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ALFRED TENNYSON

POET LAUREATE

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# LANCELOT AND ELAINE







## LANCELOT AND ELAINE.

**E**L AINE the fair, Elaine the loveable,  
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,  
High in her chamber up a tower to the east  
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot;  
Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray  
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;  
Then fearing rust or soilure fashion'd for it  
A case of silk, and braided thereupon  
All the devices blazon'd on the shield

In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,  
A border fantasy of branch and flower,  
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.  
Nor rested thus content, but day by day  
Leaving her household and good father climb'd  
That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door,  
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,  
Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,  
Now made a pretty history to herself  
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,  
And every scratch a lance had made upon it,  
Conjecturing when and where: this cut is fresh;  
That ten years back; this dealt him at Caerlyle;  
That at Caerleon; this at Camelot:  
And ah God's mercy what a stroke was there!  
And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God

Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,  
And saved him : so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield  
Of Lancelot, she that knew not ev'n his name ?  
He left it with her, when he rode to tilt  
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,  
Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name  
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur long before they crown'd him  
king,  
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse,  
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.  
A horror lived about the tarn, and cieve

Like its own mists to all the mountain side :  
For here two brothers, one a king, had met  
And fought together ; but their names were lost.  
And each had slain his brother at a blow,  
And down they fell and made the glen abhorrd :  
And there they lay till all their bones were  
bleach'd,  
And lichen'd into colour with the crags :  
And he, that once was king, had on a crown  
Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside.  
And Arthur came, and labouring up the pass  
All in a misty moonshine, unawares  
Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull  
Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown  
Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims  
Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn :

And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and  
caught,

And set it on his head, and in his heart

Heard murmurs “ lo, thou likewise shalt be king.”

Thereafter, when a king, he had the gems  
Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his  
knights,

Saying “ these jewels, whereupon I chanced

Divinely, are the kingdom's not the king's—

For public use: henceforward let there be,

Once every year, a joust for one of these:

For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn

Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow

In use of arms and manhood, till we drive

The Heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land

Hereafter, which God hinder." Thus he spoke :

And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and  
still

Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,  
With purpose to present them to the Queen,  
When all were won ; but meaning all at once  
To snare her royal fancy with a boon  
Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last  
And largest, Arthur, holding then his court  
Hard on the river nigh the place which now  
Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust  
At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh  
Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere  
" Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move

To these fair jousts?" "Yea, lord," she said, "ye  
know it."

"Then will ye miss," he answer'd, "the great deeds  
Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,  
A sight ye love to look on." And the Queen  
Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly  
On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.  
He thinking that he read her meaning there,  
"Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more  
Than many diamonds," yielded, and a heart,  
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen  
(However much he yearn'd to make complete  
The tale of diamonds for his destined boon)  
Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,  
"Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,  
And lets me from the saddle;" and the King

Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.

No sooner gone than suddenly she began.

“To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to  
blame.

Why go ye not to these fair jousts ? the knights

Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd

Will murmur, lo the shameless ones, who take

Their pastime now the trustful king is gone !”

Then Lancelot vext at having lied in vain :

“Are ye so wise ? ye were not once so wise,

My Queen, that summer, when ye loved me first.

Then of the crowd ye took no more account

Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,

When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,

And every voice is nothing. As to knights,

Them surely can I silence with all ease.  
 But now my loyal worship is allow'd  
 Of all men : many a bard, without offence,  
 Has link'd our names together in his lay,  
 Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,  
 The pearl of beauty : and our knights at feast  
 Have pledged us in this union, while the king  
 Would listen smiling. How then ? is there more ?  
 Has Arthur spoken aught ? or would yourself,  
 Now weary of my service and devoir,  
 Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord ?"

She broke into a little scornful laugh.

" Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,  
 That passionate perfection, my good lord—  
 But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven ?

He never spake word of reproach to me,  
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,  
He cares not for me : only here to-day  
There gleam'd a vague suspicion in his eyes :  
Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him—else  
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,  
And swearing men to vows impossible,  
To make them like himself : but, friend, to me  
He is all fault who hath no fault at all :  
For who loves me must have a touch of earth ;  
The low sun makes the colour : I am yours,  
Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond.  
And therefore hear my words : go to the jousts :  
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream  
When sweetest ; and the vermin voices here  
May buzz so loud—we scorn them, but they sting."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights.

“ And with what face, after my pretext made,

Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I

Before a king who honours his own word,

As if it were his God's ?”

“ Yea,” said the Queen,

“ A moral child without the craft to rule,

Else had he not lost me : but listen to me,

If I must find you wit : we hear it said

That men go down before your spear at a touch

But knowing you are Lancelot ; your great name,

This conquers : hide it therefore ; go unknown :

Win ! by this kiss you will : and our true king

Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,

As all for glory ; for to speak him true,

Ye know right well, how meek so'er he seem.

No keener hunter after glory breathes.

He loves it in his knights more than himself:

They prove to him his work : win and return."

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,  
Wroth at himself: not willing to be known,  
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,  
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,  
And there among the solitary downs,  
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way ;  
Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,  
That all in loops and links among the dales  
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw  
Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.  
Thither he made and wound the gateway horn.  
Then came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,

Who let him into lodging and disarm'd.  
 And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man ;  
 And issuing found the Lord of Astolat  
 With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,  
 Moving to meet him in the castle court ;  
 And close behind them stept the lily maid  
 Elaine, his daughter : mother of the house  
 There was not : some light jest among them rose  
 With laughter dying down as the great knight  
 Approach'd them : then the Lord of Astolat.  
 " Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name  
 Livest between the lips ? for by thy state  
 And presence I might guess thee chief of those,  
 After the king, who eat in Arthur's halls.  
 Him have I seen : the rest, his Table Round,  
 Known as they are, to me they are unknown."

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights,  
"Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known,  
What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.  
But since I go to joust as one unknown  
At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not,  
Hereafter you shall know me—and the shield—  
I pray you lend me one, if such you have,  
Blank, or at least with some device not mine."

Then said the Lord of Astolat, "Here is Torre's:  
Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre.  
And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.  
His ye can have." Then added plain Sir Torre,  
"Yea since I cannot use it, ye may have it."  
Here laugh'd the father saying "Fie, Sir Charl,  
Is that an answer for a noble knight?"

*LANCELOT AND ELAINE.*

Allow him : but Lavaine, my younger here,  
He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,  
Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour  
And set it in this damsel's golden hair,  
To make her thrice as wilful as before."

"Nay, father, nay good father, shame me not  
Before this noble knight " said young Lavaine  
"For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre :  
He seem'd so sullen, vext he could not go :  
A jest, no more : for, knight, the maiden dream,  
That some one put this diamond in her hand,  
And that it was too slippery to be held,  
And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,  
The castle-well, belike ; and then I said  
That *if* I went and *if* I fought and won it

(But all was jest and joke among ourselves)  
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.  
But father give me leave, an if he will,  
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight :  
Win shall I not, but do my best to win :  
Young as I am, yet would I do my best."

" So ye will grace me," answer'd Lancelot,  
Smiling a moment, " with your fellowship  
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,  
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend ;  
And you shall win this diamond—as I hear,  
It is a fair large diamond,—if ye may,  
And yield it to this maiden, if ye will."  
" A fair large diamond," added plain Sir Torre,  
" Such be for Queens and not for simple maids."

Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,  
 Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,  
 Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement  
 Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,  
 Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return'd.  
 " If what is fair be but for what is fair,  
 And only Queens are to be counted so,  
 Rash were my judgment then, who deem this  
         maid  
 Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,  
 Not violating the bond of like to like."

He spoke and ceased : the lily maid Elaine,  
 Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,  
 Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments.  
 The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,

In battle with the love he bare his lord,  
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.  
Another sinning on such heights with one,  
The flower of all the west and all the world,  
Had been the sleeker for it: but in him  
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose  
And drove him into wastes and solitudes  
For agony, who was yet a living soul.  
Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man,  
That ever among ladies ate in Hall,  
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.  
However marr'd, of more than twice her years,  
Seam'd with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,  
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes  
And loved him, with that love which was her  
doom.

Then the great knight, the darling of the court,  
 Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall  
 Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain  
 Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,  
 But kindly man moving among his kind :  
 Whom they with meats and vintage of their best  
 And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.  
 And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,  
 And ever well and readily answer'd he :  
 But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,  
 Suddenly speaking of the wordless man,  
 Heard from the Baron that, ten years before,  
 The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.  
 " He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design  
 Against my house, and him they caught and  
 maim'd

But I my sons and little daughter fled  
From bonds or death, and dwelt among the  
woods

By the great river in a boatman's hut.  
Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke  
The Pagan yet once more on Badon hill."

"O there, great Lord, doubtless," Lavaine said,  
rapt

By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth  
Toward greatness in its elder, "you have fought.  
O tell us—for we live apart—you know  
Of Arthur's glorious wars." And Lancelot spoke  
And answer'd him at full, as having been  
With Arthur in the fight which all day long  
Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem ;

And in the four wild battles by the shore  
 Of Duglas ; that on Bassa · then the war  
 That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts  
 Of Celidon the forest ; and again  
 By castle Gurnion where the glorious King  
 Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,  
 Carved of one emerald, center'd in a sun  
 Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed ;  
 And at Caerleon had he help'd his lord,  
 When the strong neighings of the wild white  
     Horse

Set every gilded parapet shuddering ;  
 And up in Agned Cathregonion too,  
 And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit,  
 Where many a heathen fell ; “ and on the mount  
 Of Badon I myself beheld the King

Charge at the head of all his Table Round,  
And all his legions crying Christ and him,  
And break them ; and I saw him, after, stand  
High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume  
Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,  
And seeing me, with a great voice he cried  
' They are broken, they are broken ' for the King,  
However mild he seems at home, nor cares  
For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts—  
For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs  
Saying, his knights are better men than he—  
Yet in this heathen war the fire of God  
Fills him : I never saw his like : there lives  
No greater leader."

While he utter'd this,

Low to her own heart said the lily maid

"Save your great self, fair lord ;" and when he fell  
 From talk of war to traits of pleasantry--  
 Being mirthful he but in a stately kind--  
 She still took note that when the living smile  
 Died from his lips, across him came a cloud  
 Of melancholy severe, from which again,  
 Whenever in her hovering to and fro  
 The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,  
 There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness  
 Of manners and of nature : and she thought  
 That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.  
 And all night long his face before her lived,  
 As when a painter, poring on a face,  
 Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man  
 Behind it, and so paints him that his face,  
 The shape and colour of a mind and life.

Lives for his children, ever at its best  
And fullest ; so the face before her lived,  
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full  
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.  
Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought  
She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.  
First as in fear, step after step, she stole  
Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating :  
Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,  
“ This shield, my friend, where is it ? ” and Lavaine  
Past inward, as she came from out the tower.  
There to his proud horse Lancelot turn’d, and  
smooth’d  
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.  
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew  
Nearer and stood. He look’d, and more amazed

Than if seven men had set upon him, saw  
The maiden standing in the dewy light.  
He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.  
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,  
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood  
Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.  
Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire,  
That he should wear her favour at the tilt.  
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.  
"Fair lord, whose name I know not—noble it is,  
I well believe, the noblest—will you wear  
My favour at this tourney?" "Nay," said he,  
"Fair lady, since I never yet have worn  
Favour of any lady in the lists.  
Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know.'  
"Yea, so," she answer'd; "then in wearing mine

Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,  
That those who know should know you." And  
he turn'd

Her counsel up and down within his mind,  
And found it true, and answer'd, "true, my child.  
Well, I will wear it : fetch it out to me :  
What is it ?" and she told him "a red sleeve  
Broider'd with pearls," and brought it : then he  
bound

Her token on his helmet, with a smile  
Saying, "I never yet have done so much  
For any maiden living," and the blood  
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight ;  
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine  
Returning brought the yet-unblazon'd shield,  
His brother's ; which he gave to Lancelot,

Who parted with his own to fair Elaine ;  
 “ Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield  
 In keeping till I come.” “ A grace to me,”  
 She answer’d, “ twice to-day. I am your Squire.”  
 Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, “ Lily maid.  
 For fear our people call you lily maid  
 In earnest, let me bring your colour back ;  
 Once, twice, and thrice : now get you hence to  
 bed :

So kiss’d her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,  
 And thus they moved away : she stay’d a minute,  
 Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there—  
 Her bright hair blown about the serious face  
 Yet rosy-kindled with her brother’s kiss—  
 Paused in the gateway, standing by the shield  
 In silence, while she watch’d their arms far-off

Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.  
Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,  
There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away  
Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,  
To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight  
Not far from Camelot, now for forty years  
A hermit, who had pray'd, labour'd and pray'd  
And ever labouring had scoop'd himself  
In the white rock a chapel and a hall  
On massive columns, like a shorecliff cave,  
And cells and chambers : all were fair and dry ;  
The green light from the meadows underneath  
Struck up and lived along the milky roofs ;  
And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees

And poplars made a noise of falling showers.

And thither wending there that night they bode.

But when the next day broke from underground,  
And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,  
They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away :  
Then Lancelot saying, " hear, but hold my name  
Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,"  
Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant reverence,  
Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,  
But left him leave to stammer, "is it indeed?"  
And after muttering "the great Lancelot"  
At last he got his breath and answer'd "One,  
One have I seen—that other, our liege lord,  
The dread Pendragon, Britain's king of kings,  
Of whom the people talk mysteriously,

He will be there—then were I stricken blind  
That minute, I might say that I had seen.”

