THE RING GIVEN TO VENUS.

The Argument.
THERE WAS A MAN IN A CERTAIN GREAT CITY WHO ON HIS WEDDING-DAY UNWITTINGLY GAVE HIS SPOUSAL RING TO THE GODDESS VENUS, AND FOR THIS CAUSE TROUBLE CAME UPON HIM, TILL IN THE END HE GOT HIS RING BACK AGAIN.

HE STORY of this chronicle
Doth of an ancient city' tell,
Well built upon a goodly shore;
The wide lands stretched behind
it bore
Great wealth of oil and wine and
wheat;
The great sea carried to its feet
The dainty things of many lands;
There the hid miners' toiling hands

Dragged up to light the dull blue lead,
And silver white, and copper red,
And dreadful iron; many a time
The sieves swung to the woman's rhyme
O'er gravelly streams that carried down
The golden sand from caves unknown;
Dark basalt 'o'er the sea's beat stood,
And porphyry cliffs as red as blood;
From the white marble quarries' edge
Down to the sweeping river's sedge,
Sheep bore the web that was to be;
The purple lay beneath the sea,

1. an ancient city: Malinesbury set his story in Rome, and Morris's Laurence might well be a prosperous merchant. The tale's references to "great wealth of oil and wine and wheat" and other geographical allusions point to a (non-existent) medieval city-state on the eastern coast of Italy (A. P. M. W.). Other details—such as the playing of "The King of England's Son" at Laurence's wedding, for example—suggest that Morris may have intentionally blended the tale's more generic points of geographical and historical reference.
2. basalt: a dark rock that contains magnetic iron and crystals of feldspar.
The madder\(^3\) waved in the light wind,
The woad-stalks\(^4\) did the peasant bind
That were to better his worn hood;
And ever, amid all things good,
Least of all things this lucky land
Lacked for the craftsman’s cunning hand.
SO richer grew that city still
Through many a year of good and ill,
And when the white beasts drew the car
That bore their banner to the war;\(^5\)
From out the brazen gates enwrought
With many a dreamer’s steadfast thought,
An hundred thousand men poured out
To shake the scared earth with their shout.
NOW little will your wonder be
That mid so great prosperity
Enough there was of ill and sin;
That many folk who dwelt therein
Lived evil lives from day to day,
Nor put their worst desires away.
But as in otherwise indeed
Of God’s good pardon had they need,
And were herein as other folk,
So must they bear this added yoke,
That rife was wicked sorcery there;
And why I know not; if it were
Wrought by a lingering memory
Of how that land was wont to be
A dwelling-place, a great stronghold
Unto the cozening gods of old.
It might be so; but add thereto
That of all men life’s sweets they knew.
That death to them was wholly bad,

3madder: a Eurasian herb (*Rubia tinctorum* of the family *Rubiacae*) with verticillate leaves and small, yellowish flowers. Its root was formerly used to make a red dye.

4woad-stalk: woad, or *Isatis tinctoria*, was used as a blue dyestuff.

5That bore their banner to the war: In J. C. Sismondi’s *History of the Italian Republics* (1832), twelfth- and thirteenth-century armies of Italian city-states displayed their standards in the manner Morris describes here.
Till some men's lives were like a dream,
Where nought in order can be set,
And nought worth thence the soul may get,
Or weigh one thing for what it is:
Yea, at the best, mid woe and bliss,
Some dreamlike day would come to most.
NOW this great city still made boast
That, mid her merchants, men there were
Who e'en from kings the bell might bear
For wealth and honour: and I think
That no men richer wines might drink,
Were better housed, or braver clad,
Or more of all the world's joy had
Than their rich men; that no king's door
Could show forth greater crowds of poor,
Who lacked for bread and all things good,
Than in that land a merchant's could;
Yea, rich indeed 'mongst all were they.
NOW on a certain summer day
One of their fairest palaces,
A paradise midst whispering trees,
Beyond its wont was bright and fair;
Great feast did men get ready there,
Because its young lord, lately come
Back from the eastlands to his home,
That day should wed a lovely maid.
He, for that tide too long delayed,
A lading of great rarities
Had brought to dazzle those sweet eyes;
So had you wandered through the house
From hall to chamber amorous,
While in the minster church hard by,
Mid incense smoke and psalmody,
The gold-clad priest made one of twain,
So wandering, had you tried in vain
To light on an uncomely thing:
Such dyes as stain the parrot's wing,
The May-flowers or the evening sky,
Made bright the silken tapestry;
And threaded pearls therein were wrought,
And emeralds from far eastlands brought
To deck the shapes of knight and king;
His maybe who of old did sing
God's praises 'twixt the shield and spear,\(^7\)
Or his the Trojan folk did fear.\(^8\)
Or from the silken mimicry
Of fair Cassandra\(^9\) might you see
Circe\(^10\) the red ruby tear,
As he her snowy breast made bare;
Since woe itself must there be sweet
For such a place to be made meet.
If such things hid the marble walls,
What wonder that the swift footfalls
Were dulled upon the marble floor
By silken webs from some far shore,
Whereon were pictured images
Of other beasts and other trees
And other birds than these men knew;
That from the vaulted ceilings' blue
Stars shone like Danae's coming shower,\(^11\)
Or that some deftly painted bower
Thence mocked the roses of that day?
Full many a life had passed away,
And many a once young hand grown old,

\(^7\) twist the shield and spear: The intended allusion here may be to the warrior-psalmist David. In "The Seed of David" (1856-64), part of an altar piece for Landaff Cathedral, D. G. Rossetti used Morris as a model for the head of David, who wears chain-mail in the painting as he plays the harp (A. P. M. W.).

