

Classic Poetry Series

William Morris

- poems -

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William Morris (1834 - 1896)

William Morris was born in Essex and educated at Exeter College, Oxford. He was the founding editor of the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine (1856) in which many of his early poems appear. He was a practising painter (1857-62) and public lecturer on art, architecture and socialism (1877-96). He founded the Kelmscott Press, Hammersmith, in 1890 and was a founding member the same year of the Hammersmith Socialist Society. He helped found the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877) which he served as secretary. His designs in things like furniture and fabrics contributed to the Arts and Crafts Movement and changed Victorian taste. He was president of the Birmingham Society of Arts and master of the Art Workers Guild. He found time to produce literary works and early influences on him included the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin, Carlyle and Rossetti. He declined a position as a poetry professor at Oxford. A social and moral critic, he gave his first public lecture in 1887 and formed the Socialist League. He died, worn out by his various activities, and was buried at Kelmscott.

A Death Song

What cometh here from west to east awending?
And who are these, the marchers stern and slow?
We bear the message that the rich are sending
Aback to those who bade them wake and know.
Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day.

We asked them for a life of toilsome earning,
They bade us bide their leisure for our bread;
We craved to speak to tell our woeful learning;
We come back speechless, bearing back our dead.
Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day.

They will not learn; they have no ears to hearken.
They turn their faces from the eyes of fate;
Their gay-lit halls shut out the skies that darken.
But, lo! this dead man knocking at the gate.
Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day.

Here lies the sign that we shall break our prison;
Amidst the storm he won a prisoner's rest;
But in the cloudy dawn the sun arisen
Brings us our day of work to win the best.
Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all if they would dusk the day.

William Morris

A Good Knight In Prison

Wearily, drearily,
Half the day long,
Flap the great banners
High over the stone;
Strangely and eerily
Sounds the wind's song,
Bending the banner-poles.

While, all alone,
Watching the loophole's spark,
Lie I, with life all dark,
Feet tether'd, hands fetter'd
Fast to the stone,
The grim walls, square-letter'd
With prison'd men's groan.

Still strain the banner-poles
Through the wind's song,
Westward the banner rolls
Over my wrong.

William Morris

Atalanta's Race

Through thick Arcadian woods a hunter went,
Following the beasts upon a fresh spring day;
But since his horn-tipped bow but seldom bent,
Now at the noontide nought had happed to slay,
Within a vale he called his hounds away,
Hearkening the echoes of his lone voice cling
About the cliffs and through the beech-trees ring.

But when they ended, still awhile he stood,
And but the sweet familiar thrush could hear,
And all the day-long noises of the wood,
And o'er the dry leaves of the vanished year
His hounds' feet pattering as they drew anear,
And heavy breathing from their heads low hung,
To see the mighty corner bow unstrung.

Then smiling did he turn to leave the place,
But with his first step some new fleeting thought
A shadow cast across his sun-burnt face;
I think the golden net that April brought
From some warm world his wavering soul had caught;
For, sunk in vague sweet longing, did he go
Betwixt the trees with doubtful steps and slow.

Yet howsoever slow he went, at last
The trees grew sparser, and the wood was done;
Whereon one farewell backward look he cast,
Then, turning round to see what place was won,
With shaded eyes looked underneath the sun,
And o'er green meads and new-turned furrows brown
Beheld the gleaming of King Schœneus' town.

So thitherward he turned, and on each side
The folk were busy on the teeming land,
And man and maid from the brown furrows cried,
Or midst the newly blossomed vines did stand,
And as the rustic weapon pressed the hand
Thought of the nodding of the well-filled ear,
Or how the knife the heavy bunch should shear.

Merry it was: about him sung the birds,
The spring flowers bloomed along the firm dry road,
The sleek-skinned mothers of the sharp-horned herds
Now for the barefoot milking-maidens lowed;
While from the freshness of his blue abode,
Glad his death-bearing arrows to forget,
The broad sun blazed, nor scattered plagues as yet.

Through such fair things unto the gates he came,
And found them open, as though peace were there;
Wherethrough, unquestioned of his race or name,
He entered, and along the streets 'gan fare,

Which at the first of folk were well-nigh bare;
But pressing on, and going more hastily,

Men hurrying too he 'gan at last to see.
Following the last of these he still pressed on,
Until an open space he came unto,
Where wreaths of fame had oft been lost and won,
For feats of strength folks there were wont to do.
And now our hunter looked for something new,
Because the whole wide space was bare, and stilled
The high seats were, with eager people filled.

There with the others to a seat he gat,
Whence he beheld a broidered canopy,
'Neath which in fair array King Schœneus sat
Upon his throne with councillors thereby;
And underneath his well-wrought seat and high,
He saw a golden image of the sun,
A silver image of the Fleet-foot One.

A brazen altar stood beneath their feet
Whereon a thin flame flicker'd in the wind;
Nigh this a herald clad in raiment meet
Made ready even now his horn to wind,
By whom a huge man held a sword, entwin'd
With yellow flowers; these stood a little space
From off the altar, nigh the starting place.

And there two runners did the sign abide,
Foot set to foot,--a young man slim and fair,
Crisp-hair'd, well knit, with firm limbs often tried
In places where no man his strength may spare:
Dainty his thin coat was, and on his hair.
A golden circlet of renown he wore,
And in his hand an olive garland bore.

But on this day with whom shall he contend?
A maid stood by him like Diana clad
When in the woods she lists her bow to bend,
Too fair for one to look on and be glad,
Who scarcely yet has thirty summers had,
If he must still behold her from afar;
Too fair to let the world live free from war.

She seem'd all earthly matters to forget;
Of all tormenting lines her face was clear;
Her wide gray eyes upon the goal were set
Calm and unmov'd as though no soul were near.
But her foe trembled as a man in fear,
Nor from her loveliness one moment turn'd
His anxious face with fierce desire that burn'd.

Now through the hush there broke the trumpet's clang
Just as the setting sun made eventide.
Then from light feet a spurt of dust there sprang,
And swiftly were they running side by side;
But silent did the thronging folk abide
Until the turning-post was reach'd at last,
And round about it still abreast they passed.

But when the people saw how close they ran,
When half-way to the starting-point they were,
A cry of joy broke forth, whereat the man
Headed the white-foot runner, and drew near
Unto the very end of all his fear;
And scarce his straining feet the ground could feel,
And bliss unhop'd for o'er his heart 'gan steal.

But 'midst the loud victorious shouts he heard
Her footsteps drawing nearer, and the sound
Of fluttering raiment, and thereat afeard
His flush'd and eager face he turn'd around,
And even then he felt her past him bound
Fleet as the wind, but scarcely saw her there
Till on the goal she laid her fingers fair.

There stood she breathing like a little child
Amid some warlike clamour laid asleep,
For no victorious joy her red lips smil'd,
Her cheek its wonted freshness did but keep;
No glance lit up her clear gray eyes and deep,
Though some divine thought soften'd all her face
As once more rang the trumpet through the place.

But her late foe stopp'd short amidst his course,
One moment gaz'd upon her piteously.
Then with a groan his lingering feet did force
To leave the spot whence he her eyes could see;
And, changed like one who knows his time must be
But short and bitter, without any word
He knelt before the bearer of the sword;

Then high rose up the gleaming deadly blade,
Bar'd of its flowers, and through the crowded place
Was silence now, and midst of it the maid
Went by the poor wretch at a gentle pace,
And he to hers upturn'd his sad white face;
Nor did his eyes behold another sight
Ere on his soul there fell eternal light.

So was the pageant ended, and all folk
Talking of this and that familiar thing
In little groups from that sad concourse broke,
For now the shrill bats were upon the wing,

And soon dark night would slay the evening,
And in dark gardens sang the nightingale
Her little-headed, oft-repeated tale.

And with the last of all the hunter went,
Who, wondering at the strange sight he had seen,
Prayed an old man to tell him what it meant,
Both why the vanquished man so slain had been,
And if the maiden were an earthly queen,
Or rather what much more she seemed to be,
No sharer in this world's mortality.

"Stranger," said he, "I pray she soon may die
Whose lovely youth has slain so many an one!
King Schœneus' daughter is she verily,
Who when her eyes first looked upon the sun
Was fain to end her life but new begun,
For he had vowed to leave but men alone
Sprung from his loins when he from earth was gone.

"Therefore he bade one leave her in the wood,
And let wild things deal with her as they might,
But this being done, some cruel god thought good
To save her beauty in the world's despite;
Folk say that her, so delicate and white
As now she is, a rough root-grubbing bear
Amidst her shapeless cubs at first did rear.

"In course of time the woodfolk slew her nurse,
And to their rude abode the youngling brought,
And reared her up to be a kingdom's curse;
Who grown a woman, of no kingdom thought,
But armed and swift, 'mid beasts destruction wrought,
Nor spared two shaggy centaur kings to slay
To whom her body seemed an easy prey.

"So to this city, led by fate, she came
Whom known by signs, whereof I cannot tell,
King Schœneus for his child at last did claim.
Nor elsewhere since that day doth she dwell
Sending too many a noble soul to hell--
What! shine eyes glisten! what then, thinkest thou
Her shining head unto the yoke to bow?

"Listen, my son, and love some other maid
For she the saffron gown will never wear,
And on no flower-strewn couch shall she be laid,
Nor shall her voice make glad a lover's ear:
Yet if of Death thou hast not any fear,
Yea, rather, if thou lov'st her utterly,
Thou still may'st woo her ere thou com'st to die,

"Like him that on this day thou sawest lie dead;
For fearing as I deem the sea-born one;
The maid has vowed e'en such a man to wed
As in the course her swift feet can outrun,
But whoso fails herein, his days are done:
He came the nighest that was slain to-day,
Although with him I deem she did but play.

"Behold, such mercy Atalanta gives
To those that long to win her loveliness;
Be wise! be sure that many a maid there lives
Gentler than she, of beauty little less,
Whose swimming eyes thy loving words shall bless,
When in some garden, knee set close to knee,
Thou sing'st the song that love may teach to thee."

So to the hunter spake that ancient man,
And left him for his own home presently:
But he turned round, and through the moonlight wan
Reached the thick wood, and there 'twixt tree and tree
Distraught he passed the long night feverishly,
'Twixt sleep and waking, and at dawn arose
To wage hot war against his speechless foes.

There to the hart's flank seemed his shaft to grow,
As panting down the broad green glades he flew,
There by his horn the Dryads well might know
His thrust against the bear's heart had been true,
And there Adonis' bane his javelin slew,
But still in vain through rough and smooth he went,
For none the more his restlessness was spent.

So wandering, he to Argive cities came,
And in the lists with valiant men he stood,
And by great deeds he won him praise and fame,
And heaps of wealth for little-valued blood;
But none of all these things, or life, seemed good
Unto his heart, where still unsatisfied
A ravenous longing warred with fear and pride.

Therefore it happened when but a month had gone
Since he had left King Schœneus' city old,
In hunting-gear again, again alone
The forest-bordered meads did he behold,
Where still mid thoughts of August's quivering gold
Folk hoed the wheat, and clipped the vine in trust
Of faint October's purple-foaming must.

And once again he passed the peaceful gate,
While to his beating heart his lips did lie,
That owning not victorious love and fate,
Said, half aloud, "And here too must I try,

To win of alien men the mastery,
And gather for my head fresh meed of fame
And cast new glory on my father's name."

In spite of that, how beat his heart, when first
Folk said to him, "And art thou come to see
That which still makes our city's name accurst
Among all mothers for its cruelty?
Then know indeed that fate is good to thee
Because to-morrow a new luckless one
Against the white-foot maid is pledged to run."

So on the morrow with no curious eyes
As once he did, that piteous sight he saw,
Nor did that wonder in his heart arise
As toward the goal the conquering maid 'gan draw,
Nor did he gaze upon her eyes with awe,
Too full the pain of longing filled his heart
For fear or wonder there to have a part.

But O, how long the night was ere it went!
How long it was before the dawn begun
Showed to the wakening birds the sun's intent
That not in darkness should the world be done!
And then, and then, how long before the sun
Bade silently the toilers of the earth
Get forth to fruitless cares or empty mirth!

And long it seemed that in the market-place
He stood and saw the chaffering folk go by,
Ere from the ivory throne King Schœneus' face
Looked down upon the murmur royally,
But then came trembling that the time was nigh
When he midst pitying looks his love must claim,
And jeering voices must salute his name.

But as the throng he pierced to gain the throne,
His alien face distraught and anxious told
What hopeless errand he was bound upon,
And, each to each, folk whispered to behold
His godlike limbs; nay, and one woman old
As he went by must pluck him by the sleeve
And pray him yet that wretched love to leave.

For sidling up she said, "Canst thou live twice,
Fair son? canst thou have joyful youth again,
That thus thou goest to the sacrifice
Thyself the victim? nay then, all in vain
Thy mother bore her longing and her pain,
And one more maiden on the earth must dwell
Hopeless of joy, nor fearing death and hell.

"O, fool, thou knowest not the compact then
That with the three-formed goddess she has made
To keep her from the loving lips of men,
And in no saffron gown to be arrayed,
And therewithal with glory to be paid,
And love of her the moonlit river sees
White 'gainst the shadow of the formless trees.

"Come back, and I myself will pray for thee
Unto the sea-born framer of delights,
To give thee her who on the earth may be
The fairest stirrer up to death and fights,
To quench with hopeful days and joyous nights
The flame that doth thy youthful heart consume:
Come back, nor give thy beauty to the tomb."

How should he listen to her earnest speech?
Words, such as he not once or twice had said
Unto himself, whose meaning scarce could reach
The firm abode of that sad hardihead--
He turned about, and through the marketstead
Swiftly he passed, until before the throne
In the cleared space he stood at last alone.

Then said the King, "Stranger, what dost thou here?
Have any of my folk done ill to thee?
Or art thou of the forest men in fear?
Or art thou of the sad fraternity
Who still will strive my daughter's mates to be,
Staking their lives to win an earthly bliss,
The lonely maid, the friend of Artemis?"

"O King," he said, "thou sayest the word indeed;
Nor will I quit the strife till I have won
My sweet delight, or death to end my need.
And know that I am called Milanion,
Of King Amfidamas the well-loved son:
So fear not that to thy old name, O King,
Much loss or shame my victory will bring."

"Nay, Prince," said Schœneus, "welcome to this land
Thou wert indeed, if thou wert here to try
Thy strength 'gainst some one mighty of his hand;
Nor would we grudge thee well-won mastery.
But now, why wilt thou come to me to die,
And at my door lay down thy luckless head,
Swelling the band of the unhappy dead,

"Whose curses even now my heart doth fear?
Lo, I am old, and know what life can be,
And what a bitter thing is death anear.
O, Son! be wise, and harken unto me,

And if no other can be dear to thee,
At least as now, yet is the world full wide,
And bliss in seeming hopeless hearts may hide:

"But if thou lovest life, then all is lost."
"Nay, King," Milanion said, "thy words are vain.
Doubt not that I have counted well the cost.
But say, on what day wilt thou that I gain
Fulfilled delight, or death to end my pain.
Right glad were I if it could be to-day,
And all my doubts at rest for ever lay."

"Nay," said King Schœneus, "thus it shall not be,
But rather shalt thou let a month go by,
And weary with thy prayers for victory
What god thou know'st the kindest and most nigh.
So doing, still perchance thou shalt not die:
And with my goodwill wouldst thou have the maid,
For of the equal gods I grow afraid.

"And until then, O Prince, be thou my guest,
And all these troublous things awhile forget."
"Nay," said he, "couldst thou give my soul good rest,
And on mine head a sleepy garland set,
Then had I 'scaped the meshes of the net,
Nor should thou hear from me another word;
But now, make sharp thy fearful heading-sword.

"Yet will I do what son of man may do,
And promise all the gods may most desire,
That to myself I may at least be true;
And on that day my heart and limbs so tire,
With utmost strain and measureless desire,
That, at the worst, I may but fall asleep
When in the sunlight round that sword shall sweep. "

He went therewith, nor anywhere would bide,
But unto Argos restlessly did wend;
And there, as one who lays all hope aside,
Because the leech has said his life must end,
Silent farewell he bade to foe and friend,
And took his way unto the restless sea,
For there he deemed his rest and help might be.

Upon the shore of Argolis there stands
A temple to the goddess that he sought,
That, turned unto the lion-bearing lands,
Fenced from the east, of cold winds hath no thought,
Though to no homestead there the sheaves are brought,
No groaning press torments the close-clipped murk,
Lonely the fane stands, far from all men's work.

Pass through a close, set thick with myrtle-trees,
Through the brass doors that guard the holy place,
And entering, hear the washing of the seas
That twice a-day rise high above the base,
And with the south-west urging them, embrace
The marble feet of her that standeth there
That shrink not, naked though they be and fair.

Small is the fane through which the sea-wind sings
About Queen Venus' well-wrought image white,
But hung around are many precious things,
The gifts of those who, longing for delight,
Have hung them there within the goddess' sight,
And in return have taken at her hands
The living treasures of the Grecian lands.

And thither now has come Milanion,
And showed unto the priests' wide open eyes
Gifts fairer than all those that there have shone,
Silk cloths, inwrought with Indian fantasies,
And bowls inscribed with sayings of the wise
Above the deeds of foolish living things;
And mirrors fit to be the gifts of kings.

And now before the Sea-born One he stands,
By the sweet veiling smoke made dim and soft,
And while the incense trickles from his hands,
And while the odorous smoke-wreaths hang aloft,
Thus doth he pray to her: "O Thou, who oft
Hast holpen man and maid in their distress
Despise me not for this my wretchedness!

"O goddess, among us who dwelt below,
Kings and great men, great for a little while,
Have pity on the lowly heads that bow,
Nor hate the hearts that love them without guile;
Wilt thou be worse than these, and is thy smile
A vain device of him who set thee here,
An empty dream of some artificer?

"O great one, some men love, and are ashamed;
Some men are weary of the bonds of love;
Yea, and by some men lightly art thou blamed,
That from thy toils their lives they cannot move,
And 'mid the ranks of men their manhood prove.
Alas! O goddess, if thou slayest me,
What new immortal can I serve but thee?

"Think then, will it bring honour to thy head
If folk say, 'Everything aside he cast
And to all fame and honour was he dead,
And to his one hope now is dead at last,

Since all unholpen he is gone and past;
Ah, the gods love not man, for certainly,
He to his helper did not cease to cry.'

"Nay, but thou wilt help; they who died before
Not single-hearted as I deem came here,
Therefore unthanked they laid their gifts before
Thy stainless feet, still shivering with their fear,
Lest in their eyes their true thought might appear,
Who sought to be the lords of that fair town,
Dreaded of men and winners of renown.

"O Queen, thou knowest I pray not for this:
O set us down together in some place
Where not a voice can break our heaven of bliss,
Where nought but rocks and I can see her face,
Softening beneath the marvel of thy grace,
Where not a foot our vanished steps can track--
The golden age, the golden age come back!

"O fairest, hear me now who do thy will,
Plead for thy rebel that she be not slain,
But live and love and be thy servant still;
Ah, give her joy and take away my pain,
And thus two long-enduring servants gain.
An easy thing this is to do for me,
What need of my vain words to weary thee.

"But none the less, this place will I not leave
Until I needs must go my death to meet,
Or at thy hands some happy sign receive
That in great joy we twain may one day greet
Thy presence here and kiss thy silver feet,
Such as we deem thee, fair beyond all words,
Victorious o'er our servants and our lords."

Then from the altar back a space he drew,
But from the Queen turned not his face away,
But 'gainst a pillar leaned, until the blue
That arched the sky, at ending of the day,
Was turned to ruddy gold and changing gray,
And clear, but low, the nigh-ebbed windless sea
In the still evening murmured ceaselessly.

And there he stood when all the sun was down,
Nor had he moved, when the dim golden light,
Like the fair lustre of a godlike town,
Had left the world to seeming hopeless night,
Nor would he move the more when wan moonlight
Streamed through the pillows for a little while,
And lighted up the white Queen's changeless smile.

Nought noted he the shallow-flowing sea
As step by step it set the wrack a-swim;
The yellow torchlight nothing noted he
Wherein with fluttering gown and half-bared limb
The temple damsels sung their midnight hymn;
And nought the doubled stillness of the fane
When they were gone and all was hushed again.

But when the waves had touched the marble base,
And steps the fish swim over twice a-day,
The dawn beheld him sunken in his place
Upon the floor; and sleeping there he lay,
Not heeding aught the little jets of spray
The roughened sea brought nigh, across him cast,
For as one dead all thought from him had passed.

Yet long before the sun had showed his head,
Long ere the varied hangings on the wall
Had gained once more their blue and green and red,
He rose as one some well-known sign doth call
When war upon the city's gates doth fall,
And scarce like one fresh risen out of sleep,
He 'gan again his broken watch to keep.

