OW on the second day that these did meet
March was a-dying through soft days
and sweet,
Too hopeful for the wild days yet to be;
But in the hall that ancient company,
Not lacking younger folk that day at least,
Softened by spring were gathered at the feast,
And as the time drew on, throughout the hall
A horn was sounded, giving note to all
That they at last the looked-for tale should hear.

THEN spake a Wanderer: O kind hosts and dear,
Hearken a little unto such a tale
As folk with us will tell in every vale
About the yule-tide fire, whenas the snow
Deep in the passes, leteth men to go
From place to place: now there few great folk be,
Although we upland men have memory
Of ills kings did us; yet as now indeed
Few have much wealth, few are in utter need.
Like the wise ants a kingless, happy folk
We long have been, not galled by any yoke,
But the white leaguer of the winter tide
Whereby all men at home are bound to bide.
Alas, my folly! how I talk of it,
As though from this place where to-day we sit
The way thereto were short. Ah, would to God
Upon the snow-freed herbage now I trod!
But pardon, sirs; the time goes swiftly by,
Hearken a tale of conquering destiny.

1upland men: Morris’s Norwegian mariners tend to like tales in which tyrants are chastened or rebuked.
3winter tide: the “leaguer” or “siege” of heavy snows, the only restraint imposed on these kingless northmen.
THE MAN BORN TO BE KING.

The Argument.

IT WAS FORETOLD TO A GREAT KING,¹ THAT HE WHO SHOULD REIGN AFTER HIM SHOULD BE LOW BORN AND POOR; WHICH THING CAME TO PASS IN THE END, FOR ALL THAT THE KING COULD DO.

KING THERE was in days of old
Who ruled wide lands nor
lacked for gold,
Nor honour, nor much
longed-for praise,
And his days were called happy days,
So peaceable his kingdoms were,
While others, wrapt in war and fear,
Fell ever unto worse and worse.
Therefore his city was the nurse

Of all that men then had of lore,
And none were driven from his door
That seemed well skilled in anything;
So of the sages was he king;
And from this learned man and that,
Little by little, lore he gat,
And many a lordless, troubled land
Fell scarce loth to his dreaded hand.

MIDST this it chanced that, on a day,
Clad in his glittering gold array,
He held a royal festival;
And nigh him in his glorious hall
Beheld his sages most and least,
Sitting much honoured at the feast.
But mid the faces so well known,
Of men he well might call his own,

He saw a little wizened man
With face grown rather grey than wan
From lapse of years; beardless was he,
And bald as is the winter tree;
But his two deep-set, glittering eyes
Gleamed at the sight of mysteries
None knew but he; few words he said,
And unto those small heed was paid;
But the king, young, yet old in guile,
Failed not to note a flickering smile
Upon his face, as now and then
He turned him from the learned men
Toward the king's seat, so thought to know
What new thing he might have to show;
And presently, the meat being done,
He bade them bring him to his throne,
And when before the throne he stood,
He said: We deem thy coming good;
What is thine art, canst thou in rhyme
Tell stories of the ancient time?
Or dost thou chronicle old wars?
Or know'st thou of the change of stars?
Or seek'st thou the transmuting stone?²
Or canst thou make the shattered bone
Grow whole, and dying men arise
And live as long as thou the wise;
Or what gift dost thou bring me here,
Where nought but men of lore are dear
To me and mine? O King, said he,
But few things know I certainly,
Though I have toiled for many a day
Along the hard and doubtful way
That bringeth wise men to the grave:
And now for all the years I gave,

¹a great king: In one English version of the Gests, the king is Delphinus, in

²transmuting stone: the "philosopher's stone," sought by early alchemists. Among its alleged virtues was the power to transform 'base' metals into gold.
To know all things that man can learn,
A few months learned life I earn,
Nor feel much liker to a god
Than when beside my sheep I trod
Upon the thorny, wind-swept down.
Yet am I come unto thy town
To tell thee somewhat that I learned
As on the stars I gazed, and yearned
To cast this weary body off,
With all its chains of mock and scoff
And creeping death; for as I read
The sure decrees with joy and dread,
Somewhat I saw writ down of thee,
And who shall have the sovereignty
When thou art gone. Nay, said the King,
Speak quick and tell me of the thing.
Sire, said the Sage, A thine ancient line
Thou holdest as a thing divine,
So long and undisturbed it is,
But now shall there be end to this,
For surely in my glittering text
I read that he who shall sit next,
On this thine ancient throne and high,
Shall be no better born than I
Whose grandsire none remembereth,
Nor where my father first drew breath.
Yea, said the King, and this may be;
Yet, O Sage, ere I credit thee,
Some token certes must thou show,
Or tell me what I think to know,
Alone, among all folk alive;

3Sage: In "The Devil and His Three Golden Hairs," this prophecy is made by the neighbors of the hero, who further assert he will marry the king's daughter because he was born with a "good-luck caul" or membrane on his head. No human prophecy appears in the Gesta, only the mysterious voice. In one version of the Gesta, the newborn child is the aristocratic son of a faithful count the evil king has driven away. (Charles Swan, Select Tales from the Gesta Romanorum,

Then surely great gifts will I give
To thee, and make thee head of all
Who watch the planets rise and fall.
Bid these stand backward from thy throne,
The Sage said, then to thee alone
Long hidden matters will I tell;
And then, if thou believest, well,
And if thou dost not, well also;
No gift I ask, but leave to go;
For strange to me is this thy state,
And for thyself, thou well may'st hate
My crabbed age and misery.
Well, said the King, let this thing be;
And ye, my masters, stand aback!
For of the fresh air have I lack,
And in my pleasance would I walk
To hearken this grave elder's talk
And gain new lore. Therewith he rose
And led the way unto a close,
Shaded with grey-leaved olive-trees;
And when they were amidst of these
He turned about and said: Speak, friend,
And of thy folly make an end,
And take this golden chain therefor.
Rightly thou nam'st my weak lore,
The Sage said, therefore to the end
Be wise, and what the fates may send
Take thou, nor struggle in the net
Wherein thine helpless feet are set!
Hearken! a year is well-nigh done
Since, at the hottest of the sun,
Stood Antony beneath this tree,
And took a jewelled cup of thee,
And drank swift death in guise of wine;*

NY, 1887, 225)

pleasance: a pleasure ground or enclosure laid out with shady walks, trees, shrubs, and ornamental ponds.
Since he, most trusted of all thine,  
At last too full of knowledge grew,  
And chiefly, he of all men knew  
How the Earl Marshal Hugh had died;  
Since he had drawn him on to ride  
Into a bushment1 of his foes,  
To die amidst the rain of blows.  
Thou knowest that by me he died,  
The King said, how if now I cried,  
Help! the magician slayeth me?  
Swiftly should twenty sword-blades be  
Clashing within thy ribs, and thou  
Nearer to death than even now.  
Not thus, O King, I fear to die,  
The Sage said; Death shall pass me by  
Many a year yet, because perchance,  
I fear not aught his clattering dance,2  
And have enough of weary days.  
But thou... farewell, and win the praise  
Of sages, by thy heartening  
With heed to this most certain thing.  
Fear not because this tale I know,  
For to my grey tower back I go  
High raised above the healthy hills  
Where the great ern3 the swift hare kills,  
Or stoops upon the new-yeaned4 lamb;  
There almost as a god I am  
Unto few folk; who hear thy name  
Indeed, but know not of thy fame,

5a close: an ensurance, court, or yard.  
6guise of wine: The Grimms' king is evil, but his misdeeds are unspecified. The  
king of the Gesta is envious, but not a murderer.  
7bushment: anbush.  
8clattering dance: a metaphor taken from the danse macabre motif popular in  
visual arts from the 13th to 15th centuries. In this dance, corpses and skeletons  
lead a line-dance of living people into death.  
9ern: eagle.  
10new-yeaned: new-born.

Nay, scarce if thou be man or beast.  
So saying, back unto the feast  
He turned, and went adown the hall,  
Not heeding any gibe or call;  
And left the palace and the town  
With face turned toward his windy down.11  
Back to the hall, too, the King went,  
With eyes upon the pavement bent  
In pensive thought, delighting not  
In riches and his kingly lot;  
But thinking how his days began,  
And of the lonely souls of man.  
UT time past, and midst this and that,  
The wise man's message he forgot;  
And as a king he lived his life,  
And took to him a noble wife  
Of the kings' daughters, rich and fair.  
And they being wed for nigh a year,  
And she now growing great with child,  
It happed unto the forest wild  
This king with many folk must ride  
At ending of the summer-tide.  
There boar and hart12 they brought to bay,  
And had right noble prize that day;  
But when the noon was now long past,  
And the thick woods grew overcast,  
They roused the mightiest hart of all.  
Then loudly 'gan the King to call  
Unto his huntsmen, not to leave  
That mighty beast for dusk nor eve,  
Till they had won him; with which word  
His horn he blew, and forth he spurred,  
Taking no thought of most or least,  
But only of that royal beast.  
And over rough and smooth he rode,
Nor yet for anything abode,
Till dark night, swallowing up the day,
With blindness his swift course must stay.
Nor was there with him any one,
So far his fair steed had outrun
The best of all his hunting-folk.
SO, glancing at the stars that broke
Twixt the thick branches here and there,
Backward he turned, and peered with care
Into the darkness, but saw nought,
Nor heard his folk, and therewith thought
His bed must be the brake leaves brown.
Then in a while he lighted down,
And felt about a little space,
If he might find a softer place;
But as he groped from tree to tree
Some glimmering light he seemed to see
Twixt the dark stems, and thither turned,
If yet perchance some wood-fire burned
Within a peasant's hut, where he
Might find, amidst their misery,
Rough food, or shelter at the least.
SO, leading on his wearied beast,
Blindly he crept from tree to tree,
Till slowly grew that light to be
The thing he looked for, and he found
A hut on a cleared space of ground,
From whose half-opened door there streamed
The light that erst far off had gleamed.
Then of that shelter was he fain,
But just as he made shift to gain
The open space in front of it,
A shadow o'er the grass did flit,
And on the wretched threshold stood
A big man, with a bar of wood

12 hart: male deer.

