;
So to the ships we went, when we had been
A long way in our arms, nor yet had seen

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

A sign of man, but as for living things,
Gay birds with many-coloured crests and wings,
Conies a-nigh the beach, and while we hacked
Within the wood, grey serpents, yellow-backed,
And monstrous lizards; yea, and one man said
That 'midst the thorns he saw a dragon's head;
And keeping still his eyes on it he felt
For a stout shaft he had within his belt;
But just as he had got it to the string
And drawn his hand aback, the loathly thing
Vanished away, and how he could not tell.

Now spite of all, little our courage fell,
For this day's work, nay rather, all things seemed
To show that we no foolish dream had dreamed—
The pathless, fearful sea, the land that lay
So strange, so hard to find, so far away,
The lovely summer air, the while we knew
That unto winter now at home it grew,
The flowery shore, the dragon-guarded wood,
So hard to pierce—each one of these made good
The foolish hope that led us from our home,
That we to utter misery might come.

Now next morn when the tide began to flow
We weighed, and somewhat northward did we go
Coasting that land, and every now and then
We went ashore to try the woods again,
But little change we found in them, until
Inland we saw a bare and scarp'd white hill
Rise o'er their tops, and going further on

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Unto a broad green river's mouth we won,
And entering there, ran up it with the flood,
For it was deep although 'twixt walls of wood
Darkly enough its shaded stream did flow,
And high trees hid the hill we saw just now.

So as we peered about from side to side
A path upon the right bank we espied
Through the thick wood, and mooring hastily
Our ships unto the trunks of trees thereby,
Laurence and I with sixty men took land
With bow or cutting sword or bill in hand,
And bearing food to last till the third day;
But with the others there did Nicholas stay
To guard the ships, with whom was Kirstin still,
Who now seemed pining for old things, and ill,
Spite of the sea-breeze and the lovely air.

But as for us, we followed up with care
A winding path, looking from left to right
Lest any deadly thing should come in sight;
And certainly our path a dragon crossed
That in the thicket presently we lost;
And some men said a leopard they espied,
And further on we heard a beast that cried;
Serpents we saw, like those we erst had seen,
And many-coloured birds, and lizards green,
And apes that chattered from amidst the trees.

So on we went until a dying breeze
We felt upon our faces, and soon grew
The forest thinner, till at last we knew
The great scarped hill, which if we now could scale
For sight of much far country would avail;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But coming there we climbed it easily,
For though escarped and rough toward the sea,
The beaten path we followed led us round
To where a soft and grassy slope we found,
And there it forked, one arm led up the hill
Another through the forest wound on still ;
Which last we left, in good hope soon to see
Some signs of man, which happened presently ;
For two-thirds up the hill we reached a space
Levelled by man's hand in the mountain's face,
And there a rude shrine stood, of unhewn stones
Both walls and roof, with a great heap of bones
Piled up outside it : there awhile we stood
In doubt, for something there made cold our blood,
Till brother Laurence, with a whispered word,
Crossed himself thrice, and drawing forth his sword
Entered alone, but therewith presently
From the inside called out aloud to me
To follow, so I trembling, yet went in
To that abode of unknown monstrous sin,
And others followed : therein could we see,
Amidst the gloom by peering steadily,
An altar of rough stones, and over it
We saw a god of yellow metal sit,
A cubit long, which Laurence with his tongue
Had touched and found pure gold ; withal there hung
Against the wall men's bodies brown and dry,
Which gaudy rags of raiment wretchedly
Did wrap about, and all their heads were wreathed
With golden chaplets ; and meanwhile we breathed
A heavy, faint, and sweet spice-laden air,

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

As though that incense late were scattered there.

But from that house of devils soon we passed
Trembling and pale, Laurence the priest, the last,
And got away in haste, nor durst we take
Those golden chaplets for their wearers' sake,
Or that grim golden devil whose they were ;
Yet for the rest, although they brought us fear
They did but seem to show our heaven a-nigh
Because we deemed these might have come to die
In seeking it, being slain for fatal sin.

And now we set ourselves in haste to win
Up to that mountain's top, and on the way
Looked backward oft upon the land that lay
Beneath the hill, and still on every hand
The forest seemed to cover all the land,
But that some four leagues off we saw a space
Cleared of the trees, and in that open place
Houses we seemed to see, and rising smoke
That told where dwelt the unknown, unseen folk.

But when at last the utmost top we won
A dismal sight our eyes must look upon ;
The mountain's summit, levelled by man's art,
Was hedged by high stones set some yard apart
All round a smooth paved space, and midst of these
We saw a group of well-wrought images,
Or so they seemed at first, who stood around
An old hoar man laid on the rocky ground
Who seemed to live as yet ; now drawing near
We saw indeed what things these figures were ;
Dead corpses, by some deft embalmer dried,
And on this mountain after they had died

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Set up like players at a yule-tide feast ;
Here stood a hunter, with a spotted beast
Most like a leopard, writhing up his spear ;
Nigh the old man stood one as if drawn near
To give him drink, and on each side his head
Two damsels daintily apparelled ;
And then again, nigh him who bore the cup,
Were two who 'twixt them bore a litter up
As though upon a journey he should go,
And round about stood men with spear and bow,
And painted targets as the guard to all,
Headed by one beyond man's stature tall,
Who, half turned round, as though he gave the
word,

Seemed as he once had been a mighty lord.

But the live man amid the corpses laid,
Turning from side to side, some faint word said
Now and again, but kept his eyes shut fast,
And we when from the green slope we had passed
On to this dreadful stage, awe-struck and scared,
Awhile upon the ghastly puppets stared,
Then trembling, with drawn swords, came close a-nigh
To where the hapless ancient man did lie,
Who at the noise we made now oped his eyes
And fixing them upon us did uprise,
And with a fearful scream stretched out his hand,
While upright on his head his hair did stand
For very terror, while we none the less
Were rooted to the ground for fearfulness,
And scarce our weapons could make shift to hold.
But as we stood and gazed, over he rolled
Like a death-stricken bull, and there he lay,

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

With his long-hoarded life quite past away.

Then in our hearts did wonder conquer fear,
And to the dead men did we draw anear
And found them such-like things as I have said,
But he, their master, was apparelled
Like to those others that we saw e'en now
Hung up within the dreary house below.

Right little courage had we there to stay,
So down the hill again we took our way,
When looking landward thence we had but seen,
All round about, the forest dull and green,
Pierced by the river where our ships we left,
And bounded by far-off blue mountains, cleft
By passes here and there; but we went by
The chapel of the gold god silently,
For doubts had risen in our hearts at last
If yet the bitterness of death were past.

But having come again into the wood,
We there took counsel whether it were good
To turn back to the ships, or push on still
Till we had reached the place that from the hill
We had beheld, and since the last seemed best
Onward we marched, scarce staying to take rest
And eat some food, for feverish did we grow
For haste the best or worst of all to know.

Along the path that, as I said before,
Led from the hill, we went, and laboured sore
To gain the open ere the night should fall,
But yet in vain, for like a dreary pall
Cast o'er the world, the darkness hemmed us in,
And though we struggled desperately to win

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

From out the forest through the very night,
Yet did that labour so abate our might,
We thought it good to rest among the trees,
Nor come on those who might be enemies
In the thick darkness, neither did we dare
To light a fire lest folk should slay us there
Mazed and defenceless; so the one half slept
As they might do, the while the others kept
Good guard in turn; and as we watched we heard
Sounds that might well have made bold men afeard,
And cowards die of fear, but we, alone,
Apart from all, such desperate men were grown,
If we should fail to win our Paradise,
That common life we now might well despise.

So by the day-break on our way we were
When we had seen to all our fighting gear;
And soon we came unto that open space
And here and there about a grassy place
Saw houses scattered, neither great nor fair,
For they were framed of trees as they grew there,
And walled with wattle-work from tree to tree;
And thereabout beasts unknown did we see,
Four-footed, tame; and soon a man came out
From the first house, and with a startled shout
Took to his heels, and soon from far and near,
The folk swarmed out, and still as in great fear
Gave us no second look, but ran their best,
And they being clad but lightly for the rest,
To follow them seemed little mastery.
So to their houses gat we speedily
To see if we might take some loiterer;

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

And some few feeble folk we did find there,
Though most had fled, and unto these with pain
We made some little of our meaning plain,
'And sent an old man forth into the wood
To show his fellows that our will was good.
Who going from us came back presently
His message done, and with him two or three
The boldest of his folk, and they in turn
A little of us by our signs did learn,
Then went their way : and so at last all fear
Was laid aside, and thronging they drew near
To look upon us ; and at last came one
Who had upon his breast a golden sun,
And in strange glittering gay attire was clad ;
He let us know our coming made him glad,
And bade us come with him ; so thereon we,
Thinking him some one in authority,
Rose up and followed him, who with glad face
Led us through closer streets of that strange place,
And brought us lastly to a shapely hall
Round and high-roofed, held up with tree-trunks tall,
And midst his lords the barbarous king sat there,
Gold-crowned, in strange apparel rich and fair,
Whereat we shuddered, for we saw that he
Was clad like him that erewhile we did see
Upon the hill, and like those other ones
Hung in the dismal shrine of unhewn stones.

Yet nought of evil did he seem to think,
But bade us sit by him and eat and drink,
So eating did we speak by signs meanwhile
Each unto each, and they would laugh and smile

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

As folk well pleased ; and with them all that day
Well feasted, learning some things did we stay.
And sure of all the folk I ever saw
These were the gentlest : if they had a law
We knew not then, but still they seemed to be
Like the gold people of antiquity.

Now when we tried to ask for that good land,
Eastward and seaward did they point the hand ;
Yet if they knew what thing we meant thereby
We knew not ; but when we for our reply
Said that we came thence, they made signs to say
They knew it well, and kneeling down they lay
Before our feet, as people worshipping.

But we, though somewhat troubled at this thing,
Failed not to hope, because it seemed to us
That this so simple folk and virtuous,
So happy midst their dreary forest bowers,
Showed at the least a better land than ours,
And some yet better' thing far onward lay.

Amidst all this we made a shift to pray
That some of them would go with us, to be
Our fellows on the perilous green sea,
And much did they rejoice when this they knew,
And straightway midst their young men lots they drew
And the next morn of these they gave us ten,
And wept at our departing.

Now these men,
Though brown indeed through dint of that hot sun,
Were comely and well knit, as any one
I saw in Greece, and fit for deeds of war,
Though as I said of all men gentlest far ;

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

Their arms were axe and spear, and shield and bow,
But nought of iron did they seem to know,
For all their cutting tools were edged with flint,
Or with soft copper, that soon turned and bent ;
With cloths of cotton were their bodies clad,
But other raiment for delight they had
Most fairly woven of some unknown thing ;
And all of them from little child to king
Had many ornaments of beaten gold :
Certes, we might have gathered wealth untold
Amongst them, if thereto had turned our thought.
But none the glittering evil valued aught.

