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English Tales in Verse

SELECTED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE Tale in Verse marks the contact of two lines of literary growth which have often blended, but stand in no constant relation, and in modern times have been apt to run apart. The shepherd under the hawthorn has probably in all ages *told his tale* (in every sense of the phrase) in homely prose. But the tale of literature has passed through the whole gamut of phases which divide the realistic novel of to-day from the thirteenth-century romances of Arthur or the modern romaunt of the *Lady of the Lake*. The extant story-literature of the earliest times is all in verse; the lyric mood of the primeval chant still lingers in the heroic lay, as it does in that brief tale of the Creation which embalms the new-found inspiration of Cædmon. Even in Chaucer, verse is still the natural garb of story; if his blithe tongue anywhere halts and hobbles, it is when he is constraining it to 'talk prose' in the tale of Melibeus. For pure narrative quality Chaucer's verse is unsurpassed in English. The subsequent development of English verse lies rather in the regions of drama and lyric than of epic; its most potent mastery of expression has been achieved in an atmosphere of strong personal emotion or penetrating imaginative analysis; the great solitary example of Milton apart, English

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literature has hardly evolved an epic style. The lyric and dramatic imagination of the sixteenth century, the curious far-reaching intellect of the seventeenth, the satiric and moralizing reflections of the eighteenth, turned the main currents of verse-style aside from the simple ends of story. Spenser drove it in large undulating eddies along his spacious stanza; Shakespeare tossed it flashing and foaming hither and thither under the stress of his passion and his thought; Cowley forced it to take the ply of his curious fancy; and Waller began that process of polarizing it into antithesis and crystallizing it into epigram which reached its consummation under the dexterous touch of Pope. Throughout the eighteenth century, narrative verse, unless quickened by the zest of satire or burlesque, was something of a *tour de force*; the recounting pen willingly meandered into description, or subsided into sentiment. Then, in very happy time, came to the rescue 'the other harmony of prose'; a cool, indifferent, flexible material, fitted to take the mental mould of the genial but unromantic observers who created the English novel, and long since freed by Dryden from the traditional rhetoric which might have thwarted and perverted their natural vein. The temper of the modern novel has been preponderatingly the temper of prose; and no verse since Chaucer's could have adequately conveyed the wealth of matter-of-fact observation and robust humour in which its strength has lain. Yet verse was not to perish as a vehicle of story. The nineteenth century recovery of poetry was effected largely through the channel of romance;

and many of its typical poets loved to convey their 'criticism of life' through symbols of myth or idyll, instead of, like their predecessors of the eighteenth, through formal treatises in verse. The *Idylls of the King* are Tennyson's 'Essay on Man'.

The term 'Tale in Verse', strictly taken, includes the entire field of English poetry narrative or 'epic' in kind, from *Paradise Lost* to *Miss Kilmansegg*, from *The Cock and the Fox* to *Lucy Gray*. This vast domain is not easily broken up into distinct sections, however easy it may seem to distinguish such examples as these. It is most conveniently regarded as a number of branches ramifying from a single nucleus or core, and retaining its qualities with decreasing purity and distinctness as the branches grow more distant from the centre. The Tale, in its purest form, is *told*, but the telling is after the same fashion as the talk of Shakespeare's men and women; it is illusive but not real; absolutely true in tone and spirit, but not affecting to be a reproduction of the language actually used by men. Whatever impairs the apparent appeal to a circle of absorbed listeners, detracts from the pure quality of the Tale; whatever implies an extraneous interest in poet or hearer, detracts from it. A satiric tale like *Absalom and Achitophel*, or Menenius' Fable of the Belly and the Members, an allegory like the *Faery Queen*, are less pure forms of the Tale than simple narratives. The literary epics, great and small, with their traditional machinery and their traditional pomp of style, are habitually rather written than told. If the poet in his vehemence falls to de-

claiming and ejaculating instead of describing, lyric or rhetoric takes the place of epic. If, finally, the heightened emotion and the ideal apprehension of the matter, which verse postulates, fall away, as in the rhymed anecdotes of Peter Pindar, then we find ourselves once more at an outer and remote ramification of the Tale in Verse. Satire, didacticism, convention, lyric subjectivity, rhetorical elaboration, unimaginative prose, are so many alien points of attraction, which may indeed (as in *Joseph Andrews*) give the initial impetus to a story finer than they could inspire, or, as in Milton and Keats, compensate by sheer splendour of style for what is lost in simple narrative force; but which always tend to detach story from the primary root and mainstay of the whole *genre*. The history of the Story in Verse is a survey of the varying disposition and behaviour of the poetic Tale under the stress, or the lure, of these contending powers.

I

The primitive Germanic peoples were not, like the Greek and the Italian, born tellers of tales; but they had the root of the matter in them; they understood a great situation, they had heard the tragic cry. Their character, at its best, made for a union of strength, tenderness, and fidelity in which both the tragic contradictions and the humorous dissonances of life get grip and strike root. Professor York Powell and Professor Ker have admirably dwelt upon the tragic force of the Lombard stories of Alboin and Thurisvend.

In the extant literature of the Anglo-Saxons these Germanic qualities rarely find full or energetic expression. Of the heroic stories which formed a part of their common Germanic heritage almost nothing remains. That the grandest of all Germanic story cycles—that of the Sigurd-Siegfried and the Niebelungen—was ever chanted by an Anglo-Saxon bard at all, we know only from the passing mention, in *Beowulf*, of a lay of 'Sigemund' the dragon-slayer, and from a fragment of a 'Waldere'. Christianity, so ardently embraced in England, probably assisted this obliteration of pagan memories. It also contributed, we can hardly doubt, to relax the sinewy strength of Germanic character and to put refined sentiment and elegiac pathos in the place of rugged passion. It substituted for the vague moral *chiaroscuro* of heathendom the sharply-contrasted lights and shadows natural to a world where all events are incidents in the warfare of God and devil. Lessing long afterwards asked whether such a thing as 'Christian tragedy'¹ were possible at all. In any case the effect of an unreflecting Christian enthusiasm was, as the effect of every other apparently complete solution of the riddle of the world must be, to cut away the psychological ground of the kinds of imagination which fasten upon situations of moral complexity and contradiction. For Aristotle the moral issue in tragedy is necessarily complex; both parties in the conflict, he lays down, are in their measure 'good'. Christianity, however theoretically in accord with this temper, imposed quite another upon the literature which it inspired.

The stories which the pious Anglo-Saxon poet elaborated with delight are ethically as clear as day: no shadow of tragic error qualifies the heroic grandeur of Judith, as no shade of goodness is allowed to redeem the soul of the 'foul beast'¹ Holofernes; Elene has all the graces of triumph and achievement when she compels the stubborn astuteness of the Jewish infidels to hand over the true cross; Andreas has all the graces of suffering when he undergoes persecution from the pagans. It is perhaps not an accident that the one pagan epic which has survived, *Beowulf*, has the same simplicity and plainness of conception, the same absence of tragic stress.

The most powerful tragic situation in Old English poetry is not drawn from legend or tradition; it is a simple transcript of reality, a report, probably by an eye-witness, of an English Thermopylae, the blood of which was hardly dry when he wrote.

The tragedy of Byrhtnoth was a bit of the national life, rooted in the national character, and merely seen and told by the poet. English character here at least achieved what English imagination could not, there and then, have effected without it.

If the tragic tale had to happen before it could be told, of the humorous tale there is in extant Old English literature hardly a trace. Not that the elements of humour were absent. Loud laughter resounded over the ale-cups in the banqueting-hall at night, to be remembered wistfully by the forlorn exile, and sadly renounced by the dying warrior. "Now had the chieftain foregone

laughter and disport", says the messenger who relates the passing of Beowulf.¹ Here, too, the Christian temper introduced an alien, graver note. There is already a foretaste of Puritanism in the scornful phrases which describe the loud riot of Holofernes' feast. Yet in the courts of fanatical ascetics like King Sigebert of East Anglia or Ceadwalla of Wessex, laughter can hardly have enjoyed more favour than in the heaven of *Faust*. Of the *scurra* or jester, who enlivened the contemporary courts of the Franks, there is no trace; and the riddles, which an Anglo-Saxon poet provided for use at feasts, are probably the most solemn form of post-prandial entertainment known. If anything marks decisively the aloofness of the Anglo-Saxon from the literature of wit and humour, it is the deliberate effacement of these qualities in those numerous riddles founded upon the Latin of Symposius or Aldhelm. What in Latin is terse and epigrammatic, the English poet overlays, diffuses, adorns, sentimentalizes; whatever is pointed he wraps in a loose sheath of embroidered indecisive phrase.

For his serious, diffuse, sentimental story-matter the Anglo-Saxon had a perfectly responsive literary form. The alliterative verse which all the Germanic tribes inherited in common, took the mould of the special qualities of each. In the North it became brief, energetic, rugged, abrupt, like the hammer-strokes of Thor. In England it bore the stamp of a gentler temper and a less iron will; it has more variety, fluctuation, and

¹ *Beowulf*, v. 3021.

self-indulgence. The Norseman told his tale in stanzas, the Englishman in continuous verse; but though the stanza is usually an impediment to continuity in narrative, the Norse tale is habitually straightforward, simple, direct; while the English tale advances in curves and undulations, deflecting, oscillating, returning on itself, as if in a perpetual effort to find expression for matter which continually eludes it. When the poet of the *Exodus* has to describe the crossing of the Red Sea, he keeps the two elements of the situation—the passing of Israel and the baffled power of the sea—before us by an incessant oscillation from one to the other:

"At these words the whole host arose, the multitude of brave men;—the sea was still. The warriors raised glancing shields and trophies on the sand. The sea wall uprose, and stood erect before the Israelites for a day's space. The hosts of warriors were resolute; the wall of waves with strong arm kept guard,—they scorned not in heart the Holy One's bidding."¹

Anglo-Saxon story-telling, then, as we know it, is an isolated and detached province of the English tale, limited in range of topic, strongly mannered in speech, and buried in all but complete oblivion for centuries after its day of limited renown. Its direct influence upon the subsequent history of the Tale is thus very slight. Yet the Germanic core of the English people which in all our greatest literature has ultimately made itself apparent through whatever symbolism of classic or romantic art and phrase, found at least inci-

¹ *Exodus*, 299 f. Heinzl, *Stil der Altgerm. Poesie*, p. 12.

dental expression in the Anglo-Saxon tale. The stormy sea-sense of the Elizabethans already pulses in the *Andreas* and the *Seafarer*. Above all, the swinging, accentual rhythm moves to the stress of metrical instincts which have continually reasserted themselves, and are still more vital to-day than they were one, two, or three hundred years ago.

II

For some three centuries after the Song of Maldon (978) the record of English story remains silent. When it is at length resumed it discloses totally different conditions of story-making. The new *segger* of Henry III and Edward I's time was a homelier, less honoured person than the Anglo-Saxon *sc6p*. He had no elaborate traditional art, no poetic speech stored with the phrases and formulas of generations of older makers, no repertory of ancestral tales as familiar to his hearers as himself, nor an audience composed of the best in the land. His art was in its first beginnings, his speech a rude idiom struggling to clothe itself in the alien charm of measure and rhyme, his repertory of tales a marvellous collection of legend and romance from all parts of the known world, caught at second-hand from the eloquence of Norman lips and Norman pens. Thirteenth-century France was not only the emporium of story matter for all the nations of Western Europe, but their mistress in the arts of telling. What it taught, for better or worse, may be summed up in three points:—

First, the *romantic* tale, in which the ground of national or folk-tradition and common experience is definitely abandoned, and the delight in the marvellous and the unknown, in preternatural exploits and fantastic adventures, has full scope. A clerical counterpart of the secular romance, far older indeed, but pursued with peculiar zest and fertility in the romantic age, was the *saint's legend*.

Secondly, in equally sharp antithesis to the fantastic romance and to the 'epic' of national tradition is the humorous satirical tale of modern life, conveyed either directly or through fable. This may be called generally the *fabliau* type. Between the Romance and the *fabliau* stands the *lai*, attaching itself to the latter by its frequent modernity and realism, to the former by the fantastic element which commonly survives from the Breton songs to which the *lais* ascribe their origin.

Thirdly, a narrative *manner*, lacking the highest distinction and the most searching power, but extraordinarily facile, vivacious, and alert.

The romantic and humorous-realistic types of story fell into further varieties, distinguished by their *scale*, and also by the class of hearer for whom they were intended, and by whose support they thrive.

The castle hall and the ladies' bower favoured the romance of fantastic adventure, of legendary heroism, of impossible fidelity; the tavern and market-place preferred to be tickled by the broad and drastic humour of a *fabliau*, or the keen anti-feudal satire of *Renart the Fox*. Both classes of audience, again, relished two kinds of tale-struct-

ture, with a corresponding difference in scale: the long, complicated tale which has its centre of interest in the personality of the hero; and the simple, short story, or *novella*, which is concerned primarily with a single incident. If the courts listened to the romances of Arthur or the Graal, of Roland or William of Orange, poured forth in his 'handfuls of fair French' by Chrestien de Troyes and his school, so the market-place had the thirty thousand verses of Renart, with its countless continuations and 'counterfeits'. And, on the other hand, if the market-place had the versified jests and anecdotes of the *fabliau*, the castle had the equally simple and indivisible *lai*.

A brilliant device, which saved the unity of the short story while attaining also the rich complexity of the romance, came from the East. This was the *story-framework*. An Indian sage instructing his pupil by a tale which at every point gives occasion for other tales in illustration or enforcement; an Indian trial, where the prospects of the two litigants are alternately promoted and retarded by the pointed tales they tell;—these are the motives of the two most famous story-complexes of the early middle ages—the *Disciplina Clencalis* and the *Seven Wise Masters*. The didactic aim declined, the point became dramatic instead of doctrinaire; but had there been no *Seven Wise Masters* there would have been no *Decameron* and no *Canterbury Tales*.

Among these various classes of tale, the romances contained some of the finest story-material in the world. There is the stuff of an 'Cedipus Tyrannus'

in the tales of Gregorius and of Degare, who after long wanderings encounter and unwittingly wed their mothers. There is the germ of an 'Odyssey' in the romance of *Guy of Wavvick*, who returns a pilgrim from the Holy Land, and after showing himself the greatest warrior of his nation, in battle with the giant Colbrand, enters his own hall, in his pilgrim's garb, and looks, unrecognized, upon his wife as she sits at work like Penelope among her maids. There is a fainter suggestion of the love of Achilles and Patroclus in the pathetic story of Amis and Amiloun. But on the whole, the greater possibilities of story were ignored by all but the best of the romancers. They had no grasp of human nature, no sense consequently of the stress and contradiction from which tragedy springs; by 'tragedy' the whole medieval world understood, characteristically enough, a simple decline from good to evil hap; and when a tragic *nodus* apparently confronted them they habitually chose either to dissolve it in sentiment or to cut it by force. The hero is never brought to the point at which he utters the agonized cry of *CEdipus* or Lear in their last straits. All obstacles and perils give way before him. If he is exposed as an infant, tender wolves or lions bring him up; if imprisoned, merciful jailers let him out; if condemned to death by paynims, a Sultan's daughter loves and helps him, or the Sultan himself is smitten with pity as he stands at the stake, and not only releases him but troops to the altar with all his house. Even when the hero undergoes real and grievous affliction, like Amis and Amiloun, or Griselda, the poignancy of tragedy is somehow

warded off; the calamity does not rightly come home; the tragic cry is dissolved in a saintly ardour of suffering.

Englishmen have rarely been apt translators; and of the English rhymers and *seggers* who busied themselves in decocting the abundant stores of French romance, few succeeded in conveying into their homely vernacular much of the romantic spirit. To the mystic imagination of Brittany, but half-intelligible to the accomplished French *trouvères* themselves, they were quite impervious; though they fully appreciated its market value as a source of extravagant incident. The wonder-castle of the Graal, the magic potion which effaces all things on earth for Tristan and Isolde but their love, become telling curiosities, like the marvels of the Castle of Otranto.

Of far more promise for the future of English story was the fresh and vigorous *realism*, for which the English purveyors of entertainment seized every opportunity. Their imaginary warfare lacks the virtue of imagination, but they can sometimes suggest the hurtling of real battle when they only try to tell what they have seen. They are more familiar with camp than with court, with the serving men's quarters than with the lady's bower; and the story will become vivid and genial in their hands as it quits the *terrain* accessible only to their ineffective fancy and descends to the familiar resort of their five senses and homely mother-wit. To men of this temper the piquant stories of everyday society which had obtained so prodigious a vogue among the French populace were naturally con-

genial. The *fabliaux*, with their keen satiric point and their unrestrained license, touched the vein of many a rough Englishman who altogether lacked the power of emulating their facility and sparkle. Few of these imitations survive; but by the end of the thirteenth century the country abounded in tales of cognate character, as we may judge from the decree, of 1292, in which the University of Oxford condemned the multitude of *fabulæ* dealing with license and tending to immorality. Some of these stories have won their literary apotheosis in the *Canterbury Tales*; others, like *Dame Siriz* and *A Pennyworth of Wit*, still extant in their original form, serve to illustrate the kind of material which Chaucer found before him. *Dame Siriz* is a tale of the Theodore and Honoria type transferred to low life. The Dame, a professional go-between, *frightens* a merchant's wife into accepting the advances of a clerical suitor by the device of putting pepper into the eyes of a little dog and explaining that the weeping animal is her daughter—bewitched for similar obstinacy. There is a finer point in the story of another merchant who, irresolute between his wife and his mistress, receives as 'a pennyworth of wit' the counsel to try their fidelity by presenting himself before each in turn as a penniless fugitive. But the English *fabliau* is seen at its best where the humour plays under some frankly fictitious disguise, as in the admirable story of the *Fox and the Wolf*. It is hard to explain why the great continental Beast-epic of the Fox remained so strange to English literature before Caxton, for almost all English poets who have made animals talk have

made them talk well. The *genre* has always, in European literature, hovered between two types—the poem of animal nature, and the fable pure and simple in which the animal speakers are a mere disguise for men. The first is more Germanic, the other Latin and French; the one appeals to the Naturalism of the English mind, the other to its delight in allegory.

The *Cock and the Fox* comes, in easy vivacity, within reasonable distance of the *Parlement of Fowls* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, and shows how tolerable an instrument of narrative colloquial English had become, a generation before Chaucer began to write. Here is a specimen of the dialogue, slightly paraphrased. The Wolf coming up to the well, hears the Fox at the bottom:—

"Quoth the Fox: 'Who is now there?
I wene it is Isegrim that I hear.'
'That is sooth/ the Wolf sede,
'But what art thou, so God thee rede?'
'Ah,' quoth the Fox, 'I will thee tell,—
I am Renard, thy friend,
And if I thy coming had ween'd,
I had so prayed for thee
That thou should'st have come to me.'
'To thee?' quoth the Wolf, 'whereto?
What should I in the well-pit do?'
Quoth the Fox: 'Thou art unwise;
Here is the bliss of Paradise;
Here evermore I may well fare,
Withouten pain, withouten care;
Here is meat, and here is drink,
Here is bliss withouten swink,
Here is hunger never mo
Nor any other kind of woe;

Of all good things here is enough'.
At these words the Wolf laughed.
'Art thou dead, so God thee rede,
Or of the world?' the Wolf said."

III

Such were, briefly, the modes of story current in England when the greatest of all English story-tellers began to write. Chaucer reached his final mastery through a somewhat prolonged apprenticeship. Of the recognized story-types there is none which he did not touch, and none which his touch did not adorn; but they were not all equally adapted to the purpose of artistic story-telling, and made demands not satisfied with equal facility, or in an equal degree, upon Chaucer's manipulating art. Infinitely versatile in range of topics and of motives, rejecting neither high nor low, chivalrous adventure nor modern street-jest, pious legend nor joyous fable, the Chaucerian tale had yet to satisfy two canons: it had to have definite unity of structure and harmony of form; and it had to be put into terms of universal human nature, to be made alive and arresting to every human hearer with open eyes and ears. In humanity under every guise he takes a keen and genial delight; and just because of his humanism he will not tolerate the shapelessness which comes of matter getting the better of spirit, nor the abstractions and pedantries which come of the tool getting the better of the hand.

To such canons as these the *romances* were, among current forms of story, peculiarly ob-

noxious. The typical romance was shapeless, its humanity thin and vague; and Chaucer's positive mind did not provide the kind of alchemy which later turned its very tenuity of substance into material for the brilliant phantasmagoria of Ariosto and the solemn Faerie of Spenser. He had not the ethical intensity of his contemporary, the nameless Gawain-poet, who, like Spenser, brings the marvellous adventures of his hero into subtle relation with his character,—the paragon of knighthood who shudders a little at death. His ways of dealing with romance anticipate faintly the ways of other great positive-minded poets who looked back upon romance from the achieved heights of the full Renaissance which he was but beginning to climb: the mighty travesty of Rabelais and Cervantes, the humanized romance of Shakespeare. What Chaucer thought of the romance in his maturity we know from the admirable parody of *Sir Thopas*—a counterpart, as genial as it is merciless, of the chastisement inflicted by Hogarth's irate musician upon the imperturbable street practitioners under his window.

But there was a strain in his nature to which romance was congenial, and a period of his life in which he gave it unstinted scope. The sentimental extravagance of romantic love, the pathos of fidelity through the long separations imposed by the romantic prodigality of space and time, appealed to that 'pity', which, as he thrice tells us, 'renneth soon in gentil heart', and which was only qualified and chastened by the criticism of his Gallic wit. In youth he had written (as the

Man of Lawe relates) the pathetic tale of 'Seis and Alcyon', which serves as proem to the kindred pathos of the story of the duchess Blanche. The first literary ambition inspired by his Italian journey was, unless appearances deceive, to clothe in the newly-discovered eloquence and music of Boccaccio the more *outrt* pathos of Boccaccio's own Griselda.¹ And 'patient' Griselda is but one of a gracious but somewhat anaemic sisterhood of saintly martyrs,—Constance the all-enduring, Virginia and Cecily the chaste.² The exquisite figure of Constance alone, apart from the charm of language, lifts the *Man of Lawe's Tale* above the better romances; structurally it is as well qualified as Sir Thopas itself to serve as their parody. But after Chaucer had entered the forties (*ie.* from 1380 or thereabouts onward) this vein of sentiment began to run thin. When called upon by the queen to tell the stories of a series of 'Good Women', he assents with charming *entrain*; but he has not gone far before the legend of 'Cupid's Saints' palls upon their quondam votary, notwithstanding that he has dared to impress into his service such 'saints' as Medea and Cleopatra; and presently he has flung away from this cloistered and ascetic virtue to the world of secular humanity, and is telling, with infinite zest, of doughty English wives and frank English maidens,—of the wife of Bath and dame Alison, of May and Dorigen, 'fresh Canace' and 'Emelie

¹ Chaucer, as is well known, used Petrarch's Latin version of the tale.

² The Tales of the Man of Lawe, the Physician, and the Second Nun were all clearly composed long before Chaucer had planned the *Canterbury Tales*, in which they were finally incorporated.

the bright', or adding a gay ironic *envoy* to the tale of the saintly Griselda:

" Grisilde is deed, and eek hir pacience,
And bothe atones buried in Itaille;
For which I crye in open audience,
No wedded man so hardy be tassaille
His wyves pacience, in hope to finde
Grisildes, for in certein he shall faille!"

The splendid *Knight's Tale*, whose course the bright Emelie controls, shows what Chaucer, at the height of his artistic maturity, cared to make of a thoroughly romantic story. It is true that he took the subject from no ordinary romance, but from a quasi-epic full of classical pretensions; but Boccaccio had read Virgil and Statius with romantic eyes, and his epic machinery and episodes only provided new varieties of romantic prolixity and irrelevance. Chaucer, far more naive, and quite innocent of the lofty ambitions of Humanism, is more classic in spirit than Boccaccio; the *Knighfs Tale* is some degrees more Homeric than the *Teseide*. The romantic in it is at once ennobled and restricted; love is more potent and more passionate; but it appears, like the love of Paris and Helen, an incident in a world not as a whole given to sentiment, but ready to allow, with the bland middle-aged cynicism of a Theseus or a Pandarus, that

" A man mot ben a fool or yong or old".

And just as he does not curb romantic sentiment, but gives it at once a higher value and a truer proportion, so he is not afraid of romantic

marvel, provided he can bring it somehow to terms with human nature. The gods debate and wrangle over the fate of Emily, as of old over that of Troy, and Chaucer paints them with humorous gusto, as he might have done some company of jovial and somewhat disreputable nobles. In several other tales he takes over mythical or faery matter with equally naïve relish, from native saint's legend, Breton *lai*, or oriental fable, but with a subtle adaptation to the temper and quality of the narrator. No touch of criticism mars the devout Prioress's tender legend of the slain child's miraculous song; the epicurean Franklin is honestly indignant with the magician who spreads the dead by illusion before the eyes of Dorigen, but does not doubt the power of his art; the gross-bodied wife of Bath, though well aware that *now no man can see elves mo*, tells her tale of Arthurian faery with complete good faith; while the young, poetic Squier, 'as fresh as is the month of May', whose half-told tale is in romantic beauty the finest of all, achieves, like Coleridge in the *Ancient Mariner*, the feat of giving illusive reality to his marvels by imaginative insight into the kind of mental experience which they would create if they happened indeed. The homely folks crowding open-mouthed about the brazen steed, and noting its points with the horsey accomplishment of an English mob; Canace in her girlish joy dreaming of her mirror, going out into the woods at dawn to try the virtue of her ring upon the 'leden' of the singing birds, and then listening rapt to the piteous tale of the bleeding

falcon,—all this wealth of human realism serves, not to attenuate romance, but to give it its full value.

Nevertheless, it is perhaps in his tales of frank and joyous humour, where romance is ignored or even flouted, that Chaucer's mastery is most consummate. Spenser and Shakespeare touched romance to finer issues; but the literature of the *fabliau* culminates in the tales of the Miller of Trumpington (the *Reve's*), the Cock and the Fox (the *Nun's Priest's*), and in the grimmer jest of the Three Rioters who seek for Death (the *Pardoner's*). Chaucer's humour was more potent and prevailing than his pathos; he had felt the *lacrymæ rerum*, but the mood of tragic despondence or foreboding was rather poignant with him than prolonged; after telling a 'tragedy' he passed gladly, as at the close of *Troilus*, to the relief of a quasi-'comic' *Hous of Fame*. This side of Chaucer is reflected in the admirable connecting story of the *Canterbury Tales*, and embodied in the person of Harry Bailie, who sets it going and determines its course. Like Pandarus and Theseus, he keeps romance in check while allowing it to have its fling; does due honour to the noble tale of Palamon, but will not away with Sir Thopas; roundly echoes the Knight's protest against the Monk's 'tragedies' of ruined princes, and expresses his mind in his counsel to the Nun's Priest: '*Look, let thy mind be murie evermo!*' The hearty positive genius of the English people keeps watch, throughout this final masterpiece of Chaucer, upon the irresponsible literary and poetic instincts of rhetoric,

sentiment, romance, which in later days have habitually scorned its control. It is Chaucer's magical achievement as a story-teller to have reconciled the two without doing violence to either.

IV

But Chaucer's magic died with him. The ensuing century not only found no comparable artist attempting his work; it introduced conditions which made it harder to achieve, and placed heavier burdens upon weaker shoulders. As usual, it was not the most studious imitators who came nearest. Henryson, who deals out doom to Chaucer's faithless Cresseide, and makes her kneel by the wayside, a leper, unrecognized, to beg alms of her old lover, is more Chaucerian than Lydgate with his 'new Canterbury Tale' of Thebes. Henryson, the schoolmaster of Dunfermline, is not quite without the foibles of his craft; and the Humanist movement, which gave the schoolmaster an unprecedented importance in the making of literature, tended on the whole to accumulate obstacles to the recovery of Chaucer's art, or the attainment of any art so classic in noble simplicity as his. It was too favourable to rhetoric not to be perilous to story. Nothing is more remarkable in Chaucer than the naive unconcern with which he goes by the rhetorical allurements of the Roman poetry which he read for its story's sake; both those which belonged to a great poetic manner beyond his reach, and those which marked a perilous excess of mere intellectual vivacity over imaginative power. If he did not

and could not acquire the noble style of Virgil or of Dante, he seems to have at least suffered no hurt from the brilliant virtuosity of Ovid. But in the first generation of the sixteenth century the days of this happy nonchalance, or serene self-mastery, were over. Phonetic decay had ruined the beauty of Chaucer's verse; his metric had perished with the inflections on which it was based; English was once more a rude tongue, utterly worsted in a comparison, which Chaucer could have stood, with the efficiency, lucidity, and point of Augustan Latin. The brocaded ceremonial stateliness of Latin style was inevitably alluring to the speakers of a homely idiom, and beguiled them to emulate an eloquence habitually tending to declamation, and formal beauties which rather decorate and diversify a narrative than arise spontaneously in its course. In the mind of a Dante or a Milton the language of Virgil may beget a narrative style of incomparable poetic weight and power, but it is a dangerous school of story for smaller men.

And while the language was rapidly annexing stylistic elements not directly favourable to story, the animating spirit of literature was also passing yet more swiftly out of the mood of quiescent reminiscence in which story thrives. It was an age of discovery and innovation, of enlarging horizons and beckoning dreams. The temper of the Elizabethan Renaissance was lyrical, passionate, individual; all their greatest poetry and their greatest prose, whatever its form, is lyrical in mood; we hear through its complex harmonies

a ground-tone of heroic song. Their vivacious energy threw itself into the arts which directly utter, to the neglect of those which report and describe. Story could not hold its own before lyric and drama; the glass held up to nature triumphed over the secondary portraiture of life in the pigments of words. The Tale, as fashioned by Chaucer, with its marvellous reconciliation of humour and sentiment, of realism and romance, of churl and gentle, has passed through the crucible and resumed existence transformed and re-arrayed. The story-form has lost vigour and pliability; it can no longer hold so rich a content nor attach so various an audience; prose and poetry go their several ways; churl and gentle follow their separate resorts. The Miller and the Reve will be found among the fishwives of Billingsgate, listening to the racy tales they tell their waterman as he rows them home,¹ or exchanging ribald stories with the 'Cobbler of Canterbury' and the 'Tinker of Turvey'; the Knight and the Squier have joined the courtly circle who listened to the *Faerie Queene*; while Harry Bailie, deriding both, has found his place among the spectators at the Globe, laughing and swearing at the jests of Falstaff, and cheering equally the heroism and the gaiety of Prince Hal.

Spenser made his début as an enthusiastic disciple of Chaucer, and fell at first to telling tales, like the 'Oak and the Briar'¹ in the *Shepherd's*

¹ This is the scheme of the extant series of tales called *Westward for Smelts*, which, with the other collections named, are actual imitations in prose of the *Canterbury Tales*,

Calendar, or the tale of Mother Hubbard, in what was meant to be a reproduction of the supple rhymed couplet which had been Chaucer's mature and final choice in verse. But his genius was from the first obviously of quite another type, and he only found himself when he had devised his noble but intensely lyrical stanza, and taken as the haunt and main region of his song the glorious elfin-land of the *Faerie Queene*, with its unearthly iridescent atmosphere, and its unsubstantial woof of story, woven of the dreams of sages, saints, and knights. His poetry sang through symbols as inveterately as Chaucer's spoke through substance. Beyond question, story lost some of its native vigour in breathing this ethereal air and feeding on this ideal diet; a loss which the great example of Bunyan (not to speak of Dante) shows to be not inevitable in allegory. But there are many scenes like the debate with Despair or the unmasking of Duessa, which carry us along by the sheer force of the dramatic situation, and then the ethical symbolism enters as an added grace.

Spenser, beyond all others, expressed in story what was loftiest and most original in the English Renaissance. But his moral *Mhos* was too lofty and intense to permit him to represent it on all sides. The purely pagan and sensual Humanism of Italy, which rioted in the romance of Aretino and the sculpture of Cellini, and breathed more of Ovid than of Plato, had apt scholars in England too; and Spenser had touched it with passing scorn in his portrayals of the House of Pride or the Bower of Bliss. In England, as in Italy, its congenial

domain was the world of classic myth, as set forth with hard enamelled brilliance by Ovid. This myth-world was as remote from nature and humanity as Spenser's, and the school of poets who felt its charm were not minded, like Shelley and Keats in after-days, to make it more natural or more human than it was. They rather fastened, with the enthusiasm of pure artists, upon every fantastic or arabesque contortion of incident which offered a coign of vantage for beauty. Like many a romantic poet of later times, like Keats in *Lamia* or Victor Hugo in the *Satyre*, they delighted in representing the 'leaps' which Nature declines to make, the transformations of gods and men in which Ovid had laid up the choicest labour of his 'sweet witty soul'. Some of these traits are exhibited in the mythologic plays of Lyly, and in his *Euphues*, but they are most completely embodied in the *Glaucus and Scilla* of Thomas Lodge. Marlowe and Shakespeare have their roots, as epic poets, in the same neo-pagan school, but both in important points evade its formulas and prophesy of the superb poetic future which it was given to Shakespeare only to achieve.

Lodge was an adept in the graceful ingenuities of style which Lyly, his college contemporary and literary exemplar, had first made current. He delighted in images derived from classic myths, and in the painting or sculpture founded on them. In the chamber of his heroines Diana will be carved in marble, surprised by the sudden intrusion of Actaeon, or Anacreon's Cupids kept in check by 'well-shaped Modesty'; while on the walls "all the

chaste ladies of the world inched out of silver, looking through fair mirrors of chrysolite, carbuncles, sapphires, emeralds, fix their eyes on the picture of Eternity".¹ Sumptuous scenery of this kind is one of Lodge's habitual points of repair, in verse as in prose. It was not a very noble sphere, and the highest claim, after all, of Lodge, as of Lyly, is to have helped to guide the early steps of Shakespeare. For that the manner of the *Venus and Adonis* (1593) owes something to that of the *Glaucus and Scilla* is hardly doubtful. But Shakespeare not only showed himself already a master of all the devices and ingenuities to which Lyly gave vogue; he threw into the somewhat artificial and jaded atmosphere of the classic tale the fragrance of nature, the freshness of a blithe, observant, penetrating spirit, the naivete of English folk-lore. Shakespeare, like Lodge, derives the method of his tale ultimately from Ovid, but he is far freer and bolder in his use of it. In the famous description of the hare, for instance, a touch as luminous and delicately distinct as Ovid's achieves effects not caught from his enamel and gold, but from the dewy morning meads on Cotswold or by Avon. And already in the *Lucrece* of the next year (1594) his manner is more his own. It is, unmistakably, the 'graver labour' to which, in the dedication of the *Venus and Adonis*, he promised 'to devote all idle hours'. Its deeper tones denote, not certainly any revolt or recantation, but yet a resolve to give his work a fuller consonance with his nature, to make it utter the richer harmonies of his music as

¹A *Margarite of America*. Warton, *Hist. of E. P.*, iv. 348.

well as its liquid and mellow soprano song. The charm of the earlier poem is largely that of a succession of beautiful pictorial effects; in the later, painting is passing into drama; if incomplete as a presentation of life, it is woven of living material; the rhetoric is still profuse and overwrought, but it is more fraught with passion and truth, less prone to curious elegances of arabesque.

Yet, with all their prodigality of beauty, Shakespeare's tales interest us chiefly as marking a phase in the still incomplete growth of the dramatist. The single tale left us by the precocious genius of Marlowe is, on the other hand, as mature as anything he has done, as full as *Tamburlaine* or *Edward II* of those brave sublunary things which the 'Muses' darling' had in him. Of all the dramatists of his day his was the most lyrical temperament; but his impetuous vein did not readily conform to the traditional moulds of lyric verse. In drama he scornfully repudiated the 'jigging vein of rhyming mother wits'; in the tale he rejected the consecrated stanza. A few conceits apart, mostly of characteristic audacity, his narrative style is, beyond all contemporary example, nervous, penetrating, and direct; he discharges his lines, like arrows, with fiery vehemence, and a kind of austerity, taking his most ardent joys without a smile, and finding them in passion, action, heady riots, and the beauty that stings and thrills. Of the genial humanity of Chaucer there is nothing. The energy of a single motive drives on the tale,—the love which, like an elemental force, unsought and inevitable, compels Hero and

Leander into one another's arms; seeing that, as his famous phrases have it,—

"It lies not in our power to love or hate,
For love in us is overruled by fate... .
Where both deliberate, the love is slight;
Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

Marlowe's death left his work a fragment; and Chapman's continuation—two-thirds of the entire work—abounds with all the ingenuities of rhetorical device, of which the most learned of Elizabethan poets had so ample a store.

V

In their most pagan mood, however, the Eliza' bethans remained singularly free from the more deadly weaknesses of neo-classicism. Their hardy originality asserted itself through their most ardent discipleship to ancient writers; antiquity and its ideals nourished and enriched their minds, but did not master or subdue them. The English Renaissance at no time dreamed, like the Italian, of the actual revival of the pagan world. Compared with the fanatic fervour of Rienzi for his restored Rome, the temper of More's Platonic Utopia is that of a brilliant *jeu d'esprit*; and Elizabethan El Dorados beckoned from beyond far other seas than the Tyrrhene or Ægean. The literatures of the classical world won by slow and insecure steps such partial authority as they attained in our so-called Augustan age; and it is only in the seventeenth century that the determining ideals, the fundamental genius of even

Roman poetry, as distinguished from its charm of detail, began to be understood and emulated. To delight in honey-tongued Ovid's tale of Medea or Virgil's tragedy of Dido—one of the fountain-heads of modern romance—was one thing, to appreciate the quality and aims of ancient epic with the insight of Milton or Dryden quite another. How remote from such understanding even learned Elizabethans could be is apparent when we remember that Spenser supposed his *Faerie Queene* to stand, with Ariosto's *Orlando*, in the direct line of descent from the *Iliad* and the *Æneid*, to which it bears as much relation as a typical Elizabethan mansion does to the Parthenon. The advent of James was the signal for a general rally of the forces that made for a more severe and obsequious classicism. Inigo Jones imposed upon the picturesque and quaint luxuriance of contemporary architecture the penurious elegance of Palladio, and shared court favour with Ben Jonson, the sturdiest devotee of the canons of ancient art. To write an epic poem, not like Spenser or Ariosto, but like Homer or Virgil, became the mark of young aspirants, great and small. Milton hazarded upon the possibility of a modern epic his fixed lifelong resolve to leave behind him a poem that posterity would not willingly let die. Cowley and Davenant opened the long and dreary chapter of the second-rate epic, most mortal of all forms of literature, with the *Davideis* of the one (1656) and the *Gondibert* (1650) of the other. Cowley's poem, as full of talent as it is poor in genius, admirably exhibits

the literary problems and aspirations current in the days when Milton was brooding over the scheme of *Paradise Lost*. Cowley, too, aimed at a Christian epic, and displayed his biblical hero in a framework elaborately adapted from Homer and Virgil. His careful fidelity to the letter of epic tradition allows us to estimate the quality of Milton's classicism and the extent and limits of his originality. David, like Adam, is the object of a conflict between Heaven and Hell; and his early history is told, like that of Odysseus and Æneas, while the action pauses. *Gondibert*, while by no means so good, is considerably more independent. In two points Davenant broke decidedly away from epic tradition, under the twofold spell, it would seem, of drama and of song. Nothing better illustrates the prestige which the English drama had won over the English mind than Davenant's serious attempt, as he says, to "cut out the walks of his epic poem to the meanders of the English stage";¹ in other words, to contrive the plot as if it were the matter of a five-act play;—plot and counterplot, with a 'turn' in the third act,—at which point the author laid down his pen. The second point—the stanza—was of more moment for the future of the Tale. No one emulated his quasi-dramatic epic; but the quatrain with alternate rhymes which Davenant daringly chose to write—with the idea, as he naively tells us, that his cantos might "(like the works of Homer) be sung at village feasts"—won for a moment the favour of Dryden. For a spirited

¹ Davenant: Preface to *Gondibert*.

and moving tale the weighty and sonorous five-foot quatrain was no doubt a hazardous choice; but Dryden, with his brilliant faculty of saving an apparently hopeless cause, compels us to regard it as, in his case, a happy one. Davenant never really masters the secret of the difficult strophe; it remains with him, despite his lyrical intention, an aggregate of four lines having rhymes in particular places but no totality of effect: Dryden elicits all the spring and resonance of which lines are capable, the verse fairly bounds under his hands, and each strophe has the value of a single complex musical phrase. The *Annus Mirabilis* (1667) is not a great poem, nor indeed strictly a poem at all; Dryden himself did not claim for it a place among the heroic epics, "though both the actions and actors are as much heroic as any poem can contain".¹ it is a brilliant example of a bad kind; the apotheosis of the Chronicle in verse. That Dryden never tried the loftier flight must be reckoned to the credit of his critical sanity and self-knowledge. For one who reckoned epic the supreme form of literature, as he did, the literary *ignis fatuus* of the modern epic must have had a dangerous attraction. But his shrewdness doubtless drew a warning from the virtual failure of Cowley and Davenant, and perhaps not less from the amazing triumph of Milton. No one better understood than Dryden himself, when he asked leave to turn *Paradise Lost* into rhyme, the difference in fundamental inspiration between himself and the master

¹ Dryden: Preface to *Annus Mirabilis*.

who sardonically permitted him to 'tag his lines'. The 'heroic' poetry in which he excelled was, with all its frequent magnificence of expression, a product of rhetorical cunning and a vigorous brain, not of greatness or depth of character. It was, at its best, of the breed of the noble and dignified heroic of Corneille; at its worst it approached the baser variety of sentimental 'heroic romances' current at the French court. Dryden was, in many things, above his generation; but he was too much its child to be capable of the rarer heroic strain; and Gray's famous image is a trifle too lofty to express quite adequately the quality by which he has defied all subsequent changes of literary taste. His car traversed the fields of glory as swiftly when it was borne by coursers of somewhat less than 'aetherial race',—when the charioteer, dropping all pretensions to the mantle of the *vates sacer*, stood upon his unassailable rank as a master of familiar and hearty eloquence, an unsurpassed pleader and *raconteur*. Like Ovid, Boccaccio, and Chaucer, he unites an infallible appeal to the story-loving instinct of the mass of men with all the captivations of literary style. He lacks the simple strength, the tenderness, the archness of Chaucer, the romantic grace and sparkle of the Roman and the Italian; but in union of massive home-speaking power and vivid play of mind with the story-telling power he has no rival.

It was upon some of the tales of these kindred of his that Dryden spent the happiest labour of his closing years. The *Fables* (1700) owed their origin,

indeed, to his occupation with the ancient epic. The story of the Wrath of Achilles is only an episode of the 'tale of Troy divine'; but no one ever read the episode without wishing to read the beginning and the end; and the *Iliad* sent Dryden to the twelfth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where they are told. Then, the lighter music having won his ear, he turned over the leaf to more familiar themes, such as 'the good-natured story of Baucis and Philemon', and the rest. Presently, "having done with Ovid for this time, it came into my mind that our old English poet, Chaucer, in many things resembled him, and that with no disadvantage on the side of the modern author"; whereupon he retold for his generation the tales of Palamon and Arcite, of the Cock and the Fox, and the Wife of Bath's tale of King Arthur. Finally, "from Chaucer I was led to think of Boccace, who was not only his contemporary, but also pursued the same studies", and turned into English verse three of the most famous tales of the *Decameron*. The most valuable and important of these for the modern reader, and for the present purpose, are the tales from Boccaccio, where Dryden, having a prose original to deal with, found his own form, and where the limpid grace of Chaucer does not rise up to disparage him. The tales he has chosen have all a vein of fine romantic extravagance in keeping with the 'happy valiancy' of his manner. The boorish Cymon startled not only into good sense but into philosophic sagacity by the beauty of Iphigenia;¹ Nastagio hunting down the spirit of the hapless damsel who had

• ¹ *Decam.* V. (Love stories with a happy ending), Nov. i.

refused his hand;¹ old Tancred savagely sending his daughter her lover's heart,²—these fine audacities of medieval legend fanned anew the old heroic fire, and threw out a last challenge to his well-tried skill. It is hardly an accident that he has uniformly avoided the tales which make no demand upon credulity, and offer no problem to the master of persuasive speech. Dryden belonged to a generation for which the vision of romance had faded, and the vision of nature was not yet born: but the forensic instinct had never been so keen or the means of gratifying it so highly developed; and that instinct found its opportunity best in a story somewhat audaciously unreal in motive,—a profile of capricious arabesque requiring all an artist's cunning to give meaning and vitality to its random curves. Such success as this must be conceded to Dryden in these tales. Nowhere is his language more pliant, or his verse more supple.

VI

Dryden blew the embers of the Tale in Verse, but the momentary glow did not arrest its steady decline. In spite of the brilliance of Pope and the Horatian urbanity of Prior, in spite of the admirable ease of Swift and the geniality of Gay, the verse-tale was, in respect of all higher literary qualities, decrepit, and the power of story-telling confined to narrow limits of topic and mood. The only kind of verse-tale which thrived was that in

¹*Decam.* V., Nov. 8.

²*Decam.* IV. (Love stories with a tragic ending), Nov. i.

which verse is not a symptom of poetry, but only an adjunct of wit. Prior's hopeless *Henry and Emma*, so complacently put forward by way of preserving what was worth having in the glorious *Nut-browne Maid*, suffices to show the mortal collapse in which romance of every kind lay stricken. The country shepherd still *told his tale* under the hawthorn, and at the tea-tables of Queen Anne's ladies reputations were hourly slain by tongues schooled in the anecdotic accomplishment of scandal. But in spite of the admirable mock-heroic reflections of these two worlds left by Gay and by Pope (the *Shepherd's Week*, 1713; the *Rape of the Lock*, 1711), the tale in literature had no root. The finer instruments of literary expression had been pressed into the service of satire, of moral reflexion, and wrought to a degree of polished efficiency altogether marvellous, but of value for narrative only in proportion as this was saturated with satiric or reflective elements. The heroic couplet, so supple in the hands of Chaucer, so sinewy still in those of Dryden, had crystallized, under Pope's treatment, into a detached series of epigrammatic antitheses. The presiding spirit of literature was, in a somewhat narrow sense, a masculine spirit; strong in the qualities ordinarily predominant in men, but weak in those which the best and healthiest men share with the woman and the child. Sentiment and imagination were by and by to recall story to literature. But it had to be recovered in prose before it was recovered in verse. The great and splendid development of the prose novel was the outlet found by the suppressed spirit of story. It

came about, significantly enough, under the indirect influence of feminine minds. Addison's short stories in the *Spectator* were especially addressed to women; and Richardson's long ones, designed, as is well known, for their edification, directly provoked the great and masculine art of Fielding.

But while prose fiction absorbed the story-impulse of an age of prose, the Tale in Verse had a future; and its recovery was an incident in the general triumph of poetry all along the line which marks the close of the century. It was an incident only. For the movement towards poetry was only in part a movement towards story; of the two main lines of advance which composed that movement, the so-called 'Revival of Romance' alone prompted directly to the poetic tale, while the poetic Naturalism or 'Return to Nature' was on the whole even less favourable to story than the spirit of the town which it dethroned. It withdrew poetry from the buzz and jangle of satiric tongues where story is denuded of romance, to the lonely meadows and moss-grown hermitages where it lacks the nourishing soil of human interests and intercourse. Action, among these amiable lovers of nature, is continually dissolved away into contemplation and description; the sinews of story relax, and the attempt to improvise them results in curious anomalies of art:—Thomson peopling the glens of his noble and austere landscapes with Dresden-china figures, whom he expects the reader to accept; or Wordsworth, perpetually imagining that he has infused into 'incidents of common life' the won-

derful glamour which without effort he throws upon the mountain or the flower. Wordsworth has, it is true, his rare and supreme successes in the tale; but the power of *Margaret* and of *Michael* lies not in the dynamic elements of story, but in the intense portrayal of a single situation of concentrated pathos. Nevertheless, the new preoccupation with the country gradually opened up new springs of human interest, and sympathetic observers began to divine the unknown wealth of heroic or pathetic incident lurking in the obscure life of the hamlet, and perishing without record like the beauty of the desert flower. The *Deserted Village*, the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, are full of the germs of story which, in an age of poets who sang and told instead of meditating and moralizing, would have burst into life. In prose it was otherwise. The great novelists had brought all the picturesque wealth of rural English life upon their broad, receptive canvasses; and Goldsmith himself, following in their way, easily broke the limits which bound his course in verse; the *Vicar of Wakefield* shows what the sketch of the Parson in the *Deserted Village* might, half a century later, have become. In the next decade description yields somewhat more freely to narrative; Langhorne's *The Country Justice* (1775), with its pathetic episode of the roadside birth, forms a link between Goldsmith and Crabbe. In Crabbe's own works we can trace the whole evolution of the Tale from the descriptive poem: narrative episode, still embryonic in *The Library* (1781) and *The Village* (1783), gradually attracts and absorbs the

whole poetic substance, until in the *Parish Register* (1807) and the *Borough* (1810) the nominal topic forms little more than a prosaic integument for the series of lively and moving tales; while in the *Tales in Verse* (1813) and *Tales of the Hall* (1819), the integument itself is finally sloughed off. Nothing could better illustrate the recovery of verse-story which marks the first generation of the nineteenth century, than this change of method and of point of view in a poet otherwise most tenaciously conservative of both, and with no pulse of revolution in his blood.

It is not among the contemplative devotees of a country life that the sources of the recovery of story are to be sought, but in that second line of rebels against the Augustan hegemony (including many recruits from the first) who in the seventh decade of the eighteenth century began to get the upper hand in English letters. The Revival of Romance had, in regard to the intrinsic character of the poetry to which it opened a way, many affinities with the 'Return to Nature'¹; but its way led far more through tale and ballad than through any more abstract or contemplative form of verse. Milton and Spenser were beacon-lights to both; but the Landscapists looked rather to *L' Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, the Romantics to the *Faerie Queene*. Thomson's *Seasons* is dominated by Milton; the *Castle of Indolence* by Spenser. Gray passed from the personal ode and elegy to render for the first time in English verse the heroic myths of the North and West. The decisive turning-point in the history of the movement

was undoubtedly the appearance, in 1765, of Percy's *Reliques of English Poetry*. Whether that amiable prelate had himself heard the horns of elf-land blowing may be doubtful; certainly he was capable of taking the dulcet warble of some neighbouring clergyman for an excellent echo of their note. But he put others with better ears in the way of hearing them. His collection is a strange farrago of good and bad, old and new; but of the old and the good there was enough, and the new and bad perished of its own inanity. The most fruitful part of the bequest was no doubt the ballads, after them the romances. The German poet Burger caught fire from the ballads of the *Reliques*, and his *Lenore* quickened the lyric fervour in many an English brain, "Have you seen the translation of Burger's *Lenore* in the Monthly Magazine?" wrote Lamb to Coleridge. "If you have!!!!" All the seething literary energies of the declining century sought expression for a time through the channel of this simple and primitive form of verse, not always without some violence to their natural bent and scope.

Wordsworth and Coleridge, poets of the brooding eye and the visionary dream, made their first serious appeal to the world through a form consecrated to adventure and exploit. Scott, too, who only found full scope for the entire range of his imagination in the prose novel, gave the first inadequate hint of his powers in ballads of very unequal merit. All three, after 'blowing through brass' strains of a somewhat insecure and casual magnificence, passed on to 'breathe

through silver' a music more perfectly expressive of their nature, None of the Lyrical Ballads is so Wordsworthian as the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* ; the *Ancient Mariner* itself, though perhaps a greater poem than the *Christabel*, is less saturated with the quality of Coleridge's mind; and *Glenfinlas* and the *Eve of St. John* are clearly transcended by *Marmion* and the *Lady of the Lake*. Wordsworth, the least epic-ally gifted of the three, thus fell for the time out of the ranks of the lyrical tellers of tales; while Coleridge and Scott evolved a new, rich, and beautiful form of the Tale in Verse. Scott, as is well known, with his usual generosity, declared that he owed the suggestion of the metre of the *Lay to Christabel*, which he had heard recited by Stoddart. To us the tales of the two poets belong to two widely different types. In delicacy and richness of music, in sense of mystery, *Christabel* is unrelated to any part of Scott's work. But he discovered a host of new effects in compensation for those which his ear was too gross to catch; he transported the dainty metre from Coleridge's mystic faeryland, and set it to the tune of trumpet and harp, the clank of spurs, and the canter of troopers. And while Coleridge sang as the shy and lonely poet for fit ears and few, Scott was a true modern minstrel, full of genial and accessible power, easily captivating the hearts of old and young, learned and lewd, a born story-teller such as had not arisen in England since Dryden, or even since Chaucer. His only rival, until his young contemporary Byron gaily filched his

crown, was the older contemporary whose tales, entirely untouched by his manner, were to be the delight of his maturity and the solace of his death-bed, and whom Byron called 'Nature's sternest painter and the best'. At the present day the lustre of Scott's and Byron's tales is more tarnished than that of Crabbe's. The pageants of romance and of romantic history grow dim; the tragedy of everyday life always finds an echo and never loses its hold. Yet Crabbe is no mere transcriber. His world, as Tennyson said, is his own. "There is a 'tramp, tramp, tramp', a merciless sledge-hammer thud about his lines which suits his subjects."¹ Byron appealed even more than Scott to the zest of the strange and the marvellous,—a kind of attraction which serves better to make men famous than to keep them so. The flagging interest of the public in metrical tales instantly revived when the hackneyed romance of border chivalry was replaced by the melodrama of oriental crime, and Scott's flowing but often featureless verse by Byron's unfailing resonance and glitter. Something of the old contrast between epic and romance was resumed in these two. Scott's tales, with whatever embroidery of romantic fancy, are yet living abstracts of national life, with more of Homer than of Ariosto, to whom Byron, in his mood of splendid but wilful compliment, compared his old rival. For Byron, his hero fills the whole field and absorbs the whole interest, like Sir Guy or Sir Bevis in the old romances. Marmion's death is a single

¹ *Life of Tennyson* (i vol. ed), p. 659.

incident in a supreme national catastrophe; when Lara's foes have won the day, they think 'their triumph nought till Lara too should yield'.

VII

Scott restored the Tale in Verse to literature. That achievement had an effect which far outweighed and outlasted his special manner, the limitations of which soon became obvious. The hot volley of short ringing lines, however telling in a recital of stirring adventure, was wanting in several qualities which had distinguished other schools of narrative verse. It was diffuse, without the leisured urbanity of Ariosto; plain, without the simplicity and reserve of Homer; old-fashioned, without the charming *naïveté* of Chaucer. Scott led the way back to romance, but his keen antiquarian taste was too much dominated by the bald manner of the medieval romancers, greatly as he surpassed them in all the dynamic qualities of story-telling. He had read the *Orlando* with delight; but on the whole the later and more splendid developments of romantic tale, whether in Italy or in England, lay beyond the range of his artistic susceptibility. The entire world of Greek letters was unknown to him. Chaucer he had naturally read; but there are curiously few signs that he loved him. Scott's achievement was to tell a tale in the semi-lyric manner of a lay; Chaucer throughout his whole later career is occupied in effacing the characteristics of the lay from his narrative style. The *Knight's Tale* is the

measure of his success; *Sir Thopas* the measure of the critical keenness which was its condition.

