

In this Idyll the author does not appear at his best; although there is much to commend, the poem falls below the high standard set by the poet in preceding idylls. It is fresh and animated in tone, and harmonizes well with its general position and design. It contains many fine descriptions, which are admirable specimens of scene painting. The descriptions of Arthur's city and the mystic gate, the meeting with Merlin, the warriors who guard the river, and finally the encounter with Death are excellent. We are indebted to Tennyson also for his happy use of fine old English words and expressions. The scenes between Gareth and his mother, however, are much too long and tedious. We cannot reconcile our æsthetic sense to the incredible kitchen part of the story. The coarse taunts of Lynette are hardly in keeping with the delicate songs she sings, and the refinement and sentiment she displays at times. The verse often seems cramped for want of necessary conjunctions, while here and there are interspersed lines of a redundant nature. The frequent alliteration and play upon words palls on the ear, and at times the poet indulges in excessive reiteration. On the whole, however, the fine inventions, the vivid pictures, and the richness of expression throw a magical glamour over the poem, which raises it at once above the commonplace.

GARETH AND LYNETTE.



THE last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,
 And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring
 Stared at the spate. A slender-shafted pine
 Lost footing, fell, and so was whirl'd away.
 "How he went down," said Gareth, "as a false knight 5
 Or evil king before my lance, if lance
 Were mine to use — O senseless cataract,
 Bearing all down in thy precipitancy —
 And yet thou art but swollen with cold snows
 And mine is living blood: thou dost His will, 10
 The Maker's, and not knowest, and I that know,
 Have strength and wit, in my good mother's hall
 Linger with vacillating obedience,
 Prison'd, and kept and coax'd and whistled to —
 Since the good mother holds me still a child! 15
 Good mother is bad mother unto me!
 A worse were better; yet no worse would I.
 Heaven yield her for it, but in me put force
 To weary her ears with one continuous prayer,
 Until she let me fly discaged to sweep 20
 In ever-highering eagle-circles up
 To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop
 Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,
 A knight of Arthur, working out his will,
 To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain, when he came 25

With Modred hither in the summer-time,
 Ask'd me to tilt with him, the proven knight.
 Modred for want of worthier was the judge.
 Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,
 'Thou hast half prevail'd against me,' said so — he — 30
 Tho' Modred biting his thin lips was mute,
 For he is alway sullen: what care I?"

" And Gareth went, and hovering round her chair
 Ask'd, "Mother, tho' ye count me still the child,
 Sweet mother, do ye love the child?" She laugh'd, 35
 "Thou art but a wild-goose to question it."
 "Then, mother, an ye love the child," he said,
 "Being a goose and rather tame than wild,
 Hear the child's story." "Yea, my well-beloved,
 An't were but of the goose and golden eggs." 40

12 And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes:
 "Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine
 Was finer gold than any goose can lay;
 For this an eagle, a royal eagle, laid 45
 Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm
 As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.
 And there was ever haunting round the palm
 A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw
 The splendor sparkling from aloft, and thought,
 'An I could climb and lay my hand upon it, 50
 Then were I wealthier than a leash of kings.'
 But ever when he reach'd a hand to climb,
 One that had loved him from his childhood caught
 And stay'd him, 'Climb not lest thou break thy neck,
 I charge thee by my love,' and so the boy, 55
 Sweet mother, neither clomb nor brake his neck,
 But brake his very heart in pining for it,
 And past away."

