

Classic Poetry Series

William Morris
- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

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 Garden By The Sea

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

And though within it no birds sing,
And though no pillared 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 close two fair streams are,
Drawn from the purple hills afar,
Drawn down unto the restless sea:
Dark hills whose heath-bloom feeds no bee,
Dark shore no ship has ever seen,
Tormented 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,
Whereby I grow both deaf and blind,
Careless to win, unskilled 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 kissed, once reft from me
Anigh the murmuring of the sea.

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

Agnes And The Hill-Man

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH.

Agnes went through the meadows a-weeping,
Fowl are a-singing.
There stood the hill-man heed thereof keeping.
Agnes, fair Agnes!
"Come to the hill, fair Agnes, with me,
The reddest of gold will I give unto thee!"

Twice went Agnes the hill round about,
Then wended within, left the fair world without.

In the hillside bode Agnes, three years thrice told o'er,
For the green earth sithence fell she longing full sore.

There she sat, and lullaby sang in her singing,
And she heard how the bells of England were ringing.

Agnes before her true-love did stand:
"May I wend to the church of the English Land?"

"To England's Church well mayst thou be gone,
So that no hand thou lay the red gold upon.

"So that when thou art come the churchyard anear
Thou cast not abroad thy golden hair.

"So that when thou standest the church within
To thy mother on bench thou never win.

"So that when thou hearest the high God's name,
No knee unto earth thou bow to the same."

Hand she laid on all gold that was there,
And cast abroad her golden hair.

And when the church she stood within
To her mother on bench straight did she win.

And when she heard the high God's name,
Knee unto earth she bowed to the same.

When all the mass was sung to its end
Home with her mother dear did she wend.

"Come, Agnes, into the hillside to me,
For thy seven small sons greet sorely for thee!"

"Let them greet, let them greet, as they have will to do;
For never again will I hearken thereto!"

Weird laid he on her, sore sickness he wrought,
Fowl are a-singing.
That self-same hour to death was she brought.
Agnes, fair Agnes!

William Morris

All For The Cause

Hear a word, a word in season,
for the day is drawing nigh,
When the Cause shall call upon us,
some to live, and some to die!

He that dies shall not die lonely,
many an one hath gone before;
He that lives shall bear no burden
heavier than the life they bore.

Nothing ancient is their story,
e'en but yesterday they bled,
Youngest they of earth's beloved,
last of all the valiant dead.

E'en the tidings we are telling,
was the tale they had to tell,
E'en the hope that our hearts cherish,
was the hope for which they fell.

In the grave where tyrants thrust them,
lies their labour and their pain,
But undying from their sorrow
springeth up the hope again.

Mourn not therefore, nor lament it,
that the world outlives their life;
Voice and vision yet they give us,
making strong our hands for strife.

Some had name, and fame, and honour,
learn'd they were, and wise and strong;
Some were nameless, poor, unlettered,
weak in all but grief and wrong.

Named and nameless all live in us;
one and all they lead us yet
Every pain to count for nothing,
every sorrow to forget.

Hearken how they cry, "O happy,
happy ye that ye were born
In the sad slow night's departing,
in the rising of the morn.

"Fair the crown the Cause hath for you,
well to die or well to live
Through the battle, through the tangle,
peace to gain or peace to give."

Ah, it may be! Oft meseemeth,
in the days that yet shall be,
When no slave of gold abideth
'twixt the breadth of sea to sea,

Oft, when men and maids are merry,
ere the sunlight leaves the earth,
And they bless the day beloved,
all too short for all their mirth,

Some shall pause awhile and ponder
on the bitter days of old,
Ere the toil of strife and battle
overthrew the curse of gold;

Then 'twixt lips of loved and lover
solemn thoughts of us shall rise;
We who once were fools defeated,
then shall be the brave and wise.

There amidst the world new-built
shall our earthly deeds abide,
Though our names be all forgotten,
and the tale of how we died.

Life or death then, who shall heed it,
what we gain or what we lose?
Fair flies life amid the struggle,
and the Cause for each shall choose.

Hear a word, a word in season,

for the day is drawing nigh,
When the Cause shall call upon us,
some to live, and some to die!

William Morris

Another For The Briar-Rose

O treacherous scent, O thorny sight,
O tangle of world's wrong and right,
What art thou 'gainst my armour's gleam
But dusky cobwebs of a dream?

Beat down, deep sunk from every gleam
Of hope, they lie and dully dream;
Men once, but men no more, that Love
Their waste defeated hearts should move.

Here sleeps the world that would not love!
Let it sleep on, but if He move
Their hearts in humble wise to wait
On his new-wakened fair estate.

O won at last is never late!
Thy silence was the voice of fate;
Thy still hands conquered in the strife;
Thine eyes were light; thy lips were life.

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,
Harkening 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, entwined
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 happed 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 Amphidamas 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 aweary 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

Drawing Near The Light

Lo, when we wade the tangled wood,
In haste and hurry to be there,
Nought seem its leaves and blossoms good,
For all that they be fashioned fair.

But looking up, at last we see
The glimmer of the open light,
From o'er the place where we would be:
Then grow the very brambles bright.

So now, amidst our day of strife,
With many a matter glad we play,
When once we see the light of life
Gleam through the tangle of to-day.

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

Echoes Of Love's House

Love gives every gift whereby we long to live

“Love takes every gift, and nothing back doth give.”

Love unlocks the lips that else were ever dumb:

“Love locks up the lips whence all things good might come.”

Love makes clear the eyes that else would never see:

“Love makes blind the eyes to all but me and thee.”

Love turns life to joy till nought is left to gain:

“Love turns life to woe till hope is nought and vain.”

Love, who changest all, change me nevermore!

“Love, who changest all, change my sorrow sore!”

Love burns up the world to changeless heaven and blest,

“Love burns up the world to a void of all unrest.”

And there we twain are left, and no more work we need:

“And I am left alone, and who my work shall heed?”

Ah! I praise thee, Love, for utter joyance won!

“And is my praise nought worth for all my life undone?”

William Morris

Error And Loss

Upon an eve I sat me down and wept,
Because the world to me seemed nowise good;
Still autumn was it, & the meadows slept,
The misty hills dreamed, and the silent wood
Seemed listening to the sorrow of my mood:
I knew not if the earth with me did grieve,
Or if it mocked my grief that bitter eve.

Then 'twixt my tears a maiden did I see,
Who drew anigh me on the leaf-strewn grass,
Then stood and gazed upon me pitifully
With grief-worn eyes, until my woe did pass
From me to her, and tearless now I was,
And she mid tears was asking me of one
She long had sought unaided and alone.

I knew not of him, and she turned away
Into the dark wood, and my own great pain
Still held me there, till dark had slain the day,
And perished at the grey dawn's hand again;
Then from the wood a voice cried: "Ah, in vain,
In vain I seek thee, O thou bitter-sweet!
In what lone land are set thy longed-for feet?"

Then I looked up, and lo, a man there came
From midst the trees, and stood regarding me
Until my tears were dried for very shame;
Then he cried out: "O mourner, where is she
Whom I have sought o'er every land and sea?
I love her and she loveth me, and still
We meet no more than green hill meeteth hill."

With that he passed on sadly, and I knew
That these had met and missed in the dark night,
Blinded by blindness of the world untrue,
That hideth love and maketh wrong of right.
Then midst my pity for their lost delight,
Yet more with barren longing I grew weak,
Yet more I mourned that I had none to seek.

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

For The Briar-Rose

The Briarwood.

The fateful slumber floats and flows
About the tangle of the rose;
But lo! the fated hand and heart
To rend the slumberous curse apart!

The Council Room.

The threat of war, the hope of peace,
The Kingdom's peril and increase
Sleep on, and bide the latter day,
When fate shall take her chain away.

The Garden Court.

The maiden pleasance of the land
Knoweth no stir of voice or hand,
No cup the sleeping waters fill,
The restless shuttle lieth still.

The Rosebower.

Here lies the hoarded love, the key
To all the treasure that shall be;
Come fated hand the gift to take,
And smite this sleeping world awake.

William Morris

From The Upland To The Sea

Shall we wake one morn of spring,
Glad at heart of everything,
Yet pensive with the thought of eve?
Then the white house shall we leave,
Pass the wind-flowers and the bays,
Through the garth, and go our ways,
Wandering down among the meads
Till our very joyance needs
Rest at last; till we shall come
To that Sun-god's lonely home,
Lonely on the hill-side grey,
Whence the sheep have gone away;
Lonely till the feast-time is,
When with prayer and praise of bliss,
Thither comes the country side.
There awhile shall we abide,
Sitting low down in the porch
By that image with the torch:
Thy one white hand laid upon
The black pillar that was won
From the far-off Indian mine;
And my hand nigh touching thine,
But not touching; and thy gown
Fair with spring-flowers cast adown
From thy bosom and thy brow.
There the south-west wind shall blow
Through thine hair to reach my cheek,
As thou sittest, nor mayst speak,
Nor mayst move the hand I kiss
For the very depth of bliss;
Nay, nor turn thine eyes to me.
Then desire of the great sea
Nigh enow, but all unheard,
In the hearts of us is stirred,
And we rise, we twain at last,
And the daffodils downcast,
Feel thy feet and we are gone
From the lonely Sun-Crowned one.
Then the meads fade at our back,

And the spring day 'gins to lack
That fresh hope that once it had;
But we twain grow yet more glad,
And apart no more may go
When the grassy slope and low
Dieth in the shingly sand:
Then we wander hand in hand
By the edges of the sea,
And I weary more for thee
Than if far apart we were,
With a space of desert drear
'Twixt thy lips and mine, O love!
Ah, my joy, my joy thereof!

William Morris

Goldilocks And Goldilocks

It was Goldilocks woke up in the morn
At the first of the shearing of the corn.

There stood his mother on the hearth
And of new-leased wheat was little dearth.

There stood his sisters by the quern,
For the high-noon cakes they needs must earn.

"O tell me Goldilocks my son,
Why hast thou coloured raiment on?"

"Why should I wear the hodden grey
When I am light of heart to-day?"

"O tell us, brother, why ye wear
In reaping-tide the scarlet gear?"

Why hangeth the sharp sword at thy side
When through the land 'tis the hook goes wide?"

"Gay-clad am I that men may know
The freeman's son where'er I go.

The grinded sword at side I bear
Lest I the dastard's word should hear."

"O tell me Goldilocks my son,
Of whither away thou wilt be gone?"

"The morn is fair and the world is wide
And here no more will I abide."

"O Brother, when wilt thou come again?"
"The autumn drought, and the winter rain,

The frost and the snow, and St. David's wind,
All these that were time out of mind,

All these a many times shall be
Ere the Upland Town again I see."

"O Goldilocks my son, farewell,
As thou wendest the world 'twixt home and hell!"

"O brother Goldilocks, farewell,
Come back with a tale for men to tell!"

So 'tis wellaway for Goldilocks,
As he left the land of the wheaten shocks.

He's gotten him far from the Upland Town,
And he's gone by Dale and he's gone by Down.

He's come to the wild-wood dark and drear,
Where never the bird's song doth he hear.

He has slept in the moonless wood and dim
With never a voice to comfort him.

He has risen up under the little light
Where the noon is as dark as the summer night.

Six days therein has he walked alone
Till his scrip was bare and his meat was done.

On the seventh morn in the mirk, mirk wood,
He saw sight that he deemed was good.

It was as one sees a flower a-bloom
In the dusky heat of a shuttered room.

He deemed the fair thing far aloof,
And would go and put it to the proof.

But the very first step he made from the place
He met a maiden face to face.

Face to face, and so close was she
That their lips met soft and lovingly.

Sweet-mouthed she was, and fair he wist;
And again in the darksome wood they kissed.

Then first in the wood her voice he heard,
As sweet as the song of the summer bird.

"O thou fair man with the golden head,
What is the name of thee?" she said.

"My name is Goldilocks," said he;
"O sweet-breathed, what is the name of thee?"

"O Goldilocks the Swain," she said,
"My name is Goldilocks the Maid."

He spake, "Love me as I love thee,
And Goldilocks one flesh shall be."

She said, "Fair man, I wot not how
Thou lovest, but I love thee now.

But come a little hence away,
That I may see thee in the day.

For hereby is a wood-lawn clear
And good for awhile for us it were."

Therewith she took him by the hand
And led him into the lighter land.

There on the grass they sat adown.
Clad she was in a kirtle brown.

In all the world was never maid
So fair, so evilly arrayed.

No shoes upon her feet she had
And scanty were her shoulders clad;

Through her brown kirtle's rents full wide
Shone out the sleekness of her side.

An old scrip hung about her neck,
Nought of her raiment did she reckon.

No shame of all her rents had she;
She gazed upon him eagerly.

She leaned across the grassy space
And put her hands about his face.

She said: "O hunger-pale art thou,
Yet shalt thou eat though I hunger now."

She took him apples from her scrip,
She kissed him, cheek and chin and lip.

She took him cakes of woodland bread:
"Whiles am I hunger-pinched," she said.

She had a gourd and a pilgrim shell;
She took him water from the well.

She stroked his breast and his scarlet gear;
She spake, "How brave thou art and dear!"

Her arms about him did she wind;
He felt her body dear and kind.

"O love," she said, "now two are one,
And whither hence shall we be gone?"

"Shall we fare further than this wood,"
Quoth he, "I deem it dear and good?"

She shook her head, and laughed, and spake;
"Rise up! For thee, not me, I quake.

Had she been minded me to slay
Sure she had done it ere to-day.

But thou: this hour the crone shall know
That thou art come, her very foe.

No minute more on tidings wait,
Lest e'en this minute be too late."

She led him from the sunlit green,
Going sweet-stately as a queen.

There in the dusky wood, and dim,
As forth they went, she spake to him:

"Fair man, few people have I seen
Amidst this world of woodland green:

But I would have thee tell me now
If there be many such as thou."

"Betwixt the mountains and the sea,
O Sweet, be many such," said he.

Athwart the glimmering air and dim
With wistful eyes she looked on him.

"But ne'er an one so shapely made
Mine eyes have looked upon," she said.

He kissed her face, and cried in mirth:
"Where hast thou dwelt then on the earth?"

"Ever," she said, "I dwell alone
With a hard-handed cruel crone.

And of this crone am I the thrall
To serve her still in bower and hall;

And fetch and carry in the wood,
And do whate'er she deemeth good.

But whiles a sort of folk there come
And seek my mistress at her home;

But such-like are they to behold
As make my very blood run cold.

Oft have I thought, if there be none
On earth save these, would all were done!

Forsooth, I knew it was nought so,
But that fairer folk on earth did grow.

But fain and full is the heart in me
To know that folk are like to thee."

Then hand in hand they stood awhile
Till her tears rose up beneath his smile.

And he must fold her to his breast
To give her heart a while of rest.

Till sundered she and gazed about,
And bent her brows as one in doubt.

She spake: "The wood is growing thin,
Into the full light soon shall we win.

Now crouch we that we be not seen,
Under yon bramble-bushes green."

Under the bramble-bush they lay
Betwixt the dusk and the open day.

"O Goldilocks my love, look forth
And let me know what thou seest of worth."

He said: "I see a house of stone,
A castle excellently done."

"Yea," quoth she, "There doth the mistress dwell
What next thou seest shalt thou tell."

"What lookest thou to see come forth?"

"Maybe a white bear of the North."

"Then shall my sharp sword lock his mouth."

"Nay," she said, "or a worm of the South."

"Then shall my sword his hot blood cool."

"Nay, or a whelming poison-pool."

"The trees its swelling flood shall stay,
And thrust its venom'd lip away."

"Nay, it may be a wild-fire flash
To burn thy lovely limbs to ash."

"On mine own hallows shall I call,
And dead its flickering flame shall fall."

"O Goldilocks my love, I fear
That ugly death shall seek us here.

Look forth, O Goldilocks my love,
That I thine hardy heart may prove.

What cometh down the stone-wrought stair
That leadeth up to the castle fair?"

"Adown the doorward stair of stone
There cometh a woman all alone."

"Yea, that forsooth shall my mistress be:
O Goldilocks, what like is she?"

"O fair she is of her array,
As hitherward she wends her way."

"Unlike her wont is that indeed:
Is she not foul beneath her weed?"

"O nay, nay! But most wondrous fair
Of all the women earth doth bear."

"O Goldilocks, my heart, my heart!
Woe, woe! for now we drift apart."

But up he sprang from the bramble-side,
And "O thou fairest one!" he cried:

And forth he ran that Queen to meet,
And fell before her gold-clad feet.

About his neck her arms she cast,
And into the fair-built house they passed.

And under the bramble-bushes lay
Unholpen, Goldilocks the may.

Thenceforth a while of time there wore,
And Goldilocks came forth no more.

Throughout that house he wandered wide,
Both up and down, from side to side.

But never he saw an evil crone,
But a full fair Queen on a golden throne.

Never a barefoot maid did he see,
But a gay and gallant company.

He sat upon the golden throne,
And beside him sat the Queen alone.

Kind she was, as she loved him well,
And many a merry tale did tell.

But nought he laughed, nor spake again,
For all his life was waste and vain.

Cold was his heart, and all afraid
To think on Goldilocks the Maid.

Withal now was the wedding dight
When he should wed that lady bright.

The night was gone, and the day was up
When they should drink the bridal cup.

And he sat at the board beside the Queen,
Amidst of a guest-folk well beseen.

But scarce was midmorn on the hall,
When down did the mirk of midnight fall.

Then up and down from the board they ran,
And man laid angry hand on man.

There was the cry, and the laughter shrill,
And every manner word of ill.

Whoso of men had hearkened it,
Had deemed he had woke up over the Pit.

Then spake the Queen o'er all the crowd,
And grim was her speech, and harsh, and loud:

"Hold now your peace, ye routing swine,
While I sit with mine own love over the wine!

For this dusk is the very deed of a foe,
Or under the sun no man I know."

And hard she spake, and loud she cried
Till the noise of the bickering guests had died.

Then again she spake amidst of the mirk,
In a voice like an unoiled wheel at work:

"Whoso would have a goodly gift,
Let him bring aback the sun to the lift.

Let him bring aback the light and the day,
And rich and in peace he shall go his way."

Out spake a voice was clean and clear:
"Lo, I am she to dight your gear;

But I for the deed a gift shall gain,
To sit by Goldilocks the Swain.

I shall sit at the board by the bride-groom's side,
And be betwixt him and the bride.

I shall eat of his dish and drink of his cup,
Until for the bride-bed ye rise up."

Then was the Queen's word wailing-wild:
"E'en so must it be, thou Angel's child.

Thou shalt sit by my groom till the dawn of night,
And then shalt thou wend thy ways aright."

Said the voice, "Yet shalt thou swear an oath
That free I shall go though ye be loth."

"How shall I swear?" the false Queen spake:
"Wherewith the sure oath shall I make?"

"Thou shalt swear by the one eye left in thine head,
And the throng of the ghosts of the evil dead."

She swore the oath, and then she spake:
"Now let the second dawn awake."

And e'en therewith the thing was done;
There was peace in the hall, and the light of the sun.

And again the Queen was calm and fair,
And courteous sat the guest-folk there.

Yet unto Goldilocks it seemed
As if amidst the night he dreamed;

As if he sat in a grassy place,
While slim hands framed his hungry face;

As if in the clearing of the wood
One gave him bread and apples good;

And nought he saw of the guest-folk gay,
And nought of all the Queen's array.

Yet saw he betwixt board and door,
A slim maid tread the chequered floor.

Her gown of green so fair was wrought,
That clad her body seemed with nought

But blossoms of the summer-tide,
That wreathed her, limbs and breast and side.

And, stepping towards him daintily,
A basket in her hand had she.

And as she went, from head to feet,
Surely was she most dainty-sweet.

Love floated round her, and her eyes
Gazed from her fairness glad and wise;

But babbling-loud the guests were grown;
Unnoted was she and unknown.

Now Goldilocks she sat beside,
But nothing changed was the Queenly bride;

Yea too, and Goldilocks the Swain
Was grown but dull and dazed again.

The Queen smiled o'er the guest-rich board,
Although his wine the Maiden poured;

Though from his dish the Maiden ate,
The Queen sat happy and sedate.

But now the Maiden fell to speak
From lips that well-nigh touched his cheek:

"O Goldilocks, dost thou forget?
Or mindest thou the mirk-wood yet?

Forgettest thou the hunger-pain
And all thy young life made but vain?

How there was nought to help or aid,
But for poor Goldilocks the Maid?"

She murmured, "Each to each we two,
Our faces from the wood-mirk grew.

Hast thou forgot the grassy place,
And love betwixt us face to face?

Hast thou forgot how fair I deemed
Thy face? How fair thy garment seemed?

Thy kisses on my shoulders bare,
Through rents of the poor raiment there?

My arms that loved thee nought unkissed
All o'er from shoulder unto wrist?

Hast thou forgot how brave thou wert,
Thou with thy fathers' weapon girt;

When underneath the bramble-bush
I quaked like river-shaken rush,

Wondering what new-wrought shape of death
Should quench my new love-quicken'd breath?

Or else: forget'st thou, Goldilocks,
Thine own land of the wheaten shocks?

Thy mother and thy sisters dear,
Thou said'st would bide thy true-love there?

Hast thou forgot? Hast thou forgot?
O love, my love, I move thee not."

Silent the fair Queen sat and smiled
And heeded nought the Angel's child,

For like an image fashioned fair
Still sat the Swain with empty stare.

These words seemed spoken not, but writ
As foolish tales through night-dreams flit.

Vague pictures passed before his sight,
As in the first dream of the night.

But the Maiden opened her basket fair,
And set two doves on the table there.

And soft they cooed, and sweet they billed
Like man and maid with love fulfilled.

Therewith the Maiden reached a hand
To a dish that on the board did stand;

And she crumbled a share of the spice-loaf brown,
And the Swain upon her hand looked down;

Then unto the fowl his eyes he turned;
And as in a dream his bowels yearned

For somewhat that he could not name;
And into his heart a hope there came.

And still he looked on the hands of the Maid,
As before the fowl the crumbs she laid.

