THEN April-tide was melting into May,
Within a hall that midst the garden lay
These elders met, and having feasted well,
The time came round the wonted tale to tell.
Then spake a Wanderer: Sirs, it happened to me,

Long years ago, to cross the narrow sea
That 'twixt us Drontheimers and England lies;¹
Young was I then, and little thought these eyes
Should see so many lands ere all was done.
But this land was a fair and fertile one,
As at that time, for April-tide it was,
Even as now; well, sirs, it came to pass
That to this town or that we took our way,
Or in some abbey's guesten-chamber lay,
And many tales we heard, some false, some true,
Of the ill deeds our fathers used to do
Within that land; and still the tale would end:²
Yet did the Saint his Holy House defend;
Or: Sirs, their fury all was nought and vain,
And by our Earl the pirate-king was slain.

God wot,¹ I laughed full often in my sleeve,
And could have told them stories, by their leave,

¹The narrow sea / That twixt us Drontheimers and England lies: Somewhat more than 600 miles of the North Sea separate the northern Norwegian town of Trondheim from northeastern England.
²Of the ill deeds our fathers used to do / Within that land: In the ninth century, the Northmen (Scandinavians, mainly Danes) swarmed over Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia. By the middle of the 10th century, the subjects of Alfred the Great and his successors had repelled the Danish invaders, but these returned in the late 10th century, and reconquered much of the island under King Canute (1016-1042). These "norman" conquerors enslaved and slaughtered peasants and nobility alike, and plundered native churches and monasteries.
³God wot: knows.
⁴fen: marsh.
⁵Minster: a large church, usually attached (as here) to a monastery. In The Life of William Morris (II:313) Mackail suggests that these lines
Wrought on those gables. Yea, I heard withal,
In the fresh morning air, the trowels fall
Upon the stone, a thin noise far away;
For high up wrought the masons on that day,
Since to the monks that house seemed scarcely well
Till they had set a spire or pinnacle
Each side the great porch. In that burgh I heard
This tale, and late have set down every word
That I remembered, when the thoughts would come
Of what we did in our deserted home,
And of the days, long past, when we were young,
Nor knew the cloudy woes that o'er us hung.
And howsoever I am now grown old,
Yet is it still the tale I then heard told
Within the guest-house of that minster-close,
Whose walls, like cliffs new-made, before us rose.

The Proud King:
The Medieval Tale for April

The Narrative:

King Jovinian is quite unaware that his kingly status is an arbitrary social construction, and his lubris even inspires him to hope for physical immortality. Deprived of his royal garments during a hunt, however, the king discovers to his horror that no one knows or cares who he is, and later learns at the court that another man rules contentedly in his place. Not only do the king's former servitors rebuff his approaches, but his own wife fails to recognize him.

Cast finally out of the castle in rage, he visits a woodland anchorite, and wrests forth the sudden anguished prayer: "O Lord God, give me back myself again!" The monk now recognizes his former master in the wilderness, and lends him his habit and donkey. When the chastened Jovinian returns with these familiar symbols of humility to the foot of his former throne, he recognizes that its new occupant is an angel, who abdicates and points the moral of his experience: only acceptance of human contingency and mortality can provide hope for their transcendence.

Sources:

Morris's revisions of the spare account found in the Gesta Romanorum (no. XXIII) elaborate the king's fluctuating emotions, the pathos of his false hopes, and the heedless indifference of those he encounters. He also moderates the actions of the king's retinue. In the Gesta, for example, the king's knight orders him scourged, but Morris's knight orders his servants to feed and clothe the confused beggar, and give him a night's lodging.

Another slight doctrinal shift appears in Jovinian's encounter with the anchorite: the Gesta's king makes his confession to the woodland hermit, but Morris's Jovinian prays directly to God.
Critical Remarks:

“The Proud King” is the first of three didactic medieval tales Morris arranged in temporal succession early in the sequence (April, May, and June). Like both the March tales and “The Proud King”’s classical companion for April, it offers a homily of royal arrogance reproofed. It is also one of only two medieval Earthly Paradise narratives (the other is “The Writing on the Image”) which do not involve romantic love.

Morris’s revisions of his sources essentially modulate the tale from a catalogue of reversals to a study in progress towards self-knowledge. The result is a kind of austere stoic parable.

See also Bellas, 199-206; Boos, 82-84; Calhoun, 143-44; Kirchhoff (1990), 166-67; Oberg, 41.

Manuscripts:

A rough draft for “The Proud King” exists in B.L. Add. MS 45,306, and an earlier version of the lines 168-232 is inserted into Huntington MS 6418, ff. 94, 96, and 97. Most changes involve punctuation.

“The Proud King” is the fourth medieval tale in Morris’s list of early manuscript drafts, where it follows “The Wanderers’ Prologue,” “The Lady of the Land,” and “The Palace East of the Sun” (later “The Land East of the Sun”).

THE PROUD KING.

The Argument.

A certain king, blinded by pride, thought that he was something more than man, if not equal to God; but such a judgement fell on him that none knew him for king, and he suffered many things, till in the end humbling himself, he regained his kingdom and honour.

N a far country that I cannot name, 
And on a year long ages past away, 
A King there dwelt, in rest and ease and fame, 
And richer than the Emperor1 is today: 
The very thought of what this man might say, 
From dusk to dawn kept many a lord awake, 
For fear of him did many a great man quake.

