THE HALL AND THE WOOD.

BY WILLIAM MORRIS.

'Twas in the water-dwindling tide
When July days were done,
Sir Rafe of Greenhowes, 'gan to ride
In the earliest of the sun.

He left the white-walled burg behind,
He rode amidst the wheat.
The westland-gotten wind blew kind
Across the acres sweet.

Then rose his heart and cleared his brow,
And slow he rode the way:
"As then it was, so is it now,
Not all hath worn away."

So came he to the long green lane
That leadeth to the ford,
And saw the sickle by the wain
Shine bright as any sword.

The brown carles stayed twixt draught and draught,
And murmuring, stood aloof,
But one spake out when he had laughed:
"God bless the Green-wood Roof!"

Then o'er the ford and up he fared;
And lo the happy hills!
And the mountain-dale by summer cleared,
That oft the winter fills.

Then forth he rode by Peter's gate,
And smiled and said aloud:
"No more a day doth the Prior wait;
White stands the tower and proud."

There leaned a knight on the gateway side
In armour white and wan,
And after the heels of the horse he cried,
"God keep the hunted man!"

Then quoth Sir Rafe, "Amen, amen!"
For he deemed the word was good;
But never a while he lingered then
Till he reached the Nether Wood.

He rode by ash, he rode by oak,
He rode the thicket round,
And heard no woodman strike a stroke,
No wandering wife he found.
THE HALL AND THE WOOD.

He rode the wet, he rode the dry,
He rode the grassy glade:
At Wood-end yet the sun was high,
And his heart was unafraid.

There on the bent his rein he drew,
And looked o'er field and fold,
O'er all the merry meads he knew
Beneath the mountains old.

He gazed across to the good Green Howe
As he smelt the sun-warmed sward;
Then his face grew pale from chin to brow,
And he cried, "God save the sword!"

For there beyond the winding way,
Above the orchards green,
Stood up the ancient gables gray
With ne'er a roof between.

His naked blade in hand he had,
O'er rough and smooth he rode,
Till he stood where once his heart was glad
Amidst his old abode.

Across the hearth a tie-beam lay
Unmoved a weary while.
The flame that clomb the ashlar gray
Had burned it red as tile.

The sparrows bickering on the floor
Fled at his entering in;
The swift flew past the empty door
His wingèd meat to win.

Red apples from the tall old tree
O'er the wall's rent were shed.
Thence oft, a little lad, would he
Look down upon the lead.

There turned the cheeping chaffinch now
And feared no birding child;
Through the shot-window thrust a bough
Of garden-rose run wild.

He looked to right, he looked to left,
And down to the cold gray hearth,
Where lay an axe with half burned heft
Amidst the ashen hearth.

He caught it up and cast it wide
Against the gable wall;
Then to the díaïs did he stride,
O'er beam and bench and all.

Amidst there yet the high-seat stood,
Where erst his sires had sat;
And the mighty board of oaken wood,
The fire had stayed thereat.
THE HALL AND THE WOOD.

Then through the red wrath of his eyne
He saw a sheathed sword,
Laid thwart that wasted field of wine,
Amidmost of the board.

And by the hilts a slug-horn lay,
And there beside a scroll,
He caught it up and turned away
From the lea-land of the bowl.

Then with the sobbing grief he strove,
For he saw his name thereon;
And the heart within his breast uphove
As the pen's tale now he won.

"O Rafe, my love of long ago!
Draw forth thy father's blade,
And blow the horn for friend and foe,
And the good green-wood to aid!"

He turned and took the slug-horn up,
And set it to his mouth,
And o'er that meadow of the cup
Blew east and west and south.

He drew the sword from out the sheath
And shook the fallow brand;
And there a while with bated breath,
And hearkening ear did stand.

Him-seemed the horn's voice he might hear—
Or the wind that blew o'er all.
Him-seemed that footsteps drew anear—
Or the boughs shook round the hall.

Him-seemed he heard a voice he knew—
Or a dream of while agone.
Him-seemed bright raiment towards him drew—
Or bright the sun-set shone.

She stood before him face to face,
With the sunbeam thwart her hand,
As on the gold of the Holy Place
The painted Angels stand.

With many a kiss she closed his eyes;
She kissed him cheek and chin:
E'en so in the painted Paradise
Are Earth's folk welcomed in.

There in the door the green-coats stood,
O'er the bows went up the cry,
"O welcome, Rafe, to the free green-wood,
With us to live and die."

It was bill and bow by the high-seat stood,
And they cried above the bows,
"Now welcome, Rafe, to the good green-wood,
And welcome Kate the Rose!"

Cc 2
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White, white in the moon is the woodland plash,
White is the woodland glade,
Forth wend those twain, from oak to ash,
With light hearts unafraid.

The summer moon high o'er the hill,
All silver-white is she,
And Sir Rafe's good men with bow and bill,
They go by two and three.

In the fair green-wood where lurks no fear,
Where the King's writ runneth not,
There dwell they, friends and fellows dear,
While summer days are hot.

And when the leaf from the oak-tree falls,
And winds blow rough and strong,
With the carles of the woodland thorps and halls
They dwell, and fear no wrong.

And there the merry Yule they make,
And see the winter wane,
And fain are they for true-love's sake,
And the folk thereby are fain.

For the ploughing carle and the straying herd
Flee never for Sir Rafe:
No barefoot maiden wends afeard,
And she deems the thicket safe.

But sore adread do the chapmen ride;
Wide round the wood they go;
And the judge and the sergeants wander wide
Lest they plead before the bow.

Well learned and wise is Sir Rafe's good sword,
And straight the arrows fly,
And they find the coat of many a lord,
And the crest that rideth high.