

III

BALLADS

Ballads

PREFACE

COLERIDGE PUBLISHED SIX BALLADS over a period of thirty years. They are the most consciously experimental part of his work, and although three of them are unfinished, they total over two thousand lines of verse with many additional drafts and rejected versions. A number of shorter poems, collected in the Visionary Fragments section (VII), may also be sketches or openings for others. He developed the form through experiments in variable metre; the incantatory effects of rhyme and repetition; archaic and magical use of vocabulary; and the symbolic use of natural imagery.

The ballad always fascinated Coleridge as a popular type of storytelling which broke the conventions of eighteenth-century realism, and gave access to extreme and primitive emotions. Many of his ballads puzzled and shocked even his most perceptive contemporaries like Wordsworth and Hazlitt. At some symbolic level, they touched on the disturbing elements of human experience which are normally censored by the rational mind. All of them concern some violent or "forbidden" action or event, that has inexplicably terrible consequences.

In chapter 14 of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge described his ballads as "directed to persons and characters supernatural". He later intended to write "a critical essay on the supernatural in poetry, and the principles that regulate its introduction"; but perhaps deliberately this was never done. Some of his ideas appear in the preface to "The Three Graves" (No. 31), and later scattered through his Notebooks and *Table Talk*. He said he had personally seen "far too many" ghosts actually to believe in them; and it is clear that it was the psychology and symbolism of the supernatural (closely related to that of dreams) which interested him.

The ballads are often thought of as uniformly "nightmare" pieces, whereas in fact their atmospheres and settings are diverse: an

eighteenth-century country village (No. 31), a seventeenth-century sea-voyage (No. 32), a fifteenth-century castle (No. 33), and other loosely medieval or courtly scenarios. Their literary sources are also various: folk tales, fairy tales, travellers' stories, legends, dreams. But all of them can be described as studies in irrational experiences, with a strong emphasis on ideas of enchantment or possession or violation.

Most of the six ballads present supernatural or "daemonic" forces in Nature, battoning on human protagonists, and subjecting them to extreme stress. Three of the victims are women, three are men, all are young. (Coleridge pointed out that even the Mariner was young at the time of his voyage.) Their experiences are not easily subject to rational, or even religious, explanation. The forces are given figurative (but not always human) shape and great psychological authenticity. Coleridge wanted "these shadows of the imagination" to produce what he called, in a famous phrase, "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, that constitutes poetic faith".

As a form, the popular or "gothick" ballad was not itself Coleridge's rediscovery. Wide interest had already been aroused by the collection of Border Ballads published by the folklorist Bishop Thomas Percy (who was also an expert on Oriental Tales and Icelandic Sagas) as *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (3 vols., 1765). This collection contained "Sir Patrick Spence" (referred to by Coleridge in "Dejection: An Ode", No. 50), "Barbara Allen", and "Sir Cauline" (whose heroine is "fayre Christabelle"). The forged medieval ballads of Thomas Chatterton (edited by Southey), and the horror-ballad "Lenore" (1774) by the German poet Gottfried Bürger, were also fashionable. Wordsworth originally suggested the form to Coleridge in 1797, perhaps not entirely seriously, as a way of making money from the magazines, and his first efforts were collaborations (see Nos. 31 and 75).

Coleridge took the popular themes of folklore – the demon lover, the nightmare voyage, the haunted castle, the *femme fatale* – and transformed them into sophisticated psychological dramas, which explore the dark side of his imagination. All kinds of childhood fears, adult obsessions, problems of identity, guilts, hallucinatory experiences, sexual fantasies, and religious doubts are released into the poems with most powerful effect. Time and again, it is evident that the protagonists of the ballads (of either sex) are, at some level, Coleridge himself.

But the very formality of the eighteenth-century ballad conventions encouraged Coleridge to transcend confessional restraints. The impetuous narrative movement, the use of framing voices, the archaic or naïve stylization, the daemonic figures, the gothic imagery, the chant-like phrasing, and the whole emphasis on direct dramatic presentation (rather than meditation) helped to free him from conscious censorship or poetic inhibitions. In an almost anthropological sense, he could enter into areas of the "taboo". Witchcraft (No. 31), paranoid delusions (No. 32), sexual violation (No. 33), possession (No. 35), and murderous jealousy (No. 36) are all touched on with extraordinary daring.

The artistic freedom with which Coleridge developed the basic four-line, four-stress pattern of the traditional ballad stanza is also remarkable. The visual and cosmic symbolism of the poems (which has received much study) also depends on certain music and cadence within the language, which produces magical effects of spell-binding incantation through repetition and internal rhyme:

The harbour-bay was clear as glass
So smoothly it was strewn!
And on the bay the moonlight lay
And the shadow of the Moon.

In a Preface to "Christabel" Coleridge also hinted how the sudden extending or contracting of syllabic structures, and stanza lengths, could express shifts of feeling. They were "not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion".

Though Coleridge began most of his ballads in the Stowey period, he worked on them for many years, quite contrary to the common belief that they were the product of a single inspired period of his life. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" went through at least three major versions, and took nineteen years to reach its final form (with the brilliant framing device of the prose "gloss") in 1817. The two parts of "Christabel" were composed over three years, and there is evidence for a lost third part which Coleridge was working on as late as 1816 (see No. 85). "The Three Graves", which first appeared in 1809, seems to have been reworked over a decade. "Alice Du Clos" was not written until the 1820s, but still shows new effects of narrative and imagery.

The literary impact of Coleridge's ballads was also extended over

a considerable time, as they came to be better understood. It is most immediately evident in Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805); Keats's poems "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and "St Agnes Eve" (1820); and Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy" (1819). The general revival of gothick and medieval styles in Victorian England, and the whole of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, owes much to their settings and use of symbolism. Tennyson, Morris and Ruskin all learned from them; and even such a strange invention as Christina Rossetti's ballad "Goblin Market" shows their subtle influence. Nor should it be forgotten that when Byron read "Christabel" aloud at the Villa Diodati, one stormy night in June 1816, Shelley ran out in a fit and Mary Shelley began her novel *Frankenstein*.

The Three Graves

A FRAGMENT OF A SEXTON'S TALE

“The Author has published the following humble fragment, encouraged by the decisive recommendation of more than one of our most celebrated living Poets. The language was intended to be dramatic; that is, suited to the narrator; and the metre corresponds to the homeliness of the diction. It is therefore presented as the fragment, not of a Poem, but of a common Ballad-tale. Whether this is sufficient to justify the adoption of such a style, in any metrical composition not professedly ludicrous, the Author is himself in some doubt. At all events, it is not presented as poetry, and it is in no way connected with the Author's judgment concerning poetic diction. Its merits, if any, are exclusively psychological. The story which must be supposed to have been narrated in the first and second parts is as follows: —

“Edward, a young farmer, meets at the house of Ellen her bosom-friend Mary, and commences an acquaintance, which ends in a mutual attachment. With her consent, and by the advice of their common friend Ellen, he announces his hopes and intentions to Mary's mother, a widow-woman bordering on her fortieth year, and from constant health, the possession of a competent property, and from having had no other children but Mary and another daughter (the father died in their infancy), retaining for the greater part her personal attractions and comeliness of appearance; but a woman of low education and violent temper. The answer which she at once returned to Edward's application was remarkable — ‘Well, Edward! you are a handsome young fellow, and you shall have my daughter.’ From this time all their wooing passed under the mother's eye; and, in fine, she became herself enamoured of her future son-in-law, and practised every art, both of endearment and of calumny, to transfer his affections from her daughter to herself. (The outlines of the Tale are positive facts, and of no very distant date, though the author has purposely altered the names and the scene of action, as well as invented the characters of the parties and the detail of the incidents.) Edward, however, though perplexed by her strange detractions from her daughter's good qualities, yet in the innocence of his own heart

still mistook her increasing fondness for motherly affection; she at length, overcome by her miserable passion, after much abuse of Mary's temper and moral tendencies, exclaimed with violent emotion – 'O Edward! indeed, indeed, she is not fit for you – she has not a heart to love you as you deserve. It is I that love you! Marry me, Edward! and I will this very day settle all my property on you.' The Lover's eyes were now opened; and thus taken by surprise, whether from the effect of the horror which he felt, acting as it were hysterically on his nervous system; or that at the first moment he lost the sense of the guilt of the proposal in the feeling of its strangeness and absurdity, he flung her from him and burst into a fit of laughter. Irritated by this almost to frenzy, the woman fell on her knees, and in a loud voice that approached to a scream, she prayed for a curse both on him and on her own child. Mary happened to be in the room directly above them, heard Edward's laugh, and her mother's blasphemous prayer, and fainted away. He, hearing the fall, ran upstairs, and taking her in his arms, carried her off to Ellen's home; and after some fruitless attempts on her part toward a reconciliation with her mother, she was married to him. – And here the third part of the Tale begins.

"I was not led to choose this story from any partiality to tragic, much less to monstrous events (though at the time that I composed the verses, somewhat more than twelve years ago, I was less averse to such subjects than at present), but from finding in it a striking proof of the possible effect on the imagination, from an idea violently and suddenly impressed on it. I had been reading Bryan Edwards's account of the effects of the *Oby* witchcraft on the Negroes in the West Indies, and Hearne's deeply interesting anecdotes of similar workings on the imagination of the Copper Indians (those of my readers who have it in their power will be well repaid for the trouble of referring to those works for the passages alluded to); and I conceived the design of shewing that instances of this kind are not peculiar to savage or barbarous tribes, and of illustrating the mode in which the mind is affected in these cases, and the progress and symptoms of the morbid action on the fancy from the beginning.