And he murmured low, "O Goldilocks!
Were we but amid the wheaten shocks!"

Then the false Queen knit her brows and laid
A fair white hand by the hand of the Maid.

He turned his eyes away thereat,
And closer to the Maiden sat.

But the queen-bird now the carle-bird fed
Till all was gone of the sugared bread.

Then with wheedling voice for more he craved,
And the Maid a share from the spice-loaf shaved;

And the crumbs within her hollow hand
She held where the creeping doves did stand.

But Goldilocks, he looked and longed,
And saw how the carle the queen-bird wronged.

For when she came to the hand to eat
The hungry queen-bird thence he beat.

Then Goldilocks the Swain spake low:
"Foul fall thee, bird, thou doest now

As I to Goldilocks, my sweet,
Who gave my hungry mouth to eat."

He felt her hand as he did speak,
He felt her face against his cheek.

He turned and stood in the evil hall,
And swept her up in arms withal.

Then was there hubbub wild and strange,
And swiftly all things there 'gan change.

The fair Queen into a troll was grown,
A one-eyed, bow-backed, haggard crone.

And though the hall was yet full fair,
And bright the sunshine streamed in there,

On evil shapes it fell forsooth:
Swine-heads; small red eyes void of ruth;

And bare-boned bodies of vile things,
And evil-feathered bat-felled wings.

And all these mopped and mowed and grinned,
And sent strange noises down the wind.

There stood those twain unchanged alone
To face the horror of the crone;

She crouched against them by the board;
And cried the Maid: "Thy sword, thy sword!"

Thy sword, O Goldilocks! For see
She will not keep her oath to me."

Out flashed the blade therewith. He saw
The foul thing sidelong toward them draw,

Holding within her hand a cup
Wherein some dreadful drink seethed up.

Then Goldilocks cried out and smote,
And the sharp blade sheared the evil throat.

The head fell noseling to the floor;
The liquor from the cup did pour,

And ran along a sparkling flame
That nigh unto their footsoles came.

Then empty straightway was the hall,
Save for those twain, and she withal.

So fled away the Maid and Man,
And down the stony stairway ran.

Fast fled they o'er the sunny grass
Yet but a little way did pass

Ere cried the Maid: "Now cometh forth
The snow-white ice-bear of the North;

Turn Goldilocks, and heave up sword!"
Then fast he stood upon the sward,

And faced the beast, that whined and cried,
And shook his head from side to side.

But round him the Swain danced and leaped,
And soon the grisly head he reaped.

And then the ancient blade he sheathed,
And ran unto his love sweet-breathed;

And caught her in his arms and ran
Fast from that house, the bane of man.

Yet therewithal he spake her soft
And kissed her over oft and oft,

Until from kissed and trembling mouth
She cried: "The Dragon of the South!"

He set her down and turned about,
And drew the eager edges out.

And therewith scaly coil on coil
Reared 'gainst his face the mouth aboil:

The gaping jaw and teeth of dread
Was dark 'twixt heaven and his head.

But with no fear, no thought, no word,
He thrust the thin-edged ancient sword.

And the hot blood ran from the hairy throat,
And set the summer grass afloat.

Then back he turned and caught her hand,
And never a minute did they stand.

But as they ran on toward the wood,
He deemed her swift feet fair and good.

She looked back o'er her shoulder fair:
"The whelming poison-pool is here;

And now availeth nought the blade:
O if my cherished trees might aid!

But now my feet fail. Leave me then!
And hold my memory dear of men."

He caught her in his arms again;
Of her dear side was he full fain.

Her body in his arms was dear:
"Sweet art thou, though we perish here!"

Like quicksilver came on the flood:
But lo, the borders of the wood!

She slid from out his arms and stayed;
Round a great oak her arms she laid.

"If e'er I saved thee, lovely tree,
From axe and saw, now, succour me:

Look how the venom creeps anigh,
Help! lest thou see me writhe and die."

She crouched beside the upheaved root,
The bubbling venom touched her foot;

Then with a sucking gasping sound
It ebbed back o'er the blighted ground.

Up then she rose and took his hand
And never a moment did they stand.

"Come, love," she cried, "the ways I know,
How thick soe'er the thickets grow.

O love, I love thee! O thine heart!
How mighty and how kind thou art!"

Therewith they saw the tree-dusk lit,
Bright grey the great boles gleamed on it.

"O flee," she said, "the sword is nought
Against the flickering fire-flaught."

"But this availeth yet," said he,
"That Hallows All our love may see."

He turned about and faced the glare:
"O Mother, help us, kind and fair!

Now help me, true St. Nicholas,
If ever truly thine I was!"

Therewith the wild-fire waned and paled
And in the wood the light nigh failed;

And all about 'twas as the night.
He said: "Now won is all our fight,

And now meseems all were but good
If thou mightst bring us from the wood."

She fawned upon him, face and breast;
She said: "It hangs 'twixt worst and best.

And yet, O love, if thou be true,
One thing alone thou hast to do."

Sweetly he kissed her, cheek and chin:
"What work thou biddest will I win."

"O love, my love, I needs must sleep;
Wilt thou my slumbering body keep,

And, toiling sorely, still bear on
The love thou seemest to have won?"

"O easy toil," he said, "to bless
Mine arms with all thy loveliness."

She smiled; "Yea, easy it may seem,
But harder is it than ye deem.

For hearken! Whatso thou mayst see,
Piteous as it may seem to thee,

Heed not nor hearken! bear me forth,
As though nought else were aught of worth,

For all earth's wealth that may be found
Lay me not sleeping on the ground,

To help, to hinder, or to save!
Or there for me thou diggest a grave."

He took her body on his arm,
Her slumbering head lay on his barm.

Then glad he bore her on the way,
And the wood grew lighter with the day.

All still it was, till suddenly
He heard a bitter wail near by.

Yet on he went until he heard
The cry become a shapen word:

"Help me, O help, thou passer by!
Turn from the path, let me not die!

I am a woman; bound and left
To perish; of all help bereft."

Then died the voice out in a moan;
He looked upon his love, his own,

And minding all she spake to him
Strode onward through the wild-wood dim.

But lighter grew the woodland green
Till clear the shapes of things were seen.

And therewith wild halloos he heard,
And shrieks, and cries of one afeard.

Nigher it grew and yet more nigh
Till burst from out a brake near by

A woman bare of breast and limb,
Who turned a piteous face to him

E'en as she ran: for hard at heel
Followed a man with brandished steel,

And yelling mouth. Then the swain stood
One moment in the glimmering wood

Trembling, ashamed: Yet now grown wise
Deemed all a snare for ears and eyes.

So onward swiftnier still he strode
And cast all thought on his fair load.

And yet in but a little space
Back came the yelling shrieking chase,

And well-nigh gripped now by the man,
Straight unto him the woman ran;

And underneath the gleaming steel
E'en at his very feet did kneel.

She looked up; sobs were all her speech,
Yet sorely did her face beseech.

While o'er her head the chaser stared,
Shaking aloft the edges bared.

Doubted the swain, and a while did stand
As she took his coat-lap in her hand.

Upon his hand he felt her breath
Hot with the dread of present death.

Sleek was her arm on his scarlet coat,
The sobbing passion rose in his throat.

But e'en therewith he looked aside
And saw the face of the sleeping bride.

Then he tore his coat from the woman's hand,
And never a moment there did stand.

But swiftly thence away he strode
Along the dusky forest road.

And there rose behind him laughter shrill,
And then was the windless wood all still,

He looked around o'er all the place,
But saw no image of the chase.

And as he looked the night-mirk now
O'er all the tangled wood 'gan flow.

Then stirred the sweetling that he bore,
And she slid adown from his arms once more.

Nought might he see her well-loved face;
But he felt her lips in the mirky place.

"'Tis night," she said, "and the false day's gone,
And we twain in the wild-wood all alone.

Night o'er the earth; so rest we here
Until to-morrow's sun is clear.

For overcome is every foe
And home to-morrow shall we go."

So 'neath the trees they lay, those twain,
And to them the darksome night was gain.

But when the morrow's dawn was grey
They woke and kissed whereas they lay.

And when on their feet they came to stand
Swain Goldilocks stretched out his hand.

And he spake: "O love, my love indeed,
Where now is gone thy goodly weed?"

For again thy naked feet I see,
And thy sweet sleek arms so kind to me.

Through thy rent kirtle once again
Thy shining shoulder showeth plain."

She blushed as red as the sun-sweet rose:
"My garments gay were e'en of those

That the false Queen dight to slay my heart;
And sore indeed was their fleshly smart.

Yet must I bear them, well-beloved,
Until thy truth and troth was proved.

And this tattered coat is now for a sign
That thou hast won me to be thine.

Now wilt thou lead along thy maid
To meet thy kindred unafraid."

As stoops the falcon on the dove
He cast himself about her love.

He kissed her over, cheek and chin,
He kissed the sweetness of her skin.

Then hand in hand they went their way
Till the wood grew light with the outer day.

At last behind them lies the wood,
And before are the Upland Acres good.

On the hill's brow awhile they stay
At midmorn of the merry day.

He sheareth a deal from his kirtle meet,
To make her sandals for her feet.

He windeth a wreath of the beechen tree,
Lest men her shining shoulders see.

And a wreath of woodbine sweet, to hide
The rended raiment of her side;

And a crown of poppies red as wine,
Lest on her head the hot sun shine.

She kissed her love withal and smiled:
"Lead forth, O love, the Woodland Child!

Most meet and right meseems it now
That I am clad with the woodland bough.

For betwixt the oak-tree and the thorn
Meseemeth erewhile was I born.

And if my mother aught I knew
It was of the woodland folk she grew.

And O that thou art well at ease
To wed the daughter of the trees!"

Now Goldilocks and Goldilocks
Go down amidst the wheaten shocks,

But when anigh to the town they come,
Lo there is the wain a-wending home,

And many a man and maid beside,
Who tossed the sickles up, and cried:

"O Goldilocks, now whither away?
And what wilt thou with the woodland may?"

"O this is Goldilocks my bride,
And we come adown from the wild-wood side,

And unto the Fathers' House we wend
To dwell therein till life shall end."

"Up then on the wain, that ye may see
From afar how thy mother bideth thee.

That ye may see how kith and kin
Abide thee, bridal brave to win."

So Goldilocks and Goldilocks
Sit high aloft on the wheaten shocks,

And fair maids sing before the wain,
For all of Goldilocks are fain.

But when they came to the Fathers' door,
There stood his mother old and hoar.

Yet was her hair with grey but blent,
When forth from the Upland Town he went.

There by the door his sisters stood;
Full fair they were and fresh of blood;

Little they were when he went away;
Now each is meet for a young man's may.

"O tell me, Goldilocks, my son,
What are the deeds that thou hast done?"

"I have wooed me a wife in the forest wild,
And home I bring the Woodland Child."

"A little deed to do, O son,
So long a while as thou wert gone."

"O mother, yet is the summer here
Now I bring aback my true-love dear.

And therewith an Evil Thing have I slain;
Yet I come with the first-come harvest-wain."

"O Goldilocks, my son, my son!
How good is the deed that thou hast done?"

But how long the time that is worn away!
Lo! white is my hair that was but grey.

And lo these sisters here, thine own,
How tall, how meet for men-folk grown!

Come, see thy kin in the feasting-hall,
And tell me if thou knowest them all!

O son, O son, we are blithe and fain;
But the autumn drought, and the winter rain,

The frost and the snow, and St. David's wind,
All these that were, time out of mind,

All these a many times have been
Since thou the Upland Town hast seen."

Then never a word spake Goldilocks
Till they came adown from the wheaten shocks.

And there beside his love he stood
And he saw her body sweet and good.

Then round her love his arms he cast:
"The years are as a tale gone past.

But many the years that yet shall be
Of the merry tale of thee and me.

Come, love, and look on the Fathers' Hall,
And the folk of the kindred one and all!

For now the Fathers' House is kind,
And all the ill is left behind.

And Goldilocks and Goldilocks
Shall dwell in the land of the Wheaten Shocks."

William Morris

Gunnar's Howe Above The House At Lithend

Ye who have come o'er the sea
to behold this grey minster of lands,
Whose floor is the tomb of time past,
and whose walls by the toil of dead hands
Show pictures amidst of the ruin
of deeds that have overpast death,
Stay by this tomb in a tomb
to ask of who lieth beneath.
Ah! the world changeth too soon,
that ye stand there with unbated breath,
As I name him that Gunnar of old,
who erst in the haymaking tide
Felt all the land fragrant and fresh,
as amidst of the edges he died.
Too swiftly fame fadeth away,
if ye tremble not lest once again
The grey mound should open and show him
glad-eyed without grudging or pain.
Little labour methinks to behold him
but the tale-teller laboured in vain.

Little labour for ears that may hearken
to hear his death-conquering song,
Till the heart swells to think of the gladness
undying that overcame wrong.
O young is the world yet meseemeth
and the hope of it flourishing green,
When the words of a man unremembered
so bridge all the days that have been,
As we look round about on the land
that these nine hundred years he hath seen.

Dusk is abroad on the grass
of this valley amidst of the hill:
Dusk that shall never be dark
till the dawn hard on midnight shall fill
The trench under Eyiafell's snow,
and the grey plain the sea meeteth grey.
White, high aloft hangs the moon

that no dark night shall brighten ere day,
For here day and night toileth the summer
lest deedless his time pass away.

William Morris

Hafbur And Signy

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH.

King Hafbur & King Siward
They needs must stir up strife,
All about the sweetling Signy
Who was so fair a wife.
O wilt thou win me then,
or as fair a maid as I be?

It was the King's son Hafbur
Woke up amid the night,
And 'gan to tell of a wondrous dream
In swift words nowise light.

"Me-dreamed I was in Heaven
Amid that fair abode,
And my true-love lay upon mine arm
And we fell from cloud to cloud."

As there they sat, the dames and maids,
Of his words they took no keep,
Only his mother well-beloved
Heeded his dreamful sleep.

"Go get thee gone to the mountain,
And make no long delay;
To the elve's eldest daughter
For thy dream's areding pray."

So the King's son, even Hafbur,
Took his sword in his left hand,
And he's away to the mountain
To get speech of that Lily-wand.

He beat thereon with hand all bare,
With fingers small and fine,
And there she lay, the elve's daughter,
And well wotted of that sign.

"Bide hail, Elve's sweetest daughter,
As on skins thou liest fair,
I pray thee by the God of Heaven
My dream arede thou clear.

"Me-dreamed I was in heaven,
Yea amid that fair abode,
And my true-love lay upon mine arm
And we fell from cloud to cloud."

"Whereas thou dreamed'st thou wert in heaven,
So shalt thou win that may;
Dreamed'st thou of falling through the clouds,
So falls for her thy life away."

"And if it lieth in my luck
To win to me that may,
In no sorrow's stead it standeth me
For her to cast my life away."

Lord Hafbur lets his hair wax long,
And will have the gear of mays,
And he rideth to King Siward's house
And will well learn weaving ways.

Lord Hafbur all his clothes let shape
In such wise as maidens do,
And thus he rideth over the land
King Siward's daughter to woo.

Now out amid the castle-garth
He cast his cloak aside,
And goeth forth to the high-bower
Where the dames and damsels abide.

Hail, sit ye there, dames and damsels,
Maids and queens kind and fair,
And chiefest of all to the Dane-King's daughter
If she abideth here!

"Hail, sittest thou, sweet King's daughter,

A-spinning the silken twine,
It is King Hafbur sends me hither
To learn the sewing fine."

Hath Hafbur sent thee here to me?
Then art thou a welcome guest,
And all the sewing that I can
Shall I learn thee at my best.

"And all the sewing that I can
I shall learn thee lovingly,
Out of one bowl shalt thou eat with me,
And by my nurse shalt thou lie."

King's children have I eaten with,
And lain down by their side:
Must I lie abed now with a very nurse?
Then woe is me this tide!"

"Nay, let it pass, fair maiden!
Of me gettest thou no harm,
Out of one bowl shalt thou eat with me
And sleep soft upon mine arm."

There sat they, all the damsels,
And sewed full craftily;
But ever the King's son Hafbur
With nail in mouth sat he.

They sewed the hart, they sewed the hind,
As they run through the wild-wood green,
Never gat Hafbur so big a bowl
But the bottom soon was seen.

In there came the evil nurse
In the worst tide that might be:
"Never saw I fair maiden
Who could sew less craftily.

"Never saw I fair maiden
Seam worse the linen fine,
Never saw I noble maiden

Who better drank the wine."

This withal spake the evil nurse,
The nighest that she durst:
"Never saw I yet fair maiden
Of drink so sore athirst.

"So little a seam as ever she sews
Goes the needle into her mouth,
As big a bowl as ever she gets
Out is it drunk forsooth.

"Ne'er saw I yet in maiden's head
Two eyes so bright and bold,
And those two hands of her withal
Are hard as the iron cold."

"Hearken, sweet nurse, whereso thou art,
Why wilt thou mock me still?
Never cast I one word at thee,
Went thy sewing well or ill.

"Still wilt thou mock, still wilt thou spy;
Nought such thou hast of me,
Whether mine eyes look out or look in
Nought do they deal with thee."

O it was Hafbur the King's son
Began to sew at last;
He sewed the hart, and he sewed the hind,
As they flee from the hound so fast.

He sewed the lily, and he sewed the rose,
And the little fowls of the air;
Then fell the damsels a-marvelling,
For nought had they missed him there.

Day long they sewed till the evening,
And till the long night was deep,
Then up stood dames and maidens
And were fain in their beds to sleep.

So fell on them the evening-tide,
O'er the meads the dew drave down,
And fain was Signy, that sweet thing,
With her folk to bed to be gone.

Therewith asked the King's son Hafbur,
"And whatten a bed for me?"
"O thou shalt sleep in the bower aloft
And blue shall thy bolster be."

She went before, sweet Signy,
O'er the high bower's bridge aright,
And after her went Hafbur
Laughing from heart grown light.

Then kindled folk the waxlights,
That were so closely twined,
And after them the ill nurse went
With an ill thought in her mind.

The lights were quenched, the nurse went forth,
They deemed they were alone:
Lord Hafbur drew off his kirtle red,
Then first his sword outshone.

Lord Hafbur mid his longing sore
Down on the bed he sat:
I tell you of my soothfastness,
His byrny clashed thereat.

Then spake the darling Signy,
Out of her heart she said,
"Never saw I so rough a shirt
Upon so fair a maid."

She laid her hand on Hafbur's breast
With the red gold all a-blaze:
"Why wax thy breasts in no such wise
As they wax in other mays?"

"The wont it is in my father's land
For maids to ride to the Thing,

Therefore my breasts are little of growth
Beneath the byrny-ring."

And there they lay through the night so long,
The King's son and the may,
In talk full sweet, but little of sleep,
So much on their minds there lay.

"Hearken, sweet maiden Signy,
As here alone we lie,
Who is thy dearest in the world,
And lieth thine heart most nigh?"

"O there is none in all the world
Who lieth so near to my heart
As doth the bold King Hafbur:
Ne'er in him shall I have a part.

"As doth the bold King Hafbur
That mine eyes shall never know:
Nought but the sound of his gold-wrought horn
As he rides to the Thing and fro."

"O, is it Hafbur the King's son
That thy loved heart holdeth dear?
Turn hither, O my well-beloved,
To thy side I lie so near."

"If thou art the King's son Hafbur,
Why wilt thou shame me love,
Why ridest thou not to my father's garth
With hound, and with hawk upon glove?"

"Once was I in thy father's garth,
With hound and hawk and all;
And with many mocks he said me nay,
In such wise did our meeting fall."

All the while they talked together
They deemed alone they were,
But the false nurse ever stood close without,
And nought thereof she failed to hear.

O shame befall that evil nurse,
Ill tidings down she drew,
She stole away his goodly sword,
But and his byrny new.

She took to her his goodly sword,
His byrny blue she had away,
And she went her ways to the high bower
Whereas King Siward lay.

"Wake up, wake up, King Siward!
Over long thou sleepest there,
The while the King's son Hafbur
Lies abed by Signy the fair."

"No Hafbur is here, and no King's son.
That thou shouldst speak this word;
He is far away in the east-countries,
Warring with knight and lord.

"Hold thou thy peace, thou evil nurse,
And lay on her no lie,
Or else tomorn ere the sun is up
In the bale-fire shall ye die."

"O hearken to this, my lord and king,
And trow me nought but true;
Look here upon his bright white sword,
But and his byrny blue!"

Then mad of mind waxed Siward,
Over all the house 'gan he cry,
"Rise up, O mighty men of mine,
For a hardy knight is anigh:

"Take ye sword and shield in hand,
And look that they be true;
For Hafbur the King hath gusted with us;
Stiffnecked he is, great deeds to do."

So there anigh the high-bower door

They stood with spear and glaive;
"Rise up, rise up, Young Hafbur,
Out here we would thee have!"

That heard the goodly Signy
And she wrang her hands full sore:
"Hearken and heed, O Hafbur,
Who stand without by the door!"

Thank and praise to the King's son Hafbur,
Manly he played and stout!
None might lay hand upon him
While the bed-post yet held out.

But they took him, the King's son Hafbur,
And set him in bolts new wrought;
Then lightly he rent them asunder,
As though they were leaden and nought.

Out and spake the ancient nurse,
And she gave a rede of ill:
"Bind ye him but in Signy's hair,
So shall hand and foot lie still.

"Take ye but one of Signy's hairs
Hafbur's hands to bind,
Ne'er shall he rend them asunder
His heart to her is so kind."

Then took they two of Signy's hairs
Bonds for his hands to be,
Nor might he rive them asunder
So dear to his heart was she.

Then spake the sweetling Signy
As the tears fast down her cheek did fall:
"O rend it asunder, Hafbur,
That gift to thee I give withal."

Now sat the King's son Hafbur
Amidst the castle-hall,
And thronged to behold him man and maid,

But the damsels chiefest of all.

They took him, the King's son Hafbur,
Laid bolts upon him in that place,
And ever went Signy to and fro,
The weary tears fell down apace.