\(^8\) this the Trojan folk did fear: perhaps Achilles, the Greeks' preeminent warrior.

\(^9\) Cassandra: Priam's daughter, and forseer of the fall of Troy. Apollo granted her the gift of prophecy, undercut by the curse that no one believed her.

\(^10\) Circe: Ajax or Aias, son of Oileus or Ilius, King of the Locrians of Opus, was sometimes so-called to distinguish him from Ajax, son of Telamon. Ajax sped Cassandra at the altar of Athena during the sack of Troy, and she clung to the statue of Athena as he dragged her away.

\(^11\) Danae's coming shower: Zeus transformed himself into a cascade of golden light to ravish Danae, mother of Perseus. A description of this episode appears in "The Doom of King Acrisius," the classical tale for April (ll. 325-58).

\(^6\) lading: cargo or freight.
Dealing with silk and gems and gold,
Through weary days and anxious nights,
That went to fashion those delights,
Which added now small bliss indeed
To those who pleasure had to meed
Upon a day when all were glad:
Yet when the Church all dues had had,
And the street, filled with minstrelsy,
Gave token of the twain anigh;
When through the hall-doors, open wide,
Streamed in the damsels of the bride;
When the tall brown-cheeked bridgroom came
Flushed with hot love and pride and shame,
And by the hand his love led on,
Who midst that glorious company shone
Like some piece of the pale moonlight
Cut off from quietness and night;
Then all these dainty things in sooth
Seemed meet for such an hour of youth;
And vain were words such joy to stay;
And deathless seemed that little day,
And as a fitful hapless dream
The past and future well might seem.
WHAT need to tell how sea and earth
Had been run through to make more mirth
For folk already over-glad;
What cunning pageants there they had;
What old tales acted o'er again,
Where grief and death glad folk did feign,
Who deemed their own joy still would bide;
What old songs sung wherein did hide
Meet meanings for that lovesome day;
What singing of the bridal lay
By a fair, soft-voiced, trembling maid,
Like to the Goddess\(^{12}\) well arrayed,
Who, dreaded once, was grown to be
A pageant-maker's imagery?
Why make long words of that sweet band

Who scattered flowers from slender hand,
And brought the garlands forth? How tell
What music on the feasters fell,
So sweet and solemn, that from mirth
O'er-strained well-nigh must tears have birth?
Nay, let all pass, and deem indeed
That every joyance was their meed
Wherewith men cheat themselves to think
That they of endless joy may drink;
That every sense in turn must bear
Of o'er-sweet pleasure its full share,
Till for awhile the very best
They next might gain, seemed utter rest,
And of some freshness were they fain.
So then the garden did they gain,
And wandered there by twos and threes
Amidst the flowers, or 'neath the trees
Sat, keeping troublous thoughts at bay.
So fared they through the earlier day;
But when the sun did now decline,
And men grew graver for the wine
That erst such noble tales had told;
And maids no more were free and bold,
But reddened at the words half said,
While round about the rebecks\(^{13}\) played;
Then needs must the feastmasters strive
Too pensive thoughts away to drive,
And make the sun go down with mirth
At least upon that spot of earth;
So did the minstrel men come in,
And tale-tellers the lay begin,
And men by fabled woes were stirred,
Or smiling their own follies heard
Told of some other; and withal
Here did the dice on table fall,
Here stout in arms the chess-king stood;
There young men stirred their sluggish blood

\(^{12}\)Goddess: Venus.

\(^{13}\)Rebecks: The rebeck was an ancient and medieval bowed instrument, usually three-stringed, with a pear-shaped body and slender neck.
With clattering sword and buckler play,
There others on the daisies lay
Above the moat, and watched their quill
Make circles in the water still,
Or laughed to see the damsel hold
Her dainty skirt enwrought with gold
Back from the flapping tench's\(^t\) tail,
Or to his close-set dusky mail
With gentle force brought laughingly
The shrinking finger-tip anigh.

MIDST these abode a little knot
Of youths and maidens, on a spot
Fenced by a cloister of delight,
Well wrought of marble green and white;
Wherein upon a wall of gold
Of Tristram\(^{15}\) was the story told,
Well done by cunning hands that knew
What form to man and beast was due.
Midmost, upon a space of green,
Half shaded from the summer sheen,
Half with the afternoon sun thrown
Upon its daisies glittering strewn,
Was gathered that fair company
Wherewith the bridegroom chanced to be,
Who through the cloister door must gaze
From time to time 'thwart the sun's blaze
On to a shaded space of grass
Whereon his new-wed maiden was,
Hearkening in seeming to a song
That told of some past love and wrong;
But as he strained his ear to catch
Across the wind some louder snatch
Of the sweet tune, new-coming folk
The sweet sight hid, the music broke;
Of these one maiden trimly girt
Bore in her gleaming upheld skirt

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\(^{t}\)tench: a thick-bodied freshwater carp, *Tinca vulgaris*, found in still and deep waters.

\(^{15}\)Tristram: woodland hunter and legendary lover of the Celtic Isolde.