Almost all the memorable telling of Tales in Verse during the subsequent portion of the nineteenth century was controlled or haunted by one of these three ideals. In the hands of Keats the Tale recovered at a stroke all the lyric loveliness of attendant detail and all the delicacy and wealth of music which it had gathered in those of Shakespeare and Marlowe. The *Eve of St. Agnes* and the *Isabella* created a tradition of sheer beauty which no subsequent English poet has been able to ignore. But the bent of the next generation was, no less certainly, towards a more reserved and austere simplicity. Keats himself in *Lamia* essayed the more sinewy manner of Dryden, and the problem of which Tennyson's art found the beautiful solution was to reconcile instincts of beauty as rich and as imperious as those of Keats with the ideal of simplicity and reserve which he had learnt from the Greeks. With a manner not conspicuously varied or flexible he succeeded in satisfying both ideals in dealing with matters so unlike as the vicissitudes of homely fisher-folks in a Devonshire village of to-day and the legendary glories and griefs of Camelot. The more rigorous classicists were apt to suffer from the difficulty always found in making austere simplicity in English resemble austere simplicity in Greek. Landor's Greek tales are written with a severity which in other hands would seem frigid and artificial; but his native grandeur of mind, his mingled passion and ten-

derness, triumph over this obstacle; the verse is hard and inflexible as marble, but it breathes and burns. He renders the hurly-burly of battle not, like Scott, by a sympathetic rush and tumult of style, but like a sculptor, by an intense and passion-fraught repose. Arnold, his most direct successor among the poets of the mid-century, surpassed Landor's finest epic work in a few passages of his narrative poems, as in the famous close of *Sohrab and Rustum*; but his less massive build of mind does not so uniformly support and ennoble the austere form which he uses.

In the meantime the day of the great old English master of the Tale in Verse was at length to return. Chaucer, though never without reputation, had not touched the deeper poetic instincts of the first generation of nineteenth-century poets. His blithe realism was foreign to the romantic temper, his medieval scenery and ideas obscured his inner affinity, as an artist, to the Greeks. The slow advance of English philology made it possible to regard him as a rude pioneer in verse whose other merits entitled him to indulgence for his halting lines. Even Leigh Hunt, the first to emulate him as a story-teller, went to school with Dryden for his narrative verse, and long afterwards, while owning Chaucer to be the greatest of English narrative poets 'even in versification', added the curious apologetic qualification—"if the unsettled state of the language in his time, and the want of all native precursors in the art, be considered". Yet Hunt was the first who seriously set himself to tell a tale in Chaucer's manner,

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to imitate his sprightly familiarity, his genial unconstraint. He only succeeded in showing how rare and difficult a thing that Chaucerian grace of manner is. He is unconstrained enough, but his unconstraint, though not without moments of charm, is apt to recall the slovenly ease of an underbred man. He is at his best in describing scenery; for the human drama and its tragic climax he lacks sinew; the concentrated pathos of Dante dissolves away in his hands into a tender romantic dream. Nor did Hunt attempt to reproduce the dramatic element in the telling, which was Chaucer's final and most brilliant contribution to the Tale. It was otherwise with the other two leading Chaucerians of the century, Clough and Morris. Clough had thrown the first freshness of his genius into his best-known tales, the *Bothie* and *Amours de Voyage*—modern idylls, in which the perplexed spirit of the fifties breathes a grave undertone through the amenities of Long Vacation Oxford, or is sharply set off against the gay insouciance of the well-to-do bourgeois travellers. To Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*, the first and greatest example of the purely modern idyll, Clough (like Longfellow in *Evangeline*) plainly owed his poetic realism as well as his accentual hexameters; outdaring in both respects 'daring Germany' herself. Goethe's realism affected Clough somewhat as Chaucer's colloquialism had affected Hunt; both felt themselves emancipated by a classic and authoritative example from the bondage of a literary tradition; and both played fantastic tricks in the ardour of recovered liberty.

dough's work is controlled by no prevailing sense of beauty, like Goethe's; he has moments of greatness, and may perhaps still claim to have written three or four of the finest English hexameters; but it is almost as certain that he has to answer for a hundred or more of the worst. In the closing year of his life Clough applied the frank modernity of tone and topic which he had learnt from Goethe to the dramatic scheme of Chaucer. The *Mari Magno* is founded upon a pilgrimage of to-day,—the deck of an Atlantic liner for the Canterbury highway, and the great Republic, big with the destinies of the future, for the gray old medieval shrine. The enforced leisure of a voyage makes the high seas a natural framework for tales. Three centuries before Clough, Cinthio had made the tellers of his *Hecatommithi* fugitives on shipboard from the sack of Rome. So the Elizabethan *Westward for Smelts* already mentioned. But the pilgrims are very slightly drawn. Clough is interested in his speakers only as types of different ways of regarding the particular social problem which all their stories illustrate. In William Morris the dramatic element recedes still further, and the modernity is deliberately repudiated. If Clough threw the pale cast of modern intellectualism upon the rich humanity of the Chaucerian tale, Morris sequestered it in the vague lustrous twilight of legendary romance, and attached his tales to the slow-changing seasons of the primeval year. The two most considerable modern imitators of Chaucer represent the extremest divergence of which the modern

Tale in Verse is capable within the limits of an art related to his.

During the last twenty-five years story has certainly not lost ground as a living literary form. The dynamic imagination which goes out in incident and adventure has even tended, in verse-as in prose, to outstrip the penetrating imagination which analyses; and its predominance has been enforced by marked growth in English society and politics of both the historic temper which turns men's eyes upon the past, the storehouse of story, and the militant temper which makes them find romance in action, and prose in peace. The ruling political philosophy of the mid-century held a nation to be 'happy in proportion as its annals were dull'; that conception has, in an increasing number of minds, given way, under the stress of Darwin or of Nietzsche, to the belief, confessed or not, that its happiness lies rather in a constant, successful 'struggle-for-existence'—or, from our point of view, in the enactment of a perpetual romance. Partly because it is so blent with personal and national feeling, this temper has found issue more in stirring lyrical ballads than in the restrained objective work of the narrative poet. And even where the epic tone is preserved, the language is apt to be charged with the heightened colour and the audacious phrasing of lyric verse, as in the fine tales of Mr. Phillips. The contagion of Mr. Swinburne's immense lyric impetus, which vibrates in every line he has written, has contributed to draw the whole narrative poetry of his generation towards a more lyrical ideal of verse and

manner, and to diminish in proportion the prestige of the most notable epic achievement of the previous generation,—the *Idylls of the King*. His superb but fundamentally lyrical *Balan and Balen*, compared with the Idyll on the same story, marks the change of mood and *tempo*. If the poetry of thought, penetration, analysis, has yielded ground at one point to the poetry of action and adventure, so it has at another to the poetry of the dream. The lovely visions of Mr. Yeats are full of the elements of story,—wandering filaments of romance blown like impalpable gossamers in our faces, but rarely putting on the semblance of either coherent action or sustained thought. With a profusion of beautiful and stirring song, our poetry lacks at present the qualities which make poetic story great, representative, and finally memorable. No contemporary poem has even such claim as the *Idylls of the King* had to be a national epic, to enshrine the soul of England,—as Mr. Kipling's ballads may be said to enshrine her imperial 'limbs and outward flourishes'. The picturesque multiplicity of our verse represents all the changing phases of concrete life; but even from the superb genius of Mr. Swinburne we do not dream of listening for those final 'criticisms of life',—those last words of visionary contemplation which the stir and movement of the greatest Tales in Verse implicitly involve;—that prophetic strain of old experience which came from Sophocles among the olives of Colonus, from Shakespeare by his recovered Avon, from Milton in the poor chamber that hardly fenced off, the alien roar of Restoration London.

ENGLISH TALES IN VERSE

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

(c. 1340-1400)

I. THE SQUIRE'S TALE

Heere bigynneth the Squieres Tale

AT Sarray, in the land of Tartarye,
Ther dwelte a kyng that werreyed Russye,
Thurgh which ther dyde many a doughty man.
This noble kyng was cleped Cambyuskan,
Which in his tyme was of so greet renoun
That ther was nowher in no regioun
So excellent a lord in alle thyng.
Hym lakked noght that longeth to a kyng;
As of the secte of which that he was born,
He kepte his lay, to which that he was sworn;
And therto he was hardy, wys, and riche,
Pitous and just, and evermore yliche;
Sooth of his word, benigne and honourable,
Of his corderge as any centre stable;
Yong, fressh, and strong, in armes desirous
As any bacheler of al his hous.
A fair persone he was, and fortunat,
And kepte alwey so wel roial estat
That ther was nowher swich another man.

This noble kyng, this Tarte Cambyuskan,
Hadde two sones on Elpheta his wyf,

Of whiche the eldeste highte Algarsyf;
 That oother sone was cleped Cambalo.
 A doghter hadde this worthy kyng also
 That yongest was, and highte Canacee,
 But for to telle yow all hir beautee
 It lyth nat in my tonge, nyn¹ my konnyng;
 I dar nat undertake so heigh a'thyng;
 Myn Englissh eek is insufficient;
 It moste been a rethor excellent,
 That koude his colours longynge for that art,
 If he sholde hire discryven every part;
 I am noon swich, I moot speke as I kan.

And so bifel that whan this Cambyuskan
 Hath twenty wynter born his diademe,
 As he was wont fro yeer to yeer, I deme,
 He leet the feeste of his nativitee
 Doon cryen thurghout Sarray his citee,
 The last Idus of March after the yeer.

Phebus, the sonne, ful joly was and cleer,
 For he was neigh his exaltacioun
 In Martes face, and in his mansioun
 In Aries, the colerik hoote signe.
 Ful lusty was the weder and benigne,
 For which the foweles agayn the sonne sheene,
 What for the sesoun and the yonge grene,
 Ful loude songen hire affecciouns,
 Hem semed han geten hem protecciouns
 Agayn the swerd of wynter, keene and coold.

This Cambyuskan—of which I have yow toold—
 In roial vestiment sit² on his deys,
 With diademe, ful heighe in his paleys,
 And halt his feeste so solempne and so ryche,
 That in this world ne was ther noon it lyche;
 Of which if I shal tellen al tharray,

¹ *nyn* (*ne in*), nor in. ² sit, sits.

Thanne wolde it occupie a someres day;
 And eek it nedeth nat for to devyse
 At every cours the ordre of hire servyse.
 I wol nat tellen of hir strange sewes,
 Ne of hir swannes, ne of hire heronsewes¹.
 Eek in that lond, as tellen knyghtes olde,
 Ther is som mete that is ful deynte holde
 That in this lond men recche of it but smal;
 Ther nys no man that may reporten al.

I wol nat taryen yow, for it is pry me²,
 And for it is no fruyt, but los of tyme;
 Unto my firste I wole have my recours.

And so bifel that after the thridde cours,
 Whil that this kyng sit thus in his nobleye,
 Herknyng his mynstraies hir thynges pleye
 Biforn hym at the bord deliciously,
 In at the halle dore, al sodeynly,
 Ther cam a knyght upon a steede of bras,
 And in his hand a brood mirour of glas;
 Upon his thombe he hadde of gold a ring,
 And by his syde a naked swerd hangyng;
 And up he rideth to the heighe bord.
 In al the halle ne was ther spoken a word,
 For merveille of this knyght; hym to biholde
 Ful bisily ther wayten yonge and olde.

This strange knyght that cam thus sodeynly,
 Al armed, save his heed, ful richely,
 Saleweth kyng and queene, and lordes alle,
 By ordre, as they seten in the halle,
 With so heigh reverence and obeisaunce,
 As wel in speche as in contenaunce,
 That Gawayn, with his olde curteisye,
 Though he were comen ageyn out of fairye,
 Ne koude hym nat amende with a word;

¹ heronsewes, herons. ² prynu, 9 a.m.

And after this, biforn the heighe bord,
 He with a manly voys seith his message
 After the forme used in his langage,
 Withouten vice of silable, or of lettre;
 And for his tale sholde seme the bettre,
 Accordant to his wordes was his cheere,
 As techeth art of speche hem that it leere.
 Al be it that I kan nat sowne his stile,
 Ne kan nat clymben over so heigh a style,
 Yet seye I this, as to commune entente,
 Thus muche amounteth al that ever he mente,
 If it so be that I have it in mynde.

He seyde, " The kyng of Arabe and of Inde,
 My lige lord, on this solempne day
 Saleweth yow, as he best kan and may,
 And sendeth yow, in honour of youre feeste,
 By me, that am al redy at youre heeste,
 This steede of bras, that esily and weel
 Kan in the space of o day natureel,—
 This is to seyn, in foure and twenty houres,—
 Wher so yow lyst, in droghte or elles shoures,
 Beren youre body into every place
 To which youre herte wilneth for to pace,
 Withouten wem of yow, thurgh foul or fair;
 Or, if yow lyst to fleen as hye in the air
 As dooth an egle whan hym list to soore,
 This same steede shal bere yow ever moore,
 Withouten harm, til ye be ther yow leste,
 Though that ye slepen on his bak, or reste;
 And turne ageyn with writhyng of a pyn.
 He that it wroghte koude ful many a gyn.
 He way ted¹ many a constellacioun
 Er he had doon this operacioun,
 And knew ful many a seel, and many a bond.

¹ wayted, watched.

" This mirroure eek, that I have in myn hond,
 Hath swich a myght that men may in it see
 Whan ther shal fallen any adversitee
 Unto youre regne, or to yourself also,
 And openly who is youre freend or foo;
 And over al this, if any lady bright
 Hath set hire herte on any maner wight,
 If he be fals she shal his tresoun see,
 His newe love, and al his subtiltee,
 So openly that ther shal no thyng hyde.
 Wherefore, ageyn this lusty someres tyde,
 This mirour and this ryng that ye may see
 He hath sent to my Lady Canacee,
 Youre excellente doghter that is heere.

"The vertu of the ryng, if ye wol heere,
 Is this, that if hire lust' it for to were
 Upon hir thombe, or in hir purs it here,
 Ther is no fowel that fleeth under the hevene
 That she ne shal wel understonde his stevene²,
 And knowe his menyng openly and pleyn,
 And answeere hym in his langage ageyn;
 And every gras that groweth upon roote
 She shall eek knowe, and whom it wol do boote,
 Al be his woundes never so depe and wyde.

" This naked swerd that hangeth by my syde
 Swich vertu hath that what man so ye smyte,
 Thurghout his armure it wol kerve and byte,
 Were it as thikke as is a branched ook;
 And what man that is wounded with the strook
 Shal never be hool, til that yow list of grace
 To stroke hym with the plat in thilke place
 Ther he is hurt; this is as muche to seyn,
 Ye moote with the platte swerd ageyn
 Strike hym in the wounde and it wol close.

¹ *if hire fast*, if she desire, ² *sfevene*, voice.

This is a verray sooth, withouten glose,
It failleth nat whil it is in youre hold."

And whan this knyght hath thus his tale told,
He rideth out of halle, and doun he lighte.
His steede, which that shoon as sonne brighte,
Stant in the court as stille as any stoon.
This knyght is to his chambre lad anoon,
And is unarmed and unto mete y-set.

The presentes been ful roially y-fet¹,—
This is to seyn, the swerd and the mirour,—
And born anon into the heighe tour,
With certeine officers ordeyned therfore;
And unto Canacee this ryng was bore
Solempnely, ther she sit at the table;
But sikerly, withouten any fable,
The hors of bras, that may nat be remewed,
It stant as it were to the ground y-glewed;
Ther may no man out of the place it dryve
For noon engyn of wyndas ne polyve²;
And cause why? for they kan nat the craft;
And therfore in the place they han it laft,
Til that the knyght hath taught hem the manere
To voyden hym, as ye shal after heere.

Greet was the prees that swarmeth to and fro
To gauren on this hors that stondeth so;
For it so heigh was, and so brood and long,
So wel proportioned for to been strong,
Right as it were a steede of Lumbardye;
Ther-with so horsly, and so quyk of eye,
As it a gentil Poilleys³ courser were;
For certes, fro his tayl unto his ere,
Nature ne art ne koude hym nat amende

¹ *y-fet*, fetched, conveyed.

² *wyndas ne polyve*, windlass nor pulley.

³ *Poilleys*, Apulian.

In no degree, as al the peple wende.
But evermoore hir mooste wonder was
How that it koude go, and was of bras!
It was of fairye, as al the peple semed.
Diverse folk diversely they demed;
As many heddes as many wittes ther been.
They murmureden as dooth a swarm of been,
And maden skiles after hir fantasies,
Rehersynge of thise olde poetries;
And seyden, it was lyk the Pegasee,
The hors that hadde wynges for to flee;
Or elles it was the Grekes hors, Synoun,
That broghte Troie to destruccioun,
As men may in thise olde gestes rede.

"Myn herte", quod oon, "is evermoore in drede;
I trow som men of armes been ther-inne,
That shapen hem this citee for to wynne;
It were right good that al swich thyng were knowe."

Another rowned to his felawe lowe,
And seyde, "He lyeth! it is rather lyk
An apparence, y-maad by som magyk;
As jogelours pleyen at thise feestes grete".
Of sondry doutes thus they jangle and trete,
As lewed peple demeth comunly
Of thynges that been maad moore subtilly
Than they kan in hir lewednesse comprehende,
They demen gladly to the badder ende.

And somme of hem wondred on the mirour
That born was up into the hye tour,
How men myghte in it swiche thynges se.
Another answerde and seyde it myghte wel be
Naturelly, by composiciouns
Of angles and of slye reflexiouns;
And seyden that in Rome was swich oon.
They speken of Alocen and Vitulon,

And Aristotle, that writen in hir lyves
Of queynte mirours and of prospectives,
As knowen they that han hir bookes herd.

And other folk han wondred on the swerd
That wolde percen thurghout every thyng;
And fille in speche¹ of Thelophus the kyng,
And of Achilles with his queynte spere,
For he koude with it bothe heele and dere²,
Right in swich wise as men may with the swerd
Of which right now ye han youre-selven herd.
They speken of sondry hardyng of metal,
And speke of medicynes therwithal,
And how and whanne it sholde y-harded be,
Which is unknowe, algates³ unto me.

Tho speeke they of Canacees ryng,
And seyden alle that swich a wonder thyng
Of craft of rynges herde they never noon;
Save that he Moyses and kyng Salomon
Hadden a name of konnyng in swich art;
Thus seyn the peple and drawen hem apart.

But nathelees somme seiden that it was
Wonder to maken of fern-asshen glas,
And yet nys glas nat lyk asshen of fern,
But for they han i-knowen it so fern⁴
Therefore cesseth hir janglyng and hir wonder.

As score wondren somme on cause of thonder,
On ebbe, on flood, on gossomer, and on myst,
And on alle thyng til that the cause is wyst,
Thus jangle they, and demen and devyse,
Till that the kyng gan fro the bord aryse.

Phebus hath laft the angle meridional,
And yet ascendyng⁵ was the beest roial,

¹ *fille in speche*, fell to talking. ² *dere*, hurt.

² *algates*, at least, anyhow. ⁴ *so fern*, so long.

³ *And yet ascendyng*, &c.; i.e. it was drawing towards 2 p.m.

The gentil Leon, with his Aldiran,
 Whan that this Tartre kyng Cambyuskan
 Roos fro his bord, ther as he sat ful hye.
 Tofoorn hym gooth the loude mynstralcye
 Til he cam to his chambre of parements;
 Ther as they sownen diverse instruments
 That it is lyk an hevene for to heere.
 Now dauncen lusty Venus¹ children deere,
 For in the Fyssh hir lady sat ful hye,
 And looketh on hem with a freendly eye.

This noble kyng is set up in his trone;
 This strange knyght is fet to hym ful soone,
 And on the daunce he gooth with Canacee.
 Heere is the revel and the jolitee
 That is nat able a dul man to devyse;
 He moste han knowen love and his servyse,
 And been a festlych man, as fressh-as May,
 That sholde yow devysen swich array.

Who koude telle yow the forme of daunces
 So unkouth, and so fresshe contenaunces,
 Swich subtil lookyng and dissymulynges
 For drede of jalouse mennes aperceyvynge?
 No man but Launcelot, and he is deed.
 Therefore I passe of al this lustiheed;
 I say namoore, but in this jolynesse
 I lete hem til men to the soper dresse.

The sty ward byt² the spices for to hye,
 And eek the wyn, in al this melodye.
 The usshers and the squiers been y-goon,
 The spices and the wyn is come anoon.
 They ete and drynke, and whan this hadde an ende,
 Unto the temple, as reson was, they wende.

The service doon they soupen al by day;

¹ The plant Venus being 'exalted', in Piscis, thoughts of love are in the ascendant.

² *byt*, orders.

What nedeth yow rehercen hire array?
Éch man woot wel that a kynges feeste
Hath plentee to the mooste and to the leeste,
And deyntees mo than been in my knowyng.

At after soper gooth this noble kyng
To seen this hors of bras, with all the route
Of lordes and of ladyes hym aboute.
Swich wondryng was ther on this hors of bras
That syn the grete sege of Troie was,—
Ther as men wondreden on an hors also,—
Ne was ther swich a wondryng as was tho.
But fynally, the kyng axeth this knyght
The vertu of this courser, and the myght,
And preyde hym to telle his governaunce.

This hors anon bigan to trippe and daunce
Whan that this knyght leyde hand upon his reyne,
And seyde, " Sire, ther is namoore to seyne,
But whan yow list to ryden anywhere
Ye mooten trille a pyn, stant in his ere,
Which I shal telle yow bitwix us-two.
Ye moote nempne hym to what place also,
Or to what contree, that yow list to ryde;
And whan ye come ther as yow list abyde,
Bidde hym descende, and trille another pin,—
For therin lith the effect of al the gin,—
And he wol doun descende and doon youre wille,
And in that place he wol abide stille.
Though al the world the contrarie hadde y-swore,
He shal nat thennes been y-drawe ne y-bore;
Or, if yow liste bidde hym thennes goon,
Trille this pyn, and he wol vanysshe anon
Out of the sighte of every maner wight,
And come agayn, be it by day or nyght,
Whan that yow list to clepen hym ageyn
In swich a gyse as I shal to yow seyn,

Bitwixe yow and me, and that ful soone.
Ride whan yow list, ther is namoore to doone."

Enformed whan the kyng was of that knyght,
And hath conceyved in his wit aright
The manere and the forme of al this thyng,
Ful glad and blithe this noble doughty kyng
Repeireth to his revel as biforn.

The brydel is unto the tour y-born
And kept among his juelees leeve and deere,
The hors vanysshed, I noot in what manere,
Out of hir sighte, ye gete namoore of me;
But thus I lete in lust and jolitee
This Cambyuskan his lordes festeiynge,
Til wel ny the day bigan to sprynge.

[PART ii]

The norice of digestioun, the sleepe,
Gan on hem wynke, and bad hem taken keepe
That muchel drynke and labour wolde han reste;
And with a galpyng mouth hem alle he keste,
And seyde, it was tyme to lye adoun,
For blood was in his domynacioun.
" Cherisseth blood, natures freend," quod he.
They thanken hym galpyng, by two, by thre,
And every wight gan drawe hym to his reste,
As sleepe hem bad; they took it for the beste.

Hire dremes shul nat been y-toold for me;
Ful were hire heddes of fumositee,
That causeth dreem, of which ther nys no charge.
They slepen til that it was pryme large,
The mooste part, but it were Canacee.
She was ful mesurable, as wommen be;
For of hir fader hadde she take leve
To goon to reste, soone after it was eve.

Hir liste nat appalled for to be,
Ne on the morwe unfeestlich for to se,
And slepte hire firste sleepe and thanne awook,
For swich a joye she in hir herte took,
Bothe of hir queynte ryng and hire mirour,
That twenty tyme she changed hir colour,
And in hire sleepe, right for impressioun
Of hire mirour, she hadde a visioun.
Wherefore er that the sonne gan up glyde
She cleped on hir maistresse hire bisyde,
And seyde that hire liste for to ryse.

Thise olde wommen that been gladly wyse,
As is hire maistresse, answerde hire anon,
And seyde, "Madam, whider wil ye goon
Thus erly, for the folk been alle on reste?"

"I wol", quod she, "arise, for me leste
No lenger for to slepe, and walke aboute."

Hir maistresse clepeth wommen a greet route,
And up they rysen, wel a ten or twelve;
Up riseth fresshe Canacee hir-selve,
As rody and bright as dooth the yonge sonne
That in the Ram is foure degrees up-ronne.
Noon hyer was he whan she redy was,
And forth she walketh esily a pas,
Arrayed after the lusty sesoun soote¹
Lightly, for to pleye and walke on foote,
Nat but with fyve or sixe of hir meynee,
And in a trench, forth in the park, gooth she.
The vapour, which that fro the erthe glood,
Made the sonne to seme rody and brood,
But nathelees it was so fair a sighte
That it made alle hire hertes for to lighte,—
What for the sesoun, and the morwenynge,
And for the foweles that she herde synge;

¹ soote, sweet.

For right anon she wiste what they mente
 Right by hir song, and knew al hir¹ entente.

The knotte why that every tale is toold,
 If it be taried til that lust be coold
 Of hem that han it after herkned yooore,
 The savour passeth ever lenger the moore,
 For fulsomnesse of his prolixture;
 And by the same resoun thynketh me,
 I sholde to the knotte condescende
 And maken of hir walkyng soone an ende.

Amydde a tree fordrye², as whit as chalk,
 As Canacee was pleyyng in hir walk,
 Ther sat a faucon over hire heed ful hye,
 That with a pitous voys so gan to crye
 That all the wode resounded of hire cry.
 Y-beten hath she hir-self so pitously
 With bothe hir wynges til the rede blood
 Ran endelong the tree ther as she stood,
 And ever in oon she cryde alwey and shrighthe,
 And with hir beek hir-selven so she prighthe,
 That ther nys tygre, ne noon so crueel beest,
 That dwelleth outhur in wode or in forest,
 That nolde han wept, if that he wepe koude,
 For sorwe of hire, she shrighthe alwey so loude;
 For ther nas never yet no man on lyve,—
 If that I koude a faucon wel discryve,—
 That herde of swich another of fairnesse,
 As wel of plumage as of gentillesse
 Of shape, and al that myghte y-rekened be.
 A faucon peregryn thanne semed she
 Of fremde land, and evermoore, as she stood,
 She swowneth now and now for lakke of blood,
 Til wel neigh is she fallen fro the tree.

¹ *hir, their.* ² *fordiye, withered.*

This faire kynges doghter, Canacee,
 That on hir fynger baar the queynthe ryng,
 Thurgh which she understood wel every thyng
 That any fowel may in his leden¹ seyn,
 And koude answee hym in his ledene ageyn,
 Hath understonde what this faukon seyde,
 And wel neigh for the routhe almoost she deyde;
 And to the tree she gooth ful hastily,
 And on this faukon looketh pitously,
 And heeld hir lappe abrood, for wel she wiste
 The faukon moste fallen fro the twiste²,
 Whan that it swowned next, for lakke of blood.
 A longe while to wayten hire she stood,
 Til atte laste she spak in this manere
 Unto the hauk, as ye shal after heere:

"What is the cause, if it be for to telle,
 That ye be in this furial pyne of helle?"
 Quod Canacee unto the hauk above.
 "Is this for sorwe of deeth, or los of love?
 For, as I trowe, thise been causes two
 That causen moost a gentil herte wo.
 Of oother harm it nedeth nat to speke,
 For ye youre-self upon your-self yow wreke,
 Which proveth well that outhere love or drede
 Moot been enchesoun⁸ of youre cruel dede,
 Syn that I see noon oother wight you chace.
 For love of God, as doth youre-selven grace,
 Or what may been youre helpe; for West nor Est
 Ne saugh I never, er now, no bryd ne beest
 That ferde with hymself so pitously.
 Ye sle me with youre sorwe, verrailly;
 I have of yow so greet compassioun.
 For Goddes love, come fro the tree adoun;
 And, as I am a kynges doghter trewe,

¹ leden, language. ² twiste, bough. ² enchesoun, occasion.

If that I verrailly the cause knewe
 Of youre disese, if it lay in my myght,
 I wolde amenden it er it were nyght,
 As wisly helpe me grete God of kynde!
 And herbes shal I right ynowe y-fynde
 To heele with youre hurtes hastily."

Tho shrighte this faucon yet moore pitously
 Than ever she dide, and fil to grounde anon,
 And lith aswowne, deed, and lyk a stoon,
 Til Canacee hath in hire lappe hire take
 Unto the tyme she gan of swough awake;
 And after that she of hir swough gan breyde¹
 Right in hir haukes ledene thus she seyde:
 " That pitee renneth soone in gentil herte,
 Feelynge his similitude in peynes smerte,
 Is preved al day, as men may it see,
 As wei by werk as by auctoritee;
 For gentil herte kitheth² gentillesse.
 I se wel that ye han of my distresse
 Compassioun, my faire Canacee,
 Of verray wommanly benignytee
 That nature in youre principles hath set;
 But for noon hope for to fare the bet,
 But for to obeye unto youre herte free,
 And for to maken othere be war by me,
 As by the whelp chasted is the leoun,³
 Right for that cause and that conclusioun,
 Whil that I have a leyser and a space,
 Myn harm I wol confessen, er I pace."
 And ever whil that oon hir sorwe tolde
 That oother weepe as she to water wolde,
 Til that the faucon bad hire to be stille,
 And, with a syk⁴, right thus she seyde hir wille.

¹ *gatt breyde*, started up.

² *kitheth*, shows.

³ i.e. the whelp is chastised as an example to the lion.
 (M893)

⁴ *syk*, sigh.
 02

" Ther I was bred, alias! that harde day,—
And fostred in a rock of marbul gray
So tendrely that no thyng eyled me,—
I nyste nat what was adversitee
Til I koude flee ful hye under the sky—
Tho dwelte a tercelet me faste by,
That semed welle of alle gentillesse;
Al were he ful of tresoun and falsnesse,
It was so wrapped under humble cheere,
And under he we of trouthe in swich manere,
Under plesance, and under bisy peyne,
That I ne koude han wend he koude feyne,
So depe in greyn he dyed his coloures.
Right as a serpent hit¹ hym under floures
Til he may seen his tyme for to byte,
Right so this god of love, this ypocryte,
Dooth so his cerymonyes and obeisaunces,
And kepeth in semblant alle his observaunces
That sowneth into² gentillesse of love.
As in a toumbe is al the faire above,
And under is the corps, swich as ye woot,
Swich was the ypocryte, bothe coold and hoot,
And in this wise he served his entente,
That save the feend, noon wiste what he mente
Til he so longe hadde wopen and compleyned,
And many a yeer his service to me feyned,
Til that myn herte, to pitous and to nyce³,
Al innocent of his coroured malice,
For-fered of his deeth, as thoughte me,
Upon his othes and his seuretee,
Graunted hym love upon this condicioun,
That evermoore myn honour and renoun
Were saved, bothe privee and apert:
This is to seyn, that after his desert,

¹ hit, hides. ² sowneth into, tend towards. ³ nyce, foolish.

I yaf hym al myn herte and my thocht,—
God woot, and he, that otherwise noght,—
And took his herte in chaunge for myn for ay;
But sooth is seyde, goon sithen many a day,
" A trewe wight and a theef thenken nat oon";
And whan he saugh the thyng so fer y-goon
That I hadde graunted hym fully my love,
In swich a gyse as I have seyde above,
And yeven hym my trewe herte as fre
As he swoor he yaf his herte to me;
Anon this tigre ful of doublenesse
Fil on his knees with so devout humblesse,
With so heigh reverence, and, as by his cheere,
So lyk a gentil love of manere,
So ravysshed, as it semed, for the joye,
That never Jason, ne Parys of Troye,—
Jason? Certes, noon oother man
Syn Lameth was, that alderfirst bigan
To loven two, as writen folk biforn;
Ne never, syn the firste man was born,
Ne koude man, by twenty thousand part,
Countrefete the sophymes of his art,
Ne were worthy unbokelen his galoche
Ther doubienesse or feynyng sholde approche,
Ne so koude thanke a wight as he dide me!
His manere was an hevene for to see
Til any womman, were she never so wys,
So peynted he, and kembde at pointdevys,
As wel his wordes as his contenance;
And I so loved hym for his obeisaunce,
And for the trouthe I demed in his herte,
That if so were that any thyng hym smerte,
Al were it never so lite, and I it wiste,
Me thoughte I felte deeth myn herte twiste;
And shortly, so ferforth this thyng is went,

That my wyl was his willes instrument,—
 This is to seyn, my wyl obeyed his wyl
 In alle thyng, as fer as resoun fil,
 Kepyng the boundes of my worshiþe ever;
 Ne never hadde I thyng so lief, ne lever,
 As hym, God woot! ne never shal namo.
 This lasteth lenger than a yeer or two
 That I supposed of hym noght but good;
 But finally thus, atte laste it stood,
 That Fortune wolde that he moste twynne¹
 Out of that place which that I was inne.
 Wher² me was wo, that is no questioun;
 I kan nat make of it discripsioun,
 For o thyng dare I tellen boldely,
 I knowe what is the peyne of deeth ther-by;
 Swich harme I felte for he ne myghte bileve!
 So on a day of me he took his leve,
 So sorwful eek that I wende verrailly
 That he had felt as muche harm as I,
 Whan that I herde hym speke and saugh his hewe;
 But nathelees I thoughte he was so trewe,
 And eek that he repaire sholde ageyn
 Withinne a litel while, sooth to seyn,
 And resoun wolde eek that he moste go
 For his hondur, as ofte it happeth so,
 That I made vertu of necessitee,
 And took it wel, syn that it moste be.
 As I best myghte I hidde fro hym my sorwe
 And took hym by the hond, Seint John to borwe³,
 And seyde hym thus: " Lo, I am youres al;
 Beth swich as I to yow have been and shall".
 What he answerde it nedeth noght reherce;
 Who kan say bet than he, who can do werse?

¹ twynne, depart. ² wher, whether.

³ 'with St. John as my surety'.

Whan he hath al i-seyd, thanne hath he doon.
" Therefore bihoveth hire a ful long spoon
That shal ete with a feend," thus herde I seye;
So atte laste he moste forth his weye,
And forth he fleeth til he cam ther hym leste,
Whan it cam hym to purpos for to reste.
I trowe he hadde thilke text in mynde,
That " Alle thyng repeiryng to his kynde
Gladeth hymself,"—thus seyn men, as I gesse.
Men loven of propre kynde newefangelnesse,
As briddes doon that men in cages fede;
For though thou nyght and day take of hem hede,
And strawe hir cage faire, and softe as silk,
And yeve hem sugre, hony, breed and milk,
Yet right anon as that his dore is uppe,
He with his feet wol spurne adoun his cuppe,
And to the wode he wole, and wormes ete;
So newefangel been they of hire mete
And loven novelrie of propre kynde,
No gentillesse of blood ne may hem bynde.
"So ferde this tercelet, alias, the day!
Though he were gentil born, fressh and gay,
And goodlich for to seen, humble and free.
He saugh upon a tyme a kyte flee,
And sodeynly he loved this kyte so
That al his love is clene fro me ago,
And hath his trouthe falsed in this wyse.
Thus hath the kyte my love in hire servyse,
And I am lorn withouten remedie."
And with that word this faucon gan to crie,
And swowned eft in Canacees barm.

Greet was the sorwe for the haukes harm
That Canacee and alle hir wommen made;
They nyste how they myghte the faucon glade,
But Canacee hom bereth hire in hir lappe,

And softly in piastres gan hire wrappe,
Ther as she with hire beek hadde hurt hirselve.
Now kan nat Canacee but herbes delve
Out of the ground, and make salves newe
Of herbes precieuse, and fyne of hewe,
To heelen with this hauk; fro day to nyght
She dooth hire bisynesse and al hir myght,
And by hire beddes heed she made a mewe,
And covered it with veluettes blewe,
In signe of trouthe that is in wommen sene,
And al without the mewe is peynted grene,
In which were peynted alle thise false fowles,
As beth thise tidyves, tercelettes and owles;
And pyes, on hem for to crie and chyde,
Right for despit, were peynted hem bisyde.

Thus lete I Canacee, hir hauk kepyng,
I wol namoore as now speke of hir ryng
Til it come eft to purpos for to seyn
How that this faucon gat hire love ageyn,
Repentant, as the storie telleth us,
By mediacioun of Cambalus,
The kynges sone, of whiche I yow tolde;
But hennes-forth I wol my proces holde
To speken of adventures and of batailles,
That never yet was herd so greet mervailles,

First wol I telle yow of Cambyuskan,
That in his tyme many a citee wan;
And after wol I speke of Algarsif,
How that he wan Theodera to his wif,
For whom ful ofte in greet peril he was,
Ne hadde he ben holpe by the steede of bras;
And after wol I speke of Cambalo,
That faught in lystes with the bretheren two
For Canacee, er that he myghte hire wynne;
And ther I lefte I wol ageyn bigynne.

[PART iii]

Apollo whirleth up his chaar so hye,
 Til that the god Mercurius hous, the slye—

[At this point Chaucer left the tale 'half-told'.]

II. PRIORESS'S TALE

The Prologe of the Prioresses Tale

OLORD, oure Lord, thy name how merveillous
 Is in this large world y-sprad," quod she;
 " For noght oonly thy laude precious
 Parfourned is by men of dignitee,
 But by the mouth of children thy bountee
 Parfourned is; for on the brest souk^nge
 Somtyme shewen they thyn heriyng.

Wherefore, in laude as I best kan or may,
 Of thee, and of the white lylle flour,
 Which that the bar and is a mayde alway,
 To telle a storie I wol do my labour;
 Nat that I may encreessen hir honour,
 For she herself is honour and the roote
 Of bountee, next hir sone, and soules boote

O mooder mayde! O mayde mooder fre!
 O bussh unbrent, brennyng in Moyses sight!
 That ravysedest down fro the Deitee,
 Thurgh thyn humblesse, the goost that in thalight;
 Of whos vertu, whan he thyn herte lighte,
 Conceyved was the fadres sapience,
 Helpe me to telle it in thy reverence!

Lady, thy bountee, thy magnificence,
 Thy vertu, and thy grete humylitee,

Ther may no tonge expresse in no science;
 For somtyme, lady, er men praye to thee,
 Thou goost biforn of thy benygnytee,
 And getest us the lyght, thurgh thy preyere,
 To gyden us unto thy sone so deere.

My konnyng is so wayk, O blisful queene,
 For to declare thy grete worthynesse,
 That I ne may the weighte nat susteene;
 But as a child of twelf months oold or lesse,
 That kan unnethes any word expresse,
 Right so fare I, and therfore I yow preye,
 Gydeh my song that I shal of you seye."

Heere bigynneth The Prioresses Tale

Ther was in Asye, in a greet citee,
 Amonges cristene folk, a Jewerye,
 Sustened by a lord of that contree,
 For foule usure and lucre of vileynye
 Hateful to Crist and to his compaignye;
 And thurgh the strete men myghte ride or wende,
 For it was free, and open at eyther ende.

A litel scole of cristen folk ther stood
 Doun at the ferther ende, in which ther were
 Children an heepe, y-comen of Cristen blood,
 That lerned in that scole yeer by yeer
 Swich manere doctrine as men used there,—
 This is to seyn, to syngen, and to rede,
 As smale children doon in hire childhede.

Among thise children was a wydwes sone,
 A litel clergeoun¹, seven yeer of age,
 That day by day to scole was his wone;

¹ *clergeoun*, chorister.

And eek also, where as he saugh thymage
 Of Cristes mooder, he hadde in usage,
 As hym was taught, to knele adoun and seye
 His *Ave Marie*, as he goth by the weye.

Thus hath this wydwe hir litel sone y-taught
 Oure blisful lady, Cristes mooder deere,
 To worshiþe ay, and he forgate it naught,
 For sely¹ child wol alday soone leere,—
 But ay whan I remembre on this mateere,
 Seint Nicholas stant² ever in my presence,
 For he so yong to Crist dide reverence.

This litel child his litel book lernynge,
 As he sat in the scole at his prymer,
 He *Alma redemptoris* herde synge,
 As children lerned hire antiphoner;
 And, as he dorste, he drough hym ner and ner,
 And herkned ay the wordes and the noote,
 Till he the firste vers koude al by rote.

Noght wiste he what this Latyn was to seye,
 For he so yong and tendre was of age;
 But on a day his felawe gan he preye
 Texpounden hym this song in his langage,
 Or telle him why this song was in usage;
 This preyde he hym to construe and declare
 Ful often time upon his knowes³ bare.

His felawe, which that elder was than he,
 Answerde hym thus: "This song I have herd seye
 Was maked of oure blisful lady free,
 Hire to salue, and eek hire for to preye
 To been oure help and socour when we deye;
 I kan na moore expounde in this mateere,
 I lerne song, I kan but smal grammeere".

¹ **sely**, simple. ² *stant*, stands. ³ *knowes*, knees.

" And is this song maked in reverence
Of Cristes mooder?" seyde this innocent.
" Now certes, I wol do my diligence
To konne it al, er Cristemasse is went,
Though that I for my prymer shal be shent,
And shal be beten thries in an houre,
I wol it konne cure lady for to hondure!"

His felawe taughte hym hornward prively
Fro day to day, til he koude it by rote,
And thanne he song it well and boldly
Fro word to word, acordynge with the note.
Twies a day it passed thurgh his throte,
To scoleward and hornward whan he wente;
On Cristes mooder set was his entente.

As I have seyd, thurgh-out the Jewerie
This litel child, as he cam to and fro,
Ful murily then wolde he synge and crie
O Alma redemptoris evermo.
The swetnesse hath his herte perced so
Of Cristes mooder, that to hire to preye
He kan nat stynte of syngyng by the weye.

Oure firste foe, the serpent Sathanas,
That hath in Jewes herte his waspes nest,
Up swal, and seide, "O Hebrayk peple, alias!
Is this to yow a thyng that is honest
That swich a boy shal walken as hym lest
In youre despit, and syng of swich sentence,
Which is agayn youre lawes reverence?"

Fro thennes forth the Jewes han conspired
This innocent out of this world to chace.
An homycide ther-to han they hyred,
That in an aleye hadde a privee place;
And as the child gan forby for to pace,

This cursed Jew hym hente and heeld hym faste,
And kitte his throte, and in a pit hym caste.

I seye that in a wardrobe they hym threwe
Where as this Jewes purgen hire entraille.

O cursed folk, O Herodes al newe!
What may youre yvel entente yow availle?
Mordre wol out, certeyn, it wol nat faille,
And namely ther thonour of God shal sprede,
The blood out-crieth on youre cursed dede.

O martir, sowded to¹ virginitee!
Now maystow syngen, folwyng e ever in oon
The white Lamb celestial, quod she,
Of which the grete Evaungelist, Seint John,
In Pathmos wroot, which seith that they that goon
Biforn this Lamb, and synge a song al newe,
That never fleshly wommen they ne knewe.

This poure wydwe awaiteth al that nyght
After hir litel child, but he cam noght,
For which, as soone as it was dayes lyght,
With face pale of drede and bisy thoght,
She hath at scole and elles-where him soght;
Til finally she gan so fer espie
That he last seyn was in the Jewerie.

With moodres pitee in hir brest enclosed
She gooth, as she were half out of hir mynde,
To every place where she hath supposed
By liklihede hir litel child to fynde;
And ever on Cristes mooder, meeke and kinde,
She cride, and atte laste thus she wroghte,
Among the cursed Jewes she hym soghte.

She frayneth² and she preyeth pitously,
To every Jew that dwelte in thilke place,

¹ sowded to, confirmed in.

² frayneth, inquires.

To telle hire if hir child wente oght forby.
 They seyde "Nay"; but Jhesu, of his grace,
 Yaf in hir thought inwith¹ a litel space,
 That in that place after hir sone she cryde,
 Where he was casten in a pit bisyde.

O grete God that parfournest thy laude
 By mouth of innocents, lo, heere thy myght?
 This gemme of chastite, this emeraude,
 And eek of martirdom the ruby bright,
 Ther he, with throte y-korven, lay upright ,
 He *Alma redemptoris* gan to syng,
 So loude, that all the place gan to rynge!

The cristene folk, that thurgh the strete wente,
 In comen, for to wondre upon this thyng;
 And hastily they for the provost sente.
 He cam anon, withouten tarrying,
 And herieth Crist that is of hevene kyng,
 And eek his mooder, honour of mankynde,
 And after that the Jewes leet he bynde.

This child, with pitous lamentacioun,
 Up-taken was, syngynge his song alway;
 And with honcSur of greet processoun
 They carien hym unto the nexte abbay.
 His mooder swownynge by his beere lay;
 Unnethe myghte the peple that was there
 This newe Rachel brynge fro his bere.

With torment, and with shameful deeth echon
 This provost dooth the Jewes for to sterve,
 That of this mordre wiste, and that anon;
 He nolde no swich cursednesse observe;
 " Yvele shal have that yvele wol deserve ";

¹ *inwith*, within. ² *upright*, on his back, with his face up.

Therfore with wilde hors he dide hem drawe,
And after that he heng hem by the lawe.

Upon his beere ay lith this innocent
Biforn the chief auter, whil masse laste,
And after that the abbot with his covent
Han sped hem for to burien hym ful faste;
And when they hooly water on hym caste,
Yet spak this child, whan spreynd was hooly water,
And song, *O Alma redemptoris mater!*

This abbot, which that was an hooly man,
As monkes been, or elles oghte be,
This yonge child to conjure he bigan,
And seyde, "O deere child, I halse¹ thee,
In vertu of the hooly Trinitee,
Tell me what is thy cause for to synge,
Sith that thy throte is kut, to my semyng?"

" My throte is kut unto my nekke boon,"
Seyde this child, " and as by wey of kynde
I sholde have dyed, ye, longe tyme agon;
But Jhesu Crist, as ye in bookes fynde,
Wil that his glorie laste and be in mynde,
And, for the worship of his mooder deere,
Yet may I synge *O Alma* loude and cleere.

" This welle of mercy, Cristes mooder sweete,
I loved alwey, as after my konnyng,
And whan that I my lyf sholde forlete,
To me she cam, and bad me for to synge
This antheme verrailly in my deyyng,
As ye han herd, and whan that I hadde songe
Me thoughte she leyde a greyn upon my tonge:

¹ *halse*, conjure.

Wherefore I synge, and synge moot certyn
 In honour of that blisful mayden free,
 Til fro my tonge of-taken is the greyn;
 And after that thus seyde she to me,
 ' My litel child, now wol I fecche thee
 Whan that the greyn is fro thy tonge y-take;
 Be nat agast, I wol thee nat forsake '."

This hooly monk, this abbot, hym mene I,
 His tonge out caughte and took away the greyn,
 And he yaf up the goost ful softly.
 And whan this abbot hadde this wonder seyn,
 His salte teeris trikked down as reyn,
 And gruf¹ he fil, al plat upon the grounde,
 And stille he lay as he had ben y-bounde.

The covent eke lay on the pavement,
 Wepyng and heryng Cristes mooder deere,
 And after that they ryse and forth been went,
 And tooken away this martir from his beere;
 And in a tombe of marbul stones cleere,
 Enclosen they his litel body sweete:
 Ther he is now, God leve us for to meete!

O yonge Hugh of Lyncoln, slayn also
 With cursed Jewes, as it is notable,
 For it is but a litel while ago,
 Preye eek for us, we synful folk unstable,
 That of his mercy God, so merciable,
 On us his grete mercy multiplie
 For reverence of his mooder, Marie. *Amen.*

¹ *gruf*, on his face.

iii. PARDONER'S TALE

Here bigynneth The Pardoners Tale

IN Flaundres whilom was a compaignye
 Of yonge folk, that haunteden folye,
 As riot, hasard, stywes and tavernes,
 Where-as with harpes, lutes and gyternes,
 They daunce and pleyen at dees, bothe day and nyght,
 And eten also, and drynken over hir myght,
 Thurgh which they doon the devel sacrificise
 Withinne that develes temple, in cursed wise,
 By superfluytee abhomynable.
 Hir othes been so grete and so dampnable
 That it is grisly for to heere hem swere;
 Oure blessed Lordes body they to-tere;
 Hem thoughte that Jewes rente hym noght ynough,
 And ech of hem at otheres synne lough;
 And right anon thanne comen tombesteres¹
 Fetys and smale, and yonge frutesteres,
 Syngeres with harpes, baudes, wafereres²,
 Whiche been the verray develes officeres,
 To kyndle and blowe the fyr of lecherye,
 That is annexed unto glotonye.
 The Hooly Writ take I to my witnesse
 That luxurie is in wyn and dronkenesse.

" Lo, how that dronken Looth, unkyndely³,
 Lay by his doghtrs two unwityngly;
 So dronke he was he nyste what he wroghte.

Herodes, (who so wel the stories soghte,)
 Whan he of wyn was repleet at his feeste,
 Right at his owene table, he yaf his heeste
 To sleen the Baptist John, ful giltelees.

¹ *tombesteres*, female tumblers.

² *wafereres*, confectioners.

³ *unkyndely*, against nature.

Seneca seith a good word, doutelees;
 He seith he kan no difference fynde
 Bitwix a man that is out of his mynde
 And a man which that is dronkelewe,
 But that woodnesse, fallen in a shrewe,
 Persevereth lenger than dooth drunkenesse.
 O glotonye, ful of cursednesse;
 O cause first of oure confusioun;
 O original of oure dampnacioun;
 Til Crist hadde boght us with his blood agayn

Lo, how deere, shortly for to sayn,
 Aboght was thilke cursed vileynye;
 Corrupt was al this world for glotonye!
 Adam oure fader, and his wyf also,
 Fro Paradys, to labour and to wo
 Were dryven for that vice, it is no drede,—
 For whil that Adam fasted, as I rede,
 He was in Paradys, and whan that he
 Eet of the fruyt deffended, on the tree,
 Anon he was out cast to wo and peyne.
 O glotonye, on thee wel oghte us pleyne!

O, wiste a man how manye maladyes
 Folwen of excesse and of glotonyes,
 He wolde been the moore mesurable
 Of his diete, sittynge at his table!
 Alias! the shorte throte, the tendre mouth,
 Maketh that est and west, and north and south,
 In erthe, in eir, in water, man to-swynke
 To gete a glotoun deyntee mete and drynke!
 Of this matiere, O Paul, wel kanstow trete!
 "Mete unto wombe, and wombe eek unto mete,
 Shal God destroyen bothe", as Paulus seith.
 Alias! a foul thyng is it, by my feith,
 To seye this word, and fouler is the dede
 Whan man so drynketh of the white and rede,

That of his throte he maketh his pryvee,
Thurgh thilke cursed superfluitee.

The Apostel wepyng seith ful pitously,
" Ther walken manye of whiche yow toold have I,
I seye it now wepyng with pitous voys,
That they been enemys of Cristes croys,
Of whiche the ende is deeth, wombe is hir god".
O wombe! O bely! O stynkyng is thi cod!
Fulfilled of donge and of corrupcioun!
At either ende of thee foul is the soun;
How greet labdur and cost is thee to fynde!
Thise cookes, how they stampe, and streyne, and grynde,
And turnen substaunce into accident¹,
To fulfillen al thy likerous talent²!
Out of the harde bones knocke they
The mary, for they caste noght away
That may go thurgh the golet softe and swoote.
Of spicerie, of leef, and bark, and roote,
Shal been his sauce y-maked by delit,
To make hym yet a newer appetit;
But certes he that haunteth swiche delices
Is deed, whil that he lyveth in tho vices.

A lecherous thyng is wyn, and dronkenesse
Is ful of stryvyng and of wrecchednesse.
O dronke man! disfigured is thy face,
Sour is thy breeth, foul artow to embrace,
And thurgh thy dronke nose semeth the soun,
As though thou seydest ay, "Sampsoun! Sampsoun!"
And yet, God woot, Sampsoun drank never no wyn.
Thou fallest as it were a styked swyn,
Thy tonge is lost and al thyn honeste cure;
For dronkenesse is verray sepulture
Of mannes wit and his discrecioun;

¹ 'destroy the identity of their materials'.

² *likorous talent*, gluttonous desire.

In whom that drynke hath dominacioun,
 He kan no conseil kepe, it is no drede.
 Now kepe yow fro the white and fro the rede,
 And namely fro the white wyn of Lepe,
 That is to selle in Fysshstrete, or in Chepe.
 This wyn of Spaigne crepeth subtilly
 In othere wynes growynge faste by,
 Of which ther ryseth swich fumositee,
 That whan a man hath dronken draughtes thre,
 And weneth that he be at hoom in Chepe,
 He is in Spaigne right at the toun of Lepe,—
 Nat at the Rochele, ne at Burdeux-toun,—
 And thanne wol he seye, "Sampsoun, Sampsoun!"

But herkneth, lordyngs, o word, I yow preye,
 That alle the sovereyn actes, dar I seye,
 Of victories in the Olde Testament,
 Thurgh verray God that is omnipotent,
 Were doon in abstinence and in preyere;
 Looketh the Bible and ther ye may it leere.

Looke, Attila, the grete conquerour,
 Deyde in his sleepe, with shame and dishonour,
 Bledynge ay at his nose in dronkenesse.
 A capitayn sholde lyve in sobrenesse;
 And over al this avyseth yow right wel
 What was comaunded unto Lamuel,—
 Nat Samuel, but Lamuel seye I;
 Redeth the Bible, and fynde it expresly
 Of wyn-yevyng to hem that han justise.
 Namore of this, for it may wel suffice.

And now that I have spoken of glotonye,
 Now wol I yow deffenden¹ hasardrye.
 Hasard is verray mooder of lesynges,
 And of deceite, and cursed forswerynges,
 Blaspheme of Crist, manslaughter, and wast also

¹ *deffenden*, forbid.

Of catel, and of tyme, and forthermo
It is repreeve and contrarie of honour
For to ben holde a commune hasardour
And ever the hyer he is of estaat,
The moore is he holden desolaat.
If that a prynce useth hasardrye
In alle governaunce and policye,
He is, as by commune opinioun,
Y-holde the lasse in reputacioun.

Stilbon, that was a wys embassadour,
Was sent to Corynthe in ful greet honour
Fro Lacidomye to maken hire alliaunce;
And whan he cam, hym happede *par chaunce*
That alle the gretteste that were of that lend
Pleyynge atte hasard he hem fond;
For which, as soone as it myghte be,
He stal hym hoom agayn to his contrce,
And seyde, " Ther wol I nat lese my name,
Ne I wol nat take on me so greet defame,
Yow for to allie unto none hasardours;
Sendeth othere wise embassadours,
For, by my trouthe, me were levere dye,
Than I yow sholde to hasardours allye;
For ye that been so glorious in honours,
Shul nat allyen yow with hasardours,
As by my wyl, ne as by my tretee!"
This wise philosophre thus seyde hee.

Looke eek that to the kyng Demetrius,
The kyng of Parthes, as the book seith us,
Sente him a paire of dees of gold, in scorn,
For he hadde used hasard ther-biforn;
For which he heeld his glorie or his renoun
At no value or reputacioun.
Lordes may fynden oother maner play
Honaste ynough to dryve the day away.

