
 ALFRED LORD TENNYSON
Rizpah¹

17—

1

Wailing, wailing, wailing, the wind over land and sea—
 And Willy's voice in the wind, "O mother, come out to me!"
 Why should he call me tonight, when he knows that I cannot go?
 For the downs are as bright as day, and the full moon stares
 at the snow.

2

5 We should be seen, my dear; they would spy us out of the town.
 The loud black nights for us, and the storm rushing over the down,
 When I cannot see my own hand, but am led by the creak of the
 chain,
 And grovel and grope for my son till I find myself drenched with
 the rain.

3

Anything fallen again? nay—what was there left to fall?
 10 I have taken them home, I have numbered the bones, I have
 hidden them all.
 What am I saying? and what are *you*? do you come as a spy?
 Falls? what falls? who knows? As the tree falls so must it lie.

4

Who let her in? how long has she been? you—what have
 you heard?
 Why did you sit so quiet? you never have spoken a word.
 15 O—to pray with me—yes—a lady—none of their spies—
 But the night has crept into my heart, and begun to darken
 my eyes.

5

Ah—you, that have lived so soft, what should *you* know of
 the night,
 The blast and the burning shame and the bitter frost and the
 fright?
 I have done it, while you were asleep—you were only made for
 the day.
 20 I have gathered my baby together—and now you may go your way.

6

Nay—for it's kind of you, madam, to sit by an old dying wife.
 But say nothing hard of my boy, I have only an hour of life.

1. See II Samuel xxi.8–11 for the story of Rizpah, a mother who kept guard over the bones of her sons who had been hanged.

I kissed my boy in the prison, before he went out to die.
 "They dared me to do it," he said, and he never has told me a lie.
 25 I whipped him for robbing an orchard once when he was but
 a child—
 "The farmer dared me to do it," he said; he was always so wild—
 And idle—and couldn't be idle—my Willy—he never could rest.
 The King should have made him a soldier, he would have been
 one of his best.

7

But he lived with a lot of wild mates, and they never would let
 him be good;
 30 They swore that he dare not rob the mail, and he swore that
 he would;
 And he took no life, but he took one purse, and when all was done
 He flung it among his fellows—"I'll none of it," said my son.

8

I came into court to the judge and the lawyers. I told them my tale,
 God's own truth—but they killed him, they killed him for
 robbing the mail.
 35 They hanged him in chains for a show—we had always borne
 a good name—
 To be hanged for a thief—and then put away—isn't that enough
 shame?
 Dust to dust—low down—let us hide! but they set him so high
 That all the ships of the world could stare at him, passing by.
 God'll pardon the hell-black raven and horrible fowls of the air,
 40 But not the black heart of the lawyer who killed him and hanged
 him there.

9

And the jailer forced me away. I had bid him my last good-bye;
 They had fastened the door of his cell. "O mother!" I heard him cry.
 I couldn't get back though I tried, he had something further to say,
 And now I never shall know it. The jailer forced me away.

10

Then since I couldn't but hear that cry of my boy that was dead,
 They seized me and shut me up: they fastened me down on my bed.
 "Mother, O mother!"—he called in the dark to me year after year—
 They beat me for that, they beat me—you know that I couldn't
 but hear;
 And then at the last they found I had grown so stupid and still
 50 They let me abroad again—but the creatures had worked their will.

11

Flesh of my flesh was gone, but bone of my bone was left—
 I stole them all from the lawyers—and you, will you call it
 a theft?—
 My baby, the bones that had sucked me, the bones that had
 laughed and had cried—
 Theirs? O, no! they are mine—not theirs—they had moved in
 my side.

12

55 Do you think I was scared by the bones? I kissed 'em, I buried
 'em all—
 I can't dig deep, I am old—in the night by the churchyard wall.
 My Willy 'ill rise up whole when the trumpet of judgment
 'ill sound,
 But I charge you never to say that I laid him in holy ground.

13

They would scratch him up—they would hang him again on
 the cursed tree.
 60 Sin? O, yes, we are sinners, I know—let all that be,
 And read me a Bible verse of the Lord's goodwill toward men—
 "Full of compassion and mercy, the Lord"—let me hear it again;
 "Full of compassion and mercy—long-suffering." Yes, O, yes!
 For the lawyer is born but to murder—the Saviour lives but
 to bless.
 65 He'll never put on the black cap² except for the worst of the worst,
 And the first may be last—I have heard it in church—and the last
 may be first.
 Suffering—O, long-suffering—yes, as the Lord must know,
 Year after year in the mist and the wind and the shower and
 the snow.

14

Heard, have you? what? they have told you he never repented
 his sin.
 70 How do they know it? are *they* his mother? are *you* of his kin?
 Heard! have you ever heard, when the storm on the downs began,
 The wind that 'ill wail like a child and the sea that 'ill moan like
 a man?

15

Election, Election, and Reprobation³—it's all very well.
 But I go tonight to my boy, and I shall not find him in hell.
 75 For I cared so much for my boy that the Lord has looked into
 my care,
 And He means me I'm sure to be happy with Willy, I know
 not where.

16

And if *he* be lost—but to save *my* soul, that is all your desire—
 Do you think that I care for *my* soul if my boy be gone to the fire?
 I have been with God in the dark—go, go, you may leave me
 alone—
 80 You never have borne a child—you are just as hard as a stone.

17

Madam, I beg your pardon! I think that you mean to be kind,
 But I cannot hear what you say for my Willy's voice in the wind—

2. Cap worn by judges when pronouncing death sentences.

3. Calvinistic doctrines that God chooses certain

persons (the Elect) to be saved and that others are damned.

The snow and the sky so bright—he used to call in the dark,
 And he calls to me now from the church and not from the
 gibbet—for hark!

85 Nay—you can hear it yourself—it is coming—shaking the walls—
 Willy—the moon's in a cloud——Good-night. I am going. He calls.

1880

In Love, If Love Be Love¹

In love, if love be Love, if love be ours,
 Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers:
 Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.

It is the little rift² within the lute,
 5 That by and by will make the music mute,
 And ever widening slowly silence all.

The little rift within the lover's lute
 Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit,
 That rotting inward slowly molders all.

10 It is not worth the keeping: let it go:
 But shall it? answer, darling, answer, no.
 And trust me not at all or all in all.

To E. FitzGerald¹

Old Fitz, who from your suburb grange,
 Where once I tarried for a while,
 Glance at the wheeling orb of change,
 And greet it with a kindly smile;
 5 Whom yet I see as there you sit
 Beneath your sheltering garden-tree,
 And watch your doves about you flit,
 And plant on shoulder, hand, and knee,
 Or on your head their rosy feet,
 10 As if they knew your diet spares
 Whatever moved in that full sheet
 Let down to Peter at his prayers;²
 Who live on milk and meal and grass;
 And once for ten long weeks I tried
 15 Your table of Pythagoras,³
 And seemed at first "a thing enskied,"

1. Sung by Vivien in her successful attempt to seduce Merlin, the magician (*Idylls* VI.385 ff.).

2. Crack.

1. Edward FitzGerald, translator of the *Rubāiyāt of Omar Khayyām* (the "golden Eastern lay"), was an early admirer of Tennyson's poetry and a friend of long standing. This dedication in the form of a verse letter was to introduce an early poem by Ten-

nyson entitled *Tiresias*. Before the letter and poem reached him in 1883 FitzGerald died.

2. I.e., meat, fish, or fowl. See Acts x.11–12.

3. Greek philosopher and vegetarian. FitzGerald made several unsuccessful attempts to regulate Tennyson's eating habits as well as to diminish his daily consumption of a pint of port wine and vast quantities of pipe tobacco.

As Shakespeare has it,⁴ airy-light
 To float above the ways of men,
 Then fell from that half-spiritual height
 20 Chilled, till I tasted flesh again
 One night when earth was winter-black,
 And all the heavens flashed in frost;
 And on me, half-asleep, came back
 That wholesome heat the blood had lost,
 25 And set me climbing icy capes
 And glaciers, over which there rolled
 To meet me long-armed vines with grapes
 Of Eshcol hugeness;⁵ for the cold
 Without, and warmth within me, wrought
 30 To mold the dream; but none can say
 That Lenten fare makes Lenten thought
 Who reads your golden Eastern lay,
 Than which I know no version done
 In English more divinely well;
 35 A planet equal to the sun
 Which cast it, that large infidel
 Your Omar; and your Omar drew
 Full-handed plaudits from our best
 In modern letters, and from two,
 40 Old friends outvaluing all the rest,
 Two voices heard on earth no more;
 But we old friends are still alive,
 And I am nearing seventy-four,
 While you have touched at seventy-five,
 45 And so I send a birthday line
 Of greeting; and my son, who dipped
 In some forgotten book of mine
 With sallow scraps of manuscript,
 And dating many a year ago,
 50 Has hit on this, which you will take,
 My Fitz, and welcome, as I know,
 Less for its own than for the sake
 Of one recalling gracious times,
 When, in our younger London days,
 55 You found some merit in my rhymes,
 And I more pleasure in your praise.

1883

1885

Locksley Hall Sixty Years After¹

Late, my grandson! half the morning have I paced these sandy
 tracts,
 Watched again the hollow ridges roaring into cataracts,

4. *Measure for Measure* I.iv.34.

5. See Numbers xiii.23.

1. Tennyson insisted that this poem was a "dra-

matic impersonation," not an autobiography. The ranting tone is therefore as appropriate to the lonely 80-year-old speaker of 1886 as it was for the jilted

Wandered back to living boyhood while I heard the
 curlews call,
 I myself so close on death, and death itself in Locksley
 Hall.

- 5 So—your happy suit was blasted—she the faultless, the
 divine;
 And you liken—boyish babble—this boy-love of yours
 with mine.

I myself have often babbled doubtless of a foolish past;
 Babble, babble; our old England may go down in babble at
 last.

- “Curse him!” curse your fellow-victim? call him dotard in
 your rage?
 10 Eyes that lured a doting boyhood well might fool a dotard’s age.

Jilted for a wealthier! wealthier? yet perhaps she was not wise;
 I remember how you kissed the miniature with those sweet
 eyes.

In the hall there hangs a painting—Amy’s arms about my
 neck—
 Happy children in a sunbeam sitting on the ribs of wreck.

- 15 In my life there was a picture, she that clasped my neck had
 flown;
 I was left within the shadow sitting on the wreck alone.

Yours has been a slighter ailment, will you sicken for her
 sake?
 You, not you! your modern amorist is of easier, earthlier
 make.

- Amy loved me, Amy failed me, Amy was a timid child;
 20 But your Judith—but your worldling—*she* had never driven
 me wild.

She that holds the diamond necklace dearer than the
 golden ring,
 She that finds a winter sunset² fairer than a morn of spring.

She that in her heart is brooding on his briefer lease of life,
 While she vows “till death shall part us,” she the
 would-be-widow wife.

young man in the original *Locksley Hall* (published in 1842 but presumably set in 1826). Although the speaker’s tone has remained the same during the 60 years that have passed, his attitudes towards progress, immortality, and democracy have changed considerably. Also changed is his view of the Squire of Locksley Hall, who has just died—the feudal past as represented by his former rival for the hand

of his cousin Amy.

Tennyson told his son that later generations of readers might find that the two poems were his “most historically interesting” productions, in their descriptions of his century at two different points in its development.

2. The elderly man whom Judith chose to marry.

25 She the worldling born of worldlings—father, mother—be
 content,
 Even the homely farm can teach us there is something in
 descent.

Yonder in that chapel, slowly sinking now into the ground,
 Lies the warrior, my forefather, with his feet upon the hound.

Crossed!³ for once he sailed the sea to crush the Moslem in
 his pride;
 30 Dead the warrior, dead his glory, dead the cause in which he
 died.

Yet how often I and Amy in the moldering aisle have stood,
 Gazing for one pensive moment on that founder of our blood.

There again I stood today, and where of old we knelt in prayer,
 Close beneath the casement crimson with the shield of
 Locksley—there,

35 All in white Italian marble, looking still as if she smiled,
 Lies my Amy dead in childbirth, dead the mother, dead the
 child.

Dead—and sixty years ago, and dead her aged husband now—
 I, this old white-headed dreamer, stoopt and kissed her
 marble brow.

Gone the fires of youth, the follies, furies, curses, passionate
 tears,
 40 Gone like fires and floods and earthquakes of the planet's
 dawning years.

Fires that shook me once, but now to silent ashes fallen away.
 Cold upon the dead volcano sleeps the gleam of dying day.

Gone the tyrant of my youth,⁴ and mute below the chancel
 stones,
 All his virtues—I forgive them—black in white above his bones.⁵

45 Gone the comrades of my bivouac, some in fight against the foe,
 Some through age and slow diseases, gone as all on earth will go.

Gone with whom for forty years my life in golden sequence ran,
 She with all the charm of woman, she with all the breadth of man,

50 Strong in will and rich in wisdom, Edith, yet so lowly-sweet,
 Woman to her inmost heart, and woman to her tender feet,

3. The crossed feet of the statue on top of the tomb indicate that the speaker's ancestor had served in the Crusades.

4. A "selfish uncle" who became his guardian after

the death of his father. See *Locksley Hall*, line 156.

5. I.e., black-lettered inscription carved on a slab of white marble set into the floor of the church.

Very woman of very woman, nurse of ailing body and mind,
 She that linked again the broken chain that bound me
 to my kind.

Here today was Amy with me, while I wandered down the
 coast,
 Near us Edith's holy shadow, smiling at the slighter ghost.

55 Gone our sailor son thy father, Leonard early lost at sea;
 Thou alone, my boy, of Amy's kin and mine are left to me.

Gone thy tender-natured mother, wearying to be left alone,
 Pining for the stronger heart that once had beat beside her own.