"The Tale is supposed to be narrated by an old Sexton, in a country church-yard, to a traveller whose curiosity had been awakened by the appearance of three graves, close by each other, to two only of which there were grave-stones. On the first of these was the name, and dates, as usual: on the second, no name, but only a date, and the words, 'The Mercy of God is infinite.'"

PART III

The grapes upon the Vicar's wall;
 Were ripe as ripe could be;
 And yellow leaves in sun and wind
 Were falling from the tree.

On the hedge-elms in the narrow lane
 Still swung the spikes of corn:
 Dear Lord! it seems but yesterday —
 Young Edward's marriage-morn.

Up through that wood behind the church,
 There leads from Edward's door
 A mossy track, all over boughed,
 For half a mile or more.

And from their house-door by that track
 The bride and bridegroom went;
 Sweet Mary, though she was not gay,
 Seemed cheerful and content.

But when they to the church-yard came,
 I've heard poor Mary say,
 As soon as she stepped into the sun,
 Her heart it died away.

And when the Vicar join'd their hands,
 Her limbs did creep and freeze:
 But when they prayed, she thought she saw
 Her mother on her knees.

And o'er the church-path they returned —
 I saw poor Mary's back,
 Just as she stepped beneath the boughs
 Into the mossy track.

Her feet upon the mossy track
 The married maiden set:
 That moment — I have heard her say —
 She wished she could forget.

The shade o'er-flushed her limbs with heat –
Then came a chill like death:
And when the merry bells rang out, 35
They seemed to stop her breath.

Beneath the foulest mother's curse
No child could ever thrive:
A mother is a mother still,
The holiest thing alive. 40

So five months passed: the mother still
Would never heal the strife;
But Edward was a loving man
And Mary a fond wife.

“My sister may not visit us, 45
My mother says her nay:
O Edward! you are all to me,
I wish for your sake I could be
More lifesome and more gay.

“I'm dull and sad! indeed, indeed 50
I know I have no reason!
Perhaps I am not well in health,
And 'tis a gloomy season.”

'Twas a drizzly time – no ice, no snow!
And on the few fine days 55
She stirred not out, lest she might meet
Her mother in the ways.

But Ellen, spite of miry ways
And weather dark and dreary,
Trudged every day to Edward's house, 60
And made them all more cheery.

Oh! Ellen was a faithful friend,
More dear than any sister!
As cheerful too as singing lark;
And she ne'er left them till 'twas dark, 65
And then they always missed her.

And now Ash-Wednesday came – that day
But few to church repair:
For on that day you know we read
The Commination prayer. 70

Our late old Vicar, a kind man,
Once, Sir, he said to me,
He wished that service was clean out
Of our good Liturgy.

The mother walked into the church – 75
To Ellen's seat she went:
Though Ellen always kept her church
All church-days during Lent.

And gentle Ellen welcomed her
With courteous looks and mild: 80
Thought she, "What if her heart should melt,
And all be reconciled!"

The day was scarcely like a day –
The clouds were black outright:
And many a night, with half a moon, 85
I've seen the church more light.

The wind was wild; against the glass
The rain did beat and bicker;
The church-tower swinging over head,
You scarce could hear the Vicar! 90

And then and there the mother knelt,
And audibly she cried –
"Oh! may a clinging curse consume
This woman by my side!

"O hear me, hear me, Lord in Heaven, 95
Although you take my life –
O curse this woman, at whose house
Young Edward woo'd his wife.

"By night and day, in bed and bower,
 O let her curséd be!!!" 100
 So having prayed, steady and slow,
 She rose up from her knee!
 And left the church, nor e'er again
 The church-door entered she.

I saw poor Ellen kneeling still, 105
 So pale! I guessed not why:
 When she stood up, there plainly was
 A trouble in her eye.

And when the prayers were done, we all
 Came round and asked her why: 110
 Giddy she seemed, and sure, there was
 A trouble in her eye.

But ere she from the church-door stepped
 She smiled and told us why:
 "It was a wicked woman's curse," 115
 Quoth she, "and what care I?"

She smiled, and smiled, and passed it off
 Ere from the door she stept –
 But all agree it would have been
 Much better had she wept. 120

And if her heart was not at ease,
 This was her constant cry –
 "It was a wicked woman's curse –
 God's good, and what care I?"

There was a hurry in her looks, 125
 Her struggles she redoubled:
 "It was a wicked woman's curse,
 And why should I be troubled?"

These tears will come – I dandled her
 When 'twas the merest fairy – 130
 Good creature! and she hid it all:
 She told it not to Mary.

But Mary heard the tale: her arms
Round Ellen's neck she threw;
"O Ellen, Ellen, she cursed me,
And now she hath cursed you!" 135

I saw young Edward by himself
Stalk fast adown the lee,
He snatched a stick from every fence,
A twig from every tree. 140

He snapped them still with hand or knee,
And then away they flew!
As if with his uneasy limbs
He knew not what to do!

You see, good sir! that single hill?
His farm lies underneath: 145
He heard it there, he heard it all,
And only gnashed his teeth.

Now Ellen was a darling love
In all his joys and cares: 150
And Ellen's name and Mary's name
Fast-linked they both together came,
Whene'er he said his prayers.

And in the moment of his prayers
He loved them both alike: 155
Yea, both sweet names with one sweet joy
Upon his heart did strike!

He reach'd his home, and by his looks
They saw his inward strife:
And they clung round him with their arms,
Both Ellen and his wife. 160

And Mary could not check her tears,
So on his breast she bowed;
Then frenzy melted into grief,
And Edward wept aloud. 165

Dear Ellen did not weep at all,
But closelier did she cling,
And turned her face and looked as if
She saw some frightful thing.

PART IV

To see a man tread over graves 170
I hold it no good mark;
'Tis wicked in the sun and moon,
And bad luck in the dark!

You see that grave? The Lord he gives,
The Lord, he takes away: 175
O Sir! the child of my old age
Lies there as cold as clay.

Except that grave, you scarce see one
That was not dug by me;
I'd rather dance upon 'em all 180
Than tread upon these three!

"Aye, Sexton! 'tis a touching tale."
You, Sir! are but a lad;
This month I'm in my seventieth year,
And still it makes me sad. 185

And Mary's sister told it me,
For three good hours and more;
Though I had heard it, in the main,
From Edward's self, before.

Well! it passed off! the gentle Ellen 190
Did well nigh dote on Mary;
And she went oftener than before,
And Mary loved her more and more:
She managed all the dairy.

To market she on market-days, 195
To church on Sundays came;
All seemed the same: all seemed so, Sir!
But all was not the same!

Had Ellen lost her mirth? Oh! no!
But she was seldom cheerful; 200
And Edward looked as if he thought
That Ellen's mirth was fearful.

When by herself, she to herself
Must sing some merry rhyme;
She could not now be glad for hours, 205
Yet silent all the time.

And when she soothed her friend, through all
Her soothing words 'twas plain
She had a sore grief of her own,
A haunting in her brain. 210

And oft she said, I'm not grown thin!
And then her wrist she spanned;
And once when Mary was down-cast,
She took her by the hand,
And gazed upon her, and at first 215
She gently pressed her hand;

Then harder, till her grasp at length
Did gripe like a convulsion!
"Alas!" said she, "we ne'er can be
Made happy by compulsion!" 220

And once her both arms suddenly
Round Mary's neck she flung,
And her heart panted, and she felt
The words upon her tongue.

She felt them coming, but no power 225
Had she the words to smother;
And with a kind of shriek she cried,
"Oh Christ! you're like your mother!"

So gentle Ellen now no more
Could make this sad house cheery; 230
And Mary's melancholy ways
Drove Edward wild and weary.

Lingering he raised his latch at eve,
Though tired in heart and limb:
He loved no other place, and yet
Home was no home to him. 235

One evening he took up a book,
And nothing in it read;
Then flung it down, and groaning cried,
"O! Heaven! that I were dead." 240

Mary looked up into his face,
And nothing to him said;
She tried to smile, and on his arm
Mournfully leaned her head.

And he burst into tears, and fell 245
Upon his knees in prayer:
"Her heart is broke! O God! my grief,
It is too great to bear!"

'Twas such a foggy time as makes
Old sextons, Sir! like me, 250
Rest on their spades to cough; the spring
Was late uncommonly.

And then the hot days, all at once,
They came, we knew not how:
You looked about for shade, when scarce 255
A leaf was on a bough.

It happened then ('twas in the bower,
A furlong up the wood:
Perhaps you know the place, and yet
I scarce know how you should,) 260

No path leads thither, 'tis not nigh
To any pasture-plot;
But clustered near the chattering brook,
Lone hollies marked the spot.

Those hollies of themselves a shape 265
As of an arbour took,
A close, round arbour; and it stands
Not three strides from a brook.

Within this arbour, which was still
With scarlet berries hung, 270
Were these three friends, one Sunday morn,
Just as the first bell rung.

'Tis sweet to hear a brook, 'tis sweet
To hear the Sabbath-bell,
'Tis sweet to hear them both at once, 275
Deep in a woody dell.

His limbs along the moss, his head
Upon a mossy heap,
With shut-up senses, Edward lay:
That brook e'en on a working day 280
Might chatter one to sleep.