So spake Lavaine, and when they reach'd the lists  
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes  
Run thro' the peopled gallery which half round  
Lay like a rainbow fall'n upon the grass,  
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat  
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,  
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,  
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,  
And from the carven-work behind him crept  
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make  
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them  
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable  
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found

The new design wherein they lost themselves,  
 Yet with all ease, so tender was the work :  
 And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,  
 Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.  
 Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said,  
 "Me you call great : mine is the firmer seat,  
 The truer lance : but there is many a youth  
 Now crescent, who will come to all I am  
 And overcome it ; and in me there dwells  
 No greatness, save it be some far-off touch  
 Of greatness to know well I am not great :  
 'There is the man.'" And Lavaine gaped upon him  
 As on a thing miraculous, and anon  
 The trumpets blew ; and then did either side,  
 They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,  
 Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,

Meet in the midst, and there so furiously  
Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,  
If any man that day were left afield,  
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.  
And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw  
Which were the weaker; then he hurl'd into it  
Against the stronger: little need to speak  
Of Lancelot in his glory: King, duke, earl,  
Count, baron—whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,  
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,  
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight  
Should do and almost overdo the deeds  
Of Lancelot; and one said to the other "Lo!  
What is he? I do not mean the force alone.

The grace and versatility of the man—

Is it not Lancelot !” “ When has Lancelot worn

Favour of any lady in the lists ?

Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know.”

“ How then ? who then ?” a fury seized on them,

A fiery family passion for the name

Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.

They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds

and thus,

Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they

made

In moving, all together down upon him

Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,

Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all

Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,

Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,

And him that helms it, so they overbore  
Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear  
Down-glancing, lamed the charger, and a spear  
Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head  
Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt, and remain'd.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully;  
He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,  
And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.  
He up the side, sweating with agony, got,  
But thought to do while he might yet endure,  
And being lustily holpen by the rest,  
His party,—tho' it seemed half-miracle  
To those he fought with—drave his kith and kin,  
And all the Table Round that held the lists,  
Back to the barrier; then the heralds blew

Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve  
Of scarlet, and the pearls; and all the knights,  
His party, cried "Advance, and take your prize  
The diamond;" but he answer'd, "diamond me  
No diamonds! for God's love, a little air!  
Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!  
Hence will I and I charge you, follow me not."

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field  
With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.  
There from his charger down he slid, and sat,  
Gasping to Sir Lavaine, "draw the lance-head:"  
"Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot," said Lavaine,  
"I dread me, if I draw it, ye will die."  
But he "I die already with it: draw—  
Draw,"—and Lavaine drew, and that other gave

A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,  
And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank  
For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.  
Then came the hermit out and bare him in,  
There stanch'd his wound ; and there, in daily  
doubt

Whether to live or die, for many a week  
Hid from the wide world's rumour by the grove  
Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,  
And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,  
His party, knights of utmost North and West,  
Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles,  
Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him  
Lo, Sire, our knight thro' whom we won the day

Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize

Untaken, crying that his prize is death."

"Heaven hinder," said the King "that such an one

So great a knight as we have seen to-day—

He seem'd to me another Lancelot—

Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot—

He must not pass uncared for. Wherefore rise,

O Gawain, and ride forth and find the knight.

Wounded and wearied needs must he be near.

I charge you that you get at once to horse.

And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of

you

Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given :

His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him

No customary honour : since the knight

Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,

Ourselves will send it after. Rise and take  
This diamond, and deliver it, and return,  
And bring us where he is and how he fares,  
And cease not from your quest, until you find."

So saying from the carven flower above,  
To which it made a restless heart, he took,  
And gave, the diamond : then from where he sat  
At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,  
With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince  
In the mid might and flourish of his May,  
Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,  
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint  
And Lamorack, a good knight, but therewithal  
Sir Modred's brother, of a crafty house,  
Nor often loyal to his word, and now

Wroth that the king's command to sally forth  
In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave  
The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings.

So all in wrath he got to horse and went ;  
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,  
Past, thinking "is it Lancelot who has come  
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain  
Of glory, and has added wound to wound,  
And ridd'n away to die?" So fear'd the King,  
And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.  
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,  
"Love, are you yet so sick?" "Nay, Lord," she  
said.  
"And where is Lancelot?" Then the Queen  
amazed

“ Was he not with you ? won he not your prize ? ”

“ Nay, but one like him. ” “ Why that like was he. ”

And when the King demanded how she knew,  
Said “ Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,  
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk  
That men went down before his spear at a touch,  
But knowing he was Lancelot ; his great name  
Conquer’d ; and therefore would he hide his name  
From all men, ev’n the king, and to this end  
Had made the pretext of a hindering wound,  
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn  
If his old prowess were in aught decay’d :  
And added, ‘ our true Arthur, when he learns,  
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain  
Of purer glory. ’ ”

Then replied the King :

*LANCELOT AND ELAINE.*

“Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,  
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,  
To have trusted me as he has trusted you.  
Surely his king and most familiar friend  
Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed  
Albeit I know my knights fantastical,  
So fine a fear in our large Lancelot  
Must needs have moved my laughter : now  
                  remains  
But little cause for laughter : his own kin—  
Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him,  
                  these !  
His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him ;  
So that he went sore wounded from the field :  
Yet good news too : for goodly hopes are mine  
That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.

He wore, against his wont, upon his helm  
A sleeve of scarlet, broidered with great pearls,  
Some gentle maiden's gift."

"Yea, lord," she said,  
"Your hopes are mine," and saying that she  
choked,  
And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,  
Past to her chamber, and there flung herself  
Down on the great King's couch, and writhed  
upon it,  
And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,  
And shriek'd out "traitor" to the unhearing  
wall,  
Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,  
And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

Gawain the while thro' all the region round  
Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,  
Touch'd at all points, except the poplar grove,  
And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat:  
Whom glittering in enamell'd arms the maid  
Glanced at, and cried "What news from Camelot,  
lord?  
What of the knight with the red sleeve?" "He  
won."  
"I knew it," she said. "But parted from the  
jousts  
Hurt in the side," whereat she caught her breath;  
Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go;  
Thereon she smote her hand: well-nigh she  
swoon'd:  
And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came

The lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince  
Reported who he was, and on what quest  
Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find  
The victor, but had ridden wildly round  
To seek him, and was wearied of the search.  
To whom the lord of Astolat “ Bide with us,  
And ride no longer wildly, noble Prince !  
Here was the knight, and here he left a shield ;  
This will he send or come for : furthermore  
Our son is with him ; we shall hear anon,  
Needs must we hear.” To this the courteous Prince  
Accorded with his wonted courtesy,  
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,  
And stay’d ; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine :  
Where could be found face daintier ? then her  
shape

From forehead down to foot perfect—again  
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd :  
“ Well—if I bide, lo ! this wild flower for me ! ”  
And oft they met among the garden yews,  
And there he set himself to play upon her  
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height  
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,  
Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence  
And amorous adulation, till the maid  
Rebell'd against it, saying to him, “ Prince,  
O loyal nephew of our noble King,  
Why ask you not to see the shield he left,  
Whence you might learn his name ? Why slight  
your King,  
And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove  
No surer than our falcon yesterday,

Who lost the henn we slipt her at, and went  
To all the winds?" "Nay, by mine head," said he,  
"I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven,  
O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes:  
But an ye will it let me see the shield."

And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw  
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,  
Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd;  
"Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true  
man!"

"And right was I," she answer'd merrily, "I,  
Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all."  
"And if I dream'd," said Gawain, "that you love  
This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, you know  
it!

Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?"

Full simple was her answer "What know I?  
 My brethren have been all my fellowship,  
 And I, when often they have talk'd of love,  
 Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd,  
 Meseem'd, of what they knew not ; so myself—  
 I know not if I know what true love is,  
 But if I know, then, if I love not him,  
 Methinks there is none other I can love."  
 "Yea, by God's death," said he, "ye love him well  
 But would not, knew ye what all others know,  
 And whom he loves." "So be it," cried Elaine  
 And lifted her fair face and moved away :  
 But he pursued her calling "Stay a little !  
 One golden minute's grace : he wore your sleeve :  
 Would he break faith with one I may not name ?  
 Must our true man change like a leaf at last ?

Nay—like enough : why then, far be it from me  
To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves !  
And, damsel, for I deem you know full well  
Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave  
My quest with you ; the diamond also : here !  
For if you love, it will be sweet to give it ;  
And if he love, it will be sweet to have it  
From your own hand ; and whether he love or not,  
A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well  
A thousand times !—a thousand times farewell !  
Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two  
May meet at court hereafter : there, I think,  
So you will learn the courtesies of the court,  
We two shall know each other.”

Then he gave,

And slightly kiss'd the hand to which he gave  
The diamond, and all wearied of the quest  
Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went  
A true-love ballad, lightly rode away.

Thence to the court he past; there told the  
King

What the King knew "Sir Lancelot is the knight."  
And added "Sire, my liege, so much I learnt;  
But fail'd to find him tho' I rode all round  
The region: but I lighted on the maid,  
Whose sleeve he wore; she loves him; and to her  
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,  
I gave the diamond: she will render it;  
For by mine head she knows his hiding-place.

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied  
“ Too courteous truly ! ye shall go no more  
On quest of mine, seeing that ye forget  
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings.”

He spake and parted. Wroth but all in awe,  
For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word,  
Linger'd that other, staring after him ;  
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad  
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.  
All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were  
loosed :

“ The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,  
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat.”

Some read the King's face, some the Queen's,  
and all

Had marvel what the maid might be, but most  
Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame  
Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.  
She, that had heard the noise of it before,  
But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low  
Marr'd her friend's point with pale tranquillity.  
So ran the tale like fire about the court,  
Fire in dry stubble a nine days' wonder flared :  
Till ev'n the knights at banquet twice or thrice  
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,  
And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid  
Smiled at each other, while the Queen who sat  
With lips severely placid felt the knot  
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen  
Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor  
Beneath the banquet, where the meats became

As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat,  
Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept  
The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,  
Crept to her father, while he mused alone,  
Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,  
“Father, you call me wilful, and the fault  
Is yours who let me have my will, and now  
Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?”  
“Nay,” said he, “surely.” “Wherefore, let me  
hence,”  
She answer’d, “and find out our dear Lavaine.”  
“Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine:  
Bide,” answer’d he: “we needs must hear anon  
Of him, and of that other.” “Ay,” she said,

"And of that other, for I needs must hence  
 And find that other, wheresoe'er he be,  
 And with mine own hand give his diamond to him,  
 Lest I be found as faithless in the quest  
 As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me.  
 Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams  
 Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,  
 Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid.  
 The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,  
 My father, to be sweet and serviceable  
 To noble knights in sickness, as ye know,  
 When these have worn their tokens: let me hence  
 I pray you." Then her father nodding said,  
 "Ay, ay, the diamond: wit you well, my child,  
 Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,  
 Being our greatest: yea, and you must give it—

And sure I think this fruit is hung too high  
For any mouth to gape for save a Queen's—  
Nay, I mean nothing: so then, get you gone,  
Being so very wilful you must go."

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipt away,  
And while she made her ready for her ride,  
Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,  
"Being so very wilful you must go,"  
And changed itself and echoed in her heart,  
"Being so very wilful you must die."  
But she was happy enough and shook it off,  
As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us ;  
And in her heart she answer'd it and said,  
"What matter, so I help him back to life?"  
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide

Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs  
 'To Camelot, and before the city-gates  
 Came on her brother with a happy face  
 Making a roan horse caper and curvet  
 For pleasure all about a field of flowers :  
 Whom when she saw, "Lavaine," she cried,  
     " Lavaine,  
 How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?" He amazed,  
 "Torre and Elaine ! why here ? Sir Lancelot !  
 How know ye my lord's name is Lancelot?"  
 But when the maid had told him all her tale,  
 Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods  
 Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,  
 Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,  
 Past up the still rich city to his kin,  
 His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot ;

And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove  
Led to the caves : there first she saw the casque  
Of Lancelot on the wall : her scarlet sleeve,  
Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,  
Stream'd from it still ; and in her heart she laugh'd,  
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,  
But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.  
And when they gain'd the cell in which he slept,  
His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands  
Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream  
Of dragging down his enemy made them move.  
Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn,  
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,  
Uttered a little tender dolorous cry.  
The sound not wonted in a place so still  
Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes

Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying  
“Your prize the diamond sent you by the King :”  
His eyes glisten'd : she fancied “is it for me ?”  
And when the maid had told him all the tale  
Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest  
Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt  
Full lowly by the corners of his bed,  
And laid the diamond in his open hand.  
Her face was near, and as we kiss the child  
That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.  
At once she slipt like water to the floor.  
“Alas,” he said, “your ride has wearied you.  
Rest must you have.” “No rest for me,” she said ;  
“Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest.”  
What might she mean by that ? his large black  
eyes,

Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt upon her,  
Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself  
In the heart's colours on her simple face ;  
And Lancelot look'd and was perplex in mind,  
And being weak in body said no more ;  
But did not love the colour ; woman's love,  
Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd  
Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,  
And past beneath the wildly-sculptured gates  
Far up the dim rich city to her kin ;  
There bode the night : but woke with dawn, and  
past  
Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,  
Thence to the cave ; so day by day she past

In either twilight ghost-like to and fro  
Gliding, and every day she tended him,  
And likewise many a night ; and Lancelot  
Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt  
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times  
Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem  
Uncourteous, even he : but the meek maid  
Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him  
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,  
Milder than any mother to a sick child,  
And never woman yet, since man's first fall;  
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love  
Upbore her ; till the hermit, skill'd in all  
The simples and the science of that time,  
Told him that her fine care had saved his life,  
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,

Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,  
Would listen for her coming and regret  
Her parting step, and held her tenderly,  
And loved her with all love except the love  
Of man and woman when they love their best  
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death  
In any knightly fashion for her sake.  
And peradventure had he seen her first  
She might have made this and that other world  
Another world for the sick man ; but now  
The shackles of an old love straiten'd him,  
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,  
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made  
Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.

