

THE WANDERERS

[THE FIRST PROLOGUE TO THE EARTHLY PARADISE]

O HO! oho! whence come ye, Sirs,
Drifted to usward in such guise,
In ship unfit for mariners,
Such heavy sorrow in your eyes?

THE WANDERERS:

O masters of this outland shore,
When first we hoisted up our sail
We were all furnished with good store
Of swords and spears and gilded mail:

Yea then, of minstrels, many an one
Stood on the deck with harp in hand,
And many a dame bright as the sun
Cried farewell to us from the land.

See now our hair as white as snow
On head and cheek, and chin and lip;
Smooth men we were when long ago
We drew the gangway to the ship.

A summer cruise we went that tide
To take of merchants toll and tax;
Out from our tops there floated wide
The Lion with the Golden Axe.

Five ships we were; the Fighting Man
That bore our chiefest in command,
The Boar, the Bear, the Gold-crowned Swan,
And we last in the Rose Garland.

Ah, must we tell our tale again
This oncel and still we pray you, Sirs,
Once only now! So had we fain
Forget it for these last few years

The Wan-
derers

We walk about above the ground.
In few words—that time as I say
We swept both narrow seas and sound
Of all the ships that came our way.

Our holds were full of bales of goods
Worth many a florin, so perdie
Homeward we turned, counting the roods
Of land we should buy presently.

Alas! the slip 'twixt lip and cup:
For on a time, as it befell
We wanted water, so brought up
Within a bay we knew full well.

There, when the hawsers were made fast
Ashore we went, feast did we keep,
Then filled our water-casks; at last
There in our tents we fell asleep.

But as it drew to the twilight
In the grey dawn, we heard a shout
Come from the captain's tent: forthright
From the fringed doorway he came out.

Straight ran we to him: "Have no fear
Fellows," he said; "from a strange dream,
Or something more, as ye shall hear,
Have I just waked; thus did it seem:

I stood upon a certain land
Hard by the sea, a white city
Above; a sea-beat yellow strand
Furrowed by keels was under me.

And as I stood, it seemed, perdie!
A yellow lion was I grown;
Of you some forty were with me,
Each as a lion with a crown

Each one of us a great axe had
In his right paw; and blithe we seemed
And thereat nothing mazed or sad:
And furthermore, fellows, I dreamed

That folk kept passing to and fro
Nor saw us: all were fair and young,
Laughing and merry did they go,
And many were the songs they sung.

Forth to the city then we went,
The fairest houses there we saw
With walls about green gardens bent,
And in the midst, without a flaw

Rose up a temple of green stone
Like glass: therein were images
As of Diana, burd-alone,
Trim-shod, with dainty naked knees.

Jupiter saw I, furthermore,
Without a frown upon his face:
And Pallas with her book of lore
Set in a corner of the place.

There was the Ruler of the Sea,
And Juno still in wrathful mood,
Bacchus we saw, and Mercury;
With downcast eyes there Pluto stood.

And midmost there, with wings that met
Over his head, was mighty Love,
And there beside was Venus set,
Fresh, soft, and naked, with her dove

Brushing his wings against her feet.
Now in this temple, Sirs, I say,
I dreamed I saw two fellows meet
And talk together such a way:

The Wan-
derers

'Ah!' said the first, 'if folk but knew
The merry days we live in here,
No longer should we be a few,
Full many a keel would hither steer.'

'Yea' quoth the other, 'did they know
That every man grows young again
That underneath our gates doth go,
And never after suffers pain;

No war, no winter, no disease,
No storm nor famine reach us here,
Ever we live 'mid rest and ease
And no man doth another fear!'

When this I heard, so loud my heart
'Gan beat that scarce I heard one say:
'But far this sweet land is apart
From all the world! Yet is the way

Not altogether hard to find
It still you steer west hardily
Beseeching Venus to be kind.'
This said, they passed on presently.

No longer was I lion then,
But man again, old, near my death,
And ye were gone, as oft to men
In helpless dreams it happeneth.

* Kneeling
to Venus
(big)

Down fell I straight upon my knees,
And holding Venus by the feet,
'I pray thee give me rest and peace
And fearless life, my lady sweet,'

* These notes are written in the manuscript on the back of the
previous leaf opposite the verse selected. They are suggestions for
the illustrations to be made by Burne-Jones.

Said I, and therewithal I wept;
Nearer and nearer to my death
I grew, yet still my hands I kept
Upon the image, with weak breath

Muttering out prayers; till suddenly
As happed once to Pygmalion
So dreamed I that it happed to me;
The stone my hands were laid upon

Grew into soft flesh, the fair leg
Drew back a little as she said,
'My knight, I grant you that you beg,'
And laid her hands upon my head.

Then shuddering my head I bent
Before the Goddess, with shut eyes,
As through my veins the new blood went
Filling my heart with ecstasies

Forgotten long; within a while
I raised my eyes and looked and there
Still stood the image with set smile
And colourless with gilded hair.

Then suddenly aware I was
All was a dream; yet woke I not
But passed from out that house of glass,
And went again to that same spot

Where first I found myself, and then
I woke indeed, but, fellows mine,
Waking, I saw two ancient men
There in the corners; of gold fine

One wore a crown; about his head
Shone rings of light, all armed was he
And all his raiment was of red;
He held a great axe handily.

The Wan-
derers

The other man was clad in blue
One-eyed he was and held a spear:
Olaf and Odin straight I knew
And cried the cry that you did hear.

Straightway they vanished, but each one
Beckoned me westward as he went;
Then to the tent I heard you run—
Say, fellows, what these wonders meant.”

All waited till the mass-priest said:
“The Devil well such dreams might send,
When one lay helpless on his bed,
To tempt a man to evil end.”

Such things were possible to be
He doubted not, a little while,
“Hell-fire afterwards,” said he;
I broke in with a certain smile,

“Yea also here St Olaf came.”
He said, “The Devil, oh my son,
Having no body but a flame
Can just as well be two as one,

Olaf as Odin for the nonce,”
Said John our mass-priest, “yea, and know
I heard a tale of men who once
Sought for this land ye seek of now,

And to some isle far in the West
Outside the world they came one day
And there they went ashore to rest
But as upon the grass they lay

Devils set on them and to shreds
Tore many, but some got away
And years thereafter with white heads
Came broken-hearted to Norway.”

When he had done Sir Rolf the Old
Next said: "Captain, it seems to me
You plan a voyage overbold—
Now such a thing as this might be

If we were sitting poor at home—
But I am rich and old and bent
And think no more at last to roam.
I think, that westward if ye went,

Many a strange thing might ye see
Nor yet come home again, or live
More than a month or two; for me
At home henceforth I think to thrive."

"Yea too," quoth one, "the western seas
Are all alive with fearful things,
Great rolling waves without a breeze
And wingless birds and fish with wings."

Then I hot-headed and aflame
To seek new things, at such-like words
Cried, "In that place from whence you came
Do folk perchance sell spears and swords?"

Or by the loom do men there sit
Watching the women's shuttle fly
From side to side, not touching it
With any finger? Do they die

And of that great renown think nought
Our fathers won in other days
Who over strange seas strange things sought,
Nor bore to die with little praise?

Let whoso will of these go home
And sit there while the minstrels sing
Great lies about him, the beer-foam
Still on their beards, and sea-roving

The Wan-
derers

In words alone: but we will go
Follow our fortunes to the West,
And leave the winter and the snow
And gain all things that men love best."

The young men shouted thereupon;
For through their hearts the thoughts did pass,
Warm days, ripe fruit, the merry sun,
And sweet fair ladies on the grass,

Or cinnamon-fires burning bright
In the cool autumn evening,
And gold-gowns fairer to the sight
Than raiment of the Greekish king.

But there were old men there, and men
Not old, but fain enow to live
Without risk three score years and ten
With what delights that land could give;

So there rose up a murmuring
And earnest talk 'twixt man and man;
There was said many a foolish thing—
Yea, some of us indeed began

Within our sheaths to loose the swords,
Until the Captain cried at last,
"O fellows, you have heard my words,
Nor do I bid you on this cast

To venture all but if your hearts
Are firm thereon as mine today,
Then let those go who for their parts
Would still live on in their old way."

Then with his sword he drew a line
Deep in the sand and said, "Fellows,
Whoso from henceforth will be mine
To sail in seas no shipman knows."

Two hundred of us followed him—
The Captain said: "Good fellows mine,
Sell me two ships for these my men
And for our gold and cloth your wine,

Stockfish and salt-meat; and farewell,
God prosper all things to your hand."
"Which," said they, "would you have us sell?"
"The Fighting Man and Rose Garland,"

Said he. So all was straightway done,
And each man happy thought himself
As we went westward with the sun
And they sailed eastward with their pelf.

Alas! we left that merry shore,
And never to come back again,
And never see our own folk more,
And suffer many and many a pain.

The Wan-
derers

The Ships
splitting
(big)

FOR twenty days we sailed away,
Due west past many lands we knew,
Till at the last before us lay
Stretched out, the landless sea and blue.

Still west we went, till the north-wind
Came on us, amid clouds and rain;
And so no longer could we find
Our true course, therefore were we fain

To strike sail, as we drove before
The wind that yet kept rising till
We thought we ne'er should see the shore
In life again, for good or ill.

* Edward on
his galley at
Sluse (big)

* It will be noticed that this incident does not occur in the poem here, though it is referred to later on. It was evidently to be added on revision, and is happily preserved in the published Prologue.

The Wan-
derers

Till as it happed the great wind fell
Even at its highest, and that past
We rode becalmed, and in the swell
Dipping our yard-arms; then at last

We saw stars, and as the wind
Rose light and fair, we steered north-west:
Then was the weather sweet and kind
As unto sailors at the best.

So passed ten days and it grew warm,
And warmer ever as we sailed;
And no man yet had come to harm
Spite of the storm. Now the wind failed

One evening just as the night fell,
And rose again about midnight,
And blew till morning fair and well,
Then saw we land as it grew light.

A long green coast dipped in the sea,
A wall of trees behind there was,
Under our ship's sides certainly
Clear showed the water green as glass.

Ah, how we sang and shouted then!
Never before such joy we had,
We were the happiest of all men,
Never again could we be sad.

Most grievous of all times is this
For wretches to remember now,
We thought then, Here begins our bliss—
Alas! for then began sorrow:

For ever as we coasted there
The fair young folk we looked to see
Our fellow dreamed of, and the fair
Long yellow beach and white city:

But we saw nought but trees and grass
And thereupon wild things playing
Around the sea as green as glass
And fish with many a scarlet ring.