Fair silken balls sewed round with gold;
Which when the others did behold
Men cast their mantles unto earth,
And maids within their raiments' girth
Drew up their gown-skirts, loosening here
Some button on their bosoms clear
Or slender wrists, there making tight
The laces round their ankles light;
For folk were wont within that land
To cast the ball from hand to hand,
Dancing meanwhile full orderly;
So now the bridegroom with a sigh,
Struggling with love's quick-gathering yoke,
Turned round unto that joyous folk
And got him ready for the play.
LOVELY to look on was the sway
Of the slim maidens 'neath the ball
As they swung back to note its fall
With dainty balanced feet; and fair
The bright outflowing golden hair,
As swiftly, yet in measured wise,
One maid ran forth to gain the prize:
Eyes glittered and young cheeks glowed bright,
And gold-shod foot, round limb and light,
Gleamed from beneath the girded gown
That, unrebuked, untouched, was thrown
Hither and thither by the breeze;
Shill laughter smote the thick-leaved trees,
Familiar names clear voices cried,
Sweet sound rose up as sweet sound died,
And still the circle spread and spread,
As folk to all that goodlihead
Kept thronging in, till they must stay
A little while the eager play,
And now, for very breathlessness,
With rest the trodden daisies bless.
So now against the wall some leaned,
Some from amidst the daisies gleaned
The yellow trefoil,\(^{16}\) and the blue

\(^{16}\)trefoil: three-leaved clover, of the genus *Trifolium*. 
Faint speedwell" in the shade that grew;
Some panting sat and clasped their knees
With faces turned unto the breeze,
And midst them the new-comers stood,
With hair smooth yet and unstirred blood.
LAURENCE, the bridegroom, as the game
Unto this tide of resting came,
Turned idle eyes about, and met
An image in the grey wall set,
A thing he knew from early days:
There in a gilded carven place
Queen Venus' semblance stood, more fair
Than women whom that day did bear,
And yet a marvel for the life
Wherewith its brazen limbs were rife.
Not in that country was she wrought,
Or in those days; she had been brought
From a fair city far away,
Ruined e'en then for many a day.
Full many a tale had there been told
Of him who once that Queen did mould,
And all of these were strange to hear,
And dreadful some, and full of fear.
And now as Laurence gazed upon
That beauty, in the old days won
He knew not from what pain and toil,
Vague fear new-risen seemed to spoil
The summer joy; her loveliness
That hearts, long dead now, once did bless,
Grown dangerous, 'gan to lead his mind
On through a troubous maze and blind
Of unnamed thoughts, and silently,
With knitted brow, he drew anigh,
And midst the babbling close did gaze
Into the marvel of her face;
Till, with a sudden start, at last
His straying thoughts he seemed to cast

Aside, and laughed aloud, and said:
O COLD and brazen goodliehead,
How lookest thou on those that live?
Thou who, tales say, wert wont to strive
On earth, in heaven, and 'neath the earth,
To wrap all in thy net of mirth,
And drag them down to misery
Past telling: and didst thou know why?
And what has God done with thee then,
That thou art perished from midst men
E'en as the things thou didst destroy,
Thy Paris" and thy town of Troy,
And many a man and maid and town?
How is thy glory fallen adown,
That I, even I, must sigh for thee!
SO spake he, as the minstrelsy
Struck up once more a joyous strain,
And called them to the play again;
And therewithal he looked about,
In answer to the merry shout
That called on him by name to turn.
But even therewith the sun did burn
Upon his new-gained spousal-ring,
A wondrous work, a priceless thing,
Whereon, 'neath mulberries white and red,
And green leaves, lay fair Thisbe dead."
By her dead love; the low sun's blaze
It caught now, and he fell to gaze
Thereon, and said at last: Perchance
The ball might break it in the dance,
And that an ugly omen were;
Nay, one to ward it well is here.
Thou, Goddess, that heareth Thisbe's vow,

18Paris: Paris's legendary award of an apple to Venus and abduction of Helen allegedly caused the Trojan war.
19Thisbe: In Ovid's Metamorphoses, Thisbe's parents forbade her to marry her lover Pyramus, but she agreed to meet him at Ninus's tomb, where a lion attacked her and she fled, leaving behind her cloak. Pyramus later arrived, saw the torn cloak, and killed himself in the belief that Thisbe was dead. Thisbe then followed his example when she found the body.
From blind eyes gaze upon her now
Till I return mine own to claim;
And as thou mayst, bear thou the shame
Of being the handmaid to my love;
Full sure I am thou wilt not move.

KNOW that this image there did stand
With arm put forth and open hand,
As erst on Ida\textsuperscript{20} triumphing;
And now did Laurence set the ring
On the fourth finger fair and straight,
And laughing, Thou mayst bear the weight,
Turned back again unto the play.

TO him slow passed the time away,
But when at last in purple shade
Twixt wall and wall the grass was laid,
And he grew gladder therewithal,
Then weariness on folk 'gan fall;
The fifes left off their dancing tune,
And sang of lovers fain of June,
And thence that company 'gan go
By twos and threes with footsteps slow,
Pensive at end of mirthful day.

But from them Laurence turned away
Unto the carven dame, to take
The ring he wore for true-love's sake:
Daylight it was, though broad and red
The sun was grown, and shadows led
Eastward with long lines o'er the grass;
Daylight, but what had come to pass?
NEARBY those voices still he heard
In laugh and talk and careless word;
Upon his cheek the wind blew cold;
His own fair house he did behold
Changed nowise; from the little close
The scent of trodden grass arose;
How could it be a dream? Yet there

\textsuperscript{20}Ida: Mount Ida was the legendary site of Greek mythology's most

beauty-contest. Hermes appointed Paris to judge whether Hera, Athena, or

Aphrodite merited the "Apple of Discord," and he awarded the prize to Venus.

