THE WATCHING OF THE FALCON

The Argument.

THE CASE OF THIS FALCON WAS SUCH, THAT WHO SO WATCHED IT WITHOUT SLEEPING FOR SEVEN DAYS AND SEVEN NIGHTS, HAD HIS FIRST WISH GRANTED HIM BY A FAY LADY, THAT APPEARED TO HIM THEREON; AND SOME WISHED ONE THING, AND SOME ANOTHER. BUT A CERTAIN KING, WHO WATCHED THE FALCON DAILY, WOULD WISH FOR NOUGHT BUT THE LOVE OF THAT FAY; WHICH WISH BEING ACCOMPLISHED, WAS AFTERWARDS HIS RUIN.

And avarice and deadly pride,  
There may have end like everything,  
Both to the shepherd and the king:  
Lest this green earth become but hell  
If folk for ever there should dwell.  
Full little most men think of this,  
But half in woe and half in bliss  
They pass their lives, and die at last  
Unwilling, though their lot be cast  
In wretched places of the earth,  
Where men have little joy from birth  
Until they die; in no such case  
Were those who tilled this pleasant place.  
There soothly men were loth to die,  
Though sometimes in his misery  
A man would say, Would I were dead!  
Alas! full little likeliest  
That he should live for ever there.  
So folk within that country fair  
Lived on, nor from their memories drove  
The thought of what they could not have,  
And without need tormented still  
Each other with some bitter ill;  
Yea, and themselves too, growing grey  
With dread of some long-lingering day,  
That never came ere they were dead  
With green sods growing on the head;  
Nowise content with what they had,  
But falling still from good to bad  
While hard they sought the hopeless best;  
And seldom happy or at rest  
Until at last with lessening blood  
One foot within the grave they stood.

1land: Mandeville and Arras identify the country as Armenia.  
2likelyest: probability.
OW so it chanced that in this land
There did a certain castle stand,
Set alone deep in the hills,
Amid the sound of falling rills
Within a valley of sweet grass,
To which there went one narrow pass
Through the dark hills, but seldom trod.
Rarely did horse-hoof press the sod
About the quiet weedy moat,
Where unscarred did the great fish float;
Because men dreaded there to see
The uncouth things of faerie;
Nathless by some few fathers old
These tales about the place were told:
That neither squire nor seneschal
Or valet came in bower or hall,
Yet all things were in order due,
Hangings of gold and red and blue,
And tables with fair service set;
Cups that had paid the Caesar's debt
Could he have laid his hands on them;
Dorsars, with pearls in every hem,
And fair embroidered gold-wrought things,
Fit for a company of kings;
And in the chambers dainty beds,
With pillows dight for fair young heads;
And horses in the stables were,
And in the cellars wine full clear
And strong, and casks of ale and mead;
Yea, all things a great lord could need.
FOR whom these things were ready there
None knew; but if one chanced to fare

3nathless: nevertheless.
4valet: steward or chief servant in a great house.
5the Caesar's debt: an apparently generic allusion to Roman imperial extravagance.
6dorsars: variant spelling of dorses, ornamental hangings for a throne or room

Into that place at Easter-tide,
There would he find a falcon tied
Unto a pillar of the Hall;
And such a fate to him would fall,
That if unto the seventh night
He watched the bird from dark to light
And light to dark unceasingly,
On the last evening he should see
A lady beautiful past words;
Then, were he come of clowns or lords,
Son of a swineherd or a king,
There must she grant him anything
Perforce that he might dare to ask,
And do his very hardest task.
But if he slumbered, ne'er again
The wretched should wake; for he was slain
Helpless, by hands he could not see,
And torn and mangled wretchedly.
NOW said these elders: Ere this tide
Full many folk this thing have tried,
But few have got much good thereby;
For first, a many came to die
By slumbering ere their watch was done;
Or else they saw that lovely one,
And mazed, they knew not what to say;
Or asked some toy for all their pay,
That easily they might have won,
Nor staked their lives and souls thereon;
Or asking, asked for some great thing