She speaketh to him in sorrowful mood:
"This will I, Hafbur, for thee,
Piteous prayer for thee shall make
My mother's sisters three.

"For my father's mind stands fast in this,
To do thee to hang upon the bough
On the topmost oak in the morning-tide
While the sun is yet but low."

But answered thereto young Hafbur
Out of a wrathful mind:
"Of all heeds I heeded, this was the last,
To be prayed for by womankind.

"But hearken, true-love Signy,
Good heart to my asking turn,
When thou seest me swing on oaken-bough
Then let thy high-bower burn."

Then answered the noble Signy,
So sore as she must moan,
"God to aid, King's son Hafbur,
Well will I grant thy boon."

They followed him, King Hafbur,
Thick thronging from the castle-bent:
And all who saw him needs must greet
And in full piteous wise they went.

But when they came to the fair green mead
Where Hafbur was to die,
He prayed them hold a little while:
For his true-love would he try.

"O hang me up my cloak of red,
That sight or my ending let me see.
Perchance yet may King Siward rue
My hanging on the gallows tree."

Now of the cloak was Signy ware
And sorely sorrow her heart did rive,
She thought: "The ill tale all is told,
No longer is there need to live."

Straightway her damsels did she call
As weary as she was of mind:
"Come, let us go to the bower aloft
Game and glee for a while to find."

Yea and withal spake Signy,
She spake a word of price:
"To-day shall I do myself to death
And meet Hafbur in Paradise.

"And whoso there be in this our house
Lord Hafbur's death that wrought,
Good reward I give them now
To red embers to be brought.

"So many there are in the King's garth
Of Hafbur's death shall be glad;
Good reward for them to lose
The trothplight may they had."

She set alight to the bower-aloft
And it burned up speedily,
And her good love and her great heart
Might all with eye see.

It was the King's son Hafbur
O'er his shoulder cast his eye,
And beheld how Signy's house of maids
On a red low stood on high.

"Now take ye down my cloak of red,
Let it lie on the earth a-cold;

Had I ten lives of the world for one,
Nought of them all would I hold."

King Siward looked out of his window fair,
In fearful mood enow,
For he saw Hafbur hanging on oak
And Signy's bower on a low.

Out then spake a little page
Was clad in kirtle red:
"Sweet Signy burns in her bower aloft,
With all her mays unwed."

Therewithal spake King Siward
From rueful heart unfain:
"Ne'er saw I two King's children erst
Such piteous ending gain.

"But had I wist or heard it told
That love so strong should be,
Ne'er had I held those twain apart
For all Denmark given me.

O hasten and run to Signy's bower
For the life of that sweet thing;
Hasten and run to the gallows high,
No thief is Hafbur the King."

But when they came to Signy's bower
Low it lay in embers red;
And when they came to the gallows tree,
Hafbur was stark and dead.

They took him the King's son Hafbur,
Swathed him in linen white,
And laid him in the earth of Christ
By Signy his delight.
O wilt thou win me then,
or as fair a maid as I be?

William Morris

Hildebrand And Hellelil

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH.

Hellelil sitteth in bower there,
None knows my grief but God alone,
And seweth at the seam so fair,
I never wail my sorrow to any other one.

But there whereas the gold should be
With silk upon the cloth sewed she.

Where she should sew with silken thread
The gold upon the cloth she laid.

So to the Queen the word came in
That Hellelil wild work doth win.

Then did the Queen do furs on her
And went to Hellelil the fair.

“O swiftly sewest thou, Hellelil,
Yet nought but mad is thy sewing still!”

“Well may my sewing be but mad
Such evil hap as I have had.

My father was good king and lord,
Knights fifteen served before his board.

He taught me sewing royally,
Twelve knights had watch and ward of me.

Well served eleven day by day,
To folly the twelfth did me bewray.

And this same was hight Hildebrand,
The King’s son of the English Land.

But in bower were we no sooner laid

Than the truth thereof to my father was said.

Then loud he cried o'er garth and hall:
'Stand up, my men, and arm ye all!

'Yea draw on mail and dally not,
Hard neck lord Hildebrand hath got!'

They stood by the door with glaive and spear;
'Hildebrand rise and hasten here!'

Lord Hildebrand stroked my white white cheek:
'O love, forbear my name to speak.

'Yea even if my blood thou see,
Name me not, lest my death thou be.'

Out from the door lord Hildebrand leapt,
And round about his good sword swept.

The first of all that he slew there
Were my seven brethren with golden hair.

Then before him stood the youngest one,
And dear he was in the days ago.

Then I cried out: 'O Hildebrand,
In the name of God now stay thine hand.

'O let my youngest brother live
Tidings hereof to my mother to give!'

No sooner was the word gone forth
Than with eight wounds fell my love to earth.

My brother took me by the golden hair,
And bound me to the saddle there.

There met me then no littlest root,
But it tore off somewhat of my foot.

No littlest brake the wild-wood bore,

But somewhat from my legs it tore.

No deepest dam we came unto
But my brother's horse he swam it through.

But when to the castle gate we came,
There stood my mother in sorrow and shame.

My brother let raise a tower high,
Bestrewn with sharp thorns inwardly.

He took me in my silk shirt bare
And cast me into that tower there.

And wheresoe'er my legs I laid
Torment of the thorns I had.

Wheresoe'er on feet I stood
The prickles sharp drew forth my blood.

My youngest brother me would slay
But my mother would have me sold away.

A great new bell my price did buy
In Mary's Church to hang on high.

But the first stroke that ever it strake
My mother's heart asunder brake."

So soon as her sorrow and woe was said,
None knows my grief but God alone,
In the arm of the Queen she sat there dead,
I never tell my sorrow to any other one.

William Morris

Hope Dieth: Hope Liveth

Strong are thine arms, O love, & strong
Thine heart to live, and love, and long;
But thou art wed to grief and wrong:
Live, then, and long, though hope be dead!
Live on, & labour thro' the years!
Make pictures through the mist of tears,
Of unforgotten happy fears,
That crossed the time ere hope was dead.
Draw near the place where once we stood
Amid delight's swift-rushing flood,
And we and all the world seemed good
Nor needed hope now cold and dead.
Dream in the dawn I come to thee
Weeping for things that may not be!
Dream that thou layest lips on me!
Wake, wake to clasp hope's body dead!
Count o'er and o'er, and one by one
The minutes of the happy sun
That while agone on kissed lips shone,
Count on, rest not, for hope is dead.
Weep, though no hair's breadth thou shalt move
The living Earth, the heaven above
By all the bitterness of love!
Weep and cease not, now hope is dead!
Sighs rest thee not, tears bring no ease,
Life hath no joy, and Death no peace:
The years change not, though they decrease,
For hope is dead, for hope is dead.
Speak, love, I listen: far away
I bless the tremulous lips, that say,
"Mock not the afternoon of day,
Mock not the tide when hope is dead!"
I bless thee, O my love, who say'st:
"Mock not the thistle-cumbered waste;
I hold Love's hand, and make no haste
Down the long way, now hope is dead.
With other names do we name pain,
The long years wear our hearts in vain.
Mock not our loss grown into gain,

Mock not our lost hope lying dead.
Our eyes gaze for no morning-star,
No glimmer of the dawn afar;
Full silent wayfarers we are
Since ere the noon-tide hope lay dead.
Behold with lack of happiness
The master, Love, our hearts did bless
Lest we should think of him the less:
Love dieth not, though hope is dead!"

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 uncontent,
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

Knight Aagen And The Maiden Else

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH.

It was the fair knight Aagen
To an isle he went his way,
And plighted troth to Else,
Who was so fair a may.

He plighted troth to Else
All with the ruddy gold,
But or ere that day's moon came again
Low he lay in the black, black mould.

It was the maiden Else,
She was fulfilled of woe
When she heard how the fair knight Aagen
In the black mould lay alow.

Uprose the fair knight Aagen,
Coffin on back took he,
And he's away to her bower,
Sore hard as the work might be.

With that same chest on door he smote,
For the lack of flesh and skin;
"O hearken, maiden Else,
And let thy true-love in!"

Then answered maiden Else,
"Never open I my door,
But and if thou namest Jesu's name
As thou hadst might before."

"O hearken, maiden Else,
And open thou thy door,
For Jesu's name I well may name
As I had might before!"

Then uprose maiden Else,

O'er her cheek the salt tears ran,
Nor spared she into her very bower
To welcome that dead man.

O, she's taken up her comb of gold
And combed adown her hair,
And for every hair she combed adown
There fell a weary tear.

"Hearken thou, knight Aagen,
Hearken, true-love, and tell,
If down-adown in the black, black earth
Thou farest ever well?"

"O whenso thou art joyous,
And the heart is glad in thee,
Then fares it with my coffin
That red roses are with me.

"But whenso thou art sorrowful
And weary is thy mood,
Then all within my coffin
Is it dreadful with dark blood.

"Now is the red cock a-crowing,
To the earth adown must I;
Down to the earth wend all dead folk,
And I wend in company.

"Now is the black cock a-crowing,
To the earth must I adown,
For the gates of Heaven are opening now,
Thereto must I begone."

Uprose the fair knight Aagen,
Coffin on back took he,
And he's away to the churchyard now,
Sore hard as the work might be.

But so wrought maiden Else,
Because of her weary mood,
That she followed after own true love

All through the mirk wild wood.

But when the wood was well passed through,
And in the churchyard they were,
Then was the fair knight Aagen
Waxen wan of his golden hair.

And when therefrom they wended
And were the church within,
Then was the fair knight Aagen
Waxen wan of cheek and chin.

“Hearken thou, maiden Else,
Hearken, true-love, to me,
Weep no more for thine own troth-plight,
However it shall be!

“Look thou up to the heavens aloft,
To the little stars and bright,
And thou shalt see how sweetly
It fareth with the night!”

She looked up to the heavens aloft,
To the little stars bright above
The dead man sank into his grave,
Ne'er again she saw her love.

Home then went maiden Else,
Mid sorrow manifold,
And ere that night's moon came again
She lay alow in the mould.

William Morris

Love Fulfilled

Hast thou longed through weary days
For the sight of one loved face?
Mast thou cried aloud for rest,
Mid the pain of sundering hours;
Cried aloud for sleep and death,
Since the sweet unhop'd for best
Was a shadow and a breath?
O, long now, for no fear lowers
O'er these faint feet-kissing flowers.
O, rest now; and yet in sleep
All thy longing shalt thou keep.

Thou shalt rest and have no fear
Of a dull awaking near,
Of a life for ever blind,
Uncontent and waste and wide.
Thou shalt wake and think it sweet
That thy love is near and kind.
Sweeter still for lips to meet;
Sweetest that thine heart doth hide
Longing all unsatisfied
With all longing's answering
Howsoever close ye cling.

Thou rememberest how of old
E'en thy very pain grew cold,
How thou might'st not measure bliss
E'en when eyes and hands drew nigh.
Thou rememberest all regret
For the scarce remembered kiss,
The lost dream of how they met,
Mouths once parched with misery.
Then seemed Love born but to die,
Now unrest, pain, bliss are one,
Love, unhidden and alone.

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}
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

Love's Reward

It was a knight of the southern land
Rode forth upon the way
When the birds sang sweet on either hand
About the middle of the May.

But when he came to the lily-close,
Thereby so fair a maiden stood,
That neither the lily nor the rose
Seemed any longer fair nor good.

"All hail, thou rose and lily-bough!
What dost thou weeping here,
For the days of May are sweet enow,
And the nights of May are dear?"

"Well may I weep and make my moan,
Who am bond and captive here;
Well may I weep who lie alone,
Though May be waxen dear."

"And is there none shall ransom thee;
Mayst thou no borrow find?"

"Nay, what man may my borrow be,
When all my wealth is left behind?"

"Perchance some ring is left with thee,
Some belt that did thy body bind?"

"Nay, no man may my borrow be,
My rings and belt are left behind."

"The shoes that the May-blooms kissed on thee
Might yet be things to some men's mind."

"Nay, no man may my borrow be,
My golden shoes are left behind."

"The milk-white sark that covered thee
A dear-bought token some should find."

"Nay, no man may my borrow be,
My silken sark is left behind."

"The kiss of thy mouth and the love of thee
Better than world's wealth should I find."

"Nay, thou mayst not my borrow be,
For all my love is left behind.

"A year ago come Midsummer-night
I woke by the Northern sea;
I lay and dreamed of my delight
Till love no more would let me be.

"Seaward I went by night and cloud
To hear the white swans sing;
But though they sang both clear and loud,
I hearkened a sweeter thing.

"O sweet and sweet as none may tell
Was the speech so close 'twixt lip and lip:
But fast, unseen, the black oars fell
That drave to shore the rover's ship.

"My love lay bloody on the strand
Ere stars were waxen wan:
Naught lacketh graves the Northern land
If to-day it lack a lovelier man.

"I sat and wept beside the mast
When the stars were gone away.
Naught lacketh the Northland joy gone past
If it lack the night and day."

"Is there no place in any land
Where thou wouldst rather be than here?"
"Yea, a lone grave on a cold sea-strand
My heart for a little holdeth dear."

"Of all the deeds that women do
Is there none shall bring thee some delight?"
"To lie down and die where lay we two
Upon Midsummer night."

"I will bring thee there where thou wouldst be,

A borrow shalt thou find."
"Wherewith shall I reward it thee
For wealth and good-hap left behind?"

"A kiss from lips that love not me,
A good-night somewhat kind;
A narrow house to share with thee
When we leave the world behind."

They have taken ship and sailed away
Across the Southland main;
They have sailed by hills were green and gay,
A land of goods and gain.

They have sailed by sea-cliffs stark and white
And hillsides fair enow;
They have sailed by lands of little night
Where great the groves did grow.

They have sailed by islands in the sea
That the clouds lay thick about;
And into a main where few ships be
Amidst of dread, and doubt.

With broken mast and battered side
They drave amidst the tempest's heart;
But why should death to these betide
Whom love did hold so well apart?

The flood it drave them toward the strand,
The ebb it drew them fro;
The swallowing seas that tore the land
Cast them ashore and let them go.

"Is this the land? is this the land,
Where life and I must part a-twain?"
"Yea, this is e'en the sea-washed strand
That made me yoke-fellow of pain.

"The strand is this, the sea is this,
The grey bent and the mountains grey;
But no mound here his grave-mound is;

Where have they borne my love away?"

"What man is this with shield and spear
Comes riding down the bent to us?
A goodly man forsooth he were
But for his visage piteous."

"Ghost of my love, so kind of yore,
Art thou not somewhat gladder grown
To feel my feet upon this shore?
O love, thou shalt not long be lone."

"Ghost of my love, each day I come
To see where God first wrought us wrong:
Now kind thou com'st to call me home,
Be sure I shall not tarry long."

"Come here, my love; come here for rest,
So sore as my body longs for thee!
My heart shall beat against thy breast
As arms of thine shall comfort me."

"Love, let thy lips depart no more
From those same eyes they once did kiss,
The very bosom wounded sore
When sorrow clave the heart of bliss!"

O was it day, or was it night,
As there they told their love again?
The high-tide of the sun's delight,
Or whirl of wind and drift of rain?

"Speak sweet, my love, of how it fell,
And how thou cam'st across the sea,
And what kind heart hath served thee well,
And who thy borrow there might be?"

Naught but the wind and sea made moan
As hastily she turned her round;
From light clouds wept the morn alone,
Not the dead corpse upon the ground.

"O look, my love, for here is he
Who once of all the world was kind,
And led my sad heart o'er the sea!
And now must he be left behind."

She kissed his lips that yet did smile,
She kissed his eyes that were not sad:
"O thou who sorrow didst beguile,
And now wouldst have me wholly glad!

"A little gift is this," she said,
"Thou once hadst deemed great gift enow;
Yet surely shalt thou rest thine head
Where I one day shall lie alow.

"There shalt thou wake to think of me,
And by thy face my face shall find;
And I shall then thy borrow be
When all the world is left behind."

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

Masters in This Hall

Masters in this hall, hear ye news today.
Brought from over the sea and ever I you pray.

Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we clear!
Holpen are all folk on Earth, born is God's Son so dear!
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we loud!
God today hath poor folk raised and cast a-down the proud.

Going o'er the hills, through the milk-white snow,
Heard I ewes bleat, while the wind did blow.

Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we clear!
Holpen are all folk on Earth, born is God's Son so dear!
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we loud!
God today hath poor folk raised and cast a-down the proud.

Then to Bethlem town, we went two and two,
And in a sorry place, heard the oxen low.

Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we clear!
Holpen are all folk on Earth, born is God's Son so dear!
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we loud!
God today hath poor folk raised and cast a-down the proud.

Therein did we see, a sweet and goodly may
And a fair old man, upon the straw she lay.

Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we clear!
Holpen are all folk on Earth, born is God's Son so dear!
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we loud!
God today hath poor folk raised and cast a-down the proud.

And a little child, on her arm had she,
'Wot ye who this is?' said the hinds to me.

Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we clear!
Holpen are all folk on Earth, born is God's Son so dear!
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we loud!
God today hath poor folk raised and cast a-down the proud.

This is Christ the Lord, masters be ye glad!
Christmas is come in, and no folk should be sad.

Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we clear!
Holpen are all folk on Earth, born is God's Son so dear!
Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell sing we loud!
God today hath poor folk raised and cast a-down the proud.

William Morris

Meeting In Winter

Winter in the world it is,
Round about the unhop'd kiss
Whose dream I long have sorrow'd o'er;
Round about the longing sore,
That the touch of thee shall turn
Into joy too deep to burn.

Round thine eyes and round thy mouth
Passeth no murmur of the south,
When my lips a little while
Leave thy quivering tender smile,
As we twain, hand holding hand,
Once again together stand.

Sweet is that, as all is sweet;
For the white drift shalt thou meet,
Kind and cold-cheek'd and mine own,
Wrapp'd about with deep-furr'd gown
In the broad-wheeled chariot:
Then the north shall spare us not;
The wide-reaching waste of snow
Wilder, lonelier yet shall grow
As the reddened sun falls down.

But the warders of the town,
When they flash the torches out
O'er the snow amid their doubt,
And their eyes at last behold
Thy red-litten hair of gold;
Shall they open, or in fear
Cry, "Alas! What cometh here?
Whence hath come this Heavenly
To tell of all the world undone?"

They shall open, and we shall see
The long street litten scantily
By the long stream of light before
The guest-hall's half-open door;
And our horses' bells shall cease

As we reach the place of peace;
Thou shalt tremble, as at last
The worn threshold is o'er-past,
And the fire-light blindeth thee:
Trembling shalt thou cling to me
As the sleepy merchants stare
At thy cold hands slim and fair,
Thy soft eyes and happy lips
Worth all lading of their ships.

O my love, how sweet and sweet
That first kissing of thy feet,
When the fire is sunk alow,
And the hall made empty now
Groweth solemn, dim and vast!
O my love, the night shall last
Longer than men tell thereof
Laden with our lonely love!

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

Mother And Son

Now sleeps the land of houses,
and dead night holds the street,
And there thou liest, my baby,
and sleepest soft and sweet;
My man is away for awhile,
but safe and alone we lie,
And none heareth thy breath but thy mother,
and the moon looking down from the sky
On the weary waste of the town,
as it looked on the grass-edged road
Still warm with yesterday's sun,
when I left my old abode;
Hand in hand with my love,
that night of all nights in the year;
When the river of love o'erflowed
and drowned all doubt and fear,
And we two were alone in the world,
and once if never again,
We knew of the secret of earth
and the tale of its labour and pain.

Lo amidst London I lift thee,
and how little and light thou art,
And thou without hope or fear
thou fear and hope of my heart!
Lo here thy body beginning,
O son, and thy soul and thy life;
But how will it be if thou livest,
and enterest into the strife,
And in love we dwell together
when the man is grown in thee,
When thy sweet speech I shall hearken,
and yet 'twixt thee and me
Shall rise that wall of distance,
that round each one doth grow,
And maketh it hard and bitter
each other's thought to know.

Now, therefore, while yet thou art little

and hast no thought of thine own,
I will tell thee a word of the world;
of the hope whence thou hast grown;
Of the love that once begat thee,
of the sorrow that hath made
Thy little heart of hunger,
and thy hands on my bosom laid.
Then mayst thou remember hereafter,
as whiles when people say
All this hath happened before
in the life of another day;
So mayst thou dimly remember
this tale of thy mother's voice,
As oft in the calm of dawning
I have heard the birds rejoice,
As oft I have heard the storm-wind
go moaning through the wood;
And I knew that earth was speaking,
and the mother's voice was good.

Now, to thee alone will I tell it
that thy mother's body is fair,
In the guise of the country maidens
Who play with the sun and the air;
Who have stood in the row of the reapers
in the August afternoon,
Who have sat by the frozen water
in the high day of the moon,
When the lights of the Christmas feasting
were dead in the house on the hill,
And the wild geese gone to the salt-marsh
had left the winter still.
Yea, I am fair, my firstling;
if thou couldst but remember me!
The hair that thy small hand clutcheth
is a goodly sight to see;
I am true, but my face is a snare;
soft and deep are my eyes,
And they seem for men's beguiling
fulfilled with the dreams of the wise.
Kind are my lips, and they look
as though my soul had learned

Deep things I have never heard of,
my face and my hands are burned
By the lovely sun of the acres;
three months of London town
And thy birth-bed have bleached them indeed,
"But lo, where the edge of the gown"
(So said thy father) "is parting
the wrist that is white as the curd
From the brown of the hand that I love,
bright as the wing of a bird."

Such is thy mother, O firstling,
yet strong as the maidens of old,
Whose spears and whose swords were the warders
of homestead, of field and of fold.
Oft were my feet on the highway,
often they wearied the grass;
From dusk unto dusk of the summer
three times in a week would I pass
To the downs from the house on the river
through the waves of the blossoming corn.
Fair then I lay down in the even,
and fresh I arose on the morn,
And scarce in the noon was I weary.
Ah, son, in the days of thy strife,
If thy soul could but harbour a dream
of the blossom of my life!
It would be as the sunlit meadows
beheld from a tossing sea,
And thy soul should look on a vision
of the peace that is to be.