Now wol I speke of othes false and grete
 A word or two, as olde bookes trete.
 Gret sweryng is a thyng abhominable,
 And fals sweryng is yet moore reprevable.
 The heighe God forbad sweryng at al,—
 Witnesse on Mathew, but in special
 Of sweryng seith the hooly Jeremye,
 "Thou shalt seye sooth thyne othes, and nat lye
 And swere in doom, and eek in rightwisnesse";
 But ydel sweryng is a cursednesse.
 Bihoold and se, that in the firste table
 Of heighe Goddes heestes, honorable,
 How that the seconde heeste of hym is this:
 "Take nat my name in ydel, or amys";
 Lo, rather he forbedeth swich sweryng
 Than homycide, or many a cursed thyng;
 I seye that as by ordre thus it stondeth.
 This knowen, that his heestes understondeth,
 How that the seconde heeste of God is that;
 And forther over, I wol thee telle, al plat,
 That vengeance shal nat parten from his hous
 That of his othes is to outrageous,—
 'By Goddes precious herte', and "By his nayles",
 And "By the blood of Crist that is in Hayles",
 "Sevene is my chaunce, and thyn is cynk and treye,
 By Goddes armes, if thou falsly pleye,
 This daggere shal thurghout thyn herte go!"
 This fruyt cometh of the bicched¹ bones two,
 Forsweryng, ire, falsnesse, homycide.
 Now for the love of Crist that for us dyde,
 Leveth youre othes, bothe grete and smale.
 But, sires, now wol I telle forth my tale.
 Thise riotoures thre, of whiche I telle,
 Longe erst er prime rong of any belle,
¹ *bicched*, cursed.

Were set hem in a taverne for to drynke;
 And as they sat they herde a belle clynke
 Biform a cors, was caried to his grave.
 That oon of hem gan callen to his knave:
 "Go bet¹", quod he, "and axe redily
 What cors is this that passeth heer forby,
 And looke that thou reporte his name weel".

"Sire," quod this boy, "it nedeth never a deel,
 It was me toold er ye cam heere two houres;
 He was, *pardee*[^] an old felawe of youres,
 And sodeynly he was y-slayn to-nyght,
 For-dronke, as he sat on his bench upright;
 Ther cam a privee theef, men clepeth Deeth,
 That in this contree al the peple sleeth,
 And with his spere he smoot his herte atwo,
 And wente his wey withouten wordes mo.
 He hath a thousand slayn this pestilence,
 And, maister, er ye come in his presence,
 Me thynketh that it were necessarie
 For to be war of swich an adversarie;
 Beth redy for to meete hym evermoore;
 Thus taughte me my dame; I sey namoore."

"By Seinte Marie!" seyde this taverner,
 "The child seith sooth, for he hath slayn this yeer
 Henne over a mile, withinne a greet village,
 Bothe man and womman, child, and hyne, and page;
 I trowe his habitacioun be there;
 To been avysed greet wysdom it were,
 Er that he dide a man a dishonour."

"Ye, Goddes armes!" quod this riotour,
 "Is it swich peril with hym for to meete?
 I shal hym seke by wey, and eek by strete;
 I make avow to Goddes digne bones!
 Herkneþ, felawes, we thre been al ones,

¹ *go bet, go quickly.*

Lat ech of us holde up his hand til oother,
And ech of us bicomē otheres brother,
And we wol sleen this false traytour, Deeth;
He shal be slayn, he that so manye sleeth,
By Goddes dignitee, er it be nyght!"

Togidres han thise thre hir trouthes plight
To lyve and dyen ech of hem for oother,
As though he were his owene y-bore brother;
And up they stirte, al dronken, in this rage;
And forth they goon towardses that village
Of which the taverner hadde spoke biforn;
And many a grisly ooth thanne han they sworn;
And Cristes blessed body they to-rente,—
Deeth shal be deed, if that they may hym hente.

Whan they han goon nat fully half a mile,
Right as they wolde han troden over a stile,
An oold man and a poure with hem mette;
This olde man ful mekely hem grette,
And seyde thus: "Now, lordes, God yow see!"

The proudeste of thise riotoures three
Answerde agayn, "What, carl with sory grace,
Why artow al for-wrapped, save thy face?
Why lyvestow so longe in so greet age?"

This olde man gan looke in his visage,
And seyde thus: "For I ne kan nat fynde
A man, though that I walked into Ynde,
Neither in citee, ne in no village,
That wolde chaunge his youthe for myn age;
And therefore moot I han myn age stille,
As longe tyme as it is Goddes wille.
Ne Deeth, alias! ne wol nat han my lyf;
Thus walke I, lyk a resteleees kaityf,
And on the ground, which is my moodres gate,
I knokke with my staf, erly and late,
And seye, "Leeve mooder, leet me in!"

Lo, how I vanysshe, flessch and blood and skyn;
Alias! whan shul my bones been at reste?
Mooder, with yow wolde I chaunge my cheste
That in my chambre longe tyme hath be,
Ye, for an heyre-clowt to wrappe me!"
But yet to me she wol nat do that grace,
For which ful pale and welked is my face.

" But, sires, to yow it is no curteisye
To speken to an old man vileynye,
But he trespasse in word, or elles in dede.
In Hooly Writ ye may your self wel rede,
Agayns¹ an oold man, hoor upon his heed,
Ye sholde arise; wherfore I yeve yow reed,
Ne dooth unto an oold man noon harm now,
Namoore than ye wolde men did to yow
In age, if that ye so longe abyde.
And God be with yow, where ye go or ryde;
I moote go thider as I have to go."

"Nay, olde cherl, by God, thou shalt nat so!"
Seyde this oother hasardour anon;
" Thou partest nat so lightly, by Seint John!
Thou spak right now of thilke traytour, Deeth,
That in this contree alle oure freendes sleeth;
Have heer my trouthe, as thou art his espye,
Telle where he is, or thou shalt it abyde,
By God and by the hooly sacrement!
For soothiy, thou art oon of his assent
To sleen us yonge folk, thou false theef!"

" Now, sires," quod he, " if that ye be so leef
To fynde Deeth, turne up this croked wey,
For in that grove I lafte hym, by my fey,
Under a tree, and there he wole abyde;
Noght for youre boost he wole him no thyng hyde.
Se ye that ook? Right there ye shal hym fynde.

¹ *agayns*, in the presence of.

God save yow that boghte agayn mankynde,
And yow amende!" thus seyde this olde man;
And evejrich of thise riotoures ran
Til he cam to that tree, and ther they founde,
Of floryns fyne, of gold y-coyned rounde,
Wei ny a seven bussshels, as hem thoughte.
No lenger thanne after Deeth they soughte,
But ech of hem so glad was of that sighte,
For that the floryns been so faire and brighte,
That doun they sette hem by this precious hoord.
The worste of hem he spak the firste word.
"Bretheren," quod he, "taak kepe what I seye;
My wit is greet, though that I bourde and pleye.
This tresor hath Fortune unto us yeven
In myrthe and joliftee oure lyf to lyven,
And lightly as it comth so wol we spende.
Ey, Goddes precious dignitee! who wende
To-day, that we sholde han so fair a grace?
But myghte this gold be caried fro this place
Room to myn hous, or elles unto youres,—
For wel ye woot that al this gold is oures,—
Thanne were we in heigh felicitee.
But trewely, by daye it may nat bee;
Men wolde seyn that we were theves stronge,
And for oure owene tresor doon us honge.
This tresor moste y-caried be by nyghte
As wisely and as slyly as it myghte.
Wherfore, I rede that cut among us alle
Be drawe, and lat se wher the cut wol falle;
And he that hath the cut with herte blithe
Shal renne to the towne, and that fnl swithe,
And brynge us breed and wyn ful prively,
And two of us shul kepen subtilly
This tresor wel; and if he wol nat tarie,
Whan it is nyght we wol this tresor carie,

By oon assent, where as us thynketh best."
That oon of hem the cut broghte in his fest,
And bad hem drawe and looke where it wol falle;
And it fil on the yongeste of hem alle,
And forth toward the toun he wente anon;
And al so soone as that he was gon,
That oon of hem spak thus unto that oother:
"Thow knowest wel thou art my sworne brother;
Thy profit wol I telle thee anon;
Thou woost wel that oure felawe is agon,
And heere is gold, and that ful greet plentee,
That shal departed been among us thre;
But nathelees, if I kan shape it so
That it departed were among us two,
Hadde I nat doon a freendes torn to thee?"

That oother answerde, "I noot how that may be;
He woot how that the gold is with us tweye;
What shal we doon, what shal we to hym seye?"

"Shal it be conseil?" seyde the firste shrewe,
"And I shal tellen thee in wordes fewe
What we shal doon, and bryngen it wel aboute."

"I graunte," quod that oother, "out of doute,
That by my trouthe I shal thee nat biwreye."

"Now," quod the firste, "thou woost wel we be
tweye,

And two of us shul strenger be than oon.
Looke whan that he is set, and right anoon
Arys, as though thou woldest with hym pleye,
And I shal ryve hym thurgh the sydes tweye,
Whil that thou strogelest with hym as in game,
And with thy daggere looke thou do the same;
And thanne shal al this gold departed be,
My deere freend, bitwixen me and thee.
Thanne may we bothe oure lustes all fulfille,
And pleye at dees right at oure owene wille."

And thus acorded been thise shrewes tweye,
To sleen the thridde, as ye han herd me seye.

This yongeste, which that wente unto the toun,
Ful ofte in herte he rolleth up and down
The beautee of thise floryns newe and brighte;
"O Lord," quod he, "if so were that I myghte
Have al this tresor to my self allone,
Ther is no man that lyveth under the trone
Of God, that sholde lyve so murye as I!"
And atte laste the feend, oure enemy,
Putte in his thought that he sholde poyson beye,
With which he myghte sleen his felawes tweye;
For-why the feend foond hym in swich lyvyng,
That he hadde leve hym to sorwe brynge,
For this was outrely his mile entente
To sleen hem bothe and never to repente.
And forth he gooth, no lenger wolde he tarie,
Into the toun, unto a pothecarie,
And preyde hym that he hym wolde selle
Som poyssoun, that he myghte his rattes quelle;
And eek ther was a polcat in his hawe,
That, as he seyde, his capouns hadde y-slawe,
And fayn he wolde wreke hym, if he myghte,
On vermyn, that destroyed hym by nyghte.

The pothecarie answerde, "And thou shalt have
A thyng that, al so God my soule save!
In al this world ther nis no creature,
That eten or dronken hath of this confiture,
Noght but the montance of a corn of whete,
That he ne shal his lif anon forlete;
Ye, sterve he shal, and that in lasse while
Than thou wolt goon a-paas nat but a mile;
This poyssoun is so strong and violent."

This cursed man hath in his hond y-hent
This poyssoun in a box, and sith he ran

Into the nexte strete unto a man,
And borwed hym large botelles thre,
And in the two his poyson poured he;
The thridde he kepte clene for his owene drynke;
For al the nyght he shoope hym for to swynke
In carynge of the gold out of that place.
And whan this riotour with sory grace
Hadde filled with wyn his grete hotels thre,
To his felawes agayn repaireth he.

What nedeth it to sermone of it moore?
For right as they hadde cast his deeth bifoore,
Right so they han hym slayn, and that anon,
And whan that this was doon thus spak that oon:
" Now lat us sitte and drynke, and make us merie,
And afterward we wol his body berie";
And with that word it happed hym, *par cos*,
To take the botel ther the poysoun was,
And drank and yaf his felawe drynke also,
For which anon they storven bothe two.

But certes, I suppose that Avycen
Wroot never in no Canon, ne in no fen,
Mo wonder signes of empoisonyng
Than hadde these wrecches two, er hir endyng,
Thus ended been these homycides two,
And eek the false empoysonere also.

O cursed synne of alle cursednesse!
O traytorous homycide! O wikkednesse!
O glotonye, luxurie, and hasardrye!
Thou blasphemour of Crist with vileynye,
And othes grete, of usage and of pride!
Alias! mankynde, how may it bitide
That to thy Creatour which that thee wroghte,
And with his precious herte-blood thee boghte,
Thou art so fals and so unkynde, alias!

Now, goode men, God foryeve yow youre trespass,
And ware yow fro the synne of avarice.
Myn hooly pardoun may yow alle warice,
So that ye offre nobles, or sterlynges,
Or elles silver broches, spoones, rynges.
Boweth youre heed under this hooly bulle!
Cometh up, ye wy ves, offreth of youre wolle!
Youre names I entre heer in my rolle anon;
Into the blisse of hevene shul ye gon;
I yow assoille by myn heigh power,—
Yow that wol offre,—as clene and eek as cleer
As ye were born; and lo, sires, thus I preche,
And Jhesu Crist, that is oure soules leche,
So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve;
For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve.

" But, sires, o word forgat I in my tale;
I have relikes and pardoun in my male¹
As faire as any man in Engeland,
Whiche were me yeven by the popes hond.
If any of yow wole of devocioun
Offren, and han myn absolucioun,
Com forth anon, and kneleth heere adoun,
And mekely receyveth my pardoun;
Or elles taketh pardoun as ye wende,
Al newe and fressh at every miles ende,—
So that ye offren, alwey newe and newe,
Nobles or pens, whiche that be goode and trewe.
It is an honour to everich that is heer
That ye mowe have a suffisant Pardoneer
Tassoille yow in contree as ye ryde,
For AventiSres whiche that may bityde.
Paraventure ther may fallen oon or two
Doun of his hors and breke his nekke atwo;

¹ *male*, bag.

Looke which a seuretee is it to yow alle,
That I am in youre felaweshipe y-falle,
That may assoille yow, bothe moore and lasse,
Whan that the soule shal fro the body passe.
I rede that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne,
For he is moost envoluped in synne!
Com forth, sire Hoost, and offre first anon,
And thou shalt kisse my relikes everychon,—
Ye, for a grote! Unbokele anon thy purs."

"Nay, nay," quod he, "thanne have I Cristes curs!
Lat be," quod he, "it shal nat be, so theeche¹!
Thou woldest make me kisse thyn olde breech,
And swere it were a relyk of a seint,
Though it were with thy fundement depeint;
But, by the croys which that Seint Eleyne fond,
I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond
Inside of relikes, or of seintuarie.
Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie,
They shul be shryned in an hogges toord."

This Pardoner answerde nat a word;
So wrooth he was no word ne wolde he seye.

"Now," quod oure Hoost, "I wol no lenger pleye
With thee, ne with noon oother angry man."
But right anon the worthy Knyght bigan,—
Whan that he saugh that al the peple lough,—

"Namooore of this, for it is right ynough!
Sire Pardoner, be glad and myrie of cheere;
And ye, sir Hoost, that been to me so deere,
I prey yow that ye kisse the Pardoner;
And Pardoner, I prey thee drawe thee neer,
And as we diden, lat us laughe and pleye.'
Anon they kiste and ryden forth hir weye.

¹ so theeche, as I wish to thrive.

IV. NUN'S PRIESTS TALE

*Here bigynneth The Nonnes Preestes Tale of the Cok
and Hen,— Chauntedeer and Pertelote*

A POURE wydwe, somdel stape in age
Was whilom dwellyng in a narwe cotage
Beside a greve, stondynge in a dale.
This wydwe, of which I telle yow my tale,
Syn thilke day that she was last a wyf,
In pacience ladde a ful symple lyf,
For litel was hir catel and hir rente.
By housbondrie of swich as God hire sente
She foond herself, and eek hire doghtren two.
Thre large sowes hadde she, and namo;
Three keen and eek a sheep that highte Malle.
Ful sooty was hir bour, and eek hire halle,
In which she eet ful many a sklendre meel;
Of poynaunt sauce hir neded never a deel.
No deyntee morsel passed thurgh hir throte,
Hir diete was accordant to hir cote;
Repleccioun ne made hire never sik,
Attempree diete was al hir phisik,
And exercise, and hertes suffisaunce.
The goute lette hire no-thing for to daunce,
Napoplexie shente nat hir heed;
No wyn ne drank she, neither whit ne reed;
Hir bord was served moost with whit and blak,—
Milk and broun breed,—in which she foond no lak;
Seynd¹ bacoun and somtyme an ey or tweye,
For she was, as it were, a maner deye².

A yeerd she hadde, enclosed al aboute
With stikkes, and a drye dych withoute,

¹ seynd, fried.

² a maner deye, a kind of dairy-woman.

In which she hadde a cok, heet Chauntecleer.
In al the land of crowyng nas his peer.
His voys was murier than the murie orgon
On messe dayes that in the chirche gon;
Wei sikerer was his crowyng in his logge
Than is a klokke, or an abbey orlogge.
By nature knew he eche ascencioun
Of the equynoxial in thilke toun;
For whan degrees fiftene weren ascended,¹
Thanne crew he that it myghte nat been amended.
His coomb was redder than the fyn coral,
And batailled as it were a castel wal;
His byle was blak, and as the jeet it shoon;
Lyk asure were his legges and his toon;
His nayles whiter than the lylie flour,
And lyk the burned gold was his colour.

This gentil cok hadde in his governaunce
Sevene hennes for to doon al his plesaunce,
Whiche were his sustres and his paramours,
And wonder lyk to hym, as of colours;
Of whiche the faireste hewed on hir throte
Was cleped faire damoysele Pertelote.
Curteys she was, discreet and debonaire,
And compaignable, and bar hyrself so faire
Syn thilke day that she was seven nyght oold,
That trewely she hath the herte in hoold
Of Chauntecleer, loken in every lith²;
He loved hire so that wel was hym therwith;
But swiche a joye was it to here hem synge,
Whan that the brighte sonne bigan to sprynge,
In sweete accord, "My lief is faren in londe";
For thilke tyme, as I have understonde,
Beestes and briddes koude speke and synge.

And so bifel, that in the dawenyng,

¹ i.e. when each successive hour was complete.

² *lith*, limb.

As Chauntecleer among his wyves alle
 Sat on his perche, that was in the halle,
 And next hym sat this faire Pertelote,
 This Chauntecleer gan gronen in his throte,
 As man that in his dreem is drecched¹ soore.
 And whan that Pertelote thus herde hym roore,
 She was agast, and seyde, "O herte deere!
 What eyleth yow, to grone in this manure?
 Ye been a verray sleper; fy, for shame!"

And he answerde and seyde thus: "Madame,
 I pray yow that ye take it nat agrief;
 By God, me mette² I was in swich meschief
 Right now, that yet myn herte is soore afright.
 Now God", quod he, "my swevene recche aright,
 And kepe my body out of foul prisoun!
 Me mette how that I romed up and doun
 Withinne our yeerd, wheer as I saugh a beest
 Was lyk an hound, and wolde han maad areest
 Upon my body, and han had me deed.
 His colour was bitwixe yelow and reed,
 And tipped was his tayl, and bothe his eeris,
 With blak, unlyk the remenant of his heeris;
 His snowte small, with glowynge eyen tweye.
 Yet of his look for feere almoost I deye;
 This caused me my gronyng doutelees."

"Avoy!" quod she, "fy on yow, hertelees!
 Alias!" quod she, "for by that God above!
 Now han ye lost myn herte and al my love.
 I kan nat love a coward, by my feith!
 For certes, what so any womman seith,
 We alle desiren, if it mighte bee,
 To han housbdndes hardy, wise, and free,
 And secree, and no nygard, ne no fool,
 Ne hym that is agast of every tool,

¹ drecched, troubled. ² me mette, I dreamed.

Ne noon avauntour, by that God above!
 How dorste ye seyn, for shame, unto youre love
 That any thyng myghte make yow aferd?
 Have ye no marines herte, and han a berd?
 " Alias! and konne ye been agast of swevenys?
 No thyng, God woot, but vanitee in swevene is.
 Swevenes engendren of replecciouns,
 And ofte of fume, and of complecciouns,
 Whan humours been so habundant in a wight.

" Certes this dreem, which ye han met to-nyght,
 Cometh of the greet superfluytee
 Of youre rede colera, *pardee*>
 Which causeth folk to dreden in hir dremes
 Of arwes, and of fyre with rede lemes,¹
 Of rede beestes, that they wol hem byte,
 Of contekes and of whelpes, grete and lyte;
 Right as the humour of malencolie
 Causeth ful many a man in sleepe to crie,
 For feere of blake beres, or boles blake,
 Or elles blake develes wole hem take.
 Of othere humours koude I telle also
 That werken many a man in sleepe ful wo;
 But I wol passe as lightly as I kan.
 Lo, Catoun, which that was so wys a man,
 Seyde he nat thus, "Ne do no fors of dremes"?

" Now, sire," quod she, " whan we flee fro the
 bemes,
 For Goddes love, as taak som laxatyf.
 Up peril of my soule, and of my lyf,
 I conseilte yow the beste, I wol nat lye,
 That bothe of colere and of malencolye
 Ye purge yow, and, for ye shal nat tarie,
 Though in this toun is noon apothecarie,
 I shal myself to herbes techen yow

¹ *lemes*, flashes.

That shul been for youre hele, and for youre prow¹;
 And in oure yeerd tho herbes shal I fynde,
 The whiche han of hire propretee by kynde
 To purge yow, bynethe and eek above.
 Forget nat this, for Goddes owene love!
 Ye been ful coleryk of compleccioun.
 Ware the sonne in his ascencioun
 Ne fynde yow nat repleet of humours hoote;
 And if it do, I dar wel leye a grote
 That ye shul have a fevere terciane,
 Or an agu, that may be youre bane.
 A day or two ye shul have digestyves
 Of wormes, er ye take youre laxatyves
 Of lawriol, centaure and fumetere,
 Or elles of ellebor that groweth there,
 Of katapuce or of gaitrys beryis,
 Of herbe yve, growyng in oure yeerd, ther mery is;
 Pekke hem up right as they growe and ete hem yn;
 Be myrie, housbonde, for youre fader kyn!
 Dredeth no dreem; I kan sey yow namoore."

"Madame," quod he, "*graunt mercy* of youre loore
 But nathelees, as touchyng daun Catoun,
 That hath of wysdom swich a greet renoun,
 Though that he bad no dremes for to drede
 By God, men may in olde bookes rede
 Of many a man, moore of auctorite
 Than ever Caton was, so moot I thee!
 That al the revers seyn of his sentence,
 And han wel founden by experience
 The dremes been significaciouns
 As wel of joye as tribulaciouns,
 That folk enduren in this lif present.
 Ther nedeth make of this noon argument,
 The verray preeve sheweth it in dede.

¹prow, good.

" Oon of the gretteste auctours that men rede
Seith thus, that whilom two felawes wente
On pilgrimage, in a ful good entente,
And happed so they coomen in a toun,
Wher as ther was swich congregacioun
Of peple, and eek so streit of herbergage,
That they ne founde as muche as o cotage
In which they bothe myghte logged bee;
Wherefore they mosten of necessitee,
As for that nyght, departen compaignye;
And ech of hem gooth to his hostelrye,
And took his loggyng as it wolde falle.
That oon of hem was logged in a stalle,
Fer in a yeerd, with oxen of the plough;
That oother man was logged wel ynough,
As was his aventure, or his fortiene,
That us governeth alle as in commune.

" And so bifel that longe er it were day,
This man mette in his bed, ther as he lay,
How that his felawe gan upon hym calle,
And seyde, " Alias! for in an oxes stalle
This nyght I shal be mordred ther I lye;
Now helpe me, deere brother, or I dye;
In alle haste com to me!" he seyde.

" This man out of his sleepe for feere abrayde;
But whan that he was wakened of his sieepe,
He turned hym and took of this no keepe;
Hym thoughte his dreem nas but a vanitee.
Thus twies in his slepyng dremed hee,
And atte thridde tyme yet his felawe
Cam, as hym thoughte, and seide, "I am now
slawe!

Bihoold my bloody woundes, depe and wyde;
Arys up erly in the morwe tyde,
And at the west gate of the toun," quod he,

" A carte ful of donge ther shallow se,
In which my body is hid ful prively;
Do thilke carte arresten boldely;
My gold caused my mordre, sooth to sayn."
And tolde hym every point how he was slayn,
With a ful pitous face, pale of hewe;
And truste wel, his dreem he foond ful trewe;
For on the morwe, as soone as it was day,
To his felawes in he took the way,
And whan that he cam to this oxes stalle,
After his felawe he bigan to calle.

" The hostiler answerde hym anon
And seyde, " Sire, your felawe is agon;
As soone as day he wente out of the toun."

"This man gan fallen in suspecion,—
Remembrynge on his dremes, that he mette,—
And forth he gooth, no lenger wolde he lette,
Unto the west gate of the toun, and fond
A donge carte, as it were to donge lond,
That was arrayed in that same wise
As ye han herd the dede man devyse;
And with an hardy herte he gan to crye
Vengeance and justice of this felonye.

" My felawe mordred is this same nyght,
And in this carte he lith gapyng upright.
I crye out on the ministres," quod he,
"That sholden kepe and reulen this citee;
Harrow! alias! heere lith my felawe slayn!"
What sholde I moore unto this tale sayn?
The peple out sterte and caste the cart to grounde,
And in the myddel of the dong they founde
The dede man, that mordred was al newe.

" O blisful God, that art so just and trewe!
Lo, how that thou biwreyest mordre alway!
Mordre wol out, that se we day by day;

Mordre is so wlatson¹, abhomynable
 To God, that is so just and resonable,
 That he ne wol nat suffre it heled² be,
 Though it abyde a yeer, or two, or thre;
 Mordre wol out, this my conclusioun.
 And right anon, ministres of that toun
 Han hent the carter, and so soore hym pyned,
 And eek the hostiler so soore engyned,
 That they biknewe³ hire wikkednesse anon,
 And were an-hanged by the nekke bon.

" Heere may men seen that dremes been to drede;
 And certes, in the same book I rede,
 Right in the nexte chapitre after this,—
 I gabbe nat, so have I joye or blis,—
 Two men that wolde han passed over see,
 For certeyn cause, into a fer contree,
 If that the wynd ne hadde been contrarie,
 That made hem in a citee for to tarie
 That stood ful myrie upon an haven syde;
 But on a day, agayn the even-tyde,
 The wynd gan chaunge, and blew right as hem leste.
 Jolif and glad they wente unto hir reste,
 And casten hem ful erly for to saille.

" But to that o man fil a greet mervaille;
 That oon of hem in slepyng as he lay,
 Hym mette a wonder dreem, agayn the day:
 Hym thoughte a man stood by his beddes syde
 And hym comanded that he sholde abyde,
 And seyde hym thus: "If thou tomorwe wende,
 Thou shalt be dreynt, my tale is at an ende."

" He wook, and tolde his felawe what he mette,
 And preyde hym his viage for to lette;
 As for that day, he preyde hym to byde.
 His felawe, that lay by his beddes syde,

¹ wlatson, odious. ² heled, hidden. ³ biknewe, confessed.

Gan for to laughe, and scorned hym ful faste;
 " No dreem ", quod he, " may so myn herte agaste,
 That I wol lette for to do my thynges;
 I sette not a straw by thy dremynges,
 For swevenes been but vanytees and japes;
 Men dreme al day of owles or of apes,
 And eke of many a maze therwithal;
 Men dreme of thyng that never was ne shal;
 But sith I see that thou wolt heere abyde,
 And thus forslewthen wilfully thy tyde,
 God woot it reweth me, and have good day!"
 And thus he took his leve, and wente his way;
 But ere that he hadde half his cours y-seyled,
 Noot I nat why, ne what myschaunce it eyled,
 But casuelly the shippes botme rente,
 And shipe and man under the water wente
 In sighte of othere shippes it bisyde,
 That with hem seyled at the same tyde!
 And therfore, faire Pertelote so deere,
 By swiche ensamples olde yet maistow leere,
 That no man sholde been to recchelees
 Of dremes, for I seye thee doutelees,
 That many a dreem ful soore is for to drede.

" Lo, in the lyf of Seint Kenelm I rede,
 That was Kenulphus sone, the noble kyng
 Of Mercenrike, how Kenelm mette a thyng.
 A lite er he was mordred, on a day
 His mordre in his avysioun he say¹.
 His norice hym expowned every deel
 His swevene, and bad hym for to kepe hym weel
 For traisoun; but he nas but seven yeer oold,
 And therfore litel tale hath he toold
 Of any dreem, so hooly was his herte.
 By God, I hadde levere than my sherte

¹say, saw.

That ye hadde rad his legende as have I.
Dame Pertelote, I sey yow trewely,
Macrobeus, that writ the avisioun
In Affrike of the worthy Cipoun,
Affermeth dremes, and seith that they been
Warnynge of thynges that men after seen;
And forther-moore, I pray yow looketh wel
In the Olde Testament of Daniel,
If he heeld dremes any vanitee.

" Reed eek of Joseph, and ther shul ye see
Wher dremes be somtyme,—I sey nat alle,—
Warnynge of thynges that shul after falle.
Looke of Egipte the kyng, daun Pharao,
His baker and his butiller also,
Wher they ne felte noon effect in dremes.
Whoso wol seken actes of sondry remes¹
May rede of dremes many a wonder thyng.

" Lo, Cresus, which that was of Lyde kyng,
Mette he nat that he sat upon a tree,
Which signified he sholde anhangd bee?

" Lo heere Andromacha, Ectores wyf,
That day that Ector sholde lese his lyf,
She dremed on the same nyght biforn,
How that the lyf of Ector sholde be lorne,
If thilke day he wente into bataille;
She warned hym, but it myghte nat availle;
He wente forth to fighte natheles,
And he was slayn anon of Achilles;
But thilke tale is al to longe to telle,
And eek it is ny day, I may nat dwelle;
Shortly I seye, as for conclusioun,
That I shal han of this avisioun
Adversitee; and I seye forthermoor,
That I ne telle of laxatyves no stoor,

¹ *remes*, realms.

For they been venymes, I woot it weel;
I hem diffye, I love hem never a deel!

"Now let us speke of myrthe, and stynte al this;
Madame Pertelote, so have I blis,
Of o thyng God hath sent me large grace;
For whan I se the beautee of youre face,
Ye been so scarlet reed aboute youre eyen,
It maketh al my drede for to dyen,
For, al-so siker as *In principle*,
Mulier est hominis confusio,—
Madame, the sentence of this Latyn is,
"Womman is mannes joye, and al his blis";
For whan I feele a-nyght your softe syde,
Al be it that I may nat on yow ryde,
For that oure perche is maad so narwe, alias!
I am so ful of joye and of solas,
That I diffye bothe swevene and dreem ":
And with that word he fly doun fro the beam,
For it was day, and eke his hennes alle;
And with a chuk he gan hem for to calle,
For he hadde founde a corn, lay in the yerd.
Real he was, he was namoore aferd,
He fethered Pertelote twenty tyme,
And trad as ofte, er that it was pryme.
He looketh as it were a grym leoun,
And on his toos he rometh up and doun;
Hym deigned nat to sette his foot to grounde.
He chukketh whan he hath a corn y-founde,
And to hym rennen thanne his wyves alle.
Thus roial, as a prince is in an halle,
Leve I this Chauntecleer in his pasture,
And after wol I telle his ^venture.

Whan that the monthe in which the world bigan,
That highte March, whan God first maked man,
Was compleet, and y-passed were also,

Syn March bigan, thritty dayes and two,
Bifel that Chauntecleer in all his pryde,
His sevene wyves walkynge by his syde,
Caste up his eyen to the bryghte sonne
That in the signe of Taurus hadde y-ronne
Twenty degrees and oon, and som-what moore,
And knew by kynde, and by noon oother loore,
That it was pryme, and crew with blisful stevene.
" The sonne ", he seyde, " is clomben up on hevene
Fourty degrees and oon, and moore y-wis.
Madame Pertelote, my worldes blis,
Herkneth thise blisful briddes how they syr
And se the fresshe floures how they spryng'
Ful is myn herte of revel and solas!"
But sodeynly hym fil a sorweful cas;
For ever the latter ende of joy is wo.
God woot that worldly joye is soone ago,
And if a rethor koude faire endite,
He in a cronycle saufly myghte it write,
As for a sovereyn notabilitee.
Now every wys man, lat him herkne me;
This storie is al so trewe, I undertake,
As is the book of Launcelot de Lake,
That wommen holde in ful greet reverence.
Now wol I torne agayn to my sentence.

A colfox, fui of sly iniquitee,
That in the grove hadde wonned yeres three,
By heigh ymaginacioun forn-cast,
The same nyght thurgh-out the hegges brast
Into the yerd, ther Chauntecleer the faire
Was wont, and eek his wyves, to repaire;
And in a bed of wortes stille he lay,
Til it was passed undren¹ of the day,
Waitynge his tyme on Chauntecleer to falle;

¹ *undren*, the forenoon.

As gladly doon thise homycides alle
That in await liggen to mordre men.

O false mordroure lurkyng in thy den!
O newe Scariot, newe Genyloun!
False dissymulour, O Greek Synoun,
That broghtest Troye al outrely to sorwe!
O Chauntecleer, acursed be that morwe,
That thou into that yerd flaugh fro the bemes!
Thou were ful wel y-warned by thy dremes
That thilke day was perilous to thee;
But what that God forwoot moot nedes bee,
After the opinioun of certein clerkis.
Witnesse on hym that any parfit clerk is,
That in scole is greet altercacioun
In this mateere, and greet disputisoun,
And hath been of an hundred thousand men;
But I ne kan nat bulte¹ it to the bren,
As kan the hooly doctour Augustyn,
Or Boece, or the bisshope Bradwardyn,
Wheither that Goddes worthy forwityng
Streyneth me nedely to doon a thyng,—
Nedely clepe I symple necessitee,—
Or elles if free choys be graunted me
To do that same thyng, or do it noght,
Though God forwoot it er that it was wrought;
Or if his wityng streyneth never a deel,
But by necessitee condicioneel.
I wil nat han to do of swich mateere,
My tale is of a cok, as ye may heere,
That took his conseil of his wyf with sorwe,
To walken in the yerd upon that morwe
That he hadde met that dreem that I yow tolde.
Wommennes conseils been ful ofte colde;
Wommannes conseil broghte us first to wo

¹ *bulte*, sift.

And made Adam fro Paradys to go,
Ther as he was ful myrie and wel at ese;
But for I noot to whom it myght displese,
If I conseil of wommen wolde blame,
Passe over, for I seyde it in my game.
Rede auctours where they trete of swich mateere,
And what they seyn of wommen ye may heere;
Thise been the cokkes wordes, and nat myne,
I kan noon harm of no womman divyne!

Faire in the soond, to bathe hire myrily,
Lith Pertelote, and alle hire sustres by,
Agayn the soone, and Chauntecleer so free
Soong murier than the mermayde in the see;
For *Physiologus* seith sikerly,
How that they syngen wel and myrily.

And so bifel that as he cast his eye
Among the wortes, on a boterflye,
He was war of this fox that lay ful lowe.
No-thing ne liste hym thanne for to crowe,
But cride anon, "Cok, cok!" and up he sterte,
As man that was affrayed in his herte,—
For naturelly a beest desireth flee
Fro his contrdrie, if he may it see,
Though he never erst hadde seyn it with his eye.

This Chauntecleer, whan he gan hym espye,
He wolde han fled, but that the fox anon
Seyde, "Gentil sire, alias! wher wol ye gon?
Be ye affrayed of me that am youre freend?
Now, certes, I were worse than a feend,
If I to yow wolde harm or vileynye.
I am nat come your conseil for tespye,
But trewely the cause of my comynge
Was oonly for to herkne how that ye synge;
For trewely, ye have as myrie a stevene
As any aungel hath that is in hevene.

Therwith ye han in musyk moore feelynge
 Than hadde Boece, or any that kan synge.
 My lord youre fader,—God his soule blesse!
 And eek youre mooder, of hire gentillesse,
 Han in myn hous y-been to my greet ese,
 And certes, sire, ful fayn wolde I yow plese.
 But for men speke of syngyng, I wol seye,—
 So moote I brouke¹ wel myne eyen tweye,—
 Save yow, I herde never man so synge
 As dide youre fader in the morwenyng.
 Certes, it was of herte, al that he song;
 And for to make his voys the moore strong,
 He wolde so peyne hym that with bothe his eyen
 He moste wynke, so loude he wolde cryen;
 And stonden on his tiptoon therwithal,
 And strecche forth his nekke, long and smal;
 And eek he was of swich discrecioun
 That ther nas no man in no regioun
 That hym in song or wisdom myghte passe.
 I have wel rad, in "Daun Burnel the Asse",
 Among his vers, how that ther was a cok,
 For that a preestes sone yaf hym a knok
 Upon his leg, whil he was yong and nyce,
 He made hym for to lese his benefice;
 But certeyn, ther nys no comparisoun
 Bitwixe the wisdom and discrecioun
 Of youre fader and of his subtiltee.
 Now syngeth, sire, for seinte charitee;
 Lat se, konne ye youre fader countrefete."

This Chauntecleer his wynges gan to bete,
 As man that koude his tray sou n nat espie,
 So was he ravysshed with his flaterie.

Alias, ye lordes, many a fals flatour
 Is in youre courtes, afad many a losengeour²,

¹ *brouke*, enjoy the use of.

² *losengeour*, flatterer.

That plesen yow wel moore, by my feith,
 Than he that soothfastnesse unto yow seith,—
 Redeth Ecclesiaste of flaterye,—
 Beth war, ye lordes, of hir trecherye.

This Chauntecleer stood hye upon his toos
 Strecchyng his nekke, and heeld his eyen cloos,
 And gan to crowe loude for the nones,
 And daun Russell, the fox, stirte up atones,
 And by the gargat¹ hente Chauntecleer,
 And on his bak toward the wode hym beer;
 For yet ne was ther no man that hym sewed².

O destinee, that mayst nat been eschewed!
 Alas, that Chauntecleer fleigh fro the bemes!
 Alias, his wyf ne roghte nat of dremes!
 And on a Friday fil al this meschaunce.

O Venus, that art goddesse of plesaunce,
 Syn that thy servant was this Chauntecleer,
 And in thy servyce dide al his poweer,
 Moore for delit than world to multiplie,
 Why woltestow suffre hym on thy day to dye?

O Gaufred,³ deere maister soverayn,
 That, whan thy worthy kyng Richard was slayn
 With shot, compleynedest his deeth so soore!
 Why ne hadde I now thy sentence, and thy loore,
 The Friday for to chide, as diden ye?—
 For on a Friday, soothly, slayn was he.
 Thanne wolde I shewe yow how that I koude pleyne
 For Chauntecleres drede, and for his peyne.

Certes, swich cry, ne lamentacioun,
 Was never of ladyes maad whan Ylioun
 Was wonne, and Pirrus with his streite⁴ swerd,
 Whan he hadde hent kyng Priam by the berd,
 And slayn hym,—as seyth us *Eneydos*,—

¹ gargat, throat. ² sewed, pursued.

³ Gaufred of Vinsauf wrote an elegy on Richard I. ⁴ streite, drawn.

As maden alle the hennes in the clos,
Whan they had seyn of Chauntecleer the sighte.
But sovereynly dame Pertelote shrighthe,
Ful louder than dide Hasdrubales wyf,
Whan that hir housbonde hadde lost his lyf,
And that the Romainys hadde brend Cartage,—
She was so ful of torment and of rage,
That wilfully into the fyr she sterte,
And brende hireselven with a stedefast herte.

O woful hennes, right so criden ye,
As, whan that Nero brende the citee
Of Rome, cryden senatoures wyves,
For that hir husbondes losten alle hir lyves
Withouten gilt,—this Nero hath hem slayn.
Now wol I torne to my tale agayn.

This sely widwe, and eek hir doghtres two,
Herden thise hennes crie and maken wo,
And out at dores stirten they anon,
And syen the fox toward the grove gon,
And bar upon his bak the cok away,
And cryden, "Out! harrow! and weylaway!
Ha! ha! the fox!" and after hym they ran,
And eek with staves many another man;
Ran Colle, oure dogge, and Talbot, and Gerland
And Malkyn, with a dystaf in hir hand;
Ran cow and calf, and eek the verray hogges,
So were they fered for berkyng of the dogges,
And shoutyng of the men and wommen eek;
They ronne so hem thoughte hir herte breek.
They yolliden, as feendes doon in helle;
The dokes cryden, as men wolde hem quelle;
The gees, for feere, flowen over the trees;
Out of the hyve cam the swarm of bees;
So hydous was the noys, *a benedicite!*
Certes, he Jakke Straw, and his meynee,

Ne made never shoutes half so shrille,
 Whan that they wolden any Flemyng kille,
 As thilke day was maad upon the fox.
 Of bras they broghten bemes, and of box,
 Of horn, of boon, in whiche they blewe and powped,
 And therwithal they skriked and they howped;
 It semed as that hevene sholde falle.

Now, goode men, I pray yow herkneth alle;
 Lo, how Fortune turneth sodeynly
 The hope and pryde eek of hir enemy!
 This cok, that lay upon the foxes bak,
 In al his drede unto the fox he spak,
 And seyde, "Sire, if that I were as ye,
 Yet wolde I seyn, as wys God helpe me,
 'Turneth agayn, ye proude cherles alle!
 A verray pestilence upon yow falle;
 Now am I come unto the wodes syde,
 Maugree youre heed, the cok shal heere abyde;
 I wol hym etc in feith, and that anon!"

The fox answerde, "In feith it shal be don";
 And as he spak that word, al sodeynly
 This cok brak from his mouth delyverly²,
 And heighe upon a tree he fleigh anon!
 And whan the fox saugh that he was y-gon,—

"Alias!" quod he, "O Chauntecleer, alias!
 I have to yow", quod he, "y-doon trespas,
 In as muche as I maked yow aferd,
 Whan I yow hente and broghte out of the yerd;
 But, sire, I dide it of no wikke entente.
 Com doun, and I shal telle yow what I mente;
 I shal seye sooth to yow, God help me so!"

"Nay thanne," quod he, "I shrewe us bothe two,
 And first I shrewe myself, bothe blood and bones,
 If thou bigyle me any ofter than ones.

¹ *bemes*, trumpets.

² *delyverly*, deftly.

Thou shalt na moore, thurgh thy flaterye,
 Do me to synge, and wynke with myn eye,
 For he that wynketh, whan he sholde see,
 Al wilfully, God lat him never thee!"

"Nay," quod the fox, "but God yeve hym mes-
 chaunce,

That is so undiscreet of governaunce
 That jangleth whan he sholde holde his pees."

Lo, swich it is for to be recchelees,
 And rrecligent, and truste on flaterye.
 But ye that holden this tale a folye,—
 As of a fox, or of a cok and hen,—
 Taketh the moralite, good men ;
 For Seint Paul seith that al that writen is,
 To oure doctrine it is y-write y-wis;
 Taketh the fruyt and lat the chafe be stille.
 Now, goode God, if that it be thy wille,
 As seith my lord, so make us alle goode men,
 And brynge us to his heighe blisse! *Amen.*

V. THE MONK'S TALE OF UGOLINO

The Tale of 'Huguelin',—Ugolino of Pisa,—is the eleventh of the series of seventeen 'tragedies' successively related by the Monk. They have no definite sequence, and nothing in common but the 'unhappy ending', in which, according to medieval theory, the essential quality of tragedy lay.

Of the erl HUGELYN OF PYZE the langour
 Ther may no tonge telle for pitee;
 But litel out of Pize stant a tour,
 In whiche tour in prisoun put was he,
 And with hym been his litel children thre;
 The eldeste scarsly fyf yeer was of age.
 Alias, Fortiine! it was greet crueltee
 Swiche briddes for to putte in swiche a cage!

Dampned was he to dyen in that prisoun,
For Roger, which that bisshope was of Pize,
Hadde on hym maad a fals suggestioun
Thurgh which the peple gan upon hym rise
And putten hym to prisoun, in swich wise
As ye han herd, and mete and drynke he hadde
So smal, that wel unnethe it may suffise,
And therwithal it was ful poure and badde.

And on a day bifil that in that hour
Whan that his mete wont was to be broght,
The gayler shette the dores of the tour.
He herde it wel, but he ne spak right noght,
And in his herte anon ther fil a thoght
That they for hunger wolde doon hym dyen.
"Alias!" quod he, "alias, that I was wrought!"
Therwith the teeris fillen from his eyen.

His yonge sone, that thre yeer was of age,
Unto hym seyde, "Fader, why do ye wepe?
Whanne wol the gayler bryngen cure potage;
Is there no morsel breed that ye do kepe?
I am so hungry that I may nat slepe;
Now wolde God that I myghte slepen evere!
Thanne sholde nat hunger in my wombe crepe;
Ther is no thyng, but breed, that me were levere."

Thus day by day this child bigan to crye,
Til in his fadres barm adoun it lay,
And seyde, "Farewel, fader, I moot dye!"
And kiste his fader, and dyde the same day;
And whan the woful fader deed it say,
For wo his armes two he gan to byte,
And seyde, "Alias, Fortune! and weylaway!
Thy false wheel my wo al may I wyte!"

His children wende that it for hunger was
 That he his armes gnow, and nat for wo,
 And seyde, "Fader, do nat so, alias!
 But rather ete the flessch upon us two;
 Oure flessch thou yaf us, take oure flessch us fro,
 And ete ynogh",—right thus they to hym seyde,
 And after that, withinne a day or two,
 They leyde hem in his lappe adoun and deyde.

Hymself, despeired, eek for hunger starf;
 Thus ended is this myghty erl of Pize;
 From heigh estaat Fortune away hym carf.
 Of this tragedie it oghte ynough suffise.
 Whoso wol here it in a lenger wise,
 Redeth the grete poete of Ytaille
 That highte Dant, for he kan al devyse
 Fro point to point,—nat o word wol he faille.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

(1564-1616)

vi. THE RAPE OF LUCRECE

FROM the besieged Ardea all in post,
 Borne by the trustless wings of false desire,
 Lust-breathed Tarquin leaves the Roman host,
 And to Collatium bears the lightless fire
 Which, in pale embers hid, lurks to aspire
 And girdle with embracing flames the waist
 Of Collatine's fair love, Lucrece the chaste.

Haply that name of "chaste" unhappily set
 This bateless edge on his keen appetite;
 When Collatine unwisely did not let
 To praise the clear unmatched red and white

Which triumph'd in that sky of his delight,
Where mortal stars, as bright as heaven's beauties,
With pure aspects did him peculiar duties.

For he the night before, in Tarquin's tent,
Unlocked the treasure of his happy state;
What priceless wealth the heavens had him lent
In the possession of his beauteous mate;
Reckoning his fortune at such high-proud rate,
That kings might be espoused to more fame,
But king nor peer to such a peerless dame.

O happiness enjoy'd but of a few!
And, if possess'd, as soon decay'd and done
As is the morning's silver-melting dew
Against the golden splendour of the sun !
An expired date, cancell'd ere well begun :
Honour and beauty, in the owner's arms,
Are weakly fortress'd from a world of harms.

Beauty itself doth of itself persuade
The eyes of men without an orator;
What needeth then apologies be made,
To set forth that which is so singular?
Or why is Collatine the publisher
Of that rich jewel he should keep unknown
From thievish ears, because it is his own?

Perchance his boast of Lucrece' sovereignty
Suggested this proud issue of a king;
For by our ears our hearts oft tainted be:
Perchance that envy of so rich a thing,
Braving compare, disdainfully did sting
His high-pitch'd thoughts, that meaner men should
vaunt
That golden hap which their superiors want.

But some untimely thought did instigate
His all-too-timeless speed, if none of those:
His honour, his affairs, his friends, his state,
Neglected all, with swift intent he goes
To quench the coal which in his liver glows.
O rash false heat, wrapp'd in repentant cold,
Thy hasty spring still blasts, and ne'er grows old!

When at Collatium this false lord arrived,
Well was he welcomed by the Roman dame,
Within whose face beauty and virtue strived
Which of them both should underprop her fame.
When virtue bragg'd, beauty would blush for shame;
When beauty boasted blushes, in despite
Virtue would stain that o'er with silver white.

But beauty, in that white intitled,
From Venus' doves doth challenge that fair field:
Then virtue claims from beauty beauty's red,
Which virtue gave the golden age to gild
Their silver cheeks, and call'd it then their shield;
Teaching them thus to use it in the fight,
When shame assail'd, the red should fence the white.

This heraldry in Lucrece' face was seen,
Argued by beauty's red and virtue's white:
Of cither's colour was the other queen,
Proving from world's minority their right:
Yet their ambition makes them still to fight;
The sovereignty of either being so great,
That oft they interchange each other's seat.

Their silent war of lilies and of roses,
Which Tarquin view'd in her fair face's field,
In their pure ranks his traitor eye encloses;
Where, lest between them both it should be kill'd,

The coward captive vanquished doth yield
To those two armies that would let him go,
Rather than triumph in so false a foe.

Now thinks he that her husband's shallow tongue,—
The niggard prodigal that praised her so,—
In that high task hath done her beauty wrong,
Which far exceeds his barren skill to show:
Therefore that praise which Collatine doth owe
Enchanted Tarquin answers with surmise,
In silent wonder of still-gazing eyes.

This earthly saint, adored by this devil,
Little suspecteth the false worshipper;
For unstain'd thoughts do seldom dream on evil;
Birds never limed no secret bushes fear:
So guiltless she securely gives good cheer
And reverend welcome to her princely guest,
Whose inward ill no outward harm expressed:

For that he coloured with his high estate,
Hiding base sin in plaits of majesty;
That nothing in him seem'd inordinate,
Save sometime too much wonder of his eye,
Which, having all, all could not satisfy;
But, poorly rich, so wanteth in his store,
That, cloy'd with much, he pineth still for more.

But she, that never coped with stranger eyes,
Could pick no meaning from their parling looks,
Nor read the subtle-shining secrecies
Writ in the glassy margents of such books:
She touched no unknown baits, nor fear'd no hooks:
Nor could she moralize his wanton sight,
More than his eyes were open'd to the light.

He stories to her ears her husband's fame,
Won in *foe* fields of fruitful Italy;

And decks with praises Collatings high name,
Made glorious by his manly chivalry
With bruised arms and wreaths of victory:
Her joy with heaved-up hand she doth express,
And, wordless, so greets heaven for his success.

Far from the purpose of his coming hither,
He makes excuses for his being there:
No cloudy show of stormy blustering weather
Doth yet in his fair welkin once appear;
Till sable Night, mother of Dread and Fear,
Upon the world dim darkness doth display,
And in her vaulty prison stows the Day.

For then is Tarquin brought unto his bed,
Intending weariness with heavy spright;
For, after supper, long he questioned
With modest Lucrece, and wore out the night:
Now leaden slumber with life's strength doth fight;
And every one to rest themselves betake,
Save thieves, and cares, and troubled minds, that
wake.

As one of which doth Tarquin lie revolving
The sundry dangers of his will's obtaining;
Yet ever to obtain his will resolving,
Though weak-built hopes persuade him to abstaining:
Despair to gain doth traffic oft for gaining;
And when great treasure is the meed proposed,
Though death be adjunct, there's no death supposed.

Those that much covet are with gain so fond,
For what they have not, that which they possess
They scatter and unloose it from their bond,
And so, by hoping more, they have but less;

Or, gaining more, the profit of excess
Is but to surfeit, and such griefs sustain,
That they prove bankrupt in this poor-rich gain.

The aim of all is but to nurse the life
With honour, wealth, and ease, in waning age;
And in this aim there is such thwarting strife,
That one for all, or all for one we gage;
As life for honour in fell battle's rage;
Honour for wealth; and oft that wealth doth cost
The death of all, and all together lost.

So that in venturing ill we leave to be
The things we are for that which we expect;
And this ambitious foul infirmity,
In having much, torments us with defect
Of that we have: so then we do neglect
The thing we have; and, all for want of wit,
Make something nothing by augmenting it

Such hazard now must doting Tarquin make,
Pawning his honour to obtain his lust;
And for himself himself he must forsake:
Then where is truth, if there be no self-trust?
When shall he think to find a stranger just,
When he himself himself confounds, betrays
To slanderous tongues and wretched hateful days?

Now stole upon the time the dead of night,
When heavy sleep had closed up mortal eyes:
No comfortable star did lend his light,
No noise but owls' and wolves' death-boding cries;
Now serves the season that they may surprise
The silly lambs: pure thoughts are dead and still,
While lust and murder wake to stain and kill

And now this lustful lord leap'd from his bed,
Throwing his mantle rudely o'er his arm;
Is madly toss'd between desire and dread;
Th' one sweetly flatters, th' other feareth harm;
But honest fear, bewitch'd with lust's foul charm,
Doth too too oft betake him to retire,
Beaten away by brain-sick rude desire.

His falchion on a flint he softly smiteth,
That from the cold stone sparks of fire do fly;
Whereat a waxen torch forthwith he lighteth,
Which must be lode-star to his lustful eye;
And to the flame thus speaks advisedly,
"As from this cold flint I enforced this fire,
So Lucrece must I force to my desire".

Here pale with fear he doth premeditate
The dangers of his loathsome enterprise,
And in his inward mind he doth debate
What following sorrow may on this arise:
Then looking scornfully, he doth despise
His naked armour of still-slaughter'd lust,
And justly thus controls his thoughts unjust:

"Fair torch, burn out thy light, and lend it not
To darken her whose light excelleth thine:
And die, unhallow'd thoughts, before you blot
With your uncleanness that which is divine;
Offer pure incense to so pure a shrine:
Let fair humanity abhor the deed
That spots and stains love's modest snow-white weed.

"O shame to knighthood and to shining arms!
O foul dishonour to my household's grave!
O impious act, including all foul harms!
A martial man to be soft fancy's slave!

True valour still a true respect should have;
Then my digression is so vile, so base,
That it will live engraven in my face.

"Yea, though I die, the scandal will survive,
And be an eye-sore in my golden coat;
Some loathsome dash the herald will contrive,
To cipher me how fondly I did dote;
That my posterity, shamed with the note,
Shall curse my bones, and hold it for no sin
To wish that I their father had not been.

"What win I, if I gain the thing I seek?
A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy.
Who buys a minute's mirth to wail a week?
Or sells eternity to get a toy?
For one sweet grape who will the vine destroy?
Or what fond beggar, but to touch the crown,
Would with the sceptre straight be stricken down?

"If Collatinus dream of my intent,
Will he not wake, and in a desperate rage
Post hither, this vile purpose to prevent?
This siege that hath engirt his marriage,
This blur to youth, this sorrow to the sage,
This dying virtue, this surviving shame,
Whose crime will bear an ever-during blame?

"O, what excuse can my invention make,
When thou shalt charge me with so black a deed?
Will not my tongue be mute, my frail joints shake,
Mine eyes forego their light, my false heart bleed?
The guilt being great, the fear doth still exceed;
And extreme fear can neither fight nor fly,
But coward-like with trembling terror die.

" Had Collatinus kill'd my son or sire,
Or lain in ambush to betray my life,
Or were he not my dear friend, this desire
Might have excuse to work upon his wife,
As in revenge or quittal of such strife:
 But as he is my kinsman, my dear friend,
 The shame and fault finds no excuse nor end

"Shameful it is; ay, if the fact be known:
Hateful it is; there is no hate in loving:
I 'll beg her love; but she is not her own:
The worst is but denial and reproving:
My will is strong, past reason's weak removing.
 Who fears a sentence or an old man's saw
 Shall by a painted cloth be kept in awe."

Thus, graceless, holds he disputation
'Tween frozen conscience and hot-burning will,
And with good thoughts makes dispensation,
Urging the worsen sense for vantage still;
Which in a moment doth confound and kill
 All pure effects, and doth so far proceed,
 That what is vile shows like a virtuous deed.

