

Now two great entries open'd from the hall, 650
 At one end one that gave upon a range
 Of level pavement where the King would pace
 At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood;
 And down from this a lordly stairway sloped 655
 Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers;
 And out by this main doorway past the King.
 But one was counter to the hearth, and rose
 High that the highest-crested helm could ride
 Therethro' nor graze; and by this entry fled
 The damsel in her wrath, and on to this 660
 Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door
 King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,
 A war-horse of the best, and near it stood
 The two that out of north had follow'd him.
 This bare a maiden shield, a casque; that held 665
 The horse, the spear; whereat Sir Gareth loosed
 A cloak that dropt from collar-bone to heel,
 A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,
 And from it, like a fuel-smother'd fire
 That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flash'd as
 those 670
 Dull-coated things, that making slide apart
 Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns
 A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly.
 So Gareth ere he parted flash'd in arms.
 Then as he donn'd the helm, and took the shield 675
 And mounted horse and graspt a spear, of grain
 Storm-strengthen'd on a windy site, and tipt
 With trenchant steel, around him slowly prest
 The people, while from out of kitchen came
 The thralls in throng, and seeing who had work'd 680
 Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,
 Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,
 "God bless the King, and all his fellowship!"

And on thro' lanes of shouting Gareth rode
 Down the slope street, and past without the gate. 685

So Gareth past with joy; but as the cur
 Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause
 Be cool'd by fighting, follows, being named,
 His owner, but remembers all, and growls
 Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door 690
 Mutter'd in scorn of Gareth whom he used
 To harry and hustle.

"Bound upon a quest
 With horse and arms — the King hath past his time —
 My scullion knave! Thralls, to your work again,
 For an your fire be low ye kindle mine! 695
 Will there be dawn in West and eve in East?
 Begone! — my knave! — belike and like enow
 Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth
 So shook his wits they wander in his prime —
 Crazed! How the villain lifted up his voice, 700
 Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave!
 Tut, he was tame and meek enow with me,
 Till peacock'd up with Lancelot's noticing.
 Well — I will after my loud knave, and learn
 Whether he know me for his master yet. 705
 Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance
 Hold, by God's grace, he shall into the mire —
 Thence, if the King awaken from his craze,
 Into the smoke again."

But Lancelot said:
 "Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King, 710
 For that did never he whereon ye rail,
 But ever meekly served the King in thee?
 Abide: take counsel; for this lad is great

And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword."
 "Tut, tell not me," said Kay, "ye are overfine
 To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies:" 715
 Then mounted, on thro' silent faces rode
 Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate.

But by the field of tourney lingering yet
 Mutter'd the damsel: "Wherefore did the King 720
 Scorn me? for, were Sir Lancelot lackt, at least
 He might have yielded to me one of those
 Who tilt for lady's love and glory here,
 Rather than—O sweet heaven! O fie upon him!—
 His kitchen-knave." 725

To whom Sir Gareth drew —
 And there were none but few goodlier than he —
 Shining in arms, "Damsel, the quest is mine.
 Lead, and I follow." She thereat, as one
 That smells a foul-flesh'd agaric in the holt, 730
 And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,
 Or shrew, or weasel, nipt her slender nose
 With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, "Hence!
 Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease.
 And look who comes behind;" for there was Kay.
 "Knowest thou not me? thy master I am Kay. 735
 We lack thee by the hearth."

And Gareth to him,
 "Master no more! too well I know thee, ay —
 The most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall."
 "Have at thee then," said Kay: they shock'd, and Kay 740
 Fell shoulder-slipt, and Gareth cried again,
 "Lead, and I follow," and fast away she fled.

But after sod and shingle ceased to fly
 Behind her, and the heart of her good horse

Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,
 Perforce she stay'd, and overtaken spoke: 745

"What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?
 Deem'st thou that I accept thee aught the more
 Or love thee better, that by some device
 Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness,
 Thou hast overthrown and slain thy master — thou! — 750
 Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon! — to me
 Thou smellest all of kitchen as before."

