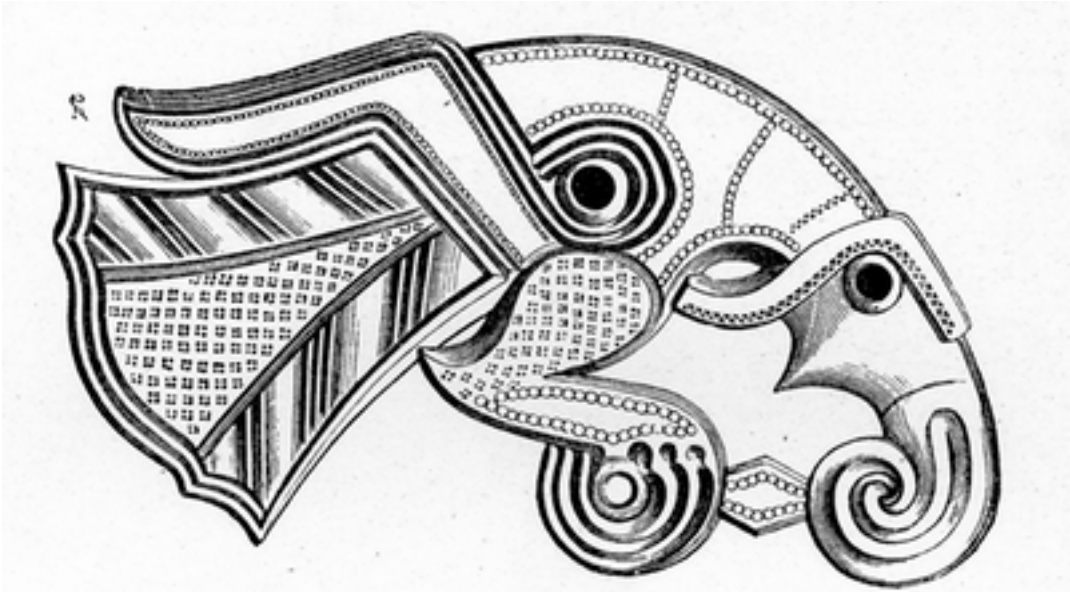
English 110.017

Heroes and Monsters

Course Readings



The Wanderer

'Oft the lonely one experiences compassion,
the Creator's kindness; though he with sorrowing mind,
o'er the watery way, must long
agitate with his hands the rime-cold sea,
go in exile tracks; his fate is full decreed.'—
So said a wanderer, of his hardships mindful,
of hostile slaughters, his dear friends' fall.—
' Oft I must alone, each morn,
my care bewail: there is now none living,
to whom my thoughts I dare
tell openly. I in sooth know,
that it is in man a noble quality,
that he his soul's coffer fast bind,
hold his treasure. Strive as he will,
the weary-minded cannot fate withstand,
nor the rugged soul'd help effect;
even the ambitious a sad one oft
in their breast's coffer fast bind.
So I my thoughts must,
oft miserable, from country separated,
far from my friends, in fetters bind,
since that long ago my bounteous patron
earth's cavern cover'd, and I abject thence
went, stricken with years, over the billowy mass;
sad sought the hall of some munificent lord,
where I far or near might find
one who in the mead-hall my ** might know,
or me friendless would comfort,
allure with pleasure. He knows who tries,
how hapless is care as a comrade
to him who little has of faithful friends;
him an exile's track awaits, not twisted gold;
a trembling body, not earth's riches:

he remembers the hall-retainers, and receipt of treasure;
how him in youth his bounteous patron
train'd to the feast; but pleasure all has fall'n;
for he knows who must his dear lord's,
his lov'd master's lessons long be depriv'd of,
when sorrow and sleep at once together
a poor solitary often bind,
that seems to him in mind, that he his lord
embraces and kisses, and on his knee lays
hands and head, as when he ere at times,
in former days, his gifts enjoy'd;
then wakes again the friendless mortal,
sees before him fallow ways,
ocean fowls bathing, spreading their wings,
rime and snow descending with hail mingled;
then are the heavier his wounds of heart,
painful after dreaming; sorrow is renew'd,
when his friends' remembrance through his mind passes;
when he greets with songs, earnestly surveys
the seats of men, swims again away.
The spirit of seafarers, brings there not many
known songs: but care is renew'd
to him who must send very abundantly
over the billowy mass his weary spirit;
therefore I cannot think, throughout this world,
why my mind it saddens,
when I the chieftains' life all consider;
how they suddenly their halls resign'd,
the proud kinsmen. So this mid-earth
every day declines and falls;
therefore may not become wise a man, ere he has pass'd
his share of winters in the world. The sagacious must be patient,
must not be too ardent, nor too hurrying of fortune,
nor too faint a soldier, nor too reckless,
nor too fearful, nor too elate, nor too greedy of money,
nor ever too vaunting, ere he be well experienced.

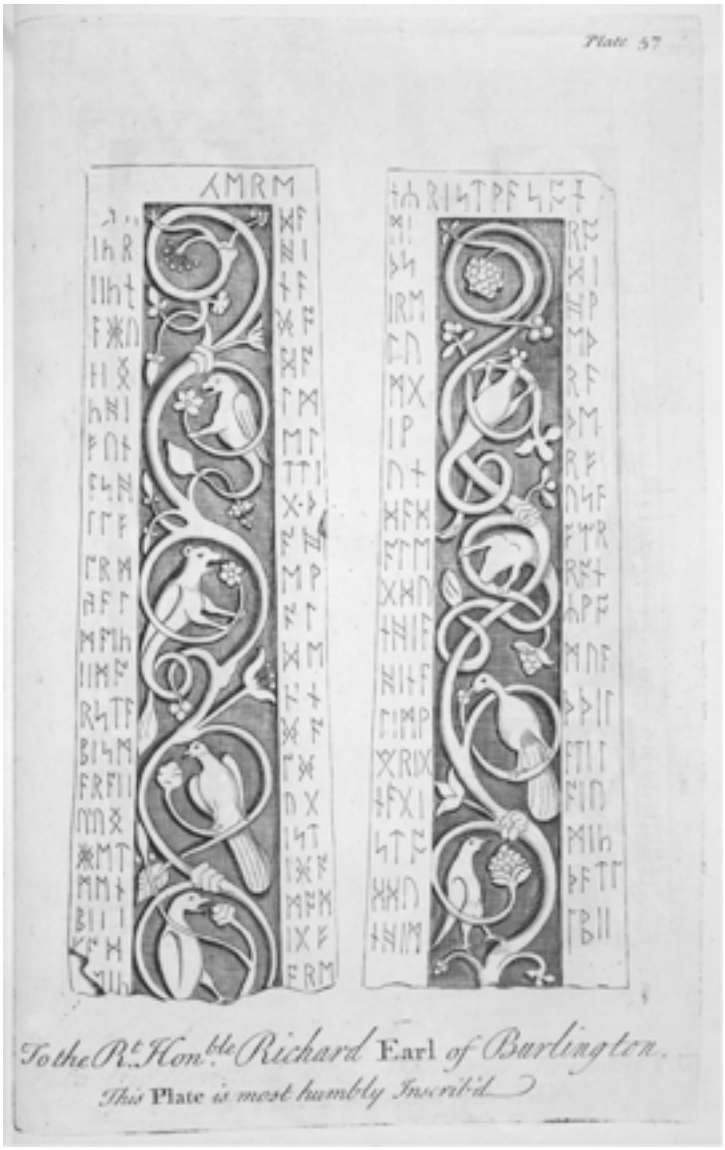
a man must wait, when he a promise utters,
till that he, bold of spirit, well know
to what his breast's thoughts shall lead.
The prudent man should understand, how ghastly it will be,
when all this world's wealth shall stand waste,
as now divers, over this mid-earth,
with wind shaken walls stand,
with rime bedeck'd: tottering the chambers,
disturb'd are the joyous halls, the powerful lie
of joy bereft, the noble all have fall'n,
the proud ones by the wall. Some hath war destroy'd,
borne on their journey hence; one the fowl hath borne away
o'er the deep ocean; one the hoar wolf
by death hath separated; one with gory countenance,
in an earth-grave a man hath hidden.
So o'erwhelm'd this world the Creator of men,
till that of the inhabitants, in the briefest moment,
the old works of giants stood desolate.
But he who this wall'd place wisely devis'd,
and this dark life profoundly contemplates,
wise in spirit, afar oft remembers
his many battles, and these words utters:
Where is horse, where is man? where is the treasure-giver ?
where are the festive sittings ? where are the joys of the hall?
Alas bright cup ! alas mail'd warrior !
alas chieftain's splendour ! how the time has pass'd,
has darken'd under veil of night, as if it had not been.
Stands now behind the beloved warriors
the wall of wonderous height, with worm carcases foul.
The men has swept away the spearmen's band,
the slaughter-greedy weapon, and fate omnipotent
and these stone shelters storms dash,
fierce-rushing; binds the earth
the winter's violence; then comes dusky,
darkens, the shade of night, from the north sends
the rough hail-shower, to men's grievance.

Irksome is all the realm of earth,
the fates' decrees change the world under heaven:
here is wealth transient, here is a friend transient,
here is man transient, here is a kinsman transient;
all this place of earth hall become desolate.'—
so spake a sage in mind, sat apart in meditation.
Good is he who holds his faith. Never his affliction too quickly should
a man from his breast make known, unless he ere the remedy can
vigorously forward. Well it is for him who seeketh mercy,
comfort, at the Father in heaven, where all our fastness standeth.

Translated by Benjamin Thorpe

Lines 92-96 in Old English:

Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?
Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seledreamas?
Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga!
Eala þeodnes þrym! Hu seo þrag gewat,
genap under nihthelm, swa heo no wære.



The Dream of the Rood

Hear while I tell about the best of dreams
Which came to me the middle of one night
While humankind were sleeping in their beds.
It was as though I saw a wondrous tree
Towering in the sky suffused with light,
Brightest of beams; and all that beacon was
Covered with gold. The corners of the earth

Gleamed with fair jewels, just as there were five
Upon the cross-beam. Many bands of angels,
Fair throughout all eternity, looked on.
No felon's gallows that, but holy spirits,
Mankind, and all this marvellous creation,
Gazed on the glorious tree of victory.
And I with sins was stained, wounded with guilt.
I saw the tree of glory brightly shine
In gorgeous clothing, all bedecked with gold.
The Ruler's tree was worthily adorned
With gems; yet I could see beyond that gold
The ancient strife of wretched men, when first
Upon its right side it began to bleed.
I was all moved with sorrows, and afraid
At the fair sight. I saw that lively beacon
Changing its clothes and hues; sometimes it was
Bedewed with blood and drenched with flowing gore,
At other times it was bedecked with treasure.
So I lay watching there the Saviour's tree,
Grieving in spirit for a long, long while,
Until I heard it utter sounds, the best
Of woods began to speak these words to me:
"It was long past - I still remember it -
That I was cut down at the copse's end,
Moved from my root. Strong enemies there took me,
Told me to hold aloft their criminals,
Made me a spectacle. Men carried me
Upon their shoulders, set me on a hill,
A host of enemies there fastened me.
And then I saw the Lord of all mankind
Hasten with eager zeal that He might mount
Upon me. I durst not against God's word
Bend down or break, when I saw tremble all
The surface of the earth. Although I might
Have struck down all the foes, yet stood I fast.
Then the young hero (who was God almighty)

Got ready, resolute and strong in heart.
He climbed onto the lofty gallows-tree,
Bold in the sight of many watching men,
When He intended to redeem mankind.
I trembled as the warrior embraced me.
But still I dared not bend down to the earth,
Fall to the ground. Upright I had to stand.
A rood I was raised up; and I held high
The noble King, the Lord of heaven above.
I dared not stoop. They pierced me with dark nails;
The scars can still be clearly seen on me,
The open wounds of malice. yet might I
Not harm them. They reviled us both together.
I was made wet all over with the blood
Which poured out from his side, after He had Sent forth His spirit. And I underwent
Full many a dire experience on that hill.
I saw the God of hosts stretched grimly out.
Darkness covered the Ruler's corpse with clouds
His shining beauty; shadows passed across,
Black in the darkness. All creation wept,
Bewailed the King's death; Christ was on the cross.
And yet I saw men coming from afar,
Hastening to the Prince. I watched it all.
With sorrows I was grievously oppressed,
Yet willingly I bent to those men's hands,
Humbly. They took up there Almighty God,
And from the heavy torment lifted Him.
The soldiers left me standing drenched with moisture,
Wounded all over with the metal points.
They laid Him down limb-weary; then they stood
Beside the corpse's head, there they beheld
The Lord of heaven, and He rested there
A while, tired after the great agony.
The men then made a sepulchre for Him
In sight of me. They carved it of bright stone,

And set therein the Lord of victories.
Next, wretched in the eveningtide, they sang
A dirge for Him; and when they went away,
Weary from that great Prince, He stayed alone.
Yet we remained there weeping in our places
A good long time after the warriors' voices
Had passed away from us. The corpse grew cold,
The fair abode of life. Then men began
To cut us down. That was a dreadful fate.
In a deep pit they buried us. But friends
And servants of the Lord learnt where I was,
And decorated me with gold and silver.
Now you may understand, dear warrior,
That I have suffered deeds of wicked men
And grievous sorrows. Now the time has come
That far and wide on earth men honour me,
And all this great and glorious creation,
And to this beacon offers prayers. On me
The Son of God once suffered; therefore now
I tower mighty underneath the heavens,
And I may heal all those in awe of me.
Once I became the cruellest of tortures,
Most hateful to all nations, till the time
I opened the right way of life for men.
So then the prince of glory honoured me,
And heaven's King exalted me above
All other trees, just as Almighty God
Raised up His mother Mary for all men
Above all other women in the world.
Now, my dear warrior, I order you
That you reveal this vision to mankind,
Declare in words this is the tree of glory
On which Almighty God once suffered torments
For mankind's many sins, and for the deeds
Of Adam long ago. He tasted death
Thereon; and yet the Lord arose again

By his great might to come to human aid.
He rose to heaven. And the Lord Himself,
Almighty God and all His angels with Him,
Will come onto this earth again to seek
Mankind on Doomsday, when the final Judge
Will give His verdict upon every man,
What in this fleeting life he shall have earned.
Nor then may any man be without fear
About the words the Lord shall say to him.
Before all He shall ask where that man is
Who for God's name would suffer bitter death
As formerly He did upon the cross.
Then they will be afraid, and few will know
What they may say to Christ. But there need none
Be fearful if he bears upon his breast
The best of tokens. Through the cross each soul
Nay journey to the heavens from this earth,
Who with the Ruler thinks to go and dwell."
I prayed then to the cross with joyous heart
And eagerness, where I was all alone,
Companionless; my spirit was inspired
With keenness for departure; and I spent
Much time in longing. Now my hope of life
Is that I may approach the tree of triumph
Alone more often than all other men,
Honour it well; my wish for that is great
Within my heart, and my hope for support
Is turned towards the cross. I have on earth
Not many noble friends, but they have gone
Hence from earth's joys and sought the King of glory.
With the High father now they live in heaven
And dwell in glory; and I wait each day
For when the cross of God, which here on earth
I formerly beheld, may fetch me from
This transitory life and carry me
To where there is great bliss and joy in heaven,

Where the Lord's host is seated at the feast,
And it shall set me where I afterwards
may dwell in glory, live in lasting bliss
Among the saints. May God be friend to me,
He who once suffered on the gallows tree
On earth here for men's sins. Us He redeemed
And granted us our life and heavenly home.
Hope was renewed with glory and with bliss
For those who suffered burning fires in hell.
The Son was mighty on that expedition,
Successful and victorious; and when
The one Almighty Ruler brought with Him
A multitude of spirits to God's kingdom,
To bliss among the angels and the souls
Of all who dwelt already in the heavens
In glory, then Almighty God had come,
The Ruler entered into His own land.

Translation by Richard Hamer (1970)

The Saga of Erik the Red

Chapter 1

Olaf, who was called Olaf the White, was styled a warrior king. He was the son of King Ingjald, the son of Helgi, the son of Olaf, the son of Gudred, the son of Halfdan Whiteleg, king of the Uplands (in Norway).

He led a harrying expedition of sea-rovers into the west, and conquered Dublin, in Ireland, and Dublinshire, over which he made himself king. He married Aud the Deep-minded, daughter of Ketil Flatnose, son of Bjorn the Ungartered, a noble man from Norway. Their son was named Thorstein the Red.

Olaf fell in battle in Ireland, and then Aud and Thorstein went into the Sudreyjar (the Hebrides). There Thorstein married Thorid, daughter of Eyvind the Easterling, sister of Helgi the Lean; and they had many children.

Thorstein became a warrior king, and formed an alliance with Earl Sigurd the Great, son of Eystein the Rattler. They conquered Caithness, Sutherland, Ross, and Moray, and more than half Scotland. Over these Thorstein was king until the Scots plotted against him, and he fell there in battle.

Aud was in Caithness when she heard of Thorstein's death. Then she caused a merchant-ship to be secretly built in the wood, and when she was ready, directed her course out into the Orkneys. There she gave in marriage Thorstein the Red's daughter, Gro, who became mother of Grelad, whom Earl Thorfinn, the Skullcleaver, married.

Afterwards Aud set out to seek Iceland, having twenty free men in her ship. Aud came to Iceland, and passed the first winter in Bjarnarhofn (Bjornshaven) with her brother Bjorn. Afterwards she occupied all the Dale country between the Dogurdara (day-meal river) and the Skraumuhlaupsa (river of the giantess's leap), and dwelt at Hvamm. She had prayer meetings at Krossholar (Crosshills), where she caused crosses to be erected, for she was baptised and deeply devoted to the faith. There came with her to Iceland many men worthy of honour, who had been taken captive in sea-roving expeditions to the west, and who were called bondmen.

One of these was named Vifil; he was a man of high family, and had been taken captive beyond the western main, and was also called a bondman before Aud set him free. And when Aud granted dwellings to her ship's company, Vifil asked why she gave no abode to him like unto the others. Aud replied, "That it was of no moment to him, for," she said, "he would be esteemed in whatever place he was, as one worthy of honour." She gave him Vifilsdalr (Vifilsdale), and he dwelt there and married. His sons were Thorbjorn and Thorgeir, promising men, and they grew up in their father's house.

Chapter 2

There was a man named Thorvald, the son of Asvald, the son of Ulf, the son of Yxna-Thoris. His son was named Eirik. Father and son removed from Jadar (in Norway) to Iceland, because of manslaughters, and occupied land in Hornstrandir, and dwelt at Drangar.

There Thorvald died, and Eirik then married Thjodhild, daughter of Jorund, the son of Atli, and of Thorbjorg the Ship-breasted, whom afterwards Thorbjorn, of the Haukadalr (Hawkdale) family, married; he it was who dwelt at Eiriksstadr after Eirik removed from the north. It is near Vatzhorn.

Then did Eirik's thralls cause a landslip on the estate of Valthjof, at Valthjofsstadr. Eyjolf the Foul, his kinsman, slew the thralls beside Skeidsbrekkur (slopes of the race-course), above Vatzhorn. In return Eirik slew Eyjolf the Foul; he slew also Hrafn the Dueller, at Leikskalar (playbooths). Gerstein, and Odd of Jorfi, kinsman of Eyjolf, were found willing to follow up his death by a legal prosecution; and then was Eirik banished from Haukadalr.

He occupied then Brokey and Eyxney, and dwelt at Tradir, in Sudrey, the first

winter. At this time did he lend to Thorgest pillars for seat-stocks, Afterwards Eirik removed into Eyxney, and dwelt at Eiriksstadr. He then claimed his pillars, and got them not. Then went Eirik and fetched the pillars from Breidabolstadr, and Thorgest went after him. They fought at a short distance from the hay-yard at Drangar, and there fell two sons of Thorgest, and some other men.

After that they both kept a large body of men together. Styr gave assistance to Eirik, as also did Eyjolf, of Sviney, Thorbjorn Vifilsson, and the sons of Thorbrand, of Alptafjordr (Swanfirth). But the sons of Thord Gellir, as also Thorgeir, of Hitardalr (Hotdale), Aslak, of Langadalr (Longdale), and Illugi, his son, gave assistance to Thorgest.

Eirik and his people were outlawed at Thorsnes Thing. He prepared a ship in Eiriksvagr (creek), and Eyjolf concealed him in Dimunarvagr while Thorgest and his people sought him among the islands. Eirik said to his people that he purposed to seek for the land which Gunnbjorn, the son of Ulf the Crow, saw when he was driven westwards over the ocean, and discovered Gunnbjarnarsker (Gunnbjorn's rock or skerry). He promised that he would return to visit his friends if he found the land. Thorbjorn, and Eyjolf, and Styr accompanied Eirik beyond the islands. They separated in the most friendly manner, Eirik saying that he would be of the like assistance to them, if he should be able so to be, and they should happen to need him.

Then he sailed oceanwards under Snæfellsjokull (snow mountain glacier), and arrived at the glacier called Blaserkr (Blue-shirt); thence he journeyed south to see if there were any inhabitants of the country.

He passed the first winter at Eiriksey, near the middle, of the Vestribygd (western settlement). The following spring he proceeded to Eiriksfjordr, and fixed his abode there. During the summer he proceeded into the unpeopled districts in the west, and was there a long time, giving names to the places far and wide. The second winter he passed in Eiriksholmar (isles), off Hvarfsgnupr (peak of disappearance, Cape Farewell); and the third summer he went altogether northwards, to Snæfell and into Hrafnsfjordr (Ravensfirth); considering then that he had come to the head of Eiriksfjordr, he turned back, and passed the third winter in Eiriksey, before the mouth of Eiriksfjordr.

Now, afterwards, during the summer, he proceeded to Iceland, and came to

Breidafjordr (Broadfirth). This winter he was with Ingolf, at Holmlatr (Island-litter). During the spring, Thorgest and he fought, and Eirik met with defeat. After that they were reconciled. In the summer Eirik went to live in the land which he had discovered, and which he called Greenland, "Because," said he, "men will desire much the more to go there if the land has a good name."

Chapter 3

Thorgeir Vifilsson married, and took to wife Arnora, daughter of Einar, from Laugarbrekka (the slope of the hot spring), the son of Sigmund, the eon of Ketil-Thistil, who had occupied Thistilsfjordr.

The second daughter of Einar was named Hallveig. Thorbjorn Vifilsson took her to wife, and received with her the land of Laugarbrekka, at Hellisvollr (the cave-hill). To that spot Thorbjorn removed his abode, and became great and worshipful. He was the temple-priest, and had a magnificent estate. Thorbjorn's daughter was Gudrid, the fairest of women, and of peerless nobility in all her conduct.

There was a man named Orm, who dwelt at Arnarstapi (eagle-rock), and he had a wife who was named Halldis. He was a well-to-do franklin, a great friend of Thorbjorn, and Gudrid lived at his house as his foster-child for a long time.

There was a man named Thorgeir, who dwelt at Thorgeirsfjall (fell). He was mighty rich in cattle, and had been made a freedman. He had a son, whose name was Einar, a handsome man, well mannered, and a great dandy. Einar, at this time, was a travelling merchant, sailing from land to land with great success; and he always passed his winter either in Iceland or in Norway.

Now after this, I have to tell how that one autumn, when Einar was in Iceland, he proceeded with his wares along Snæfellsnes, with the object of selling; he came to Arnarstapi; Orm invited him to stay there, and Einar accepted his invitation, because there was friendship between him and Orm's people, and his wares were earned into a certain outhouse. There he unpacked his merchandise, showed it to Orm and the housemen, and bade Orm take therefrom such things as he would. Orm accepted the offer, and pronounced Einar to be a goodly gallant traveller, and a great favourite of fortune. When now they were busy with the wares, a woman passed before the door of the outhouse.

Einar inquired of Orm who that fair woman might be, passing before the door. “I have not seen her here before,” said he.

“That is Gudrid, my foster-child,” said Orm, “daughter of Thorbjorn the franklin, from Laugarbrekka.”

“She must be a good match,” said Einar; “surely she has not been without suitors who have made proposals for her, has she?”

Orm answered, “Proposals have certainly been made, friend, but this treasure is not to be had for the picking up; it is found that she will be particular in her choice, as well as also her father.”

“Well, in spite of that,” quoth Einar, “she is the woman whom I have it in my mind to propose for, and I wish that in this suit of mine you approach her father on my part, and apply yourself to plead diligently for me, for which I shall pay you in return a perfect friendship. The franklin, Thorbjorn, may reflect that our families would be suitably joined in the bonds of affinity; for he is a man in a position of great honour, and owns a fine abode, but his personal property, I am told, is greatly on the decrease; neither I nor my father lack lands or personal property; and if this alliance should be brought about, the greatest assistance would accrue to Thorbjorn.”

Then answered Orm, “Of a surety I consider myself to be thy friend, and yet am I not willing to bring forward this suit, for Thorbjorn is of a proud mind, and withal a very ambitious man.”

Einar replied that he desired no other thing than that his offer of marriage should be made known. Orm then consented to undertake his suit, and Einar journeyed south again until he came home.

A while after, Thorbjorn had a harvest-feast, as he was bound to have because of his great rank. There were present Orm, from Arnarstapi, and many other friends of Thorbjorn.

Orm entered into conversation with Thorbjorn, and told him how that Einar had lately been to see him from Thorgeirsfjall, and was become a promising man. He now began the wooing on behalf of Einar, and said that an alliance between the families would be very suitable on account of certain interests. “There may arise

to thee, franklin," he said, "great assistance in thy means from this alliance."

But Thorbjorn answered, "I did not expect the like proposal from thee, that I should give my daughter in marriage to the son of a thrall. And so thou perceivest that my substance is decreasing; well, then, my daughter shall not go home with thee, since thou considerest her worthy of so poor a match."

Then went Orm home again, and each of the other guests to his own household, and Gudrid remained with her father, and stayed at home that winter.

Now, in the spring, Thorbjorn made a feast to his friends, and a goodly banquet was prepared. There came many guests, and the banquet was of the best. Now, at the banquet, Thorbjorn called for a hearing, and thus spake: - "Here have I dwelt a long time. I have experienced the goodwill of men and their affection towards me, and I consider that our dealings with one another have been mutually agreeable. But now do my money matters begin to bring me uneasiness, although to this time my condition has not been reckoned contemptible. I wish, therefore, to break up my household before I lose my honour; to remove from the country before I disgrace my family. So now I purpose to look after the promises of Eirik the Red, my friend, which he made when we separated at Breidafjordr. I purpose to depart for Greenland in the summer, if events proceed as I could wish."

These tidings about this design appeared to the guests to be important, for Thorbjorn had long been beloved by his friends. They felt that he would only have made so public a declaration that it might be held of no avail to attempt to dissuade him from his purpose. Thorbjorn distributed gifts among the guests, and then the feast was brought to an end, and they departed to their own homesteads.

Thorbjorn sold his lands, and bought a ship which had been laid up on shore at the mouth of the Hraunhofn (harbour of the lava field). Thirty men ventured on the expedition with him. There was Orm, from Arnarstapi, and his wife, and those friends of Thorbjorn who did not wish to be separated from him.

Then they launched the ship, and set sail with a favourable wind. But when they came out into the open sea the favourable wind ceased, and they experienced great gales, and made but an ill-sped voyage throughout the summer. In addition

to that trouble, there came fever upon the expedition, and Orm died, and Halldis, his wife, and half the company. Then the sea waxed rougher, and they endured much toil and misery in many ways, and only reached Herjolfsnes, in Greenland, at the very beginning of winter.

There dwelt at Herjolfsnes the man who was called Thorkell. He was a useful man and most worthy franklin. He received Thorbjorn and all his ship's company for the winter, assisting them in right noble fashion. This pleased Thorbjorn well and his companions in the voyage.

Chapter 4

At that time there was a great dearth in Greenland; those who had been out on fishing expeditions had caught little, and some had not returned.

There was in the settlement the woman whose name was Thorbjorg. She was a prophetess (spae-queen), and was called Litilvolva (little sybil). She had had nine sisters, and they were all spae-queens, and she was the only one now living.

It was a custom of Thorbjorg, in the winter time, to make a circuit, and people invited her to their houses, especially those who had any curiosity about the season, or desired to know their fate; and inasmuch as Thorkell was chief franklin thereabouts, he considered that it concerned him to know when the scarcity which overhung the settlement should cease. He invited, therefore, the spae-queen to his house, and prepared for her a hearty welcome, as was the custom whereever a reception was accorded a woman of this kind. A high seat was prepared for her, and a cushion laid thereon in which were poultry-feathers.