Truth, for truth is truth, he worshiped, being true as he was
 brave;
 60 Good, for good is good, he followed, yet he looked beyond
 the grave.⁶

Wiser there than you, that crowning barren Death as lord of all,
 Deem this over-tragic drama's closing curtain is the pall!

Beautiful was death in him, who saw the death, but kept the deck,
 Saving women and their babes, and sinking with the
 sinking wreck,

65 Gone forever! Ever? no—for since our dying race began,
 Ever, ever, and forever was the leading light of man.

Those that in barbarian burials killed the slave, and slew the wife
 Felt within themselves the sacred passion of the second life.

Indian warriors dream of ampler hunting grounds beyond
 the night;
 70 Even the black Australian dying hopes he shall return, a white.

Truth for truth, and good for good! The good, the true, the
 pure, the just—
 Take the charm "Forever" from them, and they crumble into dust.

Gone the cry of "Forward, Forward," lost within a growing gloom;
 Lost, or only heard in silence from the silence of a tomb.

75 Half the marvels of my morning, triumphs over time and space,
 Staled by frequency, shrunk by usage into commonest
 commonplace!

"Forward" rang the voices then, and of the many mine was one.
 Let us hush this cry of "Forward" till ten thousand years have
 gone.

6. These lines were written in April, 1886, after Tennyson received news of the death of his 32-year-old son, Lionel, who had been returning from India to England.

Far among the vanished races, old Assyrian kings would flay
80 Captives whom they caught in battle—iron-hearted victors they.

Ages after, while in Asia, he that led the wile Moguls
Timur built his ghastly tower of eighty thousand human skulls,⁷

Then, and here in Edward's time, an age of noblest English
names,
Christian conquerors took and flung the conquered Christian
into flames.⁸

85 Love your enemy, bless your haters, said the Greatest of the
great;
Christian love among the Churches looked the twin of
heathen hate.

From the golden alms of Blessing man had coined himself
a curse:
Rome of Caesar, Rome of Peter, which was crueler? which
was worse?

France had shown a light to all men, preached a Gospel, all
men's good;
90 Celtic Demos⁹ rose a Demon, shrieked and slaked the light
with blood.

Hope was ever on her mountain, watching till the day
begun—
Crowned with sunlight—over darkness—from the still
unrisen sun.

Have we grown at last beyond the passions of the primal clan?
"Kill your enemy, for you hate him," still, "your enemy" was
a man.

95 Have we sunk below them? peasants maim the helpless
horse, and drive
Innocent cattle under thatch, and burn the kindlier brutes
alive.¹

Brutes, the brutes are not your wrongers—burnt at midnight,
found at morn,
Twisted hard in mortal agony with their offspring, born-unborn,

Clinging to the silent mother! Are we devils? are we men?
100 Sweet Saint Francis of Assisi, would that he were here again,²

7. Timur or Tamerlane (1336–1405), Mogul ruler whose conquests included the Persian City, Isfahan, where the skulls of thousands of the slaughtered inhabitants were piled up.

8. In the reign of Edward VI (1547–53), Catholics were persecuted; in the reign of Mary (1553–58), Protestants were persecuted.

9. I.e., the common people; here, the reference is to the mass executions and slaughtering during the French Revolution.

1. In the 1880's, peasants agitating against landlords in Ireland destroyed cattle and farm buildings.

2. St. Francis (1182–1226), whose fondness for animals and birds was noteworthy.

He that in his Catholic wholeness used to call the very flowers
Sisters, brothers—and the beasts—whose pains are hardly
less than ours!

Chaos, Cosmos! Cosmos, Chaos! who can tell how all will end?
Read the wide world's annals, you, and take their wisdom for
your friend.

105 Hope the best, but hold the Present fatal daughter of the Past,
Shape your heart to front the hour, but dream not that the
hour will last.

Aye, if dynamite and revolver³ leave you courage to be wise—
When was age so crammed with menace? madness? written,
spoken lies?

Envy wears the mask of Love, and, laughing sober fact to
scorn,
110 Cries to weakest as to strongest, "Ye are equals, equal-born."

Equal-born? O, yes, if yonder hill be level with the flat.
Charm us, orator, till the lion look no larger than the cat,

Till the cat through that mirage of overheated language loom
Larger than the lion—Demos end in working its own doom.

115 Russia bursts our Indian barrier,⁴ shall we fight her? shall
we yield?
Pause! before you sound the trumpet, hear the voices from
the field.

Those three hundred millions under one Imperial scepter now,
Shall we hold them? shall we loose them? take the suffrage
of the plow.⁵

Nay, but these⁶ would feel and follow Truth if only you and you,
120 Rivals of realm-ruining party, when you speak were wholly true.

Plowmen, shepherds, have I found, and more than once, and
still could find,
Sons of God, and kings of men in utter nobleness of mind,

Truthful, trustful, looking upward to the practiced hustings-liar;⁷
So the higher wields the lower, while the lower is the higher.

3. Bombings and shootings, as in the Anarchist Riot in Haymarket Square, Chicago, May 4, 1886.

4. The British regarded Afghanistan as a buffer between Russia and India; in 1885 a Russian attack against an Afghan border force (an incident known as the Panjdeh scare) brought Britain and Russia to the brink of war.

5. I.e., let the farm laborers' vote decide whether Britain should try to hold India as part of Queen Victoria's Empire (which it had become in 1877) or to

withdraw and let the 300 million people of India confront the threat of Russian invasion on their own.

6. Farm laborers, to whom Parliament granted the right to vote in 1884. As a member of the House of Lords Tennyson himself had voted for this measure but with considerable reluctance because it seemed to him premature.

7. I.e., a lying politician making a campaign speech on a platform.

125 Here and there a cotter's babe is royal-born by right divine;
Here and there my lord is lower than his oxen or his swine.

Chaos, Cosmos! Cosmos, Chaos! once again the sickening
game;
Freedom, free to slay herself, and dying while they shout
her name.

Step by step we gained a freedom known to Europe, known
to all;
130 Step by step we rose to greatness—through the tonguesters
we may fall.

You that woo the Voices⁸—tell them “old experience is a fool,”
Teach your flattered kings that only those who cannot read
can rule.

Pluck the mighty from their seat, but set no meek ones in
their place;
Pillory Wisdom in your markets, pelt your offal at her face.

135 Tumble Nature heel o'er head, and, yelling with the yelling
street,
Set the feet above the brain and swear the brain is in the feet.

Bring the old dark ages back without the faith, without
the hope,
Break the State, the Church, the Throne, and roll their ruins
down the slope.

Authors—essayist, atheist, novelist, realist, rhymester, play
your part,
140 Paint the mortal shame of nature with the living hues of art.

Rip your brothers' vices open, strip your own foul passions bare;
Down with Reticence, down with Reverence—forward—naked—
let them stare.

Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage of your
sewer;
Send the drain into the fountain, lest the stream should issue
pure.

145 Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism⁹—
Forward, forward, aye, and backward, downward too into the
abysm!

8. Votes.

9. When translations of the novels of Emile Zola (1840–1902) began appearing in England in 1884 his publisher was prosecuted and a violent controversy ensued. Zola's emphasis on the animal nature

of his characters and his frank treatment of their sexual lives (especially those of the working classes) appealed to the younger generation of English writers but seemed shockingly distasteful to some of Tennyson's contemporaries.

Do your best to charm the worst, to lower the rising race
 of men;
 Have we risen from out the beast, then back into the beast
 again?

Only "dust to dust" for me that sicken at your lawless din,
 150 Dust in wholesome old-world dust before the newer world
 begin.

Heated am I? you—you wonder—well, it scarce becomes
 mine age—
 Patience! let the dying actor mouth his last upon the stage.

Cries of unprogressive dotage ere the dotard fall asleep?
 Noises of a current narrowing, not the music of a deep?

155 Aye, for doubtless I am old, and think gray thoughts, for I
 am gray;
 After all the stormy changes shall we find a changeless May?

After madness, after massacre, Jacobinism and Jacquerie,¹
 Some diviner force to guide us through the days I shall
 not see?

When the schemes and all the systems, kingdoms and
 republics fall,
 160 Something kindlier, higher, holier—all for each and each
 for all?

All the full-brain, half-brain races, led by Justice, Love,
 and Truth;
 All the millions one at length, with all the visions of my youth?

All diseases quenched by Science, no man halt, or deaf
 or blind;
 Stronger ever born of weaker, lustier body, larger mind?

165 Earth at last a warless world, a single race, a single tongue—
 I have seen her far away—for is not Earth as yet so young?

Every tiger madness muzzled, every serpent passion killed,
 Every grim ravine a garden, every blazing desert tilled,

Robed in universal harvest up to either pole she smiles,
 170 Universal ocean softly washing all her warless isles.

Warless? when her tens are thousands, and her thousands
 millions, then—
 All her harvest all too narrow—who can fancy warless men?

1. The Jacobins were an extremist Revolutionary party in France; a "Jacquerie" is an uprising of peasants against landholders, the name being

derived from a peasants' revolt against the nobles of Northern France in 1358.

Warless? war will die out late then. Will it ever? late or soon?
 Can it, till this outworn earth be dead as you dead world the
 moon?

175 Dead the new astronomy calls her.—On this day and at this hour,
 In this gap between the sandhills, whence you see the Locksley
 tower,

Here we met, our latest meeting—Amy—sixty years ago—
 She and I—the moon was falling greenish through a rosy glow,

180 Just above the gateway tower, and even where you see her now—
 Here we stood and clasped each other, swore the
 seeming-deathless vow.—

Dead, but how her living glory lights the hall, the dune, the
 grass!
 Yet the moonlight is the sunlight, and the sun himself will pass.

Venus near her! smiling downward at this earthlier earth of ours,
 Closer on the sun, perhaps a world of never fading flowers.²

185 Hesper, whom the poet called the Bringer home of all good
 things³—
 All good things may move in Hesper, perfect peoples, perfect
 kings.

Hesper—Venus—were we native to that splendor or in Mars,
 We should see the globe we groan in, fairest of their evening
 stars.

190 Could we dream of wars and carnage, craft and madness, lust
 and spite,
 Roaring London, raving Paris, in that point of peaceful light?

Might we not in glancing heavenward on a star so silver-fair,
 Yearn, and clasp the hands and murmur, “Would to God that
 we were there”?

Forward, backward, backward, forward, in the
 immeasurable sea,
 Swayed by vaster ebbs and flows than can be known to
 you or me.

195 All the suns—are these but symbols of innumerable man,
 Man or Mind that sees a shadow of the planner or the plan?

2. The evening star, being closer to the sun, may be a more perfect planet than ours, but as the speaker also speculates (line 192), its beautiful appearance may be deceptive and life there be troubled by war and other evils as is life on earth.

3. Hesper or Venus, was addressed by the Greek poet Sappho “Oh, Hesperus! Thou bringest all things home.” Cf. *The Waste Land*, line 221-222 and see also *In Memoriam*, sec. 121.

Is there evil but on earth? or pain in every peopled sphere?
Well, be grateful for the sounding watchword "Evolution" here,

Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good,
200 And Reversion ever dragging Evolution in the mud.

What are men that He should heed us? cried the king of
sacred song;⁴
Insects of an hour, that hourly work their brother insect wrong,

While the silent heavens roll, and suns along their fiery way,
All their planets whirling round them, flash a million
miles a day.

205 Many an aeon moulded earth before her highest, man,
was born,
Many an aeon too may pass when earth is manless and forlorn,

Earth so huge, and yet so bounded—pools of salt, and plots
of land—
Shallow skin of green and azure—chains of mountain, grains
of sand!

210 Only That which made us meant us to be mightier by and by,
Set the sphere of all the boundless heavens within the
human eye,

Sent the shadow of Himself, the boundless, through the
human soul;
Boundless inward in the atom, boundless outward in the Whole.



Here is Locksley Hall, my grandson, here the lion-guarded gate.
Not tonight in Locksley Hall—tomorrow—you, you come
so late.

215 Wrecked—your train—or all but wrecked? a shattered wheel?
a vicious boy!
Good, this forward,⁵ you that preach it, is it well to wish
you joy?

Is it well that while we range with Science, glorying in
the Time,
City children soak and blacken soul and sense in city slime?

220 There among the glooming alleys Progress halts on palsied feet,
Crime and hunger cast our maidens by the thousand on
the street.

4. King David. See Psalm viii.4.

5. Cf. *Locksley Hall*, line 181. "Forward" had been the young man's watchword for progress into the future, a progress associated with railway journeys. Now his grandson's railway journey has been dis-

rupted by the vandalism of "a vicious boy" (line 215), an embodiment of the underprivileged classes of modern industrial society who may wreck the progress that Science seemed to promise.

There the master scrimps his haggard sempstress of her
 daily bread,
 There a single sordid attic holds the living and the dead.

There the smoldering fire of fever creeps across the rotted floor,
 And the crowded couch of incest in the warrens of the poor.

225 Nay, your pardon, cry your "Forward," yours are hope and
 youth, but I—
 Eighty winters leave the dog too lame to follow with the cry,

Lame and old, and past his time, and passing now into
 the night;
 Yet I would the rising race were half as eager for the light.

230 Light the fading gleam of even? light the glimmer of the dawn?
 Aged eyes may take the growing glimmer for the gleam
 withdrawn.

Far away beyond her myriad coming changes earth will be
 Something other than the wildest modern guess of you and me.

Earth may reach her earthly-worst, of it she gain her
 earthly-best,
 Would she find her human offspring this ideal man at rest?

235 Forward then, but still remember how the course of Time
 will swerve,
 Crook and turn upon itself in many a backward streaming curve.

Not the Hall tonight, my grandson! Death and Silence hold
 their own.
 Leave the master⁶ in the first dark hour of his last sleep alone.

240 Worthier soul was he than I am, sound and honest, rustic
 Squire,
 Kindly landlord, boon companion—youthful jealousy is a liar.