Quoth he, " She took me kindly by the hand,
And gazed for tidings in my eager eyes,
Fearing some hard news from the warlike band,
Where her beloved Collatinus lies.
O, how her fear did make her colour rise!
 First red as roses that on lawn we lay,
 Then white as lawn, the roses took away.

" And how her hand, in my hand being lock'd,
Forced it to tremble with her loyal fear!
Which struck her sad, and then it faster rock'd,
Until her husband's welfare she did hear;

Whereat she smiled with so sweet a cheer,
That had Narcissus seen her as she stood,
Self-love had never drown'd him in the flood.

"Why hunt I then for colour or excuses?
All orators are dumb when beauty pleadeth;
Poor wretches have remorse in poor abuses;
Love thrives not in the heart that shadows dreadeth:
Affection is my captain, and he leadeth;
And when his gaudy banner is display'd,
The coward fights and will not be dismay'd.

"Then, childish fear, avaunt! debating, die!
Respect and reason, wait on wrinkled age!
My heart shall never countermand mine eye:
Sad pause and deep regard beseem the s^age;
My part is youth, and beats these from the stage:
Desire my pilot is, beauty my prize;
Then who fears sinking where such treasure lies?"

As corn overgrown by weeds, so heedful fear
Is almost choked by unresisted lust.
Away he steals with open listening ear,
Full of foul hope and full of fond mistrust;
Both which, as servitors to the unjust,
So cross him with their opposite persuasion,
That now he vows a league, and now invasion.

Within his thought her heavenly image sits,
And in the self-same seat sits Collatine:
That eye which looks on her confounds his wits;
That eye which him beholds, as more divine,
Unto a view so false will not incline;
But with a pure appeal seeks to the heart,
Which once corrupted takes the worser part;

And therein heartens up his servile powers,
Who, flatter'd by their leader's jocund show,
Stuff up his lust, as minutes fill up hours;
And as their captain, so their pride doth grow,
Paying more slavish tribute than they owe.

By reprobate desire thus madly led,
The Roman lord marcheth to Lucrece' bed.

The locks between her chamber and his will,
Each one by him enforced retires his ward;
But, as they open, they all rate his ill,
Which drives the creeping thief to some regard:
The threshold grates the door to have him heard;
Night-wandering weasels shriek to see him there;
They fright him, yet he still pursues his fear.

As each unwilling portal yields him way,
Through little vents and crannies of the place
The wind wars with his torch to make him stay,
And blows the smoke of it into his face,
Extinguishing his conduct in this case;
But his hot heart, which fond desire doth scorch,
Puffs forth another wind that fires the torch:

And being lighted, by the light he spies
Lucretia's glove, wherein her needle sticks:
He takes it from the rushes where it lies,
And griping it, the needle his finger pricks;
As who would say "This glove to wanton tricks
Is not inured; return again in haste;
Thou see'st our mistress' ornaments are chaste".

But all these poor forbiddings could not stay him;
He in the worst sense construes their denial:
The doors, the wind, the glove, that did delay him,
He takes for accidental things of trial;

Or as those bars which stop the hourly dial,
Who with a lingering stay his course doth let,
Till every minute pays the hour his debt.

"So, so," quoth he, "these lets attend the time,
Like little frosts that sometime threat the spring,
To add a more rejoicing to the prime,
And give the sneaped birds more cause to sing.
Pain pays the income of each precious thing;
Huge rocks, high winds, strong pirates, shelves and
sands,
The merchant fears, ere rich at home he lands."

Now is he come unto the chamber door,
That shuts him from the heaven of his thought,
Which with a yielding latch, and with no more,
Hath barr'd him from the blessed thing he sought.
So from himself impiety hath wrought,
That for his prey to pray he doth begin,
As if the heavens should countenance his sin.

But in the midst of his unfruitful prayer,
Having solicited th' eternal power
That his foul thoughts might compass his fair fair,
And they would stand auspicious to the hour,
Even there he starts: quoth he, "I must deflower:
The powers to whom I pray abhor this fact,
How can they then assist me in the act?

"Then Love and Fortune be my gods, my guide!
My will is back'd with resolution:
Thoughts are but dreams till their effects be tried;
The blackest sin is cleared with absolution;
Against love's fire fear's frost hath dissolution.
The eye of heaven is out, and misty night
Covers the shame that follows sweet delight."

This said, his guilty hand pluck'd up the latch,
And with his knee the door he opens wide.
The dove sleeps fast that this night-owl will catch:
Thus treason works ere traitors be espied.
Who sees the lurking serpent steps aside;
But she, sound sleeping, fearing no such thing,
Lies at the mercy of his mortal sting.

Into the chamber wickedly he stalks,
And gazeth on her yet unstained bed.
The curtains being close, about he walks,
Rolling his greedy eyeballs in his head:
By their high treason is his heart misled;
Which gives the watch-word to his hand full soon
To draw the cloud that hides the silver moon.

Look, as the fair and fiery-pointed sun,
Rushing from forth a cloud, bereaves our sight;
Even so, the curtain drawn, his eyes begun
To wink, being blinded with a greater light:
Whether it is that she reflects so bright,
That dazzleth them, or else some shame supposed;
But blind they are, and keep themselves enclosed.

O, had they in that darksome prison died!
Then had they seen the period of their ill;
Then Collatine again, by Lucrece' side,
In his clear bed might have reposed still:
But they must ope, this blessed league to kill:
And holy-thoughted Lucrece to their sight
Must sell her joy, her life, her world's delight.

Her lily hand her rosy cheek lies under,
Cozening the pillow of a lawful kiss;
Who, therefore angry, seems to part in sunder,
Swelling on either side to want his bliss;

Between whose hills her head entombed is:
Where, like a virtuous monument, she lies,
To be admired of lewd unhallow'd eyes.

Without the bed her other fair hand was,
On the green coverlet; whose perfect white
Show'd like an April daisy on the grass,
With pearly sweat, resembling dew of night.
Her eyes, like marigolds, had sheathed their light,
And canopied in darkness sweetly lay,
Till they might open to adorn the day.

Her hair, like golden threads, play'd with her breath;
O modest wantons! wanton modesty!
Showing life's triumph in the map of death,
And death's dim look in life's mortality:
Each in her sleep themselves so beautify,
As if between them twain there were no strife,
But that life lived in death, and death in life.

Her breasts, like ivory globes circled with blue,
A pair of maiden worlds unconquered,
Save of their lord no bearing yoke they knew,
And him by oath they truly honoured.
These worlds in Tarquin new ambition bred;
Who, like a foul usurper, went about
From this fair throne to heave the owner out.

What could he see but mightily he noted?
What did he note but strongly he desired?
What he beheld, on that he firmly doted,
And in his will his wilful eye he tired.
With more than admiration he admired
Her azure veins, her alabaster skin,
Her coral lips, her snow-white dimpled chin.

As the grim lion fawneth o'er his prey,
Sharp hunger by the conquest satisfied,
So o'er this sleeping soul doth Tarquin stay,
His rage of lust by gazing qualified;
Slack'd, not suppressed; for standing by her side,
His eye, which late this mutiny restrains,
Unto a greater uproar tempts his veins:

And they, like straggling slaves for pillage fighting,
Obdurate vassals fell exploits effecting,
In bloody death and ravishment delighting,
Nor children's tears nor mothers' groans respecting,
Swell in their pride, the onset still expecting:
Anon his beating heart, alarum striking,
Gives the hot charge and bids them do their liking.

His drumming heart cheers up his burning eye,
His eye commends the leading to his hand;
His hand, as proud of such a dignity,
Smoking with pride, march'd on to make his stand
On her bare breast, the heart of all her land;
Whose ranks of blue veins, as his hand did scale,
Left their round turrets destitute and pale.

They, mustering to the quiet cabinet
Where their dear governess and lady lies,
Do tell her she is dreadfully beset,
And fright her with confusion of their cries:
She, much amazed, breaks ope her lock'd-up eyes,
Who, peeping forth this tumult to behold,
Are by his flaming torch dimm'd and controll'd.

Imagine her as one in dead of night
From forth dull sleep by dreadful fancy waking,
That thinks she hath beheld some ghastly sprite,
Whose grim aspect sets every joint a-shaking;

What terror 't is! but she, in worser taking,
From sleep disturbed, needfully doth view
The sight which makes supposed terror true.

Wrapp'd and confounded in a thousand fears,
Like to a new-kill'd bird she trembling lies;
She dares not look; yet, winking, there appears
Quick-shifting antics, ugly in her eyes:
Such shadows are the weak brain's forgeries;
Who, angry that the eyes fly from their lights,
In darkness daunts them with more dreadful sights.

His hand, that yet remains upon her breast,—
Rude ram, to batter such an ivory wall!—
May feel her heart—poor citizen!—distressed,
Wounding itself to death, rise up and fall,
Beating her bulk, that his hand shakes withal.
This moves in him more rage and lesser pity,
To make the breach and enter this sweet city.

First, like a trumpet, doth his tongue begin
To sound a parley to his heartless foe;
Who o'er the white sheet peers her whiter chin,
The reason of this rash alarm to know,
Which he by dumb demeanour seeks to show;
But she with vehement prayers urgeth still
Under what colour he commits this ill.

Thus he replies: " The colour in thy face,
That even for anger makes the lily pale,
And the red rose blush at her own disgrace,
Shall plead for me and tell my loving tale:
Under that colour am I come to scale
Thy never-conquer'd fort: the fault is thine,
For those thine eyes betray thee unto mine.

"Thus I forestall thee, if thou mean to chide:
Thy beauty hath ensnared thee to this night,
Where thou with patience must my will abide;
My will that marks thee for my earth's delight,
Which I to conquer sought with all my might;
But as reproof and reason beat it dead,
By thy bright beauty was it newly bred.

"I see what crosses my attempt will bring;
I know what thorns the growing rose defends;
I think the honey guarded with a sting;
All this beforehand counsel comprehends:
But will is deaf and hears no heedful friends;
Only he hath an eye to gaze on beauty,
And dotes on what he looks, 'gainst law or duty.

"I have debated, even in my soul,
What wrong, what shame, what sorrow I shall breed;
But nothing can affection's course control,
Or stop the headlong fury of his speed.
I know repentant tears ensue the deed,
Reproach, disdain, and deadly enmity;
Yet strive I to embrace mine infamy."

This said, he shakes aloft his Roman blade,
Which, like a falcon towering in the skies,
Coucheth the fowl below with his wings' shade,
Whose crooked beak threatens if he mount he dies:
So under his insulting falchion lies
Harmless Lucretia, marking what he tells
With trembling fear, as fowl hear falcon's bells.

"Lucrece," quoth he, "this night I must enjoy thee:
If thou deny, then force must work my way,
For in thy bed I purpose to destroy thee:
That done, some worthless slave of thine I'll slay,

To kill thine honour with thy life's decay;
And in thy dead arms do I mean to place him,
Swearing I slew him, seeing thee embrace him.

" So thy surviving husband shall remain
The scornful mark of every open eye;
Thy kinsmen hang their heads at this disdain,
Thy issue blurred with nameless bastardy:
And thou, the author of their obloquy,
Shalt have thy trespass cited up in rhymes,
And sung by children in succeeding times.

" But if thou yield, I rest thy secret friend:
The fault unknown is as a thought unacted;
A little harm done to a great good end
For lawful policy remains enacted.
The poisonous simple sometimes is compacted
In a pure compound; being so applied,
His venom in effect is purified.

" Then, for thy husband and thy children's sake,
Tender my suit: bequeath not to their lot
The shame that from them no device can take,
The blemish that will never be forgot;
Worse than a slavish wipe or birth-hour's blot:
For marks descried in men's nativity
Are nature's faults, not their own infamy."

Here with a cockatrice' dead-killing eye
He rouseth up himself and makes a pause;
While she, the picture of pure piety,
Like a white hind under the gripe's sharp claws,
Pleads, in a wilderness where are no laws,
To the rough beast that knows no gentle right,
Nor aught obeys but his foul appetite.

But when a black-faced cloud the world doth threat,
In his dim mist the aspiring mountains hiding,
From earth's dark womb some gentle gust doth get,
Which blows these pitchy vapours from their biding,
Hindering their present fall by this dividing;
 So his unhallow'd haste her words delays,
 And moody Pluto winks while Orpheus plays.

Yet, foul night-waking cat, he doth but dally,
While in his hold-fast foot the weak mouse panteth:
Her sad behaviour feeds his vulture folly,
A swallowing gulf that even in plenty wanteth:
His ear her prayers admits, but his heart granteth
 No penetrable entrance to her plaining:
 Tears harden lust, though marble wear with raining.

Her pity-pleading eyes are sadly fixed
In the remorseless wrinkles of his face;
Her modest eloquence with sighs is mixed,
Which to her oratory adds more grace.
She puts the period often from his place;
 And midst the sentence so her accent breaks,
 That twice she doth begin ere once she speaks.

She conjures him by high almighty Jove,
By knighthood, gentry, and sweet friendship's oath,
By her untimely tears, her husband's love,
By holy human law, and common troth,
By heaven and earth, and all the power of both,
 That to his borrow'd bed he make retire,
 And stoop to honour, not to foul desire.

Quoth she, " Reward not hospitality
With such black payment as thou hast pretended;
Mud not the fountain that gave drink to thee;
Mar not the thing that cannot be amended;

End thy ill aim before thy shoot be ended;
He is no woodman that doth bend his bow
To strike a poor unseasonable doe.

" My husband is thy friend; for his sake spare me:
Thyself art mighty; for thine own sake leave me:
Myself a weakling; do not then ensnare me:
Thou look'st not like deceit; do not deceive me.
My sighs, like whirlwinds, labour hence to heave thee:
If ever man were moved with woman's moans,
Be moved with my tears, my sighs, my groans:

" All which together, like a troubled ocean,
Beat at thy rocky and wreck-threatening heart,
To soften it with their continual motion;
For stones dissolved to water do convert.
O, if no harder than a stone thou art,
Melt at my tears, and be compassionate!
Soft pity enters at an iron gate.

" In Tarquin's likeness I did entertain thee:
Hast thou put on his shape to do him shame?
To all the host of heaven I complain me,
Thou wrong'st his honour, wound'st his princely name.
Thou art not what thou seem'st; and if the same,
Thou seem'st not what thou art, a god, a king;
For kings like gods should govern every thing.

" How will thy shame be seeded in thine age,
When thus thy vices bud before thy spring
If in thy hope thou darest do such outrage,
What darest thou not when once thou art a king?
O, be remembered, no outrageous thing
From vassal actors can be wiped away;
Then kings' misdeeds cannot be hid in clay.

" This deed will make thee only loved for fear;
But happy monarchs still are fear'd for love:
With foul offenders thou perforce must bear,
When they in thee the like offences prove:
If but for fear of this, thy will remove;
For princes are the glass, the school, the book,
Where subjects¹ eyes do learn, do read, do look.

"And wilt thou be the school where Lust shall learn?
Must he in thee read lectures of such shame?
Wilt thou be glass wherein it shall discern
Authority for sin, warrant for blame,
To privilege dishonour in thy name?
Thou back'st reproach against long-living laud,
And makest fair reputation but a bawd.

"Hast thou command? by him that gave it thee,
From a pure heart command thy rebel will:
Draw not thy sword to guard iniquity,
For it was lent thee all that brood to kill.
Thy princely office how canst thou fulfil,
When, patterned by thy fault, foul sin may say,
He learn'd to sin, and thou didst teach the way?

"Think but how vile a spectacle it were,
To view thy present trespass in another.
Men's faults do seldom to themselves appear;
Their own transgressions partially they smother:
This guilt would seem death-worthy in thy brother.
O, how are they wrapped in with infamies
That from their own misdeeds askance their eyes!

" To thee, to thee, my heaved-up hands appeal,
Not to seducing lust, thy rash relier:
I sue for exiled majesty's repeal;
Let him return, and flattering thoughts retire:

His true respect will prison false desire,
And wipe the dim mist from my dotting eyne,
That thou shalt see thy state and pity mine."

"Have done," quoth he: "my uncontrolled tide
Turns not, but swells the higher by this let.
Small lights are soon blown out, huge fires abide,
And with the wind in greater fury fret:
The petty streams that pay a daily debt
To their salt sovereign, with their fresh falls' haste
Add to his flow, but alter not his taste."

"Thou art", quoth she, "a sea, a sovereign king;
And, lo, there falls into thy boundless flood
Black lust, dishonour, shame, misgoverning,
Who seek to stain the ocean of thy blood.
If all these petty ills shall change thy good,
Thy sea within a puddle's womb is hearsed,
And not the puddle in thy sea dispersed."

"So shall these slaves be king, and thou their slave;
Thou nobly base, they basely dignified;
Thou their fair life, and they thy fouler grave:
Thou loathed in their shame, they in thy pride:
The lesser thing should not the greater hide;
The cedar stoops not to the base shrub's foot,
But low shrubs wither at the cedar's root."

"So let thy thoughts, low vassals to thy state"—
"No more," quoth he; "by heaven, I will not hear thee:
Yield to my love; if not, enforced hate,
Instead of love's coy touch, shall rudely tear thee;
That done, despitefully I mean to bear thee
Unto the base bed of some rascal groom,
To be thy partner in this shameful doom."

This said, he sets his foot upon the light,
For light and lust are deadly enemies:
Shame folded up in blind concealing night,
When most unseen, then most doth tyrannize.
The wolf hath seized his prey, the poor lamb cries;
Till with her own white fleece her voice controll'd
Entombs her outcry in her lips' sweet fold:

For with the nightly linen that she wears
He pens her piteous clamours in her head;
Cooling his hot face in the chastest tears
That ever modest eyes with sorrow shed.
O, that prone lust should stain so pure a bed!
The spots whereof could weeping purify,
Her tears should drop on them perpetually.

But she hath lost a dearer thing than life,
And he hath won what he would lose again:
This forced league doth force a further strife;
This momentary joy breeds months of pain;
This hot desire converts to cold disdain:
Pure Chastity is rifled of her store,
And Lust, the thief, far poorer than before.

Look, as the full-fed hound or gorged hawk,
Unapt for tender smell or speedy flight,
Make slow pursuit, or altogether balk
The prey wherein by nature they delight;
So surfeit-taking Tarquin fares this night:
His taste delicious, in digestion souring,
Devours his will, that lived by foul devouring.

O, deeper sin than bottomless conceit
Can comprehend in still imagination!
Drunken Desire must vomit his receipt,
Ere he can see his own abomination.

While Lust is in his pride, no exclamation
Can curb his heat or rein his rash desire,
Till like a jade Self-will himself doth tire.

And then with lank and lean discoloured cheek,
With heavy eye, knit brow, and strengthless pace,
Feeble Desire, all recreant, poor, and meek,
Like to a bankrupt beggar wails his case:
The flesh being proud, Desire doth fight with Grace,
For there it revels; and when that decays,
The guilty rebel for remission prays.

So fares it with this faultful lord of Rome,
Who this accomplishment so hotly chased;
For now against himself he sounds this doom,
That through the length of times he stands disgraced :
Besides, his soul's fair temple is defaced;
To whose weak ruins muster troops of cares,
To ask the spotted princess how she fares.

She says, her subjects with foul insurrection
Have batter'd down her consecrated wall,
And by their mortal fault brought in subjection
Her immortality, and made her thrall
To living death and pain perpetual:
Which in her prescience she controlled still,
But her foresight could not forestall their will.

Even in this thought through the dark night he stealeth,
A captive victor that hath lost in gain;
Bearing away the wound that nothing healeth,
The scar that will, despite of cure, remain;
Leaving his spoil perplex'd in greater pain.
She bears the load of lust he left behind,
And he the burthen of a guilty mind.

He like a thievish dog creeps sadly thence;
She like a wearied lamb lies panting there;
He scowls and hates himself for his offence;
She, desperate, with her nails her flesh doth tear;
He faintly flies, sweating with guilty fear;
 She stays, exclaiming on the direful night;
 He runs, and chides his vanished, loathed delight.

He thence departs a heavy convertite;
She there remains a hopeless castaway;
He in his speed looks for the morning light;
She prays she never may behold the day,
"For day", quoth she, "night's scapes doth open lay,
 And my true eyes have never practised how
 To cloak offences with a cunning brow.

"They think not but that every eye can see
The same disgrace which they themselves behold;
And therefore would they still in darkness be,
To have their unseen sin remain untold;
For they their guilt with weeping will unfold,
 And grave, like water that doth eat in steel,
 Upon my cheeks what helpless shame I feel."

Here she exclaims against repose and rest,
And bids her eyes hereafter still be blind.
She wakes her heart by beating on her breast,
And bids it leap from thence, where it may find
Some purer chest to close so pure a mind.
 Frantic with grief thus breathes she forth her spite
 Against the unseen secrecy of night:

"O comfort-killing Night, image of hell!
Dim register and notary of shame!
Black stage for tragedies and murders fell!
Vast sin-concealing chaos! nurse of blame!

Blind muffled bawd! dark harbour for defame!
Grim cave of death! whispering conspirator
With close-tongued treason and the ravisher!

" O hateful, vaporous, and foggy Night!
Since thou art guilty of my cureless crime,
Muster thy mists to meet the eastern light,
Make war against proportion'd course of time;
Or if thou wilt permit the sun to climb
His wonted height, yet ere he go to bed,
Knit poisonous clouds about his golden head.

" With rotten damps ravish the morning air;
Let their exhaled unwholesome breaths make sick
The life of purity, the supreme fair,
Ere he arrive his weary noon-tide prick;
And let thy misty vapours march so thick,
That in their smoky ranks his smother'd light
May set at noon and make perpetual night.

" Were Tarquin Night, as he is but Night's child,
The silver-shining queen he would distain;
Her twinkling handmaids too, by him defiled,
Through Night's black bosom should not peep again:
So should I have co-partners in my pain;
And fellowship in woe doth woe assuage,
As palmers' chat makes short their pilgrimage.

" Where now I have no one to blush with me,
To cross their arms and hang their heads with mine,
To mask their brows and hide their infamy;
But I alone alone must sit and pine,
Seasoning the earth with showers of silver brine,
Mingling my talk with tears, my grief with groans,
Poor wasting monuments of lasting moans.

" O Night, thou furnace of foul-reeking smoke,
Let not the jealous Day behold that face
Which underneath thy black all-hiding cloak
Immodestly lies martyr'd with disgrace!
Keep still possession of thy gloomy place,
That all the faults which in thy reign are made
May likewise be sepulchred in thy shade!

" Make me not object to the tell-tale Day!
The light will show, character'd in my brow,
The story of sweet chastity's decay,
The impious breach of holy wedlock vow:
Yea, the illiterate, that know not how
To cipher what is writ in learned books,
Will quote my loathsome trespass in my looks.

" The nurse, to still her child, will tell my story,
And fright her crying babe with Tarquin's name;
The orator, to deck his oratory,
Will couple my reproach to Tarquin's shame;
Feast-finding minstrels, tuning my defame,
Will tie the hearers to attend each line,
How Tarquin wronged me, I Collatine.

" Let my good name, that senseless reputation,
For Collatine's dear love be kept unspotted :
If that be made a theme for disputation,
The branches of another root are rotted,
And undeserved reproach to him allotted
That is as clear from this attain of mine
As I, ere this, was pure to Collatine.

" O unseen shame! invisible disgrace!
O unfelt sore! crest-wounding, private scar!
Reproach is stamp'd in Collatinus' face,
And Tarquin's eye may read the mot afar,

How he in peace is wounded, not in war.

Alas, how many bear such shameful blows,
Which not themselves, but he that gives them knows!

" If, Collatine, thine honour lay in me,
From me by strong assault it is bereft.
My honey lost, and I, a drone-like bee,
Have no perfection of my summer left,
But robb'd and ransacked by injurious theft:
In thy weak hive a wandering wasp hath crept,
And suck'd the honey which thy chaste bee kept.

" Yet am I guilty of thy honour's wrack;
Yet for thy honour did I entertain him;
Coming from thee, I could not put him back,
For it had been dishonour to disdain him:
Besides, of weariness he did complain him,
And talk'd of virtue: O unlook'd-for evil,
When virtue is profaned in such a devil!

" Why should the worm intrude the maiden bud?
Or hateful cuckoos hatch in sparrows' nests?
Or toads infect fair founts with venom mud?
Or tyrant folly lurk in gentle breasts?
Or kings be breakers of their own behests?
But no perfection is so absolute,
That some impurity doth not pollute.

" The aged man that coffers-up his gold
Is plagued with cramps and gouts and painful fits;
And scarce hath eyes his treasure to behold,
But like still-pining Tantalus he sits,
And useless burns the harvest of his wits;
Having no other pleasure of his gain
But torment that it cannot cure his pain.

" So then he hath it when he cannot use it,
And leaves it to be master'd by his young;
Who in their pride do presently abuse it:
Their father was too weak, and they too strong,
To hold their cursed-blessed fortune long.
The sweets we wish for turn to loathed sour
Even in the moment that we call them ours.

"Unruly blasts wait on the tender spring;
Unwholesome weeds take root with precious flowers:
The adder hisses where the sweet birds sing;
What virtue breeds iniquity devours:
We have no good that we can say is ours,
But ill-annexed Opportunity
Or kills his life or else his quality.

" O Opportunity, thy guilt is great!
T is thou that executest the traitor's treason:
Thou set'st the wolf where he the lamb may get;
Whoever plots the sin, thou 'point'st the season;
Tis thou that spurn'st at right, at law, at reason;
And in thy shady cell, where none may spy him,
Sits Sin, to seize the souls that wander by him.

" Thou makest the vestal violate her oath;
Thou blow'st the fire when temperance is thaw'd;
Thou smother'st honesty, thou murder'st troth;
Thou foul abettor! thou notorious bawd!
Thou plantest scandal and displacest laud:
Thou ravisher, thou traitor, thou false thief,
Thy honey turns to gall, thy joy to grief!

" Thy secret pleasure turns to open shame,
Thy private feasting to a public fast,
Thy smoothing titles to a ragged name,
Thy sugared tongue to bitter wormwood taste:

Thy violent vanities can never last.
How comes it then, vile Opportunity
Being so bad, such numbers seek for thee?

" When wilt thou be the humble suppliant's friend,
And bring him where his suit may be obtain'd?
When wilt thou sort an hour great strifes to end?
Or free that soul which wretchedness hath chained?
Give physic to the sick, ease to the pain'd? ,
The poor, lame, blind, halt, creep, cry out for thee;
But they ne'er meet with Opportunity.

"The patient dies while the physician sleeps;
The orphan pines while the oppressor feeds;
Justice is feasting while the widow weeps;
Advice is sporting while infection breeds:
Thou grant'st no time for charitable deeds:
Wrath, envy, treason, rape, and murder's rages,
Thy heinous hours wait on them as their pages.

When Truth and Virtue have to do with thee,
A thousand crosses keep them from thy aid:
They buy thy help; but Sin ne'er gives a fee,
He gratis comes; and thou art well appaid
As well to hear as grant what he hath said.
My Collatine would else have come to me
When Tarquin did, but he was stay'd by thee.

" Guilty thou art of murder and of theft,
Guilty of perjury and subornation,
Guilty of treason, forgery, and shift,
Guilty of incest, that abomination;
An accessory by thine inclination
To all sins past, and all that are to come,
From the creation to the general doom.

" Mis-shapen Time, copesmate of ugly Night,
Swift subtle post, carrier of grisly care,
Eater of youth, false slave to false delight,
Base watch of woes, sin's pack-horse, virtue's snare;
Thou nursest all and murder'st all that are:
 O, hear me then, injurious, shifting Time!
 Be guilty of my death, since of my crime.

" Why hath thy servant, Opportunity,
Betray'd the hours thou gavest me to repose,
Cancell'd my fortunes, and enchained me
To endless date of never-ending woes?
Time's office is to fine the hate of foes;
 To eat up errors by opinion bred,
 Not spend the dowry of a lawful bed

" Time's glory is to calm contending kings,
To unmask falsehood and bring truth to light,
To stamp the seal of time in aged things,
To wake the morn and sentinel the night,
To wrong the wronger till he render right,
 To ruinate proud buildings with thy hours,
 And smear with dust their glittering golden towers;

" To fill with worm-holes stately monuments,
To feed oblivion with decay of things,
To blot old books and alter their contents,
To pluck the quills from ancient ravens' wings,
To dry the old oak's sap and cherish springs,
 To spoil antiquities of hammer'd steel,
 And turn the giddy round of Fortune's wheel;

" To show the beldam daughters of her daughter,
To make the child a man, the man a child,
To slay the tiger that doth live by slaughter,
To tame the unicorn and lion wild,

To mock the subtle in themselves beguiled,
To cheer the ploughman with increaseful crops,
And waste huge stones with little water-drops.

" Why work'st thou mischief in thy pilgrimage,
Unless thou couldst return to make amends?
One poor retiring minute in an age
Would purchase thee a thousand thousand friends,
Lending him wit that to bad debtors lends:
O, this dread night, wouldst thou one hour come
back,
I could prevent this storm and shun thy wrack!

" Thou ceaseless lackey to eternity,
With some mischance cross Tarquin in his flight:
Devise extremes beyond extremity,
To make him curse this cursed crimeful night:
Let ghastly shadows his lewd eyes affright;
And the dire thought of his committed evil
Shape every bush a hideous shapeless devil.

" Disturb his hours of rest with restless trances,
Afflict him in his bed with bedrid groans;
Let there bechance him pitiful mischances,
To make him moan; but pity not his moans:
Stone him with hardened hearts, harder than stones;
And let mild women to him lose their mildness,
Wilder to him than tigers in their wildness.

" Let him have time to tear his curled hair,
Let him have time against himself to rave,
Let him have time of Time's help to despair,
Let him have time to live a loathed slave,
Let him have time a beggar's orts to crave,
And time to see one that by alms doth live
Disdain to him disdained scraps to give.

- " Let him have time to see his friends his foes,
And merry fools to mock at him resort;
Let him have time to mark how slow time goes
In time of sorrow, and how swift and short
His time of folly and his time of sport;
And ever let his unrecalling crime
Have time to wail th' abusing of his time.
- " O Time, thou tutor both to good and bad,
Teach me to curse him that thou taught'st this ill!
At his own shadow let the thief run mad,
Himself himself seek every hour to kill!
Such wretched hands such wretched blood should spill;
For who so base would such an office have
As slanderous deathsman to so base a slave?
- "The baser is he, coming from a king,
To shame his hope with deeds degenerate:
The mightier man, the mightier is the thing
That makes him honoured, or begets him hate;
For greatest scandal waits on greatest state.
The moon being clouded presently is miss'd,
But little stars may hide them when they list.
- " The crow may bathe his coal-black wings in mire,
And unperceived fly with the filth away;
But if the like the snow-white swan desire,
The stain upon his silver down will stay.
Poor grooms are sightless night, kings glorious day:
Gnats are unnoted wheresoever they fly,
But eagles gazed upon with every eye.
- "Out, idle words, servants to shallow fools!
Unprofitable sounds, weak arbitrators!
Busy yourselves in skill-contending schools;
Debate where leisure serves with dull debaters;

To trembling clients be you mediators:
For me, I force not argument a straw,
Since that my case is past the help of law.

"In vain I rail at Opportunity,
At Time, at Tarquin, and uncheerful Night;
In vain I cavil with mine infamy,
In vain I spurn at my confirmed despite:
This helpless smoke of words doth me no right.
The remedy indeed to do me good
Is to let forth my foul-defiled blood.

"Poor hand, why quiver'st thou at this decree
Honour thyself to rid me of this shame;
For if I die, my honour lives in thee;
But if I live, thou livest in my defame:
Since thou couldst not defend thy loyal dame,
And wast afeard to scratch her wicked foe,
Kill both thyself and her for yielding so."

This said, from her be-tumbled couch she starteth,
To find some desperate instrument of death:
But this no slaughterhouse no tool imparteth
To make more vent for passage of her breath;
Which, thronging through her lips, so vanisheth
As smoke from ^Etna, that in air consumes,
Or that which from discharged cannon fumes.

"In vain", quoth she, "I live, and seek in vain
Some happy mean to end a hapless life.
I fear'd by Tarquin's falchion to be slain,
Yet for the self-same purpose seek a knife:
But when I fear'd I was a loyal wife:
So am I now: O no, that cannot be;
Of that true type hath Tarquin rifled me.

" O, that is gone for which I sought to live,
And therefore now I need not fear to die.
To clear this spot by death, at least I give
A badge of fame to slander's livery;
A dying life to living infamy:
 Poor helpless help, the treasure's stol'n away,
 To burn the guiltless casket where it lay!

" Well, well, dear Collatine, thou shalt not know
The stained taste of violated troth;
I will not wrong thy true affection so,
To flatter thee with an infringed oath;
This bastard graff shall never come to growth:
 He shall not boast who did thy stock pollute
 That thou art doting father of his fruit.

" Nor shall he smile at thee in secret thought,
Nor laugh with his companions at thy state:
But thou shalt know thy interest was not bought
Basely with gold, but stol'n from forth thy gate.
For me, I am the mistress of my fate,
 And with my trespass never will dispense,
 Till life to death acquit my forced offence.

" I will not poison thee with my attaint,
Nor fold my fault in cleanly-coin'd excuses;
My sable ground of sin I will not paint,
To hide the truth of this false night's abuses:
My tongue shall utter all; mine eyes, like sluices,
 As from a mountain-spring that feeds a dale
 Shall gush pure streams to purge my impure tale."

By this, lamenting Philomel had ended
The well-tuned warble of her nightly sorrow,
And solemn night with slow sad gait descended
To ugly hell; when, lo, the blushing morrow

Lends light to all fair eyes that light will borrow:
But cloudy Lucrece shames herself to see,
And therefore still in night would cloister'd be.

Revealing day through every cranny spies,
And seems to point her out where she sits weeping;
To whom she sobbing speaks: "O eye of eyes,
Why pry'st thou through my window? leave thy peep-
ing:

Mock with thy tickling beams eyes that are sleeping:
Brand not my forehead with thy piercing light,
For day hath nought to do what's done by night".

Thus cavils she with every thing she sees:
True grief is fond and testy as a child,
Who wayward once, his mood with nought agrees:
Old woes, not infant sorrows, bear them mild;
Continuance tames the one; the other wild,
Like an unpractised swimmer plunging still,
With too much labour drowns for want of skill.

So she, deep-drenched in a sea of care,
Holds disputation with each thing she views,
And to herself all sorrow doth compare;
No object but her passion's strength renews;
And as one shifts, another straight ensues:
Sometime her grief is dumb and hath no words;
Sometime 't is mad and too much talk affords.

The little birds that tune their morning's joy
Make her moans mad with their sweet melody:
For mirth doth search the bottom of annoy;
Sad souls are slain in merry company;
Grief best is pleased with griefs society:
True sorrow then is feelingly sufficed
When with like semblance it is sympathized.

T is double death to drown in Jcen of shore;
He ten times pines that pines beholding food;
To see the salve doth make the wound ache more;
Great grief grieves most at that would do it good;
Deep woes roll forward like a gentle flood,
Who, being stopp'd, the bounding banks o'erflows;
Grief dallied with nor law nor limit knows.

" You mocking birds," quoth she, " your tunes entomb
Within your hollow-swelling feather'd breasts,
And in my hearing be you mute and dumb:
My restless discord loves no stops nor rests;
A woeful hostess brooks not merry guests:
Relish your nimble notes to pleasing ears;
Distress likes dumps when time is kept with tears.

" Come, Philomel, that sing'st of ravishment,
Make thy sad grove in my dishevelPd hair:
As the dank earth weeps at thy languishment,
So I at each sad strain will strain a tear,
And with deep groans the diapason bear;
For burden-wise I 'll hum on Tarquin still,
While thou on Tereus descant'st better skill.

" And whiles against a thorn thou bear'st a part,
To keep thy sharp woes waking, wretched I,
To imitate thee well, against my heart
Will fix a sharp knife to affright mine eye;
Who, if it wink, shall thereon fall and die.
These means, as frets upon an instrument,
Shall tune our heart-strings to true languishment.

" And for, poor bird, thou sing'st not in the day,
As shaming any eye should thee behold,
Some dark deep desert, seated from the way,
That knows not parching heat nor freezing cold,

Will we find out; and there we will unfold
To creatures stern sad tunes, to change their kinds:
Since men prove beasts, let beasts bear gentle
minds."

As the poor frightened deer, that stands at gaze,
Wildly determining which way to fly,
Or one encompassed with a winding maze,
That cannot tread the way out readily;
So with herself is she in mutiny,
To live or die which of the twain were better,
When life is shamed, and death reproach's debtor.

"To kill myself," quoth she, "alack, what were it,
But with my body my poor soul's pollution?
They that lose half with greater patience bear it
Than they whose whole is swallow'd in confusion.
That mother tries a merciless conclusion
Who, having two sweet babes, when death takes
one,
Will slay the other and be nurse to none.

"My body or my soul, which was the dearer,
When the one pure, the other made divine?
Whose love of either to myself was nearer,
When both were kept for heaven and Collatine?
Ay me! the bark peel'd from the lofty pine,
His leaves will wither and his sap decay;
So must my soul, her bark being peePd away.

Her house is sack'd, her quiet interrupted,
Her mansion batter'd by the enemy;
Her sacred temple spotted, spoiled, corrupted
Grossly engirt with daring infamy:
Then let it not be call'd impiety,
If in this blemish'd fort I make some hole
Through which I may convey this troubled soul.

"Yet die I will not till my Collatine
Have heard the cause of my untimely death;
That he may vow, in that sad hour of mine,
Revenge on him that made me stop my breath.
My stained blood to Tarquin I 'll bequeath,
Which by him tainted shall for him be spent,
And as his due writ in my testament.

" My honour I 'll bequeath unto the knife
That wounds my body so dishonoured.
Tis honour to deprive dishonoured life;
The one will live, the other being dead:
So of shame's ashes shall my fame be bred;
For in my death I murder shameful scorn:
My shame so dead, mine honour is new-born.

" Dear lord of that dear jewel I have lost,
What legacy shall I bequeath to thee?
My resolution, love, shall be thy boast,
By whose example thou revenged mayst be.
How Tarquin must be used, read it in me:
Myself, thy friend, will kill myself, thy foe,
And for my sake serve thou false Tarquin so

" This brief abridgement of my will I make:
My soul and body to the skies and ground;
My resolution, husband, do thou take;
Mine honour be the knife's that makes my wound;
My shame be his that did my fame confound;
And ail my fame that lives disbursed be
To those that live, and think no shame of me.

"Thou, Collatine, shalt oversee this will;
How was I overseen that thou shalt see it!
My blood shall wash the slander of mine ill;
My life's foul deed, my life's fair end shall free it.

Faint not, faint heart, but stoutly say 'So be it':
Yield to my hand; my hand shall conquer thee:
Thou dead, both die, and both shall victors be."

This plot of death when sadly she had laid,
And wiped the brinish pearl from her bright eyes,
With untuned tongue she hoarsely calls her maid,
Whose swift obedience to her mistress hies;
For fleet-wing'd duty with thought's feathers flies.
Poor Lucrece' cheeks unto her maid seem so
As winter meads when sun doth melt their snow.

Her mistress she doth give demure good-morrow,
With soft-slow tongue, true mark of modesty,
And sorts a sad look to her lady's sorrow,
For why her face wore sorrow's livery;
But durst not ask of her audaciously
Why her two suns were cloud-eclipsed so,
Nor why her fair cheeks over-wash'd with woe.

But as the earth doth weep, the sun being set,
Each flower moisten'd like a melting eye;
Even so the maid with swelling drops gan wet
Her circled eyne, enforced by sympathy
Of those fair suns set in her mistress* sky,
Who in a salt-waved ocean quench their light,
Which makes the maid weep like the dewy night.

A pretty while these pretty creatures stand,
Like ivory conduits coral cisterns filling:
One justly weeps; the other takes in hand
No cause, but company, of her drops spilling:
Their gentle sex to weep are often willing;
Grieving themselves to guess at others' smarts,
And then they drown their eyes or break their hearts.

For men have marble, women waxen, minds,
And therefore are they form'd as marble will;
The weak oppress'd, the impression of strange kinds
Is form'd in them by force, by fraud, or skill:
Then call them not the authors of their ill,
No more than wax shall be accounted evil
Wherein is stamp'd the semblance of a devil.

Their smoothness, like a goodly champaign plain,
Lays open all the little worms that creep;
In men, as in a rough-grown grove, remain
Cave-keeping evils that obscurely sleep:
Through crystal walls each little mote will peep:
Though men can cover crimes with bold stern looks,
Poor women's faces are their own faults' books.

No man inveigh against the withered flower,
But chide rough winter that the flower hath kill'd:
Not that devoured, but that which doth devour,
Is worthy blame. O, let it not be hild
Poor women's faults, that they are so fulfilPd
With men's abuses: those proud lords, to blame,
Make weak-made women tenants to their shame.

The precedent whereof in Lucrece view,
Assail'd by night with circumstances strong
Of present death, and shame that might ensue
By that her death, to do her husband wrong:
Such danger to resistance did belong,
That dying fear through all her body spread;
And who cannot abuse a body dead?

By this, mild patience bid fair Lucrece speak
To the poor counterfeit of her complaining:
"My girl," quoth she, "on what occasion break
Those tears from thee, that down thy cheeks are rain-
ing?"

If thou dost weep for grief of my sustaining,
Know, gentle wench, it small avails my mood:
If tears could help, mine own would do me good.

"But tell me, girl, when went"—and there she stay'd
Till after a deep groan—"Tarquin from hence?"

"Madam, ere I was up," replied the maid,
"The more to blame my sluggard negligence:
Yet with the fault I thus far can dispense;
Myself was stirring ere the break of day,
And, ere I rose, was Tarquin gone away.

"But, lady, if your maid may be so bold,
She would request to know your heaviness."
"O, peace!" quoth Lucrece; "if it should be told,
The repetition cannot make it less;
For more it is than I can well express:
And that deep torture may be call'd a hell
When more is felt than one hath power to tell.

"Go, get me hither paper, ink, and pen:
Yet save that labour, for I have them here.
What should I say? One of my husband's men
Bid thou be ready, by and by, to bear
A letter to my lord, my love, my dear:
Bid him with speed prepare to carry it;
The cause craves haste, and it will soon be writ."

Her maid is gone, and she prepares to write,
First hovering o'er the paper with her quill:
Conceit and grief an eager combat fight;
What wit sets down is blotted straight with will;
This is too curious-good, this blunt and ill:
Much like a press of people at a door,
Throng her inventions, which shall go before.

At last she thus begins: "Thou worthy lord
Of that unworthy wife that greeteth thee,
Health to thy person! next vouchsafe t^h afford—
If ever, love, thy Lucrece thou wilt see—
Some present speed to come and visit me.
So, I commend me from our house in grief:
My woes are tedious, though my words are brief."

Here folds she up the tenour of her woe,
Her certain sorrow writ uncertainly.
By this short schedule Collatine may know
Her grief, but not her griefs true quality:
She dares not thereof make discovery,
Lest he should hold it her own gross abuse,
Ere she with blood had stain'd her stain'd excuse.

Besides, the life and feeling of her passion
She hoards, to spend -when he is by to hear her;
When sighs and groans and tears may grace the fashion
Of her disgrace, the better so to clear her
From that suspicion which the world might bear her.
To shun this blot, she would not blot the letter
With words, till action might become them better.

To see sad sights moves more than hear them told;
For then the eye interprets to the ear
The heavy motion that it doth behold,
When every part a part of woe doth bear.
T is but a part of sorrow that we hear:
Deep sounds make lesser noise than shallow fords,
And sorrow ebbs, being blown with wind of words.

Her letter now is seaPd, and on it writ
"At Ardea to my lord with more than haste".
The post attends, and she delivers it,
Charging the sour-faced groom to hie as fast

As lagging fowls before the northern blast:
Speed more than speed but dull and slow she deems:
Extremity still urgeth such extremes.

The homely villain court'sies to her low;
And, blushing on her, with a steadfast eye
Receives the scroll without or yea or no,
And forth with bashful innocence doth hie.
But they whose guilt within their bosoms lie
Imagine every eye beholds their blame;
For Lucrece thought he blush'd to see her shame

When, silly groom! God wot, it was defect
Of spirit, life, and bold audacity.
Such harmless creatures have a true respect
To talk in deeds, while others saucily
Promise more speed, but do it leisurely:
Even so this pattern of the worn-out age
Pawn'd honest looks, but laid no words to gage.

His kindled duty kindled her mistrust,
That two red fires in both their faces blazed;
She thought he blush'd, as knowing Tarquin's lust
And, blushing with him, wistly on him gazed;
Her earnest eye did make him more amazed:
The more she saw the blood his cheeks replenish,
The more she thought he spied in her some blemish.

But long she thinks till he return again,
And yet the duteous vassal scarce is gone.
The weary time she cannot entertain,
For now 't is stale to sigh, to weep, and groan:
So woe hath wearied woe, moan tired moan,
That she her plaints a little while doth stay,
Pausing for means to mourn some newer way.

At last she calls to mind where hangs a piece
Of skilful painting, made for Priam's Troy:
Before the which is drawn the power of Greece,
For Helen's rape the city to destroy,
Threatening cloud-kissing Ilion with annoy;
Which the conceited painter drew so proud,
As heaven, it seem'd, to kiss the turrets bow'd.

A thousand lamentable objects there,
In scorn of nature, art gave lifeless life:
Many a dry drop seem'd a weeping tear,
Shed for the slaughtered husband by the wife:
The red blood reek'd, to show the painter's strife;
And dying eyes gleam'd forth their ashy lights,
Like dying coals burnt out in tedious nights.

There might you see the labouring pioner
Begrimed with sweat, and smeared all with dust:
And from the towers of Troy there would appear
The very eyes of men through loop-holes thrust,
Gazing upon the Greeks with little lust:
Such sweet observance in this work was had,
That one might see those far-off eyes look sad.

In great commanders grace and majesty
You might behold, triumphing in their faces;
In youth, quick bearing and dexterity;
And here and there the painter interlaces
Pale cowards, marching on with trembling faces;
Which heartless peasants did so well resemble,
That one would swear he saw them quake and
tremble.

In Ajax and Ulysses, O, what art
Of physiognomy might one behold!
The face of either cipher'd cither's heart;
Their face their manners most expressly told:

In Ajax' eyes blunt rage and rigour roll'd;
But the mild glance that sly Ulysses lent
Show'd deep regard and smiling government.

There pleading might you see grave Nestor stand,
As 'twere encouraging the Greeks to fight;
Making such sober action with his hand,
That it beguiled attention, charm'd the sight:
In speech, it seem'd, his beard, all silver white,
Wagg'd up and down, and from his lips did fly
Thin winding breath, which purld up to the sky.

About him were a press of gaping faces,
Which seem'd to swallow up his sound advice;
All jointly listening, but with several graces,
As if some mermaid did their ears entice,
Some high, some low, the painter was so nice;
The scalps of many, almost hid behind,
To jump up higher seem'd, to mock the mind.

Here one man's hand lean'd on another's head,
His nose being shadow'd by his neighbour's ear;
Here one being throng'd bears back, all boll'n and red;
Another smother'd seems to pelt and swear;
And in their rage such signs of rage they bear,
As, but for loss of Nestor's golden words,
It seem'd they would debate with angry swords.

For much imaginary work was there;
Conceit deceitful, so compact, so kind,
That for Achilles' image stood his spear,
Griped in an armed hand; himself, behind,
Was left unseen, save to the eye of mind:
A hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head,
Stood for the whole to be imagined.

And from the walls of strong-besieged Troy
When their brave hope, bold Hector, march'd to field,
Stood many Trojan mothers, sharing joy
To see their youthful sons bright weapons wield;
And to their hope they such odd action yield,
That through their light joy seemed to appear,
Like bright things stain'd, a kind of heavy fear.

And from the strand of Dardan, where they fought,
To Simois' reed^ banks the red blood ran,
Whose waves to imitate the battle sought
With swelling ridges; and their ranks began
To break upon the galled shore, and than
Retire again, till, meeting greater ranks,
They join and shoot their foam at Simois' banks.

To this well-painted piece is Lucrece come,
To find a face where all distress is stelPd.
Many she sees where cares have carved some,
But none where all distress and dolour dwelled,
Till she despairing Hecuba beheld,
Staring on Priam's wounds with her old eyes,
Which bleeding under Pyrrhus' proud foot lies.

In her the painter had anatomized
Time's ruin, beauty's wreck, and grim care's reign:
Her cheeks with chaps and wrinkles were disguised;
Of what she was no semblance did remain:
Her blue blood changed to black in every vein,
Wanting the spring that those shrunk pipes had fed,
Show'd life imprisoned in a body dead.

On this sad shadow Lucrece spends her eyes,
And shapes her sorrow to the beldam's woes,
Who nothing wants to answer her but cries,
And bitter words to ban her cruel foes:

The painter was no god to lend her those;
And therefore Lucrece swears he did her wrong,
To give her so much grief and not a tongue.

" Poor instrument," quoth she, " without a sound,
I'll tune thy woes with my lamenting tongue;
And drop sweet balm in Priam's painted wound,
And rail on Pyrrhus that hath done him wrong;
And with my tears quench Troy that burns so long;
And with my knife scratch out the angry eyes
Of all the Greeks that are thine enemies.

" Show me the strumpet that began this stir,
That with my nails her beauty I may tear.
Thy heat of lust, fond Paris, did incur
This load of wrath that burning Troy doth bear:
Thy eye kindled the fire that burneth here;
And here in Troy, for trespass of thine eye,
The sire, the son, the dame, and daughter die.

" Why should the private pleasure of some one
Become the public plague of many moe?
Let sin, alone committed, light alone
Upon his head that hath transgressed so;
Let guiltless souls be freed from guilty woe:
For one's offence why should so many fall,
To plague a private sin in general?

" Lo, here weeps Hecuba, here Priam dies,
Here manly Hector faints, here Troilus swoonds,
Here friend by friend in bloody channel lies,
And friend to friend gives unadvised wounds,
And one man's lust these many lives confounds:
Had doting Priam check'd his son's desire,
Troy had been bright with fame and not with fire."

Here feelingly she weeps Troy's painted woes:
For sorrow, like a heavy-hanging bell,
Once set on ringing, with his own weight goes;
Then little strength rings out the doleful knell:
So Lucrece, set a-work, sad tales doth tell
 To penciird pensiveness and coloured sorrow;
 She lends them words, and she their looks doth
 borrow.

She throws her eyes about the painting round,
And whom she finds forlorn she doth lament.
At last she sees a wretched image bound,
That piteous looks to Phrygian shepherds lent:
His face, though full of cares, yet showed content;
 Onward to Troy with the blunt swains he goes,
 So mild, that Patience seem'd to scorn his woes.

In him the painter laboured with his skill
To hide deceit, and give the harmless show
An humble gait, calm looks, eyes wailing still,
A brow unbent, that seem'd to welcome woe;
Cheeks neither red nor pale, but mingled so
 That blushing red no guilty instance gave,
 Nor ashy pale the fear that false hearts have.

But, like a constant and confirmed devil,
He entertained a show so seeming just,
And therein so ensconced his secret evil,
That jealousy itself could not mistrust
False-creeping craft and perjury should thrust
 Into so bright a day such black-faced storms,
 Or blot with hell-born sin such saint-like forms.

The well-skilPd workman this mild image drew
For perjured Sinon, whose enchanting story
The credulous old Priam after slew;
Whose words like wildfire burnt the shining glory

Of rich-built Ilion, that the skies were sorry,
And little stars shot from their fixed places,
When their glass fell wherein they view'd their faces.

This picture she advisedly perused,
And chid the painter for his wondrous skill,
Saying, some shape in Sinon's was abused;
So fair a form lodged not a mind so ill:
And still on him she gazed; and gazing still,
Such signs of truth in his plain face she spied,
That she concludes the picture was belied.

"It cannot be", quoth she, "that so much guile"—
She would have said "can lurk in such a look";
But Tarquin's shape came in her mind the while,
And from her tongue "can lurk" from "cannot" took:
"It cannot be" she in that sense forsook,
And turn'd it thus, "It cannot be, I find,
But such a face should bear a wicked mind:

"For even as subtle Sinon here is painted,
So sober-sad, so weary, and so mild,
As if with grief or travail he had fainted,
To me came Tarquin armed; so beguiled
With outward honesty, but yet defiled
With inward vice: as Priam him did cherish,
So did I Tarquin; so my Troy did perish.

"Look, look, how listening Priam wets his eyes,
To see those borrow'd tears that Sinon sheds!
Priam, why art thou old and yet not wise?
For every tear he falls a Trojan bleeds:
His eye drops fire, no water thence proceeds;
Those round clear pearls of his, that move thy pity,
Are balls of quenchless fire to burn thy city.

"Such devils steal effects from lightless hell;
For Sinon in his fire doth quake with cold,
And in that cold hot-burning fire doth dwell;
These contraries such unity do hold,
Only to flatter fools and make them bold:
 So Priam's trust false Sinon's tears doth flatter,
 That he finds means to burn his Troy with water."

Here, all enraged, such passion her assails,
That patience is quite beaten from her breast.
She tears the senseless Sinon with her nails,
Comparing him to that unhappy guest
Whose deed hath made herself herself detest:
 At last she smilingly with this gives o'er;
 "Fool, fool!" quoth she, "his wounds will not be
 sore."

Thus ebbs and flows the current of her sorrow,
And time doth weary time with her complaining.
She looks for night, and then she longs for morrow,
And both she thinks too long with her remaining:
Short time seems long in sorrow's sharp sustaining:
 Though woe be heavy, yet it seldom sleeps;
 And they that watch see time how slow it creeps.

Which all this time hath overslipp'd her thought,
That she with painted images hath spent;
Being from the feeling of her own grief brought
By deep surmise of others' detriment;
Losing her woes in shows of discontent.
 It easeth some, though none it ever cured,
 To think their dolour others have endured.

But now the mindful messenger, come back,
Brings home his lord and other company;
Who finds his Lucrece clad in mourning black :
And round about her tear-distained eye

Blue circles streamed, like rainbows in the sky:
These water-galls in her dim element
Foretell new storms to those already spent.

Which when her sad-beholding husband saw,
Amazedly in her sad face he stares:
Her eyes, though sod in tears, look'd red and raw,
Her lively colour kill'd with deadly cares.
He hath no power to ask her how she fares:
Both stood, like old acquaintance in a trance,
Met far from home, wondering each other's chance.

At last he takes her by the bloodless hand,
And thus begins: "What uncouth ill event
Hath thee befall'n, that thou dost trembling stand?
Sweet love, what spite hath thy fair colour spent?
Why art thou thus attired in discontent?
Unmask, dear dear, this moody heaviness,
And tell thy grief, that we may give redress."

Three times with sighs she gives her sorrow fire,
Ere once she can discharge one word of woe:
At length addressed to answer his desire,
She modestly prepares to let them know
Her honour is ta'en prisoner by the foe;
While Collatine and his consorted lords
With sad attention long to hear her words.

And now this pale swan in her watery nest
Begins the sad dirge of her certain ending;
"Few words", quoth she, "shall fit the trespass best,
Where no excuse can give the fault amending:
In me moe woes than words are now depending;
And my laments would be drawn out too long,
To tell them all with one poor tired tongue.

"Then be this all the task it hath to say:
Dear husband, in the interest of thy bed
A stranger came, and on that pillow lay
Where thou wast wont to rest thy weary head;
And what wrong else may be imagined
By foul enforcement might be done to me,
From that, alas, thy Lucrece is not free.