In his right hand, who seemed as though
He got him ready for a blow;
But ere he spoke the King cried: 'Friend,
May God good hap upon thee send,
If thou wilt give me rest this night,
And food according to thy might.
NAY, said the carle, 'my wife lieth
In labour, and is nigh her death:
Nor canst thou enter here at all;
But near by is my asses' stall,
Who on this night bide in the town.
There, if thou wilt, mayst thou lie down,
And sleep until the dawn of day,
And I will bring thee what I may
Of food and drink. Then said the King:
Thanked be thou; neither for nothing
Shalt thou this good deed do to me.
Nay, said the carle, let these things be,
Surely I think before the morn,
To be too weary and forlorn
For gold much heart in me to put.
With that he turned, and from the hut
Brought out a lantern, and rye-bread,
And wine, and showed the King a shed,
Strewed with a litter of dry brake:
Withal he muttered, for his sake,
Unto Our Lady some rude prayer,
And turned about and left him there.
SO when the rye-bread, nowise fine,
The King had munched, and with green wine
Had quenched his thirst, his horse he tied
Unto a post, and there beside
He fell asleep upon the brake.
But in an hour did he awake,
Astonied with an unnamed fear,
For words were ringing in his ear
Like the last echo of a scream,
TAKE! TAKE! but of the vanished dream
No image was there left to him.
Then, trembling sore in every limb,
Did he arise, and drew his sword,
And passed forth on the forest sward,
And cautiously about he crept;
But nought at all he heard, except
Some groaning of the woodman's wife,
And forest sounds well known, but rife
With terror to the lonely soul.
THEN he lay down again, to roll
His limbs within his huntsman's cloak;
And slept again; and once more woke
To tremble with that unknown fear,
And other echoing words to hear:
GIVE UP! GIVE UP! nor anything
Showed more why these strange words should ring
About him. Then he sat upright,
Bewildered, gazing through the night,
Until his weary eyes, grown dim,
Showed not the starlit tree-trunks slim
Against the black wood, grey and plain;
And into sleep he sank again,
And woke not soon: but sleeping dreamed
That he awoke, nor other seemed
The place he woke in but that shed,
And there beside his broken bed
He seemed to see the ancient sage
Shrivelled yet more with untold age,
Who bending down his head to him

14carle: male peasant or commoner.
15TAKE! TAKE! Only the Gesta includes these voices, which call three times, crying "By," "take," and "restore." They also explain directly, rather than through a dream figure, that the newborn is destined to become the Emperor's heir.

Said, with a mocking smile and grim:
Take, or give up; what matters it?
This child new-born shall surely sit
Upon thy seat when thou art gone,
And dwelling 'twixt strait walls of stone.
AGAIN the King woke at that word
And sat up, panting and afeard,
And staring out into the night,
Where yet the woods thought not of light;
And fain he was to cast off sleep,
Such visions from his eyes to keep.
Heavy his head grew none the less,
'Twixt wildering thoughts and weariness,
And soon he fell asleep once more,
Nor dreamed, nor woke again, before
The sun shone through the forest trees;
And, shivering in the morning breeze,
He blinked with just-awakened eyes;
And pondering on those mysteries,
Unto the woodman's hovel went.
HIM he found kneeling down, and bent
In moody grief above a bed,
Whereon his wife lay, stark and dead,
Whose soul near morn had passed away;
And 'twixt the dead and living lay
A new-born man-child, fair and great.
So in the door the King did wait
To watch the man, who had no heed
Of this or that, so sore did bleed
The new-made wound within his heart.
But as the King gazed, for his part
He did but see his threatened foe,
And ever hard his heart did grow
With deadly hate and wilfulness:
And sight of that poor man's distress

16broken: large ferns.
Made it the harder, as of nought
But that unbroken line he thought
Of which he was the last; withal
His scornful troubled eyes did fall
Upon that nest of poverty,
Where nought of joy he seemed to see.
ON straw the poor dead woman lay;
The door alone let in the day,
Showing the trodden earthen floor,
A board on trestles weak and poor,
Three stumps of tree for stool or chair,
A half-glazed pipkin, a small earthenware pot or pan,
A bowl of porridge by the wife,
Untouched by lips that lacked for life,
A platter and a bowl of wood;
And in the further corner stood
A bow cut from the wych-elm tree,
A holly club, and arrows three
III pointed, heavy, spliced with thread.
Hi! soothly, well remembered
Was that unblissful wretched home,
Those four bare walls, in days to come;
And often in the coming years
He called to mind the pattering tears
That, on the rent old sackcloth cast
About the body, fell full fast,
Twixt half-meant prayers and curses wild,
And that weak wailing of the child,
His threatened dreaded enemy,
The mighty king that was to be.
BUT as he gazed unsoftened there,
With hate begot of scorn and care,
Loudly he heard a great horn blow,
And his own hunting call did know;

---

The Man Born To Be King

And soon began the shouts to hear
Of his own people drawing near.
Then lifting up his horn, he blew
A long shrill point, a short strain or snatch of melody, esp. a short phrase sounded as a signal.

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17stark and dead: In none of Morris’s sources does the mother die.
18pipkin: a small earthenware pot or pan.
19wych-elm: a species of elm with broader leaves and more spreading branches than the common elm.
To help me get the day's work done,
And now, indeed, forth must he go
If unto manhood he should grow,
And lonely I must wander forth,
To whom east, west, and south, and north
Are all alike: forgive it me
If little thanks I give to thee
Who scarce can thank great God in heaven
For what is left of what was given.
SMALL heed unto him the King gave,
But trembling in his haste to have
The body of his enemy,
Said to an old squire: Bring to me
The babe, and give the good man this
Wherewith to gain a little bliss,
In place of all his troubles gone,
Nor need he now be long alone.
THE calf's rough face, at clink of gold,
Lit up, though still did he behold
The wasted body lying there;
But stooping, a rough box, foursquare,
Made of old wood and lined with hay,
Wherein the helpless infant lay,
He raised, and gave it to the squire,
Who on the floor cast down his hire,
Nor sooth dared murmur aught the while,
But turning smiled a grim hard smile
To see the calf his pieces count
Still weeping: so did all men mount,
And turning round into the wood
Forgot him and his dreariness,
And soon were far off from the hut.
THEN coming out, the door he shut
Behind him, and adown a glade,
Towards a rude hermitage he made
To fetch the priest unto his need,

To bury her and say her bed:
So when all things that he might do
Were done aright, heavy with woe,
He left the woodland hut behind
To take such chance as he might find
In other lands, forgetting all
That in that forest did befall.

UT through the wild-wood rode the King,
Moody and thinking on the thing,
And weighted yet by hovering fear;
Till now, when they had drawn anear
The open country, and could see
The road run on from close to lea,
And lastly by a wooden bridge
A long way from that healthy ridge
Cross over a deep lowland stream,
Then in his eyes there came a gleam,
And his hand fell upon his sword,
And turning round to squire and lord
He said: Ride, sirs, the way is clear,
Nor of my people have I fear,
Nor do my foes range over wide;
And for myself, fain would I ride
Right slowly homewards through the fields,
Noting what this and that one yields;
While by my squire who bears the child
Lightly my way shall be beguiled.
For some nurse now he needs must have
This tender life of his to save;
And doubtless by the stream there is
Some house where he may dwell in bliss,
Till he grow old enough to learn
How gold and glory he may earn;
And grow, perchance, to be a lord.
WITHI downcast eyes he spoke that word;

21*dreariness*: sadness or sorrow.
The Medieval Tale for March

But forth they galloped speedily,
And he drew rein and stood to see
Their green costs lessening as they went.
This man unto the other bent,
Until mid dust and haze at last
Into a wavering mass they passed;
Then 'twixt the hedgerows vanished quite,
Just told of by the dust-cloud white
Rolled upwards 'twixt the elm-trunks slim.

HEN turned the King about to him
Who held the child, noting again
The thing wherein he first had lain,
And on one side of it could see
A lion painted hastily
In red upon a ground of white,
As though of old it had been dight\(^{23}\)
For some lord's rough-wrought palisade;
But naked 'mid the hay was laid
The child, and had no mark or sign.\(^{24}\)
THEN said the King: My ancient line
Thou and thy sires through good and ill
Have served, and unto thee my will
Is law enough from day to day;
Ride nigh me, hearkening what I say.
HE shook his rein, and side by side
Down through the meadows did they ride,
And opening all his heart, the King
Told to the old man everything,
Both of the sage, and of his dream.
Withal drawn nigh unto the stream,
He said: Yet this shall never be,

\(^{22}\)leas: pasture or grassland.
\(^{23}\)dight: put in order, array, dress.
\(^{24}\)no mark or sign: There is nothing about a distinctive cradle in the Gesta, where the child is recognized by his face, and in one variant by a birthmark. In the version which makes the child the son of a slain count mentioned above in the note to l. 75, the king's suspicions are aroused by the youth's goodness and