Yet, yet the tears on my cheek!
and what is this doth move
My heart to thy heart, beloved,
save the flood of yearning love?
For fair and fierce is thy father,
and soft and strange are his eyes
That look on the days that shall be
with the hope of the brave and the wise.
It was many a day that we laughed,
as over the meadows we walked,

And many a day I hearkened
and the pictures came as he talked;
It was many a day that we longed,
and we lingered late at eve
Ere speech from speech was sundered,
and my hand his hand could leave.
Then I wept when I was alone,
and I longed till the daylight came;
And down the stairs I stole,
and there was our housekeeping dame
(No mother of me, the foundling)
kindling the fire betimes
Ere the haymaking folk went forth
to the meadows down by the limes;
All things I saw at a glance;
the quickening fire-tongues leapt
Through the crackling heap of sticks,
and the sweet smoke up from it crept,
And close to the very hearth
the low sun flooded the floor,
And the cat and her kittens played
in the sun by the open door.
The garden was fair in the morning,
and there in the road he stood
Beyond the crimson daisies
and the bush of southernwood.
Then side by side together
through the grey-walled place we went,
And O the fear departed,
and the rest and sweet content!

Son, sorrow and wisdom he taught me,
and sore I grieved and learned
As we twain grew into one;
and the heart within me burned
With the very hopes of his heart.
Ah, son, it is piteous,
But never again in my life
shall I dare to speak to thee thus;
So may these lonely words
about thee creep and cling,
These words of the lonely night

in the days of our wayfaring.
Many a child of woman
to-night is born in the town,
The desert of folly and wrong;
and of what and whence are they grown?
Many and many an one
of wont and use is born;
For a husband is taken to bed
as a hat or a ribbon is worn.
Prudence begets her thousands;
"good is a housekeeper's life,
So shall I sell my body
that I may be matron and wife."
"And I shall endure foul wedlock
and bear the children of need."
Some are there born of hate,
many the children of greed.
"I, I too can be wedded,
though thou my love hast got."
"I am fair and hard of heart,
and riches shall be my lot."
And all these are the good and the happy,
on whom the world dawns fair.
O son, when wilt thou learn
of those that are born of despair,
As the fabled mud of the Nile
that quickens under the sun
With a growth of creeping things,
half dead when just begun?
E'en such is the care of Nature
that man should never die,
Though she breed of the fools of the earth,
and the dregs of the city sty.
But thou, O son, O son,
of very love wert born,
When our hope fulfilled bred hope,
and fear was a folly outworn.
On the eve of the toil and the battle
all sorrow and grief we weighed,
We hoped and we were not ashamed,
we knew and we were not afraid.

Now waneth the night and the moon;
ah, son, it is piteous
That never again in my life
shall I dare to speak to thee thus.
But sure from the wise and the simple
shall the mighty come to birth;
And fair were my fate, beloved,
if I be yet on the earth
When the world is awoken at last,
and from mouth to mouth they tell
Of thy love and thy deeds and thy valour,
and thy hope that nought can quell.

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

Of The Three Seekers

There met three knights on the woodland way,
And the first was clad in silk array:
The second was dight in iron and steel,
But the third was rags from head to heel.
"Lo, now is the year and the day come round
When we must tell what we have found."
The first said: "I have found a king
Who grudgeth no gift of anything."
The second said: "I have found a knight
Who hath never turned his back in fight."
But the third said: "I have found a love
That Time and the World shall never move."

Whither away to win good cheer?
"With me," said the first, "for my king is near."
So to the King they went their ways;
But there was a change of times and days.
"What men are ye," the great King said,
"That ye should eat my children's bread?
My waste has fed full many a store,
And mocking and grudge have I gained therefore.
Whatever waneth as days wax old,
Full worthy to win are goods and gold."

Whither away to win good cheer?
"With me," said the second, "my knight is near."
So to the knight they went their ways,
But there was a change of times and days.
He dwelt in castle sure and strong,
For fear lest aught should do him wrong.
Guards by gate and hall there were,
And folk went in and out in fear.
When he heard the mouse run in the wall,
"Hist!" he said, "what next shall befall?
Draw not near, speak under your breath,
For all new-corners tell of death.
Bring me no song nor minstrelsy,
Round death it babbleth still," said he.
"And what is fame and the praise of men,

When lost life cometh not again?"

Whither away to seek good cheer?

"Ah me!" said the third, "that my love were anear!

Were the world as little as it is wide,

In a happy house should ye abide.

Were the world as kind as it is hard,

Ye should behold a fair reward."

So far by high and low have they gone,

They have come to a waste was rock and stone.

But lo, from the waste, a company

Full well bedight came riding by;

And in the midst, a queen, so fair,

That God wrought well in making her.

The first and second knights abode

To gaze upon her as she rode,

Forth passed the third with head down bent,

And stumbling ever as he went.

His shoulder brushed her saddle-bow;

He trembled with his head hung low.

His hand brushed o'er her golden gown,

As on the waste he fell adown.

So swift to earth her feet she set,

It seemed that there her arms he met.

His lips that looked the stone to meet

Were on her trembling lips and sweet.

Softly she kissed him cheek and chin,

His mouth her many tears drank in.

"Where would'st thou wander, love," she said,

"Now I have drawn thee from the dead?"

"I go my ways," he said, "and thine

Have nought to do with grief and pine."

"All ways are one way now," she said,

"Since I have drawn thee from the dead."

Said he, "But I must seek again

Where first I met thee in thy pain:

I am not clad so fair," said he,

"But yet the old hurts thou may'st see.

And thou, but for thy gown of gold,

A piteous tale of thee were told."

"There is no pain on earth," she said,

"Since I have drawn thee from the dead."
"And parting waiteth for us there,"
Said he, "As it was yester-year."
"Yet first a space of love," she said,
"Since I have drawn thee from the dead."
He laughed; said he, "Hast thou a home
Where I and these my friends may come?"
Laughing, "The world's my home," she said,
"Now I have drawn thee from the dead.
Yet somewhere is a space thereof
Where I may dwell beside my love.
There clear the river grows for him
Till o'er its stones his keel shall swim.
There faint the thrushes in their song,
And deem he tarrieth overlong.
There summer-tide is waiting now
Until he bids the roses blow.
Come, tell my flowery fields," she said,
"How I have drawn thee from the dead."

Whither away to win good cheer?
"With me," he said, "for my love is here.
The wealth of my house it waneth not;
No gift it giveth is forgot.
No fear my house may enter in,
For nought is there that death may win.
Now life is little, and death is nought,
Since all is found that erst I sought."

William Morris

Of The Wooing Of Halbiorn The Strong

A STORY FROM THE LAND-SETTLING BOOK OF ICELAND, CHAPTER XXX.

At Deildar-Tongue in the autumn-tide,
So many times over comes summer again,
Stood Odd of Tongue his door beside.
What healing in summer if winter be vain?
Dim and dusk the day was grown,
As he heard his folded wethers moan.
Then through the garth a man drew near,
With painted shield and gold-wrought spear.
Good was his horse and grand his gear,
And his girths were wet with Whitewater.
"Hail, Master Odd, live blithe and long!
How fare the folk at Deildar-Tongue?"
"All hail, thou Hallbiorn the Strong!
How fare the folk by the Brothers'-Tongue?"
"Meat have we there, and drink and fire,
Nor lack all things that we desire.
But by the other Whitewater
Of Hallgerd many a tale we hear."
"Tales enow may my daughter make
If too many words be said for her sake."
"What saith thine heart to a word of mine,
That I deem thy daughter fair and fine?
Fair and fine for a bride is she,
And I fain would have her home with me."
"Full many a word that at noon goes forth
Comes home at even little worth.
Now winter treadeth on autumn-tide,
So here till the spring shalt thou abide.
Then if thy mind be changed no whit,
And ye still will wed, see ye to it!
And on the first of summer days,
A wedded man, ye may go your ways.
Yet look, howso the thing will fall,
My hand shall meddle nought at all.
Lo, now the night and rain draweth up,
And within doors glimmer stoop and cup.

And hark, a little sound I know,
The laugh of Snaebiorn's fiddle-bow,
My sister's son, and a craftsman good,
When the red rain drives through the iron wood."
Hallbiorn laughed, and followed in,
And a merry feast there did begin.
Hallgerd's hands undid his weed,
Hallgerd's hands poured out the mead.
Her fingers at his breast he felt,
As her hair fell down about his belt.
Her fingers with the cup he took,
And o'er its rim at her did look.
Cold cup, warm hand, and fingers slim,
Before his eyes were waxen dim.
And if the feast were foul or fair,
He knew not, save that she was there.
He knew not if men laughed or wept,
While still 'twixt wall and dais she stept.
Whether she went or stood that eve,
Not once his eyes her face did leave.
But Snaebiorn laughed and Snaebiorn sang,
And sweet his smitten fiddle rang.
And Hallgerd stood beside him there,
So many times over comes summer again,
Nor ever once he turned to her,
What healing in summer if winter be vain?

Master Odd on the morrow spake,
So many times over comes summer again.
Hearken, O guest, if ye be awake,"
What healing in summer if winter be vain?
"Sure ye champions of the south
Speak many things from a silent mouth.
And thine, meseems, last night did pray
That ye might well be wed to-day.
The year's ingathering feast it is,
A goodly day to give thee bliss.
Come hither, daughter, fine and fair,
Here is a Wooer from Whitewater.
East away hath he gotten fame,
And his father's name is e'en my names.
Will ye lay hand within his hand,

That blossoming fair our house may stand?"
She laid her hand within his hand;
White she was as the lily wand.
Low sang Snaebiorn's brand in its sheath,
And his lips were waxen grey as death.
"Snaebiorn, sing us a song of worth,
If your song must be silent from now henceforth."
Clear and loud his voice outrang,
And a song of worth at the wedding he sang.
"Sharp sword," he sang, "and death is sure."
So many times over comes summer again,
"But love doth over all endure."
What healing in summer if winter be vain?

Now winter cometh and weareth away,
So many times over comes summer again,
And glad is Hallbiorn many a day.
What healing in summer if winter be vain?
Full soft he lay his love beside;
But dark are the days of wintertide.
Dark are the days, and the nights are long,
And sweet and fair was Snaebiorn's song.
Many a time he talked with her,
Till they deemed the summer-tide was there.
And they forgot the wind-swept ways
And angry fords of the flitting-days.
While the north wind swept the hillside there
They forgot the other Whitewater.
While nights at Deildar-Tongue were long,
They clean forgot the Brothers'-Tongue.
But whatso falleth 'twixt Hell and Home,
So many times over comes summer again,
Full surely again shall summer come.
What healing in summer if winter be vain?

To Odd spake Hallbiorn on a day
So many times over comes summer again,
"Gone is the snow from everyway."
What healing in summer if winter be vain?
Now green is grown Whitewater-side,
And I to Whitewater will ride."
Quoth Odd, "Well fare thou winter-guest,

May thine own Whitewater be best.
Well is a man's purse better at home
Than open where folk go and come."
"Come ye carles of the south country,
Now shall we go our kin to see!
For the lambs are bleating in the south,
And the salmon swims towards Olfus mouth.
Girth and graithe and gather your gear!
And ho for the other Whitewater!"
Bright was the moon as bright might be,
And Snaebiorn rode to the north country.
And Odd to Reykholt is gone forth,
To see if his mares be ought of worth.
But Hallbiorn into the bower is gone
And there sat Hallgerd all alone.
She was not dight to go nor ride
She had no joy of the summer-tide.
Silent she sat and combed her hair,
That fell all round about her there.
The slant beam lay upon her head,
And gilt her golden locks to red.
He gazed at her with hungry eyes
And fluttering did his heart arise.
"Full hot," he said, "is the sun to-day,
And the snow is gone from the mountain-way.
The king-cup grows above the grass,
And through the wood do the thrushes pass."
Of all his words she hearkened none,
But combed her hair amidst the sun.
"The laden beasts stand in the garth
And their heads are turned to Helliskarth."
The sun was falling on her knee,
And she combed her gold hair silently.
"To-morrow great will be the cheer
At the Brothers'-Tongue by Whitewater."
From her folded lap the sunbeam slid;
She combed her hair, and the word she hid.
"Come, love; is the way so long and drear
From Whitewater to Whitewater?"
The sunbeam lay upon the floor;
She combed her hair and spake no more.
He drew her by the lily hand:

"I love thee better than all the land."
He drew her by the shoulders sweet:
"My threshold is but for thy feet."
He drew her by the yellow hair:
"O why wert thou so deadly fair?
"O am I wedded to death?" he cried
"Is the Dead-strand come to Whitewater side?"
And the sun was fading from the room,
But her eyes were bright in the change and the gloom.
"Sharp sword," she sang, "and death is sure,
But over all doth love endure."
She stood up shining in her place
And laughed beneath his deadly face.
Instead of the sunbeam gleamed a brand,
The hilts were hard in Hallbiorn's hand:
The bitter point was in Hallgerd's breast
That Snaebiorn's lips of love had pressed.
Morn and noon, and nones passed o'er,
And the sun is far from the bower door.
To-morrow morn shall the sun come back,
So many times over comes summer again,
But Hallgerd's feet the floor shall lack.
What healing in summer if winter be vain?

Now Hallbiorn's house-carles ride full fast,
So many times over comes summer again,
Till many a mile of way is past.
What healing in summer if winter be vain?
But when they came over Oxridges,
'Twas, "Where shall we give our horses ease?"
When Shieldbroad-side was well in sight,
'Twas, "Where shall we lay our heads to-night?"
Hallbiorn turned and raised his head;
"Under the stones of the waste," he said.
Quoth one, "The clatter of hoofs anigh."
Quoth the other, "Spears against the sky!"
"Hither ride men from the Wells apace;
Spur we fast to a kindlier place."
Down from his horse leapt Hallbiorn straight:
"Why should the supper of Odin wait?
Weary and chased I will not come
To the table of my fathers' home."

With that came Snaebiorn, who but he,
And twelve in all was his company.
Snaebiorn's folk were on their feet;
He spake no word as they did meet.
They fought upon the northern hill:
Five are the howes men see there still.
Three men of Snaebiorn's fell to earth
And Hallbiorn's twain that were of worth.
And never a word did Snaebiorn say,
Till Hallbiorn's foot he smote away.
Then Hallbiorn cried: "Come, fellow of mine,
To the southern bent where the sun doth shine."
Tottering into the sun he went,
And slew two more upon the bent.
And on the bent where dead he lay
Three howes do men behold to-day.
And never a word spake Snaebiorn yet,
Till in his saddle he was set.
Nor was there any heard his voice,
So many times over comes summer again,
Till he came to his ship in Grimsar-oyce.
What healing in summer if winter be vain?

On so fair a day they hoisted sail,
So many times over comes summer again,
And for Norway well did the wind avail.
What healing in summer if winter be vain?
But Snaebiorn looked aloft and said:
"I see in the sail a stripe of red:
Murder, meseems, is the name of it
And ugly things about it flit.
A stripe of blue in the sail I see:
Cold death of men it seems to me.
And next I see a stripe of black,
For a life fulfilled of bitter lack."
Quoth one, "So fair a wind doth blow
That we shall see Norway soon enow."
"Be blithe, O shipmate," Snaebiorn said,
"Tell Hacon the Earl that I be dead."
About the midst of the Iceland main
Round veered the wind to the east again.
And west they drave, and long they ran

Till they saw a land was white and wan.
"Yea," Snaebiorn said, "my home it is,
Ye bear a man shall have no bliss.
Far off beside the Greekish sea
The maidens pluck the grapes in glee.
Green groweth the wheat in the English land
And the honey-bee flieth on every hand.
In Norway by the cheaping town
The laden beasts go up and down.
In Iceland many a mead they mow
And Hallgerd's grave grows green enow.
But these are Gunnbiorn's skerries wan
Meet harbour for a hapless man.
In all lands else is love alive,
But here is nought with grief to strive.
Fail not for a while, O eastern wind,
For nought but grief is left behind.
And before me here a rest I know,"
So many times over comes summer again,
"A grave beneath the Greenland snow,"
What healing in summer if winter be vain?

William Morris

On The Edge Of The Wilderness

Puellae.

Whence comest thou, and whither goest thou?
Abide! abide! longer the shadows grow;
What hopest thou the dark to thee will show?

Abide! abide! for we are happy here.

Amans.

Why should I name the land across the sea
Wherein I first took hold on misery?
Why should I name the land that flees from me?

Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellae.

What wilt thou do within the desert place
Whereto thou turnest now thy careful face?
Stay but a while to tell us of thy case.

Abide! abide! for we are happy here.

Amans.

What, nigh the journey's end shall I abide,
When in the waste mine own love wanders wide,
When from all men for me she still doth hide?

Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellae.

Nay, nay; but rather she forgetteth thee,
To sit upon the shore of some warm sea,
Or in green gardens where sweet fountains be.

Abide! abide! for we are happy here.

Amans.

Will ye then keep me from the wilderness,
Where I at least, alone with my distress,
The quiet land of changing dreams may bless?

Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellae.

Forget the false forgetter and be wise,
And 'mid these clinging hands and loving eyes,
Dream, not in vain, thou knowest paradise.

Abide! abide! for we are happy here.

Amans.

Ah! with your sweet eyes shorten not the day,
Nor let your gentle hands my journey stay!
Perchance love is not wholly cast away.

Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellae.

Pluck love away as thou wouldst pluck a thorn
From out thy flesh; for why shouldst thou be born
To bear a life so wasted and forlorn?

Abide! abide! for we are happy here.

Amans.

Yea, why then was I born, since hope is pain,
And life a lingering death, and faith but vain,
And love the loss of all I seemed to gain?

Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellae.

Dost thou believe that this shall ever be,
That in our land no face thou e'er shalt see,
No voice thou e'er shalt hear to gladden thee?

Abide! abide! for we are happy here.

Amans.

No longer do I know of good or bad,
I have forgotten that I once was glad;
I do but chase a dream that I have had.

Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellae.

Stay! take one image for thy dreamful night;
Come, look at her, who in the world's despite
Weeps for delaying love and lost delight.

Abide! abide! for we are happy here.

Amans.

Mock me not till to-morrow. Mock the dead,
They will not heed it, or turn round the head,
To note who faithless are, and who are wed.

Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellae.

We mock thee not. Hast thou not heard of those
Whose faithful love the loved heart holds so close,
That death must wait till one word lets it loose?

Abide! abide! for we are happy here.

Amans.

I hear you not: the wind from off the waste

Sighs like a song that bids me make good haste
The wave of sweet forgetfulness to taste.

Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellae.

Come back! like such a singer is the wind,
As to a sad tune sings fair words and kind,
That he with happy tears all eyes may blind!

Abide! abide! for we are happy here.

Amans.

Did I not hear her sweet voice cry from far,
That o'er the lonely waste fair fields there are,
Fair days that know not any change or care?

Let me depart, since ye are happy here.

Puellae.

Oh, no! not far thou heardest her, but nigh;
Nigh, 'twixt the waste's edge and the darkling sky.
Turn back again, too soon it is to die.

Abide! a little while be happy here.

Amans.

How with the lapse of lone years could I strive,
And can I die now that thou biddest live?
What joy this space 'twixt birth and death can give.

Can we depart, who are so happy here?

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

Pain And Time Strive Not

What part of the dread eternity
Are those strange minutes that I gain,
Mazed with the doubt of love and pain,
When I thy delicate face may see,
A little while before farewell?

What share of the world's yearning-tide
That flash, when new day bare and white
Blots out my half-dream's faint delight,
And there is nothing by my side,
And well remembered is farewell?

What drop in the grey flood of tears
That time, when the long day toiled through,
Worn out, shows nought for me to do,
And nothing worth my labour bears
The longing of that last farewell?

What pity from the heavens above,
What heed from out eternity,
What word from the swift world for me?
Speak, heed, and pity, O tender love,
Who knew'st the days before farewell!

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

Pray But One Prayer For Us

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 dim;
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

Prologue of the Earthly Paradise

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 me sing of names remembered,
Because they, living not, can ne'er be dead,
Or long time take their memory quite away
From us poor singers of an empty day.

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

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.

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

Sir Peter Harpdon's End

In an English Castle in Poictou. Sir Peter Harpdon, a Gascon knight in the English service, and John Curzon, his lieutenant.

John Curzon

Of those three prisoners, that before you came
We took down at St. John's hard by the mill,
Two are good masons; we have tools enough,
And you have skill to set them working.

Sir Peter

So-
What are their names?

John Curzon

Why, Jacques Aquadent,
And Peter Plombiere, but-

Sir Peter

What colour'd hair
Has Peter now? has Jacques got bow legs?

John Curzon

Why, sir, you jest: what matters Jacques' hair,
Or Peter's legs to us?

Sir Peter

O! John, John, John!
Throw all your mason's tools down the deep well,

Hang Peter up and Jacques; they're no good,
We shall not build, man.

John Curzon

going.

Shall I call the guard
To hang them, sir? and yet, sir, for the tools,
We'd better keep them still; sir, fare you well.

Muttering as he goes.

What have I done that he should jape at me?
And why not build? the walls are weak enough,
And we've two masons and a heap of tools.

Goes, still muttering.

Sir Peter

To think a man should have a lump like that
For his lieutenant! I must call him back,
Or else, as surely as St. George is dead,
He'll hang our friends the masons—here, John! John!

John Curzon

At your good service, sir.

Sir Peter

Come now, and talk
This weighty matter out; there, we've no stone
To mend our walls with,â€”neither brick nor stone.

John Curzon

There is a quarry, sir, some ten miles off.

Sir Peter

We are not strong enough to send ten men
Ten miles to fetch us stone enough to build.
In three hours' time they would be taken or slain,
The cursed Frenchmen ride abroad so thick.

John Curzon

But we can send some villaynes to get stone.