4Easter-tide: No time is specified by Mandeville. In Melusine, the castle is accessible during a three-day period that begins on the "vigil of St. John's," December 27th (363).
5for he was slain . . . : Mandeville says only of those who fail that "never Man shall see [them] more" (179). Arras says that they are well treated but never permitted to leave the castle alive. Arras's punishment for the King—"a beating by invisible hands—may have suggested Morris's bloodier outcome.
6mazed: amazed, bewildered.
That was their bane; as to be king
One asked, and died the morrow morn. 10
That he was crowned, of all forlorn.
YET thither came a certain man,
Who from being poor great riches wan
Past telling, whose grandsons now are
Great lords thereby in peace and war;
And in their coat-of-arms they bear,
Upon a field of azure fair,
A castle and a falcon set
Below a chief of golden fret. 11
AND in our day a certain knight 12
Prayed to be worsted in no fight,
And so it happed to him: yet he
Died none the less most wretchedly,
And all his prowess was in vain,
For by a losel 13 was he slain,
As on the highway side he slept
One summer night, of no man kept.

10 *to be king / One asked, and died the morrow morn*: Morris invents the king who dies on the morning of his coronation and the murdered knight, but Mandeville does comment briefly on the poor man who becomes rich that “…he was wiser in Wishing than was the King” (179). The coat of arms was probably suggested by Melusine’s description of a hall decorated with the portraits and arms of all the knights who have “watched.”
11 *fret*: In heraldry, a fret is a figure formed by two narrow bands in saltire (the shape of a St. Andrew’s cross), interlaced with a lozenge-shaped device, called a mascle.
12 *And in our day, a certain knight …*: Instead of this story, Mandeville’s second cautionary example involves a “knight of the Temple” who asks that his purse be perpetually full of gold. After the lady grants his request, she tells him “that he had asked the Destruction of their Order (the Templars) for the Trust and Affiance of that Purse, and for the great Pride that they should have” (179). The Knights Templars, a military/monastic order organized to guard pilgrimage sites, was disbanded and its leaders executed early in the fourteenth century by Philip IV of France, who resented their power and wealth, and wanted to repudiate the debts his court owed to them.

Mandeville’s alternate *exemplum* might also have appealed to Morris, given his contempt for greed and ambition and fondness for history mixed with myth.

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SUCH tales as these the fathers old
About that lonely castle told;
And in their day the King must try
Himself to prove that mystery,
Although, unless the fay 14 could give
For ever on the earth to live,
Nought could he ask that he had not:
For boundless riches had he got,
Fair children, and a faithful wife;
And happily had passed his life,
And all fulfilled of victory,
Yet was he fain this thing to see. 15
SO towards the mountains he set out
One noontide, with a gallant rout 16
Of knights and lords, and as the day
Began to fail, came to the way
Where he must enter all alone, 17
Between the dreary walls of stone.
Thereon to that fair company
He bade farewell, who wistfully
Looked backward oft as home they rode.
But in the entry he abide
Of that rough unknown narrowing pass,
Where twilight at the high noon was.
THEN onward he began to ride:
Smooth rose the rocks on every side,
And seemed as they were cut by man;
Adown them ever water ran,
But they of living things were bare,
Yea, not a blade of grass grew there;
And underfoot rough was the way,
For scattered all about there lay

14 *fay*: fairy, supernatural being.
15 *yet was he fain …*: This discontent, not simple greed, is in this case the king’s fatal flaw.
16 *rout*: attendant company or retinue.
17 *Where he must enter all alone …*: Morris invents the details of the King’s
Great jagged pieces of black stone,
Throughout the pass the wind did moan,
With such wild noises, that the King
Could almost think he heard something
Spoken of men; as one might hear
The voices of folk standing near
One's chamber wall: yet saw he nought
Except those high walls strangely wrought,
And overhead the strip of sky.
SO, going onward painfully,
He met therein no evil thing,
But came about the sun-setting
Unto the opening of the pass,
And thence beheld a vale of grass
Bright with the yellow daffodil;
And all the vale the sun did fill
With his last glory. Midmost there
Rose up a stronghold, built four-square,
Upon a flowery grassy mound,
That moat and high wall ran around.
Thereby he saw a walled pleasance,\(^{18}\)
With walks and sward fit for the dance
Of Arthur's court in its best time,
That seemed to feel some magic clime;\(^{19}\)
For though through all the vale outside
Things were as in the April-tide,
And daffodils and cowslips grew
And hidden the March violets blew,
Within the bounds of that sweet close\(^{20}\)
Was trellised the bewildering rose;
There was the lily over-sweet,
And starry pinks\(^{21}\) for garlands meet;