\textsuperscript{31}Serendib: Ceylon.
And 'neath the torches red gold burned,
And the best pageants of the day
Swept through the hall and said their say,
Departing e'en as men's lives go:
But though to Laurence slow and slow
Those hours must needs seem, none the less
He gave himself to mirthfulness,
At least in seeming; till at last
All guests from out the palace passed.
And now the short soft summer night
Was left at peace for their delight;
But Laurence, muffled up and hid,
Shrinking, betwixt his servants slid,
For now he had a little space
To come unto that mystic place
Where still his ring he thought to see.
A file and chisel now had he,
And weighty hammer; yet withal
As he drew toward the cloister-wall,
Well-nigh he called himself a fool
To go with cloak and blacksmith's tool
And lay hard blows upon a dream;
For now in sooth he nigh must deem
His eyes had mocked him. Reaching soon
That cloister by the broad high moon,
He hurried through the door, and heard
All round the sound of June's brown bird[22]
Above the voices of the night;
Trembling, he sprang into the light
Through the black arches of the place,
And stealing on stood face to face
With the old smiling image there,
And lowered to her fingers fair
His troubled, wild, and shrinking eyes,
And stretched his hand out to the prize:
His eyes, his hand, were there in vain.
ONCE more, as sure of coming gain,
As erst in Ida she did stand,

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Struck up The King of England's Son,
And soon amid that ordered word
The lessening sound of feet he heard,
And then the song itself must die.
But from the bridechamber nearby
Now for a space rose clear and sweet
The damsels' song, Fair Marguerite;
And when that ended all was still,
And he with strained, divided will,
Trembling with love, yet pale with fear,
To the bridechamber door drew near,
Muttering some well-remembered charm
That erst had kept his soul from harm.
Yet misty seemed the place; the wall,
Its woven waters seemed to fall,
Its trees, its beasts, its loom-wrought folk,
Now seemed indeed as though they woke,
And moved unto him as he went.
The room seemed full of some strange scent;
And strains of wicked songs he heard,
And half-said God-denying word:
He reeled, and cried aloud, and strove
To gain the door that hid his love;
It seemed to him that, were he there,
All would again be calm and fair.
But in the way before his eyes
A cloudy column seemed to rise,
Cold, odorous, impalpable,
And a voice cried: I love thee well,
And thou hast loved me ere to-night,
And longed for this o'er-great delight,
And had no words therefore to pray.
Come, have thy will, and cast away
Thy foolish fear, thy foolish love,
Since me at least thou canst not move,
Now thou with ring hast wedded me:
Come, cast the hope away from thee
Wherewith unhappy brooding men
Must mock their threescore years and ten:
Come, thou that mockest me, I live!

How with my beauty canst thou strive?
Unhappy if thou couldst! for see
What depth of joy there is in me!
THEN round about him closed the mist;
It was as though his lips were kissed,
His body by soft arms embraced,
His fingers lovingly enlaced
By other fingers; until he
Midst darkness his own ring did see.
NOUGHT else awhile; then back there came
New vision: as amidst white flame
The flower-girt goddess wavered there,
Nor knew he now where they twain were,
Midst wild desire that nigh did rend
His changed heart: then there came an end
Of all that light and ecstasy;
His soul grew blind, his eyes could see;
And, moaning from an empty heart,
He saw the hangings blown apart
By the night wind, the lights flare red
In the white light the high moon shed
O'er all the place he knew so well,
And senseless on the floor he fell.

H, what a night to what a morn!
Ah, what a morrow black with scorn,
And hapless end of happy love!
What shame his helpless shame to prove!
For who, indeed, alone could bear
The dreadful shame, the shameful fear,
Of such a bridal? Think withal,
More trusted such a tale would fall
Upon those folks' ears than on most
Who, as I said erst, saw a host
Of wild things lurking in the night;
To whom was magic much as right
As prayers or holy psalmody.
So nothing else it seemed might be,
When Laurence for three nights had striven
To gain the fair maid to him given,
But that her sire should know the thing
And help him with his counselling,
So, weary, wasted with his shame,
Unto his house the bridegroom came,
And when the twain were left alone
He told him how the thing had gone.
The old man doubted not the sooth
Of what he said, but, touched with ruth,
Yet spent no time in mourning vain.
SON, said he, idle were the pain
To seek if thou some deed hast wrought
Which on thine head this grief hath brought,
Some curse for which this doth atone,
Some laugh whereby is honour gone
From the dread powers unnameable;
Rather, who now can help thee well?
SMALL heed, my father, Laurence said,
Gave I to such things, and small dread
To anything I could not see,
But it were God who fashioned me:
From witch-wives have I bought ere now
Wind-bags indeed, but yet did trow
Nothing therein, but dealt with these.
My shipmen's clamour to appease.
WELL, said he, that perchance is worse
For thee, yea, may have gained this curse.
But come, I know a certain man
Who in these things great marvels can,
And something of an age are we,
Yoke-fellows in astronomy,
A many years agone, alas!
SO therewithal the twain did pass
Toward the great church, and entered there,
And, going 'twixt the pillars fair,
Came to a chapel, where a priest.
Made ready now the Holy Feast.
Hist, said the old man, there he is;
May he find healing for all this!
Kneel down, and note him not too much,
No easy man he is to touch.
SO down upon the floor of stone

