N the dim place that the sun knew no more
He rose up when his tale was fully o'er,
And 'gan to pace the long hall to and fro
With old eyes looking downward, e'en as though
None else were there: at last with upraised face
He walked back swiftly to his fire-lit place,
And sat him down, and turned to the young folk
Smiling perforce; then from their lips outbroke
The murmuring speech his moody looks had stilled,
And with a sweet sound was the hall full filled;
E'en like the noise that from the thin wood's side
Swims through the dawning day at April-tide
Across the speckled eggs, when from the brown
Soft feathers glittering eyes are looking down
Over the dewy meads, too fresh and fair
For aught but lovely feet to wander there.
Drag on, long night of winter, in whose heart,
Nurse of regret, the dead spring yet has part!
Drag on, O night of dreams! O night of fears!
Fed by the summers of the bygone years!

ROM this dull rainy undersky and low,
This murky ending of a leaden day,
That never knew the sun, this half-thawed snow,
These tossing black boughs faint against the grey
Of gathering night, thou turnest, dear, away
Silent, but with thy scarce-seen kindly smile
Sent through the dusk my longing to beguile.

There, the lights gleam, and all is dark without!
And in the sudden change our eyes meet dazed:
O look, love, look again! the veil of doubt
Just for one flash, past counting, then was raised!
O eyes of heaven, as clear thy sweet soul blazed
On mine a moment! O come back again
Strange rest and dear amid the long dull pain!

Nay, nay, gone by! though there she sitteth still,
With wide grey eyes so frank and fathomless:
Be patient, heart, thy days they yet shall fill
With utter rest: Yea, now thy pain they bless,
And feed thy last hope of the world's redress.
O unseen hurrying rack! O wailing wind!
What rest and where go ye this night to find?

---

rack: a wind-driven mass of high, often broken, clouds.
THE year has changed its name since
that last tale;
Yet nought the poisoned spring doth that avail.
Deep buried under snow the country lies;
Made dim by whirling flakes the rook\(^{26}\) still flies
South-west before the wind; noon is as still
As midnight on the southward-looking hill,
Whose slopes have heard so many words and loud
Since on the vine the woolly buds first showed.
The raven hanging o'er the farmstead gate,
While for another death his eye doth wait,
Hears but the muffled sound of crowded byre
And winds' moan round the wall. Up in the spire
The watchet set high o'er the half-hid town
Hearhens the sound of chiming bells fall down
Below him; and so dull and dead they seem
That he might well-nigh be amidst a dream
Wherein folk hear and hear not. Such a tide,
With all work gone from the hushed world outside,
Still finds our old folk living, and they sit
Watching the snow-flakes by the window flit
Midmost the time 'twixt noon and dusk; till now
One of the elders clears his knitted brow,
And says: Well, hearken of a man who first
In every place seemed doomed to be accursed;
To tell about his ill hap lies on me;
Before the winter is quite o'er, maybe
Some other mouth of his good hap may tell;\(^{26}\)
But no third tale there is, of what befell
His fated life,\(^{27}\) when he had won his place;
And that perchance is not so ill a case
For him and us; for we may rise up, glad

\(^{25}\)rook: crow.
\(^{26}\)Some other mouth of his good hap may tell: a reference to "Bellerophon in Lycia," the February classical tale.
\(^{27}\)His fated life: Morris omits legends of subsequent vicissitudes of the mythical Bellerophon's life. According to Lempière, for example, "Some authors have supported that he attempted to fly to heaven upon the horse Pegasus, but that Jupiter sent an insect, which stung the horse, and threw down the rider, who wandered upon the earth in the greatest melancholy and dejection till the day of his death..."
The two long Bellerophon tales resonate with these and other nuances, so much so that they might have fared better had they appeared in a separate single volume, after the format of The Life and Death of Jason. The widespread familiarity of the Jason-legend had obviously pleased Morris’s contemporary audience, but “Bellerophon”’s complex blend of lovely surfaces, hard-beset idealism, and hidden emotional ironies better represented his mature views of reality, and well might hold the attention of a wider audience today.

See also Blass, 166-75; Boos, 152-58; Calhoun, 206-207; Kirchhoff, 201, 202, 206-207; and Silver, 67, 74-75.

Manuscripts:
An early draft exists in the British Library Add. M. S. 45,301, and the final draft is in Huntington Library M. S. 6418.

BELLEROPHON AT ARGOS.

The Argument.
HIPPONOUS, SON OF GLAUCUS KING OF CORINTH, UNWITTINGLY SLEW HIS BROTHER BELLER, AND, FLEEING FROM HIS COUNTRY, CAME TO PRÆTUS KING OF ARGOS, WHO PURIFIED HIM OF HIS GUILT; AND THEREAFTER WAS HE CALLED BELLEROPHON. HE DWELT LONG WITH PRÆTUS, WELL LOVED BY HIM, AND RECEIVING MANY GOOD THINGS AT HIS HANDS; BUT AT LAST HE LOST THE KING’S FAVOUR BY THE GIULE OF THE QUEEN STHENOBOEA, AND WAS SENT TO JOBATES KING OF LYCIA, HER FATHER, WITH A COVERT MESSAGE OF EVIL.

PRÆTUS, the King of Argos, on a day
In tangled forests drave the boar to bay,
And had good hap, for ere the noon was o’er
He set his foot upon the third huge boar
His steel that day had reached; then, fain of rest,
The greensward ‘neath the spreading oak-tree pressed,
And, king-like, feasted with his folk around.
Nor lacked he for sweet music’s measured sound,
For when somewhat were men’s desires appeased
Of meat and drink, their weary limbs well eased,
There ‘gan an ancient hunter and his son
To tell of glorious deeds in old days done
Within the wood; but as Lyæus’ gift,

1Prætus, the King of Argos: son of Abas and Ocale. Morris here foreshortened Lempiètre’s version, in which Proclus lost a power struggle with his twin brother Acrisius for the throne of Argos, but later married Sthenoboia, daughter of Iobates, King of Lycia, and became ruler of Tyrsa with Iobates’s help.
2Lyæus’ gift: wine, the “gift” of Dionysus.
And measured words from common life did lift
The thoughts of men, and noble each man seemed
Unto his fellow, from afar there gleamed
Sun-litten arms, and 'twixt the singer's word
The slow tramp of a great horse soon they heard,
And from a glade that pierced the thicket through
In sight at last a mounted man there drew.
Then the dogs growled, and midst their weapons' clang
Unto their feet the outmost hunters sprang,
Handling their spears; but still King Prætus lay,
Till nigh the circle that lone man made stay,
And with wild eyes gazed down upon the throng.
Weared he seemed, and his black war-horse strong
On many a mile had left both sweat and blood,
And panting now with drooping head he stood,
Forgetting all the eager joys of speed;
And tattered was his rider's lordly weed,
His broken sheath now held a sword no more,
With rust his armour bright was spotted o'er,
Unkempt and matted was the yellow hair
That crowned his head, nor was there helmet there;
His face, that should have been as fair and bright
And ruddy as a maid's, was deadly white,
And drawn and haggard; and his grey eyes stared,
As though of something he were sore afeard
That other folk saw not at all. But now
A hunter cried out: Nay, and who art thou?
What God or man pursues thee? bide and speak;
Nor yet shalt thou for nought the King's rest break.
A scared look did the man behind him fling,
Then said: Stand close around me: to your King,
When I may see him, will I tell the tale;
Unless indeed, meanwhile, my life should fail.
With that, as one who hath but little might,
From off his wearied steed did he alight.
They led him to the King, who 'gainst a tree
Stood upright now, the new-comer man to see;

Who brought unto him would not meet his eyes,
But stood and stared distraught in dreamy wise;
Till cheerily the King of Argos said:
Cast somewhat off, O friend, thy drearhead;
Sit thee and eat and drink, and be my guest;
I will not harm thee though thou be unblest;
Let Gods or men take vengeance as they can,
Nor ask my help, who dwell a peaceful man
'Twixt white-walled Argos* and the rustling trees.
THE man turned round, as asking what were these,
The words he said; then, casting here and there
A troubled look, as if not safe he were
From some dread thing that followed even yet,
He sat him down, and like a starved man ate:
Yet did he tremble as he took the food,
And in the cup he gazed, as though the blood
Of man it held, and not the blood of earth,
The stirrer up to kindly words and mirth.
But when his hunger now was satisfied,
Casting his hair back the King he eyed,
And in a choked and husky voice he said:
Now can ye see, O folk, I am not dead;
But tell me, King, how shall I name thee here,
Since he in whose heart lieth any prayer,
To nameless Gods will let no warm words flow?
To Prætus pray for what thou wouldst now,
The King said; by the soil of Argos pray:
To no light matter will I say thee nay,
For my heart giveth to thee: name thy name,
And say whereby these evils on thee came.
With changing eyes now gazed the outcast man
On Prætus' cheery face, and colour ran
O'er his wan visage. Thou art kind, he said;
But kinder eyes I knew, that on the dead
Must look for ever now; and joy is gone:
Best hadst thou cast forth such a luckless one;

*white-walled Argos: In the classical period the Peloponnesian city of Argos
was surrounded on all sides by limestone walls (Robert and Kathleen Cook, 
For what I love I slay, and what I hate
I strive to save from out the hands of Fate.
Listen and let me babble: I have seen
Since that hour was, nought but the long leaves green,
The tree-trunks, and the scared things of the wood.
Then silently awhile he seemed to brood
O'er what had been, but even as the King
Opened his lips to mind of the thing
That he should tell, from his bent head there came
Slow words, as if from one confessing shame,
While nigher to his mouth King Proetus drew.
HIPPOONUS men have called me, ere I knew
The hate of Gods and fear of men; my life
Went past at Corinth⁵ free from baneful strife,
For there my father ruled from sea to sea,
Glaucus the Great⁶ and fair Eurymede,
My mother, bare another son to him,
Like unto me in mind and face and limb,
Whom men called Beller; and most true it is
That I with him dwelt long in love and bliss,
However long ago that seems to be.
What plans we laid for joyous victory!
What lovely lands un till ed we thought to win,
And be together even as Gods therein,
Bringing the monsters of the world to nought!
How eagerly from old men news we sought
Of lands that lay anigh the ocean-stream!
And yet withal what folly then did seem
Their cold words and their weary hopeless eyes;
When this alone of all things then seemed wise,
To know how sweet life was, how dear the earth,
And only fluttering hope stayed present mirth:
Ah, how I babble! What a thing man is,
Who, falling unto misery out of bliss,
Thinks that new wisdom but the sole thing then

⁵Corinth: a major Greek maritime city-state on the isthmus between northern Greece and the Peloponneso.
⁶Glaucus the Great: The legendary son of Sisyphus, King of Corinth, and Merope, the daughter of Atlas. Glaucus was born in the Boetian village of Potnia.

That binds the many ways of toiling men!
IN one fair chamber did we sleep a-night,
I and my brother; there, 'twixt light and light,
Three nights together did I dream a dream,
Where lying on my bed I still did seem,
E'en as I was indeed, when a cold hand
Was laid upon me, and a shape did stand
By my bed-head, a woman clad in grey,
Like to the lingering time 'twixt night and day,
And veiled her face was, and her tall gaunt form.
She drew me from my peaceful bed and warm,
And led me, shuddering, barefoot, o'er the floor,
Until, with beating heart, I stood before
My brother's bed, and knew what I should do;
For from beneath her shadowy robe she drew
A well-steeled feathered dart, and that must I,
Casting all will aside, clutch mightily,
And, still unable with her will to strive,
E'en as her veiled hand pointed, madly drive
Into the heart of mine own mother's son,
Striving to scream as that ill deed was done.
NO cry came forth, but even with the stroke,
With sick and fainting heart, I nigh awoke.
And when the dream again o'er me was cast,
Chamber, and all I knew, away had passed,
Nor saw I more the ghost: alone I stood
In a strange land, anigh an oaken wood
High on a hill; and far below my feet
The white walls of a glorious town did meet
A yellow strand and ship-beset green sea;
And all methought was as a toy for me,
For I was king thereof and great snow.
BUT as I stood upon that hill's green brow,
Rejoicing much, yet yearning much indeed
For something past that still my heart must need,
Once more was all changed; by the windy sea
Did men hold games with great solemnity
In honour of some hero passed away,
Whose body dead upon a huge pile lay
Waiting the torch, and people far and wide
About the strand a name I knew not cried,
Lamenting him who once had been his king;
But when I saw the face of the dead thing
Over whose head so many a cry was thrown
On to the wind, I knew it for my own.

COLD pangs shot through me then, sleep’s bonds I broke;
Shuddering with terror in my bed I woke,
And when thought came again, a weight of fear
Lay on my heart and still grew heavier;

But when the next night and the third night came,
And still in sleep my visions were the same,
No longer in mine own heart could I hold
The story of that marvel quite untold,

For fear possessed me; good at first it seemed
That I should tell the dream so strangely dreamed
Unto my brother, then I feared that he
Might for that tale look with changed eyes on me

As deeming that some secret hope had wrought
Within my false heart, and that pageant brought
Before mine eyes; or he might flee the land
To save our house from some accursed hand;
And either way that dream seemed hard to tell
That yet, untold, made for my soul a hell.