Cast the poison from your bosom, oust the madness from
 your brain.
 Let the trampled serpent show you that you have not lived
 in vain.

Youthful! youth and age are scholars yet but in the lower school,
 Nor is he the wisest man who never proved himself a fool.

245 Yonder lies our young sea village—Art and Grace are less
 and less:
 Science grows and Beauty dwindles—roofs of slated
 hideousness!

6. Amy's husband, the feudal-style master and squire of Locksley Hall, as contrasted with the master as capitalist employer of line 221.

There is one old hostel left us where they swing the Locksley
 shield,
 Till the peasant cow shall butt the "lion passant" from his field.⁷

Poor old Heraldry, poor old History, poor old Poetry,
 passing hence,
 250 In the common deluge drowning old political common sense!

Poor old voice of eighty crying after voices that have fled!
 All I loved are vanished voices, all my steps are on the dead.

All the world is ghost to me, and as the phantom disappears,
 Forward far and far from here is all the hope of eighty years.

• • • • •

255 In this hostel—I remember—I repent it o'er his grave—
 Like a clown—by chance he met me—I refused the hand
 he gave.

From that casement where the trailer mantles all the moldering
 bricks—
 I was then in early boyhood, Edith but a child of six—

While I sheltered in this archway from a day of driving
 showers—
 260 Peeped the winsome face of Edith like a flower among the
 flowers.

Here tonight! the Hall tomorrow, when they toll the chapel bell!
 Shall I hear in one dark room a wailing, "I have loved thee
 well"?

Then a peal that shakes the portal—one has come to claim
 his bride,
 Her that shrank, and put me from her, shrieked, and started
 from my side—

265 Silent echoes! You, my Leonard, use and not abuse your day,
 Move among your people, know them, follow him⁸ who
 led the way,

Strove for sixty widowed years to help his homelier brother men,
 Served the poor, and built the cottage, raised the school, and
 drained the fen.

Hears he now the voice that wronged him? who shall swear it
 cannot be?
 270 Earth would never touch her worst, were one in fifty such as he.

7. In heraldry "field" refers to the entire surface of the shield on which the coat-of-arms was painted. The Locksley shield, featuring a running lion ("lion

passant"), appears on the signboard outside the old inn. On the "peasant cow" see lines 95–99 and 118.
 8. Amy's husband.

Ere she gain her heavenly-best, a God must mingle with game.
 Nay, there may be those about us whom we neither see
 nor name,

Felt within us as ourselves, the Powers of Good, the
 Powers of Ill,
 Strowing balm, or shedding poison in the fountains of the will.

275 Follow you the star that lights a desert pathway, yours or mine.
 Forward, till you see the Highest Human Nature is divine.

Follow Light, and do the Right—for man can half-control his
 doom—
 Till you find the deathless Angel seated in the vacant tomb.⁹

280 Forward, let the stormy moment fly and mingle with the past.
 I that loathed have come to love him. Love will conquer at
 the last.

Gone at eighty, mine own age, and I and you will bear the pall;
 Then I leave thee lord and master, latest lord of Locksley Hall.

1886

1886

By an Evolutionist

The Lord let the house of a brute to the soul of a man,
 And the man said, "Am I your debtor?"
 And the Lord—"Not yet: but make it as clean as you can,
 And then I will let you a better."

I

5 If my body come from brutes, my soul uncertain, or a fable,
 Why not bask amid the senses while the sun of morning
 shines,
 I, the finer brute rejoicing in my hounds, and in my stable,
 Youth and health, and birth and wealth, and choice of women
 and of wines?

2

10 What has thou done for me, grim Old Age, save breaking my bones
 on the rack?
 Would I had passed in the morning that looks so bright from
 afar!

OLD AGE

Done for thee? starved the wild beast that was linked with thee
 eighty years back.
 Less weight now for the ladder-of-heaven that hangs on a star.

9. The angel who rolled back the stone from the tomb of Christ. See Matthew, 28:1-7.

I

If my body come from brutes, though somewhat finer than
their own,

I am heir, and this my kingdom. Shall the royal voice be mute?

15 No, but if the rebel subject seek to drag me from the throne,
Hold the scepter, Human Soul, and rule thy province of
the brute.

2

I have climbed to the snows of Age, and I gaze at a field in the
Past,

Where I sank with the body at times in the sloughs of a low
desire,

20 But I hear no yelp of the beast, and the Man is quiet at last
As he stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse of a height
that is higher.

1889

June Bracken and Heather

TO ———¹

There on the top of the down,
The wild heather round me and over me June's high blue,
When I looked at the bracken so bright and the heather so brown,
I thought to myself I would offer this book to you,

5 This, and my love together,
To you that are seventy-seven,
With a faith as clear as the heights of the June-blue heaven,
And a fancy as summer-new
As the green of the bracken amid the gloom of the heather.

1892

*From Idylls of the King**Dedication*¹

These to His Memory—since he held them dear,
Perchance as finding there unconsciously
Some image of himself—I dedicate,
I dedicate, I consecrate with tears—
These Idylls.

5 And indeed he seems to me
Scarce other than my king's ideal knight,
"Who revered his conscience as his king;

1. Addressed to Tennyson's wife as a dedication to a volume of poems.

1. Tennyson's dedication of his *Idylls* to Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, who had died in 1861, was more than a mere formality on the part

of the Poet Laureate. Because of his earnest dedication to duty, his statesmanship, his work for peace, Albert seemed to Tennyson to have been almost a modern reincarnation of King Arthur.

Whose glory was, redressing human wrong;
 Who spake no slander, no, nor listened to it;
 10 Who loved one only and who clave to her—"2
 Her—over all whose realms to their last isle,
 Commingled with the gloom of imminent war,
 The shadow of his loss drew like eclipse,
 Darkening the world. We have lost him; he is gone.
 15 We know him now; all narrow jealousies
 Are silent, and we see him as he moved,
 How modest, kindly, all-accomplished, wise,
 With what sublime repression of himself,
 And in what limits, and how tenderly;
 20 Not swaying to this faction or to that;
 Not making his high place the lawless perch
 Of winged ambitions, nor a vantage-ground
 For pleasure; but through all this tract of years
 Wearing the white flower of a blameless life,
 25 Before a thousand peering littlenesses,
 In that fierce light which beats upon a throne,
 And blackens every blot: for where is he,
 Who dares foreshadow for an only son
 A lovelier life, a more unstained, than his?
 30 Or how should England dreaming of *his* sons
 Hope more for these than some inheritance
 Of such a life, a heart, a mind as thine,
 Thou noble Father of her Kings to be,
 Laborious for her people and her poor—
 35 Voice in the rich dawn of an ampler day—
 Far-sighted summoner of War and Waste
 To fruitful strifes and rivalries of peace—
 Sweet nature gilded by the gracious gleam
 Of letters, dear to Science, dear to Art,
 40 Dear to thy land³ and ours, a Prince indeed,
 Beyond all titles, and a household name,
 Hereafter, through all times, Albert the Good.

Break not, O woman's-heart, but still endure;
 Break not, for thou art Royal, but endure,
 Remembering all the beauty of that star
 45 Which shone so close beside Thee that ye made
 One light together, but has passed and leaves
 The Crown a lonely splendor.

May all love,
 His love, unseen but felt, o'ershadow thee,
 50 The love of all thy sons encompass thee,
 The love of all thy daughters cherish thee,
 The love of all thy people comfort thee,
 Till God's love set thee at his side again!

1862

2. A paraphrase of King Arthur's words (*Idylls* XI.472) summarizing the ideals of the knights of

the Round Table.

3. Albert was a native of Saxe-Coburg in Germany.

A Dedication¹

Dear, near and true—no truer Time himself
 Can prove you, though he make you evermore
 Dearer and nearer, as the rapid of life
 Shoots to the fall—take this and pray that he
 5 Who wrote it, honoring your sweet faith in him,
 May trust himself; and after praise and scorn,
 As one who feels the immeasurable world,
 Attain the wise indifference of the wise;
 And after Autumn past—if left to pass
 10 His autumn into seeming-leafless days—
 Draw toward the long frost and longest night
 Wearing his wisdom lightly, like the fruit
 Which in our winter woodland looks a flower.

1864

I Stood on a Tower

I stood on a tower in the wet,
 And New Year and Old Year met,
 And winds were roaring and blowing;
 And I said, "O years, that meet in tears,
 5 Have ye aught that is worth the knowing?
 Science enough and exploring,
 Wanderers coming and going,
 Matter enough for deploring,
 But aught that is worth the knowing?"
 10 Seas at my feet were flowing,
 Waves on the shingle pouring,
 Old Year roaring and blowing,
 And New Year blowing and roaring.

1865

1868

The Silent Voices

When the dumb Hour, clothed in black,
 Brings the Dreams about my bed,
 Call me not so often back,
 Silent Voices of the dead,
 5 Toward the lowland ways behind me,
 And the sunlight that is gone!
 Call me rather, silent voices,
 Forward to the starry track
 Glimmering up the heights beyond me
 10 On, and always on!

1892

1. To the poet's wife, Emily.

St. Agnes' Eve¹

Deep on the convent roof the snows
 Are sparkling to the moon;
 My breath to heaven like vapor goes;
 May my soul follow soon!
 5 The shadows of the convent towers
 Slant down the snowy sward,
 Still creeping with the creeping hours
 That lead me to my Lord.
 Make Thou my spirit pure and clear
 10 As are the frosty skies,
 Or this first snowdrop of the year
 That in my bosom lies.

 As these white robes are soiled and dark,
 To yonder shining ground;
 15 As this pale taper's earthly spark,
 To yonder argent round;
 So shows my soul before the Lamb,
 My spirit before Thee;
 So in mine earthly house I am,
 20 To that I hope to be.
 Break up the heavens, O Lord! and far,
 Through all yon starlight keen,
 Draw me, thy bride, a glittering star,
 In raiment white and clean.

 25 He lifts me to the golden doors;
 The flashes come and go;
 All heaven bursts her starry floors,
 And strows her lights below,
 And deepens on and up! the gates
 30 Roll back, and far within
 For me the Heavenly Bridegroom waits,
 To make me pure of sin.
 The Sabbaths of Eternity,
 One Sabbath deep and wide—
 35 A light upon the shining sea—
 The Bridegroom with his bride!

1833

1836, 1842

You Ask Me, Why, Though Ill at Ease¹

You ask me, why, though ill at ease,
 Within this region I subsist,

1. The evening preceding January 21, St. Agnes's Day, honoring the patron saint of virgins. According to a legend (which Keats also used), a young girl might have a vision of her future bridegroom if she performed certain rituals on this wintry eve-

ning. As Tennyson said, "Here the legend is told by a nun," and the "Heavenly Bridegroom" is Christ.
1. Written at the time of the disturbances during and after the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832.

Whose spirits falter in the mist,
And languish for the purple seas.

5 It is the land that freemen till,
That sober-suited Freedom chose,
The land, where girt with friends or foes
A man may speak the thing he will;

A land of settled government,
10 A land of just and old renown,
Where Freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent;

Where faction seldom gathers head,
But, by degrees to fullness wrought,
15 The strength of some diffusive thought
Hath time and space to work and spread.

Should banded unions² persecute
Opinion, and induce a time
When single thought is civil crime,
20 And individual freedom mute,

Though power should make from land to land
The name of Britain trebly great—
Though every channel of the State
Should fill and choke with golden sand—

25 Yet waft me from the harbor-mouth,
Wild wind! I seek a warmer sky,
And I will see before I die
The palms and temples of the South.

1833

1842

Lines

Here³ often, when a child I lay reclined,
I took delight in this locality.
Here stood the infant Ilion of the mind,
And here the Grecian ships did seem to be.
The drain-cut levels of the marshy lea—
Gray sea banks and pale sunsets—dreary wind,
Dim shores, dense rains, and heavy-clouded sea!

1833

1850

2. Any organized political groups, not necessarily trade unions.

3. At Mablethorpe, on the Lincolnshire coast.

Sonnet¹

How thought you that this thing could captivate?
 What are those graces that could make her dear,
 Who is not worth the notice of a sneer
 To rouse the vapid devil of her hate?
 5 A speech conventional, so void of weight
 That after it has buzzed about one's ear,
 'Twere rich refreshment for a week to hear
 The dentist babble or the barber prate;

 A hand displayed with many a little art;
 10 An eye that glances on her neighbor's dress;
 A foot too often shown for my regard;
 An angel's form—a waiting-woman's² heart;
 A perfect-featured face, expressionless,
 Insipid, as the Queen upon a card.

1836

1931

Move Eastward, Happy Earth

Move eastward, happy earth, and leave
 Yon orange sunset waning slow;
 From fringes of the faded eve,
 O happy planet, eastward go,
 5 Till over thy dark shoulder glow
 Thy silver sister-world,³ and rise
 To glass herself in dewy eyes
 That watch me from the glen below.

 Ah, bear me with thee, smoothly borne,
 10 Dip forward under starry light,
 And move me to my marriage morn,
 And round again to happy night.

ca. 1836

1842

The Revenge¹

A BALLAD OF THE FLEET

I

At Flores in the Azores Sir Richard Grenville lay,
 And a pinnace, like a fluttered bird, came flying from far away:

1. Perhaps inspired by Tennyson's disillusioned feelings toward Rosa Baring, a beautiful girl of high social station in Somersby, for whom he had a short-lived infatuation.

2. Female servant's.

3. The planet Venus, or perhaps the moon, which

will be reflected in the eyes of the speaker's beloved.

1. Based on Sir Walter Raleigh's account of an engagement in 1591 off the coast of Flores, one of the islands of the Azores, in which five Spanish ships were sunk by the *Revenge* during a fifteen-hour battle.

“Spanish ships of war at sea! we have sighted fifty-three!”

Then sware Lord Thomas Howard: “’Fore God I am no coward;

- 5 But I cannot meet them here, for my ships are out of gear,
And the half my men are sick. I must fly, but follow quick.
We are six ships of the line; can we fight with fifty-three?”