They knelt, until the mass was done,
Midst peasant folk, and sailors' wives,
Sore careful for their husbands' lives;
But when the mass was fully o'er
They made good haste unto the door
That led unto the sacristy:
And there a ring right fair to see
The old man to a verger23 gave
In token, praying much to have
With Dan Palumbus speech awhile:
The verger took it with a smile,
As one who says, Ye ask in vain;
But presently he came again,
And said: Fair sir, come hither then,
The priest will see you of all men!
WITH eyes made grave by their intent
From out the lordly church they went
Into the precinct, and withal
They passed along the minster wall,
And heard amidst the buttresses
The grey hawks chatter to the breeze,
The sanctus bell24 run down the wind;
Until the priest's house did they find,
Built 'neath the belfry huge and high,
Fluttered about perpetually
By chattering daws,25 and shaken well
From roof to pavement when the bell
Hung out its sound o'er night or day.
HURD, Dan Palumbus takes his way
P'ta now from out the sacristy,26
The verger said; sirs, well be ye!
For time it is that I were gone.
Therewith he left the twain alone
Beside the door, and, sooth to say,

2Berger: a sexton or sacristan.
23Sancta: bell rung during the Roman Catholic mass during the sanctus, a hymn which celebrated the consecration of the host.
24Palumbus: Members of the species Corvus monedula, jackdaws are common small birds found in England.
25Sactuary: church storeroom for ceremonial vestments and vessels.
In haste he seemed to get away
As one afeard; but they bode there,
And round about the house did peer,
But found nought dreadful: small it was,
Set on a tiny plot of grass,
And on each side the door a bay
Brushed 'gainst the oak porch rent and grey;
A yard-wide garden ran along
The wall, by ancient box fenced strong;
And in the corner, where it met
The belfry, was a great yew set,
Where sat the blackbird-hen in spring,
Hearkening her bright-billed husband sing.
A peaceful place it should have been
For one who of the world had seen
O'ermuch, and quiet watch would keep
Over his soul awaiting sleep.

BUT now they heard the priest draw nigh,
And saw him and his shadow high
Wind round the wind-worn buttresses;
So coming by the last of these
He met them face to face: right tall
He was; his straight black hair did fall
About his shoulders; strong he seemed,
His eyes looked far off, as he dreamed
Of other things than what they saw;
Strange lines his thin pale face did draw
Into a set wild look of pain
And terror. As he met the twain
He greeted well his ancient friend,
And prayed them within doors to wend.
Small was his chamber; books were there
Right many, and in seeming fair.
But who knows what therein might be
Twixt board and board of beechen tree?
PALUMBUS bade them sit, and sat,
And talked apace of this and that,
Nor heeded that the youth spake wild,
Nor that his old friend coughed and smiled,
As ill at ease, while the priest spake;

Then from his cloak a purse did take,
And at the last pushed in his word
Edgewise, as 'twere. PALUMBUS heard
As one who fain had been born deaf,
Then rose and cried: Thou fill'st the sheaf,
Thou fill'st the sheaf! this is my doom,
Well may the sexton make my tomb!
And up and down he walked, muttering,
Twixt closed teeth, many a nameless thing.
AT last he stopped and said: O ye,
I knew that ye would come to me,
And offer me great store of gold:
Full often good help have I sold,
And thus this tide should I have done;
But on this mountain of grey stone
I stood last night, and in my art
I dealt; and terror filled my heart,
And hope, and great uncertainty;
Therefore I deem that I shall die;
For cool and bold erst have I been,
Whatever I have heard and seen;
But the old Master of my fear
Seems afar now, and God grown near,
And soon I look to see his face.
Therefore, if but a little space,
Would I be on his side, and do
A good deed; all the more for you,
Since ye art part of sweet days, friend,
That once we deemed would never end;
And in thine eyes meseems, O youth,
Kindness I see and hope and truth;
And thou and he may speak a word
For me unto my master's Lord:
Well, I must reap that I did sow,
But take your gold again and go;
And thou for six days fast and pray,
And come here on the seventh day
About nightfall; then shalt thou learn
In what way doth the matter turn,
And fully know of time and place,
And be well armed thy foe to face,
SO homeward doubtful went the twain,
And Laurence spent in fear and pain
The six long days; and so at last;
When the seventh sun was well-nigh past,
Came to that dark man's fair abode:
The grey tower with the sunset glowed,
The daws wheeled black against the sky
About the belfry windows high,
Or here and there one sank adown
The dizzy shaft of panelled stone;
And sound of children nigh the close
Was mingled with the cries of those;
And e'en as Laurence laid his hand
Upon the latch, and there did stand
Lingered a space, most startling clear
The sweet chime filled the evening air.
He entered mid the great bell's drone,
And found Palumbus all alone
Mid books laid open. Rest, said he;
Time presses not for thee or me;
Surely shall I die soon now.
Silent, with hands laid to his brow,
He sat then, nor did Laurence speak,
Fearing perchance some spell to break;
At last the priest caught up a book,
And from its leaves a letter took,
And unknown words there were on it
For superscription duly writ,
And sealed it was in solemn wise.
He said: Thou knowest where there lies,
Five leagues hence, or a little less,
North of the town, a sandy ness\(^\text{27}\)
That shippers call St. Clement's Head;
South of it dreary land and dead
Lies stretched now, and the sea bears o'er
Ruin of shingle evermore,
And saps the headland year by year,

\(^{27}\text{ness: here, a promontory or headland.}\)