" For in the dreadful dead of dark midnight,
With shining falchion in my chamber came
A creeping creature, with a flaming light,
And softly cried 'Awake, thou Roman dame,
And entertain my love; else lasting shame
On thee and thine this night I will inflict,
If thou my love's desire do contradict.

" 'For some hard-favour'd groom of thine,' quoth he,
'Unless thou yoke thy liking to my will,
I'll murder straight, and then I'll slaughter thee
And swear I found you where you did fulfil
The loathsome act of lust, and so did kill
The lechers in their deed: this act will be
My fame and thy perpetual infamy.'

"With this, I did begin to start and cry;
And then against my heart he sets his sword,
Swearing, unless I took all patiently, "
I should not live to speak another word;
So should my shame still rest upon record,
And never be forgot in mighty Rome
Th' adulterate death of Lucrece and her groom.

" Mine enemy was strong, my poor self weak,
And far the weaker with so strong a fear:
My bloody judge forbade my tongue to speak;
No rightful plea might plead for justice there:

His scarlet lust came evidence to swear
That my poor beauty had purloin'd his eyes;
And when the judge is robb'd the prisoner dies.

"O, teach me how to make mine own excuse!
Or at the least this refuge let me find;
Though my gross blood be stain'd with this abuse.
Immaculate and spotless is my mind;
That was not forced; that never was inclined
To accessary yieldings, but still pure
Doth in her poison'd closet yet endure."

Lo, here, the hopeless merchant of this loss,
With head declined, and voice damm'd up with woe
With sad set eyes, and wretched arms across,
From lips new-waxen pale begins to blow
The grief away that stops his answer so:
But, wretched as he is, he strives in vain;
What he breathes out his breath drinks up again.

As through an arch the violent roaring tide
Outruns the eye that doth behold his haste,
Yet in the eddy boundeth in his pride
Back to the strait that forced him on so fast;
In rage sent out, recalled in rage, being past:
Even so his sighs, his sorrows, make a saw,
To push grief on, and back the same grief draw.

Which speechless woe of his poor she attendeth,
And his untimely frenzy thus awaketh:
"Dear lord, thy sorrow to my sorrow lendeth
Another power; no flood by raining slaketh.
My woe too sensible thy passion maketh
More feeling-painful: let it then suffice
To drown one woe, one pair of weeping eyes.

" And for my sake, when I might charm thee so
For she that was thy Lucrece, now attend me:
Be suddenly revenged on my foe,
Thine, mine, his own: suppose thou dost defend me
From what is past: the help that thou shalt lend me
Comes all too late, yet let the traitor die;
For sparing justice feeds iniquity.

" But ere I name him, you fair lords," quoth she,
Speaking to those that came with Collatine,
" Shall plight your honourable faiths to me,
With swift pursuit to venge this wrong of mine ;
For 't is a meritorious fair design
To chase injustice with revengeful arms:
Knights, by their oaths, should right poor ladies¹
harms."

At this request, with noble disposition
Each present lord began to promise aid,
As bound in knighthood to her imposition,
Longing to hear the hateful foe bewray'd.
But she, that yet her sad task hath not said,
The protestation stops. " O, speak," quoth she,
" How may this forced stain be wiped from me?

" What is the quality of mine offence,
Being constraint with dreadful circumstance?
May my pure mind with the foul act dispense,
My low-declined honour to advance?
May any terms acquit me from this chance?
The poison'd fountain clears itself again;
And why not I from this compelled stain?"

With this, they all at once began to say,
Her body's stain her mind untainted clears;
While with a joyless smile she turns away
The face, that map which deep impression bears

Of hard misfortune, carved in it with tears.

"No, no," quoth she, "no dame, hereafter living,
By my excuse shall claim excuse's giving."

Here with a sigh, as if her heart would break,
She throws forth Tarquin's name: "He, he," she says,
But more than "he" her poor tongue could not speak;
Till after many accents and delays,
Untimely breathings, sick and short assays,
She utters this, "He, he, fair lords, 't is he,
That guides this hand to give this wound to me."

Even here she sheathed in her harmless breast
A harmful knife, that thence her soul unsheathed:
That blow did bail it from the deep unrest
Of that polluted prison where it breathed:
Her contrite sighs unto the clouds bequeathed
Her winged sprite, and through her wounds doth fly
Life's lasting date from cancell'd destiny.

Stone-still, astonished with this deadly deed,
Stood Collatine and all his lordly crew;
Till Lucrece' father, that beholds her bleed,
Himself on her self-slaughter'd body threw;
And from the purple fountain Brutus drew
The murderous knife, and, as it left the place,
Her blood, in poor revenge, held it in chase;

And bubbling from her breast, it doth divide
In two slow rivers, that the crimson blood
Circles her body in on every side,
Who, like a late-sack'd island, vastly stood
Bare and unpeopled in this fearful flood.
Some of her blood still pure and red remained,
And some look'd black, and that false Tarquin
stain'd.

About the mourning and congealed face
Of that black blood a water)' rigol goes.
Which seems to weep upon the tainted place:
And ever since, as pitying Lucrece' woes,
Corrupted blood some watery token shows;
 And blood untainted still doth red abide,
 Blushing at that which is so putrified.

" Daughter, dear daughter," old Lucretius cries,
" That life was mine which thou hast here deprived.
If in the child the father's image lies,
Where shall I live now Lucrece is unliv'd?
Thou wast not to this end from me derived.
 If children pre-decease progenitors,
 We are their offspring, and they none of ours.

" Poor broken glass, I often did behold
In thy sweet semblance my old age new born;
But now that fair fresh mirror, dim and old,
Shows me a bare-boned death by time outworn:
O, from thy cheeks my image thou has torn,
 And shiver'd all the beauty of my glass,
 That I no more can see what once I was!

" O time, cease thou thy course and last no longer,
It they surcease to be that should survive.
Shall rotten death make conquest of the stronger
And leave the faltering feeble souls alive?
The old bees die, the young possess their hive:
 Then live, sweet Lucrece, live again and see
 Thy father die, and not thy father thee!"

By this, starts Collatine as from a dream,
And bids Lucretius give his sorrow place;
And then in key-cold Lucrece' bleeding stream
He falls, and bathes the pale fear in his face,

And counterfeits to die with her a space;
Till manly shame bids him possess his breath
And live to be revenged on her death.

The deep vexation of his inward soul
Hath served a dumb arrest upon his tongue;
Who, mad that sorrow should his use control,
Or keep him from heart-easing words so long,
Begins to talk; but through his lips do throng
Weak words, so thick come in his poor heart's aid,
That no man could distinguish what he said

Yet sometime "Tarquin" was pronounced plain,
But through his teeth, as if the name he tore.
This windy tempest, till it blow up rain,
Held back his sorrow's tide, to make it more;
At last it rains, and busy winds give o'er:
Then son and father weep with equal strife
Who should weep most, for daughter or for wife.

The one doth call her his, the other his,
Yet neither may possess the claim they lay.
The father says "She's mine". "O, mine she is,"
Replies her husband: "do not take away
My sorrow's interest; let no mourner say
He weeps for her, for she was only mine,
And only must be waiFd by Collatine."

"O," quoth Lucretius, "I did give that life
Which she too early and too late hath spill'd."
"Woe, woe," quoth Collatine, "she was my wife,
I owed her, and 't is mine that she hath kill'd."
"My daughter" and "my wife" with clamours filPd
The dispersed air, who, holding Lucrece' life,
Answer'd their cries, "my daughter" and "my wife".

Brutus, who pluck'd the knife from Lucrece' side,
Seeing such emulation in their woe,
Began to clothe his wit in state and pride,
Burying in Lucrece' wound his folly's show.
He with the Romans was esteemed so
As silly-jeering idiots are with kings,
For sportive words and uttering foolish things:

But now he throws that shallow habit by,
Wherein deep policy did him disguise;
And arm'd his long-hid wits advisedly,
To check the tears in Collatinus' eyes.
"Thou wronged lord of Rome," quoth he, "arise:
Let my unsounded self, supposed a fool,
Now set thy long-experienced wit to school.

"Why, Collatine, is woe the cure for woe?
Do wounds help wounds, or grief help grievous deeds?
Is it revenge to give thyself a blow
For his foul act by whom thy fair wife bleeds?
Such childish humour from weak minds proceeds:
Thy wretched wife mistook the matter so,
To slay herself, that should have slain her foe.

"Courageous Roman, do not steep thy heart
In such relenting dew of lamentations;
But kneel with me and help to bear thy part,
To rouse our Roman gods with invocations,
That they will suffer these abominations,
Since Rome herself in them doth stand disgraced,
By our strong arms from forth her fair streets chased.

"Now, by the Capitol that we adore,
And by this chaste blood so unjustly stain'd,
By heaven's fair sun that breeds the fat earth's store,
By all our country rights in Rome maintained,

And by chaste Lucrece' soul that late complain'd
Her wrongs to us, and by this bloody knife,
We will revenge the death of this true wife."

This said, he struck his hand upon his breast,
And kiss'd the fatal knife, to end his vow;
And to his protestation urged the rest,
Who, wondering at him, did his words allow:
Then jointly to the ground their knees they bow;
And that deep vow, which Brutus made before,
He doth again repeat, and that they swore.

When they had sworn to this advised doom,
They did conclude to bear dead Lucrece thence;
To show her bleeding body thorough Rome,
And so to publish Tarquin's foul offence:
Which being done with speedy diligence,
The Romans plausibly did give consent
To Tarquin's everlasting banishment

JOHN DRYDEN

(1637-1700)

vii. CYMON AND IPHIGENIA

From Boccace

I N that sweet isle, where Venus keeps her court.
And every grace, and all the loves, resort;
Where either sex is formed of softer earth,
And takes the bent of pleasure from their birth;
There lived a Cyprian lord, above the rest
Wise, wealthy, with a numerous issue blest

But, as no gift of fortune is sincere,
Was only wanting in a worthy heir;

His eldest born, a goodly youth to view,
Excelled the rest in shape and outward shew,
Fair, tall, his limbs with due proportion joined,
But of a heavy, dull, degenerate mind.
His soul belied the features of his face;
Beauty was there, but beauty in disgrace.
A clownish mien, a voice with rustic sound,
And stupid eyes that ever loved the ground,
He looked like Nature's error, as the mind
And body were not of a piece designed,
But made for two, and by mistake in one were joined.

The ruling rod, the father's forming care,
Were exercised in vain on wit's despair;
The more informed, the less he understood,
And deeper sunk by floundering in the mud.
Now scorned of all, and grown the public shame,
The people from Galesus changed his name,
And Cymon called, which signifies a brute;
So well his name did with his nature suit.

His father, when he found his labour lost,
And care employed that answered not the cost,
Chose an ungrateful object to remove,
And loathed to see that Nature made him love;
So to his country-farm the fool confined;
Rude work well suited with a rustic mind.
Thus to the wilds the sturdy Cymon went,
A squire among the swains, and pleased with banishment.
His corn and cattle were his only care,
And his supreme delight a country-fair.

It happened on a summer's holiday,
That to the greenwood-shade he took his way,
For Cymon shunned the church, and used not much to
pray.

His quarter-staff, which he could ne'er forsake,
Hung half before and half behind his back.
He trudged along, unknowing what he sought,
And whistled as he went, for want of thought.

By chance conducted, or by thirst constrained,
The deep recesses of the grove he gained;
Where, in a plain defended by the wood,
Crept through the matted grass a crystal flood,
By which an alabaster fountain stood;
And on the margin of the fount was laid,
Attended by her slaves, a sleeping maid;
Like Dian and her nymphs, when, tired with sport,
To rest by cool Eurotas they resort.
The dame herself the goddess well expressed,
Not more distinguished by her purple vest
Than by the charming features of her face,
And, even in slumber, a superior grace:
Her comely limbs composed with decent care,
Her body shaded with a slight cymarr;
Her bosom to the view was only bare;
Where two beginning paps were scarcely spied,
For yet their places were but signified:
The fanning wind upon her bosom blows,
To meet the fanning wind the bosom rose;
The fanning wind and purling streams continue her repose.

The fool of nature stood with stupid eyes,
And gaping mouth, that testified surprise,
Fixed on her face, nor could remove his sight,
New as he was to love, and novice in delight:
Long mute he stood, and leaning on his staff,
His wonder witnessed with an idiot laugh;
Then would have spoke, but by his glimmering sense
First found his want of words, and feared offence:

Doubted for what he was he should be known,
By his clown-accent and his country-tone.

Through the rude chaos thus the running light
Shot the first ray that pierced the native night:
Then day and darkness in the mass were mixed,
Till gathered in a globe the beams were fixed:
Last shone the sun, who, radiant in his sphere,
Illumined heaven and earth, and rolled around the year.
So reason in this brutal soul began:
Love made him first suspect he was a man;
Love made him doubt his broad barbarian sound;
By love his want of words and wit he found;
That sense of want prepared the future way
To knowledge, and disclosed the promise of a day.

What not his father's care nor tutor's art
Could plant with pains in his unpolished heart,
The best instructor, Love, at once inspired,
As barren grounds to fruitfulness are fired;
Love taught him shame, and shame with love at strife
Soon taught the sweet civilities of life.
His gross material soul at once could find
Somewhat in her excelling all her kind;
Exciting a desire till then unknown,
Somewhat unfound, or found in her alone.
This made the first impression on his mind,
Above, but just above, the brutal kind.
For beasts can like, but not distinguish too,
Nor their own liking by reflection know;
Nor why they like or this or t' other face,
Or judge of this or that peculiar grace;
But love in gross, and stupidly admire;
As flies, allured by light, approach the fire.
Thus our man-beast, advancing by degrees,
First likes the whole, then separates what he sees;

On several parts a several praise bestows,
The ruby lips, the well-proportioned nose,
The snowy skin, the raven-glossy hair,
The dimpled cheek, the forehead rising fair,
And even in sleep itself a smiling air.
From thence his eyes descending viewed the rest,
Her plump round arms, white hands, and heaving breast
Long on the last he dwelt, though every part
A pointed arrow sped to pierce his heart.

Thus in a trice a judge of beauty grown
(A judge erected from a country clown),
He longed to see her eyes in slumber hid,
And wished his own could pierce within the lid.
He would have waked her, but restrained his thought,
And love new-born the first good manners taught.
An awful fear his ardent wish withstood,
Nor durst disturb the goddess of the wood;
For such she seemed by her celestial face,
Excelling all the rest of human race;
And things divine, by common sense he knew
Must be devoutly seen at distant view:
So checking his desire, with trembling heart
Gazing he stood, nor would nor could depart;
Fixed as a pilgrim wildered in his way,
Who dares not stir by night, for fear to stray;
But stands with awful eyes to watch the dawn of day

At length awaking, Iphigene the fair
(So was the beauty called who caused his care)
Unclosed her eyes, and double day revealed,
While those of all her slaves in sleep were sealed.

The slaving cudden, propped upon his staff,
Stood ready gaping with a grinning laugh,

To welcome her awake, nor durst begin
To speak, but wisely kept the fool within.
Then she: "What make you, Cymon, here alone?"
(For Cymon's name was round the country known,
Because descended of a noble race,
And for a soul ill sorted with his face.)

But still the sot stood silent with surprise,
With fixed regard on her new opened eyes,
And in his breast received the envenomed dart,
A tickling pain that pleased amid the smart.
But conscious of her form, with quick distrust
She saw his sparkling eyes, and feared his brutal lust.
This to prevent, she waked her sleepy crew,
And rising hasty took a short adieu.

Then Cymon first his rustic voice essayed,
With proffered service to the parting maid
To see her safe; his hand she long denied,
But took at length, ashamed of such a guide.
So Cymon led her home, and leaving there,
No more would to his country clowns repair,
But sought his father's house, with better mind,
Refusing in the farm to be confined.

The father wondered at the son's return,
And knew not whether to rejoice or mourn;
But doubtfully received, expecting still
To learn the secret causes of his altered will.
Nor was he long delayed: the first request
He made, was like his brothers to be dressed,
And, as his birth required, above the rest.

With ease his suit was granted by his sire,
Distinguishing his heir by rich attire:
His body thus adorned, he next designed
With liberal arts to cultivate his mind;

He sought a tutor of his own accord,
And studied lessons he before abhorred.

Thus the man-child advanced, and learned so fast,
That in short time his equals he surpassed:
His brutal manners from his breast exiled,
His mien he fashioned, and his tongue he filed;
In every exercise of all admired,
He seemed, nor only seemed, but was inspired:
Inspired by love, whose business is to please;
He rode, he fenced, he moved with graceful ease,
More famed for sense, for courtly carriage more,
Than for his brutal folly known before.

What then of altered Cymon shall we say,
But that the fire which choked in ashes lay,
A load too heavy for his soul to move,
Was upward blown below, and brushed away by love?
Love made an active progress through his mind,
The dusky parts he cleared, the gross refined,
The drowsy waked; and, as he went, impressed
The Maker's image on the human breast.
Thus was the man amended by desire,
And, though he loved perhaps with too much fire,
His father all his faults with reason scanned,
And liked an error of the better hand;
Excused the excess of passion in his mind,
By flames too fierce, perhaps too much refined:
So Cymon, since his sire indulged his will,
Impetuous loved, and would be Cymon still;
Galesus he disowned, and chose to bear
The name of fool, confirmed and bishoped by the fair.

To Cipseus by his friends his suit he moved,
Cipseus the father of the fair he loved;

But he was pre-engaged by former ties,
While Cymon was endeavouring to be wise;
And Iphigene, obliged by former vows,
Had given her faith to wed a foreign spouse:
Her sire and she to Rhodian Pasimond,
Though both repenting, were by promise bound,
Nor could retract; and thus, as Fate decreed,
Though better loved, he spoke too late to speed.

The doom was past; the ship already sent
Did all his tardy diligence prevent;
Sighed to herself the fair unhappy maid,
While stormy Cymon thus in secret said:
"The time is come for Iphigene to find
The miracle she wrought upon my mind;
Her charms have made me man, her ravished love
In rank shall place me with the blest above.
For mine by love, by force she shall be mine,
Or death, if force should fail, shall finish my design."

Resolved he said; and rigged with speedy care
A vessel strong, and well equipped for war.
The secret ship with chosen friends he stored,
And bent to die, or conquer, went aboard.
Ambushed he lay behind the Cyprian shore,
Waiting the sail that all his wishes bore;
Nor long expected, for the following tide
Sent out the hostile ship and beauteous bride.

To Rhodes the rival bark directly steered,
When Cymon sudden at her back appeared,
And stopped her flight: then standing on his prow,
In haughty terms he thus defied the foe:
"Or strike your sails at summons, or prepare
To prove the last extremities of war".

Thus warned, the Rhodians for the fight provide;
Already were the vessels side by side,
These obstinate to save, and those to seize the bride.
But Cymon soon his crooked grapples cast,
Which with tenacious hold his foes embraced,
And, armed with sword and shield, amid the press he
passed.

Fierce was the fight, but hastening to his prey,
By force the furious lover freed his way;
Himself alone dispersed the Rhodian crew;
The weak disdained, the valiant overthrew;
Cheap conquest for his following friends remained,
He reaped the field, and they but only gleaned.

His victory confessed, the foes retreat,
And cast their weapons at the victor's feet.
Whom thus he cheered: "O Rhodian youth, I fought
For love alone, nor other booty sought;
Your lives are safe; your vessel I resign,
Yours be your own, restoring what is mine;
In Iphigene I claim my rightful due,
Robbed by my rival, and detained by you:
Your Pasimond a lawless bargain drove,
The parent could not sell the daughter's love;
Or if he could, my love disdains the laws,
And like a king by conquest gains his cause;
Where arms take place, all other pleas are vain;
Love taught me force, and force shall love maintain.
You, what by strength you could not keep, release,
And at an easy ransom buy your peace."

Fear on the conquered side soon signed the accord,
And Iphigene to Cymon was restored.
While to his arms the blushing bride he took,
To seeming sadness she composed her look;

As if by force subjected to his will,
Though pleased, dissembling, and a woman still.
And, for she wept, he wiped her falling tears,
And prayed her to dismiss her empty fears;
"For yours I am," he said, "and have deserved
Your love much better, whom so long I served,
Than he to whom your formal father tied
Your vows, and sold a slave, not sent a bride".
Thus while he spoke, he seized the willing prey,
As Paris bore the Spartan spouse away.
Faintly she screamed, and even her eyes confessed
She rather would be thought, than was, distressed.

Who now exults but Cymon in his mind?
Vain hopes and empty joys of human kind,
Proud of the present, to the future blind!
Secure of fate, while Cymon ploughs the sea,
And steers to Candy with his conquered prey,
Scarce the third glass of measured hours was run,
When like a fiery meteor sunk the sun,
The promise of a storm; the shifting gales
Forsake by fits and fill the flagging sails;
Hoarse murmurs of the main from far were heard,
And night came on, not by degrees prepared,
But all at once; at once the winds arise,
The thunders roll, the forky lightning flies.
In vain the master issues out commands,
In vain the trembling sailors ply their hands;
The tempest unforeseen prevents their care,
And from the first they labour in despair.
The giddy ship betwixt the winds and tides,
Forced back and forwards, in a circle rides,
Stunned with the different blows; then shoots amain,
Till counterbuffed she stops, and sleeps again.
Not more aghast the proud archangel fell,

Plunged from the height of heaven to deepest hell,
Than stood the lover of his love possessed,
Now cursed the more, the more he had been blessed;
More anxious for her danger than his own,
Death he defies, but would be lost alone.

Sad Iphigene to womanish complaints
Adds pious prayers, and wearies all the saints;
Even if she could, her love she would repent,
But since she cannot, dreads the punishment:
Her forfeit faith and Pasimond betrayed
Are ever present, and her crime upbraid.
She blames herself, nor blames her lover less;
Augments her anger as her fears increase;
From her own back the burden would remove,
And lays the load on his ungoverned love,
Which interposing durst, in Heaven's despite,
Invade and violate another's right:
The Powers incensed awhile deferred his pain,
And made him master of his vows in vain:
But soon they punished his presumptuous pride;
That for his daring enterprise she died,
Who rather not resisted than complied.

Then, impotent of mind, with altered sense,
She hugged the offender, and forgave the offence,
Sex to the last. Meantime with sails declined
The wandering vessel drove before the wind,
Tossed and retossed, aloft, and then alow;
Nor port they seek, nor certain course they know,
But every moment wait the coming blow.
Thus blindly driven, by breaking day they viewed
The land before them, and their fears renewed;
The land was welcome, but the tempest bore
The threatened ship against a rocky shore,

A winding bay was near; to this they bent,
And just escaped; their force already spent.
Secure from storms, and panting from the sea,
The land unknown at leisure they survey;
And saw (but soon their sickly sight withdrew)
The rising towers of Rhodes at distant view;
And cursed the hostile shore of Pasimond,
Saved from the seas, and shipwrecked on the ground.

The frightened sailors tried their strength in vain
To turn the stern, and tempt the stormy main;
But the stiff wind withstood the labouring oar,
And forced them forward on the fatal shore!
The crooked keel now bites the Rhodian strand,
And the ship moored constrains the crew to land:
Yet still they might be safe, because unknown;
But as ill fortune seldom comes alone,
The vessel they dismissed was driven before,
Already sheltered on their native shore;
Known each, they know, but each with change of cheer;
The vanquished side exults, the victors fear;
Not them but theirs, made prisoners ere they fight,
Despairing conquest, and deprived of flight.

The country rings around with loud alarms,
And raw in fields the rude militia swarms;
Mouths without hands; maintained at vast expense,
In peace a charge, in war a weak defence;
Stout once a month they march, a blustering band,
And ever, but in times of need, at hand;
This was the morn when, issuing on the guard,
Drawn up in rank and file they stood prepared
Of seeming arms to make a short essay,
Then hasten to be drunk, the business of the day.

The cowards would have fled, but that they knew
Themselves so many, and their foes so few;

But crowding on, the last the first impel,
Till overborne with weight the Cyprians fell.
Cymon enslaved, who first the war begun,
And Iphigene once more is lost and won.

Deep in a dungeon was the captive cast,
Deprived of day, and held in fetters fast;
His life was only spared at their request,
Whom taken he so nobly had released:
But Iphigenia was the ladies' care,
Each in their turn addressed to treat the fair;
While Pasimond and his the nuptial feast prepare.

Her secret soul to Cymon was inclined,
But she must suffer what her fates assigned;
So passive is the church of womankind.
What worse to Cymon could his fortune deal,
Rolled to the lowest spoke of all her wheel?
It rested to dismiss the downward weight,
Or raise him upward to his former height;
The latter pleased; and love (concerned the most)
Prepared the amends for what by love he lost.

The sire of Pasimond had left a son,
Though younger, yet for courage early known,
Ormisda called, to whom, by promise tied,
A Rhodian beauty was the destined bride;
Cassandra was her name, above the rest
Renowned for birth, with fortune amply blessed.
Lysimachus, who ruled the Rhodian state,
Was then by choice their annual magistrate:
He loved Cassandra too with equal 'aire,
But Fortune had not favoured his desire;
Crossed by her friends, by her not disapproved,
Nor yet preferred, or like Ormisda loved:

So stood the affair: some little hope remained,
That, should his rival chance to lose, he gained.

Meantime young Pasimond his marriage pressed,
Ordained the nuptial day, prepared the feast;
And frugally resolved (the charge to shun,
Which would be double should he wed alone),
To join his brother's bridal with his own.

Lysimachus, oppressed with mortal grief,
Received the news, and studied quick relief:
The fatal days approached; if force were used,
The magistrate his public trust abused;
To justice liable, as law required,
For when his office ceased, his power expired:
While power remained, the means were in his hand
By force to seize, and then forsake the land:
Betwixt extremes he knew not how to move,
A slave to fame, but more a slave to love:
Restraining others, yet himself not free,
Made impotent by power, debased by dignity.
Both sides he weighed: but after much debate,
The man prevailed above the magistrate.

Love never fails to master what he finds,
But works a different way in different minds,
The fool enlightens, and the wise he blinds.
This youth proposing to possess and scape,
Began in murder, to conclude in rape:
Unpraised by me, though Heaven sometime may bless
An impious act with undeserved success:
The great, it seems, are privileged alone,
To punish all injustice but their own.
But here I stop, not daring to proceed,
Yet blush to flatter an unrighteous deed;
For crimes are but permitted, not decreed

Resolved on force, his wit the praetor bent
To find the means that might secure the event;
Nor long he laboured, for his lucky thought
In captive Cymon found the friend he sought.
The example pleased: the cause and crime the same,
An injured lover and a ravished dame.
How much he durst he knew by what he dared,
The less he had to lose, the less he cared
To menage loathsome life when love was the reward.

This pondered well, and fixed on his intent,
In depth of night he for the prisoner sent;
In secret sent, the public view to shun,
Then with a sober smile he thus begun:
"The Powers above, who bounteously bestow
Their gifts and graces on mankind below,
Yet prove our merit first, nor blindly give
To such as are not worthy to receive:
For valour and for virtue they provide
Their due reward, but first they must be tried:
These fruitful seeds within your mind they sowed;
Twas yours to improve the talent they bestowed;
They gave you to be born of noble kind,
They gave you love to lighten up your mind
And purge the grosser parts; they gave you care
To please, and courage to deserve the fair.

"Thus far they tried you, and by proof they found
The grain entrusted in a grateful ground:
But still the great experiment remained,
They suffered you to lose the prize you gained,
That you might learn the gift was theirs alone,
And, when restored, to them the blessing own.
Restored it soon will be; the means prepared,
The difficulty smoothed, the danger shared:

But be yourself, the care to me resign,
Then Iphigene is yours, Cassandra mine.
Your rival Pasimond pursues your life,
Impatient to revenge his ravished wife,
But yet not his; to-morrow is behind,
And Love our fortunes in one band has joined:
Two brothers are our foes, Ormisda mine
As much declared as Pasimond is thine:
To-morrow must their common vows be tied:
With Love to friend, and Fortune for our guide,
Let both resolve to die, or each redeem a bride.

"Right I have none, nor hast thou much to plead;
'Tis force, when done, must justify the deed:
Our task performed, we next prepare for flight:
And let the losers talk in vain of right:
We with the fair will sail before the wind;
If they are grieved, I leave the laws behind.
Speak thy resolves: if now thy courage droop,
Despair in prison and abandon hope;
But if thou darest in arms thy love regain
(For liberty without thy love were vain),
Then second my design to seize the prey,
Or lead to second rape, for well thou knowest the way."

Said Cymon, overjoyed: "Do thou propose
The means to fight, and only show the foes:
For from the first, when love had fired my mind,
Resolved, I left the care of life behind."

To this the bold Lysimachus replied,
"Let Heaven be neuter and the sword decide:
The spousals are prepared, already play
The minstrels, and provoke the tardy day:
By this the brides are waked, their grooms are dressed;
All Rhodes is summoned to the nuptial feast,
All but myself the sole unbidden guest.

Unbidden though I am, I will be there,
And, joined by thee, intend to joy the fair.

"Now hear the rest; when day resigns the light,
And cheerful torches gild the jolly night,
Be ready at my call; my chosen few
With arms administered shall aid thy crew.
Then entering unexpected will we seize
Our destined prey, from men dissolved in ease,
By wine disabled, unprepared for fight,
And hastening to the seas, suborn our flight:
The seas are ours, for I command the fort,
A ship well manned expects us in the port:
If they, or if their friends, the prize contest,
Death shall attend the man who dares resist."

It pleased; the prisoner to his hold retired,
His troop with equal emulation fired,
All fixed to fight, and all their wonted work required.

The sun arose; the streets were thronged around,
The palace opened, and the posts were crowned.
The double bridegroom at the door attends
The expected spouse, and entertains the friends:
They meet, they lead to church, the priests invoke
The Powers, and feed the flames with fragrant smoke.
This done, they feast, and at the close of night
By kindled torches vary their delight,
These lead the lively dance, and those the brimming
bowls invite.

Now, at the appointed place and hour assigned,
With souls resolved the ravishers were joined:
Three bands are formed; the first is sent before
To favour the retreat and guard the shore;
The second at the palace-gate is placed,
And up the lofty stairs ascend the last:

A peaceful troop they seem with shining vests,
But coats of mail beneath secure their breasts.

Dauntless they enter, Cymon at their head,
And find the feast renewed, the table spread:
Sweet voices, mixed with instrumental sounds,
Ascend the vaulted roof, the vaulted roof rebounds.
When, like the harpies, rushing through the hall
The sudden troop appears, the tables fall,
Their smoking load is on the pavement thrown;
Each ravisher prepares to seize his own:
The brides, invaded with a rude embrace,
Shriek out for aid, confusion fills the place.
Quick to redeem the prey their plighted lords
Advance, the palace gleams with shining swords.

But late is all defence, and succour vain;
The rape is made, the ravishers remain:
Two sturdy slaves were only sent before
To bear the purchased prize in safety to the shore.
The troop retires, the lovers close the rear,
With forward faces not confessing fear:
Backward they move, but scorn their pace to mend;
Then seek the stairs, and with slow haste descend.

Fierce Pasimond, their passage to prevent,
Thrust full on Cymon's back in his descent,
The blade returned unbathed, and to the handle bent.
Stout Cymon soon remounts, and cleft in two
His rival's head with one descending blow:
And as the next in rank Ormisda stood,
He turned the point; the sword enured to blood
Bored his unguarded breast, which poured a purple flood.

With vowed revenge the gathering crowd pursues,
The ravishers turn head, the fight renews;

The hall is heaped with corps; the sprinkled gore
Besmeares the walls, and floats the marble floor.
Dispersed at length, the drunken squadron flies,
The victors to their vessel bear the prize,
And hear behind loud groans, and lamentable cries.

The crew with merry shouts their anchors weigh,
Then ply their oars, and brush the buxom sea,
While troops of gathered Rhodians crowd the key.
What should the people do when left alone?
The governor and government are gone;
The public wealth to foreign parts conveyed;
Some troops disbanded, and the rest unpaid.
Rhodes is the sovereign of the sea no more;
Their ships unrigged, and spent their naval store;
They neither could defend nor can pursue,
But grind their teeth, and cast a helpless view;
In vain with darts a distant war they try,
Short, and more short, the missive weapons fly.
Meanwhile the ravishers their crimes enjoy,
And flying sails and sweeping oars employ:
The cliffs of Rhodes in little space are lost;
Jove's isle they seek, nor Jove denies his coast.

In safety landed on the Candian shore,
With generous wines their spirits they restore;
There Cymon with his Rhodian friend resides,
Both court and wed at once the willing brides.
A war ensues, the Cretans own their cause,
Stiff to defend their hospitable laws:
Both parties lose by turns, and neither wins,
Till peace, propounded by a truce, begins.
The kindred of the slain forgive the deed,
But a short exile must for show precede:
The term expired, from Candia they remove,
And happy each at home enjoys his love.

viii. THEODORE AND HONORIA

From *Boccace*

OF all the cities in Romanian lands,
The chief and most renowned Ravenna stands;
Adorned in ancient times with arms and arts,
And rich inhabitants with generous hearts.
But Theodore the brave, above the rest,
With gifts of fortune and of nature blessed,
The foremost place for wealth and honour held,
And all in feats of chivalry excelled.

This noble youth to madness loved a dame
Of high degree, Honoria was her name;
Fair as the fairest, but of haughty mind,
And fiercer than became so soft a kind;
Proud of her birth (for equal she had none),
The rest she scorned, but hated him alone;
His gifts, his constant courtship, nothing gained;
For she, the more he loved, the more disdained.
He lived with all the pomp he could devise,
At tilts and tournaments obtained the prize,
But found no favour in his lady's eyes:
Relentless as a rock, the lofty maid
Turned all to poison that he did or said:
Nor prayers nor tears nor offered vows could move;
The work went backward; and the more he strove
To advance his suit, the farther from her love.

Wearied at length, and wanting remedy,
He doubted oft, and oft resolved to die.
But pride stood ready to prevent the blow,
For who would die to gratify a foe?
His generous mind disdained so mean a fate;
That passed, his next endeavour was to hate.

But vainer that relief than all the rest;
The less he hoped, with more desire possessed;
Love stood the siege, and would not yield his breast.

Change was the next, but change deceived his care;
He sought a fairer, but found none so fair.
He would have worn her out by slow degrees,
As men by fasting starve the untamed disease;
But present love required a present ease.
Looking, he feeds alone his famished eyes,
Feeds lingering death, but, looking not, he dies.
Yet still he chose the longest way to fate,
Wasting at once his life and his estate.

His friends beheld, and pitied him in vain,
For what advice can ease a lover's pain?
Absence, the best expedient they could find,
Might save the fortune, if not cure the mind:
This means they long proposed, but little gained,
Yet after much pursuit at length obtained.

Hard you may think it was to give consent,
But struggling with his own desires he went;
With large expense, and with a pompous train,
Provided as to visit France or Spain,
Or for some distant voyage o'er the main.
But Love had clipped his wings, and cut him short,
Confined within the purlieus of his court.
Three miles he went, nor farther could retreat;
His travels ended at his country seat:"
To Chassi's pleasing plains he took his way,
There pitched his tents, and there resolved to stay.

The spring was in the prime, the neighbouring grove
Supplied with birds, the choristers of love;
Music unbought, that ministered delight
To morning walks, and lulled his cares by night:

There he discharged his friends, but not the expense
Of frequent treats and proud magnificence.
He lived as kings retire, though more at large
From public business, yet with equal charge;
With house and heart still open to receive;
As well content as love would give him leave:
He would have lived more free; but many a guest,
Who could forsake the friend, pursued the feast.

It happed one morning, as his fancy led,
Before his usual hour he left his bed,
To walk within a lonely lawn, that stood
On every side surrounded by the wood:
Alone he walked, to please his pensive mind,
And sought the deepest solitude to find;
'T was in a grove of spreading pines he strayed;
The wind within the quivering branches played,
The dancing trees a mournful music made;
The place itself was suiting to his care,
Uncouth and savage as the cruel fair.
He wandered on, unknowing where he went,
Lost in the wood, and all on love intent:
The day already half his race had run,
And summoned him to due repast at noon,
But Love could feel no hunger but his own.

While listening to the murmuring leaves he stood,
More than a mile immersed within the wood,
At once the wind was laid; the whispering sound
Was dumb; a rising earthquake rocked the ground;
With deeper brown the grove was overspread,
A sudden horror seized his giddy head,
And his ears tinkled, and his colour fled.
Nature was in alarm; some danger nigh
Seemed threatened, though unseen to mortal eye.

Unused to fear, he summoned all his soul,
And stood collected in himself—and whole;
Not long: for soon a whirlwind rose around,
And from afar he heard a screaming sound,
As of a dame distressed, who cried for aid,
And filled with loud laments the secret shade.

A thicket close beside the grove there stood,
With briars and brambles choked, and dwarfish wood;
From thence the noise, which now approaching near
With more distinguished notes invades his ear;
He raised his head, and saw a beauteous maid
With hair dishevelled issuing through the shade;
Stripped of her clothes, and e'en those parts revealed
Which modest nature keeps from sight concealed.
Her face, her hands, her naked limbs were torn,
With passing through the brakes and prickly thorn;
Two mastiffs gaunt and grim her flight pursued,
And oft their fastened fangs in blood imbrued:
Oft they came up, and pinched her tender side,
"Mercy, O mercy, Heaven", she ran, and cried:
When Heaven was named, they loosed their hold again,
Then sprung she forth, they followed her amain.

Not far behind, a knight of swarthy face
High on a coal-black steed pursued the chace;
With flashing flames his ardent eyes were filled,
And in his hands a naked sword he held:
He cheered the dogs to follow her who fled,
And vowed revenge on her devoted head.

As Theodore was born of noble kind,
The brutal action roused his manly mind:
Moved with unworthy usage of the maid,
He, though unarmed, resolved to give her aid.

A saplin pine he wrenched from out the ground,
The readiest weapon that his fury found.
Thus, furnished for offence, he crossed the way
Betwixt the graceless villain and his prey.

The knight came thundering on, but, from afar,
Thus in imperious tone forbad the war:
" Cease, Theodore, to proffer vain relief,
Nor stop the vengeance of so just a grief;
But give me leave to seize my destined prey,
And let eternal justice take the way:
I but revenge my fate, disdained, betrayed,
And suffering death for this ungrateful maid."

He said, at once dismounting from the steed;
For now the hell-hounds with superior speed
Had reached the dame, and, fastening on her side,
The ground with issuing streams of purple dyed.
Stood Theodore surprised in deadly fright,
With chattering teeth, and bristling hair upright;
Yet armed with inborn worth,— " Whate'er", said he,
"Thou art, who knowst me better than I thee;
Or prove thy rightful cause, or be defied."
The spectre, fiercely staring, thus replied:

" Know, Theodore, thy ancestry I claim,
And Guido Cavalcanti was my name.
One common sire our fathers did beget,
My name and story some remember yet;
Thee, then a boy, within my arms I laid,
When for my sins I loved this haughty maid;
Not less adored in life, nor served by me,
Than proud Honoria now is loved by thee.
What did I not her stubborn heart to gain?
But all my vows were answered with disdain:
She scorned my sorrows, and despised my pain.

Long time I dragged my days in fruitless care;
Then loathing life, and plunged in deep despair,
To finish my unhappy life I fell
On this sharp sword, and now am damned in hell.

"Short was her joy; for soon the insulting maid
By Heaven's decree in the cold grave was laid;
And as in unrepenting sin she died,
Doomed to the same bad place, is punished for her pride:
Because she deemed I well deserved to die,
And made a merit of her cruelty.
There, then, we met; both tried, and both were cast,
And this irrevocable sentence passed,
That she, whom I so long pursued in vain,
Should suffer from my hands a lingering pain:
Renewed to life, that she might daily die,
I daily doomed to follow, she to fly;
No more a lover, but a mortal foe,
I seek her life (for love is none below);
As often as my dogs with better speed
Arrest her flight, is she to death decreed:
Then with this fatal sword, on which I died,
I pierce her opened back or tender side,
And tear that hardened heart from out her breast,
Which with her entrails makes my hungry hounds a feast.
Nor lies she long, but as her fates ordain,
Springs up to life, and fresh to second pain,
Is saved to-day, to-morrow to be slain."

This, versed in death, the infernal knight relates,
And then for proof fulfilled their common fates;
Her heart and bowels through her back he drew,
And fed the hounds that helped him to pursue.
Stern looked the fiend, as frustrate of his will,
Not half sufficed, and greedy yet to kill.

And now the soul, expiring through the wound,
Had left the body breathless on the ground,
When thus the grisly spectre spoke again:
" Behold the fruit of ill-rewarded pain!
As many months as I sustained her hate,
So many years is she condemned by Fate
To daily death; and every several place
Conscious of her disdain and my disgrace,
Must witness her just punishment, and be
A scene of triumph and revenge to me.
As in this grove I took my last farewell,
As on this very spot of earth I fell,
As Friday saw me die, so she my prey
Becomes even here, on this revolving day."

Thus while he spoke, the virgin from the ground
Upstartd fresh, already closed the wound,
And unconcerned for all she felt before,
Precipitates her flight along the shore:
The hell-hounds, as ungorged with flesh and blood,
Pursue their prey, and seek their wonted food:
The fiend remounts his courser, mends his pace,
And all the vision vanished from the place.

Long stood the noble youth oppressed with awe
And stupid at the wondrous things he saw,
Surpassing common faith, transgressing Nature's law:
He would have been asleep, and wished to wake,
But dreams, he knew, no long impression make,
Though strong at first; if vision, to what end,
But such as must his future state portend,
His love the damsel, and himself the fiend?
But yet reflecting that it could not be
From Heaven, which cannot impious acts decree,
Resolved within himself to shun the snare
Which hell for his destruction did prepare;

And as his better genius should direct,
From an ill cause to draw a good effect.

Inspired from Heaven he homeward took his way,
Nor palled his new design with long delay;
But of his train a trusty servant sent
To call his friends together at his tent.
They came, and, usual salutations paid,
With words premeditated thus he said:
"What you have often counselled, to remove
My vain pursuit of unregarded love,
By thrift my sinking fortune to repair,
Though late, yet is at last become my care:
My heart shall be my own; my vast expense
Reduced to bounds by timely providence:
This only I require; invite for me
Honor, with her father's family,
Her friends and mine; the cause I shall display,
On Friday next, for that's the appointed day".

Well pleased were all his friends, the task was light,
The father, mother, daughter they invite;
Hardly the dame was drawn to this repast;
But yet resolved, because it was the last.
The day was come, the guests invited came,
And with the rest the inexorable dame:
A feast prepared with riotous expense,
Much cost, more care, and most magnificence.
The place ordained was in that haunted grove
Where the revenging ghost pursued his love:
The tables in a proud pavilion spread,
With flowers below, and tissue overhead:
The rest in rank, Honor, chief in place,
Was artfully contrived to set her face
To front the thicket and behold the chace.

The feast was served, the time so well forecast,
That just when the dessert and fruits were placed,
The fiend's alarm began; the hollow sound
Sung in the leaves, the forest shook around,
Air blackened, rolled the thunder, groaned the ground.

Nor long before the loud laments arise,
Of one distressed, and mastiffs' mingled cries;
And first the dame came rushing through the wood,
And next the famished hounds that sought their food,
And griped her flanks, and oft essayed their jaws in
blood.

Last came the felon on the sable steed,
Armed with his naked sword, and urged his dogs to
speed.

She ran, and cried, her flight directly bent
(A guest unbidden) to the fatal tent,
The scene of death, and place ordained for punishment.
Loud was the noise, aghast was every guest,
The women shrieked, the men forsook the feast;
The hounds at nearer distance hoarsely bayed;
The hunter close pursued the visionary maid,
She rent the heaven with loud laments, imploring aid.

The gallants, to protect the lady's right,
Their fauchions brandished at the grisly sight;
High on his stirrups he provoked the fight.
Then on the crowd he cast a furious look,
And withered all their strength before he strook:
"Back on your lives! let be", said he, "my prey,
And let my vengeance take the destined way:
Vain are your arms, and vainer your defence,
Against the eternal doom of Providence:
Mine is the ungrateful maid by Heaven designed:
Mercy she would not give, nor mercy shall she find".

At this the former tale again he told
With thundering tone, and dreadful to behold:
Sunk were their hearts with horror of the crime,
Nor needed to be warned a second time,
But bore each other back; some knew the face,
And all had heard the much lamented case
Of him who fell for love, and this the fatal place.

And now the infernal minister advanced,
Seized the due victim, and with fury kneed
Her back, and piercing through her inmost heart,
Drew backwards as before the offending part.
The reeking entrails next he tore away,
And to his meagre mastiffs made a prey.
The pale assistants on each other stared,
With gaping mouths for issuing words prepared;
The stillborn sounds upon the palate hung,
And died imperfect on the faltering tongue.
The fright was general; but the female band,
A helpless train, in more confusion stand:
With horror shuddering, on a heap they run,
Sick at the sight of hateful justice done;
For conscience rung the alarm, and made the case their
own.

So spread upon a lake, with upward eye,
A plump of fowl behold their foe on high;
They close their trembling troop; and all attend
On whom the sowsing eagle will descend.

But most the proud Honoria feared the event,
And thought to her alone the vision sent.
Her guilt presents to her distracted mind
Heaven's justice, Theodore's revengeful kind,
And the same fate to the same sin assigned;
Already sees herself the monster's prey,

And feels her heart and entrails torn away.
'T was a mute scene of sorrow, mixed with fear;
Still on the table lay the unfinished cheer:
The knight and hungry mastiffs stood around,
The mangled dame lay breathless on the ground;
When on a sudden, re-inspired with breath,
Again she rose, again to suffer death;
Nor stayed the hell-hounds, nor the hunter stayed,
But followed, as before, the flying maid:
The avenger took from earth the avenging sword,
And mounting light as air his sable steed he spurred:
The clouds dispelled, the sky resumed her light,
And Nature stood recovered of her fright.

But fear, the last of ills, remained behind,
And horror heavy sat on every mind.
Nor Theodore encouraged more his feast,
But sternly looked, as hatching in his breast
Some deep design, which when Honoria viewed
The fresh impulse her former fright renewed:
She thought herself the trembling dame who fled,
And him the grisly ghost that spurred the infernal steed:
The more dismayed, for when the guests withdrew,
Their courteous host saluting all the crew,
Regardless passed her o'er, nor graced with kind adieu.
That sting infix'd within her haughty mind,
The downfall of her empire she divined;
And her proud heart with secret sorrow pined.
Home as they went, the sad discourse renewed,
Of the relentless dame to death pursued,
And of the sight obscene so lately viewed;
None durst arraign the righteous doom she bore,
Even they who pitied most yet blamed her more:
The parallel they needed not to name,
But in the dead they damned the living dame.

At every little noise she looked behind,
For still the knight was present to her mind:
And anxious oft she started on the way,
And thought the horseman-ghost came thundering for his
prey.

Returned, she took her bed with little rest,
But in short slumbers dreamt the funeral feast:
Awake, she turned her side, and slept again;
The same black vapours mounted in her brain,
And the same dreams returned with double pain.

Now forced to wake, because afraid to sleep,
Her blood all fevered, with a furious leap
She sprung from bed, distracted in her mind,
And feared, at every step, a twitching spright behind
Darkling and desperate, with a staggering pace,
Of death afraid, and conscious of disgrace,
Fear, pride, remorse, at once her heart assailed;
Pride put remorse to flight, but fear prevailed.
Friday, the fatal day, when next it came,
Her soul forethought the fiend would change his game,
And her pursue, or Theodore be slain,
And two ghosts join their packs to hunt her o'er the
plain.

This dreadful image so possessed her mind,
That, desperate any succour else to find,
She ceased all further hope; and now began
To make reflection on the unhappy man.
Rich, brave, and young, who past expression loved,
Proof to disdain, and not to be removed:
Of all the men respected and admired,
Of all the dames, except herself, desired:
Why not of her? preferred above the rest
By him with knightly deeds, and open love professed?
So had another been, where he his vows addressed.

This quelled her pride, yet other doubts remained,
That once disdaining, she might be disdained.
The fear was just, but greater fear prevailed,
Fear of her life by hellish hounds assailed:
He took a lowering leave; but who can tell
What outward hate might inward love conceal?
Her sex's arts she knew, and why not then
Might deep dissembling have a place in men?
Here hope began to dawn; resolved to try,
She fixed on this her utmost remedy;
Death was behind, but hard it was to die:
Twas time enough at last on death to call;
The precipice in sight, a shrub was all
That kindly stood betwixt to break the fatal fall.

One maid she had, beloved above the rest:
Secure of her, the secret she confessed;
And now the cheerful light her fears dispelled,
She with no winding turns the truth concealed,
But put the woman off, and stood revealed:
With faults confessed, commissioned her to go,
If pity yet had place, and reconcile her foe.
The welcome message made was soon received;
'T was what he wished and hoped, but scarce believed:
Fate seemed a fair occasion to present,
He knew the sex, and feared she might repent
Should he delay the moment of consent.
There yet remained to gain her friends (a care
The modesty of maidens well might spare);
But she with such a zeal the cause embraced,
(As women, where they will, are all in haste,)
The father, mother, and the kin beside,
Were overborne by fury of the tide;
With full consent of all she changed her state;
Resistless in her love as in her hate.

By her example warned, the rest beware;
More easy, less imperious, were the fair;
And that one hunting, which the devil designed
For one fair female, lost him half the kind.

GEORGE CRABBE

(1754-1832)

ix. EDWARD SHORE

GENIUS! thou gift of Heav'n! thou light divine!
Amid what dangers art thou doom'd to shine!
Oft will the body's weakness check thy force,
Oft damp thy vigour, and impede thy course;
And trembling nerves compel thee to restrain
Thy nobler efforts, to contend with pain;
Or Want (sad guest!) will in thy presence come,
And breathe around her melancholy gloom:
To life's low cares will thy proud thought confine,
And make her sufferings, her impatience, thine.

Evil and strong, seducing passions prey
On soaring minds, and win them from their way,
Who then to Vice the subject spirits give,
And in the service of the conqueror live;
Like captive Samson making sport for all,
Who fear'd their strength, and glory in their fall.

Genius, with virtue, still may lack the aid
Implor'd by humble minds, and hearts afraid;
May leave to timid souls the shield and sword
Of the tried Faith, and the resistless Word;
Amid a world of dangers venturing forth,
Frail, but yet fearless, proud in conscious worth,

Till strong temptation, in some fatal time,
Assails the heart, and wins the soul to crime;
When left by honour, and by sorrow spent,
Unused to pray, unable to repent,
The nobler powers, that once exalted high
Th' aspiring man, shall then degraded lie:
Reason, through anguish, shall her throne forsake,
And strength of mind but stronger madness make.

When *Edward Shore* had reached his twentieth year,
He felt his bosom light, his conscience clear;
Applause at school the youthful hero gain'd,
And trials there with manly strength sustained:
With prospects bright upon the world he came,
Pure love of virtue, strong desire of fame:
Men watch'd the way his lofty mind would take,
And all foretold the progress he would make.

Boast of these friends, to older men a guide,
Proud of his parts, but gracious in his pride;
He bore a gay good-nature in his face,
And in his air were dignity and grace;
Dress that became his state and years he wore,
And sense and spirit shone in *Edward Shore*.

Thus, while admiring friends the Youth beheld,
His own disgust their forward hopes repel'd;
For he unfix'd, unfixing, look'd around,
And no employment but in seeking found;
He gave his restless thoughts to views refined,
And shrank from worldly cares with wounded mind.

Rejecting trade, awhile he dwelt on laws,
" But who could plead, if unapproved the cause?"
A doubting, dismal tribe physicians seem'd;
Divines o'er texts and disputations dream'd;

War and its glory he perhaps could love,
But there again he must the cause approve.

Our hero thought no deed should gain applause
Where timid virtue found support in laws;
He to all good would soar, would fly all sin,
By the pure prompting of the will within;
"Who needs a law that binds him not to steal,"
Ask'd the young teacher, "can he rightly feel?
To curb the will, or arm in honour's cause,
Or aid the weak—are these enforced by laws?
Should we a foul, ungenerous action dread,
Because a law condemns th' adulterous bed?
Or fly pollution, not for fear of stain,
But that some statute tells us to refrain?
The grosser herd in ties like these we bind,
In virtue's freedom moves th' enlightened mind."

"Man's heart deceives him," said a friend.—"Of course,"
Replied the Youth; "but has it power to force?
Unless it forces, call it as you will,
It is but wish, and proneness to the ill."

"Art thou not tempted?"—"Do I fall?" said Shore.
"The pure have fallen."—"Then are pure no more.
While reason guides me, I shall walk aright,
Nor need a steadier hand, or stronger light;
Nor this in dread of awful threats, design'd
For the weak spirit and the grov'ling mind;
But that, engaged by thoughts and views sublime,
I wage free war with grossness and with crime."
Thus look'd he proudly on the vulgar crew,
Whom statutes govern, and whom fears subdue.

Faith, with his virtue, he indeed profess'd,
But doubts deprived his ardent mind of rest;

Reason, his sovereign mistress, fail'd to show
Light through the mazes of the world below:
Questions arose, and they surpassed the skill
Of his sole aid, and would be dubious still;
These to discuss he sought no common guide,
But to the doubters in his doubts applied;
When all together might in freedom speak,
And their loved truth with mutual ardour seek.
Alas! though men who feel their eyes decay
Take more than common pains to find their way,
Yet, when for this they ask each other's aid,
Their mutual purpose is the more delay'd:
Of all their doubts, their reasoning clear'd not one,
Still the same spots were present in the sun;
Still the same scruples haunted Edward's mind,
Who found no rest, nor took the means to find.

But though with shaken faith, and slave to fame,
Vain and aspiring on the world he came,
Yet was he studious, serious, moral, grave,
No passion's victim, and no system's slave:
Vice he opposed, indulgence he disdain'd,
And o'er each sense in conscious triumph reign'd.

Who often reads will sometimes wish to write,
And Shore would yield instruction and delight:
A serious drama he design'd, but found
'Twas tedious travelling in that gloomy ground;
A deep and solemn story he would try,
But grew ashamed of ghosts, and laid it by;
Sermons he wrote, but they who knew his creed,
Or knew it not, were ill-disposed to read;
And he would lastly be the nation's guide,
But, studying, fail'd to fix upon a side;
Fame he desired, and talents he possess'd,
But loved not labour, though he could not rest,

Nor firmly fix the vacillating mind,
That, ever working, could no centre find.

'Tis thus a sanguine reader loves to trace
The Nile forth rushing on his glorious race;
Calm and secure the fancied traveller goes
Through sterile deserts and by threatening foes;
He thinks not then of Afric's scorching sands,
Th' Arabian sea, the Abyssinian bands;
Fasils and Michaels, and the robbers all,
Whom we politely chiefs and heroes call:
He of success alone delights to think,
He views that fount, he stands upon the brink,
And drinks a fancied draught, exulting so to drink.

In his own room, and with his books around,
His lively mind its chief employment found;
Then idly busy, quietly employed,
And, lost to life, his visions were enjoyed:
Yet still he took a keen inquiring view
Of all that crowds neglect, desire, pursue;
And thus abstracted, curious, still, serene,
He, unemploy'd, beheld life's shifting scene;
Still, more averse from vulgar joys and cares,
Still more unfitted for the world's affairs.