The Man Born To Be King

For surely as thou lovest me,
Adown this water shall he float\(^{25}\)
With this rough box for ark and boat,
Then if mine old line he must spill
There let God save him if He will,
While I in no case shed his blood.
YEA, said the squire, thy words are good,
For the whole sin shall lie on me,
Who greater things would do for thee
If need there were; yet note, I pray,
It may be he will 'scape this day
And live; and what wouldst thou do then
If thou shouldst meet him amongst men?
I counsel thee to let him go
Since sure to nought thy will shall grow.
YEA, yea, the King said, let all be
That may be, if I once but see
This ark whirl in the eddies swift
Or tangled in the autumn drift
And wrong side up. But with that word
Their horse-hoofs on the plank he heard,
And swift across the bridge he rode,
And nigh the end of it abode,
Then turned to watch the old squire stop,
And leaning o'er the bridge-rail drop
The luckless child; he heard withal
A muttered word and splashing fall
And from the wakened child a cry,
And saw the cradle hurrying by,
Whirled round and sinking, but as yet
Holding the child, nor overset.
NOW somewhat, soothly at the sight
Did the King doubt if he outright

\(^{25}\)shall he float: Morris here follows the Grimm story, in which the cradle is cast adrift on the river. In the Gesta, the Emperor orders his servants to kill the child and bring back his heart, but they refuse, and bring the emperor an
Had rid him of his feeble foe,
But frowning did he turn to go
Unto his home, nor knew indeed
How better he might help his need;
And as unto his house he rode
Full little care for all he showed;
But bade stark Samuel the squire
Unto his bridle-hand ride nigher,
And talked to him of careless things,
As unto such will talk great kings.
BUT when unto his palace gate
He came at last, thereby did wait
The chamberlain with eager eyes
Above his lips grown grave with lies,
In haste to tell him that the queen,
While in the wild-wood he had been,
Had borne a daughter unto him
Strong, fair of face, and straight of limb.
So well at ease and glad therest
His troubled dream he nigh forgot,
His troubled waking, and the ride
Unto the fateful river-side;
Or thought of all as little things
Unmeet to trouble souls of kings.
SO passed the days, so passed the years
In such-like hopes, and such-like fears,
And such-like deeds in field and hall
As unto royal men befall,
And fourteen years have passed away
Since on the huddled brake he lay
And dreamed that dream, remembered now.
Once and again, when slow and slow
The minutes of some sleepless night
Crawl toward the dawning of the light.

animal's heart instead.

REMEMBERED not on this sweet morn
When to the ringing of the horn,
Jingle of bits and mingled shout,
Toward that same stream he rideth out
To see his grey-winged falcons fly.
So long he rode he drew anigh
A mill upon the river's brim,
That seemed a goodly place to him,
For o'er the oily smooth millhead
There hung the apples growing red,
And many an ancient apple-tree
Within the orchard could he see,
While the smooth mill walls white and black
Shook to the great wheel's measured clack,
And grumble of the gear within;
While o'er the roof that dulled that din
The doves sat crooning half the day,
And round the half-cut stack of hay
The sparrows fluttered twittering.
THERE smiling stayed the joyous king,
And since the autumn noon was hot
Thought good anigh the pleasant spot
To dine that day, and therewith sent
To tell the miller his intent:
Who held the stirrup of the King,
Bareheaded, joyful at the thing,
While from his horse he lit adown,
Then led him o'er an elm-beam brown,
New cut in February tide,
That crossed the stream from side to side.
So underneath the apple-trees
The King sat careless; well at ease,
And ate and drank right merrily.
TO whom the miller drew anigh
Among the courtiers, bringing there
Such as he could of country fare,
Green yellowing plums from off his wall,
Wasp-bitten pears, the first to fall
From off the wavering spire-like tree, 
Junkets, 26 and cream and fresh honey.
SMILING the King regarded him,
For he was round-paunched, short of limb,
Red-faced, with long, lank flaxen hair;
But with him was a boy, right fair,
Grey-eyed, and yellow-haired, most like
Unto some Michael who doth strike 27
The dragon on a minster wall;
So sweet-eyed was he, and withal
So fearless of all things he seemed.
But when he saw him the King deemed
He scarce could be the miller’s kin,
And laughing said: Hast thou within
Thy dusty mill the dame who bore
This stripling in the days of yore,
For fair were I to see her now,
If she be liker him than thou?
SIRE, said the miller, that may be,
And thou my dame shall surely see;
But for the stripling, neither I
Begat him, nor my wife did lie
In labour when the lad was born,
But as an outcast and forlorn 28
We found him fourteen years to-day,
So quick the time has worn away.

26Junkets: cream-cheeses or other foodstuffs derived from cream.
27who doth strike: The archangel Michael was often portrayed as a supernaturally beautiful youth, whose fight with a dragon symbolized the victory over Satan in Revelations 12:7-8: “And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven.” Michael’s description here recalls paintings of the angel on minster (church) walls.
28Outcast and forlorn: The adoption of the boy by the childless miller, and the detail that he is fourteen years old when he meets the king, come from Grimm. In the Gest, a kind Duke or Earl finds and raises the child, and unwittingly

THEN the King, hearkening what he said,
A vanished day remembered,
And troubled grew his face thereat;
But while he thought of this and that
The man turned from him and was gone,
And by him stood the lad alone;
At whom he gazed, and as their eyes
Met, a great horror ‘gan arise
Within his heart, and back he shrunk,
And shuddering a deep draught he drank,
Scarce knowing if his royal wine
He touched, or juice of some hedge-vine.
BUT as his eyes he lifted up
From off his jewelled golden cup,
Once more the miller drew anigh,
By whom his wife went timidly,
Bearing some burden in her hand;
So when before him she did stand,
And he beheld her worn and old,
And black-haired, then that hair of gold,
Grey eyes, firm lips, and round cleft chin,
Brought stronger memory of his sin.
BUT the carle spake: Dame, tell the King
How this befell, a little thing
The thoughts of such great folk to hold;
Speak out, and fear not to be bold.
MY tale, she said, is short enow,
For this day fourteen years ago
Along this river-side I rode
From market to our poor abode,
Where dwelt we far from other men,
Since thinner 29 was the country then
Than now it is; so as I went,
And wearied o’er my panniers 30 bent,

29thinner: less populated.
30panniers: baskets carried by a beast of burden, usually in pairs.
From out the stream a feeble cry
I heard, and therewith presently,
From off my mule's back could I see
This boy who standeth here by thee,
A naked, new-born infant, laid
In a rough ark that had been stayed
By a thick tangled bed of weed;
So pitying the youngling's need,
Dismounting, did I wade for him
Waist deep, whose ark now scarce did swim,
And he, with cold, and misery,
And hunger, was at point to die.

Withal, I bare him to the mill
And cherished him, and had good will
To bring the babe up as mine own;
Since childless were we and alone,
And no one came to father it.

So oft have I rejoiced to sit
Beside the fire and watch him play.
And now, behold him! but some day
I look to lose him, for, indeed,
I deem he comes of royal seed,
Unmeet for us: and now, my lord,
Hast thou heard every foolish word
About my son, this boy, whose name
Is Michael, soothily, since he came
To us this day nigh Michaelmas.  

See, sire, the ark wherein he was!
Which I have kept. Therewith she drew
A cloth away; but the King knew,
Long ere she moved, what he should see,
Nor looked, but seeming carelessly
Leaned on the board and hid his eyes.
But at the last did he arise

And saw the painted lion red,
Not faded, well rememberèd;
Withal he thought: And who of these
Were with me then amongst the trees
To see this box. But presently
He thought again that none but he
And the grey squire, old Samuel,
That painting could have noted well;
Since Samuel his cloak had cast
About it, and therewith had past
Throughout the forest on that day,
And not till all were well away
Had drawn it off before the King.
But changed and downcast at the thing,
He left the lovely autumn place,
Still haunted by the new-found face
Of his old foe, and back he rode
Unto his ancient rich abode,
Forcing but dismal merriment
As midst his smiling lords he went;
Who yet failed not to note his mood,
So changed: and some men of the wood
Remembered them, but said not aught,
Yea, trembled lest their hidden thought
Some bird should learn, and carry it.

The morrow come, the King did sit
Alone, to talk with Samuel,
Who yet lived, gathering wage for hell.
He from the presence in a while
Came forth, and with his ugly smile
He muttered: Well beside me, then,
St. Peter! they are lucky men
Who serve no kings, since they indeed
May damn themselves each for his need.

31Michael: One version of the English Gesta calls the hero Henry. He is nameless in Grimm's tale.
32Michaelmas: the feast day of St. Michael, September 29th.
33for his need: instead of damning themselves to serve the King. Once again, this insertion expresses Morris's contempt for authoritarian rule. No other source gives a name or personality to any of the King's henchmen.
And will not he outlive this day
Whom the deep water could not slay,
Ere yet his lips had tasted food?
With that a horse, both strong and good,
He gat of the King’s equestry, 34
And toward the mill rode speedily.
THERE Michael by the mill-wall 35 lay,
Watching the swift stream snatch away
His float from midst the careless dace; 36
But thinking of the thin, dark face,
That yesterday all men he saw
Gaze at with seeming love and awe;
Nor had he, wondering at the lords,
Lost one word of the housewife’s words;
And still he noted that the King
Beheld him as a wondrous thing,
Strange to find there: so in his heart
He thought to play some royal part
In this wild play of life, and made
Stories, wherein great words he said,
And did great deeds in desperate fight.
But midst these thoughts there came in sight
He who had carried him of yore
From out the woodman’s broken door,
Dressed like a king’s man, with fine gold
Touching his hard brown hands and old,
So was his sleeve embroiderèd;
A plumèd hat had he on his head,
And by his side a cutting sword
Fit for the girdle of a lord;
And round his neck a knife he bore,
The hilt whereof was figured o’er
With green leaves on a golden ground,
Whose stem a silver scroll enwound;

34 the King’s equestry: officer in the service of a royal or aristocratic person, especially one charged (perhaps nominally) with the care of horses.
35 mill-wall: “wake” of disturbed water around the dam.
Let my dame come, for she can read
Well-written letters at good need.
NAY, friend, he said, suffice it thee
This seal at the scroll's end to see,
My Lord the King's; and hear my word,
That I come hither from my lord
Thy foundling lad to have away
To serve the king from this same day.
DOWNCAST the fuller looked thereat,
And twisting round his dusty hat,
Said: Well, my lord, so must it be,
Nor is he aught akin to me,
Nor seems so: none the less would I
Have left him, when I came to die,
All things I have, with this my mill,
Wherein he hath no prentice skill,
Young as he is: and surely here
Might he have lived, with little fear,
A life of plenty and of bliss.
Near by, too, a fair maid there is,
I looked should be good wife to him.