Now, when she came in the evening, accompanied by the man who had been sent to meet her, she was dressed in such wise that she had a blue mantle over her, with strings for the neck, and it was inlaid with gems quite down to the skirt. On her neck she had glass beads. On her head she had a black hood of lambskin, lined with ermine. A staff she had in her hand, with a knob thereon; it was ornamented with brass, and inlaid with gems round about the knob. Around her she wore a girdle of soft hair, and therein was a large skin-bag, in which she kept the talismans needful to her in her wisdom. She wore hairy calf-skin shoes on her feet, with long and strong-looking thongs to them, and great knobs of latten at the ends. On her hands she had gloves of ermine-skin, and they were white and hairy within.

Now, when she entered, all men thought it their bounden duty to offer her becoming greetings, and these she received according as the men were agreeable to her. The franklin Thorkell took the wise-woman by the hand, and led her to the seat prepared for her. He requested her to cast her eyes over his herd, his household, and his homestead. She remained silent altogether.

During the evening the tables were set; and now I must tell you what food was made ready for the spae-queen. There was prepared for her porridge of kid's milk, and hearts of all kinds of living creatures there found were cooked for her. She had a brazen spoon, and a knife with a handle of walrus-tusk, which was mounted with two rings of brass, and the point of it was broken off.

When the tables were removed, the franklin Thorkell advanced to Thorbjorg and asked her how she liked his homestead, or the appearance of the men; or how soon she would ascertain that which he had asked, and which the men desired to know. She replied that she would not give answer before the morning, after she had slept there for the night.

And when the (next) day was far spent, the preparations were made for her which she required for the exercise of her enchantments. She begged them to bring to her those women who were acquainted with the lore needed for the exercise of the enchantments, and which is known by the name of Weird-songs, but no such women came forward. Then was search made throughout the homestead if any woman were so learned.

Then answered Gudrid, "I am not skilled in deep learning, nor am I a wise-woman, although Halldis, my foster-mother, taught me, in Iceland, the lore which she called Weird-songs."

"Then art thou wise in good season," answered Thorbjorg; but Gudrid replied, "That lore and the ceremony are of such a kind, that I purpose to be of no assistance therein, because I am a Christian woman."

Then answered Thorbjorg, "Thou mightest perchance afford thy help to the men in this company, and yet be none the worse woman than thou wast before; but to Thorkell give I charge to provide here the things that are needful."

Thorkell thereupon urged Gudrid to consent, and she yielded to his wishes. The

women formed a ring round about, and Thorbjorg ascended the scaffold and the seat prepared for her enchantments. Then sang Gudrid the weird-song in so beautiful and excellent a manner, that to no one there did it seem that he had ever before heard the song in voice so beautiful as now.

The spae-queen thanked her for the song. “Many spirits,” said she, “have been present under its charm, and were pleased to listen to the song, who before would turn away from us, and grant us no such homage. And now are many things clear to me which before were hidden both from me and others. And I am able this to say, that the dearth will last no longer, the season improving as spring advances. The epidemic of fever which has long oppressed us will disappear quicker than we could have hoped. And thee, Gudrid, will I recompense straightway, for that aid of thine which has stood us in good stead; because thy destiny is now clear to me, and foreseen. Thou shalt make a match here in Greenland, a most honourable one, though it will not be a long-lived one for thee, because thy way lies out to Iceland; and there, shall arise from thee a line of descendants both numerous and goodly, and over the branches of thy family shall shine a bright ray. And so fare thee now well and happily, my daughter.”

Afterwards the men went to the wise-woman, and each enquired after what he was most curious to know. She was also liberal of her replies, and what she said proved true. After this came one from another homestead after her, and she then went there. Thorbjorn was invited, because he did not wish to remain at home while such heathen worship was performing.

The weather soon improved when once spring began, as Thorbjorg had said, Thorbjorn made ready his ship, and went on until he came to Brattahlid (the steep slope). Eirik received him with the utmost cordiality, saying he had done well to come there. Thorbjorn and his family were with him during the winter. And in the following spring Eirik gave to Thorbjorn land at Stokknes, and handsome farm buildings were there built for him, and he dwelt there afterwards.

Chapter 5

Eirik had a wife who was named Thjodhild, and two sons; the one was named Thorstein, and the other Leif. These sons of Eirik were both promising men. Thorstein was then at home with his father; and there was at that time no man in Greenland who was thought so highly of as he. Leif had sailed to Norway, and

was there with King Olaf Tryggvason.

Now, when Leif sailed from Greenland during the summer, he and his men were driven out of their course to the Sudreyjar. They were slow in getting a favourable wind from this place, and they stayed there a long time during the summer ... reaching Norway about harvest-tide.

He joined the body-guard of King Olaf Tryggvason, and the king formed an excellent opinion of him, and it appeared to him that Leif was a well-bred man. Once upon a time the king entered into conversation with Leif, and asked him, "Dost thou purpose sailing to Greenland in summer?"

Leif answered, "I should wish so to do, if it is your will." The king replied, "I think it may well be so; thou shalt go my errand, and preach Christianity in Greenland."

Leif said that he was willing to undertake it, but that, for himself, he considered that message a difficult one to proclaim in Greenland. But the king said that he knew no man who was better fitted for the work than he. "And thou shalt carry," said he, "good luck with thee in it." "That can only be," said Leif, "if I carry yours with me."

Leif set sail as soon as he was ready. He was tossed about a long time out at sea, and lighted upon lands of which before he had no expectation. There were fields of wild wheat, and the vine-tree in full growth. There were also the trees which were called maples; and they gathered of all this certain tokens; some trunks so large that they were used in house-building. Leif came upon men who had been shipwrecked, and took them home with him, and gave them sustenance during the winter. Thus did he show his great munificence and his graciousness when he brought Christianity to the land, and saved the shipwrecked crew. He was called Leif the Lucky.

Leif reached land in Eiriksfjordr, and proceeded home to Brattahlid. The people received him gladly. He soon after preached Christianity and catholic truth throughout the land, making known to the people the message of King Olaf Tryggvason; and declaring how many renowned deeds and what great glory accompanied this faith. Eirik took coldly to the proposal to forsake his religion, but his wife, Thjodhild, promptly yielded, and caused a church to be built not

very near the houses. The building was called Thjodhild's Church; in that spot she offered her prayers, and so did those men who received Christ, and they were many. After she accepted the faith, Thjodhild would have no intercourse with Eirik, and this was a great trial to his temper.

After this there was much talk about making ready to go[17] to the land which Leif had discovered. Thorstein, Eirik's son, was chief mover in this, a worthy man, wise and much liked. Eirik was also asked to go, and they believed that his luck and foresight would be of the highest use. He was [for a long time against it, but did not say nay], when his friends exhorted him to go. They made ready the ship which Thorbjorn had brought there, and there were twenty men who undertook to start in her. They had little property, but chiefly weapons and food. On the morning when Eirik left home he took a little box, which had in it gold and silver; he hid the money, and then went forth on his journey.

He had proceeded, however, but a little way, when he fell from his horse, and broke his ribs and injured his shoulder, and cried out, "Aiai!" At this accident he sent word to his wife that she should take away the money that he had hidden, declaring his misfortune to be a penalty paid on account of having hid the money. Afterwards they sailed away out of Eiriksfjordr with gladness, as their plan seemed to promise success. They were driven about for a long time on the open sea, and came not into the track which they desired. They came in sight of Iceland, and also met with birds from the coast of Ireland. Then was their ship tossed to and fro on the sea. They returned about harvest-tide, worn out by toil and much exhausted, and reached Eiriksfjordr at the beginning of winter.

Then spake Eirik, "You were in better spirits in the summer, when you went forth out of the firth, than you are in now, and yet for all that there is much to be thankful for." Thorstein replied, "It is a chieftain's duty now to look after some arrangement for these men who are without shelter, and to find them food." Eirik answered, "That is an ever-true saying, 'You know not until you have got your answer.' I will now take thy counsel about this." All those who had no other abodes were to go with the father and the son. Then came they to land, and went forth home.

Chapter 6

Now, after this, I have to tell you how Thorstein, Eirik's son, began wooing Gudrid, Thorbjorn's daughter. To his proposals a favourable answer was given,

both by the maid herself, and also by her father. The marriage was also arranged, so that Thorstein went to take possession of his bride, and the bridal feast was held at Brattahlid in the autumn. The banquet went off well, and was numerously attended. Thorstein owned a homestead in the Vestribygd on the estate known as Lysufjordr (shining firth).

The man who was called Thorstein owned the other half of the homestead. His wife was called Sigrid. Thorstein went, during the autumn, to Lysufjordr, to his namesake, both he and Gudrid. Their reception was a welcome one. They were there during the winter. When little of the winter was past, the event happened there that fever broke out on their estate. The overseer of the work was named Garth. He was an unpopular man. He took the fever first and died. Afterwards, and with but little intermission, one took the fever after another and died. Then Thorstein, Eirik's son, fell ill, and also Sigrid, the wife of his namesake Thorstein. And one evening Sigrid left the house, and rested awhile opposite the outer door; and Gudrid accompanied her; and they looked back towards the outer door, and Sigrid screamed out aloud.

Gudrid said, "We have come forth unwarily, and thou canst in no wise withstand the cold; let us even go home as quickly as possible." "It is not safe as matters are," answered Sigrid. "There is all that crowd of dead people before the door; Thorstein, thy husband, also, and myself, I recognise among them, and it is a grief thus to behold." And when this passed away, she said, "Let us now go, Gudrid; I see the crowd no longer."

Thorstein, Eirik's son, had also disappeared from her sight; he had seemed to have a whip in his hand, and to wish to smite the ghostly troop. Afterwards they went in, and before morning came she was dead, and a coffin was prepared for the body. Now, the same day, the men purposed to go out fishing, and Thorstein led them to the landing places, and in the early morning he went to see what they had caught.

Then Thorstein, Eirik's son, sent word to his namesake to come to him, saying that matters at home were hardly quiet; that the housewife was endeavouring to rise to her feet and to get under the clothes beside him. And when he was come in she had risen upon the edge of the bed. Then took he her by the hands and laid a pole-axe upon her breast. Thorstein, Eirik's son, died near nightfall.

Thorstein, the franklin, begged Gudrid to lie down and sleep, saying that he would watch over the body during the night. So she did, and when a little of the night was past, Thorstein, Eirik's son, sat up and spake, saying he wished Gudrid to be called to him, and that he wished to speak with her.

"God wills," he said, "that this hour be given to me for my own, and the further completion of my plan." Thorstein, the franklin, went to find Gudrid, and waked her; begged her to cross herself, and to ask God for help, and told her what Thorstein, Eirik's son, had spoken with him; "and he wishes," said he, "to meet with thee. Thou art obliged to consider what plan thou wilt adopt, because I can in this issue advise thee in nowise."

She answered, "It may be that this, this wonderful thing, has regard to certain matters, which are afterwards to be had in memory; and I hope that God's keeping will test upon me, and I will, with God's grace, undertake the risk and go to him, and know what he will say, for I shall not be able to escape if harm must happen to me. I am far from wishing that he should go elsewhere; I suspect, moreover, that the matter will be a pressing one."

Then went Gudrid and saw Thorstein. He appeared to her as if shedding tears. He spake in her ear, in a low voice, certain words which she alone might know; but this he said so that all heard, "That those men would be blessed who held the true faith, and that all salvation and mercy accompanied it; and that many, nevertheless, held it lightly."

"It is," said he, "no good custom which has prevailed here in Greenland since Christianity came, to bury men in unconsecrated ground with few religious rites over them. I wish for myself, and for those other men who have died, to be taken to the church; but for Garth, I wish him to be burned on a funeral pile as soon as may be, for he is the cause of all those ghosts which have been among us this winter." He spake to Gudrid also about her own state, saying that her destiny would be a great one, and begged her to beware of marrying Greenland men. He begged her also to pay over their property to the Church and some to the poor; and then he sank down for the second time.

It had been a custom in Greenland, after Christianity was brought there, to bury men in unconsecrated ground on the farms where they died. An upright stake was placed over a body, and when the priests came afterwards to the place, then

was the stake pulled out, consecrated water poured therein, and a funeral service held, though it might be long after the burial.

The bodies were removed to the church in Eiriksfjordr, and funeral services held by the priests.

After that died Thorbjorn. The whole property then went to Gudrid. Eirik received her into his household, and looked well after her stores.

Chapter 7

There was a man named Thorfinn Karlsefni, son of Thord Horsehead, who dwelt in the north (of Iceland), at Reynines in Skagafjordr, as it is now called. Karlsefni was a man of good family, and very rich. His mother's name was Thorun. He engaged in trading journeys, and seemed a goodly, bold, and gallant traveller.

One summer Karlsefni prepared his ship, intending to go to Greenland. Snorri, Thorbrand's son, from Alptafjordr, resolved to travel with him, and there were thirty men in the company.

There was a man named Bjarni, Grimolf's son, a man of Breidafjordr (Broadfirth); another called Thorhall, son of Gamli, a man from the east of Iceland. They prepared their ship the very same summer as Karlsefni, with intent also to go to Greenland. They had in the ship forty men.

The two ships launched out into the open sea as soon as they were ready. It is not recorded how long a voyage they had. But, after this, I have to tell you that both these ships came to Eiriksfjordr about autumn.

Eirik rode down to the ships with other men of the land, and a market-fair was promptly instituted. The captains invited Gudrid to take such of the merchandise as she wished, and Eirik displayed on his part much magnificence in return, inasmuch as he invited both these ships' companies home with him to pass the winter in Brattahlid. The merchants accepted the invitation, and went home with Eirik. Afterwards their merchandise was removed to Brattahlid, where a good and large outhouse was not lacking in which to store the goods. The merchants were well pleased to stay with Eirik during the winter.

When now Yule was drawing nigh, Eirik began to look more gloomy than he was wont to be.

Presently Karlsefni entered into conversation with him, and said, "Art thou in trouble, Eirik? it appears to me that thou art somewhat more taciturn than thou hast been; still thou helpest us with much liberality, and we are bound to reward thee according as we have means thereto. Say now what causes thy cheerlessness."

Eirik answered, "You receive hospitality well, and like worthy men. Now, I have no mind that our intercourse together should be expensive to you; but so it is, that it will seem to me an ill thing if it is heard that you never spent a worse Yule than this, just now beginning, when Eirik the Red entertained you at Brattahlid, in Greenland."

Karlsefni answered, "It must not come to such a pass; we have in our ships malt, meal, and corn, and you have right and title to take therefrom whatever you wish, and to make your entertainment such as consorts with your munificence."

And Eirik accepted the offer. Then was preparation made for the Yule-feast, and so magnificent was it that the men thought they had scarcely ever seen so grand a feast.

And after Yule, Karlsefni broached to Eirik the subject of a marriage with Gudrid, which he thought might be under Eirik's control, and the woman appeared to him to be both beautiful and of excellent understanding. Eirik answered and said, that for his part he would willingly undertake his suit, and said, moreover, that she was worthy of a good match. It is also likely, he thought, that she will be following out her destiny, should she be given to him; and, moreover, the report which comes to me of him is good.

The proposals were now laid before her, and she allowed the marriage with her to be arranged which Eirik wished to promote. However, I will not now speak at length how this marriage took place; the Yule festival was prolonged and made into a marriage-feast. Great joy was there in Brattahlid during the winter. Much playing at backgammon and telling of stories went on, and many things were done that ministered to the comfort of the household.

Chapter 8

During this time much talk took place in Brattahlid about making ready to go to Vinland the Good, and it was asserted that they would there find good choice

lands. The discourse came to such conclusion that Karlsefni and Snorri prepared their ship, with the intention of seeking Vinland during the summer. Bjarni and Thorhall ventured on the same expedition, with their ship and the retinue which had accompanied them.

There was a man named Thorvard; he married Freydis, natural daughter of Eirik the Red; he set out with them likewise, as also Thorvald, a son of Eirik.] There was a man named Thorvald; he was a son-in-law of Eirik the Red. Thorhall was called the Sportsman; he had for a long time been Eirik's companion in hunting and fishing expeditions during the summers, and many things had been committed to his keeping. Thorhall was a big man, dark, and of gaunt appearance; rather advanced in years, overbearing in temper, of melancholy mood, silent at all times, underhand in his dealings, and withal given to abuse, and always inclined towards the worst. He had kept himself aloof from the true faith when it came to Greenland. He was but little encompassed with the love of friends, but yet Eirik had long held conversation with him. He went in the ship with Thorvald and his man, because he was widely acquainted with the unpeopled districts. They had the ship which Thorbjorn had brought to Greenland, and they ventured on the expedition with Karlsefni and the others; and most of them in this ship were Greenlanders. There were one hundred and sixty men in their ships.

They sailed away from land; then to the Vestribygd and to Bjarneyjar (the Bear Islands). Thence they sailed away from Bjarneyjar with northerly winds. They were out at sea two half-days. Then they came to land, and rowed along it in boats, and explored it, and found there flat stones, many and so great that two men might well lie on them stretched on their backs with heel to heel. Polar-foxes were there in abundance. This land they gave name to, and called it Helluland (stone-land).

Then they sailed with northerly winds two half-days, and there was then land before them, and on it a great forest and many wild beasts. An island lay in the south-east off the land, and they found bears thereon, and called the island Bjarney (Bear Island); but the mainland, where the forest was, they called Markland (forest-land). Then, when two half-days were passed, they saw land, and sailed under it. There was a cape to which they came. They cruised along the land, leaving it on the starboard side. There was a harbourless coast-land, and

long sandy strands. They went to the land in boats, and found the keel of a ship, and called the place Kjalar-nes (Keelness). They gave also name to the strands, calling them Furdustrandir (wonder-shore), because it was tedious to sail by them.Then the coast became indented with creeks, and they directed their ships along the creeks.

Now, before this, when Leif was with King Olaf Tryggvason, and the king had requested him to preach Christianity in Greenland, he gave him two Scotch people, the man called Haki, and the woman called Hækja. The king requested Leif to have recourse to these people if ever he should want fleetness, because they were swifter than wild beasts. Eirik and Leif had got these people to go with Karlsefni. Now, when they had sailed by Furdustrandir, they put the Scotch people on land, and requested them to run into the southern regions, seek for choice land, and come back after three half-days were passed. They were dressed in such wise that they had on the garment which they called biafal. It was made with a hood at the top, open at the sides, without sleeves, and was fastened between the legs. A button and a loop held it together there; and elsewhere they were without clothing. Then did they cast anchors from the ships, and lay there to wait for them. And when three days were expired the Scotch people leapt down from the land, and one of them had in his hand a bunch of grapes, and the other an ear of wild wheat.

They said to Karlsefni that they considered they had found good and choice land. Then they received them into their ship, and proceeded on their journey to where the shore was cut into by a firth. They directed the ships within the firth. There was an island lying out in front of the firth, and there were great currents around the island, which they called Straums-ey (Stream-island). There were so many birds on it that scarcely was it possible to put one's feet down for the eggs. They continued their course up the firth, which they called Straumsfjordr, and carried their cargo ashore from the ships, and there they prepared to stay. They had with them cattle of all kinds, and for themselves they sought out the produce of the land thereabout. There were mountains, and the place was fair to look upon.

They gave no heed to anything except to explore the land, and they found large pastures. They remained there during the winter, which happened to be a hard one, with no work doing; and they were badly off for food, and the fishing failed.

Then they went out to the island, hoping that something might be got there from fishing or from what was drifted ashore. In that spot there was little, however, to be got for food, but their cattle found good sustenance. After that they called upon God, praying that He would send them some little store of meat, but their prayer was not so soon granted as they were eager that it should be. Thorhall disappeared from sight, and they went to seek him, and sought for three half-days continuously.

On the fourth half-day Karlsefni and Bjarni found him on the peak of a crag. He lay with his face to the sky, with both eyes and mouth and nostrils wide open, clawing and pinching himself, and reciting something. They asked why he had come there. He replied that it was of no importance; begged them not to wonder thereat; as for himself, he had lived so long, they needed not to take any account of him. They begged him to go home with them, and he did so. A little while after a whale was driven ashore, and the men crowded round it, and cut it up, and still they knew not what kind of whale it was. Even Karlsefni recognised it not, though he had great knowledge of whales. It was cooked by the cook-boys, and they ate thereof; though bad effects came upon all from it afterwards.

Then began Thorhall, and said, "Has it not been that the Redbeard has proved a better friend than your Christ? this was my gift for the poetry which I composed about Thor, my patron; seldom has he failed me." Now, when the men knew that, none of them would eat of it, and they threw it down from the rocks, and turned with their supplications to God's mercy. Then was granted to them opportunity of fishing, and after that there was no lack of food that spring. They went back again from the island, within Straumsfjordr, and obtained food from both sides; from hunting on the mainland, and from gathering eggs and from fishing on the side of the sea.

Chapter 9

When summer was at hand they discussed about their journey, and made an arrangement. Thorhall the Sportsman wished to proceed northwards along Furdustrandir, and off Kjalarnes, and so seek Vinland; but Karlsefni desired to proceed southwards along the land and away from the east, because the land appeared to him the better the further south he went, and he thought it also more advisable to explore in both directions. Then did Thorhall make ready for his journey out by the islands, and there volunteered for the expedition with him not

more than nine men; but with Karlsefni there went the remainder of the company. And one day, when Thorhall was carrying water to his ship, he drank, and recited this verse:

"The clashers of weapons did say when I came here that I should have the best of drink (though it becomes me not to complain before the common people). Eager God of the war-helmet! I am made to raise the bucket; wine has not moistened my beard, rather do I kneel at the fountain."

Afterwards they put to sea, and Karlsefni accompanied them by the island. Before they hoisted sail Thorhall recited a verse:

"Go we back where our countrymen are. Let us make the skilled hawk of the sand-heaven explore the broad ship-courses; while the dauntless rousers of the sword-storm, who praise the land, and cook whale, dwell on Furdustrandir."

Then they left, and sailed northwards along Furdustrandir and Kjalarnes, and attempted there to sail against a wind from the west. A gale came upon them, however, and drove them onwards against Ireland, and there were they severely treated, enthralled, and beaten. Then Thorhall lost his life.

Chapter 10

Karlsefni proceeded southwards along the land, with Snorri and Bjarni and the rest of the company. They journeyed a long while, and until they arrived at a river, which came down from the land and fell into a lake, and so on to the sea. There were large islands off the mouth of the river, and they could not come into the river except at high flood-tide.

Karlsefni and his people sailed to the mouth of the river, and called the land Hop. There they found fields of wild wheat wherever there were low grounds; and the vine in all places were there was rough rising ground. Every rivulet there was full of fish. They made holes where the land and water joined and where the tide went highest; and when it ebbed they found halibut in the holes. There was great plenty of wild animals of every form in the wood. They were there half a month, amusing themselves, and not becoming aware of anything. Their cattle they had with them. And early one morning, as they looked around, they beheld nine canoes made of hides, and snout-like staves were being brandished from the boats, and they made a noise like flails, and twisted round in the direction of the

sun's motion.

Then Karlsefni said, "What will this betoken?" Snorri answered him, "It may be that it is a token of peace; let us take a white shield and go to meet them." And so they did. Then did they in the canoes row forwards, and showed surprise at them, and came to land. They were short men, ill-looking, with their hair in disorderly fashion on their heads; they were large-eyed, and had broad cheeks. And they stayed there awhile in astonishment. Afterwards they rowed away to the south, off the headland.

Chapter 11

They had built their settlements up above the lake. And some of the dwellings were well within the land, but some were near the lake. Now they remained there that winter. They had no snow whatever, and all their cattle went out to graze without keepers.

Now when spring began, they beheld one morning early, that a fleet of hide-canoes was rowing from the south off the headland; so many were they as if the sea were strewn with pieces of charcoal, and there was also the brandishing of staves as before from each boat. Then they held shields up, and a market was formed between them; and this people in their purchases preferred red cloth; in exchange they had furs to give, and skins quite grey. They wished also to buy swords and lances, but Karlsefni and Snorri forbad it. They offered for the cloth dark hides, and took in exchange a span long of cloth, and bound it round their heads; and so matters went on for a while. But when the stock of cloth began to grow small, then they split it asunder, so that it was not more than a finger's breadth. The Skrælingar (Esquimaux) gave for it still quite as much, or more than before.

Chapter 12

Now it came to pass that a bull, which belonged to Karlsefni's people, rushed out of the wood and bellowed loudly at the same time. The Skrælingar, frightened thereat, rushed away to their canoes, and rowed south along the coast. There was then nothing seen of them for three weeks together. When that time was gone by, there was seen approaching from the south a great crowd of Skrælingar boats, coming down upon them like a stream, the staves this time being all brandished in the direction opposite to the sun's motion, and the Skrælingar were all howling loudly. Then took they and bare red shields to meet them. They

encountered one another and fought, and there was a great shower of missiles. The Skrælingar had also war-slings, or catapults.

Then Karlsefni and Snorri see that the Skrælingar are bringing up poles, with a very large ball attached to each, to be compared in size to a sheep's stomach, dark in colour; and these flew over Karlsefni's company towards the land, and when they came down they struck the ground with a hideous noise. This produced great terror in Karlsefni and his company, so that their only impulse was to retreat up the country along the river, because it seemed as if crowds of Skrælingar were driving at them from all sides. And they stopped not until they came to certain crags. There they offered them stern resistance.

Freydis came out and saw how they were retreating. She called out, "Why run you away from such worthless creatures, stout men that ye are, when, as seems to me likely, you might slaughter them like so many cattle? Let me but have a weapon, I think I could fight better than any of you." They gave no heed to what she said. Freydis endeavoured to accompany them, still she soon lagged behind, because she was not well; she went after them into the wood, and the Skrælingar directed their pursuit after her. She came upon a dead man; Thorbrand, Snorri's son, with a flat stone fixed in his head; his sword lay beside him, so she took it up and prepared to defend herself therewith.

Then came the Skrælingar upon her. She let down her sark and struck her breast with the naked sword. At this they were frightened, rushed off to their boats, and fled away. Karlsefni and the rest came up to her and praised her zeal. Two of Karlsefni's men fell, and four of the Skrælingar, notwithstanding they had overpowered them by superior numbers. After that, they proceeded to their booths, and began to reflect about the crowd of men which attacked them upon the land; it appeared to them now that the one troop will have been that which came in the boats, and the other troop will have been a delusion of sight. The Skrælingar also found a dead man, and his axe lay beside him. One of them struck a stone with it, and broke the axe. It seemed to them good for nothing, as it did not withstand the stone, and they threw it down.

Chapter 13

[Karlsefni and his company] were now of opinion that though the land might be choice and good, there would be always war and terror overhanging them, from those who dwelt there before them. They made ready, therefore, to move away,

with intent to go to their own land. They sailed forth northwards, and found five Skrælingar in jackets of skin, sleeping [near the sea], and they had with them a chest, and in it was marrow of animals mixed with blood; and they considered that these must have been outlawed. They slew them. Afterwards they came to a headland and a multitude of wild animals; and this headland appeared as if it might be a cake of cow-dung, because the animals passed the winter there. Now they came to Straumsfjordr, where also they had abundance of all kinds. It is said by some that Bjarni and Freydis remained there, and a hundred men with them, and went not further away. But Karlsefni and Snorri journeyed southwards, and forty men with them, and after staying no longer than scarcely two months at Hop, had come back the same summer. Karlsefni set out with a single ship to seek Thorhall, but the (rest of the) company remained behind. He and his people went northwards off Kjalarnes, and were then borne onwards towards the west, and the land lay on their larboard-side, and was nothing but wilderness. And when they had proceeded for a long time, there was a river which came down from the land, flowing from the east towards the west. They directed their course within the river's mouth, and lay opposite the southern bank.

Chapter 14

One morning Karlsefni's people beheld as it were a glittering speak above the open space in front of them, and they shouted at it. It stirred itself, and it was a being of the race of men that have only one foot, and he came down quickly to where they lay. Thorvald, son of Eirik the Red, sat at the tiller, and the One-footer shot him with an arrow in the lower abdomen. He drew out the arrow. Then said Thorvald, "Good land have we reached, and fat is it about the paunch." Then the One-footer leapt away again northwards. They chased after him, and saw him occasionally, but it seemed as if he would escape them. He disappeared at a certain creek. Then they turned back, and one man spake this ditty:

"Our men chased (all true it is) a One-footer down to the shore; but the wonderful man strove hard in the race.... Hearken, Karlsefni."