There was a house where Edward oft-times went,
And social hours in pleasant trifling spent;
He read, conversed, and reason'd, sang and play'd,
And all were happy while the idler stay'd;
Too happy one! for thence arose the pain,
Till this engaging trifler came again.

But did he love? We answer, day by day,
The loving feet would take th' accusom'd way,
The amorous eye would rove as if in quest
Of something rare, and on the mansion rest;

The same soft passion touch'd the gentle tongue,
 And *Anna's* charms in tender notes were sung;
 The ear, too, seem'd to feel the common flame,
 Soothed and delighted with the fair one's name;
 And thus, as love each other part possess'd,
 The heart, no doubt, its sovereign power confessed.

Pleased in her sight, the Youth required no more;
 Not rich himself, he saw the damsel poor;
 And he too wisely, nay, too kindly loved,
 To pain the being whom his soul approved.

A serious Friend our cautious Youth possess'd,
 And at his table sat a welcome guest:
 Both unemploy'd, it was their chief delight
 To read what free and daring authors write;
 Authors who loved from common views to soar,
 And seek the fountains never traced before:
 Truth they profess'd, yet often left the true
 And beaten prospect, for the wild and new.
 His chosen friend his fiftieth year had seen,
 His fortune easy, and his air serene;
 Deist and atheist call'd; for few agreed
 What were his notions, principles, or creed;
 His mind reposed not, for he hated rest,
 But all things made a query or a jest;
 Perplexed himself, he ever sought to prove
 That man is doom'd in endless doubt to rove;
 Himself in darkness he profess'd to be,
 And would maintain that not a man could see.

The youthful Friend, dissentient, reasoned still
 Of the soul's prowess, and the subject-will;
 Of virtue's beauty, and of honour's force,
 And a warm zeal gave life to his discourse:
 Since from his feelings all his fire arose,
 And he had interest in the themes he chose.

The Friend, indulging a sarcastic smile,
Said, "Dear enthusiast! thou wilt change thy style,
When man's delusions, errors, crimes, deceit,
No more distress thee, and no longer cheat".

Yet, lo! this cautious man, so coolly wise,
On a young Beauty fix'd unguarded eyes;
And her he married: Edward at the view
Bade to his cheerful visits long adieu;
But haply err'd, for this engaging bride
No mirth suppressed, but rather cause supplied:
And when she saw the friends, by reasoning long,
Confused if right, and positive if wrong,
With playful speech, and smile that spoke delight,
She made them careless both of wrong and right.

This gentle damsel gave consent to wed,
With school and school-day dinners in her head:
She now was promised choice of daintiest food,
And costly dress, that made her sovereign good;
With walks on hilly heath to banish spleen,
And summer-visits when the roads were clean.
All these she loved, to these she gave consent,
And she was married to her heart's content.

Their manner this—the Friends together read,
Till books a cause for disputation bred;
Debate then followed, and the vapour'd child
Declared they argued till her head was wild;
And strange to her it was that mortal brain
Could seek the trial, or endure the pain.

Then, as the Friend reposed, the younger pair
Sat down to cards, and play'd beside his chair;
Till he, awaking, to his books applied,
Or heard the music of th' obedient bride:

If mild the evening, in the fields they stray'd,
And their own flock with partial eye survey'd;
But oft the husband, to indulgence prone,
Resumed his book, and bade them walk alone.

"Do, my kind Edward—I must take mine ease—
Name the dear girl the planets and the trees:
Tell her what warblers pour their evening song,
What insects flutter, as you walk along;
Teach her to fix the roving thoughts, to bind
The wandering sense, and methodise the mind."

This was obey'd; and oft, when this was done,
They calmly gazed on the declining sun;
In silence saw the glowing landscape fade,
Or, sitting, sang beneath the arbour's shade:
Till rose the moon, and on each youthful face
Shed a soft beauty and a dangerous grace.

When the young Wife beheld in long debate
The friends, all careless as she seeming sate,
It soon appeared there was in one combined
The nobler person and the richer mind:
He wore no wig, no grisly beard was seen.
And none beheld him careless or unclean,
Or watch'd him sleeping. We indeed have heard
Of sleeping beauty, and it has appeared;
'T is seen in infants—there indeed we find
The features soften'd by the slumbering mind;
But other beauties, when disposed to sleep,
Should from the eye of keen inspector keep:
The lovely nymph who would her swain surprise,
May close her mouth, but not conceal her eyes;
Sleep from the fairest face some beauty takes,
And all the homely features homelier makes:
So thought our wife, beholding with a sigh
Her sleeping spouse, and Edward smiling by.

A sick relation for the husband sent;
Without delay the friendly sceptic went;
Nor fear'd the youthful pair, for he had seen
The wife untroubled, and the friend serene;
No selfish purpose in his roving eyes,
No vile deception in her fond replies:
So judged the husband, and with judgment true,
For neither yet the guilt or danger knew.

What now remain'd? but they again should play
Th' accustomed game, and walk th' accustomed way;
With careless freedom should converse or read,
And the Friend's absence neither fear nor heed:
But rather now they seem'd confused, constraint;
Within their room still restless they remain'd,
And painfully they felt, and knew each other pain'd.
Ah, foolish men! how could ye thus depend,
One, on himself, the other on his friend?

The Youth with troubled eye the lady saw,
Yet felt too brave, too daring to withdraw;
While she, with tuneless hand the jarring keys
Touching, was not one moment at her ease:
Now would she walk, and call her friendly guide,
Now speak of rain, and cast her cloak aside;
Seize on a book, unconscious what she read,
And restless still to new resources fled;
Then laugh'd aloud, then tried to look serene;
And ever changed, and every change was seen.

Painful it is to dwell on deeds of shame—
The trying day was past, another came;
The third was all remorse, confusion, dread,
And (all too late!) the fallen hero fled.

Then felt the Youth, in that seducing time,
How feebly Honour guards the heart from crime:

Small is his native strength; man needs the stay,
The strength imparted in the trying day;
For all that Honour brings against the force
Of headlong passion, aids its rapid course;
Its slight resistance but provokes the fire,
As wood-work stops the flame, and then conveys it
higher.

The Husband came; a wife by guilt made bold
Had, meeting, soothed him, as in days of old;
But soon this fact transpired; her strong distress,
And his Friend's absence, left him nought to guess.

Still cool, though grieved, thus prudence bade him
write—

"I cannot pardon, and I will not fight;
Thou art too poor a culprit for the laws,
And I too faulty to support my cause:
All must be punish'd; I must sigh alone,
At home thy victim for her guilt atone;
And thou, unhappy! virtuous now no more,
Must loss of fame, peace, purity deplore;
Sinners with praise will pierce thee to the heart,
And saints, deriding, tell thee what thou art".

Such was his fall; and Edward, from that time,
Felt in full force the censure and the crime—
Despised, ashamed; his noble views before
And his proud thoughts, degraded him the more:
Should he repent—would that conceal his shame?
Could peace be his? It perish'd with his fame:
Himself he scorn'd, nor could his crime forgive;
He fear'd to die, yet felt ashamed to live:
Grieved, but not contrite, was his heart; oppressed,
Not broken; not converted, but distressed;
He wanted will to bend the stubborn knee,

He wanted light the cause of ill to see,
To learn how frail is man, how humble then should be;
For faith he had not, or a faith too weak
To gain the help that humbled sinners seek;
Else had he pray'd—to an offended God
His tears had flown a penitential flood;
Though far astray, he would have heard the call
Of mercy—"Come! return, thou prodigal":
Then, though confused, distressed, ashamed, afraid,
Still had the trembling penitent obey'd;
Though faith had fainted, when assail'd by fear,
Hope to the soul had whispered, " Persevere!"
Till in his Father's house, an humbled guest,
He would have found forgiveness, comfort, rest.

But all this joy was to our Youth denied
By his fierce passions and his daring pride;
And shame and doubt impeird him in a course,
Once so abhorr'd, with unresisted force.
Proud minds and guilty, whom their crimes oppress,
Fly to new crimes for comfort and redress;
So found our fallen Youth a short relief
In wine, the opiate guilt applies to grief,—
From fleeting mirth that o'er the bottle lives,
From the false joy its inspiration gives,—
And from associates pleased to find a friend
With powers to lead them, gladden, and defend,
In all those scenes where transient ease is found,
For minds whom sins oppress and sorrows wound.

Wine is like anger; for it makes us strong,
Blind, and impatient, and it leads us wrong;
The strength is quickly lost, we feel the error long:
Thus led, thus strengthen'd, in an evil cause,
For folly pleading, sought the Youth applause;

Sad for a time, then eloquently wild,
He gaily spoke, as his companions smiled;
Lightly he rose, and with his former grace
Proposed some doubt, and argued on the case;
Fate and foreknowledge were his favourite themes—
How vain man's purpose, how absurd his schemes:
"Whatever is, was ere our birth decreed;
We think our actions from ourselves proceed,
And idly we lament th' inevitable deed;
It seems our own, but there's a power above
Directs the motion, nay, that makes us move;
Nor good nor evil can you beings name,
Who are but rooks and castles in the game;
Superior natures with their puppets play,
Till, bagged or buried, all are swept away".

Such were the notions of a mind to ill
Now prone, but ardent and determined still:
Of joy now eager, as before of fame,
And screened by folly when assail'd by shame,
Deeply he sank; obey'd each passion's call,
And used his reason to defend them all.

Shall I proceed, and step by step relate
The odious progress of a Sinner's fate?
No—let me rather hasten to the time
(Sure to arrive!) when misery waits on crime.

With Virtue, prudence fled; what Shore possessed
Was sold, was spent, and he was now distressed:
And Want, unwelcome stranger, pale and wan,
Met with her haggard looks the hurried man:
His pride felt keenly what he must expect
From useless pity and from cold neglect.

Struck by new terrors, from his friends he fled,
And wept his woes upon a restless bed;

Retiring late, at early hour to rise,
With shrunken features, and with bloodshot eyes:
If sleep one moment closed the dismal view,
Fancy her terrors built upon the true:
And night and day had their alternate woes,
That baffled pleasure, and that mock'd repose;
Till to despair and anguish was consign'd
The wreck and ruin of a noble mind.

Now seized for debt, and lodged within a jail,
He tried his friendships, and he found them fail;
Then fail'd his spirits, and his thoughts were all
Fix'd on his sins, his sufferings, and his fall:
His ruffled mind was pictured in his face,
Once the fair seat of dignity and grace:
Great was the danger of a man so prone
To think of madness, and to think alone;
Yet pride still lived, and struggled to sustain
The drooping spirit and the roving brain;
But this too fail'd: a Friend his freedom gave,
And sent him help the threat'ning world to brave;
Gave solid counsel what to seek or flee,
But still would stranger to his person be:
In vain! the truth determined to explore,
He traced the Friend whom he had wrong'd before.

This was too much; both aided and advised
By one who shunn'd him, pitied, and despised:
He bore it not; 'twas a deciding stroke,
And on his reason like a torrent broke:
In dreadful stillness he appeared a while,
With vacant horror and a ghastly smile;
Then rose at once into the frantic rage,
That force controll'd not, nor could love assuage.

Friends now appeared, but in the Man was seen
The angry Maniac, with vindictive mien;
Too late their pity gave to care and skill
The hurried mind and ever-wandering will:
Unnoticed pass'd all time, and not a ray
Of reason broke on his benighted way;
But now he spurn'd the straw in pure disdain,
And now laugh'd loudly at the clinking chain.

Then, as its wrath subsided by degrees,
The mind sank slowly to infantine ease,
To playful folly, and to causeless joy,
Speech without aim, and without end, employ;
He drew fantastic figures on the wall,
And gave some wild relation of them all;
With brutal shape he join'd the human face,
And idiot smiles approved the motley race.

Harmless at length th' unhappy man was found,
The spirit settled, but the reason drown'd;
And all the dreadful tempest died away
To the dull stillness of the misty day.

And now his freedom he attain'd—if free
The lost to reason, truth, and hope, can be;
His friends, or wearied with the charge, or sure
The harmless wretch was now beyond a cure,
Gave him to wander where he pleased, and find
His own resources for the eager mind:
The playful children of the place he meets,
Playful with them he rambles through the streets;
In all they need, his stronger arm he lends,
And his lost mind to these approving friends.

That gentle Maid, whom once the Youth had loved,
Is now with mild religious pity moved;

Kindly she chides his boyish flights, while he
Will for a moment fix'd and pensive be;
And as she trembling speaks, his lively eyes
Explore her looks, he listens to her sighs;
Charm'd by her voice, th' harmonious sounds invade
His clouded mind, and for a time persuade:
Like a pleased infant, who has newly caught
From the maternal glance a gleam of thought,
He stands enrapt, the half-known voice to hear,
And starts, half conscious, at the falling tear.

Rarely from town, nor then unwatch'd, he goes,
In darker mood, as if to hide his woes;
Returning soon, he with impatience seeks
His youthful friends, and shouts, and sings, and speaks;
Speaks a wild speech with action all as wild—
The children's leader, and himself a child;
He spins their top, or, at their bidding, bends
His back, while o'er it leap his laughing friends;
Simple and weak, he acts the boy once more,
And heedless children call him *Silly Shore*.

x. PHOEBE DAWSON

TWO summers since, I saw at Lammas Fair,
The sweetest flower that ever blossom'd there,
When *Phoebe Dawson* gaily cross'd the Green,
In haste to see and happy to be seen;
Her airs, her manners, all who saw admired;
Courteous though coy, and gentle though retired;
The joy of youth and health her eyes displayed,
And ease of heart her every look convey'd;
A native skill her simple robes express'd,
As with untutor'd elegance she dress'd;
The lads around admired so fair a sight,

And Phoebe felt, and felt she gave, delight.
Admirers soon of every age she gain'd,
Her beauty won them and her worth retain'd;
Envy itself could no contempt display,
They wish'd her well, whom yet they wish'd away.
Correct in thought, she judg'd a servant's place
Preserved a rustic beauty from disgrace;
And yet on Sunday-eve, in freedom's hour,
With secret joy she felt that beauty's power,
When some proud bliss upon the heart would steal,
That, poor or rich, a beauty still must feel.

At length the youth ordain'd to move her breast,
Before the swains with bolder spirit press'd;
With looks less timid made his passion known,
And pleased by manners most unlike her own;
Loud though in love, and confident though young;
Fierce in his air, and voluble of tongue;
By trade a tailor, though, in scorn of trade,
He served the 'Squire, and brush'd the coat he made.
Yet now, would Phoebe her consent afford,
Her slave alone, again he'd mount the board;
With her should years of growing love be spent,
And growing wealth;—she sigh'd and look'd consent.

Now, through the lane, up hill, and 'cross the green,
(Seen by but few, and blushing to be seen—
Dejected, thoughtful, anxious, and afraid,)
Led by the lover, walk'd the silent maid;
Slow through the meadows roved they, many a mile,
Toy'd by each bank, and trifled at each stile;
Where, as he painted every blissful view,
And highly colour'd what he strongly drew,
The pensive damsel, prone to tender fears,
Dimm'd the false prospect with prophetic tears.—

Thus passed th' allotted hours, till, lingering late,
The lover loiter'd at the master's gate;
There he pronounced adieu! and yet would stay,
Till chidden—soothed—entreated—forced away;
He would of coldness, though indulged, complain,
And oft retire, and oft return again;
When, if his teasing vex'd her gentle mind,
The grief assumed, compelled her to be kind!
For he would proof of plighted kindness crave,
That she resented first, and then forgave;
And to his grief and penance yielded more
Than his presumption had required before.
 Ah! fly temptation, youth; refrain! refrain!
 Each yielding maid and each presuming swain!

Lo! now with red rent cloak and bonnet black,
And torn green gown loose hanging at her back,
One who an infant in her arms sustains,
And seems in patience striving with her pains;
Pinch'd are her looks, as one who pines for bread,
Whose cares are growing and whose hopes are fled;
Pale her parch'd lips, her heavy eyes sunk low,
And tears unnoticed from their channels flow;
Serene her manner, till some sudden pain
Frets the meek soul, and then she's calm again;—
Her broken pitcher to the pool she takes,
And every step with cautious terror makes;
For not alone that infant in her arms,
But nearer cause, her anxious soul alarms.
With water burthen'd, then she picks her way,
Slowly and cautious, in the clinging clay;
Till, in mid-green, she trusts a place unsound,
And deeply plunges in th' adhesive ground;
Thence, but with pain, her slender foot she takes,
While hope the mind as strength the frame forsakes:

For when so full the cup of sorrow grows,
Add but a drop, it instantly overflows.
And now her path, but not her peace, she gains,
Safe from her task, but shivering with her pains;
Her home she reaches, open leaves the door,
And placing first her infant on the floor,
She bares her bosom to the wind, and sits
And sobbing struggles with the rising fits:
In vain they come, she feels the inflating grief,
That shuts the swelling bosom from relief;
That speaks in feeble cries a soul distressed,
Or the sad laugh that cannot be repress'd.
The neighbour-matron leaves her wheel and flies
With all the aid her poverty supplies;
Unfee'd, the calls of Nature she obeys,
Not led by profit, not allur'd by praise;
And waiting long, till these contentions cease,
She speaks of comfort, and departs in peace.
Friend of distress! the mourner feels thy aid;
She cannot pay thee, but thou wilt be paid.

But who this child of weakness, want, and care?
'Tis *Phoebe Dawson*, pride of Lammas Fair;
Who took her lover for his sparkling eyes,
Expressions warm, and love-inspiring lies:
Compassion first assail'd her gentle heart,
For all his suffering, all his bosom's smart:
"And then his prayers! they would a savage move,
And win the coldest of the sex to love":—
But ah! too soon his looks success declared,
Too late her loss the marriage-rite repair'd;
The faithless flatterer then his vows forgot,
A captious tyrant or a noisy sot:
If present, railing, till he saw her pain'd;
If absent, spending what their labours gain'd;

Till that fair form in want and sickness pined,
And hope and comfort fled that gentle mind.
Then fly temptation, you h; resist, refrain!
Nor let me preach for ever and in vain!

XL THE WAGER

COUNTER and Clubb were men in trade, whose pains,
Credit, and prudence, brought them constant gains;
Partners and punctual, every friend agreed
Counter and Clubb were men who must succeed.
When they had fix'd some little time in life,
Each thought of taking to himself a wife:
As men in trade alike, as men in love,
They seem'd with no according views to move;
As certain ores in outward view the same,
They show'd their difference when the magnet came.
Counter was vain: with spirit strong and high,
'T was not in him like suppliant swain to sigh:
" His wife might o'er his men and maids preside,
And in her province be a judge and guide;
But what he thought, or did, or wish'd to do,
She must not know, or censure if she knew;
At home, abroad, by day, by night, if he
On aught determin'd, so it was to be:
How is a man ", he ask'd, " for business fit,
Who to a female can his will submit?
Absent a while, let no inquiring eye
Or plainer speech presume to question why:
But all be silent; and, when seen again,
Let all be cheerful—shall a wife complain?
Friends I invite, and who shall dare t' object,
Or look on them with coolness or neglect:
No! I must ever of my house be head,
And, thus obey'd, I condescend to wed."

Clubb heard the speech—"My friend is nice," said he;
"A wife with less respect will do for me:
How is he certain such a prize to gain?
What he approves, a lass may learn to feign,
And so affect t'obey till she begins to reign;
A while complying, she may vary then,
And be as wives of more unwary men;
Beside, to him who plays such lordly part,
How shall a tender creature yield her heart;
Should he the promised confidence refuse,
She may another more confiding choose;
May show her anger, yet her purpose hide,
And wake his jealousy, and wound his pride.
In one so humbled, who can trace the friend?
I on an equal, not a slave, depend;
If true, my confidence is wisely placed,
And being false, she only is disgraced."

Clubb, with these notions, cast his eye around,
And one so easy soon a partner found.
The lady chosen was of good repute;
Meekness she had not, and was seldom mute;
Though quick to anger, still she loved to smile,
And would be calm if men would wait a while:
She knew her duty, and she loved her way,
More pleased in truth to govern than obey;
She heard her priest with reverence, and her spouse
As one who felt the pressure of her vows;
Useful and civil, all her friends confessed—
Give her her way, and she would choose the best;
Though some indeed a sly remark would make—
Give it her not, and she would choose to take.

All this, when Clubb some cheerful months had spent,
He saw, confess'd, and said he was content.

Counter meantime selected, doubted, weigh'd,
And then brought home a young complying maid;
A tender creature, full of fears as charms,
A beauteous nursling from its mother's arms;
A soft, sweet blossom, such as men must love,
But to preserve must keep it in the stove:
She had a mild, subdued, expiring look—
Raise but the voice, and this fair creature shook;
Leave her alone, she felt a thousand fears—
Chide, and she melted into floods of tears;
Fondly she pleaded, and would gently sigh,
For very pity, or she knew not why;
One whom to govern none could be afraid—
Hold up the finger, this meek thing obey'd;
Her happy husband had the easiest task—
Say but his will, no question would she ask;
She sought no reasons, no affairs she knew,
Of business spoke not, and had nought to do.

Oft he exclaim'd, " How meek! how mild! how kind!
With her^t were cruel but to seem unkind:
Though ever silent when I take my leave,
It pains my heart to think how hers will grieve;
T is heaven on earth with such a wife to dwell,
I am in raptures to have sped so well;
But let me not, my friend, your envy raise,
No! on my life, your patience has my praise."

His friend, though silent, felt the scorn implied—
"What need of patience?" to himself he cried:
" Better a woman o'er her house to rule,
Than a poor child just hurried from her school;
Who has no care, yet never lives at ease;
Unfit to rule, and indisposed to please.
What if he govern, there his boast should end;
No husband's power can make a slave his friend."

It was the custom of these friends to meet
With a few neighbours in a neighbouring street;
Where Counter ofttimes would occasion seize
To move his silent friend by words like these:
"A man," said he, "if govern'd by his wife,
Gives up his rank and dignity in life;
Now, better fate befalls my friend and me."
He spoke, and look'd th' approving smile to see.

The quiet partner, when he chose to speak,
Desired his friend "another theme to seek;
When thus they met, he judged that state-affairs
And such important subjects should be theirs":
But still the partner, in his lighter vein,
Would cause in Clubb affliction or disdain;
It made him anxious to detect the cause
Of all that boasting:—"Wants my friend applause?
This plainly proves him not at perfect ease,
For, felt he pleasure, he would wish to please.
These triumphs here for some regrets atone—
Men who are bless'd let other men alone."
Thus made suspicious, he observed and saw
His friend each night at early hour withdraw;
He sometimes mention'd Juliet's tender nerves,
And what attention such a wife deserves:
"In this", thought Clubb, "full sure some mystery lies—
He laughs at me, yet he with much complies,
And all his vaunts of bliss are proud apologies".

With such ideas treasured in his breast,
He grew composed, and let his anger rest;
Till Counter once (when wine so long went round,
That friendship and discretion both were drown'd)
Began, in teasing 2nd triumphant mood,
His evening banter:—"Of all earthly good,

The best", he said, " was an obedient spouse,
Such as my friend's—that every one allows:
What if she wishes his designs to know?
It is because she would her praise bestow;
What if she wills that he remain at home?
She knows that mischief may from travel come.
I, who am free to venture where I please,
Have no such kind preventing checks as these;
But mine is double duty, first to guide
Myself aright, then rule a house beside;
While this our friend, more happy than the free,
Resigns all power, and laughs at liberty."

" By Heaven!" said Clubb—" excuse me if I swear—
I'll bet a hundred guineas, if he dare,
That uncontroll'd I will such freedoms take
That he will fear to equal—there's my stake."

"A match!" said Counter, much by wine inflam'd;
"But we are friends—let smaller stake be named:
Wine for our future meeting, that will I
Take and no more—what peril shall we try?"
"Let's to Newmarket," Clubb replied; "or choose
Yourself the place, and what you like to lose;
And he who first returns, or fears to go,
Forfeits his cash."—Said Counter, "Be it so".

The friends around them saw with much delight
The social war, and hail'd the pleasant night;
Nor would they further hear the cause discuss'd,
Afraid the recreant heart of Clubb to trust.

Now sober thoughts returned as each withdrew,
And of the subject took a serious view;
"T was wrong," thought Counter, "and will grieve my
love";

"T was wrong," thought Clubb, "my wife will not approve:

But friends were present; I must try the thing,
Or with my folly half the town will ring."

He sought his lady—"Madame, I'm to blame,
But was reproach'd, and could not bear the shame;
Here in my folly—for 't is best to say
The very truth—I've sworn to have my way;
To that Newmarket—(though I hate the place,
And have no taste or talents for a race,
Yet so it is—well, now prepare to chide)—
I laid a wager that I dared to ride;
And I must go: by Heaven, if you resist
I shall be scorn'd, and ridiculed, and hiss'd;
Let me with grace before my friends appear,
You know the truth, and must not be severe:
He too must go, but that he will of course:
Do you consent?—I never think of force."

"You never need," the worthy dame replied;
"The husband's honour is the woman's pride:
If I in trifles be the wilful wife,
Still for your credit I would lose my life.
Go! and when fix'd the day of your return,
Stay longer yet, and let the blockheads learn
That though a wife may sometimes wish to rule,
She would not make th' indulgent man a fool;
I would at times advise—but idle they
Who think th' assenting husband *must* obey."

The happy man, who thought his lady right
In other cases, was assured to-night;
Then for the day with proud delight prepared,
To show his doubting friends how much he dared.

Counter—who grieving sought his bed, his rest
Broken by pictures of his love distress'd—
With soft and winning speech the fair prepared:
" She all his counsels, comforts, pleasures shared:
She was assured he loved her from his soul,
She never knew and need not fear control;
But so it happened—he was grieved at heart,
It happened so, that they awhile must part—
A little time—the distance was but short,
And business call'd him—he despised the sport;
But to Newmarket he engaged to ride
With his friend Clubb": and there he stopp'd and sigh'd.

Awhile the tender creature look'd dismay'd,
Then floods of tears the call of grief obey'd:—

" She an objection! No!" she sobb'd, " not one;
Her work was finish'd, and her race was run;
For die she must, indeed she would not live
A week alone, for all the world could give;
He too must die in that same wicked place;
It always happened—was a common case;
Among those horrid horses, jockeys, crowds,
Twas certain death—they might bespeak their shrouds;
He would attempt a race, be sure to fall—
And she expire with terror—that was all:
With love like hers she was indeed unfit
To bear such horrors, but she must submit."

" But for three days, my love! three days at most."
" Enough for me; I then shall be a ghost."
" My honour's pledged!"—" Oh! yes, my dearest life,
I know your honour must outweigh your wife;
But ere this absence have you sought a friend?
I shall be dead—on whom can you depend?
Let me one favour of your kindness crave,
Grant me the stone I mentioned for my grave."

"Nay, love, attend—why, bless my soul—I say
I will return—there—weep no longer—nay!"

"Well! I obey, and to the last am true,
But spirits fail me; I must die; adieu!"

"What, Madam! must?—'tis wrong—I'm angry—
 zounds!

Can I remain and lose a thousand pounds?"

"Go then, my love! it is a monstrous sum,
Worth twenty wives—go, love! and I am dumb;
Nor be displeased—had I the power to live,
You might be angry, now you must forgive:
Alas! I faint—ah! cruel—there's no need
Of wounds or fevers—this has done the deed."

The lady fainted, and the husband sent
For every aid, for every comfort went;
Strong terror seized him: "Oh! she loved so well,
And who th' effect of tenderness could tell?"

She now recovered, and again began
With accent querulous—"Ah! cruel man!"
Till the sad husband, conscience-struck, confess'd,
'T was very wicked with his friend to jest;
For now he saw that those who were obey'd,
Could like the most subservient feel afraid:
And though a wife might not dispute the will
Of her liege lord, she could prevent it still.

The morning came, and Clubb prepared to ride
With a smart boy, his servant, and his guide;
When, ere he mounted on his ready steed,
Arrived a letter, and he stopp'd to read.

"My friend," he read, "our journey I decline,
A heart too tender for such strife is mine;

Yours is the triumph, be you so inclined;
But you are too considerate and kind:
In tender pity to my Juliet's fears
I thus relent, overcome by love and tears;
She knows your kindness; I have heard her say,
A man like you 't is pleasure to obey:
Each faithful wife, like ours, must disapprove
Such dangerous trifling with connubial love;
What has the idle world, my friend, to do
With our affairs? they envy me and you:
What if I could my gentle spouse command—
Is that a cause I should her tears withstand?
And what if you, a friend of peace, submit
To one you love—is that a theme for wit?
'T was wrong, and I shall henceforth judge it weak
Both of submission and control to speak:
Be it agreed that all contention cease,
And no such follies vex our future peace;
Let each keep guard against domestic strife,
And find nor slave nor tyrant in his wife."

"Agreed," said Clubb, "with all my soul agreed";—
And to the boy, delighted, gave his steed.
"I think my friend has well his mind express'd,
And I assent; such things are not a jest."
"True," said the wife, "no longer he can hide
The truth that pains him by his wounded pride:
Your friend has found it not an easy thing,
Beneath his yoke this yielding soul to bring:
These weeping willows, though they seem inclined
By every breeze, yet not the strongest wind
Can from their bent divert this weak but stubborn kind;
Drooping they seek your pity to excite,
But 'tis at once their nature and delight;
Such women feel not; while they sigh and weep,

'Tis but their habit—their affections sleep;
They are like ice that in the hand we hold,
So very melting, yet so very cold;
On such affection let not man rely,
The husbands suffer, and the ladies sigh:
But your friend's offer let us kindly take,
And spare his pride for his vexation's sake;
For he has found, and through his life will find,
'T is easiest dealing with the firmest mind—
More just when it resists, and, when it yields, more
kind"

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

(1770-1850)

xii. MARGARET

IT was a plot
Of garden-ground run wild, its matted weeds
Marked with the steps of those, whom, as they passed,
The gooseberry trees that shot in long lank slips,
Or currants, hanging from their leafless stems
In scanty strings, had tempted to o'erleap
The broken wall. I looked around, and there,
Where two tall hedgerows of thick alder boughs
Joined in a cold damp nook, espied a well
Shrouded with willow-flowers and plummy fern.
My thirst I slaked, and from the cheerless spot
Withdrawing, straightway to the shade returned
Where sate the old man on the cottage bench;
And while, beside him, with uncovered head,
I yet was standing, freely to respire,
And cool my temples in the fanning air,
Thus did he speak—"I see around me here

Things which you cannot see: we die, my friend,
Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
And prized in his peculiar nook of earth
Dies with him, or is changed; and very soon
Even of the good is no memorial left.
The poets, in their elegies and songs
Lamenting the departed, call the groves,
They call upon the hills and streams to mourn,
And senseless rocks; nor idly; for they speak,
In these their invocations, with a voice
Obedient to the strong creative power
Of human passion. Sympathies there are
More tranquil, yet perhaps of kindred birth,
That steal upon the meditative mind,
And grow with thought. Beside yon spring I stood,
And eyed its waters till we seemed to feel
One sadness, they and I. For them a bond
Of brotherhood is broken: time has been
When, every day, the touch of human hand
Dislodged the natural sleep that binds them up
In mortal stillness; and they ministered
To human comfort. Stooping down to drink,
Upon the slimy foot-stone I espied
The useless fragment of a wooden bowl,
Green with the moss of years, and subject only
To the soft handling of the elements:
There let the relic lie—fond thought—vain words
Forgive them—never did my steps approach
This humble door but she who dwelt therein
A daughter's welcome gave me, and I loved her
As my own child. Oh, sir! the good die first,
And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust
Burn to the socket. Many a passenger
Hath blessed poor Margaret for her gentle looks,
When she upheld the cool refreshment drawn

From that forsaken spring; and no one came
But he was welcome; no one went away
But that it seemed she loved him. She is dead,
The light extinguished of her lonely hut,
The hut itself abandoned to decay,
And she forgotten in the quiet grave!

"I speak", continued he, "of one whose stock
Of virtues bloomed beneath this lowly roof.
She was a woman of a steady mind,
Tender and deep in her excess of love,
Not speaking much, pleased rather with the joy
Of her own thoughts: by some especial care
Her temper had been framed, as if to make
A being—who by adding love to peace
Might live on earth a life of happiness.
Her wedded partner lacked not on his side
The humble worth that satisfied her heart:
Frugal, affectionate, sober, and withal
Keenly industrious. She with pride would tell
That he was often seated at his loom,
In summer, ere the mower was abroad
Among the dewy grass,—in early spring,
Ere the last star had vanished.—They who passed
At evening, from behind the garden fence
Might hear his busy spade, which he would ply,
After his daily work, until the light
Had failed, and every leaf and flower were lost
In the dark hedges. So their days were spent
In peace and comfort; and a pretty boy
Was their best hope,—next to the God in heaven.

"Not twenty years ago, but you I think
Can scarcely bear it now in mind, there came
Two blighting seasons, when the fields were left
With half a harvest. It pleased Heaven to add

A worse affliction in the plague of war;
This happy land was stricken to the heart!
A wanderer then among the cottages
I, with my freight of winter raiment, saw
The hardships of that season; many rich
Sank down, as in a dream, among the poor;
And of the poor did many cease to be,
And their place knew them not. Meanwhile, abridged
Of daily comforts, gladly reconciled
To numerous self-denials, Margaret
Went struggling on through those calamitous years
With cheerful hope, until the second autumn,
When her life's helpmate on a sick-bed lay,
Smitten with perilous fever. In disease
He lingered long; and when his strength returned,
He found the little he had stored, to meet
The hour of accident or crippling age,
Was all consumed. A second infant now
Was added to the troubles of a time
Laden, for them and all of their degree,
With care and sorrow; shoals of artisans
From ill-requited labour turned adrift
Sought daily bread from public charity,
They, and their wives and children—happier far
Could they have lived as do the little birds
That peck along the hedgerows, or the kite
That makes her dwelling on the mountain rocks.

" A sad reverse it was for him who long
Had filled with plenty, and possessed in peace,
This lonely cottage. At his door he stood,
And whistled many a snatch of merry tunes
That had no mirth in them; or with his knife
Carved uncouth figures on the heads of sticks—
Then, not less idly, sought, through every nook

In house or garden, any casual work
Of use or ornament; and with a strange,
Amusing, yet uneasy novelty,
He blended, where he might, the various tasks
Of summer, autumn, winter, and of spring.
But this endured not; his good humour soon
Became a weight in which no pleasure was;
And poverty brought on a petted mood
And a sore temper: day by day he drooped,
And he would leave his work—and to the town,
Without an errand, would direct his steps,
Or wander here and there among the fields.
One while he would speak lightly of his babes,
And with a cruel tongue: at other times
He tossed them with a false unnatural joy,
And 't was a rueful thing to see the looks
Of the poor innocent children. 'Every smile',
Said Margaret to me, here beneath these trees,
'Made my heart bleed.'"

At this the Wanderer paused:
And, looking up to those enormous elms,
He said: "'T is now the hour of deepest noon.
At this still season of repose and peace,
This hour, when all things which are not at rest
Are cheerful; while this multitude of flies
Is filling all the air with melody;
Why should a tear be in an old man's eye?
Why should we thus, with an untoward mind,
And in the weakness of humanity,
From natural wisdom turn our hearts away,
To natural comfort shut our eyes and ears,
And, feeding on disquiet, thus disturb
The calm of nature with our restless thoughts?"
He spake with somewhat of a solemn tone:

But, when he ended, there was in his face
Such easy cheerfulness, a look so mild,
That for a little time it stole away
All recollection, and that simple tale
Passed from my mind like a forgotten sound.
A while on trivial things we held discourse,
To me soon tasteless. In my own despite,
I thought of that poor woman as of one
Whom I had known and loved. He had rehearsed
Her homely tale with such familiar power,
With such an active countenance, an eye
So busy, that the things of which he spake
Seemed present; and, attention now relaxed,
A heart-felt dullness crept along my veins.
I rose; and, having left the breezy shade,
Stood drinking comfort from the warmer sun,
That had not cheered me long—ere, looking round
Upon that tranquil ruin, I returned,
And begged of the old man that, for my sake,
He would resume his story.

He replied,
"It were a wantonness, and would demand
Severe reproof, if we were men whose hearts
Could hold vain dalliance with the misery
Even of the dead; contented thence to draw
A momentary pleasure, never marked
By reason, barren of all future good.
But we have known that there is often found
In mournful thoughts, and always might be found,
A power to virtue friendly; were't not so,
I am a dreamer among men, indeed
An idle dreamer! 'T is a common tale,
An ordinary sorrow of man's life,
A tale of silent suffering, hardly clothed

In bodily form.—But, without further bidding,
I will proceed.

"While thus it fared with them,
To whom this cottage, till those hapless years,
Had been a blessed home, it was my chance
To travel in a country far remote;
And when these lofty elms once more appeared,
What pleasant expectations lured me on
O'er the flat common!—With quick step I reached
The threshold, lifted with light hand the latch;
But, when I entered, Margaret looked at me
A little while; then turned her head away
Speechless,—and, sitting down upon a chair,
Wept bitterly. I wist not what to do,
Or how to speak to her. Poor wretch! at last
She rose from off her seat, and then,—O sir!
I cannot *tell* how she pronounced my name,—
With fervent love, and with a face of grief
Unutterably helpless, and a look
That seemed to cling upon me, she inquired
If I had seen her husband. As she spake
A strange surprise and fear came to my heart,
Nor had I power to answer ere she told
That he had disappeared—not two months gone.
He left his house: two wretched days had passed,
And on the third, as wistfully she raised
Her head from off her pillow, to look forth,
Like one in trouble, for returning light,
Within her chamber-casement she espied
A folded paper, lying as if placed
To meet her waking eyes. This tremblingly
She opened—found no writing, but beheld
Pieces of money carefully enclosed,
Silver and gold.—' I shuddered at the sight',

Said Margaret, ' for I knew it was his hand
Which placed it there: and ere that day was ended,
That long and anxious day! I learned from one
Sent hither by my husband to impart
The heavy news, that he had joined a troop
Of soldiers going to a distant land.
He left me thus—he could not gather heart
To take a farewell of me; for he feared
That I should follow with my babes, and sink
Beneath the misery of that wandering life.'

"This tale did Margaret tell with many tears;
And, when she ended, I had little power
To give her comfort, and was glad to take
Such words of hope from her own mouth as served
To cheer us both:—but long we had not talked
Ere we built up a pile of better thoughts,
And with a brighter eye she looked around
As if she had been shedding tears of joy.
We parted.—Twas the time of early spring;
I left her busy with her garden tools;
And well remember, o'er that fence she looked,
And, while I paced along the footway path,
Called out, and sent a blessing after me,
With tender cheerfulness; and with a voice
That seemed the very sound of happy thoughts.

" I roved o'er many a hill and many a dale,
With my accustomed load; in heat and cold,
Through many a wood, and many an open ground,
In sunshine and in shade, in wet and fair.
Drooping or blithe of heart, as might befall;
My best companions now the driving winds,
And now the ' trotting brooks' and whispering trees,
And now the music of my own sad steps,
With many a short-lived thought that passed between,

And disappeared.—I journeyed back this way,
When, in the warmth of midsummer, the wheat
Was yellow; and the soft and bladed grass,
Springing afresh, had o'er the hay-field spread
Its tender verdure. At the door arrived,
I found that she was absent In the shade
Where now we sit, I waited her return.
Her cottage, then a cheerful object, wore
Its customary look,—only, it seemed,
The honeysuckle, crowding round the porch,
Hung down in heavier tufts: and that bright weed,
The yellow stonecrop, suffered to take root
Along the window's edge, profusely grew,
Blinding the lower panes. I turned aside,
And strolled into her garden. It appeared
To lag behind the season, and had lost
Its pride of neatness. Daisy-flowers and thrift
Had broken their trim lines, and straggled o'er
The paths they used to deck:—carnations, once
Prized for surpassing beauty, and no less
For the peculiar pains they had required,
Declined their languid heads, without support.
The cumbrous bind-weed, with its wreaths and bells,
Had twined about her two small rows of pease,
And dragged them to the earth.—Ere this an hour
Had wasted.—Back I turned my restless steps;
A stranger passed; and guessing whom I sought,
He said that she was used to ramble far.
The sun was sinking in the west; and now
I sate with sad impatience. From within
Her solitary infant cried aloud;
Then, like a blast that dies away self-willed,
The voice was silent. From the bench I rose;
But neither could divert nor soothe my thoughts.
The spot, though fair, was very desolate—

The longer I remained more desolate:—
And, looking round me, now I first observed
The corner stones, on either side the porch,
With dull red stains discoloured, and stuck o'er
With tufts and hairs of wool, as if the sheep,
That fed upon the common, thither came
Familiarly; and found a couching-place
Even at her threshold. Deeper shadows fell
From these tall elms;—the cottage-clock struck eight;—
I turned, and saw her distant a few steps.
Her face was pale and thin, her figure too
Was changed. As she unlocked the door, she said,
'It grieves me you have waited here so long,
But, in good truth, I've wandered much of late
And, sometimes—to my shame I speak—have need
Of my best prayers to bring me back again.'
While on the board she spread our evening meal,
She told me—interrupting not the work
Which gave employment to her listless hands—
That she had parted with her elder child;
To a kind master on a distant farm
Now happily apprenticed,—'I perceive
You look at me, and you have cause; to-day
I have been travelling far; and many days
About the fields I wander, knowing this
Only, that what I seek I cannot find;
And so I waste my time: for I am changed;
And to myself, said she, 'have done much wrong
And to his helpless infant. I have slept
Weeping, and weeping have I waked; my tears
Have flowed as if my body were not such
As others are; and I could never die.
But I am now in mind and in my heart
More easy; and I hope', said she, 'that Heaven
Will give me patience to endure the things

Which I behold at home.' It would have grieved
Your very soul to see her; sir, I feel
The story linger in my heart; I fear
Tis long and tedious; but my spirit clings
To that poor woman:—so familiarly
Do I perceive her manner, and her look,
And presence, and so deeply do I feel
Her goodness, that, not seldom, in my walks
A momentary trance comes over me;
And to myself I seem to muse on one
By sorrow laid asleep;—or borne away,
A human being destined to awake
To human life, or something very near
To human life, when he shall come again
For whom she suffered. Yes, it would have grieved
Your very soul to see her: evermore
Her eyelids drooped, her eyes were downward cast;
And, when she at her table gave me food,
She did not look at me. Her voice was low,
Her body was subdued. In every act
Pertaining to her house affairs, appeared
The careless stillness of a thinking mind
Self-occupied: to which all outward things
Are like an idle matter. Still she sighed,
And yet no motion of the breast was seen,
No heaving of the heart. While by the fire
We sate together, sighs came on my ear,
I knew not how, and hardly whence they came.

" Ere my departure, to her care I gave,
For her son's use, some tokens of regard,
Which with a look of welcome she received;
And I exhorted her to place her trust
In God's good love, and seek his help by prayer.
I took my staff, and when I kissed her babe

The tears stood in her eyes. I left her then
With the best hope and comfort I could give;
She thanked me for my wish;—but for my hope
Methought she did not thank me.

" I returned,

And took my rounds along this road again
Ere on its sunny bank the primrose flower
Peeped forth, to give an earnest of the spring.
I found her sad and drooping; she had learned
No tidings of her husband; if he lived,
She knew not that he lived; if he were dead,
She knew not he was dead. She seemed the same
In person and appearance; but her house
Bespoke a sleepy hand of negligence;
The floor was neither dry nor neat, the hearth
Was comfortless, and her small lot of books,
Which, in the cottage window, heretofore
Had been piled up against the corner panes
In seemly order, now, with straggling leaves
Lay scattered here and there, open or shut,
As they had chanced to fall. Her infant babe
Had from its mother caught the trick of grief,
And sighed among its playthings. Once again
I turned towards the garden gate, and saw,
More plainly still, that poverty and grief
Were now come nearer to her: weeds defaced
The hardened soil, and knots of withered grass:
No ridges there appeared of clear black mould,
No winter greenness; of her herbs and flowers,
It seemed the better part were gnawed away
Or trampled into earth; a chain of straw,
Which had been twined about the slender stem
Of a young apple-tree, lay at its root,
The bark was nibbled round by truant sheep.

Margaret stood near, her infant in her arms,
And, noting that my eye was on the tree,
She said, ' I fear it will be dead and gone
Ere Robert come again \ Towards the house
Together we returned; and she inquired
If I had any hope:—but for her babe
And for, her little: orphan boy, she said,
She had no wish to live, that she must die
Of sorrow. Yet I saw the idle loom
Still in its place; his Sunday garments hung
Upon the self-same nail; his very staff
Stood undisturbed behind the door. And when,
In bleak December, I retraced this way,
She told me that her little babe was dead,
And she was left alone. She now, released
From her maternal cares, had taken up
The employment common through these wilds, and
gained

By spinning hemp a pittance for herself,
And for this end had hired a neighbour's boy
To give her needful help. That very time
Most willingly she put her work aside,
And walked with me along the miry road,
Heedless how far; and in such piteous sort
That any heart had ached to hear her; begged
That, wheresoever I went, I still would ask
For him whom she had lost. We parted then—
Our final parting; for from that time forth
Did many seasons pass ere I returned
Into this tract again.

" Nine tedious years;
From their first separation, nine long years,
She lingered in unquiet widowhood;
A wife and widow. Needs must it have been

A sore heart-wasting. I have heard, my friend,
That in yon arbour oftentimes she sate
Alone, through half the vacant Sabbath-day;
And, if a dog passed by, she still would quit
The shade, and look abroad. On this old bench
For hours she sate; and evermore her eye
Was busy in the distance, shaping things
That made her heart beat quick. You see that path,
Now faint,—the grass has crept o'er its gray line;
There, to and fro, she paced through many a day
Of the warm summer, from a belt of hemp
That girt her waist, spinning the long-drawn thread
With backward steps. Yet ever as there passed
A man whose garments showed the soldier's red,
Or crippled mendicant in sailor's garb,
The little child who sate to turn the wheel
Ceased from his task; and she with faltering voice
Made many a fond inquiry; and when they,
Whose presence gave no comfort, were gone by,
Her heart was still more sad. And by yon gate,
That bars the traveller's road, she often stood,
And when a stranger horseman came, the latch
Would lift, and in his face look wistfully:
Most happy, if, from aught discovered there
Of tender feeling, she might dare repeat
The same sad question. Meanwhile her poor hut
Sank to decay: for he was gone whose hand,
At the first nipping of October frost,
Closed up each chink, and with fresh bands of straw
Chequered the green-grown thatch. And so she lived
Through the long winter, reckless and alone;
Until her house by frost, and thaw, and rain,
Was sapped; and while she slept, the nightly damps
Did chill her breast; and in the stormy day
Her tattered clothes were ruffled by the wind;

Even at the side of her own fire. Yet still
She loved this wretched spot, nor would for worlds
Have parted hence; and still that length of road,
And this rude bench, one torturing hope endeared,
Fast rooted at her heart; and here, my friend,
In sickness she remained; and here she died,
Last human tenant of these ruined walls."

The old man ceased: he saw that I was moved;
From that low bench, rising instinctively
I turned aside in weakness, nor had power
To thank him for the tale which he had told.
I stood, and leaning o'er the garden wall,
Reviewed that woman's sufferings; and it seemed
To comfort me while with a brother's love
I blessed her—in the impotence of grief.
At length towards the cottage I returned
Fondly,—and traced, with interest more mild,
That secret spirit of humanity
Which, 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies
Of nature, 'mid her plants, and weeds, and flowers,
And silent overgrowings, still survived.
The old man, noting this, resumed, and said,
"My friend! enough to sorrow you have given,
The purposes of wisdom ask no more;
Be wise and cheerful; and no longer read
The forms of things with an unworthy eye.
She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.
I well remember that those very plumes,
Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,
By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,
As once I passed, did to my heart convey
So still an image of tranquillity,
So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,

That what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
The passing shows of being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream that could not live
Where meditation was. I turned away,
And walked along my road in happiness."

He ceased, Ere long the sun declining shot
A slant and mellow radiance, which began
To fall upon us, while, beneath the trees,
We sate on that low bench: and now we felt,
Admonished thus, the sweet hour coming on.
A linnet warbled from those lofty elms,
A thrush sang loud, and other melodies,
At distance heard, peopled the milder air.
The old man rose, and, with a sprightly mien
Of hopeful preparation, grasped his staff:
Together casting then a farewell look
Upon those silent walls, we left the shade;
And, ere the stars were visible, had reached
A village inn,—our evening resting-place.

XIII MICHAEL: A PASTORAL POEM

IF from the public way you turn your steps
Up the tumultuous brook of Green-head Ghyll,
You will suppose that with an upright path
Your feet must struggle; in such bold ascent
The pastoral mountains front you, face to face.
But, courage! for around that boisterous brook
The mountains have all opened out themselves,
And made a hidden valley of their own.
No habitation can be seen: but they
Who journey thither find themselves alone
With a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites

That overhead are sailing in the sky.
It is in truth an utter solitude;
Nor should I have made mention of this dell
But for one object which you might pass by,
Might see and notice not. Beside the brook
Appears a straggling heap of unhewn stones!
And to that place a story appertains,
Which, though it be ungarnished with events,
Is not unfit, I deem, for the fireside,
Or for the summer shade. It was the first
Of those domestic tales that spake to me
Of shepherds, dwellers in the valleys, men
Whom I already loved; not verily
For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
Where was their occupation and abode.
And hence this tale, while I was yet a boy
Careless of books, yet having felt the power
Of nature, by the gentle agency
Of natural objects led me on to feel
For passions that were not my own, and think
(At random and imperfectly indeed)
On man, the heart of man, and human life.
Therefore, although it be a history
Homely and rude, I will relate the same
For the delight of a few natural hearts;
And, with yet fonder feeling, for the sake
Of youthful poets, who among these hills
Will be my second self when I am gone.

Upon the forest-side in Grasmere Vale
There dwelt a shepherd, Michael was his name;
An old man, stout of heart, and strong of limb,
His bodily frame had been from youth to age
Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen,
Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs,

And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt
And watchful more than ordinary men.
Hence had he learned the meaning of all winds,
Of blasts of every tone; and, oftentimes,
When others heeded not, he heard the south
Make subterraneous music, like the noise
Of bagpipers on distant Highland hills.
The shepherd, at such warning, of his flock
Bethought him, and he to himself would say,
"The winds are now devising work for me!"
And, truly, at all times, the storm—that drives
The traveller to a shelter—summoned him
Up to the mountains: he had been alone
Amid the heart of many thousand mists,
That came to him and left him on the heights.
So lived he till his eightieth year was past.
And grossly that man errs, who should suppose
That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks,
Were things indifferent to the shepherd's thoughts.
Fields, where with cheerful spirits he had breathed
The common air; the hills, which he so oft
Had climbed with vigorous steps; which had im-
pressed
So many incidents upon his mind
Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear;
Which like a book preserved the memory
Of the dumb animals, whom he had saved,
Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts,
So grateful in themselves, the certainty
Of honourable gain; these fields, these hills,
Which were his living being, even more
Than his own blood—what could they less? had laid
Strong hold on his affections, were to him
A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
The pleasure which there is in life itself.

His days had not been passed in singleness.
His helpmate was a comely matron, old—
Though younger than himself full twenty years.
She was a woman of a stirring life,
Whose heart was in her house: two wheels she had
Of antique form, this large for spinning wool,
That small for flax; and if one wheel had rest
It was because the other was at work.
The pair had but one inmate in their house,
An only child, who had been born to them
When Michael, telling o'er his years, began
To deem that he was old,—in shepherd's phrase,
With one foot in the grave. This only son,
With two brave sheep-dogs tried in many a storm,
The one of an inestimable worth,
Made all their household. I may truly say,
That they were as a proverb in the vale
For endless industry. When day was gone,
And from their occupations out of doors
The son and father were come home, even then,
Their labour did not cease; unless when all
Turned to their cleanly supper-board, and there,
Each with a mess of pottage and skimmed milk
Sat round their basket piled with oaten cakes,
And their plain home-made cheese. Yet when their meal
Was ended, Luke (for so the son was named)
And his old father both betook themselves
To such convenient work as might employ
Their hands by the fireside; perhaps to card
Wool for the housewife's spindle, or repair
Some injury done to sickle, flail, or scythe,
Or other implement of house or field.

Down from the ceiling by the chimney's edge
That in our ancient uncouth country style

Did with a huge projection overbrow
Large space beneath, as duly as the light
Of day grew dim the housewife hung a lamp:
An aged utensil, which had performed
Service beyond all others of its kind.
Early at evening did it burn and late,
Surviving comrade of uncounted hours,
Which going by from year to year had found
And left the couple neither gay perhaps
Nor cheerful, yet with objects and with hopes,
Living a life of eager industry.
And now, when Luke had reached his eighteenth year,
There by the light of this old lamp they sat,
Father and son, while late into the night
The housewife plied her own peculiar work,
Making the cottage through the silent hours
Murmur as with the sound of summer flies.
This light was famous in its neighbourhood,
And was a public symbol of the life
The thrifty pair had lived. For, as it chanced,
Their cottage on a plot of rising ground
Stood single, with large prospect, north and south,
High into Easedale, up to Dunmail-Raise,
And westward to the village near the lake;
And from this constant light, so regular
And so far seen, the house itself, by all
Who dwelt within the limits of the vale,
Both old and young, was named THE EVENING STAR.

Thus living on through such a length of years,
The shepherd, if he loved himself, must needs
Have loved his helpmate; but to Michael's heart
This son of his old age was yet more dear—
Less from instinctive tenderness, the same
Blind spirit, which is in the blood of all—

Than that a child, more than all other gifts,
Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts,
And stirrings of inquietude, when they
By tendency of nature needs must fail.
Exceeding was the love he bare to him,
His heart and his heart's joy! For oftentimes
Old Michael, while he was a babe in arms,
Had done him female service, not alone
For pastime and delight, as is the use
Of fathers, but with patient mind enforced
To acts of tenderness; and he had rocked
His cradle with a woman's gentle hand.

And, in a later time, ere yet the boy
Had put on boy's attire, did Michael's love,
Albeit of a stern unbending mind,
To have the young one in his sight, when he
Had work by his own door, or when he sat
With sheep before him on his shepherd's stool,
Beneath that large old oak, which near their door
Stood,—and, from its enormous breadth of shade,
Chosen for the shearer's covert from the sun,
Thence in our rustic dialect was called
The CLIPPING TREE, a name which yet it bears.
There, while they two were sitting in the shade
With others round them, earnest all and blithe,
Would Michael exercise his heart with looks
Of fond correction and reproof bestowed
Upon the child, if he disturbed the sheep
By catching at their legs, or with his shouts
Scared them, while they lay still beneath the shears.

And when by Heaven's good grace the boy grew up
A healthy lad, and carried in his cheek
Two steady roses that were five years old,
Then Michael from a winter coppice cut

With his own hand a sapling, which he hooped
With iron, making it throughout, in all
Due requisites a perfect shepherd's staff,
And gave it to the boy; wherewith equipt
He as a watchman oftentimes was placed
At gate or gap, to stem or turn the flock;
And, to his office prematurely called,
There stood the urchin, as you will divine,
Something between a hindrance and a help;
And for this course not always, I believe,
Receiving from his father hire of praise;
Though nought was left undone which staff or voice,
Or looks, or threatening gestures could perform.