Then doubting drew we near to land
With fainter hearts than heretofore;
With iron chain and hempen band
We made the ships fast to the shore.

Then said the Captain: "Good fellows,
This is a right fair land to see,
Deep grass, sweet streams and trees in rows,
And birds singing in every tree.

And yet no sign of man there is;
How good the sweet land of my dream
Must be, when such a land as this
Is left untilled of any team,

Without a man or house thereon!"
"Yet inland, Captain, let us go
And seek thereafter," called out one,
"And sail at last if it be so

There are no folk. A grievous thing
It would be to sail back again
A year hence for this land seeking;
And well it might be then in vain."

Yea, said we all, so it shall be,
And chose by lot nine of our men,
And sent them out by three and three
Well armed and victualled; said we then:

"A month here do we wait for you
Then sail away whate'er betide,
But that ye light on something new."
This done we built our camp beside

The Wan-
derers

That warm sea, and there many a day
We swam among the purple fish
And sported there in every way
That any man could think or wish.

Or in the woods went wandering
And lay beneath outlandish trees,
Heard strange new birds new carols sing
And thought of coming voyages.

Moreover there we held great feasts
Because the place was furnished well
With deer and goats and such like beasts
Whereof full many a head there fell;

Thereof also we made good store
Of salt meat for our voyages.
So passed the month along the shore
Nor saw we ought of those same threes.

Until one day, the time being past
We hauled the ships down to the sea
And broke the camp up, then at last
Three men came running hastily.

Far had they gone, but nothing seen
But trees and meadows fair enough,
And such beasts as with us had been.
No lion or bear, and nothing rough,

Hurtful or evil did they see,
Nothing but still the quiet land,
But of all fruits right great plenty
Whereof they carried some in hand.

A great river they came unto
And went along its bank, until
On the fifth day they saw it go
Into a cavern in a hill

With a great roar, as well might be.
Then up that hill they clomb and thence
Looked landward but did nothing see
But trees and meads until a fence

Of mountains rose against the sky.
They went thereto for three days more.
Then clomb the mountains easily;
Thence seaward could they see the shore,

Landward a fairer place than all
They yet had seen, a fair green plain
With trees and streams, yet like a wall
Far off the mountains rose again.

Therefore they crossed the plain, but when
They reached the top of this third range,
And saw no signs of any men
And saw the land with little change

Spread out beneath them as before,
They thought it good to turn straightway
Back to the ships. So to the shore
They came upon the thirtieth day.

“Fellows,” they said, “the land is good,
Nor is there anything to fear.
We are the first that have spilled blood
Even of beasts; none dwelleth here.”

But as they spoke a certain one
Came towards us between bush and bush
Out from the forest to the sun,
Holding a basket made of rush.

Thereto his hair was white as snow
And bent he walked as if with pain,
Yet as he neared us, did we know
Our fellow John the Long again

The Wan-
derers

Who went from us both young and fair
And merry-hearted, a stout man,
Broad-shouldered and with yellow hair:
Half-dead he stood there bent and wan.

We pressed around him, but he said
No word, but stooping opened wide
The rushen basket, then as dead
Our hearts grew, when we saw inside

The heads of our two fellows lie
Bloody and cut off at the neck;
Then straight some cried out angrily
To have him forthwith to the deck

Of the chief ship and judge him there;
Some clashed their axes o'er his head;
But then beholding his white hair
And that he stood like one long dead,

Upright, but looking at nothing,
Their clamour died out suddenly.
For in our ears the words did ring
The priest spoke, of the isles that lie

Outside the world where devils be.
We thought, our fellows have been slain
And damned perchance most piteously,
And this one has been raised again

And sent to frighten us to death—
And little of that did it fail:
We stood scarce daring to draw breath
Or look around us, while the sail

Kept flapping in the rising wind,
And the noon sun was shining fair,
Till this thought came into my mind,
What if the night should find us here?

Then gasping to the ship I ran
And straight the others followed me
As sheep their leader, till no man
Was on the shore but only he.

No heed at all he seemed to take
As we the hawsers cut, and as
Some way the ships began to make
Leaving that land of trees and grass

Inhabited by fiends of Hell;
Nor did we ever after know
What things the other three befell
That erewhile with the rest did go.

Three days we sailed that land along
Ever with hearts right sore afraid
Till from the land the wind blew strong
And so the open sea we made.

This was the first day of those days
When we were sorry we had come
Far off from the green land-locked bays
And white-wood houses of our home.

But whitherward now should we steer,
What star should lead us now thereto?
Yea though our hearts should die with fear
No way but onward could we go.

Yea call it onward if you will:
Whereto the wind blew there went we,
There was no use for strength or skill,
We were as boys blown out to sea.

WESTWARD so far as we could tell
With a fair wind twelve days we sailed,
And nothing evil us befell;
Till as before the sea-breeze failed

The Wan-
derers

At night-fall, therefore watch and ward
We kept with little sleep that night;
The low land, covered with green sward
We saw at the first streak of light.

Above, the tall trees as before,
And all about, the goats and deer
Playing together on the shore—
Masters, then sunk our hearts with fear.

To leave that evil land behind
Twelve days to sail upon the sea
Before the merry Eastern wind
And still in the same place to be

As to our eyes it verily seemed:
Almost we thought to see laid there
Our fellow's body—had we dreamed
At sight of that still land so fair

Those evil things that there befell,
Or was there such another place
Inhabited by fiends from Hell
And otherwise in goodly case?

Now as the wind blew on the land
A furlong from the land we rode,
An anchor out on either hand;
And many an evil we forbode.

This happed: about the dead of night
The watch gave warning, and we all
Looked landward, and saw many a light
Pass to and fro, and therewithal

Strange cries we heard come from the shore,
And still the lights came one by one,
And kept increasing more and more
Until the rising of the sun.

But in the twilight we saw there
A multitude of moving things
Black on the green shore: many a prayer
We muttered hearing their cryings.

We said, we sought for Heaven on earth
But now at last have come to Hell;
These things that make such sort of mirth
With these for ever shall we dwell.

Alas the merry merchant-town,
Alas the farms at home, we said,
The crossed tombs on the grassy down
Around the church when we [] dead.

But now hereafter shall they say
To those that in our houses dwell,
Forgetting God they sailed away
And drove into the mouth of Hell.

Yet God was good to us, fair Sirs;
As day-light spread we looked to see
Uncertain forms of great monsters,
And soon within their grip to be;

Nevertheless as the day rose
With fainting hearts we armed us clean
And saw the faces of our foes,
Such folk as we had often seen;

Black men such as our people bring
With ivory and spices rare,
When southward they go sea-roving,
Or like the Greek kings' eunuchs are.

They offered battle by their guise,
As crowding on the grassy strand
They hailed us with outlandish cries
And shook their weapons in their hand.

The Wan-
derers

Right ugly staves they had with them
Set round with many a spiky bone,
Skin coats with gaudy painted hem,
And axes evil made of stone.

And bows they had but weak enough,
They had no raiment of defence
But furry skins, and targets rough;
They had no boat to come from thence.

Therefore our hearts again grew light
And little heeded we their noise,
But that it stirred in us forthright
Remembrance of old battle joys.

And loud the Captain shouted: "Sirs
Here is a good game to your hand!
Ye are no merchant mariners
To buy and sell from land to land.

Up anchors, man the oars forthright,
Get ready axes to the hand;
Blow horns, for we shall hear ere night
New tidings of our promised Land!"

Joyous our hearts grew and merry;
We cried our cries, while overhead
Out went the banner suddenly,
And down the wind went long and red.

Out ran the forty oars like one,
While from the stern the minstrel men
Struck up *The King of England's Son*.
Forgotten were our troubles then,

As towards the shore we drove, singing,
Amid the stones and sharp arrows—
We counted that a little thing,
So fain we were to come to blows.

There in their midst ashore we leapt,
And great and grim the slaughter was,
In their skin coats their bodies kept,
The great stone axes broke like glass.

There on the shore in heap on heap
They fell upon the trodden grass,
Or from the beach they fled like sheep
By such wild ways as they might pass,

And these we followed after straight,
But left behind some fifty there,
To guard our passage, if ill fate
Betid, for still we feared a snare.

But nought within the woods that day
We saw but dying men and dead,
They had no rede, but, get away,
These strangers may not be bested.

So on we pressed till at noontide
We came unto a clearer space
Where stood their town, and therebeside
A little river ran apace.

A poor place built of reeds and wood
And no man there to make defence;
Ajar the gates of wattle stood,
Both men and women had gone thence.

Natheless their beasts were left behind,
And, namely, pigs and beasts like goats
But bigger far than are our kind;
And geese swam all about their moats.

But iron or silver, brass or gold
Nor any metal, found we there,
But stout staves certain flints did hold
Brought to a sharp edge and a fair.

The Wan-
derers

And nothing woven there we found
For all their raiment was of skin,
And pots but neither glazed or round
We saw with evil drink therein.

And in the midst we saw a hall
Wherein their filthy God they keep,
Who had on him, for royal pall,
The skins of some beast like a sheep,

Set round with many a coloured shell.
So there our helmets we did off,
And on their swine we feasted well
Then burnt their God with jeer and scoff.

Thereafter all the place we burned,
Then got together some poor spoil,
And back toward our ships returned
At undern. Now with care and toil

Had we come through the woods before;
Much more we laboured coming back,
Driving our cattle us before;
Nought was it now but hew and hack

And stumble; till the night-fall came
And found us still deep in the woods
Forewearied with our arms, foot-lame,
And scattered shepherding our goods.

Therefore we made a barrier,
Wherein we laid us down to sleep
And wait; nor had we any fear
Of miscreants and such Devil's sheep.

But in the dead of night I woke,
And heard a sharp and bitter cry,
And there saw, struck with a great stroke,
Lie dead, Sir John of Hederby.

We armed us with what speed we might,
As thick and fast the arrows came,
Nor did we any more lack light,
For all the woods were red with flame.

Straight we set forward valiantly
While all about the blacks lay hid,
Who never spared to yell and cry—
A woful night to us befell.

For some within the fire fell,
And some with shafts were smitten dead,
Neither could any see right well
Which side to guard, nor by my head

Did we strike stroke at all that night,
For ever onward as we drew
So drew they back from out our sight;
Thus we went on as men might do

In evil dreams, until we felt
The sea-breeze push the smoke away,
And of the sea the savour smelt
Sweeter than roses by my fay!