...And apricots hung on the wall,
And midst the flowers did peaches fall,
And nought had blemish there or spot,
For in that place decay was not.
SILENT awhile the King abode
Beholding all, then on he rode
And to the castle-gate drew nigh,
Till fell the drawbridge silently,
And when across it he did ride
He found the great gates open wide,
And entered there, but as he passed
The gates were shut behind him fast,
But not before that he could see
The drawbridge rise up silently.\(^{22}\)
Then round he gazed oppressed with awe,
And there no living thing he saw
Except the sparrows in the caves,
As restless as light autumn leaves
Blown by the fitful rainy wind.
Thereon his final goal to find,
He lighted off his war-horse good
And let him wander as he would,
When he had eased him of his gear;
Then gathering heart against his fear,
Just at the silent end of day
Through the fair porch he took his way,
And found at last a goodly hall
With glorious hangings on the wall,
Inwrought with trees of every clime,
And stories of the ancient time,
But all of sorcery they were.
For o'er the daïs Venus fair,
Fluttered about by many a dove
Made hopeless men for hopeless love

\(^{18}\)pleasance: an enclosure or pleasure-ground laid out with shady walks, trees, shrubs, and ornamental ponds.

\(^{19}\)clime: climate, atmosphere.

\(^{20}\)close: enclosure, court, or yard.

\(^{21}\)pinks: the white, pink, crimson, or variegated flowers of i. plumari, a favorite garden plant.

\(^{22}\)The drawbridge rise up: In Arras, an old man waiting at the gate gives the
Both sick and sorry, there they stood,
Wrought wonderfully in various mood,
But wasted all by that hid fire
Of measureless o'er-sweet desire,
And let the hurrying world go by
Forgetting all felicity.
But down the hall the tale was wrought
How Argo in old time was brought\(^{23}\)
To Colchis for the fleece of gold.
And on the other side was told
How mariners for long years came
To Circe, winning grief and shame,\(^{24}\)
Until at last by hardihead
And craft, Ulysses won her bed.
LONG upon these the King did look,
And of them all good heed he took,
To see if they would tell him aught
About the matter that he sought,
But all were of the times long past;
So going all about, at last,
When grown nigh weary of his search,
A falcon on a silver perch\(^{25}\)
Anigh the daís did he see,
And wondered; because certainly
At his first coming 'twas not there;
But, 'neath the bird a scroll most fair,
With golden letters on the white

king instructions and warns him especially not to ask for the lady herself.

23 How Argo in old time was brought: The Argo was the ship in which Jason and his army of heroes, the Argonauts, sailed the Black Sea to recover the golden fleece.

24 Circe, winning grief and shame: In the Odyssey, Circe was a witch who turned visitors to her island into animals. When she saw that the gods' protection made Odysseus impervious to her spell, she became his lover (Odyssey X).

25 A falcon on a silver perch: Compare the description of the sparrowhawk in Melusine: "in the myddes of the hall a long horne of a unyconce that was fayre an shyte and therupon was sped a grete cloth of gold wheron stood the sperhawk and a golve a whyt ylkit under his feet."

26 "Ye who have not enow of bliss . . . : No such written warning appears in Morris's two sources. Directly after Melusine's description of the sparrowhawk, however, the old man remarks that the lady will give anything else he desires, but not her body, for "if ye desire and ask to have hersel, cysyl adventure shall fall to you thereof" (364). Mandeville also suggests that it is common knowledge the fay can grant "the first wish that he will wish of earthly things" (178). Morris uses the scroll to state more directly his mildly egalitarian theme, that the King has "little care," and granting of wishes is meant only for those who "in this hard world labor sore."
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Men talk, nor would they e'er forget
My name, if this should come to be,
Whoever should come after me:
But while I lay wrapped round with gold
Should tales and histories manifold
Be written of me, false and true;
And as the time still onward drew
Almost a god would folk count me,
Saying: In our time none such be.
But therewith did he sigh again,
And said: Ah, vain, and worse than vain!
For though the world forget me nought,
Yet by that time should I be brought
Where all the world I should forget,
And bitterly should I regret
That I, from godlike great renown,
To helpless death must fall adown:
How could I bear to leave it all?
Then straight upon his mind did fall
Thoughts of old longings half forgot,
Matters for which his heart was hot
A while ago: whereof no more
He cared for some, and some right sore
Had vexed him, being fulfilled at last.
And when the thought of these had passed,
Still something was there left behind,
That by no torturing of his mind
Could he in any language name,
Or into form of wishing frame. 28
AT last he thought: What matters it?
Before these seven days shall fit
Some great thing surely shall I find,
That gained will not leave grief behind,

27 Alexander: Alexander the Great (355-323 B. C.), King of Macedon, overran the Persian empire and plundered the Levant, Asia Minor, Egypt, and northwest India.