Young was he when he first sat on the throne, 
And he was wedded to a noble wife, 
But at the days must he sit alone, 
Nor durst a man speak to him for his life 
Except with leave: nought knew he change or strife, 
But that the years passed silently away, 
And in his black beard gathered specks of grey.

Now so it chanced, upon a May morning, 

1 A far country that I cannot name: In the Gesta Romanorum, the protagonist is “the Emperor Jovian.” Morris makes him the king of an anonymous nation.
2 Emperor: Holy Roman Emperor.
Wakeful he lay when yet low was the sun,
Looking distraught at many a royal thing,
And counting up his titles one by one,
And thinking much of things that he had done;
For full of life he felt, and hale and strong,
And knew that none durst say when he did wrong.

For no man now could give him dread or doubt,
The land was 'neath his sceptre far and wide,
And at his beck would well-armed myriads shout.
Then swelled his vain, unthinking heart with pride,
Until at last he raised him up and cried:
What need have I for temple or for priest?
Am I not God, whiles that I live at least?

And yet withal that dead his fathers were,
He needs must think, that quick the years pass by;
But he, who seldom yet had seen death near
Or heard his name, said: Still I may not die:
Though underneath the earth my fathers lie;
My sire indeed was called a mighty king,
Yet in regard of mine, a little thing

His kingdom was; moreover his grandsire
To him was put a prince of narrow lands,
Whose father, though to things he did aspire
Beyond most men, a great knight of his hands,
Yet ruled some little town where now there stands
The kennel of my dogs; then may not I
Rise higher yet, nor like poor wretches die?

Since up the ladder ever we have gone
Step after step nor fallen back again;
And there are tales of people who have won
A life enduring, without care or pain,
Or any man to make their wishes vain;
Perchance this prize unwitting now I hold;
For times change fast, the world is waxen old.

So mid these thoughts once more he fell asleep,
And when he woke again, high was the sun,
Then quickly from his gold bed did he leap,
And of his former thoughts remembered none,
But said: To-day through green woods will we run,
Nor shall to-day be worse than yesterday,
But better it may be, for game and play.

So for the hunt was he apparell'd,
And forth he rode with heart right well at ease;
And many a strong, deep-chested hound they led,
Over the dewy grass betwixt the trees,
And fair white horses fit for the white knees
Of Her the ancients fabled rides a-nights
Betwixt the setting and the rising lights.

Now following up a mighty hart and swift
The King rode long upon that morning tide,
And since his horse was worth a kingdom's gift,
It chanced him all his servants to outride,
Until unto a shaded river-side
He came alone at hottest of the sun,
When all the freshness of the day was done.

Dismounting there, and seeing so far adown
The red-finned fishes o'er the gravel play,
It seemed that moment worth his royal crown
To hide there from the burning of the day;
Wherefore he did off all his rich array,
And tied his horse unto a neighbouring tree,
And in the water sported leisurely.

3Her the ancients fabled rides a-nights: In ancient sources, Diana, the moon-goddess, hunted for the most part on foot, but she rode assorted beasts in at least one 10th-century medieval text (A.P.M.W.).
But when he was fulfilled of this delight
He gat him to the bank well satisfied,
And thought to do on him his raiment bright
And homeward to his royal house to ride;
But 'mazed and angry, looking far and wide
Nought saw he of his horse and rich attire,
And 'gainst the thief 'gan threaten vengeance dire.

But little help his fury was to him,
So lustly he 'gan to shout and cry;
None answered: still the lazy chub 'd swim
By inches 'gainst the stream; away did fly
The small pied bird, but nathless stayed anigh,
And o'er the stream still plied his fluttering trade,
Of such a helpless man not much afraid.

Weary of crying in that lonely place,
He ceased at last; and thinking what to do,
E'en as he was, up stream he set his face,
Since not far off a certain house he knew
Where dwelt his ranger, a lord leal and true,
Who many a bounty at his hands had had,
And now to do him ease would be right glad.

Thither he hastened on, and as he went
The hot sun sorely burned his naked skin,
The whiles he thought: When he to me has lent
Fine raiment, and at ease I sit within
His coolest chamber clad in linen thin,
And drinking wine, the best that he has got,
I shall forget this troublous day and hot.

Now note, that while he thus was on his way,
And still his people for their master sought,
There met them one who in the King's array

Bestrode his very horse, and as they thought
Was none but he in good time to them brought,
Therefore they hailed him King, and so all rode
From out the forest to his fair abode.

And there in royal guise he sat at meat,
Served, as his wont was, 'neath the canopy,
And there the hounds fawned round about his feet,
And there that city's elders did he see,
And with his lords took counsel what should be;
And there at supper when the day waxed dim
The Queen within his chamber greeted him.

EAVE we him there; for to the ranger's gate
The other came, and on the horn he blew,
Till peered the wary porter through the grate
To see if he, perchance, the blower knew,
Before he should the wicket-gate undo;
But when he saw him standing there,
he cried:
What dost thou, friend, to show us all thine hide?