And long have husbandmen had fear
Of its short-lived and treacherous soil,
And left it free from any toil.
There, with thy face turned toward the land,\(^*\)
At the hill's foot take thou thy stand,
Just where the turf the shingle meets;\(^2\)
Wherewith the sea the marshland eats;
But seaward if thy face thou turn,
What I have learned then shalt thou learn
With like reward: watch carefully
And well, and a strange company
Shall pass thee as thou standest there,
And heed thee not; some foul some fair,
Some glad some sorry; rule thy heart,
And heed them nothing for thy part,
Till at the end of all thou seest
A great lord on a marvellous beast
Unnameable; on him cry out,
And he thereon shall turn about
And ask thy need; have thou no fear,
But give him what I give thee here,
And let him read, and thou shalt win
Thine happiness, and have no sin.
But as for me, be witness thou
That in the scroll I give thee now
My death lies, and I know it well,
And cry to God against his hell.
In languid voice he spake, as one
Who knows the task that must be done,
And how each word from him should fall,
And gives no heed to it at all;
But here he stopped a little space,
And once more covered up his face;
But soon began his speech again
In a soft voice and freed from pain:

\(^*\text{turn toward the land: Notice that Laurence travels with the high land on his left and watches the sun rise over the sea. Any Italian setting Morris might have intended would therefore lie along the eastern coast (A. P. M. W.).}\)

\(^{2}\text{shingle: gravel or other alluvial deposits of stones on a shore.}\)
AND for the folk that thou shalt see,
Whence cometh all that company,
Marvel thou not thereat, for know
That this is sure: long years ago,
Leagues seaward of that barren place,
The temple of a glorious race,
Built with far mightier walls than these,
Stood fair midst groves of whispering trees.
Thence come these folk, remembering
Their glory, once so great a thing.
I have said: Could they be once more
As they have been; but all is o'er;
What matters what is, what has been,
And what shall be, when I have seen
The last few hours of my last day?
Depart. Ah me, to cast away
Such power as I on earth have had!
I who could make the lover glad
Above his love's dead face, at least
A little while. Now has all ceased
With that small scrap of black and white:
Think of me, God, midst thy delight,
And save me! yea, or do thy will!
For thou too hast beheld my skill.
THE scroll did Laurence hold in hand,
And silent he a space did stand,
Gazing upon Palumbus, who
Sat open-eyed, as though he knew
Nought of what things were round about;
So, stealthily, and in great doubt
Of strange things yet to come to pass,
Did Laurence gain the darkening grass,
And through the precinct and the town
He passed, and reached the foreshores brown,
And gathered heart, and as he might
Went boldly forward through the night.
At first on his left hand uprose
Great cliffs and sheer, and, rent from those,
Boulders strewn thick across the strand,
Made weary work for foot and hand;
But well he knew the part indeed,
And scarce of such light had he need
As still the summer eve might shed
From the high stars or sunset dead.
Soft was the lovely time and fair;
A little sea-wind raised his hair,
That seemed as though from heaven it blew.
All sordid thoughts the sweet time slew,
And gave good hope such welcoming,
That presently he 'gan to sing,
Though still amid the quiet night
He could not hear his song aright
For the grave thunder of the sea
That smote the beach so musically,
And in the dim light seemed so soft
As each great wave was raised aloft
To fall in foam, you might have deemed
That waste of ocean was but dreamed,
And that the surf's strong music was
By some unknown thing brought to pass.
And Laurence, singing as he went,
As in some lower firmament,
Beneath the line that marked where met
The world's roof and the highway wet,
Could see a ship's light gleam afar
Scarce otherwise than as a star,
While o'erhead fields of thin white cloud
The more part of the stars did shroud.
SO on he went, and here and there
A few rough fisher-carles there were,
Launching their ordered keels to sea,
Eager to gain, if it might be,
The harbour-mouth with morning-light;
Or else some bird that flies by night
Wheeled round about with his harsh cry;
Or as the cliffs sank he could spy
Afar some homestead glittering
With high feast or some other thing.
Such gleams of fellowship had he
At first along the unquiet sea;
But when a long way off the town
The cliffs were wholly sunken down,
And on the marshland's edge he went;
For all sounds then the night-jar sent
Its melancholy laugh across
The sea-wind moaning for the loss
Of long-drowned lands, that in old time
Were known for great in many a clime.
BUT the moon rose, and 'neath its light,
Cloud-barred, the wide wastes came in sight,
With gleaming, sand-choked, reed-clad pools,
And marsh lights for the mock of fools;
And o'er the waste beneath the moon
The sea-wind piped a dreary tune,
And louder grew, and the world then
No more seemed made for sons of men,
And summer seemed an empty name,
And harvest-time a mock and shame:
Such hopeless ruin seemed settled there,
On acres sunny once and fair.
BUT Laurence now could well behold
The sandy headland bare and bold
Against the sea, and stayed his feet
Awhile, to think how he should meet
These nameless things, his enemies,
The lords of terror and disease;
Then trembling, hastened on, for thought
Full many an image to him brought,
Once seen, with loathing cast aside,
But ready e'en for such a tide,
Come back with longing's added sting,
And whatsoever time could bring.
NOW thrusting all these thoughts apart
He hastened on with hasty heart,
Till on the doubtful place he stood
Where the sea sucked the pasture's blood.
And with back turned unto the sea
He strove to think right strenuously
Of this and that well-liking place;
The merry clamour of the chase,
And nigh it the sea-holly was,
Whose cold grey leaves and stiff stark shade
On earth a double moonlight made:
Above him, specked with thorn and whin,\(^{31}\)
And clad with short grey grass and thin,
The hill ran up, and Laurence knew
That down the other slope there grew
A dark pine-wood, whose added sound
Scarce noted, yet did more confound,
With changing note, his weary mind.
BUT now with drowsiness grown blind,
Once more he tottered on his place,
And let fall down his weary face;
But then remembering all his part,
Once and again woke with a start
And dozed again; and then at last,
Shuddering, all slumber from him cast,
Yet scarce knew if he lived or no:
For by his scared wild eyes did go
A wondrous pageant,\(^{32}\) noiselessly,
Although so close it passed him by;
The fluttering raiment by him brushed,
As through its folds the sea-wind rushed.
BY then his eyes were opened wide.
Already up the grey hill-side
The backs of two were turned to him:
One like a young man tall and slim,
Whose heels with rosy wings were dight;
One like a woman clad in white,
With glittering wings of many a hue,
Still changing, and whose shape none knew.
In aftertime would Laurence say,