Now of these foresters, we learned, that they,
Hemmed by the woods, went seldom a long way
From where we saw them, and no boat they had,
Nor much of other people good or bad
They knew, and ever had they little war :
But now and then a folk would come from far
In ships unlike to ours, and for their gold
Would give them goods ; and some men over bold
Who dwelt beyond the great hill we had seen,
Had waged them war, but these all slain had been
Among the tangled woods by men who knew
What tracks of beasts the thicket might pierce
through.

Such things they told us whom we brought away,
But after this, for certes on that day
Not much we gathered of their way of life.

So to the ships we came at last, and rife
With many things new learned, we told them all,
And though our courage might begin to fall

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

A little now, yet each to other we
Made countenance of great felicity,
And spoke as if the prize were well-nigh won.

Behold then, sirs, how fortune led us on,
Little by little till we reached the worst,
And still our lives grew more and more accurst.

THE ELDER OF THE CITY

Nay, friends, believe your worser life now past,
And that a little bliss is reached at last ;
Take heart, therefore, for like a tale so told
Is each man's life : and ye, who have been bold
To see and suffer such unheard-of things,
Henceforth shall be more worshipped than the kings
We hear you name ; since then ye reach this day,
How are ye worse for what has passed away ?

THE WANDERER

Kind folk, what words of ours can give you praise
That fits your kindness ; yet for those past days,
If we bemoan our lot, think this at least :
We are as men, who cast aside a feast
Amidst their lowly fellows, that they may
Eat with the king, and who at end of day,
Bearing sore stripes, with great humility
Must pray the bedesmen of those men to be.
They scorned that day while yet the sun was high.

Not long within the river did we lie,
But put to sea intending as before
To coast with watchful eyes the unknown shore,

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

And strive to pierce the woods : three days we sailed,
And little all our watchfulness availed,
Though all that time the wind was fair enow ;
But on the fourth day it began to blow
From off the land, and still increased on us
Until the storm grown wild and furious,
Although at anchor still we strove to ride,
Had blown us out into the ocean wide,
Far out of sight of land ; and when at last,
After three days, its fury was o'erpast,
Of all our counsels this one was the best
To beat back blindly to the longed-for west ;
Baffling the wind was, toilsome was the way,
Nor did we make land till the thirtieth day,
When both flesh-meat and water were nigh spent,
But anchoring at last, ashore we went,
And found the land far better than the first,
For this with no thick forest was accurst,
Though here and there were scattered clumps of
wood.

The air was cooler, too, but soft and good,
Fair streams we saw, and herds of goats and deer,
But nothing noisome for a man to fear.

So since at anchor safe our good ships lay
Within the long horns of a sandy bay,
We thought it good ashore to take our ease,
And pitched our tents a-nigh some maple-trees
Not far from shore, and there with little pain
Enough of venison quickly did we gain
To feast us all, and high feast did we hold,
Lighting great fires, for now the nights were cold,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And we were fain a noble roast to eat ;
Nor did we lack for drink to better meat,
For from the dark hold of the Rose-Garland
A well-hooped cask our shipmen brought a-land,
That knew some white-walled city of the Rhine.

There crowned with flowers, and flushed with noble
wine,

Hearkening the distant murmur of the main,
And safe upon our promised land again,
What wonder if our vain hopes rose once more
And Heaven seemed dull beside that twice-won shore.

By midnight in our tents were we asleep,
And little watch that night did any keep,
For as our garden that fair land we deemed.
But in my sleep of lovely things I dreamed,
For I was back at Micklegarth once more,
But not a court-man's son there as of yore,
But the Greek king, or so I seemed to be,
Set on the throne whose awe and majesty
Gold lions guard ; before whose moveless feet
A damsel knelt, praying in words so sweet
For what I know not now, that both mine eyes
Grew full of tears, and I must bid her rise
And sit beside me ; step by step she came
Up the gold stair, setting my heart a-flame
With all her beauty, till she reached the throne
And there sat down, but as with her alone
In that vast hall, my hand her hand did seek,
And on my face I felt her balmy cheek,
Throughout my heart there shot a dreadful pang,
And down below us, with a sudden clang

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

The golden lions rose, and roared aloud,
And in at every door did armed men crowd,
Shouting out death and curses, and I fell
Dreaming indeed that this at last was hell.

But therewithal I woke, and through the night
Heard shrieks and shouts and clamour of the fight,
And snatching up my axe, unarmed beside
Nor scarce awaked, my rallying cry I cried,
And with good haste unto the hubbub went ;
But even in the entry of the tent
Some dark mass hid the star-besprinkled sky,
And whistling past my head a spear did fly,
And striking out I saw a naked man
Fall 'neath my blow, nor heeded him, but ran
Unto the captain's tent, for there indeed
I saw my fellows stand at desperate need,
Beset with foes, nor yet armed more than I,
Though on the way I rallied hastily
Some better armed, with whom I straightway fell
Upon the foe, who with a hideous yell
Turned round upon us ; but we desperate
And fresh, and dangerous for our axes' weight,
Fought so that they must needs give back a pace
And yield our fellows some small breathing space.
Then gathering all together, side by side
We laid our weapons, and our cries we cried
And rushed upon them, who abode no more
Our levelled points, but scattering from the shore
Ran here and there, but when some two or three
We in the chase had slain right easily,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

We held our hands, nor followed more their flight,
Fearing the many chances of the night.

Then did we light our watch-fires up again
And armed us all, and found three good men slain ;
Ten wounded, among whom was Nicholas,
Though little heedful of these things he was,
For in his tent he sat upon the ground,
Holding fair Kirstin's hand, whom he had found
Dead, with a feathered javelin in her breast.

But taking counsel now, we thought it best
To gather up our goods and get away
Unto the ships, and there to wait the day ;
Nor did we loiter, fearful lest the foe,
Who somewhat now our feebleness must know,
Should come on us with force made manifold,
And all our story quickly should be told.
So to our boats in haste the others gat,
But in his tent, not speaking, Nicholas sat,
Nor moved when o'er his head we struck the tent.
But when all things were ready, then I went
And raised the body up, and silently
Bore it adown the beach unto the sea ;
Then he arose and followed me, and when
He reached at last the now embarking men,
And in a boat my burden I had laid,
He sat beside ; but no word had he said
Since first he knew her slain. Such ending had
The night at whose beginning all were glad.

One wounded man of theirs we brought with us
Hoping for news, but he grew furious
When he awoke aboard from out his swoon,

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

And tore his wounds, and smote himself, and soon
Died outright, though his hurts were slight enow,
So nought from him of that land could we know.
But now as we that luckless country scanned,
Just at the daybreak did we see a band
Of these barbarians come with shout and yell
Across the place where all these things befell,
Down to the very edges of the sea ;
But though armed now, by day, we easily
Had made a shift no few of them to slay,
It seemed to us the better course to weigh
And try another entry to that land ;
So southward with a light wind did we stand,
Not losing sight of shore, and now and then
I led ashore the more part of our men
Well armed, by daylight, and the barbarous folk
Once and again from bushments on us broke,
Whom without loss of men we brushed away.
But in our turn it happed to us one day
Upon a knot of them unwares to come,
These we bore back with us, the most of whom
Would neither eat nor drink, but sullenly
Sat in a corner of the ship to die ;
But 'mongst them was a woman, who at last,
Won by the glitter of some toy we cast
About her neck, by soft words and by wine,
Began to answer us by sign to sign ;
Of whom we learned not much indeed, but when
We set on shore those tameless savage men,
And would have left her too, she seemed to pray,
For terror of her folk, with us to stay :

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Therefore we took her back with us, and she,
Though learning not our tongue too easily,
Unto the forest-folk began to speak.

Now midst all this passed many a weary week,
And we no nigher all the time had come
Unto the portal of our blissful home,
And needs our bright hope somewhat must decay;
Yet none the less as dull day passed by day,
Still onward by our folly were we led,
And still with lies our wavering hearts we fed.

Happy we were in this, that still the wind
Blew as we wished, and still the air was kind,
Nor failed we of fresh water as we went
Along the coast, and oft our bows we bent
On beast and fowl, and had no lack of food.

Upon a day it chanced, that as we stood
Somewhat off shore to fetch about a ness,
Although the wind was blowing less and less,
We were entrapped into a fearful sea,
And carried by a current furiously
Away from shore, and there were we so tost
That for awhile we deemed ourselves but lost
Amid those tumbling waves; but now at last,
When out of sight of land we long had passed,
The sea fell, and again toward land we stood,
Which, reached upon the tenth day, seemed right good,
But yet untilled, and mountains rose up high
Far inland, mingling with the cloudy sky.

Once more we took the land, and since we found
That, more than ever, beasts did there abound,
We pitched our camp beside a little stream,

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

But scarcely there of Paradise did dream
As heretofore. Our camp we fortified
With wall and dyke, and then the land we tried,
And found the people most untaught and wild,
Nigh void of arts, but harmless, good, and mild,
Nor fearing us: with some of these we went
Back to our camp and people, with intent
To question them by her we last had got.
But when she heard their tongue she knew it not,
Nor they her tongue: howbeit they seemed to say,
That o'er the mountains other lands there lay
Where folk dwelt, clothed and armed like unto us,
But made withal as they were timorous
And feared them much. Then we made signs that we,
So little feared by all that tumbling sea,
Would go to seek them; but they still would stay
Our journey; nathless what they meant to say
We scarce knew yet: howbeit, since these men
Were friendly, and the weather, which till then
Had been most fair, now grew to storm and rain,
And the wind blew on land, and not in vain
To us poor fools, that tale, half understood
Those folk had told: midst all, we thought it good
To haul our ships ashore, and build us there
A place where we might dwell, till we could fare
Along the coast, or inland it might be,
That fertile realm, those goodly men to see.

Right foul the weather was a dreary space
While we abode with people of that place,
And built them huts, as well we could, for we
Who dwell in Norway have great mastery

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

In woodwright's craft ; but they in turn would bring
Wild fruits to us, and many a woodland thing,
And catch us fish, and show us how to take
The smaller beasts, and meanwhile for our sake
They learned our tongue, and we too somewhat learned
Of words of theirs ; but day by day we yearned
To cross those mountains, and I woke no morn,
To find myself lost, wretched, and forlorn,
But those far-off white summits gave me heart ;
Now too those folk their story could impart
Concerning them, and that in short was this—
—Beyond them lay a fair abode of bliss
Where dwelt men like the Gods, and clad as we,
Who doubtless lived on through eternity
Unless the very world should come to nought,
But never had they had the impious thought
To scale those mountains ; since most surely, none
Of men they knew could follow up the sun,
The fearful sun, and live ; but as for us
They said, who were so wise and glorious
It might not be so.