Then he turned round; not for the sea-gull's cry
That wheeled above the temple in his flight,
Not for the fresh south wind that lovingly
Breathed on the new-born day and dying night,
But some strange hope 'twixt fear and great delight
Drew round his face, now flushed, now pale and wan,
And still constrained his eyes the sea to scan.

Now a faint light lit up the southern sky,
Not sun or moon, for all the world was gray,
But this a bright cloud seemed, that drew anigh,
Lighting the dull waves that beneath it lay
As toward the temple still it took its way,
And still grew greater, till Milanion
Saw nought for dazzling light that round him shone.

But as he staggered with his arms outspread,
Delicious unnamed odours breathed around,
For languid happiness he bowed his head,
And with wet eyes sank down upon the ground,
Nor wished for aught, nor any dream he found
To give him reason for that happiness,
Or make him ask more knowledge of his bliss.

At last his eyes were cleared, and he could see
Through happy tears the goddess face to face
With that faint image of Divinity,
Whose well-wrought smile and dainty changeless grace

Until that morn so gladdened all the place;
Then, he unwitting cried aloud her name
And covered up his eyes for fear and shame.

But through the stillness he her voice could hear
Piercing his heart with joy scarce bearable,
That said, "Milanion, wherefore dost thou fear,
I am not hard to those who love me well;
List to what I a second time will tell,
And thou mayest hear perchance, and live to save
The cruel maiden from a loveless grave.

"See, by my feet three golden apples lie--
Such fruit among the heavy roses falls,
Such fruit my watchful damsels carefully
Store up within the best loved of my walls,
Ancient Damascus, where the lover calls
Above my unseen head, and faint and light
The rose-leaves flutter round me in the night.

"And note, that these are not alone most fair
With heavenly gold, but longing strange they bring
Unto the hearts of men, who will not care
Beholding these, for any once-loved thing
Till round the shining sides their fingers cling.
And thou shalt see thy well-girt swift-foot maid
By sight of these amidst her glory stayed.

"For bearing these within a scrip with thee,
When first she heads thee from the starting-place
Cast down the first one for her eyes to see,
And when she turns aside make on apace,
And if again she heads thee in the race
Spare not the other two to cast aside
If she not long enough behind will bide.

"Farewell, and when has come the happy time
That she Diana's raiment must unbind
And all the world seems blessed with Saturn's clime,
And thou with eager arms about her twined
Beholdest first her gray eyes growing kind,
Surely, O trembler, thou shalt scarcely then
Forget the Helper of unhappy men."

Milanion raised his head at this last word
For now so soft and kind she seemed to be
No longer of her Godhead was he feared;
Too late he looked; for nothing could he see
But the white image glimmering doubtfully
In the departing twilight cold and gray,
And those three apples on the step that lay.

These then he caught up quivering with delight,
Yet fearful lest it all might be a dream;
And though weary with the watchful night,
And sleepless nights of longing, still did deem
He could not sleep; but yet the first sunbeam
That smote the fane across the heaving deep
Shone on him laid in calm, untroubled sleep.

But little ere the noontide did he rise,
And why he felt so happy scarce could tell
Until the gleaming apples met his eyes.
Then leaving the fair place where this befell
Oft he looked back as one who loved it well,
Then homeward to the haunts of men, 'gan wend
To bring all things unto a happy end.

Now has the lingering month at last gone by,
Again are all folk round the running place,
Nor other seems the dismal pageantry
Than heretofore, but that another face
Looks o'er the smooth course ready for the race,
For now, beheld of all, Milanion
Stands on the spot he twice has looked upon.

But yet--what change is this that holds the maid?
Does she indeed see in his glittering eye
More than disdain of the sharp shearing blade,
Some happy hope of help and victory?
The others seem'd to say, "We come to die;
Look down upon us for a little while,
That, dead, we may bethink us of thy smile."

But he--what look of mastery was this
He cast on her? why were his lips so red;
Why was his face so flush'd with happiness?
So looks not one who deems himself but dead,
E'en if to death he bows a willing head;
So rather looks a god well pleas'd to find
Some earthly damsel fashion'd to his mind,

Why must she drop her lids before his gaze,
And even as she casts adown her eyes
Redden to note his eager glance of praise,
And wish that she were clad in other guise?
Why must the memory to her heart arise
Of things unnoticed when they first were heard,
Some lover's song, some answering maiden's word?

What makes these longings, vague--without a name,
And this vain pity never felt before,
This sudden languor, this contempt of fame,
This tender sorrow for the time past o'er,

These doubts that grow each minute more and more?
Why does she tremble as the time grows near,
And weak defeat and woeful victory fear?

But while she seem'd to hear her beating heart,
Above their heads the trumpet blast rang out
And forth they sprang, and she must play her part;
Then flew her white feet, knowing not a doubt,
Though, slackening once, she turn'd her head about,
But then she cried aloud and faster fled
Than e'er before, and all men deemed him dead.

But with no sound he raised aloft his hand,
And thence what seemed a ray of light there flew
And past the maid rolled on along the sand;
Then trembling she her feet together drew
And in her heart a strong desire there grew
To have the toy, some god she thought had given
That gift to her, to make of earth a heaven.

Then from the course with eager steps she ran,
And in her odorous bosom laid the gold.
But when she turned again, the great-limbed man,
Now well ahead she failed not to behold,
And mindful of her glory waxing cold,
Sprang up and followed him in hot pursuit,
Though with one hand she touched the golden fruit.

Note, too, the bow that she was wont to bear
She laid aside to grasp the glittering prize,
And o'er her shoulder from the quiver fair
Three arrows fell and lay before her eyes
Unnoticed, as amidst the people's cries
She sprang to head the strong Milanion,
Who now the turning-post had well-nigh won.

But as he set his mighty hand on it
White fingers underneath his own were laid,
And white limbs from his dazzled eyes did flit,
Then he the second fruit cast by the maid:
She ran awhile, and then as one afraid
Wavered and stopped, and turned and made no stay,
Until the globe with its bright fellow lay.

Then, as a troubled glance she cast around,
Now far ahead the Argive could she see,
And in her garment's hem one hand she wound
To keep the double prize, and strenuously
Sped o'er the course, and little doubt had she
To win the day, though now but scanty space
Was left betwixt him and the winning place.

Short was the way unto such wingèd feet,
Quickly she gained upon him till at last
He turned about her eager eyes to meet
And from his hand the third fair apple cast.
She wavered not, but turned and ran so fast
After the prize that should her bliss fulfil,
That in her hand it lay ere it was still.

Nor did she rest, but turned about to win
Once more, an unblest woeful victory--
And yet--and yet--why does her breath begin
To fail her, and her feet drag heavily?
Why fails she now to see if far or nigh
The goal is? why do her gray eyes grow dim?
Why do these tremors run through every limb?

She spreads her arms abroad some stay to find
Else must she fall, indeed, and findeth this,
A strong man's arms about her body twined.
Nor may she shudder now to feel his kiss,
So wrapped she is in new unbroken bliss:
Made happy that the foe the prize hath won,
She weeps glad tears for all her glory done.

Shatter the trumpet, hew adown the posts!
Upon the brazen altar break the sword,
And scatter incense to appease the ghosts
Of those who died here by their own award.
Bring forth the image of the mighty Lord,
And her who unseen o'er the runners hung,
And did a deed for ever to be sung.

Here are the gathered folk; make no delay,
Open King Schœneus' well-filled treasury,
Bring out the gifts long hid from light of day,
The golden bowls o'erwrought with imagery,
Gold chains, and unguents brought from over sea,
The saffron gown the old Phœnician brought,
Within the temple of the Goddess wrought.

O ye, O damsels, who shall never see
Her, that Love's servant bringeth now to you,
Returning from another victory,
In some cool bower do all that now is due!
Since she in token of her service new
Shall give to Venus offerings rich enow,
Her maiden zone, her arrows and her bow.

William Morris

Autumn

Laden Autumn here I stand
Worn of heart, and weak of hand:
Nought but rest seems good to me,
Speak the word that sets me free.

William Morris

Day

I am Day; I bring again
Life and glory, Love and pain:
Awake, arise! from death to death
Through me the World's tale quickeneth.

William Morris

Earth the Healer, Earth the Keeper

So swift the hours are moving
Unto the time unproved:
Farewell my love unloving,
Farewell my love beloved!

What! are we not glad-hearted?
Is there no deed to do?
Is not all fear departed
And Spring-tide blossomed new?

The sails swell out above us,
The sea-ridge lifts the keel;
For They have called who love us,
Who bear the gifts that heal:

A crown for him that winneth,
A bed for him that fails,
A glory that beginneth
In never-dying tales.

Yet now the pain is ended
And the glad hand grips the sword,
Look on thy life amended
And deal out due award.

Think of the thankless morning,
The gifts of noon unused;
Think of the eve of scorning,
The night of prayer refused.

And yet. The life before it,
Dost thou remember aught,
What terrors shivered o'er it
Born from the hell of thought?

And this that cometh after:
How dost thou live, and dare
To meet its empty laughter,
To face its friendless care?

In fear didst thou desire,
At peace dost thou regret,
The wasting of the fire,
The tangling of the net.

Love came and gat fair greeting;
Love went; and left no shame.
Shall both the twilights meeting
The summer sunlight blame?

What! cometh love and goeth
Like the dark night's empty wind,

Because thy folly soweth
The harvest of the blind?

Hast thou slain love with sorrow?
Have thy tears quenched the sun?
Nay even yet tomorrow
Shall many a deed be done.

This twilight sea thou sailest,
Has it grown dim and black
For that wherein thou failest,
And the story of thy lack?

Peace then! for thine old grieving
Was born of Earth the kind,
And the sad tale thou art leaving
Earth shall not leave behind.

Peace! for that joy abiding
Whereon thou layest hold
Earth keepeth for a tiding
For the day when this is old.

Thy soul and life shall perish,
And thy name as last night's wind;
But Earth the deed shall cherish
That thou today shalt find.

And all thy joy and sorrow
So great but yesterday,
So light a thing tomorrow,
Shall never pass away.

Lo! lo! the dawn-blink yonder,
The sunrise draweth nigh,
And men forget to wonder
That they were born to die.

Then praise the deed that wendeth
Through the daylight and the mirth!
The tale that never endeth
Whoso may dwell on earth.

William Morris

Flora

am the handmaid of the earth,
I broider fair her glorious gown,
And deck her on her days of mirth
With many a garland of renown.

And while Earth's little ones are fain
And play about the Mother's hem,
I scatter every gift I gain
From sun and wind to gladden them.

William Morris

For the Bed at Kelmscott

The wind's on the wold
And the night is a-cold,
And Thames runs chill
'Twixt mead and hill.
But kind and dear
Is the old house here
And my heart is warm
'Midst winter's harm.
Rest then and rest,
And think of the best
'Twixt summer and spring,
When all birds sing
In the town of the tree,
And ye in me
And scarce dare move,
Lest earth and its love
Should fade away
Ere the full of the day.
I am old and have seen
Many things that have been;
Both grief and peace
And wane and increase
No tale I tell
Of ill or well,
But this I say:
Night treadeth on day,
And for worst or best
Right good is rest.

William Morris

Iceland First Seen

Lo from our loitering ship a new land at last to be seen;
Toothed rocks down the side of the firth on the east guard a weary wide lea,
And black slope the hillsides above, striped adown with their desolate green:
And a peak rises up on the west from the meeting of cloud and of sea,
Foursquare from base unto point like the building of Gods that have been,
The last of that waste of the mountains all cloud-wreathed and snow-flecked and grey,
And bright with the dawn that began just now at the ending of day.

Ah! what came we forth for to see that our hearts are so hot with desire?
Is it enough for our rest, the sight of this desolate strand,
And the mountain-waste voiceless as death but for winds that may sleep not nor tire?
Why do we long to wend forth through the length and breadth of a land,
Dreadful with grinding of ice, and record of scarce hidden fire,
But that there 'mid the grey grassy dales sore scarred by the ruining streams
Lives the tale of the Northland of old and the undying glory of dreams?

O land, as some cave by the sea where the treasures of old have been laid,
The sword it may be of a king whose name was the turning of fight;
Or the staff of some wise of the world that many things made and unmade,
Or the ring of a woman maybe whose woe is grown wealth and delight.
No wheat and no wine grows above it, no orchard for blossom and shade;
The few ships that sail by its blackness but deem it the mouth of a grave;
Yet sure when the world shall awaken, this too shall be mighty to save.

Or rather, O land, if a marvel it seemeth that men ever sought
Thy wastes for a field and a garden fulfilled of all wonder and doubt,
And feasted amidst of the winter when the fight of the year had been fought,
Whose plunder all gathered together was little to babble about;
Cry aloud from thy wastes, O thou land, "Not for this nor for that was I wrought.
Amid waning of realms and of riches and death of things worshipped and sure,
I abide here the spouse of a God, and I made and I make and endure."

O Queen of the grief without knowledge, of the courage that may not avail,
Of the longing that may not attain, of the love that shall never forget,
More joy than the gladness of laughter thy voice hath amidst of its wail:
More hope than of pleasure fulfilled amidst of thy blindness is set;
More glorious than gaining of all thine unfaltering hand that shall fail:
For what is the mark on thy brow but the brand that thy Brynhild doth bear?
Love once, and loved and undone by a love that no ages outwear.

Ah! when thy Balder comes back, and bears from the heart of the Sun
Peace and the healing of pain, and the wisdom that waiteth no more;
And the lilies are laid on thy brow 'mid the crown of the deeds thou hast done;
And the roses spring up by thy feet that the rocks of the wilderness wore:
Ah! when thy Balder comes back and we gather the gains he hath won,
Shall we not linger a little to talk of thy sweetness of old,
Yea, turn back awhile to thy travail whence the Gods stood aloof to behold?

William Morris

In Arthur's House

In Arthur's house whileome was I
When happily the time went by
In midmost glory of his days.
He held his court then in a place
Whereof ye shall not find the name
In any story of his fame:
Caerliel good sooth men called it not,
Nor London Town, nor Camelot;
Yet therein had we bliss enow.
--Ah, far off was the overthrow
Of all that Britain praised and loved;
And though among us lightly moved
A love that could but lead to death,
Smooth-skinned he seemed, of rosy breath,
A fear to sting a lady's lip,
No ruin of goodly fellowship,
No shame and death of all things good.

Forgive the old carle's babbling mood;
As here I sit grey-haired and old,
My life gone as a story told,
Ye bid me tell a story too;
And then the evil days and few,
That yet were overlong for me
Rise up so clear I may not see
The pictures of my minstrel lore.

Well hearken! on a day of yore
From prime of morn the court did ride
Amidmost of the summertide
To search the dwellings of the deer
Until the heat of noon was near;
Then slackening speed awhile they went
Adown a ragged thorn-bushed bent
At whose feet grew a tangled wood
Of oak and holly nowise good:
But therethrough with some pain indeed
And rending of the ladies' weed
They won at last, and after found
A space of green-sward grown around
By oak and holly set full close;
And in the midst of it arose
Two goodly sycamores that made
A wide and little sun-pierced shade
About their high boles straight and green:
A fount was new-born there-between,
And running on as clear as glass,
Flowed winding on amid the grass
Until the thick wood swallowed it.
A place for happy folk to sit
While the hot day grew hotter still
Till eve began to work his will.

--So might those happy people think
Who grudged to see the red sun sink
And end another day of bliss
Although no joy tomorn should miss --
They laughed for joy as they drew nigh
The shade and fount: but lo, thereby
A man beside the fountain laid
The while his horse 'twixt sun and shade
Cropped the sweet grass: but little care
Had these of guile or giant's lair,
And scarce a foot before the Queen
Rode Gawain o'er the daisied green
To see what man his pleasure took;
Who rose up in meanwhile and shook
His tangled hair aback, as one
Who e'en but now his sleep hath done.
Rough-head and yellow-haired was he
Great-eyed, as folk have told to me,
And big and stout enow of limb:
As one who thinks no harm he smiled,
And cried out: "Well met in the wild,
Fair King and Queen; and ye withal
Sweet dames and damsels! Well befall
This day, whereon I see thee nigh,
O Lancelot, before I die!
And surely shall my heart rejoice
Sir Gawain, when I hear thy voice!"

Then Lancelot laughed: "Thou knowest us then
Full well among a many men?"

"As quoth the lion to the mouse,"
The man said; "in King Arthur's House
Men are not names of men alone,
But coffers rather of deeds done."

The Queen smiled blithe of heart, and spake:
"Hast thou done deeds for ladies' sake?"

"Nay Dame," he said, "I am but young;
A little have I lived and sung
And seen thy face this happy noon."

The King said: "May we hearken soon
Some merry tale of thee? for I
Am skilled to know men low and high
And deem thee neither churl nor fool."

Said he, "My fathers went to school
Where folk are taught a many things,
But not by bliss: men called them kings
In days when kings were near to seek;

But as a long thread waxeth weak,
So is it with our house; and now
I wend me home from oaken bough
Unto a stead where roof and wall
Shall not have over far to fall
When their last day comes."
As he spake
He reddened: "Nathless for their sake,
Whom the world loved once, mock not me
O King, if thence I bring to thee
A morsel and a draught of wine,
Though nothing king-like here thou dine."

Of some kind word King Arthur thought,
But ere he spake the woodman caught
His forest-nag and leapt thereon,
And through the tangled brake was gone.
Then leapt the King down, glad at heart,
Thinking, This day shall not depart
Without some voice from days that were;
And lightly leapt down Guenevere,
And man and maid lay presently
Neath the bee-laden branches high,
And sweet the scent of trodden grass
Amid the blossoms' perfume was.

There long they lay, and little spake,
As folk right loth the calm to break;
Till lo upon the forest-breeze
A noise of folk, and from the trees
They came: the first-seen forester,
A grizzled carle in such-like gear,
And then two maidens poorly clad
Though each a silver chaplet had
And round her neck a golden chain:
And last two varlets led a wain
Drawn by white oxen well bedight
With oaken boughs and lilies white;
Therein there lay a cask of wine
And baskets piled with bread full fine,
And flesh of hart and roe and hare;
And in the midst upon a chair
Done over with a cloth of gold
There sat a man exceeding old
With long white locks: and clad was he
No other than his company
Save that a golden crown he bore
Full fairly fashioned as of yore,
And with a sword was girt about
Such as few folk will see I doubt.
Right great it was: the scabbard thin
Was fashioned of a serpent's skin,

In every scale a stone of worth;
Of tooth of sea-lion of the north
The cross was, and the blood-boot stone
That heals the hurt the blade hath done
Hung down therefrom in silken purse:
The ruddy kin of Niblung's curse
O'er tresses of a sea-wife's hair
Was wrapped about the handle fair;
And last a marvellous sapphire stone
Amidst of the great pommel shone,
A blue flame in the forest green.
And Arthur deemed he ne'er had seen
So fair a sword: nay not when he
The wonder of the land-locked sea
Drew from the stone that Christmas-tide.

Now forth the forest youth did ride,
Leapt down beside the King, and spake:
"King Arthur for thy greatness' sake
My grandsire comes to look on thee;
My father standeth here by me;
These maidens are my sisters twain;
My brethren draw out from the wain
Somewhat thy woodland cheer to mend."

Thereat his sire the knee did bend
Before the King, who o'er the brown
Rough sleeve of the man's homespun gown
Beheld a goodly golden ring:
And fell to greater marvelling
When he beheld how fine and fair
The woodman's kneeling sisters were.
And all folk thereby deemed in sooth
That (save indeed the first seen youth)
These folk were nobler e'en than those
Of Arthur's wonder of a house.

But now the elder drew anigh,
By half a head was he more high
Than Arthur or than Lancelot,
Nor had eld bent him: he kneeled not
Before the King, but smiling took
His hands in hands that nowise shook;
And the King joyed as he who sees
One of his fathers' images
Stand glad before him in a dream.

Then down beside the bubbling stream
They sat together, and the King
Was loth to fall a questioning;
So first the elder spake and said:

"It joys me of thy goodlihead
O great king of our land; and though
Our blood within thee doth not flow,
And I who was a king of yore
May scarcely kneel thy feet before,
Yet do I deem thy right the best
Of all the kings who rule the West.
I love thy name and fame: behold,
King Arthur, I am grown so old
In guilelessness, the Gods have sent,
Be I content or discontent,
This gift unto my latter days
That I may see as through a haze
The lives and deeds of days to come:
I laugh for some, I weep for some --
I neither laugh nor weep for thee,
But trembling through the clouds I see
Thy life and glory to the end;
And how the sweet and bitter blend
Within the cup that thou must drink.
Good is it that thou shalt not shrink
From either: that the afterdays
Shall still win glory from thy praise
And scarce believe thee laid asleep
When o'er thy deeds the days lie deep."