And he had passed a restless night,
And was not well in health;
The women sat down by his side,
And talked as 'twere by stealth. 285

"The Sun peeps through the close thick leaves,
See, dearest Ellen! see!
'Tis in the leaves, a little sun,
No bigger than your ee;

"A tiny sun, and it has got 290
A perfect glory too;
Ten thousand threads and hairs of light,
Make up a glory gay and bright
Round that small orb, so blue."

And then they argued of those rays, 295
What colour they might be;
Says this, "They're mostly green"; says that,
"They're amber-like to me."

So they sat chatting, while bad thoughts
Were troubling Edward's rest; 300
But soon they heard his hard quick pants,
And the thumping in his breast.

"A mother too!" these self-same words
Did Edward mutter plain;
His face was drawn back on itself, 305
With horror and huge pain.

Both groaned at once, for both knew well
What thoughts were in his mind;
When he waked up, and stared like one
That hath been just struck blind. 310

He sat upright; and ere the dream
Had had time to depart,
"O God, forgive me!" (he exclaimed)
"I have torn out her heart."

Then Ellen shrieked, and forthwith burst 315
Into ungentle laughter;
And Mary shivered, where she sat,
And never she smiled after.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

IN SEVEN PARTS

Facile credo, plures esse Naturas invisibiles quam visibiles in rerum universitate. Sed horum omnium familiam quis nobis enarrabit, et gradus et cognationes et discrimina et singulorum munera? Quid agunt? quæ loca habitant? Harum rerum notitiam semper ambivit ingenium humanum, nunquam attigit. Juvat, interea, non diffiteor, quandoque in animo, tanquam in tabula, majoris et melioris mundi imaginem contemplari: ne mens assuefacta hodiernæ vitæ minutis se contrahat nimis, et tota subsidat in pusillas cogitationes. Sed veritati interea invigilandum est, modusque servandus, ut certa ab incertis, diem a nocte, distinguamus.

T. Burnet, *Archæol. Phil.* p. 68.

[I can easily believe that there are more invisible creatures in the universe than visible ones. But who will tell us what family each belongs to, what their ranks and relationships are, and what their respective distinguishing characters may be? What do they do? Where do they live? Human wit has always circled around a knowledge of these things without ever attaining it. But I do not doubt that it is beneficial sometimes to contemplate in the mind, as in a picture, the image of a grander and better world; for if the mind grows used to the trivia of daily life, it may dwindle too much and decline altogether into worthless thoughts. Meanwhile, however, we must be on the watch for the truth, keeping a sense of proportion so that we can tell what is certain from what is uncertain and day from night.]

PART I

An ancient
Mariner meeteth
three Gallants
bidden to a
wedding-feast,
and detaineth one.

It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
"By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?"

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide, 5
And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din."

He holds him with his skinny hand,
"There was a ship," quoth he. 10
"Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!"
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

The Wedding
Guest is
spellbound by the
eye of the old
sea-faring man,
and constrained to
hear his tale.

He holds him with his glittering eye –
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years' child: 15
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner. 20

*a good example of
of a journey*

"The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.

The Mariner tells
how the ship
sailed southward
with a good wind
and fair weather,
till it reached the
line.

The Sun came up upon the left, 25
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,
Till over the mast at noon –" 30
The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,
For he heard the loud bassoon.

The Wedding
Guest heareth the
bridal music; but
the Mariner
continueth his
tale.

The bride hath paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes 35
The merry minstrelsy.

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner. 40

The ship drawn by
a storm toward the
south pole.

"And now the STORM-BLAST came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
And chased us south along.

*Narrative
slanting*

With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled.

45

50

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

The land of ice,
and of fearful
sounds where no
living thing was to
be seen.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken —
The ice was all between.

55

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!

60

Alliteration

*ice sound's
negative*

Till a great
sea-bird, called the
Albatross, came
through the
snow-fog, and was
received with
great joy and
hospitality.

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God's name.

65

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steered us through!

70

And lo! the
Albatross proveth
a bird of good
omen, and
followeth the ship
as it returned
northward
through fog and
floating ice.

And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariner's hollo!

expression of
goodness in the
universe

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud, 75
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white Moon-shine."

The ancient
Mariner
inhospitably
killeth the pious
bird of good
omen.

"God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus! - 80
Why look'st thou so?" - With my cross-bow
I shot the ALBATROSS.

climax point. This is the past principal point
of action.

PART II

The Sun now rose upon the right:
Out of the sea came he,
Still hid in mist, and on the left 85
Went down into the sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
Came to the mariners' hollo! 90

His shipmates cry
out against the
ancient Mariner,
for killing the bird
of good luck.

And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
(For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow)
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay, 95
That made the breeze to blow!

But when the fog
cleared off, they
justify the same,
and thus make
themselves
accomplices in
the crime.

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averred, I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist. 100
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

The fair breeze
continues; the
ship enters the
Pacific Ocean, and
sails northward,
even till it reaches
the Line.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst 105
Into that silent sea.

The ship hath
been suddenly
becalm'd.

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

110

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
(As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.) *simile*

115

And the Albatross
begins to be
avenged.

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

*Now the Albatross
begins
to be avenged.*

120

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

125

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.

130

Spirit had
followed them;
One of the invisible
inhabitants of this
universe, neither
parted souls nor
angels; concerning
whom the learned Jew, Josephus, and the Platonic Constantinopolitan, Michael Psellus,
may be consulted. They are very numerous, and there is no climate or element
without one or more.

And some in dreams assur'd were
Of the spirit that plagued us so;
Nine fathom deep he had followed us
From the land of mist and snow.

whom the learned Jew, Josephus, and the Platonic Constantinopolitan, Michael Psellus,
may be consulted. They are very numerous, and there is no climate or element
without one or more.

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

135

The shipmates, in
their sore distress,
would fain throw
the whole guilt
on the ancient
Mariner: in sign
whereof they
hang the dead sea-bird round his neck.

Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

140

PART III

There passed a weary time: Each throat
Was parched, and glazed each eye.
A weary time! a weary time!
How glazed each weary eye,
When looking westward, I beheld
A something in the sky.

145

The ancient
Mariner
beholdeth a sign
in the element
afar off.

At first it seemed a little speck,
And then it seemed a mist;
It moved and moved, and took at last
A certain shape, I wist.

150

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it neared and neared:
As if it dodged a water-sprite,
It plunged and tacked and veered.

155

At its nearer
approach, it
seemeth him to
be a ship: and at a
dear ransom he
freeth his speech
from the bonds of
thirst.

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
We could nor laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail!

160

A flash of joy;

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
Agape they heard me call:
Gramercy! they for joy did grin,
And all at once their breath drew in,
As they were drinking all.

165

And horror
follows. For can it
be a ship that
comes onward
without wind or
tide?

See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!
Hither to work us weal;
Without a breeze; without a tide,
She steadies with upright keel!

170

The western wave was all a-flame.
 The day was well nigh done!
 Almost upon the western wave
 Rested the broad bright Sun;
 When that strange shape drove suddenly
 Betwixt us and the Sun. 175

It seemeth him
 but the skeleton
 of a ship.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,
 (Heaven's Mother send us grace!)
 As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
 With broad and burning face. 180

And its ribs are
 seen as bars on the
 face of the setting
 Sun. The Spectre-
 Woman and her
 Death-Mate, and
 no other on board
 the skeleton-ship.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
 How fast she nears and nears!
 Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun,
 Like restless gossameres?

Are those *her* ribs through which the Sun
 Did peer, as through a grate?
 And is that Woman all her crew?
 Is that a DEATH? and are there two?
 Is DEATH that woman's mate? 185

Like vessel, like
 crew!

Her lips were red, *her* looks were free,
 Her locks were yellow as gold;
 Her skin was as white as leprosy,
 The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
 Who thicks man's blood with cold. 190

Death and
 Life-in-Death
 have dived for the
 ship's crew, and
 she (the latter)
 winneth the
 ancient Mariner.

The naked hulk alongside came,
 And the twain were casting dice;
 "The game is done! I've won! I've won!"
 Quoth she, and whistles thrice. 195

No twilight within
 the courts of the
 Sun.

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
 At one stride comes the dark;
 With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
 Off shot the spectre-bark. 200

At the rising of the Moon,
 We listened and looked sideways up!
 Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
 My life-blood seemed to sip!
 The stars were dim, and thick the night,
 The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;
 From the sails the dew did drip —
 Till clomb above the eastern bar
 The hornéd Moon, with one bright star
 Within the nether tip.

205

210

One after another,
 One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,
 Too quick for groan or sigh,
 Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
 And cursed me with his eye.

215

His shipmates drop down dead.
 Four times fifty living men,
 (And I heard nor sigh nor groan)
 With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
 They dropped down one by one.

But Life-in-Death begins her work on the ancient Mariner.
 The souls did from their bodies fly, —
 They fled to bliss or woe!
 And every soul, it passed me by,
 Like the whizz of my cross-bow!

220

PART IV

The Wedding Guest feareth that a Spirit is talking to him.
 "I fear thee, ancient Mariner!
 I fear thy skinny hand!
 And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
 As is the ribbed sea-sand.

225

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
 And thy skinny hand, so brown." —
 Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!
 This body dropt not down.

230

But the ancient Mariner assureth him of his bodily life, and proceedeth to relate his horrible penance.
 (Alone, alone, all, all alone,
 Alone on a wide wide sea!
 And never a saint took pity on
 My soul in agony.)