Thus they spoke one eve
When the black rain-clouds for a while did leave
Upon the fresh and teeming earth to frown,
And we they spoke to had just set us down
Midmost their village : from the resting earth
Sweet odours rose, and in their noisy mirth
The women played, as rising from the brook
Off their long locks the glittering drops they shook ;
Betwixt the huts the children raced along ;
Some man was singing a wild barbarous song

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

A-nigh us, and these folk possessing nought,
And lacking nought, lived happy, free from thought,
Or so it seemed—but we, what thing could pay
For all that we had left so far away?

Such thoughts as these I uttered murmuringly,
But lifting up mine eyes, against the sky
Beheld the snowy peaks brought near to us
By a strange sunset, red and glorious,
That seemed as through the much-praised land it
lit,

And would do, long hours after we must sit
Beneath the twinkling stars with none to heed:
And though I knew it was not so indeed,
Yet did it seem to answer me, as though
It called us once more on our quest to go.

Then springing up I raised my voice and said,—
“What is it, fellows, fear ye to be dead
Upon those peaks, when, if ye loiter here
Half dead, with very death still drawing near,
Your lives are wasted all the more for this,
That ye in this world thought to garner bliss;
Unless indeed ye chance to think it well
With this unclad and barbarous folk to dwell,
Deedless and hopeless; ye, to whom the land,
That o’er the world has sent so many a band
Of conquering men, was yet not good enough.

“Did ye then deem the way would not be rough
Unto the lovely land ye so desire?
Did ye not rather swear through blood and fire,
And all ill things to follow up this quest
Till life or death your longing laid to rest?

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

“Let us not linger here then, until fate
Make longing unavailing, hope too late,
And turn to lamentations all our prayers,
But with to-morrow cast aside your cares,
And stout of heart make ready for the strife
'Twixt this short time of dreaming and real life.

“Lo now, if but the half will come with me,
The summit of those mountains will I see,
Or, else die first; yea, if but twenty men
Will follow me; nor will I stay if ten
Will share my trouble or felicity—
What do I say? alone, O friends, will I
Seek for my life, for no man can die twice,
And death or life may give me Paradise!”

Then Nicholas said, “Rolf, I will go with thee,
For desperate do I think the quest to be,
And I shall die, and that to me is well,
Or else I may forget, I cannot tell—
Still I will go.”

Then Laurence said, “I too
Will go remembering what I said to you,
When any land, the first to which we came
Seemed that we sought, and set your hearts aflame,
And all seemed won to you: but still I think,
Perchance years hence, the fount of life to drink,
Unless by some ill chance I first am slain,
But boundless risk must pay for boundless gain.”

So most men said, but yet a few there were
Who said, “Nay, soothly let us live on here,
We have been fools and we must pay therefore
With this dull life, and labour very sore

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Until we die; yet are we grown too wise
Upon this earth to seek for Paradise;
Leave us, but ye may yet come back again
When ye have found your trouble nought and
vain."

Well, in three days we left those men behind,
To dwell among the simple folk and kind
Who were our guides at first, until that we
Reached the green hills clustered confusedly
About the mountains, then they turned, right glad
That till that time no horrors they had had;
But we still hopeful, making nought of time
The rugged rocks now set ourselves to climb,
And lonely there for days and days and days
We stumbled through the blind and bitter ways,
Now rising to the never-melting snow,
Now beaten thence, and fain to try below
Another kingdom of that world of stone.

At last when all our means of life were gone,
And some of us had fallen in the fight
With cold and weariness, we came in sight
Of what we hungered for—what then—what then?
—A savage land, a land untilled again,
No lack of food while lasted shaft or bow,
But folk the worst of all we came to know;
Scarce like to men, yea, worse than most of beasts,
For of men slain they made their impious feasts;
These, as I deem for our fresh blood athirst
From out the thick wood often on us burst.
Not heeding death, and in confused fight
We spent full many a wretched day and night,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

That yet were happiest of the times we knew,
For with our grief such fearful foes we grew,
That Odin's gods had hardly scared men more
As fearless through the naked press we bore.

At first indeed some prisoners did we take,
Asking them questions for our fair land's sake,
Hoping 'gainst hope; but when in vain had been
Our questioning, and we one day had seen
Their way of banqueting, then axe and spear
Ended the wretched life and sullen fear
Of any wild man wounded in the fight.

So with the failing of our hoped delight
We grew to be like devils—then I knew
At my own cost, what each man cometh to
When every pleasure from his life is gone,
And hunger and desire of life alone,
That still beget dull rage and bestial fears,
Like gnawing serpents through the world he bears.

What time we spent there? nay, I do not know:
For happy folk no time can pass too slow
Because they die; because at last they die
And are at rest, no time too fast can fly
For wretches; but eternity of woe
Had hemmed us in, and neither fast or slow
Passed the dull time as we held reckoning.

Yet midst so many a wretched, hopeless thing
One hope there was, if it was still a hope,
At last, at last, to turn, and scale the cope
Of those dread mountains we had clambered o'er.
And we did turn, and with what labour sore,
What thirst, what hunger, and what wretchedness

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

We struggled daily, how can words express?
Yet amidst all, the kind God led us on
Until at last a high raised pass we won
And like grey clouds afar beheld the sea,
And weakened with our toil and misery
Wept at that sight, that like a friend did seem
Forgotten long, beheld but in a dream
When we know not if we be still alive.

But thence descending, we with rocks did strive,
Till dwindled, worn, at last we reached the plain
And came unto our untaught friends again,
And those we left, who yet alive and well,
Wedded to brown wives, fain would have us tell
The story of our woes, which when they heard,
The country people wondered at our word,
But not our fellows; and so all being said
A little there we gathered lustihead
Still talking over what was best to do.
And we the leaders yet were fain to go
From sea to sea and take what God might send,
Who at the worst our hopes and griefs would end
With that same death we once had hoped to stay,
Or even yet might send us such a day,
That our past troubles should but make us glad
As men rejoice in pensive songs and sad.

This was our counsel; those that we had left
Said, that they once before had been bereft
Of friends and country by a sick man's dream,
That this their life not evil did they deem
Nor would they rashly cast it down the wind;
But whoso wandered, they would stay behind.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Others there were who said, whate'er might come,
They would at least seek for the happy home
They had forgotten once, and there at last
In penitence for sins and follies past
Wait for the death that they in vain had fled.

Well, when all things by all sides had been said,
We drew the ships again unto the sea,
Which those who went not with us, carefully
Had tended for those years we were away
(Which still they said was ten months and a day);
And these we rigged, and in a little while
The Fighting Man looked o'er the false sea's smile
Unto the land of Norway, and our band
Across the bulwarks of the Rose-Garland,
Amidst of tears and doubt and misery
Sent after them a feeble farewell cry,
And they returned a tremulous faint cheer,
While from the sandy shell-strewn beach anear
The soft west wind across the waves bore out
A strange confused noise of wail and shout.
For there the dark line of the outland folk
A few familiar grey-eyed faces broke,
That minded us of Norway left astern,
Ere we began our heavy task to learn.

THE ELDER OF THE CITY

Sirs, by my deeming had ye still gone on
When ye had crossed the mountains, ye had won
Unto another sea at last, and there

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Had found clad folk, and cities great and fair,
Though not the deathless country of your thought.

THE WANDERER

Yea, sirs, and short of that we had deemed nought,
Ere yet our hope of life had fully died,
And for those cities scarce should we have tried,
E'en had we known of them, and certainly
Nought but those bestial people did we see:
But let me hasten now unto the end.

Fair wind and lovely weather God did send
To us deserted men, who but two score
Now mustered, so we stood off from the shore
Still stretching south till we lost land again,
Because we deemed the labour would be vain
To try the shore too near where we had been,
Where none of us as yet a sign had seen
Of that which we desired. And now we few,
Thus left alone, each unto other grew
The dearer friends, and less accursed we seemed
As still the less of 'scaping death we dreamed,
And knew the lot of all men should be ours,
A chequered day of sunshine and of showers
Fading to twilight and dark night at last.

Those forest folk with ours their lot had cast,
And ever unto us were leal and true,
And now when all our tongue at last they knew
They told us tales, too long to tell as now;
Yet this one thing I fain to you would show

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

About the dying man our sight did kill
Amidst the corpses on that dreary hill :
Namely, that when their king drew nigh to death,
But still had left in him some little breath,
They bore him to that hill, when they had slain,
By a wild root that killed with little pain,
His servants and his wives like as we saw,
Thinking that thence the gods his soul would draw
To heaven ; but the king being dead at last,
The servants dead being taken down, they cast
Into the river, but the king they hung
Embalmed within that chapel, where they sung
Some office over him in solemn wise,
Amidst the smoke of plenteous sacrifice.

Well, though wild hope no longer in us burned,
Unto the land within a while we turned,
And found it much the same, and still untilled,
And still its people of all arts unskilled ;
And some were dangerous and some were kind ;
But midst them no more tidings did we find
Of what we once had deemed well won, but now
Was like the dream of some past kingly show.

What shall I say of all these savages,
Of these wide plains beset with unsown trees,
Through which untamed man-fearing beasts did range ?
To us at least there seemed but little change,
For we were growing weary of the world.

Whiles did we dwell ashore, whiles were we hurled
Out to the landless ocean, whiles we lay
Long time within some river or deep bay ;
And so the months went by, until at last,

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

When now three years were fully overpast
Since we had left our fellows, and grown old
Our leaky ship along the water rolled,
Upon a day unto a land we came
Whose people spoke a tongue well-nigh the same
As that our forest people used, and who
A little of the arts of mankind knew,
And tilled the kind earth, certes not in vain ;
For wealth of melons we saw there, and grain
Strange unto us. Now battered as we were,
Grown old before our time, in worn-out gear,
These people, when we first set foot ashore,
Garlands of flowers and fruits unto us bore,
And worshipped us as gods, and for no words
That we could say would cease to call us lords,
And pray our help to give them bliss and peace,
And fruitful seasons of the earth's increase.

Withal at last, they, when in talk they fell
With our good forest-folk, to them did tell
That they were subject to a mighty king,
Who, as they said, ruled over everything,
And, dwelling in a glorious city, had
All things that men desire to make them glad.
“He,” said they, “none the less shall be but slave
Unto your lords, and all that he may have
Will he but take as free gifts at their hands,
If they will deign henceforth to bless his lands
With their most godlike presence.”