Then they journeyed away back again northwards, and saw, as they thought, the land of the One-footers. They wished, however, no longer to risk their company. They conjectured the mountains to be all one range; those, that is, which were at Hop, and those which they now discovered; almost answering to one another; and it was the same distance to them on both sides from Straumsfjordr. They

journeyed back, and were in Straumsfjordr the third winter. Then fell the men greatly into backsliding. They who were wifeless pressed their claims at the hands of those who were married.

Snorri, Karlsefni's son, was born the first autumn, and he was three winters old when they began their journey home. Now, when they sailed from Vinland, they had a southern wind, and reached Markland, and found five Skrælingar; one was a bearded man, two were women, two children. Karlsefni's people caught the children, but the others escaped and sunk down into the earth. And they took the children with them, and taught them their speech, and they were baptized. The children called their mother Vætilldi, and their father Uvægi. They said that kings ruled over the land of the Skrælingar, one of whom was called Avalldamon, and the other Valldidida. They said also that there were no houses, and the people lived in caves or holes. They said, moreover, that there was a land on the other side over against their land, and the people there were dressed in white garments, uttered loud cries, bare long poles, and wore fringes. This was supposed to be Hvitramannaland (whiteman's land). Then came they to Greenland, and remained with Eirik the Red during the winter.

Chapter 15

Bjarni, Grimolf's son, and his men were carried into the Irish Ocean, and came into a part where the sea was infested by ship-worms. They did not find it out before the ship was eaten through under them; then they debated what plan they should follow. They had a ship's boat which was smeared with tar made of seal-fat. It is said that the ship-worm will not bore into the wood which has been smeared with the seal-tar. The counsel and advice of most of the men was to ship into the boat as many men as it would hold. Now, when that was tried, the boat held not more than half the men. Then Bjarni advised that it should be decided by the casting of lots, and not by the rank of the men, which of them should go into the boat; and inasmuch as every man there wished to go into the boat, though it could not hold all of them; therefore, they accepted the plan to cast lots who should leave the ship for the boat. And the lot so fell that Bjarni, and nearly half the men with him, were chosen for the boat. So then those left the ship and went into the boat who had been chosen by lot so to do.

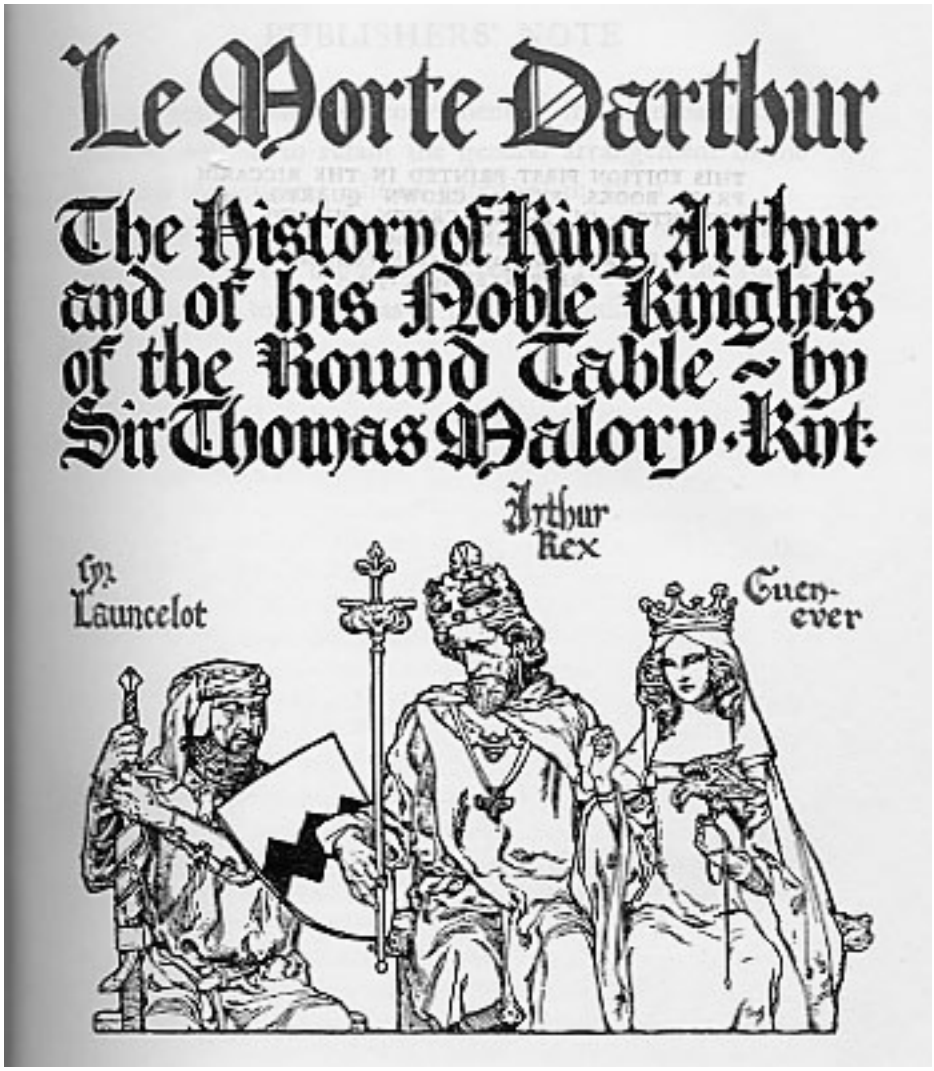
And when the men were come into the boat, a young man, an Icelander, who had been a fellow-traveller of Bjarni, said, "Dost thou intend, Bjarni, to separate

thyself here from me." "It must needs be so now," Bjarni answered. He replied, "Because, in such case, thou didst not so promise me when I set out from Iceland with thee from the homestead of my father." Bjarni answered, "I do not, however, see here any other plan; but what plan dost thou suggest?" He replied, "I propose this plan, that we two make a change in our places, and thou come here and I will go there." Bjarni answered, "So shall it be; and this I see, that thou labourest willingly for life, and that it seems to thee a grievous thing to face death." Then they changed places. The man went into the boat, and Bjarni back into the ship; and it is said that Bjarni perished there in the Worm-sea, and they who were with him in the ship; but the boat and those who were in it went on their journey until they reached land, and told this story afterwards.

Chapter 16

The next summer Karlsefni set out for Iceland, and Snorri with him, and went home to his house in Reynines. His mother considered that he had made a shabby match, and she was not at home the first winter. But when she found that Gudrid was a lady without peer, she went home, and their intercourse was happy. The daughter of Snorri, Karlsefni's son, was Hallfrid, mother of Bishop Thorlak, the son of Runolf. (Hallfrid and Runolf) had a son, whose name was Thorbjorn; his daughter was Thorun, mother of Bishop Bjarn. Thorgeir was the name of a son of Snorri, Karlsefni's son; he was father of Yngvild, the mother of the first Bishop Brand. And here ends this story.

Translated by J. Sephton (1880)



Thomas Malory (c. 1405-1471)

Morte Darthur

from **BOOK I**

IT befell in the days of Uther Pendragon, when he was king of all England, and so reigned, that there was a mighty duke in Cornwall that held war against him long time. And the duke was called the Duke of Tintagil. And so by means King Uther sent for this duke, charging him to bring his wife with him, for she was called a fair lady, and a passing wise, and her name was called Igraine.

So when the duke and his wife were come unto the king, by the means of great

lords they were accorded both. The king liked and loved this lady well, and he made them great cheer out of measure, and desired to have lain by her. But she was a passing good woman, and would not assent unto the king. And then she told the duke her husband, and said, I suppose that we were sent for that I should be dishonoured; wherefore, husband, I counsel you, that we depart from hence suddenly, that we may ride all night unto our own castle. And in like wise as she said so they departed, that neither the king nor none of his council were ware of their departing. All so soon as King Uther knew of their departing so suddenly, he was wonderly wroth. Then he called to him his privy council, and told them of the sudden departing of the duke and his wife.

Then they advised the king to send for the duke and his wife by a great charge; and if he will not come at your summons, then may ye do your best, then have ye cause to make mighty war upon him. So that was done, and the messengers had their answers; and that was this shortly, that neither he nor his wife would not come at him.

Then was the king wonderly wroth. And then the king sent him plain word again, and bade him be ready and stuff him and garnish him, for within forty days he would fetch him out of the biggest castle that he hath.

When the duke had this warning, anon he went and furnished and garnished two strong castles of his, of the which the one hight Tintagil, and the other castle hight Terrabil. So his wife Dame Igraine he put in the castle of Tintagil, and himself he put in the castle of Terrabil, the which had many issues and posterns out. Then in all haste came Uther with a great host, and laid a siege about the castle of Terrabil. And there he pight many pavilions, and there was great war made on both parties, and much people slain. Then for pure anger and for great love of fair Igraine the king Uther fell sick. So came to the king Uther Sir Ulfius, a noble knight, and asked the king why he was sick. I shall tell thee, said the king, I am sick for anger and for love of fair Igraine, that I may not be whole. Well, my lord, said Sir Ulfius, I shall seek Merlin, and he shall do you remedy, that your heart shall be pleased. So Ulfius departed, and by adventure he met Merlin in a beggar's array, and there Merlin asked Ulfius whom he sought. And he said he had little ado to tell him. Well, said Merlin, I know whom thou seekest, for thou seekest Merlin; therefore seek no farther, for I am he; and if King Uther will well reward me, and be sworn unto me to fulfil my desire, that shall be his honour

and profit more than mine; for I shall cause him to have all his desire. All this will I undertake, said Ulfius, that there shall be nothing reasonable but thou shalt have thy desire. Well, said Merlin, he shall have his intent and desire. And therefore, said Merlin, ride on your way, for I will not be long behind.

THEN Ulfius was glad, and rode on more than a pace till that he came to King Uther Pendragon, and told him he had met with Merlin. Where is he? said the king. Sir, said Ulfius, he will not dwell long. Therewithal Ulfius was ware where Merlin stood at the porch of the pavilion's door. And then Merlin was bound to come to the king. When King Uther saw him, he said he was welcome. Sir, said Merlin, I know all your heart every deal; so ye will be sworn unto me as ye be a true king anointed, to fulfil my desire, ye shall have your desire. Then the king was sworn upon the Four Evangelists. Sir, said Merlin, this is my desire: the first night that ye shall lie by Igraine ye shall get a child on her, and when that is born, that it shall be delivered to me for to nourish there as I will have it; for it shall be your worship, and the child's avail, as mickle as the child is worth. I will well, said the king, as thou wilt have it. Now make you ready, said Merlin, this night ye shall lie with Igraine in the castle of Tintagil; and ye shall be like the duke her husband, Ulfius shall be like Sir Brastias, a knight of the duke's, and I will be like a knight that hight Sir Jordanus, a knight of the duke's. But wait ye make not many questions with her nor her men, but say ye are diseased, and so hie you to bed, and rise not on the morn till I come to you, for the castle of Tintagil is but ten miles hence; so this was done as they devised. But the duke of Tintagil espied how the king rode from the siege of Terrabil, and therefore that night he issued out of the castle at a postern for to have distressed the king's host. And so, through his own issue, the duke himself was slain or ever the king came at the castle of Tintagil.

So after the death of the duke, King Uther lay with Igraine more than three hours after his death, and begat on her that night Arthur, and on day came Merlin to the king, and bade him make him ready, and so he kissed the lady Igraine and departed in all haste. But when the lady heard tell of the duke her husband, and by all record he was dead or ever King Uther came to her, then she marvelled who that might be that lay with her in likeness of her lord; so she mourned privily and held her peace. Then all the barons by one assent prayed the king of accord betwixt the lady Igraine and him; the king gave them leave, for fain would he have been accorded with her. So the king put all the trust in Ulfius to

entreat between them, so by the entreaty at the last the king and she met together. Now will we do well, said Ulfius, our king is a lusty knight and wifeless, and my lady Igraine is a passing fair lady; it were great joy unto us all, an it might please the king to make her his queen. Unto that they all well accorded and moved it to the king. And anon, like a lusty knight, he assented thereto with good will, and so in all haste they were married in a morning with great mirth and joy.

And King Lot of Lothian and of Orkney then wedded Margawse that was Gawaine's mother, and King Nentres of the land of Garlot wedded Elaine. All this was done at the request of King Uther. And the third sister Morgan le Fay was put to school in a nunnery, and there she learned so much that she was a great clerk of necromancy. And after she was wedded to King Uriens of the land of Gore, that was Sir Ewain's le Blanchemain's father.

THEN Queen Igraine waxed daily greater and greater, so it befell after within half a year, as King Uther lay by his queen, he asked her, by the faith she owed to him, whose was the child within her body; then she sore abashed to give answer. Dismay you not, said the king, but tell me the truth, and I shall love you the better, by the faith of my body. Sir, said she, I shall tell you the truth. The same night that my lord was dead, the hour of his death, as his knights record, there came into my castle of Tintagil a man like my lord in speech and in countenance, and two knights with him in likeness of his two knights Prastias and Jordanus, and so I went unto bed with him as I ought to do with my lord, and the same night, as I shall answer unto God, this child was begotten upon me. That is truth, said the king, as ye say; for it was I myself that came in the likeness, and therefore dismay you not, for I am father of the child; and there he told her all the cause, how it was by Merlin's counsel. Then the queen made great joy when she knew who was the father of her child.

Soon came Merlin unto the king, and said, Sir, ye must purvey you for the nourishing of your child. As thou wilt, said the king, be it. Well, said Merlin, I know a lord of yours in this land, that is a passing true man and a faithful, and he shall have the nourishing of your child, and his name is Sir Ector, and he is a lord of fair livelihood in many parts in England and Wales; and this lord, Sir Ector, let him be sent for, for to come and speak with you, and desire him yourself, as he loveth you, that he will put his own child to nourishing to another

woman, and that his wife nourish yours. And when the child is born let it be delivered to me at yonder privy postern unchristened. So like as Merlin devised it was done. And when Sir Ector was come he made fiaunce to the king for to nourish the child like as the king desired; and there the king granted Sir Ector great rewards. Then when the lady was delivered, the king commanded two knights and two ladies to take the child, bound in a cloth of gold, and that ye deliver him to what poor man ye meet at the postern gate of the castle. So the child was delivered unto Merlin, and so he bare it forth unto Sir Ector, and made an holy man to christen him, and named him Arthur; and so Sir Ector's wife nourished him with her own pap.

THEN within two years King Uther fell sick of a great malady. And in the meanwhile his enemies usurped upon him, and did a great battle upon his men, and slew many of his people. Sir, said Merlin, ye may not lie so as ye do, for ye must to the field though ye ride on an horse-litter: for ye shall never have the better of your enemies but if your person be there, and then shall ye have the victory. So it was done as Merlin had devised, and they carried the king forth in an horse-litter with a great host towards his enemies. And at St. Albans there met with the king a great host of the North. And that day Sir Ulfius and Sir Brastias did great deeds of arms, and King Uther's men overcame the Northern battle and slew many people, and put the remnant to flight. And then the king returned unto London, and made great joy of his victory. And then he fell passing sore sick, so that three days and three nights he was speechless: wherefore all the barons made great sorrow, and asked Merlin what counsel were best. There is none other remedy, said Merlin, but God will have his will. But look ye all barons be before King Uther to-morn, and God and I shall make him to speak. So on the morn all the barons with Merlin came to-fore the king; then Merlin said aloud unto King Uther, Sir, shall your son Arthur be king after your days, of this realm with all the appurtenance? Then Uther Pendragon turned him, and said in hearing of them all, I give him God's blessing and mine, and bid him pray for my soul, and righteously and worshipfully that he claim the crown, upon forfeiture of my blessing; and therewith he yielded up the ghost, and then was he interred as longed to a king. Wherefore the queen, fair Igraine, made great sorrow, and all the barons.

THEN stood the realm in great jeopardy long while, for every lord that was mighty of men made him strong, and many weened to have been king. Then

Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and counselled him for to send for all the lords of the realm, and all the gentlemen of arms, that they should to London come by Christmas, upon pain of cursing; and for this cause, that Jesus, that was born on that night, that he would of his great mercy show some miracle, as he was come to be king of mankind, for to show some miracle who should be rightwise king of this realm. So the Archbishop, by the advice of Merlin, sent for all the lords and gentlemen of arms that they should come by Christmas even unto London. And many of them made them clean of their life, that their prayer might be the more acceptable unto God. So in the greatest church of London, whether it were Paul's or not the French book maketh no mention, all the estates were long or day in the church for to pray. And when matins and the first mass was done, there was seen in the churchyard, against the high altar, a great stone four square, like unto a marble stone; and in midst thereof was like an anvil of steel a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword naked by the point, and letters there were written in gold about the sword that said thus: — Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil, is rightwise king born of all England. Then the people marvelled, and told it to the Archbishop. I command, said the Archbishop, that ye keep you within your church and pray unto God still, that no man touch the sword till the high mass be all done. So when all masses were done all the lords went to behold the stone and the sword. And when they saw the scripture some assayed, such as would have been king. But none might stir the sword nor move it. He is not here, said the Archbishop, that shall achieve the sword, but doubt not God will make him known. But this is my counsel, said the Archbishop, that we let purvey ten knights, men of good fame, and they to keep this sword. So it was ordained, and then there was made a cry, that every man should assay that would, for to win the sword. And upon New Year's Day the barons let make a jousts and a tournament, that all knights that would joust or tourney there might play, and all this was ordained for to keep the lords together and the commons, for the Archbishop trusted that God would make him known that should win the sword.

So upon New Year's Day, when the service was done, the barons rode unto the field, some to joust and some to tourney, and so it happened that Sir Ector, that had great livelihood about London, rode unto the jousts, and with him rode Sir Kay his son, and young Arthur that was his nourished brother; and Sir Kay was made knight at All Hallowmass afore. So as they rode to the jousts-ward, Sir Kay lost his sword, for he had left it at his father's lodging, and so he prayed young

Arthur for to ride for his sword. I will well, said Arthur, and rode fast after the sword, and when he came home, the lady and all were out to see the jousting. Then was Arthur wroth, and said to himself, I will ride to the churchyard, and take the sword with me that sticketh in the stone, for my brother Sir Kay shall not be without a sword this day. So when he came to the churchyard, Sir Arthur alighted and tied his horse to the stile, and so he went to the tent, and found no knights there, for they were at the jousting. And so he handled the sword by the handles, and lightly and fiercely pulled it out of the stone, and took his horse and rode his way until he came to his brother Sir Kay, and delivered him the sword. And as soon as Sir Kay saw the sword, he wist well it was the sword of the stone, and so he rode to his father Sir Ector, and said: Sir, lo here is the sword of the stone, wherefore I must be king of this land. When Sir Ector beheld the sword, he returned again and came to the church, and there they alighted all three, and went into the church. And anon he made Sir Kay swear upon a book how he came to that sword. Sir, said Sir Kay, by my brother Arthur, for he brought it to me. How gat ye this sword? said Sir Ector to Arthur. Sir, I will tell you. When I came home for my brother's sword, I found nobody at home to deliver me his sword; and so I thought my brother Sir Kay should not be swordless, and so I came hither eagerly and pulled it out of the stone without any pain. Found ye any knights about this sword? said Sir Ector. Nay, said Arthur. Now, said Sir Ector to Arthur, I understand ye must be king of this land. Wherefore I, said Arthur, and for what cause? Sir, said Ector, for God will have it so; for there should never man have drawn out this sword, but he that shall be rightwise king of this land. Now let me see whether ye can put the sword there as it was, and pull it out again. That is no mastery, said Arthur, and so he put it in the stone; wherewithal Sir Ector assayed to pull out the sword and failed.

Now assay, said Sir Ector unto Sir Kay. And anon he pulled at the sword with all his might; but it would not be. Now shall ye assay, said Sir Ector to Arthur. I will well, said Arthur, and pulled it out easily. And therewithal Sir Ector knelt down to the earth, and Sir Kay. Alas, said Arthur, my own dear father and brother, why kneel ye to me? Nay, nay, my lord Arthur, it is not so; I was never your father nor of your blood, but I wot well ye are of an higher blood than I weened ye were. And then Sir Ector told him all, how he was betaken him for to nourish him, and

Then Arthur made great dole when he understood that Sir Ector was not his father. Sir, said Ector unto Arthur, will ye be my good and gracious lord when ye

are king? Else were I to blame, said Arthur, for ye are the man in the world that I am most beholden to, and my good lady and mother your wife, that as well as her own hath fostered me and kept. And if ever it be God's will that I be king as ye say, ye shall desire of me what I may do, and I shall not fail you; God forbid I should fail you Sir, said Sir Ector, I will ask no more of you, but that ye will make my son, your foster brother, Sir Kay, seneschal of all your lands. That shall be done, said Arthur, and more, by the faith of my body, that never man shall have that office but he, while he and I live Therewithal they went unto the Archbishop, and told him how the sword was achieved, and by whom; and on Twelfth-day all the barons came thither, and to assay to take the sword, who that would assay. But there afore them all, there might none take it out but Arthur; wherefore there were many lords wroth, and said it was great shame unto them all and the realm, to be overgoverned with a boy of no high blood born. And so they fell out at that time that it was put off till Candlemas and then all the barons should meet there again; but always the ten knights were ordained to watch the sword day and night, and so they set a pavilion over the stone and the sword, and five always watched. So at Candlemas many more great lords came thither for to have won the sword, but there might none prevail. And right as Arthur did at Christmas, he did at Candlemas, and pulled out the sword easily, whereof the barons were sore aggrieved and put it off in delay till the high feast of Easter. And as Arthur sped before, so did he at Easter; yet there were some of the great lords had indignation that Arthur should be king, and put it off in a delay till the feast of Pentecost.

Then the Archbishop of Canterbury by Merlin's providence let purvey then of the best knights that they might get, and such knights as Uther Pendragon loved best and most trusted in his days. And such knights were put about Arthur as Sir Baudwin of Britain, Sir Kay, Sir Ulfius, Sir Brastias. All these, with many other, were always about Arthur, day and night, till the feast of Pentecost.

AND at the feast of Pentecost all manner of men assayed to pull at the sword that would assay; but none might prevail but Arthur, and pulled it out afore all the lords and commons that were there, wherefore all the commons cried at once, We will have Arthur unto our king, we will put him no more in delay, for we all see that it is God's will that he shall be our king, and who that holdeth against it, we will slay him. And therewithal they kneeled at once, both rich and poor, and cried Arthur mercy because they had delayed him so long, and Arthur forgave

them, and took the sword between both his hands, and offered it upon the altar where the Archbishop was, and so was he made knight of the best man that was there. And so anon was the coronation made. And there was he sworn unto his lords and the commons for to be a true king, to stand with true justice from thenceforth the days of this life. Also then he made all lords that held of the crown to come in, and to do service as they ought to do. And many complaints were made unto Sir Arthur of great wrongs that were done since the death of King Uther, of many lands that were bereaved lords, knights, ladies, and gentlemen. Wherefore King Arthur made the lands to be given again unto them that owned them.

When this was done, that the king had stablished all the countries about London, then he let make Sir Kay seneschal of England; and Sir Baudwin of Britain was made constable; and Sir Ulfius was made chamberlain; and Sir Brastias was made warden to wait upon the north from Trent forwards, for it was that time the most party the king's enemies. But within few years after Arthur won all the north, Scotland, and all that were under their obeissance. Also Wales, a part of it, held against Arthur, but he overcame them all, as he did the remnant, through the noble prowess of himself and his knights of the Round Table.

THEN the king removed into Wales, and let cry a great feast that it should be holden at Pentecost after the incoronation of him at the city of Carlion. Unto the feast came King Lot of Lothian and of Orkney, with five hundred knights with him. Also there came to the feast King Uriens of Gore with four hundred knights with him. Also there came to that feast King Nentres of Garlot, with seven hundred knights with him. Also there came to the feast the king of Scotland with six hundred knights with him, and he was but a young man. Also there came to the feast a king that was called the King with the Hundred Knights, but he and his men were passing well beseen at all points. Also there came the king of Carados with five hundred knights. And King Arthur was glad of their coming, for he weened that all the kings and knights had come for great love, and to have done him worship at his feast; wherefore the king made great joy, and sent the kings and knights great presents. But the kings would none receive, but rebuked the messengers shamefully, and said they had no joy to receive no gifts of a beardless boy that was come of low blood, and sent him word they would none of his gifts, but that they were come to give him gifts with hard swords betwixt the neck and the shoulders: and therefore they came thither, so they told to the

messengers plainly, for it was great shame to all them to see such a boy to have a rule of so noble a realm as this land was. With this answer the messengers departed and told to King Arthur this answer. Wherefore, by the advice of his barons, he took him to a strong tower with five hundred good men with him. And all the kings aforesaid in a manner laid a siege to-fore him, but King Arthur was well victualed. And within fifteen days there came Merlin among them into the city of Carlion. Then all the kings were passing glad of Merlin, and asked him, For what cause is that boy Arthur made your king? Sirs, said Merlin, I shall tell you the cause, for he is King Uther Pendragon's son, born in wedlock, gotten on Igraine, the duke's wife of Tintagil. Then is he a bastard, they said all. Nay, said Merlin, after the death of the duke, more than three hours, was Arthur begotten, and thirteen days after King Uther wedded Igraine; and therefore I prove him he is no bastard. And who saith nay, he shall be king and overcome all his enemies; and, or he die, he shall be long king of all England, and have under his obeissance Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, and more realms than I will now rehearse. Some of the kings had marvel of Merlin's words, and deemed well that it should be as he said; and some of them laughed him to scorn, as King Lot; and more other called him a witch. But then were they accorded with Merlin, that King Arthur should come out and speak with the kings, and to come safe and to go safe, such surance there was made. So Merlin went unto King Arthur, and told him how he had done, and bade him fear not, but come out boldly and speak with them, and spare them not, but answer them as their king and chieftain; for ye shall overcome them all, whether they will or nill.

THEN King Arthur came out of his tower, and had under his gown a jesseraunt of double mail, and there went with him the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Sir Baudwin of Britain, and Sir Kay, and Sir Brastias: these were the men of most worship that were with him. And when they were met there was no meekness, but stout words on both sides; but always King Arthur answered them, and said he would make them to bow an he lived. Wherefore they departed with wrath, and King Arthur bade keep them well, and they bade the king keep him well. So the king returned him to the tower again and armed him and all his knights. What will ye do? said Merlin to the kings; ye were better for to stint, for ye shall not here prevail though ye were ten times so many. Be we well advised to be afeared of a dream-reader? said King Lot. With that Merlin vanished away, and came to King Arthur, and bade him set on them fiercely; and in the meanwhile there were three hundred good men, of the best that were with the kings, that

went straight unto King Arthur, and that comforted him greatly. Sir, said Merlin to Arthur, fight not with the sword that ye had by miracle, till that ye see ye go unto the worse, then draw it out and do your best. So forthwithal King Arthur set upon them in their lodging. And Sir Baudwin, Sir Kay, and Sir Brastias slew on the right hand and on the left hand that it was marvel; and always King Arthur on horseback laid on with a sword, and did marvellous deeds of arms, that many of the kings had great joy of his deeds and hardiness.

Then King Lot brake out on the back side, and the King with the Hundred Knights, and King Carados, and set on Arthur fiercely behind him. With that Sir Arthur turned with his knights, and smote behind and before, and ever Sir Arthur was in the foremost press till his horse was slain underneath him. And therewith King Lot smote down King Arthur. With that his four knights received him and set him on horseback. Then he drew his sword Excalibur, but it was so bright in his enemies' eyes, that it gave light like thirty torches. And therewith he put them a-back, and slew much people. And then the commons of Carlion arose with clubs and staves and slew many knights; but all the kings held them together with their knights that were left alive, and so fled and departed. And Merlin came unto Arthur, and counselled him to follow them no further.