"Damsel," Sir Gareth answer'd gently, "say
 Whate'er ye will, but whatsoever ye say,
 I leave not till I finish this fair quest, 755
 Or die therefore."

"Ay, wilt thou finish it?
 Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks!
 The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it.
 But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave,
 And then by such a one that thou for all 760
 The kitchen brewis that was ever supt
 Shalt not once dare to look him in the face."

"I shall assay," said Gareth with a smile
 That madden'd her, and away she flash'd again
 Down the long avenues of a boundless wood, 765
 And Gareth following was again beknaved:

"Sir Kitchen-knave, I have miss'd the only way
 Where Arthur's men are set along the wood;
 The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves:
 If both be slain, I am rid of thee; but yet, 770
 Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit of thine?
 Fight, an thou canst: I have miss'd the only way."

So till the dusk that follow'd evensong
 Rode on the two, reviler and reviled;
 Then after one long slope was mounted, saw, 775
 Bowl-shaped, thro' tops of many thousand pines
 A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink
 To westward — in the deeps whereof a mere,
 Round as the red eye of an eagle-owl,
 Under the half-dead sunset glared; and shouts 780
 Ascended, and there brake a servingman
 Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,
 "They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere."
 Then Gareth, "Bound am I to right the wrong'd,
 But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee." 785
 And when the damsel spake contemptuously,
 "Lead, and I follow," Gareth cried again,
 "Follow, I lead!" so down among the pines
 He plunged; and there, black-shadow'd nigh the mere,
 And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed, 790
 Saw six tall men haling a seventh along,
 A stone about his neck to drown him in it.
 Three with good blows he quieted, but three
 Fled thro' the pines; and Gareth loosed the stone
 From off his neck, then in the mere beside 795
 Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.
 Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet
 Set him, a stalwart baron, Arthur's friend.

"Well that ye came, or else these caitiff rogues
 Had wreak'd themselves on me; good cause is theirs 800
 To hate me, for my wont hath ever been
 To catch my thief, and then like vermin here
 Drown him, and with a stone about his neck;
 And under this wan water many of them
 Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone, 805
 And rise, and flickering in a grimly light

Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life
 Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood.
 And fain would I reward thee worshipfully.
 What guerdon will ye?" 810

Gareth sharply spake:
 "None! for the deed's sake have I done the deed,
 In uttermost obedience to the King.
 But wilt thou yield this damsel harborage?"

Whereat the baron saying, "I well believe
 You be of Arthur's Table," a light laugh 815
 Broke from Lynette: "Ay, truly of a truth,
 And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave! —
 But deem not I accept thee aught the more,
 Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit
 Down on a rout of craven foresters. 820
 A thresher with his flail had scatter'd them.
 Nay — for thou smellest of the kitchen still.
 But an this lord will yield us harborage,
 Well."

So she spake. A league beyond the wood,
 All in a full-fair manor and a rich, 825
 His towers, where that day a feast had been
 Held in high hall, and many a viand left,
 And many a costly cate, received the three.
 And there they placed a peacock in his pride
 Before the damsel, and the baron set 830
 Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.

"Meseems, that here is much discourtesy,
 Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.
 Hear me — this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,
 And pray'd the King would grant me Lancelot 835

To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night —
 The last a monster unsubduable
 Of any save of him for whom I call'd —
 Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-knave,
 'The quest is mine; thy kitchen-knave am I, 840
 And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I.'
 Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,
 'Go, therefore,' and so gives the quest to him —
 Him — here — a villain fitter to stick swine
 Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong, 845
 Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman."

Then half-ashamed and part-amazed, the lord
 Now look'd at one and now at other, left
 The damsel by the peacock in his pride,
 And, seating Gareth at another board, 850
 Sat down beside him, ate and then began :

"Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave, or not,
 Or whether it be the maiden's fantasy,
 And whether she be mad, or else the King,
 Or both or neither, or thyself be mad, 855
 I ask not : but thou striketh a strong stroke,
 For strong thou art and goodly therewithal,
 And saver of my life; and therefore now,
 For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh
 Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back 860
 To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.
 Thy pardon; I but speak for thine avail,
 The saver of my life."