BUT of a certain elder now I thought,
Who much of lore to both of us had taught
And loved us well; Diana’s priest was he,

And in the wild woods served her faithfully,
Dwelling with new folk in her woodland shrine,
That from the hillside such a man sees shine
As goes from Corinth unto Sicyon.7

And now amid these thoughts was night nigh done,
And the dawn gliimmered; I grew hot to go
To that old priest these troublous things to show;

So from my bed I rose up silently,
And with all haste I did my weed on me,
And went unto the door; but as I passed

7Sicyon: an ancient Greek city on a plateau at the intersection of the Asopus and Helissos rivers, about 11 miles northwest of Corinth in the northern Peloponnese.

The fair porch through, I saw how ‘gainst the last
Brass-adorned pillar lay a feathered dart;
And therewith came new fear into my heart,
For as the dart that I in dreams had seen
So was it fashioned, and with feathers green
And scarlet was the hinder end bedight,
And round the shaft were bands of silver white.

Then scarcely did I know if still I dreamed,
Yet, looking at the shaft, withal it seemed
Good unto me to take it in my hand,
That the old man the more might understand
How real my dream had been in very deed,
And give me counsel better to my need.

With that I caught it up, and went my way,
And almost ere the sun had made it day
Was I within the woods, and hastening on,
Afire until the old man’s house were won,
And like a man who walks in sleep I went

Nor noted aught amid my strong intent.
BUT when I reached the little forest fane
I found my labour had but been in vain;
For there the priest’s folk told me he had gone
The eve before to Corinth, all alone,

And on some weighty matter, as they deemed;
And measurelessly troubled still he seemed.
His trouble troubled me, because I thought
That unto him sure knowledge had been brought
Of some great danger hanging over me,

And that he thither went my face to see.
While I was seeking him; and therewithal
Great fear and heaviness on me did fall;
And all the life I once had thought so sweet
Now seemed a troublous thing and hard to meet.

SO cityward again I set my face,
And through the woodland glades I rode apace,
And halfway betwixt dawn and noon had I
Unto the wood’s edge once more come anigh;
And now upon the wind I seemed to hear
The sound of mingled voices drawing near;
Whereon I stayed to hearken and cried out,
But feeble was the sound from my parched throat;
And listening afterward I heard not now
Those sounds, and timorous did my faint heart grow,
And tales of woodfolk my vexed mind did take.

But just as I the well-wrought reins would shake,
Grown nigher did I hear those sounds again,
And drew aback the hand that held the rein,
And even therewith stalked forth into the way
From out the thicket a huge wolf and grey,
And stood with yellow eyes that glared on me;
And I stared too; my folly made me see
No wolf, but some dread deity, in him;
But trembling as I was in every limb,
E'en as his growling smote upon my heart
Tighter my fingers clutched the dreadful dart;
I made a shift in stirrups up to stand,
And hurled the quivering shaft from out my hand.

Then fire seemed all around me, and a pang
Crushed down my heart as from the thicket rang
A dreadful cry: clear saw I, even as he
Who meets the Father's visage suddenly;
No wolf was there; but o'er the herdsman ran
With staggering steps a pale and bleeding man,
His left hand on the shaft, whose banded wood
Over the barbs within his bosom stood,
His right hand raised against me, as he fell
Close to my horse-hoofs; and I knew full well
That this my brother's last farewell should be,
And thus his face henceforward should I see.

WHAT else? it matters not; the priest I saw,
And armed men from the thicket toward me draw,
With scared eyes fixed on mine; I drew my sword,
And sat there, waiting for a dreadful word,
Biding the rush of many men on me;
But they began to draw round silently,
And ere the circle yet was fully made,
I, who at first might even thus have stayed
For death and curses, felt the love of life
Stir up my heart again to hope and strife;
Yea, even withal I saw in one bright gleam

The latter ending of my dreaded dream.
So, crying out, strongly my horse I spurred,
And as he, rearing up, dashed forth, I heard
Clatter of arms and cries; a spear flew o'er
My bended head, a well-aimed arrow tore
My helm therefrom; yet then a cry there came:
Take him alive, nor bring a double shame
Upon the great house! Even therewith I drave
Against a mighty man as wave meets wave;
Back flew my right arm, and my sword was gone,
Whirled off as from a sling the wave-worn stone,
And my horse reel'd, but he before me lay
Rolled over, horse and man, and in my way
Was no one now, as I spurred madly on:
And so in no long time the race I won,
For nobly was I mounted; and I deem
That to the most of those men did it seem
No evil thing that I should ride away.

O KING, I think this happed but yesterday,
And now already do I deem that I
Did no good deed in seeking not to die,
For I am weary, and the Gods made me
A luckless man among all folk to be;
I care not if their purpose I undo,
Since now I doubt not that the thing is so;
And yet am I so made, that, having life,
Must I, though ever worsted in the strife,
Cling to it still too much to gain the rest
Which yet I know of all things is the best.

Then slay me, King! lo now, I pray for this,
And no least portion of thy hoarded bliss:
Slay me, and let the oak-boughs say their say
Over my bones through the wild winter day!
Slay me, for I am fain thereto go
Where no talk is of either bliss or woe.
NAY, said the King, didst thou not eat and drink
When hunger drove thee e'en now? yea, and shrink
When my men's spears were pointed at thy breast?
Be patient; thou indeed shalt gain thy rest,
But many a thing has got to come ere then:
For all things die, and thou midst other men
Shalt scarce remember thou hast had a friend.
At worst before thou comest to the end
Joy shalt thou have, and sorrow: wherefore come;
With me thou well mayst have no hapless home.
Dread not the Gods; ere long time has gone by
Thy soul from all guilt will we purify,
And sure no heavy curse shall lie on thee.
Nay, did their anger cause this thing to be?
Perchance in heaven they smile upon thy gain;
Lo, for a little while a burning pain,
Then yearting unfulfilled a little space,
Then tender memories of a well-loved face
In quiet hours, and then forgetfulness.
How hadst thou rather borne, still less and less
To love what thou hadst loved, till it became
A thing to be forgotten, a great shame
To think thou shouldst have wasted life thereon?
Come then, thou spakest of a kingdom won
Thy dream foretold, and shall not this be too,
E'en as the dreadful deed thou cam'st to do?
To horse! and unto Argos let us wend;
Begin thy life afresh with me for friend.
Wide is the world, nor yet for many a day
Will every evil thing be cleared away
That bringeth scathe to men within its girth;
Surely a man like thee can win the mirth
That cometh of the conquering of such things;
For not in vain art thou the seed of kings
Unless thy face belie thee; nay, no more!
Why speak I vain words to a heart still sore
With sudden death of happiness? yet come
And ride with us unto our lovely home.
HIPPONOUS to the King's word answered nought,
But sat there brooding o'er his dreary thought,
Nor seemed to hear; and when the Argive men
Brought up to him his battle-stead again,
Scarce witting of the company or place,
He mounted, and with set and weary face
Rode as they bade him at the King's left hand:

Nor did the sight of the fair well-tilled land,
When that they gained from out the tangled wood,
Do aught in dealing with his mournful mood;
Nor Argos' walls as from the fields they rose,
Such good things with their mightiness to close
From chance of hurt; scarce saw he the fair gate,
Dainty to look on, yet so huge of weight;
Nor did the streets' well-ordered houses draw
His eyes to look at them; unmoved he saw
The south-land merchants' dusky glittering train;
About the fountain the slim maids in vain
Drew sleek arms from the water, or turned round
With shaded eyes at the great horn's hoarse sound.
The sight of the King's house, deemed of all men
A wonder mid the houses kings had then,
Drew from him but a troubled frown, as though
Men's toilsome folly he began to know;
The carven Gods within the banquet-hall,
The storied hangings that bedight the wall,
Made his heart sick to think of labour vain,
Telling once more the oft-told tale of pain.
Coid in the damsel's hand his strong hand lay,
When to the steaming bath she led the way;
And when another damsel brought for him
Raiment wherein the Tyrian dye* showed dim
Amid the gold lines of the broderies,
Her face downcast because she might not please,
He heeded not. When to the hall he passed,
And by the high seat he was set at last,
Then Proetus, smiling from his mild eyes, laid
A hand upon his combed-out hair and said:
SURELY for no good luck this golden hair
Has come to Argos, and this visage fair,
To make us, who were well know before,
Seem to our maids like curls at the hall-door,
Prying about when men to war are gone
And girls and children sit therein alone.
BUT nought Hipponous heeded the King's say,

*Tyrian dye: purple.
But, turning, roughly put his hand away,
And frowning muttered, and still further drew,
As a man touched amid his dream might do.
In sooth he dreamed, and dreary was his dream;
A bitter thing the world to him did seem;
The void of life to come he peopled now
With folk of scornful eyes and brazen brow;
And one by one he told the tale of days
Wherein an envious mock was the world's praise;
Where good deeds brought ill fame, and truth was not,
Hate was remembered, love was soon forgot;
No face was good for long to look upon,
And naught was worthy when it once was won;
But narrow, helpless, friendless was the way
That led unto the last most hopeless day
Of hopeless days, in tangled, troubled wise.
So thought he, till the tears were in his eyes,
Since he was young yet, for hope lying dead.
BUT on his fixed eyes and his weary head
The happy King of Argos gazed awhile,
Till from his eye faded the scornful smile
That lingered on his lips; and now he turned,
As one who long ago that task had learned,
And unto the great men about him spoke,
And was a merry king of merry folk.
SO passed the feast, and all men drew to sleep,
And e'en Hipponous his soul might steep
In sweet forgetfulness a little while;
And somewhat did the fresh young day beguile
His treasured sorrow when he woke next morn,
And somewhat less he felt himself forlorn:
Nor did the King forget him, but straight sent
Unto the priests, and told them his intent
That this his guest should there be purified,
Since he with honour in his house should bide.
SO was Jove's house made ready for that thing,
And thither amid songs and harp-playing,
White-robed and barefoot, was Hipponous brought,
Who, bough in hand, for peace the God besought.
Noiseless the white bulls fell beneath the stroke

Of the gold-girdled, well-taught temple folk;
Up to the roof arose the incense-cloud;
The chanted prayer of men, now low now loud,
Thrilled through the brazen leaves of the great door;
Thick lay the scattered herbs upon the floor,
And in the midst at last the hero stood,
Freed of the guilt of shedding kindred blood.*
And then the chief priest cried: Bellerophon,
With this new hapless name that thou hast won,
Go forth, go free, be happy once again,
But no more called Hipponous of men.
THEN forth Bellerophon passed wearily,
Although so many prayers had set him free;
Yet somewhat was he ready to forget,
And turn unto the days that might be yet.
But when before King Proetus' throne he came,
The King called out on him by his new name:
O fair Bellerophon, like me, be wise,
And set things good to win before thine eyes,
Lands, and renown, and riches, and a life
That knows from day to day so much of strife
As makes men happy, since the age of gold
Is past, if e'er it was, as a tale told.
O KING, he said, thou sittest in full day,
Thou strivest to put thoughts of night away;
My life has not yet left the morning-tide;
And I, who find the world that seemed so wide,
Now narrowed to a little troublous space
Where help is not, astonied turn my face
Unto the coming hours, nor know at all
What thing of joy or hope to me will fall.
Be patient, King; perchance within a while
No marfeast I may be, but learn to smile
Even as thou, who lovest life so much.
Who knows but grief may vanish at a touch,

*Freed of the guilt of shedding kindred blood: Each Greek city-state had its own mode of worship; at Argos those whose relatives had died offered sacrifices to Apollo and Mercury (John Potter, Antiquities of Greece, Edinburgh, 1832, I, 231).
As joy does? and a long way off is death:
Some folk seem glad even to draw their breath.
YEA, said the King, thou hast it, for indeed
I fain would live, like most men; but what need
Unto a fevered man to talk of wine?
Thy heart shall love life when it grows like mine.
But come thou hence, and I will show to thee
What things of price the Gods have given to me.
Not good it is to harp on the frayed string;
And thou, so seeing many a lovely thing,
Mayst hide thy weary pain a little space.
AND therewith did King Proctus from that place
Draw forth Bellerophon, and so when he
In his attire was now clad royally,
From out the precinct to his palace fair
Did the King bring him; and he showed him there
His stables, where the war-steeds stood arow
Over the dusty grain: then did they go
To armouries, where sword and spear and shield
Hung bloodless, ready for the fated field:
The treasury showed he, where things richly wrought
Together into such a place were brought,
That he who stole the oxen of a God,10
For all his godlike cunning scarce had trod
Untaken on its floor: withal he showed
The chamber where the brodered raiment glowed,
Where the spice lay, and scented ungents fit
To touch Queen Venus' skin and brighten it:
The ivory chairs and beds of ivory
He showed him, and he bid his tired eyes see
The stories wrought on brazen doors, the flowers
And things uncouth carved on the wood of bowers;
The painted walls that told things old and new,