We list not buy to-day or flesh or fell;
Go home and get thyself a shirt at least,
If thou wouldst aught, for saith our vicar well,
That God hath given clothes e'en to the beast.6
Therewith he turned to go, but as he ceased
The King cried out: Open, O foolish man!
I am thy lord and King, Jovinian;

Go now, and tell thy master I am here
Desiring food and clothes, and in this plight,
And then hereafter need'st thou have no fear,
Because thou didst not know me at first sight.

Small pied bird: probably the kingfisher *Alcedo isedula*, a spotted blue, orange and white bird. Its "trade" is to dive for freshwater fish.

6God hath... the beast: probably a paraphrase of Luke 12:27 ("Consider the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these"), applied here to animals rather than plants.
Yea, yea, I am but dreaming in the night,
The carle7 said, and I bid thee, friend, to dream.
Come through! here is no gate, it doth but seem.

With that his visage vanished from the grate;
But when the King now found himself alone,
He hurled himself against the mighty gate,
And beat upon it madly with a stone,
Half wondering midst his rage, how any one
Could live, if longed--for things he chanced to lack.
But midst all this, at last the gate flew back,

And there the porter stood, brown-bill8 in hand,
And said: Ah, fool, thou makest this ado,
Wishing before my lord's high seat to stand;
Thou shalt be gladder soon hereby to go,
Or surely nought of handy blows9 I know.
Come, willy nilly, thou shalt tell this tale
Unto my lord, if aught it may avail.

With that his staff he handled as if he
Would smite the King, and said: Get on before!
St. Mary! now thou goest full leisurely,
Who, erewhile, fain wouldst batter down the door.
See now, if ere this matter is passed o'er,
I come to harm, yet thou shalt not escape;
Thy back is broad enow to pay thy jape.10

Half blind with rage the King before him passed,
But nought of all he doomed him to durst say,
Lest he from rest nigh won should yet be cast;
So with a swelling heart he took his way,
Thinking right soon his shame to cast away;

And the carle followed still, ill satisfied
With such a wretched losel11 to abide.

Fair was the ranger's house and new and white,
And by the King built scarce a year ago;
And carved about for this same lord's delight
With woodland stories deftly wrought in stone;
There oft the King was wont to come alone,
For much he loved this lord, who erst had been
A landless squire, a servant of the Queen.

Now long a lord and clad in rich attire,
In his fair hall he sat before the wine
Watching the evening sun's yet burning fire
Through the close branches of his pleasance shine,
In mood of him who deems himself divine,
Remembering not whereto we all must come,
Not thinking aught but of his happy home.

From just outside loud mocking merriment
He heard midst this; and therewithal a squire
Came hurrying up, his laughter scarcely spent,
Who said: My lord, a man in such attire
As Adam's, ere he took the devil's hire,12
Who saith that thou wilt know him for the King,
Up from the gate John Porter needs must bring.

He to the King is nothing like in aught
But that his beard he weareth in such guise
As doth my lord: wilt thou that he be brought?
Percance some treason 'neath his madness lies.
Yea, saith the ranger, that may well be wise;
But haste, for now am I right well at ease,
Nor would be wearied with such folk as these.

7carle: male peasant.
8brown-bill: pike-like weapon with a blade attached to a long pole.
9handy blows: blows with the hand.
10pay thy jape: atone for your trick (by being beaten).
11loセル: worthless person.
12Adam's, ere he took the devil's hire: what humans wore before the fall: nothing.
Then went the squire, and coming back again,  
The porter and the naked King brought in,  
Who thinking now that this should end his pain,  
Forgot his fury and the porter’s sin,  
And said: thou wonderest how I came to win  
This raiment, that kings long have ceased to wear,  
Since Noah’s flood has altered all the air?

Well, thou shalt know; but first I pray thee, Hugh,  
Reach me that cloak that lieth on the board,  
For certes, though thy folk are leal and true,  
It seemeth that they deem a mighty lord  
Is made by crown, and silken robe, and sword;  
Lo, such are borel\textsuperscript{13} folk; but thou and I  
Fail not to know the signs of majesty.\textsuperscript{14}

Thou risest not! thou lookest strange on me!  
Ah, what is this? Who reigneth in my stead?  
How long hast thou been plotting secretly?  
Then slay me now, for I be not dead  
Armies will rise up when I nod my head.  
Slay me! or cast thy treachery away,  
And have anew my favour from this day.

Why should I tell thee that thou ne’er wast king?  
The ranger said; thou knowest not my mind.  
Poor man, I pray God help thee in this thing,\textsuperscript{15}  
And, ere thou diest, send thee days more kind;  
And help from us a-going shalt thou find.

Good fellows, this poor creature is but mad,  
Take him, and in a coat let him be clad;  
And give him meat and drink, and on this night  
Beneath some roof of ours let him abide,  
For some day God may set his folly right.  
Then spread the King his arms abroad and cried:  
Woe to thy food, thy house, and thee betide,  
Thou loathsome traitor! Get ye from the hall,  
Lest smitten by God’s hands this roof should fall;

Yea, if the world be but an idle dream,  
And God deals nought with it, yet shall ye see -  
Red flame from out these carven windows stream.  
I, I, will burn this vile place utterly,  
And strewn with salt\textsuperscript{16} the poisonous earth shall be,  
That such a wretch of such a man has made,  
That so such Judases may grow afraid.