And Gareth said,
 "Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,
 Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell." 865

So when, next morn, the lord whose life he saved
 Had, some brief space, convey'd them on their way
 And left them with God-speed, Sir Gareth spake,
 "Lead, and I follow." Haughtily she replied :

"I fly no more : I allow thee for an hour. 870
 Lion and stoat have isled together, knave,
 In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks
 Some ruth is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool?
 For hard by here is one will overthrow 875
 And slay thee; then will I to court again,
 And shame the King for only yielding me
 My champion from the ashes of his hearth."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd courteously :
 "Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.
 Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find 880
 My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay
 Among the ashes and wedded the King's son."

Then to the shore of one of those long loops
 Wherethro' the serpent river coil'd, they came.
 Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep; the stream 885
 Full, narrow; this a bridge of single arc
 Took at a leap; and on the further side
 Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold
 In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily in hue,
 Save that the dome was purple, and above, 890
 Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering.
 And therebefore the lawless warrior paced
 Unarm'd, and calling, "Damsel, is this he,
 The champion thou hast brought from Arthur's hall?
 For whom we let thee pass." "Nay, nay," she said, 895
 "Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn
 Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here

His kitchen-knave: and look thou to thyself:
See that he fall not on thee suddenly,
And slay thee unarm'd; he is not knight but knave." 900

Then at his call, "O daughters of the Dawn,
And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,
Arm me," from out the silken curtain-folds
Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls
In gilt and rosy raiment came: their feet 905
In dewy grasses glisten'd; and the hair
All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem
Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.
These arm'd him in blue arms, and gave a shield
Blue also, and thereon the morning star. 910
And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,
Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,
Glorying; and in the stream beneath him shone,
Immingled with heaven's azure waveringly,
The gay pavilion and the naked feet, 915
His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

Then she that watch'd him: "Wherefore stare ye
so?
Thou shakest in thy fear: there yet is time:
Flee down the valley before he get to horse.
Who will cry shame? Thou art not knight but 920
knave."

Said Gareth: "Damsel, whether knave or knight,
Far liefer had I fight a score of times
Than hear thee so missay me and revile.
Fair words were best for him who fights for thee;
But truly foul are better, for they send 925
That strength of anger thro' mine arms, I know
That I shall overthrow him."

And he that bore
The star, when mounted, cried from o'er the bridge:
"A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me!
Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn. 930
For this were shame to do him further wrong
Than set him on his feet, and take his horse
And arms, and so return him to the King.
Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave.
Avoid: for it besemeth not a knave 935
To ride with such a lady."

"Dog, thou liest!
I spring from loftier lineage than thine own."
He spake; and all at fiery speed the two
Shock'd on the central bridge, and either spear
Bent but not brake, and either knight at once, 940
Hurl'd as a stone from out of a catapult
Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,
Fell as if dead; but quickly rose and drew,
And Gareth lash'd so fiercely with his brand
He drave his enemy backward down the bridge, 945
The damsel crying, "Well-stricken, kitchen-knave!"
Till Gareth's shield was cloven; but one stroke
Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground.

Then cried the fallen, "Take not my life: I yield."
And Gareth, "So this damsel ask it of me 950
Good — I accord it easily as a grace."
She reddening, "Insolent scullion! I of thee?
I bound to thee for any favor ask'd!"
"Then shall he die." And Gareth there unlaced
His helmet as to slay him, but she shriek'd, 955
"Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay
One nobler than thyself." "Damsel, thy charge
Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight,

Thy life is thine at her command. Arise
 And quickly pass to Arthur's hall, and say 960
 His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave
 His pardon for thy breaking of his laws.
 Myself when I return will plead for thee.
 Thy shield is mine — farewell ; and, damsel, thou,
 Lead, and I follow." 965

