

## THE SAILOR BOY

HE rose at dawn and, fired with hope,  
Shot o'er the seething harbour-bar,  
And reach'd the ship and caught the rope,  
And whistled to the morning star.

And while he whistled long and loud  
He heard a fierce mermaiden cry,  
'O boy, tho' thou art young and proud,  
I see the place where thou wilt lie.

'The sands and yeasty surges mix  
In caves about the dreary bay,  
And on thy ribs the limpet sticks,  
And in thy heart the scrawl shall play.'

'Fool,' he answer'd, 'death is sure  
To those that stay and those that roam,  
But I will nevermore endure  
To sit with empty hands at home.

'My mother clings about my neck,  
My sisters crying "stay for shame";  
My father raves of death and wreck,  
They are all to blame, they are all to blame.

'God help me! save I take my part  
Of danger on the roaring sea,  
A devil rises in my heart,  
Far worse than any death to me.'

## THE HOLY GRAIL

FROM noiseful arms, and acts of prowess done  
In tournament or tilt, Sir Percivale,  
Whom Arthur and his knighthood call'd The Pure,  
Had pass'd into the silent life of prayer,  
Praise, fast, and alms; and leaving for the cowl  
The helmet in an abbey far away  
From Camelot, there, and not long after, died.

And one, a fellow-monk among the rest,  
Ambrosius, loved him much beyond the rest,  
And honour'd him, and wrought into his heart  
A way by love that waken'd love within,  
To answer that which came: and as they sat  
Beneath a world-old yew-tree, darkening half  
The cloisters, on a gustful April morn  
That puff'd the swaying branches into smoke  
Above them, ere the summer when he died,  
The monk Ambrosius question'd Percivale:

'O brother, I have seen this yew-tree smoke,  
Spring after spring, for half a hundred years:  
For never have I known the world without,  
Nor never stray'd beyond the pale: but thee,  
When first thou camest – such a courtesy  
Spake thro' the limbs and in the voice – I knew  
For one of those who eat in Arthur's hall;  
For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,  
Some true, some light, but every one of you  
Stamp'd with the image of the King; and now  
Tell me, what drove thee from the Table Round,  
My brother? was it earthly passion crost?'

'Nay,' said the knight; 'for no such passion mine.

## THE HOLY GRAIL

But the sweet vision of the Holy Grail  
Drove me from all vainglories, rivalries,  
And earthly heats that spring and sparkle out  
Among us in the jousts, while women watch  
Who wins, who falls; and waste the spiritual strength  
Within us, better offer'd up to Heaven.'

To whom the monk: 'The Holy Grail! - I trust  
We are green in Heaven's eyes; but here too much  
We moulder - as to things without I mean -  
Yet one of your own knights, a guest of ours,  
Told us of this in our refectory,  
But spake with such a sadness and so low  
We heard not half of what he said. What is it?  
The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?'

'Nay, monk! what phantom?' answer'd Percivale.  
'The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord  
Drank at the last sad supper with his own.  
This, from the blessed land of Aromat -  
After the day of darkness, when the dead  
Went wandering o'er Moriah - the good saint  
Arimathæan Joseph, journeying brought  
To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn  
Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord.  
And there awhile it bode; and if a man  
Could touch or see it, he was heal'd at once,  
By faith, of all his ills. But then the times  
Grew to such evil that the holy cup  
Was caught away to Heaven, and disappear'd.'

To whom the monk: 'From our old books I know  
That Joseph came of old to Glastonbury,  
And there the heathen Prince, Arviragus,  
Gave him an isle of marsh whereon to build;  
And there he built with wattles from the marsh

## THE HOLY GRAIL

A little lonely church in days of yore,  
For so they say, these books of ours, but seem  
Mute of this miracle, far as I have read.  
But who first saw the holy thing to-day?"

'A woman,' answer'd Percivale, 'a nun,  
And one no further off in blood from me  
Than sister; and if ever holy maid  
With knees of adoration wore the stone,  
A holy maid; tho' never maiden glow'd,  
But that was in her earlier maidenhood,  
With such a fervent flame of human love,  
Which being rudely blunted, glanced and shot  
Only to holy things; to prayer and praise  
She gave herself, to fast and alms. And yet,  
Nun as she was, the scandal of the Court,  
Sin against Arthur and the Table Round,  
And the strange sound of an adulterous race,  
Across the iron grating of her cell  
Beat, and she pray'd and fasted all the more.