\(^{30}\text{sea-holly: Eryngium maritimum, a European coastal herb of the carrot family, with spiny leaves and pale blue flowers.}\)

\(^{31}\text{thorn: Ulex europaeus, a spiny yellow-flowered European shrub, also called furze or gorse.}\)

\(^{32}\text{pageant: Progresses and processions of mythical and emblematic personages were customary in certain medieval and Renaissance festivities, and appeared in several Chaucerian texts—the Prologue of "The Legend of Good Women," for example.}\)
A dreadful look one woman cast
On Laurence, and upon his breast
A wounded blood-stained hand she pressed.
BUT on the heels of these there came
A King, that through the night did flame,
For something more than steel or brass
The matter of his armour was,
Its fashion strange past words to say;
Who knows where first it saw the day?
On a red horse he rode; his face
Gave no more hope of any grace
Than through the blackness of the night
The swift-descending lightning might;
And yet therein great joy indeed
The brightness of his eyes did feed;
A joy as of the leaping fire
Over the house-roof rising higher
To greet the noon-sun, when the glaive
Forbids all folk to help or save.
YET harmless this one passed him by,
And through the air deliciously
Faint pensive music breathed; and then
There came a throng of maids and men,
A young and fair and gentle band;
Whereof some passed him hand in hand,
Some side by side not touching walked,
As though of happy things they talked;
Noiseless they were like all the rest
As past him up the hill they pressed;
Yet she who brushed by him most close
Cast to his feet a fresh red rose.
THEN somewhat of a space there was
Before the next band 'gan to pass,
So faint they moved for very woe;
And these were men and maids also,
And young were most, and most were fair;
And hand in hand some few went there,
And still were fain with love to see

Each other's bitter misery;
But most, just sundered, went along
With faces drawn by hidden wrong,
Clenched hands, and muttering lips that cursed
From brooding hearts their sin that nursed.
And she that went the last of all,
Black-robed, in passing by let fall
At Laurence's feet a black-bound wreath
Of bitter herbs long come to death.
ALONE, afoot, when these were gone,
A bright one came, whose garments shone
In wondrous wise; a bow he bore,²⁴
And deadly feathered shafts good store;
Winged was he and most Godlike fair;
Slowly he went, and oft would stare
With eyes distraught down on the grass,
As waiting what might come to pass;
Then whiles would he look up again,
And set his teeth as if with pain;
And whiles for very joy of heart
His eyes would gleam, his lips would part
With such a smile as though the earth
Were newly made to give him mirth;
Back o'er his shoulder would he gaze
Seaward, or through the marshland haze
That lay before, strain long and hard,
Till fast the tears fell on the sward:
So towards the hill's brow wandered he.
THEN through the moaning of the sea
There came a faint and thrilling strain,
Till Laurence strove with tears in vain,
And his flesh trembled, part with fear,
Part as with some great pleasure near;
And then his dazzled eyes could see
Once more, a noiseless company;
And his heart failed him at the sight,
And he forgot both wrong and right,
And nothing thought of his intent;

³³glaive: sword or spear.

²⁴bow he bore: Cupid's distinctive weapon was the bow.
For close before him now there went
Fair women clad in ancient guise,
That hid but little from his eyes
More loveliness than earth doth hold
Now, when her bones are growing old;
But all too swift they went by him,
And fluttering gown and ivory limb
Went twinkling up the bare hill-side,
And lonely there must he abide.
THEN seaward had he nigh turned round,
And thus the end of life had found,
When even before his wilder'd sight
There glided forth a figure white,
And passed him by afoot, alone;
No raiment on her sweet limbs shone,
Only the tresses of her hair
The wind drove round her body fair;
No sandals were there on her feet,
But still before them blossoms sweet
Unnamed, unknown within that land,
Sprang up; she held aloft her hand
As to the trembling man she turned.
Her glorious eyes, and on it burned
The dreadful pledge, the looked-for thing,
The well-wrought, lovely spousal ring.
THEN Laurence trembled more and more;
Huge longing his faint heart swept o'er;
As one who would a boon beseech.
His fevered hand forth did he reach,
And then she stayed and gazed at him,
Just moving lightly each fair limb
As one who loiters, but must go;
But even as the twain stood so,
She saying nought, he saying nought,
And who knows what wild wave of thought
Beating betwixt them, from his girth
The dread scroll loosened fell to earth,
And to his ears where sounds waxed dim
Louder its rustle seemed to him.
Than loudest thunder, down he bent,

Remembering now his good intent,
And got the scroll within his hand;
And when mid prayers he came to stand
Upright again, then was she gone,
And he once more was left alone.
FORDONE, bewildered, downcast now,
Heard he confused clamour grow;
And then swept onward through the night
A babbling crowd in raiment bright,
Wherein none listened sought at all
To what from other lips might fall,
And none might meet his fellow's gaze;
And still o'er every restless face
Passed restless shades of rage and pain,
And sickening fear and longing vain.
On wound that manifold agony
Unholpen, vile, till earth and sea
Grew silent, till the moonlight died
Before a false light blaring wide,
And from amidst that fearful folk
The Lord of all the pageant broke.
MOST like a mighty king was he,
And crowned and sceptred royally;
As a white flame his visage shone,
Sharp, clear-cut as a face of stone;
But flickering flame, not flesh, it was;
And over it such looks did pass
Of wild desire, and pain, and fear,
As in his people's faces were,
But tenfold fiercer: furthermore,
A wondrous steed the Master bore,
Unnameable of kind or make,
Not horse, nor hippogriff, nor drake.
Like and unlike to all of these,
And flickering like the semblances
Of an ill dream, wrought as in scorn
Of sunny noon, fresh eve, and morn.