28 Still something was there left behind . . . : In Melusine, the King plans to ask

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Nor turn to deadly injury.
Nor now will I let these things be,
And think of some unknown delight.
NOW, therewithal, was come the night, 29
And thus his watch was well begun;
And till the rising of the sun,
Waking, he paced about the hall,
And saw the hangings on the wall
Fade into nought, and then grow white
In patches by the pale moonlight,
And then again fade utterly
As still the moonbeams passed them by;
Then in a while, with hope of day,
Begin a little to grow grey,
Until familiar things they grew,
As up at last the great sun drew,
And lit them with his yellow light
At ending of another night.
THEN right glad was he of the day,
That passed with him in such-like way;
For neither man nor beast came near,
Nor any voices did he hear.
And when again it drew to night
Silent it passed, till first twilight
Of morning came, and then he heard
The feeble twittering of some bird,
That, in that utter silence drear,
Smote harsh and startling on his ear.
THEREWTH came on that lonely day
That passed him in no other way;
And thus six days and nights went by,
And nothing strange had come anigh.
And on that day he well-nigh deemed
That all that story had been dreamed.

for the Lady all along, simply because he has been warned to do otherwise.

29 therewithal, was come the night: Mandeville states only that "at the end of seven days and seven nights, the lady came to him and bade him wish . . . ."
Daylight and dark, night and day, 
Passed ever in their wonted way; 
The wind played in the trees outside, 
The rooks from out the high trees cried; 
And all seemed natural, frank, and fair, 
With little sign of magic there. 
Yet neither could he quite forget 
That close with summer blossoms set, 
And fruit hung on trees blossoming, 
When all about was early spring. 
Yea, if all this by man were made, 
Strange was it that yet undecayed 
The food lay on the tables still 
Unchanged by man; that wine did fill 
The golden cups, yet bright and red. 
And all was so apparelled 
For guests that came not, yet was all 
As though that servants filled the hall. 
So waxed and waned his hopes, and still 
He formed no wish for good or ill. 
AND while he thought of this and that 
Upon his perch the falcon sat 
Unfed, unhooded,30 his bright eyes 
Beholders of the hard-earned prize, 
Glancing around him restlessly, 
As though he knew the time drew nigh 
When this long watching should be done. 
So little by little fell the sun, 
From high noon unto sun-setting; 
And in that lapse of time the King, 
Though still he woke, yet none the less 
Was dreaming in his sleeplessness 
Of this and that which he had done 
Before this watch he had begun; 
Till, with a start, he looked at last

About him, and all dreams were past; 
For now, though it was past twilight 
Without, within all grew as bright 
As when the noon-sun smote the wall, 
Though no lamp shone within the hall. 
THEN rose the King upon his feet, 
And well-nigh heard his own heart beat, 
And grew all pale for hope and fear 
As sound of footsteps caught his ear 
But soft, and as some fair lady, 
Going as gently as might be, 
Stopped now and then awhile, distraught 
By pleasant wanderings of sweet thought. 
NIGHER the sound came, and more nigh, 
Until the King unwittingly 
Trembled, and felt his hair arise, 
But on the door still kept his eyes; 
That opened soon, and in the light 
There stepped alone a lady bright, 
And made straight toward him up the hall. 
In golden garments was she clad,31 
And round her waist a belt she had 
Of emeralds fair, and from her feet, 
That shod with gold the floor did meet, 
She held the raiment daintily, 
And on her golden head had she 
A rose-wreath round a pearl-wrought crown. 
Softly she walked with eyes cast down, 
Nor looked she any other than 
An earthly lady, though no man 
Has seen so fair a thing as she. 
SO when her face the King could see 
Still more he trembled, and he thought: 
Surely my wish is hither brought,