But soon as Luke, full ten years old, could stand
Against the mountain blasts; and to the heights,
Not fearing toil, nor length of weary ways,
He with his father daily went, and they
Were as companions, why should I relate
That objects which the shepherd loved before
Were dearer now? that from the boy there came
Feelings and emanations—things which were
Light to the sun and music to the wind;
And that the old man's heart seemed born again.
Thus in his father's sight the boy grew up;
And now when he had reached his eighteenth year,
He was his comfort and his daily hope.

While in this sort the simple household lived
From day to day, to Michael's ear there came
Distressful tidings. Long before the time
Of which I speak, the shepherd had been bound
In surety for his brother's son, a man
Of an industrious life, and ample means—
But unforeseen misfortunes suddenly
Had prest upon him,—and old Michael now

Was summoned to discharge the forfeiture,
A grievous penalty, but little less
Than half his substance. This unlooked-for claim
At the first hearing, for a moment took
More hope out of his life than he supposed
That any old man ever could have lost.
As soon as he had gathered so much strength
That he could look his trouble in the face,
It seemed that his sole refuge was to sell
A portion of his patrimonial fields.
Such was his first resolve; he thought again,
And his heart failed him. "Isabel," said he,
Two evenings after he had heard the news,
"I have been toiling more than seventy years,
And in the open sunshine of God's love
Have we all lived; yet if these fields of ours
Should pass into a stranger's hand, I think
That I could not lie quiet in my grave.
Our lot is a hard lot; the sun himself
Has scarcely been more diligent than I;
And I have lived to be a fool at last
To my own family. An evil man
That was, and made an evil choice, if he
Were false to us; and if he were not false,
There are ten thousand to whom loss like this
Had been no sorrow. I forgive him—but
'T were better to be dumb than to talk thus.
When I began, my purpose was to speak
Of remedies and of a cheerful hope.
Our Luke shall leave us, Isabel; the land
Shall not go from us, and it shall be free;
He shall possess it free as is the wind
That passes over it. We have, thou knowest,
Another kinsman—he will be our friend
In this distress. He is a prosperous man,

Thriving in trade—and Luke to him shall go,
And with his kinsman's help and his own thrift
He quickly will repair this loss, and then
May come again to us. If here he stay,
What can be done? Where every one is poor,
What can be gained?" At this the old man paused,
And Isabel sat silent, for her mind
Was busy, looking back into past times.
There's Richard Bateman, thought she to herself,,
He was a parish-boy—at the church-door
They made a gathering for him, shillings, pence,
And halfpennies, wherewith the neighbours bought
A basket, which they filled with pedlar's wares;
And with this basket on his arm, the lad
Went up to London, found a master there,
Who out of many chose the trusty boy
To go and overlook his merchandise
Beyond the seas: where he grew wondrous rich,
And left estates and moneys to the poor,
And at his birthplace built a chapel floored
With marble, which he sent from foreign lands.
These thoughts, and many others of like sort,
Passed quickly through the mind of Isabel,
And her face brightened. The old man was glad,
And thus resumed:—"Well, Isabel! this scheme
These two days has been meat and drink to me.
Far more than we have lost is left us yet.
We have enough,—I wish indeed that I
Were younger,—but this hope is a good hope.
Make ready Luke's best garments, of the best
Buy for him more, and let us send him forth
To-morrow, or the next day, or to-night:
If he *could* go, the boy should go to-night."
Here Michael ceased, and to the fields went forth
With a light heart. The housewife for five days

Was restless morn and night, and all day long
Wrought on with her best fingers to prepare
Things needful for the journey of her son.
But Isabel was glad when Sunday came
To stop her in her work: for, when she lay
By Michael's side, she through the two last nights
Heard him, how he was troubled in his sleep;
And when they rose at morning she could see
That all his hopes were gone. That day at noon
She said to Luke, while they two by themselves
Were sitting at the door, "Thou must not go;
We have no other child but thee to lose,
None to remember—do not go away,
For if thou leave thy father he will die".
The youth made answer with a jocund voice;
And Isabel, when she had told her fears,
Recovered heart. That evening her best fare
Did she bring forth, and all together sat
Like happy people round a Christmas fire.

With daylight Isabel resumed her work;
And all the ensuing week the house appeared
As cheerful as a grove in spring: at length
The expected letter from their kinsman came,
With kind assurances that he would do
His utmost for the welfare of the boy;
To which, requests were added, that forthwith
He might be sent to him. Ten times or more
The letter was read over; Isabel
Went forth to show it to the neighbours round;
Nor was there at that time on English land
A prouder heart than Luke's. When Isabel
Had to her house returned, the old man said,
"He shall depart to-morrow". To this word
The housewife answered, talking much of things

Which, if at such short notice he should go,
Would surely be forgotten. But at length
She gave consent, and Michael was at ease.

Near the tumultuous brook of Green-head Ghyll,
In that deep valley, Michael had designed
To build a sheepfold; and, before he heard
The tidings of his melancholy loss,
For this same purpose he had gathered up
A heap of stones, which by the streamlet's edge
Lay thrown together, ready for the work.
With Luke that evening thitherward he walked;
And soon as they had reached the place he stopped,
And thus the old man spake to him:—"My son,
To-morrow thou wilt leave me: with full heart
I look upon thee, for thou art the same
That wert a promise to me ere thy birth,
And all thy life hast been my daily joy.
I will relate to thee some little part
Of our two histories; 'twill do thee good
When thou art from me, even if I should speak
Of things thou canst not know of. After thou
First cam'st into the world—as oft befalls
To new-born infants—thou didst sleep away
Two days, and blessings from thy father's tongue
Then fell upon thee. Day by day passed on,
And still I loved thee with increasing love.
Never to living ear came sweeter sounds
Than when I heard thee by our own fireside
First uttering, without words, a natural tune;
When thou, a feeding babe, didst in thy joy
Sing at thy mother's breast. Month followed month,
And in the open fields my life was passed
And on the mountains, else I think that thou
Hadst been brought up upon thy father's knees.

But we were playmates, Luke: among these hills,
As well thou know'st, in us the old and young
Have played together, nor with me didst thou
Lack any pleasure which a boy can know."
Luke had a manly heart; but at these words
He sobbed aloud. The old man grasped his hand,
And said, "Nay, do not take it so—I see
That these are things of which I need not speak.
Even to the utmost I have been to thee
A kind and a good father: and herein
I but repay a gift which I myself
Received at others' hands; for, though now old
Beyond the common life of man, I still
Remember them who loved me in my youth.
Both of them sleep together: here they lived
As all their forefathers had done; and when
At length their time was come, they were not loath
To give their bodies to the family mould.
I wished that thou shouldst live the life they lived.
But't is a long time to look back, my son,
And see so little gain from threescore years.
These fields were burthened when they came to me;
Till I was forty years of age, not more
Than half of my inheritance was mine.
I toiled and toiled; God blessed me in my work,
And till these three weeks past the land was free.
It looks as if it never could endure
Another master. Heaven forgive me, Luke,
If I judge ill for thee, but it seems good
That thou shouldst go." At this the old man paused;
Then, pointing to the stones near which they stood,
Thus, after a short silence, he resumed:
"This was a work for us; and now, my son,
It is a work for me. But, lay one stone—
Here, lay it for me, Luke, with thine own hands.

Nay, boy, be of good hope:—we both may live
To see a better day. At eighty-four
I still am strong and hale;—do thou thy part,
I will do mine.—I will begin again
With many tasks that were resigned to thee;
Up to the heights, and in among the storms,
Will I without thee go again, and do
All works which I was wont to do alone,
Before I knew thy face.—Heaven bless thee, boy!
Thy heart these two weeks has been beating fast
With many hopes—It should be so—Yes—yes—
I knew that thou couldst never have a wish
To leave me, Luke: thou hast been bound to me
Only by links of love: when thou art gone,
What will be left to us!—But, I forget
My purposes. Lay now the corner-stone,
As I requested:—and hereafter, Luke,
When thou art gone away, should evil men
Be thy companions, think of me, my son,
And of this moment; hither turn thy thoughts,
And God will strengthen thee: amid all fear
And all temptation, Luke, I pray that thou
Mayst bear in mind the life thy fathers lived,
Who, being innocent, did for that cause
Bestir them in good deeds. Now, fare thee well—
When thou return'st thou in this place wilt see
A work which is not here; a covenant
T will be between us—But, whatever fate
Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last,
And bear thy memory with me to the grave."

The shepherd ended here; and Luke stooped down,
And, as his father had requested, laid
The first stone of the sheepfold. At the sight
The old man's grief broke from him; to his heart

He pressed his son, he kissfed him and wept;
And to the house together they returned.
Hushed was that house in peace, or seeming peace,
Ere the night fell:—with morrow's dawn the boy
Began his journey, and when he had reached
The public way, he put on a bold face;
And all the neighbours as he passed their doors
Came forth with wishes and with farewell prayers,
That followed him till he was out of sight.

A good report did from their kinsman come,
Of Luke and his well-doing: and the boy
Wrote loving letters, full of wondrous news,
Which, as the housewife phrased it, were throughout
"The prettiest letters that were ever seen".
Both parents read them with rejoicing hearts.
So, many months passed on: and once again
The shepherd went about his daily work
With confident and cheerful thoughts; and now
Sometimes when he could find a leisure hour
He to that valley took his way, and there
Wrought at the sheepfold. Meantime Luke began
To slacken in his duty; and at length
He in the dissolute city gave himself
To evil courses: ignominy and shame
Fell on him, so that he was driven at last
To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas.

There is a comfort in the strength of love;
T will make a thing endurable, which else
Would overset the brain, or break the heart:
I have conversed with more than one who well
Remember the old man, and what he was
Years after he had heard this heavy news.
His bodily frame had been from youth to age

Of an unusual strength. Among the rocks
He went, and still looked up upon the sun,
And listened to the wind; and as before
Performed all kinds of labour for his sheep,
And for the land his small inheritance.
And to that hollow dell from time to time
Did he repair, to build the fold of which
His flock had need. 'T is not forgotten yet
The pity which was then in every heart
For the old man—and 't is believed by all
That many and many a day he thither went,
And never lifted up a single stone.

There, by the sheepfold, sometimes was he seen
Sitting alone, with that his faithful dog,
Then old, beside him, lying at his feet.
The length of full seven years from time to time
He at the building of this sheepfold wrought,
And left the work unfinished when he died.
Three years, or little more, did Isabel
Survive her husband: at her death the estate
Was sold, and went into a stranger's hand.
The cottage which was named THE EVENING STAR
Is gone—the ploughshare has been through the ground
On which it stood; great changes have been wrought
In all the neighbourhood:—yet the oak is left
That grew beside their door; and the remains
Of the unfinished sheepfold may be seen
Beside the boisterous brook of Green-head Ghyll.

JOHN KEATS

(1796-1821)

xiv. LAMIA

PART I

UPON a time, before the faery broods
Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods.
Before King Oberon's bright diadem,
Sceptre, and mantle, clasp'd with dewy gem,
Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns
From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslipp'd lawns,
The ever-smitten Hermes empty left
His golden throne, bent warm on amorous theft:
From high Olympus had he stolen light,
On this side of Jove's clouds, to escape the sight
Of his great summoner, and made retreat
Into a forest on the shores of Crete.
For somewhere in that sacred island dwelt
A Nymph, to whom all hoofed Satyrs knelt;
At whose white feet the languid Tritons pour'd
Pearls, while on land they withered and adored.
Fast by the springs where she to bathe was wont,
And in those meads where sometimes she might haunt,
Were strewn rich gifts, unknown to any Muse,
Though Fancy's casket were unlocked to choose.
Ah! what a world of love was at her feet!
So Hermes thought, and a celestial heat
Burn'd from his winged heels to either ear,
That from a whiteness, as the lily clear,
Blush'd into roses 'mid his golden hair,
Fallen in jealous curls about his shoulders bare.
From vale to vale, from wood to wood, he flew,
Breathing upon the flowers his passion new,

And wound with many a river to its head,
To find where this sweet Nymph prepared her secret bed:
In vain; the sweet Nymph might nowhere be found,
And so he rested, on the lonely ground,
Pensive, and full of painful jealousies
Of the Wood-Gods, and even the very trees.
There as he stood, he heard a mournful voice,
Such as once heard, in gentle heart, destroys
All pain but pity: thus the lone voice spake:
"When from this wreathed tomb shall I awake!
When move in a sweet body fit for life,
And love, and pleasure, and the ruddy strife
Of hearts and lips! Ah, miserable me!"
The God, dove-footed, glided silently
Round bush and tree, soft-brushing, in his speed,
The taller grasses and full-flowering weed,
Until he found a palpitating snake,
Bright, and cirque-couchant in a dusky brake.

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson-barr'd;
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
Dissolved, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—
So rainbow-sided, touched with miseries,
She seem'd at once, some penanced lady elf,
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.
Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire
Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar:
Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!
She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete:
And for her eyes—what could such eyes do there
But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?

As Proserpine still weeps for her Sicilian air.
Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake
Came, as through bubbling honey, for Love's sake,
And thus; while Hermes on his pinions lay,
Like a stoop'd falcon ere he takes his prey.

" Fair Hermes! crown'd with feathers, fluttering light,
I had a splendid dream of thee last night;
I saw thee sitting, on a throne of gold,
Among the Gods, upon Olympus old,
The only sad one; for thou didst not hear
The soft, lute-finger'd Muses chanting clear,
Nor even Apollo when he sang alone,
Deaf to his throbbing throat's long, long melodious moan.
I dreamt I saw thee, robed in purple flakes,
Break amorous through the clouds, as morning breaks,
And, swiftly as a bright Phœbean dart,
Strike for the Cretan isle; and here thou art!
Too gentle Hermes, hast thou found the maid?"
Whereat the star of Lethe not delay'd
His rosy eloquence, and thus inquired:
" Thou smooth-lipp'd serpent, surely high-inspired!
Thou beauteous wreath, with melancholy eyes,
Possess whatever bliss thou canst devise,
Telling me only where my nymph is fled,—
Where she doth breathe!" "Bright planet, thou hast said,"
Return'd the snake, "but seal with oaths, fair God!"

"I swear", said Hermes, "by my serpent rod,
And by thine eyes, and by thy starry crown!"
Light flew his earnest words, among the blossoms blown.
Then thus again the brilliance feminine:

" Too frail of heart! for this lost nymph of thine,
Free as the air, invisibly, she strays '—
About these thornless wilds; her pleasant days

She tastes unseen; unseen her nimble feet
Leave traces in the grass and flowers sweet:
From weary tendrils, and bow'd branches green,
She plucks the fruit unseen, she bathes unseen:
And by my power is her beauty veiPd
To keep it unaffronted, unassail'd
By the love-glances of unlovely eyes,
Of Satyrs, Fauns, and blear'd Silenus' sighs.
Pale grew her immortality, for woe
Of all these lovers, and she grieved so
I took compassion on her, bade her steep
Her hair in weird syrops, that would keep
Her loveliness invisible, yet free
To wander as she loves, in liberty.
Thou shalt behold her, Hermes, thou alone,
If thou wilt, as thou swearest, grant my boon!"
Then, once again, the charmed God began
An oath, and through the serpent's ears it ran
Warm, tremulous, devout, psalterian.
Ravish'd she lifted her Circean head,
Blush'd a live damask, and swift-lipping said,
"I was a woman, let me have once more
A woman's shape, and charming as before.
I love a youth of Corinth—O the bliss!
Give me my woman's form, and place me where he is.
Stoop, Hermes, let me breathe upon thy brow,
And thou shalt see thy sweet nymph even now."
The God on half-shut feathers sank serene,
She breathed upon his eyes, and swift was seen
Of both the guarded nymph near-smiling on the green.
It was no dream; or say a dream it was,
Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass
Their pleasures in a long immortal dream.
One warm, flush'd moment, hovering, it might seem
Dash'd by the wood-nymph's beauty, so he burn'd;

Then, lighting on the printless verdure, turn'd
To the swoon'd serpent, and with languid arm,
Delicate, put to proof the lithe Caducean charm.
So done, upon the nymph his eyes he bent
Full of adoring tears and blandishment,
And towards her stept: she, like a moon in wane,
Faded before him, cowered, nor could restrain
Her fearful sobs, self-folding like a flower
That faints into itself at evening hour:
But the God fostering her chilled hand,
She felt the warmth, her eyelids open'd bland,
And, like new flowers at morning song of bees,
Bloom'd and gave up her honey to the lees.
Into the green-recessed woods they flew;
Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do.

Left to herself, the serpent now began
To change; her elfin blood in madness ran;
Her mouth foam'd, and the grass, therewith besprent,
Wither'd at dew so sweet and virulent;
Her eyes in torture fix'd, and anguish drear,
Hot, glazed, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,
Flashed phosphor and sharp sparks, without one cooling
tear.

The colours all inflamed throughout her train,
She writhed about, convulsed with scarlet pain:
A deep volcanian yellow took the place
Of all her milder-mooned body's grace;
And, as the lava ravishes the mead,
Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede:
Made gloom of all her frecklings, streaks and bars,
Eclipsed her crescents, and lick'd up her stars:
So that, in moments few, she was undrest
Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst,
And rubious-argent; of all these bereft,

Nothing but pain and ugliness were left.
Still shone her crown; that vanish'd, also she
Melted and disappeared as suddenly;
And in the air, her new voice luting soft,
Cried, "Lycius! gentle Lycius!"—borne aloft
With the bright mists about the mountains hoar
These words dissolved: Crete's forests heard no more.

Whither fled Lamia, now a lady bright,
A full-born beauty new and exquisite?
She fled into that valley they pass o'er
Who go to Corinth from Cenchreas' shore;
And rested at the foot of those wild hills,
The rugged founts of the Peraean rills,
And of that other ridge whose barren back
Stretches, with all its mist and cloudy rack,
South-westward to Cleone. There she stood
About a young bird's flutter from a wood,
Fair, on a sloping green of mossy tread,
By a clear pool, wherein she passioned
To see herself escaped from so sore ills,
While her robes flaunted with the daffodils.

Ah, happy Lycius!—for she was a maid
More beautiful than ever twisted braid,
Or sigh'd, or blush'd, or on spring-flower'd lea
Spread a green kirtle to the minstrelsy:
A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore
Of love deep learned to the red heart's core:
Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain
To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain;
Define their pettish limits, and estrange
Their points of contact, and swift counterchange;
Intrigue with the specious chaos, and dispart
Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art;

As though in Cupid's college she had spent
Sweet days a lovely graduate, still unshent,
And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment.

Why this fair creature chose so fairly
By the wayside to linger, we shall see;
But first't is fit to tell how she could muse
And dream, when in the serpent prison-house,
Of all she list, strange or magnificent:
How, ever, where she will'd, her spirit went;
Whether to faint Elysium, or where
Down through tress-lifting waves the Nereids fair
Wind into Thetis' bower by many a pearly stair;
Or where God Bacchus drains his cups divine,
Stretch'd out, at ease, beneath a glutinous pine;
Or where in Pluto's gardens palatine
Mulciber's columns gleam in far piazzian line.
And sometimes into cities she would send
Her dream, with feast and rioting to blend;
And once, while among mortals dreaming thus,
She saw the young Corinthian Lycius
Charioting foremost in the envious race,
Like a young Jove with calm uneager face,
And fell into a swooning love of him.
Now on the moth-time of that evening dim
He would return that way, as well she knew,
To Corinth from the shore; for freshly blew
The eastern soft wind, and his galley now
Grated the quay-stones with her brazen prow
In port Cenchreas, from Egina isle
Fresh anchored; whither he had been awhile
To sacrifice to Jove, whose temple there
Waits with high marble doors for blood and incense rare.
Jove heard his vows, and better'd his desire;
For by some freakful chance he made retire

From his companions, and set forth to walk,
Perhaps grown wearied of their Corinth talk:
Over the solitary hills he fared,
Thoughtless, at first, but ere eve's star appear'd
His fantasy was lost, where reason fades,
In the calm'd twilight of Platonic shades.
Lamia beheld him coming, near, more near—
Close to her passing, in indifference drear,
His silent sandals swept the mossy green;
So neighboured to him, and yet so unseen
She stood: he passed, shut up in mysteries,
His mind wrapp'd like his mantle, while her eyes
Followed his steps, and her neck regal white
Turn'd—syllabbling thus, "Ah, Lycius bright!
And will you leave me on the hills alone?
Lycius look back! and be some pity shown."
He did; not with cold wonder fearingly,
But Orpheus-like at an Eurydice;
For so delicious were the words she sung,
It seem'd he had loved them a whole summer long:
And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,
Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,
And still the cup was full,—while he, afraid
Lest she should vanish ere his lip had paid
Due adoration, thus began to adore;
Her soft look growing coy, she saw his chain so sure:
"Leave thee alone! Look back! Ah, Goddess, see
Whether my eyes can ever turn from thee!
For pity do not this sad heart belie—
Even as thou vanishest so I shall die.
Stay! though a Naiad of the rivers, stay!
To thy far wishes will thy streams obey:
Stay! though the greenest woods be thy domain,
Alone they can drink up the morning rain;
Though a descended Pleiad, will not one

Of thine harmonious sisters keep in tune
Thy spheres, and as thy silver proxy shine?
So sweetly to these ravish'd ears of mine
Came thy sweet greeting, that if thou shouldst fade,
Thy memory will waste me to a shade:—
For pity do not melt!"—" If I should stay",
Said Lamia, " here, upon this floor of clay,
And pain my steps upon these flowers too rough,
What canst thou say or do of charm enough
To dull the nice remembrance of my home?
Thou canst not ask me with thee here to roam
Over these hills and vales, where no joy is,—
Empty of immortality and bliss!
Thou art a scholar, Lycius, and must know
That finer spirits cannot breathe below
In human climes, and live: Alas! poor youth,
What taste of purer air hast thou to soothe
My essence? What serener palaces,
Where I may all my many senses please,
And by mysterious sleights a hundred thirsts appease:
It cannot be—Adieu!" So said, she rose
Tiptoe with white arms spread. He, sick to lose
The amorous promise of her lone complain,
Swoon'd murmuring of love, and pale with pain.
The cruel lady, without any show
Of sorrow for her tender favourite's woe,
But rather, if her eyes could brighter be,
With brighter eyes and slow amenity,
Put her new lips to his, and gave afresh
The life she had so tangled in her mesh:
And as he from one trance was wakening
Into another, she began to sing, ,
Happy in beauty, life, and love, and everything,
A song of love, too sweet for earthly lyres,
While, like held breath, the stars drew in their panting fires,

And then she whispered in such trembling tone,
As those who, safe together met alone
For the first time through many anguish'd days,
Use other speech than looks; bidding him raise
His drooping head, and clear his soul of doubt,
For that she was a woman, and without
Any more subtle fluid in her veins
Than throbbing blood, and that the self-same pains
Inhabited her frail-strung heart as his.
And next she wondered how his eyes could miss
Her face so long in Corinth, where, she said,
She dwelt but half retired, and there had led
Days happy as the gold coin could invent
Without the aid of love; yet in content
Till she saw him, as once she pass'd him by,
Where 'gainst a column he leant thoughtfully
At Venus' temple porch, 'mid baskets heap'd
Of amorous herbs and flowers, newly reap'd
Late on that eve, as 't was the night before
The Adonian feast; whereof she saw no more,
But wept alone those days, for why should she adore?
Lycius from death awoke into amaze,
To see her still, and singing so sweet lays;
Then from amaze into delight he fell
To hear her whisper woman's lore so well;
And every word she spake enticed him on
To unperplexed delight and pleasure known.
Let the mad poets say whate'er they please
Of the sweets of Fairies, Peris, Goddesses,
There is not such a treat among them all,
Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,
As a real woman, lineal indeed
From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed.
Thus gentle Lamia judged, and judged aright,
That Lycius could not love in half a fright,

So threw the goddess off, and won his heart
More pleasantly by playing woman's part,
With no more awe than what her beauty gave.
That, while it smote, still guaranteed to save.
Lycius to all made eloquent reply,
Marrying to every word a twin-born sigh;
And last, pointing to Corinth, ask'd her sweet,
If't was too far that night for her soft feet.
The way was short, for Lamia's eagerness
Made, by a spell, the triple league decrease
To a few paces; not at all surmised
By blinded Lycius, so in her comprised
They pass'd the city gates, he knew not how
So noiseless, and he never thought to know.

As men talk in a dream, so Corinth all,
Throughout her palaces imperial,
And all her populous streets and temples lewd,
Mutter'd, like tempest in the distance brew'd,
To the wide-spreaded night above her towers.
Men, women, rich and poor, in the cool hours,
Shuffled their sandals o'er the pavement white,
Companion'd or alone; while many a light
Flared, here and there, from wealthy festivals,
And threw their moving shadows on the walls,
Or found them cluster'd in the corniced shade
Of some arch'd temple door, or dusky colonnade.

Muffling his face, of greeting friends in fear,
Her fingers he press'd hard, as one came near
With curPd grey beard, sharp eyes, and smooth bald crown.
Slow-stepp'd, and robed in philosophic gown:
Lycius shrank closer, as they met and past,
Into his mantle, adding wings to haste,
While hurried Lamia trembled: " Ah," said he,
"Why do you shudder, love, so ruefully?

Why does your tender palm dissolve in dew?"—
"I'm wearied," said fair Lamia: "tell me who
Is that old man? I cannot bring to mind
His features:—Lycius' wherefore do you blind
Yourself from his quick eyes?" Lycius replied,
"Tis Apollonius sage, my trusty guide
And good instructor; but to-night he seems
The ghost of folly haunting my sweet dreams".

While yet he spake they had arrived before
A pillar'd porch, with lofty portal door,
Where hung a silver lamp whose phosphor glow
Reflected in the slabbed steps below,
Mild as a star in water; for so new
And so unsullied was the marble hue,
So through the crystal polish, liquid fine,
Ran the dark veins, that none but feet divine
Could e'er have touch'd there. Sounds ^Eolian
Breathed from the hinges, as the ample span
Of the wide doors disclosed a place unknown
Some time to any, but those two alone,
And a few Persian mutes, who that same year
Were seen about the markets: none knew where
They could inhabit; the most curious
Were foip'd, who watch'd to trace them to their house:
And but the flutter-winged verse must tell,
For truth's sake what woe afterwards befel,
'T would humour many a heart to leave them thus
Shut from the busy world of more incredulous

PART II

Love in a hut, with water and a crust,
Is—Love, forgive us!—cinders, ashes, dust;
Love in a palace is perhaps at last
More grievous torment than a hermit's fast:—

That is a doubtful tale from faery land,
Hard for the non-elect to understand.
Had Lycius lived to hand his story down,
He might have given the moral a fresh frown,
Or clench'd it quite: but too short was their bliss
To breed distrust and hate, that make the soft voice hiss.
Besides, there, nightly, with terrific glare,
Love, jealous grown of so complete a pair,
Hover'd and buzz'd his wings, with fearful roar,
Above the lintel of their chamber door,
And down the passage cast a glow upon the floor.

For all this came a ruin: side by side
They were enthroned, in the even tide,
Upon a couch, near to a curtaining
Whose airy texture, from a golden string,
Floated into the room, and let appear . . .
Unveiled the summer heaven, blue and clear,
Betwixt two marble shafts:—there they reposed,
Where use had made it sweet, with eyelids closed,
Saving a tithe which love still open kept,
That they might see each other while they almost slept;
When from the slope side of a suburb hill,
Deafening the swallow's twitter, came a thrill
Of trumpets—Lycius started—the sounds fled,
But left a thought, a buzzing in his head.
For the first time, since first he harbour'd in
That purple-lined palace of sweet sin,
His spirit pass'd beyond its golden bourn
Into the noisy world almost forsworn.
The lady, ever watchful, penetrant,
Saw this with pain, so arguing a want
Of something more, more than her empery
Of joys; and she began to moan and sigh
Because he mused beyond her, knowing well

That but a moment's thought is passion's passing bell.
"Why do you sigh, fair creature?" whisper'd he:
"Why, do you think?" returned she tenderly:
"You have deserted me; where am I now?
Not in your heart while care weighs on your brow:
No, no, you have dismiss'd me; and I go
From your breast houseless: ay, it must be so."
He answer'd, bending to her open eyes,
Where he was mirror'd small in paradise,—
"My silver planet, both of eve and morn!
Why will you plead yourself so sad forlorn,
While I am striving how to fill my heart
With deeper crimson, and a double smart?
How to entangle, trammel up and snare
Your soul in mine, and labyrinth you there,
Like the hid scent in an unbudded rose?
Ay, a sweet kiss—you see your mighty woes.
My thoughts! shall I unveil them? Listen then!
What mortal hath a prize, that other men
May be confounded and abash'd withal,
But lets it sometimes pace abroad majestic,
And triumph, as in thee I should rejoice
Amid the hoarse alarm of Corinth's voice.
Let my foes choke, and my friends shout afar,
While through the thronged streets your bridal car
Wheels round its dazzling spokes."—The lady's cheek
Trembled; she nothing said, but, pale and meek,
Arose and knelt before him, wept a rain
Of sorrows at his words; at last with pain
Beseeching him, the while his hand she wrung,
To change his purpose. He thereat was stung
Perverse, with stronger fancy to reclaim
Her wild and timid nature to his aim;
Besides, for all his love, in self despite,
Against his better self, he took delight

Luxurious in her sorrows, soft and new.
His passion, cruel grown, took on a hue
Fierce and sanguineous as 't was possible
In one whose brow had no dark veins to swell,
Fine was the mitigated fury, like
Apollo's presence when in act to strike
The serpent—Ha, the serpent! certes, she
Was none. She burnt, she loved the tyranny,
And, all subdued, consented to the hour
When to the bridal he should lead his paramour.
Whispering in midnight silence, said the youth,
"Sure some sweet name thou hast, though, by my truth,
I have not ask'd it, ever thinking thee
Not mortal, but of heavenly progeny,
As still I do. Hast any mortal name,
Fit appellation for this dazzling frame?
Or friends or kinsfolk on the citied earth,
To share our marriage feast and nuptial mirth?"
"I have no friends," said Lamia, "no, not one;
My presence in wide Corinth hardly known.
My parents' bones are in their dusty urns
Sepulchred, where no kindled incense burns,
Seeing all their luckless race are dead, save me,
And I neglect the holy rite for thee.
Even as you list invite your many guests:
But if, as now it seems, your vision rests
With any pleasure on me, do not bid
Old Apollonius—from him keep me hid."
Lycius, perplex'd at words so blind and blank,
Made close inquiry; from whose touch she shrank,
Feigning a sleep; and he to the dull shade
Of deep sleep in a moment was betray'd.

It was the custom then to bring away
The bride from home at blushing shut of day,

Veiled, in a chariot, heralded along
By strewn flowers, torches, and a marriage song,
With other pageants: but this fair unknown
Had not a friend. So being left alone
(Lycius was gone to summon all his kin),
And knowing surely she could never win
His foolish heart from its mad pompousness,
She set herself, high-thoughted, how to dress
The misery in fit magnificence.
She did so, but 't is doubtful how and whence
Came, and who were her subtle servitors.
About the halls, and to and from the doors,
There was a noise of wings, till in short space
The glowing banquet-room shone with wide-arched grace
A haunting music, sole perhaps and lone
Supportress of the faery-roof, made moan
Throughout, as fearful the whole charm might fade.
Fresh carved cedar, mimicking a glade
Of palm and plantain, met from either side,
High in the midst, in honour of the bride:
Two palms and then two plantains, and so on,
From either side their stems branched one to one
All down the aisled place; and beneath all
There ran a stream of lamps straight on from wall to wail.
So canopied, lay an untasted feast
Teeming with odours. Lamia, regal drest,
Silently paced about, and as she went,
In pale contented sort of discontent,
Missioned her viewless servants to enrich
The fretted splendour of each nook and niche.
Between the tree-stems marbled plain at first,
Came jasper panels; then, anon, there burst
Forth creeping imagery of slighter trees,
And with the larger wove in small intricacies.
Approving all, she faded at self-will,

And shut the chamber up, close, hush'd and still,
Complete and ready for the revels rude,
When dreadful guests would come to spoil her solitude.

The day appear'd, and all the gossip rout.
O senseless Lycius! Madman! wherefore flout
The silent-blessing fate, warm cloister'd hours,
And show to common eyes these secret bowers?
The herd approach'd; each guest, with busy brain,
Arriving at the portal, gazed amain,
And enter'd marvelling: for they knew the street,
Remember'd it from childhood all complete
Without a gap, yet ne'er before had seen
That royal porch, that high-built fair demesne;
So in they hurried all, mazed, curious and keen;
Save one, who look'd thereon with eye severe,
And with calm-planted steps walk'd in austere;
'T was Apollonius: something too he laugh'd,
As though some knotty problem, that had daft
His patient thought, had now begun to thaw,
And solve and melt:—'t was just as he foresaw.

He met within the murmurous vestibule
His young disciple. " 'T is no common rule,
Lycius," said he, " for uninvited guest
To force himself upon you, and infest
With an unbidden presence the bright throng
Of younger friends; yet must I do this wrong,
And you forgive me." Lycius blush'd and led
The old man through the inner doors broad-spread;
With reconciling words and courteous mien
Turning into sweet milk the sophist's spleen.

Of wealthy lustre was the banquet-room,
Fill'd with pervading brilliance and perfume:
Before each lucid panel fuming stood

A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,
Each by a sacred tripod held aloft,
Whose slender feet wide-swerved upon the soft
Wool-woofed carpets: fifty wreaths of smoke
From fifty censers their light voyage took
To the high roof, still mimick'd as they rose
Along the mirror'd walls by twin-clouds odorous.
Twelve sphered tables by silk seats insphered,
High as the level of a man's breast rear'd
On libbard's paws, upheld the heavy gold
Of cups and goblets, and the store thrice told
Of Ceres' horn, and, in huge vessels, wine
Came from the gloomy tun with merry shine.
Thus loaded with a feast the tables stood,
Each shrining in the midst the image of a God.

When in an antechamber every guest
Had felt the cold full sponge to pleasure pressed,
By ministering slaves, upon his hands and feet,
And fragrant oils with ceremony meet
Pour'd on his hair, they all moved to the feast
In white robes, and themselves in order placed
Around the silken couches, wondering
Whence all this mighty cost and blaze of wealth could
spring.

Soft went the music the soft air along,
While fluent Greek a vowel'd under-song
Kept up among the guests, discoursing low
At first, for scarcely was the wine at flow;
But when the happy vintage touch'd their brains,
Louder they talk, and louder came the strains
Of powerful instruments:—the gorgeous dyes,
The space, the splendour of the draperies,
The roof of awful richness, nectarous cheer,
Beautiful slaves, and Lamia's self, appear,

Now, when the wine has done its rosy deed,
And every soul from human trammels freed,
No more so strange; for merry wine, sweet wine,
Will make Elysian shades not too fair, too divine.
Soon was God Bacchus at meridian height;
Flush'd were their cheeks, and bright eyes double bright
Garlands of every green, and every scent
From vales deflower'd, or forest-trees branch-rent,
In baskets of bright osier'd gold were brought
High as the handles heap'd, to suit the thought
Of every guest; that each, as he did please,
Might fancy-fit his brows, silk-pillow'd at his ease.

What wreath for Lamia? What for Lycius?
What for the sage, old Apollonius?
Upon her aching forehead be there hung
The leaves of willow and of adder's tongue;
And for the youth, quick, let us strip for him
The thyrsus, that his watching eyes may swim
Into forgetfulness; and, for the sage,
Let spear-grass and the spiteful thistle wage
War on his temples. Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade.

By her glad Lycius sitting, in chief place,
Scarce saw in all the room another face,
Till, checking his love trance, a cup he took
Full brimm'd, and opposite sent forth a look

'Cross the broad table, to beseech a glance
From his old teacher's wrinkled countenance,
And pledge him. The bald-head philosopher
Had fix'd his eye, without a twinkle or a stir,
Full on the alarmed beauty of the bride,
Brow-beating her fair form, and troubling her sweet pride,
Lycius then press'd her hand, with devout touch,
As pale it lay upon the rosy couch:
'Twas icy, and the cold ran through his veins;
Then sudden it grew hot, and all the pains
Of an unnatural heat shot to his heart.
"Lamia, what means this? Wherefore dost thou start?
Know'st thou that man?" Poor Lamia answered not
He gazed into her eyes, and not a jot
Own'd they the lovelorn piteous appeal:
More, more he gazed: his human senses reel:
Some hungry spell that loveliness absorbs;
There was no recognition in those orbs.
"Lamia!" he cried—and no soft-toned reply.
The many heard, and the loud revelry
Grew hush; the stately music no more breathes:
The myrtle sicken'd in a thousand wreaths.
By faint degrees, voice, lute, and pleasure ceased;
A deadly silence step by step increased,
Until it seem'd a horrid presence there,
And not a man but felt the terror in his hair.
"Lamia!" he shriek'd; and nothing but the shriek
With its sad echo did the silence break.
"Begone, foul dream!" he cried, gazing again
In the bride's face, where now no azure vein
Wander'd on fair-spaced temples; no soft bloom
Misted the cheek; no passion to illumine
The deep-recessed vision:—all was blight;
Lamia, no longer fair, there sat a deadly white.
"Shut, shut those juggling eyes, thou ruthless man!

Turn them aside, wretch! or the righteous ban
Of all the Gods, whose dreadful images
Here represent their shadowy presences,
May pierce them on the sudden with the thorn
Of painful blindness; leaving thee forlorn,
In trembling dotage to the feeblest fright
Of conscience, for their long-offended might,
For all thine impious proud-heart sophistries,
Unlawful magic, and enticing lies.
Corinthians! look upon that grey-beard wretch!
Mark how, possessed, his lashless eyelids stretch
Around his demon eyes! Corinthians, see!
My sweet bride withers at their potency."
"Fool!" said the sophist, in an under-tone
Gruff with contempt; which a death-nighing moan
From Lycius answer'd, as, heart-struck and lost,
He sank supine beside the aching ghost.
"Fool! Fool!" repeated he, while his eyes still
Relented not, nor moved; "from every ill
Of life have I preserved thee to this day,
And shall I see thee made a serpent's prey?"
Then Lamia breathed death-breath; the sophist's eye,
Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,
Keen, cruel, perceant, stinging: she, as well
As her weak hand could any meaning tell,
Motion'd him to be silent; vainly so,
He look'd and look'd again a level—No!
"A serpent!" echoed he; no sooner said,
Than with a frightful scream she vanished:
And Lycius' arms were empty of delight,
As were his limbs of life, from that same night,
On the high couch he lay!—his friends came round—
Supported him—no pulse or breath they found,
And, in its marriage robe, the heavy body wound.

XV. ISABELLA, OR THE POT OF BASIL

A Story, from *Boccaccio*

I

FAIR Isabel, poor simple Isabel!
Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love's eye!
They could not in the self-same mansion dwell
Without some stir of heart, some malady;
They could not sit at meals but feel how well
It soothed each to be the other by;
They could not, sure, beneath the same roof sleep,
But to each other dream, and nightly weep.

II

With every morn their love grew tenderer,
With every eve deeper and tenderer still;
He might not in house, field, or garden stir,
But her full shape would all his seeing fill;
And his continual voice was pleasanter
To her, than noise of trees or hidden rill;
Her lute-string gave an echo of his name,
He spoilt her half-done broidery with the same.

iii

He knew whose gentle hand was at the latch,
Before the door had given her to his eyes;
And from her chamber-window he would catch
Her beauty farther than the falcon spies;
And constant as her vespers would he watch,
Because her face was turn'd to the same skies;
And with sick longing all the night outwear,
To hear her morning-step upon the stair.

IV

A whole long month of May in this sad plight
Made their cheeks paler by the break of June:
"To-morrow will I bow to my delight,
To-morrow will I ask my lady's boon."—
"O may I never see another night,
Lorenzo, if thy lips breathe not love's tune."—
So spake they to their pillows; but, alas!
Honeyless days and days did he let pass;

V

Until sweet Isabella's untouch'd cheek
Fell sick within the rose's just domain,
Fell thin as a young mother's, who doth seek
By every lull to cool her infant's pain:
"How ill she is!" said he, "I may not speak,
And yet I will, and tell my love all plain:
If looks speak love-laws, I will drink her tears,
And at the least't will startle off her cares."

VI

So said he one fair morning, and all day
His heart beat awfully against his side;
And to his heart he inwardly did pray
For power to speak; but still the ruddy tide
Stifled his voice, and pulsed resolve away—
Fever'd his high conceit of such a bride,
Yet brought him to the meekness of a child:
Alas! when passion is both meek and wild!

VII

So once more he had waked and anguished
A dreary night of love and misery,
If Isabel's quick eye had not been wed
To every symbol on his forehead high;

She saw it waxing very pale and dead,
And straight all flushed; so, lisped tenderly,
"Lorenzo!"—here she ceased her timid quest,
But in her tone and look he read the rest.

VIII

"O Isabella! I can half perceive
That I may speak my grief into thine ear;
If thou didst ever anything believe,
Believe how I love thee, believe how near
My soul is to its doom: I would not grieve
Thy hand by unwelcome pressing, would not fear
Thine eyes by gazing; but I cannot live
Another night, and not my passion shrive.

IX

"Love! thou art leading me from wintry cold,
Lady! thou ledest me to summer clime,
And I must taste the blossoms that unfold
In its ripe warmth this gracious morning time."
So said, his erewhile timid lips grew bold,
And poesied with hers in dewy rhyme:
Great bliss was with them, and great happiness
Grew, like a lusty flower in June's caress.

X

Parting they seem'd to tread upon the air,
Twin roses by the zephyr blown apart
Only to meet again more close, and share
The inward fragrance of other's heart.
She, to her chamber gone, a ditty fair
Sang, of delicious love and honey'd dart;
He with light steps went up a western hill,
And bade the sun farewell, and joy'd his fill.

XI

All close they met again, before the dusk
Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,
All close they met, all eves, before the dusk
Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,
Close in a bower of hyacinth and musk,
Unknown of any, free from whispering tale.
Ah! better had it been for ever so,
Than idle ears should pleasure in their woe.

XII

Were they unhappy then?—It cannot be—
Too many tears for lovers have been shed,
Too many sighs give we to them in fee,
Too much of pity after they are dead,
Too many doleful stories do we see,
Whose matter in bright gold were best be read;
Except in such a page where Theseus' spouse
Over the pathless waves towards him bows.

XIII

But, for the general award of love,
The little sweet doth kill much bitterness;
Though Dido silent is in under-grove,
And Isabella's was a great distress,
Though young Lorenzo in warm Indian clove
Was not embalm'd, this truth is not the less—
Even bees, the little almsmen of spring-bowers,
Know there is richest juice in poison-flowers.

XIV

With her two brothers this fair lady dwelt,
Enriched from ancestral merchandise,
And for them many a weary hand did swelt
In torched mines and noisy factories,

And many once proud-quivered loins did melt
In blood from stinging whip; with hollow eyes
Many all day in dazzling river stood,
To take the rich-ored driftings of the flood

XV

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
And went all naked to the hungry shark;
For them his ears gush'd blood; for them in death
The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark
Lay full of darts; for them alone did seethe
A thousand men in troubles wide and dark:
Half-ignorant, they turn'd an easy wheel,
That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel.

XVI

Why were they proud? Because their marble founts
Gush'd with more pride than do a wretch's tears?
Why were they proud? Because fair orange-mounts
Were of more soft ascent than lazar stairs?
Why were they proud? Because red-lined accounts
Were richer than the songs of Grecian years?
Why were they proud? again we ask aloud,
Why in the name of Glory were they proud?

XVII

Yet were these Florentines as self-retired
In hungry pride and gainful cowardice,
As two close Hebrews in that land inspired,
Paled in and vineyarded from beggar-spies;
The hawks of ship-mast forests—the untired
And pannier'd mules for ducats and old lies—
Quick cat's-paws on the generous stray-away,—
Great wits in Spanish, Tuscan, and Malay.

XVIII

How was it these same ledger-men could spy
Fair Isabella in her downy nest?
How could they find out in Lorenzo's eye
A straying from his toil? Hot Egypt's pest
Into their vision covetous and sly!
How could these money-bags see east and west?
Yet so they did—and every dealer fair
Must see behind, as doth the hunted hare.

XIX

O eloquent and famed Boccaccio!
Of thee we now should ask forgiving boon,
And of thy spicy myrtles as they blow,
And of thy roses amorous of the moon,
And of thy lilies, that do paler grow
Now they can no more hear thy ghittern's tune,
For venturing syllables that ill beseem
The quiet glooms of such a piteous theme.

XX

Grant thou a pardon here, and then the tale
Shall move on soberly, as it is meet;
There is no other crime, no mad assail
To make old prose in modern rhyme more sweet:
But it is done—succeed the verse or fail—
To honour thee, and thy gone spirit greet;
To stead thee as a verse in English tongue,
An echo of thee in the north-wind sung.

XXI

These brethren having found by many signs
What love Lorenzo for their sister had,
And how she loved him too, each unconfines
His bitter thoughts to other, well nigh mad

That he, the servant of their trade designs,
Should in their sister's love be blithe and glad,
When 't was their plan to coax her by degrees
To some high noble and his olive-trees.

XXII

And many a jealous conference had they,
And many times they bit their lips alone,
Before they fix'd upon a surest way
To make the youngster for his crime atone;
And at the last, these men of cruel clay
Cut Mercy with a sharp knife to the bone;
For they resolved in some forest dim
To kill Lorenzo, and there bury him.

XXIII

So on a pleasant morning, as he leant
Into the sun-rise, o'er the balustrade
Of the garden-terrace, towards him they bent
Their footing through the dews; and to him said,
" You seem there in the quiet of content,
Lorenzo, and we are most loth to invade
Calm speculation; but if you are wise,
Bestride your steed while cold is in the skies.

XXIV

" To-day we purpose, ay, this hour we mount
To spur three leagues towards the Apennine;
Come down, we pray thee, ere the hot sun count
His dewy rosary on the eglantine."
Lorenzo, courteously as he was wont,
Bow'd a fair greeting to these serpents¹ whine;
And went in haste, to get in readiness,
With belt, and spur, and bracing huntsman's dress
(M893) K2

XXV

And as he to the court-yard pass'd along,
Each third step did he pause, and listen'd oft
If he could hear his lady's matin-song,
Or the light whisper of her footstep soft;
And as he thus over his passion hung,
He heard a laugh full musical aloft;
When, looking up, he saw her features bright
Smile through an in-door lattice all delight.

XXVI

"Love, Isabel!" said he, " I was in pain
Lest I should miss to bid thee a good morrow:
Ah! what if I should lose thee, when so fain
I am to stifle all the heavy sorrow
Of a poor three hours' absence? but we 'll gain
Out of the amorous dark what day doth borrow.
Good-bye! I'll soon be back."—"Good-bye!" said she:
And as he went she chanted merrily.

XXVII

So the two brothers and their murder'd man
Rode past fair Florence, to where Arno's stream
Gurgles through straitened banks, and still doth fan
Itself with dancing bulrush, and the bream
Keeps head against the freshets. Sick and wan
The brothers' faces in the ford did seem,
Lorenzo's flush with love. They pass'd the water
Into a forest quiet for the slaughter.

XXVIII

There was Lorenzo slain and buried in,
There in that forest did his great love cease;
Ah! when a soul doth thus its freedom win,
It aches in loneliness—is ill at peace

As the break-covert blood-hounds of such sin:

They dipp'd their swords in the water, and did tease
Their horses homeward, with convulsed spur,
Each richer by his being a murderer.

XXIX

They told their sister how, with sudden speed,

Lorenzo had ta'en ship for foreign lands,
Because of some great urgency and need

In their affairs, requiring trusty hands.

Poor girl! put on thy stifling widow's weed,

And 'scape at once from Hope's accursed bands;
To-day thou wilt not see him, nor to-morrow,
And the next day will be a day of sorrow.

XXX

She weeps alone for pleasures not to be;

Sorely she wept until the night came on,
And then, instead of love, O misery!

She brooded o'er the luxury alone:

His image in the dusk she seem'd to see,

And to the silence made a gentle moan,

Spreading her perfect arms upon the air,

And on her couch low murmuring, "Where? O where?"

XXXI

But Selfishness, Love's cousin, held not long

Its fiery vigil in her single breast;

She fretted for the golden hour, and hung

Upon the time with feverish unrest—

Not long; for soon into her heart a throng

Of higher occupants, a richer zest,

Came tragic; passion not to be subdued,

And sorrow for her love in travels rude.

XXXII

In the mid days of autumn, on their eves
The breath of Winter comes from far away,
And the sick west continually bereaves
Of some gold tinge, and plays a roundelay
Of death among the bushes and the leaves,
To make all bare before he dares to stray
From his north cavern. So sweet Isabel
By gradual decay from beauty fell,

XXXIII

Because Lorenzo came not. Oftentimes
She ask'd her brothers, with an eye all pale,
Striving to be itself, what dungeon climes
Could keep him off so long? They spake a tale
Time after time, to quiet her. Their crimes
Came on them, like a smoke from Hinnom's vale;
And every night in dreams they groan'd aloud,
To see their sister in her snowy shroud.

XXXIV

And she had died in drowsy ignorance,
But for a thing more deadly dark than all;
It came like a fierce potion, drunk by chance,
Which saves a sick man from the feather'd pall
For some few gasping moments; like a lance,
Waking an Indian from his cloudy hall
With cruel pierce, and bringing him again
Sense of the gnawing fire at heart and brain.

XXXV

It was a vision. In the drowsy gloom,
The dull of midnight, at her couch's foot
Lorenzo stood, and wept: the forest tomb
Had marr'd his glossy hair which once could shoot

Lustre into the sun, and put cold doom
Upon his lips, and taken the soft lute
From his lorn voice, and past his loamed ears
Had made a miry channel for his tears.

xxxvi

Strange sound it was, when the pale shadow spake,
For there was striving, in its piteous tongue,
To speak as when on earth it was awake,
And Isabella on its music hung:
Languor there was in it, and tremulous shake,
As in a palsied Druid's harp unstrung;
And through it moan'd a ghostly under-song,
Like hoarse night-gusts sepulchral briars among.

xxxvii

Its eyes, though wild, were still all dewy bright
With love, and kept all phantom fear aloof
From the poor girl by magic of their light,
And while it did unthread the horrid woof
Of the late darken'd time—the murderous spite
Of pride and avarice—the dark pine roof
In the forest—and the sodden turfed dell,
Where, without any words, from stabs he fell.

xxxviii

Saying moreover, "Isabel, my sweet!
Red whortle berries droop above my head,
And a large flint-stone weighs upon my feet,
Around me beeches and high chestnuts shed
Their leaves and prickly nuts; a sheep-fold bleat
Comes from beyond the river to my bed:
Go, shed one tear upon my heather-bloom,
And it shall comfort me within the tomb.

XXXIX

"I am a shadow now, alas! alas!
Upon the skirts of human nature dwelling
Alone: I chant alone the holy mass,
While little sounds of life are round me knelling,
And glossy bees at noon do fieldward pass,
And many a chapel bell the hour is telling,
Paining me through: those sounds grow strange to me
And thou art distant in Humanity.

XL

"I know what was, I feel full well what is,
And I should rage, if spirits could go mad;
Though I forget the taste of earthly bliss,
That paleness warms my grave, as though I had
A seraph chosen from the bright abyss
To be my spouse: thy paleness makes me glad :
Thy beauty grows upon me, and I feel
A greater love through all my essence steal."

XLI

The Spirit mourn'd "Adieu!"—dissolved, and left
The atom darkness in a slow turmoil;
As when of healthful midnight sleep bereft,
Thinking on rugged hours and fruitless toil,
We put our eyes into a pillowy cleft,
And see the spangly gloom froth up and boil:
It made sad Isabella's eyelids ache,
And in the dawn she started up awake;

XLII

"Ha! ha!" said she, "I knew not this hard life,
I thought the worst was simple misery;
I thought some Fate with pleasure or with strife
Portion'd us—happy days, or else to die;

But there is crime—a brother's bloody knife!
Sweet Spirit, thou hast schooFd my infancy:
I'll visit thee for this, and kiss thine eyes,
And greet thee morn and even in the skies."

XLIII

When the full morning came, she had devised
How she might secret to the forest hie;
How she might find the clay, so dearly prized,
And sing to it one latest lullaby;
How her short absence might be unsurmised,
While she the inmost of the dream would try.
Resolved, she took with her an aged nurse,
And went into that dismal forest-hearse.

XLIV

See, as they creep along the river side,
How she doth whisper to that aged dame,
And, after looking round the champaign wide,
Shows her a knife.—"What feverous hectic flame
Burns in thee, child?—what good can thee betide
That thou shouldst smile again?"—The evening came,
And they had found Lorenzo's earthy bed;
The flint was there, the berries at his head.

XLV

Who hath not loiter'd in a green church-yard,
And let his spirit, like a demon mole,
Work through the clayey soil and gravel hard,
To see skull, coffin'd bones, and funeral stole;
Pitying each form that hungry Death hath marr'd,
And filling it once more with human soul?
Ah! this is holiday to what was felt,
When Isabella by Lorenzo knelt

XLVI

She gazed into the fresh-thrown mould, as though
One glance did fully all its secrets tell;
Clearly she saw, as other eyes would know
Pale limbs at bottom of a crystal well;
Upon the murderous spot she seem'd to grow,
Like to a native lily of the dell :
Then with her knife, all sudden she began
To dig more fervently than misers can.

XLVII

Soon she turn'd up a soiled glove, whereon
Her silk had play'd in purple phantasies;
She kiss'd it with a lip more chill than stone,
And put it in her bosom, where it dries
And freezes utterly unto the bone
Those dainties made to still an infant's cries:
Then 'gan she work again; nor stay'd her care,
But to throw back at times her veiling hair.

XLVIII

That old nurse stood beside her wondering,
Until her heart felt pity to the core
At sight of such a dismal labouring,
And so she kneeled, with her locks all hoar,
And put her lean hands to the horrid thing:
Three hours they laboured at this travail sore;
At last they felt the kernel of the grave,
And Isabella did not stamp and rave.

XLIX

Ah! wherefore all this wormy circumstance?
Why linger at the yawning tomb so long?
O for the gentleness of old Romance,
The simple plaining of a minstrel's song!

Fair reader, at the old tale take a glance,
For here, in truth, it doth not well belong
To speak:-O turn thee to the very tale,
And taste the music of that vision pale.

L

With duller steel than the Perséan sword
They cut away no formless monster's head,
But one, whose gentleness did well accord
With death, as life. The ancient harps have said,
Love never dies, but lives, immortal Lord:
If Love impersonate was ever dead,
Pale Isabella kiss'd it, and low moan'd.
Twas love; cold,—dead indeed, but not dethroned.

LI

In anxious secrecy they took it home,
And then the prize was all for Isabel:
She calm'd its wild hair with a golden comb,
And all around each eye's sepulchral cell
Pointed each fringed lash; the smeared loam
With tears, as chilly as a dripping well,
She drench'd away: and still she comb'd and kept
Sighing all day—and still she kiss'd and wept.

LII

Then in a silken scarf,—sweet with the dews
Of precious flowers pluck'd in Araby,
And divine liquids come with odorous ooze
Through the cold serpent-pipe refreshfully,—
She wrapp'd it up; and for its tomb did choose
A garden-pot, wherein she laid it by,
And cover'd it with mould, and o'er it set
Sweet Basil, which her tears kept ever wet.