2

Then spake Sir Richard Grenville: “I know you are no coward;
You fly them for a moment to fight with them again.

- 10 But I’ve ninety men and more that are lying sick ashore.
I should count myself the coward if I left them, my Lord Howard,
To these Inquisition dogs and the devildoms of Spain.”

3

So Lord Howard passed away with five ships of war that day,
Till he melted like a cloud in the silent summer heaven;

- 15 But Sir Richard bore in hand all his sick men from the land
Very carefully and slow,
Men of Bideford in Devon,
And we laid them on the ballast down below;
For we brought them all aboard,
20 And they blessed him in their pain, that they were not left
to Spain,
To the thumbscrew and the stake, for the glory of the Lord.

4

He had only a hundred seamen to work the ship and to fight,
And he sailed away from Flores till the Spaniard came in sight,
With his huge sea-castles heaving upon the weather bow.

- 25 “Shall we fight or shall we fly?
Good Sir Richard, tell us now,
For to fight is but to die!
There’ll be little of us left by the time this sun be set.”
And Sir Richard said again: “We be all good English men.
30 Let us bang these dogs of Seville, the children of the devil,
For I never turned my back upon Don or devil yet.”

5

Sir Richard spoke and he laughed, and we roared a hurrah,
and so

The little Revenge ran on sheer into the heart of the foe,
With her hundred fighters on deck, and her ninety sick below;

- 35 For half of their fleet to the right and half to the left were seen,
And the little Revenge ran on through the long sea lane
between.

6

Thousands of their soldiers looked down from their decks and
laughed,

Thousands of their seamen made mock at the mad little craft
Running on and on, till delayed

- 40 By their mountain-like San Philip that, of fifteen hundred tons,
And up-shadowing high above us with her yawning tiers of guns,
Took the breath from our sails, and we stayed.

7

And while now the great San Philip hung above us like a cloud
 Whence the thunderbolt will fall
 45 Long and loud,
 Four galleons drew away
 From the Spanish fleet that day,
 And two upon the larboard and two upon the starboard lay,
 And the battle thunder broke from them all.

8

50 But anon the great San Philip, she bethought herself and went,
 Having that within her womb that had left her ill content;
 For a dozen times they came with their pikes and musqueteers,
 And the rest they came aboard us, and they fought us hand
 to hand,
 And a dozen times we shook 'em off as a dog that shakes his ears
 55 When he leaps from the water to the land.

9

And the sun went down, and the stars came out far over the
 summer sea,
 But never a moment ceased the fight of the one and the fifty-three.
 Ship after ship, the whole night long, their high-built galleons came,
 Ship after ship, the whole night long, with her battle thunder and
 flame;
 60 Ship after ship, the whole night long, drew back with her dead and
 her shame.
 For some were sunk and many were shattered, and so could fight
 us no more—
 God of battles, was ever a battle like this in the world before?

10

For he said, "Fight on! fight on!"
 Though his vessel was all but a wreck;
 65 And it chanced that, when half of the short summer night was
 gone,
 With a grisly wound to be dressed he had left the deck,
 But a bullet struck him that was dressing it suddenly dead,
 And himself he was wounded again in the side and the head,
 And he said, "Fight on! fight on!"

11

70 And the night went down, and the sun smiled out far over the
 summer sea,
 And the Spanish fleet with broken sides lay round us all in
 a ring;
 But they dared not touch us again, for they feared that we still
 could sting,
 So they watched what the end would be.
 And we had not fought them in vain,
 75 But in perilous plight were we,
 Seeing forty of our poor hundred were slain,
 And half of the rest of us maimed for life
 In the crash of the cannonades and the desperate strife;

And the sick men down in the hold were most of them stark
 and cold,
 80 And the pikes were all broken or bent, and the powder was all of it
 spent;
 And the masts and the rigging were lying over the side;
 But Sir Richard cried in his English pride:
 "We have fought such a fight for a day and a night
 As may never be fought again!
 85 We have won great glory, my men!
 And a day less or more
 At sea or ashore,
 We die—does it matter when?
 Sink me the ship, Master Gunner—sink her, split her in twain!
 90 Fall into the hands of God, not into the hands of Spain!"

12

And the gunner said, "Aye, aye," but the seamen made reply:
 "We have children, we have wives,
 And the Lord hath spared our lives.
 We will make the Spaniard promise, if we yield, to let us go;
 95 We shall live to fight again and to strike another blow."
 And the lion there lay dying, and they yielded to the foe.

13

And the stately Spanish men to their flagship bore him then,
 Where they laid him by the mast, old Sir Richard caught at last,
 And they praised him to his face with their courtly foreign grace;
 100 But he rose upon their decks, and he cried:
 "I have fought for Queen and Faith like a valiant man and true;
 I have only done my duty as a man is bound to do.
 With a joyful spirit I Sir Richard Grenville die!"
 And he fell upon their decks, and he died.

14

105 And they stared at the dead that had been so valiant and true,
 And had holden the power and glory of Spain so cheap
 That he dared her with one little ship and his English few;
 Was he devil or man? He was devil for aught they knew,
 But they sank his body with honor down into the deep,
 110 And they manned the Revenge with a swarthier alien crew,
 And away she sailed with her loss and longed for her own;
 When a wind from the lands they had ruined awoke from sleep,
 And the water began to heave and the weather to moan,
 And or ever that evening ended a great gale blew,
 115 And a wave like the wave that is raised by an earthquake grew,
 Till it smote on their hulls and their sails and their masts and their
 flags,
 And the whole sea plunged and fell on the shot-shattered navy
 of Spain,
 And the little Revenge herself went down by the island crags
 To be lost evermore in the main.

The Kraken¹

Below the thunders of the upper deep,
 Far, far beneath in the abysmal sea,
 His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep
 The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee
 5 About his shadowy sides; above him swell
 Huge sponges of millennial growth and height;
 And far away into the sickly light,
 From many a wondrous grot and secret cell
 Unnumbered and enormous polypi;^o *octopuses*
 10 Winnow with giant arms the slumbering green.
 There hath he lain for ages, and will lie
 Battening upon huge sea worms in his sleep,
 Until the latter fire² shall heat the deep;
 Then once by man and angels to be seen,
 15 In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.

1830

The Eagle: A Fragment

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
 Close to the sun in lonely lands,
 Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

 The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls:
 5 He watches from his mountain walls,
 And like a thunderbolt he falls.

1851

*FROM THE PRINCESS*¹

Sweet and Low

Sweet and low, sweet and low,
 Wind of the western sea,
 Low, low, breathe and blow,
 Wind of the western sea!
 5 Over the rolling waters go,

1. A mythical sea beast of gigantic size.
 2. Fire that would finally consume the world (Revelation 16.8–9).
 1. *The Princess* (1847), a long narrative poem, contains interludes in which occasional songs are sung.

The six songs printed here, some of which first appeared in later editions of the poem, rank among the finest of Tennyson's lyrics, and various 19th- and 20th-century composers have set them to music.

Come from the dying moon, and blow,
 Blow him again to me;
 While my little one, while my pretty one, sleeps.

Sleep and rest, sleep and rest,
 10 Father will come to thee soon;
 Rest, rest, on mother's breast,
 Father will come to thee soon;
 Father will come to his babe in the nest,
 Silver sails all out of the west
 15 Under the silver moon;
 Sleep, my little one, sleep, my pretty one, sleep.

1849

1850

The Splendor Falls

The splendor falls on castle walls
 And snowy summits old in story;
 The long light shakes across the lakes,
 And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
 5 Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
 Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O, hark, O, hear! how thin and clear,
 And thinner, clearer, farther going!
 O, sweet and far from cliff and scar^o
 10 The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
 Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying,
 Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

mountainside

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
 They faint on hill or field or river;
 15 Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
 And grow forever and forever.
 Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
 And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

1850

Ask Me No More

Ask me no more: the moon may draw the sea;
 The cloud may stoop from heaven and take the shape,
 With fold to fold, of mountain or of cape;
 But O too fond, when have I answered thee?
 5 Ask me no more.

Ask me no more: what answer should I give?
 I love not hollow cheek or faded eye:

Yet, O my friend, I will not have thee die!
 Ask me no more, lest I should bid thee live;
 10 Ask me no more.

Ask me no more: thy fate and mine are sealed;
 I strove against the stream and all in vain;
 Let the great river take me to the main.
 No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield;
 15 Ask me no more.

1849

1850

Come Down, O Maid¹

Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height.
 What pleasure lives in height (the shepherd sang),
 In height and cold, the splendor of the hills?
 But cease to move so near the heavens, and cease
 5 To glide a sunbeam by the blasted pine,
 To sit a star upon the sparkling spire;
 And come, for Love is of the valley, come,
 For Love is of the valley, come thou down
 And find him; by the happy threshold, he,
 10 Or hand in hand with Plenty in the maize,
 Or red with spirted purple of the vats,
 Or foxlike in the vine; nor cares to walk
 With Death and Morning on the Silver Horns,^o *mountain peaks*
 Nor wilt thou snare him in the white ravine,
 15 Nor find him dropped upon the firths of ice,^o *glaciers*
 That huddling slant in furrow-cloven falls
 To roll the torrent out of dusky doors.
 But follow; let the torrent dance thee down
 To find him in the valley; let the wild
 20 Lean-headed eagles yelp alone, and leave
 The monstrous ledges there to slope, and spill
 Their thousand wreaths of dangling water-smoke,
 That like a broken purpose waste in air.
 So waste not thou, but come; for all the vales
 25 Await thee; azure pillars of the hearth²
 Arise to thee; the children call, and I
 Thy shepherd pipe, and sweet is every sound,
 Sweeter thy voice, but every sound is sweet;
 Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the lawn,
 30 The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
 And murmuring of innumerable bees.

1847

1. Written during Tennyson's visit to the Swiss Alps in 1846, after he had seen Mount Jungfrau

("The Maiden").

2. Columns of smoke from the houses in the valley.

Flower in the Crannied Wall

Flower in the crannied wall,
 I pluck you out of the crannies,
 I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
 5 Little flower—but if I could understand
 What you are, root and all, and all in all,
 I should know what God and man is.

1869

Sonnet

She took the dappled partridge flecked with blood,
 And in her hand the drooping pheasant bare,
 And by his feet she held the woolly hare,
 And like a master painting where she stood,
 5 Looked some new goddess of an English wood.
 Nor could I find an imperfection there,
 Nor blame the wanton act that showed so fair—
 To me whatever freak¹ she plays is good.
Hers is the fairest Life that breathes with breath,
 10 And *their* still plumes and azure eyelids closed
 Made quiet Death so beautiful to see
 That Death lent grace to Life and Life to Death
 And in one image Life and Death reposed,
 To make my love an Immortality.

ca. 1830

1931

From Maud¹

Part 1

6

* * *

5

Ah, what shall I be at fifty
 220 Should Nature keep me alive,
 If I find the world so bitter

1. Prank.

1. Tennyson described this experimental long poem as a “monodrama,” in which a speaker tells his story in a sequence of short lyrics, in varying meters—a method that requires the reader to fill in the events of the action on the evidence of the speaker’s shifting emotional states. The speaker is a young man, living alone in the country, whose

disillusionment after his father’s suicide has left him full of a bitterness that borders on madness. He is restored to sanity and intense happiness when he discovers that Maud, the beautiful daughter of a local landowner, accepts his love for her. Our selections focus on the stages of this love affair. In the early sections he is fearful of love itself (“And most of all would I flee from the cruel

When I am but twenty-five?
 Yet, if she were not a cheat,
 If Maud were all that she seemed,
 225 And her smile were all that I dreamed,²
 Then the world were not so bitter
 But a smile could make it sweet.

* * *

8

Perhaps the smile and tender tone
 Came out of her pitying womanhood,
 For am I not, am I not, here alone
 255 So many a summer since she died,
 My mother, who was so gentle and good?
 Living alone in an empty house,
 Here half-hid in the gleaming wood,
 Where I hear the dead at midday moan,
 260 And the shrieking rush of the wainscot mouse,
 And my own sad name in corners cried,
 When the shiver of dancing leaves is thrown
 About its echoing chambers wide,
 Till a morbid hate and horror have grown
 265 Of a world in which I have hardly mixed,
 And a morbid eating lichen fixed
 On a heart half turned to stone.

* * *

10

I have played with her when a child;
 She remembers it now we meet.
 Ah, well, well, well, I *may* be beguiled
 By some coquettish deceit.
 280 Yet, if she were not a cheat,
 And Maud were all that she seemed,
 And her smile had all that I dreamed,
 Then the world were not so bitter
 But a smile could make it sweet.

8

She came to the village church,
 And sat by a pillar alone;
 An angel watching an urn
 Wept over her, carved in stone;
 305 And once, but once, she lifted her eyes,

madness of love"), and he is suspicious that Maud is stony hearted and will make a fool of him. When she accepts his proposal, he is, at first, deliriously exultant but, later, serene and secure. Subsequent sections of the poem (not printed here) show how the resolution of his problems is shattered when he loses Maud after killing her brother in a duel.

Eventually he finds a fresh resolution by enlisting to fight against Russia in the Crimean War.

Tennyson called the poem "a little *Hamlet*, the history of a morbid, poetic soul, under the blighting influence of a recklessly speculative age."

2. On a previous day he had encountered Maud and was surprised by her smiling at him.

And suddenly, sweetly, strangely blushed
 To find they were met by my own;
 And suddenly, sweetly, my heart beat stronger
 And thicker, until I heard no longer
 310 The snowy-banded, dilettante,
 Delicate-handed priest intone;
 And thought, is it pride? and mused and sighed,
 "No surely, now it cannot be pride."

11

I

O let the solid ground
 Not fail beneath my feet
 400 Before my life has found
 What some have found so sweet;
 Then let come what come may,
 What matter if I go mad,
 I shall have had my day.