He ceased but his old lips moved still,
As though they would the tale fulfil
His heart kept secret: Arthur's eyes
Gleamed with the pride that needs would rise
Up from his heart, and low he said:
"I know the living by the dead
I know the future by the past."
Wise eyes and kind the elder cast
Upon him; while a nameless fear
Smote to the heart of Guenevere,
And, fainting there, was turned to love:
And thence a nameless pain did move
The noble heart of Lancelot,
The store of longing unforgot.
-- And west a little moved the sun
And noon began, and noon was done.

But as the elder's grey eyes turned
On Guenevere's, her sweet face burned
With sweet shame; as though she knew
He read her story through and through.
Kindly he looked on her and said:
"O Queen, the chief of goodlihead,
Be blithe and glad this day at least
When in my fathers' house ye feast:
For surely in their ancient hall

Ye sit now: look, there went the wall
Where yon turf ridge runs west-away:
Time was I heard my grand-dame say
She saw this stream run bubbling down
The hall-floor shut in trench of stone;
Therein she washed her father's cup
That last eve e'er the fire went up
O'er ridge and rafter and she passed
Betwixt the foeman's spears the last
Of all the women, wrapping round
This sword the gift of Odin's ground."

He shook the weapon o'er his knee,
Thereon gazed Arthur eagerly.
"Draw it, my lord," quoth Guenevere,
"Of such things have we little fear
In Arthur's house." And Lancelot rose
To look upon the treasure close.
But grimly smiled the ancient man:
"E'en as the sun arising wan
In the black sky when Heimdall's horn
Screams out and the last day is born,
This blade to eyes of men shall be
On that dread day I shall not see --"
Fierce was his old face for a while:
But once again he 'gan to smile
And took the Queen's slim lily hand
And set it on the deadly brand
Then laughed and said: "Hold this, O Queen,
Thine hand is where God's hands have been,
For this is Tyrfing: who knows when
His blade was forged? Belike ere men
Had dwelling on the middle-earth.
At least a man's life is it worth
To draw it out once: so behold
These peace-strings wrought of pearl and gold
The scabbard to the cross that bind
Lest a rash hand and heart made blind
Should draw it forth unwittingly."

Blithe laughed King Arthur: "Sir," said he,
"We well may deem in days by gone
This sword, the blade of such an one
As thou hast been, would seldom slide
Back to its sheath unsatisfied.
Lo now how fair a feast thy kin
Have dight for us and might we win
Some tale of thee in Tyrfing's praise,
Some deed he wrought in greener days,
This were a blithesome hour indeed."

"Sir," said the elder, "little need

To pray me hereof. Please ye dine
And drink a cup of woodman's wine,
Surely meantime some tale shall stir
Within my heart of days that were."

Then to their meat they gat and there
Feasted amid the woodland fair
The fairest folk of all the land.
Ah me when first the Queen's fair hand
Drew near the kneeling forest youth
New-wrought the whole world seemed in sooth
And nothing left therein of ill.
So at the last the Queen did fill
A cup of wine, and drank and said:
"In memory of thy fathers dead
I drink, fair lord, drink now with me
And then bethink thee presently
Of deeds that once won prize and praise
The glory of thy fathers' days."
He drank and laughed and said, "Nay, nay,
Keep we the peace-strings whole today.
This draught from where thy lips have been
Within mine old heart maketh green
The memory of a love full true,
The first recorded deed that drew
My fathers' house from dark to light.

If thus my grandame told aright,
A rougher place our land was then,
Quoth she, than with us living men,
And other trees were in the wood
And folk of somewhat other blood
Than ours: then were the small-eyed bears
More plenty in the woodland lairs
Than badgers now: no holiday
It was to chase the wolves away,
Yea there were folk who had to tell
Of lyngworms lying on the fell,
And fearful things by lake and fen,
And manlike shapes that were not men.
Then fay-folk roamed the woods at noon,
And on the grave-mound in the moon
Faint gleamed the flickering treasure-flame.
Days of the world that won no fame,
Yet now, quoth she, folk looking back
Across the tumult and the wrack
And swelling up of windy lies
And dull fool-fashioned cruelties,
Deem that in those days God abode
On earth and shared ill times and good
And right and wrong with that same folk
Their hands had fashioned for the yoke.

Quoth she, of such nought tells my tale,
Yet saith that such as should prevail
In those days o'er the fears of earth
Must needs have been some deal of worth,
And saith that had ye seen a kin
Who dwelt these very woods within
Them at the least ye would have told
For cousins of the Gods of old.
Amongst all these it tells of one,
The goodman's last-begotten son,
Some twenty summers old: as fair
As any flower that blossomed there
In sun and rain, and strong therewith
And lissom as a willow withe.
Now through these woods amidst of June
This youngling went until at noon
From out of the thicket his fair face
Peered forth upon this very place;
For he had been a-hunting nigh
And wearied thought a while to lie
Beside the freshness of the stream.
But lo as in a morning dream
The place was changed, for there was dight
A fair pavilion blue and white
E'en where we play, and all around
Was talk of men and diverse sound,
Tinkling of bit and neigh of steed
Clashing of arms and iron weed.
For round about the painted tent
Armed folk a many came or went,
Or on the fresh grass lay about.
Surely our youth at first had doubt
If 'twere not better to be gone
Than meet these stranger folk alone --
But wot ye well such things as these
Were new to him born mid the trees
And wild things: and he thought, Maybe
The household of the Gods I see:
Who for as many tales as I
Have heard of them, I ne'er saw nigh.
If they be men, I wotted not
That such fair raiment men had got;
They will be glad to show them then.

For one thing taught these woodland men
Whatever wisdom they let fall
Men since have won Fear nought at all.

So from the holly brake he strode
Shouldering the while his hunter's load,
A new slain roe; but there arose
To meet him half a score of those

Whom in fair words he greeted well.

Now was he clad in a sheep's fell
And at his back his quiver hung,
His woodknife on his thigh: unstrung
His bow he held in a staff's stead.
An oaken wreath was round his head
From whence his crispy locks of brown
Well nigh unto his belt hung down,
And howso frank his eyes might be
A half-frown soothly might you see
As these men handled sword or spear
And cried out, "Hold, what dost thou here?"
"Ah," said he, "then no Gods ye are.
Fear not, I shall not make you war."
Therewith his hunting-knife he drew
And the long blade before them he threw.
Then loud they laughed; one sheathed his sword:
"Thanks, army-leader, for that word!
We are not Gods e'en as thou say'st,
Nor thou a devil of the waste
But e'en a devil's a friend belike."
Something [of] hate hereat did strike
Unto the woodsman's unused heart,
Yet he spake softly for his part:
"What men are ye and where dwell ye?
What is the wondrous house I see?"
"In the fair southland is our home
Yet from the north as now we come,"
Said one: then with a mocking smile,
"And in our house there dwells awhile
A very Goddess of the north.
But lo you, take a thing of worth
For that thy quarry, and begone."

But as he spake another one
Spake softly in his ear: and so
The word from this to that did go,
With laughing that seemed nowise good
Unto the dweller of the wood,
Who saying nought moved toward the tent.
But they came round him as he went
And said: "Nay, pagan, stay thy feet;
Thou art not one our dame to greet

. . .

William Morris

In Prison

Wearily, drearily,
Half the day long,
Flap the great banners
High over the stone;
Strangely and eerily
Sounds the wind's song,
Bending the banner-poles.

While, all alone,
Watching the loophole's spark,
Lie I, with life all dark,
Feet tether'd, hands fetter'd
Fast to the stone,
The grim walls, square-letter'd
With prison'd men's groan.

Still strain the banner-poles
Through the wind's song,
Westward the banner rolls
Over my wrong.

William Morris

King Arthur's Tomb

Hot August noon: already on that day
Since sunrise through the Wiltshire downs, most sad
Of mouth and eye, he had gone leagues of way;
Ay and by night, till whether good or bad

He was, he knew not, though he knew perchance
That he was Launcelot, the bravest knight
Of all who since the world was, have borne lance,
Or swung their swords in wrong cause or in right.

Nay, he knew nothing now, except that where
The Glastonbury gilded towers shine,
A lady dwelt, whose name was Guenevere;
This he knew also; that some fingers twine,

Not only in a man's hair, even his heart,
(Making him good or bad I mean,) but in his life,
Skies, earth, men's looks and deeds, all that has part,
Not being ourselves, in that half-sleep, half-strife,

(Strange sleep, strange strife,) that men call living; so
Was Launcelot most glad when the moon rose,
Because it brought new memories of her. "Lo,
Between the trees a large moon, the wind lows

"Not loud, but as a cow begins to low,
Wishing for strength to make the herdsman hear:
The ripe corn gathereth dew; yea, long ago,
In the old garden life, my Guenevere

"Loved to sit still among the flowers, till night
Had quite come on, hair loosen'd, for she said,
Smiling like heaven, that its fairness might
Draw up the wind sooner to cool her head.

"Now while I ride how quick the moon gets small,
As it did then: I tell myself a tale
That will not last beyond the whitewashed wall,
Thoughts of some joust must help me through the vale,

"Keep this till after: How Sir Gareth ran
A good course that day under my Queen's eyes,
And how she sway'd laughing at Dinadan.
No. Back again, the other thoughts will rise,

"And yet I think so fast 'twill end right soon:
Verily then I think, that Guenevere,
Made sad by dew and wind, and tree-barred moon,
Did love me more than ever, was more dear

"To me than ever, she would let me lie
And kiss her feet, or, if I sat behind,

Would drop her hand and arm most tenderly,
And touch my mouth. And she would let me wind

"Her hair around my neck, so that it fell
Upon my red robe, strange in the twilight
With many unnamed colours, till the bell
Of her mouth on my cheek sent a delight

"Through all my ways of being; like the stroke
Wherewith God threw all men upon the face
When he took Enoch, and when Enoch woke
With a changed body in the happy place.

"Once, I remember, as I sat beside,
She turn'd a little, and laid back her head,
And slept upon my breast; I almost died
In those night-watches with my love and dread.

"There lily-like she bow'd her head and slept,
And I breathed low, and did not dare to move,
But sat and quiver'd inwardly, thoughts crept,
And frighten'd me with pulses of my Love.

"The stars shone out above the doubtful green
Of her bodice, in the green sky overhead;
Pale in the green sky were the stars I ween,
Because the moon shone like a star she shed

"When she dwelt up in heaven a while ago,
And ruled all things but God: the night went on,
The wind grew cold, and the white moon grew low,
One hand had fallen down, and now lay on

"My cold stiff palm; there were no colours then
For near an hour, and I fell asleep
In spite of all my striving, even when
I held her whose name-letters make me leap.

"I did not sleep long, feeling that in sleep
I did some loved one wrong, so that the sun
Had only just arisen from the deep
Still land of colours, when before me one

"Stood whom I knew, but scarcely dared to touch,
She seemed to have changed so in the night;
Moreover she held scarlet lilies, such
As Maiden Margaret bears upon the light

"Of the great church walls, nathless did I walk
Through the fresh wet woods, and the wheat that morn,
Touching her hair and hand and mouth, and talk
Of love we held, nigh hid among the corn.

"Back to the palace, ere the sun grew high,
We went, and in a cool green room all day
I gazed upon the arras giddily,
Where the wind set the silken kings a-sway.

"I could not hold her hand, or see her face;
For which may God forgive me! but I think,
Howsoever, that she was not in that place."
These memories Launcelot was quick to drink;

And when these fell, some paces past the wall,
There rose yet others, but they wearied more,
And tasted not so sweet; they did not fall
So soon, but vaguely wrenched his strained heart sore

In shadowy slipping from his grasp: these gone,
A longing followed; if he might but touch
That Guenevere at once! Still night, the lone
Grey horse's head before him vex'd him much,

In steady nodding over the grey road:
Still night, and night, and night, and emptied heart
Of any stories; what a dismal load
Time grew at last, yea, when the night did part,

And let the sun flame over all, still there
The horse's grey ears turn'd this way and that,
And still he watch'd them twitching in the glare
Of the morning sun, behind them still he sat,

Quite wearied out with all the wretched night,
Until about the dustiest of the day,
On the last down's brow he drew his rein in sight
Of the Glastonbury roofs that choke the way.

And he was now quite giddy as before,
When she slept by him, tired out, and her hair
Was mingled with the rushes on the floor,
And he, being tired too, was scarce aware

Of her presence; yet as he sat and gazed,
A shiver ran throughout him, and his breath
Came slower, he seem'd suddenly amazed,
As though he had not heard of Arthur's death.

This for a moment only, presently
He rode on giddy still, until he reach'd
A place of apple-trees, by the thorn-tree
Wherefrom St. Joseph in the days past preached.

Dazed there he laid his head upon a tomb,

Not knowing it was Arthur's, at which sight
One of her maidens told her, "He is come,"
And she went forth to meet him; yet a blight

Had settled on her, all her robes were black,
With a long white veil only; she went slow,
As one walks to be slain, her eyes did lack
Half her old glory, yea, alas! the glow

Had left her face and hands; this was because
As she lay last night on her purple bed,
Wishing for morning, grudging every pause
Of the palace clocks, until that Launcelot's head

Should lie on her breast, with all her golden hair
Each side: when suddenly the thing grew drear,
In morning twilight, when the grey downs bare
Grew into lumps of sin to Guenevere.

At first she said no word, but lay quite still,
Only her mouth was open, and her eyes
Gazed wretchedly about from hill to hill;
As though she asked, not with so much surprise

As tired disgust, what made them stand up there
So cold and grey. After, a spasm took
Her face, and all her frame, she caught her hair,
All her hair, in both hands, terribly she shook,

And rose till she was sitting in the bed,
Set her teeth hard, and shut her eyes and seem'd
As though she would have torn it from her head,
Natheless she dropp'd it, lay down, as she deem'd

It matter'd not whatever she might do:
O Lord Christ! pity on her ghastly face!
Those dismal hours while the cloudless blue
Drew the sun higher: He did give her grace;

Because at last she rose up from her bed,
And put her raiment on, and knelt before
The blessed rood, and with her dry lips said,
Muttering the words against the marble floor:

"Unless you pardon, what shall I do, Lord,
But go to hell? and there see day by day
Foul deed on deed, hear foulest word on word,
For ever and ever, such as on the way

"To Camelot I heard once from a churl,
That curled me up upon my jennet's neck
With bitter shame; how then, Lord, should I curl

For ages and for ages? dost thou reckon

"That I am beautiful, Lord, even as you
And your dear mother? why did I forget
You were so beautiful, and good, and true,
That you loved me so, Guenevere? O yet

"If even I go to hell, I cannot choose
But love you, Christ, yea, though I cannot keep
From loving Launcelot; O Christ! must I lose
My own heart's love? see, though I cannot weep,

"Yet am I very sorry for my sin;
Moreover, Christ, I cannot bear that hell,
I am most fain to love you, and to win
A place in heaven some time: I cannot tell:

"Speak to me, Christ! I kiss, kiss, kiss your feet;
Ah! now I weep!" The maid said, "By the tomb
He waiteth for you, lady," coming fleet,
Not knowing what woe filled up all the room.

So Guenevere rose and went to meet him there,
He did not hear her coming, as he lay
On Arthur's head, till some of her long hair
Brush'd on the new-cut stone: "Well done! to pray

"For Arthur, my dear Lord, the greatest king
That ever lived." "Guenevere! Guenevere!
Do you not know me, are you gone mad? fling
Your arms and hair about me, lest I fear

"You are not Guenevere, but some other thing."
"Pray you forgive me, fair lord Launcelot!
I am not mad, but I am sick; they cling,
God's curses, unto such as I am; not

"Ever again shall we twine arms and lips."
"Yea, she is mad: thy heavy law, O Lord,
Is very tight about her now, and grips
Her poor heart, so that no right word

"Can reach her mouth; so, Lord, forgive her now,
That she not knowing what she does, being mad,
Kills me in this way: Guenevere, bend low
And kiss me once! for God's love kiss me! sad

"Though your face is, you look much kinder now;
Yea once, once for the last time kiss me, lest I die."
"Christ! my hot lips are very near his brow,
Help me to save his soul! Yea, verily,

"Across my husband's head, fair Launcelot!
Fair serpent mark'd with V upon the head!
This thing we did while yet he was alive,
Why not, O twisting knight, now he is dead?"

"Yea, shake! shake now and shiver! if you can
Remember anything for agony,
Pray you remember how when the wind ran
One cool spring evening through fair aspen-tree,

"And elm and oak about the palace there
The king came back from battle, and I stood
To meet him, with my ladies, on the stair,
My face made beautiful with my young blood."

"Will she lie now, Lord God?" "Remember too,
Wrung heart, how first before the knights there came
A royal bier, hung round with green and blue,
About it shone great tapers with sick flame.

"And thereupon Lucius, the Emperor,
Lay royal-robed, but stone-cold now and dead,
Not able to hold sword or sceptre more,
But not quite grim; because his cloven head

"Bore no marks now of Launcelot's bitter sword,
Being by embalmers deftly solder'd up;
So still it seem'd the face of a great lord,
Being mended as a craftsman mends a cup.

"Also the heralds sung rejoicingly
To their long trumpets; 'Fallen under shield,
Here lieth Lucius, King of Italy,
Slain by Lord Launcelot in open field.'

"Thereat the people shouted: 'Launcelot!'
And through the spears I saw you drawing nigh,
You and Lord Arthur: nay, I saw you not,
But rather Arthur, God would not let die,

"I hoped, these many years; he should grow great,
And in his great arms still encircle me,
Kissing my face, half blinded with the heat
Of king's love for the queen I used to be.

"Launcelot, Launcelot, why did he take your hand,
When he had kissed me in his kingly way?
Saying: 'This is the knight whom all the land
Calls Arthur's banner, sword, and shield to-day;

"'Cherish him, love.' Why did your long lips cleave
In such strange way unto my fingers then?"

So eagerly glad to kiss, so loath to leave
When you rose up? Why among helmed men

"Could I always tell you by your long strong arms,
And sway like an angel's in your saddle there?
Why sicken'd I so often with alarms
Over the tilt-yard? Why were you more fair

"Than aspens in the autumn at their best?
Why did you fill all lands with your great fame,
So that Breuse even, as he rode, fear'd lest
At turning of the way your shield should flame?

"Was it nought then, my agony and strife?
When as day passed by day, year after year,
I found I could not live a righteous life!
Didst ever think queens held their truth for dear?

"O, but your lips say: 'Yea, but she was cold
Sometimes, always uncertain as the spring;
When I was sad she would be overbold,
Longing for kisses. When war-bells did ring,

"The back-toll'd bells of noisy Camelot."
"Now, Lord God, listen! listen, Guenevere,
Though I am weak just now, I think there's not
A man who dares to say: 'You hated her,

"And left her moaning while you fought your fill
In the daisied meadows!' lo you her thin hand,
That on the carven stone can not keep still,
Because she loves me against God's command,

"Has often been quite wet with tear on tear,
Tears Launcelot keeps somewhere, surely not
In his own heart, perhaps in Heaven, where
He will not be these ages." "Launcelot!

"Loud lips, wrung heart! I say when the bells rang,
The noisy back-toll'd bells of Camelot,
There were two spots on earth, the thrushes sang
In the lonely gardens where my love was not,

"Where I was almost weeping; I dared not
Weep quite in those days, lest one maid should say,
In tittering whispers: 'Where is Launcelot
To wipe with some kerchief those tears away?'

"Another answer sharply with brows knit,
And warning hand up, scarcely lower though:
'You speak too loud, see you, she heareth it,
This tigress fair has claws, as I well know,

"As Launcelot knows too, the poor knight! well-a-day!
Why met he not with Iseult from the West,
Or better still, Iseult of Brittany?
Perchance indeed quite ladyless were best.'

"Alas, my maids, you loved not overmuch
Queen Guenevere, uncertain as sunshine
In March; forgive me! for my sin being such,
About my whole life, all my deeds did twine,

"Made me quite wicked; as I found out then,
I think; in the lonely palace where each morn
We went, my maids and I, to say prayers when
They sang mass in the chapel on the lawn.

"And every morn I scarce could pray at all,
For Launcelot's red-golden hair would play,
Instead of sunlight, on the painted wall,
Mingled with dreams of what the priest did say;

"Grim curses out of Peter and of Paul;
Judging of strange sins in Leviticus;
Another sort of writing on the wall,
Scored deep across the painted heads of us.

"Christ sitting with the woman at the well,
And Mary Magdalen repenting there,
Her dimmed eyes scorch'd and red at sight of hell
So hardly 'scaped, no gold light on her hair.