Thus raving, those who held him he shook off  
And rushed from out the hall, nigh mad indeed,  
And gained the gate, not heeding blow or scoff,  
Nor longer of his nakedness took heed,  
But ran, he knew not where, at headlong speed  
Till, when at last his strength was fully spent,  
Worn out, he fell beneath a woody bent.

But for the ranger, left alone in peace,  
He bade his folk bring in the minstrelsy;  
And thinking of his life, and fair increase  
Of all his goods, a happy man was he,  
And towards his master felt right lovingly,  
And said: This luckless madman will avail  
When next I see the King for one more tale.

\textsuperscript{13}borel: rough, unlearned.
\textsuperscript{14} ... but thou and I / Fail not to know the signs of majesty: In the Gesta, the angel reveals his true identity in the presence of the whole court. The privacy of Morris’s scene enhances its spiritual meaning, as does the angel’s emphasis on humility.
\textsuperscript{15}Poor man, I pray God help thee in this thing: In the Gesta, the knight to whom the emperor appeals has him beaten (102). Morris often removed gratuitous cruelty from his source material.
\textsuperscript{16}strewn with salt: Salted earth is infertile.
Meanwhile Jovinian by the road-side lay,
Panting, confused, scarce knowing if
he dreamed,
Until at last, when vanished was the day,
Through the dark night far
off a bright light gleamed;
Which growing quickly, down the road there streamed
The glare of torches, held by men who ran
Before the litter of a mighty man.

These mixed with soldiers soon the road did fill,
And on their harness could the King behold
The badge of one erst wont to do his will,
A counsellor, a gatherer-up of gold,
Who underneath his rule had now grown old:
Then wrath and bitterness so filled his heart,
That from his wretched lair he needs must start.

And o'er the clatter shrilly did he cry:
Well met, Duke Peter! ever art thou wise;
Surely thou wilt not let a day go by
Ere thou art good friends with mine enemies;
O fit to rule within a land of lies,
Go on thy journey, make thyself more meet
To sit in hell beneath the devil's feet!

But as he ceased a soldier drew anear,
And smote him flatting with his scathed sword,
And said: Speak louder, that my lord may hear
And give thee wages for thy ribald word!
Come forth, for I must show thee to my lord,
For he may think thee more than mad indeed,
Who of men's ways has taken wondrous heed.
Now was the litter stayed midstmost the road,
And round about the torches in a ring

17 Well met, Duke Peter! . . . : The Emperor in the Gesta, who learns his lesson less quickly than Morris's character, seeks out the duke to ask for help.

18 Scathe: harm, injury.
19 Deny me, with such grace . . . : Matthew 26: 69-75. When Peter sought refuge with the High Priest's servants on the night of Jesus's arrest, they asked him whether he was the rabbi's disciple, and he insisted three times that he did not "know the man." Maundy week is Holy Week, the week of Jesus's death and resurrection.
Thy luck it is thou tellest it to me,
Who deem thee mad and let thee go thy way:
The King is not a man to pity thee,
Or on thy folly thy fool's tale to lay:
Poor fool! take this, and with the light of day
Buy food and raiment of some labouring clown,
And by my counsel keep thee from the town,
For fear thy madness break out in some place
Where folk thy body to the judge must hale,
And then indeed thou in evil case.
Press on, sirs! or the time will not avail.
There stood the King, with limbs that 'gan to fail,
Speechless, and holding in his trembling hand
A coin new stamped for people of the land;
Thereon, with sceptre, crown, and royal robe,
The image of a King, himself, was wrought;
His jewelled feet upon a quartered globe,
As though by him all men were vain and nought.
One moment the red glare the silver caught,
As the lord ceased, the next his hurrying folk
The flaming circle round the litter broke.
The next, their shadows barred a patch of light,
Fast vanishing, all else around was black;
And the poor wretch, left lonely with the night,
Muttered: I wish the day would ne'er come back,
If all that once I had I now must lack:
Ah God! how long is it since I was King,
Nor lacked enough to wish for anything?

20take this. . . . The duke in the Cesta imprisons the emperor. This is another
instance in which Morris edits out gratuitous cruelty.
21clown: a boar.

Then down the lonely road he wandered yet,
Following the vanished lights, he scarce knew why,
Till he began his sorrows to forget,
And, steepe in drowsiness, at last drew nigh
A grassy bank, where, worn with misery,
He slept the dreamless sleep of weariness,
That many a time such wretches' eyes will bless.

UT at the dawn he woke, nor knew, at first
What ugly chain of grief had brought him there,
Nor why he felt so wretched and accursed;
At last remembering, the fresh morning air,
The rising sun, and all things fresh and fair,
Yet caused some little hope in him to rise,
That end might come to these new miseries.

So looking round about, he saw that he
To his own city gates was come anear;
Then he arose, and going warily,
And hiding now and then for very fear
Of folk who bore their goods and country cheer
Unto the city's market, at the last
Unto a stone's-throw of the gate he passed.

But when he drew unto the very gate,
Into the throng of country-folk he came
Who for the opening of the door did wait,
Of whom some mocked, and some cried at him shame,
And some would know his country and his name;
But one into his waggon drew him up,
And gave him milk from out a beechen cup,
And asked him of his name and misery;"
Then in his throat a swelling passion rose,
Which yet he swallowed down, and: Friend, said he,
Last night I had the hap to meet the foes
Of God and man, who robbed me, and with blows
Stripped off my weed and left me on the way:
Thomas the Pilgrim am I called to-day.