235

He despiseth the
creatures of the
calm.

The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

And envieth that
they should live,
and so many lie
dead.

I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay. 240

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust. 245

I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky 250
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

But the curse
liveth for him in
the eye of the dead
men.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Nor rot nor reek did they:
The look with which they looked on me 255
Had never passed away.

An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
Is the curse in a dead man's eye! 260
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die.

In his loneliness
and fixedness he
yeameth towards
the journeying
Moon, and the
stars that still
sojourn, yet still
move onward; and

every where the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival.

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And no where did abide:
Softly she was going up; 265
And a star or two beside —

Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt alway
A still and awful red. 270

By the light of the
Moon he
beholdeth God's
creatures of the
great calm.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes. 275

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire. 280

Their beauty and
their happiness.

He blesseth them
in his heart.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware: 285
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

The spell begins to
break.

The selfsame moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea. 290

PART V

Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,
Beloved from pole to pole!
To Mary Queen the praise be given!
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
That slid into my soul. 295

By grace of the
holy Mother, the
ancient Mariner is
refreshed with rain.

The silly buckets on the deck,
That had so long remained,
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;
And when I awoke, it rained. 300

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,
My garments all were dank;
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
And still my body drank.

I moved, and could not feel my limbs: 305
I was so light – almost
I thought that I had died in sleep,
And was a blessed ghost.

He heareth sounds
and seeth strange
sights and
commotions in
the sky and the
element.

And soon I heard a roaring wind:
It did not come anear; 310
But with its sound it shook the sails,
That were so thin and sere.

The upper air burst into life!
And a hundred fire-flags sheen,
To and fro they were hurried about! 315
And to and fro, and in and out,
The wan stars danced between.

And the coming wind did roar more loud,
And the sails did sigh like sedge;
And the rain poured down from one black
cloud; 320
The Moon was at its edge.

The thick black cloud was cleft, and still
The Moon was at its side:
Like waters shot from some high crag,
The lightning fell with never a jag, 325
A river steep and wide.

The bodies of the
ship's crew are
inspired, and the
ship moves on;

The loud wind never reached the ship,
Yet now the ship moved on!
Beneath the lightning and the Moon
The dead men gave a groan. 330

They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
It had been strange, even in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise.

The helmsman steered, the ship moved on; 335
Yet never a breeze up blew;
The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,
Where they were wont to do;
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools –
We were a ghastly crew. 340

The body of my brother's son
Stood by me, knee to knee:
The body and I pulled at one rope,
But he said nought to me.

But not by the
souls of the men,
nor by daemons of
earth or middle
air, but by a blessed
troop of angelic
spirits, sent down
by the invocation
of the guardian
saint.

"I fear thee, ancient Mariner!" 345
Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest!
'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,
Which to their corpses came again,
But a troop of spirits blest:

For when it dawned – they dropped their arms, 350
And clustered round the mast;
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,
And from their bodies passed.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the Sun; 355
Slowly the sounds came back again,
Now mixed, now one by one.

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the sky-lark sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are, 360
How they seemed to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning!

And now 'twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song, 365
That makes the heavens be mute.

It ceased; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June, 370
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

Till noon we quietly sailed on,
Yet never a breeze did breathe:
Slowly and smoothly went the ship, 375
Moved onward from beneath.

The lonesome Spirit from the south-pole carries on the ship as far as the Line, in obedience to the angelic troop, but still requireth vengeance.

Under the keel nine fathom deep,
From the land of mist and snow,
The spirit slid: and it was he
That made the ship to go. 380
The sails at noon left off their tune,
And the ship stood still also.

The Sun, right up above the mast,
Had fixed her to the ocean:
But in a minute she 'gan stir, 385
With a short uneasy motion
Backwards and forwards half her length
With a short uneasy motion.

Then like a pawing horse let go,
She made a sudden bound: 390
It flung the blood into my head,
And I fell down in a swound.

The Polar Spirit's fellow daemons, the invisible inhabitants of the element, take part in his wrong; and two of them relate, one to the other, that penance long and heavy for the ancient Mariner hath been accorded to the Polar Spirit, who returneth southward.

How long in that same fit I lay,
I have not to declare;
But ere my living life returned, 395
I heard and in my soul discerned
Two voices in the air.

"Is it he?" quoth one, "Is this the man?
By him who died on cross,
With his cruel bow he laid full low 400
The harmless Albatross.

The spirit who bideth by himself
In the land of mist and snow,
He loved the bird that loved the man
Who shot him with his bow."

405

The other was a softer voice,
As soft as honey-dew:
Quoth he, "The man hath penance done,
And penance more will do."

PART VI

FIRST VOICE

"But tell me, tell me! speak again,
Thy soft response renewing –
What makes that ship drive on so fast?
What is the ocean doing?"

410

SECOND VOICE

"Still as a slave before his lord,
The ocean hath no bias;
His great bright eye most silently
Up to the Moon is cast –

415

If he may know which way to go;
For she guides him smooth or grim.
See, brother, see! how graciously
She looketh down on him."

420

FIRST VOICE

The Mariner hath
been cast into a
trance; for the
angelic power
causeth the vessel
to drive northward
faster than human
life could endure.

"But why drives on that ship so fast,
Without or wave or wind?"

SECOND VOICE

"The air is cut away before,
And closes from behind.

425

Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high!
Or we shall be belated:
For slow and slow that ship will go,
When the Mariner's trance is abated."

The supernatural motion is retarded; the Mariner awakes, and his penance begins anew.

I woke, and we were sailing on 430
As in a gentle weather:
'Twas night, calm night, the Moon was high;
The dead men stood together.

All stood together on the deck,
For a charnel-dungeon fitter: 435
All fixed on me their stony eyes,
That in the Moon did glitter.

The pang, the curse, with which they died,
Had never passed away:
I could not draw my eyes from theirs, 440
Nor turn them up to pray.

The curse is finally expiated.

And now this spell was snapt: once more
I viewed the ocean green,
And looked far forth, yet little saw
Of what had else been seen - 445

Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend 450
Doth close behind him tread.

But soon there breathed a wind on me,
Nor sound nor motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea,
In ripple or in shade. 455

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring -
It mingled strangely with my fears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship, 460
Yet she sailed softly too:
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze –
On me alone it blew.

And the ancient
Mariner
beholdeth his
native country.

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed } Finally Ancient Mariner
The light-house top I see? } saw his native land.
Is this the hill? is this the kirk? 465
Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,
And I with sobs did pray –
O let me be awake, my God!
Or let me sleep alway. 470

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
So smoothly it was strewn!
And on the bay the moonlight lay,
And the shadow of the Moon. 475

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,
That stands above the rock:
The moonlight steeped in silentness
The steady weathercock.

The angelic spirits
leave the dead
bodies,

And the bay was white with silent light, 480
Till rising from the same,
Full many shapes, that shadows were,
In crimson colours came.

And appear in
their own forms
of light.

A little distance from the prow
Those crimson shadows were: 485
I turned my eyes upon the deck –
Oh, Christ! what saw I there!

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,
And, by the holy rood!
A man all light, a seraph-man,
On every corse there stood. 490

This seraph-band, each waved his hand:
It was a heavenly sight!
They stood as signals to the land,
Each one a lovely light; 495

This seraph-band, each waved his hand,
No voice did they impart –
No voice; but oh! the silence sank
Like music on my heart.

But soon I heard the dash of oars, 500
I heard the Pilot's cheer;
My head was turned perforce away,
And I saw a boat appear.

The Pilot and the Pilot's boy,
I heard them coming fast: 505
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy
The dead men could not blast.

I saw a third – I heard his voice:
It is the Hermit good!
He singeth loud his godly hymns 510
That he makes in the wood.
He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away
The Albatross's blood.

PART VII

The Hermit of
the wood,

This Hermit good lives in that wood
Which slopes down to the sea. 515
How loudly his sweet voice he rears!
He loves to talk with mariners
That come from a far countree.

He kneels at morn, and noon, and eve –
He hath a cushion plump: 520
It is the moss that wholly hides
The rotted old oak-stump.

- The skiff-boat neared: I heard them talk,
 "Why, this is strange, I trow!
 Where are those lights so many and fair,
 That signal made but now?" 525
- Approacheth the
 ship with wonder. "Strange, by my faith!" the Hermit said –
 "And they answered not our cheer!
 The planks looked warped! and see those sails,
 How thin they are and sere! 530
 I never saw aught like to them,
 Unless perchance it were
- Brown skeletons of leaves that lag
 My forest-brook along;
 When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow, 535
 And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,
 That eats the she-wolf's young."
- "Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look –
 (The Pilot made reply)
 I am a-feared" – "Push on, push on!" 540
 Said the Hermit cheerily.
- The boat came closer to the ship,
 But I nor spake nor stirred;
 The boat came close beneath the ship,
 And straight a sound was heard. 545
- The ship suddenly
 sinketh. Under the water it rumbled on,
 Still louder and more dread:
 It reached the ship, it split the bay;
 The ship went down like lead.
- The ancient
 Mariner is saved in
 the Pilot's boat. Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound, 550
 Which sky and ocean smote,
 Like one that hath been seven days drowned
 My body lay afloat;
 But swift as dreams, myself I found
 Within the Pilot's boat. 555

Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,
The boat spun round and round;
And all was still, save that the hill
Was telling of the sound.