Now when we were all met, some bade
To turn again and smite these thieves,
Yet were the more part now afraid
Nor list to die like shrivelled leaves.

Soon we should all be more than kings,
Nor was there anything to gain
From these but hogs and such-like things,
And folly was it to be slain

Upon the eve of Paradise.
Therefore we put again to sea
Leaving a land that might entice
More wary travellers than we.

The Wan-
derers

Ships sailing
(small)

We coasted by cape after cape
Until the wind blew easterly,
Then due west we our course did shape,
Withal was but a gentle sea.

Our hearts upon the end were set
As fair we sailed before the wind,
All things behind did we forget
In sweet hope happy life to find.

The third day came Sir Nicholas,
Our Captain, to the Rose Garland.
And coming up to where I was,
Spoke to me, holding up his hand:

“Sir Rafe, I deem you wise and true
Nor given unto babbling words,
Which spoken we may not undo
And make worse wounds than grinded swords.

Now I am heavy in my heart,
And all my hope is fallen to nought,
Fain would I you should have a part
Of this my burden: I am brought

Night after night in lifelike dreams
To that land where we wish to go;
Alas none ever happy seems
Of all the folk I meet there now.

And tombs are in the fair church set,
No man adores the Goddesses,
The palace steps with blood are wet,
And weeds grow up between the trees.

Last night I saw my father there,
My mother whom I left alive
In Norway, and my daughter fair,
No one of them did seem to thrive.

At last this question came from me,
That long unto my tongue did cling:
'Do folk die here?' Then piteously
They answered me with sore weeping.

'Alas! fair son,' my father said,
'None comes to this unhappy place
Unless for ever they are dead;'
And therewith he lift up his face.

O, well do I remember, Rafe,
My father, when from sea we came,
And thought to see our homestead safe,
And saw, instead, its last thin flame

Die out above my dead mother;
His face was not so wretched then
As that the shade did show me there—
O, Rafe, we are but ruined men!

A dream has sent us on this quest,
And certain half-forgotten tales:
To live for ever is the best
That haps to us; but if all fails

What is the worst of all?" Said I,
"It is well seen, friend, by my head,
We shall find some good way to die;
Then are we, as our fathers, dead,

Who fell upon the English shore,
Or sunk below the sandy Seine,
Or back from Russia came no more,
Or got no mercy from the Dane.

Yea, also, ere we come to this
Doubt not that we shall find some way
To pass our life in worldly bliss
In some sweet isle with game and play.

The Wan-
derers

And shall we now curse God and die
If following some minstrels' dream,
As boys a painted butterfly,
We find it lead us down the stream

Of circumstance, to a strange life
Wherein more wonders we shall see
Than if we lived at home in strife
Thirty men's lives, as men now be?

I say a dream has brought us here,
Let us now go where it may lead,
For no dream shall we ever steer
Back eastward, Captain, by my rede.

Yea, are we now as like to find
This very Earthly Paradise,
As any land I bear in mind.
Needs must we on in any wise—

Or will the wind that ever blew
From some point east, as we came here,
Be unto us so leal and true
As back at our command to steer?"

"I would the wind would rise," said he,
"And blow us to some Christian shore
Through howsoever wild a sea,
Thence would I never wander more.

There should we find some fair abbey
Where long in penance should I dwell
And ever to the great God pray,
And say my psalter fair and well.

For now have we sinned Adam's sin,
To make us Gods who are but men,
To find a heaven and dwell therein
Whose years are but three score and ten.

Yea, almost are we fain to have
Such Gods as we ourselves have made,
For if they be not strong to save
Of them is no man much afraid.

This is the thing I fear therefore,
That we our journey end too well,
And reach the much desired shore,
And without dying come to Hell.

I pray rather that God may stay
Our ship in the mid-ocean now,
Until our flesh fall all away;
Or else that some great wind may blow,

And drive us underneath the sea—
There shall [] do what seemeth best
Unto our bodies, that shall be
Until the Day of Doom at rest.”

Now even as he spake to me,
Dead fell the wind, the sails did flap,
And all our way stopped suddenly,
Just as he wished that it might hap.

Thereat a terror seized my heart
He was foredoomed: and I was wise
And wished a long life for my part
Should we fail of our paradise

With joyous tilts and ladies' love,
Fair things, and flower-crowned revelry:
And were we never hence to move,
God's martyrs in the middle sea.

The Captain looked up in my face
Amazed and blank, then slunk away
And went about from place to place
Nor spoke to me again that day.

The Wan-
derers

The next day twice he passed me by
Then turned, and said, "My words were nought:
Why do you look so bitterly
As if some evil I had wrought?"

This is a calm such as might chance
In any sea that you could find."
Yet here withal he looked askance
Eastward, as though he prayed for wind.

I said, "They say that God hears prayer,
And, by the Saints I deem it true;
You asked a small thing, and a fair:
Suppose that God has given it you.

To die in war, when all is said,
You and your fellows, this you asked:
God is a great God, by my head,
And is not lightly overtaken.

Pray again, Captain, as before
And we shall see that abbey fair
Clean standing on some grassy shore;
And well I wish that I was there.

O for another draught of life
I would endure their lazy hum
And snatch some flower from their strife—
Cucullus non facit monachum."

He said no more but slouched his hat
And went, and soon I heard him sing,
And saw his flushed face, as he sat
With our fellows, carolling.

Within a while they sang no more,
For many a day we hung there still,
And want of water grieved us sore,
To eat our meat we had no will.

And now Sir Nicholas sat silent,
Although his lips were still moving,
So that men deemed a spell he meant
To call up some unholy thing.

Thus lay we till the twentieth night,
Which was with moon and clear enow,
The Fighting Man lay in our sight
Some half a furlong from our bow.

Between her masts in the moonlight
We saw a small black cloud arise;
We were as joyous at that sight
As we had found our paradise.

Straightway the Captain cried aloud,
"Man oars and sails! here cometh wind!"
But so increased on us that cloud,
His words we had no time to mind,

When no man now could see his hand,
And the green seas rolling in;
Then neither had we place to stand,
And but if one some hope could win

Straight were his troubles at an end.
In rags the sails went, weak and strong,
The masts like withy twigs did bend
And through the dark we went headlong.

At night we drove before the gale,
And fain we were, that tide, of light;
The leaden day came dull and pale
And little clearer than the night.

Four days the Rose Garland was cast
From hill to hill of inky sea,
And then the wind gave out at last
And from the west blew easily.

The Wan-
derers

And we, storm-tossed and battered men,
Could count our losses, who were now
But threescore rusty folk, and ten,
Who were two hundred, brave enow

Of gold and silver—What betid
That night unto the Fighting Man
From us for ever will be hid;
The dying moon with mist was wan,

Across that light we saw her men
Run hurrying to sail and oar,
We saw her sails flap downward; when
The dark came and we saw no more.

A ship sail-
ing (small)

WE came unto another land
With gentle winds in two days more;
But all unlike the fair green strand,
This was a brown and dreadful shore.

Natheless of water were we fain
So sent some twenty fellows tall
To fetch it at whatever pain
And what flesh they might meet withal.

Of flesh indeed we had some store
So cared the less: in half a day
Back came our hunters to the shore,
Two less than they had gone away.

Water they had with them enow,
For flesh two lions dead they bore
Smitten with many a stab and blow,
And somewhere had the fight been sore

For many of our folk were torn:
Thus said they, that the land was bad,
Never was land so foul, forlorn
And crossed and evil, dull and sad,

Until a small vale fair and green
Betwixt two rugged hills they found,
As fair a place as man has seen
Where streams and wells did much abound,

Set all about with orange trees
And heavy-hung pomegranates fair;
They shouted, setting eyes on these,
And made haste to be quickly there.

But as they stooped by the full brook
And drank great draughts upon their knees,
Or down from off the fair trees shook
Pomegranates, and great oranges,

Lions set on them, two were slain
At unawares, and many a wound
The others had, but with great pain
They slew two, chased the rest, and bound

The slain beasts upon boughs. This tale
Set all of us afire to go
And see this dangerous and fair vale
And slay the beasts that plagued it so.

We chose a twenty men to stay
And guard the ship, that now lay hid
Under a ness; then went away
All armed; and strange things straight betid.

For as we came just at the head
Of that rough pass that reached the place,
The foremost man stopped short and said,
Turning on us a mazed face,

The Wan-
derers

“Hold! hold! for many well-armed men
Be in the valley, by God’s blood!”
Softly enough we crawled on then
Unto a rock near where we stood,

Priests, bull,
ladies, sol-
diers (big)

Behind which many a man might hide.
Then through the valley in our sight
Five hundred soldiers straight did ride,
All featly armed in armour bright,

Not loathly black men, by my head,
But white and fair as men might be;
And soon two ways they opened
And then a new thing did we see.

There in the midst of carven stone
An altar, built in ancient wise,
A white bull that did stamp and moan,
And two priests dight for sacrifice;

Behind ten damsels who were clad
More richly than the tongue can say,
Gold crowns upon their heads they had,
Gold copes their kirtles overlay.

So delicate their beauty was
With open mouths we lay and stared;
But with a frown Sir Nicholas
His trenchant shining sword half bared,

Muttering, “Some Moloch’s sacrificel”
But I thought, well with one of these
Could I make me a paradise
Among these flowers and sweet trees.

Natheless their eyes were full of woe,
And heavily they hung the head;
So that I deemed it might be so
Even as Sir Nicholas had said.

Now did the priests move presently
And slew the white bull where he stood,
And on the people standing by
Threw up in showers the dark red blood.

Then came the maidens up, and cast
White lilies on the altar stone,
Then to the other side they passed,
Towards us and there stood alone

And seemed half-fainting with some grief
But none said ought; and then there came
An armed man crowned with oaken leaf,
And underneath the bull set flame

When on the altar it was laid,
Then as the flames shot up on high
Outlandish horns and trumpets made
A strange and solemn melody.

And this being done, there came again
The priests to where the maids did stand,
And seemed in words we heard not plain
To give to them some straight command

The meaning whereof soon we knew,
For forthwith all their golden crowns
And gold copes on the ground they threw,
Then set their fair hands to their gowns,

Then on the green grass piteously
The silken garments down did rain,
The soft smocks slipped from breast and thigh
They never now should hide again.