SO after the feast and journey, King Arthur drew him unto London, and so by the counsel of Merlin, the king let call his barons to council, for Merlin had told the king that the six kings that made war upon him would in all haste be awroke on him and on his lands. Wherefore the king asked counsel at them all. They could no counsel give, but said they were big enough. Ye say well, said Arthur; I thank you for your good courage, but will ye all that loveth me speak with Merlin? ye know well that he hath done much for me, and he knoweth many things, and when he is afore you, I would that ye prayed him heartily of his best advice. All the barons said they would pray him and desire him. So Merlin was sent for, and fair desired of all the barons to give them best counsel. I shall say you, said Merlin, I warn you all, your enemies are passing strong for you, and they are good men of arms as be alive, and by this time they have gotten to them four kings more, and a mighty duke; and unless that our king have more chivalry with him than he may make within the bounds of his own realm, an he fight with them in battle, he shall be overcome and slain. What were best to do in this cause? said all the barons. I shall tell you, said Merlin, mine advice; there are two brethren beyond the sea, and they be kings both, and marvellous good men of

their hands; and that one hight King Ban of Benwick, and that other hight King Bors of Gaul, that is France. And on these two kings warreth a mighty man of men, the King Claudas, and striveth with them for a castle, and great war is betwixt them. But this Claudas is so mighty of goods whereof he getteth good knights, that he putteth these two kings most part to the worse; wherefore this is my counsel, that our king and sovereign lord send unto the kings Ban and Bors by two trusty knights with letters well devised, that an they will come and see King Arthur and his court, and so help him in his wars, that he will be sworn unto them to help them in their wars against King Claudas. Now, what say ye unto this counsel? said Merlin. This is well counselled, said the king and all the barons.

from **BOOK III**

IN the beginning of Arthur, after he was chosen king by adventure and by grace; for the most part of the barons knew not that he was Uther Pendragon's son, but as Merlin made it openly known. But yet many kings and lords held great war against him for that cause, but well Arthur overcame them all, for the most part the days of his life he was ruled much by the counsel of Merlin. So it fell on a time King Arthur said unto Merlin, My barons will let me have no rest, but needs I must take a wife, and I will none take but by thy counsel and by thine advice. It is well done, said Merlin, that ye take a wife, for a man of your bounty and noblesse should not be without a wife. Now is there any that ye love more than another? Yea, said King Arthur, I love Guenever the king's daughter, Leodegrance of the land of Cameliard, the which holdeth in his house the Table Round that ye told he had of my father Uther. And this damosel is the most valiant and fairest lady that I know living, or yet that ever I could find. Sir, said Merlin, as of her beauty and fairness she is one of the fairest alive, but, an ye loved her not so well as ye do, I should find you a damosel of beauty and of goodness that should like you and please you, an your heart were not set; but there as a man's heart is set, he will be loath to return. That is truth, said King Arthur. But Merlin warned the king covertly that Guenever was not wholesome for him to take to wife, for he warned him that Launcelot should love her, and she him again; and so he turned his tale to the adventures of Sangreal.

Then Merlin desired of the king for to have men with him that should enquire of Guenever, and so the king granted him, and Merlin went forth unto King Leodegrance of Cameliard, and told him of the desires of the king that he would

have unto his wife Guenever his daughter. That is to me, said King Leodegrance, the best tidings that ever I heard, that so worthy a king of prowess and noblesse will wed my daughter. And as for my lands, I will give him, wist I it might please him, but he hath lands enow, him needeth none; but I shall send him a gift shall please him much more, for I shall give him the Table Round, the which Uther Pendragon gave me, and when it is full complete, there is an hundred knights and fifty. And as for an hundred good knights I have myself, but I faute fifty, for so many have been slain in my days. And so Leodegrance delivered his daughter Guenever unto Merlin, and the Table Round with the hundred knights, and so they rode freshly, with great royalty, what by water and what by land, till that they came nigh unto London.

from **BOOK V**

WHEN King Arthur had after long war rested, and held a royal feast and Table Round with his allies of kings, princes, and noble knights all of the Round Table, there came into his hall, he sitting in his throne royal, twelve ancient men, bearing each of them a branch of olive, in token that they came as ambassadors and messengers from the Emperor Lucius, which was called at that time, Dictator or Procuror of the Public Weal of Rome. Which said messengers, after their entering and coming into the presence of King Arthur, did to him their obeisance in making to him reverence, and said to him in this wise: The high and mighty Emperor Lucius sendeth to the King of Britain greeting, commanding thee to acknowledge him for thy lord, and to send him the truage due of this realm unto the Empire, which thy father and other to-fore thy precessors have paid as is of record, and thou as rebel not knowing him as thy sovereign, withholdest and retainest contrary to the statutes and decrees made by the noble and worthy Julius Cesar, conqueror of this realm, and first Emperor of Rome. And if thou refuse his demand and commandment know thou for certain that he shall make strong war against thee, thy realms and lands, and shall chastise thee and thy subjects, that it shall be ensample perpetual unto all kings and princes, for to deny their truage unto that noble empire which domineth upon the universal world. Then when they had showed the effect of their message, the king commanded them to withdraw them, and said he should take advice of council and give to them an answer. Then some of the young knights, hearing this their message, would have run on them to have slain them, saying that it was a rebuke to all the knights there being present to suffer them to say so to the king. And anon the king commanded that none of them, upon pain of death, to missay

them nor do them any harm, and commanded a knight to bring them to their lodging, and see that they have all that is necessary and requisite for them, with the best cheer, and that no dainty be spared, for the Romans be great lords, and though their message please me not nor my court, yet I must remember mine honour.

After this the king let call all his lords and knights of the Round Table to counsel upon this matter, and desired them to say their advice. Then Sir Cador of Cornwall spake first and said, Sir, this message liketh me well, for we have many days rested us and have been idle, and now I hope ye shall make sharp war on the Romans, where I doubt not we shall get honour. I believe well, said Arthur, that this matter pleaseth thee well, but these answers may not be answered, for the demand grieveth me sore, for truly I will never pay truage to Rome, wherefore I pray you to counsel me. I have understood that Belinus and Brenius, kings of Britain, have had the empire in their hands many days, and also Constantine the son of Heleine, which is an open evidence that we owe no tribute to Rome but of right we that be descended of them have right to claim the title of the empire.

THEN answered King Anguish of Scotland, Sir, ye ought of right to be above all other kings, for unto you is none like nor pareil in Christendom, of knighthood nor of dignity, and I counsel you never to obey the Romans, for when they reigned on us they distressed our elders, and put this land to great extortions and tallies, wherefore I make here mine avow to avenge me on them; and for to strengthen your quarrel I shall furnish twenty thousand good men of war, and wage them on my costs, which shall await on you with myself when it shall please you. And the king of Little Britain granted him to the same thirty thousand; wherefore King Arthur thanked them. And then every man agreed to make war, and to aid after their power; that is to wit, the lord of West Wales promised to bring thirty thousand men, and Sir Uwaine, Sir Ider his son, with their cousins, promised to bring thirty thousand. Then Sir Launcelot with all other promised in likewise every man a great multitude.

And when King Arthur understood their courages and good wills he thanked them heartily, and after let call the ambassadors to hear their answer. And in presence of all his lords and knights he said to them in this wise: I will that ye return unto your lord and Procuror of the Common Weal for the Romans, and

say ye to him, Of his demand and commandment I set nothing, and that I know of no truage nor tribute that I owe to him, nor to none earthly prince, Christian nor heathen; but I pretend to have and occupy the sovereignty of the empire, wherein I am entitled by the right of my predecessors, sometime kings of this land; and say to him that I am delibered and fully concluded, to go with mine army with strength and power unto Rome, by the grace of God, to take possession in the empire and subdue them that be rebel. Wherefore I command him and all them of Rome, that incontinent they make to me their homage, and to acknowledge me for their Emperor and Governor, upon pain that shall ensue. And then he commanded his treasurer to give to them great and large gifts, and to pay all their dispenses, and assigned Sir Cador to convey them out of the land. And so they took their leave and departed, and took their shipping at Sandwich, and passed forth by Flanders, Almaine, the mountains, and all Italy, until they came unto Lucius. And after the reverence made, they made relation of their answer, like as ye to-fore have heard.

When the Emperor Lucius had well understood their credence, he was sore moved as he had been all araged, and said, I had supposed that Arthur would have obeyed to my commandment, and have served you himself, as him well beseemed or any other king to do. O Sir, said one of the senators, let be such vain words, for we let you wit that I and my fellows were full sore afeard to behold his countenance; I fear me ye have made a rod for yourself, for he intendeth to be lord of this empire, which sore is to be doubted if he come, for he is all another man than ye ween, and holdeth the most noble court of the world, all other kings nor princes may not compare unto his noble maintenance. On New Year's Day we saw him in his estate, which was the royalest that ever we saw, for he was served at his table with nine kings, and the noblest fellowship of other princes, lords, and knights that be in the world, and every knight approved and like a lord, and holdeth Table Round: and in his person the most manly man that liveth, and is like to conquer all the world, for unto his courage it is too little: wherefore I advise you to keep well your marches and straits in the mountains; for certainly he is a lord to be doubted. Well, said Lucius, before Easter I suppose to pass the mountains, and so forth into France, and there bereave him his lands with Genoese and other mighty warriors of Tuscany and Lombardy. And I shall send for them all that be subjects and allied to the empire of Rome to come to mine aid. And forthwith sent old wise knights unto these countries following: first to Ambage and Arrage, to Alexandria, to India, to Armenia, whereas the

river of Euphrates runneth into Asia, to Africa, and Europe the Large, to Ertayne and Elamye, to Araby, Egypt, and to Damascus, to Damietta and Cayer, to Cappadocia, to Tarsus, Turkey, Pontus and Pamphylia, to Syria and Galatia. And all these were subject to Rome and many more, as Greece, Cyprus, Macedonia, Calabria, Cateland, Portugal, with many thousands of Spaniards. Thus all these kings, dukes, and admirals, assembled about Rome, with sixteen kings at once, with great multitude of people. When the emperor understood their coming he made ready his Romans and all the people between him and Flanders.

Also he had gotten with him fifty giants which had been engendered of fiends; and they were ordained to guard his person, and to break the front of the battle of King Arthur. And thus departed from Rome, and came down the mountains for to destroy the lands that Arthur had conquered, and came unto Cologne, and besieged a castle thereby, and won it soon, and stuffed it with two hundred Saracens or Infidels, and after destroyed many fair countries which Arthur had won of King Claudas. And thus Lucius came with all his host, which were disperplyd sixty mile in breadth, and commanded them to meet with him in Burgoyne, for he purposed to destroy the realm of Little Britain.

NOW leave we of Lucius the Emperor and speak we of King Arthur, that commanded all them of his retinue to be ready at the utas of Hilary for to hold a parliament at York. And at that parliament was concluded to arrest all the navy of the land, and to be ready within fifteen days at Sandwich, and there he showed to his army how he purposed to conquer the empire which he ought to have of right. And there he ordained two governors of this realm, that is to say, Sir Baudwin of Britain, for to counsel to the best, and Sir Constantine, son to Sir Cador of Cornwall, which after the death of Arthur was king of this realm. And in the presence of all his lords he resigned the rule of the realm and Guenever his queen to them, wherefore Sir Launcelot was wroth, for he left Sir Tristram with King Mark for the love of Beale Isould. Then the Queen Guenever made great sorrow for the departing of her lord and other, and swooned in such wise that the ladies bare her into her chamber. Thus the king with his great army departed, leaving the queen and realm in the governance of Sir Baudwin and Constantine. And when he was on his horse he said with an high voice, If I die in this journey I will that Sir Constantine be mine heir and king crowned of this realm as next of my blood. And after departed and entered into the sea at Sandwich with all his army, with a great multitude of ships, galleys, cogs, and dromounds, sailing on

the sea.

from **BOOK XIII**

AT the vigil of Pentecost, when all the fellowship of the Round Table were come unto Camelot and there heard their service, and the tables were set ready to the meat, right so entered into the hall a full fair gentlewoman on horseback, that had ridden full fast, for her horse was all besweated. Then she there alighted, and came before the king and saluted him; and he said: Damosel, God thee bless. Sir, said she, for God's sake say me where Sir Launcelot is. Yonder ye may see him, said the king. Then she went unto Launcelot and said: Sir Launcelot, I salute you on King Pelles' behalf, and I require you come on with me hereby into a forest. Then Sir Launcelot asked her with whom she dwelled. I dwell, said she, with King Pelles. What will ye with me? said Launcelot. Ye shall know, said she, when ye come thither. Well, said he, I will gladly go with you. So Sir Launcelot bade his squire saddle his horse and bring his arms; and in all haste he did his commandment.

Then came the queen unto Launcelot, and said: Will ye leave us at this high feast? Madam, said the gentlewoman, wit ye well he shall be with you to-morn by dinner time. If I wist, said the queen, that he should not be with us here to-morn he should not go with you by my good will. Right so departed Sir Launcelot with the gentlewoman, and rode until that he came into a forest and into a great valley, where they saw an abbey of nuns; and there was a squire ready and opened the gates, and so they entered and descended off their horses; and there came a fair fellowship about Sir Launcelot, and welcomed him, and were passing glad of his coming. And then they led him unto the Abbess's chamber and unarmed him; and right so he was ware upon a bed lying two of his cousins, Sir Bors and Sir Lionel, and then he waked them; and when they saw him they made great joy. Sir, said Sir Bors unto Sir Launcelot, what adventure hath brought you hither, for we weened to-morn to have found you at Camelot? As God me help, said Sir Launcelot, a gentlewoman brought me hither, but I know not the cause.

In the meanwhile that they thus stood talking together, therein came twelve nuns that brought with them Galahad, the which was passing fair and well made, that unnethe in the world men might not find his match: and all those ladies wept. Sir, said they all, we bring you here this child the which we have nourished, and

we pray you to make him a knight, for of a more worthier man's hand may he not receive the order of knighthood. Sir Launcelot beheld the young squire and saw him seemly and demure as a dove, with all manner of good features, that he weened of his age never to have seen so fair a man of form. Then said Sir Launcelot: Cometh this desire of himself? He and all they said yea. Then shall he, said Sir Launcelot, receive the high order of knighthood as to-morn at the reverence of the high feast. That night Sir Launcelot had passing good cheer; and on the morn at the hour of prime, at Galahad's desire, he made him knight and said: God make him a good man, for of beauty faileth you not as any that liveth.

NOW fair sir, said Sir Launcelot, will ye come with me unto the court of King Arthur? Nay, said he, I will not go with you as at this time. Then he departed from them and took his two cousins with him, and so they came unto Camelot by the hour of underne on Whitsunday. By that time the king and the queen were gone to the minster to hear their service. Then the king and the queen were passing glad of Sir Bors and Sir Lionel, and so was all the fellowship. So when the king and all the knights were come from service, the barons espied in the sieges of the Round Table all about, written with golden letters: Here ought to sit he, and he ought to sit here. And thus they went so long till that they came to the Siege Perilous, where they found letters newly written of gold which said: Four hundred winters and four and fifty accomplished after the passion of our Lord Jesu Christ ought this siege to be fulfilled. Then all they said: This is a marvellous thing and an adventurous. In the name of God, said Sir Launcelot; and then accompted the term of the writing from the birth of our Lord unto that day. It seemeth me said Sir Launcelot, this siege ought to be fulfilled this same day, for this is the feast of Pentecost after the four hundred and four and fifty year; and if it would please all parties, I would none of these letters were seen this day, till he be come that ought to enchieve this adventure. Then made they to ordain a cloth of silk, for to cover these letters in the Siege Perilous.

Then the king bade haste unto dinner. Sir, said Sir Kay the Steward, if ye go now unto your meat ye shall break your old custom of your court, for ye have not used on this day to sit at your meat or that ye have seen some adventure. Ye say sooth, said the king, but I had so great joy of Sir Launcelot and of his cousins, which be come to the court whole and sound, so that I bethought me not of mine old custom. So, as they stood speaking, in came a squire and said unto the king: Sir, I bring unto you marvellous tidings. What be they? said the king. Sir, there is

here beneath at the river a great stone which I saw fleet above the water, and therein I saw sticking a sword. The king said: I will see that marvel. So all the knights went with him, and when they came to the river they found there a stone fleeting, as it were of red marble, and therein stuck a fair rich sword, and in the pommel thereof were precious stones wrought with subtle letters of gold. Then the barons read the letters which said in this wise: Never shall man take me hence, but only he by whose side I ought to hang, and he shall be the best knight of the world.

When the king had seen the letters, he said unto Sir Launcelot: Fair Sir, this sword ought to be yours, for I am sure ye be the best knight of the world. Then Sir Launcelot answered full soberly: Certes, sir, it is not my sword; also, Sir, wit ye well I have no hardiness to set my hand to it, for it longed not to hang by my side. Also, who that assayeth to take the sword and faileth of it, he shall receive a wound by that sword that he shall not be whole long after. And I will that ye wit that this same day shall the adventures of the Sangreal, that is called the Holy Vessel, begin.

NOW, fair nephew, said the king unto Sir Gawaine, assay ye, for my love. Sir, he said, save your good grace I shall not do that. Sir, said the king, assay to take the sword and at my commandment. Sir, said Gawaine, your commandment I will obey. And therewith he took up the sword by the handles, but he might not stir it. I thank you, said the king to Sir Gawaine. My lord Sir Gawaine, said Sir Launcelot, now wit ye well this sword shall touch you so sore that ye shall will ye had never set your hand thereto for the best castle of this realm. Sir, he said, I might not withsay mine uncle's will and commandment. But when the king heard this he repented it much, and said unto Sir Percivale that he should assay, for his love. And he said: Gladly, for to bear Sir Gawaine fellowship. And therewith he set his hand on the sword and drew it strongly, but he might not move it. Then were there no mo that durst be so hardy to set their hands thereto. Now may ye go to your dinner, said Sir Kay unto the king, for a marvellous adventure have ye seen. So the king and all went unto the court, and every knight knew his own place, and set him therein, and young men that were knights served them.

So when they were served, and all sieges fulfilled save only the Siege Perilous, anon there befell a marvellous adventure, that all the doors and windows of the

palace shut by themself. Not for then the hall was not greatly darked; and therewith they were all abashed both one and other. Then King Arthur spake first and said: By God, fair fellows and lords, we have seen this day marvels, but or night I suppose we shall see greater marvels.

In the meanwhile came in a good old man, and an ancient, clothed all in white, and there was no knight knew from whence he came. And with him he brought a young knight, both on foot, in red arms, without sword or shield, save a scabbard hanging by his side. And these words he said: Peace be with you, fair lords. Then the old man said unto Arthur: Sir, I bring here a young knight, the which is of king's lineage, and of the kindred of Joseph of Aramathie, whereby the marvels of this court, and of strange realms, shall be fully accomplished.

THE king was right glad of his words, and said unto the good man: Sir, ye be right welcome, and the young knight with you. Then the old man made the young man to unarm him, and he was in a coat of red sendal, and bare a mantle upon his shoulder that was furred with ermine, and put that upon him. And the old knight said unto the young knight: Sir, follow me. And anon he led him unto the Siege Perilous, where beside sat Sir Launcelot; and the good man lift up the cloth, and found there letters that said thus: This is the siege of Galahad, the haut prince. Sir, said the old knight, wit ye well that place is yours. And then he set him down surely in that siege. And then he said to the old man: Sir, ye may now go your way, for well have ye done that ye were commanded to do; and recommend me unto my grandsire, King Pelles, and unto my lord Petchere, and say them on my behalf, I shall come and see them as soon as ever I may. So the good man departed; and there met him twenty noble squires, and so took their horses and went their way.

Then all the knights of the Table Round marvelled greatly of Sir Galahad, that he durst sit there in that Siege Perilous, and was so tender of age; and wist not from whence he came but all only by God; and said: This is he by whom the Sangreal shall be enchieved, for there sat never none but he, but he were mischieved. Then Sir Launcelot beheld his son and had great joy of him. Then Bors told his fellows: Upon pain of my life this young knight shall come unto great worship. This noise was great in all the court, so that it came to the queen. Then she had marvel what knight it might be that durst adventure him to sit in the Siege Perilous. Many said unto the queen he resembled much unto Sir Launcelot. I may well suppose,

said the queen, that Sir Launcelot begat him on King Pelles' daughter, by the which he was made to lie by, by enchantment, and his name is Galahad. I would fain see him, said the queen, for he must needs be a noble man, for so is his father that him begat, I report me unto all the Table Round.

So when the meat was done that the king and all were risen, the king yede unto the Siege Perilous and lift up the cloth, and found there the name of Galahad; and then he shewed it unto Sir Gawaine, and said: Fair nephew, now have we among us Sir Galahad, the good knight that shall worship us all; and upon pain of my life he shall enchieve the Sangreal, right as Sir Launcelot had done us to understand. Then came King Arthur unto Galahad and said: Sir, ye be welcome, for ye shall move many good knights to the quest of the Sangreal, and ye shall enchieve that never knights might bring to an end. Then the king took him by the hand, and went down from the palace to shew Galahad the adventures of the stone.

THE queen heard thereof, and came after with many ladies, and shewed them the stone where it hoved on the water. Sir, said the king unto Sir Galahad, here is a great marvel as ever I saw, and right good knights have assayed and failed. Sir, said Galahad, that is no marvel, for this adventure is not theirs but mine; and for the surety of this sword I brought none with me, for here by my side hangeth the scabbard. And anon he laid his hand on the sword, and lightly drew it out of the stone, and put it in the sheath, and said unto the king: Now it goeth better than it did aforehand. Sir, said the king, a shield God shall send you. Now have I that sword that sometime was the good knight's, Balin le Savage, and he was a passing good man of his hands; and with this sword he slew his brother Balan, and that was great pity, for he was a good knight, and either slew other through a dolorous stroke that Balin gave unto my grandfather King Pelles, the which is not yet whole, nor not shall be till I heal him.

Therewith the king and all espied where came riding down the river a lady on a white palfrey toward them. Then she saluted the king and the queen, and asked if that Sir Launcelot was there. And then he answered himself: I am here, fair lady. Then she said all with weeping: How your great doing is changed sith this day in the morn. Damosel, why say you so? said Launcelot. I say you sooth, said the damosel, for ye were this day the best knight of the world, but who should say so now, he should be a liar, for there is now one better than ye, and well it is

proved by the adventures of the sword whereto ye durst not set to your hand; and that is the change and leaving of your name. Wherefore I make unto you a remembrance, that ye shall not ween from henceforth that ye be the best knight of the world. As touching unto that, said Launcelot, I know well I was never the best. Yes, said the damosel, that were ye, and are yet, of any sinful man of the world. And, Sir king, Nacien, the hermit, sendeth thee word, that thee shall befall the greatest worship that ever befell king in Britain; and I say you wherefore, for this day the Sangreal appeared in thy house and fed thee and all thy fellowship of the Round Table. So she departed and went that same way that she came.

Now, said the king, I am sure at this quest of the Sangreal shall all ye of the Table Round depart, and never shall I see you again whole together; therefore I will see you all whole together in the meadow of Camelot to joust and to tourney, that after your death men may speak of it that such good knights were wholly together such a day. As unto that counsel and at the king's request they accorded all, and took on their harness that longed unto jousting. But all this moving of the king was for this intent, for to see Galahad proved; for the king deemed he should not lightly come again unto the court after his departing. So were they assembled in the meadow, both more and less. Then Sir Galahad, by the prayer of the king and the queen, did upon him a noble jesseraunce, and also he did on his helm, but shield would he take none for no prayer of the king. And then Sir Gawaine and other knights prayed him to take a spear. Right so he did; and the queen was in a tower with all her ladies, for to behold that tournament. Then Sir Galahad dressed him in midst of the meadow, and began to break spears marvellously, that all men had wonder of him; for he there surmounted all other knights, for within a while he had defouled many good knights of the Table Round save twain, that was Sir Launcelot and Sir Percivale.

THEN the king, at the queen's request, made him to alight and to unlace his helm, that the queen might see him in the visage. When she beheld him she said: Soothly I dare well say that Sir Launcelot begat him, for never two men resembled more in likeness, therefore it nis no marvel though he be of great prowess. So a lady that stood by the queen said: Madam, for God's sake ought he of right to be so good a knight? Yea, forsooth, said the queen, for he is of all parties come of the best knights of the world and of the highest lineage; for Sir Launcelot is come but of the eighth degree from our Lord Jesu Christ, and Sir Galahad is of the ninth degree from our Lord Jesu Christ, therefore I dare say

they be the greatest gentlemen of the world.

And then the king and all estates went home unto Camelot, and so went to evensong to the great minster, and so after upon that to supper, and every knight sat in his own place as they were toforehand. Then anon they heard cracking and crying of thunder, that them thought the place should all to-drive. In the midst of this blast entered a sunbeam more clearer by seven times than ever they saw day, and all they were alighted of the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then began every knight to behold other, and either saw other, by their seeming, fairer than ever they saw afore. Not for then there was no knight might speak one word a great while, and so they looked every man on other as they had been dumb. Then there entered into the hall the Holy Grail covered with white samite, but there was none might see it, nor who bare it. And there was all the hall fulfilled with good odours, and every knight had such meats and drinks as he best loved in this world. And when the Holy Grail had been borne through the hall, then the holy vessel departed suddenly, that they wist not where it became: then had they all breath to speak. And then the king yielded thankings to God, of His good grace that he had sent them. Certes, said the king, we ought to thank our Lord Jesu greatly for that he hath shewed us this day, at the reverence of this high feast of Pentecost.

Now, said Sir Gawaine, we have been served this day of what meats and drinks we thought on; but one thing beguiled us, we might not see the Holy Grail, it was so preciously covered. Wherefore I will make here avow, that to-morn, without longer abiding, I shall labour in the quest of the Sangreal, that I shall hold me out a twelvemonth and a day, or more if need be, and never shall I return again unto the court till I have seen it more openly than it hath been seen here; and if I may not speed I shall return again as he that may not be against the will of our Lord Jesu Christ.

When they of the Table Round heard Sir Gawaine say so, they arose up the most part and made such avows as Sir Gawaine had made. Anon as King Arthur heard this he was greatly displeased, for he wist well they might not again-say their avows. Alas, said King Arthur unto Sir Gawaine, ye have nigh slain me with the avow and promise that ye have made; for through you ye have bereft me the fairest fellowship and the truest of knighthood that ever were seen together in any realm of the world; for when they depart from hence I am sure

they all shall never meet more in this world, for they shall die many in the quest. And so it forthinketh me a little, for I have loved them as well as my life, wherefore it shall grieve me right sore, the departition of this fellowship: for I have had an old custom to have them in my fellowship.

AND therewith the tears fell in his eyes. And then he said: Gawaine, Gawaine, ye have set me in great sorrow, for I have great doubt that my true fellowship shall never meet here more again. Ah, said Sir Launcelot, comfort yourself; for it shall be unto us a great honour and much more than if we died in any other places, for of death we be siker. Ah, Launcelot, said the king, the great love that I have had unto you all the days of my life maketh me to say such doleful words; for never Christian king had never so many worthy men at his table as I have had this day at the Round Table, and that is my great sorrow.

When the queen, ladies, and gentlewomen, wist these tidings, they had such sorrow and heaviness that there might no tongue tell it, for those knights had held them in honour and chierté. But among all other Queen Guenever made great sorrow. I marvel, said she, my lord would suffer them to depart from him. Thus was all the court troubled for the love of the departition of those knights. And many of those ladies that loved knights would have gone with their lovers; and so had they done, had not an old knight come among them in religious clothing; and then he spake all on high and said: Fair lords, which have sworn in the quest of the Sangreal, thus sendeth you Nacien, the hermit, word, that none in this quest lead lady nor gentlewoman with him, for it is not to do in so high a service as they labour in; for I warn you plain, he that is not clean of his sins he shall not see the mysteries of our Lord Jesu Christ. And for this cause they left these ladies and gentlewomen.

After this the queen came unto Galahad and asked him of whence he was, and of what country. He told her of whence he was. And son unto Launcelot, she said he was. As to that, he said neither yea nor nay. So God me help, said the queen, of your father ye need not to shame you, for he is the goodliest knight, and of the best men of the world come, and of the strain, of all parties, of kings. Wherefore ye ought of right to be, of your deeds, a passing good man; and certainly, she said, ye resemble him much. Then Sir Galahad was a little ashamed and said: Madam, sith ye know in certain, wherefore do ye ask it me? for he that is my father shall be known openly and all betimes. And then they went to rest them.

And in the honour of the highness of Galahad he was led into King Arthur's chamber, and there rested in his own bed.