I moved my lips – the Pilot shrieked 560
And fell down in a fit;
The holy Hermit raised his eyes,
And prayed where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,
Who now doth crazy go, 565
Laughed loud and long, and all the while
His eyes went to and fro.
"Ha! ha!" quoth he, "full plain I see,
The Devil knows how to row."

And now, all in my own countree, 570
I stood on the firm land!
The Hermit stepped forth from the boat,
And scarcely he could stand.

The ancient
Mariner earnestly
entreateth the
Hermit to shrieve
him; and the
penance of life falls
on him.

"O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!"
The Hermit crossed his brow. 575
"Say quick," quoth he, "I bid thee say –
What manner of man art thou?"

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale; 580
And then it left me free.

And ever and anon
throughout his
future life an
agony
constraineth him
to travel from land
to land:

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns. 585

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach. 590

What loud uproar bursts from that door!
The wedding-guests are there:
But in the garden-bower the bride
And bride-maids singing are:
And hark the little vesper bell,
Which biddeth me to prayer!

595

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God himself
Scarce seeméd there to be.

600

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company! —

To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And youths and maidens gay!

605

And to teach, by
his own example,
love and reverence
to all things that
God made and
loveth.

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

610

Lesson
of Anni-
and Mariner

He prayeth best, who loveth best,
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

615

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar,
Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest
Turned from the bridegroom's door.

620

He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man,
He rose the morrow morn.

625

Christabel

PREFACE

The first part of the following poem was written in the year 1797, at Stowey, in the county of Somerset. The second part, after my return from Germany, in the year 1800, at Keswick, Cumberland. It is probable that if the poem had been finished at either of the former periods, or if even the first and second part had been published in the year 1800, the impression of its originality would have been much greater than I dare at present expect. But for this I have only my own indolence to blame. The dates are mentioned for the exclusive purpose of precluding charges of plagiarism or servile imitation from myself. For there is amongst us a set of critics, who seem to hold, that every possible thought and image is traditional; who have no notion that there are such things as fountains in the world, small as well as great; and who would therefore charitably derive every rill they behold flowing, from a perforation made in some other man's tank. I am confident, however, that as far as the present poem is concerned, the celebrated poets whose writings I might be suspected of having imitated, either in particular passages, or in the tone and the spirit of the whole, would be among the first to vindicate me from the charge, and who, on any striking coincidence, would permit me to address them in this doggerel version of two monkish Latin hexameters.

'Tis mine and it is likewise yours;
 But an if this will not do;
 Let it be mine, good friend! for I
 Am the poorer of the two.

I have only to add that the metre of *Christabel* is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless, this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion.

PART I

'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,
 And the owls have awakened the crowing cock;
 Tu - whit!—Tu - whoo!
 And hark, again! the crowing cock,
 How drowsily it crew. 5

Sir Leoline, the Baron rich,
 Hath a toothless mastiff bitch;
 From her kennel beneath the rock
 She maketh answer to the clock,
 Four for the quarters, and twelve for the hour; 10
 Ever and aye, by shine and shower,
 Sixteen short howls, not over loud;
 Some say, she sees my lady's shroud.

Is the night chilly and dark?
 The night is chilly, but not dark. 15
 The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
 It covers but not hides the sky.
 The moon is behind, and at the full;
 And yet she looks both small and dull.
 The night is chill, the cloud is gray: 20
 'Tis a month before the month of May,
 And the Spring comes slowly up this way.

The lovely lady, Christabel,
 Whom her father loves so well,
 What makes her in the wood so late, 25
 A furlong from the castle gate?
 She had dreams all yesternight
 Of her own betrothed knight;
 And she in the midnight wood will pray
 For the weal of her lover that's far away. 30

She stole along, she nothing spoke,
 The sighs she heaved were soft and low,
 And naught was green upon the oak
 But moss and rarest misietoe:

She kneels beneath the huge oak tree, 35
And in silence prayeth she.

The lady sprang up suddenly,
The lovely lady, Christabel!
It moaned as near, as near can be,
But what it is she cannot tell. — 40
On the other side it seems to be,
Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree.

The night is chill; the forest bare;
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?
There is not wind enough in the air 45
To move away the ringlet curl
From the lovely lady's cheek —
There is not wind enough to twirl
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can, 50
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

Hush, beating heart of Christabel!
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!
She folded her arms beneath her cloak, 55
And stole to the other side of the oak.
What sees she there?

There she sees a damsel bright,
Drest in a silken robe of white,
That shadowy in the moonlight shone: 60
The neck that made that white robe wan,
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;
Her blue-veined feet unsandal'd were,
And wildly glittered here and there
The gems entangled in her hair. 65
I guess, 'twas frightful there to see
A lady so richly clad as she —
Beautiful exceedingly!

Mary mother, save me now!
(Said Christabel,) And who art thou? 70

The lady strange made answer meet,
And her voice was faint and sweet: —
Have pity on my sore distress,
I scarce can speak for weariness:
Stretch forth thy hand, and have no fear! 75
Said Christabel, How camest thou here?
And the lady, whose voice was faint and sweet,
Did thus pursue her answer meet: —

My sire is of a noble line,
And my name is Geraldine: 80
Five warriors seized me yestermorn,
Me, even me, a maid forlorn:
They choked my cries with force and fright,
And tied me on a palfrey white.
The palfrey was as fleet as wind, 85
And they rode furiously behind.

They spurred amain, their steeds were white:
And once we crossed the shade of night.
As sure as Heaven shall rescue me,
I have no thought what men they be; 90
Nor do I know how long it is
(For I have lain entranced I wis)
Since one, the tallest of the five,
Took me from the palfrey's back,
A weary woman, scarce alive. 95
Some muttered words his comrades spoke:
He placed me underneath this oak;
He swore they would return with haste;
Whither they went I cannot tell —
I thought I heard, some minutes past, 100
Sounds as of a castle bell.
Stretch forth thy hand (thus ended she),
And help a wretched maid to flee.

Then Christabel stretched forth her hand,
And comforted fair Geraldine: 105
O well, bright dame! may you command
The service of Sir Leoline;
And gladly our stout chivalry

Will he send forth and friends withal
To guide and guard you safe and free
Home to your noble father's hall. 110

She rose: and forth with steps they passed
That strove to be, and were not, fast.
Her gracious stars the lady blest,
And thus spake on sweet Christabel: 115
All our household are at rest,
The hall as silent as the cell;
Sir Leoline is weak in health,
And may not well awakened be,
But we will move as if in stealth, 120
And I beseech your courtesy,
This night, to share your couch with me.

They crossed the moat, and Christabel
Took the key that fitted well;
A little door she opened straight, 125
All in the middle of the gate;
The gate that was ironed within and without,
Where an army in battle array had marched out.
The lady sank, belike through pain,
And Christabel with might and main 130
Lifted her up, a weary weight,
Over the threshold of the gate:
Then the lady rose again,
And moved, as she were not in pain.

So free from danger, free from fear, 135
They crossed the court: right glad they were.
And Christabel devoutly cried
To the lady by her side,
Praise we the Virgin all divine
Who hath rescued thee from thy distress! 140
Alas, alas! said Geraldine,
I cannot speak for weariness.
So free from danger, free from fear,
They crossed the court: right glad they were.

Outside her kennel, the mastiff old
Lay fast asleep, in moonshine cold.
The mastiff old did not awake,
Yet she an angry moan did make!
And what can ail the mastiff bitch?
Never till now she uttered yell
Beneath the eye of Christabel. 150
Perhaps it is the owlet's scritch:
For what can ail the mastiff bitch?

They passed the hall, that echoes still,
Pass as lightly as you will! 155
The brands were flat, the brands were dying,
Amid their own white ashes lying;
But when the lady passed, there came
A tongue of light, a fit of flame;
And Christabel saw the lady's eye, 160
And nothing else saw she thereby,
Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,
Which hung in a murky old niche in the wall.
O softly tread, said Christabel,
My father seldom sleepeth well. 165

Sweet Christabel her feet doth bare,
And jealous of the listening air
They steal their way from stair to stair,
Now in glimmer, and now in gloom,
And now they pass the Baron's room, 170
As still as death, with stifled breath!
And now have reached her chamber door;
And now doth Geraldine press down
The rushes of the chamber floor.

The moon shines dim in the open air, 175
And not a moonbeam enters here.
But they without its light can see
The chamber carved so curiously,
Carved with figures strange and sweet,
All made out of the carver's brain, 180
For a lady's chamber meet:

The lamp with twofold silver chain
Is fastened to an angel's feet.

The silver lamp burns dead and dim;
But Christabel the lamp will trim. 185
She trimmed the lamp, and made it bright,
And left it swinging to and fro,
While Geraldine, in wretched plight,
Sank down upon the floor below.

O weary lady, Geraldine, 190
I pray you, drink this cordial wine!
It is a wine of virtuous powers;
My mother made it of wild flowers.

And will your mother pity me,
Who am a maiden most forlorn? 195
Christabel answered – Woe is me!
She died the hour that I was born.
I have heard the grey-haired friar tell
How on her death-bed she did say,
That she should hear the castle-bell 200
Strike twelve upon my wedding-day.
O mother dear! that thou wert here!
I would, said Geraldine, she were!

But soon with altered voice, said she –
“Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine! 205
I have power to bid thee flee.”
Alas! what ails poor Geraldine?
Why stares she with unsettled eye?
Can she the bodiless dead espy?
And why with hollow voice cries she, 210
“Off, woman, off! this hour is mine –
Though thou her guardian spirit be,
Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me.”