These, as but born of sickness, could not live :  
For when the blood ran lustier in him again,  
Full often the sweet image of one face,  
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,  
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.  
Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace  
Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,  
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well  
What the rough sickness meant, but what this  
meant

She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,  
And drave her ere her time across the fields  
Far into the rich city, where alone  
She murmur'd "vain, in vain : it cannot be.  
He will not love me : how then ? must I die."  
Then as a little helpless innocent bird,

That has but one plain passage of few notes,  
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er  
For all an April morning, till the ear  
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid  
Went half the night repeating, "must I die?"  
And now to right she turn'd, and now to left,  
And found no ease in turning or in rest;  
And "him or death" she mutter'd, "death or him,"  
Again and like a burthen, "him or death."

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,  
To Astolat returning rode the three.  
There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self  
In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,  
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought  
"If I be loved, these are my festal robes,

If not, the victim's flowers before he fall.”  
And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid  
That she should ask some goodly gift of him  
For her own self or hers ; “ and do not shun  
To speak the wish most dear to your true heart :  
Such service have ye done me, that I make  
My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I  
In mine own land, and what I will I can.”  
Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,  
But like a ghost without the power to speak.  
And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,  
And bode among them yet a little space  
Till he should learn it ; and one morn it chanced  
He found her in among the garden yews,  
And said, “ Delay no longer, speak your wish,  
Seeing I must go to-day :” then out she brake ;

"Going? and we shall never see you more.

And I must die for want of one bold word."

"Speak : that I live to hear," he said, "is yours."

Then suddenly and passionately she spoke :

"I have gone mad. I love you : let me die."

"Ah, sister," answer'd Lancelot, "what is this?"

And innocently extending her white arms,

"Your love," she said, "your love—to be your wife.

And Lancelot answer'd, "Had I chos'n to wed,

I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine :

But now there never will be wife of mine."

"No, no," she cried, "I care not to be wife,

But to be with you still, to see your face,

To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world."

And Lancelot answer'd, "Nay, the world, the  
world,

All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart  
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue  
To blare its own interpretation—nay,  
Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,  
And your good father's kindness." And she said  
"Not to be with you, not to see your face—  
Alas for me then, my good days are done."  
"Nay, noble maid," he answer'd, "ten times nay !  
This is not love : but love's first flash in youth,  
Most common : yea I know it of mine own self :  
And you yourself will smile at your own self  
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life  
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age :  
And then will I, for true you are and sweet  
Beyond mine old belief in womanhood,  
More specially should your good knight be proud.

Endow you with broad land and territory  
Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,  
So that would make you happy : furthermore,  
Ev'n to the death, as tho' ye were my blood,  
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.  
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,  
And more than this I cannot."

While he spoke

She neither blush'd nor shook, but deathly-pale  
Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied ;  
" Of all this will I nothing ;" and so fell,  
And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.

Then spake, to whom thro' those black walls of  
yew

Their talk had pierced, her father. " Ay, a flash,

I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead.

Too courteous are you, fair Lord Lancelot.

I pray you, use some rough discourtesy

To blunt or break her passion."

Lancelot said,

"That were against me: what I can I will;"

And there that day remain'd, and toward even

Sent for his shield: full meekly rose the maid,

Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield;

Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,

Unclasping flung the casement back, and look'd

Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.

And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound;

And she by tact of love was well aware

That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.

And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,

Nor bad farewell, but sadly rode away.

This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat :  
His very shield was gone ; only the case,  
Her own poor work, her empty labour, left.  
But still she heard him, still his picture form'd  
And grew between her and the pictured wall.  
Then came her father, saying in low tones  
“ Have comfort,” whom she greeted quietly.  
Then came her brethren saying, “ Peace to thee  
Sweet sister,” whom she answer'd with all calm.  
But when they left her to herself again,  
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field  
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd ; the owls  
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt

Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms  
Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,  
And call'd her song "The Song of Love and  
Death,"

And sang it : sweetly could she make and sing.

"Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain ;  
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain :  
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

"Love, art thou sweet ? then bitter death must  
be :

Love, thou art bitter ; sweet is death to me.

O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

“Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,  
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,  
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

“I fain would follow love, if that could be ;  
I needs must follow death, who calls for me ;  
Call and I follow, I follow ! let me die.”

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,  
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind  
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and  
thought

With shuddering “Hark the Phantom of the house  
That ever shrieks before a death,” and call’d  
The father, and all three in hurry and fear  
Ran to her, and lo ! the bloodred light of dawn

Flared on her face, she shrilling "Let me die!"

As when we dwell upon a word we know  
Repeating, till the word we know so well  
Becomes a wonder and we know not why,  
So dwelt the father on her face and thought  
"Is this Elaine?" till back the maiden fell,  
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,  
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.  
At last she said "Sweet brothers, yesternight  
I seem'd a curious little maid again,  
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,  
And when ye used to take me with the flood  
Up the great river in the boatman's boat.  
Only ye would not pass beyond the cape  
That has the poplar on it: there ye fixt

Your limit, oft returning with the tide.  
And yet I cried because ye would not pass  
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood  
Until we found the palace of the king.  
And yet ye would not ; but this night I dream'd  
That I was all alone upon the flood,  
And then I said " Now shall I have my will :"  
And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.  
So let me hence that I may pass at last  
Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,  
Until I find the palace of the king.  
There will I enter in among them all,  
And no man there will dare to mock at me ;  
But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,  
And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me ;  
Gawain, who bad a thousand farewells to me,

Lancelot, who coldly went nor bad me one :  
 And there the King will know me and my love,  
 And there the Queen herself will pity me,  
 And all the gentle court will welcome me,  
 And after my long voyage I shall rest !”

“Peace,” said her father, “O my child, ye seem  
 Light-headed, for what force is yours to go,  
 So far, being sick ? and wherefore would ye look  
 On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all ?”

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move,  
 And bluster into stormy sobs and say  
 “I never loved him : an I meet with him,  
 I care not howsoever great he be,  
 Then will I strike at him and strike him down,

Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,  
For this discomfort he hath done the house."

To which the gentle sister made reply,  
"Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,  
Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault  
Not to love me, than it is mine to love  
Him of all men who seems to me the highest."

"Highest?" the Father answer'd, echoing  
"highest?"

(He meant to break the passion in her) "nay,  
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest ;  
But this I know, for all the people know it,  
He loves the Queen, and in an open shame :  
And she returns his love in open shame.

**If this be high, what is it to be low?"**

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat ;  
 "Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I  
 For anger : these are slanders : never yet  
 Was noble man but made ignoble talk.  
 He makes no friend who never made a foe.  
 But now it is my glory to have loved  
 One peerless, without stain : so let me pass  
 My father, howsoe'er I seem to you,  
 Not all unhappy, having loved God's best  
 And greatest, tho' my love had no return :  
 Yet, seeing ye desire your child to live,  
 Thanks, but ye work against your own desire ;  
 For if I could believe the things ye say  
 I should but die the sooner ; wherefore cease,

Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man  
Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die."

So when the ghostly man had come and gone  
She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven,  
Besought Lavaine to write as she devised  
A letter, word for word ; and when he ask'd  
"Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord ?  
Then will I bear it gladly ;" she replied,  
"For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,  
But I myself must bear it." Then he wrote  
The letter she devised ; which being writ  
And folded, "O sweet father, tender and true,  
Deny me not," she said—"ye never yet  
Denied my fancies—this, however strange,  
My latest : lay the letter in my hand

A little ere I die, and close the hand  
Upon it; I shall guard it even in death.  
And when the heat is gone from out my heart,  
Then take the little bed on which I died  
For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's  
For richness, and me also like the Queen  
In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.  
And let there be prepared a chariot-bier  
To take me to the river, and a barge  
Be ready on the river, clothed in black.  
I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.  
There surely I shall speak for mine own self,  
And none of you can speak for me so well.  
And therefore let our dumb old man alone  
Go with me, he can steer and row, and he  
Will guide me to that palace, to the doors."

She ceased : her father promised ; whereupon  
She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death  
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.  
But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh  
Her father laid the letter in her hand,  
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.  
So that day there was dole in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground,  
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows  
Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier  
Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone  
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,  
Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay.  
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,  
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,

Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face  
So those two brethren from the chariot took  
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,  
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung  
The silken case with braided blazonings,  
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her  
"Sister, farewell for ever," and again  
"Farewell, sweet sister," parted all in tears.  
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead  
Steer'd by the dumb went upward with the flood -  
In her right hand the lily, in her left  
The letter—all her bright hair streaming down -  
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold  
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white  
All but her face, and that clear-featured face  
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,

But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved  
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last  
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,  
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,  
With deaths of others, and almost his own,  
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds : for he saw  
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen  
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed  
With such and so unmoved a majesty  
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,  
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet  
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye  
The shadow of a piece of pointed lace,  
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,

And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side,  
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,  
They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd, "Queen,  
Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,  
Take, what I had not won except for you,  
These jewels, and make me happy, making them  
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,  
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's  
Is tawnier than her cygnet's : these are words .  
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin  
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it  
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words  
Perchance, we both can pardon : but, my Queen,  
I hear of rumours flying thro' your court

Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,  
Should have in it an absoluter trust  
To make up that defect : let rumours be :  
When did not rumours fly ? these, as I trust  
That you trust me in your own nobleness,  
I may not well believe that you believe."

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen  
Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine  
Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,  
Till all the place whereon she stood was green ;  
Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand  
Received at once and laid aside the gems  
There on a table near her, and replied.

"It may be, I am quicker of belief

Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.  
Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.  
This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill,  
It can be broken easier. I for you  
This many a year have done despite and wrong  
To one whom ever in my heart of hearts  
I did acknowledge nobler. What are these?  
Diamonds for me ! they had been thrice their worth  
Being your gift, had you not lost your own.  
To loyal hearts the value of all gifts  
Must vary as the giver's. Not for me !  
For her ! for your new fancy. Only this  
Grant me, I pray you : have your joys apart.  
I doubt not that however changed, you keep  
So much of what is graceful : and myself  
Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy

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Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy

In which as Arthur's queen I move and rule :  
So cannot speak my mind. An end to this !  
A strange one ! yet I take it with Amen.  
So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls ;  
Deck her with these ; tell her she shines me  
down :

An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's  
Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck  
O as much fairer—as a faith once fair  
Was richer than those diamonds—hers not mine—  
Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,  
Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will—  
She shall not have them."

Saying which she seized,  
And, thro the casement standing wide for heat,

Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the  
stream.

Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,  
Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.

Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disgust  
At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,  
Close underneath his eyes, and right across

Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge

Whereon the lily maid of Astolat

Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away

To weep and wail in secret ; and the barge,

On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.

There two stood arm'd, and kept the door ; to

whom,

Ail up the marble stair, tier over tier,  
Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that  
ask'd

“What is it?” but that oarsman's haggard face,  
As hard and still as is the face that men  
Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks  
On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said,  
“He is enchanted, cannot speak—and she,  
Look how she sleeps—the Fairy Queen, so fair!  
Yea, but how pale! what are they? flesh and  
blood?

Or come to take the King to fairy land?  
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,  
But that he passes into fairy land.”

While thus they babbled of the King, the King

Came girt with knights : then turn'd the tongueless  
man

From the half-face to the full eye, and rose

And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.

So Arthur bad the meek Sir Percivale

And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid ;

And reverently they bore her into hall.

Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,

And Lancelot later came and mused at her,

And last the Queen herself and pitied her :

But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,

Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it ; this was all.

‘ Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,  
I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,  
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,

Hither, to take my last farewell of you.  
I loved you, and my love had no return,  
And therefore my true love has been my death.  
And therefore to our lady Guinevere,  
And to all other ladies, I make moan.  
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.  
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,  
As thou art a knight peerless."

Thus he read,

And ever in the reading, lords and dames  
Wept, looking often from his face who read  
To hers which lay so silent, and at times,  
So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips,  
Who had devised the letter, moved again.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all ;

"My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,  
 Know that for this most gentle maiden's death  
 Right heavy am I ; for good she was and true,  
 But loved me with a love beyond all love  
 In women, whomsoever I have known.  
 Yet to be loved makes not to love again ;  
 Not at my years, however it hold in youth.  
 I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave  
 No cause, not willingly, for such a love :  
 To this I call my friends in testimony,  
 Her brethren, and her father, who himself  
 Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,  
 To break her passion, some discourtesy  
 Against my nature : what I could, I did.  
 I left her and I bad her no farewell.  
 Tho', had I dreamt the damsel would have died,

I might have put my wits to some rough use,  
And help'd her from herself."

Then said the Queen  
(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)  
"Ye might at least have done her so much grace  
Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her  
death."

He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,  
He adding,

"Queen, she would not be content  
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.  
Then might she follow me thro' the world, she  
ask'd ;  
It could not be. I told her that her love  
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down

To rise hereafter in a stiller flame  
Toward one more worthy of her—then would I,  
More specially were he, she wedded, poor,  
Estate them with large land and territory  
In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,  
To keep them in all joyance : more than this  
I could not ; this she would not, and she died.’