And if for shame and sore trembling
A little while a damsel stayed
The priest cried out at that fair thing
Till mother-naked she was made.

The Wan-
derers

So mid their raiment there a space
Naked they stood nor word did say,
Nor of those men asked any grace
Knowing full well the bitter play

That should be played: for thither drew
The priest and with cold sour face
Set them in order two and two
And moved them slowly from that place.

Led by the priests and minstrelsy
To a huge rock they came at last,
Over against where we did lie.
Then to each side the minstrels passed

Adown the vale, and the wind sent
This way and that their golden hair
About their bodies as they went
With fainting feet through flowers fair.

And then came forth four sturdy men
With brazen chains that foot and hand
They did upon the damsels ten;
And when so bound they all did stand

Unto the rock they made them fast.
And when we saw them side by side
Wailing and naked, then at last
Scarce in our place could we abide.

But Nicholas said: "Bide, fair fellows,
And see some further felony
Before we come to handy blows
And die like men if needs must be.

For this I think to be their case,
And with the thought is my soul sick,
That chaining them in this wild place
They leave them to be eaten quick

Of those same beasts that fell on you.
Now if things be thus as I say,
Since they are many we are few;
Bide here until they go away,

The Wan-
derers

Which needs they must ere the beasts come—
Small help shall we be being rash!"
Straightway we heard the burr and hum
Of their great horns and cymbals' clash,

That drowned the poor lost maids' wailing.
Then turned the felons hastily,
And got them gone with horns sounding
From out the vale; yet abode we

Behind the rock, lest, to our cost
Some one might turn upon his tracks
To seek some thing he might have lost,
And bring the others on our backs.

But as we waited, with dull roar
We saw steal forth a yellow beast,
And then another, then three more,
Then many flocked toward the feast.

Ladies
chained to
rock, lions
coming (big)

Judge if we griped the sword hilt then
Or of the axe the plated haft,
Or if those few that were bowmen
Drew to the head of the long shaft.

And out we broke with a great shout,
And ran toward the rock with speed;
There did we ring those maids about,
And unto our defence took heed.

And soothly there was a grim fight,
So many were the beasts and fell
That we had liefer men of might
Had been before us; truth to tell

The Wan-
derers

Here was no talk of ransoming,
The fallen man to shreds was rent.
There happed full many a grievous thing,
But in the end the beasts were shent,

And all were slain; yet did they tear
Ten of our folk, so stout they fought.
Fain were they of the feast so fair
The felons for their maws had brought.

Then from the rock all tenderly
We loosed those ladies; and full oft
Deliciously our hearts beat high
At touching the round limbs so soft,

The dainty hands and naked feet.
Long was it doing, but at last
An end it had; then as was meet
We brought them all the raiment cast

Down by the altar: and all mazed
They decked themselves in these again,
And in their country tongue they praised,
Or so we deemed, our care and pain.

Then said one, "This is the Greek tongue
That erst at Micklegarth I heard
By the Greek king when I was young,
Yet lacks it something, by my beard."

Then by our fellow that knew Greek
We bade them have no fear at all,
For we their proper land would seek,
Being masters of a dromond tall.

Thereto they said, that in short space
Their country folk would thither come
To take their crushed bones from that place
And bury them with tears at home;

That overland their country lay,
Our dromond was no skill therefore;
But prayed us with them still to stay
And with them leave this cursed shore.

“At home ye shall be kings,” they said,
“When that they know your noble deed
And nothing, by Diana’s Head,
Shall be denied that ye may need.”

Then did we ask them whence they came,
And how they were in such a case,
And if their country was of fame,
And if they were of Grecian race.

“Sirs, of the Ladies’ Land we be,”
They said, “and such-like are our folk
That ladies there have sovereignty
And men be underneath the yoke.

Now of the race whereof ye speak,
Our country was of noble fame,
Yet know we not this word of ‘Greek’
And have not even heard the name.

Needs must we say our country ‘was,’
For now are we in servage base,
Being but poor conquered folk, alas!
Therefore are we in evil case:

For now this tribute must we pay
Each year unto the Emperor,
Ten maids of us these beasts must slay
In honour of his ancestor

Who was a God called Hercules:
Yea, Sirs, and even now we fear
His wrath not lightly to appease
When of this slaughter he shall hear.”

**The Wan-
derers**

“Have no fear, fair maidens,” we said,
“We do not greatly doubt his might,
And for his God, now is he dead,
And hidden up from all men’s sight.

And some of us have fought in France
And some in wild Prussia have been,
And some in Spain have led the dance
And unafraid Greek fire seen.

Yea, and to some isle will we flee,
And there our bodies from him hide,
And live long lives there, if so be
That ours should prove the weaker side.”

Now as we talked together thus
We heard a great horn sound afar,
With a long wail and piteous,
And blown unlike a point of war.

And then we saw where came riding
Folk all in black but armed nobly,
A sad song did their trumpets sing
And ever went they heavily.

Procession of
other ladies
with banner
(big)

Over their heads a great banner,
Wherein was painted royally
Diana, with her snooded hair
And fair legs naked to the knee.

And in the midst a great black bier
All wrought about with cypress trees,
And ever as they drew anear
We saw that they were all ladies.

Now when they saw us, still they stood
Amazed, a while, then spurred forward,
And leaping down amid the blood
Of men and beasts upon the sward,

Caught up in arms those maidens fair
Weeping aloud, and kissed them oft
Upon the lips and yellow hair,
Or nestled in their bosoms soft.

The Wan-
derers

Then in a while they turned to us
And, seeing the dead men who lay
All rent and torn, and piteous,
They said, "We thought to take away

Some little bones of poor damsels:
Therefore at home a tomb there is
Well built mid trees and sounding wells,
Unto your dead men we give this.

And unto you that be alive
Will we give whatsoe'er you ask,
And evermore, Sirs, will we strive
To be your handmaidens; no task

Shall be too much for our good will.
Now come with us to our country
For soothly would we gaze our fill
On such men, if no Gods ye be."

"We have some fair fellows," we said,
"Left in our ship, these would we bring
And other matters—By God's Head
There have we many a full fair thing

May be to you all strange and new."
Thus said we, and went all away
Toward the ship, except a few
Who with the ladies there did stay.

There when we met our fellows, we
From out the ship did quickly take
What we could carry easily
And chiefly for the ladies' sake.

The Wan-
derers

As for ourselves, we thought that there
Of nothing would there be a lack,
So needed nought but some poor fare
And the good armour on the back.

There did we leave the Rose Garland:
God wot if she were borne away
A fair spoil to some heathen land
Or slowly rotted where she lay!

All riding
away to-
gether (big)

SO when we were all met again
The dead men on the bier we laid
And crossed the desert with much pain,
Nor were we any more afraid

Of any thing that we might meet,
Being now a goodly company
All armed, for every maiden sweet
Rode girt with sword about the thigh.

The land was desolate and rough,
And waterless till the fourth day,
Then came a green plain fair enough
Where many a head of neat did play.

For two days more we travelled on
And rich and fair the land was still.
The third at early morn we won
The top of a round-headed hill.

The ladies'
town (big)

Then showed the ladies how their town
Lay in the valley, and thereby
A river toward the sea ran down,
Where many a keel we did espy.

Thence did we send a messenger,
One of the ladies from that place,
Off to their Queen upon the spur
To show her lightly all the case.

The Wanderers

And as we drew anigh thereto
The folk came thronging thick and fast
Or out upon the walls they drew,
Until through the great gate we passed.

Great was the town and built nobly
And all with black was hung about,
Which down they tore as we went by
And hung rich golden carpets out.

Inside with
people riding
(big)

Soon to a mighty hall we came,
And there upon a throne of gold
In gold raiment, a noble dame
Ancient and grey we did behold.

The Queen,
old, by her-
self (small)

Then on their knees the ladies fell,
And fain we would have done the same
And shown her reverence full well;
But down from off her throne she came

And took us by the hands and said:
"Which is your Lord, that I may give
My crown to him from off my head,
And make him king while he shall live?"

And you, Sirs, ask for heaps of gold
And lands and houses; do not fear
In any thing to be too bold."
Now when this saying I did hear,

And saw our knights with wild eyes stare
Upon those maids fit to entice
A wise man into foolish ways,
I thought, here ends our Paradise.

The Wan-
derers

Then spoke Sir Nicholas and said,
“O Queen, it seemeth unto me
I ask a great thing, by my head!
The body of my sweet lady.”

Therewith the leader of the band
That came that day into the vale
Did he lead forward by the hand;
And she by turns both red and pale

Her head upon his shoulder leant;
And of the other maidens, some
Blushing, their dear eyes downward bent;
While from our knights there rose a hum,

And some stood all pale and upright
Looking aloof with troubled eyes—
Sirs, there can be no fairer sight
In any hall of Paradise.

Then did the Queen laugh out and say,
“O Sir, your boon seems small enow,
To ancient folk like me and grey.
Have here the crown upon your brow:

And no light thing therewith ye have
For ye shall lead us in the war
And from our foes this city save,
Many and grievous as they are.”

Then answered Nicholas again,
“O Queen, ye make too much of this:
We were well paid for all our pain
With no more guerdon than a kiss.

But if of us ye please to make
Your knights and soldiers, will we then
Do noble battle for your sake;
For neither are we borel men:

From Harald Fair-Hair am I sprung
And thence from Odin in right line,
Who was a God, as skalds have sung.
Ye see this jewelled collar shine

About my armour; this to me
The King of England with his hand
Did give, upon his own galley
By Sluse hard by the Flemish Land.

And these are knights and gentlemen
Who know no fear, well skilled in war
And each a worthy match for ten
Of such folk as your foemen are.

With these men and your country-folk
Will we well guard this fair walled town
And you from this felon's yoke;
But never will I wear your crown

For of your law I know not ought,
And you are old and ripe in wit;
On many a hard thing have you thought
And have been used long time to sit,

Judging the people day by day."
"Sir," said the Queen, "so be it then,
Yet am I bondwoman alway
To you and to your noble men.

And, for your ancestor Odin
A noble temple shall he have
With a gold altar set therein
Which many a skillful man shall grave."

"Lady," he said, "by no dead man
Were we brought to the lions' jaws,
Through many waters wild and wan:
I rede you know our holy laws,

The Wan-
derers

And learn to know the Trinity
The Mother of God and All Hallows;
And leave your false Gods." Silently
She stood and listened with bent brows,

While our mass-priest took up the word
And showed her much about her faith,
And many things about the Lord,
And what the holy Gospel saith.