Then Christabel knelt by the lady's side,
And raised to heaven her eyes so blue – 215
Alas! said she, this ghastly ride –
Dear lady! it hath wildered you!

The lady wiped her moist cold brow,
And faintly said, "'tis over now!"

Again the wild-flower wine she drank: 220
Her fair large eyes 'gan glitter bright,
And from the floor whereon she sank,
The lofty lady stood upright:
She was most beautiful to see,
Like a lady of a far countree. 225

And thus the lofty lady spake —
"All they who live in the upper sky,
Do love you, holy Christabel!
And you love them, and for their sake
And for the good which me befel, 230
Even I in my degree will try,
Fair maiden, to requite you well.
But now unrobe yourself; for I
Must pray, ere yet in bed I lie."

Quoth Christabel, So let it be! 235
And as the lady bade, did she.
Her gentle limbs did she undress,
And lay down in her loveliness.

But through her brain of weal and woe
So many thoughts moved to and fro, 240
That vain it were her lids to close;
So half-way from the bed she rose,
And on her elbow did recline
To look at the lady Geraldine.

Beneath the lamp the lady bowed, 245
And slowly rolled her eyes around;
Then drawing in her breath aloud,
Like one that shuddered, she unbound
The cincture from beneath her breast:
Her silken robe, and inner vest, 250
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
Behold! her bosom and half her side—

A sight to dream of, not to tell!
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!

Yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs; 255
Ah! what a stricken look was hers!
Deep from within she seems half-way
To lift some weight with sick assay,
And eyes the maid and seeks delay;
Then suddenly, as one defied, 260
Collects herself in scorn and pride,
And lay down by the Maiden's side! —
And in her arms the maid she took,
 Ah wel-a-day!
And with low voice and doleful look 265
These words did say:
"In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!
Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow; 270
 But vainly thou warrest,
 For this is alone in
 Thy power to declare,
 That in the dim forest
 Thou heard'st a low moaning, 275
And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair;
And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,
To shield her and shelter her from the damp air."

THE CONCLUSION TO PART I

It was a lovely sight to see
The lady Christabel, when she 280
Was praying at the old oak tree.
 Amid the jagged shadows
 Of mossy leafless boughs,
 Kneeling in the moonlight,
 To make her gentle vows; 285
Her slender palms together prest,
Heaving sometimes on her breast;
Her face resigned to bliss or bale —
Her face, oh call it fair not pale,

And both blue eyes more bright than clear, 290
Each about to have a tear.

With open eyes (ah woe is me!)
Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,
Fearfully dreaming, yet, I wis,
Dreaming that alone, which is — 295
O sorrow and shame! Can this be she,
The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?
And lo! the worker of these harms,
That holds the maiden in her arms,
Seems to slumber still and mild, 300
As a mother with her child.

A star hath set, a star hath risen,
O Geraldine! since arms of thine
Have been the lovely lady's prison.
O Geraldine! one hour was thine — 305
Thou'st had thy will! By tairn and rill,
The night-birds all that hour were still.
But now they are jubilant anew,
From cliff and tower, tu—whoo! tu—whoo!
Tu—whoo! tu—whoo! from wood and fell! 310

And see! the lady Christabel
Gathers herself from out her trance;
Her limbs relax, her countenance
Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids
Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds — 315
Large tears that leave the lashes bright!
And oft the while she seems to smile
As infants at a sudden light!

Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,
Like a youthful hermitess, 320
Beauteous in a wilderness,
Who, praying always, prays in sleep.
And, if she move unquietly,
Perchance, 'tis but the blood so free
Comes back and tingles in her feet. 325
No doubt, she hath a vision sweet.

What if her guardian spirit 'twere,
What if she knew her mother near?
But this she knows, in joys and woes,
That saints will aid if men will call: 330
For the blue sky bends over all!

PART II

Each matin bell, the Baron saith,
Knells us back to a world of death.
These words Sir Leoline first said,
When he rose and found his lady dead: 335
These words Sir Leoline will say
Many a morn to his dying day!

And hence the custom and law began
That still at dawn the sacristan,
Who duly pulls the heavy bell, 340
Five and forty beads must tell
Between each stroke – a warning knell,
Which not a soul can choose but hear
From Bratha Head to Wyndermere.

Saith Bracy the bard, So let it knell! 345
And let the drowsy sacristan
Still count as slowly as he can!
There is no lack of such, I ween,
As well fill up the space between.
In Langdale Pike and Witch's Lair, 350
And Dungeon-ghyll so foully rent,
With ropes of rock and bells of air
Three sinful sextons' ghosts are pent,
Who all give back, one after t'other,
The death-note to their living brother; 355
And oft too, by the knell offended,
Just as their one! two! three! is ended,
The devil mocks the doleful tale
With a merry peal from Borodale.

The air is still! through mist and cloud
That merry peal comes ringing loud; 360

And Geraldine shakes off her dread,
And rises lightly from the bed;
Puts on her silken vestments white,
And tricks her hair in lovely plight, 365
And nothing doubting of her spell
Awakens the lady Christabel.
"Sleep you, sweet lady Christabel?
I trust that you have rested well."

And Christabel awoke and spied 370
The same who lay down by her side —
O rather say, the same whom she
Raised up beneath the old oak tree!
Nay, fairer yet! and yet more fair!
For she belike hath drunken deep 375
Of all the blessedness of sleep!
And while she spake, her looks, her air
Such gentle thankfulness declare,
That (so it seemed) her girded vests
Grew tight beneath her heaving breasts. 380
"Sure I have sinn'd!" said Christabel,
"Now heaven be praised if all be well!"
And in low faltering tones, yet sweet,
Did she the lofty lady greet
With such perplexity of mind 385
As dreams too lively leave behind.

So quickly she rose, and quickly arrayed
Her maiden limbs, and having prayed
That He, who on the cross did groan,
Might wash away her sins unknown, 390
She forthwith led fair Geraldine
To meet her sire, Sir Leoline.

The lovely maid and the lady tall
Are pacing both into the hall,
And pacing on through page and groom, 395
Enter the Baron's presence-room.

The Baron rose, and while he prest
His gentle daughter to his breast,
With cheerful wonder in his eyes
The lady Geraldine espies, 400
And gave such welcome to the same,
As might beseem so bright a dame!

But when he heard the lady's tale,
And when she told her father's name,
Why waxed Sir Leoline so pale, 405
Murmuring o'er the name again,
Lord Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine?

Alas! they had been friends in youth;
But whispering tongues can poison truth;
And constancy lives in realms above; 410
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;
And to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain.
And thus it chanced, as I divine,
With Roland and Sir Leoline. 415
Each spake words of high disdain
And insult to his heart's best brother:
They parted — ne'er to meet again!
But never either found another
To free the hollow heart from paining — 420
They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder;
A dreary sea now flows between; —
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Shall wholly do away, I ween, 425
The marks of that which once hath been.

Sir Leoline, a moment's space,
Stood gazing on the damsel's face:
And the youthful Lord of Tryermaine
Came back upon his heart again. 430

O then the Baron forgot his age,
His noble heart swelled high with rage;
He swore by the wounds in Jesu's side

He would proclaim it far and wide,
With trump and solemn heraldry, 435
That they, who thus had wronged the dame,
Were base as spotted infamy!
"And if they dare deny the same,
My herald shall appoint a week,
And let the recreant traitors seek 440
My tourney court – that there and then
I may dislodge their reptile souls
From the bodies and forms of men!"
He spake: his eye in lightning rolls!
For the lady was ruthlessly seized; and he kenned 445
In the beautiful lady the child of his friend!

And now the tears were on his face,
And fondly in his arms he took
Fair Geraldine, who met the embrace,
Prolonging it with joyous look. 450
Which when she viewed, a vision fell
Upon the soul of Christabel,
The vision of fear, the touch and pain!
She shrunk and shuddered, and saw again –
(Ah, woe is me! Was it for thee, 455
Thou gentle maid! such sights to see?)

Again she saw that bosom old,
Again she felt that bosom cold,
And drew in her breath with a hissing sound:
Whereat the Knight turned wildly round, 460
And nothing saw, but his own sweet maid
With eyes upraised, as one that prayed.

The touch, the sight, had passed away,
And in its stead that vision blest,
Which comforted her after-rest 465
While in the lady's arms she lay,
Had put a rapture in her breast,
And on her lips and o'er her eyes
Spread smiles like light!

With new surprise,
"What ails then my beloved child?" 470

The Baron said – His daughter mild
Made answer, "Ail will yet be well!"
I ween, she had no power to tell
Aught else: so mighty was the spell.

Yet he, who saw this Geraldine, 475
Had deemed her sure a thing divine:
Such sorrow with such grace she blended,
As if she feared she had offended
Sweet Christabel, that gentle maid!
And with such lowly tones she prayed 480
She might be sent without delay
Home to her father's mansion.

"Nay!

Nay, by my soul!" said Leoline.
"Ho! Bracy the bard, the charge be thine!
Go thou, with music sweet and loud, 485
And take two steeds with trappings proud,
And take the youth whom thou lov'st best
To bear thy harp, and learn thy song,
And clothe you both in solemn vest,
And over the mountains haste along, 490
Lest wandering folk, that are abroad,
Detain you on the valley road.

"And when he has crossed the Irthing flood,
My merry bard! he hastes, he hastes
Up Knorren Moor, through Halegarth Wood, 495
And reaches soon that castle good
Which stands and threatens Scotland's wastes.