13 To whom the mother said,
 1 "True love, sweet son, had risk'd himself and climb'd,
 And handed down the golden treasure to him." 60

2 And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes:
 "Gold? said I gold? — ay then, why he, or she,
 Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world
 Had ventured — *had* the thing I spake of been 65
 Mere gold — but this was all of that true steel
 Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,
 And lightnings play'd about it in the storm,
 And all the little fowl were flurried at it,
 And there were cries and clashings in the nest,
 That sent him from his senses: let me go." 70

3 Then Bellicent bemoan'd herself and said
 "Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness?
 Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth
 Lies like a log, and all but smoulder'd out!
 For ever since when traitor to the King 75
 He fought against him in the barons' war,
 And Arthur gave him back his territory,
 His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there
 A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburiable,
 No more; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows. 80
 And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,
 Albeit neither loved with that full love
 I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love.
 Stay therefore thou; red berries charm the bird,
 And thee, mine innocent, the jousts, the wars, 85
 Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang
 Of wrench'd or broken limb — an often chance
 In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,
 Frights to my heart; but stay: follow the deer
 By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns; 90

So make thy manhood mightier day by day;
 Sweet is the chase: and I will seek thee out
 Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace
 Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year,
 Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness
 I know not thee, myself, nor anything.
 Stay, my best son! ye are yet more boy than man."

Then Gareth: "An ye hold me yet for child,
 Hear yet once more the story of the child.
 For, mother, there was once a king, like ours.
 The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,
 Ask'd for a bride; and thereupon the king
 Set two before him. One was fair, strong, arm'd —
 But to be won by force — and many men
 Desired her; one, good lack, no man desired.
 And these were the conditions of the king:
 That save he won the first by force, he needs
 Must wed that other, whom no man desired,
 A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile
 That evermore she long'd to hide herself,
 Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye —
 Yea — some she cleaved to, but they died of her.
 And one — they call'd her Fame; and one — O mother,
 How can ye keep me tether'd to you? — Shame.
 Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.
 Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,
 Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King —
 Else, wherefore born?"

To whom the mother said:
 "Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,
 Or will not deem him, wholly proven King —
 Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King
 When I was frequent with him in my youth,

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And heard him kingly speak, and doubted him
 No more than he, himself; but felt him mine,
 Of closest kin to me: yet — wilt thou leave
 Thine easeful bidding here, and risk thine all,
 Life, limbs, for one that is not proven King?
 Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth
 Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son."

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And Gareth answer'd quickly: "Not an hour,
 So that ye yield me — I will walk thro' fire,
 Mother, to gain it — your full leave to go.
 Not proven, who swept the dust of ruin'd Rome
 From off the threshold of the realm, and crush'd
 The idolaters, and made the people free?
 Who should be king save him who makes us free?"

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So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain
 To break him from the intent to which he grew,
 Found her son's will unwaveringly one,
 She answer'd craftily: "Will ye walk thro' fire?
 Who walks thro' fire will hardly heed the smoke.
 Ay, go then, an ye must: only one proof,
 Before thou ask the King to make thee knight,
 Of thine obedience and thy love to me,
 Thy mother, — I demand."

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And Gareth cried:
 "A hard one, or a hundred, so I go.
 Nay — quick! the proof to prove me to the quick!"

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But slowly spake the mother looking at him:
 "Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,
 And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks
 Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,
 And those that hand the dish across the bar.

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Nor shalt thou tell thy name to any one.
And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day."

10 For so the Queen believed that when her son
Beheld his only way to glory lead 155
Low down thro' villain kitchen-vassalage,
Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud
To pass thereby; so should he rest with her,
Closed in her castle from the sound of arms. 160

Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied:
"The thrall in person may be free in soul,
And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I,
And, since thou art my mother, must obey.
I therefore yield me freely to thy will; 165
For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself
To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knives;
Nor tell my name to any — no, not the King."

Gareth awhile linger'd. The mother's eye
Full of the wistful fear that he would go, 170
And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turn'd,
Perplex'd his outward purpose, till an hour
When, waken'd by the wind which with full voice
Swept bellowing thro' the darkness on to dawn,
He rose, and out of slumber calling two 175
That still had tended on him from his birth,
Before the wakeful mother heard him, went.

The three were clad like tillers of the soil.
Southward they set their faces. The birds made
Melody on branch and melody in mid air. 180
The damp hill-slopes were quicken'd into green,
And the live green had kindled into flowers,
For it was past the time of Easter-day.