At last she said, "Sir Holy Man
Too many things at once ye show;
I will believe all that I can:
But pray you cease for a while now.

Truly it makes the senses reel
To hear all this so suddenly—
The Gods we sought in woe and weal
Devils, or else a painted lie.

And many things must we believe,
That now for the first time we know
And from you by mere chance receive,
Or lie in endless fiery woe.

Sirs, ye are noble, and we think
Ye would not bid us trust a lie,
Or from a muddied river drink.
Your God has served you faithfully,

So in some fountain wash away,
If so ye will, our forebear's sin
Who stole the apple as ye say;
Faith an ill deed he did therein.

And that good Lord of whom ye tell,
Who all his life did nought but good,
And loved the people passing well;
And whom, upon a cross of wood,

For his reward they foully hung—
Would God I had been there that day!
Another song ye might have sung,
Your faith been turned another way.

The Wan-
derers

Now for a while let these things be—
And for the rest, I dare well say
That who will choose as foolishly
As your chief, none will say him nay.

And therewithal, Sirs, will we give
Some house and goods and needful weed
To each; that while with us ye live
Such common things ye may not need.”

Then from the presence did we go;
And over my shoulder as we went
I looked full oft that I might know
If my maid's eyes were on me bent.

But she held ever down her head
Toward the ground and smiled gently,
Moving her lips as if she said
Some little ballad inwardly.

Then to a chamber did we come
Where, being unarmed, on us they did
Such gowns as there were none in Rome
Ere of the Cæsars they were rid.

Then came we to another hall
Spread for a feast, and hung around
With histories, where ladies tall
In strife with men full many a wound

Both gave and took: and there we met
Unarmed and gay the maidens sweet,
With gems in their white bosoms set,
And naked arms, and gold-shod feet.

Feast (big)

The Wan-
derers

Not half so sweet the west wind smells
That blows in spring through the may-bush;
Sweeter their voice than he that tells
The coming summer, or the thrush;

Or Philomela that bewails
The wrongs of many hundred years,
And fills our hearts with speechless tales,
Our ears with sweet and causeless tears.

Softly they bid us to the feast
Which was full noble, and withal
Was many a pageant and strange beast
Brought for our pleasure through the hall.

There saw we how that Theseus slew
The Beast, by help of a poor may,
To whom not long abode he true;
There saw we the Knight Perseus slay

The evil thing by the sea-side;
There was the noble story told
Of those good knights that wandered wide
With Jason for the Fleece of Gold.

Thereafter all the feast being done
We wandered in a garden green;
And I for my part went alone
With her that was my joy and Queen.

Sweet follies there we said and did,
I list not tell now, being old:
Only I know, her face half-hid
Among her rippled hair of gold,

She burst out singing suddenly
While I was telling of our quest
And of the land we thought to see
In some far ocean of the west.

SONG

The Wan-
derers

O LOVE whither do you go
Spear in hand and belted so?

I go to win a crown, my love,
To put your golden hair above,
I go to fight and travail sore
That you may cling to me the more.

Two lovers
in garden
(big)

I will wear a crown of green
With red roses set between,
If it be not rich enow
Then sweet kisses shall you sow
In between the flowers red
All about my golden head;
I will cling so hardily
You shall never go from me.

O my Love, soon goes the day,
O my Love, soon comes the night;
All my glory goes away,
Comes my hour of delight.

O GOD! how sweet the kisses were
Upon her lips and breast and brow
Amid the glory of her hair—
Ah folly, to remember now

When I am old and soon to die!
—Sirs, to my tale. So passed away
The golden days most happily
In many a quaint disport and play.

For there were tiltings with the spear,
Music in gardens and in halls,
And converse with our ladies dear,
And dancing between golden walls.

The Wan-
derers

And beautiful old tales were sung
By minstrels that were well beseen
On fair long wooden stages hung
With palaces, and gardens green.

Wedding
(big) and
ladies being
christened

And soon the maids were christened
With much pomp in the great church, then
Full richly were we fellows wed
And were the happiest of all men.

NOW amid all these pleasant days
Sir Nicholas went to and fro
Strengthening the city in all ways
Lest the Great King should come thereto.

In time indeed, for on a day
His herald to the city came
With a foul message by my fay,
Whose best word was but blood and flame:

That he would sow the place with salt,
And yoke young maidens to his plough,
And take such vengeance for their fault
That no grass any more should grow

In all the land: that those that fell
By the sharp sword should fare the best:
That when the scourge had torn them well
Fierce fire should burn up the rest.

But first a great drove would he drive
Unto his country, that his men
Might see them naked, and alive
Into the fire send them then.

That for the strangers who had come
By water, when their eyes were out,
By water would he send them home
With great stones tied their necks about.

Now we, when this thief we had heard,
Went nigh to slay him evilly;
But at the last his hair and beard
We shaved, and ugly devils three

Upon his tabard did we paint,
And sent him back, and by my head
Then was no time for us to faint,
For then were we as good as dead.

Now was it but a word and blow;
For the third day we saw the smoke
Of the burnt homesteads upward go
All round the City; and poor folk

Came hurrying in through all the gates,
Men, ancient folk, and maids weeping;
Then did we arm us with our mates,
And go to look upon the King.

Soon met we certain of his folk
Burning a village, and at first
We slew some hundred in the smoke,
And afterwards put to the worst

Another band more orderly;
And as they came on thicker then
We gat us back to the city,
Leaving but two of all our men.

And at our heels a rabble came,
At whom so well the archers shot
They scattered with no little shame,
And with our walls they meddled not:

The Wan-
derers

Whom straight, as afterwards we learned,
The Great King met as fast they fled,
And caused some of them to be burned,
Some to be scourged till they were dead.

Then soon with much folk, and great show,
And cymbals and great horns sounding,
There came one whom the maids did know
By his apparel for the King.

Who having sacrificed a bull
To some dead dog, gave straightly word
That they should take that city, full
Of living souls, and to the sword

Put all the men, and old women;
But take the younger ones alive,
And shut them, fettered, in a pen.
A fierce assault they then did give,

But nothing won but loss and harm.
So past the next day, and the next,
Nor any day without alarm.
And all day long their camp we vex

With arrows, quarrels, and big stones.
And oft they shot wild-fire forth
That burned the marrow and bones.
At last Sir Nicholas grew wrath

And swore to end the thing or die,
So the tenth night from a small gate
We issued out, we fellows only,
When moonless was the night and late.

Then to the King's tent did we go
And found him drunk amid his men
Who lay about him drunk also;
Then took we him with eight or ten

Of his chief lords and came away.
Great joy there was in the city
Thereof, as soon as it was day;
But from the camp arose a cry,

The Wan-
derers

And straight they trussed them to be gone;
Then did we open the gates wide
And set on them with sword and stone,
Arrow and spear, on every side.

Nor made they any great defence,
But ever, running here and there
Half armed, but hasted to get thence—
Fair grew the field flowers that year

Over the bones of those that came
To ravish, torture, and to slay,
To set the city on a flame
And lead the fairest maids away.

Now when from very weariness
The slaughter ceased, with bells ringing
Back went we, whom all folk did bless,
And out of hold we took the King

A triumph
(big)

Who when he saw his end was near
His helpless God he loud did curse,
And grovelling his beard did tear,
And ever grew from bad to worse;

Yea, scarce a man he seemed to be
When to the market-cross he came,
And trailing hung back heavily,
And let us drag him without shame.

There was his vile head smitten off;
And yet, because he was a king,
We slew him without any scoff,
Nor paid him back with torturing

The Wan-
derers

For his vile words; and his body
Under the earth with little show
We laid, but without villainy;
Being wishful to forget all now.

For no more evil could he do,
And he was come of noble kin
Who dwelt in Greece a while ago
And were great Lords and Knights therein.

Now he being dead, there came to us
Three ancient men to pray us peace,
And that for ransom plenteous
Their folk taken we would release.

And we thereto being nothing loth,
Took of them money and much good,
And caused them swear a solemn oath,
And swore ourselves upon the Rood.

So now that ended was this strife
Like Lords and Kings we dwelt at home
And long time lived a quiet life
Nor yet had any will to roam.

River of sand
lions with
wings
fiery well, ox
over hell
mouth
(small)

But of the marvels of the land
The Ladies showed us many things;
As of the river of fine sand,
The lions that had eagles' wings.

The Land of Darkness too they showed,
The bottomless and fiery well;
The great brass ox that ever lowed
Over the going down to Hell.

Two pic-
tures (big)
one in hall
one in gar-
den of joy-
ances

The time is short to tell of these,
And of the tiltings that we had,
The feasts and other joyances
Wherewith the Ladies made us glad.

IF here my tale could have an end,
O my masters, I might say now
Although our lives we well might mend
Yet were we happy men enow.

The Wan-
derers

Further afield my story goes
And drags us through most evil ways,
And woes past all our other woes;
Unbearable and heavy days.

For there we all lived happily
Until our youth was wholly gone
And wives and friends began to die:
Then on a day I walked alone,

And as I walked, there all about
The merry children at their play
Ran by, with many a joyous shout;
And there went singing many a may.

Thereby a house was built richly
Behind a garden walled with stone,
Therein upon the grass did lie
A fair maid singing all alone.

SONG

SHE

IN the white-flowered hawthorn brake,
Sweet, be merry for my sake;
Twine the flowers in my hair,
Kiss me where I am most fair,
Ah! kiss me, love, for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

Two lovers
with music
(big)

The Wan-
derers

HE

Love, hold back the golden hair,
That hides you where you are most fair,
Let me kiss the rose-tinged snow.
Ah! the time goes, fast or slow—
Kiss me, my sweet! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

SHE

Shall we weep for a dead day
Or set sorrow in our way?
Will you weep that the days wear,
Hidden in my golden hair?
Kiss me, my love, for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

HE

O Love, weep that the days flit
As on my neck I feel your breath
That I may then remember it
When I am old and near my death.
O kiss me, love, for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?

WHETHER with music, or the pain
Of moody thought touched to the quick,
I know not, but like summer rain
My tears upon the dust fell thick.