EANWHILE young Michael's head
gan swim
With thoughts of noble life and praise;
And he forgot the happy days
Wherein the happy dreams he dreamed
That now so near fulfilment seemed;
And, looking through the open mill,
Stared at the grey and windy hill
And saw it not, but some fair place
Made strange with many a changing face,
And all his life that was to be.
BUT Samuel, laughing scornfully,
Said: O good soul, thou thinkest then
This is a life for well-born men,

As deems our lord this youngling is:
Tell me, good lad, where lies thy bliss?
BUT Michael turned shamefaced and red,
Waked from his dream, and stammering said:
Fair sir, my life is sweet and good,
And John, the ranger of the wood,
Saith that I draw so good a bow,
That I shall have full skill enow
Ere many months have passed me by
To join the muster, and to try
To win the bag of florins white,
That folk, on Barnaby the bright,
Shoot for within the market town.
Sir, please you to look up and down
The weedy reaches of our stream,
And note the bubbles of the bream,
And see the great chub take the fly,
And watch the long pike bask in the sun,
Outside the shadow of the weed.
Withal there come unto our need
Woodcock and snipe when swallows go;
And now the water-hen flies low
With feet that well-nigh touch the reeds,
And plovers cry about the meads,
And the stares chatter; certes, sir,
It is a fair place all the year.

†† little lettered skill I can: (here), know.
† muster: enroll in the militia.
†† market town: Silver coins were offered as the prize in an archery contest on St. Barnabas's day (June 11th).
‡ bream: a hump-backed freshwater fish, Abramis brama.
‡† chub: Leuciscus cephalus, a thick, coarse-fleshed freshwater fish.
‡ pike: a voracious freshwater fish with a long slender snout, Esox lucius.
‡‡ snipe: a small long-billed marsh bird, Gallinago gallinago.
‡†† waterhen: moorhen, Gallinula chloropus.
‡‡‡ plovers: long-legged yellow-spotted birds common in open places throughout Europe, Charadrius placidus.
Thou show'st churl's breeding, by my head,
In foul despite of thy fair face!
Take heart, for to a better place
Thou goest now. Miller, farewell,
Nor need'st thou to the neighbours tell
The noble fortunes of the lad;
For, certes, he shall not be glad
To know them in a year or twain.
Yet shall thy finding not be vain,
And thou mayst bless it; for behold
This bag wherein is store of gold;
Take it and let thy hinds' go play,
And grind no corn for many a day,
For it would buy thy mill and thee.
HE turned to go, but pensively
Stood Michael; for his broken dream
Doubtful and far away did seem
Amidst the squire's rough mockeries;
And tears were gathering in his eyes.
But the kind miller's rough farewell
Rang in his ears; and Samuel
Stamped with his foot and plucked his sleeve;
So therewithal he turned to leave
His old abode, the quiet place,
Trembling, with wet and tearful face.
BUT even as he turned there came
From out the house the simple dame
And cast rough arms about the lad,
Saying: For that I have been glad
By means of thee this many a day,
My mourning heart this hour doth pay.
But, fair son, mayst thou live in bliss,
And die in peace; remembering this,
When thou art come to high estate,
That in our house, early and late,

The happy house that shall be sad,
Thou hadst the best of all we had,
And love unfeigned from us twain,
Whose hearts thou madest young again,
Hearts that the quicker old shall grow
Now thou art gone. Good dame, enow,
Quoth Samuel, the day grows late,
And sure the King for meat shall wait
Until he see this new-found lord.
He strode away upon that word;
And half ashamed, and half afeard,
Yet eager as his dream he neared,
Shyly the lad went after him.

They crossed the stream, and by its brim
They mounted the great warhorse grey,
And without word they rode away.

UT as along the river's edge
They went; and brown birds in the sedge
Twittered their sweet and formless tune
In the fair autumn afternoon,
And reach by reach the well-known stream
They passed, again the hopeful dream

Of one too young to think death near,
Who scarce had learned the name of fear,
Remorseful memories put to flight;
Lovely the whole world showed and bright.
Nor did the harsh voice rouse again
The thought of mockery or of pain,
For other thoughts held Samuel.
SO, riding silently and well,
They reached at last the dusty road
That led unto the King's abode.
But Samuel turned away his face
Therefrom, and at a steady pace
The great horse thundered o'er the bridge,
And made on toward the heathy" ridge,
Wherefrom they rode that other day.
But Michael, noting well the way,
Why thus they went fell wondering,
And said aloud: Dwells then the King,
Fair sir, as now within the wood?
YOUNG fool, where that it seems him good
He dwelleth, quoth old Samuel,
And now it pleaseth him to dwell
With the black monks47 across the wood.
W ith al he muttered in his hood:
Curst be the King, and thee also,
Who thrust me out such deeds to do,
 When I should bide at home to pray,
Who draw so nigh my ending day.
So saying forth his horse he spurred,
And to himself said yet this word:
Yea, yea, and of all days forborn
God curse the day when I was born.
THEREW ITH he groaned; yet saying thus
His case seemed hard and piteous,
When he remembered how of old
Another tale he might have told.
SO as each thought his own thoughts still,
The horse began to breast the hill,
And still they went on higher ground,
Until as Michael turned him round
He saw the sunny country-side
Spread out before him far and wide,
Golden amidst its waning green,
Joyous with varied life unseen.
Meanwhile from side to side of them
The trees began their way to hem,
As still he gazed from tree to tree,

And when he turned back presently
He saw before him like a wall
Uncounted tree-trunks dim and tall.
Then with their melancholy sound
The odorose spruce-woods met around
Those wayfarers, and when he turned
Once more, far off the sunlight burned
In star-like spots, while from o'erhead
Dim twilight through the boughs was shed.
NOT there as yet had Michael been,
Nor had he left the meadows green
Dotted about with spreading trees,
And fresh with sun and rain and breeze,
For those mirk woods; and now his eyes
Gazed round about for mysteries.
Since many an old wife's tale he knew;
Huge woodcutters48 in raiment blue,
The remnant of a mighty race,
The ancient masters of the place,
And hammering trolls49 he looked to see,
And dancers of the faerie,50
Who, as the ancient stories told,
In front were lovely to behold,
But empty shells seen from behind.

O on they rode until the wind
Had died out, stilled by the trees,
And Michael 'mid those images
Of strange things made alive by fear,
Grew drowsy in the forest drear;
Nor noted how the time went past

47hinds: farm servants, agricultural laborers.
48heathy: A heath is a bare, flat tract of land.
49black monks: In the Middle Ages, this phrase usually referred to the Benedictine monks, who wore black habits. The monks of a monastery near the
50woodcutters: probably "giants," thought to have once dominated the world (Cf. Genesis 6:4).
51hammering trolls: The early Scandinavians called various sorts of supernatural beings "trolls," and considered them superior workers in iron and precious stones.
52faerie: The notion that faeries' bodies are human in shape but
Until they nigh had reached at last
The borders of the spruce-tree wood;
And with a tingling of the blood
Samuel bethought him of the day
395
When turned about the other way
He carried him he rode with now.
For the firs ended on the brow
Of a rough gravelly hill, and there
Lay a small valley nowise fair
399
Beneath them, clear at first of all
But brake,53 till amid rushes tall
Down in the bottom alders grew
Crabbed and rough; and winding through
The clayey mounds a brook there was
404
Oozy and foul, half choked with grass.
THERE now the squire awhile drew rein,
And noted how the ground again
Rose up upon the other side,
And saw a green glade opening wide
409
'Twixt oaks and hollies, and he knew
Full well what place it led unto;
Withal he heard the bittern's8 boom,
And though without the fir-wood's gloom
They now were come, yet red and low
414
The sun above the trees did show,
And in despite of hardihead,8
The old squire had a mortal dread
Of lying in the wood alone
When that was done that should be done.
419
NOW Michael, wakened by the wind,
Clutched tighter at the belt behind,
And with wide eyes was staring round,
When Samuel said: Get to the ground,
My horse shall e'en sink deep snow
424
elusive to the eye is also Scandinavian.
53brake: fern.
54bittern's: a heronlike water bird with an echoing cry, ardea stellaris.