Things come to pass, and things that onward drew.
BUT all the while Bellerophon's grave face
And soon-passed smile seemed unmeet for that place,
And ever Proctus felt a pang of fear,
As if it told of times a-drawing near
When all the wealth and beauty that was his
Should not avail to buy one hour of bliss.
And sometimes when he watched his wandering eyes
And heard his stammering speech, would there arise
Within his heart a feeling like to hate,
Mingled with scorn of one so crushed by fate:
For ever must the rich man hate the poor.
NOW at the last they stood without a door
Adorned with silver, wrought of precious wood;
Then Proctus laughed, and said: O guest, thy mood
Is hard to deal with; never any leech
Has striven as I thy sickness' heart to reach;
And I grow weary and must get me aid.
Therewith upon the lock his hand he laid
And pushed the door a back, and then the twain
The daintiest of all passages did gain,
And as betwixt its walls they passed along
Nearer they drew unto the measured song
Of sweet-voiced women; and the King spake then:
Drive fire out with fire, say all wise men;
Here mayst thou set thine eyes on such an one,
That thou no more wilt think of days gone,
But days to come; for here indeed my spouse
Watches the damsels in the weaving-house,
Or in the pleasance11 sits above their play;
And certes here upon no long-passed day,
Unless my eyes were bleared with coming eld,
Fair sights for such as thou have I beheld.
ACROSS the exile's brow a frown there came,
As though his sorrow of such things thought shame,
Yet mayhap his eye brightened as he heard
The song grow louder and the hall they heard;
But the King smiled, and swiftlier led him on,

10he who stole the oxen of a God: This may refer to several figures: Mercury, who stole the cattle of his older brother Apollo (see the Homeric "Hymn to Mercury"; or Alcyones, a legendary giant who stole from Erytheia Helios's oxen, sacred to Zeus; or the "cunning" Odysseus, whose men, according to Chapter 12 of the Odyssey, killed and ate Helios's oxen, an act which the god avenged by sending a thunderbolt to destroy their ship and all the sailors except Odysseus.

11pleasance: recreational area of a manor-house or palace.
Until unto the door thereof they won.
Now noble was that hall and fair snow,
Betwixt whose slim veined pillars set arow,
And marble lattice wrought like flowering trees,
Showed the green freshness of the summer seas,
Made cheery by the sun, and many a ship,
Whose black bows smoothly through the waves did slip.
In bowls whereon old stories pictured were
The bright rose-laurels trembled in the air,
That from the sea stole through the lattices,
And round them hummed a few bewildered bees.
Midmost the pavement, wrought by toil of years,
A tree was set, gold-leaved like that which bears
Unto the maids of Hesperus strange fruit;
A many-coloured serpent from the root
Curl’d upward round the stem, and, reaching o’er
A four-square silver later, did outpour
Bright glittering water from his throat of brass;
And at each corner of the basin was
A brazen hart who seemed at point to drink;
And these the craftsman had not made to shrink
Though in the midst Diana’s feet pressed down
The forest greenward, and her girded gown
Cleared from the brambles fell about her thigh,
And eager showed her terrible bright eye.
BUT ‘twixt the pillars and that marvellous thing
Were scattered those they had e’en now heard sing;
Their song had sunk now, and a murmuring voice,
But mingled with the clicking loom’s sharp noise,
And splashing of the fountain, where a maid,
With one hand lightly on a brass deer laid,
One clasped about her own foot, knelt to watch
Her brazen jar the tinkling water catch;
Withal the wool-comb’s sound within the fleece
Began and grew, and slowly did decrease,
And then began as still it gat new food;
And by the loom an ancient woman stood
And grumbled o’er the web; and on the floor
Ten spindles twisted ever, from the store
Raised on high pillars at the gable end,

Adown a steep stair did a maiden wend,
Who in the wide folds of her gathered gown
Fresh yarn bright-dyed unto the loom bare down.
BUT on the downy cushions of a throne,
Above all this, sat the fair Queen alone,
Who heeded not the work, nor noted aught;
Nor showed indeed that there was any thought
Within her heaving breast; but though she moved
No whit the limbs a God might well have loved,
Although her mouth was as of one who lies
In peaceful sleep; though over her deep eyes
No shadow came to trouble her white brow,
Yet might you deem no rest was on her now;
Rather too weary seemed e’en to sigh
For foolish life that joyless passed her by.
SO thus the King Bellerophon led in
Just as the old song did once more begin
From the slim maids, that by the loom’s side spun;
But ere it had full sway, the newest one
Unto the door stopped singing suddenly,
And pressed her neighbour’s arm, that she might see
What new folk were come in; and therewithal
An angry glance from the Queen’s eyes did fall
Upon the maid; so that Bellerophon
A cruel visage had to look upon,
When first he saw the Queen raised high above
The ordered tresses of that close of love.
BUT when the women knew the King indeed
They did him reverence, and with lowly heed
Made way for him, while a girl here and there
Made haste to hide what labour had made bare
Of limb or breast; and the King smiled through all,
And now and then a wandering glance let fall
Upon some fairest face; and so at last
Through the sweet band unto the Queen they passed,
Who rose and waited them by her fair throne
With eyes wherefrom all care once more had gone
Of life and what it brought: then the king said:
O Sthenoboea, hither have I led
A man, who, from a happy life down-hurled,
Looks with sick eyes upon this happy world;  
Not knowing how to stay here or depart:  
Thou knowest and I know the wounded heart  
Forgetteth pain and groweth whole again,  
Yet is the pain that passeth no less pain.  
But since this man is noble even as we,  
And help begets help, and withal to me  
Worthy he seems to be a great king's friend,  
Now help me to begin to make an end  
Of his so heavy mood; for though indeed  
This daintiness may nowise help his need,  
Yet may kind words avail to make him kind  
Unto himself; kind eyes may make him blind  
Unto the ugly, tangled whirl of life;  
Or in some measured image of real strife  
He may forget the things that he has lost,  
Nor think of how he needs must yet be tossed  
Like other men from wave to wave of fate.  
GRAVELY she set herself the end to wait  
Of the King's speech; and what of scorn might be  
Within her heart changed nowise outwardly  
Her eyes that looked with scorn on every thing;  
And yet withal, while still the cheery King  
Let his tale flow, unto the exile's place  
She glanced with scornful wonder at his face  
At first, because she deemed it soft and kind;  
Yet was he fair, and she, she needs must find  
Something that drew her to his wide grey eyes;  
And presently as with some great surprise  
Her heart 'gan beat, and she must strive in vain  
To crush within it a sweet rising pain,  
She deemed to be that pity that she knew  
As the last folly wise folk turn unto.  
For pain was wont to rouse her rage, and she  
Was like those beasts that slaughter cruelly  
Their wounded fellows: truth she knew not of,  
And fain had killed folk babbling over love;  
Justice she thought of as a thing that might  
Balk some desire of hers before the night  
Of death should end it all: nor hope she knew,  
Nor what fear was, how ill soe'er life grew.  
This wisdom had she more than most of folk,  
That through the painted cloud of lies she broke  
To gain what brought her pleasure for awhile;  
However men might call it nought and vile;  
Nor was she one to make a piteous groan  
O'er bitter pain amidst her pleasure grown.  
BUT she was one of those wrought by the gods  
To be too foolish men as sharpest rods  
To scourge their folly; wrought so daintily  
That scarcely could a man her body see  
Without awaking strife 'twixt good and ill  
Within him; and her sweet, soft voice would fill  
Men's hearts with strange desires, and her great eyes,  
Truthful to show her to the cold and wise  
E'en as she was, would make some cast aside  
Whatever wisdom in their breasts might hide,  
And still, despite what long ill days might prove,  
They called her languid hate the soul of love.  
BUT now that fire that to her eyes arose  
She cast aback awhile to lie all close  
About her heart; her full lips trembled not,  
And from her cheek faded the crimson spot  
That erst increased thereon. O Prince, she said,  
Strive to get back again thy goodlyhead;  
Life flitteth fast, and while it still abides,  
Our folly many a good thing from us hides,  
That else would pierce our hearts with its delight  
Unto the quick, in all the Gods' despite.  
HE gazed upon her wondering, for again  
That new-born hope, that sweet and bitter pain,  
Flushed her smooth cheek, and glittered in her eyes,  
And wrought within her lips; yet was she wise,  
And gazing on his pale and wondering face,  
In his frank eyes she did not fail to trace  
A trouble like unto a growing hate,  
That, yet unknown to him, her love did wait;  
Then once more did she smother up that flame,  
Calm grew she; from her lips a false voice came:  
Yea, and bethink thee, mayst thou not be born
To raise the crushed and succour the forlorn,
And in the place of sorrow to set mirth,
Gaining a great name through the wondering earth?
Now surely has my lord the King done well
To bring thee here thy tale to me to tell;
Come, then, for nearby such a bower there is
As most men deem to be a place of bliss;
There, when thy tale is o'er that I am fain
To hearken, may sweet music ease thy pain
Amidst our feast; or of these maids shall one
Read of some piteous thing the Gods have done
To us poor folk upon the earth that dwell.
Yea, and the reader will I choose so well,
That such an one herself shall seem to be
As she of whom the tale tells piteously,
And thou shalt hear when all is past and o'er,
And with its sorrow still thine heart is sore,
The Lydian flutes 12 come nigher and more nigh,
Till glittering raiment cometh presently,
And thou behold'st the dance of the slim girls,
Waving and strange as the leaf-wreath that whirls
Down in the marble court we walk in here
Mid sad October, when the rain draws near:
So delicate therewith, that when all sound
Of sobbing flute has left the air around,
And, panting, lean the dancers against wall
And well-wrought pillar, you hear nought at all
But their deep breathing, so are all men stilled,
So full their hearts with all that beauty filled.
COLDLY and falsely was her speech begun,
But she waxed warm ere all the tale was done;
Nay, something soft was in her voice at last,
As round his soul her net she strove to cast
Almost despite herself: Unmoved he stood,
But that some thought did cross his weary mood
That made him knit his brow, and therewith came
A flush across his face as if of shame

Because of that new thought; but when an end
Her speech had, then he spake: What love or friend
Can do me good? God-hated shall I be,
And bring to no man aught but misery;
And thou, O royal man, and thou, O Queen,
Who heretofore in bliss and mirth have been,
Hearken my words, and on your heads be all
The trouble that from me shall surely fall
If I abide with you: yet doubt it not
That this your love shall never be forgot
WhereWITH ye strive to win a helpless man,
And ever will I labour as I can
To make my ill forebodings come to nought.
BUT midst these things, pleased by some hidden thought,
The King smiled, turning curious eyes on them,
And smoothing down his raiment's golden hem
As one who hearkens music; then said he:
Wilt thou give word for our festivity,
O Sthenoboea? But come thou, O guest,
And by the great sea we will take our rest,
Speaking few words. So from her golden throne
She passed to do what things must needs be done,
And with firm feet amidst her maids she went
On this new tyrannous sweetness all intent;
So did it work in her, that scarcely she
Might bear the world now, as she turned to see
The stranger and the King a-going down
By marble stairs unto the foreshores brown.
So slipped the morn away, and when the sun
His downward course some three hours had begun,
Summoned by sound of horns they took their way
Unto a bower that looking westward lay,
Yet was by trellised roses shaded so
That little of the hot sun did it know
But what the lime-trees' honey-sweet scent told,
And their wide wind-stirred leaves, turned into gold
Against the bright rays of the afternoon.
SO to that chamber came the fair Queen soon,
Well harbingered by flutes; nor had she spared
To veil her limbs in raiment that had fared

12. Lydian flutes: Lydia, an inland region of Asia Minor, was associated with soothing lyric modes.
O'er many a sea, before it had the hap
The Lycian's smooth skin in its folds to lap.
But as she entered there in queenly guise,
With firm and haughty step, and careless eyes
Over the half-hid beauty of her breast,
One moment on the exile did they rest,
And softened to a meek, imploring gaze;
One moment only; as with great amaze
His eyes beheld her, doubtful what was there,
All had gone thence, but the proud empty stare
That she was wont to turn on everything.
WITHAL she sat her down beside the King,
And the feast passed with much of such delight
As makes to happy men the world seem bright,
But from the hapless draws but hate and scorn,
Because the Gods both happy and forlorn
Have set in one world, each to each to be
A vain rebuke, a bitter memory.
YET the Queen held her word, and when that they
Had heard the music sing adown the day,
After the dancing women had but left
Sweet honeyed scents behind, or roses, reft
By their own hands from head or middle small,
Then came with hurried steps into the hall
The reader and her scroll; sweet-eyed was she,
And timid as some loving memory
Midst the world's clamour; clad in gown of wool,
She sat herself adown upon a stool
Anigh the proud feet of the Lycian Queen,13
And straight, as if no soul she there had seen,
With slender hand put back her golden hair,
And 'gan to read from off the parchment fair.
In a low voice, and trembling at the first,
She read a tale of lovers' lyes accurst
By cruel Gods and careless, foolish men:
Like dainty music was her voice, and when

13the Lycian Queen: Lycia, a mountainous coastal region in southwestern Asia Minor between Caria and Pamphylia, extended inland to the ridge of Mt. Taurus.