He pausing, Arthur answer’d, “ O my knight,  
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,  
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,  
To see that she be buried worshipfully.”

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm  
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went  
The marshall’d order of their Table Round,

And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see  
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,  
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,  
And mass, and rolling music, like a Queen.  
And when the knights had laid her comely head  
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,  
Then Arthur spake among them, " Let her tomb  
Be costly, and her image thereupon.  
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet  
Be carven, and her lily in her hand.  
And let the story of her dolorous voyage  
For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb  
In letters gold and azure!" which was wrought  
Thereafter ; but when now the lords and dames  
And people, from the high door streaming, brake  
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,

Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,  
Drew near, and sigh'd in passing "Lancelot,  
Forgive me ; mine was jealousy in love."  
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,  
"That is love's curse ; pass on, my Queen, for-  
given."

But Arthur who beheld his cloudy brows  
Approach'd him, and with full affection flung  
One arm about his neck, and spake and said.

"Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have  
Most love and most affiance, for I know  
What thou hast been in battle by my side,  
And many a time have watch'd thee at the tilt  
Strike down the lusty and long-practised knight,  
And let the younger and unskill'd go by

To win his honour and to make his name,  
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man  
Made to be loved ; but now I would to God,  
For the wild people say wild things of thee,  
Thou could'st have loved this maiden, shaped, it  
seems,

By God for thee alone, and from her face,  
If one may judge the living by the dead,  
Delicately pure and marvellously fair,  
Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man  
Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons  
Born to the glory of thy name and fame,  
My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake."

Then answer'd Lancelot, "Fair she was, my  
King,

Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.  
To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,  
To doubt her pureness were to want a heart —  
Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love  
Could bind him, but free love will not be bound.”

“Free love, so bound, were freest,” said the  
King.

“Let love be free; free love is for the best :  
And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,  
What should be best, if not so pure a love  
Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee  
She fail'd to bind, tho' being, as I think,  
Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know.”

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,

And at the inrunning of a little brook  
Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd  
The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes  
And saw the barge that brought her moving down,  
Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said  
Low in himself "Ah simple heart and sweet,  
Ye loved me, damsel, surely with a love  
Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?  
Ay, that will I. Farewell too—now at last—  
Farewell, fair lily. 'Jealousy in love?'  
Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?  
Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,  
May not your crescent fear for name and fame  
Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes?  
Why did the King dwell on my name to me?  
Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,

Lancelot, whom the Lady of the Lake  
Stole from his mother—as the story runs—  
She chanted snatches of mysterious song  
Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn  
She kiss'd me saying thou art fair, my child,  
As a king's son, and often in her arms  
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.  
Would she had drown'd me in it, where'er it be!  
For what am I? what profits me my name  
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and  
    have it:  
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;  
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?  
To make men worse by making my sin known?  
Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?  
Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man

Not after Arthur's heart! I needs must break  
These bonds that so defame me: not without  
She wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,  
Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,  
I pray him, send a sudden Angel down  
To seize me by the hair and bear me far,  
And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,  
Among the tumbled fragments of the hills."

So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,  
Not knowing he should die a holy man.



# THE HOLY GRAIL







## THE HOLY GRAIL.



FROM noiseful arms, and acts of prowess  
done

In tournament or tilt, Sir Percivale,  
Whom Arthur and his knighthood call'd The Pure,  
Had pass'd into the silent life of prayer,  
Praise, fast, and alms ; and leaving for the cowl  
The helmet in an abbey far away  
From Camelot, there, and not long after. died.

And one a fellow-monk among the rest,

Ambrosius, loved him much beyond the rest,  
And honour'd him, and wrought into his heart  
A way by love that waken'd love within,  
To answer that which came : and as they sat  
Beneath a world-old yew-tree, darkening half  
The cloisters, on a gustful April morn  
That puff'd the swaying branches into smoke  
Above them, ere the summer when he died,  
The monk Ambrosius question'd Percivale

“O brother, I have seen this yew-tree smoke,  
Spring after spring, for half a hundred years :  
For never have I known the world without,  
Nor ever stray'd beyond the pale : but thee,  
When first thou camest—such a courtesy  
Spake thro' the limbs and in the voice—I knew

For one of those who eat in Arthur's hall ;  
For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,  
Some true, some light, but every one of you  
Stamp'd with the image of the King ; and now  
Tell me, what drove thee from the Table Round,  
My brother ? was it earthly passion crost ?”

“Nay,” said the knight ; “for no such passion  
mine.

But the sweet vision of the Holy Grail  
Drove me from all vainglories, rivalries,  
And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out  
Among us in the jousts, while women watch  
Who wins, who falls ; and waste the spiritual  
strength  
Within us, better offer'd up to Heaven.”

To whom the monk : “ The Holy Grail !—I trust  
We are green in Heaven’s eyes ; but here too much  
We moulder—as to things without I mean—  
Yet one of your own knights, a guest of ours,  
Told us of this in our refectory,  
But spake with such a sadness and so low  
We heard not half of what he said. What is it  
The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?”

“ Nay, monk ! what phantom ? ” answer’d

Percivale.

‘ The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord  
Drank at the last sad supper with his own  
This, from the blessed land of Aromat—  
After the day of darkness, when the dead  
Went wandering o’er Moriah—the good saint,

Arimathæan Joseph, journeying brought  
To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn  
Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord.  
And there awhile it bode ; and if a man  
Could touch or see it, he was heal'd at once,  
By faith, of all his ills. But then the times  
Grew to such evil that the holy cup  
Was caught away to Heaven, and disappear'd."

To whom the monk : "From our old books I  
know

That Joseph came of old to Glastonbury,  
And there the heathen Prince, Arviragus,  
Gave him an isle of marsh whereon to build ;  
And there he built with wattles from the marsh  
A little lonely church in days of yore,

For so they say, these books of ours, but seem  
Mute of this miracle, far as I have read.  
But who first saw the holy thing to-day?"

“A woman,” answer’d Percivale, “a nun,  
And one no further off in blood from me  
Than sister; and if ever holy maid  
With knees of adoration wore the stone,  
A holy maid; tho’ never maiden glow’d,  
But that was in her earlier maidenhood,  
With such a fervent flame of human love,  
Which being rudely blunted, glanced and shot  
Only to holy things; to prayer and praise  
She gave herself, to fast and alms. And yet,  
Nun as she was, the scandal of the Court,  
Sin against Arthur and the Table Round,

And the strange sound of an adulterous race,  
Across the iron grating of her cell  
Beat, and she pray'd and fasted all the more.

“And he to whom she told her sins, or what  
Her all but utter whiteness held for sin,  
A man well-nigh a hundred winters old,  
Spake often with her of the Holy Grail,  
A legend handed down thro' five or six,  
And each of these a hundred winters old,  
From our Lord's time. And when King Arthur

made

His Table Round, and all men's hearts became  
Clean for a season, surely he had thought  
That now the Holy Grail would come again ;  
But sin broke out. Ah, Christ, that it would come,

And heal the world of all their wickedness !

‘ O Father !’ asked the maiden, ‘ might it come

To me by prayer and fasting ?’ ‘ Nay,’ said he,

‘ I know not, for thy heart is pure as snow.’

And so she pray’d and fasted, till the sun

Shone, and the wind blew, thro’ her, and I thought

She might have risen and floated when I saw her.

“ For on a day she sent to speak with me.

And when she came to speak, behold her eyes

Beyond my knowing of them, beautiful,

Beyond all knowing of them, wonderful,

Beautiful in the light of holiness.

And ‘ O my brother, Percivale,’ she said,

‘ Sweet brother, I have seen the Holy Grail .

For, waked at dead of night, I heard a sound

As of a silver horn from o'er the hills  
Blown, and I thought, "It is not Arthur's use  
To hunt by moonlight;" and the slender sound  
As from a distance beyond distance grew  
Coming upon me—O never harp nor horn,  
Nor aught we blow with breath, or touch with  
hand,  
Was like that music as it came; and then  
Stream'd thro' my cell a cold and silver beam,  
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,  
Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive,  
Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed  
With rosy colours leaping on the wall;  
And then the music faded, and the Grail  
Pass'd, and the beam decay'd, and from the walls  
The rosy quiverings died into the night.

So now the Holy Thing is here again  
Among us, brother, fast thou too and pray,  
And tell thy brother knights to fast and pray,  
That so perchance the vision may be seen  
By thee and those, and all the world be heal'd.

“Then leaving the pale nun, I spake of this  
To all men ; and myself fasted and pray'd  
Always, and many among us many a week  
Fasted and pray'd even to the uttermost,  
Expectant of the wonder that would be.

“And one there was among us, ever moved  
Among us in white armour, Galahad.  
'God make thee good as thou art beautiful,'  
Said Arthur, when he dubb'd him knight ; and  
none,

In so young youth, was ever made a knight  
Till Galahad ; and this Galahad, when he heard  
My sister's vision, fill'd me with amaze ;  
His eyes became so like her own, they seem'd  
Hers, and himself her brother more than I.

“ Sister or brother none had ne ; but some  
Call'd him a son of Lancelot, and some said  
Begotten by enchantment—chatterers they,  
Like birds of passage piping up and down,  
That gape for flies—we know not whence they  
come ;

For when was Lancelot wanderingly lewd ?

“ But she, the wan sweet maiden shore away  
Clean from her forehead all that wealth of hair  
Which made a silken mat-work for her feet ;

And out of this she plaited broad and long  
A strong sword-belt, and wove with silver thread  
And crimson in the belt a strange device,  
A crimson grail within a silver beam ;  
And saw the bright boy-knight, and bound it on  
him,  
Saying, ' My knight, my love, my knight of heaven,  
O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine,  
I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt.  
Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,  
And break thro' all, till one will crown thee king  
Far in the spiritual city : ' and as she spake  
She sent the deathless passion in her eyes  
Thro' him, and made him hers, and laid her mind  
On him, and he believed in her belief.

“Then came a year of miracle : O brother,  
In our great hall there stood a vacant chair,  
Fashion’d by Merlin ere he past away,  
And carven with strange figures ; and in and out  
The figures, like a serpent, ran a scroll  
Of letters in a tongue no man could read.  
And Merlin call’d it ‘The Siege perilous,’  
Perilous for good and ill ; ‘for there,’ he said,  
‘No man could sit but he should lose himself :’  
And once by misadvertence Merlin sat  
In his own chair, and so was lost ; but he,  
Galahad, when he heard of Merlin’s doom,  
Cried, ‘If I lose myself I save myself !’

“Then on a summer night it came to pass,  
While the great banquet lay along the hall,

That Galahad would sit down in Merlin's chair.

“ And all at once, as there we sat, we heard  
A cracking and a riving of the roofs,  
And rending, and a blast, and overhead  
Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry.  
And in the blast there smote along the hall  
A beam of light seven times more clear than day :  
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail  
All over cover'd with a luminous cloud,  
And none might see who bare it, and it past.  
But every knight beheld his fellow's face  
As in a glory, and all the knights arose,  
And staring each at other like dumb men  
Stood, till I found a voice and sware a vow

“ I sware a vow before them all, that I,

Because I had not seen the Grail, would ride  
A twelvemonth and a day in quest of it,  
Until I found and saw it, as the nun  
My sister saw it ; and Galahad sware the vow,  
And good Sir Bors, our Lancelot's cousin, sware,  
And Lancelot sware, and many among the knights,  
And Gawain sware, and louder than the rest."

Then spake the monk Ambrosius, asking him,  
"What said the King? Did Arthur take the vow?

"Nay, for my lord," said Percivale, "the king,  
Was not in hall: for early that same day,  
Scaped thro' a cavern from a bandit hold,  
An outraged maiden sprang into the hall  
Crying on help: for all her shining hair

Was smear'd with earth, and either milky arm  
Red-rent with hooks of bramble, and all she wore  
Torn as a sail that leaves the rope is torn  
In tempest: so the king arose and went  
To smoke the scandalous hive of those wild bees  
That made such honey in his realm. Howbeit  
Some little of this marvel he too saw,  
Returning o'er the plain that then began  
To darken under Camelot; whence the king  
Look'd up, calling aloud, 'Lo there! the roofs  
Of our great hall are rolled in thunder-smoke!  
Pray Heaven, they be not smitten by the bolt.'  
For dear to Arthur was that hall of ours,  
As having there so oft with all his knights  
Feasted, and as the stateliest under heaven.

“O brother, had you known our mighty hall,  
Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago!  
For all the sacred mount of Camelot,  
And all the dim rich city, roof by roof,  
Tower after tower, spire beyond spire,  
By grove, and garden-lawn, and rushing brook,  
Climbs to the mighty hall that Merlin built.  
And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt  
With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall:  
And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,  
And in the second men are slaying beasts,  
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,  
And on the fourth are men with growing wings,  
And over all one statue in the mould  
Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown,  
And peak'd wings pointed to the Northern Star.

And eastward fronts the statue, and the crown  
And both the wings are made of gold, and flame  
At sunrise till the people in far fields,  
Wasted so often by the heathen hordes,  
Behold it, crying, 'We have still a king.'

“And, brother, had you known our hall within,  
Broader and higher than any in all the lands!  
Where twelve great windows blazon Arthur's  
wars,

And all the light that falls upon the board  
Streams thro' the twelve great battles of our King.  
Nay, one there is, and at the eastern end,  
Wealthy with wandering lines of mount and mere,  
Where Arthur finds the brand, Excalibur.  
And also one to the west, and counter to it,

And blank : and who shall blazon it ? when and  
how ?—

O there, perchance, when all our wars are done,  
The brand Excalibur will be cast away.