And fast away she fled ;
 Then when he came upon her, spake : " Methought,
 Knave, when I watch'd thee striking on the bridge,
 The savor of thy kitchen came upon me
 A little faintlier : but the wind hath changed ;
 I scent it twenty-fold." And then she sang, 970
 " ' O morning star ' — not that tall felon there
 Whom thou, by sorcery or unhappiness
 Or some device, hast foully overthrown, —
 ' O morning star that smilest in the blue,
 O star, my morning dream hath proven true, 975
 Smile sweetly, thou ! my love hath smiled on me.' "

" But thou begone, take counsel, and away,
 For hard by here is one that guards a ford —
 The second brother in their fool's parable —
 Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot. 980
 Care not for shame : thou art not knight but knave." "

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd laughingly :
 " Parables ? Hear a parable of the knave.
 When I was kitchen-knave among the rest,
 Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates 985
 Own'd a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,
 ' Guard it,' and there was none to meddle with it.
 And such a coat art thou, and thee the King
 Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I,

To worry, and not to flee — and — knight or knave — 990
 The knave that doth thee service as full knight
 Is all as good, meseems, as any knight
 Toward thy sister's freeing."

" Ay, Sir Knave !
 Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight,
 Being but knave, I hate thee all the more." 995

" Fair damsel, you should worship me the more,
 That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies."

" Ay, ay," she said " but thou shalt meet thy match."

So when they touch'd the second river-loop,
 Huge on a huge red horse, and all in mail 1000
 Burnish'd to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun
 Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower
 That blows a globe of after arrowlets
 Ten-thousand-fold had grown, flash'd the fierce shield,
 All sun ; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots 1005
 Before them when he turn'd from watching him.
 He from beyond the roaring shallow roar'd,
 " What doest thou, brother, in my marches here ? "
 And she athwart the shallow shrill'd again,
 " Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall 1010
 Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms."
 " Ugh ! " cried the Sun, and, vizing up a red
 And cipher face of rounded foolishness,
 Push'd horse across the foamings of the ford,
 Whom Gareth met mid-stream : no room was there 1015
 For lance or tourney-skill : four strokes they struck
 With sword, and these were mighty ; the new knight
 Had fear he might be shamed ; but as the Sun
 Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,

The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream
Descended, and the Sun was wash'd away. 1020

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford;
So drew him home; but he that fought no more,
As being all bone-batter'd on the rock,
Yielded; and Gareth sent him to the King. 1025
"Myself when I return will plead for thee.
Lead, and I follow." Quietly she led.
"Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again?"
"Nay, not a point; nor art thou victor here.
There lies a ridge of slate across the ford; 1030
His horse thereon stumbled — ay, for I saw it.

"O sun' — not this strong fool whom thou, Sir Knave,
Hast overthrown thro' mere unhappiness —
O sun, that wakenest all to bliss or pain,
O moon, that layest all to sleep again, 1035
Shine sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of love-song or of love?
Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,
Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance, —

"O dewy flowers that open to the sun, 1040
O dewy flowers that close when day is done,
Blow sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike,
To garnish meats with? hath not our good King
Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom, 1045
A foolish love for flowers? what stick ye round
The pasty? wherewithal deck the boar's head?
Flowers? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay.

"O birds that warble to the morning sky,
O birds that warble as the day goes by, 1050
Sing sweetly: twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle,
Linnet? what dream ye when they utter forth
May-music growing with the growing light,
Their sweet sun-worship? these be for the snare — 1055
So runs thy fancy — these be for the spit,
Larding and basting. See thou have not now
Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly.
There stands the third fool of their allegory."

For there beyond a bridge of treble bow, 1060
All in a rose-red from the west, and all
Naked it seem'd, and glowing in the broad
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight
That named himself the Star of Evening stood.

And Gareth, "Wherefore waits the madman there 1065
Naked in open dayshine?" "Nay," she cried,
"Not naked, only wrapt in harden'd skins
That fit him like his own; and so ye cleave
His armor off him, these will turn the blade."

Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge, 1070
"O brother-star, why shine ye here so low?
Thy ward is higher up: but have ye slain
The damsel's champion?" and the damsel cried:

"No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven 1075
With all disaster unto thine and thee!
For both thy younger brethren have gone down
Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star;
Art thou not old?"

“Old, damsel, old and hard,
Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys.”
Said Gareth, “Old, and over-bold in brag! 1080
But that same strength which threw the Morning Star
Can throw the Evening.”

Then that other blew
A hard and deadly note upon the horn.
“Approach and arm me!” With slow steps from out
An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stain’d 1085
Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,
And arm’d him in old arms, and brought a helm
With but a drying evergreen for crest,
And gave a shield whereon the star of even
Half-tarnish’d and half-bright, his emblem, shone. 1090
But when it glitter’d o’er the saddle-bow,
They madly hurl’d together on the bridge;
And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,
There met him drawn, and overthrew him again,
But up like fire he started: and as oft 1095
As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,
So many a time he vaulted up again;
Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,
Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,
Labor’d within him, for he seem’d as one 1100
That all in later, sadder age begins
To war against ill uses of a life,
But these from all his life arise, and cry,
“Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us
down!”
He half despairs; so Gareth seem’d to strike 1105
Vainly, the damsel clamoring all the while,
“Well done, knave-knight, well stricken, O good
knight-knave —
O knave, as noble as any of all the knights —

Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied —
Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round — 1110
His arms are old, he trusts the harden’d skin —
Strike — strike — the wind will never change again.”
And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote,
And hew’d great pieces of his armor off him,
But lash’d in vain against the harden’d skin, 1115
And could not wholly bring him under, more
Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,
The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs
For ever; till at length Sir Gareth’s brand
Clash’d his, and brake it utterly to the hilt 1120
“I have thee now;” but forth that other sprang,
And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms
Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,
Strangled, but straining even his uttermost
Cast, and so hur’d him headlong o’er the bridge 1125
Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,
“Lead, and I follow.”

But the damsel said:
“I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;
Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves.
“O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain, 1130
O rainbow with three colors after rain,
Shine sweetly: thrice my love hath smiled on me.”

“Sir, — and, good faith, I fain had added — Knight,
But that I heard thee call thyself a knave, —
Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled, 1135
Missaid thee; noble I am; and thought the King
Scorn’d me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,
For thou hast ever answer’d courteously,
And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal

As any of Arthur's best, but, being knave,
Hast mazed my wit: I marvel what thou art." 1140

"Damsel," he said, "you be not all to blame,
Saving that you mistrusted our good King
Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one
Not fit to cope your quest. You said your say; 1145
Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold
He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet
To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets
His heart be stirr'd with any foolish heat
At any gentle damsel's waywardness. 1150
Shamed? care not! thy foul sayings fought for me:
And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks
There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,
Hath force to quell me."

Nigh upon that hour

When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,
Lets down his other leg, and stretching dreams 1155
Of goodly supper in the distant pool,
Then turn'd the noble damsel smiling at him,
And told him of a cavern hard at hand,
Where bread and baken meats and good red wine 1160
Of Southland, which the Lady Lyonors
Had sent her coming champion, waited him.

Anon they past a narrow comb wherein
Were slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse
Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues. 1165
"Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,
Whose holy hand hath fashion'd on the rock
The war of Time against the soul of man.
And yon four fools have suck'd their allegory
From these damp walls, and taken but the form. 1170

Know ye not these?" and Gareth lookt and read —
In letters like to those the vexillary
Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt —
"PHOSPHORUS," then "MERIDIUS," — "HESPERUS" —
"NOX" — "MORS," beneath five figures, armed men, 1175
Slab after slab, their faces forward all,
And running down the Soul, a shape that fled
With broken wings, torn raiment, and loose hair,
For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.
"Follow the faces, and we find it. Look, 1180
Who comes behind?"