Ye can think
How we poor wretched souls outworn might
shrink

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

From such strange worship, that like mocking seemed
To us, who of a godlike state had dreamed,
And missed it in such wise ; yet none the less
An earthly haven to our wretchedness
This city seemed, therefore we 'gan to pray
That some of them would guide us on our way,
Which words of ours they heard most joyously,
And brought us to their houses nigh the sea,
And feasted us with such things as they might.

But almost ere the ending of the night
We started on our journey, being up-borne
In litters, like to kings, who so forlorn
Had been erewhile ; so in some ten days' space
They brought us nigh their king's abiding place ;
And as we went the land seemed fair enough,
Though sometimes did we pass through forests rough,
Deserts and fens, yet for the most the way
Through ordered villages and tilled land lay,
Which after all the squalid miseries
We had beheld, seemed heaven unto our eyes,
Though strange to us it was.

But now when we
From a hill-side the city well could see,
Our guides there prayed us to abide awhile,
Wherefore we stayed, though eager to beguile
Our downcast hearts from brooding o'er our woe
By all the new things that abode might show ;
So while we bided on that flowery down
The swiftest of them sped on toward the town
To bear them news of this unhoped-for bliss ;
And we, who now some little happiness

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Could find in that fair place and pleasant air,
Sat 'neath strange trees, on new flowers growing there
Of scent unlike to those we knew of old,
While unfamiliar tales the strange birds told.
But certes seemed that city fair enow
That spread out o'er the well-tilled vale below,
Though nowise built like such as we had seen ;
Walled with white walls it was, and gardens green
Were set between the houses everywhere ;
And now and then rose up a tower foursquare
Lessening in stage on stage : with many a hue
The house walls glowed, of red and green and blue,
And some with gold were well adorned, and one
From roofs of gold flashed back the noontide sun.
Had we but seen such things not long ago
We should have hastened us to come thereto,
In hope to find the very heaven we sought.

But now while quietly we sat, and thought
Of many things, the gate wherein that road
Had end, was opened wide, and thereout flowed
A glittering throng of people, young and old,
And men and women, much adorned with gold ;
Wherefore we rose to meet them, who stood still
When they beheld us winding down the hill,
And lined both sides of the grey road, but we
Now drawing nigh them, first of all could see
Old men in venerable raiment clad,
White-bearded, who sweet flowering branches had
In their right hands, then young men armed right
well

After their way, which now were long to tell,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then damsels clad in radiant gold array,
Who with sweet-smelling blossoms strewed the way
Before our feet, then men with gleaming swords
And glittering robes, and crowned like mighty lords,
And last of all, within the very gate
The king himself, round whom our guides did wait,
Kneeling with humble faces downward bent.

What wonder if, as 'twixt these folk we went,
Hearkening their singing and sweet minstrelsy,
A little nigher now seemed our heaven to be—
Alas, a fair folk, a sweet spot of earth,
A land where many a lovely thing has birth,
But where all fair things come at last to die.

Now when we three unto the king drew nigh
Before our fellows, he, adored of all,
Spared not before us on his knees to fall,
And as we deemed who knew his speech but ill,
Began to pray us to bide with him still,
Telling withal of some old prophecy
Which seemed to say that there we should not die.

What could we do amidst these splendid lords?
No time it was to doubt or make long words,
Nor with a short but happy life at hand
Durst we to ask about the deathless land,
Though well we felt the life whereof he spoke,
Could never be among those mortal folk.
Therefore we way-worn, disappointed men,
So richly dowered with three-score years and ten,
Vouchsafed to grant the king his whole request,
Thinking within that town awhile to rest,
And gather news about the hope that fled

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Still on before us, risen from the dead,
From out its tomb of toil and misery,
That held it while we saw but sea and sky,
Or untilled lands and people void of bliss,
And our own faces heavy with distress.

But entering now that town, what huge delight
We had therein, how lovely to our sight
Was the well-ordered life of people there,
Who on that night within a palace fair
Made us a feast with great solemnity,
Till we forgot that we came there to die
If we should leave our quest, for e'en as kings
They treated us, and whatsoever things
We asked for, or could think of, those were ours.

Houses we had, noble with walls and towers,
Lovely with gardens, cooled with running streams,
And rich with gold beyond a miser's dreams,
And men and women slaves, whose very lives
Were in our hands; and fair and princely wives
If so we would; and all things for delight,
Good to the taste or beautiful to sight
The land might yield. They taught us of their law,
The muster of their men-at-arms we saw,
As men who owned them; in their judgment-place
Our lightest word made glad the pleader's face,
And the judge trembled at our faintest frown.

Think then, if we, late driven up and down
Upon the uncertain sea, or struggling sore
With barbarous men upon an untilled shore,
Or at the best, midst people ignorant
Of arts and letters, fighting against want

THE EARTHLY PARADISE .

Of very food—think if we now were glad .
From day to day, and as folk crazed and mad
Deemed our old selves, the wanderers on the sea.

And if at whiles midst our felicity
We yet remembered us of that past day
When in the long swell off the land we lay,
Weeping for joy at our accomplished dream,
And each to each a very god did seem,
For fear was dead—if we remembered this,
Yet after all, was this our life of bliss,
A little thing that we had gained at last?
And must we sorrow for the idle past,
Or think it ill that thither we were led?
Thus seemed our old desire quite quenched and dead.

You must remember that we yet were young.
Five years had passed since the grey fieldfare sung
To me a dreaming youth laid 'neath the thorn,
And though while we were wandering and forlorn
I seemed grown old and withered suddenly,
But twenty summers had I seen go by
When I lett Wickland on that desperate cruise.
But now again our wrinkles did we lose
With memory of our ills, and like a dream
Our fevered quest with its bad days did seem,
And many things grew fresh again, forgot
While in our hearts that wild desire was hot:
Yea, though at thought of Norway we might sigh,
Small was the pain which that sweet memory
Brought with its images seen fresh and clear,
And' many an old familiar thing grown dear,
But little loved the while we lived with it.

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

So smoothly o'er our heads the days did flit,
Yet not eventless either, for we taught
Such lore as we from our own land had brought
Unto this folk, who when they wrote must draw
Such draughts as erst at Micklegarth I saw,
Writ for the evil Pharaoh-kings of old ;
Their arms were edged with copper or with gold,
Whereof they had great plenty, or with flint ;
No armour had they fit to bear the dint
Of tools like ours, and little could avail
Their archer craft ; their boats knew nought of sail,
And many a feat of building could we show,
Which midst their splendour still they did not know.

And midst of all, war fell upon the land,
And in forefront of battle must we stand,
To do our best, though little mastery
We thought it then to make such foemen flee
As there we met ; but when again we came
Into the town, with something like to shame
We took the worship of that simple folk
Rejoicing for their freedom from the yoke
That round about their necks had hung so long.

For thus that war began : some monarch strong
Conquered their land of old, and thereon laid
A dreadful tribute, which they still had paid
With tears and curses ; for as each fifth year
Came round, this heavy shame they needs must bear :
Ten youths, ten maidens must they choose by lot
Among the fairest that they then had got,
Who a long journey o'er the hills must go
Unto the tyrant, nor with signs of woe

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Enter his city, but in bright array,
And harbingered by songs and carols gay,
Betake them to the temple of his god ;
But when the streets their weary feet had trod
Their wails must crown the long festivity,
For on the golden altar must they die.

Such was the sentence till the year we came,
And counselled them to put away this shame
If they must die therefore, so on that year
Barren of blood the devil's altars were,
Wherefore a herald clad in strange attire
The tyrant sent them, and but blood and fire
His best words were ; him they sent back again
Defied by us, who made his threats but vain,
When face to face with those ill folk we stood
Ready to seal our counsel with our blood.

Past all belief they loved us for all this,
And if it would have added to our bliss
That they should die, this surely they had done ;
So smoothly slipped the years past one by one,
And we had lived and died as happy there
As any men the labouring earth may bear,
But for the poison of that wickedness
That led us on God's edicts to redress.
At first indeed death seemed so far away,
So sweet in our new home was every day,
That we forgot death like the most of men
Who cannot count the threescore years and ten ;
Yet we grew fearful as the time drew on,
And needs must think of all we might have won,
Yea, by so much the happier that we were

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

By just so much increased on us our fear,
And those old times of our past misery
Seemed not so evil as the days went by
Faster and faster with the years' increase,
For loss of youth to us was loss of peace.

Two gates unto the road of life there are,
And to the happy youth both seem afar,
Both seem afar, so far the past one seems,
The gate of birth, made dim with many dreams,
Bright with remembered hopes, beset with flowers ;
So far it seems he cannot count the hours
That to this midway path have led him on
Where every joy of life now seemeth won—
So far, he thinks not of the other gate,
Within whose shade the ghosts of dead hopes wait
To call upon him as he draws anear,
Despoiled, alone, and dull with many a fear,
“ Where is thy work ? how little thou hast done,
Where are thy friends, why art thou so alone ? ”

How shall he weigh his life ? slow goes the time
The while the fresh dew-sprinkled hill we climb,
Thinking of what shall be the other side ;
Slow pass perchance the minutes we abide
On the gained summit, blinking at the sun ;
But when the downward journey is begun
No more our feet may loiter, past our ears
Shrieks the harsh wind scarce noted midst our fears,
And battling with the hostile things we meet
Till, ere we know it, our weak shrinking feet
Have brought us to the end and all is done.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And so with us it was, when youth twice won
Now for the second time had passed away,
And we unwitting were grown old and grey,
And one by one, the death of some dear friend,
Some cherished hope, brought to a troublous end
Our joyous life ; as in a dawn of June
The lover, dreaming of the brown bird's tune
And longing lips unto his own brought near,
Wakes up the crashing thunder-peal to hear.
So, sirs, when this world's pleasures came to nought
Not upon God we set our wayward thought,
But on the folly our own hearts had made ;
Once more the stories of the past we weighed
With what we hitherto had found, once more
We longed to be by some unknown far shore,
Once more our life seemed trivial, poor, and vain,
Till we our lost fool's paradise might gain,
Yea, we were like the felon doomed to die,
Who when unto the sword he draws a-nigh
Struggles and cries, though erewhile in his cell
He heard the priest of heaven and pardon tell,
Weeping and half contented to be slain.