“ So to this hall full quickly rode the King,  
In horror lest the work by Merlin wrought,  
Dreamlike, should on the sudden vanish, wrapt  
In unremorseful folds of rolling fire.  
And in he rode, and up I glanced, and saw  
The golden dragon sparkling over all :  
And many of those who burnt the hold, their arms  
Hack’d, and their foreheads grimed with smoke,  
and sear’d,  
Follow’d, and in among bright faces, ours,  
Full of the vision, prest : and then the King

Spake to me, being nearest, 'Percivale,'  
(Because the hall was all in tumult—some  
Vowing, and some protesting), 'what is this?'

“O brother, when I told him what had chanced,  
My sister's vision, and the rest, his face  
Darken'd, as I have seen it more than once,  
When some brave deed seem'd to be done in vain,  
Darken ; and 'Woe is me, my knights,' he cried,  
'Had I been here, ye had not sworn the vow.'  
Bold was mine answer, 'Had thyself been here,  
My King, thou wouldst have sworn.' 'Yea, yea,'  
said he,  
'Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail?

“ 'Nay, Lord, I heard the sound, I saw the light,

But since I did not see the Holy Thing,  
I sware a vow to follow it till I saw.'

"Then when he asked us, knight by knight, if any  
Had seen it, all their answers were as one:

'Nay, Lord, and therefore have we sworn our  
vows.'

"'Lo now,' said Arthur, 'have ye seen a  
cloud?

What go ye into the wilderness to see?'

"Then Galahad on the sudden, and in a voice  
Shrilling along the hall to Arthur, call'd,  
'But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail,  
I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry—  
O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me.'

“ ‘ Ah, Galahad, Galahad,’ said the King, ‘ for  
such

As thou art is the vision, not for these.

Thy holy nun and thou have seen a sign—

Holier is none, my Percivale, than she—

A sign to maim this Order which I made.

But you, that follow but the leader’s bell ’

(Brother, the King was hard upon his knights)

‘ Taliessin is our fullest throat of song,

And one hath sung and all the dumb will sing.

Lancelot is Lancelot, and hath overborne

Five knights at once, and every younger knight,

Unproven, holds himself as Lancelot,

Till overborne by one, he learns—and ye,

What are ye? Galahads?—no, nor Percivales

(For thus it pleased the King to range me close

After Sir Galahad) ; 'nay,' said he, 'but men  
With strength and will to right the wrong'd, of  
power

To lay the sudden heads of violence flat,  
Knights that in twelve great battles splash'd and  
dyed

The strong White Horse in his own heathen  
blood—

But one hath seen, and all the blind will see.  
Go, since your vows are sacred, being made :  
Yet—for ye know the cries of all my realm  
Pass thro' this hall—how often, O my knights,  
Your places being vacant at my side,  
This chance of noble deeds will come and go  
Unchallenged, while you follow wandering fires  
Lost in the quagmire? Many of you, yea most,

Return no more : ye think I show myself  
Too dark a prophet : come now, let us meet  
The morrow morn once more in one full field  
Of gracious pastime, that once more the King,  
Before you leave him for this Quest, may count  
The yet-unbroken strength of all his knights,  
Rejoicing in that Order which he made.'

“ So when the sun broke next from under ground,  
All the great table of our Arthur closed  
And clash'd in such a tourney and so full,  
So many lances broken—never yet  
Had Camelot seen the like, since Arthur came.  
And I myself and Galahad, for a strength  
Was in us from the vision, overthrew  
So many knights that all the people cried,

And almost burst the barriers in their heat,  
Shouting ' Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale !'

" But when the next day brake from under-  
ground—

O brother, had you known our Camelot,  
Built by old kings, age after age, so old  
The King himself had fears that it would fall,  
So strange, and rich, and dim ; for where the roofs  
Totter'd toward each other in the sky,  
Met foreheads all along the street of those  
Who watch'd us pass ; and lower, and where the  
long  
Rich galleries, lady-laden, weigh'd the necks  
Of dragons clinging to the crazy walls,  
Thicker than drops from thunder, showers of flowers

Fell as we past ; and men and boys astride  
On wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan,  
At all the corners, named us each by name,  
Calling ‘ God speed ! ’ but in the street below  
The knights and ladies wept, and rich and poor  
Wept, and the King himself could hardly speak  
For grief, and in the middle street the Queen,  
Who rode by Lancelot, wail’d and shriek’d aloud,  
‘ This madness has come on us for our sins.’  
And then we reach’d the weirdly-sculptured gate,  
Where Arthur’s wars were render’d mystically,  
And thence departed every one his way.

“ And I was lifted up in heart, and thought  
Of all my late-shown prowess in the lists,  
How my strong lance had beaten down the knights.

So many and famous names ; and never yet  
Had heaven appear'd so blue, nor earth so green.  
For all my blood danced in me, and I knew  
That I should light upon the Holy Grail.

“ Thereafter, the dark warning of our King,  
That most of us would follow wandering fires,  
Came like a driving gloom across my mind.  
Then every evil word I had spoken once,  
And every evil thought I had thought of old,  
And every evil deed I ever did,  
Awoke and cried, ‘ This Quest is not for thee.’  
And lifting up mine eyes, I found myself  
Alone, and in a land of sand and thorns,  
And I was thirsty even unto death ;  
And I, too, cried, ‘ This Quest is not for thee.’

“ And on I rode, and when I thought my thirst  
Would slay me, saw deep lawns, and then a brook,  
With one sharp rapid, where the crisping white  
Play'd ever back upon the sloping wave,  
And took both ear and eye ; and o'er the brook  
Were apple-trees, and apples by the brook  
Fallen, and on the lawns. ‘ I will rest here,’  
I said, ‘ I am not worthy of the Quest ;’  
But even while I drank the brook, and ate  
The goodly apples, all these things at once  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone,  
And thirsting, in a land of sand and thorns.

“ And then behold a woman at a door  
Spinning ; and fair the house whereby she sat,  
And kind the woman's eyes and innocent,

And all her bearing gracious ; and she rose  
Opening her arms to meet me, as who should say,  
' Rest here ;' but when I touched her, lo ! she, too,  
Fell into dust and nothing, and the house  
Became no better than a broken shed,  
And in it a dead babe ; and also this  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone.

“ And on I rode, and greater was my thirst.  
Then flash'd a yellow gleam across the world,  
And where it smote the plowshare in the field,  
The plowman left his plowing, and fell down  
Before it ; where it glitter'd on her pail,  
The milkmaid left her milking, and fell down  
Before it, and I knew not why, but thought  
' The sun is rising,' tho' the sun had risen.

Then was I ware of one that on me moved  
In golden armour with a crown of gold  
About a casque all jewels ; and his horse  
In golden armour jewell'd everywhere :  
And on the splendour came, flashing me blind ;  
And seem'd to me the Lord of all the world,  
Being so huge. But when I thought he meant  
To crush me, moving on me, lo ! he, too,  
Opened his arms to embrace me as he came,  
And up I went and touch'd him, and he, too,  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone  
And wearying in a land of sand and thorns.

“And I rode on and found a mighty hill,  
And on the top, a city wall'd : the spires  
Prick'd with incredible pinnacles into heaven.

And by the gateway stirr'd a crowd ; and these  
Cried to me climbing, ' Welcome, Percivale !  
Thou nightiest and thou purest among men !'  
And glad was I and clomb, but found at top  
No man, nor any voice. And thence I past  
Far thro' a ruinous city, and I saw  
That man had once dwelt there ; but there I found  
Only one man of an exceeding age.  
' Where is that goodly company,' said I,  
' That so cried out upon me ?' and he had  
Scarce any voice to answer, and yet gasp'd  
' Whence and what art thou ?' and even as he spoke  
Fell into dust, and disappear'd, and I  
Was left alone once more, and cried in grief,  
' Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself  
And touch it, it will crumble into dust.'

“And thence I dropt into a lowly vale,  
Low as the hill was high, and where the vale  
Was lowest, found a chapel and thereby  
A holy hermit in a hermitage,  
To whom I told my phantoms, and he said :

“ ‘ O son, thou hast not true humility,  
The highest virtue, mother of them all ;  
For when the Lord of all things made Himself  
Naked of glory for His mortal change,  
‘ Take thou my robe,’ she said, ‘ for all is thine,’  
And all her form shone forth with sudden light  
So that the angels were amazed, and she  
Follow’d him down, and like a flying star  
Led on the gray-hair’d wisdom of the east ;  
But her thou hast not known : for what is this

Thou thoughtest of thy prowess and thy sins ?  
Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself  
As Galahad.' When the hermit made an end,  
In silver armour suddenly Galahad shone  
Before us, and against the chapel door  
Laid lance, and enter'd, and we knelt in prayer.  
And there the hermit slaked my burning thirst  
And at the sacring of the mass I saw  
The holy elements alone ; but he :  
'Saw ye no more ? I, Galahad, saw the Grail,  
The Holy Grail, descend upon the shrine :  
I saw the fiery face as of a child  
That smote itself into the bread, and went ;  
And hither am I come ; and never yet  
Hath what thy sister taught me first to see,  
This Holy Thing, fail'd from my side, nor come

Cover'd, but moving with me night and day,  
Fainter by day, but always in the night  
Blood-red, and sliding down the blacken'd marsh  
Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top  
Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below  
Blood-red. And in the strength of this I rode,  
Shattering all evil customs everywhere,  
And past thro' Pagan realms, and made them mine,  
And clash'd with Pagan hordes, and bore them  
down,  
And broke thro' all, and in the strength of this  
Come victor. But my time is hard at hand,  
And hence I go ; and one will crown me king  
Far in the spiritual city ; and come thou, too,  
For thou shalt see the vision when I go.'

“While thus he spake, his eye, dwelling on mine,  
Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew  
One with him, to believe as he believed.  
Then, when the day began to wane, we went.

“There rose a hill that none but man could climb,  
Scarr'd with a hundred wintry watercourses—  
Storm at the top, and when we gain'd it, storm  
Round us and death ; for every moment glanced  
His silver arms and gloom'd : so quick and thick  
The lightnings here and there to left and right  
Struck, till the dry old trunks about us, dead,  
Yea, rotten with a hundred years of death,  
Sprang into fire : and at the base we found  
On either hand, as far as eye could see,  
A great black swamp and of an evil smell,

Part black, part whiten'd with the bones of men,  
Not to be crost, save that some ancient king  
Had built a way, where, link'd with many a bridge,  
A thousand piers ran into the great Sea.  
And Galahad fled along them bridge by bridge,  
And every bridge as quickly as he crost  
Sprang into fire and vanish'd, tho' I yearn'd  
To follow ; and thrice above him all the heavens  
Open'd and blazed with thunder such as seem'd  
Shoutings of all the sons of God : and first  
At once I saw him far on the great sea,  
In silver-shining armour starry-clear ;  
And o'er his head the holy vessel hung  
Clothed in white samite or a luminous cloud.  
And with exceeding swiftness ran the boat  
If boat it were—I saw not whence it came.

And when the heavens open'd and blazed again  
Roaring, I saw him like a silver star—  
And had he set the sail, or had the boat  
Become a living creature clad with wings?  
And o'er his head the holy vessel hung  
Redder than any rose, a joy to me,  
For now I knew the veil had been withdrawn.  
Then in a moment when they blazed again  
Opening, I saw the least of little stars  
Down on the waste, and straight beyond the star  
I saw the spiritual city and all her spires  
And gateways in a glory like one pearl—  
No larger, tho' the goal of all the saints—  
Strike from the sea ; and from the star there shot  
A rose-red sparkle to the city, and there  
Dwelt, and I knew it was the Holy Grail,

Which never eyes on earth again shall see.  
Then fell the floods of heaven drowning the deep.  
And how my feet recross'd the deathful ridge  
No memory in me lives ; but that I touch'd  
The chapel-doors at dawn I know ; and thence  
Taking my war-horse from the holy man,  
Glad that no phantom vexed me more, return'd  
To whence I came, the gate of Arthur's wars."

"O brother," ask'd Ambrosius,— "for in sooth  
These ancient books—and they would win thee—  
teem,

Only I find not there this Holy Grail,  
With miracles and marvels like to these,  
Not all unlike ; which oftentime I read,  
Who read but on my breviary with ease,

Till my head swims ; and then go forth and pass  
Down to the little thorpe that lies so close,  
And almost plaster'd like a martin's nest  
To these old walls—and mingle with our folk ;  
And knowing every honest face of theirs,  
As well as ever shepherd knew his sheep,  
And every homely secret in their hearts,  
Delight myself with gossip and old wives,  
And ills and aches, and teething, lyings-in,  
And mirthful sayings, children of the place,  
That have no meaning half a league away :  
Or lulling random squabbles when they rise.  
Chafferings and chatterings at the market-cross,  
Rejoice, small man, in this small world of mine,  
Yea, even in their hens and in their eggs—  
O brother, saving this Sir Galahad

Came ye on none but phantoms in your quest,  
No man, no woman ?”