Without thy body, in this slough;
And haste thee, or we both shall lie
Beneath the trees, and be as dry
As autumn dew can make us. Haste!
The time is short for thee to waste. 1030
THEN from the horse the boy did glide,
And slowly down the valley side
They went, and Michael, wakened now,
Sang such rude songs as he might know,
Grown fresh and joyous of his life;
While Samuel, clutching at the knife
About his neck that hung, again
Down in the bottom tightened rein,
And turning, in a hoarse voice spake:
My girths56 are loosening, come and take
The straps, and draw them tighter, lad.
THEN Michael stayed his carol glad,
And noting little in his mirth
The other's voice, unto the girth
Without a word straight set his hand:
But as with bent head he did stand,
Straining to tighten what was tight,
In Samuel's hand the steel flashed bright.57
And fell, deep smitten in his side;
Then, leaping back, the poor lad cried,
As if for help, and staggering fell,
With wide eyes fixed on Samuel;
Who none the less grown deadly pale,
Lit down, lest that should not avail
To slay him, and beside him knelt,
And since his eyes were closed now, felt
His heart that beat yet: therewithal
His hand upon the knife did fall.
But, ere his fingers clutchèd it well,

55hardihead: (here), boldness or audacity.
56girths: belts drawn tight round the body of a horse, usually to secure a saddle.
57flashed bright: All of the details of the second attempt on Michael's life and
Far off he seemed to hear a bell,
And trembling knelt upright again,
And listening, listened not in vain,
For clear he heard a tinkling sound.
Then to his horse from off the ground
He leapt, nor reasoned with his dread,
But thought the angel of the dead
Was drawing nigh the slayer to slay,
Ere scarce the soul had passed away.
One dreadful moment yet he heard
That bell, then like a madman spurred
His noble horse; that maddened too,
The close-set fir-wood galloped through,
Not stayed by any stock or stone,
Until, the furious race being done,
Anigh the bridge he fell down dead;
And Samuel, mazed with guilt and dread,
Wandered afoot throughout the night,
But came, at dawning of the light,
Half-dead unto the palace gate.
THERE till the opening did he wait:
Then, by the King's own signet-ring,
He gained the chamber of the King,
And painfully what he had done
He told, and how the thing had gone.
And said withal: Yet is he dead,
And surely that which made my dread
Shall give thee joy; for doubt not aught
That bell the angels to him brought,
That he in Abraham's breast\(^{58}\) might lie.
So ends, O King, the prophecy.
NATHLESS the King scowled, ill content,
And said: I deemed that I had sent
A man of war to do my will,

Who lacked for neither force nor skill,
And thou com'st with a woman's face,
Bewildered with thy desperate race,
And made an idiot with thy fear,
Nor bring'st me any token here!
THEREWITH he rose and gat away;
But brooding on it through that day,
Thought that all things went not so ill
As first he deemed, and that he still
Might leave his old line flourishing.
Therewith both gold and many a thing
Unto old Samuel he gave,
But failed thereby his life to save;
Who, not so old in years as sin,
Died ere the winter, and within
The minister choir\(^{59}\) was laid asleep,
With carven saints his head to keep.

ND so the days and years went by,
And still in great felicity
The King dwelt, wanting only this:
A son wherewith to share his bliss,
And reign when he was dead and gone.
Nor had he daughter, save that one
Born on the night when Michael first,\(^{60}\)
Forlorn, alone, and double cursed,
Felt on him this world's bitter air.
THIS daughter, midst fair maids most fair,
Was not yet wed, though at this time,
Being come unto her maiden's prime,
She looked upon her eighteenth May.
Midst this her mother passed away,\(^{61}\)
Not much lamented of the King,

\(^{58}\)Abraham's breast: in heaven. A patient poor man is "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom" in Luke 16:22.
\(^{59}\)minister choir: the area for the choir, around the altar in a Gothic minster or church.
\(^{60}\)Michael first: Only in Morris's text are the princess and hero born on the same day.
\(^{61}\)passed away: None of Morris's sources mentions the Queen's death or king's
Who had the thought of marrying
Some dame more fertile, and who sent
A wily man with this intent
To spy the countries out and find
Some great king’s daughter, wise and kind,
And fresh, and fair in face and limb,
In all things a fit mate for him.
In short time it came to pass
Again the King well wedded was,
And hoped once more to have a son.
And when this fair dame he had won,
A year in peace he dwelt with her,
Until the time was drawing near
When first his eyes beheld that foe,
Dead as he deemed these years ago.
Now at that time, as custom was,
His daughter was about to pass
Unto a distant house of his,
Built by some king for worldly bliss
In ancient days: there, far removed
From courts or towns, his dame beloved
The dead king had been wont to see
Play mid the summer greenery;
Or like Erigone62 of old
Standing in the vineyards girt with gold,
To queen it o’er the vintagers,
Half worshipping that face of hers.
Long years ago these folk were passed,
Their crimes forgotten, or else cast
Into the glowing crucible
Of time, that tempers all things well,
That maketh pleasure out of pain,

remarriage.
62Erigone: daughter of the shepherd Icarius. When the god Dionysus chose to
make him the first human to drink wine, Icarius courteously offered some of
the new liquor to his fellow shepherds, but they feared he had poisoned them,
and killed him for his pains. Erigone committed suicide to follow her father
into death, and became the constellation Virgo.
63peace to be: Only Morris’s princess retires to her gardens to reflect in this
way.
VER the new sun daily brought
Fresh joy of life to her bedside;
The world before her open wide
Was spread, a place for joy and bliss.
Her lips had trembled with no kiss
Wherewith love slayeth fear and shame;
Her grey eyes, conscious of no blame,
Beheld unmoved the eyes of men;
Her hearing grew no dimmer when
Some unused footstep she might hear;
And unto no man was she dear,
But as some goddess might have been
When Greek men worshipped many a queen.
NOW with her armed folk forth she rode
Unto that ancient fair abode,
And while the lark sang o'er the corn,
Love gilded not the waning morn;
And when the sun rose high above,
High thoughts she thought, but not of love;
And when that sun the world did leave,
He left no love to light the eve.
The moon no melancholy brought,
The dawn no vain, remorseful thought.
But all untroubled her sweet face
Passed 'neath the gate of that old place,
And there her bridgroom she abode.
BUT scarce was she upon the road
Ere news unto the King was brought
That Peter, the old Abbot, sought
To see him, having newly come
From the wild place that was his home
Across the forest, so the King
Bade him to enter, well willing
To hear what he might have to say;
Who, entering the great hall straightway,
Had with him an old, reverend man,

The sub-prior, father Adrian,
And five monks more, and therewithal
Ten of his folk, stout men and tall,
Who bore armed staves and coats of fence. SO,
when he came to audience,
He prayed the King of this or that,
Whereof my tale-teller forgot,
And graciously the King heard all,
And said at last: Well, what may fall,
Thou go'st not hence, fair lord, to-day;
Unless in vain a king must pray,
Thou and thy monks shall eat with me;
While feast thine axe-men merrily.

WIVING, he eyed the Abbot's folk
In careless mood, then once more spoke:
Tall men thou feedest, by the rood,
Lord Abbot! come they from the wood?
Dwell many more such thereabout?
Fain were I such should swell the shout
When I am armed, and rank meets rank.
BUT as he spoke his loud voice sank
Wavering, nor heard he aught at all
Of the faint noises of the hall,
Or what the monk in answer said;
For, looking from a steel-clad head,
Those eyes again did he behold,
That erst from 'neath the locks of gold
Kindly and bold, but soft with awe,
Beneath the apple-boughs he saw.
BUT when thereof he surely knew,
Pale to the very lips he grew;
Till gathering heart within a while,
With the faint semblance of a smile
He seemed to note the Abbot's words

64goodlihead: goodness of appearance or character.
65sub-prior: assistant to the prior of a monastery.
66coats of fence: coats of mail.
That he heard not; then from the lords
He turned, and facing Michael, said:
Raise up the steel cap from thine head,
That I may see if thou look'st bold;
Methinks I know thy face of old;
Whence com'st thou? Michael lifted straight
From off his brow the steel cap's weight,
And showed the bright locks curling round
His fresh and ruddy face, sun-browned;
And in a voice clear as a bell,
Told all his story, till he fell
Sore wounded in that dismal vale;
And said withal: My lord, the tale
Of what came after, none knoweth
Better than he, who from ill death
Saved me that tide, and made me man,
My lord, the sub-prior Adrian.
SPEAK on then, father, quoth the King,
Making as he was hearkening.
My lord, said Adrian, I, who then
Was but a server of poor men,
Outside our Abbey walls, one day
Was called by one in poor array,
A charcoal-burner's lad, who said
That soon his father would be dead,
And that of all things he would have
His rights, 67 that he his soul might save.
I made no tarrying at that word,
But took between mine hands the Lord,
And bade the boy bear forth the bell; 68a
For though few folk there were to tell
Who passed that way, nathless, I trow
The beasts were glad that news to know.
WELL, by the pine-wood's skirts we went,

---

67His rights: the last rites, administered to the dying in the Catholic Church.
68bell: The bell announced the presence of Jesus in the consecrated bread of the communion.

While through its twilight the bell sent
A heavenly tinkling; but the lad
'Gan telling me of fears he had
Of elves who dwell within the wood.
I chid him thereat, as was good,
Bidding him note Whom in mine hands
I held, The Ransom of all Lands.
But as the fir-wood's dim twilight
Waxed into day, and fair and bright
The evening sun showed through the trees,
Our ears fanned by the evening breeze,
The galloping of horse-hoofs heard,
Wherewith my page hung back, afeard
Of elves and such-like; but I said:
Wilt thou thy father should be dead
Ere we can reach him? Oh my son,
Fear not that ought can stay This One.
Therewith I smote my mule, and he
Ran forward with me hastily
As fearing to be left behind.
Well, as we went, what should we find
Down by the stream, but this my son,
Who seemed as though his days were done;
For in his side a knife there stood
Wherefrom ran out a stream of blood,
Soaking the grass and water-mint; 69
Then, I dismounting, we by dint
Of all our strength the poor youth laid
Upon my mule, and down a glade
Of oaks and hollies then we passed,
And reached the woodman's home at last;
A poor hut, built of wattled wood,
And by its crooked gable stood
A ruinous shed, unroofed and old,
That beasts of burden once did hold:
Thyself, my lord, mayst know it well,
Since thereabout the wild swine dwell;
And hart, and hind, and roe are there.
So the lad's wounds I staunched with care
Forthwith, and then the man I shivered.\(^{71}\)
Who none the less got well and lived
For many a day: then back I went,
And the next day our leech I sent
With drugs to tend upon the lad,
Who soon was as he ne'er had had
A hurt at all: and he being well,
We took him in our house to dwell,
And taught him letters, and, indeed,
Before long, Latin could he read
As well as I; but hath no will
To turn unto religion still.
Yet is he good and doth no wrong;
And being thereto both hale and strong,
My lord, the Abbot, sayeth of him:
He shall serve God with heart and limb,
Not heart and voice. Therefore, my lord,
Thou seest him armed with spear and sword
For their defence who feed him still,
Teach him, and guard his soul from ill.
Ho, Michael! hast thou there with thee
The fair-wrought knife I first did see
Deep in thy side? there, show it now
Unto the King, that he may know
Our tale is not a thing of nought.