*Hippogriff*: a legendary winged beast, having (in one of its manifestations) the anterior foreparts of a griffin (with claws) and the hindparts of a horse.
That feed the fair things of the earth.
And now brake out a mock of mirth
From all that host, and all their eyes
Were turned on Laurence in strange wise,
Who met the maddening fear that burned
Round his unhopen heart, and turned
Unto the dreadful king and cried:
What errand go ye on? Abide,
Abide! for I have tarried long;
Turn thou to me, and right my wrong!
One of thy servants keeps from me
That which I gave her not; nay, see
What thing thy Master bids thee do!
THEN wearily, as though he knew
How all should be, the Master turned,
And his red eyes on Laurence burnèd,
As without word the scroll he took;
But as he touched the skin, he shook,
As though for fear, and presently
In a great voice he 'gan to cry:
Shall this endure for ever, Lord?
Hast thou no care to keep thy word?
And must such double men abide?
Not mine, not mine, nor on thy side?
For as thou curseth them, I curse:
Make thy souls better, Lord, or worse!
THEN spake he to the trembling man:
What I am hidden, that I can;
Bide here, and thou shalt see thine own
Unto thy very feet cast down;
Then go and dwell in peace awhile.
Then round he turned with sneering smile.
And once more lonely was the night,
And colourless with grey moonlight.
BUT soon indeed the dawn drew near,
As Laurence stood twixt hope and fear,
Still doubting, now that all was gone,
If his own heart the thing had done,
Though on his coat the blood-mark was,
Though rose and wreath lay on the grass.

So long he waited wearily,
Until, when dawn 'gan stripe the sky,
If he were waking scarce he knew,
When, as he deemed, a white cloud drew
Anigh him from the marshland grey,
Over the empty ghost-trod way,
And from its midst a voice there came:
Thou who hast wrought me added shame,
Take back thine own and go thy ways;
And think, perchance, in coming days,
When all grows old about thee, how
From foolish hands thou needs must throw
A gift of unhoped great delight.
It vanished as the east grew bright,
And in the shadowless still morn
A sense of rest to him was borne,
And looking down unto his feet,
His eyes the spousal-ring did meet.
He caught it up with a glad cry,
And kissed it over longingly,
And set it on his hand again;
And dreamlike now, and vague and vain,
Seemed all those images of fear,
The wicked sights that held him there;
And rather now his eyes could see
Her that was his now verily.
THEN from that drear unhallowed place
With merry heart he set his face.
A light wind o'er the ocean blew,
And fresh and fair the young day grew;
The sun rose o'er the green sea's rim,
And gave new life and joy to him;
The white birds crying o'er his head
Seemed praising all his hardhead,
And laughing at the worsted foe;
So joyous, onward did he go,
And in a little sheltered bay
His weariness he washed away,
And made afresh on toward the town:
He met the fish-wife coming down
From her red cottage to the strand,
The fisher-children hand in hand
Over some wonder washed ashore;
The old man muttering words of lore
About the wind that was to be;
And soon the white sails specked the sea,
And fisher-keel on fisher-keel
The furrowed sand again did feel,
And round them many a barefoot maid
The burden on her shoulders laid,
While unto rest the fishers went,
And grumbling songs from rough throats sent.
NOW all is done, and he at last,
Weary, but full of joy, has passed
Over his threshold once again,
And scarce believed is all the pain
And all the fear that he has had,
Now night and day shall make him glad.
AS for Palumbus, tossed about
His soul might be in dread and doubt,
In rest at least his body lay
Ere the great bell struck noon that day.
And soon a carver did his best
To make an image of that rest,
Nor sought of gold did Laurence spare
To make his tomb both rich and fair;
And o'er his clasped hands and his head
Thereafter many a mass was said.

O when the tale was clean done,
with a smile
The old priest looked around
a little while,
That grew, as young and old
gan say their say
On that strange dream of time long passed away;
So listening, with his pleased and thoughtful look
He gan turn o'er the worn leaves of his book,
Hat noting at the first the flowers therein,
Drawn on the margin of the yellowing skin
Where chapters ended; or fair images
Of kings and lords amidst of war and peace
At books' beginnings; till within a space
His eyes grew fixed upon a certain place,
And he seemed reading. Was it then the name
Of some old town before his eyes that came,
And drew his thoughts there? Did he see it now?
The bridge across the river choked with snow;
The pillared market-place, not thronged this eve;
The muffled goodwives making haste to leave
The gusty minster porch, whose windows shone
With the first-litten candles; while the drone
Of the great organ shook the leaded panes,
And the wind moaned about the turret vanes?
Nought changed there, and himself so changed mid change,
That the next land, Death's land, would seem nought strange
To his awakening eyes. Ah! good and ill,
When will your strife the fated measure fill?
When will the tangled veil be drawn away,
To show us all that unimagined day?

End of Vol. VII.

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