'And he to whom she told her sins, or what  
Her all but utter whiteness held for sin,  
A man wellnigh a hundred winters old,  
Spake often with her of the Holy Grail,  
A legend handed down thro' five or six,  
And each of these a hundred winters old,  
From our Lord's time. And when King Arthur made  
His Table Round, and all men's hearts became  
Clean for a season, surely he had thought  
That now the Holy Grail would come again;  
But sin broke out. Ah, Christ, that it would come,  
And heal the world of all their wickedness!  
"O Father!" ask'd the maiden, "might it come  
To me by prayer and fasting?" "Nay," said he,

## THE HOLY GRAIL

"I know not, for thy heart is pure as snow."  
And so she pray'd and fasted, till the sun  
Shone, and the wind blew, thro' her, and I thought  
She might have risen and floated when I saw her.

'For on a day she sent to speak with me.  
And when she came to speak, behold her eyes  
Beyond my knowing of them, beautiful,  
Beyond all knowing of them, wonderful,  
Beautiful in the light of holiness.  
And "O my brother Percivale," she said,  
"Sweet brother, I have seen the Holy Grail:  
For, waked at dead of night, I heard a sound  
As of a silver horn from o'er the hills  
Blown, and I thought, 'It is not Arthur's use  
To hunt by moonlight;' and the slender sound  
As from a distance beyond distance grew  
Coming upon me - O never harp nor horn,  
Nor aught we blow with breath, or touch with hand,  
Was like that music as it came; and then  
Stream'd thro' my cell a cold and silver beam,  
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,  
Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive,  
Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed  
With rosy colours leaping on the wall;  
And then the music faded, and the Grail  
Past, and the beam decay'd, and from the walls  
The rosy quiverings died into the night.  
So now the Holy Thing is here again  
Among us, brother, fast thou too and pray,  
And tell thy brother knights to fast and pray,  
That so perchance the vision may be seen  
By thee and those, and all the world be heal'd."

'Then leaving the pale nun, I spake of this

## THE HOLY GRAIL

To all men; and myself fasted and pray'd  
Always, and many among us many a week  
Fasted and pray'd even to the uttermost,  
Expectant of the wonder that would be.

'And one there was among us, ever moved  
Among us in white armour, Galahad.

"God make thee good as thou art beautiful,"  
Said Arthur, when he dubb'd him knight; and none,  
In so young youth, was ever made a knight  
Till Galahad; and this Galahad, when he heard  
My sister's vision, fill'd me with amaze;  
His eyes became so like her own, they seem'd  
Hers, and himself her brother more than I.

'Sister or brother none had he; but some  
Call'd him a son of Lancelot, and some said  
Begotten by enchantment - chatterers they,  
Like birds of passage piping up and down,  
That gape for flies - we know not whence they come;  
For when was Lancelot wanderingly lewd?

'But she, the wan sweet maiden, shore away  
Clean from her forehead all that wealth of hair  
Which made 'a silken mat-work for her feet;  
And out of this she plaited broad and long  
A strong sword-belt, and wove with silver thread  
And crimson in the belt a strange device,  
A crimson grail within a silver beam;  
And saw the bright boy-knight, and bound it on him,  
Saying, "My knight, my love, my knight of heaven,  
O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine,  
I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt.  
Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,  
And break thro' all, till one will crown thee king  
Far in the spiritual city:" and as she spake

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THE HOLY GRAIL

She sent the deathless passion in her eyes  
Thro' him, and made him hers, and laid her mind  
On him, and he believed in her belief.