30Unfed, unhooded: Falcons were kept hungry and blindfolded until they were
31In golden garments was she clad . . .: Morris elaborates here on Melusine's
vaguer description of the lady's clothing.
And this will be a goodly day
If for mine own I win this may.\textsuperscript{32}
And therewithal she drew anear
Until the trembling King could hear
Her very breathing, and she raised
Her head and on the King's face gazed
With serious eyes, and stopping there,
Swept from her shoulders her long hair,
And let her gown fall on her feet,
Then spoke in a clear voice and sweet:
Well hast thou watched; so now, O King,
Be bold, and wish for some good thing;
And yet, I counsel thee, be wise.
Behold, spite of these lips and eyes,
Hundreds of years old now am I
And have seen joy and misery.
And thou, who yet hast lived in bliss,
I bid thee well consider this;\textsuperscript{33}
Better it were that men should live
As beasts, and take what earth can give,
The air, the warm sun and the grass,
Until unto the earth they pass,
And gain perchance nought worse than rest,
Than that not knowing what is best
For sons of men, they needs must thirst
For what shall make their lives accrue.
Therefore I bid thee now beware,
Lest getting something seeming fair
Thou com'st in vain to long for more,
Or lest the thing thou wisthest for
Make thee unhappy till thou diest,
Or lest with speedy death thou buyest
A little hour of happiness
Or lazy joy with sharp distress.

\textsuperscript{32}maie a maiden.
\textsuperscript{33}I bid thee well consider this: This homily on contentment is Morris's addition.

Alas, why say I this to thee?
For now I see full certainly
That thou wilt ask for such a thing;
It had been best for thee to fling
Thy body from a mountain-top,
Or in a white hot fire to drop,
Or ever thou hadst seen me here.
Nay then, be speedy and speak clear.
THEN the King cried out eagerly,
Grown fearless: Ah, be kind to me!
Thou knowest what I long for then!
Thou know'st that I, a king of men,
Will ask for nothing else than thee!
Thou didst not say this could not be,
And I have had enough of bliss,
If I may end my life with this.
HEARKEN, she said, what men will say
When they are mad!\textsuperscript{34} before to-day
I knew that words such things could mean,
And wondered that it could have been.
Think well, because this wished-for joy,
That surely will thy bliss destroy,
Will let thee live, until thy life
Is wrapped in such bewildering strife
That all thy days will seem but ill.
Now wilt thou wish for this thing still?
Wilt thou then grant it? cried the King;
Surely thou art an earthly thing,
And all this is but mockery,
And thou canst tell no more than I
What ending to my life shall be.
Nay, then, she said, I grant it thee.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34}"Hearken," she said, "what men will say / When they are mad . . . . ;
Mandeville's lady tells the King "that he was a fool to desire that he might not have; for she said that he should not ask but an earthly Thing, for she was none earthly Thing but a ghostly Thing" (178). In Merton, the lady warns him again that "Eyl mischeasence shal fall of the yf thou soone chaungest not thy
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Perforce; come nigh, for I am thine
Until the morning sun doth shine,
And only coming time can prove
What thing I am. Dizzy with love,
And with surprise struck motionless
That this divine thing, with far less
Of striving than a village maid,
Had yielded, there he stood afraid,
Spite of hot words and passionate,
And strove to think upon his fate.
BUT as he stood there, presently
With smiling face she drew anigh,
And on his face he felt her breath.
O love, she said, dost thou fear death?
Not till next morning shalt thou die,
Or fall into thy misery.
Then on his hand her hand did fall,
And forth she led him down the hall,
Going full softly by his side.
O love, she said, now well betide
The day whereon thou cam'st to me.
I would this night a year might be,
Yea, life-long; such life as we have,
A thousand years from womb to grave.35
AND then that clinging hand seemed worth
Whatever joy was left on earth,
And every trouble he forgot,
And time and death remembered not:
Kinder she grew, she clung to him
With loving arms; her eyes did swim
With love and pity, as he strove
purpose, and so shal it to al thin heyres and successours after the... " (366).
35"I grant it thee...": Only in Morris does the lady actually comply with the
King's request.
36life-long... grave. Most medieval authorities considered fairies long-lived
but not immortal: "They live much longer than we, yet die at last, or at least
vanish from that State" (Kirk, quoted in K. Briggs, An Encyclopedia of Fairies,
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To show the wisdom of his love;
With trembling lips she praised his choice,
And said: Ah, well may'st thou rejoice,
Well may'st thou think this one short night
Worth years of other men's delight,
If thy heart as mine own heart is,
Sunk in a boundless sea of bliss;
O love, rejoice with me! rejoice!
But as she spoke, her honied voice
Trembled, and midst of sobs she said:
O love, and art thou still afraid?
Return, then, to thine happiness,
Nor will I love thee any less,
But watch thee as a mother might
Her child at play. With strange delight
He stammered out: Nay, keep thy tears
For me, and for my ruined years
Weep love, that I may love thee more;
My little hour will soon be o'er.
Ah, love, she said, and thou art wise
As men are, with longing miseries
Buying these idle words and vain;
My foolish love, with lasting pain.
And yet, thou wouldst have died at last
If in all wisdom thou hadst passed
Thy weary life: forgive me then,
In pitying the sad life of men.
THEN in such bliss his soul did swim,
But tender music unto him
Her words were; death and misery
But empty music unto him
As from that place his steps she drew,
And dark the hall behind them grew.