\[\text{ITHAL the King, with eyes distraught,}
\]
\[\text{Amidst his anxious face and pale,}
\]
\[\text{Sat leaning forward through this tale,}
\]
\[\text{Scarce noting here and there a word.}
\]
\[\text{But all being told, at last he heard}
\]
\[\text{His own voice changed, and harsh, and low,}
\]

\[\text{69 water-mint: Bergamot mint, menthula aquatica.}\]
\[\text{70 hind: an adult female deer.}\]
\[\text{71 shivered: heard the confession of.}\]

---

The Man Born To Be King

That said: Fair lord, I fain would know,
Since this your man-at-arms seems true,
What thing will he be worth to you;
For better had he wear my rose\(^{72}\)
Than loiter in your Abbey-close,
Poring o'er books no man can read.
O SIRE! the monk said, if thy need
Be great of such men, let him go;
My men-at-arms need make no show
Of fairness, nor should ladies miss,
E'en as thou say'st, such men as this.
LAUGHING he spoke; the King the while,
His pale face puckering to a smile;
Then, as in some confused dream,
In Michael's hand he saw the gleam
Of that same steel remembered well,
The gift he gave to Samuel;
Drawn from his father's ancient chest
To do that morn his own behest.
And as he now beheld its sheen,
The twining stem of gold and green,
The white scroll with the letters black,
STRIKE! FOR NO DEAD MAN COMETH BACK!
He hardened yet his heart once more,
And grown unhappy as before,
When last he had that face in sight,
Now for the third time come to light,
Once more was treacherous, fierce, and fell.\(^{73}\)
NOW was the Abbot feasted well
With all his folk, then went away;
But Michael, clad in rich array,
Became the King's man, and was thought
By all most happy to be brought
Unto such hopeful fair estate.

\[\text{72 wear my rose: probably the emblem on the king's coat of arms. His}
\]
\[\text{daughter's home is called the Castle of the Rose.}\]
\[\text{73 fell: fierce, savage, ruthless.}\]
FOR ten days yet the King did wait,
Which past, for Michael did he send,
And he being come, said to him: Friend,
Take now this letter from my hand
And go unto our southern land;
My captain Hugh shall go with thee
For one day's journey, then shall he
Tell thee which way thou hast to ride:
The third day thence, about noontide,
If thou dost well, thou shouldest be close
Unto my Castle of the Rose,
Where dwells my daughter; needs it is
That no man living should see this
Until that thou within my wall
Hast given it to the seneschal; 1400
Be wise and wary then, that thou
Mayst think of this that happeneth now
As birthday to thine high estate.
So said he, knowing not that fate
Was dealing otherwise than he.
BUT Michael going, presently
Met Hugh, a big man, rough and black,
And who of nought but words had lack;
With him he mounted, and set forth
And daylong rode on from the north.
NOW if the King had hope that Hugh
Some deed like Samuel's might do,
I know not; certes nought he said
To that hard heart and narrow head,
Who knew no wiles but wiles of war,
And was as true as such men are;
Yet had there been a tale to tell
If Michael had not held him well,
And backward still the wrath had turned
Wherewith his heart not seldom burned
At scornful words his fellow said.
AT last they reached cross-ways, that led,

One west, one southward still, whereat
Hugh, taking off his feathered hat,
Bowed low in scorn, and said: Fair sir,
Unto the westward must I spur,
While you go southward, soon to get,
I doubt not, an earl's coronet;
Farewell, my lord, and yet beware
Thou dost not at my lady stare
Too hard, lest thou shouldst plumb the moat,
Or have a halter round thy throat.
BUT Michael to his scoff said nought,
But upon high things set his thought
As his departing hooves he heard.
And still betwixt the edgegreens spurred,
And when the twilight was o'erpast
At a small inn drew rein at last,
And slept that night as such folk can;
And while next morn the thrushes ran
Their first course through the autumn dew.
The gossamers' 68 did he dash through,
And on his way rode steadily
The live-long day; nor yet was he
Alone, as well might be that day,
Since a fair town was in his way:
Stout hinds he passed, and yeomen good,
And friars of the heavy hood;
And white-coifed 69 housewives mounted high
Above their maunds, 70 while merrily
The well-shod damsel trudged along
Beside them, sending forth a song
As little taught as is a bird's;
And good men, good wives, priests, and herds,
And merry maids failed not to send
Good wishes for his journey's end

74seneschal: steward, chief servant of a great house.
75gossamers: Fine cobwebs spun by small spiders.
76white-coifed: Wearing white cloth headdresses.
Athwart him, as still on he sped,
Free from all evil thoughts or dread.

ITHAL again the day went by,
And in that city's hostelry
He slept, and by the dawn of day
Next morn again was on his way,
And leaving the scarce wakened street
The newly risen sun did greet

With cheerful heart. His way wound on
Still up and up, till he had won
Up to a great hill's chalyk brow,
Whence looking back he saw below
The town spread out; church, square, and street,
And baily,\textsuperscript{78} crawling up the feet
Of the long yew-besprinkled hill;
And in the fragrant air and still,
Seeming to gain new life from it,
The doves from roof to roof did flit:
The early fires sent up their smoke,
That seemed to him to tell of folk
New wakened unto great delight:
For he upon that morning bright
So joyous felt, so free from pain,
He seemed as he were born again
Into some new immortal state
That knew no envy, fear, or hate.

NOW the road turned to his left hand
And led him through a table-land,
Windy and barren of all grain;
But where a hollow specked the plain
The yew-trees hugged the sides of it,
And mid them did the woodlark\textsuperscript{79} flit,
Or sang well sheltered from the wind;
And all about the sheep did find

Sweet grass, the while the shepherd's song
Rang clear as Michael sped along.
LONG time he rode, till suddenly,
When now the sun was broad and high,
From out a hollow where the yew
Still guarded patches of the dew,
He rode and saw that he had won
That highland's edge; he gazed upon
A valley, that beneath the haze
Of that most fair of autumn days
Showed glorious; fair with golden sheaves,
Rich with the darkened autumn-leaves,
Gay with the water-meadows green,
The bright blue streams that lay between,
The miles of beauty stretched away
From that bleak hill-side bare and grey,
Till white cliffs over slopes of vine
Drew 'gainst the sky a broken line.
And 'twixt the vineyards and the stream
Michael saw gilded spirelets gleam;
For, hedged with many a flowery close,
There lay the Castle of the Rose,
His hurried journey's aim and end.

HEN downward he began to wend,
And 'twixt the flowery hedges sweet
He heard the hook smite down the wheat,
And murmur of the unseen folk;
But when he reached the stream that broke
The golden plain, but leisurely
He passed the bridge; for he could see
The masters of that ripening realm,
Cast down beneath an ancient elm
Upon a little strip of grass,
From hand to hand the pitcher pass;
While on the turf beside them lay
The ashen-handled sickles grey,
The matters of their cheer between:

\textsuperscript{77}maunds: wicker baskets with handles.
\textsuperscript{78}baily: jurisdiction of a bailiff or king's officer.
\textsuperscript{79}woodlark: small bird living at the edge of forests, \textit{alsauda arborea}. 
Slices of white cheese, specked with green,
And green-striped onions and rye bread,
And summer apples faintly red,
Even beneath the crimson skin;
And yellow grapes, well ripe and thin,
Plucked from the cottage gable-end.
AND certes Michael felt their friend
Hearing their voices, nor forgot
His boyhood and the pleasant spot
Beside the well-remembered stream;
And friendly did this water seem
As through its white-flowered weeds it ran,
Bearing good things to beast and man.
YEA, as the parapet he passed,
And they a greeting toward him cast,
Once more he felt a boy again;
As though beneath the harvest wain
He was asleep, by that old stream,
And all these things were but a dream:
The King, the Squire, the hurrying ride
Unto the lonely quaigmire side;
The sudden pain, the deadly swoon,
The feverish life from noon to noon;
The tending of the kind old man,
The black and white Dominican, 80
The hour before the Abbot's throne,
The poring o'er old books alone
In summer morns; the King again,
The envious greetings of strange men;
This mighty horse and rich array,
This journey on an unknown way.
Surely he thought to wake from it,
And once more by the waggon sit,
Blinking upon the sunny mill.
BUT not for either good or ill
Shall he see one of all those days.
On through the quivering noontide haze