From out her heart she sighed, as she must read
Of folk unholpen in their utmost need,
Still must the stranger turn kind eyes on her.
At last awhile she paused, as she drew near
The bitter end of spilt and wasted bliss,
And death unblessed at last by any kiss;
Her voice failed, and adown her book did sink,
And midst them all awhile she seemed to think
Of her past days herself; but still so much
Her beauty and the tale their hearts did touch,
Folk held their breath till she began again,
And something 'twixt a pleasure and a pain
It was when all the sweet tale was read o'er
And her voice quivered through the air no more.
THEN round the maiden's neck King Proetus cast
A golden chain, and from the hall she passed,
And yet confused and shamefaced; for the Queen,
Who at the first the Prince's eyes had seen
Upon the maid, and then would look no more,
But kept her eyes fixed on the marble floor
As listening to the tale, her head now raised,
And with cold scorn upon the maiden gazed
As she bent down the golden gift to take;
And meanwhile, for her tender beauty's sake,
Over the exile's face a pleased smile came.
BUT she departed to the bliss or shame
Life had for her, and all folk left the bower;
For now was come the summer night's mid-hour:
The great high moon that lit the rippling sea
'Twixt the thin linden-trees shone doubtfully
Upon the dim grey garden; the sea-breeze
Stood down on the plesched14 alleys; the tall trees
Over the long roofs moved their whispering leaves,
Nor woke the dusky swifts15 beneath the eaves.

14plesched: braided.
15swifts: Small plain-colored birds related to hummingbirds and goatsuckers, swifts superficially resemble swallows.
NOW from that fair night wore the time away,
Until with lapse of many a quiet day,
And stirring times withal, Bellerophon
To love of life and hope of joy was won.
Still grave and wise he was beyond his years,
No eager man among his joyous peers
To snatch at pleasures, careful not to cheat
His soul with vain desires all over-sweet;
A wary walker on the road of life;
E'en as a man who in a garden rife
With flowers has gone unarmed, and found that there
Are evil things amid the blossoms fair,
And paid with wounds for folly: yet when he
Is whole once more, since there he needs must be,
And has no will its sweets to cast aside,
Well armed he walks there, ware of beasts that hide
Beneath the shade of those vine-trellises,
Amid the grey stems of the apple-trees.
YET at his heart, about the root of it,
Strange thoughts there lay, which at sweet times would fit
Before his eyes, as things grown palpable;
Strange hopes that made the wretched world seem well
While he abode there: therefore, was he kind
To man and maid, and all men's hearts did bind
With bonds of love, for mid the struggling folk,
The forgers and the bearers of the yoke,
Weary with wronging and with wrongs, he seemed
As one on whom a light from heaven had beamed,
That changed him to a god, yet being alive.
BUT midst all folk there did King Proetus give
Great gifts to him; great trust in him he had,
And ever by his sight was he made glad:
For well did all things prosper in his hand,
Nor was there such another in the land
For strength or goodness. Now so it was,
That he on matters of the King would pass
About the country here and there, nor dwell
At Argos much, and that thing pleased him well;
For while all else grew better, ye shall know
That greater in his heart the fear did grow
That sprung up therein on that summer eve;
And though sometimes the Queen would make believe
To heed him nought, yea, or depart maybe
At whiles, when he the King would come to see,
Yet was this but at whiles; the next day came,
And scarce would she hold parley with her shame.
ONE noon of the late autumn, when the sun
Brightened the parting year, so nearly done,
With rays as hot as early June might shed,
Dawn past an hour, upon the tulip-bed,
In the great pleasance, 'neath a wall of yew,
Walked the Corinthian, pondering what to do
In some great matter late given unto him.
So clad he was, that both on breast and limb
Steel glittered, though his head as yet was bare,
But in his face was just so much of care
As seemed to show he had got that to do
He feared but little well to carry through,
But which must have his heed a little while:
And still in going would he stop and smile,
And seem to cast the shreds of thought away
In honour of the bright fresh autumn day
And all the pleasure of the lovely place.
BUT at the last, turning about his face
Unto the sunny garden's other side,
He saw where, down a grassy path and wide,
The Queen came, with her head bent down to earth,
As though mid thoughts she were that slew her mirth;
Slowly she went, with two maids following her,
Who in their delicate slim hands did bear,
The one a cithern, and some verse-book old,
The other a white osier maund, to hold
Some of such flowers as still in fear and doubt
Against the sickness of the year held out.
BUT as they went, nigh to the Prince they drew,
And soon the maidens' eyes his beauty knew,
And one at other glanced, smiling and glad,

16cithern: guitar-like instrument played with a quill or plectrum.
17osier maund: willow basket.
For soft love of him in their hearts they had;
Yet nought they said, nor did the Queen turn round,
But kept her eyes still bent upon the ground.
So in their walk they came to where there stood
A thin-leaved apple-tree, where, red as blood,
Yellow as gold, a little fruit hung yet,
The last rays of the fainting sun to get;
And a tall clump of autumn flowers, cold-grey,
Beneath it, mocked the promise of the day,
And to them clung a hapless bee or twain;
A butterfly spread languid wings in vain
Unto the sun, that scarce could heat her now.
THERE the Queen stayed awhile her footsteps slow,
And to the flowers wandered her slender hand;
But with her eyes cast down she still did stand,
And pondered. Full of melody and peace
About her was the lingering year's decease;
Strange spicy scents there were that yet were sweet,
Green was the grass about her gold-shod feet,
And had no memory of the dawn's white rime;
Loud was the birds' song in that windless time,
Strange the sharp crying of the mistel-thrush.18
Within the close heart of the hawthorn-bush,
Strange the far-off rooks' sweet tumultuous voice.
That in the high elms e'en now must rejoice
And know not why: peace e'en if end of peace.
THE while her burning heart did never cease
To give words to such longings, as she knew
To swift destruction all her glory drew.
Ah! mine, mine, mine! she thought; ah! mine a while!
Ah! mine a little day, if all be vile
That coming years can bring unto my heart!
Ah! mine this eve, if we to-morn must part!
Mine, that a sweet hour I may know at last
How soon soever all delight is passed!
Ah! mine, mine, mine, if for a little while!
SO stood she, that her parted lips did smile,
As if of one that memories make half sad;

Her breast heaved, as no stronger wish she had
Than for some careless lover, lightly won,
And soon forgot, to lay his lips thereon;
The flower-stem that her finger-tips did hold
Was crushed not, and within her shoe of gold
Lightly her foot was laid upon the grass;
No tremors through her dainty limbs did pass,
And healthy life alone did paint her cheek:
For if indeed at first she had felt weak,
Ere well she knew what she was bent upon,
Now at the last, when every doubt was gone,
She would not show the net unto the prey
Until she deemed that in her toils he lay.
SHE raised her eyes at last with a light sigh;
Despite herself, a flush passed suddenly
Over her face, and then all pale she grew;
For now withal Bellerophon she knew,
Though at that very point of time the sun
Along his upraised steel-clad arm had run,
And made an earthly sun that dazzled her.
Yet cast she back her trembling hope and fear
Into her heart, and as before she went
Slowly, with head a little downward bent,
But when she had gone on a few yards' space,
Once more unto the Prince she raised her face;
Then stopped again, and turning round, she said,
From lips wherein all passion now seemed dead:
Damsels, get home again; thou, Mysian, go
Unto the little treasury thou dost know
Anigh my bower, and taking this gold key,
Draw forth that ancient prophet's book for me
Which shows the stars: for that I fain would show
To Prince Bellerophon, who bides me now
Ere he goes forth to bring the island folk
Once more beneath King Proetus' equal yoke.
And thou, Leucippe, bide our coming there,
And bid our folk set forth a feast as fair

18 _mistle-thrush_: so called because it feeds on mistletoe berries.

19 _Mysian_: Mysia, an area containing Pergamus and Troy in ancient Asia Minor, now part of northwestern Turkey.
As may be done; for we within a while
May need thy cithern dull thoughts to beguile.
ETEN as they turned she passed on carelessly
Unto the Prince, nor looked aback to see
That they were gone; but he indeed had heard
Through the calm air her clearly-spoken word,
And saw the maidens go, and felt as one
Who bideth, when the herald’s speech is done,
The word that bids the grinded spears fall down.
But she, with slim hand folded in her gown,
Went o’er the dewy grass to where he stood,
And in despite the fire within her blood
Was calm, and smiling on him, till nigh he thought
That surely all his fear was vain and nought.
He bowed before her as she drew nigh,
But she held out her right hand, and in clear
Sweet tones she cried: O fair Bellerophon,
Would that the victory were already won,
And thou were back again at this thy home
We have made glad for thee: behold! I come.
To say farewell; yet come a little way,
For something else indeed I had to say.
AND still she held his hand, but yet durst not
Clasp as she would the treasure she had got.
Then to a place together did they pass,
Where yew-trees hemmed around a plot of grass,
And kept it scarce touched by the faint sun’s rays;
A place well made for burning summer days,
But cheerless now. There on a marble seat
She bade him sit, while she with restless feet
Paced to and fro; while from the yew-twigs close,
With his scared cry the creeping blackbird rose.
But he, with eyes cast down upon the ground,
Deemed that his battle easier would be found
Than this. And so at last she stayed by him
And cried: The cup is full unto the brim;
For now thou goest where thou mayst be slain:
I speak then, and, alas! I speak in vain;
Thy cold eyes tell me so. How shall I move
Thy flinty heart my curse has made me love?