"And if the priest said anything that seemed
To touch upon the sin they said we did,
(This in their teeth) they looked as if they deem'd
That I was spying what thoughts might be hid

"Under green-cover'd bosoms, heaving quick
Beneath quick thoughts; while they grew red with shame,
And gazed down at their feet: while I felt sick,
And almost shriek'd if one should call my name.

"The thrushes sang in the lone garden there:
But where you were the birds were scared I trow:
Clanging of arms about pavilions fair,
Mixed with the knights' laughs; there, as I well know,

"Rode Launcelot, the king of all the band,
And scowling Gauwaine, like the night in day,
And handsome Gareth, with his great white hand
Curl'd round the helm-crest, ere he join'd the fray;

"And merry Dinadan with sharp dark face,

All true knights loved to see; and in the fight
Great Tristram, and though helmed you could trace
In all his bearing the frank noble knight;

"And by him Palomydes, helmet off,
He fought, his face brush'd by his hair,
Red heavy swinging hair; he fear'd a scoff
So overmuch, though what true knight would dare

"To mock that face, fretted with useless care,
And bitter useless striving after love?
O Palomydes, with much honour bear
Beast Glatysaunt upon your shield, above

"Your helm that hides the swinging of your hair,
And think of Iseult, as your sword drives through
Much mail and plate: O God, let me be there
A little time, as I was long ago!

"Because stout Gareth lets his spear fall low,
Gauwaine and Launcelot, and Dinadan
Are helm'd and waiting; let the trumpets go!
Bend over, ladies, to see all you can!

"Clench teeth, dames, yea, clasp hands, for Gareth's spear
Throws Kay from out his saddle, like a stone
From a castle-window when the foe draws near:
'Iseult!' Sir Dinadan rolleth overthrown.

"'Iseult!' again: the pieces of each spear
Fly fathoms up, and both the great steeds reel;
'Tristram for Iseult!' 'Iseult!' and 'Guenevere!'
The ladies' names bite verily like steel.

"They bite: bite me, Lord God! I shall go mad,
Or else die kissing him, he is so pale,
He thinks me mad already, O bad! bad!
Let me lie down a little while and wail."

"No longer so, rise up, I pray you, love,
And slay me really, then we shall be heal'd,
Perchance, in the aftertime by God above."
"Banner of Arthur, with black-bended shield

"Sinister-wise across the fair gold ground!
Here let me tell you what a knight you are,
O sword and shield of Arthur! you are found
A crooked sword, I think, that leaves a scar

"On the bearer's arm, so be he thinks it straight,
Twisted Malay's crease beautiful blue-grey,
Poison'd with sweet fruit; as he found too late,

My husband Arthur, on some bitter day!

"O sickle cutting hemlock the day long!
That the husbandman across his shoulder hangs,
And, going homeward about evensong,
Dies the next morning, struck through by the fangs!

"Banner, and sword, and shield, you dare not die,
Lest you meet Arthur in the other world,
And, knowing who you are, he pass you by,
Taking short turns that he may watch you curl'd,

"Body and face and limbs in agony,
Lest he weep presently and go away,
Saying: 'I loved him once,' with a sad sigh,
Now I have slain him, Lord, let me go too, I pray.

[Launcelot falls.]

"Alas! alas! I know not what to do,
If I run fast it is perchance that I
May fall and stun myself, much better so,
Never, never again! not even when I die."

[LAUNCELOT, on awaking.]

"I stretch'd my hands towards her and fell down,
How long I lay in swoon I cannot tell:
My head and hands were bleeding from the stone,
When I rose up, also I heard a bell."

William Morris

Love is enough

LOVE is enough: though the World be a-waning,
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
 Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark wonder,
 And this day draw a veil over all deeds pass'd over,
Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not falter;
The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter
 These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.

William Morris

Love is Enough: Songs I-IX

I1.

Love is enough: though the World be a-waning
·
· And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
·
· Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
·
· The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
·
· Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark wonder,
·
· And this day draw a veil over all deeds passed over,
·
· Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not falter;
·
· The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter

· These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.II2.
Love is enough: have no thought for to-morrow

· If ye lie down this even in rest from your pain,
·
· Ye who have paid for your bliss with great sorrow:
·
· For as it was once so it shall be again.
·
· Ye shall cry out for death as ye stretch forth in vain2.
Feeble hands to the hands that would help but they may not,
·
· Cry out to deaf ears that would hear if they could;
·
· Till again shall the change come, and words your lips say not
·
· Your hearts make all plain in the best wise they would

· And the world ye thought waning is glorious and good:2.
And no morning now mocks you and no nightfall is weary,
·

· The plains are not empty of song and of deed:
·
· The sea strayeth not, nor the mountains are dreary;

· The wind is not helpless for any man's need,

· Nor falleth the rain but for thistle and weed.2.

O surely this morning all sorrow is hidden,

All battle is hushed for this even at least;

And no one this noontide may hunger, unbidden

To the flowers and the singing and the joy of your feast

Where silent ye sit midst the world's tale increased.²

Lo, the lovers unloved that draw nigh for your blessing!

For your tale makes the dreaming whereby yet they live

The dreams of the day with their hopes of redressing,

The dreams of the night with the kisses they give,

The dreams of the dawn wherein death and hope strive.²

Ah, what shall we say then, but that earth threatened often

Shall live on for ever that such things may be,

That the dry seed shall quicken, the hard earth shall soften,

And the spring-bearing birds flutter north o'er the sea,

That earth's garden may bloom round my love's feet and me?^{III}³.
Love is enough: it grew up without heeding

In the days when ye knew not its name nor its measure,

And its leaflets untrodden by the light feet of pleasure

Had no boast of the blossom, no sign of the seeding,

As the morning and evening passed over its treasure.³.
And what do ye say then?--That Spring long departed

Has brought forth no child to the softness and showers;
· --That we slept and we dreamed through the Summer of flowers;
· We dreamed of the Winter, and waking dead-hearted
·
Found Winter upon us and waste of dull hours.3.
Nay, Spring was o'er-happy and knew not the reason,
·
And Summer dreamed sadly, for she thought all was ended
·
In her fulness of wealth that might not be amended;
·
But this is the harvest and the garnering season,
·
And the leaf and the blossom in the ripe fruit are blended.3.
It sprang without sowing, it grew without heeding,
·
Ye knew not its name and ye knew not its measure,
·
Ye noted it not mid your hope and your pleasure;
·
There was pain in its blossom, despair in its seeding,
·
But daylong your bosom now nurseth its treasure.IV4.
Love is enough: draw near and behold me
·
Ye who pass by the way to your rest and your laughter,
·
And are full of the hope of the dawn coming after;
·
For the strong of the world have bought me and sold me
·
And my house is all wasted from threshold to rafter.
·
--Pass by me, and hearken, and think of me not!4.
Cry out and come near; for my ears may not hearken,
·
And my eyes are grown dim as the eyes of the dying.
·
Is this the grey rack o'er the sun's face a-flying?

.
Or is it your faces his brightness that darken?
.

.
Comes a wind from the sea, or is it your sighing?
.

.
 --Pass by me and hearken, and pity me not!4.

Ye know not how void is your hope and your living:
.

.
 Depart with your helping lest yet ye undo me!
.

.
 Ye know not that at nightfall she draweth near to me,
.

There is soft speech between us and words of forgiving
.

.
 Till in dead of the midnight her kisses thrill through me.
.

.
 --Pass by me and harken, and waken me not!4.

Wherewith will ye buy it, ye rich who behold me?
.

.
 Draw out from your coffers your rest and your laughter,
.

.
 And the fair gilded hope of the dawn coming after!
.

.
 Nay this I sell not,--though ye bought me and sold me,--
.

For your house stored with such things from threshold to rafter.
.

.
 --Pass by me, I hearken, and think of you not!V5.
Love is enough: through the trouble and tangle
.

.
 From yesterday's dawning to yesterday's night
.

I sought through the vales where the prisoned winds wrangle,
.

.
 Till, wearied and bleeding, at end of the light
.

.
 I met him, and we wrestled, and great was my might.5.

O great was my joy, though no rest was around me,
·
· Though mid wastes of the world were we twain all alone,
·
· For methought that I conquered and he knelt and he crowned me,
·
· And the driving rain ceased, and the wind ceased to moan,
·
·
· And through clefts of the clouds her planet outshone.5.
O through clefts of the clouds 'gan the world to awaken,
·
· And the bitter wind piped, and down drifted the rain,
·
·
· And I was alone--and yet not forsaken,
·
·
· For the grass was untrodden except by my pain:
·
· With a Shadow of the Night had I wrestled in vain.5.
And the Shadow of the Night and not Love was departed;
·
· I was sore, I was weary, yet Love lived to seek;
·
·
· So I scaled the dark mountains, and wandered sad-hearted
·
· Over wearier wastes, where e'en sunlight was bleak,
·
· With no rest of the night for my soul waxen weak.5.
With no rest of the night; for I waked mid a story
·
· Of a land wherein Love is the light and the lord,
·
·
· Where my tale shall be heard, and my wounds gain a glory,
·
· And my tears be a treasure to add to the hoard
·
· Of pleasure laid up for his people's reward.5.

Ah, pleasure laid up! Haste then onward and listen,

For the wind of the waste has no music like this,

And not thus do the rocks of the wilderness glisten:

With the host of his faithful through sorrow and bliss

My Lord goeth forth now, and knows me for his.VI6.
Love is enough: cherish life that abideth,

Lest ye die ere ye know him, and curse and misname him;

For who knows in what ruin of all hope he hideth,

On what wings of the terror of darkness he rideth?

And what is the joy of man's life that ye blame him

For his bliss grown a sword, and his rest grown a fire?6.
Ye who tremble for death, or the death of desire,

Pass about the cold winter-tide garden and ponder

On the rose in his glory amidst of June's fire,

On the languor of noontide that gathered the thunder,

On the morn and its freshness, the eve and its wonder:

Ye may make it no more--shall Spring come to awaken?6.

Live on, for Love liveth, and earth shall be shaken

By the wind of his wings on the triumphing morning,

When the dead, and their deeds that die not shall awaken,

And the world's tale shall sound in your trumpet of warning,

And the sun smite the banner called Scorn of the Scorning,

And dead pain ye shall trample, dead fruitless desire,

As ye wend to pluck out the new world from the fire.VII7.
Dawn talks to Day

Over dew-gleaming flowers,

Night flies away

Till the resting of hours:

Fresh are thy feet

And with dreams thine eyes glistening,

Thy still lips are sweet

Though the world is a-listening.

O Love, set a word in my mouth for our meeting,

Cast thine arms round about me to stay my heart's beating!

O fresh day, O fair day, O long day made ours!...7.

Morn shall meet noon

While the flower-stems yet move,

Though the wind dieth soon

And the clouds fade above.

Loved lips are thine

As I tremble and hearken;

Bright thine eyes shine,

Though the leaves thy brow darken.

O Love, kiss me into silence, lest no word avail me,

Stay my head with thy bosom lest breath and life fail me!

O sweet day, O rich day, made long for our love!7.

Late day shall greet eve,

And the full blossoms shake,

For the wind will not leave

The tall trees while they wake.

Eyes soft with bliss,

Come nigher and nigher!

Sweet mouth I kiss,

Tell me all thy desire!

Let us speak, love, together some words of our story,

That our lips as they part may remember the glory!

O soft day, O calm day, made clear for our sake!7.

Eve shall kiss night,

And the leaves stir like rain

As the wind stealeth light

O'er the grass of the plain.

Unseen are thine eyes

Mid the dreamy night's sleeping,

And on my mouth there lies

The dear rain of thy weeping.

Hold silence, love, speak not of the sweet day departed,

Cling close to me, love, lest I waken sad-hearted!

O kind day, O dear day, short day, come again!VIII8.
Love is enough: while ye deemed him a-sleeping,

There were signs of his coming and sounds of his feet;

His touch it was that would bring you to weeping,

When the summer was deepest and music most sweet:

In his footsteps ye followed the day to its dying,

Ye went forth by his gown-skirts the morning to meet:

In his place on the beaten-down orchard-grass lying,

Of the sweet ways ye pondered left for life's trying.8.
Ah, what was all dreaming of pleasure anear you,

To the time when his eyes on your wistful eyes turned,

And ye saw his lips move, and his head bent to hear you,

As new-born and glad to his kindness ye yearned?

Ah, what was all dreaming of anguish and sorrow,

To the time when the world in his torment was burned,
And no god your heart from its prison might borrow,
And no rest was left, no today, no tomorrow?⁸.
All wonder of pleasure, all doubt of desire,
All blindness, are ended, and no more ye feel
If your feet tread his flowers or the flames of his fire,
If your breast meet his balms or the edge of his steel.
Change is come, and past over, no more strife, no more learning:
Now your lips and your forehead are sealed with his seal,
Look backward and smile at the thorns and the burning.
--Sweet rest, O my soul, and no fear of returning!^{IX9}.
Love is enough: ho ye who seek saving,
Go no further; come hither; there have been who have found it,
And these know the House of Fulfilment of Craving;
These know the Cup with the roses around it;
These know the World's Wound and the balm that hath bound it:
Cry out, the World heedeth not, 'Love, lead us home!'⁹.
He leadeth, He hearkeneth, He cometh to you-ward;
Set your faces as steel to the fears that assemble
Round his goad for the faint, and his scourge for the froward,
Lo his lips, how with tales of last kisses they tremble!
Lo his eyes of all sorrow that may not dissemble!

.
Cry out, for he heedeth, 'O Love, lead us home!'9.

O hearken the words of his voice of compassion:

.
'Come cling round about me, ye faithful who sicken

.
Of the weary unrest and the world's passing fashions!

.
As the rain in mid-morning your troubles shall thicken,

.
But surely within you some Godhead doth quicken,

.
As ye cry to me heeding, and leading you home.9.

'Come--pain ye shall have, and be blind to the ending!

.
Come--fear ye shall have, mid the sky's overcasting!

.
Come--change ye shall have, for far are ye wending!

.
Come--no crown ye shall have for your thirst and your fasting,

.
But the kissed lips of Love and fair life everlasting!

.
Cry out, for one heedeth, who leadeth you home!'9.

Is he gone? was he with us?--ho ye who seek saving,

.
Go no further; come hither; for have we not found it?

.
Here is the House of Fulfilment of Craving;

.
Here is the Cup with the roses around it;

.
The World's Wound well healed, and the balm that hath bound it:

Cry out! for he heedeth, fair Love that led home.

William Morris

Love's Gleaning Tide

Draw not away thy hands, my love,
With wind alone the branches move,
And though the leaves be scant above
The Autumn shall not shame us.

Say; Let the world wax cold and drear,
What is the worst of all the year
But life, and what can hurt us, dear,
Or death, and who shall blame us?

Ah, when the summer comes again
How shall we say, we sowed in vain?
The root was joy, the stem was pain
The ear a nameless blending.

The root is dead and gone, my love,
The stem's a rod our truth to prove;
The ear is stored for nought to move
Till heaven and earth have ending.

William Morris

March

Slayer of the winter, art thou here again?
O welcome, thou that's bring'st the summer nigh!
The bitter wind makes not thy victory vain,
Nor will we mock thee for thy faint blue sky.
Welcome, O March! whose kindly days and dry
Make April ready for the throstle's song,
Thou first redresser of the winter's wrong!

Yea, welcome March! and though I die ere June,
Yet for the hope of life I give thee praise,
Striving to swell the burden of the tune
That even now I hear thy brown birds raise,
Unmindful of the past or coming days;
Who sing: 'Oh joy! a new year is begun:
What happiness to look upon the sun!'

Ah, what begetteth all this storm of bliss
But death himself, who crying solemnly,
E'en from the heart of sweet Forgetfulness,
Bids us 'Rejoice, lest pleasureless ye die,
Within a little time must ye go by.
Stretch forth your open hands, and while ye live
Take all the gifts that Death and Life may give.'

William Morris

Mine and Thine

Two words about the world we see,
And nought but Mine and Thine they be.
Ah! might we drive them forth and wide
With us should rest and peace abide;
All free, nought owned of goods and gear,
By men and women though it were
Common to all all wheat and wine
Over the seas and up the Rhine.
No manslayer then the wide world o'er
When Mine and Thine are known no more.

Yea, God, well counselled for our health,
Gave all this fleeting earthly wealth
A common heritage to all,
That men might feed them therewithal,
And clothe their limbs and shoe their feet
And live a simple life and sweet.
But now so rageth greediness
That each desireth nothing less
Than all the world, and all his own,
And all for him and him alone.

William Morris

Near Avalon

A ship with shields before the sun,
Six maidens round the mast,
A red-gold crown on every one,
A green gown on the last.

The fluttering green banners there
Are wrought with ladies' heads most fair,
And a portraiture of Guenevere
The middle of each sail doth bear.

A ship with sails before the wind,
And round the helm six knights,
Their heaumes are on, whereby, half blind,
They pass by many sights.

The tatter'd scarlet banners there
Right soon will leave the spear-heads bare.
Those six knights sorrowfully bear
In all their heaumes some yellow hair.

William Morris

Near But Far Away

She wavered, stopped and turned, methought her eyes,
The deep grey windows of her heart, were wet,
Methought they softened with a new regret
To note in mine unspoken miseries,
And as a prayer from out my heart did rise
And struggled on my lips in shame's strong net,
She stayed me, and cried "Brother!" our lips met,
Her deawr hands drew me into Paradise.

Sweet seemed that kiss till thence her feet were gone,
Sweet seemed the word she spake, while it might be
As wordless music--But truth fell on me,
And kiss and word I knew, and, left alone,
Face to face seemed I to a wall of stone,
While at my back there beat a boundless sea.

William Morris

Night

I am Night: I bring again
Hope of pleasure, rest from pain:
Thoughts unsaid 'twixt Life and Death
My fruitful silence quickeneth.

William Morris

Our Hands Have Met

Our hands have met, our lips have met
Our souls - who knows when the wind blows
How light souls drift mid longings set,
If thou forget'st, can I forget
The time that was not long ago?

Thou wert not silent then, but told
Sweet secrets dear - I drew so near
Thy shamefaced cheeks grown overbold,
That scarce thine eyes might I behold!
Ah was it then so long ago!

Trembled my lips and thou wouldst turn
But hadst no heart to draw apart,
Beneath my lips thy cheek did burn -
Yet no rebuke that I might learn;
Yea kind looks still, not long ago.

Wilt thou be glad upon the day
When unto me this love shall be
An idle fancy passed away,
And we shall meet and smile and say
'O wasted sighs of long ago!'

Wilt thou rejoice that thou hast set
Cold words, dull shows 'twixt hearts drawn close,
That cold at heart I live on yet,
Forgetting still that I forget
The priceless days of long ago?

William Morris

Pomona

I am the ancient apple-queen,
As once I was so am I now.
For evermore a hope unseen,
Betwixt the blossom and the bough.

Ah, where's the river's hidden Gold!
And where the windy grave of Troy?
Yet come I as I came of old,
From out the heart of Summer's joy.

William Morris

Riding Together

For many, many days together
The wind blew steady from the East;
For many days hot grew the weather,
About the time of our Lady's Feast.

For many days we rode together,
Yet met we neither friend nor foe;
Hotter and clearer grew the weather,
Steadily did the East wind blow.

We saw the trees in the hot, bright weather,
Clear-cut, with shadows very black,
As freely we rode on together
With helms unlaced and bridles slack.

And often, as we rode together,
We, looking down the green-bank'd stream,
Saw flowers in the sunny weather,
And saw the bubble-making bream.

And in the night lay down together,
And hung above our heads the rood,
Or watch'd night-long in the dewy weather,
The while the moon did watch the wood.

Our spears stood bright and thick together,
Straight out the banners stream'd behind,
As we gallop'd on in the sunny weather,
With faces turn'd towards the wind.

Down sank our threescore spears together,
As thick we saw the pagans ride;
His eager face in the clear fresh weather,
Shone out that last time by my side.

Up the sweep of the bridge we dash'd together,
It rock'd to the crash of the meeting spears,
Down rain'd the buds of the dear spring weather,
The elm-tree flowers fell like tears.

There, as we roll'd and writhed together,
I threw my arms above my head,
For close by my side, in the lovely weather,
I saw him reel and fall back dead.

I and the slayer met together,
He waited the death-stroke there in his place,
With thoughts of death, in the lovely weather,
Gapingly mazed at my madden'd face.

Madly I fought as we fought together;
In vain: the little Christian band

The pagans drown'd, as in stormy weather
The river drowns low-lying land.

They bound my blood-stain'd hands together,
They bound his corpse to nod by my side:
Then on we rode, in the bright March weather,
With clash of cymbals did we ride.

We ride no more, no more together;
My prison-bars are thick and strong,
I take no heed of any weather,
The sweet Saints grant I live not long.