He rode, and now on either hand
Heavy with fruit the trees did stand;
Nor had he ridden long, ere he
The red towers of the house could see
Grey on the wind-beat southern side:
And soon the gates thrown open wide
He saw, the long-fixed drawbridge down,
The moat, with lilies overgrown,
Midst which the gold-scaled fishes lay:
Such peace was there for many a day.
And deep within the archway's shade
The warden on his cloak was laid,
Dozing, one hand upon a harp;
And nigh him a great golden carp
Lay stiff with all his troubles done,
Drawn from the moat ere yet the sun
Was high, and nigh him was his bane,
An angling rod of Indian cane. 81
NOW hearing Michael's horse-hooves smite
The causeway, shading from the light
His eyes, as one scarce yet awake,
He made a shift his spear to take,
And, eyeing Michael's badge the while,
Rose up, and with a lazy smile,
Said: Hol fair sir, abide, abide,
And show why hitherward ye ride
Unto my lady's royal home.
Said Michael: From the King I come,
As by my badge ye well may see;
And letters have I here with me
To give my lord the Seneschal. 82
YEA, said the man, but in the hall
He feasteth now; what haste is there?
Certes full quickly cometh care;
And sure I am he will not read
Thy letters, or to aught give heed,
Till he has played out all the play,
And every guest has gone away;  
So thou, O damoiseau, must wait;  
Tie up thine horse anigh the gate,  
And sit with me, and thou shalt hear  
The Kaiser's lieth on his bier.  
Thou laughest; hast thou never heard  
Of this same valorous Red Beard,  
And how he died? Well, I can sing  
Of many another dainty thing  
Thou wilt not a long while forget,  
The budget is not empty yet.  
Peter! I think thou mockest me;  
But thou art young and fair perdie,  
I wish thee luck: well, thou mayest go  
And feel the afternoon wind blow  
Within Dame Bertha's pleasant here;  
She who was held so lief and dear,  
All this was built but for her sake;  
Who made the hearts of men to ache,  
And dying full of years and shame  
Yet left an unforgotten name.  
God rest her soul! Michael the while  
Hearkened his talking with a smile,  
Then said: O friend, I think to hear  
Both The King lieth on his bier  
And many another song of thee,  
Ere I depart; but now show me  
The pleasure of the ancient queen,  
For these red towers above the green

83damoiseau: young man of aristocratic birth, not yet made a knight.  
84Kaiser: Frederick I Barbarossa ("Redbeard"); 1122-1190, legendary  
uniter of German princes under the Holy Roman Empire who died  
en route to a Crusade.  
85budget: small pouch or wallet.  
86Dame Bertha's: As noted in ll. 1145-48, a now-dead king had built  
the palace to house his "dame beloved."
And many a musical sweet sound,
He cast him down upon the ground,
And watched the glittering water leap,
Still singing low, nor thought to sleep.
BUT scarce three minutes had gone by
Before, as if in mockery,
The starling chattered o'er his head,
And nothing he remembered,
Nor dreamed of aught that he had seen.

EANWHILE unto the garden green
Had come the Princess, and with her
A maiden that she held right dear,
Who knew the inmost of her mind.
Those twain, as the warm scented wind
played with their raiment or their hair,

Had late been running here and there,
Chasing each other merrily,
As maids do, thinking no one by;
But now, well wearied therewithal,

Had let their gathered garments fall
About their feet, and slowly went;

And through the leaves a murmur sent,
As of two happy doves that sing
The soft returning of the spring.

BUT of the two the Princess spoke
The less, but into laughter broke
Not seldom, and would redder oft,
As on her lips her fingers soft
She laid, as still the other maid,

Half grave, half smiling, fancies said.
SO in their walk they drew anigh

That fountain in the midst, whereby
Lay Michael sleeping, dreaming nought
Of such fair things as nigh him brought;
They, when the fountain shaft was past,
Beheld him on the ground down-cast,
And stopped at first, until the maid
Stepped lightly forward to the shade,
And when she had gazed there awhile
Came running back again, a smile

Parting her lips, and her bright eyes
Afire with many fantasies;
And ere the Lady Cecily
Could speak a word: Hush! hush! said she;
Did I not say that he would come
To woo thee in thy peaceful home
Before thy father brought him here?
Come, and behold him, have no fear!
The great bell would not wake him now,
Right in his ears. Nay, what dost thou?
The Princess said; let us go hence;

Thou know'st I give obedience
To what my father bids; but I
A maid full fain would live and die,
Since I am born to be a queen.
YEa, yea, for such as thou hast seen,
That may be well, the other said.
But come now, come; for by my head
This one must be from Paradise;
Come swiftly then, if thou art wise,
Ere aught can snatch him back again.
She caught her hand, and not in vain
She prayed; for now some kindly thought
To Cecily's brow fair colour brought,
And quickly 'gan her heart to beat
As love drew near those eyes to greet,
Who knew him not till that sweet hour

*garden green: The entire garden scene, including Cecily's first sight of Michael, is original with Morris. None of his sources even gives the princess a name, much less a plot-function beyond marriage to the hero.

In one English version of the Getta, a priest alters the text of the letter as the hero sleeps in his chapel; in another, the compassionate owner of a castle where he stays the night effects the change. In Grimm's version, thieves take the letter, then rewrite and return it.
O over the fair, pink-edged flower,
Softly she stepped; but when she came
Anigh the sleeper, lovely shame
Cast a soft mist before her eyes
Full filled of many fantasies.
But when she saw him lying there
She smiled to see her mate so fair;
And in her heart did Love begin
To tell his tale, nor thought she sin
To gaze on him that was her own,
Not doubting he was come alone
To woo her, whom midst arms and gold
She deemed she should at first behold;
And with that thought love grew again
Until departing was a pain,
Though fear grew with that growing love,
And with her lingering footsteps strove,
As from the place she turned to go,
Sighing and murmuring words but low.
But as her raiment's hem she raised,
And for her merry fellow gazed
Shamefaced and changed, she met her eyes
Turned grave and sad with ill surprise;
Who while the Princess mazed did stand
Had drawn from Michael's loosened band
The King's scroll, which she held out now
To Cecily, and whispered low:
Read, and do quickly what thou wilt;
Sad, sad! such fair life to be spilt:
Come further first. With that they stepped
A pace or two from where he slept,
And then she read: Lord Seneschal,
On thee and thine may all good fall;
Greeting hereby the King sendeth,
And biddeth thee to put to death
His enemy who beareth this;
And as thou lovest life and bliss,
And all thy goods thou holdest dear,
Set thou his head upon a spear

A good half furlong* from the gate,
Our coming hitherward to wait:
So perish the King's enemies!
SHE read, and scarcely had her eyes
Seen clear her father's name and seal,
Ere all love's power her heart did feel,
That drew her back in spite of shame,
To him who was not c'en a name
To her a little hour ago.
Panting she said: Wait thou alone
Beside him, watch him carefully,
And let him sleep if none draw nigh;
If of himself he waketh, then
Hide him until I come again,
When thou hast told him of the snare.
If thou betrayest me beware!
For death shall be the least of all
The ills that on thine head shall fall.
What say P thou art dear to me,
And doubly dear now shalt thou be;
Thou shalt have power and majesty,
And be more queen in all than I.
Few words are best, be wise, be wise!
WithHAL she turned about her eyes
Once more, and swiftly as a man
Betwixt the garden trees she ran,
Until, her own bower reached at last,
She made good haste, and quickly passed
Unto her secret treasury.
There, hurrying, since the time was nigh
For folk to come from meat, she took
From 'twixt the leaves of a great book
A royal scroll, signed, sealed, but blank;
Then, with a hand that never shrunk
Or trembled, she the scroll did fill
With these words, writ with clerkly skill:
Unto the Seneschal,** Sir Rafe,

---

*88half furlong: one-eighth of an English mile, now 220 yards.
**Seneschal: Morris adds the entire text of this letter.
Who holdeth our fair castle safe,
Greeting and health! O well-beloved,
Know that at this time we are moved
To wed our daughter, so we send
Him who bears this, our perfect friend,
To be her bridegroom; so do thou
Ask nought of him, since well we know
His race and great nobility,
And how he is most fit to be
Our son; therefore make no delay,
But wed the twain upon the day
Thou readest this: and see that all
Take oath to him, whate'er shall fall,
To do his bidding as our heir;
So doing still be lief and dear
As I have held thee yet to be.
SHE cast the pen down hastily
At that last letter, for she heard
How even now the people stirred
Within the hall: nor dared she think
What bitter potion she must drink
If now she failed; so falsely bold
That life or death did she enfold
Within its cover, making shift
To seal it with her father's gift,
A signet of cornelian.

HEN swiftly down the stairs she ran
And reached the garden; but her fears
Brought shouts and thunder to her ears,
That were but lazy words of men
Full-fed, far off; nay, even when
Her limbs caught up her flying gown
The noise seemed loud enough to drown
The twitter of the autumn birds,
And her own muttered breathless words,
That to her heart seemed loud indeed.
YET therewithal she made good speed
And reached the fountain seen of none
Where yet abode her friend alone,

Watching the sleeper, who just now
Turned in his sleep and muttered low.
Therewith fair Agnes, saying nought,
From out her hand the letter caught;
And while she leaned against the stone
Stole up to Michael's side alone,
And with a cool, unshrinking hand
Thrust the new scroll deep in his band,
And turned about unto her friend;
Who having come unto the end
Of all her courage, trembled there
With face upturned for fresher air,
And parted lips grown grey and pale,
And limbs that now began to fail,
And hands wherefrom all strength had gone,
Scarce fresher than the blue-veined stone
That quivering still she strove to clutch.
BUT when she felt her lady's touch,
Feebly she said: Go! let me die
And end this sudden misery
That in such wise has wrapped my life,
I am too weak for such a strife,
So sick I am with shame and fear;
Would thou hadst never brought me here!
BUT Agnes took her hand and said:
Nay, queen, and must we three be dead
Because thou fearest? all is safe
If boldly thou wilt face Sir Rafe.