"Bard Bracy! bard Bracy! your horses are fleet,
Ye must ride up the hall, your music so sweet,
More loud than your horses' echoing feet! 500
And loud and loud to Lord Roland call,
Thy daughter is safe in Langdale hall!
Thy beautiful daughter is safe and free –
Sir Leoline greets thee thus through me!
He bids thee come without delay 505
With all thy numerous array
And take thy lovely daughter home:

And he will meet thee on the way
With all his numerous array
White with their panting palfreys' foam: 510
And, by mine honour! I will say,
That I repent me of the day
When I spake words of fierce disdain
To Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine! –
– For since that evil hour hath flown, 515
Many a summer's sun hath shone;
Yet ne'er found I a friend again
Like Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine.”

The lady fell, and clasped his knees,
Her face upraised, her eyes o'erflowing; 520
And Bracy replied, with faltering voice,
His gracious Hail on all bestowing! –
“Thy words, thou sire of Christabel,
Are sweeter than my harp can tell;
Yet might I gain a boon of thee, 525
This day my journey should not be,
So strange a dream hath come to me,
That I had vowed with music loud
To clear yon wood from thing unblest.
Warned by a vision in my rest! 530
For in my sleep I saw that dove,
That gentle bird, whom thou dost love,
And call'st by thy own daughter's name –
Sir Leoline! I saw the same
Fluttering, and uttering fearful moan, 535
Among the green herbs in the forest alone.
Which when I saw and when I heard,
I wonder'd what might ail the bird;
For nothing near it could I see,
Save the grass and green herbs underneath the old tree. 540

“And in my dream methought I went
To search out what might there be found;
And what the sweet bird's trouble meant,
That thus lay fluttering on the ground.
I went and peered, and could descry 545
No cause for her distressful cry;

But yet for her dear lady's sake
I stooped, methought, the dove to take,
When lo! I saw a bright green snake
Coiled around its wings and neck. 550
Green as the herbs on which it couched,
Close by the dove's its head it crouched;
And with the dove it heaves and stirs,
Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!
I woke; it was the midnight hour, 555
The clock was echoing in the tower;
But though my slumber was gone by,
This dream it would not pass away —
It seems to live upon my eye!
And thence I vowed this self-same day 560
With music strong and saintly song
To wander through the forest bare,
Lest aught unholy loiter there."

Thus Bracy said: the Baron, the while,
Half-listening heard him with a smile; 565
Then turned to Lady Geraldine,
His eyes made up of wonder and love;
And said in courtly accents fine,
"Sweet maid, Lord Roland's beauteous dove,
With arms more strong than harp or song, 570
Thy sire and I will crush the snake!"
He kissed her forehead as he spake,
And Geraldine in maiden wise
Casting down her large bright eyes,
With blushing cheek and courtesy fine 575
She turned her from Sir Leoline;
Softly gathering up her train,
That o'er her right arm fell again;
And folded her arms across her chest;
And couched her head upon her breast, 580
And looked askance at Christabel
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!

A snake's small eye blinks dull and shy;
And the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head,
Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye, 585

And with somewhat of malice, and more of dread,
At Christabel she looked askance! –
One moment – and the sight was fled!
But Christabel in dizzy trance
Stumbling on the unsteady ground 590
Shuddered aloud, with a hissing sound;
And Geraldine again turned round,
And like a thing, that sought relief,
Full of wonder and full of grief,
She rolled her large bright eyes divine 595
Wildly on Sir Leoline.

The maid, alas! her thoughts are gone,
She nothing sees – no sight but one!
The maid, devoid of guile and sin,
I know not how, in fearful wise, 600
So deeply had she drunken in
That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,
That all her features were resigned
To this sole image in her mind:
And passively did imitate 605
That look of dull and treacherous hate!
And thus she stood, in dizzy trance,
Still picturing that look askance
With forced unconscious sympathy
Full before her father's view — 610
As far as such a look could be
In eyes so innocent and blue!

And when the trance was o'er, the maid
Paused awhile, and inly prayed:
Then falling at the Baron's feet, 615
"By my mother's soul do I entreat
That thou this woman send away!"
She said: and more she could not say:
For what she knew she could not tell,
O'er-mastered by the mighty spell. 620

Why is thy cheek so wan and wild,
Sir Leoline? Thy only child
Lies at thy feet, thy joy, thy pride,

So fair, so innocent, so mild;
 The same, for whom thy lady died! 625
 O by the pangs of her dear mother
 Think thou no evil of thy child!
 For her, and thee, and for no other,
 She prayed the moment ere she died:
 Prayed that the babe for whom she died, 630
 Might prove her dear lord's joy and pride!
 That prayer her deadly pangs beguiled,
 Sir Leoline!
 And wouldst thou wrong thy only child,
 Her child and thine? 635

Within the Baron's heart and brain
 If thoughts, like these, had any share,
 They only swelled his rage and pain,
 And did but work confusion there.
 His heart was cleft with pain and rage, 640
 His cheeks they quivered, his eyes were wild,
 Dishonoured thus in his old age;
 Dishonoured by his only child,
 And all his hospitality
 To the wronged daughter of his friend 645
 By more than woman's jealousy
 Brought thus to a disgraceful end –
 He rolled his eye with stern regard
 Upon the gentle minstrel bard,
 And said in tones abrupt, austere – 650
 "Why, Bracy! dost thou loiter here?
 I bade thee hence!" The bard obeyed;
 And turning from his own sweet maid,
 The agéd knight, Sir Leoline,
 Led forth the lady Geraldine! 655

THE CONCLUSION TO PART II

A little child, a limber elf,
 Singing, dancing to itself,
 A fairy thing with red round cheeks,
 That always finds, and never seeks,
 Makes such a vision to the sight 660

As fills a father's eyes with light;
And pleasures flow in so thick and fast
Upon his heart, that he at last
Must needs express his love's excess
With words of unmeant bitterness. 665
Perhaps 'tis pretty to force together
Thoughts so all unlike each other;
To mutter and mock a broken charm,
To dally with wrong that does no harm.
Perhaps 'tis tender too and pretty 670
At each wild word to feel within
A sweet recoil of love and pity.
And what, if in a world of sin
(O sorrow and shame should this be true!)
Such giddiness of heart and brain 675
Comes seldom save from rage and pain,
So talks as it's most used to do.

The Ballad of the Dark Ladié

A FRAGMENT

Beneath yon birch with silver bark,
 And boughs so pendulous and fair,
 The brook falls scatter'd down the rock:
 And all is mossy there!

And there upon the moss she sits, 5
 The Dark Ladié in silent pain;
 The heavy tear is in her eye,
 And drops and swells again.

Three times she sends her little page 10
 Up the castled mountain's breast,
 If he might find the Knight that wears
 The Griffin for his crest.

The sun was sloping down the sky,
 And she had linger'd there all day,
 Counting moments, dreaming fears — 15
 Oh wherefore can he stay?

She hears a rustling o'er the brook,
 She sees far off a swinging bough!
 "'Tis, He! 'Tis my betrothéd Knight!
 Lord Falkland, it is Thou!" 20

She springs, she clasps him round the neck,
 She sobs a thousand hopes and fears,
 Her kisses glowing on his cheeks
 She quenches with her tears.

* * *

"My friends with rude ungentle words 25
 They scoff and bid me fly to thee!
 O give me shelter in thy breast!
 O shield and shelter me!

“My Henry, I have given thee much,
I gave what I can ne'er recall, 30
I gave my heart, I gave my peace,
O Heaven! I gave thee all.”

The Knight made answer to the Maid,
While to his heart he held her hand,
“Nine castles hath my noble sire, 35
None statelier in the land.

“The fairest one shall be my love's,
The fairest castle of the nine!
Wait only till the stars peep out,
The fairest shall be thine: 40

“Wait only till the hand of eve
Hath wholly closed yon western bars,
And through the dark we two will steal
Beneath the twinkling stars!” –

“The dark? the dark? No! not the dark?
The twinkling stars? How, Henry? How?” 45
O God! 'twas in the eye of noon
He pledged his sacred vow!

And in the eye of noon my love
Shall lead me from my mother's door, 50
Sweet boys and girls all clothed in white
Strewing flowers before:

But first the nodding minstrels go
With music meet for lordly bowers,
The children next in snow-white vests, 55
Strewing buds and flowers!

And then my love and I shall pace,
My jet black hair in pearly braids,
Between our comely bachelors
And blushing bridal maids. 60

* * *

Love

All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
 Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
 All are but ministers of Love,
 And feed his sacred flame.

Oft in my waking dreams do I 5
 Live o'er again that happy hour,
 When midway on the mount I lay,
 Beside the ruined tower.

The moonshine, stealing o'er the scene
 Had blended with the lights of eve; 10
 And she was there, my hope, my joy,
 My own dear Genevieve!

She leant against the armed man,
 The statue of the armed knight;
 She stood and listened to my lay, 15
 Amid the lingering light.

Few sorrows hath she of her own,
 My hope! my joy! my Genevieve!
 She loves me best, whene'er I sing 20
 The songs that make her grieve.

I played a soft and doleful air,
 I sang an old and moving story –
 An old rude song, that suited well
 That ruin wild and hoary.

She listened with a flitting blush, 25
 With downcast eyes and modest grace;
 For well she knew, I could not choose
 But gaze upon her face.