2

405 Let the sweet heavens endure,
 Not close and darken above me
 Before I am quite quite sure
 That there is one to love me;
 Then let come what come may
 410 To a life that has been so sad,
 I shall have had my day.

12

I

Birds in the high Hall-garden
 When twilight was falling,
 Maud, Maud, Maud, Maud,
 415 They were crying and calling.

2

Where was Maud? in our wood;
 And I, who else, was with her,
 Gathering woodland lilies,
 Myriads blow together.

3

420 Birds in our wood³ sang
 Ringing through the valleys,
 Maud is here, here, here
 In among the lilies.

3. The wood in the valley of the speaker's small country estate. Here the "little birds" (as Tennyson called them in a note) are responding, in a sort of

duet, to the caws of the rooks in the garden of Maud's family estate.

4

I kissed her slender hand,
 425 She took the kiss sedately;
 Maud is not seventeen,
 But she is tall and stately.

5

I to cry out on pride
 Who have won her favor!
 430 O Maud were sure of Heaven
 If lowliness⁴ could save her.

6

I know the way she went
 Home with her maiden posy,
 For her feet have touched the meadows
 435 And left the daisies rosy.⁵

7

Birds in the high Hall-garden
 Were crying and calling to her,
 Where is Maud, Maud, Maud?
 One is come to woo her.

8

440 Look, a horse at the door,
 And little King Charley snarling,⁶
 Go back, my lord, across the moor,
 You are not her darling.

16

* * *

3

Catch not my breath, O clamorous heart,
 Let not my tongue be a thrall to my eye,
 For I must tell her before we part,
 570 I must tell her, or die.⁷

18

I

I have led her home, my love, my only friend.
 600 There is none like her, none.
 And never yet so warmly ran my blood
 And sweetly, on and on
 Calming itself to the long-wished-for end.
 Full to the banks, close on the promised good.

4. Meekness.

5. As Tennyson explained: "If you tread on the daisy [English variety], it turns up a rosy underside."

6. Maud's dog snarls at the aristocratic visitor who

is the speaker's rival for Maud's hand.

7. He is about to propose to Maud, who will accept him.

2

605 None like her, none.
 Just now the dry-tongued laurels' pattering talk
 Seemed her light foot along the garden walk,
 And shook my heart to think she comes once more.
 But even then I heard her close the door;
 610 The gates of heaven are closed, and she is gone.

3

There is none like her, none,
 Nor will be when our summers have deceased.
 O, art thou⁸ sighing for Lebanon
 In the long breeze that streams to thy delicious East,
 615 Sighing for Lebanon,
 Dark cedar, though thy limbs have here increased,
 Upon a pastoral slope as fair,
 And looking to the South and fed
 With honeyed rain and delicate air,
 620 And haunted by the starry head
 Of her whose gentle will has changed my fate,
 And made my life a perfumed altar-flame;
 And over whom thy darkness must have spread
 With such delight as theirs of old, thy great
 625 Forefathers of the thornless garden, there
 Shadowing the snow-limbed Eve from whom she came?

4

Here will I lie, while these long branches sway,
 And you fair stars that crown a happy day
 Go in and out as if at merry play,
 630 Who am no more so all forlorn
 As when it seemed far better to be born
 To labor and the mattock-hardened hand
 Than nursed at ease and brought to understand
 A sad astrology,⁹ the boundless plan
 635 That makes you tyrants in your iron skies,
 Innumerable, pitiless, passionless eyes,
 Cold fires, yet with power to burn and brand
 His nothingness into man.

5

But now shine on, and what care I,
 640 Who in this stormy gulf have found a pearl
 The countercharm of space and hollow sky,¹
 And do accept my madness, and would die
 To save from some slight shame one simple girl?—

6

645 Would die, for sullen-seeming Death may give
 More life to Love than is or ever was

8. The vast old cedar tree in Maud's garden, addressed in a fourteen-line question about its ancestry on Mount Lebanon in Syria and its ultimate ancestry in Eden (cf. Song of Solomon 5.15).

9. Astronomy.

1. Something that calms his former fears of the vastness of space revealed by modern astronomy.

In our low world, where yet 'tis sweet to live.
 Let no one ask me how it came to pass;
 It seems that I am happy, that to me
 A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass,
 650 A purer sapphire melts into the sea.

7

Not die, but live a life of truest breath,
 And teach true life to fight with mortal wrongs.
 O, why should Love, like men in drinking songs,
 Spice his fair banquet with the dust of death?²
 655 Make answer, Maud my bliss,
 Maud made my Maud by that long loving kiss,
 Life of my life, wilt thou not answer this?
 "The dusky strand of Death inwoven here
 With dear Love's tie, makes Love himself more dear."

8

660 Is that enchanted moan only the swell
 Of the long waves that roll in yonder bay?
 And hark the clock within, the silver knell
 Of twelve sweet hours that passed in bridal white,
 And died to live, long as my pulses play;
 665 But now by this my love has closed her sight
 And given false death³ her hand, and stolen away
 To dreamful wastes where footless fancies dwell
 Among the fragments of the golden day.
 May nothing there her maiden grace affright!
 670 Dear heart, I feel with thee the drowsy spell.
 My bride to be, my evermore delight,
 My own heart's heart, my ownest own, farewell;
 It is but for a little space I go.
 And ye⁴ meanwhile far over moor and fell
 675 Beat to the noiseless music of the night!
 Has our whole earth gone nearer to the glow
 Of your soft splendors that you look so bright?
 I have climbed nearer out of lonely hell.
 Beat, happy stars, timing with things below,
 680 Beat with my heart more blest than heart can tell,
 Blest, but for some dark undercurrent woe
 That seems to draw—but it shall not be so;
 Let all be well, be well.

* * *

2. I.e., why do we try to intensify the experience of love by linking it with death?

3. Sleep.

4. I.e., the stars.

Part 2

4⁵

1

O that 'twere possible
 After long grief and pain
 To find the arms of my true love
 Round me once again!

2

145 When I was wont to meet her
 In the silent woody places
 By the home that gave me birth,
 We stood tranced in long embraces
 Mixt with kisses sweeter sweeter
 150 Than anything on earth.

3

A shadow flits before me,
 Not thou, but like to thee:
 Ah Christ, that it were possible
 For one short hour to see
 155 The souls we loved, that they might tell us
 What and where they be.

4

It leads me forth at evening,
 It lightly winds and steals
 In a cold white robe before me,
 160 When all my spirit reels
 At the shouts, the leagues of lights
 And the roaring of the wheels.

* * *

1855

In the Valley of Caunteretz¹

All along the valley, stream that flashest white,
 Deepening thy voice with the deepening of the night,²
 All along the valley, where thy waters flow,
 I walked with one I loved two and thirty years ago.

5. This excerpt was originally a separate lyric, written in 1833–34 and published in 1837. Tennyson wrote that a friend “begged me to weave a story round this poem, and so *Maud* came into being.” The lyric expresses the speaker’s longing for reunion with Maud, who has died by this point in the poem.

1. A valley in the French Pyrenees visited by Tennyson and Hallam in 1830 and revisited by Tennyson in 1861. Hallam himself had earlier

described Caunteretz as a place of “waters in all shapes,” including “the impetuous cataract, fraying its way” and the “little blue lake whose deep, cold waters are fed eternally from neighboring glaciers” (cf. Swinburne, *The Lake of Gaube*). Tennyson said of this poem: “I like the little piece as well as anything I have written.”

2. Lady Tennyson’s journal reports how the noisy mountain stream affected her husband: “We had noticed the deepening of the Voice in the night.”

- 5 All along the valley, while I walked today,
 The two and thirty years were a mist that rolls away;
 For all along the valley, down thy rocky bed,
 Thy living voice to me was as the voice of the dead,
 And all along the valley, by rock and cave and tree,
 10 The voice of the dead was a living voice to me.

1861

1864

FROM IDYLLS OF THE KING

Pelleas and Ettarre¹

- King Arthur made new knights to fill the gap
 Left by the Holy Quest;² and as he sat
 In hall at old Caerleon,³ the high doors
 Were softly sundered, and through these a youth,
 5 Pelleas, and the sweet smell of the fields
 Passed, and the sunshine came along with him.

- “Make me thy knight, because I know, Sir King,
 All that belongs to knighthood, and I love.”
 Such was his cry: for having heard the King
 10 Had let proclaim a tournament—the prize
 A golden circlet and a knightly sword,
 Full fain⁴ had Pelleas for his lady won
 The golden circlet, for himself the sword:
 And there were those who knew him near the King,
 15 And promised for him: and Arthur made him knight.

- And this new knight, Sir Pelleas of the isles—
 But lately come to his inheritance,
 And lord of many a barren isle was he—
 Riding at noon, a day or twain before,
 20 Across the forest called of Dean,⁵ to find
 Caerleon and the King, had felt the sun
 Beat like a strong knight on his helm, and reeled
 Almost to falling from his horse; but saw
 Near him a mound of even-sloping side,
 25 Whereon a hundred stately beeches grew,
 And here and there great hollies under them;
 But for a mile all round was open space,
 And fern and heath: and slowly Pelleas drew
 To that dim day, then binding his good horse

1. The ninth book of the *Idylls*. Most of the story, except the ending, is based on Malory's *Morte Darthur* (4.21–24). Tennyson said of it: “Almost the saddest of the *Idylls*. The breaking of the storm.”

2. In the preceding idyll, *The Holy Grail*, many knights had misguidedly deserted the Round Table

to seek the Holy Grail.

3. The ancient village in Monmouthshire, near Wales, where Arthur often held his court.

4. Very gladly.

5. Extensive tract in the river Wye region adjacent to Monmouthshire.

30 To a tree, cast himself down; and as he lay
 At random looking over the brown earth
 Through that green-glooming twilight of the grove,
 It seemed to Pelleas that the fern without
 Burned as a living fire of emeralds,
 35 So that his eyes were dazzled looking at it.
 Then o'er it crossed the dimness of a cloud
 Floating, and once the shadow of a bird
 Flying, and then a fawn; and his eyes closed.
 And since he loved all maidens, but no maid
 40 In special, half-awake he whispered, "Where?
 O where? I love thee, though I know thee not.
 For fair thou art and pure as Guinevere,
 And I will make thee with my spear and sword
 As famous—O my Queen, my Guinevere,
 45 For I will be thine Arthur when we meet."

Suddenly wakened with a sound of talk
 And laughter at the limit of the wood,
 And glancing through the hoary boles, he saw,
 Strange as to some old prophet might have seemed
 50 A vision hovering on a sea of fire,
 Damsels in divers colors like the cloud
 Of sunset and sunrise, and all of them
 On horses, and the horses richly trapped⁶
 Breast-high in that bright line of bracken stood:
 55 And all the damsels talked confusedly,
 And one was pointing this way, and one that,
 Because the way was lost.

And Pelleas rose,
 And loosed his horse, and led him to the light,
 There she that seemed the chief among them said,
 60 "In happy time behold our pilot-star!
 Youth, we are damsels-errant,⁷ and we ride,
 Armed as ye see, to tilt against the knights
 There at Caerleon, but have lost our way:
 To right? to left? straight forward? back again?
 Which? tell us quickly."

Pelleas gazing thought,
 65 "Is Guinevere herself so beautiful?"
 For large her violet eyes looked, and her bloom
 A rosy dawn kindled in stainless heavens,
 And round her limbs, mature in womanhood;
 70 And slender was her hand and small her shape;
 And but for those large eyes, the haunts of scorn,
 She might have seemed a toy to trifle with,
 And pass and care no more. But while he gazed
 The beauty of her flesh abashed the boy,

6. Covered with beautiful cloths.

7. Wandering in search of adventure.

75 As though it were the beauty of her soul:
 For as the base man, judging of the good,
 Puts his own baseness in him by default
 Of will and nature, so did Pelleas lend
 All the young beauty of his own soul to hers,
 80 Believing her; and when she spake to him,
 Stammered, and could not make her a reply.
 For out of the waste islands had he come,
 Where saving his own sisters he had known
 Scarce any but the women of his isles,
 85 Rough wives, that laughed and screamed against
 the gulls,
 Makers of nets, and living from the sea.

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

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

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

"Lead then," she said; and through the woods they
 went.
 And while they rode, the meaning in his eyes,
 105 His tenderness of manner, and chaste awe,
 His broken utterances and bashfulness,
 Were all a burthen to her, and in her heart
 She muttered, "I have lighted on a fool,
 Raw, yet so stale!" But since her mind was bent
 110 On hearing, after trumpet blown, her name
 And title, "Queen of Beauty," in the lists
 Cried—and beholding him so strong, she thought
 That peradventure he will fight for me,
 And win the circlet: therefore flattered him,
 115 Being so gracious, that he wellnigh deemed
 His wish by hers was echoed; and her knights
 And all her damsels too were gracious to him,
 For she was a great lady.

And when they reached
 Caerleon, ere they passed to lodging, she,
 120 Taking his hand, "O the strong hand," she said,
 "See! look at mine! but wilt thou fight for me,
 And win me this fine circlet, Pelleas,
 That I may love thee?"

Then his helpless heart
 Leaped, and he cried, "Ay! wilt thou if I win?"
 125 "Ay, that will I," she answered, and she laughed,
 And straitly nipped the hand, and flung it from her;
 Then glanced askew at those three knights of hers,
 Till all her ladies laughed along with her.

"O happy world," thought Pelleas, "all, meseems,
 130 Are happy; I the happiest of them all."
 Nor slept that night for pleasure in his blood,
 And green wood-ways, and eyes among the leaves;
 Then being on the morrow knighted, sware
 To love one only. And as he came away,

135 The men who met him rounded on their heels
 And wondered after him, because his face
 Shone like the countenance of a priest of old
 Against the flame about a sacrifice
 Kindled by fire from heaven: so glad was he.