A merchant am I of another town,
And rich enow to pay thee for thy deed,
If at the King's door thou wilt set me down,
For there a squire I know, who at my need
Will give me food and drink, and fitting weed.
What is thy name? in what place dost thou live?
That I some day great gifts to thee may give.

Fair sir, the carle said, I am poor enow,
Though certes food I lack not easily;
My name is Christopher a-Green; I sow
A little orchard set with bush and tree,
And ever there the kind land keepeth me,
For I, now fifty, from a little boy
Have dwelt thereon, and known both grief and joy.

The house my grandsire built there has grown old,
And certainly a bounteous gift it were
If thou shouldst give me just enough of gold
To build it new; nor should thou lack my prayer
For such a gift. Nay, friend, have thou no care,
The King said; this is but a little thing
To me, who oft am richer than the King.

Now as they talked the gate was opened wide,
And toward the palace went they through the street,
And Christopher walked ever by the side
Of his rough wain, where midst the May-flowers sweet
Jovinian lay, that folk whom they might meet

Might see him not to mock at his bare skin:
So shortly to the King's door did they win.

Then through the open gate Jovinian ran
Of the first court, and no man stayed him there;
But as he reached the second gate, a man
Of the King's household, seeing him all bare
And bloody, cried out: Whither dost thou fare?
Sure thou are seventy times more mad than mad,
Or else some magic potion thou hast had,

Whereby thou fear'st not steel or anything.
But, said the King, good fellow, I know thee;
And can it be thou knowest not thy King?
Nay, thou shalt have a good reward of me,
That thou wouldst rather have than ten years' fee,
If thou wilt clothe me in fair weed again,
For now to see my council am I fain.

Out, ribald! quoth the fellow: what say'st thou?
Thou art my lord, whom God reward and bless?
Truly before long shalt thou find out how
John Hangman cureth ill folk's wilfulness;
Yes, from his scourge the blood has run for less
Than that which now thou sayest: nay, what say I?
For lighter words have I seen fall men die.

Come now, the sergeants to this thing shall see!
So to the guard-room was Jovinian brought,
Where his own soldiers mocked him bitterly,
And all his desperate words they heeded nought;
Until at last there came to him this thought,
That never from this misery should he win,
But, spite of all his struggles, die therein.

And terrible it seemed, that everything
So utterly was changed since yesterday;
That these, who were the soldiers of the King,
Ready to lie down in the common way
Before him, nor durst rest if he bade play,
Now stood and mocked him, knowing not the face
At whose command each man there had his place.

Ah, God! said he, is this another earth
From that whereon I stood two days ago?
Or else in sleep have I had second birth?
Or among mocking shadows do I go,
Unchanged myself of flesh and fell, although
My fair weed have I lost and royal gear?
And meanwhile all are changed that meet me here;

And yet in heart and nowise outwardly.
Amid his wretched thoughts two sergeants came,
Who said: Hold, sir! because the King would see
The man who thus so rashly brings him shame,
By taking his high style and spotless name,
That never has been questioned ere to-day.
Come, fool! needs is it thou must go our way.

So at the sight of him all men turned round,
As 'twixt these two across the courts he went,
With downcast head and hands together bound;
While from the windows maid and varlet\textsuperscript{23} leant,
And through the morning air fresh laughter sent;
Until unto the threshold they were come
Of the great hall within that kingly home.

Therewith right fast Jovinian's heart must beat,
As now he thought: Lo, here shall end the strife;
For either shall I sit on mine own seat,
Known unto all, soldier and lord and wife,
Or else is this the ending of my life,
And no man henceforth shall remember me,

\textsuperscript{23}varlet: here, servant or attendant.

And a vain name in records shall I be.
Therewith he raised his head up, and beheld
One clad in gold set on his royal throne,
Gold-crowned, whose hand the ivory sceptre held;
And underneath him sat the Queen alone,
Ringed round with standing lords, of whom not one
Did aught but utmost reverence unto him;
Then did Jovinian shake in every limb.

Yet midst amaze and rage to him it seemed
This man was nowise like him in the face;
But with a marvelous glory his head gleamed,
As though an angel sat in that high place,
Where erst he sat like all his royal race;
But their eyes met, and with a stern, calm brow
The shining one cried out: And where art thou?

Where art thou, robber of my majesty?
Was I not King, he said, but yesterday?
And though to-day folk give my place to thee,
I am Jovinian; yes, though none gainsay,
If on these very stones thou shouldst me slay,
And though no friend be left for me to moan,
I am Jovinian still, and King alone.

Then said that other: O thou foolish man,
King was I yesterday, and long before,
Nor is my name aught but Jovinian,
Whom in this house the Queen my mother bore
Unto my longing father, for right sore
Was I desired before I saw the light;
Thou, fool, art first to speak against my right.

And surely well thou merittest to die;
Yet ere I bid men lead thee unto death
Hearken to these my lords that stand anigh,
And what this faithful Queen beside me saith;
Then mayst thou many a year hence draw thy breath,
If these should stammer in their speech one whit:
Behold this face, lords, look ye well on it!