For what have other women done, when they
Were fair as I, and love before them lay?
Was not a look enough for them, a word
Low murmured, midst the hum of men scarce heard?
What have I left undone that they have done?
What asketh thou of me, O heart of stone?
CHOKED by her passion here awhile she stayed,
And he from off the bench sprang up dismayed,
And turned on her to speak; but she withal
Before him on her knees made haste to fall,
And cried out loud and shrilly: Nay, nay, nay;
Say not the word thou art about to say;
Let me depart, and things be still as now;
So that my dreams sweet images may show,
As they have done, that waking I may think:
If he, my love, from looks of love did shrink,
That was because I had not prayed him then
To be my love alone of living men;
Because he did not know that I, a Queen,
Who hitherto but loveless life have seen,
Could kneel to him, and pray upon my knees
To give me my first pleasure, my first peace.
Thou knowest not, nay, nay, thou knowest not now,
Thou with the angry eyes and bended brow!
Surely I talk my mother-tongue no more,
Therefore thou knowest not that I implore
Thy pity, that I give myself to thee,
Thy love, thy slave, thy castaway to be;
Hear’st thou? thy castaway! when in a while
Thou growest weary of my loving smile!
Oh, take me, madman! In a year or twain
I will not thwart thee if thou lovest again,
Nor eye thee sourly when thou growest cold;
Or art thou not the man that men call bold,
And fear’st thou? Then what better time than this
For we twain to begin our life of bliss?
Thy keel awaits thee, and to thee alone,
Not to the wretched dastard on the throne,
Thy men will hearken: Nay, thou shalt not speak,
My feeble reed of hope thou shalt not break!
Let me be gone, thou knowest not of love,
Thou semblance of a man that nought can move!
O wise, wise man, I give thee good farewell:
Gather fresh wisdom, thinking of my hell.
SHE sprang up to her feet and turned away
Trembling, and no word to her could he say
For grief and pity; and the Queen did go
A little way with doubtful steps and slow,
Then turned about, and once again did stand
Before his troubled face, hand laid in hand,
And sobbing now as if her heart would break;
But when from his grieved soul he fain would speak,
Again from midst her tears she cried: No, no;
Do I not know what thou wouldst bid me do?
And yet forgive me! thou art wise and good.
Surely some evil thing has turned my blood,
That even now I wished that thing to slay
That I of all things only till this day
Have loved. Ah, surely thou wilt not be slain!
Come back, and I will tell thee once again
How much I love thee, and will not forget
To say such things as might have moved thee yet,
Could I have told thee now, couldst thou have seen
These lips that love thee as they might have been.
Farewell, I durst not pray thee for one kiss!
NEARER she drew to him as she spake this,
Yet, when she ended, turned about again,
And still, as hoping all was not in vain,
Lingered a little while, and then at last,
With raging heart, swiftly therefrom she passed.
BUT, she clean vanished now, Bellerophon
Went slowly toward the palace, all alone,
And pondering on these things: and shamed he felt,
E'en as a just man who in sleep has dealt
Unjustly; nor had all her prayers and tears
Moved love in him, but rather stirred his fears,
For ever was he wise among wise men;
And though he doubted not her longing, when
She turned and spake soft words, he knew that she
So spake midst hope of what things yet might be,
And yet had left another kind of word,
Whereby a friendless man might well be feared;
Lonely he felt thereat, as one accurst,
With whom all best things still must turn to worst,
And e'en sweet love curdle to bitter hate.
Yet was he one not lightly crushed by fate.
And when at last he had his helmer on,
And heard the folk cry out, Bellerophon!
As toward the ship he passed, kind the world seemed;
Nor love so far away indeed he deemed
When he some gentle maiden's kind grey eyes
Fixed on his own he did at whiles surprise,
Or when his godlike eyes, on some maid turned
More fair than most, set fire to thoughts that burned
On breast and brow of her. So forth he passed,
And reached the border of the sea at last,
And there took ship, and hence is gone a space.
BUT for the Queen, when she had left that place,
About the pleasant paths did she go still,
So wildered in her mind because her will
Might not be done, that at the first she knew
No more what place she might be passing through
Than one who walks in sleep. Yet hope and shame,
Twain help, at last unto her spirit came;
Yea, her bright gown, soiled with the autumn grass,
Told her the tale of what had come to pass,
And to her heart came hatred of the spot
Where she had kneeled to one who loved her not,
And even therewith his image did she see
As he had been; then cried she furiously:
Ah, fool! ah, traitor! must I love thee then,
When in the world there are so many men
My smile would drive to madness? for I know
What things they are that men desire so,
And which of all these bear I not with me?
Hast thou not heart and eyes to feel and see?
Then shalt thou die, then shalt thou die, at least,
Nor sit without me at life's glorious feast,
While I fall ever unto worse and worse.
Ah me! I rave! what folly now to curse
That which I love, because its loveliness
Alone has brought me unto this distress!
I know not right nor wrong, but yet through all
Know that the Gods a just man him would call;
Nay, and I knew it, when I saw him first,
And in my heart sprang up that glorious thirst.
And should he, not being base, yield suddenly,
And as the basest man, not loving me,
Take all I gave him, and cast all his life
Into a tangled and dishonoured strife?
Nay, it could never be; but now, indeed,
Somewhat with pity of me his heart may bleed,
Since he is good; and he shall think of me,
And day by day and night by night shall see
The image of that woman on her knees,
Whom men here liken to the goddesses.
And certainly shall he come back again,
Nor shall my next speech to him be so vain.
SHE smiled, and toward the house made swiftly on
In triumph, even as though the game were won:
For, now his face was gone, she, blind with love,
Deemed but his honour she had got to move
From its high place, before his heart should fall
A prey unto her; e'en as when the wall
By many a stroke of stones was battered down,
And all may work their will upon the town.

Of Bellerophon must it be said
That, what by wisdom, what by hardihead,
His task was done, and great praise gained thereby;
So he at last, midst shouts and minstrelsy,
In the first days of spring, passed up once more
Unto the palace from the thronging shore.
Him Proetus met halfway, and, in the face
Of all the people, in a straight embrace
Held him awhile, and called him his dear son,
Praising the Gods for all that he had done;
Then hand in hand did they go up the street,
And on their heads folk cast the spring-flowers sweet,
And bands of maids met them with joyous song

And gracious pageants as they went along:
And all this for the brave Corinthian's sake,
Such joy did his return in all hearts make.
BUT though the man, once from his home driven forth,
Was so much loved and held of so much worth,
And though he throve thereby, and seemed to be
Scarcely a man, but some divinity
To people's eyes, yet in his soul no less
There lingered still a little heaviness,
And therefrom hardly could he cast away
The memory of that sunny autumn day
And of the fear it brought; and one more fear
He had besides, and as they drew anear
The palace, therewith somewhat faltering,
He needs must turn a while, and of the King
Ask how the Lycian fared: the King laughed low,
And said: Nay, surely she is well enow,
As her wont is to be, for, sooth to say,
She for herself is ever wont to pray,
And heedeth nothing other grief and wrong:
And be thou sure, my son, that such live long
And lead sweet lives; but those who ever think
How he and she may fare, and still must shrink
From sweeping any foe from out the way,
These, living other people's lives, I say,
Besides their own, and most of them forlorn,
May hap to find their lives of comfort shorn
And short enow: let pass, for as to me,
I weep for others' troubles certainly,
But for mine own would weep a little more;
And so I jog on somehow to the shore
Whence I shall not return. Thou laughest; well,
I deem I was not made for heaven or hell,
But simply for the earth; but thou, O son,
I deem of heaven, and all hearts hast thou won;
Yea, and this morn the Queen is merrier,
Because she knoweth that thou art anear.
THE Prince smiled at his words and gladder felt,
Yet somewhat of his old fear by him dwelt
And shamed him midst his honour. But withal,
With shouts and music, entered they the hall,
And there great feast was made; but ere the night
Had 'gun to put an end to men's delight,
A maid came up the hall with hurrying feet,
And there in lowly wise the King did greet,
And bid him know that Sthenoboea had will
The joyance of that high-tide to fulfil,
And Prince Bellerophon to welcome home.
And even as she spoke the Queen was come
Unto the door, and through the hall she passed,
And round about her ever looks she cast,
As though her maidens, howsoever fair
And lovesome unto common eyes they were,
Were fashioned in another wise than she;
They made for time, she for eternity.
So 'twixt the awed and wondering folk she moved,
Hapless and proud, glorious and unbeloved,
And hating all folk but her love alone:
And be a shadow seemed, one moment shown
Unto her longing eyes, then snatched away
Ere yet her heart could win one glorious day.
Cruel and happy was she deemed of men;
Cruel she was, but though tormented then
By love, still happier than she ere had been.
NOW when she saw the Prince, with such-like mien
She greeted him but as a Queen might greet
Her husband's friend fresh from a glorious feat:
Frank-seeming were her words, and in her face
No sign of all that storm the Prince could trace
That had swept over her; and yet therefore
Amidst his joy he did but fear her more.
SO time slipped by, and still was she the same,
Till he 'gan deem she had forgot the shame
Of having shameful gifts cast back to her,
That scorned love was a burden light to bear;
Yea, and the moody ways that once she had
Seemed changing into life all frank and glad.
She saw him off now, and alone at whiles;
But still, despite her kind words and her smiles,
No word of love fell from her any more.

BUT when the lush green spring was now passed o'er,
And the green lily-buds were growing white,
A feast they held for pastime and delight
Within the odorous pleasance on a tide,
And down the hours the feast in joy did glide.
Venus they worshipped there, her image shone
Above the folk from thoughts of hard life won;
About her went the girls in ordered bands,
And scattered flowers from out their flowery hands,
And with their eager voices, sweet but shrill,
Betwixt the o'erladen trees the air did fill;
Or, careless what their dainty limbs might meet,
Ungirded and unshod, with hurrying feet
Mocked cold Diana's race betwixt the trees,
Where the long grass and sorrel\(^{20}\) kissed their knees,
About the borders of the neighbouring field;
Or in the garden were content to yield
Unto the sun, and by the fountain-side,
Panting, love's growing languor would abide.
SURELY the Goddess in the warm wind breathed,
Surely her fingers wrought the flowers that wreathed
The painted trellises; some added grace
Her spirit gave to every limb and face,
Some added scent to rainent long laid hid
Beneath the stained chest's carven cypresses lid;
Fairer the girdle round the warm side clung,
Fairer the dainty folds beneath it hung,
Fairer the gold upon the bosom lay
Than was their wont ere that bewildering day,
When fear and shame, twin rulers of the earth,
Sat hoodwinked in the maze of short-lived mirth.
SONGS left the air, and little words therein
Were clean changed now, and told of honeyed sin,
And passionate words seemed fire, and words, that had
Grave meaning once, were changed, and only bade
The listeners' hearts to thoughts they could not name.

Shame changed to strong desire, desire seemed shame

\(^{20}\)sorrel: A small perennial plant belonging to the genus Rumex, sorrel is characterized by a sour taste.
And trembled; and such words the lover heard
As in the middle of the night aforesaid
He once was wont alone to whisper low
Unto himself, for fear the day should know
What his love really was; the longing eyes
That unabashed were wont to make arise
The blush of shame to bosom and grave brow,
Beholding all their fill, were downcast now;
The eager heart shrank back, the cold was moved,
Wood was the wooer, the lover was beloved.
BUT yet indeed from wise Bellerophon
Right little by Queen Venus' wiles was won:
Joyous he was, but nowise would forget
That long and changing might his life be yet,
Nor deemed he had to do with such things now,
So let all pass, e'en as a painted show.
But the Queen hoped belike, and many a prayer
That morn had made to Venus' image fair;
And as the day wore, hushed she grew at whiles
And pale; and sick and scornful were her smiles,
Nor knew her heart what words her lips might say.
So through its changing hours went by the day,
And when at last they sang the sun adown,
And, singing, watched the moon rise, and the town
Was babbling through the clear eve, saddened now;
Then faint and weary went, with footsteps slow,
The lover and beloved, to e'en such rest
As they might win; and soon the daisies pressed
By oft-kissed dainty feet and panting side,
Now with the dew were growing satisfied,
And sick blind passion now no more might spoil
The place made beautiful by patient toil
Of many a man. And now Bellerophon
Slept light and sweetly as the night wore on,
Nor dreamed about the morrow; but the Queen
Rose from her bed, and, like a sin unseen,
Stole from the house, and, barefoot as she was,
Through the dark belt of whispering trees did pass
That girt the fair feast's pleasant place around;
And when she came unto that spot of ground

Whereas she deemed Bellerophon had lain,
Then low adown she lay, and as for pain
She moaned, and on the dew she laid her cheek,
Then raised her head and cried: Now may I speak,
Now may I speak, since none can hear me now
But thou, O Love, thou of the bitter bow.
Didst thou not see, O Citheroe's son, 21
Thine image, that men call Bellerophon?
Thine image, with the heart of stone, the eyes
Of fire, those forgers of all miseries?
And shall I bear thy burden all alone,
In silent places making my low moan?
Nay, but once more I try it; help thou me,
Or on the earth a strange deed shalt thou see.
Lo, now! thou knowest what my will has been:
Day after day his fair face have I seen
And made no sign, thus had I won him soon.
But thou, the dreadful sun, the cruel moon,
The scents, the flowers, the half-veiled nakedness
Of wanton girls, my heart did so oppress
That now the chain is broken. Didst thou see
How when he turned his cruel face on me
He laughed? He laughed, nor would behold my heart;
He laughed, to think at last he had a part
In joyous life without me: here, e'en here,
He drank, rejoicing much, still drawing near,
As the fool thought, to riches and renown.
And such an one wilt thou not cast adown
When thou rememberest how he came to me
With wan worn cheek? Ah, sweet he was to see;
I loved him then, how can I love him now,
So changed, so changed? But thou, what dost thou?
Hast thou forgotten how thy temples stand,
Made rich with gifts, in many a luckless land?
Hast thou forgotten what strange rites are done
To gain thy goodwill underneath the sun?
Thou art asleep, then! Wake! the world will end
Because thou sleepest; e'en now doth it wend

21 Citheroe's son: Venus's son, Cupid.
Unto the sickening end of all delights:
Black, black the days are, dull grey are the nights;
No more the night hides shame, no more the day
Unto the rose-strewn chamber lights the way;
And folk begin to curse thee: Love is gone,
Grey shall the earth be, filled with rocks alone,
Because the generations shall die out;
Grey shall the earth be, lonely, wrapped about
With cloudy memories of the moans of men.
Thus, thus they curse. Shall I not curse thee then,
Thou who tormentest me and leav'st me lone,
Nor thinkest once of all that thou hast done?
Spare me! What cruel God taught men to speak,
To cast forth words that for all good are weak,
And strong for all undoing? thou know'st this,
O lovely one! take not all hope of bliss
Away from me, because my eager prayer
Grows like unto a curse. O great and fair,
Hearken a little, for to-morn must I
Speak once again of love to him, or die;
Hast thou no dream to send him, such as thou
Hast shown to me so many a time or now?
Wilt thou not make him weep without a cause,
As I have done, as sleep her dark veil draws
From off his head? or his awaking meet
With lovely images, so soft and sweet
That they, forgotten quite, yet leave behind
Great yearning for bright eyes and touches kind?
Alas, alas! wilt thou not change mine eyes,
Or else blind his, the cold, the over-wise?
O Love, he knows my heart, and what it is;
No fool he is to cast away his bliss
On such as me: nay, rather he will take
Some grey-eyed girl to love him for his sake,
Not for her own: he knows me, and therefore
I, grovelling here where he has lain, the more
Must burn for him: he knows me; and thou, too,
Better than I, knowest what I shall do.
O Love, thou knowest all, yet since I live
A little joyance hope to me doth give;