William Morris

Sad-Eyed and Soft and Grey

Sad-Eyed and soft and grey thou art, o morn!
Across the long grass of the marshy plain
Thy west wind whispers of the coming rain,
Thy lark forgets that May is grown forlorn
Above the lush blades of the springing corn,
Thy thrush within the high elms strives in vain
To store up tales of spring for summer's pain -
Vain day, why wert thou from the dark night born?

O many-voiced strange morn, why must thou break
With vain desire the softness of my dream
Where she and I alone on earth did seem?
How hadst thou heart from me that land to take
Wherein she wandered softly for my sake
And I and she no harm of love might deem?

William Morris

Shameful Death

There were four of us about that bed;
The mass-priest knelt at the side,
I and his mother stood at the head,
Over his feet lay the bride;
We were quite sure that he was dead,
Though his eyes were open wide.

He did not die in the night,
He did not die in the day,
But in the morning twilight
His spirit pass'd away,
When neither sun nor moon was bright,
And the trees were merely grey.

He was not slain with the sword,
Knight's axe, or the knightly spear,
Yet spoke he never a word
After he came in here;
I cut away the cord
From the neck of my brother dear.

He did not strike one blow,
For the recreants came behind,
In a place where the hornbeams grow,
A path right hard to find,
For the hornbeam boughs swing so,
That the twilight makes it blind.

They lighted a great torch then,
When his arms were pinion'd fast,
Sir John the knight of the Fen,
Sir Guy of the Dolorous Blast,
With knights threescore and ten,
Hung brave Lord Hugh at last.

I am threescore and ten,
And my hair is all turn'd grey,
But I met Sir John of the Fen
Long ago on a summer day,
And am glad to think of the moment when
I took his life away.

I am threescore and ten,
And my strength is mostly pass'd,
But long ago I and my men,
When the sky was overcast,
And the smoke roll'd over the reeds of the fen,
Slew Guy of the Dolorous Blast.

And now, knights all of you,
I pray you pray for Sir Hugh,
A good knight and a true,

And for Alice, his wife, pray too.

William Morris

Sir Galahad, a Christmas Mystery

It is the longest night in all the year,
Near on the day when the Lord Christ was born;
Six hours ago I came and sat down here,
And ponder'd sadly, wearied and forlorn.

The winter wind that pass'd the chapel door,
Sang out a moody tune, that went right well
With mine own thoughts: I look'd down on the floor,
Between my feet, until I heard a bell

Sound a long way off through the forest deep,
And toll on steadily; a drowsiness
Came on me, so that I fell half asleep,
As I sat there not moving: less and less

I saw the melted snow that hung in beads
Upon my steel-shoes; less and less I saw
Between the tiles the bunches of small weeds:
Heartless and stupid, with no touch of awe

Upon me, half-shut eyes upon the ground,
I thought: O Galahad! the days go by,
Stop and cast up now that which you have found,
So sorely you have wrought and painfully.

Night after night your horse treads down alone
The sere damp fern, night after night you sit
Holding the bridle like a man of stone,
Dismal, unfriended: what thing comes of it?

And what if Palomydes also ride,
And over many a mountain and bare heath
Follow the questing beast with none beside?
Is he not able still to hold his breath

With thoughts of Iseult? doth he not grow pale
With weary striving, to seem best of all
To her, "as she is best," he saith? to fail
Is nothing to him, he can never fall.

For unto such a man love-sorrow is
So dear a thing unto his constant heart,
That even if he never win one kiss,
Or touch from Iseult, it will never part.

And he will never know her to be worse
Than in his happiest dreams he thinks she is:
Good knight, and faithful, you have 'scaped the curse
In wonderful-wise; you have great store of bliss.

Yea, what if Father Launcelot ride out,
Can he not think of Guenevere's arms, round

Warm and lithe, about his neck, and shout
Till all the place grows joyful with the sound?

And when he lists can often see her face,
And think, "Next month I kiss you, or next week,
And still you think of me": therefore the place
Grows very pleasant, whatsoever he seek.

But me, who ride alone, some carle shall find
Dead in my arms in the half-melted snow,
When all unkindly with the shifting wind,
The thaw comes on at Candlemas: I know

Indeed that they will say: "This Galahad
If he had lived had been a right good knight;
Ah! poor chaste body!" but they will be glad,
Not most alone, but all, when in their sight

That very evening in their scarlet sleeves
The gay-dress'd minstrels sing; no maid will talk
Of sitting on my tomb, until the leaves,
Grown big upon the bushes of the walk,

East of the Palace-pleasaunce, make it hard
To see the minster therefrom: well-a-day!
Before the trees by autumn were well bared,
I saw a damozel with gentle play,

Within that very walk say last farewell
To her dear knight, just riding out to find
(Why should I choke to say it?) the Sangreal,
And their last kisses sunk into my mind,

Yea, for she stood lean'd forward on his breast,
Rather, scarce stood; the back of one dear hand,
That it might well be kiss'd, she held and press'd
Against his lips; long time they stood there, fann'd

By gentle gusts of quiet frosty wind,
Till Mador de la porte a-going by,
And my own horsehoofs roused them; they untwined,
And parted like a dream. In this way I,

With sleepy face bent to the chapel floor,
Kept musing half asleep, till suddenly
A sharp bell rang from close beside the door,
And I leapt up when something pass'd me by,

Shrill ringing going with it, still half blind
I stagger'd after, a great sense of awe
At every step kept gathering on my mind,
Thereat I have no marvel, for I saw

One sitting on the altar as a throne,
Whose face no man could say he did not know,
And though the bell still rang, he sat alone,
With raiment half blood-red, half white as snow.

Right so I fell upon the floor and knelt,
Not as one kneels in church when mass is said,
But in a heap, quite nerveless, for I felt
The first time what a thing was perfect dread.

But mightily the gentle voice came down:
"Rise up, and look and listen, Galahad,
Good knight of God, for you will see no frown
Upon my face; I come to make you glad.

"For that you say that you are all alone,
I will be with you always, and fear not
You are uncared for, though no maiden moan
Above your empty tomb; for Launcelot,

"He in good time shall be my servant too,
Meantime, take note whose sword first made him knight,
And who has loved him alway, yea, and who
Still trusts him alway, though in all men's sight,

"He is just what you know, O Galahad,
This love is happy even as you say,
But would you for a little time be glad,
To make ME sorry long, day after day?

"Her warm arms round his neck half throttle ME,
The hot love-tears burn deep like spots of lead,
Yea, and the years pass quick: right dismally
Will Launcelot at one time hang his head;

"Yea, old and shrivell'd he shall win my love.
Poor Palomydes fretting out his soul!
Not always is he able, son, to move
His love, and do it honour: needs must roll

"The proudest destrier sometimes in the dust,
And then 'tis weary work; he strives beside
Seem better than he is, so that his trust
Is always on what chances may betide;

"And so he wears away, my servant, too,
When all these things are gone, and wretchedly
He sits and longs to moan for Iseult, who
Is no care now to Palomydes: see,

"O good son, Galahad, upon this day,

Now even, all these things are on your side,
But these you fight not for; look up, I say,
And see how I can love you, for no pride

"Closes your eyes, no vain lust keeps them down.
See now you have ME always; following
That holy vision, Galahad, go on,
Until at last you come to ME to sing

"In Heaven always, and to walk around
The garden where I am." He ceased, my face
And wretched body fell upon the ground;
And when I look'd again, the holy place

Was empty; but right so the bell again
Came to the chapel-door, there entered
Two angels first, in white, without a stain,
And scarlet wings, then, after them, a bed

Four ladies bore, and set it down beneath
The very altar-step, and while for fear
I scarcely dared to move or draw my breath,
Those holy ladies gently came a-near,

And quite unarm'd me, saying: "Galahad,
Rest here awhile and sleep, and take no thought
Of any other thing than being glad;
Hither the Sangreal will be shortly brought,

"Yet must you sleep the while it stayeth here."
Right so they went away, and I, being weary,
Slept long and dream'd of Heaven: the bell comes near,
I doubt it grows to morning. Miserere!

[Enter Two Angels in white, with scarlet wings; also, Four Ladies in gowns of red and green; also an Angel, bearing in his hands a surcoat of white, with a red cross.]

AN ANGEL

O servant of the high God, Galahad!
Rise and be arm'd: the Sangreal is gone forth
Through the great forest, and you must be had
Unto the sea that lieth on the north:

There shall you find the wondrous ship wherein
The spindles of King Solomon are laid,
And the sword that no man draweth without sin,
But if he be most pure: and there is stay'd,

Hard by, Sir Launcelot, whom you will meet

In some short space upon that ship: first, though,
Will come here presently that lady sweet,
Sister of Percival, whom you well know,

And with her Bors and Percival: stand now,
These ladies will to arm you.

[FIRST LADY, putting on the hauberk]

Galahad,
That I may stand so close beneath your brow,
Margaret of Antioch, am glad.

[SECOND LADY, girding him with the sword.]

That I may stand and touch you with my hand,
O Galahad, I, Cecily, am glad.

[THIRD LADY, buckling on the spurs.]

That I may kneel while up above you stand,
And gaze at me, O holy Galahad,
I, Lucy, am most glad.

[FOURTH LADY, putting on the basnet.]

O gentle knight,
That you bow down to us in reverence,
We are most glad, I, Katherine, with delight
Must needs fall trembling.

[ANGEL, putting on the crossed surcoat.]

Galahad, we go hence,

For here, amid the straying of the snow,
Come Percival's sister, Bors, and Percival.

[The Four Ladies carry out the bed, and all go but Galahad.]

GALAHAD.

How still and quiet everything seems now:
They come, too, for I hear the horsehoofs fall.

[Enter Sir Bors, Sir Percival and his Sister.]

Fair friends and gentle lady, God you save!
A many marvels have been here to-night;
Tell me what news of Launcelot you have,
And has God's body ever been in sight?

SIR BORS.

Why, as for seeing that same holy thing,
As we were riding slowly side by side,
An hour ago, we heard a sweet voice sing,
And through the bare twigs saw a great light glide,

With many-colour'd raiment, but far off;
And so pass'd quickly: from the court nought good;
Poor merry Dinadan, that with jape and scoff
Kept us all merry, in a little wood

Was found all hack'd and dead: Sir Lionel
And Gauwaine have come back from the great quest,
Just merely shamed; and Lauvaine, who loved well
Your father Launcelot, at the king's behest

Went out to seek him, but was almost slain,
Perhaps is dead now; everywhere
The knights come foil'd from the great quest, in vain;
In vain they struggle for the vision fair.

William Morris

Sir Giles' War-Song

Ho! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières?

The clink of arms is good to hear,
The flap of pennons fair to see;
Ho! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières?

The leopards and lilies are fair to see;
"St. George Guienne" right good to hear:
Ho! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières?

I stood by the barrier,
My coat being blazon'd fair to see;
Ho! is there any will ride with me,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières?

Clisson put out his head to see,
And lifted his basnet up to hear;
I pulled him through the bars to ME,
Sir Giles, le bon des barrières.

William Morris

Song I: Though the World Be A-Waning

Love is enough: though the World be a-waning
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark wonder,
And this day draw a veil over all deeds passed over,
Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not falter;
The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter
These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.

William Morris

Song II: Have No Thought for Tomorrow

Love is enough: have no thought for to-morrow
If ye lie down this even in rest from your pain,
Ye who have paid for your bliss with great sorrow:
For as it was once so it shall be again.
Ye shall cry out for death as ye stretch forth in vain

Feeble hands to the hands that would help but they may not,
Cry out to deaf ears that would hear if they could;
Till again shall the change come, and words your lips say not
Your hearts make all plain in the best wise they would
And the world ye thought waning is glorious and good:

And no morning now mocks you and no nightfall is weary,
The plains are not empty of song and of deed:
The sea strayeth not, nor the mountains are dreary;
The wind is not helpless for any man's need,
Nor falleth the rain but for thistle and weed.

O surely this morning all sorrow is hidden,
All battle is hushed for this even at least;
And no one this noontide may hunger, unbidden
To the flowers and the singing and the joy of your feast
Where silent ye sit midst the world's tale increased.

Lo, the lovers unloved that draw nigh for your blessing!
For your tale makes the dreaming whereby yet they live
The dreams of the day with their hopes of redressing,
The dreams of the night with the kisses they give,
The dreams of the dawn wherein death and hope strive.

Ah, what shall we say then, but that earth threatened often
Shall live on for ever that such things may be,
That the dry seed shall quicken, the hard earth shall soften,
And the spring-bearing birds flutter north o'er the sea,
That earth's garden may bloom round my love's feet and me?

William Morris

Song III: It Grew Up Without Heeding

Love is enough: it grew up without heeding
In the days when ye knew not its name nor its measure,
And its leaflets untrodden by the light feet of pleasure
Had no boast of the blossom, no sign of the seeding,
As the morning and evening passed over its treasure.

And what do ye say then?--That Spring long departed
Has brought forth no child to the softness and showers;
--That we slept and we dreamed through the Summer of flowers;
We dreamed of the Winter, and waking dead-hearted
Found Winter upon us and waste of dull hours.

Nay, Spring was o'er-happy and knew not the reason,
And Summer dreamed sadly, for she thought all was ended
In her fulness of wealth that might not be amended;
But this is the harvest and the garnering season,
And the leaf and the blossom in the ripe fruit are blended.

It sprang without sowing, it grew without heeding,
Ye knew not its name and ye knew not its measure,
Ye noted it not mid your hope and your pleasure;
There was pain in its blossom, despair in its seeding,
But daylong your bosom now nurseth its treasure.

William Morris

Song IV: Draw Near and Behold Me

Love is enough: draw near and behold me
Ye who pass by the way to your rest and your laughter,
And are full of the hope of the dawn coming after;
For the strong of the world have bought me and sold me
And my house is all wasted from threshold to rafter.
--Pass by me, and hearken, and think of me not!

Cry out and come near; for my ears may not hearken,
And my eyes are grown dim as the eyes of the dying.
Is this the grey rack o'er the sun's face a-flying?
Or is it your faces his brightness that darken?
Comes a wind from the sea, or is it your sighing?
--Pass by me and hearken, and pity me not!

Ye know not how void is your hope and your living:
Depart with your helping lest yet ye undo me!
Ye know not that at nightfall she draweth near to me,
There is soft speech between us and words of forgiving
Till in dead of the midnight her kisses thrill through me.
--Pass by me and harken, and waken me not!

Wherewith will ye buy it, ye rich who behold me?
Draw out from your coffers your rest and your laughter,
And the fair gilded hope of the dawn coming after!
Nay this I sell not,--though ye bought me and sold me,--
For your house stored with such things from threshold to rafter.
--Pass by me, I hearken, and think of you not!

William Morris

Song IX: Ho Ye Who Seek Saving

Love is enough: ho ye who seek saving,
Go no further; come hither; there have been who have found it,
And these know the House of Fulfilment of Craving;
These know the Cup with the roses around it;
These know the World's Wound and the balm that hath bound it:
Cry out, the World heedeth not, 'Love, lead us home!'

He leadeth, He hearkeneth, He cometh to you-ward;
Set your faces as steel to the fears that assemble
Round his goad for the faint, and his scourge for the froward,
Lo his lips, how with tales of last kisses they tremble!
Lo his eyes of all sorrow that may not dissemble!
Cry out, for he heedeth, 'O Love, lead us home!'

O hearken the words of his voice of compassion:
'Come cling round about me, ye faithful who sicken
Of the weary unrest and the world's passing fashions!
As the rain in mid-morning your troubles shall thicken,
But surely within you some Godhead doth quicken,
As ye cry to me heeding, and leading you home.

'Come--pain ye shall have, and be blind to the ending!
Come--fear ye shall have, mid the sky's overcasting!
Come--change ye shall have, for far are ye wending!
Come--no crown ye shall have for your thirst and your fasting,
But the kissed lips of Love and fair life everlasting!
Cry out, for one heedeth, who leadeth you home!'

Is he gone? was he with us?--ho ye who seek saving,
Go no further; come hither; for have we not found it?
Here is the House of Fulfilment of Craving;
Here is the Cup with the roses around it;
The World's Wound well healed, and the balm that hath bound it:
Cry out! for he heedeth, fair Love that led home.

William Morris

Song V: Through the Trouble and Tangle

Love is enough: through the trouble and tangle
From yesterday's dawning to yesterday's night
I sought through the vales where the prisoned winds wrangle,
Till, wearied and bleeding, at end of the light
I met him, and we wrestled, and great was my might.

O great was my joy, though no rest was around me,
Though mid wastes of the world were we twain all alone,
For methought that I conquered and he knelt and he crowned me,
And the driving rain ceased, and the wind ceased to moan,
And through clefts of the clouds her planet outshone.

O through clefts of the clouds 'gan the world to awaken,
And the bitter wind piped, and down drifted the rain,
And I was alone--and yet not forsaken,
For the grass was untrodden except by my pain:
With a Shadow of the Night had I wrestled in vain.

And the Shadow of the Night and not Love was departed;
I was sore, I was weary, yet Love lived to seek;
So I scaled the dark mountains, and wandered sad-hearted
Over wearier wastes, where e'en sunlight was bleak,
With no rest of the night for my soul waxen weak.

With no rest of the night; for I waked mid a story
Of a land wherein Love is the light and the lord,
Where my tale shall be heard, and my wounds gain a glory,
And my tears be a treasure to add to the hoard
Of pleasure laid up for his people's reward.

Ah, pleasure laid up! Haste then onward and listen,
For the wind of the waste has no music like this,
And not thus do the rocks of the wilderness glisten:
With the host of his faithful through sorrow and bliss
My Lord goeth forth now, and knows me for his.

William Morris

Song VI: Cherish Life that Abideth

Love is enough: cherish life that abideth,
Lest ye die ere ye know him, and curse and misname him;
For who knows in what ruin of all hope he hideth,
On what wings of the terror of darkness he rideth?
And what is the joy of man's life that ye blame him
For his bliss grown a sword, and his rest grown a fire?

Ye who tremble for death, or the death of desire,
Pass about the cold winter-tide garden and ponder
On the rose in his glory amidst of June's fire,
On the languor of noontide that gathered the thunder,
On the morn and its freshness, the eve and its wonder:
Ye may make it no more--shall Spring come to awaken?

Live on, for Love liveth, and earth shall be shaken
By the wind of his wings on the triumphing morning,
When the dead, and their deeds that die not shall awaken,
And the world's tale shall sound in your trumpet of warning,
And the sun smite the banner called Scorn of the Scorning,
And dead pain ye shall trample, dead fruitless desire,
As ye wend to pluck out the new world from the fire.

William Morris

Song VII: Dawn Talks to Day

Dawn talks to Day
Over dew-gleaming flowers,
Night flies away
Till the resting of hours:
Fresh are thy feet
And with dreams thine eyes glistening,
Thy still lips are sweet
Though the world is a-listening.
O Love, set a word in my mouth for our meeting,
Cast thine arms round about me to stay my heart's beating!
O fresh day, O fair day, O long day made ours!

Morn shall meet noon
While the flower-stems yet move,
Though the wind dieth soon
And the clouds fade above.
Loved lips are thine
As I tremble and hearken;
Bright thine eyes shine,
Though the leaves thy brow darken.
O Love, kiss me into silence, lest no word avail me,
Stay my head with thy bosom lest breath and life fail me!
O sweet day, O rich day, made long for our love!

Late day shall greet eve,
And the full blossoms shake,
For the wind will not leave
The tall trees while they wake.
Eyes soft with bliss,
Come nigher and nigher!
Sweet mouth I kiss,
Tell me all thy desire!
Let us speak, love, together some words of our story,
That our lips as they part may remember the glory!
O soft day, O calm day, made clear for our sake!

Eve shall kiss night,
And the leaves stir like rain
As the wind stealeth light
O'er the grass of the plain.
Unseen are thine eyes
Mid the dreamy night's sleeping,
And on my mouth there lies
The dear rain of thy weeping.
Hold silence, love, speak not of the sweet day departed,
Cling close to me, love, lest I waken sad-hearted!
O kind day, O dear day, short day, come again!

William Morris

Song VIII: While Ye Deemed Him A-Sleeping

Love is enough: while ye deemed him a-sleeping,
There were signs of his coming and sounds of his feet;
His touch it was that would bring you to weeping,
When the summer was deepest and music most sweet:
In his footsteps ye followed the day to its dying,
Ye went forth by his gown-skirts the morning to meet:
In his place on the beaten-down orchard-grass lying,
Of the sweet ways ye pondered left for life's trying.