Thou, O fair Queen, say now whose face is this!
Then cried they: Hail, O Lord Jovinian,
Long mayst thou live! And the Queen knelt to kiss;
His gold-shod feet, and through her face there ran
Sweet colour, as she said: Thou art the man
By whose side I have lain for many a year,
That art my lord Jovinian lief and dear.

Then said he: O thou wretch, hear now and see!
What thing should hinder me to slay thee now?
And yet, indeed, such mercy is in me,
If thou wilt kneel down humbly and avow
Thou art no King, but base-born, as I know
Thou art indeed, in mine house shalt thou live,
And as thy service is, so shalt thou thrive.

But the unhappy King laughed bitterly,
The red blood rose to flush his visage wan
Where erst the grey of death began to be:
Thou liest, he said; I am Jovinian,
Come of great kings; nor am I such a man
As still to live when all delight is gone,
As thou might'st do, who sittest on my throne.

No answer made the other for a while,
But sat and gazed upon him steadfastly,
Until across his face there came a smile.

Where scorn seemed mingled with some great pity.
And then he said: Nathless thou shalt not die,
But live on as thou mayst, a lowly man,
Forgetting thou wast once Jovinian.

Then wildly round the hall Jovinian gazed,
Turning about to many a well-known face,
But none of all his folk seemed grieved or mazed,
But stood unmoved, each in his wonted place;
There were the Lords, the Marshal with his mace,
The Chamberlain, the Captain of the Guard,
Grey-headed, with his wrinkled face and hard,

That had peered down so many a lane of war;
There stood the grave ambassadors arow,
Come from half-conquered lands; without the bar
The foreign merchants gazed upon the show,
Willing new things of that great land to know;
Nor was there any doubt in any man
That the gold throne still held Jovinian.

Yea, as the sergeants laid their hands on him,
The mighty hound that crouched before the throne
Flew at him, fain to tear him limb from limb,
Though in the woods the brown bear's dying groan
He and that beast had often heard alone.
Ah! muttered he, take thou thy wages too,
Worship the risen sun as these men do.

They thrust him out, and as he passed the door,
The murmur of the stately court he heard
Behind him, and soft footfalls on the floor,
And, though by this somewhat his skin was seared,

24And the Queen knelt to kiss: In the Gesta, the Emperor seeks help not from the porter but from the Empress. He sends her a secret message in which he refers to tokens only she and he could know, and she is quite understandably uncertain and confused.

25Flew at him, fain to tear him limb from limb: Morris took this detail directly from the Gesta. In the original, Jovinian's favorite hawk also fails to recognize him and flies away.
Hung back at the rough eager wind afeard;  
But from the place they dragged him through the gate,  
Wherethrough he oft had rid in royal state.

Then down the streets they led him, where of old  
He, coming back from some well-finished war,  
Had seen the line of flashing steel and gold  
Wind upwards 'twixt the houses from the bar,  
While clashed the bells from wreathed spires afar;  
Now moaning, as they hailed him on, he said:  
God and the world against one lonely head!

BUT soon, the bar being past, they loosed their hold  
And said: Thus saith by us our Lord the King,  
Dwell now in peace, but yet be not so bold  
To come again, or to thy lies to cling,  
Lest unto thee there fall a worser thing;  
And for ourselves, we bid thee ever pray  
For him who has been good to thee this day.

Therewith they turned away into the town,  
And still he wandered on and knew not where,  
Till, stumbling at the last, he fell adown,  
And looking round beheld a brook right fair,  
That ran in pools and shallows here and there,  
And on the further side of it a wood,  
Nigh which a lowly clay-built hovel stood.

Gazing thereat, it came into his mind  
A priest dwelt there, a hermit wise and old,  
Whom he had ridden oftentimes to find,  
In days when first the sceptre he did hold,  
And unto whom his mind he oft had told,  
And had good counsel from him, though indeed

A scanty crop had sprung from that good seed.  
Therefore he passed the brook with heavy cheer  
And toward the little house went speedily,  
And at the door knocked, trembling with his fear,  
Because he thought: Will he remember me?  
If not, within me must there surely be  
Some devil who turns every thing to ill,  
And makes my wretched body do his will.

So, while such doleful things as this he thought,  
There came unto the door the holy man,  
Who said: Good friend, what tidings hast thou brought?  
Father, he said, knowest thou Jovinian?  
Know'st thou me not, made naked, poor, and wan?  
Alas, O father! am I not the King,  
The rightful lord of thee and everything?

Nay, thou art mad to tell me such a tale,  
The hermit said; if thou seek'st soul's health here,  
Right little will such words as this avail;  
It were a better deed to shrive thee clear,  
And take the pardon Christ has bought so dear,  
Than to an ancient man such mocks to say  
What would be fitter for a Christmas play.\textsuperscript{26}

So to his hut he got him back again,  
And fell the unhappy King upon his knees,  
And unto God at last he did complain,  
Saying: Lord God, what bitter things are these?  
What hast thou done, that every man that sees  
This wretched body, of my death is fain?  
O Lord God, give me back myself again!\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{26}Christmas play: Christmas in the Middle Ages was characterized by masquerades and buffoonery as well as the more solemn religious observances.  
\textsuperscript{27}O Lord God, give me back myself again!: Morris's addition of the King's prayer before his confession makes the hermit's sudden recognition a direct sign of divine forgiveness, unmediated by sacramental rituals.
E'en if therewith I needs must die straightway.
Indeed I know that since upon the earth
I first did go, I ever day by day
Have grown the worse, who was of little worth
E'en at the best time since my helpless birth.
And yet it pleased thee once to make me King,
Why hast thou made me now this wretched thing?