Then, Sir Percivale :

“ All men, to one so bound by such a vow,  
And women were as phantoms. O, my brother,  
Why wilt thou shame me to confess to thee  
How far I falter'd from my quest and vow ?  
For after I had lain so many nights  
A bedmate of the snail and eft and snake,  
In grass and burdock, I was changed to wan  
And meagre, and the vision had not come,  
And then I chanced upon a goodly town  
With one great dwelling in the middle of it ;  
Thither I made, and there was I disarm'd  
By maidens each as fair as any flower :  
But when they led me into hall, behold

The Princess of that castle was the one,  
Brother, and that one only, who had ever  
Made my heart leap ; for when I moved of old  
A slender page about her father's hall,  
And she a slender maiden, all my heart  
Went after her with longing : yet we twain  
Had never kiss'd a kiss, or vow'd a vow.  
And now I came upon her once again,  
And one had wedded her, and he was dead,  
And all his land and wealth and state were hers.  
And while I tarried, every day she set  
A banquet richer than the day before  
By me ; for all her longing and her will  
Was toward me as of old ; till one fair morn,  
I walking to and fro beside a stream  
That flash'd across her orchard underneath

Her castle-walls, she stole upon my walk,  
And calling me the greatest of all knights,  
Embraced me, and so kiss'd me the first time,  
And gave herself and all her wealth to me.  
Then I remember'd Arthur's warning word,  
That most of us would follow wandering fires,  
And the Quest faded in my heart. Anon,  
The heads of all her people drew to me,  
With supplication both of knees and tongue :  
' We have heard of thee : thou art our greatest  
knight,  
Our Lady says it, and we well believe :  
Wed thou our Lady, and rule over us,  
And thou shalt be as Arthur in our land.'  
O me, my brother ! but one night my vow  
Burnt me within, so that I rose and fled,

But wail'd and wept, and hated mine own self,  
And ev'n the Holy Quest, and all but her ;  
Then after I was join'd with Galahad  
Cared not for her, nor anything upon earth."

Then said the monk, " Poor men, when yule is  
cold,  
Must be content to sit by little fires.  
And this am I, so that ye care for me  
Ever so little ; yea, and blest be Heaven  
That brought thee here to this poor house of ours,  
Where all the brethren are so hard, to warm  
My cold heart with a friend : but O the pity  
To find thine own first love once more—to hold,  
Hold her a wealthy bride within thine arms,  
Or all but hold, and then—cast her aside,

Foregoing all her sweetness, like a weed.  
For we that want the warmth of double life,  
We that are plagued with dreams of something  
sweet

Beyond all sweetness in a life so rich,—  
Ah, blessed Lord, I speak too earthlywise,  
Seeing I never stray'd beyond the cell,  
But live like an old badger in his earth,  
With earth about him everywhere, despite  
All fast and penance. Saw ye none beside,  
None of your knights?"

"Yea so," said Percivale:

"One night my pathway swerving east, I saw  
The pelican on the casque of our Sir Bors  
All in the middle of the rising moon:

And toward him spurr'd and hail'd him, and he me,

And each made joy of either; then he ask'd,

'Where is he? hast thou seen him—Lancelot?'

'Once,'

Said good Sir Bors, 'he dash'd across me—mad,

And maddening what he rode: and when I cried,

'Ridest thou then so hotly on a quest

So holy?' Lancelot shouted, 'Stay me not!

I have been the sluggard, and I ride apace,

For now there is a lion in the way.'

So vanish'd.'

"Then Sir Bors had ridden on

Softly, and sorrowing for our Lancelot,

Because his former madness, once the talk

And scandal of our table, had return'd;

For Lancelot's kith and kin so worship him  
That ill to him is ill to them; to Bors  
Beyond the rest : he well had been content  
Not to have seen, so Lancelot might have seen,  
The Holy Cup of healing; and, indeed,  
Being so clouded with his grief and love,  
Small heart was his after the Holy Quest :  
If God would send the vision, well : if not,  
The Quest and he were in the hands of heaven.

“ And then, with small adventure met, Sir Bors  
Rode to the lonest tract of all the realm,  
And found a people there among their crags,  
Our race and blood, a remnant that were left  
Paynim amid their circles, and the stones

They pitch up straight to heaven : and their wise  
men

Were strong in that old magic which can trace  
The wandering of the stars, and scoff'd at him  
And this high Quest as at a simple thing :  
Told him he follow'd—almost Arthur's words—  
A mocking fire : ' what other fire than he,  
Whereby the blood beats, and the blossom blows,  
And the sea rolls, and all the world is warm'd ? '  
And when his answer chafed them, the rough crowd,  
Hearing he had a difference with their priests,  
Seized him, and bound and plunged him into a cell  
Of great piled stones ; and lying bounden there  
In darkness thro' innumerable hours  
He heard the hollow-ringing heavens sweep  
Over him, till by miracle—what else ?—

Heavy as it was, a great stone slipt and fell,  
Such as no wind could move: and thro' the gap  
Glimmer'd the streaming scud: then came a night  
Still as the day was loud; and thro' the gap  
The seven clear stars of Arthur's Table Round—  
For, brother, so one night, because they roll  
Thro' such a round in heaven, we named the stars,  
Rejoicing in ourselves and in our king—  
And these, like bright eyes of familiar friends,  
In on him shone, 'And then to me, to me,'  
Said good Sir Bors, 'beyond all hopes of mine,  
Who scarce had pray'd or ask'd it for myself—  
Across the seven clear stars—O grace to me—  
In colour like the fingers of a hand  
Before a burning taper, the sweet Grail  
Glided and past, and close upon it peal'd

A sharp quick thunder.' Afterwards a maid,  
Who kept our holy faith among her kin  
In secret, entering, loosed and let him go."

To whom the monk: "And I remember now  
That pelican on the casque: Sir Bors it was  
Who spake so low and sadly at our board;  
And mighty reverent at our grace was he:  
A square-set man and honest; and his eyes,  
An out-door sign of all the warmth within,  
Smiled with his lips—a smile beneath a cloud,  
But heaven had meant it for a sunny one:  
Ay, ay, Sir Bors, who else? But when ye reach'd  
The city, found ye all your knights return'd,  
Or was there sooth in Arthur's prophecy,  
Tell me, and what said each, and what the King?"

Then answer'd Percivale: "And that can I,  
Brother, and truly; since the living words  
Of so great men as Lancelot and our King  
Pass not from door to door and out again,  
But sit within the house. O, when we reach'd  
The city, our horses stumbling as they trode  
On heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,  
Crack'd basilisks, and splinter'd cockatrices,  
And shatter'd talbots, which had left the stones  
Raw, that they fell from, brought us to the hall.

"And there sat Arthur on the daïs-throne,  
And those that had gone out upon the Quest,  
Wasted and worn, and but a tithe of them,  
And those that had not, stood before the King.  
Who, when he saw me, rose, and bade me hail,

Saying, 'A welfare in thine eye reproves  
Our fear of some disastrous chance for thee  
On hill, or plain, at sea, or flooding ford.  
So fierce a gale made havock here of late  
Among the strange devices of our kings;  
Yea, shook this newer, stronger hall of ours,  
And from the statue Merlin moulded for us  
Half-wrench'd a golden wing; but now—the quest,  
This vision—hast thou seen the Holy Cup,  
That Joseph brought of old to Glastonbury?'

“So when I told him all thyself hast heard,  
Ambrosius, and my fresh but fixt resolve  
To pass away into the quiet life,  
He answer'd not, but, sharply turning, ask'd  
Of Gawain, 'Gawain, was this Quest for thee?'

“ ‘Nay, lord,’ said Gawain, ‘not for such as I.  
Therefore I communed with a saintly man,  
Who made me sure the Quest was not for me ;  
For I was much awearied of the Quest :  
But found a silk pavilion in a field,  
And merry maidens in it ; and then this gale  
Tore my pavilion from the tenting-pin,  
And blew my merry maidens all about  
With all discomfort ; yea, and but for this,  
My twelvemonth and a day were pleasant to me.’

“ He ceased ; and Arthur turn’d to whom at first  
He saw not, for Sir Bors, on entering, push’d  
Athwart the throng to Lancelot, caught his hand,  
Held it, and there, half-hidden by him, stood,  
Until the King espied him, saying to him,

‘Hail, Bors ! if ever loyal man and true  
Could see it, thou hast seen the Grail ;’ and Bors,  
‘Ask me not, for I may not speak of it,  
I saw it :’ and the tears were in his eyes.

“Then there remain’d but Lancelot, for the rest  
Spake but of sundry perils in the storm ;  
Perhaps, like him of Cana in Holy Writ,  
Our Arthur kept his best until the last ;  
‘Thou, too, my Lancelot,’ ask’d the King, ‘my  
friend,  
Our mightiest, hath this Quest avail’d for thee ?’

“‘Our mightiest !’ answer’d Lancelot, with a  
groan ;  
‘O King !’—and when he paused, methought I spied  
A dying fire of madness in his eyes—

'O King, my friend, if friend of thine I be,  
Happier are those that welter in their sin,  
Swine in the mud, that cannot see for slime,  
Slime of the ditch : but in me lived a sin  
So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,  
Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung  
Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower  
And poisonous grew together, each as each,  
Not to be pluck'd asunder ; and when thy knights  
Swore, I swore with them only in the hope  
That could I touch or see the Holy Grail  
They might be pluck'd asunder. Then I spake  
To one most holy saint, who wept and said,  
That save they could be pluck'd asunder, all  
My quest were but in vain ; to whom I vow'd  
That I would work according as he will'd.

And forth I went, and while I yearn'd and strove  
To tear the twain asunder in my heart,  
My madness came upon me as of old,  
And whipt me into waste fields far away ;  
There was I beaten down by little men,  
Mean knights, to whom the moving of my sword  
And shadow of my spear had been enow  
To scare them from me once ; and then I came  
All in my folly to the naked shore,  
Wide flats, where nothing but coarse grasses grew ;  
But such a blast, my King, began to blow,  
So loud a blast along the shore and sea,  
Ye could not hear the waters for the blast,  
Tho' heapt in mounds and ridges all the sea  
Drove like a cataract, and all the sand  
Swept like a river, and the clouded heavens

Were shaken with the motion and the sound.  
And blackening in the sea-foam sway'd a boat,  
Half-swallow'd in it, anchor'd with a chain ;  
And in my madness to myself I said,  
' I will embark and I will lose myself,  
And in the great sea wash away my sin.'  
I burst the chain, I sprang into the boat.  
Seven days I drove along the dreary deep,  
And with me drove the moon and all the stars ;  
And the wind fell, and on the seventh night  
I heard the shingle grinding in the surge,  
And felt the boat shock earth, and looking up,  
Behold, the enchanted towers of Carbonek,  
A castle like a rock upon a rock,  
With chasm-like portals open to the sea,  
And steps that met the breaker ! there was none

Stood near it but a lion on each side  
That kept the entry, and the moon was full.  
Then from the boat I leapt, and up the stairs.  
There drew my sword. With sudden-flaring manes  
Those two great beasts rose upright like a man,  
Each gript a shoulder, and I stood between ;  
And, when I would have smitten them, heard a  
    voice,  
' Doubt not, go forward ; if thou doubt, the beasts  
Will tear thee piecemeal.' Then with violence  
The sword was dash'd from out my hand, and fell.  
And up into the sounding hall I past ;  
But nothing in the sounding hall I saw  
No bench nor table, painting on the wall  
Or shield of knight ; only the rounded moon  
Thro' the tall oriel on the rolling sea.

But always in the quiet house I heard,  
Clear as a lark, high o'er me as a lark,  
A sweet voice singing in the topmost tower  
To the eastward : up I climb'd a thousand steps  
With pain : as in a dream I seem'd to climb  
For ever : at the last I reach'd a door,  
A light was in the crannies, and I heard,  
'Glory and joy and honour to our Lord  
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail.'  
Then in my madness I essay'd the door ;  
It gave ; and thro' a stormy glare, a heat  
As from a seventimes-heated furnace, I,  
Blasted and burnt, and blinded as I was,  
With such a fierceness that I swoon'd away-  
O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,  
All pall'd in crimson samite, and around

Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes.  
And but for all my madness and my sin,  
And then my swooning, I had sworn I saw  
That which I saw ; but what I saw was veil'd  
And cover'd ; and this quest was not for me.'

“So speaking, and here ceasing, Lancelot left  
The hall long silent, till Sir Gawain—nay,  
Brother, I need not tell thee foolish words,—  
A reckless and irreverent knight was he,  
Now bolden'd by the silence of his King,—  
Well, I will tell thee: ‘O king, my liege,’ he said,  
‘Hath Gawain fail'd in any quest of thine?  
When have I stinted stroke in foughten field?  
But as for thine, my good friend, Percivale,  
Thy holy nun and thou have driven men mad,

Yea, made our mightiest madder than our least.  
But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,  
I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,  
And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,  
To holy virgins in their ecstacies,  
Henceforward.'

“ ‘Deafer,’ said the blameless King,  
‘Gawain, and blinder unto holy things  
Hope not to make thyself by idle vows,  
Being too blind to have desire to see.  
But if indeed there came a sign from heaven,  
Blessed are Bors, Lancelot and Percivale,  
For these have seen according to their sight.  
For every fiery prophet in old times,  
And all the sacred madness of the bard,

When God made music thro' them, could but speak  
His music by the framework and the chord :  
And as ye saw it ye have spoken truth.

“ ‘ Nay—but thou errest, Lancelot : never yet  
Could all of true and noble in knight and man  
Twine round one sin, whatever it might be,  
With such a closeness, but apart there grew,  
Save that he were the swine thou spakest of,  
Some root of knighthood and pure nobleness ;  
Whereto see thou, that it may bear its flower.