Ah, what was all dreaming of pleasure anear you,
To the time when his eyes on your wistful eyes turned,
And ye saw his lips move, and his head bent to hear you,
As new-born and glad to his kindness ye yearned?
Ah, what was all dreaming of anguish and sorrow,
To the time when the world in his torment was burned,
And no god your heart from its prison might borrow,
And no rest was left, no today, no tomorrow?

All wonder of pleasure, all doubt of desire,
All blindness, are ended, and no more ye feel
If your feet tread his flowers or the flames of his fire,
If your breast meet his balms or the edge of his steel.
Change is come, and past over, no more strife, no more learning:
Now your lips and your forehead are sealed with his seal,
Look backward and smile at the thorns and the burning.
--Sweet rest, O my soul, and no fear of returning!

William Morris

Spring

Spring am I, too soft of heart
Much to speak ere I depart:
Ask the Summer-tide to prove
The abundance of my love.

William Morris

Summer

Summer looked for long am I:
Much shall change or e'er I die.
Prithee take it not amiss
Though I weary thee with bliss.

William Morris

Summer Dawn

Pray but one prayer for me 'twixt thy closed lips,
Think but one thought of me up in the stars.
The summer night waneth, the morning light slips,
Faint and grey 'twixt the leaves of the aspen, betwixt the cloud-bars
That are patiently waiting there for the dawn:
Patient and colourless, though Heaven's gold
Waits to float through them along with the sun.
Far out in the meadows, above the young corn,
The heavy elms wait, and restless and cold
The uneasy wind rises; the roses are dun;
Through the long twilight they pray for the dawn,
Round the lone house in the midst of the corn,
Speak but one word to me over the corn,
Over the tender, bow'd locks of the corn.

William Morris

The Chapel in Lyonesse

SIR OZANA.

All day long and every day,
From Christmas-Eve to Whit-Sunday,
Within that Chapel-aisle I lay,
And no man came a-near.

Naked to the waist was I,
And deep within my breast did lie,
Though no man any blood could spy,
The truncheon of a spear.

No meat did ever pass my lips
Those days. Alas! the sunlight slips
From off the gilded parclose, dips,
And night comes on apace.

My arms lay back behind my head;
Over my raised-up knees was spread
A samite cloth of white and red;
A rose lay on my face.

Many a time I tried to shout;
But as in dream of battle-rout,
My frozen speech would not well out;
I could not even weep.

With inward sigh I see the sun
Fade off the pillars one by one,
My heart faints when the day is done,
Because I cannot sleep.

Sometimes strange thoughts pass through my head;
Not like a tomb is this my bed,
Yet oft I think that I am dead;
That round my tomb is writ,

"Ozana of the hardy heart,
Knight of the Table Round,
Pray for his soul, lords, of your part;
A true knight he was found."

Ah! me, I cannot fathom it.

[He sleeps.]

SIR GALAHAD.

All day long and every day,
Till his madness pass'd away,
I watch'd Ozana as he lay

Within the gilded screen.

All my singing moved him not;
As I sung my heart grew hot,
With the thought of Launcelot
Far away, I ween.

So I went a little space
From out the chapel, bathed my face
In the stream that runs apace
By the churchyard wall.

There I pluck'd a faint wild rose,
Hard by where the linden grows,
Sighing over silver rows
Of the lilies tall.

I laid the flower across his mouth;
The sparkling drops seem'd good for drouth;
He smiled, turn'd round towards the south,
Held up a golden tress.

The light smote on it from the west;
He drew the covering from his breast,
Against his heart that hair he prest;
Death him soon will bless.

SIR BORS.

I enter'd by the western door;
I saw a knight's helm lying there:
I raised my eyes from off the floor,
And caught the gleaming of his hair.

I stept full softly up to him;
I laid my chin upon his head;
I felt him smile; my eyes did swim,
I was so glad he was not dead.

I heard Ozana murmur low,
"There comes no sleep nor any love."
But Galahad stoop'd and kiss'd his brow:
He shiver'd; I saw his pale lips move.

SIR OZANA.

There comes no sleep nor any love;
Ah me! I shiver with delight.
I am so weak I cannot move;
God move me to thee, dear, to-night!

Christ help! I have but little wit:
My life went wrong; I see it writ,

"Ozana of the hardy heart,
Knight of the Table Round,
Pray for his soul, lords, on your part;
A good knight he was found."

Now I begin to fathom it.

[He dies.]

SIR BORS.

Galahad sits dreamily;
What strange things may his eyes see,
Great blue eyes fix'd full on me?
On his soul, Lord, have mercy.

SIR GALAHAD.

Ozana, shall I pray for thee?
Her cheek is laid to thine;
No long time hence, also I see
Thy wasted fingers twine

Within the tresses of her hair
That shineth gloriously,
Thinly outspread in the clear air
Against the jasper sea.

William Morris

The Defence of Guenevere

But, learning now that they would have her speak,
She threw her wet hair backward from her brow,
Her hand close to her mouth touching her cheek,

As though she had had there a shameful blow,
And feeling it shameful to feel ought but shame
All through her heart, yet felt her cheek burned so,

She must a little touch it; like one lame
She walked away from Gauwaine, with her head
Still lifted up; and on her cheek of flame

The tears dried quick; she stopped at last and said:
"O knights and lords, it seems but little skill
To talk of well-known things past now and dead.

"God wot I ought to say, I have done ill,
And pray you all forgiveness heartily!
Because you must be right, such great lords--still

"Listen, suppose your time were come to die,
And you were quite alone and very weak;
Yea, laid a dying while very mightily

"The wind was ruffling up the narrow streak
Of river through your broad lands running well:
Suppose a hush should come, then some one speak:

" 'One of these cloths is heaven, and one is hell,
Now choose one cloth for ever; which they be,
I will not tell you, you must somehow tell

" 'Of your own strength and mightiness; here, see!'
Yea, yea, my lord, and you to ope your eyes,
At foot of your familiar bed to see

"A great God's angel standing, with such dyes,
Not known on earth, on his great wings, and hands
Held at two ways, light from the inner skies

"Showing him well, and making his commands
Seem to be God's commands, moreover, too,
Holding within his hands the cloths on wands;

"And one of these strange choosing cloths was blue,
Wavy and long, and one cut short and red;
No man could tell the better of the two.

"After a shivering half-hour you said:
'God help! heaven's colour, the blue;' and he said: 'hell.'
Perhaps you then would roll upon your bed,

"And cry to all good men that loved you well,
'Ah Christ! if only I had known, known, known;'
Launcelot went away, then I could tell,

"Like wisest man how all things would be, moan,
And roll and hurt myself, and long to die,
And yet fear much to die for what was sown.

"Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever may have happened through these years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie."

Her voice was low at first, being full of tears,
But as it cleared, it grew full loud and shrill,
Growing a windy shriek in all men's ears,

A ringing in their startled brains, until
She said that Gauwaine lied, then her voice sunk,
And her great eyes began again to fill,

Though still she stood right up, and never shrunk,
But spoke on bravely, glorious lady fair!
Whatever tears her full lips may have drunk,

She stood, and seemed to think, and wrung her hair,
Spoke out at last with no more trace of shame,
With passionate twisting of her body there:

"It chanced upon a day that Launcelot came
To dwell at Arthur's court: at Christmas time
This happened; when the heralds sung his name,

" 'Son of King Ban of Benwick,' seemed to chime
Along with all the bells that rang that day,
O'er the white roofs, with little change of rhyme.

"Christmas and whitened winter passed away,
And over me the April sunshine came,
Made very awful with black hail-clouds, yea

"And in the Summer I grew white with flame,
And bowed my head down--Autumn, and the sick
Sure knowledge things would never be the same,

"However often Spring might be most thick
Of blossoms and buds, smote on me, and I grew
Careless of most things, let the clock tick, tick,

"To my unhappy pulse, that beat right through
My eager body; while I laughed out loud,
And let my lips curl up at false or true,

"Seemed cold and shallow without any cloud.
Behold my judges, then the cloths were brought;
While I was dizzied thus, old thoughts would crowd,

"Belonging to the time ere I was bought
By Arthur's great name and his little love;
Must I give up for ever then, I thought,

"That which I deemed would ever round me move
Glorifying all things; for a little word,
Scarce ever meant at all, must I now prove

"Stone-cold for ever? Pray you, does the Lord
Will that all folks should be quite happy and good?
I love God now a little, if this cord

"Were broken, once for all what striving could
Make me love anything in earth or heaven?
So day by day it grew, as if one should

"Slip slowly down some path worn smooth and even,
Down to a cool sea on a summer day;
Yet still in slipping there was some small leaven

"Of stretched hands catching small stones by the way,
Until one surely reached the sea at last,
And felt strange new joy as the worn head lay

"Back, with the hair like sea-weed; yea all past
Sweat of the forehead, dryness of the lips,
Washed utterly out by the dear waves o'ercast,

"In the lone sea, far off from any ships!
Do I not know now of a day in Spring?
No minute of that wild day ever slips

"From out my memory; I hear thrushes sing,
And wheresoever I may be, straightway
Thoughts of it all come up with most fresh sting:

"I was half mad with beauty on that day,
And went without my ladies all alone,
In a quiet garden walled round every way;

"I was right joyful of that wall of stone,
That shut the flowers and trees up with the sky,
And trebled all the beauty: to the bone,

"Yea right through to my heart, grown very shy
With weary thoughts, it pierced, and made me glad;
Exceedingly glad, and I knew verily,

"A little thing just then had made me mad;
I dared not think, as I was wont to do,
Sometimes, upon my beauty; if I had

"Held out my long hand up against the blue,
And, looking on the tenderly darken'd fingers,
Thought that by rights one ought to see quite through,

"There, see you, where the soft still light yet lingers,
Round by the edges; what should I have done,
If this had joined with yellow spotted singers,

"And startling green drawn upward by the sun?
But shouting, loosed out, see now! all my hair,
And trancedly stood watching the west wind run

"With faintest half-heard breathing sound--why there
I lose my head e'en now in doing this;
But shortly listen--in that garden fair

"Came Launcelot walking; this is true, the kiss
Wherewith we kissed in meeting that spring day,
I scarce dare talk of the remember'd bliss,

"When both our mouths went wandering in one way,
And aching sorely, met among the leaves;
Our hands being left behind strained far away.

"Never within a yard of my bright sleeves
Had Launcelot come before--and now, so nigh!
After that day why is it Guenevere grieves?

"Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever happened on through all those years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie.

"Being such a lady could I weep these tears
If this were true? A great queen such as I
Having sinn'd this way, straight her conscience sears;

"And afterwards she liveth hatefully,
Slaying and poisoning, certes never weeps,--
Gauwaine, be friends now, speak me lovingly.

"Do I not see how God's dear pity creeps
All through your frame, and trembles in your mouth?
Remember in what grave your mother sleeps,

"Buried in some place far down in the south,
Men are forgetting as I speak to you;
By her head sever'd in that awful drouth

"Of pity that drew Agravaine's fell blow,
I pray your pity! let me not scream out
For ever after, when the shrill winds blow

"Through half your castle-locks! let me not shout
For ever after in the winter night
When you ride out alone! in battle-rout

"Let not my rusting tears make your sword light!
Ah! God of mercy, how he turns away!
So, ever must I dress me to the fight;

"So--let God's justice work! Gauwaine, I say,
See me hew down your proofs: yea, all men know
Even as you said how Mellyagraunce one day,

"One bitter day in la Fausse Garde, for so
All good knights held it after, saw--
Yea, sirs, by cursed unknighly outrage; though

"You, Gauwaine, held his word without a flaw,
This Mellyagraunce saw blood upon my bed--
Whose blood then pray you? is there any law

"To make a queen say why some spots of red
Lie on her coverlet? or will you say:
'Your hands are white, lady, as when you wed,

" 'Where did you bleed?' and I must stammer out: 'Nay,
I blush indeed, fair lord, only to rend
My sleeve up to my shoulder, where there lay

" 'A knife-point last night:' so must I defend
The honour of the lady Guenevere?
Not so, fair lords, even if the world should end

"This very day, and you were judges here
Instead of God. Did you see Mellyagraunce
When Launcelot stood by him? what white fear

"Curdled his blood, and how his teeth did dance,
His side sink in? as my knight cried and said:
'Slayer of unarm'd men, here is a chance!

" 'Setter of traps, I pray you guard your head,
By God I am so glad to fight with you,
Stripper of ladies, that my hand feels lead

" 'For driving weight; hurrah now! draw and do,
For all my wounds are moving in my breast,
And I am getting mad with waiting so.'

"He struck his hands together o'er the beast,
Who fell down flat and grovell'd at his feet,
And groan'd at being slain so young `at least.'

"My knight said: `Rise you, sir, who are so fleet
At catching ladies, half-arm'd will I fight,
My left side all uncover'd!' then I weet,

"Up sprang Sir Mellyagraunce with great delight
Upon his knave's face; not until just then
Did I quite hate him, as I saw my knight

"Along the lists look to my stake and pen
With such a joyous smile, it made me sigh
From agony beneath my waist-chain, when

"The fight began, and to me they drew nigh;
Ever Sir Launcelot kept him on the right,
And traversed warily, and ever high

"And fast leapt caitiff's sword, until my knight
Sudden threw up his sword to his left hand,
Caught it, and swung it; that was all the fight,

"Except a spout of blood on the hot land;
For it was hottest summer; and I know
I wonder'd how the fire, while I should stand,

"And burn, against the heat, would quiver so,
Yards above my head; thus these matters went;
Which things were only warnings of the woe

"That fell on me. Yet Mellyagraunce was shent,
For Mellyagraunce had fought against the Lord;
Therefore, my lords, take heed lest you be blent

"With all this wickedness; say no rash word
Against me, being so beautiful; my eyes,
Wept all away to grey, may bring some sword

"To drown you in your blood; see my breast rise,
Like waves of purple sea, as here I stand;
And how my arms are moved in wonderful wise,

"Yea also at my full heart's strong command,
See through my long throat how the words go up
In ripples to my mouth; how in my hand

"The shadow lies like wine within a cup
Of marvellously colour'd gold; yea now
This little wind is rising, look you up,

"And wonder how the light is falling so
Within my moving tresses: will you dare
When you have looked a little on my brow,

"To say this thing is vile? or will you care
For any plausible lies of cunning woof,
When you can see my face with no lie there

"For ever? am I not a gracious proof--
'But in your chamber Launcelot was found'--
Is there a good knight then would stand aloof,

"When a queen says with gentle queenly sound:
'O true as steel, come now and talk with me,
I love to see your step upon the ground

" 'Unwavering, also well I love to see
That gracious smile light up your face, and hear
Your wonderful words, that all mean verily

" 'The thing they seem to mean: good friend, so dear
To me in everything, come here to-night,
Or else the hours will pass most dull and drear;

" 'If you come not, I fear this time I might
Get thinking over much of times gone by,
When I was young, and green hope was in sight:

" 'For no man cares now to know why I sigh;
And no man comes to sing me pleasant songs,
Nor any brings me the sweet flowers that lie

" 'So thick in the gardens; therefore one so longs
To see you, Launcelot; that we may be
Like children once again, free from all wrongs

" 'Just for one night.' Did he not come to me?
What thing could keep true Launcelot away
If I said, 'Come?' There was one less than three

"In my quiet room that night, and we were gay;
Till sudden I rose up, weak, pale, and sick,
Because a bawling broke our dream up, yea

"I looked at Launcelot's face and could not speak,
For he looked helpless too, for a little while;
Then I remember how I tried to shriek,

"And could not, but fell down; from tile to tile
The stones they threw up rattled o'er my head
And made me dizzier; till within a while

"My maids were all about me, and my head
On Launcelot's breast was being soothed away
From its white chattering, until Launcelot said--

"By God! I will not tell you more to-day,
Judge any way you will--what matters it?
You know quite well the story of that fray,

"How Launcelot still'd their bawling, the mad fit
That caught up Gauwaine--all, all, verily,
But just that which would save me; these things flit.

"Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever may have happen'd these long years,
God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie!

"All I have said is truth, by Christ's dear tears."
She would not speak another word, but stood
Turn'd sideways; listening, like a man who hears

His brother's trumpet sounding through the wood
Of his foes' lances. She lean'd eagerly,
And gave a slight spring sometimes, as she could

At last hear something really; joyfully
Her cheek grew crimson, as the headlong speed
Of the roan charger drew all men to see,
The knight who came was Launcelot at good need.

William Morris

The Doomed Ship

The doomed ship drives on helpless through the sea,
All that the mariners may do is done
And death is left for men to gaze upon,
While side by side two friends sit silently;
Friends once, foes once, and now by death made free
Of Love and Hate, of all things lost or won;
Yet still the wonder of that strife bygone
Clouds all the hope or horror that may be.

Thus, Sorrow, are we sitting side by side
Amid this welter of the grey despair,
Nor have we images of foul or fair
To vex, save of thy kissed face of a bride,
Thy scornful face of tears when I was tried,
And failed neath pain I was not made to bear.

William Morris

The Earthly Paradise: Apology

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

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

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

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

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

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

William Morris

The Earthly Paradise: The Lady of the Land

The Argument A certain man having landed on an island in the Greek sea, found there a beautiful damsel, whom he would fain have delivered from a strange & dreadful doom, but failing herein, he died soon afterwards.

It happened once, some men of Italy
Midst the Greek Islands went a sea-roving,
And much good fortune had they on the sea:
Of many a man they had the ransoming,
And many a chain they gat and goodly thing;
And midst their voyage to an isle they came,
Whereof my story keepeth not the name.
Now though but little was there left to gain,
Because the richer folk had gone away,
Yet since by this of water they were fain
They came to anchor in a land-locked bay,
Whence in a while some went ashore to play,
Going but lightly armed in twos or threes,
For midst that folk they feared no enemies.

And of these fellows that thus went ashore,
One was there who left all his friends behind;
Who going inland ever more and more,
And being left quite alone, at last did find
A lonely valley sheltered from the wind,
Wherein, amidst an ancient cypress wood,
A long-deserted ruined castle stood.

The wood, once ordered in fair grove and glade,
With gardens overlooked by terraces,
And marble-paved pools for pleasure made,
Was tangled now and choked with fallen trees;
And he who went there, with but little ease
Must stumble by the stream's side, once made meet
For tender women's dainty wandering feet.

The raven's croak, the low wind choked and drear,
The baffled stream, the grey wolf's doleful cry,
Were all the sounds that mariner could hear,
As through the wood he wandered painfully;
But as unto the house he drew anigh,
The pillars of a ruined shrine he saw,
The once fair temple of a fallen law.

No image was there left behind to tell
Before whose face the knees of men had bowed;
An altar of black stone, of old wrought well,
Alone beneath a ruined roof now showed
The goal whereto the folk were wont to crowd,
Seeking for things forgotten long ago,
Praying for heads long ages laid a-low.

Close to the temple was the castle-gate,
Doorless and crumbling; there our fellow turned,

Trembling indeed at what might chance to wait
The prey entrapped, yet with a heart that burned
To know the most of what might there be learned,
And hoping somewhat too, amid his fear,
To light on such things as all men hold dear.

Noble the house was, nor seemed built for war,
But rather like the work of other days,
When men, in better peace than now they are,
Had leisure on the world around to gaze,
And noted well the past times' changing ways;
And fair with sculptured stories it was wrought,
By lapse of time unto dim ruin brought.

Now as he looked about on all these things
And strove to read the mouldering histories,
Above the door an image with wide wings,
Whose unclad limbs a serpent seemed to seize,
He dimly saw, although the western breeze
And years of biting frost and washing rain
Had made the carver's lab our well-nigh vain.

But this, though perished sore and worn away,
He noted well, because it seemed to be,
After the fashion of another day,
Some great man's badge of war or armoury;
And round it a carved wreath he seemed to see:
But taking note of these things, at the last
The mariner beneath the gateway passed.

And there a lovely cloistered court he found,
A fountain in the mist o'erthrown and dry,
And in the cloister briars twining round
The slender shafts; the wondrous imagery
Outworn by more than many years gone by;
Because the country people, in their fear
Of wizardry, had wrought destruction here,

And piteously these fair things had been maimed;
There stood great Jove, lacking his head of might;
Here was the archer, swift Apollo, lamed;
The shapely limbs of Venus hid from sight
By weeds and shards; Diana's ankles light
Bound with the cable of some coasting ship;
And rusty nails through Helen's maddening lip.

Therefrom unto the chambers did he pass,
And found them fair still, midst of their decay,
Though in them now no sign of man there was,
And everything but stone had passed away
That made them lovely in that vanished day;
Nay, the mere walls themselves would soon be gone

And nought be left but heaps of mouldering stone.