Why am I hated so of every one?
Wilt thou not let me live my life again,
Forgetting all the deeds that I have done,
Forgetting my old name, and honour vain,
That I may cast away this lonely pain?
Yet if thou wilt not, help me in this strife,
That I may pass my little span of life

Not made a monster by unhappiness.
What shall I say? thou mad'st me weak of will,
Thou wrapped'st me in ease and carelessness,
And yet, as some folk say, thou lovest me still;
Look down! of folly I have had my fill,
And am but now as first thou madest me,
Weak, yielding clay to take impress of thee.

So said he weeping, and but scarce had done,
When yet again came forth that hermit old,
And said: Alas! my master and my son,
Is this a dream my wearied eyes behold?
What doleful wonder now shall I be told,
Of that ill world that I so long have left?
What thing thy glory from thee has bereft?

A strange surprise of joy therewith there came
To that worn heart; he said: For some great sin
The Lord my God has brought me unto shame;

I am unknown of servants, wife, and kin,
Unknown of all the lords that stand within
My father's house; nor didst thou know me more
When e'en just now I stood before thy door.

Now since thou know'st me, surely God is good,
And will not slay me, and good hope I have
Of help from Him that died upon the rood,
And is a mighty lord to slay and save:
So now again these blind men will I brave,
If thou wilt give me of thy poorest weed,
And some rough food, the which I sorely need;

Then of my sins thou straight shall shrive me clean.
Then weeping said the holy man: Dear lord,
What heap of woes upon thine head has been!
Enter, O King, take this rough gown and cord,\textsuperscript{28}
And what scant food my hovel can afford;
And tell me everything thou hast to say;
And then the High God speed thee on thy way.

So when in coarse serge\textsuperscript{29} raiment he was clad,
He told him all that pride had made him think;
And showed him of his life both good and bad;
And then being houselled,\textsuperscript{30} did he eat and drink,
While in the wise man's heart his words did sink;
For, God be praised! he thought, I am no king,
Who scarcely shall do right in anything!

Then he made ready for the King his ass,
And bade again, God speed him on the way,
And down the road the King made haste to pass
As it was growing toward the end of day,
With sober joy for troubles passed away; 670
But trembling still, as onward he did ride,
Meeting few folk upon that eventide.

O to the city gate being come at last,
He noted there two ancient warders stand,
Whereof one looked askance as he went 675
past,
And whispered low behind his held-up hand

Unto his mate: The King! who gave command
That if disguised this eve he pass this gate,
No reverence we should do his kingly state.

Thereat with joy Jovinian smiled again,
And so passed onward quickly down the street;
And well-nigh was he eased of all his pain
When he beheld the folk that he might meet
Gaze hard at him, as though they fain would greet
His well-known face, but durst not, knowing well
He would not any of his state should tell.

Withal unto the palace being come,
He lighted down thereby and entered, 680
And once again it seemed his royal home,
For folk again before him bowed the head;
And to him came a squire, who softly said:
The Queen awaits thee, O my lord the King,
Within the little hall where minstrels sing,

Since there thou bad'st her meet thee on this night.
Lead on then! said the King, and in his heart
He said: Perfay 31 all goeth more than right
And I am King again; but with a start
He thought of him who played the kingly part

31 perfay: truly, verily.

That morn, yet said: If God will have it so
This man like all the rest my face will know.
So in the Little Hall the Queen he found,
Asleep, as one a spell binds suddenly;
For her fair broidery lay upon the ground,
And in her lap her open hand did lie,
The silken-threaded needle close thereby;
And by her stood that image of the King
In rich apparel, crown, and signet-ring.

But when the King stepped forth with angry eye
And would have spoken, came a sudden light,
And changéd was that other utterly;
For he was clad in robe of shining white,
Inwrought with flowers of unnamed colours bright,
Girt with a marvellous girdle, and whose hem
Fell to his naked feet and shone in them;

And from his shoulders did two wings arise,
That, with the swaying of his body, played
This way and that; of strange and lovely dyes
Their feathers were, and wonderfully made:
And now he spoke: O King, be not dismayed,
Or think my coming here so strange to be,
For oft ere this have I been close to thee.

And now thou knowest in how short a space
The God that made the world can unmake thee,
And though He alter in no whit thy face,
Can make all folk forget thee utterly,
That thou to-day a nameless wretch mayst be,
Who yesterday woke up without a peer,
The wide world's marvel and the people's fear.

Behold, thou oughtest to thank God for this,
That on the hither side of thy dark grave
Thou well hast learned how great a God He is
Who from the heavens such countless rebels drive,
Yet turns himself such folk as thee to save;
For many a man thinks nought at all of it,
Till in a darksome land he comes to sit.

Lamenting everything: so do not thou!
For inasmuch as thou thought'st not to die
This thing may happen to thee even now,
Because the day unspeakable draws nigh;
When bathed in unknown flame all things shall lie;
And if thou art upon God's side that day;
Unslain, thine earthly part shall pass away.