Sir Peter

Alas! John, that we cannot bring them back;
They would go off to Clisson or Sanxere,
And tell them we were weak in walls and men,
Then down go we; for, look you, times are changed,
And now no longer does the country shake
At sound of English names; our captains fade
From off our muster-rolls. At Lusac Bridge
I daresay you may even yet see the hole
That Chandos beat in dying; far in Spain
Pembroke is prisoner; Phelton prisoner here;
Manny lies buried in the Charterhouse;
Oliver Clisson turn'd these years ago;
The Captal died in prison; and, over all,
Edward the prince lies underneath the ground;
Edward the king is dead; at Westminster
The carvers smooth the curls of his long beard.
Everything goes to rack - eh! and we too.
Now, Curzon, listen; if they come, these French,
Whom have I got to lean on here, but you?
A man can die but once; will you die then,

Your brave sword in your hand, thoughts in your heart
Of all the deeds we have done here in France-
And yet may do? So God will have your soul,
Whoever has your body.

John Curzon

Why, sir, I
Will fight till the last moment, until then
Will do whate'er you tell me. Now I see
We must e'en leave the walls; well, well, perhaps
They're stronger than I think for; pity though,
For some few tons of stone, if Guesclin comes!

Sir Peter

Farewell, John, pray you watch the Gascons well,
I doubt them.

John Curzon

Truly, sir, I will watch well.

Goes.

Sir Peter

Farewell, good lump! and yet, when all is said,
'Tis a good lump. Why then, if Guesclin comes;
Some dozen stones from his petrariae,
And, under shelter of his crossbows, just
An hour's steady work with pickaxes,
Then a great noise—some dozen swords and glaives
A-playing on my basnet all at once,
And little more cross purposes on earth
For me.
Now this is hard: a month ago,

And a few minutes' talk had set things right
 'Twixt me and Alice - if she had a doubt,
 As (may Heaven bless her!) I scarce think she had,
 'Twas but their hammer, hammer in her ears,
 Of 'how Sir Peter fail'd at Lusac Bridge:'
 And 'how he was grown moody of late days;'
 And 'how Sir Lambert,â€ (think now!) 'his dear friend,
 His sweet dear cousin, could not but confess
 That Peter's talk tended towards the French,
 Which he' (for instance Lambert) 'was glad of,
 Being' (Lambert, you see) â€œon the French side.'
 Well,
 If I could but have seen her on that day,
 Then, when they sent me off!
 I like to think,
 Although it hurts me, makes my head twist, what,
 If I had seen her, what I should have said,
 What she, my darling, would have said and done.
 As thus perchance:
 To find her sitting there,
 In the window-seat, not looking well at all,
 Crying perhaps, and I say quietly:
 'Alice!' she looks up, chokes a sob, looks grave,
 Changes from pale to red; but ere she speaks,
 Straightway I kneel down there on both my knees,
 And say: â€œO lady, have I sinn'd, your knight?
 That still you ever let me walk alone
 In the rose garden, that you sing no songs
 When I am by, that ever in the dance
 You quietly walk away when I come near?
 Now that I have you, will you go, think you?â€
 Ere she could answer I would speak again,
 Still kneeling there:
 'What! they have frighted you,
 By hanging burs, and clumsily carven puppets,
 Round my good name; but afterwards, my love,
 I will say what this means; this moment, see!
 Do I kneel here, and can you doubt me? Yea,'
 (For she would put her hands upon my face),
 'Yea, that is best, yea feel, love, am I changed?'
 And she would say: â€œGood knight, come, kiss my lips!'
 And afterwards as I sat there would say:

'Please a poor silly girl by telling me
What all those things they talk of really were,
For it is true you did not help Chandos,
And true, poor love! you could not come to me
When I was in such peril.'

I should say:

'I am like Balen, all things turn to blame.
I did not come to you? At Bergerath
The Constable had held us close shut up;
If from the barriers I had made three steps,
I should have been but slain; at Lusac, too,
We struggled in a marish half the day,
And came too late at last: you know, my love
How heavy men and horses are all arm'd.
All that Sir Lambert said was pure, unmix'd,
Quite groundless lies; as you can think, sweet love'.
She, holding tight my hand as we sat there,
Started a little at Sir Lambert's name,
But otherwise she listen'd scarce at all
To what I said. Then with moist, weeping eyes,
And quivering lips, that scarcely let her speak,
She said: 'I love you.'
Other words were few,
The remnant of that hour; her hand smooth'd down
My foolish head; she kiss'd me all about
My face, and through the tangles of my beard
Her little fingers crept
O God, my Alice,
Not this good way: my lord but sent and said
That Lambert's sayings were taken at their worth,
Therefore that day I was to start, and keep
This hold against the French; and I am here,-

Looks out of the window.

A sprawling lonely gard with rotten walls,
And no one to bring aid if Guesclin comes,
Or any other.
There's a pennon now!
At last.

But not the Constable's: whose arms,
I wonder, does it bear? Three golden rings
On a red ground; my cousin's by the rood!
Well, I should like to kill him, certainly,
But to be kill'd by him-
A trumpet sounds.
That's for a herald;
I doubt this does not mean assaulting yet.

Enter John Curzon.

What says the herald of our cousin, sir?

John Curzon

So please you, sir, concerning your estate,
He has good will to talk with you.

Sir Peter

Outside,
I'll talk with him, close by the gate St. Ives.
Is he unarm'd?

John Curzon

Yea, sir, in a long gown.

Sir Peter

Then bid them bring me hither my furr'd gown
With the long sleeves, and under it I'll wear,
By Lambert's leave, a secret coat of mail;
And will you lend me, John, your little axe?
I mean the one with Paul wrought on the blade,
And I will carry it inside my sleeve,
Good to be ready alwaysâ€”you, John, go
And bid them set up many suits of arms,

Bows, archgays, lances, in the base-court, and
Yourself, from the south postern setting out,
With twenty men, be ready to break through
Their unguarded rear when I cry out "St. George!"

John Curzon

How, sir! will you attack him unawares,
And slay him unarm'd?

Sir Peter

Trust me, John, I know
The reason why he comes here with sleeved gown,
Fit to hide axes up. So, let us go.

They go. Outside the castle by the great gate; Sir Lambert and Sir Peter seated;
guards attending each, the rest of Sir Lambert's men drawn up about a furlong
off.

Sir Peter

And if I choose to take the losing side
Still, does it hurt you?

Sir Lambert

O! no hurt to me;
I see you sneering, "Why take trouble then,
Seeing you love me not?" Look you, our house
(Which, taken altogether, I love much)
Had better be upon the right side now,
If, once for all, it wishes to bear rule
As such a house should: cousin, you're too wise
To feed your hope up fat, that this fair France
Will ever draw two ways again; this side
The French, wrong-headed, all a-jar
With envious longings; and the other side

The order'd English, orderly led on
By those two Edwards through all wrong and right,
And muddling right and wrong to a thick broth
With that long stick, their strength. This is all changed,
The true French win, on either side you have
Cool-headed men, good at a tilting match,
And good at setting battles in array,
And good at squeezing taxes at due time;
Therefore by nature we French being here
Upon our own big land-

Sir Peter laughs aloud.

Well, Peter! well!
What makes you laugh?

Sir Peter

Hearing you sweat to prove
All this I know so well; but you have read
The siege of Troy?

Sir Lambert

O! yea, I know it well.

Sir Peter

There! they were wrong, as wrong as men could be;
For, as I think, they found it such delight
To see fair Helen going through their town:
Yea, any little common thing she did
(As stooping to pick a flower) seem'd so strange,
So new in its great beauty, that they said:
'Here we will keep her living in this town,
Till all burns up together.' And so, fought,
In a mad whirl of knowing they were wrong;
Yea, they fought well, and ever, like a man

That hangs legs off the ground by both his hands,
Over some great height, did they struggle sore,
Quite sure to slip at last; wherefore, take note
How almost all men, reading that sad siege,
Hold for the Trojans; as I did at least,
Thought Hector the best knight a long way.

Now

Why should I not do this thing that I think,
For even when I come to count the gains,
I have them my side: men will talk, you know,
(We talk of Hector, dead so long ago,)
When I am dead, of how this Peter clung
To what he thought the right; of how he died,
Perchance, at last, doing some desperate deed
Few men would care do now, and this is gain
To me, as ease and money is to you.

Moreover, too, I like the straining game
Of striving well to hold up things that fall;
So one becomes great. See you! in good times
All men live well together, and you, too,
Live dull and happy—happy? not so quick,
Suppose sharp thoughts begin to burn you up.
Why then, but just to fight as I do now,
A halter round my neck, would be great bliss.
O! I am well off.

Aside.

Talk, and talk, and talk,
I know this man has come to murder me,
And yet I talk still.

Sir Lambert

If your side were right,
You might be, though you lost; but if I said:
'You are a traitor, being, as you are,
Born Frenchman.' What are Edwards unto you,
Or Richards?

Sir Peter

Nay, hold there, my Lambert, hold!
For fear your zeal should bring you to some harm,
Don't call me traitor.

Sir Lambert

Furthermore, my knight,
Men call you slippery on your losing side;
When at Bordeaux I was ambassador,
I heard them say so, and could scarce say "Nay."
He takes hold of something in his sleeve, and rises.

Sir Peter

rising.

They lied "and you lie, not for the first time.
What have you got there, fumbling up your sleeve,
A stolen purse?

Sir Lambert

Nay, liar in your teeth!
Dead liar too; St. Denis and St. Lambert!
Strikes at Sir Peter with a dagger.

Sir Peter

striking him flatlings with his axe.

How thief! thief! thief! so there, fair thief, so there,
St. George Guienne! glaives for the castellan!
You French, you are but dead, unless you lay

Your spears upon the earth. St. George Guienne!
Well done, John Curzon, how he has them now.

In the Castle.

John Curzon

What shall we do with all these prisoners, sir?

Sir Peter

Why, put them all to ransom, those that can
Pay anything, but not too light though, John,
Seeing we have them on the hip: for those
That have no money, that being certified,
Why, turn them out of doors before they spy;
But bring Sir Lambert guarded unto me.

John Curzon

I will, fair sir. He goes.

Sir Peter

I do not wish to kill him,
Although I think I ought; he shall go mark'd,
By all the saints, though! Enter Lambert guarded.
Now, Sir Lambert, now!
What sort of death do you expect to get,
Being taken this way?

Sir Lambert

Cousin! cousin! think!
I am your own blood; may God pardon me!
I am not fit to die; if you knew all,
All I have done since I was young and good,
O! you would give me yet another chance,

As God would, that I might wash all clear out,
By serving you and Him. Let me go now!
And I will pay you down more golden crowns
Of ransom than the king would!

Sir Peter

Well, stand back,
And do not touch me! No, you shall not die,
Nor yet pay ransom. You, John Curzon, cause
Some carpenters to build a scaffold, high,
Outside the gate; when it is built, sound out
To all good folks, 'Come, see a traitor punish'd!'
Take me my knight, and set him up thereon,
And let the hangman shave his head quite clean,
And cut his ears off close up to the head;
And cause the minstrels all the while to play
Soft music and good singing; for this day
Is my high day of triumph; is it not,
Sir Lambert?

Sir Lambert

Ah! on your own blood,
Own name, you heap this foul disgrace? you dare,
With hands and fame thus sullied, to go back
And take the lady Alice-

Sir Peter

Say her name
Again, and you are dead, slain here by me.
Why should I talk with you? I'm master here,
And do not want your schooling; is it not
My mercy that you are not dangling dead
There in the gateway with a broken neck?

Sir Lambert

Such mercy! why not kill me then outright?
To die is nothing; but to live that all
May point their fingers! yea, I'd rather die.

John Curzon

Why, will it make you any uglier man
To lose your ears? they're much too big for you,
You ugly Judas!

Sir Peter

Hold, John!

To Lambert.

That's your choice,
To die, mind! then you shall die—Lambert mine,
I thank you now for choosing this so well,
It saves me much perplexity and doubt;
Perchance an ill deed too, for half I count
This sparing traitors is an ill deed.
Well,
Lambert, die bravely, and we're almost friends.

Sir Lambert

grovelling.

O God! this is a fiend and not a man;
Will some one save me from him? help, help, help!
I will not die.

Sir Peter

Why, what is this I see?
A man who is a knight, and bandied words
So well just now with me, is lying down,
Gone mad for fear like this! So, so, you thought
You knew the worst, and might say what you pleased.
I should have guess'd this from a man like you.
Eh! righteous Job would give up skin for skin,
Yea, all a man can have for simple life,
And we talk fine, yea, even a hound like this,
Who needs must know that when he dies, deep hell
Will hold him fast for ever"so fine we talk,
'Would rather die' - all that. Now sir, get up!
And choose again: shall it be head sans ears,
Or trunk sans head?
John Curzon, pull him up!
What, life then? go and build the scaffold, John.
Lambert, I hope that never on this earth
We meet again; that you'll turn out a monk,
And mend the life I give you, so, farewell,
I'm sorry you're a rascal. John, despatch.

In the French camp before the Castle. Sir Peter prisoner, Guesclin, Clisson, Sir Lambert.

Sir Peter

So now is come the ending of my life;
If I could clear this sickening lump away
That sticks in my dry throat, and say a word,
Guesclin might listen.

Guesclin

Tell me, fair sir knight,
If you have been clean liver before God,
And then you need not fear much; as for me,
I cannot say I hate you, yet my oath,
And cousin Lambert's ears here clench the thing.

Sir Peter

I knew you could not hate me, therefore I
Am bold to pray for life; 'twill harm your cause
To hang knights of good name, harm here in France
I have small doubt, at any rate hereafter
Men will remember you another way
Than I should care to be remember'd. Ah!
Although hot lead runs through me for my blood,
All this falls cold as though I said: 'Sweet lords,
Give back my falcon!'
See how young I am;
Do you care altogether more for France,
Say rather one French faction, than for all
The state of Christendom? a gallant knight,
As (yea, by God!) I have been, is more worth
Than many castles; will you bring this death,
For a mere act of justice, on my head?
Think how it ends all, death! all other things
Can somehow be retrieved; yea, send me forth
Naked and maimed, rather than slay me here;
Then somehow will I get me other clothes,
And somehow will I get me some poor horse,
And, somehow clad in poor old rusty arms,
Will ride and smite among the serried glaives,
Fear not death so; for I can tilt right well,
Let me not say 'I could'; I know all tricks,
That sway the sharp sword cunningly; ah you,
You, my Lord Clisson, in the other days
Have seen me learning these, yea, call to mind,
How in the trodden corn by Chartr 's town,
When you were nearly swooning from the back
Of your black horse, those three blades slid at once
From off my sword's edge; pray for me, my lord!

Clisson

Nay, this is pitiful, to see him die.
My Lord the Constable, I pray you note
That you are losing some few thousand crowns

By slaying this man; also think: his lands
Along the Garonne river lie for leagues,
And are right rich, a many mills he has,
Three abbeys of grey monks do hold of him,
Though wishing well for Clement, as we do;
I know the next heir, his old uncle, well,
Who does not care two deniers for the knight
As things go now, but slay him, and then see
How he will bristle up like any perch,
With curves of spears. What! do not doubt, my lord,
You'll get the money; this man saved my life,
And I will buy him for two thousand crowns;
Well, five then! "eh! what! "No" again? well then,
Ten thousand crowns?

Guesclin

My sweet lord, much I grieve
I cannot please you; yea, good sooth, I grieve
This knight must die, as verily he must;
For I have sworn it, so, men, take him out,
Use him not roughly.

Sir Lambert

coming forward.

Music, do you know,
Music will suit you well, I think, because
You look so mild, like Laurence being grill'd;
Or perhaps music soft and slow, because
This is high day of triumph unto me,
Is it not, Peter?
You are frighten'd, though,
Eh! you are pale, because this hurts you much,
Whose life was pleasant to you, not like mine,
You ruin'd wretch! Men mock me in the streets,
Only in whispers loud, because I am

Friend of the Constable; will this please you,
Unhappy Peter? once a-going home,
Without my servants, and a little drunk,
At midnight through the lone dim lamp-lit streets,
A whore came up and spat into my eyes,
(Rather to blind me than to make me see,)
But she was very drunk, and tottering back,
Even in the middle of her laughter, fell
And cut her head against the pointed stones,
While I lean'd on my staff, and look'd at her,
And cried, being drunk.

Girls would not spit at you.

You are so handsome, I think verily
Most ladies would be glad to kiss your eyes,
And yet you will be hung like a cur dog
Five minutes hence, and grow black in the face,
And curl your toes up. Therefore I am glad.
Guess why I stand and talk this nonsense now,
With Guesclin getting ready to play chess,
And Clisson doing something with his sword,
I can't see what, talking to Guesclin though,
I don't know what about, perhaps of you.
But, cousin Peter, while I stroke your beard,
Let me say this, I'd like to tell you now
That your life hung upon a game of chess,
That if, say, my squire Robert here should beat,
Why, you should live, but hang if I beat him;
Then guess, clever Peter, what I should do then:
Well, give it up? why, Peter, I should let
My squire Robert beat me, then you would think
That you were safe, you know; Eh? not at all,
But I should keep you three days in some hold,
Giving you salt to eat, which would be kind,
Considering the tax there is on salt;
And afterwards should let you go, perhaps?
No, I should not, but I should hang you, sir,
With a red rope in lieu of mere grey rope.
But I forgot, you have not told me yet
If you can guess why I talk nonsense thus,
Instead of drinking wine while you are hang'd?
You are not quick at guessing, give it up.
This is the reason; here I hold your hand,

And watch you growing paler, see you writhe
And this, my Peter, is a joy so dear,
I cannot by all striving tell you how
I love it, nor I think, good man, would you
Quite understand my great delight therein;
You, when you had me underneath you once,
Spat as it were, and said: 'Go take him out,'
(That they might do that thing to me whereat
E'en now this long time off I could well shriek,)
And then you tried forget I ever lived,
And sunk your hating into other things;
While I - St. Denis! though, I think you'll faint,
Your lips are grey so; yes, you will, unless
You let it out and weep like a hurt child;
Hurrah! you do now. Do not go just yet,
For I am Alice, am right like her now,
Will you not kiss me on the lips, my love?-

Clisson

You filthy beast, stand back and let him go,
Or by God's eyes I'll choke you. Kneeling to Sir Peter.
Fair sir knight,
I kneel upon my knees and pray to you
That you would pardon me for this your death;
God knows how much I wish you still alive,
Also how heartily I strove to save
Your life at this time; yea, He knows quite well,
(I swear it, so forgive me!) how I would,
If it were possible, give up my life
Upon this grass for yours; fair knight, although,
He knowing all things knows this thing too, well,
Yet when you see His face some short time hence,
Tell Him I tried to save you.

Sir Peter

O! my lord,
I cannot say this is as good as life,
But yet it makes me feel far happier now,

And if at all, after a thousand years,
I see God's face, I will speak loud and bold,
And tell Him you were kind, and like Himself;
Sir, may God bless you!
Did you note how I
Fell weeping just now? pray you, do not think
That Lambert's taunts did this, I hardly heard
The base things that he said, being deep in thought
Of all things that have happen'd since I was
A little child; and so at last I thought
Of my true lady: truly, sir, it seem'd
No longer gone than yesterday, that this
Was the sole reason God let me be born
Twenty-five years ago, that I might love
Her, my sweet lady, and be loved by her;
This seem'd so yesterday, to-day death comes,
And is so bitter strong, I cannot see
Why I was born.
But as a last request,
I pray you, O kind Clisson, send some man,
Some good man, mind you, to say how I died,
And take my last love to her: fare-you-well,
And may God keep you; I must go now, lest
I grow too sick with thinking on these things;
Likewise my feet are wearied of the earth,
From whence I shall be lifted up right soon.

As he goes.

Ah me! shamed too, I wept at fear of death;
And yet not so, I only wept because
There was no beautiful lady to kiss me
Before I died, and sweetly wish good speed
From her dear lips. O for some lady, though
I saw her ne'er before; Alice, my love,
I do not ask for; Clisson was right kind,
If he had been a woman, I should die
Without this sickness: but I am all wrong,
So wrong, and hopelessly afraid to die.
There, I will go.

My God! how sick I am,
If only she could come and kiss me now.

The Hotel de la Barde, Bordeaux. The Lady Alice de la Barde looking out of a window into the street.

No news yet! surely, still he holds his own:
That garde stands well; I mind me passing it
Some months ago; God grant the walls are strong!
I heard some knights say something yestereve,
I tried hard to forget: words far apart
Struck on my heart something like this; one said:
'What eh! a Gascon with an English name,
Harpdon?' then nought, but afterwards: 'Poictou.'
As one who answers to a question ask'd;
Then carelessly regretful came: 'No, no.'
Whereto in answer loud and eagerly,
One said: 'Impossible! Christ, what foul play!'
And went off angrily; and while thenceforth
I hurried gaspingly afraid, I heard:
'Guesclin;' 'Five thousand men-at-arms;' 'Clisson.'
My heart misgives me it is all in vain
I send these succours; and in good time there!
Their trumpet sounds, ah! here they are; good knights,
God up in Heaven keep you.
If they come
And find him prisoner"for I can't believe
Guesclin will slay him, even though they storm"
(The last horse turns the corner.)
God in Heaven!
What have I got to thinking of at last!
That thief I will not name is with Guesclin,
Who loves him for his lands. My love! my love!
O, if I lose you after all the past,
What shall I do?
I cannot bear the noise
And light street out there, with this thought alive,
Like any curling snake within my brain;
Let me just hide my head within these soft
Deep cushions, there to try and think it out.

Lying in the window-seat.

I cannot hear much noise now, and I think
That I shall go to sleep: it all sounds dim
And faint, and I shall soon forget most things;
Yea, almost that I am alive and here;
It goes slow, comes slow, like a big mill-wheel
On some broad stream, with long green weeds a-sway,
And soft and slow it rises and it falls,
Still going onward.
Lying so, one kiss,
And I should be in Avalon asleep,
Among the poppies and the yellow flowers;
And they should brush my cheek, my hair being spread
Far out among the stems; soft mice and small
Eating and creeping all about my feet,
Red shod and tired; and the flies should come
Creeping o'er my broad eyelids unafraid;
And there should be a noise of water going,
Clear blue, fresh water breaking on the slates,
Likewise the flies should creep "God's eyes! God help!
A trumpet? I will run fast, leap adown
The slippery sea-stairs, where the crabs fight.
Ah!
I was half dreaming, but the trumpet's true;
He stops here at our house. The Clisson arms?
Ah, now for news. But I must hold my heart,
And be quite gentle till he is gone out;
And afterwards "but he is still alive,
He must be still alive.