But he, when all the place he had gone o'er,
And with much trouble clomb the broken stair,
And from the topmost turret seen the shore
And his good ship drawn up at anchor there,
Came down again, and found a crypt most fair
Built wonderfully beneath the greatest hall,
And there he saw a door within the wall,

Well-hinged, close shut; nor was there in that place
Another on its hinges, therefore he
Stood there and pondered for a little space
And thought: "Perchance some marvel I shall see,
For surely here some dweller there must be,
Because this door seems whole and new and sound,
While nought but ruin I can see around."

So with that word, moved by a strong desire,
He tried the hasp, that yielded to his hand,
And in a strange place, lit as by a fire
Unseen but near, he presently did stand;
And by an odorous breeze his face was fanned,
As though in some Arabian plain he stood,
Anigh the border of a spice-tree wood.

He moved not for awhile, but looking round,
He wondered much to see the place so fair,
Because, unlike the castle above ground,
No pillager or wrecker had been there;
It seemed that time had passed on otherwhere,
Nor laid a finger on this hidden place
Rich with the wealth of some forgotten race.

With hangings, fresh as when they left the loom,
The walls were hung a space above the head,
Slim ivory chairs were set about the room,
And in one corner was a dainty bed
That seemed for some fair queen apparell'd;
And marble was the worst stone on the floor,
That with rich Indian webs was covered o'er.

The wanderer trembled when he saw all this,
Because he deemed by magic it was wrought;
Yet in his heart a longing for some bliss
Whereof the hard and changing world knows nought,
Arose and urged him on, and dimmed the thought
That there perchance some devil lurked to slay

The heedless wanderer from the light of day.

Over against him was another door
Set in the wall, so casting fear aside,
With hurried steps he crossed the varied floor,
And there again the silver latch he tried
And with no pain the door he opened wide,
And entering the new chamber cautiously
The glory of great heaps of gold could see.

Upon the floor uncounted medals lay
Like things of little value; here and there
Stood golden caldrons, that might well outweigh
The biggest midst an emperor's copper-ware,
And golden cups were set on tables fair,
Themselves of gold; and in all hollow things
Were stored great gems, worthy the crowns of kings.

The walls and roof with gold were overlaid,
And precious raiment from the wall hung down;
The fall of kings that treasure might have stayed,
Or gained some longing conqueror great renown,
Or built again some God-destroyed old town;
What wonder if this plunderer of the sea
Stood gazing at it long and dizzily?

But at the last his troubled eyes and dazed
He lifted from the glory of that gold,
And then the image, that well-nigh erased
Over the castle-gate he did behold,
Above a door well wrought in coloured gold
Again he saw; a naked girl with wings
Enfolded in a serpent's scaly rings.

And even as his eyes were fixed on it
A woman's voice came from the other side,
And through his heart strange hopes began to flit
That in some wondrous land he might abide
Not dying, master of a deathless bride,
So o'er the gold which now he scarce could see
He went, and passed this last door eagerly.

Then in a room he stood wherein there was
A marble bath, whose brimming water yet
Was scarcely still; a vessel of green glass
Half full of odorous ointment was there set

Upon the topmost step that still was wet,
And jewelled shoes and women's dainty gear,
Lay cast upon the varied pavement near.

In one quick glance these things his eyes did see,
But speedily they turned round to behold
Another sight, for throned on ivory
There sat a woman, whose wet tresses rolled
On to the floor in waves of gleaming gold,
Cast back from such a form as, erewhile shown
To one poor shepherd, lighted up Troy town.

Naked she was, the kisses of her feet
Upon the floor a dying path had made
From the full bath unto her ivory seat;
In her right hand, upon her bosom laid,
She held a golden comb, a mirror weighed
Her left hand down, aback her fair head lay
Dreaming awake of some long vanished day.

Her eyes were shut but she seemed not to sleep,
Her lips were murmuring things unheard and low,
Or sometimes twitched as though she needs must weep,
Though from her eyes the tears refused to flow,
And oft with heavenly red her cheek did glow,
As if remembrance of some half-sweet shame
Across the web of many memories came.

There stood the man, scarce daring to draw breath
For fear the lovely sight should fade away;
Forgetting heaven, forgetting life and death,
Trembling for fear lest something he should say
Unwitting, lest some sob should yet betray
His presence there, for to his eager eyes
Already did the tears begin to rise.

But as he gazed she moved, and with a sigh
Bent forward, dropping down her golden head:
"Alas, alas! another day gone by,
Another day and no soul come," she said;
"Another year, and still I am not dead!"
And with that word once more her head she raised,
And on the trembling man with great eyes gazed.

Then he imploring hands to her did reach,
And toward her very slowly 'gan to move

And with wet eyes her pity did beseech,
And seeing her about to speak he strove
From trembling lips to utter words of love;
But with a look she stayed his doubtful feet,
And made sweet music as their eyes did meet.

For now she spoke in gentle voice and clear,
Using the Greek tongue that he knew full well:
"What man art thou that thus hast wandered here,
And found this lonely chamber where I dwell?
Beware, beware! for I have many a spell;
If greed of power and gold have led thee on,
Not lightly shall this untold wealth be won.

"But if thou com'st here knowing of my tale,
In hope to bear away my body fair,
Stout must thine heart be, nor shall that avail
If thou a wicked soul in thee dost bear;
So once again I bid thee to beware,
Because no base man things like this may see,
And live thereafter long and happily."

"Lady," he said, "in Florence is my home,
And in my city noble is my name;
Neither on peddling voyage am I come,
But, like my fathers, bent to gather fame;
And though thy face has set my heart a-flame
Yet of thy story nothing do I know
But here have wandered heedlessly enow.

"But since the sight of thee mine eyes did bless,
What can I be but thine? what would'st thou have?
From those thy words, I deem from some distress
By deeds of mine thy dear life I might save;
O then, delay not! if one ever gave
His life to any, mine I give to thee;
Come, tell me what the price of love must be?

"Swift death, to be with thee a day and night
And with the earliest dawning to be slain?
Or better, a long year of great delight,
And many years of misery and pain?
Or worse, and this poor hour for all my gain?
A sorry merchant am I on this day,
E'en as thou wilt so must I obey."

She said, "What brave words! nought divine am I,
But an unhappy and unheard-of maid
Compelled by evil fate and destiny
To live, who long ago should have been laid
Under the earth within the cypress shade.
Hearken awhile, and quickly shalt thou know
What deed I pray thee to accomplish now.

"God grant indeed thy words are not for nought!
Then shalt thou save me, since for many a day
To such a dreadful life I have been brought:
Nor will I spare with all my heart to pay
What man soever takes my grief away;
Ah! I will love thee, if thou lovest me
But well enough my saviour now to be.

"My father lived a many years agone
Lord of this land, master of all cunning,
Who ruddy gold could draw from out grey stone
And gather wealth from many an uncouth thing;
He made the wilderness rejoice and sing,
And such a leech he was that none could say
Without his word what soul should pass away.

"Unto Diana such a gift he gave,
Goddess above, below and on the earth,
That I should be her virgin and her slave
From the first hour of my most wretched birth;
Therefore my life had known but little mirth
When I had come unto my twentieth year
And the last time of hallowing drew anear.

"So in her temple had I lived and died
And all would long ago have passed away,
But ere that time came, did strange things betide,
Whereby I am alive unto this day;
Alas, the bitter words that I must say!
Ah! can I bring my wretched tongue to tell
How I was brought unto this fearful hell.

"A queen I was, what Gods I knew I loved,
And nothing evil was there in my thought,
And yet by love my wretched heart was moved
Until to utter ruin I was brought!
Alas! thou sayest our gods were vain and nought,
Wait, wait, till thou hast heard this tale of mine,
Then shalt thou think them devilish or divine.

"Hearken! in spite of father and of vow
I loved a man; but for that sin I think
Men had forgiven me--yea, yea, even thou;
But from the Gods the full cup must I drink
And into misery unheard-of sink,
Tormented when their own names are forgot,
And men must doubt e'er if they lived or not.

"Glorious my lover was unto my sight,
Most beautiful; of love we grew so fain
That we at last agreed, that on a night
We should be happy, but that he were slain
Or shut in hold; and neither joy nor pain
Should else forbid that hoped-for time to be;
So came the night that made a wretch of me.

"Ah! well do I remember all that night,
When through the window shone the orb of June,
And by the bed flickered the taper's light,
Whereby I trembled, gazing at the moon:
Ah me! the meeting that we had, when soon
Into his strong, well-trusted arms I fell
And many a sorrow we began to tell.

"Ah me! what parting on that night we had!
I think the story of my great despair
A little while might merry folk make sad;
For, as he swept away my yellow hair
To make my shoulder and my bosom bare,
I raised mine eyes, and shuddering could behold
A shadow cast upon the bed of gold:

"Then suddenly was quenched my hot desire
And he untwined his arms; the moon so pale
A while ago, seemed changed to blood and fire,
And yet my limbs beneath me did not fail,
And neither had I strength to cry or wail,
But stood there helpless, bare and shivering,
With staring eyes still fixed upon the thing.

"Because the shade that on the bed of gold
The changed and dreadful moon was throwing down
Was of Diana, whom I did behold
With knotted hair and shining girt-up gown,
And on the high white brow a deadly frown

Bent upon us, who stood scarce drawing breath,
Striving to meet the horrible sure death.

"No word at all the dreadful Goddess said,
But soon across my feet my lover lay,
And well indeed I knew that he was dead;
And would that I had died on that same day!
For in a while the image turned away,
And without words my doom I understood,
And felt a horror change my human blood.

"And there I fell, and on the floor I lay
By the dead man, till daylight came on me,
And not a word thenceforward could I say
For three years; till of grief and misery,
The lingering pest, the cruel enemy,
My father and his folk were dead and gone,
And in this castle I was left alone:

"And then the doom foreseen upon me fell,
For Queen Diana did my body change
Into a fork-tongued dragon flesh and fell,
And through the island nightly do I range,
Or in the green sea mate with monsters strange,
When in the middle of the moonlit night
The sleepy mariner I do affright.

"But all day long upon this gold I lie
Within this place, where never mason's hand
Smote trowel on the marble noisily;
Drowsy I lie, no folk at my command,
Who once was called the Lady of the Land;
Who might have bought a kingdom with a kiss,
Yea, half the world with such a sight as this."

And therewithal, with rosy fingers light,
Backward her heavy-hanging hair she threw,
To give her naked beauty more to sight;
But when, forgetting all the things he knew,
Maddened with love unto the prize he drew,
She cried: "Nay, wait! for wherefore wilt thou die,
Why should we not be happy, thou and I?"

"Wilt thou not save me? once in every year
This rightful form of mine that thou dost see
By favour of the Goddess have I here

From sunrise unto sunset given me,
That some brave man may end my misery.
And thou--art thou not brave? can thy heart fail,
Whose eyes e'en now are weeping at my tale?

"Then listen! when this day is overpast,
A fearful monster shall I be again,
And thou mayst be my saviour at the last,
Unless, once more, thy words are nought and vain.
If thou of love and sovereignty art fain,
Come thou next morn, and when thou seest here
A hideous dragon, have thereof no fear,

"But take the loathsome head up in thine hands
And kiss it, and be master presently
Of twice the wealth that is in all the lands
From Cathay to the head of Italy;
And master also, if it pleaseth thee,
Of all thou praisest as so fresh and bright,
Of what thou callest crown of all delight.

"Ah! with what joy then shall I see again
The sunlight on the green grass and the trees,
And hear the clatter of the summer rain,
And see the joyous folk beyond the seas.
Ah, me! to hold my child upon my knees
After the weeping of unkindly tears
And all the wrongs of these four hundred years.

"Go now, go quick! leave this grey heap of stone;
And from thy glad heart think upon thy way,
How I shall love thee--yea, love thee alone,
That bringest me from dark death unto day;
For this shall be thy wages and thy pay;
Unheard-of wealth, unheard-of love is near,
If thou hast heart a little dread to bear."

Therewith she turned to go; but he cried out:
"Ah! wilt thou leave me then without one kiss,
To slay the very seeds of fear and doubt,
That glad to-morrow may bring certain bliss?
Hast thou forgotten how love lives by this,
The memory of some hopeful close embrace,
Low whispered words within some lonely place?"

But she, when his bright glittering eyes she saw

And burning cheeks, cried out: "Alas, alas!
Must I be quite undone, and wilt thou draw
A worse fate on me than the first one was?
O haste thee from this fatal place to pass!
Yet, ere thou goest, take this, lest thou shouldst deem
Thou hast been fooled by some strange midday dream."

So saying, blushing like a new-kissed maid,
From off her neck a little gem she drew,
That 'twixt those snowy rose-tinged hillocks laid,
The secrets of her glorious beauty knew;
And ere he well perceived what she would do,
She touched his hand, the gem within it lay,
And, turning, from his sight she fled away.

Then at the doorway where her rosy heel
Had glanced and vanished, he awhile did stare,
And still upon his hand he seemed to feel
The varying kisses of her fingers fair;
Then turned he toward the dreary crypt and bare,
And dizzily throughout the castle passed
Till by the ruined fane he stood at last.

Then weighing still the gem within his hand,
He stumbled backward through the cypress wood,
Thinking the while of some strange lovely land
Where all his life should be most fair and good;
Till on the valley's wall of hills he stood,
And slowly thence passed down unto the bay
Red with the death of that bewildering day.

The next day came, and he, who all the night
Had ceaselessly been turning in his bed,
Arose and clad himself in armour bright,
And many a danger he rememberèd;
Storming of towns, lone sieges full of dread,
That with renown his heart had borne him through,
And this thing seemed a little thing to do.

So on he went, and on the way he thought
Of all the glorious things of yesterday,
Nought of the price whereat they must be bought,
But ever to himself did softly say
"No roaming now, my wars are passed away,
No long dull days devoid of happiness,
When such a love my yearning heart shall bless."

Thus to the castle did he come at last,
But when unto the gateway he drew near,
And underneath its ruined archway passed
Into the court, a strange noise did he hear,
And through his heart there shot a pang of fear;
Trembling, he gat his sword into his hand,
And midmost of the cloisters took his stand.

But for a while that unknown noise increased,
A rattling, that with strident roars did blend
And whining moans; but suddenly it ceased,
A fearful thing stood at the cloister's end
And eyed him for a while, then 'gan to wend
Adown the cloisters, and began again
That rattling, and the moan like fiends in pain.

And as it came on towards him, with its teeth
The body of a slain goat did it tear,
The blood whereof in its hot jaws did seethe,
And on its tongue he saw the smoking hair;
Then his heart sank, and standing trembling there,
Throughout his mind wild thoughts and fearful ran:
"Some fiend she was," he said, "the bane of man."

Yet he abode her still, although his blood
Curdled within him: the thing dropped the goat,
And creeping on, came close to where he stood,
And raised its head to him and wrinkled throat.
Then he cried out and wildly at her smote,
Shutting his eyes, and turned and from the place
Ran swiftly, with a white and ghastly face.

But little things rough stones and tree-trunks seemed,
And if he fell, he rose and ran on still;
No more he felt his hurts than if he dreamed,
He made no stay for valley or steep hill,
Heedless he dashed through many a foaming rill,
Until he came unto the ship at last
And with no word into the deep hold passed.

Meanwhile the dragon, seeing him clean gone,
Followed him not, but crying horribly,
Caught up within her jaws a block of stone
And ground it into powder, then turned she,
With cries that folk could hear far out at sea,
And reached the treasure set apart of old,

To brood above the hidden heaps of gold.

Yet was she seen again on many a day
By some half-waking mariner or herd,
Playing amid the ripples of the bay,
Or on the hills making all things afeard,
Or in the wood that did that castle gird,
But never any man again durst go
To seek her woman 's form, and end her woe.

As for the man, who knows what things he bore?
What mournful faces peopled the sad night,
What wailings vexed him with reproaches sore,
What images of that nigh-gained delight!
What dreamed caresses from soft hands and white,
Turning to horrors ere they reached the best;
What struggles vain, what shame, what huge unrest?

No man he knew, three days he lay and raved
And cried for death, until a lethargy
Fell on him, and his fellows thought him saved;
But on the third night he awoke to die;
And at Byzantium doth his body lie
Between two blossoming pomegranate trees,
Within the churchyard of the Genoese.

William Morris

The Eve of Crecy

Gold on her head, and gold on her feet,
And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,
And a golden girdle round my sweet;
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Margaret's maids are fair to see,
Freshly dress'd and pleasantly;
Margaret's hair falls down to her knee;
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

If I were rich I would kiss her feet;
I would kiss the place where the gold hems meet,
And the golden kirtle round my sweet:
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Ah me! I have never touch'd her hand;
When the arrière-ban goes through the land,
Six basnets under my pennon stand;
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

And many an one grins under his hood:
Sir Lambert du Bois, with all his men good,
Has neither food nor firewood;
Ah! qu'elle est belle la Marguerite.

If I were rich I would kiss her feet,
And the golden girdle of my sweet,
And thereabouts where the gold hems meet;
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Yet even now it is good to think,
While my few poor varlets grumble and drink
In my desolate hall, where the fires sink,--
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite,--

Of Margaret sitting glorious there,
In glory of gold and glory of hair,
And glory of glorious face most fair;
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

Likewise to-night I make good cheer,
Because this battle draweth near:
For what have I to lose or fear?
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

For, look you, my horse is good to prance
A right fair measure in this war-dance,
Before the eyes of Philip of France;
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

And sometime it may hap, perdie,
While my new towers stand up three and three,

And my hall gets painted fair to see--
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite--

That folks may say: Times change, by the rood,
For Lambert, banneret of the wood,
Has heaps of food and firewood;
Ah! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.

William Morris

The Haystack in the Floods

Had she come all the way for this,
To part at last without a kiss?
Yea, had she borne the dirt and rain
That her own eyes might see him slain
Beside the haystack in the floods?

Along the dripping leafless woods,
The stirrup touching either shoe,
She rode astride as troopers do;
With kirtle kilted to her knee,
To which the mud splash'd wretchedly;
And the wet dripp'd from every tree
Upon her head and heavy hair,
And on her eyelids broad and fair;
The tears and rain ran down her face.
By fits and starts they rode apace,
And very often was his place
Far off from her; he had to ride
Ahead, to see what might betide
When the roads cross'd; and sometimes, when
There rose a murmuring from his men
Had to turn back with promises;
Ah me! she had but little ease;
And often for pure doubt and dread
She sobb'd, made giddy in the head
By the swift riding; while, for cold,
Her slender fingers scarce could hold
The wet reins; yea, and scarcely, too,
She felt the foot within her shoe
Against the stirrup: all for this,
To part at last without a kiss
Beside the haystack in the floods.

For when they near'd that old soak'd hay,
They saw across the only way
That Judas, Godmar, and the three
Red running lions dismally
Grinn'd from his pennon, under which
In one straight line along the ditch,
They counted thirty heads.

So then
While Robert turn'd round to his men
She saw at once the wretched end,
And, stooping down, tried hard to rend
Her coif the wrong way from her head,
And hid her eyes; while Robert said:
"Nay, love, 'tis scarcely two to one,
At Poitiers where we made them run
So fast--why, sweet my love, good cheer,
The Gascon frontier is so near.
Naught after this."

But, "Oh!" she said,
"My God! my God! I have to tread
The long way back without you; then
The court at Paris; those six men;
The gratings of the Chatelet;
The swift Seine on some rainy day
Like this, and people standing by
And laughing, while my weak hands try
To recollect how strong men swim.
All this, or else a life with him,
For which I should be damned at last.
Would God that this next hour were past!"

He answer'd not, but cried his cry,
"St. George for Marny!" cheerily;
And laid his hand upon her rein.
Alas! no man of all his train
Gave back that cheery cry again;
And, while for rage his thumb beat fast
Upon his sword-hilts, some one cast
About his neck a kerchief long,
And bound him.

Then they went along
To Godmar; who said: "Now, Jehane,
Your lover's life is on the wane
So fast, that, if this very hour
You yield not as my paramour,
He will not see the rain leave off--
Nay, keep your tongue from gibe or scoff,
Sir Robert, or I slay you now."

She laid her hand upon her brow,
Then gazed upon the palm, as though
She thought her forehead bled, and--"No!"
She said, and turn'd her head away,
As there were nothing else to say,
And everything were settled: red
Grew Godmar's face from chin to head:
"Jehane, on yonder hill there stands
My castle, guarding well my lands:
What hinders me from taking you,
And doing that I list to do
To your fair wilful body, while
Your knight lies dead?"