And as soon as it was day the king arose, for he had no rest of all that night for sorrow. Then he went unto Gawaine and to Sir Launcelot that were arisen for to hear mass. And then the king again said: Ah Gawaine, Gawaine, ye have betrayed me; for never shall my court be amended by you, but ye will never be sorry for me as I am for you. And therewith the tears began to run down by his visage. And therewith the king said: Ah, knight Sir Launcelot, I require thee thou counsel me, for I would that this quest were undone, an it might be Sir, said Sir Launcelot, ye saw yesterday so many worthy knights that then were sworn that they may not leave it in no manner of wise. That wot I well, said the king, but it shall so heavy me at their departing that I wot well there shall no manner of joy remedy me. And then the king and the queen went unto the minster. So anon Launcelot and Gawaine commanded their men to bring their arms. And when they all were armed save their shields and their helms, then they came to their fellowship, which were all ready in the same wise, for to go to the minster to hear their service.

Then after the service was done the king would wit how many had undertaken the quest of the Holy Grail; and to accompt them he prayed them all. Then found they by the tale an hundred and fifty, and all were knights of the Round Table. And then they put on their helms and departed, and recommended them all wholly unto the queen; and there was weeping and great sorrow. Then the queen departed into her chamber and held her, so that no man should perceive her great sorrows. When Sir Launcelot missed the queen he went till her chamber, and when she saw him she cried aloud: O Launcelot, Launcelot, ye have betrayed me and put me to the death, for to leave thus my lord. Ah, madam, I pray you be not displeased, for I shall come again as soon as I may with my worship. Alas, said she, that ever I saw you; but he that suffered upon the cross for all mankind, he be unto you good conduct and safety, and all the whole fellowship.

Right so departed Sir Launcelot, and found his fellowship that abode his coming. And so they mounted upon their horses and rode through the streets of Camelot; and there was weeping of rich and poor, and the king turned away and might not speak for weeping.

from **BOOK XX**

IN May when every lusty heart flourisheth and bourgeoneth, for as the season is lusty to behold and comfortable, so man and woman rejoice and gladden of summer coming with his fresh flowers: for winter with his rough winds and blasts causeth a lusty man and woman to cower and sit fast by the fire. So in this season, as in the month of May, it befell a great anger and unhap that stinted not till the flower of chivalry of all the world was destroyed and slain; and all was long upon two unhappy knights the which were named Agravaine and Sir Mordred, that were brethren unto Sir Gawaine. For this Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred had ever a privy hate unto the queen Dame Guenever and to Sir Launcelot, and daily and nightly they ever watched upon Sir Launcelot.

So it mishapped, Sir Gawaine and all his brethren were in King Arthur's chamber; and then Sir Agravaine said thus openly, and not in no counsel, that many knights might hear it: I marvel that we all be not ashamed both to see and to know how Sir Launcelot lieth daily and nightly by the queen, and all we know it so; and it is shamefully suffered of us all, that we all should suffer so noble a king as King Arthur is so to be shamed.

Then spake Sir Gawaine, and said: Brother Sir Agravaine, I pray you and charge you move no such matters no more afore me, for wit you well, said Sir Gawaine, I will not be of your counsel. So God me help, said Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, we will not be knowing, brother Agravaine, of your deeds. Then will I, said Sir Mordred. I lieve well that, said Sir Gawaine, for ever unto all unhappiness, brother Sir Mordred, thereto will ye grant; and I would that ye left all this, and made you not so busy, for I know, said Sir Gawaine, what will fall of it. Fall of it what fall may, said Sir Agravaine, I will disclose it to the king. Not by my counsel, said Sir Gawaine, for an there rise war and wrack betwixt Sir Launcelot and us, wit you well brother, there will many kings and great lords hold with Sir Launcelot. Also, brother Sir Agravaine, said Sir Gawaine, ye must remember how ofttimes Sir Launcelot hath rescued the king and the queen; and the best of us all had been full cold at the heart-root had not Sir Launcelot been better than we, and that hath he proved himself full oft. And as for my part, said Sir Gawaine, I will never be against Sir Launcelot for one day's deed, when he rescued me from King Carados of the Dolorous Tower, and slew him, and saved my life. Also, brother Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred, in like wise Sir Launcelot rescued you both, and threescore and two, from Sir Turquin. Methinketh brother, such kind

deeds and kindness should be remembered. Do as ye list, said Sir Agravaine, for I will lain it no longer. With these words came to them King Arthur. Now brother, stint your noise, said Sir Gawaine. We will not, said Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred. Will ye so? said Sir Gawaine; then God speed you, for I will not hear your tales ne be of your counsel. No more will I, said Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris, for we will never say evil by that man; for because, said Sir Gareth, Sir Launcelot made me knight, by no manner owe I to say ill of him: and therewithal they three departed, making great dole. Alas, said Sir Gawaine and Sir Gareth, now is this realm wholly mischieved, and the noble fellowship of the Round Table shall be disparpled: so they departed.

AND then Sir Arthur asked them what noise they made. My lord, said Agravaine, I shall tell you that I may keep no longer. Here is I, and my brother Sir Mordred, brake unto my brothers Sir Gawaine, Sir Gaheris, and to Sir Gareth, how this we know all, that Sir Launcelot holdeth your queen, and hath done long; and we be your sister's sons, and we may suffer it no longer, and all we wot that ye should be above Sir Launcelot; and ye are the king that made him knight, and therefore we will prove it, that he is a traitor to your person.

If it be so, said Sir Arthur, wit you well he is none other, but I would be loath to begin such a thing but I might have proofs upon it; for Sir Launcelot is an hardy knight, and all ye know he is the best knight among us all; and but if he be taken with the deed, he will fight with him that bringeth up the noise, and I know no knight that is able to match him. Therefore an it be sooth as ye say, I would he were taken with the deed. For as the French book saith, the king was full loath thereto, that any noise should be upon Sir Launcelot and his queen; for the king had a deeming, but he would not hear of it, for Sir Launcelot had done so much for him and the queen so many times, that wit ye well the king loved him passingly well. My lord, said Sir Agravaine, ye shall ride to-morn a-hunting, and doubt ye not Sir Launcelot will not go with you. Then when it draweth toward night, ye may send the queen word that ye will lie out all that night, and so may ye send for your cooks, and then upon pain of death we shall take him that night with the queen, and outher we shall bring him to you dead or quick. I will well, said the king; then I counsel you, said the king, take with you sure fellowship. Sir, said Agravaine, my brother, Sir Mordred, and I, will take with us twelve knights of the Round Table. Beware, said King Arthur, for I warn you ye shall find him wight. Let us deal, said Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred.

So on the morn King Arthur rode a-hunting, and sent word to the queen that he would be out all that night. Then Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred gat to them twelve knights, and hid themself in a chamber in the Castle of Carlisle, and these were their names: Sir Colgrevance, Sir Mador de la Porte, Sir Gingaline, Sir Meliot de Logris, Sir Petipase of Winchelsea, Sir Galleron of Galway, Sir Melion of the Mountain, Sir Astamore, Sir Gromore Somir Joure, Sir Curselaine, Sir Florence, Sir Lovel. So these twelve knights were with Sir Mordred and Sir Agravaine, and all they were of Scotland, outher of Sir Gawaine's kin, either well-willers to his brethren.

So when the night came, Sir Launcelot told Sir Bors how he would go that night and speak with the queen. Sir, said Sir Bors, ye shall not go this night by my counsel. Why? said Sir Launcelot. Sir, said Sir Bors, I dread me ever of Sir Agravaine, that waiteth you daily to do you shame and us all; and never gave my heart against no going, that ever ye went to the queen, so much as now; for I mistrust that the king is out this night from the queen because peradventure he hath lain some watch for you and the queen, and therefore I dread me sore of treason. Have ye no dread, said Sir Launcelot, for I shall go and come again, and make no tarrying. Sir, said Sir Bors, that me repenteth, for I dread me sore that your going out this night shall wrath us all. Fair nephew, said Sir Launcelot, I marvel much why ye say thus, sithen the queen hath sent for me; and wit ye well I will not be so much a coward, but she shall understand I will see her good grace. God speed you well, said Sir Bors, and send you sound and safe again.

SO Sir Launcelot departed, and took his sword under his arm, and so in his mantle that noble knight put himself in great Jeopardy; and so he passed till he came to the queen's chamber, and then Sir Launcelot was lightly put into the chamber. And then, as the French book saith, the queen and Launcelot were together. And whether they were abed or at other manner of disports, me list not hereof make no mention, for love that time was not as is now-a-days. But thus as they were together, there came Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred, with twelve knights with them of the Round Table, and they said with crying voice: Traitor-knight, Sir Launcelot du Lake, now art thou taken. And thus they cried with a loud voice, that all the court might hear it; and they all fourteen were armed at all points as they should fight in a battle. Alas said Queen Guenever, now are we mischieved both Madam, said Sir Launcelot, is there here any armour within your chamber, that I might cover my poor body withal? An if there be any give it

me, and I shall soon stint their malice, by the grace of God. Truly, said the queen, I have none armour, shield, sword, nor spear; wherefore I dread me sore our long love is come to a mischievous end, for I hear by their noise there be many noble knights, and well I wot they be surely armed, and against them ye may make no resistance. Wherefore ye are likely to be slain, and then shall I be brent. For an ye might escape them, said the queen, I would not doubt but that ye would rescue me in what danger that ever I stood in. Alas, said Sir Launcelot, in all my life thus was I never bestead, that I should be thus shamefully slain for lack of mine armour.

But ever in one Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred cried: Traitor-knight, come out of the queen's chamber, for wit thou well thou art so beset that thou shalt not escape. O Jesu mercy, said Sir Launcelot, this shameful cry and noise I may not suffer, for better were death at once than thus to endure this pain. Then he took the queen in his arms, and kissed her, and said: Most noble Christian queen, I beseech you as ye have been ever my special good lady, and I at all times your true poor knight unto my power, and as I never failed you in right nor in wrong sithen the first day King Arthur made me knight, that ye will pray for my soul if that I here be slain; for well I am assured that Sir Bors, my nephew, and all the remnant of my kin, with Sir Lavaine and Sir Urre, that they will not fail you to rescue you from the fire; and therefore, mine own lady, recomfort yourself, whatsomever come of me, that ye go with Sir Bors, my nephew, and Sir Urre, and they all will do you all the pleasure that they can or may, that ye shall live like a queen upon my lands. Nay, Launcelot, said the queen, wit thou well I will never live after thy days, but an thou be slain I will take my death as meekly for Jesu Christ's sake as ever did any Christian queen. Well, madam, said Launcelot, sith it is so that the day is come that our love must depart, wit you well I shall sell my life as dear as I may; and a thousandfold, said Sir Launcelot, I am more heavier for you than for myself. And now I had liefer than to be lord of all Christendom, that I had sure armour upon me, that men might speak of my deeds or ever I were slain. Truly, said the queen, I would an it might please God that they would take me and slay me, and suffer you to escape. That shall never be, said Sir Launcelot, God defend me from such a shame, but Jesu be Thou my shield and mine armour!

AND therewith Sir Launcelot wrapped his mantle about his arm well and surely; and by then they had gotten a great form out of the hall, and therewithal they

rashed at the door. Fair lords, said Sir Launcelot, leave your noise and your rashing, and I shall set open this door, and then may ye do with me what it liketh you. Come off then, said they all, and do it, for it availeth thee not to strive against us all; and therefore let us into this chamber, and we shall save thy life until thou come to King Arthur. Then Launcelot unbarred the door, and with his left hand he held it open a little, so that but one man might come in at once; and so there came striding a good knight, a much man and large, and his name was Colgrevance of Gore, and he with a sword struck at Sir Launcelot mightily; and he put aside the stroke, and gave him such a buffet upon the helmet, that he fell grovelling dead within the chamber door. And then Sir Launcelot with great might drew that dead knight within the chamber door; and Sir Launcelot with help of the queen and her ladies was lightly armed in Sir Colgrevance's armour.

And ever stood Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred crying: Traitor-knight, come out of the queen's chamber. Leave your noise, said Sir Launcelot unto Sir Agravaine, for wit you well, Sir Agravaine, ye shall not prison me this night; and therefore an ye do by my counsel, go ye all from this chamber door, and make not such crying and such manner of slander as ye do; for I promise you by my knighthood, an ye will depart and make no more noise, I shall as to-morn appear afore you all before the king, and then let it be seen which of you all, outher else ye all, that will accuse me of treason; and there I shall answer you as a knight should, that hither I came to the queen for no manner of mal engin, and that will I prove and make it good upon you with my hands. Fie on thee, traitor, said Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred, we will have thee maugre thy head, and slay thee if we list; for we let thee wit we have the choice of King Arthur to save thee or to slay thee. Ah sirs, said Sir Launcelot, is there none other grace with you? then keep yourself.

So then Sir Launcelot set all open the chamber door, and mightily and knightly he strode in amongst them; and anon at the first buffet he slew Sir Agravaine. And twelve of his fellows after, within a little while after, he laid them cold to the earth, for there was none of the twelve that might stand Sir Launcelot one buffet. Also Sir Launcelot wounded Sir Mordred, and he fled with all his might. And then Sir Launcelot returned again unto the queen, and said: Madam, now wit you well all our true love is brought to an end, for now will King Arthur ever be my foe; and therefore, madam, an it like you that I may have you with me, I shall save you from all manner adventures dangerous. That is not best, said the queen;

meseemeth now ye have done so much harm, it will be best ye hold you still with this. And if ye see that as to-morn they will put me unto the death, then may ye rescue me as ye think best. I will well, said Sir Launcelot, for have ye no doubt, while I am living I shall rescue you. And then he kissed her, and either gave other a ring; and so there he left the queen, and went until his lodging.

WHEN Sir Bors saw Sir Launcelot he was never so glad of his home-coming as he was then. Jesu mercy, said Sir Launcelot, why be ye all armed: what meaneth this? Sir, said Sir Bors, after ye were departed from us, we all that be of your blood and your well-willers were so dretched that some of us leapt out of our beds naked, and some in their dreams caught naked swords in their hands; therefore, said Sir Bors, we deem there is some great strife at hand; and then we all deemed that ye were betrapped with some treason, and therefore we made us thus ready, what need that ever ye were in.

My fair nephew, said Sir Launcelot unto Sir Bors, now shall ye wit all, that this night I was more harder bestead than ever I was in my life, and yet I escaped. And so he told them all how and in what manner, as ye have heard to-fore. And therefore, my fellows, said Sir Launcelot, I pray you all that ye will be of good heart in what need somever I stand, for now is war come to us all. Sir, said Bors, all is welcome that God sendeth us, and we have had much weal with you and much worship, and therefore we will take the woe with you as we have taken the weal. And therefore, they said all (there were many good knights), look ye take no discomfort, for there nis no bands of knights under heaven but we shall be able to grieve them as much as they may us. And therefore discomfort not yourself by no manner, and we shall gather together that we love, and that loveth us, and what that ye will have done shall be done. And therefore, Sir Launcelot, said they, we will take the woe with the weal. Grant mercy, said Sir Launcelot, of your good comfort, for in my great distress, my fair nephew, ye comfort me greatly, and much I am beholding unto you. But this, my fair nephew, I would that ye did in all haste that ye may, or it be forth days, that ye will look in their lodging that be lodged here nigh about the king, which will hold with me, and which will not, for now I would know which were my friends from my foes. Sir, said Sir Bors, I shall do my pain, and or it be seven of the clock I shall wit of such as ye have said before, who will hold with you.

Then Sir Bors called unto him Sir Lionel, Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Blamore de

Ganis, Sir Bleoberis de Ganis, Sir Gahalantine, Sir Galihodin, Sir Galihud, Sir Menadeuke Sir Villiers the Valiant, Sir Hebes le Renoumes, Sir Lavaine Sir Urre of Hungary, Sir Nerounes, Sir Plenorius. These two knights Sir Launcelot made, and the one he won upon a bridge, and therefore they would never be against him. And Harry le Fise du Lake, and Sir Selises of the Dolorous Tower, and Sir Melias de Lile, and Sir Bellangere le Beuse, that was Sir Alisander's son Le Orphelin, because his mother Alice le Beale Pellerin and she was kin unto Sir Launcelot, and he held with him. So there came Sir Palomides and Sir Safere, his brother, to hold with Sir Launcelot, and Sir Clegis of Sadok, and Sir Dinas, Sir Clarius of Cleremont. So these two-and-twenty knights drew them together, and by then they were armed on horseback, and promised Sir Launcelot to do what he would. Then there fell to them, what of North Wales and of Cornwall, for Sir Lamorak's sake and for Sir Tristram's sake, to the number of a fourscore knights.

My lords, said Sir Launcelot, wit you well, I have been ever since I came into this country well willed unto my lord, King Arthur, and unto my lady, Queen Guenever, unto my power; and this night because my lady the queen sent for me to speak with her, I suppose it was made by treason, howbeit I dare largely excuse her person, notwithstanding I was there by a forecast near slain, but as Jesu provided me I escaped all their malice and treason. And then that noble knight Sir Launcelot told them all how he was hard bestead in the queen's chamber, and how and in what manner he escaped from them. And therefore, said Sir Launcelot, wit you well, my fair lords, I am sure there nis but war unto me and mine. And for because I have slain this night these knights, I wot well, as is Sir Agravaine Sir Gawaine's brother, and at the least twelve of his fellows, for this cause now I am sure of mortal war, for these knights were sent and ordained by King Arthur to betray me. And therefore the king will in his heat and malice judge the queen to the fire, and that may I not suffer, that she should be brent for my sake; for an I may be heard and suffered and so taken, I will fight for the queen, that she is a true lady unto her lord; but the king in his heat I dread me will not take me as I ought to be taken.

MY lord, Sir Launcelot, said Sir Bors, by mine advice ye shall take the woe with the weal, and take it in patience, and thank God of it. And sithen it is fallen as it is, I counsel you keep yourself, for an ye will yourself, there is no fellowship of knights christened that shall do you wrong. Also I will counsel you my lord, Sir Launcelot, than an my lady, Queen Guenever, be in distress, insomuch as she is

in pain for your sake, that ye knightly rescue her; an ye did otherwise, all the world will speak of you shame to the world's end. Insomuch as ye were taken with her, whether ye did right or wrong, it is now your part to hold with the queen, that she be not slain and put to a mischievous death, for an she so die the shame shall be yours. Jesu defend me from shame, said Sir Launcelot, and keep and save my lady the queen from villainy and shameful death, and that she never be destroyed in my default; wherefore my fair lords, my kin, and my friends, said Sir Launcelot, what will ye do? Then they said all: We will do as ye will do. I put this to you, said Sir Launcelot, that if my lord Arthur by evil counsel will to-morn in his heat put my lady the queen to the fire there to be brent, now I pray you counsel me what is best to do. Then they said all at once with one voice: Sir, us thinketh best that ye knightly rescue the queen, insomuch as she shall be brent it is for your sake; and it is to suppose, an ye might be handled, ye should have the same death, or a more shamefuler death.

And sir, we say all, that ye have many times rescued her from death for other men's quarrels, us seemeth it is more your worship that ye rescue the queen from this peril, insomuch she hath it for your sake.

Then Sir Launcelot stood still, and said: My fair lords, wit you well I would be loath to do that thing that should dishonour you or my blood, and wit you well I would be loath that my lady, the queen, should die a shameful death; but an it be so that ye will counsel me to rescue her, I must do much harm or I rescue her; and peradventure I shall there destroy some of my best friends, that should much repent me; and peradventure there be some, an they could well bring it about, or disobey my lord King Arthur, they would soon come to me, the which I were loath to hurt.

from **BOOK XXI**

[...]

AND then the king let search all the towns for his knights that were slain, and interred them; and salved them with soft salves that so sore were wounded. Then much people drew unto King Arthur. And then they said that Sir Mordred warred upon King Arthur with wrong. And then King Arthur drew him with his host down by the seaside, westward toward Salisbury; and there was a day assigned betwixt King Arthur and Sir Mordred, that they should meet upon a

down beside Salisbury, and not far from the seaside; and this day was assigned on a Monday after Trinity Sunday, whereof King Arthur was passing glad, that he might be avenged upon Sir Mordred. Then Sir Mordred araised much people about London, for they of Kent, Southsex, and Surrey, Estsex, and of Southfolk, and of Northfolk, held the most part with Sir Mordred; and many a full noble knight drew unto Sir Mordred and to the king: but they that loved Sir Launcelot drew unto Sir Mordred.

So upon Trinity Sunday at night, King Arthur dreamed a wonderful dream, and that was this: that him seemed he sat upon a chaflet in a chair, and the chair was fast to a wheel, and thereupon sat King Arthur in the richest cloth of gold that might be made; and the king thought there was under him, far from him, an hideous deep black water, and therein were all manner of serpents, and worms, and wild beasts, foul and horrible; and suddenly the king thought the wheel turned up-so-down, and he fell among the serpents, and every beast took him by a limb; and then the king cried as he lay in his bed and slept: Help. And then knights, squires, and yeomen, awaked the king; and then he was so amazed that he wist not where he was; and then he fell a-slumbering again, not sleeping nor thoroughly waking. So the king seemed verily that there came Sir Gawaine unto him with a number of fair ladies with him. And when King Arthur saw him, then he said: Welcome, my sister's son; I weened thou hadst been dead, and now I see thee alive, much am I beholding unto Almighty Jesu. O fair nephew and my sister's son, what be these ladies that hither be come with you? Sir, said Sir Gawaine, all these be ladies for whom I have foughten when I was man living, and all these are those that I did battle for in righteous quarrel; and God hath given them that grace at their great prayer, because I did battle for them, that they should bring me hither unto you: thus much hath God given me leave, for to warn you of your death; for an ye fight as to-morn with Sir Mordred, as ye both have assigned, doubt ye not ye must be slain, and the most part of your people on both parties. And for the great grace and goodness that almighty Jesu hath unto you, and for pity of you, and many more other good men there shall be slain, God hath sent me to you of his special grace, to give you warning that in no wise ye do battle as to-morn, but that ye take a treaty for a month day; and proffer you largely, so as to-morn to be put in a delay. For within a month shall come Sir Launcelot with all his noble knights, and rescue you worshipfully, and slay Sir Mordred, and all that ever will hold with him. Then Sir Gawaine and all

the ladies vanished.

And anon the king called upon his knights, squires, and yeomen, and charged them wightly to fetch his noble lords and wise bishops unto him. And when they were come, the king told them his avision, what Sir Gawaine had told him, and warned him that if he fought on the morn he should be slain. Then the king commanded Sir Lucan the Butler, and his brother Sir Bedivere, with two bishops with them, and charged them in any wise, an they might, Take a treaty for a month day with Sir Mordred, and spare not, proffer him lands and goods as much as ye think best. So then they departed, and came to Sir Mordred, where he had a grim host of an hundred thousand men. And there they entreated Sir Mordred long time; and at the last Sir Mordred was agreed for to have Cornwall and Kent, by Arthur's days: after, all England, after the days of King Arthur.

[...]

THEN were they condescended that King Arthur and Sir Mordred should meet betwixt both their hosts, and everych of them should bring fourteen persons; and they came with this word unto Arthur. Then said he: I am glad that this is done: and so he went into the field. And when Arthur should depart, he warned all his host that an they see any sword drawn: Look ye come on fiercely, and slay that traitor, Sir Mordred, for I in no wise trust him. In like wise Sir Mordred warned his host that: An ye see any sword drawn, look that ye come on fiercely, and so slay all that ever before you standeth; for in no wise I will not trust for this treaty, for I know well my father will be avenged on me. And so they met as their appointment was, and so they were agreed and accorded thoroughly; and wine was fetched, and they drank. Right soon came an adder out of a little heath bush, and it stung a knight on the foot. And when the knight felt him stung, he looked down and saw the adder, and then he drew his sword to slay the adder, and thought of none other harm. And when the host on both parties saw that sword drawn, then they blew beams, trumpets, and horns, and shouted grimly. And so both hosts dressed them together. And King Arthur took his horse, and said: Alas this unhappy day! and so rode to his party. And Sir Mordred in like wise. And never was there seen a more dolefuller battle in no Christian land; for there was but rushing and riding, foining and striking, and many a grim word was there spoken either to other, and many a deadly stroke. But ever King Arthur rode

throughout the battle of Sir Mordred many times, and did full nobly as a noble king should, and at all times he fainted never; and Sir Mordred that day put him in devoir, and in great peril. And thus they fought all the long day, and never stinted till the noble knights were laid to the cold earth; and ever they fought still till it was near night, and by that time was there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the down. Then was Arthur wood wroth out of measure, when he saw his people so slain from him.

Then the king looked about him, and then was he ware, of all his host and of all his good knights, were left no more alive but two knights; that one was Sir Lucan the Butler, and his brother Sir Bedivere, and they were full sore wounded. Jesu mercy, said the king, where are all my noble knights become? Alas that ever I should see this doleful day, for now, said Arthur, I am come to mine end. But would to God that I wist where were that traitor Sir Mordred, that hath caused all this mischief. Then was King Arthur ware where Sir Mordred leaned upon his sword among a great heap of dead men. Now give me my spear, said Arthur unto Sir Lucan, for yonder I have espied the traitor that all this woe hath wrought. Sir, let him be, said Sir Lucan, for he is unhappy; and if ye pass this unhappy day ye shall be right well revenged upon him. Good lord, remember ye of your night's dream, and what the spirit of Sir Gawaine told you this night, yet God of his great goodness hath preserved you hitherto. Therefore, for God's sake, my lord, leave off by this, for blessed be God ye have won the field, for here we be three alive, and with Sir Mordred is none alive; and if ye leave off now this wicked day of destiny is past. Tide me death, betide me life, saith the king, now I see him yonder alone he shall never escape mine hands, for at a better avail shall I never have him. God speed you well, said Sir Bedivere.

Then the king gat his spear in both his hands, and ran toward Sir Mordred, crying: Traitor, now is thy death-day come. And when Sir Mordred heard Sir Arthur, he ran until him with his sword drawn in his hand. And there King Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield, with a foin of his spear, throughout the body, more than a fathom. And when Sir Mordred felt that he had his death wound he thrust himself with the might that he had up to the bur of King Arthur's spear. And right so he smote his father Arthur, with his sword holden in both his hands, on the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the brain-pan, and therewithal Sir Mordred fell stark dead to the earth; and the noble Arthur fell in a swoon to the earth, and there he swooned ofttimes. And Sir

Lucan the Butler and Sir Bedivere ofttimes heaved him up. And so weakly they led him betwixt them both, to a little chapel not far from the seaside. And when the king was there he thought him well eased.

Then heard they people cry in the field. Now go thou, Sir Lucan, said the king, and do me to wit what betokens that noise in the field. So Sir Lucan departed, for he was grievously wounded in many places. And so as he yede, he saw and hearkened by the moonlight, how that pillers and robbers were come into the field, to pill and to rob many a full noble knight of brooches, and beads, of many a good ring, and of many a rich jewel; and who that were not dead all out, there they slew them for their harness and their riches. When Sir Lucan understood this work, he came to the king as soon as he might, and told him all what he had heard and seen. Therefore by my rede, said Sir Lucan, it is best that we bring you to some town. I would it were so, said the king.

BUT I may not stand, mine head works so. Ah Sir Launcelot, said King Arthur, this day have I sore missed thee: alas, that ever I was against thee, for now have I my death, whereof Sir Gawaine me warned in my dream. Then Sir Lucan took up the king the one part, and Sir Bedivere the other part, and in the lifting the king swooned; and Sir Lucan fell in a swoon with the lift, that the part of his guts fell out of his body, and therewith the noble knight's heart brast. And when the king awoke, he beheld Sir Lucan, how he lay foaming at the mouth, and part of his guts lay at his feet. Alas, said the king, this is to me a full heavy sight, to see this noble duke so die for my sake, for he would have holpen me, that had more need of help than I. Alas, he would not complain him, his heart was so set to help me: now Jesu have mercy upon his soul! Then Sir Bedivere wept for the death of his brother. Leave this mourning and weeping, said the king, for all this will not avail me, for wit thou well an I might live myself, the death of Sir Lucan would grieve me evermore; but my time hieth fast, said the king. Therefore, said Arthur unto Sir Bedivere, take thou Excalibur, my good sword, and go with it to yonder water side, and when thou comest there I charge thee throw my sword in that water, and come again and tell me what thou there seest. My lord, said Bedivere, your commandment shall be done, and lightly bring you word again.