“ ‘ And spake I not too truly, O my knights ?  
Was I too dark a prophet when I said  
To those who went upon the Holy Quest,  
That most of them would follow wandering fires,

Lost in the quagmire?—lost to me and gone,  
And left me gazing at a barren board,  
And a lean Order—scarce return'd a tithe—  
And out of those to whom the vision came  
My greatest hardly will believe he saw ;  
Another hath beheld it afar off,  
And leaving human wrongs to right themselves,  
Cares but to pass into the silent life.  
And one hath had the vision face to face,  
And now his chair desires him here in vain,  
However they may crown him elsewhere.

“ ‘ And some among you held, that if the King  
Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow :  
Not easily, seeing that the King must guard  
That which he rules, and is but as the hind

To whom a space of land is given to plough,  
Who may not wander from the allotted field,  
Before his work be done; but, being done,  
Let visions of the night or of the day  
Come, as they will; and many a time they come,  
Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,  
This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,  
This air that smites his forehead is not air  
But vision—yea, his very hand and foot—  
In moments when he feels he cannot die,  
And knows himself no vision to himself,  
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One  
Who rose again: ye have seen what ye have seen.

“So spake the king: I knew not all he meant.”



# PELLEAS AND ETTARRE.





## PELLEAS AND ETTARRE.



ING Arthur made new knights to fill  
the gap

Left by the Holy Quest; and as he sat  
In hall at old Caerleon, the high doors  
Were softly sunder'd, and thro' these a youth,  
Pelleas, and the sweet smell of the fields  
Past, and the sunshine came along with him.

“ Make me thy knight, because I know, Sir King,

All that belongs to knighthood, and I love,"  
Such was his cry; for having heard the King  
Had let proclaim a tournament—the prize  
A golden circlet and a knightly sword,  
Full fain had Pelleas for his lady won  
The golden circlet, for himself the sword:  
And there were those who knew him near the King  
And promised for him: and Arthur made him  
knight.

And this new knight, Sir Pelleas of the isles—  
But lately come to his inheritance,  
And lord of many a barren isle was he—  
Riding at noon, a day or twain before,  
Across the forest call'd of Dean, to find  
Caerleon and the King, had felt the sun

Beat like a strong knight on his helm, and reel'd  
Almost to falling from his horse ; but saw  
Near him a mound of even-sloping side,  
Whereon a hundred stately beeches grew,  
And here and there great hollies under them.  
But for a mile all round was open space,  
And fern and heath : and slowly Pelleas drew  
To that dim day, then binding his good horse  
To a tree, cast himself down ; and as he lay  
At random looking over the brown earth  
Thro' that green-glooming twilight of the grove,  
It seem'd to Pelleas that the fern without  
Burnt as a living fire of emeralds,  
So that his eyes were dazzled looking at it,  
Then o'er it crost the dimness of a cloud  
Floating, and once the shadow of a bird

Flying, and then a fawn ; and his eyes closed.  
And since he loved all maidens, but no maid  
In special, half-awake he whisper'd, " Where ?  
O where ? I love thee, tho' I know thee not.  
For fair thou art and pure as Guinevere,  
And I will make thee with my spear and sword  
As famous—O my queen, my Guinevere,  
For I will be thine Arthur when we meet."

Suddenly waken'd with a sound of talk  
And laughter at the limit of the wood,  
And glancing thro' the hoary boles, he saw,  
Strange as to some old prophet might have seem'd  
A vision hovering on a sea of fire,  
Damsels in divers colours like the cloud  
Of sunset and sunrise, and all of them

On horses, and the horses richly trapt  
Breast-high in that bright line of bracken stood :  
And all the damsels talk'd confusedly,  
And one was pointing this way, and one that,  
Because the way was lost.

And Pelleas rose,  
And loosed his horse, and led him to the light.  
There she that seem'd the chief among them said,  
“ In happy time behold our pilot-star !  
Youth, we are damsels-errant, and we ride,  
Arm'd as ye see, to tilt against the knights  
There at Caerleon, but have lost our way :  
To right ? to left ? straight forward ? back again ?  
Which ? tell us quickly.”

And Pelleas gazing thought,

“Is Guinevere herself so beautiful?”

For large her violet eyes look'd, and her bloom  
A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens,  
And round her limbs, mature in womanhood,  
And slender was her hand and small her shape,  
And but for those large eyes, the haunts of scorn,  
She might have seem'd a toy to trifle with,  
And pass and care no more. But while he gazed  
The beauty of her flesh abash'd the boy,  
As tho' it were the beauty of her soul:  
For as the base man, judging of the good,  
Puts his own baseness in him by default  
Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend  
All the young beauty of his own soul to hers,  
Believing her; and when she spake to him,  
Stammer'd, and could not make her a reply.

For out of the waste islands had he come,  
Where saving his own sisters he had known  
Scarce any but the women of his isles,  
Rough wives, that laugh'd and scream'd against  
the gulls,  
Makers of nets, and living from the sea.

Then with a slow smile turn'd the lady round  
And look'd upon her people ; and as when  
A stone is flung into some sleeping tarn,  
The circle widens till it lip the marge,  
Spread the slow smile thro' all her company.  
Three knights were thereamong ; and they too  
smiled,  
Scorning him ; for the lady was Ettarre,  
And she was a great lady in her land.

Again she said, "O wild and of the woods,  
Knowest thou not the fashion of our speech?  
Or have the Heavens but given thee a fair face,  
Lacking a tongue?"

"O damsel," answer'd he,  
"I woke from dreams; and coming out of gloom  
Was dazzled by the sudden light, and crave  
Pardon: but will ye to Caerleon? I  
Go likewise: shall I lead you to the King?"

"Lead then," she said; and thro' the woods  
they went.

And while they rode, the meaning in his eyes,  
His tenderness of manner, and chaste awe,  
His broken utterances and bashfulness,

Were all a burthen to her, and in her heart  
She mutter'd, "I have lighted on a fool,  
Raw, yet so stale !" But since her mind was bent  
On hearing, after trumpet blown, her name  
And title, "Queen of Beauty," in the lists  
Cried—and beholding him so strong, she thought  
That peradventure he will fight for me,  
And win the circlet: therefore flatter'd him,  
Being so gracious, that he well-nigh deem'd  
His wish by hers was echo'd; and her knights  
And all her damsels too were gracious to him,  
For she was a great lady.

And when they reach'd  
Caerleon, ere they past to lodging, she,  
Taking his hand, "O the strong hand," she said,

“See ! look at mine ! but wilt thou fight for me,  
And win me this fine circlet, Pelleas,  
That I may love thee ?”

Then his helpless heart  
Leapt, and he cried “ Ay ! wilt thou if I win ?”  
“ Ay, that will I,” she answer’d, and she laugh’d,  
And straitly nipt the hand, and flung it from her ;  
Then glanced askew at those three knights of hers,  
Till all her ladies laugh’d along with her.

“ O happy world,” thought Pelleas, “ all, me-  
seems,  
Are happy ; I the happiest of them all.”  
Nor slept that night for pleasure in his blood,  
And green wood-ways, and eyes among the leaves ;

Then being on the morrow knighted, sware  
To love one only. And as he came away,  
The men who met him rounded on their heels  
And wonder'd after him, because his face  
Shone like the countenance of a priest of old  
Against the flame about a sacrifice  
Kindled by fire from heaven : so glad was he.

Then Arthur made vast banquets, and strange  
knights  
From the four winds came in : and each one sat,  
Tho' served with choice from air, land, stream, and  
sea,  
Oft in mid-banquet measuring with his eyes  
His neighbour's make and might : and Pelleas  
look'd

Noble among the noble, for he dream'd  
His lady loved him, and he knew himself  
Loved of the King : and him his new-made knight  
Worshipt, whose lightest whisper moved him more  
Than all the ranged reasons of the world.

Then blush'd and brake the morning of the  
    jousts,  
And this was call'd "The Tournament of Youth :"  
For Arthur, loving his young knight, withheld  
His older and his mightier from the lists,  
That Pelleas might obtain his lady's love,  
According to her promise, and remain  
Lord of the tourney. And Arthur had the jousts  
Down in the flat field by the shore of Usk  
Holden : the gilded parapets were crown'd

*PELLEAS AND ETTARRE.*

With faces, and the great tower fill'd with eyes  
Up to the summit, and the trumpets blew.  
There all day long Sir Pelleas kept the field  
With honour: so by that strong hand of his  
The sword and golden circlet were achieved.

Then rang the shout his lady loved: the heat  
Of pride and glory fired her face; her eye  
Sparkled; she caught the circlet from his lance,  
And there before the people crown'd herself:  
So for the last time she was gracious to him.

Then at Caerleon for a space—her look  
Bright for all others, cloudier on her knight—  
Linger'd Ettarre: and seeing Pelleas droop,  
Said Guinevere, “ We marvel at thee much,

O damsel, wearing this unsunny face  
To him who won thee glory !” And she said,  
“ Had ye not held your Lancelot in your bower,  
My Queen, he had not won.” Whereat the Queen,  
As one whose foot is bitten by an ant,  
Glanced down upon her, turn’d and went her way.

But after, when her damsels, and herself,  
And those three knights all set their faces home,  
Sir Pelleas follow’d. She that saw him cried,  
“ Damsels—and yet I should be shamed to say  
it—

I cannot bide Sir Baby. Keep him back  
Among yourselves. Would rather that we had  
Some rough old knight who knew the worldly way,  
Albeit grizzlier than a bear, to ride

And jest with : take him to you, keep him off,  
And pamper him with papmeat, if ye will,  
Old milky fables of the wolf and sheep,  
Such as the wholesome mothers tell their boys.  
Nay, should ye try him with a merry one  
To find his mettle, good : and if he fly us,  
Small matter ! let him." This her damsels heard,  
And mindful of her small and cruel hand,  
They, closing round him thro' the journey home,  
Acted her hest, and always from her side  
Restrain'd him with all manner of device,  
So that he could not come to speech with her.  
And when she gain'd her castle, upsprang the  
bridge,  
Down rang the grate of iron thro' the groove,  
And he was left alone in open field.

“These be the wavs of ladies,” Pelleas thought,  
“To those who love them, trials of our faith.  
Yea, let her prove me to the uttermost,  
For loyal to the uttermost am I.”  
So made his moan ; and, darkness falling, sought  
A priory not far off, there lodged, but rose  
With morning every day, and, moist or dry,  
Full-arm'd upon his charger all day long  
Sat by the walls, and no one open'd to him.

And this persistance turn'd her scorn to wrath.  
Then calling her three knights, she charged them,  
“ Out !  
And drive him from the walls.” And out they  
came,  
But Pelleas overthrew them as they dash'd

Against him one by one; and these return'd,  
But still he kept his watch beneath the wall.

Thereon her wrath became a hate; and once,  
A week beyond, while walking on the walls  
With her three knights, she pointed downward,

“Look,

He haunts me—I cannot breathe—besieges me;  
Down! strike him! put my hate into your strokes,  
And drive him from my walls.” And down they  
went,

And Pelleas overthrew them one by one;  
And from the tower above him cried Ettarre,  
“Bind him, and bring him in.”

He heard her voice;

Then let the strong hand, which had overthrown  
Her minion-knights, by those he overthrew  
Be bounden straight, and so they brought him in.

Then when he came before Ettarre, the sight  
Of her rich beauty made him at one glance  
More bondsman in his heart than in his bonds.  
Yet with good cheer he spake, "Behold me,  
Lady,  
A prisoner, and the vassal of thy will ;  
And if thou keep me in thy donjon here,  
Content am I so that I see thy face  
But once a day : for I have sworn my vows,  
And thou hast given thy promise, and I know  
That all these pains are trials of my faith,  
And that thyself when thou hast seen me strain'd

And sifted to the utmost, wilt at length  
Yield me thy love and know me for thy knight."

Then she began to rail so bitterly,  
With all her damsels, he was stricken mute ;  
But when she mock'd his vows and the great  
King,  
Lighted on words : " For pity of thine own self,  
Peace, Lady, peace : is he not thine and mine ?"  
" Thou fool," she said, " I never heard his voice  
But long'd to break away. Unbind him now,  
And thrust him out of doors ; for save he be  
Fool to the midmost marrow of his bones,  
He will return no more." And those, her three,  
Laugh'd, and unbound, and thrust him from the  
gate.

And after this, a week beyond, again  
She call'd them, saying, "There he watches yet,  
There like a dog before his master's door !  
Kick'd, he returns : do ye not hate him, ye ?  
Ye know yourselves : how can ye bide at peace,  
Affronted with his fulsome innocence ?  
Are ye but creatures of the board and bed,  
No men to strike ? Fall on him all at once,  
And if ye slay him I reck not : if ye fail,  
Give ye the slave mine order to be bound,  
Bind him as heretofore, and bring him in :  
It may be ye shall slay him in his bonds."

She spake ; and at her will they couch'd their  
spears,

Three against one : and Gawain passing by,

Bound upon solitary adventure, saw  
Low down beneath the shadow of those towers  
A villainy, three to one : and thro' his heart  
The fire of honour and all noble deeds  
Flash'd, and he call'd, " I strike upon thy side—  
The caitiffs !" " Nay," said Pelleas, " but forbear ;  
He needs no aid who doth his lady's will."