A wicked smile
Wrinkled her face, her lips grew thin,
A long way out she thrust her chin:
"You know that I would strangle you
While you were sleeping; or bite through

Your throat, by God's help--ah!" she said,
"Lord Jesus, pity your poor maid!
For in such wise they hem me in,
I cannot choose but sin and sin,
Whatever happens: yet I think
They could not make me eat or drink,
And so should I just reach my rest."
"Nay, if you do not my behest,
O Jehane! though I love you well,"
Said Godmar, "would I fail to tell
All that I know?" "Foul lies," she said.
"Eh? lies, my Jehane? by God's head,
At Paris folks would deem them true!
Do you know, Jehane, they cry for you:
'Jehane the brown! Jehane the brown!
Give us Jehane to burn or drown!'
Eh--gag me Robert!--sweet my friend,
This were indeed a piteous end
For those long fingers, and long feet,
And long neck, and smooth shoulders sweet;
An end that few men would forget
That saw it--So, an hour yet:
Consider, Jehane, which to take
Of life or death!"

So, scarce awake,
Dismounting, did she leave that place,
And totter some yards: with her face
Turn'd upward to the sky she lay,
Her head on a wet heap of hay,
And fell asleep: and while she slept,
And did not dream, the minutes crept
Round to the twelve again; but she,
Being waked at last, sigh'd quietly,
And strangely childlike came, and said:
"I will not." Straightway Godmar's head,
As though it hung on strong wires, turn'd
Most sharply round, and his face burn'd.

For Robert--both his eyes were dry,
He could not weep, but gloomily
He seem'd to watch the rain; yea, too,
His lips were firm; he tried once more
To touch her lips; she reach'd out, sore
And vain desire so tortured them,
The poor grey lips, and now the hem
Of his sleeve brush'd them.

With a start
Up Godmar rose, thrust them apart;
From Robert's throat he loosed the bands
Of silk and mail; with empty hands

Held out, she stood and gazed, and saw
The long bright blade without a flaw
Glide out from Godmar's sheath, his hand
In Robert's hair, she saw him bend
Back Robert's head; she saw him send
The thin steel down; the blow told well,
Right backward the knight Robert fell,
And moaned as dogs do, being half dead,
Unwitting, as I deem: so then
Godmar turn'd grinning to his men,
Who ran, some five or six, and beat
His head to pieces at their feet.

Then Godmar turn'd again and said:
"So, Jehane, the first fitte is read!
Take note, my lady, that your way
Lies backward to the Chatelet!"
She shook her head and gazed awhile
At her cold hands with a rueful smile,
As though this thing had made her mad.

This was the parting that they had
Beside the haystack in the floods.

William Morris

The Haystack in the Woods

Had she come all the way for this,
To part at last without a kiss?
Yea, had she borne the dirt and rain
That her own eyes might see him slain
Beside the haystack in the floods?

Along the dripping leafless woods,
The stirrup touching either shoe,
She rode astride as troopers do;
With kirtle kilted to her knee,
To which the mud splash'd wretchedly;
And the wet dripp'd from every tree
Upon her head and heavy hair,
And on her eyelids broad and fair;
The tears and rain ran down her face.
By fits and starts they rode apace,
And very often was his place
Far off from her; he had to ride
Ahead, to see what might betide
When the roads cross'd; and sometimes, when
There rose a murmuring from his men
Had to turn back with promises;
Ah me! she had but little ease;
And often for pure doubt and dread
She sobb'd, made giddy in the head
By the swift riding; while, for cold,
Her slender fingers scarce could hold
The wet reins; yea, and scarcely, too,
She felt the foot within her shoe
Against the stirrup: all for this,
To part at last without a kiss
Beside the haystack in the floods.

For when they near'd that old soak'd hay,
They saw across the only way
That Judas, Godmar, and the three
Red running lions dismally
Grinn'd from his pennon, under which
In one straight line along the ditch,
They counted thirty heads.

So then
While Robert turn'd round to his men
She saw at once the wretched end,
And, stooping down, tried hard to rend
Her coif the wrong way from her head,
And hid her eyes; while Robert said:
"Nay, love, 'tis scarcely two to one,
At Poitiers where we made them run
So fast--why, sweet my love, good cheer,
The Gascon frontier is so near.
Naught after this."

But, "Oh!" she said,
"My God! my God! I have to tread
The long way back without you; then
The court at Paris; those six men;
The gratings of the Chatelet;
The swift Seine on some rainy day
Like this, and people standing by
And laughing, while my weak hands try
To recollect how strong men swim.
All this, or else a life with him,
For which I should be damned at last.
Would God that this next hour were past!"

He answer'd not, but cried his cry,
"St. George for Marny!" cheerily;
And laid his hand upon her rein.
Alas! no man of all his train
Gave back that cheery cry again;
And, while for rage his thumb beat fast
Upon his sword-hilts, some one cast
About his neck a kerchief long,
And bound him.

Then they went along
To Godmar; who said: "Now, Jehane,
Your lover's life is on the wane
So fast, that, if this very hour
You yield not as my paramour,
He will not see the rain leave off--
Nay, keep your tongue from gibe or scoff,
Sir Robert, or I slay you now."

She laid her hand upon her brow,
Then gazed upon the palm, as though
She thought her forehead bled, and--"No!"
She said, and turn'd her head away,
As there were nothing else to say,
And everything were settled: red
Grew Godmar's face from chin to head:
"Jehane, on yonder hill there stands
My castle, guarding well my lands:
What hinders me from taking you,
And doing that I list to do
To your fair wilful body, while
Your knight lies dead?"

A wicked smile
Wrinkled her face, her lips grew thin,
A long way out she thrust her chin:
"You know that I would strangle you
While you were sleeping; or bite through

Your throat, by God's help--ah!" she said,
"Lord Jesus, pity your poor maid!
For in such wise they hem me in,
I cannot choose but sin and sin,
Whatever happens: yet I think
They could not make me eat or drink,
And so should I just reach my rest."
"Nay, if you do not my behest,
O Jehane! though I love you well,"
Said Godmar, "would I fail to tell
All that I know?" "Foul lies," she said.
"Eh? lies, my Jehane? by God's head,
At Paris folks would deem them true!
Do you know, Jehane, they cry for you:
'Jehane the brown! Jehane the brown!
Give us Jehane to burn or drown!'"--
Eh--gag me Robert!--sweet my friend,
This were indeed a piteous end
For those long fingers, and long feet,
And long neck, and smooth shoulders sweet;
An end that few men would forget
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At her cold hands with a rueful smile,
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Beside the haystack in the floods.

William Morris

The Nymph's Song to Hylas

I KNOW a little garden-close
Set thick with lily and red rose,
Where I would wander if I might
From dewy dawn to dewy night,
And have one with me wandering.

And though within it no birds sing,
And though no pillar'd house is there,
And though the apple boughs are bare
Of fruit and blossom, would to God,
Her feet upon the green grass trod,
And I beheld them as before!

There comes a murmur from the shore,
And in the place two fair streams are,
Drawn from the purple hills afar,
Drawn down unto the restless sea;
The hills whose flowers ne'er fed the bee,
The shore no ship has ever seen,
Still beaten by the billows green,
Whose murmur comes unceasingly
Unto the place for which I cry.

For which I cry both day and night,
For which I let slip all delight,
That maketh me both deaf and blind,
Careless to win, unskill'd to find,
And quick to lose what all men seek.

Yet tottering as I am, and weak,
Still have I left a little breath
To seek within the jaws of death
An entrance to that happy place;
To seek the unforgotten face
Once seen, once kiss'd, once reft from me
Anigh the murmuring of the sea.

William Morris

The Story of Sigurd the Volsung (excerpt)

But therewith the sun rose upward and lightened all the earth,
And the light flashed up to the heavens from the rims of the glorious girth;
But they twain arose together, and with both her palms outspread,
And bathed in the light returning, she cried aloud and said:
"All hail, O Day and thy Sons, and thy kin of the coloured things!
Hail, following Night, and thy Daughter that leadeth thy wavering wings!
Look down With unangry eyes on us today alive,
And give us the hearts victorious, and the gain for which we strive!
All hail, ye Lords of God-home, and ye Queens of the House of Gold!
Hail, thou dear Earth that bearest, and thou Wealth of field and fold!
Give us, your noble children, the glory of wisdom and speech,
And the hearts and the hands of healing, and the mouths and hands that teach!"

Then they turned and were knit together; and oft and o'er again
They craved, and kissed rejoicing, and their hearts were full and fain.
Then Sigurd looketh upon her, and the words from his heart arise:
"Thou art the fairest of earth, and the wisest of the wise;
O who art thou that lovest? I am Sigurd, e'en as I told;
I have slain the Foe of the Gods, and gotten the Ancient Gold;
And great were the gain of thy love, and the gift of mine earthly days,
If we twain should never sunder as we wend on the changing ways.
O who art thou that lovest, thou fairest of all things born?
And what meanest thy sleep and thy slumber in the wilderness forlorn?"

She said: "I am one that loveth: I was born of the earthly folk,
But of old Allfather took me from the Kings and their wedding yoke:
And he called me the Victory-Wafer, and I went and came as he would,
And I chose the slain for his war-host, and the days were glorious and good,
Till the thoughts of my heart overcame me, and the pride of my wisdom and speech,
And I scorned the earth-folk's Framer and the Lord of the world I must teach:
For the death-doomed I caught from the sword, and the fated life I slew,
And I deemed that my deeds were goodly, and that long I should do and undo.
But Allfather came against me and the God in his wrath arose;
And he cried: `Thou hast thought in thy folly that the Gods have friends and foes,
That they wake, and the world wends onward, that they sleep, and the world slips
back,
That they laugh, and the world's weal waxeth, that they frown and fashion the the
wrack:
Thou hast cast up the curse against me; it shall fall aback on thine head;
Go back to the sons of repentance, with the children of sorrow wed!
For the Gods are great unholpen, and their grief is seldom seen,
And the wrong that they will and must be is soon as it had not been.'

"Yet I thought: ` Shall I wed in the world, shall I gather grief on the earth?
Then the fearless heart shall I wed, and bring the best to birth,
And fashion such tales for the telling, that Earth shall be holpen at least,
If the Gods think scorn of its fairness, as they sit at the changeless feast.'
"Then somewhat smiled Allfather; and he spake: 'So let it be!
The doom thereof abideth; the doom of me and thee.
Yet long shall the time pass over ere thy waking day be born:
Fare forth, and forget and be weary 'neath the Sting of the Sleepful Thorn!'

'So I came to the head of Hindfell and the ruddy shields and white,
And the wall of the wildfire wavering around the isle of night;
And there the Sleep-thorn pierced me, and the slumber on me fell,
And the night of nameless sorrows that hath no tale to tell.
Now I am she that loveth; and the day is nigh at hand
When I, who have ridden the sea-realm and the regions of the land,
And dwelt in the measureless mountains and the forge of stormy days,
Shall dwell in the house of my fathers and the land of the people's praise;
And there shall hand meet hand, and heart by heart shall beat,
And the lying-down shall be joyous, and the morn's uprising sweet.
Lo now, I look on thine heart and behold of thine inmost will,
That thou of the days wouldst hearken that our portion shall fulfil;
But O, be wise of man-folk, and the hope of thine heart refrain!
As oft in the battle's beginning ye vex the steed with the rein,
Lest at last in the latter ending, when the sword hath hushed the horn,
His limbs should be weary and fail, and his might be over-worn.
O be wise, lest thy love constrain me, and my vision wax o'er-clear,
And thou ask of the thing that thou shouldst not, and the thing that thou wouldst not
hear.

Know thou, most mighty of men, that the Norns shall order all,
And yet without thine helping shall no whit of their will befall;
Be wise! 'tis a marvel of words, and a mock for the fool and the blind;
But I saw it writ in the heavens, and its fashioning there did I find:
And the night of the Norns and their slumber, and the tide when the world runs back,
And the way of the sun is tangled, it is wrought of the dastard's lack.
But the day when the fair earth blossoms, and the sun is bright above,
Of the daring deeds is it fashioned and the eager hearts of love.

"Be wise, and cherish thine hope in the freshness of the days,
And scatter its seed from thine hand in the field of the people's praise;
Then fair shall it fall in the furrow, and some the earth shall speed,
And the sons of men shall marvel at the blossom of the deed:
But some the earth shall speed not: nay rather, the wind of the heaven
Shall waft it away from thy longing--and a gift to the Gods hast thou given,
And a tree for the roof and the wall in the house of the hope that shall be,
Though it seemeth our very sorrow, and the grief of thee and me.

"Strive not with the fools of man-folk: for belike thou shalt overcome;
And what then is the gain of thine hunting when thou bearest the quarry home?
Or else shall the fool overcome thee, and what deed thereof shall grow?
Nay, strive with the wise man rather, and increase thy woe and his woe;
Yet thereof a gain hast thou gotten; and the half of thine heart hast thou won
If thou mayst prevail against him, and his deeds are the deeds thou hast done;
Yea, and if thou fall before him, in him shalt thou live again,
And thy deeds in his hand shall blossom, and his heart of thine heart shall be fain.

"When thou hearest the fool rejoicing, and he saith, 'It is over and past,
And the wrong was better than right, and hate turns into love at the last,
And we strove for nothing at all, and the Gods are fallen asleep;
For so good is the world a-growing that the evil good shall reap.'
Then loosen thy sword in the scabbard and settle the helm on thine head,

For men betrayed are mighty, and great are the wrongfully dead.

"Wilt thou do the deed and repent it? thou hadst better never been born:
Wilt thou do the deed and exalt it? then thy fame shall be outworn:
Thou shalt do the deed and abide it, and sit on thy throne on high,
And look on today and tomorrow as those that never die.

"Love thou the Gods--and withstand them, lest thy fame should fail in the end,
And thou be but their thrall and their bondsman, who wert born for their very friend:
For few things from the Gods are hidden, and the hearts of men they know,
And how that none rejoiceth to quail and crouch alow.

"I have spoken the words, beloved, to thy matchless glory and worth;
But thy heart to my heart hath been speaking, though my tongue hath set it forth:
For I am she that loveth, and I know what thou wouldst teach
From the heart of thine unlearned wisdom, and I needs must speak thy speech."

Then words were weary and silent, but oft and o'er again
They craved and kissed rejoicing, and their hearts were full and fain.

Then spake the Son of Sigmund: "Fairest, and most of worth,
Hast thou seen the ways of man-folk and the regions of the earth?
Then speak yet more of wisdom; for most meet meseems it is
That my soul to thy soul be shapen, and that I should know thy bliss."

So she took his right hand meekly, nor any word would say,
Not e'en of love or praising, his longing to delay;
And they sat on the side of Hindfell, and their fain eyes looked and loved,
As she told of the hidden matters whereby the world is moved:
And she told of the framing of all things, and the houses of the heaven;
And she told of the star-worlds' courses, and how the winds be driven;
And she told of the Norns and their names, and the fate that abideth the earth;
And she told of the ways of the King-folk in their anger and their mirth;
And she spoke of the love of women, and told of the flame that burns,
And the fall of mighty houses, and the friend that falters and turns,
And the lurking blinded vengeance, and the wrong that amendeth wrong,
And the hand that repenteth its stroke, and the grief that endureth for long:
And how man shall bear and forbear, and be master of all that is;
And how man shall measure it all, the wrath, and the grief, and the bliss.
"I saw the body of Wisdom, and of shifting guise was she wrought,
And I stretched out my hands to hold her, and a mote of the dust they caught;
And I prayed her to come for my teaching, and she came in the midnight dream--
And I woke and might not remember, nor betwixt her tangle deem:
She spake, and how might I hearken; I heard, and how might I know;
I knew, and how might I fashion, or her hidden glory show?
All things I have told thee of Wisdom are but fleeting images
Of her hosts that abide in the heavens, and her light that Allfather sees:
Yet wise is the sower that sows, and wise is the reaper that reaps,
And wise is the smith in his smiting, and wise is the warder that keeps:
And wise shalt thou be to deliver, and I shall be wise to desire;
--And lo, the tale that is told, and the sword and the wakening fire!
Lo now, I am she that loveth, and hark how Greyfell neighs,

And Fafnir's Bed is gleaming, and green go the downward ways,
The road to the children of men and the deeds that thou shalt do
In the joy of thy life-days' morning, when thine hope is fashioned anew.
Come now, O Bane of the Serpent, for now is the high-noon come,
And the sun hangeth over Hindfell and looks on the earth-folk's home;
But the soul is so great within thee, and so glorious are thine eyes,
And me so love constraineth, and mine heart that was called the wise,
That we twain may see men's dwellings and the house where we shall dwell,
And the place of our life's beginning, where the tale shall be to tell."

So they climb the burg of Hindfell, and hand in hand they fare,
Till all about and above them is nought but the sunlit air,
And there close they cling together rejoicing in their mirth;
For far away beneath them lie the kingdoms of the earth,
And the garths of men-folk's dwellings and the streams that water them,
And the rich and plenteous acres, and the silver ocean's hem,
And the woodland wastes and the mountains, and all that holdeth all;
The house and the ship and the island, the loom and the mine and the stall,
The beds of bane and healing, the crafts that slay and save,
The temple of God and the Doom-ring, the cradle and the grave.

Then spake the Victory-Wafer: "O King of the Earthly Age,
As a God thou beholdest the treasure and the joy of thine heritage,
And where on the wings of his hope is the spirit of Sigurd borne?
Yet I bid thee hover awhile as a lark alow on the corn;
Yet I bid thee look on the land 'twixt the wood and the silver sea
In the bight of the swirling river, and the house that cherished me!
There dwelleth mine earthly sister and the king that she hath wed;
There morn by morn aforetime I woke on the golden bed;
There eve by eve I tarried mid the speech and the lays of kings;
There noon by noon I wandered and plucked the blossoming things;
The little land of Lymdale by the swirling river's side,
Where Brynhild once was I called in the days ere my father died;
The little land of Lymdale 'twixt the woodland and the sea,
Where on thee mine eyes shall brighten and thine eyes shall beam on me."
"I shall seek thee there," said Sigurd, "when the day-spring is begun,
Ere we wend the world together in the season of the sun."

"I shall bide thee there," said Brynhild, "till the fulness of the days,
And the time for the glory appointed, and the springing-tide of praise."
From his hand then draweth Sigurd Andvari's ancient Gold;
There is nought but the sky above them as the ring together they hold,
The shapen ancient token, that hath no change nor end,
No change, and no beginning, no flaw for God to mend:
Then Sigurd cries: "O Brynhild, now hearken while I swear,
That the sun shall die in the heavens and the day no more be fair,
If I seek not love in Lymdale and the house that fostered thee,
And the land where thou awakedst 'twixt the woodland and the sea!"

And she cried: "O Sigurd, Sigurd, now hearken while I swear
That the day shall die for ever and the sun to blackness wear,
Ere I forget thee, Sigurd, as I lie 'twixt wood and sea

In the little land of Lymdale and the house that fostered me!"

Then he set the ring on her finger and once, if ne'er again,
They kissed and clung together, and their hearts were full and fain.

So the day grew old about them and the joy of their desire,
And eve and the sunset came, and faint grew the sunset fire,
And the shadowless death of the day was sweet in the golden tide;
But the stars shone forth on the world, and the twilight changed and died;
And sure if the first of man-folk had been born to that starry night,
And had heard no tale of the sunrise, he had never longed for the light:
But Earth longed amidst her slumber, as 'neath the night she lay,
And fresh and all abundant abode the deeds of Day.

William Morris

The Voice of Toil

I heard men saying, Leave hope and praying,
All days shall be as all have been;
To-day and to-morrow bring fear and sorrow,
The never-ending toil between.

When Earth was younger mid toil and hunger,
In hope we strove, and our hands were strong;
Then great men led us, with words they fed us,
And bade us right the earthly wrong.

Go read in story their deeds and glory,
Their names amidst the nameless dead;
Turn then from lying to us slow-dying
In that good world to which they led;

Where fast and faster our iron master,
The thing we made, for ever drives,
Bids us grind treasure and fashion pleasure
For other hopes and other lives.

Where home is a hovel and dull we grovel,
Forgetting that the world is fair;
Where no babe we cherish, lest its very soul perish;
Where mirth is crime, and love a snare.

Who now shall lead us, what God shall heed us
As we lie in the hell our hands have won?
For us are no rulers but fools and befoolers,
The great are fallen, the wise men gone.

I heard men saying, Leave tears and praying,
The sharp knife heedeth not the sheep;
Are we not stronger than the rich and the wronger,
When day breaks over dreams and sleep?

Come, shoulder to shoulder ere the world grows older!
Help lies in nought but thee and me;
Hope is before us, the long years that bore us
Bore leaders more than men may be.

Let dead hearts tarry and trade and marry,
And trembling nurse their dreams of mirth,
While we the living our lives are giving
To bring the bright new world to birth.

Come, shoulder to shoulder ere Earth grows older!
The Cause spreads over land and sea;
Now the world shaketh, and fear awaketh,
And joy at last for thee and me.

William Morris

Winter

I am Winter, that do keep
Longing safe amidst of sleep:
Who shall say if I were dead
What should be remembered?

William Morris