Wilt thou not grant me now some sign, O Love?
Wilt thou not redden this dark sky, or move
Those stark hard walls, or make the spotted thrush
Cry as in morn through this dark scented hush?
SHE ceased, and leaned back, kneeling, and all spent
And panting, with her trembling fingers rent
The linen from her breast, and, with shut eyes,
Waited awhile as for some great surprise,
But yet heard nothing stranger or more loud
Than the leaves' rustle; a long bank of cloud
Lay in the south, low down, and scarcely seen
'Gainst the grey sky; and when at last the Queen
Opened her eyes, she started eagerly,
Although the strangest thing her eyes could see
Was but the summer lightning playing there:
Then she put back her over-hanging hair,
And in a hard and grating voice she said:
O Sthenoboea, art thou then afraid
Of a god's presence? did a god e'er come
To help a good and just man when his home
Was turned to help? I was but praying here
Unto myself, who to myself am dear
Alone of all things, mine own self to aid,
And therewithal I needs must grow afraid
E'en of myself. O wretch, unholpen still,
To-morrow early thou shalt surely fill
The measure of thy woe; and then, and then,
Alas for me! What cruellest man of men
Had made me this, and left me even thus?
UNTO the sky wild eyes and piteous
She turned, and gat unto her feet once more,
And, led by use, came back unto the door
Whence she went out, and with no stealthy tread,
Careless of all things, gat her to her bed,
And there at last, in grief and care's despite,
Slept till the world had long forgotten night.
BELLEROPHON arose the morrow morn
Unlike the man that once had been forlorn;
Bright-eyed and merry was he, and such fear
As yet clung round him did but make joy dear,
And more in hope he was, and knew not why,
Than any day that yet had passed him by.
Now ere the freshness of the morn had died,
Restless with happiness, he thought to ride
Unto a ship that in a little bay
Anigh to Philus,²² bound for outlands, lay;
Unto whose Phrygian²³ master had the King
Given commands to buy him many a thing,
And soone he sailed, since fair was grown the wind.
BUT as Bellerophon in such a mind
Passed slow along the marble cloister-wall,
He heard a voice his name behind him call,
And turning, saw the Thracian maiden²⁴ fair,
Leucippe, coming swiftly toward him there,
Who when she reached him stayed, and drawing breath
As one who rests, said: Sir, my mistress saith
That she awhile is fain to speak with thee
Before thou goest down unto the sea;
And in her bower for thee doth she abide.
He gave her some light word, and side by side
The twain passed toward the bower, he all the while
Noting the Thracian with a well-pleased smile;
For his fear slept, or he felt strong snow
Things good and ill unto his will to bow.
Yet was the gentle Thracian pale that day,
And still she seemed as she some word would say
Unto him, that her lips durst not to frame;
And when unto the Queen’s bower-door they came,
And he passed there, and it was shut on him,
She lingered still, and through her body slim

²²Philus: According to Lempière, Philus was another name for Argolis, but it might more properly be identified as an inland city on the northern edge of the Argolid. Morris, following Lempière, may have used it as a convenient metonymic designation for the whole of Proetus’s kingdom (A. P. M. W.).
²³Phrygian: Phrygia, a region in western Asia Minor, was conquered by Lydia and later by the Galatians and Romans.
²⁴the Thracian maiden: The land-surface of the fifth-century B. C. kingdom of Thrace extended over present-day Bulgaria, Turkish Thrace (east of the Hebrus), and parts of modern Greece. The Greeks considered the Thracians primitive but skilled warriors.

A tremor ran, her pale face waxed all red,
And her lips moved as though some word they said
She durst not utter loud; then she looked down
Upon her bare feet and her slave’s wool gown,
And to her daily task straight took her way.
NOW on his throne King Proetus judged that day,
And heard things dull, things strange, but when at last
The summer noon now by an hour had passed,
He went to meat, and thought to see thereat
Bellerophon’s frank face, who ever sat
At his right hand; but empty was his place.
And when the King, who fain had seen his face,
Asked whither he was gone, a certain man
Said: King, I saw the brave Corinthian,
Two hours agone, pass through the outer door,
And in his face there seemed a trouble sore,
So that I needs must ask him what was wrong;
But, staring at me as he went along,
Silent he passed, as if he heard me not;
Afoot he was, nor weapon had he got.
THE King’s face clouded: but the meal being done,
In his fair chariot did he get him gone
Unto the haven, where the Phrygian ship
Was waiting his last word her ropes to slip.
Restless he was, and wished that night were come.
But ere he left the fair porch of his home,
Unto the Queen a messenger he sent,
And bade her know whereunto now he went,
And prayed her go with him; but presently
Back came the messenger, and said that she
Was ill at ease and in her bower would bide,
For scarce she upon that day might ride.
SO at that word of hers the Argive King
Went on his way, but somewhat muttering,
For heavy thoughts were gathering round his heart;
But when he came where, ready to depart,
The ship lay, with the bright-eyed master there
Some talk he had, who said the wind was fair
And all things ready; then the King said: Friend,
To-morrow’s noon I deem will make an end
Of this thy lingering; I will send to thee
A messenger to tell thee certainly
Of my last wishes, who shall bring thee gold,
And this same ring that now thou dost behold
Upon my finger, for a token sure.
Farewell, and may thy good days long endure.
HE turned, but backward sent his eyes awhile,
Sighing, though on his lips there was a smile:
The half-raised sail that clung unto the mast,
The tinkling ripple 'gainst the black side cast,
The thin blue smoke that from the poop arose,
The northland dog that midst of ropes did doze,
The barefoot shipmen's eyes upon him bent,
Curious and half-defiant, as they went
About their work; all these things raised in him
Desire for roving, stirred up thoughts that, dim
At this time, clear at that, still oft he had,
That there his life was not so over-glad;
And as toward Argos now he rode along
By the grey sea, the shipmen's broken song
Smote on his ear and with the low surf's fall
Mingled, and seemed to him perchance to call
To freedom and a life not lived in vain.
BUT even so his palace did he gain,
And the dull listless day slipped into night,
And smothering troublous thoughts e'en as he might
Did he betake himself to bed, and there
Lay half-asleep beneath the tester fair,25
Waiting until the low-voiced flutes gave sign
That thither drew the Lycian's feet divine;
For so the wont was, that she still was led
Unto her chamber as a bride new-wed.
OF that sweet sound nought heard the King at all,
But straightway into a short sleep did fall,
Then woke as one who knoweth certainly
That all the hours he now shall hear pass by,
Nor sleep until the sun is up again.
So, waking, did he hear a cry of pain

25tester: bed-canopy.
Without my bed to-night? why dost thou groan,
Whom I ere now no love-sick girl have known?
SHE covered up her face at that last word;
The thick folds of her linen gown were stirred
As her limbs writhed beneath them; nought she said,
As though the word was not remembered
She had to say; and, loth the worst to hear,
The King awhile was tongue-tied by his fear.
AT last the words came: Thou bad'st ask of thee
Why thou to-night my playmate wouldst not be:
What hast thou done? Speak quickly of the thing!
She drew her hands away, and cried: O King,
Art thou awake yet, that this shameful guise
Seems nothing strange unto thy drowsy eyes?
Wilt thou not ask why this and this is torn?
Why this is bruised? Lo, since the long-passed morn
Thus have I sat, that thou e'en this might see,
And ask what madness there has been in me.
Thus have I sat, and cursed the God who made
The day so long, the night so long delayed.
Ask! thou art happy that the Lycian sod
Unworn oft: my virgin feet have trod
From dawn to dusk: that in the Lycian wood
Before wild things untriumbling I have stood;
That this right arm so oft the javelin threw,
These fingers rather the grey bowstring knew
Than the gold needle: even so, indeed,
Of more than woman's strength had I had need
If with a real man I had striven to-day;
But he who would have shamed thee went his way
Like a scourged woman: thou wilt spare him, then;
Lay down thy sword! that is for manly men.
FOR while she spake, and in her eyes did burn
The fires of hate, the King's face had waxed stern,
And ere her bitter speech was fully o'er
He had arisen, and from off the floor
Had gat his proven sword into his hand,
And eager by the trembling Queen did stand,
And cried: Nay, hold! for surely I know well
What tale it is thy lips to-night would tell;

Therefore my sword befits me, the tried friend
That many a troublous thing has brought to end.
Yet fear not, for another friend have I
To help me deal with this new villany,
Even the godlike man Bellerophon;
So with one word thy heavy task is done.
O Sthenoboea, speak the name of him
Who wrought this deed, then let that name wax dim
Within thy mind till it is dead and past;
For, certes, yesterday he saw the last
Of setting suns his doomed eyes shall behold.
PALE as a corpse she waxed, and stony cold
Amidst these words; silent awhile she was
After the last word from the King did pass,
But in a low voice at the last she said:
Yea, for this deed of his must he be dead?
And must he be at peace, because he strove
To take from me honour, and peace, and love?
Must a great King do thus? or hast thou not
Some lightless place in mighty Argos got
Where nought can hap to break the memory
Of what he hoped in other days might be?
For great he hath been, and of noble birth
As any man who dwelleth on the earth.
Thou hast forgotten that the dead shall rest,
What'er they wrought on earth of worst or best.
BUT the King gazed upon her gloomily,
And said: Nay, nay; the man shall surely die;
His hope die with him: is it not know?
But no such mind I bear in me as thou,
Who speakest not as a great Queen should speak,
But rather as a girl made mad and weak
By hope delayed and love cast back again,
Who knoweth not her words are words and vain.
Content thee, thou art loved and honoured still:
Speak forth the name of him who wrought the ill,
For I am fain to meet Bellerophon,
So that we twain may do what must be done.
HE spake, but mid the tumult of her mind
She heard him not, and deaf she was and blind
To all without, nor knew she if her feet
The marble cold or red-hot iron did meet.
She moved not and she felt not, but a sound
Came from her lips, and smote the air around
With slow hard words: Ah! thou hast named him then
Twice in this hour alone of earthly men;
That same Bellerophon, that all folk love,
In manly wise this morn against me strove?
AH, how the world was changed, as she went by
The King, bewildered with new misery!
Ah, and how little time it was agoe
When all that deed of hers was not yet done,
When yet she might have died for him, and made
A little love her lonely tomb to shade
Spring up within his heart; when hope there was
Of many a thing that yet might come to pass!
And now, and now, those spoken words must be
A part of her, an unwrought misery
That would not let her rest till all was o'er:
Nay, nay, no rest upon the shadowy shore.
SLOWLY she left the chamber; none the less
With measured steps her feet the floor did press
As a Queen's should, nor fainted she at all,
But straight unto the door 'twixt wall and wall
She went, and still perchance had forced a smile
Had she met any one, and all the while
Set in such torment as men cannot name:
If she did think, wondered that still the same
Were all things round her as they had been erst;
That the house fell not; that the feet accurst
To carry her, yet left no sign in blood
Of where the wretchedest on earth had stood;
That round about her still her raiment clung;
That no great sudden pain her body stung,
No inward flame her false white limbs would burn,
Or into horror all her beauty turn;
That still the gentle sounds of night were there
As she had known them: the light summer air
Within the thick-leaved trees, as she passed by
Some open window, and the nightbird's cry
From far; the gnats thin pipe about her head,
The wheeling moth delaying to be dead
Within the taper's flame: yea, certainly
Shall things about her as they have been be,
And even that a torment now has grown.
YET must she reap the grain that she has sown:
No thought of turning back was in her heart,
No more in those past days can she have part:
Nay, when her glittering bower she came unto,
She muttered through the dusk: As I would do
So have I done, so would I do again.
LO, thus in unimaginable pain
Leave we her now, and to the King turn back;
Who stood there overwhelmed by sudden lack
Of what he leaned on; with his life left bare
Of a great pleasure that was growing there.
A storm of rage swept through his heart, to think
That he of such a cup as this must drink:
For if he doubted aught, this was his doubt,
That all the tale was not told fully out;
That for Bellerophon the Queen's great scorn
And loathing was a thing but newly born;
That bitter hate was but a lover's hate,
Which even yet beneath the hand of fate
Might turn to hottest love. He groaned thereat,
And staggering back, upon the bed he sat;
His bright sword from his hand had fallen down
When that last dreadful word at him was thrown,
And now, with head sunk 'twixt his hands, he sought
Some outlet from the weary girth of thought
That hemmed him in. And must I slay him then,
Him whom I loved above all earthly men?
Behold, if now I slept here, and next morn,
Ere the day's memory should be fully born
From out of sleep, men came and said to me,
Sire, the Corinthian draweth nigh to thee,
My first thought would be joy that he had come.
And yet I am a King, nor shall my home
Become a brothel before all men's eyes.
He who drinks deadly poison surely dies;
And he hath drunk, and must abide the end.
Yet hath the image of him been my friend.
What shall I do? Not lightly can I bear
The voice of men about these things to hear:
He trusted him, he thought himself right wise
To look into men's souls through lips and eyes;
Behold the end! Yes, and most certainly
I will not bear once more his face to see;
Nor in the land where he was purified
Shall grass or marble by his blood be dyed,
Since he must go: green grew a bough of spring
Amidst the barren death of many a thing;
Not barren it, since poison fruits it bore.
Behold now, I, who loved my life of yore,
Begin to weary that I e'er was born;
But let it pass; rather let good men mourn;
Great men, the earth's salt, wear their lives away
In weeping for the n'eer-returning day:
For surely all is good enough for me.
And yet, alas! what truth there seemed in thee.
What can I do? Might he not die in war?
Nay, but at peace through him my borders are.
He shall not die here; the deep sea were good
To hide the story of his untamed blood;
Or, further, O thou fool, that so must make
My life so dull, e'en for a woman's sake!
There in that land, then, shall thy bones have rest,
Beneath the sod her worshipped feet have pressed.
In Lycia shalt thou die; her father's hand
Shall draw the sword, or his lips give command
To make an end of thee. So shall it be,
And that swift Phrygian ready now for sea
Shall bear thee hence. Would I had known thee not!
A new pain hast thou been; a heavy lot
My life in early morn to me shall seem,
When I have dreamed that all was but a dream,
And waked to truth again and lonely life.
Let be; now must I forge the hidden knife
Against thee, and I would the thing were done.
Thou mayst not die so; thou art such an one.