Was I the first who thought of this again ?
Perchance I was, but howsoe'er that be,
Long time I thought of these things certainly
Ere I durst stir my fellows to the quest,
Though secretly myself, with little rest
For tidings of our lovely land I sought.
Should prisoners from another folk be brought
Unto our town, I questioned them of this :

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

I asked the wandering merchants of a bliss
They dreamed not of, in chaffering for their goods ;
The hunter in the far-off lonely woods,
The fisher in the rivers nigh the sea,
Must tell their wild strange stories unto me.
Within the temples books of records lay
Such as I told of, thereon day by day
I pored, and got long stories from the priests
Of many-handed gods with heads of beasts,
And such-like dreariness ; and still, midst all
Sometimes a glimmering light would seem to fall
Upon my ignorance, and less content
As time went on I grew, and ever went
About my daily life distractedly,
Until at last I felt that I must die
Or to my fellows tell what in me was.

So on a day I came to Nicholas
And trembling 'gan to tell of this and that,
And as I spoke with downcast eyes I sat
Fearing to see some scorn within his eyes,
Or horror at unhappy memories ;
But now, when mine eyes could no longer keep
The tears from falling, he too, nigh to weep,
Spoke out, " O Rolf, why hast thou come to me,
Who thinking I was happy, now must see
That only with the ending of our breath,
Or by that fair escape from fear and death
Can we forget the hope that erewhile led
Our little band to woe and drearihead ?
But now are we grown old, Rolf, and to-day
Life is a little thing to cast away,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Nor can we suffer many years of it
If all goes wrong, so no more will I sit,
Praying for all the things that cannot be :
Tell thou our fellows what thou tellest me,
Nor fear that I will leave you in your need."

Well, sirs, with all the rest I had such speed
That men enough of us resolved to go
The very bitterness of death to know
Or else to conquer him ; some idle tale
With our kind hosts would plenteously avail,
For of our quest we durst not tell them aught,
Since something more than doubt was in our thought,
Though unconfessed, that we should fail at last,
Nor had we quite forgot our périls past.

Alas ! can weak men hide such thoughts as these ?
I think the summer wind that bows the trees
Through which the dreamer wandereth muttering
Will bear abroad some knowledge of the thing
That so consumes him ; howsoe'er that be,
We, born to drink the dregs of misery,
Found in the end that some one knew our aim.
For while we weighed the chances of the game
That we must play, nor yet knew what to shun,
Or what to do, there came a certain one,
A young man strange within the place, to me,
Who, swearing me at first to secrecy,
Began to tell me of the hoped-for land.
The trap I saw not, with a shaking hand
And beating heart, unto the notes of years
I turned, long parchments blotted with my tears,
And tremulously read them out aloud ;

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

But still, because the hurrying thoughts would crowd
My whirling brain, scarce heard the words I read.
Yet in the end it seemed that what he said
Tallied with that, heaped up so painfully.

Now listen ! this being done, he said to me,
“ O godlike Eastern man, believest thou
That I who look so young and ruddy now
Am very old ? because in sooth I come
To seek thee and to lead thee to our home
With all thy fellows. But if thou dost not,
Come now with me, for nigh unto this spot
My brother, left behind, an ancient man
Now dwelleth, but as grey-haired, weak and wan
As I am fresh ; of me he doth not know,
So surely shall our speech together show,
The truth of this my message.” “ Yea,” said I,
“ I doubt thee not, yet would I certainly
Hear the old man talk if he liveth yet,
That I a clearer tale of this may set
Before my fellows ; come then, lead me there.”

Thus easily I fell into the snare ;
For as along the well-known streets we went
An old hoar man there met us, weak and bent,
Who staying us, the while with age he shook,
My lusty fellow by the shoulder took,
And said, “ Oh, stranger, canst thou be the son,
Or but the younger double of such an one,
Who dwelt once in the weaver’s street hereby ? ”

But the young man looked on him lovingly,
And said, “ O certes, thou art now grown old
That thou thy younger brother canst behold

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And call him stranger." "Yea, yea, old enow,"
The other said, "what fables talkest thou?
My brother has but three years less than I,
Nor dealeth time with men so marvellously
That he should seem like twenty, I fourscore:
Thou art my nephew, let the jest pass o'er."

"Nay," said he, "but it is not good to talk
Here in the crowded street, so let us walk
Unto thine habitation; dost thou mind,
When we were boys, how once we chanced to find
That crock of copper money hid away
Up in the loft, and how on that same day
We bought this toy and that, thou a short sword
And I a brazen boat."

But at that word
The old man wildly on him 'gan to stare,
And said no more, the while we three did fare
Unto his house, but there we being alone,
Many undoubted signs the younger one
Gave to his brother, saying withal, that he
Had gained the land of all felicity,
Where, after trials too long then to tell,
The slough of grisly eld from off him fell,
And left him strong, and fair, and young again;
Neither from that time had he suffered pain
Greater or less, or feared at all to die:
And though, he said, he knew not certainly
If he should live for ever, this he knew
His days should not be full of pain and few
As most men's lives were. Now when asked why he
Had left his home, a deadly land to see,

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

He said that people's chiefs had sent him there,
Moved by report that tall men, white and fair,
Like to the Gods, had come across the sea,
Of whom old seers had told that they should be
Lords of that land, therefore his charge was this,
To lead us forth to that abode of bliss,
But secretly, since for the other folk
They were as beasts to toil beneath the yoke.
"But," said he, "brother, thou shalt go with me,
If now at last no doubt be left in thee
Of who I am."

At that, to end it all
The weak old man upon his neck did fall,
Rejoicing for his lot with many tears:
But I, rejoicing too, yet felt vague fears
Within my heart, for now almost too nigh
We seemed to that long-sought felicity.
What should I do though? What could it avail
Unto these men, to make a feigned tale?
Besides in all no faltering could I find,
Nor did they go beyond, or fall behind,
What in such cases such-like men would do,
Therefore I needs must think their story true.

So now unto my fellows did I go
And all things in due order straight did show,
And had the man who told the tale at hand;
Of whom some made great question of the land,
And where it was, and how he found it first;
And still he answered boldly to the worst
Of all their questions: then from out the place
He went, and we were left there face to face.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And joy it was to see the dark cheeks, tanned
By many a summer of that fervent land,
Flush up with joy, and see the grey eyes gleam
Through the dull film of years, as that sweet dream
Flickered before them, now grown real and true.

But when the certainty of all we knew,
Deeming for sure our quest would not be vain,
We got us ready for the sea again.
But to the city's folk we told no more
Than that we needs must make for some far shore,
Whence we would come again to them, and bring
For them and us full many a wished-for thing
To make them glad.

Then answered they indeed
That our departing made their hearts to bleed,
But with no long words did they bid us stay,
And I remembered me of that past day,
And somewhat grieved I felt, that so it was :
Not thinking how the deeds of men must pass,
And their remembrance as their bodies die,
Or, if their memories fade not utterly,
Like curious pictures shall they be at best,
For men to gaze at while they sit at rest,
Talking of alien things and feasting well.

Ah me! I loiter, being right loth to tell
The things that happened to us in the end.
Down to the noble river did we wend
Where lay the ships we taught these folk to make,
And there the fairest of them did we take
And so began our voyage ; thirty-three

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

Were left of us, who erst had crossed the sea,
Five of the forest people, and beside
None but the fair young man, our new-found guide,
And his old brother ; setting sail with these
We left astern our gilded palaces
And all the good things God had given us there
With small regret, however good they were.

Well, in twelve days our vessel reached the sea,
When turning round we ran on northerly
In sight of land at whiles ; what need to say
How the time past from hopeful day to day ?
Suffice it that the wind was fair and good,
And we most joyful, as still north we stood ;
Until when we a month at sea had been,
And for six days no land at all had seen,
We sighted it once more, whereon our guide
Shouted, " O fellows, lay all fear aside,
This is the land whereof I spake to you."
But when the happy tidings all men knew,
Trembling and pale we watched the land grow great,
And when above the waves the noontide heat
Had raised a vapour 'twixt us and the land
That afternoon, we saw a high ness stand
Out in the sea, and nigher when we came,
And all the sky with sunset was a-flame,
'Neath the dark hill we saw a city lie,
Washed by the waves, girt round with ramparts high.

A little nigher yet, and then our guide
Bade us to anchor, lowering from our side
The sailless keel wherein he erst had come,
Through many risks, to bring us to his home.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But when our eager hands this thing had done,
He and his brother gat therein alone.
But first he said, "Abide here till the morn,
And when ye hear the sound of harp and horn,
And varied music, run out every oar,
Up anchor, and make boldly for the shore.
O happy men! well-nigh do I regret
That I am not as you, to whom as yet
That moment past all moments is unknown,
When first unending life to you is shown.
But now I go, that all in readiness
May be, your souls with this delight to bless."

He waved farewell to us and went, but we,
As the night grew, beheld across the sea
Lights moving on the quays, and now and then
We heard the chanting of the outland men.
How can I tell of that strange troublous night,
Troublous and strange, though 'neath the moon-
shine white,

Peace seemed upon the sea, the glimmering town,
The shadows of the tree-besprinkled down,
The moveless dewy folds of our loose sail;
But how could these for peace to us avail?

Weary with longing, blind with great amaze,
We struggled now with past and future days;
And not in vain our former joy we thought,
Since thirty years our wandering feet had brought
To this at last—and yet, what will you have?
Can man be made content? We wished to save
The bygone years; our hope, our painted toy.
We feared to miss, drowned in that sea of joy.

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Old faces still reproached us : “ We are gone,
And ye are entering into bliss alone ;
And can ye now forget ? Year passes year,
And still ye live on joyous, free from fear ;
But where are we ? where is the memory
Of us, to whom ye once were drawn so nigh ?
Forgetting and alone ye enter in ;
Remembering all, alone we wail our sin,
And cannot touch you.”—Ah, the blessed pain !
When heaven just gained was scarcely all a gain.
How could we weigh that boundless treasure then,
Or count the sorrows of the sons of men ?
—Ah, woe is me to think upon that night !

Day came, and with the dawning of the light
We were astir, and from our deck espied
The people clustering by the water-side,
As if to meet us ; then across the sea
We heard great horns strike up triumphantly,
And then scarce knowing what we did, we weighed,
And running out the oars for shore we made,
With banners fluttering out from yard and mast.

We reached the well-built marble quays at last,
Crowded with folk, and in the front of these
There stood our guide, decked out with braveries,
Holding his feeble brother by the hand,
Then speechless, trembling, did we now take land,
Leaving all woes behind, but when our feet
The happy soil of that blest land did meet,
Fast fell our tears, as on a July day
The thunder-shower falls pattering on the way,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And certes some one we desired to bless,
But scarce knew whom midst all our thankfulness.