For one — delay'd at first

Thro' helping back the dislocated Kay
To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,
The damsel's headlong error thro' the wood —
Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops — 1185
His blue shield-lions cover'd — softly drew
Behind the twain, and when he saw the star
Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,
"Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend."
And Gareth crying prick'd against the cry; 1190
But when they closed — in a moment — at one touch
Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of the world —
Went sliding down so easily, and fell,
That when he found the grass within his hands
He laugh'd; the laughter jarr'd upon Lynette: 1195
Harshly she ask'd him, "Shamed and overthrown,
And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,
Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?"
"Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son
Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent, 1200
And victor of the bridges and the ford,
And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom
I know not, all thro' mere unhappiness —

Device and sorcery and unhappiness —
Out, sword; we are thrown!" And Lancelot answer'd:

"Prince, 1205
O Gareth — thro' the mere unhappiness
Of one who came to help thee, not to harm,
Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole
As on the day when Arthur knighted him."

Then Gareth: "Thou — Lancelot! — thine the
hand 1210
That threw me? An some chance to mar the boast
Thy brethren of thee make — which could not chance —
Had sent thee down before a lesser spear,
Shamed had I been, and sad — O Lancelot — thou!"

Whereat the maiden, petulant: "Lancelot, 1215
Why came ye not, when call'd? and wherefore now
Come ye, not call'd? I gloried in my knave,
Who being still rebuked would answer still
Courteous as any knight — but now, if knight,
The marvel dies, and leaves me fool'd and trick'd, 1220
And only wondering wherefore play'd upon;
And doubtful whether I and mine be scorn'd.
Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall,
In Arthur's presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool,
I hate thee and forever."

And Lancelot said: 1225
"Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! knight art thou
To the King's best wish. O damsel, be you wise,
To call him shamed who is but overthrown?
Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.
Victor from vanquish'd issues at the last, 1230
And overthrower from being overthrown.
With sword we have not striven; and thy good horse

And thou are weary; yet not less I felt
Thy manhood thro' that wearied lance of thine.
Well hast thou done; for all the stream is freed, 1235
And thou hast wreak'd his justice on his foes,
And when reviled hast answer'd graciously,
And makest merry when overthrown. Prince, knight,
Hail, knight and prince, and of our Table Round!"

And then when turning to Lynette he told 1240
The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said:
"Ay, well — ay, well — for worse than being fool'd
Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave,
Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks
And forage for the horse, and flint for fire. 1245
But all about it flies a honeysuckle.
Seek, till we find." And when they sought and found,
Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life
Past into sleep; on whom the maiden gazed:
"Sound sleep be thine! sound cause to sleep hast
thou. 1250

Wake lusty! Seem I not as tender to him
As any mother? Ay, but such a one
As all day long hath rated at her child,
And vext his day, but blesses him asleep —
Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle 1255
In the hush'd night, as if the world were one
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness!
O Lancelot, Lancelot," — and she clapt her hands —
"Full merry am I to find my goodly knave
Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I, 1260
Else yon black felon had not let me pass,
To bring thee back to do the battle with him.
Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first;
Who doubts thee victor? so will my knight-knave
Miss the full flower of this accomplishment." 1265

Said Lancelot: "Peradventurè he you name
 May know my shield. Let Gareth, an he will,
 Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh,
 Not to be spurr'd, loving the battle as well
 As he that rides him." "Lancelot-like," she said, 1270
 "Courteous in this, Lord Lancelot, as in all."

And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutch'd the shield:
 "Ramp, ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all spears
 Are rotten sticks! ye seem agape to roar!
 Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord! — 1275
 Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.
 O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these
 Streams virtue — fire — thro' one that will not shame
 Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.
 Hence: let us go." 1280

Silent the silent field
 They traversed. Arthur's Harp tho' summer-wan,
 In counter motion to the clouds, allured
 The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege.
 A star shot: "Lo," said Gareth, "the foe falls!"
 An owl whoopt: "Hark the victor pealing there!" 1285
 Suddenly she that rode upon his left
 Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying:
 "Yield, yield him this again; 't is he must fight:
 I curse the tongue that all thro' yesterday
 Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now 1290
 To lend thee horse and shield: wonders ye have done;
 Miracles ye cannot: here is glory enow
 In having flung the three: I see thee maim'd,
 Mangled: I swear thou canst not fling the fourth."