Enter a Squire of Clisson's.

Good day, fair sir,
I give you welcome, knowing whence you come.

Squire

My Lady Alice de la Barde, I come
From Oliver Clisson, knight and mighty lord,
Bringing you tidings: I make bold to hope
You will not count me villain, even if
They wring your heart, nor hold me still in hate.
For I am but a mouthpiece after all,
A mouthpiece, too, of one who wishes well
To you and your's.

Alice

Can you talk faster, sir,
Get over all this quicker? fix your eyes
On mine, I pray you, and whate'er you see,
Still go on talking fast, unless I fall,
Or bid you stop.

Squire

I pray your pardon then,
And, looking in your eyes, fair lady, say
I am unhappy that your knight is dead.
Take heart, and listen! let me tell you all.
We were five thousand goodly men-at-arms,
And scant five hundred had he in that hold:
His rotten sand-stone walls were wet with rain,
And fell in lumps wherever a stone hit;
Yet for three days about the barrier there
The deadly glaives were gather'd, laid across,
And push'd and pull'd; the fourth our engines came;
But still amid the crash of falling walls,
And roar of lombards, rattle of hard bolts,
The steady bow-strings flash'd, and still stream'd out
St. George's banner, and the seven swords,
And still they cried: "œ Guienne!œ until
Their walls were flat as Jericho's of old,
And our rush came, and cut them from the keep.

Alice

Stop, sir, and tell me if you slew him then,
And where he died, if you can really mean
That Peter Harpdon, the good knight, is dead?

Squire

Fair lady, in the base-court -

Alice

What base-court?
What do you talk of? Nay, go on, go on;
'Twas only something gone within my head:
Do you not know, one turns one's head round quick,
And something cracks there with sore pain? go on,
And still look at my eyes.

Squire

Almost alone,
There in the base-court fought he with his sword,
Using his left hand much, more than the wont
Of most knights now-a-days; our men gave back,
For wheresoever he hit a downright blow,
Some one fell bleeding, for no plate could hold
Against the sway of body and great arm;
Till he grew tired, and some man (no! not I,
I swear not I, fair lady, as I live!)
Thrust at him with a glaive between the knees,
And threw him; down he fell, sword undermost;
Many fell on him, crying out their cries,
Tore his sword from him, tore his helm off, andâ€”

Alice

Yea, slew him: I am much too young to live,
Fair God, so let me die!
You have done well,
Done all your message gently; pray you go,
Our knights will make you cheer; moreover, take
This bag of franks for your expenses.

The Squire kneels.

But you do not go; still looking at my face,
You kneel! what, squire, do you mock me then?
You need not tell me who has set you on,
But tell me only, 'tis a made-up tale.
You are some lover may-be, or his friend;
Sir, if you loved me once, or your friend loved,
Think, is it not enough that I kneel down
And kiss your feet? your jest will be right good
If you give in now; carry it too far,
And 'twill be cruel: not yet? but you weep
Almost, as though you loved me; love me then,
And go to Heaven by telling all your sport,
And I will kiss you then with all my heart,
Upon the mouth; O! what can I do then
To move you?

Squire

Lady fair, forgive me still!
You know I am so sorry, but my tale
Is not yet finish'd:
So they bound his hands,
And brought him tall and pale to Guesclin's tent,
Who, seeing him, leant his head upon his hand,
And ponder'd somehow, afterwards, looking upâ€”
Fair dame, what shall I say?

Alice

Yea, I know now,
Good squire, you may go now with my thanks.

Squire

Yet, lady, for your own sake I say this,
Yea, for my own sake, too, and Clisson's sake:
When Guesclin told him he must be hanged soon,
Within a while he lifted up his head
And spoke for his own life; not crouching, though,
As abjectly afraid to die, nor yet
Sullenly brave as many a thief will die;
Nor yet as one that plays at japes with God:
Few words he spoke; not so much what he said
Moved us, I think, as, saying it, there played
Strange tenderness from that big soldier there
About his pleading; eagerness to live
Because folk loved him, and he loved them back,
And many gallant plans unfinish'd now
For ever. Clisson's heart, which may God bless!
Was moved to pray for him, but all in vain;
Wherefore I bring this message:
That he waits,
Still loving you, within the little church
Whose windows, with the one eye of the light
Over the altar, every night behold
The great dim broken walls he strove to keep!
There my Lord Clisson did his burial well.
Now, lady, I will go; God give you rest!

Alice

Thank Clisson from me, squire, and farewell!
And now to keep myself from going mad.
Christ! I have been a many times to church,
And, ever since my mother taught me prayers,
Have used them daily, but to-day I wish
To pray another way; come face to face,
O Christ, that I may clasp your knees and pray
I know not what; at any rate come now

From one of many places where you are,
Either in Heaven amid thick angel wings,
Or sitting on the altar strange with gems,
Or high up in the dustiness of the apse;
Let us go, You and I, a long way off,
To the little damp, dark, Poitevin church;
While you sit on the coffin in the dark,
Will I lie down, my face on the bare stone
Between your feet, and chatter anything
I have heard long ago, what matters it
So I may keep you there, your solemn face
And long hair even-flowing on each side,
Until you love me well enough to speak,
And give me comfort; yea, till o'er your chin,
And cloven red beard the great tears roll down
In pity for my misery, and I die,
Kissed over by you.

Eh Guesclin! if I were
Like Countess Mountfort now, that kiss'd the knight,
Across the salt sea come to fight for her;
Ah! just to go about with many knights,
Wherever you went, and somehow on one day,
In a thick wood to catch you off your guard,
Let you find, you and your some fifty friends,
Nothing but arrows wheresoe'er you turn'd,
Yea, and red crosses, great spears over them;
And so, between a lane of my true men,
To walk up pale and stern and tall, and with
My arms on my surcoat, and his therewith,
And then to make you kneel, O knight Guesclin;
And thenâ€”alas! alas! when all is said,
What could I do but let you go again,
Being pitiful woman? I get no revenge,
Whatever happens; and I get no comfort,
I am but weak, and cannot move my feet,
But as men bid me.

Strange I do not die.

Suppose this has not happen'd after all?
I will lean out again and watch for news.
I wonder how long I can still feel thus,
As though I watch'd for news, feel as I did
Just half-an-hour ago, before this news.

How all the street is humming, some men sing,
And some men talk; some look up at the house,
Then lay their heads together and look grave:
Their laughter pains me sorely in the heart,
Their thoughtful talking makes my head turn round;
Yea, some men sing, what is it then they sing?
Eh? Launcelot, and love and fate and death;
They ought to sing of him who was as wight
As Launcelot or Wade, and yet avail'd
Just nothing, but to fail and fail and fail,
And so at last to die and leave me here,
Alone and wretched; yea, perhaps they will,
When many years are past, make songs of us;
God help me, though, truly I never thought
That I should make a story in this way,
A story that his eyes can never see.

One sings from outside.

Therefore be it believed
Whatsoever he grieved,
Whan his horse was relieved,
This Launcelot,
Beat down on his knee,
Right valiant was he
God's body to see,
Though he saw it not.
Right valiant to move,
But for his sad love
The high God above
Stinted his praise.
Yet so he was glad
That his son, Lord Galahad,
That high joyaunce had
All his life-days.
Sing we therefore then
Launcelot's praise again,
For he wan crown's ten,
If he wan not twelve.
To his death from his birth

He was muckle of worth,
Lay him in the cold earth,
A long grave ye may delve.
Omnes homines benedicite!
This last fitte ye may see,
All men pray for me
Who made this history
Cunning and fairly.

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 treat 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

Spring's Bedfellow

Spring went about the woods to-day,
The soft-foot winter-thief,
And found where idle sorrow lay
'Twixt flower and faded leaf.
She looked on him, and found him fair
For all she had been told;
She knelt adown beside him there,
And sang of days of old.

His open eyes beheld her nought,
Yet 'gan his lips to move;
But life and deeds were in her thought,
And he would sing of love.

So sang they till their eyes did meet,
And faded fear and shame;
More bold he grew, and she more sweet,
Until they sang the same.

Until, say they who know the thing,
Their very lips did kiss,
And Sorrow laid abed with Spring
Begot an earthly bliss.

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

Tapestry Trees

Oak.

I am the Roof-tree and the Keel;
I bridge the seas for woe and weal.

Fir.

High o'er the lordly oak I stand,
And drive him on from land to land.

Ash.

I heft my brother's iron bane;
I shaft the spear, and build the wain.

Yew.

Dark down the windy dale I grow,
The father of the fateful Bow.

Poplar.

The war-shaft and the milking-bowl
I make, and keep the hay-wain whole.

Olive.

The King I bless; the lamps I trim;
In my warm wave do fishes swim.

Apple-tree.

I bowed my head to Adam's will;
The cups of toiling men I fill.

Vine.

I draw the blood from out the earth;
I store the sun for winter mirth.

Orange-tree.

Amidst the greenness of my night,
My odorous lamps hang round and bright.

Fig-tree.

I who am little among trees
In honey-making mate the bees.

Mulberry —tree.

Love's lack hath dyed my berries red:
For Love's attire my leaves are shed.

Pear-tree.

High o'er the mead-flowers' hidden feet
I bear aloft my burden sweet.

Bay.

Look on my leafy boughs, the Crown
Of living song and dead renown!

William Morris

The Burgher's Battle

Thick rise the spear-shafts o'er the land
That erst the harvest bore;
The sword is heavy in the hand,
And we return no more.
The light wind waves the Ruddy Fox,
Our banner of the war,
And ripples in the Running Ox,
And we return no more.
Across our stubble acres now
The teams go four and four;
But out-worn elders guide the plough,
And we return no more.
And now the women heavy-eyed
Turn through the open door
From gazing down the highway wide,
Where we return no more.
The shadows of the fruited close
Dapple the feast-hall floor;
There lie our dogs and dream and doze,
And we return no more.
Down from the minster tower to-day
Fall the soft chimes of yore
Amidst the chattering jackdaws' play:
And we return no more.
But underneath the streets are still;
Noon, and the market's o'er!
Back go the goodwives o'er the hill;
For we return no more.
What merchant to our gates shall come?
What wise man bring us lore?
What abbot ride away to Rome,
Now we return no more?
What mayor shall rule the hall we built?
Whose scarlet sweep the floor?
What judge shall doom the robber's guilt,
Now we return no more?
New houses in the streets shall rise
Where builded we before,
Of other stone wrought otherwise;

For we return no more.
And crops shall cover field and hill
Unlike what once they bore,
And all be done without our will,
Now we return no more.
Look up! the arrows streak the sky,
The horns of battle roar;
The long spears lower and draw nigh,
And we return no more.
Remember how beside the wain,
We spoke the word of war,
And sowed this harvest of the plain,
And we return no more.
Lay spears about the Ruddy Fox!
The days of old are o'er;
Heave sword about the Running Ox!
For we return no more.

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 Day Is Coming

Come hither lads and hearken,
for a tale there is to tell,
Of the wonderful days a-coming, when all
shall be better than well.

And the tale shall be told of a country,
a land in the midst of the sea,
And folk shall call it England
in the days that are going to be.

There more than one in a thousand
in the days that are yet to come,
Shall have some hope of the morrow,
some joy of the ancient home.

For then, laugh not, but listen,
to this strange tale of mine,
All folk that are in England
shall be better lodged than swine.

Then a man shall work and bethink him,
and rejoice in the deeds of his hand,
Nor yet come home in the even
too faint and weary to stand.

Men in that time a-coming
shall work and have no fear
For to-morrow's lack of earning
and the hunger-wolf anear.

I tell you this for a wonder,
that no man then shall be glad
Of his fellow's fall and mishap
to snatch at the work he had.

For that which the worker winneth
shall then be his indeed,
Nor shall half be reaped for nothing
by him that sowed no seed.

O strange new wonderful justice!
But for whom shall we gather the gain?
For ourselves and for each of our fellows,
and no hand shall labour in vain.

Then all Mine and all Thine shall be Ours,
and no more shall any man crave
For riches that serve for nothing
but to fetter a friend for a slave.

And what wealth then shall be left us
when none shall gather gold
To buy his friend in the market,
and pinch and pine the sold?

Nay, what save the lovely city,
and the little house on the hill,
And the wastes and the woodland beauty,
and the happy fields we till;

And the homes of ancient stories,
the tombs of the mighty dead;
And the wise men seeking out marvels,
and the poet's teeming head;

And the painter's hand of wonder;
and the marvellous fiddle-bow,
And the banded choirs of music:
all those that do and know.

For all these shall be ours and all men's
nor shall any lack a share
Of the toil and the gain of living
in the days when the world grows fair.

Ah! such are the days that shall be!
But what are the deeds of to-day,

In the days of the years we dwell in,
that wear our lives away?
Why, then, and for what are we waiting?

There are three words to speak;
WE WILL IT, and what is the foeman
but the dream-strong wakened and weak?

O why and for what are we waiting?
while our brothers droop and die,
And on every wind of the heavens
a wasted life goes by.

How long shall they reproach us
where crowd on crowd they dwell,
Poor ghosts of the wicked city,
the gold-crushed hungry hell?

Through squalid life they laboured,
in sordid grief they died,
Those sons of a mighty mother,
those props of England's pride.

They are gone; there is none can undo it,
nor save our souls from the curse;
But many a million cometh,
and shall they be better or worse?

It is we must answer and hasten,
and open wide the door
For the rich man's hurrying terror,
and the slow-foot hope of the poor.

Yea, the voiceless wrath of the wretched,
and their unlearned discontent,
We must give it voice and wisdom
till the waiting-tide be spent.

Come, then, since all things call us,
the living and the dead,
And o'er the weltering tangle
a glimmering light is shed.

Come, then, let us cast off fooling,
and put by ease and rest,
For the Cause alone is worthy

till the good days bring the best.

Come, join in the only battle
wherein no man can fail,
Where whoso fadeth and dieth,
yet his deed shall still prevail.

Ah! come, cast off all fooling,
for this, at least, we know:
That the Dawn and the Day is coming,
and forth the Banners go.

William Morris

The Day Of Days

Each eve earth falleth down the dark,
As though its hope were o'er;
Yet lurks the sun when day is done
Behind to-morrow's door.

Grey grows the dawn while men-folk sleep,
Unseen spreads on the light,
Till the thrush sings to the coloured things,
And earth forgets the night.

No otherwise wends on our Hope:
E'en as a tale that's told
Are fair lives lost, and all the cost
Of wise and true and bold.

We've toiled and failed; we spake the word;
None hearkened; dumb we lie;
Our Hope is dead, the seed we spread
Fell o'er the earth to die.

What's this? For joy our hearts stand still,
And life is loved and dear,
The lost and found the Cause hath crowned,
The Day of Days is here.

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 willest 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 ago
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 End Of May

How the wind howls this morn
About the end of May,
And drives June on apace
To mock the world forlorn
And the world's joy passed away
And my unlonged-for face!
The world's joy passed away;
For no more may I deem
That any folk are glad
To see the dawn of day
Sunder the tangled dream
Wherein no grief they had.
Ah, through the tangled dream
Where others have no grief
Ever it fares with me
That fears and treasons stream
And dumb sleep slays belief
Whatso therein may be.
Sleep slayeth all belief
Until the hopeless light
Wakes at the birth of June
More lying tales to weave,
More love in woe's despite,
More hope to perish soon.

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 Flowering Orchard

Silk Embroidery.

Lo silken my garden,
and silken my sky,
And silken my apple-boughs
hanging on high;
All wrought by the Worm
in the peasant carle's cot
On the Mulberry leafage
when summer was hot!

William Morris

The Folk-Mote By The River

It was up in the morn we rose betimes
From the hall-floor hard by the row of limes.

It was but John the Red and I,
And we were the brethren of Gregory;

And Gregory the Wright was one
Of the valiant men beneath the sun,

And what he bade us that we did
For ne'er he kept his counsel hid.

So out we went, and the clattering latch
Woke up the swallows under the thatch.

It was dark in the porch, but our scythes we felt,
And thrust the whetstone under the belt.

Through the cold garden boughs we went
Where the tumbling roses shed their scent.

Then out a-gates and away we strode
O'er the dewy straws on the dusty road,

And there was the mead by the town-reeve's close
Where the hedge was sweet with the wilding rose.

Then into the mowing grass we went
Ere the very last of the night was spent.

Young was the moon, and he was gone,
So we whet our scythes by the stars alone:

But or ever the long blades felt the hay
Afar in the East the dawn was grey.

Or ever we struck our earliest stroke
The thrush in the hawthorn-bush awoke.

While yet the bloom of the swathe was dim
The black-bird's bill had answered him.

Ere half of the road to the river was shorn
The sunbeam smote the twisted thorn.

Now wide was the way 'twixt the standing grass
For the townsfolk unto the mote to pass,

And so when all our work was done
We sat to breakfast in the sun,

While down in the stream the dragon-fly
'Twixt the quivering rushes flickered by;

And though our knives shone sharp and white
The swift bleak heeded not the sight.

So when the bread was done away
We looked along the new-shorn hay,

And heard the voice of the gathering-horn
Come over the garden and the corn;

For the wind was in the blossoming wheat
And drave the bees in the lime-boughs sweet.

Then loud was the horn's voice drawing near,
And it hid the talk of the prattling weir.

And now was the horn on the pathway wide
That we had shorn to the river-side.

So up we stood, and wide around
We sheared a space by the Elders' Mound;

And at the feet thereof it was
That highest grew the June-tide grass;

And over all the mound it grew
With clover blent, and dark of hue.

But never aught of the Elders' Hay
To rick or barn was borne away.

But it was bound and burned to ash
In the barren close by the reedy plash.

For 'neath that mound the valiant dead
Lay hearkening words of valiance said

When wise men stood on the Elders' Mound,
And the swords were shining bright around.

And now we saw the banners borne
On the first of the way that we had shorn;
So we laid the scythe upon the sword
And girt us to the battle-sword.

For after the banners well we knew
Were the Freemen wending two and two.

There then that high-way of the scythe
With many a hue was brave and blythe.

And first below the Silver Chief
Upon the green was the golden sheaf.

And on the next that went by it
The White Hart in the Park did sit.

Then on the red the White Wings flew,
And on the White was the Cloud-fleck blue.

Last went the Anchor of the Wrights
Beside the Ship of the Faring-Knights.

Then thronged the folk the June-tide field
With naked sword and painted shield,

Till they came adown to the river-side,
And there by the mound did they abide.

Now when the swords stood thick and white

As the mace reeds stand in the streamless bight,

There rose a man on the mound alone
And over his head was the grey mail done.

When over the new-shorn place of the field
Was nought but the steel hood and the shield.

The face on the mound shone ruddy and hale,
But the hoar hair showed from the hoary mail.

And there rose a hand by the ruddy face
And shook a sword o'er the peopled place.

And there came a voice from the mound and said:
"O sons, the days of my youth are dead,

And gone are the faces I have known
In the street and the booths of the goodly town.

O sons, full many a flock have I seen
Feed down this water-girdled green.

Full many a herd of long-horned neat
Have I seen 'twixt water-side and wheat.

Here by this water-side full oft
Have I heaved the flowery hay aloft.

And oft this water-side anigh
Have I bowed adown the wheat-stalks high.

And yet meseems I live and learn
And lore of younglings yet must earn.

For tell me, children, whose are these
Fair meadows of the June's increase.

Whose are these flocks and whose the neat,
And whose the acres of the wheat?"

Scarce did we hear his latest word,

On the wide shield so rang the sword.

So rang the sword upon the shield
That the lark was hushed above the field.

Then sank the shouts and again we heard
The old voice come from the hoary beard:

“Yea, whose are yonder gables then,
And whose the holy hearths of men?
Whose are the prattling children there,
And whose the sunburnt maids and fair?

Whose thralls are ye, hereby that stand,
Bearing the freeman’s sword in hand?”

As glitters the sun in the rain-washed grass,
So in the tossing swords it was;

As the thunder rattles along and adown
E’en so was the voice of the weaponed town.

And there was the steel of the old man’s sword,
And there was his hollow voice, and his word:

“Many men many minds, the old saw saith,
Though hereof ye be sure as death.

For what spake the herald yestermorn
But this, that ye were thrall-folk born;

That the lord that owneth all and some
Would send his men to fetch us home

Betwixt the haysel, and the tide
When they shear the corn in the country-side?

O children, Who was the lord? ye say,
What prayer to him did our fathers pray.

Did they hold out hands his gyves to bear?
Did their knees his high hall’s pavement wear?

Is his house built up in heaven aloft?
Doth he make the sun rise oft and oft?

Doth he hold the rain in his hollow hand?
Hath he cleft this water through the land?

Or doth he stay the summer-tide,
And make the winter days abide?

O children, Who is the lord? ye say,
Have we heard his name before to-day?

O children, if his name I know,
He hight Earl Hugh of the Shivering Low:

For that herald bore on back and breast
The Black Burg under the Eagle's Nest."

As the voice of the winter wind that tears
At the eaves of the thatch and its emptied ears,

E'en so was the voice of laughter and scorn
By the water-side in the mead new-shorn;

And over the garden and the wheat
Went the voice of women shrilly-sweet.

But now by the hoary elder stood
A carle in raiment red as blood.

Red was his weed and his glaive was white,
And there stood Gregory the Wright.

So he spake in a voice was loud and strong:
"Young is the day though the road is long;

There is time if we tarry nought at all
For the kiss in the porch and the meat in the hall.

And safe shall our maidens sit at home
For the foe by the way we wend must come.

Through the three Lavers shall we go
And raise them all against the foe.

Then shall we wend the Downland ways,
And all the shepherd spearmen raise.

To Cheaping Raynes shall we come adown
And gather the bowmen of the town;

And Greenstead next we come unto
Wherein are all folk good and true.