I told her of the Knight that wore
Upon his shield a burning brand; 30
And that for ten long years he wooed
The Lady of the Land.

I told her how he pined: and ah!
The deep, the low, the pleading tone
With which I sang another's love, 35
Interpreted my own.

She listened with a fitting blush,
With downcast eyes, and modest grace;
And she forgave me, that I gazed
Too fondly on her face! 40

But when I told the cruel scorn
That crazed that bold and lovely Knight,
And that he crossed the mountain-woods,
Nor rested day nor night;

That sometimes from the savage den, 45
And sometimes from the darksome shade,
And sometimes starting up at once
In green and sunny glade, —

There came and looked him in the face
An angel beautiful and bright; 50
And that he knew it was a Fiend,
This miserable Knight!

And that unknowing what he did,
He leaped amid a murderous band,
And saved from outrage worse than death 55
The Lady of the Land!

And how she wept, and clasped his knees;
And how she tended him in vain —
And ever strove to expiate
The scorn that crazed his brain; — 60

And that she nursed him in a cave;
And how his madness went away,
When on the yellow forest-leaves
 A dying man he lay; —

His dying words — but when I reached
That tenderest strain of all the ditty,
My faltering voice and pausing harp
 Disturbed her soul with pity! 65

All impulses of soul and sense
Had thrilled my guileless Genevieve;
The music and the doleful tale,
 The rich and balmy eve; 70

And hopes, and fears that kindle hope,
An undistinguishable throng,
And gentle wishes long subdued,
 Subdued and cherished long! 75

She wept with pity and delight,
She blushed with love, and virgin-shame;
And like the murmur of a dream,
 I heard her breathe my name. 80

Her bosom heaved — she stepped aside,
As conscious of my look she stepped —
Then suddenly, with timorous eye
 She fled to me and wept.

She half enclosed me with her arms,
She pressed me with a meek embrace;
And bending back her head, looked up,
 And gazed upon my face. 85

'Twas partly love, and partly fear,
And partly 'twas a bashful art,
That I might rather feel, than see,
 The swelling of her heart. 90

I calmed her fears, and she was calm,
And told her love with virgin pride;
And so I won my Genevieve,
My bright and beauteous Bride.

95

Alice Du Clos

OR THE FORKED TONGUE

A BALLAD

"One word with two meanings is the traitor's shield and shaft: and a slit tongue be his blazon!"

Caucasian Proverb.

"The Sun is not yet risen,
 But the dawn lies red on the dew:
 Lord Julian has stolen from the hunters away,
 Is seeking, Lady! for you.
 Put on your dress of green, 5
 Your buskins and your quiver;
 Lord Julian is a hasty man,
 Long waiting brook'd he never.
 I dare not doubt him, that he means
 To wed you on a day, 10
 Your lord and master for to be,
 And you his lady gay.
 O Lady! throw your book aside!
 I would not that my Lord should chide."

Thus spake Sir Hugh the vassal knight 15
 To Alice, child of old Du Clos,
 As spotless fair, as airy light
 As that moon-shiny doe,
 The gold star on its brow, her sire's ancestral crest!
 For ere the lark had left his nest, 20
 She in the garden bower below
 Sate loosely wrapt in maiden white,
 Her face half drooping from the sight,
 A snow-drop on a tuft of snow!

O close your eyes, and strive to see 25
 The studious maid, with book on knee, —
 Ah! earliest-open'd flower;
 While yet with keen unblunted light

The morning star shone opposite
 The lattice of her bower – 30
 Alone of all the starry host,
 As if in prideful scorn
 Of flight and fear he stay'd behind,
 To brave th' advancing morn.

O! Alice could read passing well, 35
 And she was conning then
 Dan Ovid's mazy tale of loves,
 And gods, and beasts, and men.

The vassal's speech, his taunting vein,
 It thrill'd like venom thro' her brain; 40
 Yet never from the book
 She rais'd her head, nor did she deign
 The knight a single look.

"Off, traitor friend! how dar'st thou fix
 Thy wanton gaze on me? 45
 And why, against my earnest suit,
 Does Julian send by thee?

"Go, tell thy Lord, that slow is sure:
 Fair speed his shafts to-day!
 I follow here a stronger lure, 50
 And chase a gentler prey."

She said: and with a baleful smile
 The vassal knight reel'd off –
 Like a huge billow from a bark
 Toil'd in the deep sea-trough, 55
 That shouldering sideways in mid plunge,
 Is travers'd by a flash.
 And staggering onward, leaves the ear
 With dull and distant crash.

And Alice sate with troubled mien 60
 A moment; for the scoff was keen,
 And thro' her veins did shiver!
 Then rose and donn'd her dress of green,
 Her buskins and her quiver.

- There stands the flow'ring may-thorn tree! 65
 From thro' the veiling mist you see
 The black and shadowy stem; —
 Smit by the sun the mist in glee
 Dissolves to lightsome jewelry —
 Each blossom hath its gem! 70
- With tear-drop glittering to a smile,
 The gay maid on the garden-stile
 Mimics the hunter's shout.
 "Hip! Florian, hip! To horse, to horse!
 Go, bring the palfrey out. 75
- "My Julian's out with all his clan,
 And, bonny boy, you wis,
 Lord Julian is a hasty man,
 Who comes late, comes amiss."
- Now Florian was a stripling squire, 80
 A gallant boy of Spain,
 That toss'd his head in joy and pride,
 Behind his Lady fair to ride,
 But blush'd to hold her train.
- The huntress is in her dress of green — 85
 And forth they go; she with her bow,
 Her buskins and her quiver! —
 The squire — no younger e'er was seen —
 With restless arm and laughing een,
 He makes his javelin quiver. 90
- And had not Alice stay'd the race,
 And stopp'd to see, a moment's space,
 The whole great globe of light
 Give the last parting kiss-like touch
 To the eastern ridge, it lack'd not much, 95
 They had o'erta'en the knight.
- It chanced that up the covert lane,
 Where Julian waiting stood,
 A neighbour knight prick'd on to join
 The huntsmen in the wood. 100

And with him must Lord Julian go,
Tho' with an anger'd mind:
Betroth'd not wedded to his bride,
In vain he sought, 'twixt shame and pride,
Excuse to stay behind. 105

He bit his lip, he wrung his glove,
He look'd around, he look'd above,
But pretext none could find or frame.
Alas! alas! and well-a-day!
It grieves me sore to think, to say, 110
That names so seldom meet with Love,
Yet Love wants courage without a name!

Straight from the forest's skirt the trees
O'er-branching, made an aisle,
Where hermit old might pace and chaunt 115
As in a minster's pile.

From underneath its leafy screen,
And from the twilight shade,
You pass at once into a green,
A green and lightsome glade. 120

And there Lord Julian sate on steed;
Behind him, in a round,
Stood knight and squire, and menial train;
Against the leash the greyhounds strain;
The horses paw'd the ground. 125

When up the alley green, Sir Hugh
Spurr'd in upon the sward,
And mute, without a word, did he
Fall in behind his lord.

Lord Julian turn'd his steed half round, — 130
"What! doth not Alice deign
To accept your loving convoy, knight?
Or doth she fear our woodland sleight,
And join us on the plain?"

- With stifled tones the knight replied,
 And look'd askance on either side, — 135
 "Nay, let the hunt proceed! —
 The Lady's message that I bear,
 I guess would scantily please your ear,
 And less deserves your heed. 140
- "You sent betimes. Not yet unbarr'd
 I found the middle door; —
 Two stirrers only met my eyes,
 Fair Alice, and one more.
- "I came unlook'd for; and, it seem'd,
 In an unwelcome hour; 145
 And found the daughter of Du Clos
 Within the lattic'd bower.
- "But hush! the rest may wait. If lost,
 No great loss, I divine; 150
 And idle words will better suit
 A fair maid's lips than mine."
- "God's wrath! speak out, man," Julian cried,
 O'er-master'd by the sudden smart; —
 And feigning wrath, sharp, blunt, and rude, 155
 The knight his subtle shift pursued. —
 "Scowl not at me; command my skill,
 To lure your hawk back, if you will,
 But not a woman's heart.
- "Go! (said she) tell him, — slow is sure;
 Fair speed his shafts to-day! 160
 I follow here a stronger lure,
 And chase a gentler prey."
- "The game, pardie, was full in sight,
 That then did, if I saw aright, 165
 The fair dame's eyes engage;
 For turning, as I took my ways,
 I saw them fix'd with steadfast gaze
 Full on her wanton page."

- The last word of the traitor knight 170
 It had but entered Julian's ear, –
 From two o'erarching oaks between,
 With glist'ning helm-like cap is seen,
 Borne on in giddy cheer,
- A youth, that ill his steed can guide; 175
 Yet with reverted face doth ride,
 As answering to a voice,
 That seems at once to laugh and chide –
 "Not mine, dear mistress," still he cried,
 "'Tis this mad filly's choice." 180
- With sudden bound, beyond the boy,
 See! see! that face of hope and joy,
 That regal front! those cheeks aglow!
 Thou needed'st but the crescent sheen,
 A quiver'd Dian to have been, 185
 Thou lovely child of old Du Clos!
- Dark as a dream Lord Julian stood,
 Swift as a dream, from forth the wood,
 Sprang on the plighted Maid!
 With fatal aim, and frantic force, 190
 The shaft was hurl'd! – a lifeless corse,
 Fair Alice from her vaulting horse,
 Lies bleeding on the glade.