Or if thy body in the grave must rot,
Well mayst thou see how small a thing is this,
Whose pain of yesterday now hurts thee not,
Now thou hast come again to earthly bliss,
Though bitter-sweet thou knowest well this is,
And though no coming day can ever see
Ending of happiness where thou mayst be.

Now must I go, nor wilt thou see me more
Until the day when, unto thee at least,
This world is gone, and an unmeasured shore,
Where all is wonderful and changed, thou seest:
Therefore, farewell! at council and at feast
Thy nobles shalt thou meet as thou hast done,
Nor wilt thou more be strange to any one.

So scarce had he done speaking, ere his wings
Within the doorway of the hall did gleam,
And then he vanished quite; and all these things
Unto Jovinian little more did seem
Than some distinct and well-remembered dream,

From which one wakes amidst a feverish night,
Taking the moonshine for the morning light.
Silent he stood, not moving for a while,
Pondering o'er all these wondrous things, until
The Queen arose from sleep, and with a smile,
Said: O fair lord, your great men by your will
E'en as I speak the banquet-chamber fill,
To greet thee amidst joy and revelling,
Wilt thou not therefore meet them as a King?

So from that place of marvels having gone,
Half-mazed, he soon was clad in rich array,
And sat thereafter on his kingly throne,
As though no other had sat there that day;
Nor did a soul of all his household say
A word about the man who on that morn
Had stood there, naked, helpless, and forlorn.

But ever day by day the thought of it
Within Jovinian's heart the clearer grew,
As o'er his head the ceaseless time did flit,
And everything still towards its ending drew,
New things becoming old, and old things new;
Till, when a moment of eternity
Had passed, grey-headed did Jovinian lie

One sweet May morning, wakeful in his bed;
And thought: That day is thirty years ago
Since useless folly came into my head,
Whereby, before the steps of my own throne,
I stood in helpless agony alone,
And of the wondrous things that there befell,
When I am gone there will be none to tell:

No man is now alive who thinks that he,
The story done, for want of happier things,  
Some men must even fall to talk of kings;  
Some trouble of a far-off Grecian isle  
Some hard Sicilian craftsman's cruel guile\(^1\)  
Whereby he raised himself to be as God,  
Till good men slew him;

As blighting as the deadly pestilence,  
The brazen net of armed men from whence  
Was no escape;\(^2\) the fir-built Norway hall  
Filled with the bonders\(^4\) waiting for the fall  
Of the great roof whereto the torch is set;  
The laughing mouth, beneath the eyes still wet  
With more than sea-spray, as the well-loved land  
The freeman still looks back on, while his hand  
Clutches the tiller, and the eastern breeze  
Grows fresh and fresher: many things like these  
They talked about, till they seemed young again,  
Remembering what a glory and a gain  
Their fathers deemed the death of kings to be.  
And yet amidst it, some smiled doubtfully  
For thinking how few men escape the yoke,  
From this or that man's hand, and how most folk  
Must needs be kings and slaves the while they live,

1. **Some hard Sicilian craftsman's cruel guile**: The behavior of several ancient Sicilian tyrants—among them Phalaris (c. 570-554 B.C.) and Agathocles (317-298 B.C.)—might have warranted such allusions to cruelty and megalomania.  
2. **Persian rod**: According to Esther 4:11, anyone who dared approach the king in his inner court without a royal summons was subject to execution, but this could be averted if the king chose to extend his sceptre (as he did for Esther).  
3. **The brazen net of armed men**: Persian soldiers sometimes ‘harrowed’ their enemies by advancing across-country with arms interlocked. See Herodotus, Bk VI, Ch 31 (A.P.M.W.).  
4. **bonders**: Norwegian peasant farmer or small freeholder. Compare the burning of Njál's farmstead in the Icelandic *Njál's saga*.  

Who bade thrust out the madman on that tide,  
Was other than the King they used to see:  
Long years have passed now, since the hermit died,  
So must I tell the tale, ere by his side  
I lie, lest it be unrecorded quite,  
Like a forgotten dream in morning light.

Yea, lest I die ere night come, this same day  
Unto some scribe will I tell everything,  
That it may lie when I am gone away,  
Stored up within the archives of the King;  
And may God grant the words thereof may ring  
Like His own voice in the next comer's ears!  
Whereby His folk shall shed the fewer tears.

So it was done, and at the King's command  
A clerk that day did note it every whit,  
And after by a man of skilful hand  
In golden letters fairly was it writ.  
Yet little heed the new King took of it  
That filled the throne when King Jovinian died,  
So much did all things feed his swelling pride.

But whether God chastised him in his turn,  
And he grew wise thereafter, I know not;  
I think by eld alone he came to learn  
How lowly on some day must be his lot.  
But ye, O Kings, think all that ye have got  
To be but gauds cast out upon some heap,  
And stolen the while the Master was asleep.
And take from this man, and to that man give
Things hard enow. Yet as they mused, again
The minstrels raised some high heroic strain
That led men on to battle in old times;
And midst the glory of its mingling rhymes,
Their hard hearts softened, and strange thoughts arose
Of some new end to all life’s cruel foes.

End of Vol. II.

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