So Sir Bedivere departed, and by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft was all of precious stones; and then he said to himself: If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and

loss. And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And so, as soon as he might, he came again unto the king, and said he had been at the water, and had thrown the sword in the water. What saw thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but waves and winds. That is untruly said of thee, said the king, therefore go thou lightly again, and do my commandment; as thou art to me lief and dear, spare not, but throw it in. Then Sir Bedivere returned again, and took the sword in his hand; and then him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword, and so eft he hid the sword, and returned again, and told to the king that he had been at the water, and done his commandment. What saw thou there? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but the waters wap and waves wan. Ah, traitor untrue, said King Arthur, now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that, thou that hast been to me so lief and dear? and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the richness of the sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee, I shall slay thee with mine own hands; for thou wouldst for my rich sword see me dead.

Then Sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword, and lightly took it up, and went to the water side; and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and then he threw the sword as far into the water as he might; and there came an arm and an hand above the water and met it, and caught it, and so shook it thrice and brandished, and then vanished away the hand with the sword in the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the king, and told him what he saw. Alas, said the king, help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried over long. Then Sir Bedivere took the king upon his back, and so went with him to that water side. And when they were at the water side, even fast by the bank hoved a little barge with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur. Now put me into the barge, said the king. And so he did softly; and there received him three queens with great mourning; and so they set them down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head. And then that queen said: Ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? alas, this wound on your head hath caught over-much cold. And so then they rowed from the land, and Sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies go from him. Then Sir Bedivere cried: Ah my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies? Comfort thyself, said the king, and do as well as thou mayst, for in me

is no trust for to trust in; for I will into the vale of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound: and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul. But ever the queens and ladies wept and shrieked, that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge, he wept and wailed, and so took the forest; and so he went all that night, and in the morning he was ware betwixt two holts hoar, of a chapel and an hermitage.

THEN was Sir Bedivere glad, and thither he went; and when he came into the chapel, he saw where lay an hermit grovelling on all four, there fast by a tomb was new graven. When the hermit saw Sir Bedivere he knew him well, for he was but little to-fore Bishop of Canterbury, that Sir Mordred flemed. Sir, said Bedivere, what man is there interred that ye pray so fast for? Fair son, said the hermit, I wot not verily, but by deeming. But this night, at midnight, here came a number of ladies, and brought hither a dead corpse, and prayed me to bury him; and here they offered an hundred tapers, and they gave me an hundred besants. Alas, said Sir Bedivere, that was my lord King Arthur, that here lieth buried in this chapel. Then Sir Bedivere swooned; and when he awoke he prayed the hermit he might abide with him still there, to live with fasting and prayers. For from hence will I never go, said Sir Bedivere, by my will, but all the days of my life here to pray for my lord Arthur. Ye are welcome to me, said the hermit, for I know ye better than ye ween that I do. Ye are the bold Bedivere, and the full noble duke, Sir Lucan the Butler, was your brother. Then Sir Bedivere told the hermit all as ye have heard to-fore. So there bode Sir Bedivere with the hermit that was to-fore Bishop of Canterbury, and there Sir Bedivere put upon him poor clothes, and served the hermit full lowly in fasting and in prayers.

Thus of Arthur I find never more written in books that be authorised, nor more of the very certainty of his death heard I never read, but thus was he led away in a ship wherein were three queens; that one was King Arthur's sister, Queen Morgan le Fay; the other was the Queen of Northgalis; the third was the Queen of the Waste Lands. Also there was Nimue, the chief lady of the lake, that had wedded Pelleas the good knight; and this lady had done much for King Arthur, for she would never suffer Sir Pelleas to be in no place where he should be in danger of his life; and so he lived to the uttermost of his days with her in great rest. More of the death of King Arthur could I never find, but that ladies brought him to his burials; and such one was buried there, that the hermit bare witness that sometime was Bishop of Canterbury, but yet the hermit knew not in certain

that he was verily the body of King Arthur: for this tale Sir Bedivere, knight of the Table Round, made it to be written.

YET some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say: here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse: *Hic jacet Arthurus, Rex quondam, Rexque futurus.* Thus leave I here Sir Bedivere with the hermit, that dwelled that time in a chapel beside Glastonbury, and there was his hermitage. And so they lived in their prayers, and fastings, and great abstinence. And when Queen Guenever understood that King Arthur was slain, and all the noble knights, Sir Mordred and all the remnant, then the queen stole away, and five ladies with her, and so she went to Almesbury; and there she let make herself a nun, and ware white clothes and black, and great penance she took, as ever did sinful lady in this land, and never creature could make her merry; but lived in fasting, prayers, and alms-deeds, that all manner of people marvelled how virtuously she was changed. Now leave we Queen Guenever in Almesbury, a nun in white clothes and black, and there she was Abbess and ruler as reason would; and turn we from her, and speak we of Sir Launcelot du Lake. [...]

Text from the University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center; based on a 1903 edition of William Caxton's printing

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Henry V

from ACT 3 SCENE 1.

KING HENRY V

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead.
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility:
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger;
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,
Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage;
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;
Let pry through the portage of the head
Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it
As fearfully as doth a galled rock
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.
Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,
Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit
To his full height. On, on, you noblest English.
Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof!
Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,
Have in these parts from morn till even fought

And sheathed their swords for lack of argument:
Dishonour not your mothers; now attest
That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you.
Be copy now to men of grosser blood,
And teach them how to war. And you, good yeoman,
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
The mettle of your pasture; let us swear
That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;
For there is none of you so mean and base,
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!'

from ACT 4 SCENE 1.

WESTMORELAND
O that we now had here
But one ten thousand of those men in England
That do no work to-day!

KING HENRY V
What's he that wishes so?
My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin:
If we are mark'd to die, we are enow
To do our country loss; and if to live,

The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more.
By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,
Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;
It yearns me not if men my garments wear;
Such outward things dwell not in my desires:
But if it be a sin to covet honour,
I am the most offending soul alive.
No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England:
God's peace! I would not lose so great an honour
As one man more, methinks, would share from me
For the best hope I have. O, do not wish one more!
Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,
That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart; his passport shall be made
And crowns for convoy put into his purse:
We would not die in that man's company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.
This day is called the feast of Crispian:
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when the day is named,
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say 'To-morrow is Saint Crispian:'
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars.
And say 'These wounds I had on Crispin's day.'

Old men forget: yet all shall be forgot,
But he'll remember with advantages
What feats he did that day: then shall our names.
Familiar in his mouth as household words
Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,
Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd.
This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remember'd;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition:
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

Speech to the Troops at Tilbury

QUEEN ELIZABETH AT TILBURY.

Source:

-----. *The Picture History of England.*
London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1861. 109.

Elizabeth I (1533-1603)

My loving people,

We have been persuaded by some that are careful of our safety, to take heed how we commit our selves to armed multitudes, for fear of treachery; but I assure you I do not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people. Let tyrants fear, I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good-will of my subjects; and therefore I am come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live and die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field. I know already, for your forwardness you have deserved rewards and crowns; and We do assure you in the word of a prince, they shall be duly paid you. In the mean time, my lieutenant general shall be in my stead, than whom never prince commanded a more noble or worthy subject; not doubting but by your obedience to my general, by your concord in the camp, and your valour in the field, we shall shortly have a famous victory over those enemies of my God, of my kingdom, and of my people.

Delivered by Elizabeth I to the land forces assembled at Tilbury (Essex), 1588

Edmund Spenser (c. 1552-1599)

Prefatory Letter to Sir Walter Raleigh On *The Faerie Queene*

A Letter of the Authors Expounding His Whole Intention In The Course of This Worke: Which For That It Giveth Great Light to The Reader, For The Better Understanding Is Hereunto Annexed

To the Right Noble, and Valorous, Sir Walter Raleigh, Knight, Lord Wardein of the Stanneryes, and Her Majesties Liefetenaunt of the County of Cornewayll

SIR,

Knowing how doubtfully all allegories may be construed, and this booke of mine, which I have entituled the Faery Queene, being a continued allegory, or darke conceit, I have thought good, as well for avoyding of gealous opinions and misconstructions, as also for your better light in reading thereof, (being so by you commanded,) to discover unto you the general intention and meaning, which in the whole course thereof I have fashioned, without expressing of any particular purposes or by accidents therein occasioned. The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline: which for that I conceived shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter then for profite of the ensample, I chose the historye of King Arthure, as most fitte for the excellency of his person, being made famous by many mens former workes, and also furthest from the daunger of envy, and suspition of present time. In which I have followed all the antique poets historicall: first Homere, who in the persons of Agamemnon and Ulysses hath ensampled a good governour and a vertuous man, the one in his Ilias, the other in his Odysseis; then Virgil, whose like intention was to doe in the person of Æneas; after him Ariosto comprised them both in his Orlando; and lately Tasso dissevered them againe, and formed both parts in two persons, namely that part which they in philosophy call Ethice, or vertues of a private man, coloured in his Rinaldo; the other named Politice in his Godfredo. By ensample of which

excellente poets, I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised, the which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes: which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encoraged to frame the other part of polliticke vertues in his person, after that hee came to be king.

To some, I know, this methode will seeme displeasaunt, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly in way of precepts, or sermoned at large, as they use, then thus clowdily enwrapped in allegoricall devises. But such, me seeme, should be satisfide with the use of these dayes, seeing all things accounted by their showes, and nothing esteemed of, that is not delightfull and pleasing to commune sence. For this cause is Xenophon preferred before Plato, for that the one, in the exquisite depth of his judgement, formed a commune welth such as it should be, but the other in the person of Cyrus and the Persians fashioned a governement, such as might best be: so much more profitable and gratious is doctrine by ensample, then by rule. So have I laboured to doe in the person of Arthure: whome I conceive, after his long education by Timon, to whom he was by Merlin delivered to be brought up, so soone as he was borne of the Lady Igrayne, to have seene in a dream or vision the Faery Queen, with whose excellent beauty ravished, he awaking resolved to seeke her out, and so being by Merlin armed, and by Timon thoroughly instructed, he went to seeke her forth in Faerye Land. In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery Land. and yet, in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall queene or empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautiful lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphœbe, fashioning her name according your owne excellent conceipt of Cynthia, (Phœbe and Cynthia being both names of Diana.) So in the person of Prince Arthure I sette forth magnificence in particular, which vertue, for that (according to Aristotle and the rest) it is the perfection of all the rest, and conteineth in it them all, therefore in the whole course I mention the deedes of Arthure applyable to that vertue which I write of in that booke. But of the xii. other vertues I make xii. other knights the patrones, for the more variety of the history: of which these three bookes contayn three. The first of the Knight of the Redcrosse, in whome I expresse holynes: The seconde of Sir Guyon, in whome I sette forth temperaunce.

The third of Britomartis, a lady knight, in whome I picture chastity. But because the beginning of the whole worke seemeth abrupte and as depending upon other antecedents, it needs that ye know the occasion of these three knights severall adventures. For the methode of a poet historical is not such as of an historiographer. For an historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions; but a poet thrusteth into the middest, even where it most concerneth him, and there recoursing to the things forepaste, and divining of thinges to come, maketh a pleasing analysis of all. The beginning therefore of my history, if it were to be told by an historiographer, should be the twelfth booke, which is the last; where I devise that the Faery Queene kept her annuall feaste xii. dayes, uppon which xii. severall dayes, the occasions of the xii. several adventures hapned, which being undertaken by xii. severall knights, are in these xii. books severally handled and discoursed...

Text from Famous Prefaces. The Harvard Classics (1909–14)

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)

Selections from *Idylls of the King*

To the Queen

O loyal to the royal in thyself,
And loyal to thy land, as this to thee
Bear witness, that rememberable day,
When, pale as yet, and fever-worn, the Prince
Who scarce had plucked his flickering life again
From halfway down the shadow of the grave,
Past with thee through thy people and their love,
And London rolled one tide of joy through all
Her trebled millions, and loud leagues of man
And welcome! witness, too, the silent cry,
The prayer of many a race and creed, and clime—
Thunderless lightnings striking under sea
From sunset and sunrise of all thy realm,
And that true North, whereof we lately heard
A strain to shame us 'keep you to yourselves;
So loyal is too costly! friends—your love
Is but a burthen: loose the bond, and go.'
Is this the tone of empire? here the faith
That made us rulers? this, indeed, her voice
And meaning, whom the roar of Hougoumont
Left mightiest of all peoples under heaven?
What shock has fooled her since, that she should speak
So feebly? wealthier—wealthier—hour by hour!
The voice of Britain, or a sinking land,
Some third-rate isle half-lost among her seas?
There rang her voice, when the full city pealed
Thee and thy Prince! The loyal to their crown
Are loyal to their own far sons, who love
Our ocean-empire with her boundless homes
For ever-broadening England, and her throne

In our vast Orient, and one isle, one isle,
That knows not her own greatness: if she knows
And dreads it we are fallen. —But thou, my Queen,
Not for itself, but through thy living love
For one to whom I made it o'er his grave
Sacred, accept this old imperfect tale,
New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,
Ideal manhood closed in real man,
Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still; or him
Of Geoffrey's book, or him of Malleor's, one
Touched by the adulterous finger of a time
That hovered between war and wantonness,
And crownings and dethronements: take withal
Thy poet's blessing, and his trust that Heaven
Will blow the tempest in the distance back
From thine and ours: for some are sacred, who mark,
Or wisely or unwisely, signs of storm,
Waverings of every vane with every wind,
And wordy trucklings to the transient hour,
And fierce or careless looseners of the faith,
And Softness breeding scorn of simple life,
Or Cowardice, the child of lust for gold,
Or Labour, with a groan and not a voice,
Or Art with poisonous honey stolen from France,
And that which knows, but careful for itself,
And that which knows not, ruling that which knows
To its own harm: the goal of this great world
Lies beyond sight: yet—if our slowly-grown
And crowned Republic's crowning common-sense,
That saved her many times, not fail—their fears
Are morning shadows huger than the shapes
That cast them, not those gloomier which forego
The darkness of that battle in the West,
Where all of high and holy dies away.

from **Lancelot and Elaine**

Elaine 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 fashioned for it
A case of silk, and braided thereupon
All the devices blazoned 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, climbed
That eastern tower, and entering barred her door,
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,
Now guessed 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 killed, but God
Broke the strong lance, and rolled 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 even his name?
He left it with her, when he rode to tilt
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,
Which Arthur had ordained, and by that name
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

[... *The poem tells how Arthur found the diamonds in the crown of a long-dead king, and has since been giving the diamonds away as prizes at tournaments*]

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 answered, "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 yearned 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 allowed
Of all men: many a bard, without offence,
Has linked 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 today
There gleamed a vague suspicion in his eyes:
Some meddling rogue has tampered 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 answered 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 soe'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."

[... *The poem tells how Lancelot rode into the wilderness and came to the castle of Astolat, where he meets the lord of the castle and the lord's children, Elaine, Torre, and Lavaine. Lancelot does not reveal his identity, explaining he rides to compete in the tournament at Camelot, and does not want to be recognized. He is offered the shield of Sir Torre, the older son, and the lord's younger son, Lavaine, offers to accompany Lancelot to the tournament. Elaine watches*]

[*Lavaine speaks*] "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," answered 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,
Flushed slightly at the slight disparagement
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,
Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus returned:
"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 looked,
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 marred his face, and marked 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.
Marred as he was, he seemed the goodliest man
That ever among ladies ate in hall,
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.
However marred, of more than twice her years,
Seamed 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.

[... *At banquet in the castle that night, Lavaine asks Lancelot to tell something of the battles he and King Arthur fought together*]

"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 answered 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 loud battles by the shore
Of Duglas; that on Bassa; then the war
That thundered 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 centered in a sun
Of silver rays, that lightened as he breathed;
And at Caerleon had he helped 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."

[... *The next day, Lancelot and Lavaine prepare to depart. Elaine approaches*]

There to his proud horse Lancelot turned, and smoothed
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew
Nearer and stood. He looked, and more amazed
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
The maiden standing in the dewy light.
He had not dreamed she was so beautiful.
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
For silent, though he greeted her, she stood

Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.
Suddenly flashed 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 answered; "then in wearing mine
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,
That those who know should know you." And he turned
Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true, and answered, "True, my child.
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:
What is it?" and she told him "A red sleeve
Broidered 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 filled her with delight;
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine
Returning brought the yet-unblazoned 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 answered, "twice today. 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 kissed her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,
And thus they moved away: she stayed 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 by the gateway, standing near the shield
In silence, while she watched their arms far-off
Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.
Then to her tower she climbed, and took the shield,
There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

[... *Lancelot and Lavaine ride off, and Lancelot reveals his identity*]

But when the next day broke from underground,
And shot red fire and shadows through 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,"
Abashed 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 answered, "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 reached the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes
Run through the peopled gallery which half round
Lay like a rainbow fallen 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
Through knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever through 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 answered 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 assailed, 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 hurled into it
Against the stronger: little need to speak
Of Lancelot in his glory! King, duke, earl,
Count, baron– whom he smote, he overthrew.

[... *Lancelot wins the tournament, but is badly wounded and rides away*]

His party, cried "Advance and take thy prize
The diamond;" but he answered, "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 vanished 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, you will die."
But he, "I die already with it: draw–
Draw,"– and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave
A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,
And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank
For the pure pain, and wholly swooned away.
Then came the hermit out and bare him in,
There stanched 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.

[*... Arthur sends out men to look for the wounded knight, then speaks to Guinevere, who reveals that the stranger knight was in fact Lancelot*]

While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,
Past, thinking "Is it Lancelot who hath come
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain
Of glory, and hath added wound to wound,
And ridden away to die?" So feared the King,
And, after two days' tarriance there, returned.
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing asked,
"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
Conquered; and therefore would he hide his name
From all men, even 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 decayed;
And added, 'Our true Arthur, when he learns,
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain
Of purer glory.'"

Then replied the King:
"Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
To have trusted me as he hath trusted thee.
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, this!–
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,
"Thy hopes are mine," and saying that, she choked,
And sharply turned 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 clenched her fingers till they bit the palm,
And shrieked out "Traitor" to the unhearing wall,
Then flashed into wild tears, and rose again,
And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

[*... Searching for the strange knight, Gawain arrives at Astolat. There he sees Lancelot's shield, which Elaine has been keeping safe, and he learns that Elaine loves Lancelot, and is ignorant of the stories about Lancelot and the queen. He gives Elaine the diamond, Lancelot's tournament prize, and rides back to Camelot to report*]

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 failed 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 frowned, 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,
Lingered that other, staring after him;
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzzed abroad
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.
All ears were pricked 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
Predoomed 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 stooped so low,
Marred her friend's aim with pale tranquillity.
So ran the tale like fire about the court,
Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared:
Till even 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
Crushed 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 answered, "and find out our dear Lavaine."
"Ye will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine:
Bide," answered 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 ye 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 allowed, she slipt away,
And while she made her ready for her ride,
Her father's latest word hummed 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 answered 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 turned Sir Torre, and being in his moods

Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,
Where Arthur's wars were rendered 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,
Though carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
Streamed from it still; and in her heart she laughed,
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.
And when they gained the cell wherein 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 rolled his eyes
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,
"Your prize the diamond sent you by the King:"
His eyes glistened: 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
Assigned 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 assigned, he kissed her face.
At once she slipt like water to the floor.
"Alas," he said, "your ride hath 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 through 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 looked and was perplext 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 turned
Sighing, and feigned a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided through the fields,
And past beneath the weirdly-sculptured gates
Far up the dim rich city to her kin;
There bode the night: but woke with dawn, and past
Down through 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, though he called 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, skilled 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 straitened 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 bright 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
Beamed on his fancy, spoke, he answered 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 dimmed her sight,
And drave her ere her time across the fields
Far into the rich city, where alone
She murmured, "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 turned, and now to left,
And found no ease in turning or in rest;
And "Him or death," she muttered, "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 deemed she looked 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 near 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 go today:" 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," answered Lancelot, "what is this?"
And innocently extending her white arms,
"Your love," she said, "your love– to be your wife."
And Lancelot answered, "Had I chosen 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 through the world."
And Lancelot answered, "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 answered, "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 poor,
Endow you with broad land and territory
Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,
So that would make you happy: furthermore,
Even to the death, as though 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 blushed 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 through 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 ye, 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 remained, 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 looked
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 formed
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 answered with all calm.
But when they left her to herself again,
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching through the darkness, called; 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 called her song "The Song of Love and Death,"
And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing.

"Sweet is true love though 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 called
The father, and all three in hurry and fear
Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red 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 seemed 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 dreamed
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 remained.
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!"

[... *Elaine's father tries to break her love for Lancelot by telling her of the affair with the queen, but Elaine refuses to believe the story, persists in believing she has loved the best man on earth, and asks for a priest so that she might prepare for her death*]

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 asked
"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 deemed 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 through the field, that shone
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,

Palled 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 kissed 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,
Oared 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 though 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 seemed her statue, but that he,
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kissed her feet
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye
The shadow of some 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 uttered, "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 through 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 turned 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
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 these 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, through the casement standing wide for heat,
Flung them, and down they flashed, and smote the stream
Then from the smitten surface flashed, as it were,
Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.
Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disdain
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 armed, and kept the door; to whom,
All up the marble stair, tier over tier,
Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that asked
"What is it?" but the 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, appalled 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 Fairyland?
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,
But that he passes into Fairyland."

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
Came girt with knights: then turned 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 wondered 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 called 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 touched 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;
Though had I dreamt the damsel would have died,
I might have put my wits to some rough use,
And helped 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 helped 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 through the world, she asked;
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 answered, "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 marshalled 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 blazoned 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 marked Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,
Drew near, and sighed in passing, "Lancelot,
Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love."
He answered with his eyes upon the ground,
"That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven."
But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,
Approached him, and with full affection said,

"Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have
Most joy and most affiance, for I know
What thou hast been in battle by my side,
And many a time have watched thee at the tilt
Strike down the lusty and long practised knight,
And let the younger and unskilled 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,
Seeing the homeless trouble in thine eyes,
Thou couldst 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 answered 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–

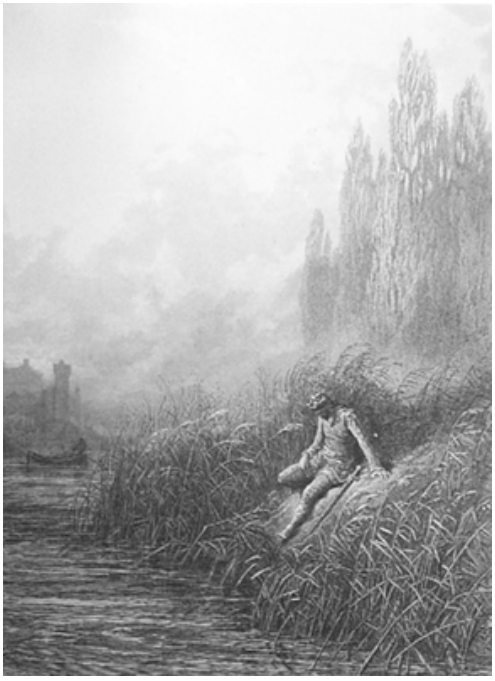
Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love
Could bind him, but free love will not be bound."

"Free love, so bound, were freëst," 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 failed to bind, though being, as I think,
Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know."

And Lancelot answered nothing, but he went,
And at the inrunning of a little brook
Sat by the river in a cove, and watched
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
Caught from his mother's arms– the wondrous one
Who passes through the vision of the night–
She chanted snatches of mysterious hymns
Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn
She kissed 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 drowned 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 willed 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 groaned Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man.



from Guinevere

[... *The affair between Lancelot and Guinevere has been revealed. Lancelot has returned to his own country, pursued by Arthur, and Guinevere has fled, incognito, to the convent of Almesbury. Modred takes advantage of Arthur's absence to usurp the throne*]

This night, a rumor wildly blown about
Came, that Sir Modred had usurped the realm,
And leagued him with the heathen, while the King
Was waging war on Lancelot: then she thought,
"With what a hate the people and the King
Must hate me," and bowed down upon her hands
Silent, until the little maid, who brooked
No silence, brake it, uttering "Late! so late!
What hour, I wonder, now?" and when she drew
No answer, by and by began to hum
An air the nuns had taught her; "Late, so late!"
Which when she heard, the Queen looked up, and said,
"O maiden, if indeed ye list to sing,
Sing, and unbind my heart that I may weep."
Whereat full willingly sang the little maid.

"Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

"No light had we: for that we do repent;
And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

"No light: so late! and dark and chill the night!
O let us in, that we may find the light!
Too late, too late: ye cannot enter now.

"Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
O let us in, though late, to kiss his feet!
No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now."

So sang the novice, while full passionately,
Her head upon her hands, remembering
Her thought when first she came, wept the sad Queen.
Then said the little novice prattling to her,

"O pray you, noble lady, weep no more;
But let my words, the words of one so small,
Who knowing nothing knows but to obey,
And if I do not there is penance given–
Comfort your sorrows; for they do not flow
From evil done; right sure am I of that,
Who see your tender grace and stateliness.
But weigh your sorrows with our lord the King's,
And weighing find them less; for gone is he
To wage grim war against Sir Lancelot there,
Round that strong castle where he holds the Queen;
And Modred whom he left in charge of all,
The traitor– Ah sweet lady, the King's grief
For his own self, and his own Queen, and realm,
Must needs be thrice as great as any of ours.
For me, I thank the saints, I am not great.
For if there ever come a grief to me
I cry my cry in silence, and have done.
None knows it, and my tears have brought me good:
But even were the griefs of little ones
As great as those of great ones, yet this grief
Is added to the griefs the great must bear,
That howsoever much they may desire
Silence, they cannot weep behind a cloud:
As even here they talk at Almesbury
About the good King and his wicked Queen,
And were I such a King with such a Queen,
Well might I wish to veil her wickedness,
But were I such a King, it could not be."

Then to her own sad heart muttered the Queen,
"Will the child kill me with her innocent talk?"
But openly she answered, "Must not I,
If this false traitor have displaced his lord,
Grieve with the common grief of all the realm?"

"Yea," said the maid, "this is all woman's grief,
That she is woman, whose disloyal life
Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round
Which good King Arthur founded, years ago,
With signs and miracles and wonders, there
At Camelot, ere the coming of the Queen."

[... *The novice continues to talk about the portents that heralded both Arthur's rise and the sinful betrayal by the queen, until Guinevere sends her away in anger. She then recalls how she first met Lancelot*]

Her memory from old habit of the mind
Went slipping back upon the golden days
In which she saw him first, when Lancelot came,
Reputed the best knight and goodliest man,
Ambassador, to lead her to his lord
Arthur, and led her forth, and far ahead
Of his and her retinue moving, they,
Rapt in sweet talk or lively, all on love
And sport and tilts and pleasure, (for the time
And maytime, and as yet no sin was dreamed,)
Rode under groves that looked a paradise
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth
That seemed the heavens upbreaking through the earth,
And on from hill to hill, and every day
Beheld at noon in some delicious dale
The silk pavilions of King Arthur raised
For brief repast or afternoon repose
By couriers gone before; and on again,
Till yet once more ere set of sun they saw

The Dragon of the great Pendragonship,
That crowned the state pavilion of the King,
Blaze by the rushing brook or silent well.