And far away my thoughts were brought
When I was but a boy at play,
Nor yet of life or death had thought,
But only on the coming day,

The great hall where the people ate,
The church half-hidden by the hill,
The pier, where in the evening late
The covered ship lay grim and still,

The Wan-
derers

The gold-coped singers in the quire,
My mother's hand upon my head,
The stories round the big yule-fire,
The snow upon the tower-lead,

The rough old vassals, cap in hand
Unto the Master of the House,
The steward with his silver wand,
The squires slim and amorous—

All rose before my swimming eyes
And still that maid sang loud and clear,
Like some lark in her extasies,
That half pierced to my muffled ear.

But from the house came suddenly
An old crone propped with crutches tied
With many a bandage; that with high
And shrill voice did the damsel chide.

Young lady
singing
Crone and
Rafe (small)

Till she arose and entered in:
She and her singing gone away,
My dreams fled as a saint flees sin,
And all the sunlight left the day.

Then on I went distraught, moody,
Doubtful, unhappy in my heart;
Counting the few years left to me
The fair things death would from me part.

In this mood came I to the quay,
Where lay the ships both great and small,
Some just at point to go away,
Some just letting the anchor fall.

The Wan-
derers

There did I find Sir Nicholas
Whose wife was dead now for this year;
Moody of countenance he was,
He saw me not as I drew near.

For at a ship he was gazing,
Whose folk were loosening her prow
From the great cable of the ring
That bound her to the shore: but now

Round at my touch he turned to me,
And for awhile along the quay
We walked together silently
Till I found heart at last to say:

“Do you remember the ill dream
You told me in the Rose Garland,
When evil did our voyage seem;
And that you wished a Christian land?”

Behold your wish has come to pass
For all this we have christened,
And for our quest, Sir Nicholas,
With right few words it had an end.

Yea on their banners now they bear
The Holy Mother of God’s Son
Rayed round with gold, instead of her
That loved of old Endymion.”

He said, “Our souls may now be safe
Where all folk worship the high God:
Yet sometimes do I wish, O Rafe,
That I were underneath the sod,

Thinking of her that had a part
In days that now are overpast—
Ah fool! ever to set my heart
On one who needs must die at last!

Yea, I remember that ill dream
And I remember too the first:
Now do all past days good days seem
When we are getting to the worst."

I said, "Like you do I regret
Overpast time; yet still I think
We might be happy even yet—
Yea, if we were upon the brink

Of death itself: for were we mad
When we left friends, goods and country
One day—such strong belief we had
In that fair place beyond the Sea.

Here is our life of little worth,
These few last years will soon be past;
And I am weary of the earth
With death for our reward at last.

Behold these ships all-boun for sea—
And what shall hinder us to go?
For here we have all sovereignty,
In nothing folk can say us no."

Then said he, "Rafe, I thought on this
A while ago, in very deed,
When ended was my earthly bliss,
And death seemed coming for our meed.

And even now, I sought this place
That I might think upon the sea,
And of the days when in short space
We thought in Paradise to be.

And now the time is short, I fear,
When we are gotten old and grey,
And this quest might take many a year,
And we may die off any day.

The Wan-
derers

Yet at all hazards will I go;
Therefore I pray thee our men find
And whether folk say yea or no,
If there be ten men of our mind,

Will we spend our last years in this."
Then merry grew my heart again,
For either should we come to bliss
Or at the worst have no more pain

Than death at last. I left him there
And with much trouble and fair words
Prevailed on twenty of our men
Who in that place were mighty lords,

Turn simple mariners again.
Then did we buy a ship with gold
And left that place with little pain;
For some were dead, and all were old

Of our first loves; their blood was chill
And little moaning did they make,
Though certainly none wished us ill
And we were sorry for their sake.

Ships going
people of
shore (big)

Though at our parting some did weep,
Remembering the green valley,
And how their bodies we did keep
Safe that day from the enemy,

By no constraint or bitter prayer
They held us: as we left the shore
We saw the folk pass here and there,
And all things went on as before.

WHEN first we left the river-mouth
Being wishful to get out to sea
We turned our vessel to the South
Although the wind was easterly.

But when we lost the land at last
We steered again toward the West,
As in the merry days now past
When ever we did hope the best.

Scarcely now had we hope or fear,
Although the savour of the sea
Pricked thoughts now dead for many a year.
But to fulfil our destiny

Was all our thought: yet none the less
Though we were old yet brisk we were,
And felt no pain or weariness,
As we slid through the water clear.

Now did we run before the wind
For many a day and still no land
Or good or evil could we find,
Or signs of it on any hand,

As short-winged birds or floating rack.
So when it reached the fortieth day,
Of food and drink we feared a lack
Though through the sea we made great way.

Therefore we ate right sparingly
And drank still less; yet passed withal
The tenth day, no land could we see
And sore famine on us did fall.

The next day, just at sunrising,
The watchman cried, "Land cometh now!"
Glad were we when a small white thing
We saw upon the weather bow.

Thither we steered, and at noontide
Began to draw anigh thereto,
And saw a city fair and wide
And looked to hear of something new.

The Wan-
derers
City from
the sea (big)

The white walls stood in the green sea,
The white foam fringed them all around;
By them the wind went noisily,
Nor heard we any other sound,

As hale and how of mariners
Or cries of men, or bells ringing
Or music when some great Lord stirs,
Or any such-like wonted thing.

And though the harbour was nigh full
Of fair new ships, yet alongside
The harbour-tower a rusty hull
Lay swinging in the rising tide.

The harbour-mouth was full narrow,
So as smooth water we did win
We well nigh brushed against the bow
Of this old ship that stood therein.

Now as we passed it, was I ware
Of Nicholas, who with face all wan
Cried out aloud, "O, Sirs, look there!
The image of the Fighting Man."

There on the prow the image stood,
Battered and ruined of its gold,
Yea, and beside, the carven rood
We knew there in the days of old.

And round about the gunwale ran
The lions of Sir Nicholas;
And underneath the Fighting Man
In copper letters beaten was,

"O Jesu Mercy." Now when we
By all these tokens knew her well,
What bitter stings of memory
Beset us, it were hard to tell.

What! were these thirty years a dream,
And we young still? I looked and there
My fellows stood, with many a seam
Upon their faces, and white hair

Was trickling down from every hood.
Take this for answer: we must die
Or win all, by the Holy Rood—
We must win all, and presently,

Or else before us death would go
And meet us at the Happy Place;
Yea, in the golden gate thereto,
We should but see his fearful face.

Where were our fellows, that we saw
The last time, ere the storm came on,
Just smitten by the gusty flaw?
Like us some shelter they had won

Doubtless, but had they left their quest
Like us, and in some pleasant isle
Forgotten death, and made the best
Of common life a little while?

Or were they slain as they sought life,
Or had they, by some happy fate,
Passed through turmoil and deadly strife
And reached at last the golden gate?

Then such ill thoughts went through my brain,
I cannot bring my tongue or lip
To tell you what they were again:
Pass it—Now no man touched the ship,

Until, as we went slowly past
I caught a grapnel up and ran
And threw it, thinking to hold fast
The bulwark of the Fighting Man;

The Wan-
derers

But when upon the rope I leant
The grapnel came home to my hand,
And into dust the bulwark went
As though it had been built of sand.

Then one man with a boarding-spear
Thrust at the ship's side, and straightway
Through the great hole did we see clear
That there our old companions lay.

Asleep they seemed but all ruddy
And neither dead nor gotten old;
But young men fresh and all lusty,
As when we last did them behold.

Then none of us did any more
But let our ship go drifting by
Until we struck against the shore;
Then did we land, but fearfully,

And looking round about like men
Woke up in some unknown wild place
After a battle; and with wan
And timorous looks we prayed God grace,

Then with drawn swords moved down the quay.
Folk saw us who stood ever still
Nor turned their heads, nor word said they
Or noticed us for good or ill.

And this we thought a marvellous thing,
That being fresh landed from the sea
No man said ought of marketing,
Or asked us what the news might be.

And in the ships in like manner
The folk moved neither more nor less;
There stood the master-mariner
Beside the helm all motionless.

There stood the sailor with one hand
Upon the rope, or on the shroud
One foot. And in that quiet land
Our footfalls seemed to groan aloud.

Then such a fear did seize on me
I never think to feel again
In whatsoever case I be:
Yet went we on, driven by pain

Of famine and by great wonder,
For soon we saw these men were dead
But uncorrupted: oft would stir
Their raiment, and their hair drifted

This way and that way in the wind,
That mocked their sleep so noisily.
Then did it come into my mind
That this the place had used to be

We were in search of: our fellows
Had found it happily; and then
God had o'erwhelmed it with His blows
That kill without destroying men.

Along the quays to the big gate
Which was most stately, then we came
Into a city rich and great,
Where still all folk did seem the same.

The riches of this dead city,
And the dead folk that were therein,
Were hard to tell; for verily
If one Byzantium should win,

A country village would he have
By this; but now a piece of bread
We lacked, our very lives to save,
Or else right soon we were but dead.

The Wan-
derers

On all the shops and stalls there lay
Both bread and meat, and other things,
Whereto in spite of fear, straightway
We ran to deaden our cravings.

But though these things looked fresh and fair
As those that stood and could not stir,
Yet when within our hands they were,
They went away to mere powder.

Then did we see no other rede
But in our ship to get away,
And for some help in this sore need
To God and all the Saints to pray.

And yet because the sea was wide,
And no good land we might come to,
There on the land we would abide
Till all the city was gone through.

So through the long streets on we went,
And man, and maid, and child we met
Like painted images of Ghent,
Within some fair cathedral set.

Now to a square we came at last
Midmost of which a conduit fair
Four streams of water outward cast
That ran four ways throughout the square.

Thereto I and my fellows ran,
For fain we were to quench our drouth;
But when unto the water wan
I stooped and thought to set my mouth,

Nought met my mouth but common air:
Then wearily we turned us round,
And spying a great palace there
We entered it, and heard no sound

But of the wind that ever went
Through open doors, and fires vast
That through the chimnies upward sent
Great roaring; so straightway we passed

Through many a chamber and rich hall,
Where the worst hangings that we saw
Were wrought of gold and royal pall
Or samite without any flaw.

There did we pass through the guard-room,
There saw we dames half-hid with veils,
And ladies working at the loom,
And ladies holding books of tales.

Then came we to a door close-shut,
Where stood a soldier with a spear,
As if on guard he had been put;
We passed him by with little fear

And found a court of marble white,
Set round with pots of orange-trees,
And midmost, open to the light,
A clear green pool, where three ladies

Naked, but covered to the knee
By the thin water, stood bathing;
While on the brink lay daintily
Their clothes with many a chain and ring.