So, when their feet were planted on the plain
That broaden'd toward the base of Camelot, 185
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn
Rolling her smoke about the royal mount,
That rose between the forest and the field.
At times the summit of the high city flash'd;
At times the spires and turrets half-way down 190
Prick'd thro' the mist; at times the great gate shone
Only, that open'd on the field below:
Anon, the whole fair city had disappear'd.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,
One crying, "Let us go no further, lord: 195
Here is a city of enchanters, built
By fairy kings." The second echo'd him,
"Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home
To northward, that this king is not the King,
But only changeling out of Fairyland, 200
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery
And Merlin's glamour." Then the first again,
"Lord, there is no such city anywhere,
But all a vision."

21 Gareth answer'd them
With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow 205
In his own blood, his pryncedom, youth, and hopes,
To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea;
So push'd them all unwilling toward the gate.
And there was no gate like it under heaven.
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined 210
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
The Lady of the Lake stood; all her dress
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretch'd under all the cornice and upheld: 215

And drops of water fell from either hand ;
 And down from one a sword was hung, from one
 A censer, either worn with wind and storm ;
 And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish ;
 And in the space to left of her, and right, 220
 Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,
 New things and old co-twisted, as if Time
 Were nothing, so inveterately that men
 Were giddy gazing there ; and over all
 High on the top were those three queens, the friends 225
 Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.

3 Then those with Gareth for so long a space
 Stared at the figures that at last it seem'd
 The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings
 Began to move, seethe, twine, and curl : they call'd 230
 To Gareth, "Lord, the gateway is alive."

4 And Gareth likewise on them fixt his eyes
 So long that even to him they seem'd to move.
 Out of the city a blast of music peal'd.
 Back from the gate started the three, to whom 235
 From out thereunder came an ancient man,
 Long-bearded, saying, "Who be ye, my sons ?"

5 Then Gareth : "We be tillers of the soil,
 Who leaving share in furrow come to see
 The glories of our King : but these, my men,— 240
 Your city moved so weirdly in the mist —
 Doubt if the King be king at all, or come
 From Fairyland ; and whether this be built
 By magic, and by fairy kings and queens ;
 Or whether there be any city at all, 245
 Or all a vision : and this music now
 Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth."

6 Then that old Seer made answer, playing on him
 And saying : "Son, I have seen the good ship sail
 Keel upward, and mast downward, in the heavens, 250
 And solid turrets topsy-turvy in the air :
 And here is truth ; but an it please thee not,
 Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.
 For truly, as thou sayest, a fairy king
 And fairy queens have built the city, son ; 255
 They came from out a sacred mountain cleft
 Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,
 And built it to the music of their harps.
 And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
 For there is nothing in it as it seems 260
 Saving the King ; tho' some there be that hold
 The King a shadow, and the city real :
 Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
 Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become
 A thrall to his enchantments, for the King 265
 Will bind thee by such vows as is a shame
 A man should not be bound by, yet the which
 No man can keep ; but, so thou dread to swear,
 Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide
 Without, among the cattle of the field. 270
 For an ye heard a music, like enow
 They are building still, seeing the city is built
 To music, therefore never built at all,
 And therefore built for ever."

7 Gareth spake
 Anger'd : "Old master, reverence thine own beard 275
 That looks as white as utter truth, and seems
 Wellnigh as long as thou art statured tall !
 Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been
 To thee fair-spoken ?"

But the Seer replied:
 "Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards:
 'Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
 Elusion, and occasion, and evasion?'
 I mock thee not but as thou mockest me,
 And all that see thee, for thou art not who
 Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art.
 And now thou goest up to mock the King,
 Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie."

Unmockingly the mocker ending here
 Turn'd to the right, and past along the plain;
 Whom Gareth looking after said; "My men,
 Our one white lie sits like a little ghost
 Here on the threshold of our enterprise.
 Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I:
 Well, we will make amends."