'Then came a year of miracle: O brother,  
In our great hall there stood a vacant chair,  
Fashion'd by Merlin ere he past away,  
And carven with strange figures; and in and out  
The figures, like a serpent, ran a scroll  
Of letters in a tongue no man could read.  
And Merlin call'd it "The Siege perilous,"  
Perilous for good and ill; "for there," he said,  
"No man could sit but he should lose himself:"  
And once by misadvertence Merlin sat  
In his own chair, and so was lost; but he,  
Galahad, when he heard of Merlin's doom,  
Cried, "If I lose myself, I save myself!"

'Then on a summer night it came to pass,  
While the great banquet lay along the hall,  
That Galahad would sit down in Merlin's chair.

'And all at once, as there we sat, we heard  
A cracking and a riving of the roofs,  
And rending, and a blast, and overhead  
Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry.  
And in the blast there smote along the hall  
A beam of light seven times more clear than day:  
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail  
All over cover'd with a luminous cloud,  
And none might see who bare it, and it past.  
But every knight beheld his fellow's face  
As in a glory, and all the knights arose,  
And staring each at other like dumb men  
Stood, till I found a voice and sware a vow.

'I sware a vow before them all, that I,

## THE HOLY GRAIL

Because I had not seen the Grail, would ride  
A twelvemonth and a day in quest of it,  
Until I found and saw it, as the nun  
My sister saw it; and Galahad sware the vow,  
And good Sir Bors, our Lancelot's cousin, sware,  
And Lancelot sware, and many among the knights,  
And Gawain sware, and louder than the rest.'

Then spake the monk Ambrosius, asking him,  
'What said the King? Did Arthur take the vow?'

'Nay, for my lord,' said Percivale, 'the King  
Was not in hall: for early that same day,  
Scaped thro' a cavern from a bandit hold,  
An outraged maiden sprang into the hall  
Crying on help: for all her shining hair  
Was smear'd with earth, and either milky arm  
Red-rent with hooks of bramble, and all she wore  
Torn as a sail that leaves the rope is torn  
In tempest: so the King arose and went  
To smoke the scandalous hive of those wild bees  
That made such honey in his realm. Howbeit  
Some little of this marvel he too saw,  
Returning o'er the plain that then began  
To darken under Camelot; whence the King  
Look'd up, calling aloud, "Lo, there! the roofs  
Of our great hall are roll'd in thunder-smoke!  
Pray Heaven, they be not smitten by the bolt."  
For dear to Arthur was that hall of ours,  
As having there so oft with all his knights  
Feasted, and as the stateliest under heaven.

'O brother, had you known our mighty hall,  
Which Merlin built for Arthur long ago!  
For all the sacred mount of Camelot,  
And all the dim rich city, roof by roof,



## THE HOLY GRAIL

Tower after tower, spire beyond spire,  
By grove, and garden-lawn, and rushing brook,  
Climbs to the mighty hall that Merlin built.  
And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt  
With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall:  
And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,  
And in the second men are slaying beasts,  
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,  
And on the fourth are men with growing wings,  
And over all one statue in the mould  
Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown,  
And peak'd wings pointed to the Northern Star.  
And eastward fronts the statue, and the crown  
And both the wings are made of gold, and flame  
At sunrise till the people in far fields,  
Wasted so often by the heathen hordes,  
Behold it, crying, "We have still a King."

'And, brother, had you known our hall within,  
Broader and higher than any in all the lands!  
Where twelve great windows blazon Arthur's wars,  
And all the light that falls upon the board  
Streams thro' the twelve great battles of our King.  
Nay, one there is, and at the eastern end,  
Wealthy with wandering lines of mount and mere,  
Where Arthur finds the brand Excalibur.  
And also one to the west, and counter to it,  
And blank: and who shall blazon it? when and how? -  
O there, perchance, when all our wars are done,  
The brand Excalibur will be cast away.  
'So to this hall full quickly rode the King,  
In horror lest the work by Merlin wrought,  
Dreamlike, should on the sudden vanish, wrapt  
In unremorseful folds of rolling fire.

## THE HOLY GRAIL

And in he rode, and up I glanced, and saw  
The golden dragon sparkling over all:  
And many of those who burnt the hold, their arms  
Hack'd, and their foreheads grimed with smoke, and sear'd,  
Follow'd, and in among bright faces, ours,  
Full of the vision: prest: and then the King  
Spake to me, being nearest, "Percivale,"  
(Because the hall was all in tumult - some  
Vowing, and some protesting), "what is this?"