NY, 1976).
But end comes to all earthly bliss,
And by his choice full short was his;
And in the morning grey and cold,
Beside the dais did she hold
His trembling hand, and wistfully
He, doubting what his fate should be,
Gazed at her solemn eyes, that now,
Beneath her calm, untroubled brow,
Were fixed on his wild face and wan;
At last she said: Oh, hapless man,
Depart! thy full wish hast thou had;
A little time thou hast been glad,
Thou shalt be sorry till thou die.
And though, indeed, full soon am I
This might not be; nathless, as day
Night follows, colourless and grey,
So this shall follow thy delight,
Thy joy hath ending with last night:
Nay, peace! and hearken to thy fate.
Strife without peace; three early and late,
Lasting long after thou art dead,
And laid with earth upon thine head;
War without victory shalt thou have;
Defeat, nor honour shalt thou save;
Thy fair land shall be rent and torn,
Thy people be of all forlorn,
And all men curse thee for this thing.
SHE loosed his hand, but yet the King
Said: Yea, and I may go with thee?
Why should we part? then let things be
E'en as they will! Poor man, she said,
Thou ravest; our hot love is dead,
If ever it had any life:
Go, make thee ready for the strife

Wherein thy days shall soon be wrapped;
And of the things that here have happened
Make thou such joy as thou mayst do;
But I from this place needs must go,
Nor shalt thou ever see me more
Until thy troubled life is o'er:
Alas! to say farewell to thee
Were nought but bitter mockery.
Fare as thou mayst, and with good heart
Play to the end thy wretched part.
Therewith she turned and went from him,38
And with such pain his eyes did swim
He scarce could see her leave the place;
And then, with troubled and pale face,
He got him thence: and soon he found
His good horse39 in the base-court40 bound;
So, loosing him, forth did he ride,
For the great gates were open wide,
And flat the heavy drawbridge lay.
So by the middle of the day,
That murky pass had he gone through,
And come to country that he knew;
And homeward turned his horse's head,
And passing village and homestead
Nigh to his palace came at last;
And still the further that he passed
From that strange castle of the fay
More dreamlike seemed those seven days,
And dreamlike the delicious night;

38 "Therewith she turned and went from him: After the Lady's malediction,
Mandeville simply adds that "..." But since, neither the King of Armenia nor
the country were ever in peace, neither had they ever since then plenty of goods
and they have been since then always under tribute of the Saracens" (178).
Morris follows the Malautine in detailing some of these hereditary disasters.
39 "His good horse: In Malautine, the King is beaten and dragged out
of the castle by invisible hands.
40 "Base-court: the lower or outer court of a castle or mansion, occupied by the
servants."
And like a dream the shoulders white,       615  
And clinging arms and yellow hair,         620  
And dreamlike the sad morning there.      625  
Until at last he 'gan to deem             630  
That all might well have been a dream.     635  
Yet why was life a weariness?              640  
What meant this sting of sharp distress?  645  
This longing for a hopeless love,          650  
No sighing from his heart could move?     655  
Or else: She did not come and go          660  
As fays might do, but soft and slow       665  
Her lovely feet fell on the floor;         670  
She set her fair hand to the door          675  
As any dainty maid might do;               680  
And though, indeed, there are but few     685  
Beneath the sun as fair as she,            690  
She seemed a fleshly thing to be.          695  
Perchance a merry mock this is,            700  
And I may some day have the bliss         705  
To see her lovely face again,              710  
As smiling she makes all things plain.     715  
And then as I am still a king,             720  
With me may she make tarrying              725  
Full long, yea, till I come to die.        730  
THEREWITH at last being come anigh        735  
Unto his very palace gate,                 740  
He saw his knights and squires wait       745  
His coming, therefore on the ground        750  
He lighted, and they flocked around        755  
Till he should tell them of his fare.      760  
Then mocking said he: Ye may dare,        765  
The worst man of you all, to go            770  
And watch as I was bold to do;             775  
For nought I heard except the wind,        780  
And nought I saw to call to mind.          785  
So said he, but they noted well            790  
That something more he had to tell          795  