With all good cheer
 He spake and laugh'd, then enter'd with his twain
 Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces
 And stately, rich in emblem and the work
 Of ancient kings who did their days in stone;
 Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court,
 Knowing all arts, had touch'd, and everywhere,
 At Arthur's ordinance, tipt with lessening peak
 And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven.
 And ever and anon a knight would pass
 Outward, or inward to the hall: his arms
 Clash'd; and the sound was good to Gareth's ear.
 And out of bower and casement shyly glanced
 Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love;
 And all about a healthful people slept
 As in the presence of a gracious king.

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Then into hall Gareth ascending heard
 A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld
 Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall
 The splendor of the presence of the King
 Throned, and delivering doom — and look'd no
 more —

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But felt his young heart hammering in his ears
 And thought, "For this half-shadow of a lie
 The truthful King will doom me when I speak."
 Yet pressing on, tho' all in fear to find
 Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one
 Nor other, but in all the listening eyes
 Of those tall knights that ranged about the throne
 Clear honor shining like the dewy star
 Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure
 Affection, and the light of victory,
 And glory gain'd, and evermore to gain.

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Then came a widow crying to the King:
 "A boon, Sir King? Thy father, Uther, reft
 From my dead lord a field with violence;
 For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd gold,
 Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes,
 We yielded not; and then he reft us of it
 Perforce and left us neither gold nor field."

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Said Arthur, "Whether would ye? gold or
 field?"

To whom the woman weeping, "Nay, my lord,
 The field was pleasant in my husband's eye."

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And Arthur: "Have thy pleasant field again,
 And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,
 According to the years. No boon is here,
 But justice, so thy say be proven true.

Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did
Would shape himself a right!" 340

And while she past,
Came yet another widow crying to him:
"A boon, Sir King! Thine enemy, King, am I.
With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord,
A knight of Uther in the barons' war, 345
When Lot and many another rose and fought
Against thee, saying thou wert basely born.
I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.
Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son
Thrall'd in his castle, and hath starved him dead, 350
And standeth seized of that inheritance
Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.
So, tho' I scarce can ask it thee for hate,
Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,
Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for my son." 355

Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him,
"A boon, Sir King! I am her kinsman, I.
Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man."

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried,
"A boon, Sir King! even that thou grant her none,
This railer, that hath mock'd thee in full hall —
None; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag." 360

But Arthur: "We sit King, to help the wrong'd
Thro' all our realm. The woman loves her lord.
Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates! 365
The kings of old had doom'd thee to the flames;
Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead,
And Uther slit thy tongue: but get thee hence —
Lest that rough humor of the kings of old

Return upon me! Thou that art her kin, 370
Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not,
But bring him here, that I may judge the right,
According to the justice of the King:
Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King
Who lived and died for men, the man shall die." 375

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,
A name of evil savor in the land,
The Cornish king. In either hand he bore
What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines
A field of charlock in the sudden sun 380
Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,
Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,
Delivering that his lord, the vassal king,
Was ev'n upon his way to Camelot;
For having heard that Arthur of his grace 385
Had made his goodly cousin Tristram knight,
And, for himself was of the greater state,
Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord
Would yield him this large honor all the more;
So pray'd him well to accept this cloth of gold, 390
In token of true heart and fealty.

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend
In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth.
An oak-tree smoulder'd there. "The goodly knight!
What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?" 395
For, midway down the side of that long hall,
A stately pile, — whereof along the front,
Some blazon'd, some but carven, and some blank,
There ran a treble range of stony shields, —
Rose, and high-arching overbrow'd the hearth. 400
And under every shield a knight was named.
For this was Arthur's custom in his hall:

When some good knight had done one noble deed,
 His arms were carven only; but if twain,
 His arms were blazon'd also; but if none, 405
 The shield was blank and bare, without a sign
 Saving the name beneath: and Gareth saw
 The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright,
 And Modred's blank as death; and Arthur cried
 To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth. 410

"More like are we to reave him of his crown
 Than make him knight because men call him king.
 The kings we found, ye know we stay'd their hands
 From war among themselves, but left them kings;
 Of whom were any bounteous, merciful, 415
 Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enroll'd
 Among us, and they sit within our hall.
 But Mark hath tarnish'd the great name of king,
 As Mark would sully the low state of churl;
 And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold, 420
 Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,
 Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead,
 Silenced for ever — craven — a man of plots,
 Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings —
 No fault of thine: let Kay the seneschal 425
 Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied —
 Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen!"