140 Then Arthur made vast banquets, and strange knights
 From the four winds came in: and each one sat,
 Though served with choice from air, land, stream, and sea,
 Oft in mid-banquet measuring with his eyes
 His neighbor's make and might: and Pelleas looked
 145 Noble among the noble, for he dreamed
 His lady loved him, and he knew himself
 Loved of the King: and him his new-made knight
 Worshipped, whose lightest whisper moved him more
 Than all the ranged reasons of the world.

150 Then blushed and brake the morning of the jousts,
 And this was called "The Tournament of Youth":
 For Arthur, loving his young knight, withheld
 His older and his mightier from the lists,
 That Pelleas might obtain his lady's love,
 155 According to her promise, and remain
 Lord of the tourney. And Arthur had the jousts
 Down in the flat field by the shore of Usk⁸
 Holden: the gilded parapets were crowned
 With faces, and the great tower filled with eyes
 160 Up to the summit, and the trumpets blew.
 There all day long Sir Pelleas kept the field

8. River near Caerleon.

With honor: so by that strong hand of his
The sword and golden circlet were achieved.

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

Then at Caerleon for a space—her look
170 Bright for all others, cloudier on her knight—
Lingered Ettarre: and seeing Pelleas droop,
Said Guinevere, “We marvel at thee much,
O damsel, wearing this unsunny face
To him who won thee glory!” And she said,
175 “Had ye not held your Lancelot in your bower,
My Queen, he had not won.” Whereat the Queen,
As one whose foot is bitten by an ant,
Glanced down upon her, turned and went her way.

But after, when her damsels, and herself,
180 And those three knights all set their faces home,
Sir Pelleas followed. She that saw him cried,
“Damsels—and yet I should be shamed to say it—
I cannot bide Sir Baby. Keep him back
Among yourselves. Would rather that we had
185 Some rough old knight who knew the worldly way,
Albeit grizzlier than a bear, to ride
And jest with: take him to you, keep him off,
And pamper him with papmeat, if ye will,
Old milky fables of the wolf and sheep,
190 Such as the wholesome mothers tell their boys.
Nay, should ye try him with a merry one
To find his mettle, good: and if he fly us,
Small matter! let him.” This her damsels heard,
And mindful of her small and cruel hand,
195 They, closing round him through the journey home,
Acted her hest,⁹ and always from her side
Restrained him with all manner of device,
So that he could not come to speech with her.
And when she gained her castle, upsprang the bridge,
200 Down rang the grate of iron through the groove,
And he was left alone in open field.
“These be the ways of ladies,” Pelleas thought,
“To those who love them, trials of our faith.
Yea, let her prove me to the uttermost,
205 For loyal to the uttermost am I.”
So made his moan; and, darkness falling, sought
A priory not far off, there lodges, but rose
With morning every day, and, moist or dry,
Full-armed upon his charger all day long.

210 Sat by the walls, and no one opened to him.
 And this persistence turned her scorn to wrath.
 Then calling her three knights, she charged them, "Out!
 And drive him from the walls." And out they came,
 But Pelleas overthrew them as they dashed
 215 Against him one by one; and these returned,
 But still he kept his watch beneath the wall.

Thereon her wrath became a hate; and once,
 A week beyond, while walking on the walls
 With her three knights, she pointed downward, "Look,
 220 He haunts me—I cannot breathe—besieges me;
 Down! strike him! put my hate into your strokes,
 And drive him from my walls." And down they went,
 And Pelleas overthrew them one by one;
 And from the tower above him cried Ettarre,
 "Bind him, and bring him in."

225 He heard her voice;
 Then let the strong hand, which had overthrown
 Her minion-knights,¹ by those he overthrew
 Be bounden straight, and so they brought him in.

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

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

And after this, a week beyond, again
 She called them, saying, "There he watches yet,
 255 There like a dog before his master's door!

1. "Minion": compliant and obsequious dependent of a ruler.

Kicked, he returns: do ye not hate him, ye?
 Ye know yourselves: how can ye bide at peace,
 Affronted with his fulsome innocence?
 Are ye but creatures of the board and bed,
 260 No men to strike? Fall on him all at once,
 And if ye slay him I reckon not: if ye fail,
 Give ye the slave mine order to be bound,
 Bind him as heretofore, and bring him in:
 It may be ye shall slay him in his bonds."
 265 She spake; and at her will they couched their spears,
 Three against one: and Gawain² passing by,
 Bound upon solitary adventure, saw
 Low down beneath the shadow of those towers
 A villainy, three to one: and through his heart
 270 The fire of honor and all noble deeds
 Flashed, and he called, "I strike upon thy side—
 The caitiffs!" "Nay," said Pelleas, "but forbear;
 He needs no aid who doth his lady's will."

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

And Pelleas overthrew them, one to three;
 280 And they rose up, and bound, and brought him in.
 Then first her anger, leaving Pelleas, burned
 Full on her knights in many an evil name
 Of craven, weakling, and thrice-beaten hound:
 "Yet, take him, ye that scarce are fit to touch,
 285 Far less to bind, your victor, and thrust him out,
 And let who will release him from his bonds.
 And if he comes again"—there she brake short;
 And Pelleas answered, "Lady, for indeed
 I loved you and I deemed you beautiful,
 290 I cannot brook to see your beauty marred
 Through evil spite: and if ye love me not,
 I cannot bear to dream you so forsworn:
 I had liefer ye were worthy of my love,
 Than to be loved again of you—farewell;
 295 And though ye kill my hope, not yet my love,
 Vex not yourself: ye will not see me more."

While thus he spake, she gazed upon the man
 Of princely bearing, though in bonds, and thought,
 "Why have I pushed him from me? this man loves,
 300 If love there be: yet him I loved not. Why?
 I deemed him fool? yea, so? or that in him
 A something—was it nobler than myself?—
 Seemed my reproach? He is not of my kind.

2. A nephew of King Arthur and one of his chief knights.

He could not love me, did he know me well.
 305 Nay, let him go—and quickly.” And her knights
 Laughed not, but thrust him bounden out of door.

Forth sprang Gawain, and loosed him from his bonds,
 And flung them o’er the walls; and afterward,
 Shaking his hands, as from a lazar’s³ rag,
 310 “Faith of my body,” he said, “and art thou not—
 Yea thou art he, whom late our Arthur made
 Knight of his table; yea and he that won
 The circlet? wherefore hast thou so defamed
 Thy brotherhood in me and all the rest,
 315 As let these caitiffs on thee work their will?”

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

And Gawain answered kindly though in scorn,
 “Why, let my lady bind me if she will,
 And let my lady beat me if she will:
 But an⁴ she send her delegate to thrall
 These fighting hands of mine—Christ kill me then
 330 But I will slice him handless by the wrist,
 And let my lady sear the stump for him,
 Howl as he may. But hold me for your friend:
 Come, ye know nothing: here I pledge my troth,
 Yea, by the honor of the Table Round,
 335 I will be leal⁵ to thee and work thy work,
 And tame thy jailing princess to thine hand.
 Lend me thine horse and arms, and I will say
 That I have slain thee. She will let me in
 To hear the manner of thy fight and fall;
 340 Then, when I come within her counsels, then
 From prime to vespers⁶ will I chant thy praise
 As prowest⁷ knight and truest lover, more
 Than any have sung thee living, till she long
 To have thee back in lusty life again,
 345 Not to be bound, save by white bonds and warm,
 Dearer than freedom. Wherefore now thy horse
 And armor: let me go: be comforted:
 Give me three days to melt her fancy, and hope
 The third night hence will bring thee news of gold.”

3. Leper’s.

4. If.

5. Loyal.

6. I.e., from dawn to sunset.

7. Bravest or noblest.

350 Then Pelleas lent his horse and all his arms,
 Saving the goodly sword, his prize, and took
 Gawain's, and said, "Betray me not, but help—
 Art thou not he whom men call light-of-love?"
 "Ay," said Gawain, "for women be so light."
 355 Then bounded forward to the castle walls,
 And raised a bugle hanging from his neck,
 And winded it, and that so musically
 That all the old echoes hidden in the wall
 Rang out like hollow woods at hunting-tide.

360 Up ran a score of damsels to the tower;
 "Avaunt," they cried, "our lady loves thee not."
 But Gawain lifting up his vizer said,
 "Gawain am I, Gawain of Arthur's court,
 And I have slain this Pelleas whom ye hate:
 365 Behold his horse and armor. Open gates,
 And I will make you merry."

And down they ran,
 Her damsels, crying to their lady, "Lo!
 Pelleas is dead—he told us—he that hath
 His horse and armor: will ye let him in?"
 370 He slew him! Gawain, Gawain of the court,
 Sir Gawain—there he waits below the wall,
 Blowing his bugle as who should say him nay."

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

So those three days, aimless about the land,
 Lost in a doubt, Pelleas wandering
 Waited, until the third night brought a moon
 385 With promise of large light on woods and ways.
 Hot was the night and silent; but a sound
 Of Gawain ever coming, and this lay^s—
 Which Pelleas had heard sung before the Queen,
 And seen her sadden listening—vexed his heart,
 390 And marred his rest—"A worm within the rose."

"A rose, but one, none other rose had I,
 A rose, one rose, and this was wondrous fair,
 One rose, a rose that gladdened earth and sky,

One rose, my rose, that sweetened all mine air—
 395 I cared not for the thorns; the thorns were there.

“One rose, a rose to gather by and by,
 One rose, a rose, to gather and to wear,
 No rose but one—what other rose had I?
 One rose, my rose; a rose that will not die,—
 400 He dies who loves it,—if the worm be there.”

This tender rhyme, and evermore the doubt,
 “Why lingers Gawain with his golden news?”
 So shook him that he could not rest, but rode
 Ere midnight to her walls, and bound his horse
 405 Hard by the gates. Wide open were the gates,
 And no watch kept; and in through these he passed,
 And heard but his own steps, and his own heart
 Beating, for nothing moved but his own self,
 And his own shadow. Then he crossed the court,
 410 And spied not any light in hall or bower,
 But saw the postern portal also wide
 Yawning, and up a slope of garden, all
 Of roses white and red, and brambles mixed
 And overgrowing them, went on, and found,
 415 Here too, all hushed below the mellow moon,
 Save that one rivulet from a tiny cave
 Came lightening downward, and so spilled itself
 Among the roses, and was lost again.

Then was he ware of three pavilions reared
 420 Above the bushes, gilden-peaked: in one,
 Red after revel, droned her lurdane⁹ knights
 Slumbering, and their three squires across
 their feet:
 In one, their malice on the placid lip
 Frozen by sweet sleep, four of her damsels lay:
 425 And in the third, the circlet of the jousts
 Bound on her brow, were Gawain and Ettarre.¹

Back, as a hand that pushes through the leaf
 To find a nest and feels a snake, he drew:
 Back, as a coward slinks from what he fears
 430 To cope with, or a traitor proven, or hound
 Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame
 Creep with his shadow through the court again,
 Fingering at his sword-handle until he stood
 There on the castle-bridge once more, and thought,
 435 “I will go back, and slay them where they lie.”
 And so went back, and seeing them yet in sleep

9. Heavy and stupid.

1. Cf. Malory, *Morte Darthur* 4.23: “And then it was in the month of May, that she and sir Gawaine went out of the castle and supped in a pavilion, and there was a bed made, and there sir Gawaine and the lady Ettarre went to bed together; and in

another pavilion she laid her damsels; and in the third pavilion laid part of her knights: for then she had no dread nor fear of sir Pelles. And there sir Gawaine lay with her, doing his pleasure in that pavilion, two days and two nights, against the faithful promise that he made to sir Pelles.”

Said, "Ye, that so dishallow the holy sleep,
 Your sleep is death," and drew the sword, and thought,
 "What! slay a sleeping knight? the King hath bound
 440 And sworn me to this brotherhood"; again,
 "Alas that ever a knight should be so false."
 Then turned, and so returned, and groaning laid
 The naked sword athwart their naked throats,
 There left it, and them sleeping; and she lay,
 445 The circlet of the tourney round her brows,
 And the sword of the tourney across her throat.

And forth he passed, and mounting on his horse
 Stared at her towers that, larger than themselves
 In their own darkness, thronged into the moon.
 450 Then crushed the saddle with his thighs, and clenched
 His hands, and maddened with himself and moaned:

"Would they have risen against me in their blood
 At the last day? I might have answered them
 Even before high God. O towers so strong,
 455 Huge, solid, would that even while I gaze
 The crack of earthquake shivering to your base
 Split you, and Hell burst up your harlot roofs
 Bellowing, and charred you through and through within,
 Black as the harlot's heart—hollow as a skull!
 460 Let the fierce east scream through your eyelet-holes,
 And whirl the dust of harlots round and round
 In dung and nettles! hiss, snake—I saw him there—
 Let the fox bark, let the wolf yell. Who yells
 Here in the still sweet summer night, but I—
 465 I, the poor Pelleas whom she called her fool?
 Fool, beast—he, she, or I? myself most fool;
 Beast too, as lacking human wit—disgraced,
 Dishonored all for trial of true love—
 Love?—we be all alike: only the King
 470 Hath made us fools and liars. O noble vows!
 O great and sane and simple race of brutes
 That own² no lust because they have no law!
 For why should I have loved her to my shame?
 I loathe her, as I loved her to my shame.
 475 I never loved her, I but lusted for her—

Away—"

He dashed the rowel into his horse,
 And bounded forth and vanished through the night.

Then she, that felt the cold touch on her throat,
 Awaking knew the sword, and turned herself
 480 To Gawain: "Liar, for thou hast not slain
 This Pelleas! here he stood, and might have slain

Me and thyself." And he that tells the tale
 Says that her ever-veering fancy turned
 To Pelleas, as the one true knight on earth,
 485 And only lover; and through her love her life
 Wasted and pined, desiring him in vain.