When we come our ways to the Outer Wood
We shall be an host both great and good;

Yea when we come to the open field
There shall be a many under shield.

And maybe Earl Hugh shall lie alow
And yet to the house of Heaven shall go.

But we shall dwell in the land we love
And grudge no hallow Heaven above.

Come ye, who think the time o'er long
Till we have slain the word of wrong!

Come ye who deem the life of fear
On this last day hath drawn o'er near!

Come after me upon the road
That leadeth to the Erne's abode."

Down then he leapt from off the mound
And back drew they that were around

Till he was foremost of all those
Betwixt the river and the close.

And uprose shouts both glad and strong
As followed after all the throng;

And overhead the banners flapped,
As we went on our ways to all that happed.

The fields before the Shivering Low
Of many a grief of manfolk know;

There may the autumn acres tell
Of how men met, and what befell.

The Black Burg under the Eagle's nest
Shall tell the tale as it liketh best.

And sooth it is that the River-land
Lacks many an autumn-gathering hand.

And there are troth-plight maids unwed
Shall deem awhile that love is dead;

And babes there are to men shall grow
Nor ever the face of their fathers know.

And yet in the Land by the River-side
Doth never a thrall or an earl's man bide;

For Hugh the Earl of might and mirth
Hath left the merry days of Earth;

And we live on in the land we love,
And grudge no hallow Heaven above.

William Morris

The Forest

Pear-tree.

By woodman's edge I faint and fail;
By craftsman's edge I tell the tale.

Chestnut-tree.

High in the wood, high o'er the hall,
Aloft I rise when low I fall.

Oak-tree.

Unmoved I stand what wind may blow.
Swift, swift before the wind I go.

William Morris

The God Of The Poor

There was a lord that hight Maltete,
Among great lords he was right great,
On poor folk trod he like the dirt,
None but God might do him hurt.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

With a grace of prayers sung loud and late
Many a widow's house he ate;
Many a poor knight at his hands
Lost his house and narrow lands.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

He burnt the harvests many a time,
He made fair houses heaps of lime;
Whatso man loved wife or maid
Of Evil-head was sore afraid.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

He slew good men and spared the bad;
Too long a day the foul dog had,
E'en as all dogs will have their day;
But God is as strong as man, I say.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

For a valiant knight, men called Boncoeur,
Had hope he should not long endure,
And gathered to him much good folk,
Hardy hearts to break the yoke.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

But Boncoeur deemed it would be vain
To strive his guarded house to gain;
Therefore, within a little while,
He set himself to work by guile.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

He knew that Maltete loved right well
Red gold and heavy. If from hell
The Devil had cried, "Take this gold cup,"

Down had he gone to fetch it up.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

Twenty poor men's lives were nought
To him, beside a ring well wrought.
The pommel of his hunting-knife
Was worth ten times a poor man's life.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

A squire new-come from over-sea
Boncoeur called to him privily,
And when he knew his lord's intent,
Clad like a churl therefrom he went.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

But when he came where dwelt Maltete,
With few words did he pass the gate,
For Maltete built him walls anew,
And, wageless, folk from field he drew.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

Now passed the squire through this and that,
Till he came to where Sir Maltete sat,
And over red wine wagged his beard:
Then spoke the squire as one afeard.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Lord, give me grace, for privily
I have a little word for thee."
"Speak out," said Maltete, "have no fear,
For how can thy life to thee be dear?"
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Such an one I know," he said,
"Who hideth store of money red."
Maltete grinned at him cruelly:
"Thou florin-maker, come anigh."
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"E'en such as thou once preached of gold,
And showed me lies in books full old,
Nought gat I but evil brass,

Therefore came he to the worser pass.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Hast thou will to see his skin?
I keep my heaviest marks therein,
For since nought else of wealth had he,
I deemed full well he owed it me."
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Nought know I of philosophy,"
The other said, "nor do I lie.
Before the moon begins to shine,
May all this heap of gold be thine."
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Ten leagues from this a man there is,
Who seemeth to know but little bliss,
And yet full many a pound of gold
A dry well nigh his house doth hold.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"John-a-Wood is he called, fair lord,
Nor know I whence he hath this hoard."
Then Maltete said, "As God made me,
A wizard over-bold is he!"
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"It were a good deed, as I am a knight,
To burn him in a fire bright;
This John-a-Wood shall surely die,
And his gold in my strong chest shall lie.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"This very night, I make mine avow,
The truth of this mine eyes shall know."
Then spoke an old knight in the hall,
"Who knoweth what things may befall?"
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"I rede thee go with a great rout,
For thy foes they ride thick about."
"Thou and the devil may keep my foes,

Thou redest me this gold to lose.
Deus est Deus pauperum."

"I shall go with but some four or five,
So shall I take my thief alive.
For if a great rout he shall see,
Will he not hide his wealth from me?"
Deus est Deus pauperum.

The old knight muttered under his breath,
"Then mayhap ye shall but ride to death."
But Maltete turned him quickly round,
"Bind me this gray-beard under ground!
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Because ye are old, ye think to jape.
Take heed, ye shall not long escape.
When I come back safe, old carle, perdie,
Thine head shall brush the linden-tree."
Deus est Deus pauperum.

Therewith he rode with his five men,
And Boncoeur's spy, for good leagues ten,
Until they left the beaten way,
And dusk it grew at end of day.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

There, in a clearing of the wood,
Was John's house, neither fair nor good.
In a ragged plot his house anigh,
Thin coleworts grew but wretchedly.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

John-a-Wood in his doorway sat,
Turning over this and that,
And chiefly how he best might thrive,
For he had will enough to live.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

Green coleworts from a wooden bowl
He ate; but careful was his soul,
For if he saw another day,

Thenceforth was he in Boncoeur's pay.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

So when he saw how Maltete came,
He said, "Beginneth now the game!"
And in the doorway did he stand
Trembling, with hand joined fast to hand.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

When Maltete did this carle behold
Somewhat he doubted of his gold,
But cried out, "Where is now thy store
Thou hast through books of wicked lore?"
Deus est Deus pauperum.

Then said the poor man, right humbly,
"Fair lord, this was not made by me,
I found it in mine own dry well,
And had a mind thy grace to tell.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Therefrom, my lord, a cup I took
This day, that thou thereon mightst look,
And know me to be leal and true,"
And from his coat the cup he drew.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

Then Maltete took it in his hand,
Nor knew he ought that it used to stand
On Boncoeur's cupboard many a day.
"Go on," he said, "and show the way.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Give me thy gold, and thou shalt live,
Yea, in my house thou well mayst thrive."
John turned about and 'gan to go
Unto the wood with footsteps slow.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

But as they passed by John's woodstack,
Growled Maltete, "Nothing now doth lack
Wherewith to light a merry fire,

And give my wizard all his hire."
Deus est Deus pauperum.

The western sky was red as blood,
Darker grew the oaken-wood;
"Thief and carle, where are ye gone?
Why are we in the wood alone?
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"What is the sound of this mighty horn?
Ah, God! that ever I was born!
The basnets flash from tree to tree;
Show me, thou Christ, the way to flee!"
Deus est Deus pauperum.

Boncoeur it was with fifty men;
Maltete was but one to ten,
And his own folk prayed for grace,
With empty hands in that lone place.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

"Grace shall ye have," Boncoeur said,
"All of you but Evil-head."
Lowly could that great lord be,
Who could pray so well as he?
Deus est Deus pauperum.

Then could Maltete howl and cry,
Little will he had to die.
Soft was his speech, now it was late,
But who had will to save Maltete?
Deus est Deus pauperum.

They brought him to the house again,
And toward the road he looked in vain.
Lonely and bare was the great highway,
Under the gathering moonlight grey.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

They took off his gilt basnet,
That he should die there was no let;
They took off his coat of steel,

A damned man he well might feel.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

“Will ye all be rich as kings,
Lacking naught of all good things?”
“Nothing do we lack this eve;
When thou art dead, how can we grieve?”
Deus est Deus pauperum.

“Let me drink water ere I die,
None henceforth comes my lips anigh.”
They brought it him in that bowl of wood.
He said, “This is but poor men’s blood!”
Deus est Deus pauperum.

They brought it him in the cup of gold.
He said, “The women I have sold
Have wept it full of salt for me;
I shall die gaping thirstily.”
Deus est Deus pauperum.

On the threshold of that poor homestead
They smote off his evil head;
They set it high on a great spear,
And rode away with merry cheer.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

At the dawn, in lordly state,
They rode to Maltete’s castle-gate.
“Whoso willeth laud to win,
Make haste to let your masters in!”
Deus est Deus pauperum.

Forthwith opened they the gate,
No man was sorry for Maltete.
Boncoeur conquered all his lands,
A good knight was he of his hands.
Dens est Deus pauperum.

Good men he loved, and hated bad;
Joyful days and sweet he had;
Good deeds did he plenteously;

Beneath him folk lived frank and free.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

He lived long, with merry days;
None said aught of him but praise.
God on him have full mercy;
A good knight merciful was he.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

The great lord, called Maltete, is dead;
Grass grows above his feet and head,
And a holly-bush grows up between
His rib-bones gotten white and clean.
Deus est Deus pauperum.

A carle's sheep-dog certainly
Is a mightier thing than he.
Till London-bridge shall cross the Nen,
Take we heed of such-like men.
Dens est Deus pauperum.

William Morris

The Half Of Life Gone

The days have slain the days,
and the seasons have gone by
And brought me the summer again;
and here on the grass I lie
As erst I lay and was glad
ere I meddled with right and with wrong.
Wide lies the mead as of old,
and the river is creeping along
By the side of the elm-clad bank
that turns its weedy stream;
And grey o'er its hither lip
the quivering rushes gleam.
There is work in the mead as of old;
they are eager at winning the hay,
While every sun sets bright
and begets a fairer day.
The forks shine white in the sun
round the yellow red-wheeled wain,
Where the mountain of hay grows fast;
and now from out of the lane
Comes the ox-team drawing another,
comes the bailiff and the beer,
And thump, thump, goes the farmer's nag
o'er the narrow bridge of the weir.
High up and light are the clouds,
and though the swallows flit
So high o'er the sunlit earth,
they are well a part of it,
And so, though high over them,
are the wings of the wandering herne;
In measureless depths above him
doth the fair sky quiver and burn;
The dear sun, floods the land
as the morning falls toward noon,
And a little wind is awake
in the best of the latter June.
They are busy winning the hay,
and the life and the picture they make,
If I were as once I was,

I should deem it made for my sake;
For here if one need not work
is a place for happy rest,
While one's thought wends over the world
north, south, and east and west.

There are the men and the maids,
and the wives and the gaffers grey
Of the fields I know so well,
and but little changed are they
Since I was a lad amongst them;
and yet how great is the change!
Strange are they grown unto me;
yea I to myself am strange.
Their talk and their laughter mingling
with the music of the meads
Has now no meaning to me
to help or to hinder my needs,
So far from them have I drifted.
And yet amidst of them goes
A part of myself, my boy,
and of pleasure and pain he knows,
And deems it something strange,
when he is other than glad.

Lo now! the woman that stoops
and kisses the face of the lad,
And puts a rake in his hand
and laughs in his laughing face.
Whose is the voice that laughs
in the old familiar place?
Whose should it be but my love's,
if my love were yet on the earth?
Could she refrain from the fields
where my joy and her joy had birth,
When I was there and her child,
on the grass that knew her feet
'Mid the flowers that led her on
when the summer eve was sweet?

No, no, it is she no longer;
never again can she come

And behold the hay-wains creeping
o'er the meadows of her home;
No more can she kiss her son
or put the rake in his hand
That she handled a while ago
in the midst of the haymaking band.
Her laughter is gone and her life;
there is no such thing on the earth,
No share for me then in the stir,
no share in the hurry and mirth.

Nay, let me look and believe
that all these will vanish away,
At least when the night has fallen,
and that she will be there 'mid the hay,
Happy and weary with work,
waiting and longing for love.
There will she be, as of old,
when the great moon hung above,
And lightless and dead was the village,
and nought but the weir was awake;
There will she rise to meet me,
and my hands will she hasten to take,
And thence shall we wander away,
and over the ancient bridge
By many a rose-hung hedgerow,
till we reach the sun-burnt ridge
And the great trench digged by the Romans:
there then awhile shall we stand,
To watch the dawn come creeping
o'er the fragrant lovely land,
Till all the world awaketh,
and draws us down, we twain,
To the deeds of the field and the fold
and the merry summer's gain.

Ah thus, only thus shall I see her,
in dreams of the day or the night,
When my soul is beguiled of its sorrow
to remember past delight.
She is gone. She was and she is not;
there is no such thing on the earth

But e'en as a picture painted;
and for me there is void and dearth
That I cannot name or measure.
Yet for me and all these she died,
E'en as she lived for awhile,
that the better day might betide.
Therefore I live, and I shall live
till the last day's work shall fail.
Have patience now but a little
and I will tell you the tale
Of how and why she died,
and why I am weak and worn,
And have wandered away to the meadows
and the place where I was born;
But here and to-day I cannot;
for ever my thought will stray
To that hope fulfilled for a little
and the bliss of the earlier day.
Of the great world's hope and anguish
to-day I scarce can think;
Like a ghost, from the lives of the living
and their earthly deeds I shrink.
I will go adown by the water
and over the ancient bridge,
And wend in our footsteps of old
till I come to the sun-burnt ridge,
And the great trench digged by the Romans;
and thence awhile will I gaze,
And see three teeming counties
stretch out till they fade in the haze;
And in all the dwellings of man
that thence mine eyes shall see,
What man as hapless as I am
beneath the sun shall be?

O fool, what words are these?
Thou hast a sorrow to nurse,
And thou hast been bold and happy;
but these, if they utter a curse,
No sting it has and no meaning,
it is empty sound on the air.
Thy life is full of mourning,

and theirs so empty and bare,
That they have no words of complaining;
nor so happy have they been
That they may measure sorrow
or tell what grief may mean.
And thou, thou hast deeds to do,
and toil to meet thee soon;
Depart and ponder on these
through the sun-worn afternoon.

William Morris

The Hall And The Wood

'Twas in the water-dwindling tide
When July days were done,
Sir Rafe of Greenhowes, 'gan to ride
In the earliest of the sun.

He left the white-walled burg behind,
He rode amidst the wheat.
The westland-gotten wind blew kind
Across the acres sweet.

Then rose his heart and cleared his brow,
And slow he rode the way:
"As then it was, so is it now,
Not all hath worn away."

So came he to the long green lane
That leadeth to the ford,
And saw the sickle by the wain
Shine bright as any sword.

The brown carles stayed 'twixt draught and draught,
And murmuring, stood aloof,
But one spake out when he had laughed:
"God bless the Green-wood Roof!"

Then o'er the ford and up he fared:
And lo the happy hills!
And the mountain-dale by summer cleared,
That oft the winter fills.

Then forth he rode by Peter's gate,
And smiled and said aloud:
"No more a day doth the Prior wait,
White stands the tower and proud."

There leaned a knight on the gateway side
In armour white and wan,
And after the heels of the horse he cried,
"God keep the hunted man!"

Then quoth Sir Rafe, "Amen, amen!"
For he deemed the word was good;
But never a while he lingered then
Till he reached the Nether Wood.

He rode by ash, he rode by oak,
He rode the thicket round,
And heard no woodman strike a stroke,
No wandering wife he found.

He rode the wet, he rode the dry,
He rode the grassy glade:
At Wood-end yet the sun was high,
And his heart was unafraid.

There on the bent his rein he drew,
And looked o'er field and fold,
O'er all the merry meads he knew
Beneath the mountains old.

He gazed across to the good Green Howe
As he smelt the sun-warmed sward;
Then his face grew pale from chin to brow,
And he cried, "God save the sword!"

For there beyond the winding way,
Above the orchards green,
Stood up the ancient gables gray
With ne'er a roof between.

His naked blade in hand he had,
O'er rough and smooth he rode,
Till he stood where once his heart was glad
Amidst his old abode.

Across the hearth a tie-beam lay
Unmoved a weary while.
The flame that clomb the ashlar gray
Had burned it red as tile.

The sparrows bickering on the floor

Fled at his entering in;
The swift flew past the empty door
His winged meat to win.

Red apples from the tall old tree
O'er the wall's rent were shed.
Thence oft, a little lad, would he
Look down upon the lead.

There turned the cheeping chaffinch now
And feared no birding child;
Through the shot-window thrust a bough
Of garden-rose run wild.

He looked to right, he looked to left,
And down to the cold gray hearth,
Where lay an axe with half burned heft
Amidst the ashen dearth.

He caught it up and cast it wide
Against the gable wall;
Then to the dais did he stride,
O'er beam and bench and all.

Amidst there yet the high-seat stood,
Where erst his sires had sat;
And the mighty board of oaken wood,
The fire had stayed thereat.

Then through the red wrath of his eyne
He saw a sheathed sword,
Laid thwart that wasted field of wine,
Amidmost of the board.

And by the hilts a slug-horn lay,
And therebeside a scroll,
He caught it up and turned away
From the lea-land of the bowl.

Then with the sobbing grief he strove,
For he saw his name thereon;
And the heart within his breast uphove

As the pen's tale now he won.

"O Rafe, my love of long ago!
Draw forth thy father's blade,
And blow the horn for friend and foe,
And the good green-wood to aid!"

He turned and took the slug-horn up,
And set it to his mouth,
And o'er that meadow of the cup
Blew east and west and south.

He drew the sword from out the sheath
And shook the fallow brand;
And there a while with bated breath,
And hearkening ear did stand.

Him-seemed the horn's voice he might hear —
Or the wind that blew o'er all.
Him-seemed that footsteps drew anear —
Or the boughs shook round the hall.

Him-seemed he heard a voice he knew —
Or a dream of while ago.
Him-seemed bright raiment towards him drew —
Or bright the sun-set shone.

She stood before him face to face,
With the sun-beam thwart her hand,
As on the gold of the Holy Place
The painted angels stand.

With many a kiss she closed his eyes;
She kissed him cheek and chin:
E'en so in the painted Paradise
Are Earth's folk welcomed in.

There in the door the green-coats stood,
O'er the bows went up the cry,
"O welcome, Rafe, to the free green-wood,
With us to live and die."

It was bill and bow by the high-seat stood,
And they cried above the bows,
"Now welcome, Rafe, to the good green-wood,
And welcome Kate the Rose!"

White, white in the moon is the woodland plash,
White is the woodland glade,
Forth wend those twain, from oak to ash,
With light hearts unafraid.

The summer moon high o'er the hill,
All silver-white is she,
And Sir Rafe's good men with bow and bill,
They go by two and three.

In the fair green-wood where lurks no fear,
Where the King's writ runneth not,
There dwell they, friends and fellows dear,
While summer days are hot,

And when the leaf from the oak-tree falls,
And winds blow rough and strong,
With the carles of the woodland thorps and halls
They dwell, and fear no wrong.

And there the merry yule they make,
And see the winter wane,
And fain are they for true-love's sake,
And the folk thereby are fain.

For the ploughing carle and the straying herd
Flee never for Sir Rafe:
No barefoot maiden wends afeard,
And she deems the thicket safe.

But sore adread do the chapmen ride;
Wide round the wood they go;
And the judge and the sergeants wander wide,
Lest they plead before the bow.

Well learned and wise is Sir Rafe's good sword,
And straight the arrows fly,

And they find the coat of many a lord,
And the crest that rideth high.

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.

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"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.

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William Morris

The King Of Denmark's Sons

In Denmark gone is many a year,
So fair upriseth the rim of the sun,
Two sons of Gorm the King there were,
So grey is the sea when day is done.

Both these were gotten in lawful bed
Of Thyrrer Denmark's Surety-head.

Fair was Knut of face and limb
As the breast of the Queen that suckled him.

But Harald was hot of hand and heart
As lips of lovers ere they part.

Knut sat at home in all men's love,
But over the seas must Harald rove.

And for every deed by Harald won,
Gorm laid more love on Knut alone.

On a high-tide spake the King in hall,
"Old I grow as the leaves that fall.

"Knut shall reign when I am dead,
So shall the land have peace and aid.

"But many a ship shall Harald have,
For I deem the sea well wrought for his grave."

Then none spake save the King again,
"If Knut die all my days be vain.

"And whoso the tale of his death shall tell,
Hath spoken a word to gain him hell.

"Lo here a doom I will not break,"
So fair upriseth the rim of the sun.
"For life or death or any man's sake,"
So grey is the sea when the day is done.

O merry days in the summer-tide!
So fair upriseth the rim of the sun.

When the ships sail fair and the young men ride.
So grey is the sea when day is done.

Now Harald has got him east away,
And each morrow of fight was a gainful day.

But Knut is to his fosterer gone
To deal in deeds of peace alone.

So wear the days, and well it is
Such lovely lords should dwell in bliss.

O merry in the winter-tide
When men to Yule-feast wend them wide.

And here lieth Knut in the Lima-firth
When the lift is low o'er the Danish earth.

"Tell me now, Shipmaster mine,
What are yon torches there that shine?"

"Lord, no torches may these be
But golden prows across the sea.

"For over there the sun shines now
And the gold worms gape from every prow."

The sun and the wind came down o'er the sea,
"Tell them over how many they be!"

"Ten I tell with shield-hung sides.
Nought but a fool his death abides."

"Ten thou tellest, and we be three,
Good need that we do manfully.

"Good fellows, grip the shield and spear,
For Harald my brother draweth near.

"Well breakfast we when night is done,
And Valhall's cock crows up the sun."

Up spoke Harald in wrathful case:
"I would have word with this waxen face!

"What wilt thou pay, thou hucksterer,
That I let thee live another year?

"For oath that thou wilt never reign
Will I let thee live a year or twain."

"Kisses and love shalt thou have of me
If yet my liegeman thou wilt be.

"But stroke of sword, and dint of axe,
Or ere thou makest my face as wax."

As thick the arrows fell around
As fall sere leaves on autumn ground.

In many a cheek the red did wane
No maid might ever kiss again.

"Lay me aboard," Lord Harald said,
"The winter day will soon be dead!