And many another suppliant crying came
 With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man,
 And evermore a knight would ride away. 430

Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily
 Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men,
 Approach'd between them toward the King, and ask'd,
 "A boon, Sir King," — his voice was all ashamed, —

"For see ye not how weak and hunger-worn 435
 I seem — leaning on these? grant me to serve
 For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knaves
 A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.
 Hereafter I will fight."

To him the King:
 "A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon! 440
 But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay,
 The master of the meats and drinks, be thine."

He rode and past; then Kay, a man of mien
 Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself
 Root-bitten by white lichen:

"Lo ye now! 445
 This fellow hath broken from some abbey, where,
 God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow,
 However that might chance! but an he work,
 Like any pigeon will I cram his crop,
 And sleeker shall he shine than any hog." 450

Then Lancelot standing near: "Sir Seneschal,
 Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the hounds;
 A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know:
 Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,
 High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands 455
 Large, fair, and fine! — Some young lad's mystery —
 But, or from sheepcot or king's hall, the boy
 Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,
 Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him."

Then Kay: "What murmurest thou of mystery? 460
 Think ye this fellow will poison the King's dish?
 Nay, for he spake too fool-like: mystery!

Tut, an the lad were noble, he had ask'd
 For horse and armor: fair and fine, forsooth!
 Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it
 That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day
 Undo thee not — and leave my man to me."

So Gareth all for glory underwent
 The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage,
 Ate with young lads his portion by the door,
 And couch'd at night with grimy kitchen-knaves.
 And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,
 But Kay the seneschal, who loved him not,
 Would hustle and harry him, and labor him
 Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set
 To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood,
 Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bow'd himself
 With all obedience to the King, and wrought
 All kind of service with a noble ease
 That graced the lowliest act in doing it.
 And when the thralls had talk among themselves,
 And one would praise the love that linkt the King
 And Lancelot — how the King had saved his life
 In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's —
 For Lancelot was first in the tournament,
 But Arthur mightiest on the battlefield —
 Gareth was glad. Or if some other told
 How once the wandering forester at dawn,
 Far over the blue tarns and hazy seas,
 On Caer-Eryri's highest found the King,
 A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,
 "He passes to the Isle Avilion,
 He passes and is heal'd and cannot die" —
 Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,
 Then would he whistle rapid as any lark,
 Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud

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That first they mock'd, but, after, revered him.
 Or Gareth, telling some prodigious tale
 Of knights who sliced a red life-bubbling way
 Thro' twenty folds of twisted dragon, held
 All in a gap-mouth'd circle his good mates
 Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,
 Charm'd; till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come
 Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind
 Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart.
 Or when the thralls had sport among themselves,
 So there were any trial of mastery,
 He, by two yards in casting bar or stone,
 Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust,
 So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go,
 Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights
 Clash like the coming and retiring wave,
 And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy
 Was half beyond himself for ecstasy.

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/ So for a month he wrought among the thralls;
 But in the weeks that follow'd, the good Queen,
 Repentant of the word she made him swear,
 And saddening in her childless castle, sent,
 Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon,
 Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow.

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2 This, Gareth hearing from a squire of Lot
 With whom he used to play at tourney once,
 When both were children, and in lonely haunts
 Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand,
 And each at either dash from either end —
 Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.
 He laugh'd; he sprang. "Out of the smoke, at once
 I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee —
 These news be mine, none other's — nay, the King's —

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Descend into the city: whereon he sought
The King alone, and found, and told him all.

3 "I have stagger'd thy strong Gawain in a tilt
For pastime; yea, he said it: joust can I.
Make me thy knight — in secret! let my name
Be hidd'n, and give me the first quest, I spring
Like flame from ashes."