The Watching of the Falcon

If it had pleased him; one old man,        655  
Beholding his changed face and wan,        660  
Muttered: Would God it might be so!        665  
Alas! I fear what fate may do;             670  
Too much good fortune hast thou had       675  
By anything to be more glad                680  
Than thou hast been, I fear thee then,     685  
Lest thou becom'st a curse to men.         690  
But to his place the doomed King passed,   695  
And all remembrance strove to cast        700  
From out his mind of that past day,        705  
And spent his life in sport and play.      710  

The very apple of his eye,                 670  
Waged war against him bitterly;            675  
And when this son was overcome             680  
And taken, and folk led him home,          685  
And him the King had gone to meet,         690  
Meaning with gentle words and sweet        695  
To win him to his love again,              700  
By his own hand he found him slain.        705  
I KNOW not if the doomed King yet         710  
Remembered the fair lady's threat,         715  
But troubles upon troubles came:           720  
His daughter next was brought to shame,    725  
Who unto all eyes seemed to be             730  
The image of all purity,                   735  
And fleeing from the royal place           740  
The King no more beheld her face. "        745  
Then next a folk that came from far         750  

41Waged war ... her face: Morris adds the son's revolt and daughter's
Sent to the King great threats of war,
But he, full-fed of victory,
Deemed this a little thing to be,
And thought the troubles of his home
Thereby he well might overcome
Amid the hurry of the fight.
His foemen seemed of little might,
Although they thronged like summer bees
About the outlying villages,
And on the land great ruin brought.
Well, he this barbarous people sought
With such an army as seemed meet
To put the world beneath his feet;
The day of battle came, and he,
Flushed with the hope of victory,
Grew happy, as he had not been
Since he those glorious eyes had seen.
THEY met: his solid ranks of steel
There scarcely more the darts could feel
Of those new foemen, than if they
Had been a hundred miles away.
They met: a storied folk were his,
To whom sharp war had long been bliss,
A thousand years of memories
Were flashing in their shielded eyes;
And grave philosophers they had
To bid them ever to be glad
To meet their death and get life done
Midst glorious deeds from sire to son.
And those they met were beasts, or worse,
To whom life seemed a jest, a curse;
Of fame and name they had not heard;
Honour to them was but a word,
A word spoke in another tongue;
No memories round their banners clung,
No walls they knew, no art of war;

By hunger were they driven afar
Unto the place whereon they stood,
Ravening for bestial joys and blood.
NO wonder if these barbarous men
Were slain by hundreds to each ten
Of the King's brave well-armoured folk;
No wonder if their charges broke
To nothing on the walls of steel,
And back the baffled hordes must reel.
So stood throughout a summer day,
Scarred touched, the King's most fair array;
Yet as it drew to eventide
The foe still surged on every side,
As hopeless hunger-bitten men,
About his folk grown weariest then.
THEREWITH the King beheld that crowd
Howling and dusk, and cried aloud:
What do ye, warriors? and how long
Shall weak folk hold in check the strong?
Nay, forward banners! end the day
And show these folk how brave men play.
The young knights shouted at his word,
But the old folk in terror heard
The shouting run adown the line,
And saw men flush as if with wine.
O Sire, they said, the day is sure,
Nor will these folk the night endure
Beset with misery and fears.
Alas! they spoke to heedless ears,
For scarce one look on them he cast,
But forward through the ranks he passed,
And cried out: Who will follow me
To win a fruitful victory?
And toward the foe in haste he spurred,
And at his back their shouts he heard,
Such shouts as he ne'er heard again.
THEY met: ere moonrise all the plain
Was filled by men in hurrying flight,
The relics of that shameful fight;
The close array, the full-armed men,
The ancient fame availed not then,
The dark night only was a friend
To bring that slaughter to an end;
And surely there the King had died,
But driven by that back-rushing tide
Against his will he needs must flee;
And as he pondered bitterly
On all that wreck that he had wrought,
From time to time indeed he thought
Of the fay woman's dreadful threat.
BUT every thing is not lost yet,
Next day he said; great was the rout
And shameful beyond any doubt,
But since indeed at eventide
The flight began, not many died,
And gathering all the stragglers now
His troops still made a gallant show.
Alas! it was a show indeed;
Himself desponding, did he lead
His beaten men against the foe,
Thinking at least to lie alow42
Before the final rout should be;
But scarce upon the enemy
Could these, whose shaken banners shook
The frightened world, now dare to look;
Nor yet could the doomed King die there
A death he once had held most fair;
Amid unwounded men he came
Back to his city, bent with shame,
Unkindly, midst his great distress,
Yea, weeping at the bitterness