Well nigh we wept thereat, although
We were in evil case, and old;
Yet went, and to a chamber low
We came where was a bed of gold

Where sat, half-dressed, a maiden sweet,
While by her, on the floor there lay
A goodly man who kissed her feet—
. She had been smiling on that day.

The Wanderers

Men going
into palace
(small)

Ladies bathing (small)
The Knights
don't come
in any of
these three
last pictures

Lovers
(small)

The Wanderers

We sighed again, when we saw these,
And their sweet love, so quickly done;
But passed them to a close of trees,
Where birds sat glittering in the sun.

There, on one side, we saw a hall,
Whereof the door was opened wide;
Of deep green jasper was the wall
With images on every side,

In which, thereto being quickly led
By evil fate and destiny,
We found a royal table spread
And thereat a great company

Of knights and ladies sitting round,
A set smile upon every face;
Their gold gowns trailing on the ground,
The light of gold through all the place.

Minstrels were in the gallery,
With silent open mouths, and hands
That moved not on the psaltery
And citern; and with ivory wands

The marshalls stood about the hall.
And there were carpets of great cost,
And histories upon the wall
Of kings, whose very names were lost.

A wretched crew we seemed surely
Amongst such fresh things as were there,
As we moved forward fearfully
With eyes upon the table fair:

For there we saw both flesh and fowl
And fish, and many a sugared cate,
And wine in many a jewelled bowl,
And longed therefore, being moved by fate.

Then shuddering our hands we set
Unto that food: then were we glad
Past words to find it all fresh yet
And that some real man's food we had.

The Wan-
derers

Then ate we of it greedily
Standing beside those stony folk;
Such bread as never man did buy
In any market there we broke.

And at the last, which was the worst,
Grown bold, we dared to take our seat
By those dead folk, and slake our thirst
From out their cups; yea and did eat

From dead hands many a strange morsel:
Thereof we grew right mad at last
And drunk with very wine of Hell.
And as we laughed and chattered fast

Things worthy weeping, suddenly
All things grew dim, and deadly sleep
And heavy dreams came over me
While watch the stony folk did keep

The Feast
(big)

With glittering eyes, and that set smile
More sad to see than bitter tears;
And the great fire burned all the while
As it had done these many years.

NOW how long in this sleep we lay,
My masters, cannot now be told;
Taking no heed of night or day,
Summer or winter, heat or cold.

The Wan-
derers

Only I know, with many a dream
My sleep was filled; whereof this one
Will serve to tell of: it did seem
On a ship's deck I sat alone

Taking no care of helm or sail
Or sea; but in an ancient book
For some forgotten ancient tale
With straining eyes did ever look:

At last I found it, and it told
About a knight of Germany,
Who, when he was already old,
By water-thieves upon the sea

Was taken, and being made their slave,
Saw lands he never knew before,
Until he chanced himself to save
From out their hands, on a wild shore.

Whereon—but here the page was torn,
And as in dreams it oft will go,
I seemed to be that knight, forlorn,
Wretched and rent from top to toe.

Upon my legs fetters I saw,
Rusty and old, and felt my back
With stripes of whips was yet half raw,
And victuals I did wholly lack.

I drifted in this evil plight
For many a league, it seemed to me,
Until at last I came in sight
Of a good ship upon the sea.

And when her folk did see me there
They sent a shallop thence with speed,
And brought me to a dromond fair;
And of her crew I took good heed.

They were an aged company
And yet were richly dressed withal;
Now knew I all their history,
Though no man spoke to me at all,

As oft in dreams it happeneth;
Namely that these same ancient folk
Were sailing to escape from death,
And had good hope to break his yoke

By bathing in a certain stream
That from a mountain cometh out
In some far land; now did I dream
That when I turned me round about,

My ship was sunk down in the sea,
And straightly was I dressed in gold,
The king of all that company,
But white-bearded and very old.

Then did the dromond outward go,
While we, like men remembering tales,
Went ever walking to and fro
And took no heed of masts or sails.

At last we saw a mountain rise
Before us, green a little way
Then brown, then white against the skies,
And straight the dromond turned that way

And ran upon a sandy beach,
And we with all the speed we might,
Leapt out, the happy stream to reach,
Whereof right soon we came in sight.

But when we came unto the bank,
And saw how terrible it was,
Then all our hearts within us sank,
For clearer was it than fine glass,

The Wan-
derers

No wind was there or any weed
And black it was, although the sky
Over our heads was blue indeed
As is the sky of Italy.

And also on the other side
There lay a black and tangled wood
Wherefrom a noise, as if folk cried
In anguish, froze our very blood.

There stood we shivering on the brink,
Old men and women in long line,
Doubtful if this cup they would drink
Would be of endless bliss or pine.

But as we waited, doubting thus
And precious time of eld was lost,
One falling, with a piteous
And frightful face, gave up the ghost.

And one man cried, "My head, my head!"
And staggering fell in the stream
And sank; then did we count us dead
And hard I strove to break the dream.

But goaded by some sudden sting
Into that place we rushed at last
With screams wherewith the hills did ring,
That this our death might soon be past.

And now behold a fresh marvel;
This water that we dreaded so
We deemed it but the mouth of Hell,
Waist-deep through it we did but go,

And when unto the bank we came
Our clothes fell from us; then were we
Naked like Adam without shame
And fair and young as folk might be.

And in a sweet green mead we were
With flowers all about growing
And flowers set upon our hair,
And no desire for anything.

And clean forgotten was the life
We led before, and all our friends,
And all our foes, and all the strife
For many unaccomplished ends:

Yea for one minute I felt this,
But quickly was I snatched away,
My dream changed from that place of bliss,
And by a city gate I lay,

Just waked from sleep, and folk went by,
Nor spoke to me good words or bad,
Though in strange guise I there did lie,
For in my armour I was clad,

And they were all in ancient weed.
Then I arose upon my feet,
And seeing they took no further heed,
I straightway entered the long street:

There did much folk go to and fro,
And all in ancient raiment clad;
And young they were, and yet did go
Full heavily, and seemed not glad.

Sosoon I stopped a man who went
Wrapped with his cloak in a strange way,
His head down toward the pavement bent,
And said I had a thing to say.

“Say on,” said he, nor raised his head.
“Fain would I know if folk die here,
For all of you are young,” I said,
“And if of death ye have no fear,

The Wan-
derers

How may I come in such-like case?"

He said, "Would God that we could die!
O man, get quickly from this place
Even if you fall dead presently—

If we could die—if we could die!

And get at last a little rest,
Twixt misery and misery!"
Therewith his hand from out his breast

He drew, and shewed a mark thereon

In fashion of an ancient seal:
"This is the Heaven we have won,
This is the guerdon of our zeal."

Therewith he filled the air with screams,
And quick I turned to get away
Half dead with fear; but as in dreams
The manner is, there must I stay.

While those folk, sealed hands raised on high,
Came flocking round me crying out,
"God, let us die! God, let us die!"
At last I sprung forth with a shout

But straight fell flatlings on my face,
And, as I struggled to arise,
Woke suddenly, in that same place
Watched by the sleepless stony eyes.

THERE burned the fire as before,
There sat unchanged the sweet ladies,
Unchangeable now any more
Until the drying of the seas.

And she beside me had risen up
To take her jewelled sandal off,
Meanwhile her lover held his cup
Out towards her with a smiling scoff.

Toward me her face was turned away
Blushing with long forgotten shame,
Across my face her long sleeve lay,
As slowly to myself I came.

Shuddering I swept it from my face
Then turning saw my fellows there,
Arising and in such-like case
As I myself; long was our hair,

And fallen away to very dust
Was all our raiment; we were clad
In armour eaten up with rust,
Whereof some store with us we had.

Together there we gathered us
And stood and knew not what to say.
—Masters, this had been piteous
To those who saw us on the day

When first we manned the Rose Garland,
Or on that merry day when we
First saw far off the low green land
And hoped to live, and happily.

At last Sir Nicholas said, "Fellows,
If ye have dreamed as I have done,
And seen what things in sleep God shows,
Your lust to live on earth is gone.

And yet I pray God of His grace,
Seeing how feeble we are grown,
To give us strength to leave this place,
And not at last to die alone,

The Wan-
derers

But else on land with husbandmen
Or mariners upon the sea;
Come Sirs, or else we perish here,
And find our way back to the quay.

As for myself, I hunger not
And if ye are the same herein,
Perchance God has not yet forgot
His ancient kindness, though we sin."

Now some of us, when we heard this,
Remembering days of hope and fear,
Rest and turmoil, sorrow and bliss,
Were fain to weep, old as we were.

Natheless we moved down towards the shore
Hoping for nought but quiet death,
Nor did we look back any more
On those fair creatures that lacked breath.

Then through those courts we went again
And found the doors still open wide:
Still brushed the golden counterpane
Against that lady's naked side;

Still stood the bathing dames, spotless
In the green water, on the brink
Still lay the shoes their feet did press,
Fairer than any man could think.

And still as through the streets we went
We saw the people as before
Standing like images of Ghent,
Until we came unto the shore.

There swung our good ship in the swell
Among the others, but her sail,
We left new, strong, and sheeted well,
Was gone—none left to tell the tale.

Now all of us did kneel on knee
And for the souls of those dead men
We prayed to God full heartily,
And boarded our old vessel then

The Wan-
derers

And loosed the hawsers and set out
Bending but weakly to the oar,
And with no cheery and glad shout
As we had done so oft before.

Ship rowed
out (small)

The Fighting Man just as of old
We saw still swinging in the tide,
And 'twixt her timbers did behold
Our fellows laid asleep inside.

So there we left the Fighting Man,
And as we turned round toward the West
And up the white-topped seas we ran,
Almost we thought their lot the best.

Now when we were got out to sea
We laboured little at the oar,
Taking but care her head should be
Turned westward, as in days of yore.

Thus did we drift till the third day,
And then we came unto an isle,
And spying there a sandy bay
Had heart to rest a little while.

And when we landed there, we found
The place was well-watered and fair,
And sea-birds' eggs did much abound,
And ripe sweet fruit was plenty there.

We victualled the good ship with these,
Being fain to let the sea-birds go
Though tame they sat upon the trees,
For neither had we shaft nor bow.

The Wan-
derers

Then we took ship and put to sea,
And in such case for fifteen days
We were, as any folk might be
Who go upon the watery ways.