But when the Queen immersed in such a trance,
And moving through the past unconsciously,
Came to that point where first she saw the King
Ride toward her from the city, sighed to find
Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold,
High, self-contained, and passionless, not like him,
"Not like my Lancelot"– while she brooded thus
And grew half-guilty in her thoughts again,
There rode an armed warrior to the doors.
A murmuring whisper through the nunnery ran,
Then on a sudden a cry, "The King." She sat
Stiff-stricken, listening; but when armed feet
Through the long gallery from the outer doors
Rang coming, prone from off her seat she fell,
And grovelled with her face against the floor:
There with her milkwhite arms and shadowy hair
She made her face a darkness from the King:
And in the darkness heard his armed feet
Pause by her; then came silence, then a voice,
Monotonous and hollow like a Ghost's
Denouncing judgment, but though changed, the King's:

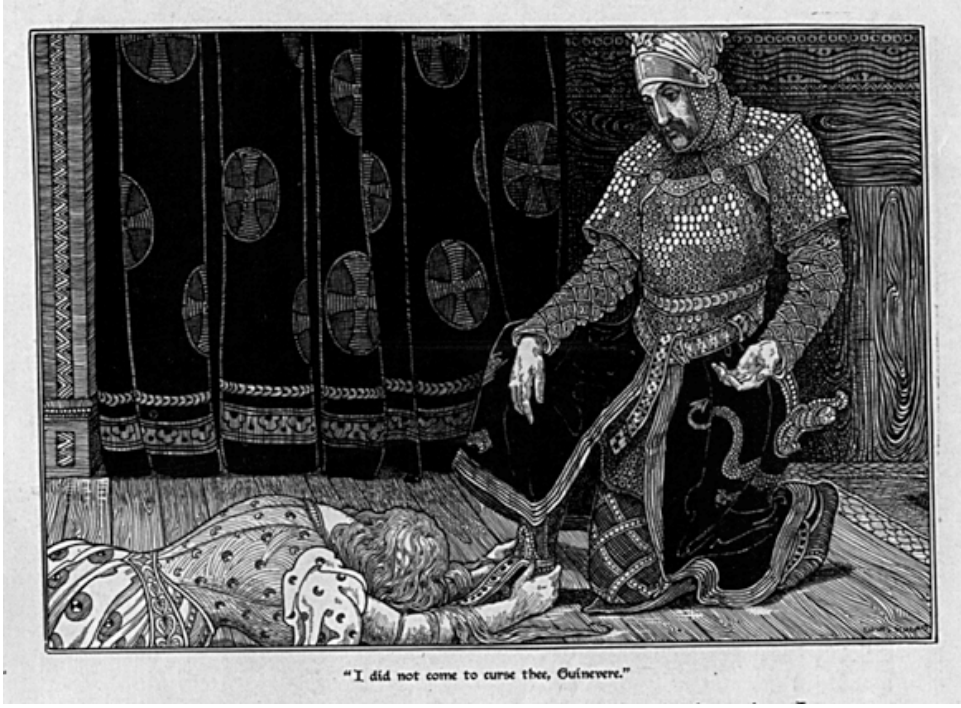
"Liest thou here so low, the child of one
I honoured, happy, dead before thy shame?
Well is it that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea;
Whom I, while yet Sir Lancelot, my right arm,
The mightiest of my knights, abode with me,
Have everywhere about this land of Christ

In twelve great battles ruining overthrown.
And knowest thou now from whence I come– from him,
From waging bitter war with him: and he,
That did not shun to smite me in worse way,
Had yet that grace of courtesy in him left,
He spared to lift his hand against the King
Who made him knight: but many a knight was slain;
And many more, and all his kith and kin
Clave to him, and abode in his own land.
And many more when Modred raised revolt,
Forgetful of their troth and fealty, clave
To Modred, and a remnant stays with me.
And of this remnant will I leave a part,
True men who love me still, for whom I live,
To guard thee in the wild hour coming on,
Lest but a hair of this low head be harmed.
Fear not: thou shalt be guarded till my death.
Howbeit I know, if ancient prophecies
Have erred not, that I march to meet my doom.
Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me,
That I the King should greatly care to live;
For thou hast spoilt the purpose of my life.
Bear with me for the last time while I show,
Even for thy sake, the sin which thou hast sinned.
For when the Roman left us, and their law
Relaxed its hold upon us, and the ways
Were filled with rapine, here and there a deed
Of prowess done redressed a random wrong.
But I was first of all the kings who drew
The knighthood-errant of this realm and all
The realms together under me, their Head,
In that fair Order of my Table Round,
A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear

To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honour his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her; for indeed I knew
Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.
And all this throve before I wedded thee,
Believing, "lo mine helpmate, one to feel
My purpose and rejoicing in my joy."
Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
Then others, following these my mightiest knights,
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
Sinned also, till the loathsome opposite
Of all my heart had destined did obtain,
And all through thee! so that this life of mine
I guard as God's high gift from scathe and wrong,
Not greatly care to lose; but rather think
How sad it were for Arthur, should he live,
To sit once more within his lonely hall,
And miss the wonted number of my knights,
And miss to hear high talk of noble deeds
As in the golden days before thy sin.
For which of us, who might be left, could speak
Of the pure heart, nor seem to glance at thee?
And in thy bowers of Camelot or of Usk

Thy shadow still would glide from room to room,
And I should evermore be vext with thee
In hanging robe or vacant ornament,
Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair.
For think not, though thou wouldst not love thy lord,
Thy lord has wholly lost his love for thee.
I am not made of so slight elements.
Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame.
I hold that man the worst of public foes
Who either for his own or children's sake,
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
Whom he knows false, abide and rule the house:
For being through his cowardice allowed
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,
She like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young.
Worst of the worst were that man he that reigns!
Better the King's waste hearth and aching heart
Than thou reseated in thy place of light,
The mockery of my people, and their bane."

He paused, and in the pause she crept an inch
Nearer, and laid her hands about his feet.
Far off a solitary trumpet blew.
Then waiting by the doors the warhorse neighed
As at a friend's voice, and he spake again:



"I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere."

"Yet think not that I come to urge thy crimes,
I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere,
I, whose vast pity almost makes me die
To see thee, laying there thy golden head,
My pride in happier summers, at my feet.
The wrath which forced my thoughts on that fierce law,
The doom of treason and the flaming death,
(When first I learnt thee hidden here) is past.
The pang– which while I weighed thy heart with one
Too wholly true to dream untruth in thee,
Made my tears burn– is also past– in part.
And all is past, the sin is sinned, and I,
Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God
Forgives: do thou for thine own soul the rest.
But how to take last leave of all I loved?
O golden hair, with which I used to play
Not knowing! O imperial-moulded form,
And beauty such as never woman wore,
Until it came a kingdom's curse with thee–

I cannot touch thy lips, they are not mine,
But Lancelot's: nay, they never were the King's.
I cannot take thy hand; that too is flesh,
And in the flesh thou hast sinned; and mine own flesh,
Here looking down on thine polluted, cries
"I loathe thee:" yet not less, O Guinevere,
For I was ever virgin save for thee,
My love through flesh hath wrought into my life
So far, that my doom is, I love thee still.
Let no man dream but that I love thee still.
Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,
Hereafter in that world where all are pure
We two may meet before high God, and thou
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know
I am thine husband– not a smaller soul,
Nor Lancelot, nor another. Leave me that,
I charge thee, my last hope. Now must I hence.
Through the thick night I hear the trumpet blow:
They summon me their King to lead mine hosts
Far down to that great battle in the west,
Where I must strike against the man they call
My sister's son– no kin of mine, who leagues
With Lords of the White Horse, heathen, and knights,
Traitors– and strike him dead, and meet myself
Death, or I know not what mysterious doom.
And thou remaining here wilt learn the event;
But hither shall I never come again,
Never lie by thy side; see thee no more–
Farewell!"

[... *Guinevere is overcome with remorse*]

"Gone– my lord!
Gone through my sin to slay and to be slain!
And he forgave me, and I could not speak.

Farewell? I should have answered his farewell.
His mercy choked me. Gone, my lord the King,
My own true lord! how dare I call him mine?
The shadow of another cleaves to me,
And makes me one pollution: he, the King,
Called me polluted: shall I kill myself?
What help in that? I cannot kill my sin,
If soul be soul; nor can I kill my shame;
No, nor by living can I live it down.
The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months,
The months will add themselves and make the years,
The years will roll into the centuries,
And mine will ever be a name of scorn.
I must not dwell on that defeat of fame.
Let the world be; that is but of the world.
What else? what hope? I think there was a hope,
Except he mocked me when he spake of hope;
His hope he called it; but he never mocks,
For mockery is the fume of little hearts.
And blessed be the King, who hath forgiven
My wickedness to him, and left me hope
That in mine own heart I can live down sin
And be his mate hereafter in the heavens
Before high God. Ah great and gentle lord,
Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint
Among his warring senses, to thy knights–
To whom my false voluptuous pride, that took
Full easily all impressions from below,
Would not look up, or half-despised the height
To which I would not or I could not climb–
I thought I could not breathe in that fine air
That pure severity of perfect light–
I yearned for warmth and colour which I found
In Lancelot– now I see thee what thou art,
Thou art the highest and most human too,
Not Lancelot, nor another. Is there none

Will tell the King I love him though so late?
Now– ere he goes to the great Battle? none:
Myself must tell him in that purer life,
But now it were too daring. Ah my God,
What might I not have made of thy fair world,
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?
It was my duty to have loved the highest:
It surely was my profit had I known:
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
We needs must love the highest when we see it,
Not Lancelot, nor another."

[... *Guinevere reveals her identity to the nuns, and joins them, eventually becoming abbess and dying after three years in that role*]

from The Passing of Arthur

[... *Sir Bedivere, the last survivor of the final battle, recalls the battle and Arthur's death*]

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
"Far other is this battle in the west
Whereto we move, than when we strove in youth,
And brake the petty kings, and fought with Rome,
Or thrust the heathen from the Roman wall,
And shook him through the north. Ill doom is mine
To war against my people and my knights.
The king who fights his people fights himself.
And they my knights, who loved me once, the stroke
That strikes them dead is as my death to me.
Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way
Through this blind haze, which ever since I saw
One lying in the dust at Almesbury,
Hath folded in the passes of the world."

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
And ever pushed Sir Modred, league by league,
Back to the sunset bound of Lyonnesse–
A land of old upheaven from the abyss
By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelt,
And the long mountains ended in a coast
Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
There the pursuer could pursue no more,
And he that fled no further fly the King;
And there, that day when the great light of heaven
Burned at his lowest in the rolling year,
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea:
Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew

Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
With formless fear; and even on Arthur fell
Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
And some had visions out of golden youth,
And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
Look in upon the battle; and in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base,
And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battleaxes on shattered helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Looked up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

[... *Arthur kills Modred, but is fatally wounded himself. He asks Bedivere to throw Excalibur back into the lake from which he had received it at the beginning of his reign. Bedivere at first decides to keep the sword and tells the king he has cast it away, but Arthur knows he is lying; finally Bedivere throws Excalibur into the lake, where an arm rises from the water to reclaim the sword. Bedivere returns to Arthur to tell him what has happened.*]

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

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

But, as he walked, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sighed the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die."
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walked,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clanged round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels–
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream– by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shivered to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony

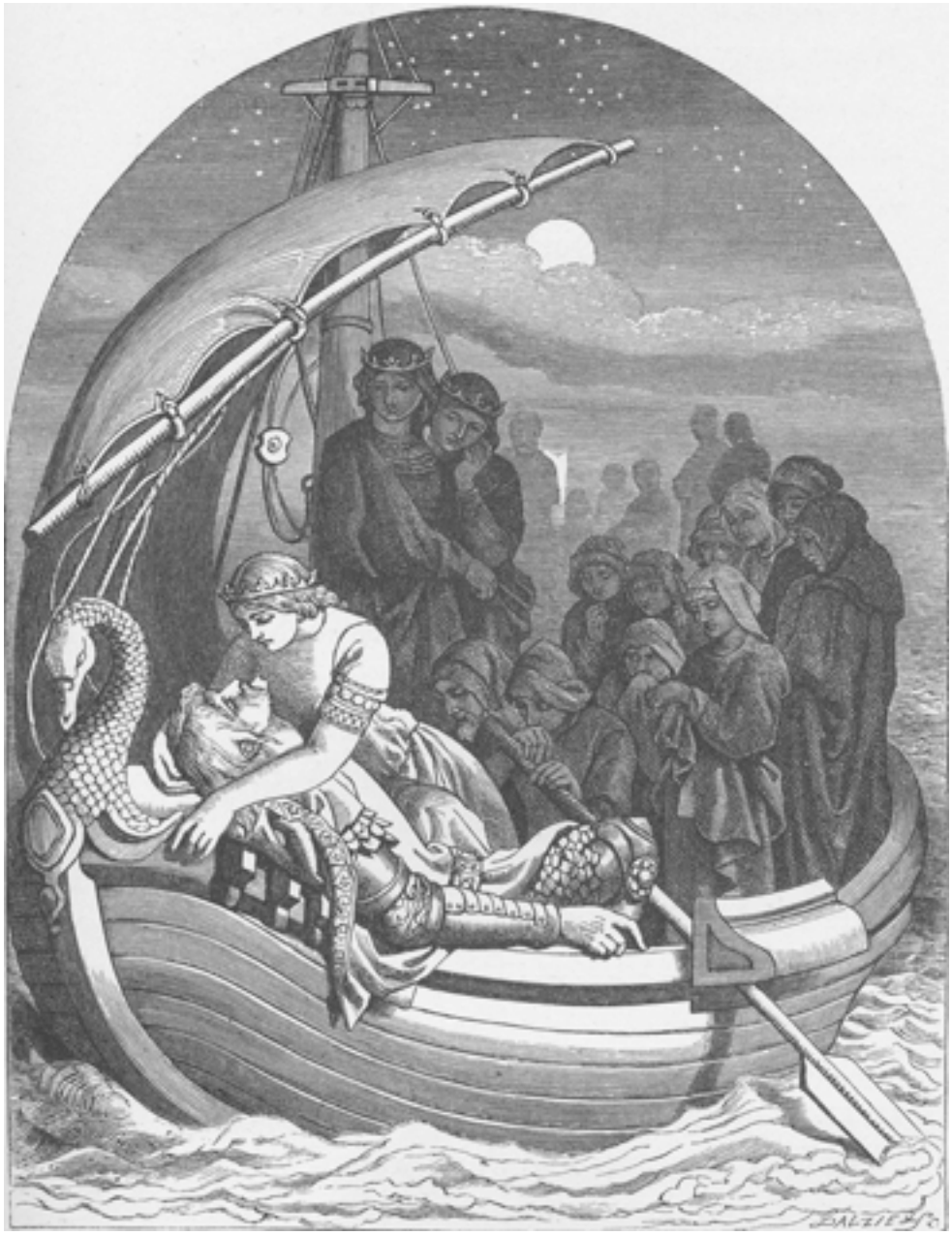
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmured Arthur, "Place me in the barge."
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shattered casque, and chafed his hands,
And called him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the withered moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dashed with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls–
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the daïs-throne– were parched with dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mixed with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shattered column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot through the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved

Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds."

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seëst– if indeed I go
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)—
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."



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

And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn
Amazed him, and he groaned, "The King is gone."
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,
"From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

Whereat he slowly turned and slowly clomb
The last hard footstep of that iron crag;
Thence marked the black hull moving yet, and cried,
"He passes to be King among the dead,
And after healing of his grievous wound
He comes again; but–if he come no more–
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,
Who shrieked and wailed, the three whereat we gazed
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
They stood before his throne in silence, friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?"

Then from the dawn it seemed there came, but faint
As from beyond the limit of the world,
Like the last echo born of a great cry,
Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb
Even to the highest he could climb, and saw,
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,
Down that long water opening on the deep
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go
From less to less and vanish into light.
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

Text from The Camelot Project, University of Rochester

Robert Browning (1812-1899)

Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came

My first thought was, he lied in every word,
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
Askance to watch the working of his lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee that pursed and scored
Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
All travellers who might find him posted there,
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed: neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,
So much as gladness that some end might be.

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

As when a sick man very near to death
Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,
And hears one bid the other go, draw breath

Freelier outside ("since all is o'er," he saith,
"And the blow fallen no grieving can amend";)

31 While some discuss if near the other graves
Be room enough for this, and when a day
Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
With care about the banners, scarves and staves:
And still the man hears all, and only craves
He may not shame such tender love and stay.

37 Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
So many times among "The Band"—to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best,
And all the doubt was now—should I be fit?

43 So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
That hateful cripple, out of his highway
Into the path he pointed. All the day
Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.

49 For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; grey plain all round:
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
I might go on; nought else remained to do.

55 So, on I went. I think I never saw
Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:
For flowers—as well expect a cedar grove!
But cockle, spurge, according to their law
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,

You'd think; a burr had been a treasure-trove.

No! penury, inertness and grimace,
In some strange sort, were the land's portion. "See
Or shut your eyes," said Nature peevishly,
"It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
'Tis the Last Judgment's fire must cure this place,
Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free."

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents.

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
Stood stupefied, however he came there:
Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,
With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain,
And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;
Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;
I never saw a brute I hated so;
He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier's art:
One taste of the old time sets all to rights.

Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
An arm in mine to fix me to the place
That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace!
Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

Giles then, the soul of honour—there he stands
Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
What honest men should dare (he said) he durst.
Good—but the scene shifts—faugh! what hangman hands
In to his breast a parchment? His own bands
Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

Better this present than a past like that;
Back therefore to my darkening path again!
No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
Will the night send a howlet or a bat?
I asked: when something on the dismal flat
Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

A sudden little river crossed my path
As unexpected as a serpent comes.
No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;
This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath
Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

So petty yet so spiteful! All along
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:
The river which had done them all the wrong,
Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

Which, while I forded,—good saints, how I feared
To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
—It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
Now for a better country. Vain presage!
Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,
Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
Soil to a plash? Toads in a poisoned tank,
Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage—

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.
What penned them there, with all the plain to choose?
No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,
None out of it. Mad brewage set to work
Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk
Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

And more than that—a furlong on—why, there!
What bad use was that engine for, that wheel,
Or brake, not wheel—that harrow fit to reel
Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air
Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,
Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,
Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
Changes and off he goes!) within a rood—
Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,

Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
Broke into moss or substances like boils;
Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

And just as far as ever from the end!
Nought in the distance but the evening, nought
To point my footstep further! At the thought,
A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,
Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I sought.

For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,
'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
All round to mountains—with such name to grace
Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.
How thus they had surprised me,—solve it, you!
How to get from them was no clearer case.

Yet half I seemed to recognise some trick
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when—
In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
Progress this way. When, in the very nick
Of giving up, one time more, came a click
As when a trap shuts—you're inside the den!

Burningly it came on me all at once,
This was the place! those two hills on the right,
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Dunce,
Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,
After a life spent training for the sight!

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart

Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

Not see? because of night perhaps?—why, day
Came back again for that! before it left,
The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:
The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—
"Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!"

Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled
Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears
Of all the lost adventurers my peers,—
How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
And such was fortunate, yet each of old
Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

There they stood, ranged along the hillsides, met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew. "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*"

Robert Browning, *Men and Women*, 2 vols. (1855.) Rev. 1863.

John Ciardi (1916-1986)

Launcelot in Hell

That noon we banged like tubs in a blast from Hell's mouth.
Axes donged on casques and the dead steamed through their armor,
their wounds frying. Horses screamed like cats, and men
ran through their own dust like darks howling. My country
went up in flames to the last rick and roof, and the smoke
was my own breath in me scorching the world bare.

We fought. May the clerk eat his own hand in fire forever
who wrote I would not face Arthur. Iron sparks iron.
We fought as we had been made, iron to iron. Who takes
a field from me tastes his own blood on it.
Three times I knocked him from the saddle. What's a king?—
he'd had the best mare ever danced on turf

and couldn't sit *that* saddle. Well, I rode her:
king's mount from bell to cockrow while bed, castle, and country
shook under us, and he snored holiness to a sleeping sword
from the fairies. Excalibur's ex-horseman. Yes, I fought him:
I took my damnation as it came and would have hacked
a thousand Arthurs small to mount her again.

He did better by a warhorse. That saddle, at least, he knew
how to climb into. Iron to iron he charged, and could have knocked
a castle over. But still a fool, too pure for a feint
or sidestep. Three times I dumped him with his ribs stove
and could have finished him backhand, but reined and waited
with my own head split and a puddle of blood in my pants.

The fourth, he hove dead already into the saddle and came on.
But even a king won't work with no blood in him:
his point dropped till it grounded, and poled him
over his horse's rump. And I did not rein but took him
clean in air, though I broke my arm to do it. And there he lay:
my two horns on his head, my third through his back.

What can a clerk know of the day of dead kings and dead countries?
I blew and no one answered. The men were dead
and scarcely boys enough left to carry a king's bones
to the smoke of the burned chapel. What other burial
was done that day was done by crows and gypsies. And in my heart:
where would I find another worth damnation?

I never turned back and I never looked back. My country
burned behind me and a king lay skewered on a charred altar,
his sword in blood at my feet. I took it up and flung it
into a swamp. He had bled into it: why hold back his sword?
No fairy arm reached out of the muck to catch it. That
was another life and spent, and what was there left to save?

Except the mare! Even bled down to dust and my bones shivered,
my veins pumped at the thought of her. Why else
had I cracked king, castle, and my own head? I rode,
and mended as I rode—mended enough—enough to be still alive—
or half alive—when I found her. And when I had waited
a cool two hours at her door, what came to meet me?

A nun! Eight thousand men dead and the best iron in England
black in the burned stones of a burned shire, and my own bones
stitched in by nothing but scars, and there she stood,
black as the day we had made of the world, and gave me
—a litany of tears! A whore of Heaven wailing
from a black cassock as if she stood naked in a hollow tree!

With her eyes turned in unseeing: as if to Heaven:
as if there were no world and we had not dared it
beyond damnation! That was the death of all:
she dared not even look at what we were! And for *this*
I had fed the best meat in England to carrion crows
and left a crown in muck for a gypsy's picking.

I did not turn back and I did not look back.
I had left a king and country dead without turning.
Should I turn now for a mare? Let Heaven ride her spavined:
I had the heat of her once, and I'd sooner
have turned Saracen and ripped the crosses from Europe
than deny my blood spilled into his in the field that made us.

Once of a world she danced like flame, and the man who would not
die to be scorched there was dead already. Dead as the clerk
who rhymed us to a moral. There is no moral. I was. He was. She was.
Blood is a war. I broke my bones on his, iron to iron.
And would again. Without her. Stroke for stroke. For his own sake.
Because no other iron dared me whole.

Text from Poetry 97.4 (1961), pp. 237-39

Rupert Brooke (1887-1915)

1914 V. The Soldier

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

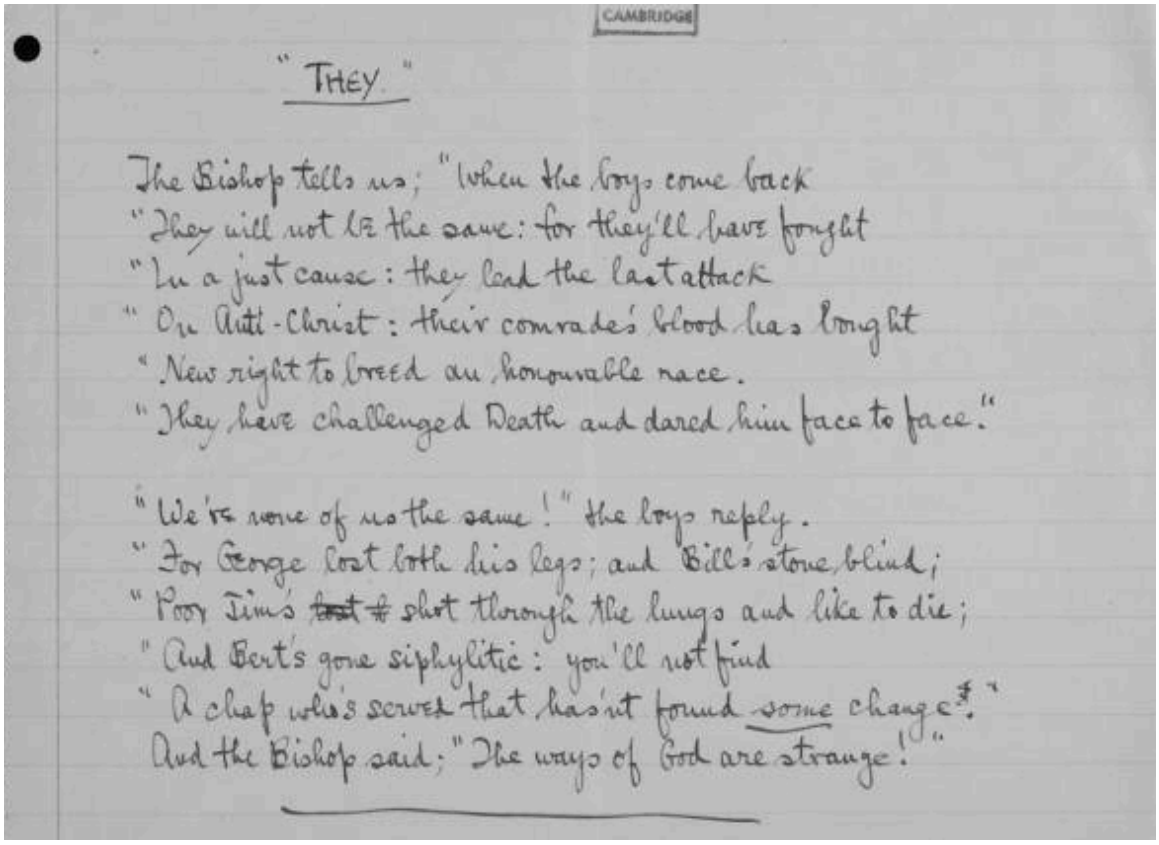
And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Rupert Brooke, *"1914" Five Sonnets* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1915).

Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)

‘They’

The Bishop tells us: ‘When the boys come back
’They will not be the same; for they’ll have fought
’In a just cause: they lead the last attack
’On Anti-Christ; their comrades’ blood has bought
’New right to breed an honourable race,
’They have challenged Death and dared him face to face.’
‘We’re none of us the same!’ the boys reply.
’For George lost both his legs; and Bill’s stone blind;
’Poor Jim’s shot through the lungs and like to die;
’And Bert’s gone syphilitic: you’ll not find
’A chap who’s served that hasn’t found some change.
’ And the Bishop said: ‘The ways of God are strange!’



Text and image from The First World War Poetry Digital Archive

Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918)

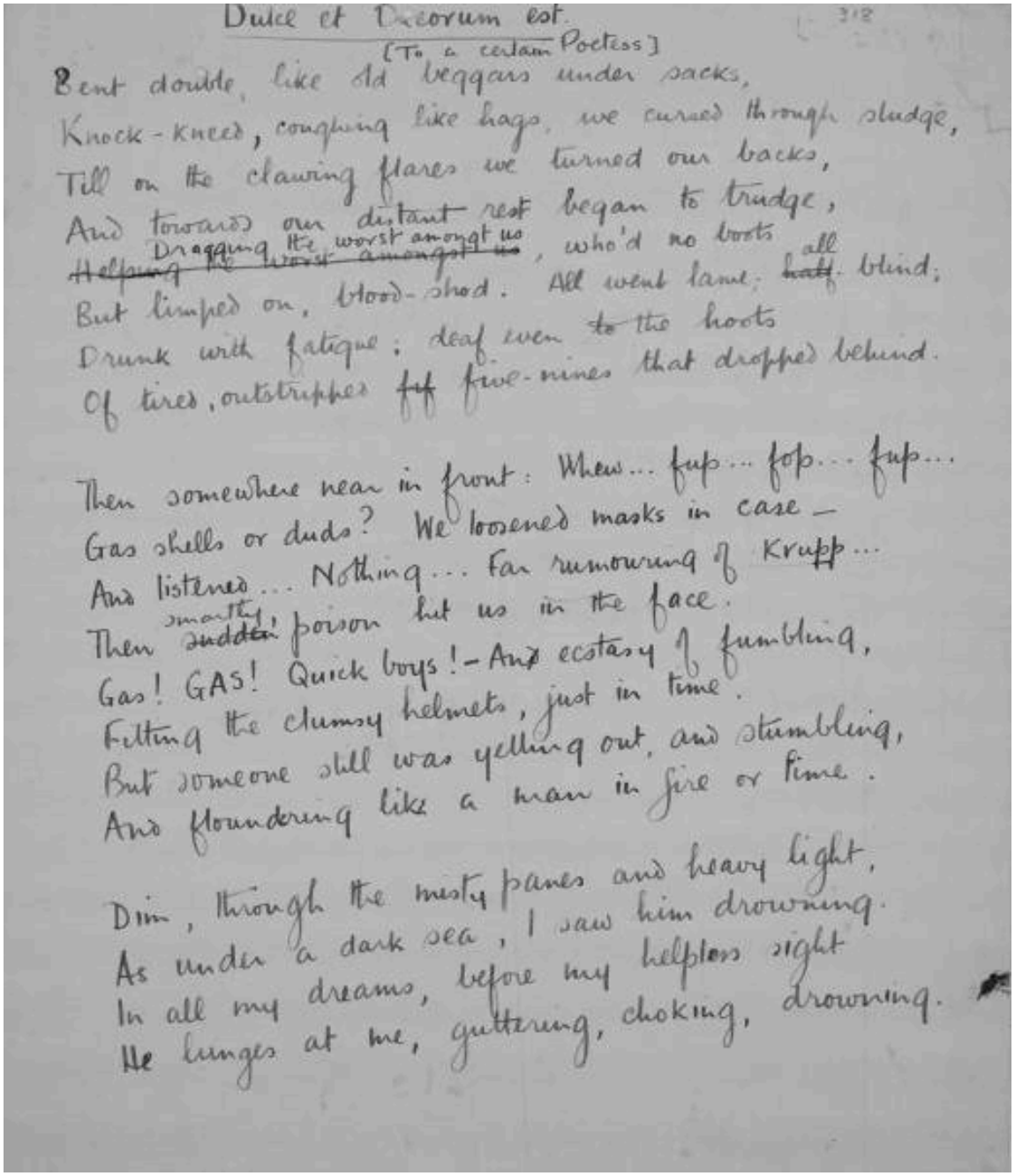
Break of Day in the Trenches

The darkness crumbles away.
It is the same old Druid Time as ever.
Only a live thing leaps my hand,
A queer sardonic rat,
As I pull the parapet's poppy
To stick behind my ear.
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.
Now you have touched this English hand
You will do the same to a German
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the sleeping green between.
It seems, odd thing, you grin as you pass
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,
Less chanced than you for life,
Bonds to the whims of murder,
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
The torn fields of France.
What do you see in our eyes
At the shrieking iron and flame
Hurl'd through still heavens?
What quaver—-what heart aghast?
Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping,
But mine in my ear is safe—-
Just a little white with the dust.