Of women's curses that did greet
His passage down the troubled street.
BUT sight of all the things they loved
The memory of their manhood moved
Within the folk, and aged men
And boys must think of battle then,
And men that had not seen the foe
Must clamour to the war to go.
So a great army poured once more
From out the city, and before
The very gates they fought again;
But their late valour was in vain;
They died indeed, and that was good,
But nought they gained for all the blood
Poured out like water; for the foe
Men might have stayed a while ago,
A match for very gods were grown.
So like the field in June-tide mown
The King's men fell, and but in vain
The remnant strove the town to gain;
Whose battlements were nought to stay
An untaught foe upon that day,
Though many a tale the annals told
Of sieges in the days of old,
When all the world then knew of war
From that fair place was driven afar.
AS for the King, a charmed life
He seemed to bear; from out that strife
He came unhurt, and he could see,
As down the valley he did flee
With his most wretched company,
His palace flaming to the sky.
Then in the very midst of woe
His yearning thoughts would backward go
Unto the castle of the fay;
He muttered: Shall I curse that day,
The Watching of the Falcon

For in a short space wilt thou be
Within an endless dim country
Where thou mayst well win woe or bliss.
Therewith she stooped his lips to kiss,
And vanished straightway from his sight.
So waking there he sat upright
And looked around, but nought could see,
And heard but song-birds' melody,
For that was the first break of day.

THEN with a sigh adown he lay
And slept, nor ever woke again,
For in that same hour was he slain
By stealthy traitors as he slept.

He of a few was much bewept,
But of most men was well forgot
While the town's ashes still were hot
The foeman on that day did burn.

As for the land, great Time did turn
The bloody fields to deep green grass,
And from the minds of men did pass
The memory of that time of woe,
And at this day all things are so
As first I said; a land it is
Where men may dwell in rest and bliss
If so they will; who yet will not,
Because their hasty hearts are hot
With foolish hate and longing vain,
The sire and dam of grief and pain.

bleak ending.
EATH the bright sky cool grew the weary earth,
And many a bud in that fair hour had birth
Upon the garden bushes; in the west
The sky got ready for the great sun's rest,
And all was fresh and lovely; none the less,

Although those old men shared the happiness
Of the bright eve, 'twas mixed with memories
Of how they might in old times have been wise,
Not casting by for very wilfulness
What wealth might come their changing life to bless;
Lulling their hearts to sleep, amid the cold
Of bitter times, that so they might behold
Some joy at last, e'en if it lingered long;
That, wearing not their souls with grief and wrong,
They still might watch the changing world go by,
Content to live, content at last to die.
ALAS! if they had reach'd content at last,
It was perforce when all their strength was past;
And after loss of many days once bright,
With foolish hopes of unattained delight.

CROSS the gap made by our English hinds
Amidst the Roman's handiwork, behold
Far off the long-roofed church; the shepherd binds
The withy round the hurdle of his fold,
Down in the foss the river fed of old,

That through long lapse of time has grown to be
The little grassy valley that you see.

Rest here awhile, not yet the eve is still,
The bees are wandering yet, and you may hear
The barley mowers on the trench'd hill,
The sheep-bells, and the restless changing weir,
All little sounds made musical and clear
Beneath the sky that burning August gives,
While yet the thought of glorious Summer lives.

Ah, love! such happy days, such days as these,
Must we still waste them, craving for the best,
Like lovers o'er the painted images
Of those who once their yearning hearts have blessed?
Have we been happy on our day of rest?
Thine eyes say Yes, but if it came again,
Perchance its ending would not seem so vain.

45Amidst the Roman's handiwork: According to May Morris (Collected Works 4xxii-xiii) Morris here described a definite place, the Roman camp on Sinodun Hill, which looks across the Thames to the small town of Dorchester and its medieval abbey church.