"And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know. 1295
 You cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice,

Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery
 Appall me from the quest."

"Nay, prince," she cried,
 "God wot, I never look'd upon the face,
 Seeing he never rides abroad by day; 1300
 But watch'd him have I like a phantom pass
 Chilling the night: nor have I heard the voice.
 Always he made his mouthpiece of a page
 Who came and went, and still reported him
 As closing in himself the strength of ten, 1305
 And when his anger tare him, massacring
 Man, woman, lad, and girl — yea, the soft babe!
 Some hold that he hath swallow'd infant flesh,
 Monster! O prince, I went for Lancelot first,
 The quest is Lancelot's: give him back the shield." 1310

Said Gareth laughing, "An he fight for this,
 Belike he wins it as the better man:
 Thus — and not else!"

But Lancelot on him urged
 All the devisings of their chivalry
 When one might meet a mightier than himself; 1315
 How best to manage horse, lance, sword, and shield,
 And so fill up the gap where force might fail
 With skill and fineness. Instant were his words.

Then Gareth: "Here be rules. I know but one —
 To dash against mine enemy and to win. 1320
 Yet have I watch'd thee victor in the joust,
 And seen thy way." "Heaven help thee!" sigh'd
 Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud that grew
 To thunder-gloom palling all stars, they rode

In converse till she made her palfrey halt, 1325
 Lifted an arm, and softly whisper'd, "There."
 And all the three were silent seeing, pitch'd
 Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,
 A huge pavilion like a mountain peak
 Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge, 1330
 Black, with black banner, and a long black horn
 Beside it hanging; which Sir Gareth graspt,
 And so, before the two could hinder him,
 Sent all his heart and breath thro' all the horn.
 Echo'd the walls; a light twinkled; anon 1335
 Came lights and lights, and once again he blew;
 Whereon were hollow tramlings up and down
 And muffled voices heard, and shadows past;
 Till high above him, circled with her maids,
 The Lady Lyonors at a window stood, 1340
 Beautiful among lights, and waving to him
 White hands and courtesy; but when the prince
 Three times had blown — after long hush — at last —
 The huge pavilion slowly yielded up,
 Thro' those black foldings, that which housed
 therein. 1345
 High on a night-black horse, in night-black arms,
 With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,
 And crown'd with fleshless laughter — some ten steps —
 In the half-light — thro' the dim dawn — advanced
 The monster, and then paused, and spake no word. 1350

But Gareth spake and all indignantly:
 "Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,
 Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,
 But must, to make the terror of thee more,
 Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries 1355
 Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,
 Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers

As for pity?" But he spake no word;
 Which set the horror higher: a maiden swoon'd;
 The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept, 1360
 As doom'd to be the bride of Night and Death;
 Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm;
 And even Sir Lancelot thro' his warm blood felt
 Ice strike, and all that mark'd him were aghast.

At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neigh'd, 1365
 And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with
 him.

Then those that did not blink the terror saw
 That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.
 But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.
 Half fell to right and half to left and lay. 1370
 Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm
 As throughly as the skull; and out from this
 Issued the bright face of a blooming boy
 Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying, "Knight,
 Slay me not: my three brethren bade me do it, 1375
 To make a horror all about the house,
 And stay the world from Lady Lyonors;
 They never dream'd the passes would be past."
 Answer'd Sir Gareth graciously to one
 Not many a moon his younger, "My fair child, 1380
 What madness made thee challenge the chief knight
 Of Arthur's hall?" "Fair Sir, they bade me do it.
 They hate the King and Lancelot, the King's friend;
 They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,
 They never dream'd the passes could be past." 1385

Then sprang the happier day from underground;
 And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance
 And revel and song, made merry over Death,
 As being after all their foolish fears