Now the crowd opened, and an ordered band
Of youths and damsels, flowering boughs in hand,
Came forth to meet us, just as long ago,
When first we won some rest from pain and woe,
Except that now eld chained not any one,
No man was wrinkled but ourselves alone,
But smooth and beautiful, bright-eyed and glad,
Were all we saw, in fair thin raiment clad
Fit for the sunny place.

But now our friend,
Our guide, who brought us to this glorious end,
Led us amidst that band, who 'gan to sing
Some hymn of welcome, midst whose carolling
Faint-hearted men we must have been indeed
To doubt that all was won; nor did we heed
That, when we well were gotten from the quay,
Armed men went past us, by the very way
That we had come, nor thought of their intent,
For armour unto us was ornament,
And had been now, for many peaceful years,
Since bow and axe had dried the people's tears.

Let all that pass—with song and minstrelsy
Through many streets they led us, fair to see,
For nowhere did we meet maimed, poor, or old,
But all were young and clad in silk and gold.
Like a king's court the common ways did seem
On that fair morn of our accomplished dream.

Far did we go, through market-place and square,
Past fane and palace, till a temple fair

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

We came to, set aback midst towering trees,
But raised above the tallest of all these.
So there we entered through a brazen gate,
And all the thronging folk without did wait,
Except the golden-clad melodious band.
But when within the precinct we did stand,
Another rampart girdled round the fane,
And that being past another one again,
And small space was betwixt them, all these three
Of white stones laid in wondrous masonry
Were builded, but the fourth we now passed through
Was half of white and half of ruddy hue ;
Nor did we reach the temple through this one,
For now a fifth wall came, of dark red stone
With golden coping and wide doors of gold ;
And this being past, our eyes could then behold
The marvellous temple, foursquare, rising high
In stage on stage up toward the summer sky,
Like the unfinished tower that Nimrod built
Before the concord of the world was spilt.

So now we came into the lowest hall,
A mighty way across from wall to wall,
Where carven pillars held a gold roof up,
And silver walls fine as an Indian cup,
With figures monstrous as a dream were wrought
And under foot the floor beyond all thought
Was wonderful, for like the tumbling sea
Beset with monsters did it seem to be ;
But in the midst a pool of ruddy gold
Caught in its waves a glittering fountain cold,
And through the bright shower of its silver spray

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Dimly we saw the high-raised daïs, gay
With wondrous hangings, for high up and small
The windows were within the dreamlike hall ;
Betwixt the pillars wandered damsels fair
Crooning low songs, or filling all the air
With incense wafted to strange images
That made us tremble, since we saw in these
The devils unto whom we now must cry
Ere we begin our new felicity :
Nathless no altars did we see but one
Which dimly from before the daïs shone
Built of green stone, with horns of copper bright.

Now when we entered from the outer light
And all the scents of the fresh day were past,
With its sweet breezes, a dull shade seemed cast
Over our joy ; what then ? not if we would
Could we turn back—and surely all was good.

But now they brought us vestments rich and fair,
And bade us our own raiment put off there,
Which straight we did, and with a hollow sound
Like mournful bells our armour smote the ground,
And damsels took the weapons from our hands
That might have gleamed with death in other lands,
And won us praise ; at last when all was done,
And brighter than the Kaiser each man shone,
Us unarmed helpless men the music led
Up to the daïs, and there our old guide said,
“ Rest, happy men, the time will not be long
Ere they will bring with incense, dance, and song
The sacred cup, your life and happiness,
And many a time this fair hour shall ye bless.”

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Alas, sirs! words are weak to tell of it,
I seemed to see a smile of mockery flit
Across his face as from our thrones he turned,
And in my heart a sudden fear there burned,
The last, I said, for ever and a day;
But even then with harsh and ominous bray
A trumpet through the monstrous pillars rung,
And to our feet with sudden fear we sprung—
Too late, too late! for through all doors did stream
Armed men, that filled the place with clash and
gleam,

And when the dull sound of their moving feet
Was still, a fearful sight our eyes did meet,
A fearful sight to us—*old men and grey*
Betwixt the bands of soldiers took their way,
And at their head in wonderful attire,
Holding within his hand a pot of fire,
Moved the false brother of the traitorous guide,
Who with bowed head walked ever by his side;
But as a-nigh the elders 'gan to draw,
We, almost turned to stone by what we saw,
Heard the old man say to the younger one,
“Speak to them that thou knowest, O fair *Son!*”

Then the wretch said, “O ye, who sought to find
Unending life against the law of kind,
Within this land, fear ye not now too much,
For no man's hand your bodies here shall touch,
But rather with all reverence folk shall tend
Your daily lives, until at last they end
By slow decay: and ye shall pardon us
The trap whereby beings made so glorious

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

As ye are made, we drew unto this place.
Rest ye content then! for although your race
Comes from the Gods, yet are ye conquered here,
As we would conquer them, if we knew where
They dwell from day to day, and with what arms
We, overcoming them, might win such charms
That we might make the world what ye desire.

“Rest then at ease, and if ye e'er shall tire
Of this abode, remember at the worst
Life flitteth, whether it be blessed or cursed.
But will ye tire? ye are our gods on earth
Whiles that ye live, nor shall your lives lack mirth
For song, fair women, and heart-cheering wine
The chain of solemn days shall here entwine
With odorous flowers; ah, surely ye are come,
When all is said, unto an envied home.”

Like an old dream, dreamed in another dream,
I hear his voice now, see the hopeless gleam,
Through the dark place of that thick wood of spears.
That fountain's splash rings yet within mine ears
I thought the fountain of eternal youth—
Yet I can scarce remember in good truth
What then I felt: I should have felt as he,
Who, waking after some festivity
Sees a dim land, and things unspeakable,
And comes to know at last that it is hell—
I cannot tell you, nor can tell you why
Driven by what hope, I cried my battle-cry
And rushed upon him; this I know indeed
My naked hands were good to me at need,

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

That sent the traitor to his due reward,
Ere I was dragged off by the hurrying guard,
Who spite of all used neither sword nor spear,
Nay as it seemed, touched us with awe and fear.
Though at the last grown all too weak to strive
They brought us to the da's scarce alive,
And changed our tattered robes again, and there
Bound did we sit, each in his golden chair,
Beholding many mummeries that they wrought
About the altar; till at last they brought,
Crowned with fair flowers, and clad in robes of gold,
The folk that from the wood we won of old—
Why make long words? before our very eyes
Our friends they slew, a fitting sacrifice
To us their new-gained gods, who sought to find
Within that land, a people just and kind
That could not die, or take away the breath
From living men.

What thing but that same death
Had we left now to hope for? death must come
And find us somewhere an enduring home.
Will grief kill men, as some folk think it will?
Then are we of all men most hard to kill.
The time went past, the dreary days went by
In dull unvarying round of misery,
Nor can I tell if it went fast or slow,
What would it profit you the time to know
That we spent there; all I can say to you
Is, that no hope our prison wall shone through,
That ever we were guarded carefully,
While day and dark and dark and day went by

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Like such a dream, as in the early night
The sleeper wakes from in such sore affright,
Such panting horror, that to sleep again
He will not turn, to meet such shameful pain.

Lo such were we, but as we hoped before
Where no hope was, so now, when all seemed o'er
But sorrow for our lives so cast away,
Again the bright sun brought about the day.

At last the temple's dull monotony
Was broke by noise of armed men hurrying by
Within the precinct, and we seemed to hear
Shouts from without of anger and of fear,
And noises as of battle; and red blaze
The night sky showed; this lasted through two days.
But on the third our guards were whispering
Pale-faced, as though they feared some coming thing,
And when the din increased about noontide,
No longer there with us would they abide,
But left us free; judge then if our hearts beat,
When any pain or death itself was sweet
To hideous life within that wicked place,
Where every day brought on its own disgrace.

Few words betwixt us passed, we knew indeed
Where our old armour once so good at need
Hung up as relics nigh the altar-stead;
Thither we hurried, and from heel to head
Soon were we armed, and our old spears and swords
Clashing 'gainst steel and stone, spoke hopeful words
To us, the children of a warrior race.
But round unto the hubbub did we face
And through the precinct strove to make our way

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

Set close together ; in besmirched array
Some met us, and some wounded very sore,
And some who wounded men to harbour bore ;
But these too busy with their pain or woe
To note us much, unchallenged let us go :
Then here and there we passed some shrinking maid
In a dark corner trembling and afraid,
But eager for the news about the fight.
Through trodden gardens then we came in sight
Of the third rampart that begirt the fane,
Which now the foemen seemed at point to gain,
For o'er the wall the ladders 'gan to show,
And huge confusion was there down below
'Twixt wall and wall ; but as the gate we passed
A man from out the crowd came hurrying fast,
But, drawing nigh us, stopped short suddenly,
And cried, " O, masters, help us or we die !
This impious people 'gainst their ancient lords
Have turned, and in their madness drawn their
swords,
Yea, and they now prevail, and fearing not
The dreadful gods still grows their wrath more hot.
Wherefore to bring you here was my intent,
But the kind gods themselves your hands have sent
To save us all, and this fair holy house
With your strange arms, and hearts most valorous."
No word we said, for even as he spoke
A frightful clamour from the wall outbroke,
As the thin line of soldiers thereupon
Crushed back, and broken, left the rampart won,
And leapt and tumbled therefrom as they could,
While in their place the conquering foemen stood :

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then the weak, wavering, huddled crowd below
Their weight upon the inner wall 'gan throw,
And at the narrow gates by hundreds died ;
For not long did the enemy abide
On the gained rampart, but by every way
Got to the ground and 'gan all round to slay,
Till great and grim the slaughter grew to be.
But we well pleased our tyrants' end to see
Still firm against the inner wall did stand,
While round us surged the press on either hand.
Nor did we fear, for what was left of life
For us to fear for ? so at last the strife
Drawn inward, in that place did much abate,
And we began to move unto the gate
Betwixt the dead and living, and these last
Ever with fearful glances by us passed
Nor hindered aught ; but mindful of the lore
Our fathers gained on many a bloody shore,
We, when unto the street we made our way,
Moved as in fight nor broke our close array,
Though no man harmed us of the troubled crowd
That thronged the streets with shouts and curses loud ;
But rather when our clashing arms they heard
Their hubbub lulled, and they as men afeard
Drew back before us.