LIII

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
And the new morn she saw not: but in peace
Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,
And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.

LIV

And so she ever fed it with thin tears,
Whence thick, and green, and beautiful it grew,
So that it smelt more balmy than its peers
Of Basil-tufts in Florence; for it drew
Nurture besides, and life, from human fears,
From the fast mouldering head there shut from view:
So that the jewel, safely casketed,
Came forth, and in perfumed leaflets spread.

LV

O Melancholy, linger here awhile !
O Music, Music, breathe despondingly !
O Echo, Echo, from some sombre isle,
Unknown, Lethean, sigh to us—O sigh!
Spirits in grief, lift up your heads, and smile;
Lift up your heads, sweet Spirits, heavily,
And make a pale light in your cypress glooms,
Tinting with silver wan your marble tombs.

LVI

Moan hither, all ye syllables of woe,
From the deep throat of sad Melpomene!
Through bronzed lyre in tragic order go,
And touch the strings into a mystery;

Sound mournfully upon the winds and low;
For simple Isabel is soon to be
Among the dead: She withers, like a palm
Cut by an Indian for its juicy balm.

LVII

O leave the palm to wither by itself;
Let not quick Winter chill its dying hour!—
It may not be—those Ballites of pelf,
Her brethren, noted the continual shower
From her dead eyes; and many a curious elf,
Among her kindred, wondered that such dower
Of youth and beauty should be thrown aside
By one mark'd out to be a Noble's bride.

LVIII

And, furthermore, her brethren wonder'd much
Why she sat drooping by the Basil green,
And why it flourished, as by magic touch;
Greatly they wonder'd what the thing might mean:
They could not surely give belief, that such
A very nothing would have power to wean
Her from her own fair youth, and pleasures gay,
And even remembrance of her love's delay.

LIX

Therefore they watch'd a time when they might sift
This hidden whim; and long they watch'd in vain;
For seldom did she go to chapel-shrift,
And seldom felt she any hunger-pain:
And when she left, she hurried back, as swift
As bird on wing to breast its eggs again:
And, patient as a hen-bird, sat her there
Beside her Basil, weeping through her hair.

LX

Yet they contrived to steal the Basil-pot,
And to examine it in secret place:
The thing was vile with green and livid spot,
And yet they knew it was Lorenzo's face:
The guerdon of their murder they had got,
And so left Florence in a moment's space,
Never to turn again.—Away they went,
With blood upon their heads, to banishment.

LXI

O Melancholy, turn thine eyes away!
O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!
O Echo, Echo, on some other day,
From isles Lethean, sigh to us—O sigh!
Spirits of grief, sing not your "Well-a-way!"
For Isabel, sweet Isabel, will die;
Will die a death too lone and incomplete,
Now they have ta'en away her Basil sweet.

LXII

Piteous she look'd on dead and senseless things,
Asking for her lost Basil amorously:
And with melodious chuckle in the strings
Of her lorn voice, she oftentimes would cry
After the Pilgrim in his wanderings,
To ask him where her Basil was; and why
T was hid from her: "For cruel't is", said she,
"To steal my Basil-pot away from me".

LXIII

And so she pined, and so she died forlorn,
Imploring for her Basil to the last.
No heart was there in Florence but did mourn
In pity of her love, so overcast.

And a sad ditty of this story borne
From mouth to mouth through all the country pass'd:
Still is the burthen sung—"O cruelty,
To steal my Basil-pot away from me!"

WILLIAM MORRIS

(1834-1896)

XVI. THE LOVE OF ALCESTIS

Argument

Admetus, King of Phere in Thessaly, received unwittingly Apollo as his servant, by the help of whom he won to wife Alcestis, daughter of Pelias: afterwards too, as in other things, so principally in this, Apollo gave him help, that when he came to die, he obtained of the Fates for him, that if another would die willingly in his stead, then he should live still; and when to everyone else this seemed impossible, Alcestis gave her life for her husband's.

MIDST sunny grass-clad meads that slope adown
To lake Bcebeis stands an ancient town,
Where dwelt of old a lord of Thessaly,
The son of Pheres and fair Clymene,
Who had to name Admetus: long ago
The dwellers by the lake have ceased to know
His name, because the world grows old; but then
He was accounted great among great men;
Young, strong, and godlike, lacking nought at all
Of gifts that unto royal men might fall
In those old simple days, before men went
To gather unseen harm and discontent,
Along with all the alien merchandise
That rich folk need, too restless to be wise.

Now on the fairest of all autumn eves,
When midst the dusty, crumpled, dying leaves
The black grapes showed, and every press and vat
Was newly scoured, this King Admetus sat
Among his people, wearied in such wise
By hopeful toil as makes a paradise
Of the rich earth; for light and far away
Seemed all the labour of the coming day,
And no man wished for more than then he had,
Nor with another's mourning was made glad.
There in the pillared porch, their supper done,
They watched the fair departing of the sun;
The while the soft-eyed well-girt maidens poured
The joy of life from out the jars long stored
Deep in the earth, while little like a king,
As we call kings, but glad with everything,
The wise Thessalian sat and blessed his life,
So free from sickening fear and foolish strife.

But midst the joy of this festivity,
Turning aside he saw a man draw nigh,
Along the dusty grey vine-bordered road
That had its ending at his fair abode;
He seemed e'en from afar to set his face
Unto the king's adorned reverend place,
And like a traveller went he wearily,
And yet as one who seems his rest to see.
A staff he bore, but nowise was he bent
With scrip or wallet; so withal he went
Straight to the king's high seat, and standing near,
Seemed a stout youth and noble, free from fear,
But peaceful and unarmed; and though ill clad,
And though the dust of that hot land he had
Upon his limbs and face, as fair was he
As any king's son you might lightly see,

Grey-eyed and crisp-haired, beautiful of limb,
And no ill eye the women cast on him.

But kneeling now, and stretching forth his hand,
He said, "O thou, the king of this fair land,
Unto a banished man some shelter give,
And help me with thy goods that I may live:
Thou hast good store, Admetus, yet may I,
Who kneel before thee now in misery,
Give thee more gifts before the end shall come
Than all thou hast laid safely in thine home".

"Rise up, and be my guest," Admetus said,
"I need no gifts for this poor gift of bread,
The land is wide, and bountiful enow.
What thou canst do, to-morrow thou shalt show,
And be my man, perchance; but this night rest
Not questioned more than any passing guest.
Yea, even if a great king thou hast spilt,
Thou shalt not answer aught but as thou wilt."

Then the man rose and said, "O king, indeed
Of thine awarded silence have I need,
Nameless I am, nameless what I have done
Must be through many circles of the sun.
But for to-morrow—let me rather tell
On this same eve what things I can do well,
And let me put mine hand in thine and swear
To serve thee faithfully a changing year;
Nor think the woods of Ossa hold one beast
That of thy tenderest yearling shall make feast,
Whiles that I guard thy flocks; and thou shalt bear
Thy troubles easier when thou com'st to hear
The music I can make. Let these thy men
Witness against me if I fail thee, when
War falls upon thy lovely land and thee."

Then the king smiled, and said, " So let it be,
Well shalt thou serve me, doing far less than this,
Nor for thy service due gifts shalt thou miss:
Behold I take thy faith with thy right hand,
Be thou true man unto this guarded land.
Ho ye! take this my guest, find raiment meet
Wherewith to clothe him; bathe his wearied feet,
And bring him back beside my throne to feast."

But to himself he said, " I am the least
Of all Thessalians if this man was born
In any earthly dwelling more forlorn
Than a king's palace".

Then a damsel slim
Led him inside, nought loth to go with him,
And when the cloud of steam had curled to meet
Within the brass his wearied dusty feet,
She from a carved press brought him linen fair
And a new-woven coat a king might wear,
And so being clad he came unto the feast,
But as he came again, all people ceased
What talk they held soever, for they thought
A very god among them had been brought;
And doubly glad the king Admetus was
At what that dying eve had brought to pass,
And bade him sit by him and feast his fill.

So there they sat till all the world was still,
And 'twixt the pillars their red torches' shine
Held forth unto the night a joyous sign.

So henceforth did this man at Pherae dwell,
And what he set his hand to wrought right well.
And won much praise and love in everything,
And came to rule all herdsmen of the king;

But for two things in chief his fame did grow;
And first that he was better with the bow
Than any 'twixt Olympus and the sea;
And then that sweet, heart-piercing melody
He drew out from the rigid-seeming lyre,
And made the circle round the winter fire
More like to heaven than gardens of the May.
So many a heavy thought he chased away
From the king's heart, and softened many a hate,
And choked the spring of many a harsh debate;
And, taught by wounds, the snatchers of the wolds
Lurked round the gates of less well-guarded folds.
Therefore Admetus loved him, yet withal,
Strange doubts and fears upon his heart did fall;
For morns there were when he the man would meet,
His hair wreathed round with bay and blossoms sweet,
Gazing distraught into the brightening east,
Nor taking heed of either man or beast,
Or anything that was upon the earth,
Or sometimes, midst the hottest of the mirth,
Within the king's hall, would he seem to wake
As from a dream, and his stringed tortoise take
And strike the cords unbidden, till the hall,
Filled with the glorious sound from wall to wall,
Trembled and seemed as it would melt away,
And sunken down the faces weeping lay
That erewhile laughed the loudest; only he
Stood upright, looking forward steadily
With sparkling eyes as one who cannot weep,
Until the storm of music sank to sleep.

But this thing seemed the doubtfullest of all
Unto the king, that should there chance to fall
A festal day, and folk did sacrifice
Unto the gods, ever by some device

The man would be away: yet with all this
His presence doubled all Admetus' bliss,
And happy in all things he seemed to live,
And great gifts to his herdsman did he give.

But now the year came round again to spring,
And southward to Iolchos went the king;
For there did Pelias hold a sacrifice
Unto the gods, and put forth things of price
For men to strive for in the people's sight;
So on a morn of April, fresh and bright,
Admetus shook the golden-studded reins,
And soon from windings of the sweet-banked lanes
The south wind blew the sound of hoof and wheel,
Clatter of brazen shields and clink of steel
Unto the herdsman's ears, who stood awhile
Harkening the echoes with a godlike smile,
Then slowly gat him foldwards, murmuring,
"Fair music for the wooing of a king".

But in six days again Admetus came,
With no lost labour or dishonoured name;
A scarlet cloak upon his back he bare,
A gold crown on his head, a falchion fair
Girt to his side; behind him four white steeds,
Whose dams had fed full in Nisaeon meads;
All prizes that his valiant hands had won
Within the guarded lists of Tyro's son.
Yet midst the sound of joyous minstrelsy
No joyous man in truth he seemed to be;
So that folk looking on him said, "Behold,
The wise king will not show himself too bold
Amidst his greatness: the gods too are great,
And who can tell the dreadful ways of fate?"

Howe'er it was, he gat him through the town
And midst their shouts at last he lighted down
At his own house, and held high feast that night;
And yet by seeming had but small delight
In aught that any man could do or say:
And on the morrow, just at dawn of day,
Rose up and clad himself, and took his spear,
And in the fresh and blossom-scented air
Went wandering till he reached Bcebeis' shore;
Yet by his troubled face set little store
By all the songs of birds and scent of flowers;
Yea, rather unto him the fragrant hours
Were grown but dull and empty of delight.

So going, at the last he came in sight
Of his new herdsman, who that morning lay
Close by the white sand of a little bay
The teeming ripple of Bcebeis lapped;
There he in cloak of white-woolled sheepskin wrapped
Against the cold dew, free from trouble sang,
The while the heifers' bells about him rang
And mingled with the sweet soft-throated birds
And bright fresh ripple: listen, then, these words
Will tell the tale of his felicity,
Halting and void of music though they be.

Song.

O dwellers on the lovely earth,
Why will ye break your rest and mirth
To weary us with fruitless prayer;
Why will ye toil and take such care
For children's children yet unborn,
And garner store of strife and scorn
To gain a scarce-remembered name,
Cumbered with lies and soiled with shame?

And if the gods care not for you,
What is this folly ye must do
To win some mortal's feeble heart?
O fools! when each man plays his part,
And heeds his fellow little more
Than these blue waves that kiss the shore
Take heed of how the daisies grow.
O fools! and if ye could but know
How fair a world to you is given.

O brooder on the hills of heaven,
When for my sin thou drav'st me forth,
Hadst thou forgot what this was worth,
Thine own hand had made? The tears of men,
The death of threescore years and ten,
The trembling of the timorous race—
Had these things so bedimmed the place
Thine own hand made, thou couldst not know
To what a heaven the earth might grow
If fear beneath the earth were laid,
If hope failed not, nor love decayed.

He stopped, for he beheld his wandering lord,
Who, drawing near, heard little of his word,
And noted less; for in that haggard mood
Nought could he do but o'er his sorrows brood,
Whatever they were, but now being come anigh,
He lifted up his drawn face suddenly,
And as the singer gat him to his feet,
His eyes Admetus' troubled eyes did meet,
As with some speech he now seemed labouring,
Which from his heart his lips refused to bring.
Then spoke the herdsman, "Master, what is this,
That thou, returned with honour to the bliss,
The gods have given thee here, still makest show
To be some wretch bent with the weight of woe?"

What wilt thou have? What help there is in me
Is wholly thine, for in felicity
Within thine house thou still hast let me live,
Nor grudged most noble gifts to me to give."

" Yea", said Admetus, " thou canst help indeed,
But as the spring shower helps the unsown mead.
Yet listen: at lolchos the first day
Unto Diana's house I took my way,
Where all men gathered ere the games began,
There, at the right side of the royal man,
Who rules lolchos, did his daughter stand,
Who with a suppliant bough in her right hand
Headed the band of maidens; but to me
More than a goddess did she seem to be,
Nor fit to die; and therewithal I thought
That we had all been thither called for nought
But that her bridegroom Pelias might choose,
And with that thought desire did I let loose,
And striving not with Love, I gazed my fill,
As one who will not fear the coming ill:
Ah, foolish were mine eyes, foolish my heart,
To strive in such a marvel to have part!
What god shall wed her rather? no more fear
Than vexes Pallas vexed her forehead clear,
Faith shone from out her eyes, and on her lips
Unknown love trembled; the Phoenician ships
Within their dark holds nought so precious bring
As her soft golden hair; no daintiest thing
I ever saw was half so wisely wrought
As was her rosy ear; beyond all thought,
All words to tell of, her veiled body showed,
As, by the image of the Three-formed bowed,
She laid her offering down; then I drawn near
The murmuring of her gentle voice could hear,

As waking one hears music in the morn,
Ere yet the fair June sun is fully born;
And sweeter than the roses fresh with dew
Sweet odours floated round me, as she drew
Some golden thing from out her balmy breast
With her right hand, the while her left hand pressed
The hidden wonders of her girdlestead;
And when abashed I sank adown my head,
Dreading the god of Love, my eyes must meet
The happy bands about her perfect feet.

What more? thou know'st perchance what thing love is?
Kindness, and hot desire, and rage, and bliss,
None first a moment; but before that day
No love I knew but what might pass away
When hot desire was changed to certainty,
Or not abide much longer; e'en such stings
Had smitten me, as the first warm day brings
When March is dying; but now half a god
The crowded way unto the lists I trod,
Yet hopeless as a vanquished god at whiles;
And hideous seemed the laughter and the smiles,
And idle talk about me on the way.

" But none could stand before me on that day,
I was as god-possessed, not knowing how
The king had brought her forth but for a show,
To make his glory greater through the land:
Therefore at last victorious did I stand
Among my peers, nor yet one well-known name
Had gathered any honour from my shame.
For there indeed both men of Thessaly,
Ætolians, Thebans, dwellers by the sea,
And folk of Attica and Argolis,
Arcadian woodmen, islanders, whose bliss

Is to be tossed about from wave to wave,
All these at last to me the honour gave,
Nor did they grudge it: yea, and one man said,
A wise Thessalian with a snowy head,
And voice grown thin with age, 'O Pelias,
Surely to thee no evil thing it was
That to thy house this rich Thessalian
Should come, to prove himself a valiant man
Amongst these heroes; for if I be wise
By dint of many years, with wistful eyes
Doth he behold thy daughter, this fair maid;
And surely, if the matter were well weighed,
Good were it both for thee and for the land
That he should take the damsel by the hand
And lead her hence, for ye near neighbours dwell;
What sayest thou, king, have I said ill or well?"

"With that must I, a fool, stand forth and ask
If yet there lay before me some great task
That I must do ere I the maid should wed;
But Pelias, looking on us, smiled and said,
'O neighbour of Larissa, and thou too,
O King Admetus, this may seem to you
A little matter; yea, and for my part
E'en such a marriage would make glad my heart;
But we the blood of Salmoneus who share
With godlike gifts great burdens also bear,
Nor is this maid without them, for the day
On which her maiden zone she puts away
Shall be her death-day, if she wed with one
By whom this marvellous thing may not be done.
For in the traces neither must steeds paw
Before my threshold, or white oxen draw
The wain that comes my maid to take from me,
Far other beasts that day her slaves must be:

The yellow lion 'neath the lash must roar,
And by his side unscared, the forest boar
Toil at the draught: what sayest thou then hereto
O lord of Pherae, wilt thou come to woo
In such a chariot, and win endless fame,
Or turn thine eyes elsewhere with little shame?

"What answered I? O herdsman, I was mad
With sweet love and the triumph I had had.
I took my father's ring from off my hand,
And said, 'O heroes of the Grecian land,
Be witnesses that on my father's name
For this man's promise, do I take the shame
Of this deed undone, if I fail herein;
Fear not, O Pelias, but that I shall win
This ring from thee, when I shall come again
Through fair Iolchos, driving that strange wain.
Else by this token, thou, O king, shalt have
Pherae my home, while on the tumbling wave
A hollow ship my sad abode shall be/

"So driven by some hostile deity,
Such words I said, and with my gifts hard won,
But little valued now, set out upon
My homeward way: but nearer as I drew
To mine abode, and ever fainter grew
In my weak heart the image of my love,
In vain with fear my boastful folly strove;
For I remembered that no god I was
Though I had chanced my fellows to surpass;
And I began to mind me in a while
What murmur rose, with what a mocking smile
Pelias stretched out his hand to take the ring,
Made by my drunkard's gift now twice a king:
And when unto my palace-door I came
I had awakened fully to my shame;

For certainly no help is left to me,
But I must get me down unto the sea
And build a keel, and whatso things I may
Set in her hold, and cross the watery way
Whither Jove bids, and the rough winds may blow
Unto a land where none my folly know,
And there begin a weary life anew."

Eager and bright the herdsman's visage grew
The while this tale was told, and at the end
He said, " Admetus, I thy life may mend,
And thou at lovely Pherse still may dwell;
Wait for ten days, and then may all be well,
And thou to fetch thy maiden home may go
And to the king thy team unheard-of show.
And if not, then make ready for the sea,
Nor will I fail indeed to go with thee,
And 'twixt the halyards and the ashen oar
Finish the service well begun ashore;
But meanwhile do I bid thee hope the best;
And take another herdsman for the rest,
For unto Ossa must I go alone
To do a deed not easy to be done."

Then springing up he took his spear and bow
And northward by the lake-shore 'gan to go;
But the king gazed upon him as he went,
Then, sighing, turned about, and homeward bent
His lingering steps, and hope began to spring
Within his heart, for some betokening
He seemed about the herdsman now to see
Of one from mortal cares and troubles free.

And so midst hopes and fears day followed day,
Until at last upon his bed he lay
When the grey, creeping dawn had now begun
To make the wide world ready for the sun

On the tenth day: sleepless had been the night
And now in that first hour of gathering light
For weariness he slept, and dreamed that he
Stood by the border of a fair, calm sea
At point to go a-shipboard, and to leave
Whatever from his sire he did receive
Of land or kingship; and withal he dreamed
That through the cordage a bright light there gleamed
Far off within the east; and nowise sad
He felt at leaving all he might have had,
But rather as a man who goes to see
Some heritage expected patiently.
But when he moved to leave the firm fixed shore,
The windless sea rose high and 'gan to roar,
And from the gangway thrust the ship aside,
Until he hung over a chasm wide
Vocal with furious waves, yet had no fear
For all the varied tumult he might hear,
But slowly woke up to the morning light
That to his eyes seemed past all memory bright;
And then strange sounds he heard, whereat his heart
Woke up to joyous life with one glad start,
And nigh his bed he saw the herdsman stand,
Holding a long white staff in his right hand,
Carved with strange figures; and withal he said,

"Awake, Admetus! loiter not a-bed,
But haste thee to bring home thy promised bride,
For now an ivory chariot waits outside,
Yoked to such beasts as Pelias bade thee bring;
Whose guidance thou shalt find an easy thing,
If in thine hands thou boldest still this rod,
Whereon are carved the names of every god
That rules the fertile earth; but having come
Unto King Pelias' well-adorned home,

Abide not long, but take the royal maid,
And let her dowry in thy wain be laid,
Of silver and fine cloth and unmixed gold,
For this indeed will Pelias not withhold
When he shall see thee like a very god.
Then let thy beasts, ruled by this carven rod,
Turn round to Pherae; yet must thou abide
Before thou comest to the streamlet's side
That feeds its dykes; there, by the little wood
Wherein unto Diana men shed blood,
Will I await thee, and thou shalt descend
And hand-in-hand afoot through Pherae wend;
And yet I bid thee, this night let thy bride
Apart among the womenfolk abide;
That on the morrow thou with sacrifice
For these strange deeds may pay a fitting price."

But as he spoke, with something like to awe,
His eyes and much-changed face Admetus saw,
And voiceless like a slave his words obeyed;
For rising up no more delay he made,
But took the staff and gained the palace-door
Where stood the beasts, whose mingled whine and roar
Had wrought his dream; there two and two they stood,
Thinking, it might be, of the tangled wood,
And all the joys of the food-hiding trees;
But harmless as their painted images
'Neath some dread spell; then, leaping up, he took
The reins in hands and the bossed leather shook,
And no deky the conquered beasts durst make
But drew, not silent; and folk just awake
When he went by, as though a god they saw,
Fell on their knees, and maidens come to draw
Fresh water from the fount sank trembling down,
And silence held the babbling wakened town.

So 'twixt the dewy hedges did he wend,
And still their noise afar the beasts did send,
His strange victorious advent to proclaim,
Till to lolchos at the last he came,
And drew anigh the gates, whence in affright
The guards fled, helpless at the wondrous sight;
And through the town news of the coming spread
Of some great god; so that the scared priests led
Pale suppliants forth; who, in unmeet attire
And hastily-caught bows and smouldering lire
Within their censers, in the market-place
Awaited him with many an upturned face,
Trembling with fear of that unnamed new god;
But through the midst of them his lions trod
With noiseless feet, nor noted aught their prey,
And the boars' hooves went pattering on the way,
While from their churning tusks the white foam flew
As raging, helpless, in the trace they drew.

But Pelias, knowing all the work of fate,
Sat in his brazen-pillared porch to wait
The coming of the king; the while the maid
In her fair marriage garments was arrayed.
And from strong places of his treasury
Men brought fine scarlet from the Syrian sea,
And works of brass, and ivory, and gold;
But when the strange-yoked beasts he did behold
Come through the press of people terrified,
Then he arose and o'er the clamour cried,
"Hail, thou, who like a very god art come
To bring great honour to my damsel's home;"
And when Admetus tightened rein before
The gleaming, brazen-wrought, half-opened door,
He cried to Pelias, "Hail, to thee, O King!
Let me behold once more my father's ring,

Let me behold the prize that I have won,
Mine eyes are wearying now to look upon."

"Fear not," he said, "the Fates are satisfied;
Yet wilt thou not descend and here abide,
Doing me honour till the next bright morn
Has dried the dew upon the new-sprung corn,
That we in turn may give the honour due
To such a man that such a thing can do,
And unto all the gods may sacrifice?"

"Nay," said Admetus, "if thou call'st me wise,
And like a very god thou dost me deem,
Shall I abide the ending of the dream
And so gain nothing? nay, let me be glad
That I at least one godlike hour have had
At whatsoever time I come to die,
That I may mock the world that passes by,
And yet forget it." Saying this, indeed,
Of Pelias did he seem to take small heed,
But spoke as one unto himself may speak,
And still the half-shut door his eyes did seek,
Wherethrough from distant rooms sweet music came,
Setting his over-strained heart a-flame,
Because amidst the Lydian flutes he thought
From place to place his love the maidens brought.

Then Pelias said, "What can I give to thee
Who fail'st so little of divinity?
Yet let my slaves lay these poor gifts within
Thy chariot, while my daughter strives to win
The favour of the spirits of this place,
Since from their altars she must turn her face
For ever now; hearken, her flutes I hear,
From the last chapel doth she draw anear."

Then by Admetus' feet the folk 'gan pile
The precious things, but he no less the while
Stared at the door ajar, and thought it long
Ere with the flutes mingled the maidens' song,
And both grew louder, and the scarce-seen floor
Was fluttering with white raiment, and the door
By slender fingers was set open wide,
And midst her damsels he beheld the bride
Ungirt, with hair unbound and garlanded:
Then Pelias took her slender hand and said,
" Daughter, this is the man that takes from thee
Thy curse midst women. Think no more to be
Childless, unloved, and knowing little bliss!
But now behold how like a god he is,
And yet with what prayers for the love of thee
He must have wearied some divinity,
And therefore in thine inmost heart be glad
That thou 'mongst women such a man hast had."

Then she with wondering eyes that strange team saw
A moment, then as one with gathering awe
Might turn from Jove's bird unto very Jove,
So did she raise her grey eyes to her love.
But to her brow the blood rose therewithal,
And she must tremble, such a look did fall
Upon her faithful eyes, that none the less
Would falter aught, for all her shamefastness:
But rather to her lover's hungry eyes
Wherein love's flame began to flicker now.

Withal, her father kissed her on the brow,
And said, "O daughter, take this royal ring,
And set it on the finger of the king,
And come not back; and thou, Admetus, pour
This wine to Jove before my open door,
And glad at heart take back thine own with thee".

Then with that word Alcestis silently,
And with no look cast back, and ring in hand,
Went forth, and soon beside her love did stand,
Nor on his finger failed to set the ring;
And then a golden cup the city's king
Gave to him, and he poured and said, "O thou,
From whatsoever place thou lookest now,
What prayers, what gifts unto thee shall I give
That we a little time with love may live?
A little time of love, then fall asleep
Together, while the crown of love we keep."

So spake he, and his strange beasts turned about,
And heeded not the people's wavering shout
That from their old fear and new pleasure sprung,
Nor noted aught of what the damsels sung,
Or of the flowers that after them they cast,
But like a dream the guarded city passed,
And 'twixt the song of birds and blossoms' scent
It seemed for many hundred years they went,
Though short the way was unto Pherae's gates.
Time they forgot, and gods, and men, and fates,
However nigh unto their hearts they were.
The woodland boars, the yellow lords of fear,
No more seemed strange to them, but all the earth
With all its changing sorrow and wild mirth
In that fair hour seemed new-born to the twain,
Grief seemed a play forgot, a pageant vain,
A picture painted, who knows where or when,
With soulless images of restless men;
For every thought but love was now gone by,
And they forgot that they should ever die.

But when they came anigh the sacred wood,
There, bidding them, Admetus' herdsman stood,

At sight of whom those yoke-fellows unchecked
Stopped dead, and little of Admetus recked,
Who now, as one from dreams not yet awake,
Drew back his love and did his wain forsake,
And gave the carven rod and guiding bands
Into the waiting herdsman's outstretched hands.
But when he would have thanked him for the thing
That he had done, his speechless tongue must cling
Unto his mouth, and why he could not tell.
But the man said, "No words! thou hast done well
To me, as I to thee; the day may come
When thou shalt ask me for a fitting home,
Nor shalt thou ask in vain; but hasten now,
And to thine house this royal maiden show,
Then give her to thy women for this night.
But when thou wakest up to thy delight
To-morrow, do all things that should be done,
Nor of the gods, forget thou any one,
And on the next day will I come again
To tend thy flocks upon the grassy plain.

"But now depart, and from thine home send here
Chariot and horse, these gifts of thine to bear
Unto thine house, and going, look not back
Lest many a wished-for thing thou com'st to lack."

Then hand in hand together, up the road
The lovers passed unto the king's abode,
And as they went, the whining snort and roar
From the yoked beasts they heard break out once more
And then die off, as they were led away;
But whether to some place lit up by day,
Or, 'neath the earth, they knew not; for the twain
Went hastening on, nor once looked back again.

But soon the minstrels met them, and a band
Of white-robed damsels flowery boughs in hand,

To bid them welcome to that pleasant place.
Then they, rejoicing much, in no long space
Came to the brazen-pillared porch, whereon
From 'twixt the passes of the hills yet shone
The dying sun; and there she stood awhile
Without the threshold, a faint tender smile
Trembling upon her lips 'twixt love and shame,
Until each side of her a maiden came
And raised her in their arms, that her fair feet
The polished brazen threshold might not meet,
And in Admetus' house she stood at last.

But to the women's chamber straight she passed
Bepraised of all,—and so the wakeful night
Lonely the lovers passed e'en as they might

But the next day with many a sacrifice,
Admetus wrought, for such a well-won prize,
A life so blest, the gods to satisfy,
And many a matchless beast that day did die
Upon the altars; nought unlucky seemed
To be amid the joyous crowd that gleamed
With gold and precious things, and only this
Seemed wanting to the King of Phœbus's bliss,
And all these pageants should be soon past by,
And hid by night the fair spring blossoms lie.

Yet on the morrow-morn Admetus came,
A haggard man oppressed with grief and shame '—
Unto the spot beside Bcebeis' shore
Whereby he met his herdsman once before,
And there again he found him flushed and glad
And from the babbling water newly clad,
Then he with downcast eyes these words began,

" O thou, whatso thy name is, god or man,
Hearken to me; meseemeth of thy deed
Some dread immortal taketh angry heed.

" Last night the height of my desire seemed won,
All day my weary eyes had watched the sun
Rise up and sink, and now was come the night
When I should be alone with my delight;
Silent the house was now from floor to roof,
And in the well-hung chambers, far aloof,
The feasters lay; the moon was in the sky;
The soft spring wind was wafting lovingly
Across the gardens fresh scents to my sweet,
As, troubled with the sound of my own feet,
I passed betwixt the pillars, whose long shade
Black on the white red-veined floor was laid:
So happy was I that the briar-rose,
Rustling outside within the flowery close,
Seemed but Love's odorous wing—too real all seemed
For such a joy as I had never dreamed.

" Why do I linger, as I lingered not
In that fair house, now ne'er to be forgot
While my life lasts?—Upon the gilded door
I laid my hand; I stood upon the floor
Of the bride-chamber, and I saw the bride,
Lovelier than any dream, stand by the side
Of the gold bed, with hands that hid her face:
One cry of joy I gave, and then the place
Seemed changed to hell as in a hideous dream.

" Still did the painted silver pillars gleam
Betwixt the scented torches and the moon;
Still did the garden shed its odorous boon
Upon the night; still did the nightingale
Unto his brooding mate tell all his tale:
But, risen 'twixt my waiting love and me,
As soundless as the dread eternity,
Sprung up from nothing, could mine eyes behold
A huge dull-gleaming dreadful coil that rolled

In changing circles on the pavement fair.
Then for the sword that was no longer there
My hand sank to my side; around I gazed,
And 'twixt the coils I met her grey eyes, glazed
With sudden horror most unspeakable;
And when mine own upon no weapon fell,
For what should weapons do in such a place,
Unto the dragon's head I set my face,
And raised bare hands against him, but a cry
Burst on mine ears of utmost agony
That nailed me there, and she cried out to me,
'O get thee hence; alas, I cannot flee!
They coil about me now, my lips to kiss.
O love, why hast thou brought me unto this?'

" Alas, my shame! trembling, away I slunk,
Yet turning saw the fearful coil had sunk
To whence it came, my love's limbs freed I saw,
And a long breath at first I heard her draw
As one redeemed, then heard the hard sobs come.
And wailings for her new accursed home.
But there outside across the door I lay,
Like a scourged hound, until the dawn of day;
And as her gentle breathing then I heard
As though she slept, before the earliest bird
Began his song, I wandered forth to seek
Thee, O strange man, e'en as thou seest me, weak
With all the torment of the night, and shamed
With such a shame as never shall be named
To aught but thee—Yea, yea, and why to thee?
Perchance this ends all thou wilt do for me?—
What then, and have I not a cure for that?
Lo, yonder is a rock where I have sat
Full many an hour while yet my life was life,
With hopes of all the coming wonder rife.

No sword hangs by my side, no god will turn
This cloudless hazy blue to black, and burn
My useless body with his lightning flash;
But the white waves above my bones may wash,
And when old chronicles our house shall name
They may leave out the letters and the shame,
That make Admetus, once a king of men—
And how could I be worse or better then?"

As one who notes a curious instrument
Working against the maker's own intent,
The herdsman eyed his wan face silently,
And smiling for a while; and then said he,—
" Admetus, thou, in spite of all I said,
Hast drawn this evil thing upon thine head,
Forgetting her who erewhile laid the curse
Upon the maiden, so for fear of worse
Go back again; for fair-limbed Artemis
Now bars the sweet attainment of thy bliss;
So taking heart, yet make no more delay
But worship her upon this very day,
Nor spare for aught, and of thy trouble make
No semblance unto any for her sake;
And thick upon the fair bride-chamber floor
Strew dittany, and on each side the door
Hang up such poppy-leaves as spring may yield;
And for the rest, myself may be a shield
Against her wrath—nay, be thou not too bold
To ask me that which may not now be told.
Yea, even what thou deemest, hide it deep
Within thine heart, and let thy wonder sleep,
For surely thou shalt one day know my name,
When the time comes again that autumn's flame
Is dying off the vine-boughs, overturned,
Stripped of their wealth. But now let gifts be burned

To her I told thee of, and in three days
Shall I by many hard and rugged ways
Have come to thee again to bring thee peace.
Go, the sun rises and the shades decrease."

Then, thoughtfully, Admetus gat him back
Nor did the altars of the Huntress lack
The fattest of the flocks upon that day.
But when night came, in arms Admetus lay
Across the threshold of the bride-chamber,
And naught amiss that night he noted there,
But durst not enter, though about the door
Young poppy-leaves were twined, and on the floor,
Not flowered as yet, with downy leaves and grey,
Fresh dittany beloved of wild goats lay.

But when the whole three days and nights were
done,
The herdsman came with rising of the sun,
And said, " Admetus, now rejoice again,
Thy prayers and offerings have not been in vain
And thou at last mayst come unto thy bliss;
And if thou askest for a sign of this,
Take thou this token; make good haste to rise,
And get unto the garden-close that lies
Below these windows sweet with greenery,
And in the midst a marvel shalt thou see,
Three white, black-hearted poppies blossoming,
Though this is but the middle of the spring ".

Nor was it otherwise than he had said,
And on that day with joy the twain were wed,
And 'gan to lead a life of great delight;
But the strange woeful history of that night,
The monstrous car, the promise to the king,
All these through weary hours of chiselling

Were wrought in stone, and in Diana's wall
Set up, a joy and witness unto all.

But neither so would winged time abide,
The changing year came round to autumn-tide,
Until at last the day was fully come
When the strange guest first reached Admetus' home.
Then, when the sun was reddening to its end,
He to Admetus' brazen porch did wend,
Whom there he found feathering a poplar dart,
Then said he, " King, the time has come to part,
Come forth, for I have that to give thine ear
No man upon the earth but thou must hear ".

Then rose the king, and with a troubled look
His well-steeled spear within his hand he took,
And by his herdsman silently he went
As to a peaked hill his steps he bent
Nor did the parting servant speak one word,
As up they climbed, unto his silent lord:
Till from the top he turned about his head
From all the glory of the gold light, shed
Upon the hill-top by the setting sun;
For now indeed the day was well-nigh done,
And all the eastern vale was grey and cold;
And when Admetus he did now behold,
Panting beside him from the steep ascent,
One much-changed godlike look on him he bent,
And said, " O mortal, listen, for I see
Thou deemest somewhat of what is in me;
Fear not! I love thee, even as I can
Who cannot feel the woes and ways of man
In spite of this my seeming; for indeed
Now thou beholdest Jove's immortal seed;
And what my name is I would tell thee now,
If men who dwell upon the earth as thou

Could hear the name and live; but on the earth,
With strange melodious stories of my birth,
Phoebus men call me, and Latona's son.

" And now my servitude with thee is done,
And I shall leave thee toiling on thine earth,
This handful, that within its little girth
Holds that which moves you so, O men that die;
Behold, to-day thou hast felicity,
But the times change, and I can see a day
When all thine happiness shall fade away;
And yet be merry, strive not with the end!
Thou canst not change it; for the rest, a friend
This year has won thee who shall never fail:
But now indeed, for nought will it avail
To say what I may have in store for thee,
Of gifts that men desire; let these things be,
And live thy life, till death itself shall come,
And turn to nought the storehouse of thine home;
Then think of me; these feathered shafts behold,
That here have been the terror of the wold,
Take these, and count them still the best of all
Thine envied wealth, and when on thee shall fall
By any way the worst extremity,
Call upon me before thou com'st to die,
And lay these shafts with incense on a fire,
That thou mayst gain thine uttermost desire."

He ceased, but ere the golden tongue was still
An odorous mist had stolen up the hill,
And to Admetus first the god grew dim,
And then was but a lovely voice to him,
And then at last the sun had sunk to rest,
And a fresh wind blew lightly from the west
Over the hill-top, and no soul was there;
But the sad dying autumn field-flowers fair,

Rustled dry leaves about the windy place,
Where even now had been the godlike face,
And in their midst the brass-bound quiver lay.
Then, going further westward, far away,
He saw the gleaming of Peneus wan
'Neath the white sky, but never any man,
Except a grey-haired shepherd driving down
From off the long slopes to his fold-yard brown
His woolly sheep, with whom a maiden went,
Singing for labour done and sweet content
Of coming rest; with that he turned again,
And took the shafts up, never sped in vain,
And came unto his house most deep in thought
Of all the things the varied year had brought.

Thenceforth in bliss and honour day by day
His measured span of sweet life wore away.
A happy man he was; no vain desire
Of foolish fame had set his heart a-fire;
No care he had the ancient bounds to change,
Nor yet for him must idle soldiers range
From place to place about the burdened land,
Or thick upon the ruined corn-fields stand;
For him no trumpets blessed the bitter war,
Wherein the right and wrong so mingled are,
That hardly can the man of single heart
Amid the sickening turmoil choose his part;
For him sufficed the changes of the year,
The god-sent terror was enough of fear
For him; enough the battle with the earth,
The autumn triumph over drought and dearth.

Better to him than wolf-moved battered shields,
O'er poor dead corpses, seemed the stubble-fields
Danced down beneath the moon, until the night
Grew dreamy with a shadowy sweet delight,

And with the high-risen moon came pensive thought,
And men in love's despite must grow distraught
And loiter in the dance, and maidens drop
Their gathered raiment, and the fifer stop
His dancing notes the pensive drone that chid,
And as they wander to their dwellings, hid
By the black shadowed trees, faint melody,
Mournful and sweet, their soft good-night must be.

Far better spoil the gathering vat bore in
Unto the pressing shed, than midst the din
Of falling houses in war's waggon lies
Besmeared with redder stains than Tyrian dyes;
Or when the temple of the sea-born one
With glittering crowns and gallant raiment shone,
Fairer the maidens seemed by no chain bound,
But such as amorous arms might cast around
Their lovely bodies, than the wretched band
Who midst the shipmen by the gangway stand;
Each lonely in her speechless misery,
And thinking of the worse time that shall be,
When midst of folk who scarce can speak her name,
She bears the uttermost of toil and shame.

Better to him seemed that victorious crown,
That midst the reverent silence of the town
He oft would set upon some singer's brow
Than was the conqueror's diadem, blest now
By lying priests, soon, bent and bloody, hung
Within the thorn, by linnets well besung,
Who think but little of the corpse beneath,
Though ancient lands have trembled at his breath.

But to this king—fair Ceres' gifts, the days
Whereon men sung in flushed Lyseus' praise
Tales of old time; the bloodless sacrifice

Unto the goddess of the downcast eyes
And soft persuading lips; the ringing lyre
Unto the bearer of the holy fire
Who once had been amongst them—things like these
Seemed meet to him men's yearning to appease.
These were the triumphs of the peaceful king.

And so, betwixt seed-time and harvesting,
With little fear his life must pass away;
And for the rest, he, from the self-same day
That the god left him, seemed to have some share
In that same godhead he had harboured there:
In all things grew his wisdom and his wealth,
And folk beholding the fair state and health
Wherein his land was, said, that now at last
A fragment of the Golden Age was cast
Over the place, for there was no debate,
And men forgot the very name of hate.

Nor failed the love of her he erst had won
To hold his heart as still the years wore on,
And she, no whit less fair than on the day
When from lolchos first she passed away,
Did all his will as though he were a god,
And loving still, the downward way she trod.

Honour and love, plenty and peace, he had;
Nor lacked for aught that makes a wise man glad,
That makes him like a rich well-honoured guest
Scarce sorry when the time comes, for the rest,
That at the end perforce must bow his head.

And yet—was death not much remembered,
As still with happy men the manner is?
Or, was he not so pleased with this world's bliss,
As to be sorry when the time should come
When but his name should hold his ancient home

While he dwelt nowhere? either way indeed,
Will be enough for most men's daily need,
And with calm faces they may watch the world,
And note men's lives hither and thither hurled,
As folk may watch the unfolding of a play—
Nor this, nor that was King Admetus' way;
For neither midst the sweetness of his life
Did he forget the ending of the strife,
Nor yet for heavy thoughts of passing pain
Did all his life seem lost to him or vain,
A wasteful jest of Jove, an empty dream;
Rather before him did a vague hope gleam,
That made him a great-hearted man and wise,
Who saw the deeds of men with far-seeing eyes,
And dealt them pitying justice still, as though
The inmost heart of each man he did know;
This hope it was, and not his kingly place
That made men's hearts rejoice to see his face
Rise in the council hall: through this, men felt
That in their midst a son of man there dwelt
Like and unlike them, and their friend through all;
And still as time went on, the more would fall
This glory on the king's beloved head,
And round his life fresh hope and fear were shed.

Yet at the last his good days passed away,
And sick upon his bed Admetus lay,
Twixt him and death nought but a lessening veil
Of hasty minutes; yet did hope not fail,
Nor did bewildering fear torment him then,
But still, as ever, all the ways of men
Seemed clear to him: but he, while yet his breath
Still held the gateway 'gainst the arms of death,
Turned to his wife, who, bowed beside the bed,
Wept for his love, and dying goodlihead,

And bade her put all folk from out the room,
Then going to the treasury's rich gloom
To bear the arrows forth, the Lycian's gift.
So she, amidst her blinding tears, made shift
To find laid in the inmost treasury
Those shafts, and brought them unto him; but he,
Beholding them, beheld therewith his life,
Both that now past, with many marvels rife,
And that which he had hoped he yet should see.

Then spoke he faintly, " Love, 'twixt thee and me
A film has come, and I am failing fast:
And now our ancient happy life is past;
For either this is death's dividing hand,
And all is done, or if the shadowy land
I yet escape, full surely if I live
The god with life some other gift will give,
And change me unto thee: e'en at this tide
Like a dead man among you all I bide,
Until I once again behold my guest,
And he has given me either life or rest:
Alas, my love! that thy too loving heart
Nor with my life or death can have a part.
O cruel words! yet death is cruel too:
Stoop down and kiss me, for I yearn for you
E'en as the autumn yearneth for the sun.

" O love, a little time we have been one,
And if we now are twain, weep not therefore;
For many a man on earth desireth sore
To have some mate upon the toilsome road,
Some sharer of his still increasing load,
And yet for all his longing and his pain
His troubled heart must seek for love in vain,
And till he dies still must he be alone—
But now, although our love indeed is gone,

Yet to this land as thou art leal and true,
Set now thine hand to what I bid thee do;
Because I may not die; rake up the brands
Upon the hearth, and from these trembling hands
Cast incense thereon, and upon them lay
These shafts, the relics of a happier day,
Then watch with me; perchance I may not die,
Though the supremest hour now draws anigh
Of life or death—O thou who madest me,
The only thing on earth alike to thee,
Why must I be unlike to thee in this?
Consider, if thou dost not do amiss
To slay the only thing that feareth death
Or knows its name, of all things drawing breath
Upon the earth: see now for no short hour,
For no half-halting death, to reach me slower
Than other men, I pray thee—what avail
To add some trickling grains unto the tale
Soon told, of minutes thou dost snatch away
From out the midst of that unending day
Wherein thou dwellest? rather grant me this
To right me wherein thou hast done amiss,
And give me life like thine for evermore."

So murmured he, contending very sore
Against the coming death; but she meanwhile,
Faint with consuming love, made haste to pile
The brands upon the hearth, and thereon cast
Sweet incense, and the feathered shafts at last;
Then, trembling, back unto the bed she crept,
And lay down by his side, and no more wept,
Nay scarce could think of death for very love
That in her faithful heart for ever strove
'Gainst fear and grief: but now the incense-cloud
The old familiar chamber did enshroud,

And on the very verge of death drawn close,
Wrapt both their weary souls in strange repose,
That through sweet sleep sent kindly images
Of simple things; and in the midst of these,
Whether it were but parcel of their dream,
Or that they woke to it as some might deem,
I know not, but the door was opened wide,
And the king's name a voice long silent cried,
And Phoebus on the very threshold trod.
And yet in nothing liker to a god
Than when he ruled Admetus' herds; for he
Still wore the homespun coat men used to see
Among the heifers in the summer morn,
And round about him hung the herdsman's horn.
And in his hand he bore the herdsman's spear
And cornel bow, the prowling dog-wolf's fear;
Though empty of its shafts the quiver was.

He to the middle of the room did pass,
And said, " Admetus, neither all for nought
My coming to thee is, nor have I brought
Good tidings to thee; poor man, thou shalt live
If any soul for thee sweet life will give
Enforced by none: for such a sacrifice
Alone the Fates can deem a fitting price
For thy redemption; in no battle-field,
Maddened by hope of glory life to yield,
To give it up to heal no city's shame
In hope of gaining long-enduring fame;
For whoso dieth for thee must believe
That thou with shame that last gift wilt receive,
And strive henceforward with forgetfulness
The honied draught of thy new life to bless.
Nay, and moreover such a glorious heart
Who loves thee well enough with life to part

But for thy love, with life must lose love too,
Which e'en when wrapped about in weeds of woe
Is godlike life indeed to such an one.

" And now behold, three days ere life is done
Do the Fates give thee, and I, even I,
Upon thy life have shed felicity
And given thee love of men, that they in turn
With fervent love of thy dear love might burn.
The people love thee and thy silk-clad breast,
Thine open doors, have given thee better rest
Than woods of spears or hills of walls might do,
And even now in wakefulness and woe
The city lies, calling to mind thy love,
Wearying with ceaseless prayers the gods above.
But thou—thine heart is wise enough to know
That they no whit from their decrees will go."

So saying, swiftly from the room he passed;
But on the world no look Admetus cast,
But peacefully turned round unto the wall
As one who knows that quick death must befall:
For in his heart he thought, " Indeed too well
I know what men are, this strange tale to tell
To those that live with me: yea, they will weep,
And o'er my tomb most solemn days will keep,
And in great chronicles will write my name,
Telling to many an age my deeds and fame.
For living men such things as this desire,
And by such ways will they appease the fire
Of love and grief: but when death comes to stare
Full in men's faces, and the truth lays bare,
How can we then have wish for anything,
But unto life that gives us all to cling?"

So said he, and with closed eyes did await,
Sleeping or waking, the decrees of fate.

But now Alcestis rose, and by the bed
She stood, with wild thoughts passing through her head.
Dried were her tears, her troubled heart and sore
Throbbled with the anguish of her love no more.
A strange look on the dying man she cast,
Then covered up her face and said, "O past!
Past the sweet times that I remember well!
Alas, that such a tale my heart can tell!
Ah, how I trusted him! what love was mine!
How sweet to feel his arms about me twine,
And my heart beat with his! what wealth of bliss
To hear his praises! all to come to this,
That now I durst not look upon his face,
Lest in my heart that other thing have place,
That which I knew now, that which men can hate.

"O me, the bitterness of God and fate!
A little time ago we two were one;
I had not lost him though his life was done,
For still was he in me—but now alone
Through the thick darkness must my soul make moan,
For I must die: how can I live to bear
An empty heart about, the nurse of fear?
How can I live to die some other tide,
And, dying, hear my loveless name outcried
About the portals of that weary land
Whereby my shadowy feet should come to stand.

"Alcestis! O Alcestis, hadst thou known
That thou one day shouldst thus be left alone,
How hadst thou borne a living soul to love!
Hadst thou not rather lifted hands to Jove,
To turn thine heart to stone, thy front to brass,
That through this wondrous world thy soul might pass,
Well pleased and careless, as Diana goes
Through the thick woods, all pitiless of those

Her shafts smite down? Alas! how could it be?
Can a god give a god's delights to thee?
Nay rather, Jove, but give me once again,
If for one moment only, that sweet pain,
The love I had while still I thought to live!
Ah! wilt thou not, since unto thee I give
My life, my hope?—But thou—I come to thee.
Thou sleepest: O wake not, nor speak to me!
In silence let my last hour pass away,
And men forget my bitter feeble day."

With that she laid her down upon the bed,
And nestling to him kissed his weary head,
And laid his wasted hand upon her breast,
Yet woke him not; and silence and deep rest
Fell on that chamber. The night wore away
Mid gusts of wailing wind, the twilight grey
Stole o'er the sea, and wrought his wondrous change
On things unseen by night, by day not strange,
But now half seen and strange; then came the sun,
And therewithal the silent world and dun
Waxing, waxed many-coloured, full of sound,
As men again their heap of troubles found,
And woke up to their joy or misery.

But there, unmoved by aught, those twain did lie,
Until Admetus' ancient nurse drew near
Unto the open door, and full of fear
Beheld them moving not, and as folk dead;
Then, trembling with her eagerness and dread,
She cried, "Admetus! art thou dead indeed?
Alcestis! livest thou my words to heed?
Alas, alas, for this Thessalian folk!"

But with her piercing cry the king awoke,
And round about him wildly 'gan to stare,
As a bewildered man who knows not where

He has awakened: but not thin or wan
His face was now, as of a dying man,
But fresh and ruddy; and his eyes shone clear,
As of a man who much of life may bear.
And at the first, but joy and great surprise
Shone out from those awakened, new-healed eyes;
But as for something more at last he yearned,
Unto his love with troubled brow he turned,
For still she seemed to sleep: alas, alas!
Her lonely shadow even now did pass
Along the changeless fields, oft looking back,
As though it yet had thought of some great lack.
And here, the hand just fallen from off his breast
Was cold; and cold the bosom his hand pressed.
And even as the colour lit the day
The colour from her lips had waned away;
Yet still, as though that longed-for happiness
Had come again her faithful heart to bless,
Those white lips smiled, unwrinkled was her brow.
But of her eyes no secrets might he know,
For, hidden by the lids of ivory,
Had they beheld that death a-drawing nigh.

Then o'er her dead corpse King Admetus hung,
Such sorrow in his heart as his faint tongue
Refused to utter; yet the just-past night
But dimly he remembered, and the sight
Of the Far-darter, and the dreadful word
That seemed to cleave all hope as with a sword:
Yet stronger in his heart a knowledge grew,
That nought it was but her fond heart and true
That all the marvel for his love had wrought,
Whereby from death to life he had been brought;
That dead, his life she was, as she had been
His life's delight while still she lived a queen.

And he fell wondering if his life were gain,
So wrapt as then in loneliness and pain;
Yet therewithal no tears would fill his eyes,
For as a god he was.

Then did he rise
And gat him down unto the Council-place,
And when the people saw his well-loved face
They cried aloud for joy to see him there,
And earth again to them seemed blest and fair.
And though indeed they did lament in turn,
When of Alcestis' end they came to learn,
Scarce was it more than seeming, or, at least,
The silence in the middle of a feast,
When men have memory of their heroes slain.
So passed the order of the world again,
Victorious Summer crowning lusty Spring,
Rich Autumn faint with wealth of harvesting,
And Winter the earth's sleep; and then again
Spring, Summer, Autumn, and the Winter's pain;
And still and still the same the years went by.

But Time, who slays so many a memory,
Brought hers to light, the short-lived loving queen;
And her fair soul, as scent of flowers unseen,
Sweetened the turmoil of long centuries.
For soon, indeed, Death laid his hand on these,
The shouters round the throne upon that day.
And for Admetus, he, too, went his way,
Though if he died at all I cannot tell;
But either on the earth he ceased to dwell,
Or else, oft born again, had many a name.
But through all lands of Greece Alcestis' fame
Grew greater, and about her husband's twined,
Lived, in the hearts of far-off men enshrined.
See I have told her tale, though I know not

What men are dwelling now on that green spot
Anigh Bcebeis, or if Pherae still,
With name oft changed perchance, adown the hill
Still shows its white walls to the rising sun.
—The gods at least remember what is done.

Strange felt the wanderers at his tale, for now
Their old desires it seemed once more to show
Unto their altered hearts, when now the rest,
Most surely coming, of all things seemed best:—
—Unless, by death perchance they yet might gain
Some space to try such deeds as now in vain
They heard of amidst stories of the past;
Such deeds as they for that wild hope had cast
From out their hands—they sighed to think of it,
And now as deedless men they there must sit.

Yet, with the measured falling of that rhyme
Mingled the lovely sights and glorious time,
Whereby, in spite of hope long past away,
In spite of knowledge growing day by day
Of lives so wasted, in despite of death,
With sweet content that eve they drew their breath,
And scarce their own lives seemed to touch them more
Than that dead queen's beside Boebdis' shore;
Bitter and sweet so mingled in them both,
Their lives and that old tale, they had been loth,
Perchance, to have them told another way.—
So passed the sun from that fair summer day.

June drew unto its end, the hot bright days
Not gat from men as much of blame as praise,
As rainless still they passed, without a cloud;
And growing grey at last, the barley bowed
Before the south-east wind. On such a day
These folk amid the trellised roses lay,

And careless for a little while at least,
Crowned with the mingled blossoms held their feast:
Nor did the garden lack for younger folk,
Who cared no more for burning summer's yoke
Than the sweet breezes of the April-tide;
But through the thick trees wandered far and wide
From sun to shade, and shade to sun again,
Until they deemed the elders would be fain
To hear the tale, and shadows longer grew:
Then round about the grave old men they drew,
Both youths and maidens; and beneath their feet
The grass seemed greener, and the flowers more sweet
Unto the elders, as they stood around.

So through the calm air soon arose the sound
Of one old voice as now a wanderer spoke.
"O friends, and ye, fair loving gentle folk,
Would I could better tell a tale to-day;
But hark to this, which while our good ship lay
Within the Weser such a while ago,
A Fleming told me, as we sat alone
One Sunday evening in the Rose-garland,
And all the other folk were gone a-land
After their pleasure, like sea-faring men.
Surely I deem it no great wonder then
That I remember everything he said,
Since from that Sunday eve strange fortune led
That keel and me on such a weary way—
Well, at the least it serveth you to-day."