As the gods love, whatever thou mayst do;
Perchance they pay small heed to false or true
In such as we are. But the lamps burn low,
The night wears, grey the eastern sky doth grow;
I must forget thee; fellow, fare thee well,
Who might have turned my feet from lonely hell!
SO saying, slowly, as a man who needs
Must do a deed that woe and evil breeds,
He rose, and took his writing tools to him,
And ere the day had made the tapers dim
Two letters with his own hand had he made,
And open was the first one, and it said
These words: Unto the wise Bellerophon.
To Lycia the Gods call thee, O my son;
So when thou hast this letter in thine hand,
Abide no longer in the Argive land
Than if thou fleddest some avenging man,
But make good speed to that swift Phrygian
Who for the southlands saileth this same day.
Take thou this gold for furtherance and stay,
And this for his reward who rules the keel,
And for a token show him this my seal.
This casket to the Lycian king be forth,
That hath in it a thing of greatest worth;
And let no hand be laid on it but thine
Till in Jobates' hands its gold doth shine.
Then bid him mind how that he had of me
When last I saw his face the fellow key
To that which in mine hands doth open it.
AWHILE the King had stayed when this was writ,
And on the gathering greyness of the morn
Long fixed his eyes, unseeing and forlorn,
Then o'er the paper moved his hand again.
Mayst thou do well among these outland men.
Perchance my face thou never more shalt see,
Perchance but little more remains to thee
Of thy loved life; thou wert not one to cry
Curses on all because life passeth by.
If woe befals thee there, think none the less
That I erewhile have wrought thee happiness.
Farewell! and ask thou not to see me first:
Life worsens here, and ere it reach the worst,
Unto the bower that may be would I speak
To help my people, wandering, blind, and weak.
ANOTHER letter by the King's side lay,
But closed and sealed; so in the twilight grey
Now did he rise, and summoned presently
A slumbering chamberlain that was thereby,
And bade him toward the treasury lead, and take
Two leathern bags for that same errand's sake:
So forth the twain went to that golden place;
But when they were therein, a mournful face
Still the King seemed to see, e'en as it was
When he from room to room with him did pass
Who now had wronged him; then the gold waxed dim,
For bitter pain his vexed heart wrought for him,
And filled with unused tears his hard wise eyes.
But choking back the thronging memories,
He laid the letter that he erst did hold
Within a casket wrought of steel and gold,
Which straight he locked; then bade his fellow fill
The bags he bore from a great golden hill,
Then to his room, made cold with morn, returned;
And since for change and some swift deed he yearned,
He bade his chamberlain bring hunter's weed,
And saddle him straightway his fleetest steed:
And see, said he, before the Prince arise
Ye show this letter to his waking eyes,
And give into his hands these things ye see;
And make good speed, the time grows short for me.
SO spake he, and there grew on him a thought
That thither might Bellerophon be brought
Ere he could get him gone; and therewithal
At last the low sun topped the garden wall,
And o'er the dewy turf long shadows threw;
Then, being new clad, the porch he hurried to,
And paced betwixt its pillars feverishly,
Until he heard the horse-boy's cheery cry
And the sharp clatter of the well-shod feet;
Then he ran out, the joyous steed to meet,
And mounted, and rode forth, he scarce knew where,
Until the town was passed, and 'twixt the fair
Green corn-fields of the June-tide he drew rein,
To ponder on his life, so spoiled and vain.
BUT when Bellerophon awoke that morn,
Weary he felt, as though he long had borne
Some heavy load, and his perplexed heart
Must chide the life wherein he had a part.
But ere he get him down to meet the day
With its new troubles, 'thwart his weary way
Was come that chamberlain, who bade him read,
And say what other thing he yet might need.
HE read, and knit his anxious brows in thought,
For in his mind great doubt that letter brought
If yet he were in friendship with the King;
And therewith came a dark imagining
Of unseen dangers, and great anger grew
Within his soul, as if the worst were true
Of all he thought might be; and in his mind
It was, that going, he might leave behind
A bitter word to pay for broken truth:
And still the King's man saw that he was wroth,
And watched him curiously, till he had read
The letter thrice, but nought to him he said.
At last he spake: Sir, even as the King
Now bids me, will I make no tarrying;
And as I came to Argos, even so,
Unfriended, bearing nothing, will I go;
And few farewells are best to-day, I deem,
For like a banished man I would not seem
Among these folk that love me: get we gone,
And tell the King his full shall be done.
SO forth they ride, and ever as the way
Lengthened behind them, and the summer day
Grew hotter on the lovely teeming earth,
The fresh soft air and sounds and sights of mirth
Wrought on Bellerophon, until it seemed
That things might not be e'en as he had deemed
At first. What thoughts are mine; have I not had
Gifts from his hands? hath he not made me glad
When I was sorry? Therefore will I take
What chance there lies herein for honour's sake.
Nay, more, and may not friendship lie herein?
May he not drive me forth from shame and sin
And evil fate? Well, howsoe'er it is,
But little evil do I see in this:
Yea, I may see his face again once more,
And crowned with honour come back to this shore,
For now I fear nought: if he thinks to see
Some evil thing that nowise is in me,
Another day the truth of all will show.
Let pass! again from out the place I go
Wherein the sport of fortune I have tried;
If it has failed me, yet the world is wide
And I am young. Now go I forth alone
To do what in my life must needs be done,
And in my own hands lies my fate, I think,
And I shall mix the cup that I must drink:
So be it; thus the world is merrier,
And I shall be a better man than here.
AMID these thoughts, unto the ship he came,
And higher yet sprung up the new-stirred flame
Of great desires when first he saw the sea
Leap up against her black sides lovingly,
And heard the sails flap, and the voice of folk,
Who at the sight of him in shouts outbroke,
Since they withal were eager to be gone.
And now were all things done that should be done;
The money rendered up, the King's seal shown,
Unto the master all his will made known,
And on the deck stood the Corinthian.
As up the mast clattering the great rings ran,
And back the hawser to the ship was cast,
The helmsman took the tiller, and at last
The head swung round; trimly the great sail drew,
The broad bows pierced the land of fishes through,
Unheard the red wine fell from out the cup
Into the noisy sea; and then rose up
The cloud of incense-smoke a little way,
But, driven from the prow, with the white spray

It mingled, and a little dimmed the crowd
Of white-head waves; then rose the sea-song loud,
While on the stern still stood Bellerophon,
Bidding farewell to what of life was gone,
Pensive, but smiling somewhat to behold
The lengthening wake, and field, and hill, and wold,
And white-walled Argos growing small astern,
That he the pleasure of the gods might learn.

BUT when the King's man,
with a doubtful smile,
Had watched the parting sails
a little while,
He turned about, revolving
many things
Within his mind, of the weak hearts of kings,
Because the Prince's glory seemed grown dim,
And nowise grand this parting seemed to him:
For day-long leave-taking there should have been,
He grumbled, and fair tables well beseen
Should have been spread the gilded ship anigh,
And many a perfect beast been slain thereby
Unto the gods. Had this Bellerophon
Too great fame for the King of Argos won?
I will be lowly, for no little bliss
I have in Argos; a good place it is.
Or else what thing has happened? Howse'er it was,
Slowly again to Argos did he pass,
And here and there he spake upon that day
Of how Bellerophon had gone away,
Perchance as one who would no more return;
And sore hearts were there, who thereat must yearn
To see the face that let a weak hope live;
And folk still doomed with many things to strive,
Who found him helpful: few indeed were there
Who did not pray that well he still might fare
Whereas he was, and few forgot him quite
For many a day and many a changing night.
BUT Sthenoboea, when she knew that morn
That she was not alone of love forlorn,
But of the thing too that fed love in her,
Yet coldly at the first her lot did bear
In outward seeming: in no other wise
She sat among her maids than when his eyes
Had first met hers. No babble shall there be
In this fool's land concerning him and me.
Gone is he; let him die and be forgot.
Cold is my heart that yesterday was hot,
Quenched is the fervent flame of yesterday;
Past is the time when I had cast away,
If he had bidden me, name, and fame, and all:
Now in this dull world e'en let things befall
As they are fated; I am stirred no more
By any hap; hope, hate, and love are o'er.
SO spake she in the morn, when, still a Queen,
She sat among her folk as she had been,
Dreaded, unloved; yet as the day wore on
She felt as though it never would be done.
And now she took to wandering restlessly,
And set her face to go unto the sea,
But soon turned back, and through the palace ranged,
And thought she thought not of him, and yet changed
Her face began to grow; and if she spoke,
As one untroubled, aught unto her folk,
Her speech grew wild and broken ere its end;
And as about the place she still did wend,
More than its wonted chill her presence threw
On those who of her coming footsteps knew;
Yea, as she passed by some, she even thought
A look like pity to their eyes was brought;
And then, amidst her craving agony,
Must she grow red with wrath that such could be.
NOW came the night, and she must cast aside
All semblance of her coldness and her pride,
And find the weary night was longer yet
Than was the day, and harder to forget
The thoughts that came therewith. How can I tell
In any words the torment of that hell
That she for her own soul had fashioned so,
That from it never any path did go
To lands of rest? no window was therein.
Through which there shone a hope of happier sin;
But close the fiery walls about her glared,
And on one dreadful picture still she stared,
Intent on that desire, that dreadful love,
The dullness of her savage heart that clove
With wasting fire, a bane to her, and all
Who in the net of her vain life might fall.
THE next day wore, and thereto followed night,
And changed through dark and dusk and dawn to light;
And when at last high-risen was the sun,
The women came to do what should be done
In the Queen's chamber: water for the bath
They brought, and dainties such as Venus hath;
Gold combs, embroidered cloths, pearl-threaded strings,
Such unguents as the hidden river brings
Through strange-wrought caverns down into a sea
Where seldom any keel of man may be;
Fine Indian webs, the work of many a year,
And incense that the bleeding tree doth bear26
Lone in the desert; yea, and fear withal
Of what new thing upon that day might fall
From her they served, for on the day now dead
Wild words, strange threatenings, had her writhed lips said.
BUT when within the chamber-door they were,
A new hope grew within them, a new fear,
For empty 'neath the golden canopy
The bed lay, and when one maid drew anigh
She saw that all untouched the linen was
As for that night; so when it came to pass
That in no chamber of that house of gold
Might any one the Lycian's face behold,
Nor any sign of her, then therewithal
To others of the household did they call,
And asked if they had tidings of the Queen;
And when they found that she had not been seen
Since at the end of day to bed she passed,