O saying, did she draw her hence,
Past tree and bower and high
pleached fence
Unto the garden's further end,
And left her there and back did wend,
And from the house made hast to get
A gilded maund, wherein she set
A flask of ancient island wine,
Ripe fruits, and wheaten manchets fine,

90pleached: formed by the intertwining of boughs and twigs.
91wheaten manchets: small loaves or rolls.
And many such a delicate
As goddesses in old time ate,
Ere Helen was a Trojan queen;
So passing through the garden green
She cast her eager eyes again
Upon the spot where he had lain,
But found it empty, so sped on
Till she at last the place had won
Where Cecily lay, faint, weak, and white
Within that fair bower of delight.
HER straight she made to eat and drink,
And said: See now thou dost not shrink
From this thy deed; let love slay fear
Now, when thy life shall grow so dear,
Each minute should seem loss to thee
If thou for thy felicity
Couldst stay to count them; for I say,
This day shall be thy happy day.
Therewith she smiled to see the wine
Embraced by her fair fingers fine;
And her sweet face grew bright again
With sudden pleasure after pain.
Again she spoke: What is this word
That dreaming I perchance have heard,
But certainly remember well;
That some old soothsayer did tell
Strange things unto my lord the King,
That on thy hand the spousal ring
No Kaiser's son; no King should set,
But one a peasant did beget:
What sayest thou? But the Queen flushed red:
Such fables I have heard, she said;
And thou; is it such a scathe to me,
The bride of such a man to be?
Nay, said she, God will have him King;
How shall we do a better thing
With this or that one than He can;
God's friend must be a goodly man.
BUT with that word she heard the sound
Of folk who through the mazes wound
Bearing the message; then she said:
Be strong, pluck up thine hardihead,
Speak little, so shall all be well,
For now our own tale will they tell.

AND even as she spoke they came,
And all the green place was aflame
With golden raiment of the lords;
While Cecily, noting not their words,
Rose up to go; and for her part,
By this had fate so steeled her heart,
Scarce otherwise she seemed than when
She passed before the eyes of men
At tourney or high festival.
But when they now had reached the hall,
And up its very steps they went,
Her head a little down she bent;
Nor raised it till the dais was gained,
For fear that love some monster feigned
To be a god, and she should be
Smit by her own bolt wretchedly.
But at the rustling, crowded dais
She gathered heart her eyes to raise,
And there beheld her love, indeed,
Clad in her father's serving weed,
But proud, and flushed, and calm withal,
Fearless of aught that might befall,
Nor too astonied, for he thought:
From point to point my life is brought
Through wonders till it comes to this;
And trouble cometh after bliss;
And I will bear all as I may,
And ever as day passeth day
My life will hammer from the twain,
Forging a long enduring chain.\(^\text{92}\)

BUT midst these thoughts their young eyes met,
And every word did he forget

\(^{92}\text{long enduring chain: Time forms a chain of memories, in which each day is a link.}\)
Wherewith men name unhappiness
As read again those words did bless
With double blessings his glad ears.
And if she trembled with her fears,
And if with doubt, and love, and shame
The rosy colour went and came
In her sweet cheeks and smooth bright brow,
Little did folk think of it now,
But as of maiden modesty,
Shamefaced to see the bridegroom nigh.
AND now when Rafe the Seneschal
Had read the message down the hall,
And turned to her, quite calm again
Her face had grown, and with no pain
She raised her serious eyes to his,
Grown soft and pensive with his bliss,
And said: Prince, thou art welcome here,
Where all my father loves is dear;
And full trust do I put in thee,
For that so great nobility
He knoweth in thee; be as kind
As I would be to thee, and find
A happy life from day to day,
Till all our days are past away.
WHAT more than found the bystanders
He found within this speech of hers,
I know not; some faint quivering
In the last words; some little thing
That checked the cold words' even flow.
But yet they set his heart aglow,
And he in turn said eagerly:
SURELY I count it nought to die
For him who brought me unto this;
For thee, who givest me this bliss;
Yea, even dost me such a grace
To look with kind eyes in my face,
And send sweet music to my ears.
BUT at his words she, mazed with tears,
Seemed faint, and failing quickly, when

Above the low hum of the men
Uprouse the sweet bells' sudden clang,
As men unto the chapel rang;
While just outside the singing folk
Into most heavenly carols broke.
And going softly up the hall
Boys bore aloft the verges' tall
Before the Bishop's gold-clad head.
THEN forth his bride young Michael led,
And nought to him seemed good or bad
Except the lovely hand he had;
But she the while was murmuring low:
If he could know, if he could know,
What love, what love, his love should be!

UT while mid mirth and minstrelsy
The ancient Castle of the Rose
Such pageant to the autumn shows,
The King sits ill at ease at home;
For in these days the tidings come
That he who in his line should wed

Lies in his own town stark and dead,
Slain in a tumult of the street.
BROODING on this he deemed it meet,
Since nigh the day was come when she
Her bridegroom’s visage looked to see,
To hold the settled day with her,
And bid her at the least to wear
Dull mourning guise for gold and white.
So on another morning bright,
When the whole promised month was past,
He drew anigh the place at last
Where Michael’s dead head, looking down
Upon the highway with a frown,
He doubted not at last to see.
So 'twixt the fruitful greenery
He rode, scarce touched by care the while,
Humming a roundel* with a smile.

WITH AL, ere yet he drew anigh,

He heard their watch-horn sound from high,

Nor wondered, for their wont was so,

And well his banner they might know

Amidst the stubble lands afar:

But now a distant point of war

He seemed to hear, and bade draw rein,

But listening cried: Push on again!

They do but send forth minstrelsy

Because my daughter thinks to see

The man who lieth on his bier.

So on they passed, till sharp and clear

They heard the pipe and shrill fife sound;

And restlessly the King glanced round

To see what he had striven for,

The crushing of that Sage's lore,

The last confusion of that fate.

But drawn still nigher to the gate

They turned a sharp bend of the road,

And saw the pageant that abode

The solemn coming of the King.

OR first on each side maids did sing,

Dressed in gold raiment; then there came

The minstrels in their coats of flame;

And then the many-coloured lords,

The knights' spears, and the

swordsmen's swords

Backed by the glittering wood of bills.**

So now, presaging many ills,

The King drew rein, yet none the less

He shrank not from his hardiness,

But thought: Well, at the worst I die,

And yet perchance long life may lie

Before me; I will hold my peace;

The dumb man's borders still increase.***

***I: who remains silent extends his domain.

**bills: concave scythe-like blades attached to long wooden handles.

*roundel: piece of music with a recurring refrain.

**The King said nought. In the Gesta the King also experiences a
lightning conversion. In Grimm, however, he does not reform, orders
his new son-in-law to fetch hairs from the head of the devil, and is later
condemned to row a magic ferryboat forever.
But with his head bowed down in thought
Stood a long while; but at the last
Upward a smiling face he cast,
And cried aloud above the folk:
Shout for: the joining of the yoke
Betwixt these twain! And thou, fair lord,
Who dost so well my every word,
Nor makest doubt of anything,
Wear thou the collar of thy King;
And a duke's banner, cut foursquare,"
Henceforth shall men before thee bear
In tourney and in stricken field.
BUT this mine heir shall bear my shield,
Carry my banner, wear my crown,
Ride equal with me through my town,
Sit on the same step of the throne;
In nothing will I reign alone:
Nor be ye with him discontent
For that with little ornament
Of gold and folk to you he came;
For he is of an ancient name
That needeth not the clink of gold,
The ancientest the world doth hold;
Por in the fertile Asian land,
Where great Damascus now doth stand,
Ages ago his line was born,
Ere yet men knew the gift of corn;
And there, anigh to Paradise,
His ancestors grew stout and wise;
And certes he from Asia bore
No little of their piercing lore.

98collar: The gift of a jewelled collar was one sign of a monarch's personal favor.
99foursquare: Ordinary knights, by contrast, bore pointed or swallowtailed banners.
100Damascus: Syrian city, east of Sidon. Christian tradition placed Eden in this area, so all human families would allegedly have originated here.

Look then to have great happiness,
For every wrong shall he redress:
THEN did the people's shouting drown
His clatter as he leapt adown;
And taking in each hand a hand
Of the two lovers, now did stand
Betwixt them on the flower-strewn way,
And to himself meanwhile 'gan say:

OW many an hour might I have been
Right merry in the gardens green;
How many a glorious day had I
Made happy with some victory;
What noble deeds I might have done,
What bright renown my deeds have won;
What blessings would have made me glad;
What little burdens had I had;
What calmness in the hope of praise;
What joy of well-accomplished days,
If I had let these things alone;
Nor sought to sit upon my throne
Like God between the cherubim.101
But now; but now, my days wax dim,
And all this fairness have I lost
Unto the winds, and all have lost
For nought, for nought! yet will I strive
My little end of life to live;
Nor will I look behind me more,
Nor forward to the doubtful shore.
WITH that he made the sign to turn,
And straight the autumn air did burn
With many a point of steel and gold;
And through the trees the carol rolled
Once more, until the autumn thrush
Far off 'gan twittering on his bush.

"cherubim: Cf. Exodus 25:22: "And there I will meet with thee and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony."
Made mindful of the long-lived spring.
O mid sweet song and tabouring, 2185
And shouts amid the apple-grove,
And soft caressing of his love,
Began the new King Michael's reign.
Nor will the poor folk see again
A king like him on any throne, 2190
Or such good deeds to all men done:
For then, as saith the chronicle,
It was the time, as all men tell,
When scarce a man would stop to gaze
At gold crowns hung above the ways.
2195
E ended; and midst those who heard
were some
Who, midst his tale, half dreamed they
were at home,
Round the great fire upon the winter night;
And, with the memory of the fresh delight
Wherewith they first had heard that story told, 2200
Forgetting not they were grown weak and old,
Yet felt as if they had at least grown grey
Within the land left for so many a day.
He, with the gestures they were wont to see,
So told his tale, so strange with eld was he,
2205
Just so he stammered, and in just such wise
He sighed, beginning fresh, as their young cyes,
Their ears, in happy days passed long ago,
Had ever noted other old men do,
When they, full filled with their quick-coming joys,
Would gaze on old folk as on carven toys.
BUT he being silent, silently awhile
They mused on these things, masking with a smile
The vain regrets that in their hearts arose,
The while with eager talk the young folk chose
The parts that pleased them; but their elder hosts

"tabouring: playing the tabours, small drums often used to accompany the pipe or trumpet."