"Lay me aboard the bastard's ship,
And see to it lest your grapnels slip!"

Then some they knelt and some they drowned,
And some lay dead Lord Knut around.

"Look here at the wax-white corpse of him,
As fair as the Queen in face and limb!

"Make now for the shore, for the moon is bright,
And I would be home ere the end of night.

"Two sons last night had Thyrré the Queen,
So fair upriseth the rim of the sun.

And both she may lack ere the woods wax green,"
So grey is the sea when day is done.

A little before the morning tide,
So fair upriseth the rim of the sun,
Queen Thyrré looked out of her window-side,
So grey is the sea when day is done.

"O men-at-arms, what men be ye?"
"Harald thy son come over the sea."

"Why is thy face so pale, my son?"
"It may be red or day is done."

"O evil words of an evil hour!
Come, sweet son, to thy mother's bower!"

None from the Queen's bower went that day
Till dark night over the meadows lay.

None thenceforth heard wail or cry
Till the King's feast was waxen high.

Then into the hall Lord Harald came
When the great wax lights were all aflame.

"What tidings, son, dost thou bear to me?
Speak out before I drink with thee."

"Tidings small for a seafarer.
Two falcons in the sea-cliff's were;

"And one was white and one was grey
And they fell to battle on a day;

"They fought in the sun, they fought in the wind,
No boot the white fowl's wounds to bind.

"They fought in the wind, they fought in the sun,
And the white fowl died when the play was done."

"Small tidings these to bear o'er the sea!

Good hap that nothing worser they be!

“Small tidings for a travelled man!
Drink with me, son, whiles yet ye can!

“Drink with me ere thy day and mine,
So fair upriseth the rim of the sun,
Be nought but a tale told over the wine.”
So grey is the sea when day is done.

Now fareth the King with his men to sleep,
So fair upriseth the rim of the sun,
And dim the maids from the Queen’s bower creep,
So grey is the sea when day is done.

And in the hall is little light,
And there standeth the Queen with cheeks full white.

And soft the feet of women fall
From end to end of the King’s great hall.

These bear the gold-wrought cloths away,
And in other wise the hall array;

Till all is black that hath been gold
So heavy a tale there must be told.

The morrow men looked on King Gorm and said
“Hath he dreamed a dream or beheld the dead?”

“Why is he sad who should be gay?
Why are the old man’s lips so grey?”

Slow paced the King adown the hall,
Nor looked aside to either wall,

Till in high-seat there he sat him down,
And deadly old men deemed him grown.

“O Queen, what thrall’s hands durst do this,
To strip my hall of mirth and bliss?”

"No thrall's hands in the hangings were,
No thrall's hands made the tenters bare.

"King's daughters' hands have done the deed,
The hands of Denmark's Surety-head."

"Nought betters the deed thy word unsaid.
Tell me that Knut my son is dead!"

She said: "The doom on thee, O King!
For thine own lips have said the thing."

Men looked to see the King arise,
The death of men within his eyes.

Men looked to see his bitter sword
That once cleared ships from board to board.

But in the hall no sword gleamed wide,
His hand fell down along his side.

No red there came into his cheek,
He fell aback as one made weak.

His wan cheek brushed the high-seat's side,
And in the noon of day he died.

So lieth King Gorm beneath the grass,
But from mouth to mouth this tale did pass.

And Harald reigned and went his way,
So fair upriseth the rim of the sun.
And still is the story told to-day,
So grey is the sea when day is done.

William Morris

The Lay Of Christine

TRANSLATED FROM THE ICELANDIC.

Of silk my gear was shapen,
Scarlet they did on me,
Then to the sea-strand was I borne
And laid in a bark of the sea.
O well were I from the World away.

Befell it there I might not drown,
For God to me was good;
The billows bare me up a-land
Where grew the fair green-wood.
O well were I from the World away.

There came a Knight a-riding
With three swains along the way
And he took me up, the little-one,
On the sea-sand as I lay.
O well were I from the World away.

He took me up, and bare me home
To the house that was his own,
And there bode I so long with him
That I was his love alone.
O well were I from the World away.

But the very first night we lay abed
Befell his sorrow and harm,
That thither came the King's ill men,
And slew him on mine arm.
O well were I from the World away.

There slew they Adalbright the King,
Two of his swains slew they,
But the third sailed swiftly from the land
Sithence I saw him never a day.
O well were I from the World away.

O wavering hope of this world's bliss,
How shall men trow in thee?

My Grove of Gems is gone away
For mine eyes no more to see!
O well were I from the World away.

Each hour the while my life shall last
Remembereth him alone,
Such heavy sorrow have I got
From our meeting long agone.
O well were I from the World away.

O, early in the morning-tide
Men cry: "Christine the fair,
Art thou well content with that true love
Thou sittest loving there?"
O well were I from the World away.

Ah, yea, so well I love him,
And so dear my love shall be,
That the very God of Heaven aloft
Worshippeth him and me.
O well were I from the World away.

"Ah, all the red gold I have got
Well would I give to-day,
Only for this and nothing else
From the world to win away."
O well were I from the World away.

"Nay, midst all folk upon the earth
Keep thou thy ruddy gold,
And love withal the mighty lord
That wedded thee of old."
O well were I from the World away.

William Morris

The Lion

The Beasts that be
In wood and waste,
Now sit and see,
Nor ride nor haste.

William Morris

The Message Of The March Wind

Fair now is the springtide, now earth lies beholding
With the eyes of a lover, the face of the sun;
Long lasteth the daylight, and hope is enfolding
The green-growing acres with increase begun.

Now sweet, sweet it is through the land to be straying
'Mid the birds and the blossoms and the beasts of the field;
Love mingles with love, and no evil is weighing
On thy heart or mine, where all sorrow is healed.

From township to township, o'er down and by tillage
Fair, far have we wandered and long was the day;
But now cometh eve at the end of the village,
Where over the grey wall the church riseth grey.

There is wind in the twilight; in the white road before us
The straw from the ox-yard is blowing about;
The moon's rim is rising, a star glitters o'er us,
And the vane on the spire-top is swinging in doubt.

Down there dips the highway, toward the bridge crossing over
The brook that runs on to the Thames and the sea.
Draw closer, my sweet, we are lover and lover;
This eve art thou given to gladness and me.

Shall we be glad always? Come closer and hearken:
Three fields further on, as they told me down there,
When the young moon has set, if the March sky should darken
We might see from the hill-top the great city's glare.

Hark, the wind in the elm-boughs! from London it bloweth,
And telleth of gold, and of hope and unrest;
Of power that helps not; of wisdom that knoweth,
But teacheth not aught of the worst and the best.

Of the rich men it telleth, and strange is the story
How they have, and they hanker, and grip far and wide;
And they live and they die, and the earth and its glory
Has been but a burden they scarce might abide.

Hark! the March wind again of a people is telling;
Of the life that they live there, so haggard and grim,
That if we and our love amidst them had been dwelling
My fondness had faltered, thy beauty grown dim.

This land we have loved in our love and our leisure
For them hangs in heaven, high out of their reach;
The wide hills o'er the sea-plain for them have no pleasure,
The grey homes of their fathers no story to teach.

The singers have sung and the builders have builded,
The painters have fashioned their tales of delight;
For what and for whom hath the world's book been gilded,
When all is for these but the blackness of night?

How long, and for what is their patience abiding?
How oft and how oft shall their story be told,
While the hope that none seeketh in darkness is hiding,
And in grief and in sorrow the world groweth old?

Come back to the inn, love, and the lights and the fire,
And the fiddler's old tune and the shuffling of feet;
For there in a while shall be rest and desire,
And there shall the morrow's uprising be sweet.

Yet, love, as we wend, the wind bloweth behind us,
And beareth the last tale it telleth to-night,
How here in the spring-tide the message shall find us;
For the hope that none seeketh is coming to light.

Like the seed of midwinter, unheeded, unperished,
Like the autumn-sown wheat 'neath the snow lying green,
Like the love that o'ertook us, unawares and uncherished,
Like the babe 'neath thy girdle that groweth unseen;

So the hope of the people now buddeth and groweth,
Rest fadeth before it, and blindness and fear;
It biddeth us learn all the wisdom it knoweth;
It hath found us and held us, and biddeth us hear:

For it beareth the message: "Rise up on the morrow

And go on your ways toward the doubt and the strife;
Join hope to our hope and blend sorrow with sorrow,
And seek for men's love in the short days of life."

But lo, the old inn, and the lights, and the fire,
And the fiddler's old tune and the shuffling of feet;
Soon for us shall be quiet and rest and desire,
And to-morrow's uprising to deeds shall be sweet.

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 Orchard

Midst bitten mead and acre shorn,
The world without is waste and worn,

But here within our orchard-close,
The guerdon of its labour shows.

O valiant Earth, O happy year
That mocks the threat of winter near,

And hangs aloft from tree to tree
The banners of the Spring to be.

William Morris

The Raven And The King's Daughter

King's daughter sitting in tower so high,
Fair summer is on many a shield.
Why weepest thou as the clouds go by?
Fair sing the swans 'twixt firth and field.
Why weepest thou in the window-seat
Till the tears run through thy fingers sweet?

The King's Daughter.

I weep because I sit alone
Betwixt these walls of lime and stone.
Fair folk are in my father's hall,
But for me he built this guarded wall.
And here the gold on the green I sew
Nor tidings of my true-love know.

The Raven.

King's daughter, sitting above the sea,
I shall tell thee a tale shall gladden thee.
Yestreen I saw a ship go forth
When the wind blew merry from the north.
And by the tiller Steingrim sat,
And O, but my heart was glad thereat!
For 'twixt ashen plank and dark blue sea
His sword sang sweet of deeds to be.

The King's Daughter.

O barren sea, thou bitter bird,
And a barren tale my ears have heard.

The Raven.

Thy father's men were hard thereby
In byrny bright and helmet high.

The King's Daughter.

O worser waxeth thy story far,
For these drew upon me bolt and bar.
Fly south, O fowl, to the field of death
For nothing sweet thy grey neb saith.

The Raven.

O, there was Olaf the lily-rose,
As fair as any oak that grows.

The King's Daughter.

O sweet bird, what did he then
Among the spears of my father's men?

The Raven.

'Twixt ashen plank and dark blue sea,
He sang: My true love waiteth me.

The King's Daughter.

As well as this dull floor knows my feet,
I am not weary yet, my sweet.

The Raven.

He sang: As once her hand I had,
Her lips at last shall make me glad.

The King's Daughter.

As once our fingers met, O love,
So shall our lips be fain thereof.

The Raven.

He sang: Come wrack and iron and flame,
For what shall breach the wall but fame?

The King's Daughter.

Be swift to rise and set, O Sun,
Lest life 'twixt hope and death be done.

The Raven.

King's daughter sitting in tower so high,
A gift for my tale ere forth I fly,
The gold from thy finger fair and fine,
Thou hadst it from no love of thine.

The King's Daughter.

By my father's ring another there is,
I had it with my mother's kiss.
Fly forth, O fowl, across the sea
To win another gift of me.
Fly south to bring me tidings true,
Fair summer is on many a shield.
Of the eve grown red with the battle-dew,
Fair sing the swans 'twixt firth and field.

The Raven.

King's daughter sitting in tower so high,
Fair summer is on many a shield.
Tidings to hearken ere thou die,
Fair sing the swans 'twixt firth and field.
In the Frankish land the spear points met,
And wide about the field was wet.
And high ere the cold moon quenched the sun,
Blew Steingrim's horn for battle won.

The King's Daughter.

Fair fall thee fowl! Tell tidings true
Of deeds that men that day did do.

The Raven.

Steingrim before his banner went,
And helms were broke and byrnies rent.

The King's Daughter.

A doughty man and good at need;
Tell men of any other's deed?

The Raven.

Where Steingrim through the battle bore
Still Olaf went a foot before.

The King's Daughter.

O fair with deeds the world doth grow!
Where is my true-love gotten now?

The Raven.

Upon the deck beside the mast
He lieth now, and sleepeth fast.

The King's Daughter.

Heard'st thou before his sleep began
That he spake word of any man?

The Raven.

Methought of thee he sang a song,
But nothing now he saith for long.

The King's Daughter.

And wottest thou where he will wend
With the world before him from end to end?

The Raven.

Before the battle joined that day
Steingrim a word to him did say:
"If we bring the banner back in peace,
In the King's house much shall my fame increase;
Till there no guarded door shall be

But it shall open straight to me.
Then to the bower we twain shall go
Where thy love the golden seam doth sew.
I shall bring thee in and lay thine hand
About the neck of that lily-wand.
And let the King be lief or loth
One bed that night shall hold you both."
Now north belike runs Steingrim's prow,
And the rain and the wind from the south do blow.

The King's Daughter.

Lo, fowl of death, my mother's ring,
But the bridal song I must learn to sing.
And fain were I for a space alone,
For O the wind, and the wind doth moan.
And I must array the bridal bed,
Fair summer is on many a shield.
For O the rain, and the rain drifts red!
Fair sing the swans 'twixt firth and field.

Before the day from the night was born,
Fair summer is on many a shield.
She heard the blast of Steingrim's horn,
Fair sing the swans 'twixt firth and field.
Before the day was waxen fair
Were Steingrim's feet upon the stair.
"O bolt and bar they fall away,
But heavy are Steingrim's feet to-day."
"O heavy the feet of one who bears
The longing of days and the grief of years!
Lie down, lie down, thou lily-wand
That on thy neck I may lay his hand.
Whether the King be lief or loth
To-day one bed shall hold you both.
O thou art still as he is still,
So sore as ye longed to talk your fill.
And good it were that I depart,
Now heart is laid so close to heart.
For sure ye shall talk so left alone
Fair summer is on many a shield.
Of days to be below the stone."

Fair sing the swans 'twixt firth and field.

William Morris

The Son's Sorrow

FROM THE ICELANDIC.

The King has asked of his son so good,
"Why art thou hushed and heavy of mood?
O fair it is to ride abroad.
Thou playest not, and thou laughest not;
All thy good game is clean forgot."

"Sit thou beside me, father dear,
And the tale of my sorrow shalt thou hear.

Thou sendedst me unto a far-off land,
And gavest me into a good Earl's hand.

Now had this good Earl daughters seven,
The fairest of maidens under heaven.

One brought me my meat when I should dine,
One cut and sewed my raiment fine.

One washed and combed my yellow hair,
And one I fell to loving there.

Befell it on so fair a day,
We minded us to sport and play.

Down in a dale my horse bound I,
Bound on my saddle speedily.

Bright red she was as the flickering flame
When to my saddle-bow she came.

Beside my saddle-bow she stood,
'To flee with thee to my heart were good.'

Kind was my horse and good to aid,
My love upon his back I laid.

We gat us from the garth away,
And none was ware of us that day.

But as we rode along the sand
Behold a barge lay by the land.

So in that boat did we depart,
And rowed away right glad at heart.

When we came to the dark wood and the shade
To raise the tent my true-love bade.

Three sons my true-love bore me there,
And syne she died who was so dear.

A grave I wrought her with my sword,
With my fair shield the mould I poured.

First in the mould I laid my love,
Then all my sons her breast above.

And I without must lie alone;
So from the place I gat me gone."

No man now shall stand on his feet
To love that love, to woo that sweet:
O fair it is to ride abroad.

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 Two Sides Of The River

The Youths.

O Winter, O white winter, wert thou gone
No more within the wilds were I alone
Leaping with bent bow over stock and stone!

No more alone my love the lamp should burn,
Watching the weary spindle twist and turn,
Or o'er the web hold back her tears and yearn:
O winter, O white winter, wert thou gone!

The Maidens.

Sweet thoughts fly swiftness than the drifting snow,
And with the twisting threads sweet longings grow,
And o'er the web sweet pictures come and go,
For no white winter are we long alone.

The Youths.

O stream so changed, what hast thou done to me,
That I thy glittering ford no more can see
Wreathing with white her fair feet lovingly?

See, in the rain she stands, and, looking down
With frightened eyes upon thy whirlpools brown,
Drops to her feet again her girded gown.
O hurrying turbid stream, what hast thou done?

The Maidens.

The clouds lift, telling of a happier day
When through the thin stream I shall take my way,
Girt round with gold, and garlanded with may,
What rushing stream can keep us long alone?

The Youths.

O burning Sun, O master of unrest,

Why must we, toiling, cast away the best,
Now, when the bird sleeps by her empty nest?

See, with my garland lying at her feet,
In lonely labour stands mine own, my sweet,
Above the quern half-filled with half-ground wheat.
O red taskmaster, that thy flames were done!

The Maidens.

O love, to-night across the half-shorn plain
Shall I not go to meet the yellow wain,
A look of love at end of toil to gain?
What flaming sun can keep us long alone?

The Youths.

To-morrow, said I, is grape gathering o'er;
To-morrow, and our loves are twinned no more
To-morrow came, to bring us woe and war.

What have I done, that I should stand with these
Harkening the dread shouts borne upon the breeze,
While she, far off, sits weeping 'neath her trees?
Alas, O kings, what is it ye have done?

The Maidens.

Come, love, delay not; come, and slay my dread!
Already is the banquet table spread;
In the cool chamber flower-strewn is my bed:
Come, love, what king shall keep us long alone?

The Youths.

O city, city, open thou thy gate!
See, with life snatched from out the hand of fate!
How on thy glittering triumph I must wait!

Are not her hands stretched out to me? Her eyes,
Grow they not weary as each new hope dies,
And lone before her still the long road lies?

O golden city, fain would I be gone!

The Maidens.

And thou art happy, amid shouts and songs,
And all that unto conquering men belongs.
Night hath no fear for me, and day no wrongs.
What brazen city gates can keep us, lone?

The Youths.

O long, long road, how bare thou art, and grey!
Hill after hill thou climbest, and the day
Is ended now, O moonlit endless way!

And she is standing where the rushes grow,
And still with white hand shades her anxious brow,
Though 'neath the world the sun is fallen now,
O dreary road, when will thy leagues be done?

The Maidens.

O tremblest thou, grey road, or do my feet
Tremble with joy, thy flinty face to meet?
Because my love's eyes soon mine eyes shall greet?
No heart thou hast to keep us long alone.

The Youths.

O wilt thou ne'er depart, thou heavy night?
When will thy slaying bring on the morning bright,
That leads my weary feet to my delight?

Why lingerest thou, filling with wandering fears
My lone love's tired heart; her eyes with tears
For thoughts like sorrow for the vanished years?
Weaver of ill thoughts, when wilt thou be gone?

The Maidens.

Love, to the east are thine eyes turned as mine,
In patient watching for the night's decline?

And hast thou noted this grey widening line?
Can any darkness keep us long alone?

The Youth.

O day, O day, is it a little thing
That thou so long unto thy life must cling,
Because I gave thee such a welcoming?

I called thee king of all felicity,
I praised thee that thou broughtest joy so nigh;
Thine hours are turned to years, thou wilt not die;
O day so longed for, would that thou wert gone!

The Maidens.

The light fails, love; the long day soon shall be
Nought but a pensive happy memory
Blessed for the tales it told to thee and me.
How hard it was, O love, to be alone.

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

The Woodpecker

I once a King and chief
Now am the tree-bark's thief,
Ever 'twixt trunk and leaf
Chasing the prey.

William Morris

Thunder In The Garden

When the boughs of the garden hang heavy with rain
And the blackbird reneweth his song,
And the thunder departing yet rolleth again,
I remember the ending of wrong.

When the day that was dusk while his death was aloof
Is ending wide-gleaming and strange
For the clearness of all things beneath the world's roof,
I call back the wild chance and the change.

For once we twain sat through the hot afternoon
While the rain held aloof for a while,
Till she, the soft-clad, for the glory of June
Changed all with the change of her smile.

For her smile was of longing, no longer of glee,
And her fingers, entwined with mine own,
With caresses unquiet sought kindness of me
For the gift that I never had known.

Then down rushed the rain, and the voice of the thunder
Smote dumb all the sound of the street,
And I to myself was grown nought but a wonder,
As she leaned down my kisses to meet.

That she craved for my lips that had craved her so often,
And the hand that had trembled to touch,
That the tears filled her eyes I had hoped not to soften
In this world was a marvel too much.

It was dusk 'mid the thunder, dusk e'en as the night,
When first brake out our love like the storm,
But no night-hour was it, and back came the light
While our hands with each other were warm.

And her smile killed with kisses, came back as at first
As she rose up and led me along,
And out to the garden, where nought was athirst,
And the blackbird renewing his song.

Earth's fragrance went with her, as in the wet grass,
Her feet little hidden were set;
She bent down her head, 'neath the roses to pass,
And her arm with the lily was wet.

In the garden we wandered while day waned apace
And the thunder was dying aloof;
Till the moon o'er the minster-wall lifted his face,
And grey gleamed out the lead of the roof.

Then we turned from the blossoms, and cold were they grown:
In the trees the wind westering moved;
Till over the threshold back fluttered her gown,
And in the dark house was I loved.

William Morris

To The Muse Of The North

O muse that swayest the sad Northern Song,
Thy right hand full of smiting & of wrong,
Thy left hand holding pity; & thy breast
Heaving with hope of that so certain rest:
Thou, with the grey eyes kind and unafraid,
The soft lips trembling not, though they have said
The doom of the World and those that dwell therein.
The lips that smile not though thy children win
The fated Love that draws the fated Death.
O, borne adown the fresh stream of thy breath,
Let some word reach my ears and touch my heart,
That, if it may be, I may have a part
In that great sorrow of thy children dead
That vexed the brow, and bowed adown the head,
Whitened the hair, made life a wondrous dream,
And death the murmur of a restful stream,
But left no stain upon those souls of thine
Whose greatness through the tangled world doth shine.
O Mother, and Love and Sister all in one,
Come thou; for sure I am enough alone
That thou thine arms about my heart shouldst throw,
And wrap me in the grief of long ago.

William Morris

Verses For Pictures

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.

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.

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.

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.

Winter.

I am Winter, that do keep
Longing safe amidst of sleep:
Who shall say if I were dead
What should be remembered?

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

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