But he by wild and way, for half the night,
 And over hard and soft, striking the sod
 From out the soft, the spark from off the hard,
 490 Rode till the star above the wakening sun,
 Beside that tower where Percivale was cowed,³
 Glanced from the rosy forehead of the dawn.
 For so the words were flashed into his heart
 He knew not whence or wherefore: "O sweet star,
 495 Pure on the virgin forehead of the dawn!"
 And there he would have wept, but felt his eyes
 Harder and drier than a fountain bed
 In summer: thither came the village girls
 And lingered talking, and they come no more
 500 Till the sweet heavens have filled it from the heights
 Again with living waters in the change
 Of seasons: hard his eyes; harder his heart
 Seemed; but so weary were his limbs, that he,
 Gasping, "Of Arthur's hall am I, but here,
 505 Here let me rest and die," cast himself down,
 And gulped his griefs in inmost sleep; so lay,
 Till shaken by a dream, that Gawain fired
 The hall of Merlin, and the morning star
 Reeled in the smoke, brake into flame, and fell.

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

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

Then fared it with Sir Pelleas as with one
 Who gets a wound in battle, and the sword
 520 That made it plunges through the wound again,
 And pricks it deeper: and he shrank and wailed,
 "Is the Queen false?" and Percivale was mute.
 "Have any of our Round Table held their vows?"
 And Percivale made answer not a word.
 525 "Is the King true?" "The King!" said Percivale.
 "Why then let man couple at once with wolves.
 What! art thou mad?"

3. Percivale, one of the most devout of Arthur's knights, had left the Round Table to become a monk.

But Pelleas, leaping up,
 Ran through the doors and vaulted on his horse
 And fled: small pity upon his horse had he,
 530 Or on himself, or any, and when he met
 A cripple, one that held a hand for alms—
 Hunched as he was, and like an old dwarf-elm
 That turns its back on the salt blast, the boy
 Paused not, but overrode him, shouting, "False,
 535 And false with Gawain!" and so left him bruised
 And battered, and fled on, and hill and wood
 Went ever streaming by him till the gloom,
 That follows on the turning of the world,
 Darkened the common path: he twitched the reins,
 540 And made his beast that better knew it, swerve
 Now off it and now on; but when he saw
 High up in heaven the hall that Merlin built,
 Blackening against the dead-green stripes of even,
 "Black nest of rats," he groaned, "ye build too high."

545 Not long thereafter from the city gates
 Issued Sir Lancelot riding airily,
 Warm with a gracious parting from the Queen,
 Peace at his heart, and gazing at a star
 And marveling what it was: on whom the boy,
 550 Across the silent seeded meadow-grass
 Borne, clashed: and Lancelot, saying, "What name hast thou
 That ridest here so blindly and so hard?"
 "No name, no name," he shouted, "a scourge am I
 To lash the treasons of the Table Round."
 555 "Yea, but thy name?" "I have many names," he cried:
 "I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,
 And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast
 And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen."
 "First over me," said Lancelot, "shalt thou pass."
 560 "Fight therefore," yelled the youth, and either knight
 Drew back a space, and when they closed, at once
 The weary steed of Pelleas floundering flung
 His rider, who called out from the dark field,
 "Thou art false as Hell: slay me: I have no sword."
 565 Then Lancelot, "Yea, between thy lips—and sharp;
 But here will I disedge⁴ it by thy death."
 "Slay then," he shrieked, "my will is to be slain,"
 And Lancelot, with his heel upon the fallen,
 Rolling his eyes, a moment stood, then spake:
 570 "Rise, weakling; I am Lancelot; say thy say."
 And Lancelot slowly rode his warhorse back
 To Camelot, and Sir Pelleas in brief while
 Caught his unbroken limbs from the dark field,
 And followed to the city. It chanced that both
 575 Brake into hall together, worn and pale.
 There with her knights and dames was Guinevere.

4. I.e., blunt your sharp tongue.

Full wonderingly she gazed on Lancelot
 So soon returned, and then on Pelleas, him
 Who had not greeted her, but cast himself
 580 Down on a bench, hard-breathing. "Have ye fought?"
 She asked of Lancelot. "Ay, my Queen," he said.
 "And thou hast overthrown him?" "Ay, my Queen."
 Then she, turning to Pelleas, "O young knight,
 Hath the great heart of knighthood in thee failed
 585 So far thou canst not bide, unfrowardly,
 A fall from *him*?" Then, for he answered not,
 "Or hast thou other griefs? If I, the Queen,
 May help them, loose thy tongue, and let me know."
 But Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce
 590 She quailed; and he, hissing "I have no sword,"
 Sprang from the door into the dark.⁵ The Queen
 Looked hard upon her lover, he on her;
 And each foresaw the dolorous day to be:
 And all talk died, as in a grove all song
 595 Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey;
 Then a long silence came upon the hall,
 And Modred⁶ thought, "The time is hard at hand."

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The Passing of Arthur

That story which the bold Sir Bedivere,
 First made and latest left of all the knights,
 Told, when the man was no more than a voice
 In the white winter of his age, to those
 5 With whom he dwelt, new faces, other minds.

For on their march to westward, Bedivere,
 Who slowly paced among the slumbering host,
 Heard in his tent the moanings of the King:

"I found Him in the shining of the stars,
 10 I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,
 But in His ways with men I find Him not.
 I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
 O me! for why is all around us here
 As if some lesser god had made the world,
 15 But had not force to shape it as he would,

5. Malory's version ends differently. His Pelleas is rescued from despair by a damsel of the lake who, by enchantment, contrives a punishment for the haughty Ettarre. "So the lady Ettarre died for sorrow, and the damsel of the lake rejoiced sir Pelles, and loved together during their lives." Tennyson's Pelleas, as we learn in *The Last Tournament* (the idyll following *Pelleas and Ettarre*), is so disillusioned by the corruptions he has discovered that he

establishes a mock court of his own where his followers indulge in drunken revelry. Through a messenger he reports to Arthur: "Tell thou the King . . . / My tower is full of harlots, like his court, / But mine are worthier, seeing they profess / To be none other than themselves."

6. Arthur's nephew, who leads the forces that revolt against the king.

Till the High God behold it from beyond,
 And enter it, and make it beautiful?
 Or else as if the world were wholly fair,
 But that these eyes of men are dense and dim,
 20 And have not power to see it as it is:
 Perchance, because we see not to the close;—
 For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
 And have but stricken with the sword in vain;
 And all whereon I leaned in wife and friend
 25 Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
 Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
 My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death:
 Nay—God my Christ—I pass but shall not die.”

Then, ere that last weird battle in the west,
 30 There came on Arthur sleeping, Gawain killed
 In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
 Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
 Went shrilling. “Hollow, hollow all delight!
 Hail, King! tomorrow thou shalt pass away.
 35 Farewell! there is an isle of rest for thee.
 And I am blown along a wandering wind,
 And hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.”
 And fainter onward, like wild birds that change
 Their season in the night and wail their way
 40 From cloud to cloud, down the long wind the dream
 Shrilled; but in going mingled with dim cries
 Far in the moonlit haze among the hills,
 As of some lonely city sacked by night,
 When all is lost, and wife and child with wail
 45 Pass to new lords; and Arthur woke and called,
 “Who spake? A dream. O light upon the wind,
 Thine, Gawain, was the voice—are these dim cries
 Thine? or doth all that haunts the waste and wild
 Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?”

50 This heard the bold Sir Bedivere and spake:
 “O me, my King, let pass whatever will,
 Elves, and the harmless glamor of the field;
 But in their stead thy name and glory cling
 To all high places like a golden cloud
 55 Forever: but as yet thou shalt not pass.
 Light was Gawain in life, and light in death
 Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man;
 And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise—
 I hear the steps of Modred in the west,
 60 And with him many of thy people, and knights
 Once thine, whom thou hast loved, but grosser grown
 Than heathen, spitting at their vows and thee.
 Right well in heart they know thee for the King.
 Arise, go forth and conquer as of old.”

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

Then rose the King and moved his host by night,
 80 And ever pushed Sir Modred, league by league,
 Back to the sunset bound of Lyonesse—
 A land of old upheaven from the abyss
 By fire, to sink into the abyss again;
 Where fragments of forgotten peoples dwelled,
 85 And the long mountains ended in a coast
 Of ever-shifting sand, and far away
 The phantom circle of a moaning sea.
 There the pursuer could pursue no more,
 And he that fled no further fly the King;
 90 And there, that day when the great light of heaven
 Burned at his lowest in the rolling year,
 On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
 Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
 Like this last, dim, weird battle of the west.
 95 A deathwhite mist slept over sand and sea:
 Whereof the chill, to him who breathed it, drew
 Down with his blood, till all his heart was cold
 With formless fear; and even on Arthur fell
 Confusion, since he saw not whom he fought.
 100 For friend and foe were shadows in the mist,
 And friend slew friend not knowing whom he slew;
 And some had visions out of golden youth,
 And some beheld the faces of old ghosts
 Look in upon the battle; and in the mist
 105 Was many a noble deed, many a base,
 And chance and craft and strength in single fights,
 And ever and anon with host to host
 Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
 Shield-breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
 110 Of battleaxes on shattered helms, and shrieks
 After the Christ, of those who falling down
 Looked up for heaven, and only saw the mist;
 And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
 Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
 115 Sweat, writhings, anguish, laboring of the lungs

In that close mist, and cryings for the light,
Moans of the dying, and voices of the dead.

120 Last, as by some one deathbed after wail
Of suffering, silence follows, or through death
Or deathlike swoon, thus over all that shore,
Save for some whisper of the seething seas,
A dead hush fell; but when the dolorous day
Grew drearier toward twilight falling, came
A bitter wind, clear from the North, and blew
125 The mist aside, and with that wind the tide
Rose, and the pale King glanced across the field
Of battle: but no man was moving there;
Nor any cry of Christian heard thereon,
Nor yet of heathen; only the wan wave
130 Brake in among dead faces, to and fro
Swaying the helpless hands, and up and down
Tumbling the hollow helmets of the fallen,
And shivered brands that once had fought with Rome,
And rolling far along the gloomy shores
135 The voice of days of old and days to be.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,
And whiter than the mist that all day long
Had held the field of battle was the King:

140 “Hearest thou this great voice that shakes the world,
And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move,
And beats upon the faces of the dead,
My dead, as though they had not died for me?—
O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fallen
Confusion, till I know not what I am,
145 Nor whence I am, nor whether I be King.
Behold, I seem but King among the dead.”

150 Then spake the bold Sir Bedivere: “My King,
King everywhere! and so the dead have kings,
There also will I worship thee as King.
Yet still thy life is whole, and still I live
Who love thee; but who hates thee, he that brought
The heathen back among us, yonder stands,
Modred, unharmed, the traitor of thine house.”

155 Then spake the King: “My house hath been my doom.
But call not thou this traitor of my house
Who hath but dwelled beneath one roof with me.
My house are rather they who sware my vows,
Yea, even while they brake them, owned me King.
And well for thee, saying in my dark hour,
160 When all the purport of my throne hath failed,
That quick or dead thou holdest me for King.
King am I, whatsoever be their cry;

And one last act of kinghood shalt thou see
 Yet, ere I pass." And uttering this the King
 165 Made at the man: then Modred smote his liege
 Hard on that helm which many a heathen sword
 Had beaten thin; while Arthur at one blow,
 Striking the last stroke with Excalibur,
 Slew him, and all but slain himself, he fell.

170 So all day long the noise of battle rolled
 Among the mountains by the winter sea;
 Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,
 Had fallen in Lyonesse about their lord,
 King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
 175 The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
 And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
 A broken chancel with a broken cross,
 That stood on a dark strait of barren land:
 On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
 180 Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
 "The sequel of today unsolders all
 The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
 Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
 185 They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
 Shall never more, at any future time,
 Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
 Walking about the gardens and the halls
 Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
 190 I perish by this people which I made,
 Though Merlin sware that I should come again
 To rule once more; but, let what will be, be,
 I am so deeply smitten through the helm
 That without help I cannot last til morn.
 195 Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
 Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
 In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
 Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
 200 Holding the sword—and how I rowed across
 And took it, and have worn it, like a king;
 And, wheresoever I am sung or told
 In aftertime, this also shall be known:
 But now delay not: take Excalibur,
 205 And fling him far into the middle mere:
 Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word."

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
 "It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
 Aidless, alone, and smitten through the helm—
 210 A little thing may harm a wounded man;
 Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
 Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word."

So saying, from the ruined shrine he stepped,
 And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
 215 Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
 Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
 Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
 By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
 Came on the shining levels of the lake.

220 There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
 And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
 Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
 And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:
 For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
 225 Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
 Of subtlest jewelry. He gazed so long
 That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
 This way and that dividing the swift mind,
 In act to throw: but at the last it seemed
 230 Better to leave Excalibur concealed
 There in the many-knotted waterflags,
 That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
 So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
 235 "Hast thou performed my mission which I gave?
 What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
 "I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
 And the wild water lapping on the crag."

240 To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
 "Thou hast betrayed thy nature and thy name.
 Not rendering true answer, as beseemed
 Thy fēalty, nor like a noble knight:
 For surer sign had followed, either hand,
 245 Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
 This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
 Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,
 As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
 I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word."

250 Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
 Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
 Counting the dewy pebbles, fixed in thought;
 But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
 How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
 255 His palms together, and he cried aloud:

"And if indeed I cast the brand away,
 Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
 Should thus be lost forever from the earth,

Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
 260 What good should follow this, if this were done?
 What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,
 Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
 Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
 An act unprofitable, against himself?
 265 The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
 What record, or what relic of my lord
 Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
 And rumors of a doubt? But were this kept,
 Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
 270 Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
 Saying, 'King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
 Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
 Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
 Upon the hidden bases of the hills.'
 275 So might some old man speak in the aftertime
 To all the people, winning reverence.
 But now much honor and much fame were lost."