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↓ Here the King's calm eye
Fell on, and check'd, and made him flush, and bow
Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answer'd him:
"Son, the good mother let me know thee here,
And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine.
Make thee my knight? my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King."

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5 Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees:
"My King, for hardihood I can promise thee.
For uttermost obedience make demand
Of whom ye gave me to, the Seneschal,
No mellow master of the meats and drinks!
And as for love, God wot, I love not yet,
But love I shall, God willing."

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6 And the King:
"Make thee my knight in secret? yea, but he,
Our noblest brother, and our truest man,
And one with me in all, he needs must know."

7 "Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know,
Thy noblest and thy truest."

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And the King:
"But wherefore would ye men should wonder at you?
Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,
And the deed's sake my knighthood do the deed,
Than to be noised of."

9 Merrily Gareth ask'd: 560

"Have I not earn'd my cake in baking of it?
Let be my name until I make my name!
My deeds will speak: it is but for a day."
So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm
Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly 565
Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.
Then, after summoning Lancelot privily:
"I have given him the first quest: he is not proven.
Look therefore, when he calls for this in hall,
Thou get to horse and follow him far away. 570
Cover the lions on thy shield, and see,
Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain."

10 Then that same day there past into the hall
A damsel of high lineage, and a brow
May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom, 575
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower:
She into hall past with her page and cried:

11 "O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,
See to the foe within! bridge, ford, beset 580
By bandits, every one that owns a tower
The lord for half a league. Why sit ye there?
Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,
Till even the lonest hold were all as free
From cursed bloodshed as thine altar-cloth 585
From that best blood it is a sin to spill."

12 "Comfort thyself," said Arthur, "I nor mine
Rest: so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,
The wastest moorland of our realm shall be
Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall.
What is thy name? thy need?"

590

13 "My name?" she said —
"Lynette, my name; noble; my need, a knight
To combat for my sister, Lyonors,
A lady of high lineage, of great lands,
And comely, yea, and comelier than myself.
She lives in Castle Perilous: a river
Runs in three loops about her living-place;
And o'er it are three passings, and three knights
Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth,
And of that four the mightiest, holds her stay'd
In her own castle, and so besieges her
To break her will, and make her wed with him;
And but delays his purport till thou send
To do the battle with him thy chief man
Sir Lancelot, whom he trusts to overthrow;
Then wed, with glory: but she will not wed
Save whom she loveth, or a holy life.
Now therefore have I come for Lancelot."

595

600

605

14 Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth ask'd:
"Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush
All wrongers of the realm. But say, these four,
Who be they? What the fashion of the men?"

610

15 They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King,
The fashion of that old knight-errantry
Who ride abroad, and do but what they will;
Courteous or bestial from the moment, such
As have nor law nor king; and three of these

615

Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day,
Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,
Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise
The fourth, who alway rideth arm'd in black,
A huge man-beast of boundless savagery.
He names himself the Night and oftener Death.
And wears a helmet mounted with a skull,
And bears a skeleton figured on his arms,
To show that who may slay or scape the three,
Slain by himself, shall enter endless night.
And all these four be fools, but mighty men,
And therefore am I come for Lancelot."

620

625

16 Hearat Sir Gareth call'd from where he rose,
A head with kindling eyes above the throng,
"A boon, Sir King — this quest!" then — for he
mark'd

630

Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull —
"Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I,
And I can topple over a hundred such.
Thy promise, King," and Arthur glancing at him,
Brought down a momentary brow. "Rough, sudden,
And pardonable, worthy to be knight —
Go therefore," and all hearers were amazed.

635

640

17 But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath
Slew the may-white: she lifted either arm,
"Fie on thee, King! I ask'd for thy chief knight,
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave."
Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turn'd,
Fled down the lane of access to the King,
Took horse, descended the slope street, and past
The weird white gate, and paused without, beside
The field of tourney, murmuring "kitchen-knave!"

645