Text from The First World War Poetry Digital Archive

Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

Dulce et Decorum Est


Dulce et Decorum est.
[To a certain Poetess]
Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the clawing flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge,
Dragging the worst amongst us, who'd no boots all
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped five-nines that dropped behind.

Then somewhere near in front: Whew... fup... fop... fup...
Gas shells or duds? We loosened masks in case —
And listened... Nothing... Far rumouring of Krupp...
Then smartly poison hit us in the face.
Gas! GAS! Quick boys! — An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets, just in time.
But someone still was yelling out, and stumbling,
And floundering like a man in fire or lime.

Dim, through the misty panes and heavy light,
As under a dark sea, I saw him drowning.
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight
He lunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

1 Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.

Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin,
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

Wilfred Owen, *Poems By Wilfred Owen with an Introduction by Siegfried Sassoon* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1921)

Image from First World War Poetry Digital Archive

Robert Graves (1895-1985)

Recalling War

Entrance and exit wounds are silvered clean,
The track aches only when the rain reminds.
The one-legged man forgets his leg of wood,
The one-armed man his jointed wooden arm.
The blinded man sees with his ears and hands
As much or more than once with both his eyes.
Their war was fought these 20 years ago
And now assumes the nature-look of time,
As when the morning traveller turns and views
His wild night-stumbling carved into a hill.

What, then, was war? No mere discord of flags
But an infection of the common sky
That sagged ominously upon the earth
Even when the season was the airiest May.
Down pressed the sky, and we, oppressed, thrust out
Boastful tongue, clenched fist and valiant yard.
Natural infirmities were out of mode,
For Death was young again; patron alone
Of healthy dying, premature fate-spasm.

Fear made fine bed-fellows. Sick with delight
At life's discovered transitoriness,
Our youth became all-flesh and waived the mind.
Never was such antiqueness of romance,
Such tasty honey oozing from the heart.
And old importances came swimming back -
Wine, meat, log-fires, a roof over the head,
A weapon at the thigh, surgeons at call.
Even there was a use again for God -
A word of rage in lack of meat, wine, fire,
In ache of wounds beyond all surgeoning.

War was return of earth to ugly earth,
War was foundering of sublimities,
Extinction of each happy art and faith
By which the world has still kept head in air,
Protesting logic or protesting love,
Until the unendurable moment struck -
The inward scream, the duty to run mad.

And we recall the merry ways of guns -
Nibbling the walls of factory and church
Like a child, piecrust; felling groves of trees
Like a child, dandelions with a switch.
Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill,
Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall:
A sight to be recalled in elder days
When learnedly the future we devote
To yet more boastful visions of despair.

As printed in The Guardian, November 13, 2008, from The Centenary Selected Poems

John Keats (1795-1821)

La Belle Dame sans Merci

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,
Alone and palely loitering;
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever dew;
And on thy cheek a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads
Full beautiful, a faery's child;
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long;
For sideways would she lean, and sing
A faery's song.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew;

And sure in language strange she said,
I love thee true.

She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she gaz'd and sighed deep,
And there I shut her wild sad eyes—
So kiss'd to sleep.

And there we slumber'd on the moss,
And there I dream'd, ah woe betide,
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
Who cry'd—"La belle Dame sans merci
Hath thee in thrall!"

I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold hill side.

And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

John Keats, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820).

Tam Lin

1. O I forbid you, maidens a',
That wear gowd on your hair,
To come or gae by Carterhaugh,
For young Tam Lin is there.

2. There's nane that gaes by Carterhaugh
But they leave him a wad,
Either their rings, or green mantles,
Or else their maidenhead.

3. Janet has kilted her green kirtle
A little aboon her knee,
And she has broded her yellow hair
A little aboon her bree,
And she's awa to Carterhaugh
As fast as she can hie.

4. When she came to carterhaugh
Tam Lin was at the well,
And there she fand his steed standing,
But away was himsel.

5. She had na pu'd a double rose,
A rose but only twa,
Till upon then started young Tam Lin,
Says, Lady, thou's pu nae mae.

6. Why pu's thou the rose, Janet,
And why breaks thou the wand?
Or why comes thou to Carterhaugh
Withoutten my command?

7. “Carterhaugh, it is my own,
My daddy gave it me,
I’ll come and gang by Carterhaugh,
And ask nae leave at thee.”

8. Janet has kilted her green kirtle
A little aboon her knee,
And she has broded her yellow hair
A little aboon her bree,
And she is to her father’s ha,
As fast as she can hie.

9. Four and twenty ladies fair
Were playing at the ba,
And out then came the fair Janet,
The flower among them a’.

10. Four and twenty ladies fair
Were playing at the chess,
And out then came the fair Janet,
As green as onie glass.

11. Out then spake an auld grey knight,
Lay oer the castle wa,
And says, Alas, fair Janet, for thee,
But we’ll be blamed a’.

12. “Haud your tongue, ye auld fac’d knight,
Some ill death may ye die!
Father my bairn on whom I will,
I’ll father none on thee.”

13. Out then spak her father dear,
And he spak meek and mild,
”And ever alas, sweet Janet,” he says,
”I think thou gaest wi child.”

14. “If that I gae wi child, father,
Mysel maun bear the blame,
There’s neer a laird about your ha,
Shall get the bairn’s name.

15. “If my love were an earthly knight,
As he’s an elfin grey,
I wad na gie my ain true-love
For nae lord that ye hae.

16. “The steed that my true love rides on
Is lighter than the wind,
Wi siller he is shod before,
Wi burning gowd behind.”

17. Janet has kilted her green kirtle
A little aboon her knee,
And she has broded her yellow hair
A little aboon her bree,
And she’s awa to Carterhaugh
As fast as she can hie.

18. When she came to Carterhaugh,
Tam Lin was at the well,
And there she fand his steed standing,
But away was himsel.

19. She had na pu’d a double rose,
A rose but only twa,
Till up then started young Tam Lin,
Says, Lady, thou pu’s nae mae.

20. “Why pu’s thou the rose, Janet,
Amang the groves sae green,
And a’ to kill the bonny babe
That we gat us between?”

21. “O tell me, tell me, Tam Lin,” she says,
”For’s sake that died on tree,
If eer ye was in holy chapel,
Or christendom did see?”

22. “Roxbrugh he was my grandfather,
Took me with him to bide
And ance it fell upon a day
That wae did me betide.

23. “And ance it fell upon a day
A cauld day and a snell,
When we were frae the hunting come,
That frae my horse I fell,
The Queen o’ Fairies she caught me,
In yon green hill do dwell.

24. “And pleasant is the fairy land,
But, an eerie tale to tell,
Ay at the end of seven years,
We pay a tiend to hell,
I am sae fair and fu o flesh,
I’m feard it be mysel.

25. “But the night is Halloween, lady,
The morn is Hallowday,
Then win me, win me, an ye will,
For weel I wat ye may.

26. “Just at the mirk and midnight hour
The fairy folk will ride,
And they that wad their true-love win,
At Miles Cross they maun bide.”

27. “But how shall I thee ken, Tam Lin,
Or how my true-love know,
Amang sa mony unco knights,
The like I never saw?”

28. “O first let pass the black, lady,
And syne let pass the brown,
But quickly run to the milk-white steed,
Pu ye his rider down.

29. “For I’ll ride on the milk-white steed,
And ay nearest the town,
Because I was an earthly knight
They gie me that renown.

30. “My right hand will be gloved, lady,
My left hand will be bare,
Cockt up shall my bonnet be,
And kaimed down shall my hair,
And thae’s the takens I gie thee,
Nae doubt I will be there.

31. “They’ll turn me in your arms, lady,
Into an esk and adder,
But hold me fast, and fear me not,
I am your bairn’s father.

32. “They’ll turn me to a bear sae grim,
And then a lion bold,
But hold me fast, and fear me not,
And ye shall love your child.

33. “Again they’ll turn me in your arms
To a red het gand of airn,
But hold me fast, and fear me not,
I’ll do you nae harm.

34. “And last they’ll turn me in your arms
Into the burning gleed,
Then throw me into well water,
O throw me in with speed.

35. “And then I’ll be your ain true-love,
I’ll turn a naked knight,
Then cover me wi your green mantle,
And hide me out o sight.”

36. Gloomy, gloomy was the night,
And eerie was the way,
As fair Jenny in her green mantle
To Miles Cross she did gae.

37. At the mirk and midnight hour
She heard the bridles sing,
She was as glad at that
As any earthly thing.

38. First she let the black pass by,
And syne she let the brown,
But quickly she ran to the milk-white steed,
And pu’d the rider down.

39. Sae weel she minded what he did say,
And young Tam Lin did win,
Syne covered him wi her green mantle,
As blythe’s a bird in spring

40. Out then spak the Queen o Fairies,
Out of a bush o broom,
"Them that has gotten young Tam Lin
Has gotten a stately-groom."

41. Out then spak the Queen o Fairies,
And an angry woman was she,
"Shame betide her ill-far'd face,
And an ill death may she die,
For she's taen awa the bonniest knight
In a' my companie.

42. "But had I kend, Tam Lin," said she,
"What now this night I see,
I wad hae taen out thy twa grey een,
And put in twa een o tree."

In The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, 1882-1898 by Francis James Child

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Goblin Market

Morning and evening
Maids heard the goblins cry:
"Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:
Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpeck'd cherries,
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheek'd peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries,
Wild free-born cranberries,
Crab-apples, dewberries,
Pine-apples, blackberries,
Apricots, strawberries;—
All ripe together
In summer weather,—
Morns that pass by,
Fair eves that fly;
Come buy, come buy:
Our grapes fresh from the vine,
Pomegranates full and fine,
Dates and sharp bullaces,
Rare pears and greengages,
Damsons and bilberries,
Taste them and try:
Currants and gooseberries,
Bright-fire-like barberries,
Figs to fill your mouth,
Citrons from the South,
Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;
Come buy, come buy."

Evening by evening
Among the brookside rushes,
Laura bow'd her head to hear,
Lizzie veil'd her blushes:
Crouching close together
In the cooling weather,
With clasping arms and cautioning lips,
With tingling cheeks and finger tips.
"Lie close," Laura said,
Pricking up her golden head:
"We must not look at goblin men,
We must not buy their fruits:
Who knows upon what soil they fed
Their hungry thirsty roots?"
"Come buy," call the goblins
Hobbling down the glen.

"Oh," cried Lizzie, "Laura, Laura,
You should not peep at goblin men."
Lizzie cover'd up her eyes,
Cover'd close lest they should look;
Laura rear'd her glossy head,
And whisper'd like the restless brook:
"Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie,
Down the glen tramp little men.
One hauls a basket,
One bears a plate,
One lugs a golden dish
Of many pounds weight.
How fair the vine must grow
Whose grapes are so luscious;
How warm the wind must blow
Through those fruit bushes."
"No," said Lizzie, "No, no, no;
Their offers should not charm us,
Their evil gifts would harm us."

She thrust a dimpled finger
In each ear, shut eyes and ran:
Curious Laura chose to linger
Wondering at each merchant man.
One had a cat's face,
One whisk'd a tail,
One tramp'd at a rat's pace,
One crawl'd like a snail,
One like a wombat prowl'd obtuse and furry,
One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry.
She heard a voice like voice of doves
Cooing all together:
They sounded kind and full of loves
In the pleasant weather.

Laura stretch'd her gleaming neck
Like a rush-imbedded swan,
Like a lily from the beck,
Like a moonlit poplar branch,
Like a vessel at the launch
When its last restraint is gone.

Backwards up the mossy glen
Turn'd and troop'd the goblin men,
With their shrill repeated cry,
"Come buy, come buy."
When they reach'd where Laura was
They stood stock still upon the moss,
Leering at each other,
Brother with queer brother;
Signalling each other,
Brother with sly brother.
One set his basket down,
One rear'd his plate;
One began to weave a crown
Of tendrils, leaves, and rough nuts brown

(Men sell not such in any town);
One heav'd the golden weight
Of dish and fruit to offer her:
"Come buy, come buy," was still their cry.
Laura stared but did not stir,
Long'd but had no money:
The whisk-tail'd merchant bade her taste
In tones as smooth as honey,
The cat-faced purr'd,
The rat-faced spoke a word
Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was heard;
One parrot-voiced and jolly
Cried "Pretty Goblin" still for "Pretty Polly;"—
One whistled like a bird.

But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste:
"Good folk, I have no coin;
To take were to purloin:
I have no copper in my purse,
I have no silver either,
And all my gold is on the furze
That shakes in windy weather
Above the rusty heather."
"You have much gold upon your head,"
They answer'd all together:
"Buy from us with a golden curl."
She clipp'd a precious golden lock,
She dropp'd a tear more rare than pearl,
Then suck'd their fruit globes fair or red:
Sweeter than honey from the rock,
Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,
Clearer than water flow'd that juice;
She never tasted such before,
How should it cloy with length of use?
She suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;

She suck'd until her lips were sore;
Then flung the emptied rinds away
But gather'd up one kernel stone,
And knew not was it night or day
As she turn'd home alone.

Lizzie met her at the gate
Full of wise upbraidings:
"Dear, you should not stay so late,
Twilight is not good for maidens;
Should not loiter in the glen
In the haunts of goblin men.
Do you not remember Jeanie,
How she met them in the moonlight,
Took their gifts both choice and many,
Ate their fruits and wore their flowers
Pluck'd from bowers
Where summer ripens at all hours?
But ever in the noonlight
She pined and pined away;
Sought them by night and day,
Found them no more, but dwindled and grew grey;
Then fell with the first snow,
While to this day no grass will grow
Where she lies low:
I planted daisies there a year ago
That never blow.
You should not loiter so."
"Nay, hush," said Laura:
"Nay, hush, my sister:
I ate and ate my fill,
Yet my mouth waters still;
To-morrow night I will
Buy more;" and kiss'd her:
"Have done with sorrow;
I'll bring you plums to-morrow

Fresh on their mother twigs,
Cherries worth getting;
You cannot think what figs
My teeth have met in,
What melons icy-cold
Piled on a dish of gold
Too huge for me to hold,
What peaches with a velvet nap,
Pellucid grapes without one seed:
Odorous indeed must be the mead
Whereon they grow, and pure the wave they drink
With lilies at the brink,
And sugar-sweet their sap."

Golden head by golden head,
Like two pigeons in one nest

Folded in each other's wings,
They lay down in their curtain'd bed:
Like two blossoms on one stem,
Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,
Like two wands of ivory
Tipp'd with gold for awful kings.
Moon and stars gaz'd in at them,
Wind sang to them lullaby,
Lumbering owls forbore to fly,
Not a bat flapp'd to and fro
Round their rest:
Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
Lock'd together in one nest.

Early in the morning
When the first cock crow'd his warning,
Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
Laura rose with Lizzie:
Fetch'd in honey, milk'd the cows,
Air'd and set to rights the house,
Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
Next churn'd butter, whipp'd up cream,
Fed their poultry, sat and sew'd;
Talk'd as modest maidens should:
Lizzie with an open heart,
Laura in an absent dream,
One content, one sick in part;
One warbling for the mere bright day's delight,
One longing for the night.

At length slow evening came:
They went with pitchers to the reedy brook;
Lizzie most placid in her look,
Laura most like a leaping flame.
They drew the gurgling water from its deep;

Lizzie pluck'd purple and rich golden flags,
Then turning homeward said: "The sunset flushes
Those furthest loftiest crags;
Come, Laura, not another maiden lags.
No wilful squirrel wags,
The beasts and birds are fast asleep."
But Laura loiter'd still among the rushes
And said the bank was steep.

And said the hour was early still
The dew not fall'n, the wind not chill;
Listening ever, but not catching
The customary cry,
"Come buy, come buy,"
With its iterated jingle
Of sugar-baited words:
Not for all her watching
Once discerning even one goblin
Racing, whisking, tumbling, hobbling;
Let alone the herds
That used to tramp along the glen,
In groups or single,
Of brisk fruit-merchant men.

Till Lizzie urged, "O Laura, come;
I hear the fruit-call but I dare not look:
You should not loiter longer at this brook:
Come with me home.
The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,
Each glowworm winks her spark,
Let us get home before the night grows dark:
For clouds may gather
Though this is summer weather,
Put out the lights and drench us through;
Then if we lost our way what should we do?"

Laura turn'd cold as stone
To find her sister heard that cry alone,
That goblin cry,
"Come buy our fruits, come buy."
Must she then buy no more such dainty fruit?
Must she no more such succous pasture find,
Gone deaf and blind?
Her tree of life droop'd from the root:
She said not one word in her heart's sore ache;
But peering thro' the dimness, nought discerning,
Trudg'd home, her pitcher dripping all the way;
So crept to bed, and lay
Silent till Lizzie slept;
Then sat up in a passionate yearning,
And gnash'd her teeth for baulk'd desire, and wept
As if her heart would break.

Day after day, night after night,
Laura kept watch in vain
In sullen silence of exceeding pain.
She never caught again the goblin cry:
"Come buy, come buy;"—
She never spied the goblin men
Hawking their fruits along the glen:
But when the noon wax'd bright
Her hair grew thin and grey;
She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn
To swift decay and burn
Her fire away.

One day remembering her kernel-stone
She set it by a wall that faced the south;
Dew'd it with tears, hoped for a root,
Watch'd for a waxing shoot,
But there came none;
It never saw the sun,

It never felt the trickling moisture run:
While with sunk eyes and faded mouth
She dream'd of melons, as a traveller sees
False waves in desert drouth
With shade of leaf-crown'd trees,
And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze.

She no more swept the house,
Tended the fowls or cows,
Fetch'd honey, kneaded cakes of wheat,
Brought water from the brook:
But sat down listless in the chimney-nook
And would not eat.

Tender Lizzie could not bear
To watch her sister's cankerous care
Yet not to share.
She night and morning
Caught the goblins' cry:
"Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy;"—
Beside the brook, along the glen,
She heard the tramp of goblin men,
The yoke and stir
Poor Laura could not hear;
Long'd to buy fruit to comfort her,
But fear'd to pay too dear.
She thought of Jeanie in her grave,
Who should have been a bride;
But who for joys brides hope to have
Fell sick and died
In her gay prime,
In earliest winter time
With the first glazing rime,
With the first snow-fall of crisp winter time.

Till Laura dwindling
Seem'd knocking at Death's door:
Then Lizzie weigh'd no more
Better and worse;
But put a silver penny in her purse,
Kiss'd Laura, cross'd the heath with clumps of furze
At twilight, halted by the brook:
And for the first time in her life
Began to listen and look.

Laugh'd every goblin
When they spied her peeping:
Came towards her hobbling,
Flying, running, leaping,
Puffing and blowing,
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
Clucking and gobbling,
Mopping and mowing,
Full of airs and graces,
Pulling wry faces,
Demure grimaces,
Cat-like and rat-like,
Ratel- and wombat-like,
Snail-paced in a hurry,
Parrot-voiced and whistler,
Helter skelter, hurry skurry,
Chattering like magpies,
Fluttering like pigeons,
Gliding like fishes,—
Hugg'd her and kiss'd her:
Squeez'd and caress'd her:
Stretch'd up their dishes,
Panniers, and plates:
"Look at our apples
Russet and dun,
Bob at our cherries,

Bite at our peaches,
Citrons and dates,
Grapes for the asking,
Pears red with basking
Out in the sun,
Plums on their twigs;
Pluck them and suck them,
Pomegranates, figs."—

"Good folk," said Lizzie,
Mindful of Jeanie:
"Give me much and many: —
Held out her apron,
Toss'd them her penny.
"Nay, take a seat with us,
Honour and eat with us,"
They answer'd grinning:
"Our feast is but beginning.
Night yet is early,
Warm and dew-pearly,
Wakeful and starry:
Such fruits as these
No man can carry:
Half their bloom would fly,
Half their dew would dry,
Half their flavour would pass by.
Sit down and feast with us,
Be welcome guest with us,
Cheer you and rest with us."—
"Thank you," said Lizzie: "But one waits
At home alone for me:
So without further parleying,
If you will not sell me any
Of your fruits though much and many,
Give me back my silver penny
I toss'd you for a fee."—

They began to scratch their pates,
No longer wagging, purring,
But visibly demurring,
Grunting and snarling.
One call'd her proud,
Cross-grain'd, uncivil;
Their tones wax'd loud,
Their looks were evil.
Lashing their tails
They trod and hustled her,
Elbow'd and jostled her,
Claw'd with their nails,
Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,
Tore her gown and soil'd her stocking,
Twitch'd her hair out by the roots,
Stamp'd upon her tender feet,
Held her hands and squeez'd their fruits
Against her mouth to make her eat.

White and golden Lizzie stood,
Like a lily in a flood,—
Like a rock of blue-vein'd stone
Lash'd by tides obstreperously,—
Like a beacon left alone
In a hoary roaring sea,
Sending up a golden fire,—
Like a fruit-crown'd orange-tree
White with blossoms honey-sweet
Sore beset by wasp and bee,—
Like a royal virgin town
Topp'd with gilded dome and spire
Close beleaguer'd by a fleet
Mad to tug her standard down.

One may lead a horse to water,
Twenty cannot make him drink.
Though the goblins cuff'd and caught her,
Coax'd and fought her,
Bullied and besought her,
Scratch'd her, pinch'd her black as ink,
Kick'd and knock'd her,
Maul'd and mock'd her,
Lizzie utter'd not a word;
Would not open lip from lip
Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
But laugh'd in heart to feel the drip
Of juice that syrupp'd all her face,
And lodg'd in dimples of her chin,
And streak'd her neck which quaked like curd.
At last the evil people,
Worn out by her resistance,
Flung back her penny, kick'd their fruit
Along whichever road they took,
Not leaving root or stone or shoot;
Some writh'd into the ground,
Some div'd into the brook
With ring and ripple,
Some scudded on the gale without a sound,
Some vanish'd in the distance.

In a smart, ache, tingle,
Lizzie went her way;
Knew not was it night or day;
Sprang up the bank, tore thro' the furze,
Threaded copse and dingle,
And heard her penny jingle
Bouncing in her purse,—
Its bounce was music to her ear.
She ran and ran
As if she fear'd some goblin man

Dogg'd her with gibe or curse
Or something worse:
But not one goblin scurried after,
Nor was she prick'd by fear;
The kind heart made her windy-paced
That urged her home quite out of breath with haste
And inward laughter.

She cried, "Laura," up the garden,
"Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeez'd from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me;
For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant men."

Laura started from her chair,
Flung her arms up in the air,
Clutch'd her hair:
"Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted
For my sake the fruit forbidden?
Must your light like mine be hidden,
Your young life like mine be wasted,
Undone in mine undoing,
And ruin'd in my ruin,
Thirsty, canker'd, goblin-ridden?"—
She clung about her sister,
Kiss'd and kiss'd and kiss'd her:
Tears once again
Refresh'd her shrunken eyes,
Dropping like rain
After long sultry drouth;

Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,
She kiss'd and kiss'd her with a hungry mouth.

Her lips began to scorch,
That juice was wormwood to her tongue,
She loath'd the feast:
Writhing as one possess'd she leap'd and sung,
Rent all her robe, and wrung
Her hands in lamentable haste,
And beat her breast.
Her locks stream'd like the torch
Borne by a racer at full speed,
Or like the mane of horses in their flight,
Or like an eagle when she stems the light
Straight toward the sun,
Or like a caged thing freed,
Or like a flying flag when armies run.

Swift fire spread through her veins, knock'd at her heart,
Met the fire smouldering there
And overbore its lesser flame;
She gorged on bitterness without a name:
Ah! fool, to choose such part
Of soul-consuming care!
Sense fail'd in the mortal strife:
Like the watch-tower of a town
Which an earthquake shatters down,
Like a lightning-stricken mast,
Like a wind-uprooted tree
Spun about,
Like a foam-topp'd waterspout
Cast down headlong in the sea,
She fell at last;
Pleasure past and anguish past,
Is it death or is it life?

Life out of death.
That night long Lizzie watch'd by her,
Counted her pulse's flagging stir,
Felt for her breath,
Held water to her lips, and cool'd her face
With tears and fanning leaves:
But when the first birds chirp'd about their eaves,
And early reapers plodded to the place
Of golden sheaves,
And dew-wet grass
Bow'd in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
And new buds with new day
Open'd of cup-like lilies on the stream,
Laura awoke as from a dream,
Laugh'd in the innocent old way,
Hugg'd Lizzie but not twice or thrice;
Her gleaming locks show'd not one thread of grey,
Her breath was sweet as May
And light danced in her eyes.

Days, weeks, months, years
Afterwards, when both were wives
With children of their own;
Their mother-hearts beset with fears,
Their lives bound up in tender lives;
Laura would call the little ones
And tell them of her early prime,
Those pleasant days long gone
Of not-returning time:
Would talk about the haunted glen,
The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,
Their fruits like honey to the throat
But poison in the blood;
(Men sell not such in any town):
Would tell them how her sister stood
In deadly peril to do her good,

And win the fiery antidote:
Then joining hands to little hands
Would bid them cling together,
"For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands."

Christina Rossetti, Goblin Market and other Poems (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1862)

John Milton (1608-1674)

Paradise Lost

from **BOOK I**

To whom th' Arch-Enemy,
And thence in Heav'n call'd Satan, with bold words
Breaking the horrid silence thus began.
If thou beest he; But O how fall'n! how chang'd
From him, who in the happy Realms of Light
Cloth'd with transcendent brightness didst out-shine
Myriads though bright: If he whom mutual league,
United thoughts and counsels, equal hope
And hazard in the Glorious Enterprize,
Joynd with me once, now misery hath joynd
In equal ruin: into what Pit thou seest
From what highth fall'n, so much the stronger prov'd
He with his Thunder: and till then who knew
The force of those dire Arms? yet not for those,
Nor what the Potent Victor in his rage
Can else inflict, do I repent or change,
Though chang'd in outward lustre; that fixt mind
And high disdain, from sence of injur'd merit,
That with the mightiest rais'd me to contend,
And to the fierce contention brought along
Innumerable force of Spirits arm'd
That durst dislike his reign, and me preferring,
His utmost power with adverse power oppos'd
In dubious Battel on the Plains of Heav'n,
And shook his throne. What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?
That Glory never shall his wrath or might

Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace
With suppliant knee, and deifie his power,
Who from the terrour of this Arm so late
Doubted his Empire, that were low indeed,
That were an ignominy and shame beneath
This downfall; since by Fate the strength of Gods
And this Empyreal substance cannot fail,
Since through experience of this great event
In Arms not worse, in foresight much advanc't,
We may with more successful hope resolve
To wage by force or guile eternal Warr
Irreconcileable, to our grand Foe,
Who now triumphs, and in th' excess of joy
Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heav'n.

[...]

Is this the Region, this the Soil, the Clime,
Said then the lost Arch-Angel, this the seat
That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
Who now is Sovran can dispose and bid
What shall be right: fardest from him his best
Whom reason hath equald, force hath made supream
Above his equals. Farewel happy Fields
Where Joy for ever dwells: Hail horrours, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less then he
Whom Thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:

Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n.