Well, as nigh we drew
Unto the sea, the men showed sparse and few,
Though frightened women standing in the street
Before their doors we did not fail to meet,
And passed by folk who at their doors laid down
Men wounded in the fight ; so through the town

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

We reached the unguarded water-gate at last,
And there, nigh weeping, saw the green waves cast
Against the quays, whereby five tall ships lay :
For in that devil's house, right many a day
Had passed with all its dull obscenity
Uncounted by us while we longed to die,
And while of all men we were out of sight,
Except those priests, the people as they might
Made ships like ours ; in whose new handiwork
Few mariners and fearful now did lurk,
And these soon fled before us, therefore we
Stayed not to think, but running hastily
Down the lone quay, seized on the nighest ship,
Nor yet till we had let the hawser slip
Dared we be glad, and then indeed once more,
Though we no longer hoped for our fair shore,
Our past disgrace, worse than the very hell,
Though hope was dead, made things seem more than well,
For if we died that night, yet were we free.

Ah ! with what joy we sniffed the fresh salt sea
After the musky odours of that place ;
With what delight each felt upon his face
The careless wind, our master and our slave,
As through the green seas fast from shore we drave,
Scarce witting where we went.

But now when we
Beheld that city, far across the sea,
A thing gone past, nor any more could hear
The mingled shouts of victory and of fear,
From out the midst thereof shot up a fire,
In a long, wavering, murky, smoke-capped spire

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

That still with every minute wider grew,
So that the ending of the place we knew
Where we had passed such days of misery,
And still more glad turned round unto the sea.

My tale grows near its ending, for we stood
Southward to our kind folk e'en as we could,
But made slow way, for ever heavily
Our ship sailed, and she often needs must lie
At anchor in some bay, the while with fear
Ourselves, we followed up the fearful deer,
Or filled our water-vessels, for indeed,
Of meat and drink were we in bitter need,
As well might be, for scarcely could we choose
What ship from off that harbour to cast loose.

Midst this there died the captain, Nicholas,
Whom, though he brought us even to this pass,
I loved the most of all men ; even now
When that seems long past, I can scarce tell how
I bear to live, since he could live no more.
Certes he took our failure very sore,
And often do I think he fain had died,
But yet for very love must needs abide
A little while, and yet a while again,
As though to share the utmost of our pain,
And miss the ray of comfort and sweet rest
Wherewith ye end our long disastrous quest—
—A drearier place than ever heretofore
The world seemed, as from that far nameless shore
We turned and left him 'neath the trees to bide ;
For midst our rest worn out at last he died.

And such seemed like to hap to us as well,

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

If any harder thing to us befell
Than was our common life ; and still we talked
How our old friends would meet men foiled, and balked
Of all the things that were to make them glad ;
Ah, sirs ! no sight of them henceforth we had ;
A wind arose, which blowing furiously
Drove us out helpless to the open sea ;
Eight days it blew, and when it fell, we lay
Leaky, dismasted, a most helpless prey
To winds and waves, and with but little food ;
Then with hard toil a feeble sail and rude
We rigged up somehow, and nigh hopelessly,
Expecting death, we staggered o'er the sea
For ten days more, but when all food and drink
Were gone for three days, and we needs must think
That in mid ocean we were doomed to die,
One morn again did land before us lie :
And we rejoiced, as much at least as he,
Who tossing on his bed deliriously,
Tortured with pain, hears the physician say
That he shall have one quiet painless day
Before he dies—What more ? we soon did stand
In this your peaceful and delicious land
Amongst the simple kindly country folk,
But when I heard the language that they spoke,
From out my heart a joyous cry there burst,
So sore for friendly words was I athirst,
And I must fall a-weeping, to have come
To such a place that seemed a blissful home,
After the tossing from rough sea to sea ;
So weak at last, so beaten down were we.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

What shall I say in these kind people's praise
Who treated us like brothers for ten days,
Till with their tending we grew strong again,
And then withal in country cart and wain
Brought us unto this city where we are ;
May God be good to them for all their care.

And now, sirs, all our wanderings have ye heard,
And all our story to the utmost word ;
And here hath ending all our foolish quest,
Not at the worst if hardly at the best,
Since ye are good—Sirs, we are old and grey
Before our time ; in what coin shall we pay
For this your goodness ; take it not amiss
That we, poor souls, must pay you back for this
As good men pay back God, Who, raised above
The heavens and earth, yet needeth earthly love

THE ELDER OF THE CITY

Oh, friends, content you ! this is much indeed,
And we are paid, thus garnering for our need
Your blessings only, bringing in their train
God's blessings as the south wind brings the rain.
And for the rest, no little thing shall be
(Since ye through all yet keep your memory)
The gentle music of the bygone years,
Long past to us with all their hopes and fears.
Think, if the gods, who mayhap love us well,
Sent to our gates some ancient chronicle
Of that sweet unforgotten land long left,
Of all the lands wherefrom we now are left—

PROLOGUE : THE WANDERERS

—Think, with what joyous hearts, what reverence,
What songs, what sweet flowers we should bring it
thence,

What images would guard it, what a shrine
Above its well-loved black and white should shine !
How should it pay our labour day by day
To look upon the fair place where it lay ;
With what rejoicings even should we take
Each well-writ copy that the scribes might make,
And bear them forth to hear the people's shout,
E'en as good rulers' children are borne out
To take the people's blessing on their birth.
When all the city falls to joy and mirth.

Such, sirs, are ye, our living chronicle,
And scarce can we be grieved at what befell
Your lives in that too hopeless quest of yours,
Since it shall bring us wealth of happy hours
Whiles that we live, and to our sons, delight,
And their sons' sons.

But now, sirs, let us go,
That we your new abodes with us may show,
And tell you what your life henceforth may be,
But poor, alas, to that ye hoped to see,

NOTES

PAGE 3.—**Levantine** : brought from the **Levant**. This was a general name for the countries at the Eastern end of the Mediterranean. The sun rises (Fr. *se lève*) in the East.

staves : of yew wood for making bows.

pointed jars : the so-called **amphoræ**, tall narrow vessels for holding wine or oil which could not stand upright but had to be rested on racks.

Ypres napery : linen (compare **napkin**) from Ypres in Flanders. Call to mind the lovely **Cloth Hall** destroyed in the Great War.

Bruges : in Flanders, where the wool grown in England used to be woven into cloth.

hogsheads of Guienne : great casks of wine from the old Province of Guienne in the S.W. of France. Bordeaux was the capital. It belonged to England till 1453.

Geoffrey Chaucer : the poet who wrote the "Canterbury Tales," was Comptroller of the Customs in the Port of London, and as such had to deal with bills of lading.

PAGE 4.—**faërie** : fairy-land.

guise : garb, costume.

conduit : (cun-dit) a pipe for leading (conducting) water, a fountain.

gods worshipped in ancient lands : Zeus, Athena, Apollo and the other gods of ancient Greece.

PAGE 5.—**dais** : a raised platform where the Elders sat.

PAGE 6.—**commonweal** : commonwealth, state.

seed of the Ionian race : the Ionians were one of the four great divisions of the ancient Greek people.

the shifting plain : the fickle and changeable sea.

PAGE 7.—**Byzantium** : a colony founded by Greeks about 667 B.C. It was renamed Constantinople when the Roman Emperor Constantine made it his capital in A.D. 330.

twibll : a double-headed battle-axe.

nathless : none the less, nevertheless.

lore : store of knowledge, learning.

Væring warriors : Norse soldiers, commonly known as **Varangians**, who served as the bodyguard of the emperors at Constantinople.

NOTES

PAGE 7.—**Swithiod** : an old name for Upper Sweden.

Odin, or Wodan : the "Allfather," chief of the gods of the old Northmen.

Micklegarth : the "Great Court" of the Greek Emperor at Constantinople.

the land so scanty and so bare : Norway.

Asgard : the home of the **Asers** or twelve chief gods of the Northmen.

PAGE 8.—**Lazarus' finger** : see the parable of Dives and Lazarus in St. Luke xvi. 19.

dromond : a swift sailing-ship for cargo.

Breton squire : a gentleman from Brittany in the N.W. of France. His name was **Nicholas**.

PAGE 9.—**a Swabian priest** : named **Laurence**, from **Swabia**, in S. Germany.

the stone : "the Philosopher's stone" which the old alchemists sought after to convert baser metals into gold.

the precious draught : "the Elixir of Life" sought after by the old alchemists.

Kaiser Redbeard : Frederick Barbarossa (Red Beard), Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, 1152-1190.

Who neither went to Heaven nor yet to Hell : according to the legend Barbarossa did not die, but sleeps in an enchanted castle underground.

fight upon the Asian plain : this was on the Third Crusade. The Crusaders had taken the Turkish capital of Iconium in Asia Minor, when Barbarossa was drowned in a river.

a pestilence there fell : the Black Death, which raged from 1347 onwards.

certes : in truth.

PAGE 10.—**cobbles** : fishing-boats.

tinkling sound : of the handbell carried by the acolyte in attendance on the priest who brought the Holy Sacrament to those dying of the plague.

vile : of low birth.

crucibles : the melting-pots in which the old alchemists tried, without success, to make gold.

Charles of Blois : a nephew of Philip VI., King of France. On the death of Duke John III. of Brittany he claimed the Duchy as the husband of Joan of Penthièvre. There was much fighting between Charles and John of Montfort, the rival claimant, who was helped by Edward III. of England. Eventually Montfort became in 1365 Duke John IV.

PAGE 11.—**firth** : the same as **frith** and **fjord**, an estuary or gulf.

oceanwards : out to sea, on to the great (Atlantic) ocean.

NOTES

PAGE 11.—apparelled : furnished with everything necessary, not merely clothes.

PAGE 12.—postern : a small door or gate, especially one at the back of a fortified place.

St. Bride : also known as St. Bridget, or Brigid, was born in Ireland in A.D. 450 and died in A.D. 521. She is the Patroness of Ireland.

Rolf : the name of the Norse leader of the expedition.

St. Peter's bell : the Minster bell which gave the hours.

King Tryggvi's hill : a mound known as Tryggvi's Cairn, named after Tryggvi, an early king of Viken, in Norway, who was murdered in A.D. 963.

PAGE 13.—bastions : a part of the fortifications which projected in the form of an angle.

the holy rood : the holy cross.

PAGE 14.—to stand : of a ship to keep a certain course, in this case to the south.

doomsday : the Day of Judgment, the end of the world.

uplanders : men whose home lay among the hills and mountains of Norway and who, therefore, knew nothing of the life of seafarers.

quest : the object of our search.

florins : a coin originally from Florence.

Wiek : Viken, an old name for a district in Norway round about Christiania Fjord.

Olaf : the father of King Tryggvi of Viken was the son of Harold Fairhair, King of Norway. This Olaf and Tryggvi were heathens. Tryggvi's son Olaf, King of Norway from A.D. 995-1000, was the king who introduced Christianity.

PAGE 15.—Vineland : Vinland, a place on the east coast of America, reached by the Northmen about A.D. 1000. It is thought to be Massachusetts or Rhode Island, and was so called from the wild vines found there.