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
 And hid Excalibur the second time,
 280 And so strode back slow to the wounded king.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
 "What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
 "I heard the water lapping on the crag,
 285 And the long ripple washing in the reeds."

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
 "Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
 Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
 Authority forgets a dying king,
 290 Laid widowed of the power in his eye
 That bowed the will. I see thee what thou art,
 For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
 In whom should meet the offices of all,
 Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
 295 Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
 Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
 Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
 And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
 But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
 300 I will arise and slay thee with my hands."

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
 And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
 Among the bullrush beds, and clutched the sword,
 And strongly wheeled and threw it. The great brand
 305 Made lightnings in the splendor of the moon,

And flashing round and round and whirled in an arch,
 Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
 Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
 By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.
 310 So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur:
 But ere he dipped the surface, rose an arm
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
 And caught him by the hilt, and brandished him
 Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
 315 And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
 "Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
 Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
 320 "Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
 Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
 Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
 Not though I live three lives of mortal men,
 So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
 325 Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
 But when I looked again, behold an arm,
 Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
 That caught him by the hilt, and brandished him
 Three times, and drew him under in the mere."

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

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

But, as he walked, King Arthur panted hard,
 345 Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
 When all the house is mute. So sighed the King,
 Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick!
 I fear it is too late, and I shall die."
 But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
 350 Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walked,
 Larger than human on the frozen hills.
 He heard the deep behind him, and a cry

Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
 Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves
 355 And barren chasms, and all to left and right
 The bare black cliff clanged round him, as he based
 His feet on just of slippery crag that rang
 Sharp-smitten with the dint of armèd heels—
 And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
 360 And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
 Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
 Beneath them; and descending they were ware
 That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
 365 Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
 Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
 A cry that shivered to the tingling stars,
 And, as it were one voice, an agony
 Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
 370 All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
 Or hath come, since the making of the world.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whereat he slowly turned and slowly clomb
 The last hard footstep of that iron crag;
 Thence marked the black hull moving yet, and cried,
 "He passes to be King among the dead,
 450 And after healing of his grievous wound
 He comes again; but—if he come no more—

O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,
 Who shrieked and wailed, the three whereat we gazed
 On that high day, when, clothed with living light,
 455 They stood before his throne in silence, friends
 Of Arthur, who should help him at his need?"

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

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

1833–69

1869

Northern Farmer¹

New Style

I

Doesn't thou 'ear my 'erse's² legs, as they canters awaäy?
 Proputty,³ proputty, proputty—that's what I 'ears 'em saäy.
 Proputty, proputty, proputty—Sam, thou's an ass for thy paaïns:
 Their's moor sense i' one o' 'is legs, nor in all thy braaïns.

2

5 Woä—theer's a crow⁴ to pluck wi' tha, Sam: yon's parson's 'ouse—
 Doesn't thou know that a man mun be eäther a man or a mouse?
 Time to think on it then; for thou'll be twenty to weeäk.⁵
 Proputty, proputty—woä then woä—let ma 'ear mysèn⁶ speäk.

3

10 Me an' thy muther, Sammy, 'as beän a-talkin' o' thee;
 Thou's beän talkin' to muther, an' she beän a tellin' it me.
 Thou'll not marry for munny—thou's sweet upo' parson's lass—
 Noä—thou'll marry for luvv—an' we boäth on us thinks tha an ass.

1. This monologue exemplifies the diversity of Tennyson's talents. A passionate attachment to land and property, which was portrayed sympathetically by Wordsworth in *Michael*, is here represented humorously. The harsh common sense of the farmer's attitude toward love and marriage is reinforced by his jaw-breaking north English dialect.

This is the second of a pair of monologues in dialect. In the first, *Northern Farmer: Old Style*, the

speaker is a bailiff who has spent his life supervising the farmlands of a wealthy squire. In the second, the "new style" farmer is himself an independent landowner.

2. Horse's.

3. Property.

4. Crow.

5. This week.

6. Myself.

4

- Seeäd her todaäy goä by—Saäint's-daäy—they was ringing the bells.
 She's a beauty thou thinks—an' soä is scoors o' gells,⁷
 15 Them as 'as munny an' 'all—wot's a beauty?—the flower as blaws.
 But propuppy, propuppy sticks, an' propuppy, propuppy graws.

5

- Do'ant be stunt:⁸ taäke time; I knaws what maäkes tha sa mad.
 Warn't I craäzed fur the lasses mysèn when I wur a lad?
 But I knawed a Quaäker feller as often 'as towd⁹ ma this:
 20 "Doänt thou marry for munny, but goä wheer munny is!"

6

An' I went wheer munny war; an' thy muther coom to 'and,
 Wi' lots o' munny laaïd by, an' a nicetish bit o' land.
 Maäybe she warn't a beauty:—I niver giv it a thowt—
 But warn't she as good to cuddle an' kiss as a lass as 'ant nowt?¹

7

- 25 Parson's lass 'ant nowt, an' she weänt 'a nowt² when 'e's deäd,
 Mun be a guvness,³ lad, or summut, and addle⁴ her breäd:
 Why? fur 'e's nobbut⁵ a curate, an' weänt niver get hissèn clear,
 An' 'e maäde the bed as 'e ligs on afoor 'e coomed to the shere.⁶

8

- 30 An' thin 'e coomed to the parish wi' lots o' Varsity debt,
 Stook to his taaïl they did, an' 'e 'ant got shut on 'em⁷ yet.
 An' 'e ligs on 'is back i' the grip,⁸ wi' noan to lend 'im a shuvv,
 Woorse nor a far-weltered yowe:⁹ fur, Sammy, 'e married fur luvv.

9

- Luvv? what's luvv? thou can luvv thy lass an' 'er munny too,
 Maakin' 'em goä together, as they've good right to do.
 35 Couldn' I luvv thy muther by cause o' 'er munny laaïd by?
 Naäy—fur I luvved 'er a vast sight moor fur it: reäson why.

10

- Ay an' thy muther says thou wants to marry the lass,
 Cooms of a gentleman burn:¹ an' we boäth on us think tha an ass.
 Woä then, propuppy, wiltha?—an ass as near as mays nowt²—
 40 Woä then, wiltha? dangtha!—the bees is as fell as owt.³

11

Breäk me a bit o' the esh⁴ for his 'eäd, lad, out o' the fence!
 Gentleman burn! what's gentleman burn? is it shillins an' pence?
 Propuppy, propuppy's ivrything 'ere, an', Sammy, I'm blest
 If it isn't the saäme oop yonder, fur them as 'as it's the best.

7. Scores of girls.

8. Stubborn.

9. Told.

1. Has nothing.

2. Won't have anything.

3. Must be a governess.

4. Earn.

5. Nothing but.

6. Shire. "Ligs": lies.

7. Rid of them.

8. Ditch.

9. Ewe lying on her back.

1. Born.

2. Makes nothing.

3. The flies are as mean as anything.

12

45 Tis'n them as 'as munny as breäks into 'ouses an' steäls,
 Them as 'as coäts to their backs an' taäkes their regular meäls.
 Noä, but it's them as niver knaws wheer a meäl's to be 'ad.
 Taäke my word for it, Sammy, the poor in a loomp is bad.

13

Them or thir feythers, tha sees, mun 'a beän a laäzy lot,
 50 Fur work mun 'a gone to the gittin' whiniver munny was got.
 Feyther 'ad ammost nowt; leästways 'is munny was 'id.
 But 'e tued an' moiled⁵ 'issèn deäd, an' 'e died a good un, 'e did.

14

Loök thou theer wheer Wrigglesby beck⁶ cooms out by the 'ill!
 Feyther run oop⁷ to the farm, an' I runs oop to the mill;
 55 An' I'll run oop to the brig,⁸ an' that thou'll live to see;
 And if thou marries a good un I'll læve the land to thee.

15

Thim's my noätions, Sammy, wheerby I meäns to stick;
 But if thou marries a bad un, I'll læve the land to Dick.—
 Coom oop, propuppy, propuppy—that's what I 'ears 'im saäy—
 60 Propuppy, propuppy, propuppy—canter an' canter awaäy.

1865

1869

To Virgil

*Written at the Request of the Mantuans¹ for the
 Nineteenth Centenary of Virgil's Death*

1

Roman Virgil, thou that singest
 Ilion's lofty temples robed in fire,
 Ilion falling, Rome arising,
 wars, and filial faith, and Dido's pyre;²

2

Landscape-lover, lord of language
 more than he that sang the "Works and Days,"³
 All the chosen coin of fancy
 flashing out from many a golden phrase;

3

5 Thou that singest wheat and woodland,
 tilth and vineyard, hive and horse and herd;

4. A branch of ash leaves (to keep the flies off the horse's head).

5. Toiled and drudged.

6. Brook.

7. I.e., father's property ran up.

8. Bridge.

1. Inhabitants of Mantua, the city near Virgil's

birthplace.

2. The allusions in this stanza are to incidents in Virgil's *Aeneid*, especially the fall of Troy (Ilion).

3. Hesiod, a Greek poet, whose *Works and Days* anticipated Virgil's *Georgics* in its pictures of farm life.

All the charm of all the Muses
often flowering in a lonely word;

4

Poet of the happy Tityrus⁴
piping underneath his beechen bowers;
Poet of the poet-satyr⁵
whom the laughing shepherd bound with flowers;

5

Chanter of the Pollio,⁶ glorying
in the blissful years again to be,
Summers of the snakeless meadow,
10 unlaborious earth and oarless sea;

6

Thou that seest Universal
Nature moved by Universal Mind;
Thou majestic in thy sadness
at the doubtful doom of human kind;

7

Light among the vanished ages;
star that gildest yet this phantom shore;
Golden branch⁷ amid the shadows,
kings and realms that pass to rise no more;

8

15 Now thy Forum roars no longer,
fallen every purple Caesar's dome—
Though thine ocean-roll of rhythm
sound forever of Imperial Rome—

9

Now the Rome of slaves hath perished,
and the Rome of freemen⁸ holds her place,
I, from out the Northern Island
sundered once from all the human race,

10

I salute thee, Mantovano,⁹
I that loved thee since my day began,
20 Wielder of the stateliest measure
ever molded by the lips of man.

1882

1882

4. A shepherd in Virgil's *Eclogue* 1.5. Silenus, in *Eclogue* 6.6. A friend of Virgil's who is celebrated in *Eclogue* 4.

7. A golden bough enabled Aeneas to enter the

world of the shades. Cf. *Aeneid* 6.208ff.

8. Italy had only recently been liberated and unified.

9. Mantuan.

“Frater Ave atque Vale”¹

Row us out from Desenzano,² to your Sirmione row!
 So they rowed, and there we landed—“O venusta Sirmio!”
 There to me through all the groves of olive in the summer glow,
 There beneath the Roman ruin where the purple flowers grow,
 5 Came that “Ave atque Vale” of the Poet’s hopeless woe,
 Tenderest of Roman poets nineteen hundred years ago,
 “Frater Ave atque Vale”—as we wandered to and fro
 Gazing at the Lydian³ laughter of the Garda Lake below
 Sweet Catullus’s all-but-island olive-silvery Sirmio!

1880

1883

The Dawn

“You are but children.”
 —EGYPTIAN PRIEST TO SOLOON

Red of the Dawn!
 Screams of a babe in the red-hot palms of a Moloch¹ of Tyre,
 Man with his brotherless dinner on man in the tropical wood,
 Priests in the name of the Lord passing souls through fire to the fire,
 5 Head-hunters and boats of Dahomey² that float upon human blood!

Red of the Dawn!
 Godless fury of peoples, and Christless frolic of kings,
 And the bolt of war dashing down upon cities and blazing farms,
 For Babylon was a child newborn, and Rome was a babe in arms,
 10 And London and Paris and all the rest are as yet but in leading strings.

Dawn not Day,
 While scandal is mouthing a bloodless name at *her* cannibal feast,
 And rake-ruined bodies and souls go down in a common wreck,
 And the Press of a thousand cities is prized for it smells of the beast,
 15 Or easily violates virgin Truth for a coin or a check.

Dawn not Day!
 Is it Shame, so few should have climbed from the dens in the level below,
 Men, with a heart and a soul, no slaves of a four-footed will?

1. “Brother, hail and farewell,” a line from an elegy by the Roman poet Catullus on the death of his brother (101.10). Tennyson himself had recently lost his brother Charles.

2. A town on Lake Garda in Italy, which Tennyson visited in 1880. “Sirmione” is a beautiful peninsula jutting into the lake, on which Catullus had his summer home. Catullus’ poem in honor of the locality includes the phrase “*O venusta Sirmio!*” (“O lovely Sirmio!”).

3. The Etruscans, who settled near Lake Garda, were thought to be descended from the Lydians of Asia Minor.

1. A god to whom children were sacrificed as burnt offerings.

2. West African country in which the custom of human sacrifice may have persisted in the 19th century. In 1870, Tennyson reported in a conversation: “On the accession of a king in Dahomey, enough women victims were killed to float a small canoe with their blood.” In 1892, after a war, Dahomey became a French colony.

But if twenty million of summers are stored in the sunlight still,
 20 We are far from the noon of man, there is time for the race to grow.

Red of the Dawn!

Is it turning a fainter red? So be it, but when shall we lay
 The Ghost of the Brute that is walking and haunting us yet, and be free?
 In a hundred, a thousand winters? Ah, what will *our* children be?
 25 The men of a hundred thousand, a million summers away?

1892

Crossing the Bar

Sunset and evening star,
 And one clear call for me!
 And may there be no moaning of the bar,
 When I put out to sea,
 5 But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
 Too full for sound and foam,
 When that which drew from out the boundless deep
 Turns again home.
 Twilight and evening bell,
 10 And after that the dark!
 And may there be no sadness of farewell,
 When I embark;
 For though from out our bourne of Time and Place
 The flood may bear me far,
 15 I hope to see my Pilot face to face
 When I have crossed the bar.

1889

1889