But then the moon being high and bright,
A rosy light we did espy
About an hour before midnight,
Far off to leeward in the sky.

And when straightway we made for it
Brighter it grew as we drew near,
But clouds across it oft would flit,
At day-break did it disappear.

By night we saw it clear again,
But redder, as a fire shows
From far, that sometimes seems to wane,
And sometimes waxing brighter grows

But this grew great, as we did sail
On towards it, till the night grew day
Therewith, and the full moon grew pale
And yet the fire was far away.

And now, since in us fear was dead,
We sailed thereto, and saw a sight
That was full dreadful, by my head,
A mighty city all alight,

But certes with no earthly flame:
No houses fell, no smoke arose,
No weeping people from it came;
About it were no shouting foes.

The burning
city (big)

Upright and whole the houses stood,
There stood the pinnacles, blood-red;
Marble and stone, and brick and wood
Were bathed in fire that nothing fed.

For all the folk were gone away
Or, else consumed: that God's mercy
Might light upon them did we pray—
Yea wheresoever they might be.

Then did we turn our dromond's head
And rowed West, with what strength we might,
And for three days the sky was red
With shining of that dreadful light

Both night and day: for three days more
At dark the pink cloud did we see,
Above the ever-burning shore;
Then all was grey, as it should be.

And now, Sirs, thin our story grows,
And soon unto an end we come;
Yea, a good end of all our woes
One way or other in your home.

For on the twentieth day from that
On which we left the burning town,
As idle on the deck I sat,
An hour before the sun went down,

Sir Nicholas, who at the bow
Was standing, called aloud and said:
"Ho Sirs! a new thing cometh now—
A town or white cliffs right ahead."

Then one to the mast-head did go
To whom a town it seemed to be,
Therefore we busied us to row,
And, pulling all night mightily,

At morning twilight came anear
Unto this place whate'er it was,
And anchored in the water clear.
Then to me came Sir Nicholas,

**The Wan-
derers**

And, stammering with eagerness,
Said, "O Rafe, once I dreamed a dream,
That day upon the Northern ness,
So long ago, it now does seem

Like an old story: oft ere this
With hope that all these things might be
And we thereby should come to bliss
Have I been mocked; therefore are we

Now weak and near our death for eld:
But now, even in the gathering light,
The place that dreaming I beheld
Do I see clear with waking sight,

So may God help me, every turn
Of the white houses and the walls;
Look! Look! for now the East doth burn
With dawn, and yellow glimmer falls

On that dear place, on that sweet place,
Where we shall live for evermore.
Kneel quickly, Rafe, and pray for grace
That we may live to reach the shore."

But ere the deck did touch my knees
We heard the sound of men that sung
Born seaward from some revelries,
And through our ears and hearts it rung.

DRINK about, for night doth go,
By daylight grey hairs will show;
Now from silver lamps doth fall
Golden light on gilded wall;
Seize this hour while you may;
Let it pass—there cometh day
When all things will turn to grey.

Let me think about my love
Softer than pink-footed dove;
Nobly-born, and meek, and wise
As the guard of Paradise.
She would be a King's despair
From her golden-gleaming hair
To her silver feet so fair.

The Wan-
derers

A picture
(small)

Who shall pray to Proserpine
For her? Juno, for her line?
Pallas, for that she is wise
As the guard of Paradise?
Venus, she that maketh fair,
For her golden-gleaming hair?
Or Diana, the full fleet,
For her sweet and silver feet?
Ah! these even, should they care
For us that die, must once despair;
Therefore are they made most fair.

Ah! yes, she shall lie alone
Underneath a carven stone.
Then be merry while ye may
For to each shall come a day
When no pleasure shall be bought,
When no friend can guess our thought,
When all that has been, shall be nought.

NOW, when I looked at Nicholas
To see what he might think of this,
Upon the deck he sunken was
And now surely had come to bliss.

For with the singing of that song
His heart was broken, and he lay
Dead, nigh the place he sought so long:
Nor had the flush yet gone away

The Wan-
derers

Wherewith his aged face was lit
While he was telling me he knew
The place, and what belonged to it,
And that his wretched dream was true.

And now, Sirs, what more can I say?
To shore we rowed, the people thronged
About us, for it now was day,
Asking to whom the ship belonged.

And when we heard them speak these words
In the Greek tongue, that well we knew,
We prayed to see their King or Lords,
And straight they brought us unto you.

Picture of
City (big)

And on the way to this great Hall,
The things our captain dreamed, we saw,
As many a garden girt with wall
And the green temple without flaw.

And through the door the images
Just showed, of Venus soft and sweet,
And tall Diana with white knees
Beneath her gown, and sandalled feet.

And now, Sirs, have ye heard our tale
And by what wild hope we were led,
And why we long ago set sail;
And everything has now been said—

But this: ye are of wealth and might
And we are few and aged folk;
Yet, Sirs, take heed, for by this light!
We will not die without a stroke;

But if ye choose to give us life,
Then what we may do, that we will,
Though we are men of war and strife,
And in few crafts have gotten skill.

The Wan-
derers

But tales of many lands we know,
And if some poor bread these be worth,
Gladly these pastimes would we show
As long as we may live on earth.

Sirs, pray you let us die in peace;
And so may God your country save,
And of your goods give great increase,
And every thing that you would have.

THE PEOPLE OF THE SHORE

ALAS! my masters, by my head
Your hope was but a rotten reed.
What! and are not our fathers dead
Who battled once against the Mede

Yet overlived it? Coming here,
Through many and many a woe they passed,
Oft were their hearts fulfilled of fear,
Yet found they rest and ease at last

Here in this land; great deeds they did
As many an ancient story saith;
Yet these also the earth has hid,
No man among them but found death.

The Wan-
derers

No doubt the Gods have sent you then
To a fair land and plenteous;
Of all the gifts they give to men
Not one have they withheld from us.

No doubt our gardens might entice
The very Gods themselves to leave
The happy woods of Paradise,
Nor once again thereafter grieve.

Their fields bright with unchanging May,
Pressed by the feet of Goddesses,
Are scarce more fair than are today
Our meadows set about with trees.

Pageant of
peace (big)

Here fields of corn and pleasant hills
Dotted with orchards shall ye see,
And sweet streams turning many mills,
And of all fruits right great plenty.

By our fair-painted palaces
The green white-flowered rivers pass;
About our coasts the summer seas
Run bubbling up the slopes of grass.

Oxen and sheep and horses go
About the merry water-meads,
Where herons, and long cranes thereto,
Lie hidden in the whispering reeds.

Pretty ladies
filling up
picture
(small)

Among all these the maidens play;
The fair white Goddess of the sea
Is little fairer made than they
In all her members certainly.

Like you, Sirs, am I chilled with eld,
Yet still I look on them with joy,
As Priam's Lords erewhile beheld
Fair Helen on the walls of Troy.

The Wan-
derers

There to our men are strong and brave
And hale and seldom wanting wit,
Many a good archer we have,
A little mark who well can hit,

And cunning folk to make for us
The images of Gods and men,
And painted walls right beauteous,
And men to make us music, when

Artists
(small)

Our hearts are full, and men to write
The stories of the past again,
And grave philosophers in white,
Leeches to heal us of our pain.

Thus under gentle laws we live
Well guarded, and in rest and peace,
And ever more and more we thrive,
And ever do our goods increase.

Poet, sage,
doctor
(small)

All things the Gods give to our hands,
Wisdom and strength, skill, great beauty,
A land that is the crown of lands—
Yet, therewithal, at last to die.

Astrea
(small)

O masters, here as everywhere,
All things begin, grow old, decay;
That groweth ugly that was fair,
The storm blots out the summer day.

The Wan-
derers

The merry shepherd's lazy song
Breaks off before the lion's roar;
The bathing girls, white-limbed and long,
Half-dead with fear splash toward the shore

At rumour of the deadly shark;
Over the corn, ripe and yellow
The hobby stoops upon the lark,
The kestrel eyes the shrew below.

The green snake in the apple-tree
Sits watching, as the shadows pass,
The feet of some Eurydice
Half-hidden by caressing grass.

The hoar frosts cut the flowers down,
The cold north wind dries up the blood;
The glassy streams grow dull and brown,
Tormented by the winter flood.

And friends fall off and pleasures cease
As grey hairs grow upon the head,
And weariness doth so increase
We have the heart to wish us dead—

Masters, your hope that this could be,
To live for ever anywhere
Has brought sad longings strange to me,
Sad thoughts, my heart can hardly bear.

And sad words from my lips have gone
Unmeet for ancient folk to say;
Pray you forget them, ye have won
Life sweet and peaceful from today.

The Gods have sent you here to us—
The land you sought for, did you know,
A fair land and a plenteous:
Henceforth ye shall not reap nor sow,

Nor spin nor weave, nor labour aught,
But ever all things shall ye have
That can by any man be sought;
And may the Gods your dear lives save

Many a year yet; and as priests
Of some revered God shall ye be,
And sit with us at all our feasts,
And houses have in our city

With most fair gardens. Ye shall tell
What lore ye have of your country,
And other things ye know as well;
And how lands great are grown to be

Our fathers knew not, when they fled
Before the face of the Great King:
And what lands are become as dead
That in their time were flourishing.

Yea, and fair Sirs, we fain would know
Who is your God of whom ye speak;
And of the Romans shall ye show,
And ye shall tell us of the Greek

Who reigns at Byzant, as ye say;
And what of Sparta is become
And Athens, and the lands that lay
In ancient days about our home.

The Wan-
derers

And then in answer will we tell
Of countries that ye never knew,
Of towns, that having long stood well,
The Gods in anger overthrew;

Of kings, who in their tyranny
Were mighty once, but fell at last;
Of merchants rich as men could be,
And yet one day their wealth was past.

The voyage for the Golden Fleece,
The Doom of King Acrisius
And how the Gods gave Psyche peace—
These stories shall ye hear from us;

And many another, that shall make
Your life seem but a story too,
So that no more your hearts shall ache
With thought of all ye might not do.

Ye shall be shown how vain it is
To strive against the Gods and Fate,
And that no man may look for bliss
Without an ending soon or late.

But what is in our hands to give
That shall ye have: and now again
We pray the Gods, long may ye live,
And fall asleep with little pain.

Old chaps
telling tales
(big)
no women

Now, Sirs, go rest you from the sea,
And soon a great feast will we hold,
Whereat some pleasant history
Such as ye wot of, shall be told.