Swegdir's search for Godhome : Swegdir was an early king of Norway who made more than one expedition to Godheim, an old name for Great Swithiod, in Sweden.

the ancient written histories : the old Norse or Icelandic sagas which were like epic poems but written in prose.

Leif the son of Eric : the leader of the Norse expedition which reached Vinland in America about A.D. 1000.

my rede : my advice. The old English King Ethelred II. (978-1016) was known as the **Redeless**, i.e., without good counsel; "unready."

the French and English strait : the Straits of Dover.

PAGE 16.—Bremen : an old seaport on the River Weser in Germany.

NOTES

PAGE 16.—**enow** : enough.

to chaffer : to bargain over a purchase.

hoard : lay in a stock of.

PAGE 17.—**Edward of England** : the Third Edward, 1327-1377.
The date of the story is 1372.

Guines : a town in France, 7 miles S. of Calais.

thwart : athwart, across.

PAGE 18.—**Waist** : the middle part of a ship, between the two
“ castles.”

castle : a raised fortified part of a ship at the stem and stern ;
there were also tub-like “ castles ” at the tops of the masts in ships
of the 14th century.

quartered : divided into four sections, each with a coat of arms.

The lilies gleamed : the Royal Arms of Edward III., as shown
on his tomb, show the Lily or Fleur-de-lis of France (top left quarter
and bottom right) and Leopards (top right quarter and bottom left).

The dying beacons : it being daybreak, the lights on the French
coast were burning low.

a-drad : afraid, in dread of.

PAGE 19.—**lee** : the side sheltered from the wind.

many an ageing line : Edward III. was about 57 years old at the
time.

ger-falcon : a beautiful kind of falcon used in hunting. So
named because it flies in circles (gyrates).

scrivener : a writer or secretary (Lat. *scribere*, French *écrire*, to
write).

the prince his son : Edward the Black Prince, eldest son of
Edward III.

PAGE 20.—**a coat of England** : a coat of mail emblazoned with
the Royal Arms of England.

coronel : the small crown worn by the Prince of Wales.

pile : this device consisted of two red lines running to a sharp
point and representing probably an arrow-head on a white ground
or field.

erewhile : some time ago.

Me seemeth : it seems to me. (Me is dative case.)

the highest bark : this is the dromond tall referred to on p. 16.

ye show : ye look, appear.

peltries : pelts, or raw hides of fur-bearing animals.

Bordeaux-ward : towards Bordeaux, the capital of Guienne.

PAGE 21.—**far nigher is my home** : namely, in Brittany.

Chandos : Sir John Chandos fought at Crecy 1346, and saved
the life of the Black Prince at Poitiers in 1356. In 1364 he defeated
Charles of Blois at Auray, in Brittany, and died of wounds in 1370.

Dinan : a town in Brittany, 14 miles S. of St. Malo.

NOTES

PAGE 21.—**the French king** : Philip VI., 1328–1350 ; John, 1350–1364.

PAGE 22.—**frank grace** : free-spoken, generous kindness.

Vannes : one of the chief towns in Brittany in the W. of France.

the French : in those days (1372) Brittany did not belong to the French king. It was incorporated in France in 1491.

PAGE 23.—**did off** : doffed. Similarly don (do on) means put on.

shoon : an old form of the plural of shoe.

hosen : an old form of the plural of hose, a leg covering ; close-fitting knee breeches.

litanies : solemn supplications chanted by the people as they moved in procession.

PAGE 24.—**I am fain** : I long, look forward with joy to.

afore-named : previously mentioned.

Alexander : the Great, King of Macedonia. One of the greatest conquerors in the world, he died in 323 B.C. He was only 32, and had conquered the great Persian Empire and reached the River Indus.

PAGE 25.—**of Odin's blood** : the Royal Family traces its descent to Cerdic, the founder of Wessex, who came in A.D. 495. The pedigree of Cerdic goes back, according to the legend, to Odin.

heralds : the officials who record people's pedigrees and look after coats of arms. There is a Herald's College, or College of Arms, in London to attend to these matters.

The van outsailed before : the foremost ships previously passed by that of the king.

his main battle : his chief force of fighting ships.

scalds : minstrels, singers or poets.

pensive : mournful.

PAGE 26.—**mazed** : confused, perplexed.

glorious estate : great and splendid position.

the blood : the juice of the grape, wine.

PAGE 27.—**southing** : setting our course towards the south.

PAGE 28.—**Biarmeland** : a district in North Russia on the shores of the White Sea round about the modern Archangel. The name of the old tribe of the Biarmar is said to survive in the name Perm.

strained : drawn tight, stretched.

wake : the trail left by a ship in the water.

PAGE 29.—**viol** : an ancient stringed instrument something like a fiddle.

scud : run quickly.

ease : calmness, peacefulness after the storm.

weltering : tumbling about like waves.

flaw : a sudden gust of wind, squall.

NOTES

PAGE 30.—**ride** : keep afloat like a ship in a storm.

unspilt : without capsizing.

wallow : rolling, tumbling mass.

wrack : seaweed cast up by the waves.

PAGE 31.—**shrouds** : part of the rigging of a ship, ropes stretched from the top of the mast to the side of the vessel.

clomb : climbed.

shortened sail : reefed some of the sails.

PAGE 32.—**the troublous wood** : we still speak of not being out of the wood yet.

Genoese : a man from Genoa, in Italy.

PAGE 33.—**delirious** : mad with joy.

PAGE 34.—**ecstasy** : wild joy.

we swept : we rowed. Large oars are sometimes called sweeps.

PAGE 35.—**tempered** : moderated, calmed down.

PAGE 36.—**conies** : rabbits, animals like rabbits.

dragon : a fabulous creature like a crocodile, with wings.

shaft : an arrow.

scarped : steep, precipitous ; also spelt **escarped**.

PAGE 37.—**we won** : succeeded in making our way to.

erst : at first, at the outset.

PAGE 38.—**crossed himself** : made the sign of the cross.

cubit : 18 inches, the length of a man's arm from elbow to finger-tip.

chaplets : wreaths.

PAGE 39.—**anigh** : near at hand.

deft embalmer : one clever at the work of embalming dead bodies to preserve them from decay.

PAGE 40.—**yule-tide** : Christmas time.

litter : a kind of chair in which people were carried by bearers.

targets : small round shields.

PAGE 41.—**cleft** : split, divided.

PAGE 42.—**wattle-work** : like wicker-work made of plaited twigs.

gat we : we went, made our way.

PAGE 44.—**the gold people of antiquity** : the people who lived in the Golden Age long ago when men lived innocent and happy as in a Garden of Eden.

PAGE 45.—**rife** : filled, well stored.

PAGE 46.—**Made countenance of felicity** : looked happy.

bedesmen : privileged beggars.

NOTES

PAGE 47.—**flesh-meat** : meat is used in the sense of food in general.

nolsome : annoying, harmful.

venison : the flesh of deer ; pronounced ven-zon.

PAGE 48.—**the Rhine** : a reference to Rhine wine.

the main : the mighty ocean.

the Greek king : in 1372 John Palaeologus I., 1341-1391, was Emperor at Constantinople. Eighty-one years afterwards, in 1453, the city was taken by the Turks.

throughout : through every part of.

PAGE 50.—**struck** : took down.

PAGE 51.—**bushments** : clumps of bushes.

unwares : unawares.

PAGE 52.—**portal** : gateway, entrance.

to fetch about a ness : to sail round a cape.

PAGE 53.—**dyke** : ditch, moat.

feared : afraid of, frightened.

fare : travel, sail. Compare the word "seafarer."

PAGE 54.—**woodwright** : one who works in wood, carpenter.

leave : cease.

PAGE 55.—**garner** : to gather in, like grain.

PAGE 56.—**the fount of life** : the Elixir of Life sought by Laurence. See note on p. 9.

PAGE 58.—**Their way of banqueting** : cannibalism.

bestial : like those felt by the brute beasts.

the cope : the summit, top. Compare the word "cope-stone" and "coping," on p. 83.

PAGE 59.—**lustihead** : vigour and good spirits.

cast down the wind : throw away ; cast to the winds.

PAGE 60.—**tremulous** : shaking, quavering.

by my deeming : in my opinion.

PAGE 61.—**bestial** : like beasts.

leal : loyal, faithful.

PAGE 63.—**gear** : garments.

PAGE 65.—**foursquare** : square.

PAGE 69.—**draughts . . . Writ for the Pharaoh-kings of old** : hieroglyphic or picture writing of the ancient Egyptians. Specimens of such writing could, of course, be seen at Constantinople.

PAGE 70.—**harbingered** : with singers leading the way.

edicts : decrees, orders.

redress : to put right what was wrong.

NOTES

PAGE 72.—**unwitting** : without knowing it.

PAGE 73.—**chaffering** : bargaining.

dreariness : dismal, uninteresting tales.

drearhead : a dismal, dreary existence.

PAGE 75.—**lusty** : full of life and vigour.

PAGE 76.—**mind** : remember.

slough : the skin cast off by a serpent.

grisly old : grim old age.

PAGE 77.—**faltering** : hesitation.

PAGE 78.—**fervent land** : hot climate.

alien things : other matters.

wend : go, make our way. "Went" is really the past tense of to wend.

PAGE 79.—**astern** : behind our ship, as we sailed away.

sailless keel : a kind of barge worked by oars with no sails.

PAGE 80.—**outland** : foreign.

moveless : still, without motion.

PAGE 81.—**braveries** : gay and splendid garments.

PAGE 82.—**fane** : a church or temple.

PAGE 83.—**precinct** : the space within the outer walls of the temple.

the unfinished tower that Nimrod built : the tower of Babel, where the speech of all the earth was confounded.

PAGE 84.—**crooning** : chanting in a soft, mournful voice.

brighter than the Kaiser : the court of the Greek Emperor at Constantinople was gorgeously splendid.

PAGE 85.—**ominous** : threatening danger.

law of kind : the law of nature under which mankind lives.

PAGE 86.—**gleam** : the flash and glitter of the spearheads.

PAGE 87.—**mummeries** : stupid ceremonies, buffooneries.

PAGE 88.—**sweet to hideous life** : sweet compared with.

altar-stead : the place where the altar was.

PAGE 89.—**besmirched array** : soiled, fouled garments.

harbour : a place of shelter.

PAGE 91.—**obscenity** : foul doings.

musky odours : the air in the temple was heavy with incense.

PAGE 94.—**some ancient chronicle** : some written book from ancient Greece from whence the ancestors of the people of the city originally came.

PAGE 95.—**scribe** : a writer, one who made written copies of books—for there was not yet any printing in 1372.