Within their troubled minds the thing they cast,
And thus remembered that at whiles of late
She had been wont the rising sun to wait
Within the close below her bower; so then
They called together others, maids and men,
And passed with troubled eyes adown the stair;
And coming to the postern-door that there
Led out into the pleasance, that they found
Still open, and thereby upon the ground,
And on a jagged bough of creeping vine,
Gold threads they saw, and silken broidery fine,
That well they knew torn from the Lycian’s gown;
Therewith by hasty feet were trodden down
The beds of summer flowers that lay between
The outer wicket of that garden green
And the bower-door, feet that had heeded nought
By what wild ways they to their end were brought;
Then by the gate where the faint sweetbriar-rose
Grew thick about the edges of the close,
Had one pushed through their boughs in such a way
That fragments of a dainty thin array
Yet fluttered on the thorns in the light breeze,
Nor might they doubt who once had carried these.
BUT when the pleasance-gate they had passed through,
At first within the lingering strip of dew
Beneath the wall, footprints they well could see;
But as the shadow failed them presently,
And little could the close-cropped summer grass
Tell them of feet that might have chanced to pass
Thereby before the dawn, their steps they stayed,
And this and that thing there betwixt them weighed
With many words; then splitting up their band,
Some took the way unto the well-tilled land,
Some seaward went, and some must turn their feet
Unto the wood: yet did not any meet
A further sign; and though some turned again
To tell the tale at once, yet all in vain
Did horsemen scour the country far and wide,
And vainly was the sleuth-hounds' mettle tried:
Gone was the Lycian, and in such a guise
That silence seemed the best word for the wise.
But many a babbling tongue in Argos was,
Who for no gold had let such matters pass;
And some there were who, mindful of her face
As down the street she passed in queenly grace,
Said that some god had seen her even as they,
And with no will that longer she should stay
Midst dying men, had taken her to his home;
And we are left behind, they said; but some
Who had been nigher to her, said that she,
Smitten by some benign divinity
Who loved the world and lovely Argos well,
Had fled with changed heart far from man to dwell,
Yea, and might be a goddess even yet.
But other folk, well ready to forget
Her bitter soul, and well content to bear
The changed life that she erst had filled with care,
Smiled, and said yea to better and to worse,
But inly thought that many a heart-felt curse
Her careless ears had heard upon the earth
Had not returned to where it had its birth.
THE Gods are kind, and hope to men they give
That they their little span on earth may live,
Nor yet faint utterly; the Gods are kind,
And will not suffer men all things to find
They search for, nor the depth of all to know
They fain would learn: and it was even so
With Sthenoboea; for a fisher old
That day a tale unto his carline27 told,
E'en such as this: When I last night had laid
The boat up 'neath the high cliff, and had made
All things about it trim, and left thee here,
Even as thou knowest, I set out to bear
Those mullets28 unto Argos. Nought befell
At first whereof is any need to tell,
But when the night had now grown very old,

27carline: old woman.
28mullets: any of a family (Mulletas) of middle-sized red or golden fishes with two barbels on the chin.
And, as my wont is, I was waxing bold,
And thinking of the bright returning day
That drives the sprites of wood and wave away,
As the path leads I entered the beech-wood
Which, close to where the ancient palace stood,
Clothes the cliff's edge; I entered warily,
Yet thought no evil thing therein to see.
Scarce lighter than dark night it was therein,
Though swift without the day on night did win.
So I went on, I say, and had no fear,
So nigh to day; but getting midstmost, where
Thinner it grows and lighter, toward the sea,
I stayed my whistling, for it seemed to me
The wind moaned louder than it should have done,
Because of wind without as well-nigh none.
When I stood still it ended, and again,
E'en as I moved, I seem to hear it plain.
Trembling, I stopped once more, and heard indeed
A sound as though one moaned in bitter need,
Clearer than was the moaning of the surf,
Now muffled by a rising bank of turf
On the cliff's edge; fear-stricken, yet in doubt,
Through the grey glimmer now I peered about,
And turned unto the sea: then my heart sank,
For by the tree the nighest to that bank
A white thing stood, like, as I now could see,
The daughters of us sons of misery,
Though such I deemed her not, and yet had I
No will or power to turn about and fly;
And now it moaned and moaned, and seem to writhe
Against the tree its body long and lithe.
Long gazed I, while still colourless and grey,
But swift snow, drew on the dawn of day;
But as I trembled there, at last I heard
How in a low voice it gave forth this word:
What say'st thou? Live on still; I loved thee not
The while I lived; my bane from thee I got:
And canst thou think that I shall love thee, then,
Where no will is, or power to sons of men?
I know not, thou mayst hate me, yet I come
That I may look on thee in that new home
My hands built for thee: if the priests speak truth,
What heart thou hast may yet be stirred by ruth,
When thy changed eyes behold the traitorous Queen
Tormented for the vile thing she has been,
If, as the books say, e'en such ways they have
As we on this explored side of the grave.
Yea, thou mayst piny then mine agony,
When no more evil I can do to thee.
Here on the earth I could not weep now,
Or show thee all my misery here; and thou
Must ever look upon me as a Queen,
Thy mistress and thy fear. Couldst thou have seen
My weary ways upon this long, long night;
Couldst thou behold the coming day's new sight,
When round this tree the folk come gathering
To see the wife and daughter of a King
Slain by her own hand, and in such a wise;
O thou I hoped for once, might not thine eyes
Have softened had they seen me shivering here,
Alone, upholpen, sick with my first fear,
Beat down by coming shame, and mocked by these
Gay fluttering rags of dainty braveries
That decked my state; by gold, and pearl, and gem,
Over my wretched breast, set in the hem
This night has torn, and o'er my bleeding feet;
Mocked by this glittering girdle, nowise meet
To do the hangman's office? Couldst thou see
That even so I needs must think of thee,
Whom I have slain, whose eyes I have made blind,
Whose feet I stayed that me they might not find,
That I might not be helped of any one?
THE day was dawning when her words were done,
And to her waist I saw her set her hand,
And take the girdle thence, and therewith stand
With arms that moved above her head a space
Within the tree; and still she had her face
Turned from me, and I stirred not, minding me
Of tales of treacherous women of the sea,
The bane of men; but now her arms down fell,
And low she spake, yet could I hear her well:
Thou bitter noose, that thus shalt end my days,
Rather than blame, shalt thou have thanks and praise
From all men: I have loved one man alone,
And unto him the worst deed have I done
Of all the ill deeds I have done on earth.
I curse men not, although midst mocks and mirth
They say: Rejoice, for Sthenoboea is dead.
I STARTED forward as that word she said,
And she beheld me: face to face we met
In the grey light, nor shall I e'er forget
Those dreadful eyes, for such indeed I deem
A goddess high up in the heavens might seem
If she should learn that all was changed, to bring
Death on her head as on an earthly thing.
Alas, I have beheld men die ere now,
But old or sickness sore their hearts did bow
With feebleness to bear what might betide,
Or else mid hope of name and fame they died,
And the world left them unawares; but she,
Full of hot blood and life yet, I could see
Was red-lipped as an image, and still had
Such smooth, soft cheeks as made beholders glad
In many a feast and solemn sacrifice;
But yet such dreadful hate was in her eyes,
Such loathing of the ways of Gods and men,
Such gathered-up despair, that truly then
I shook so that my hands might hold no more
The staff and half-filled basket that I bore.
BUT in a moment slowly she turned round,
And toward the rising swarded space of ground
Betwixt the beech-trees and the sea she went;
And I, although I knew well her intent,
Yet could not stir. There on the brink she stood;
A cool sea-wind now swept into the wood,
And drave her raiment round her; I could see,
E'en in the dawn, that jewelled broidery
Gleam in the torn folds of the glittering hem;
And now she raised her arms, I saw on them
Jewels again. Then sightless did I stand,

For such a cry I heard, as though a hand
Of fire upon her wasted heart was laid,
And to and fro, I deem, a space she swayed
Her slender body; then I moved at last,
And hurried toward the sheer cliff's edge full fast,
But ere I reached the green brink she was gone;
And, hanging o'er the rugged edge alone,
With trembling hands, far down did I behold
A white thing meet the dark grey waves and cold;
For overhanging is that foreland high,
And little sand beneath its feet doth lie
At lowest of the tide, and on that morn
Against the scarped rock was the white surf borne.
Ah! long I looked before I turned away.
No friend, indeed, was lost to me that day;
I knew her not but by the people's voice,
And they 'twas like heretofore e'en rejoice;
Yet o'er my heart a yearning passion swept,
And there where she had stood I lay and wept,
Worn as I am by care and toil and eld.
BUT when I rose again, then I beheld
The girdle to the rough bough hanging yet,
And this I loosed and in my hand did get,
And lingered for a while; then went my way,
Nor thought at first if it were night or day,
So much I pondered on the tale so wrought,
What God to nothing such a life had brought.
BUT when unto the city gate I came,
I found the thronging people all aflush
With many rumours, and this one they knew
Among all other guesses to be true,
That of the Queen nought knew her wonted place;
But unto me who still beheld that face
There in the beech-wood, idle and base enow
Seemed all that clamour carried to and fro,
Curses and mocks, and foolish laughter loud,
And gaping wonder of the empty crowd;
So in great haste I got my errand done,
And sold my wares e'en unto such an one
As first remembered he must eat to-day,
What king or queen soe'er had passed away.
Thus I returned, bringing the belt with me;
Behold it! And what way seems best to thee
To take herein? Poor are we; these bright stones
Would make us happier than the highest ones;
Yet danger hangs thereby, nor have I yet
My living from dead corpses had to get;
Nay, scarcely can I deem this Queen will be
At rest for long beneath the unquiet sea.
How say' st thou, shall I go unto the King,
And tell him every word about the thing
E'en as I know it? Nay, nay, nay, she said;
Certes but little do I fear the dead,
Yet think thou not to call the girdle thine;
With a man's death doth every gem here shine,
Our deaths the first: but do thou bide at home,
And let the King hear what may even come
To a King's ear; meddle thou not, nor make
With any such; still shall the brass pot break
The earthen pot; a lord is thanked for what
A poor man often has in prison sat.
But down the beach run thou thy shallop straight,
And from the net take off the heaviest weight,
And do this belt about it; and then go
And in the deepest of the green bay sow
This seed and fruit of love and wrath and crime,
And let this tale be dealt with by great time;
But 'twixt the sea and the green southering hill
We will abide, peaceful, if toilsome still.
SO was it done, and e'en as in her heart
Was hidden from all eyes her trait'rous part,
So the sea hid her heart from all but those
Who, having passed through all eld's dreamy doze,
Died with their tale untold. Time passed away,
And dimmer grew her name day after day;
And the fair place, where erst her eyes had chilled
Sweet laughter into silence, now was filled
By folk who, midst of fair life slipping by,
No longer had her deeds in memory.
There where she once had dwelt, mid hate and praise,
No smile, no shudder now her name could raise.

HE night had fallen
or e'er the tale was done,
And on the half-floor now
the pale moon shone
In fitful gleams, for the snow
fell no more,
But ragged clouds still streamed
the pale sky o'er.
A while they sat, and seemed
to hear the sea
Beat 'gainst the ice-glazed cliffs unceasingly,
Though nought belike that noise was but the wind
Caught in some corner, half blocked-up and blind
With the white drift: just so the mournfulness
Of the tale told out did their hearts oppress
With seeming sorrow for a glorious life
Twisted awry and crushed dead in the strife
Long ages past; while yet more like it was
That with the old tale o'er their souls did pass
Shades of their own dead hopes, and buried pain
By measured words drawn from its grave again,
Though no more deemed a strange unheard--of thing
Made but for them; as when their hearts did cling
To those dead hopes of things impossible,
While their tale's ending yet was left to tell.
TILL the hard frost gripped all things bitterly,
And who of folk might now say when or why
The earth should change and spring come back again:
Spring clean forgotten, as amidst his pain
Some hapless lover’s chance unmeaning kiss

Given unto lips that never shall be his. 29
In time long past, ere bitter knowledge came,
And cherished love was grown a wrong and shame.
Yet mid the dead swoon of the earth the days
'Gan lengthen now, and on the hard-beat ways
No more the snow drave down; and, spite of all,
The goodman's thoughts must needs begin to fall
Upon the seed hid in the dying year,
And he must busy him about his gear;
And in the city, at the high noon, when
The faint sun glimmered, sat the ancient men,
With young folk gathered round about once more,
Who heeded not the east wind's smothered roar,
Since unto most of them for mere delight
Were most things made, the dull days and the bright;
And change was life to them, and death a tale
Little believed, that chiefly did avail
To quicken love and make a story sweet.
NOW the old Swabian's glittering eyes did meet
A maiden's glance, who reddened at his gaze,
Whereon a pleasant smile came o'er his face
As from his pouch a yellow book he drew
And spake: Of many things the wise man knew,
The man who wrote this; 30 many words he made
Of haps that still perchance for great are weighed
There in the East: how kings were born and died,

29 Given unto lips that never shall be his: Compare "Dear as remembered kisses
after death;/ And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned;/ On lips that are for
others," in Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears."
30 The man who wrote this: The proximate author of the compilation from
which the medieval January tale is drawn was William of Malmesbury, author
of De Gestis Regum Anglorum (Chronicle of the Kings of England). In the inner
frame, of course, the "yellow book" may be a manuscript-version of the original
tale.

And how men lied to them, and how they lied,
And how they joyed in doing good and ill.
Now mid the great things that his book do tell,
Here is a tale, told, saith he, by a crone
At some grand feast forgotten long agone,
Which may perchance scarce be of much less worth
Than tales of deeds that reddened the green earth,
Fools' deeds of men, who well may be to you
As good as nameless, since ye never knew
The ways of those midst whom they lived erewhile,
And what their hearts deemed good, or nought and vile.