So Gawain, looking at the villainy done,  
Forbore, but in his heat and eagerness  
Trembled and quiver'd, as the dog, withheld  
A moment from the vermin that he sees  
Before him, shivers, ere he springs and kills.

And Pelleas overthrew them, one to three ;  
And they rose up, and bound, and brought him in.

Then first her anger, leaving Pelleas, burn'd  
Full on her knights in many an evil name  
Of craven, weakling, and thrice-beaten hound :  
“ Yet, take him, ye that scarce are fit to touch,  
Far less to bind, your victor, and thrust him out,  
And let who will release him from his bonds.  
And if he comes again ”—there she brake short ;  
And Pelleas answer'd, “ Lady, for indeed  
I loved you and I deem'd you beautiful,  
I cannot brook to see your beauty marr'd  
Thro' evil spite : and if ye love me not,  
I cannot bear to dream you so forsworn :  
I had liefer ye were worthy of my love,  
Than to be loved again of you—farewell ;  
And tho' ye kill my hope, not yet my love,  
Vex not yourself : ye will not see me more.”

While thus he spake, she gazed upon the man  
Of princely bearing, tho' in bonds, and thought,  
“Why have I push'd him from me? this man loves,  
If love there be: yet him I loved not. Why?  
I deem'd him fool? yea, so? or that in him  
A something—was it nobler than myself?—  
Seem'd my reproach? He is not of my kind.  
He could not love me, did he know me well.  
Nay, let him go—and quickly.” And her knights  
Laugh'd not, but thrust him bounden out of door.

Forth sprang Gawain, and loosed him from his  
bonds,  
And flung them o'er the walls; and afterward,  
Shaking his hands, as from a lazar's rag,  
“Faith of my body,” he said, “and art thou not—

Yea thou art he, whom late our Arthur made  
Knight of his table ; yea and he that won  
The circlet ? wherefore hast thou so defamed  
Thy brotherhood in me and all the rest,  
As let these caitiffs on thee work their will ?”

And Pelleas answer'd, “ O, their wills are here  
For whom I won the circlet ; and mine, hers,  
Thus to be bounden, so to see her face,  
Marr'd tho' it be with spite and mockery now,  
Other than when I found her in the woods ;  
And tho' she hath me bounden but in spite,  
And all to flout me, when they bring me in,  
Let me be bounden, I shall see her face ;  
Else must I die thro' mine unhappiness.”

And Gawain answer'd kindly tho' in scorn,  
 "Why, let my lady bind me if she will,  
 And let my lady beat me if she will :  
 But an she send her delegate to thrall  
 These fighting hands of mine—Christ kill me then  
 But I will slice him handless by the wrist,  
 And let my lady sear the stump for him,  
 Howl as he may. But hold me for your friend :  
 Come, ye know nothing : here I pledge my troth,  
 Yea, by the honour of the Table Round,  
 I will be leal to thee and work thy work,  
 And tame thy jailing princess to thine hand.  
 Lend me thine horse and arms, and I will say  
 That I have slain thee. She will let me in  
 To hear the manner of thy fight and fall ;  
 Then, when I come within her counsels, then

From prime to vespers will I chant thy praise  
As prowest knight and truest lover, more  
Than any have sung thee living, till she long  
To have thee back in lusty life again,  
Not to be bound, save by white bonds and warm,  
Dearer than freedom. Wherefore now thy horse  
And armour : let me go : be comforted :  
Give me three days to melt her fancy, and hope  
The third night hence will bring thee news of  
gold."

Then Pelleas lent his horse and all his arms,  
Saving the goodly sword, his prize, and took  
Gawain's, and said, "Betray me not, but help—  
Art thou not he whom men call light-of-love?"

"Ay," said Gawain, "for women be so light."

Then bounded forward to the castle walls,  
And raised a bugle hanging from his neck,  
And winded it, and that so musically  
That all the old echoes hidden in the wall  
Rang out like hollow woods at huntingtide.

Up ran a score of damsels to the tower ;  
“Avaunt,” they cried, “our lady loves thee not.”  
But Gawain lifting up his visor said,  
“Gawain am I, Gawain of Arthur’s court,  
And I have slain this Pelleas whom ye hate :  
Behold his horse and armour. Open gate,  
And I will make you merry.”

And down they ran,  
Her damsels, crying to their lady, “Lo !  
Pelleas is dead—he told us—he that hath

His horse and armour : will ye let him in ?  
 He slew him ! Gawain, Gawain of the court,  
 Sir Gawain—there he waits below the wall,  
 Blowing his bugle as who should say him nay."

And so, leave given, straight on thro' open door  
 Rode Gawain, whom she greeted courteously.  
 "Dead, is it so ?" she ask'd. "Ay, ay," said he,  
 "And oft in dying cried upon your name."  
 "Pity on him," she answer'd, "a good knight,  
 But never let me bide one hour at peace."  
 "Ay," thought Gawain, "and ye be fair enow :  
 But I to your dead man have given my troth,  
 That whom ye loathe him will I make you love."

So those three days, aimless about the land.

Lost in a doubt, Pelleas wandering  
Waited, until the third night brought a moon  
With promise of large light on woods and ways.

The night was hot: he could not rest, but rode  
Ere midnight to her walls, and bound his horse  
Hard by the gates. Wide open were the gates,  
And no watch kept; and in thro' these he past,  
And heard but his own steps, and his own heart  
Beating, for nothing moved but his own self,  
And his own shadow. Then he crost the court,  
And saw the postern portal also wide  
Yawning; and up a slope of garden, all  
Of roses white and red, and wild ones mixt  
And overgrowing them, went on, and found,  
Here too, all hush'd below the mellow moon,

Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave  
Came lightening downward, and so spilt itself  
Among the roses, and was lost again.

Then was he ware that white pavilions rose,  
Three from the bushes, gilden-peakt: in one,  
Red after revel, droned her lurdane knights  
Slumbering, and their three squires across their  
feet :

In one, their malice on the placid lip  
Froz'n by sweet sleep, four of her damsels lay:  
And in the third, the circlet of the jousts  
Bound on her brow, were Gawain and Ettarre.

Back, as a hand that pushes thro' the leaf  
To find a nest and feels a snake, he drew:  
Back as a coward slinks from what he fears

To cope with, or a traitor proven, or hound  
Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame  
Creep with his shadow thro' the court again,  
Fingering at his sword-handle until he stood  
There on the castle-bridge once more, and thought,  
"I will go back, and slay them where they lie."

And so went back and seeing them yet in sleep  
Said, "Ye, that so dishallow the holy sleep,  
Your sleep is death," and drew the sword, and  
thought,

"What! slay a sleeping knight? the King hath  
bound

And sworn me to this brotherhood ;" again,

"Alas that ever a knight should be so false."

Then turn'd, and so return'd, and groaning laid

The naked sword athwart their naked throats,  
There left it, and them sleeping ; and she lay,  
The circlet of the tourney round her brows,  
And the sword of the tourney across her throat.

And forth he past, and mounting on his horse  
Stared at her towers that, larger than themselves  
In their own darkness, throng'd into the moon.  
Then crush'd the saddle with his thighs, and  
clench'd  
His hands, and madden'd with himself and moan'd :

“ Would they have risen against me in their  
blood  
At the last day ? I might have answer'd them  
Even before high God. O towers so strong,

Huge, solid, would that even while I gaze  
The crack of earthquake shivering to your base  
Split you, and Hell burst up your harlot roofs  
Bellowing, and charr'd you thro' and thro' within,  
Black as the harlot's heart—hollow as a skull !  
Let the fierce east scream thro' your eyelet-holes,  
And whirl the dust of harlots round and round  
In dung and nettles ! hiss, snake—I saw him there—  
Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell. Who yells  
Here in the still sweet summer night, but I—  
I, the poor Pelleas whom she call'd her fool ?  
Fool, beast—he, she, or I ? myself most fool ;  
Beast too, as lacking human wit—disgraced,  
Dishonour'd all for trial of true love—  
Love?—we be all alike : only the king  
Hath made us fools and liars. O noble vows !

O great and sane and simple race of brutes  
That own no lust because they have no law !  
For why should I have loved her to my shame ?  
I loathe her, as I loved her to my shame.  
I never loved her, I but lusted for her—  
Away—”

He dash'd the rowel into his horse,  
And bounded forth and vanish'd thro' the night.

Then she, that felt the cold touch on her throat,  
Awaking knew the sword, and turn'd herself  
To Gawain : “ Liar, for thou hast not slain  
This Pelleas ! here he stood and might have slain  
Me and thyself.” And he that tells the tale  
Says that her ever-veering fancy turn'd

To Pelleas, as the one true knight on earth,  
And only lover ; and thro' her love her life  
Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain.

But he by wild and way, for half the night,  
And over hard and soft, striking the sod  
From out the soft, the spark from off the hard,  
Rode till the star above the wakening sun,  
Beside that tower where Percivale was cowl'd,  
Glanced from the rosy forehead of the dawn.  
For so the words were flash'd into his heart  
He knew not whence or wherefore : " O sweet star,  
Pure on the virgin forehead of the dawn."  
And there he would have wept, but felt his eyes  
Harder and drier than a fountain bed  
In summer : thither came the village girls

And linger'd talking, and they come no more  
Till the sweet heavens have fill'd it from the  
                 heights

Again with living waters in the change  
Of seasons : hard his eyes ; harder his heart  
Seem'd ; but so weary were his limbs, that he.  
Gasping, " Of Arthur's hall am I, but here,  
Here let me rest and die," cast himself down,  
And gulph'd his griefs in inmost sleep ; so lay,  
Till shaken by a dream, that Gawain fired  
The hall of Merlin, and the morning star  
Reel'd in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell.

He woke, and being ware of some one nigh,  
Sent hands upon him, as to tear him, crying  
" False ! and I held thee pure as Guinevere."

But Percivale stood near him and replied,  
“Am I but false as Guinevere is pure?  
Or art thou mazed with dreams? or being one  
Of our free-spoken Table hast not heard  
That Lancelot”—there he check’d himself and  
paused.

Then fared it with Sir Pelleas as with one  
Who gets a wound in battle, and the sword  
That made it plunges thro’ the wound again,  
And pricks it deeper : and he shrank and wail’d,  
“Is the Quen false?” and Percivale was mute.  
“Have any of our Round Table held their vows?”  
And Percivale made answer not a word.  
“Is the king true?” “The king!” said Percivale.  
“Why then let men couple at once with wolves.

What ! art thou mad ?”

But Pelleas, leaping up,  
Ran thro' the doors and vaulted on his horse  
And fled : small pity upon his horse had he,  
Or on himself, or any, and when he met  
A cripple, one that held a hand for alms—  
Hunch'd as he was, and like an old dwarf-elm  
That turns its back on the salt blast, the boy  
Paused not but overrode him, shouting “False,  
And false with Gawain !” and so left him bruised  
And batter'd, and fled on, and hill and wood  
Went ever streaming by him till the gloom,  
That follows on the turning of the world,  
Darken'd the common path : he twitch'd the reins,  
And made his beast that better knew it, swerve

Now off it and now on ; but when he saw  
High up in heaven the hall that Merlin built,  
Blackening against the dead-green stripes of even,  
"Black nest of rats," he groan'd, "ye build too  
high."

Not long thereafter from the city gates  
Issued Sir Lancelot riding airily,  
Warm with a gracious parting from the Queen,  
Peace at his heart, and gazing at a star  
And marvelling what it was : on whom the boy,  
Across the silent seeded meadow-grass  
Borne, clash'd : and Lancelot, saying, "What  
name hast thou  
That ridest here so blindly and so hard ?"  
"I have no name," he shouted, "a scourge am I.

To lash the treasons of the Table Round."

"Yea, but thy name?" "I have many names"

he cried :

"I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,

And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast

And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen."

"First over me," said Lancelot, "shalt thou pass."

"Fight therefore," yell'd the other, and either

knight

Drew back a space, and when they closed, at once

The weary steed of Pelleas floundering flung

His rider, who called out from the dark field,

"Thou art false as Hell: slay me: I have no

sword."

Then Lancelot, "Yea, between thy lips—and

sharp;

But here will I disedge it by thy death."

"Slay then," he shriek'd, "my will is to be  
slain."

And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fall'n,  
Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake :  
"Rise, weakling ; I am Lancelot ; say thy say."

And Lancelot slowly rode his war-horse back  
To Camelot, and Sir Pelleas in brief while  
Caught his unbroken limbs from the dark field,  
And follow'd to the city. It chanced that both  
Brake into hall together, worn and pale.  
There with her knights and dames was Guinevere  
Full wonderingly she gazed on Lancelot  
So soon return'd, and then on Pelleas, him  
Who had not greeted her, but cast himself

Down on a bench, hard-breathing. "Have ye  
fought?"

She ask'd of Lancelot. "Ay, my Queen," he  
said.

"And thou hast overthrown him?" "Ay, my  
Queen."

Then she, turning to Pelleas, "O young knight,  
Hath the great heart of knighthood in thee fail'd  
So far thou canst not bide, unfrowardly,  
A fall from him?" Then, for he answer'd not,  
"Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen,  
May help them, loose thy tongue, and let me  
know."

But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce  
She quail'd; and he, hissing "I have no sword,"  
Sprang from the door into the dark. The Queen

Look'd hard upon her lover, he on her ;  
And each foresaw the dolorous day to be :  
And all talk died, as in a grove all song  
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey,  
Then a long silence came upon the hall,  
And Modred thought, " The time is hard at hand."