'O brother, when I told him what had chanced,  
My sister's vision, and the rest, his face  
Darken'd, as I have seen it more than once,  
When some brave deed seem'd to be done in vain,  
Darken; and "Woe is me, my knights," he cried,  
"Had I been here, ye had not sworn the vow."  
Bold was mine answer, "Had thyself been here,  
My King, thou wouldst have sworn." "Yea, yea," said he,  
"Art thou so bold and hast not seen the Grail?"

' "Nay, lord, I heard the sound, I saw the light,  
But since I did not see the Holy Thing,  
I swear a vow to follow it till I saw."  
"Then when he ask'd us, knight by knight, if any  
Had seen it, all their answers were as one:  
"Nay, lord, and therefore have we sworn our vows."

' "Lo now," said Arthur, "have ye seen a cloud?  
What go ye into the wilderness to see?"  
"Then Galahad on the sudden, and in a voice  
Shrilling along the hall to Arthur, call'd,  
"But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail,  
I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry -  
'O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me.'"

' "Ah, Galahad, Galahad," said the King, "for such  
As thou art is the vision, not for these.

## THE HOLY GRAIL

Thy holy nun and thou have seen a sign -  
Holier is none, my Percivale, than she -  
A sign to maim this Order which I made.  
But ye, that follow but the leader's bell"  
(Brother, the King was hard upon his knights)  
"Taliessin is our fullest throat of song,  
And one hath sung and all the dumb will sing.  
Lancelot is Lancelot, and hath overborne  
Five knights at once, and every younger knight,  
Unproven, holds himself as Lancelot,  
Till overborne by one, he learns - and ye,  
What are ye? Galahads? - no, nor Percivales"  
(For thus it pleased the King to range me close  
After Sir Galahad); "nay," said he, "but men  
With strength and will to right the wrong'd, of power  
To lay the sudden heads of violence flat,  
Knights that in twelve great battles splash'd and dyed  
The strong White Horse in his own heathen blood -  
But one hath seen, and all the blind will see.  
Go, since your vows are sacred, being made:  
Yet - for ye know the cries of all my realm  
Pass thro' this hall - how often, O my knights,  
Your places being vacant at my side,  
This chance of noble deeds will come and go  
Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires  
Lost in the quagmire! Many of you, yea most,  
Return no more: ye think I show myself  
Too dark a prophet: come now, let us meet  
The morrow morn once more in one full field  
Of gracious pastime, that once more the King,  
Before ye leave him for this Quest, may count  
The yet-unbroken strength of all his knights,  
Rejoicing in that Order which he made."

## THE HOLY GRAIL

'So when the sun broke next from under ground,  
All the great table of our Arthur closed  
And clash'd in such a tourney and so full,  
So many lances broken - never yet  
Had Camelot seen the like, since Arthur came;  
And I myself and Galahad, for a strength  
Was in us from the vision, overthrew  
So many knights that all the people cried,  
And almost burst the barriers in their heat,  
Shouting, "Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale!"

'But when the next day brake from under ground -  
O brother, had you known our Camelot,  
Built by old kings, age after age, so old  
The King himself had fears that it would fall,  
So strange, and rich, and dim; for where the roofs  
Totter'd toward each other in the sky,  
Met foreheads all along the street of those  
Who watch'd us pass; and lower, and where the long  
Rich galleries, lady-laden, weigh'd the necks  
Of dragons clinging to the crazy walls,  
Thicker than drops from thunder, showers of flowers  
Fell as we past; and men and boys astride  
On wyvern, lion, dragon, griffin, swan,  
At all the corners, named us each by name,  
Calling "God speed!" but in the ways below  
The knights and ladies wept, and rich and poor  
Wept, and the King himself could hardly speak  
For grief, and all in middle street the Queen,  
Who rode by Lancelot, wail'd and shriek'd aloud,  
'"This madness has come on us for our sins."  
So to the Gate of the three Queens we came,  
Where Arthur's wars are render'd mystically,  
And thence departed every one his way.

## THE HOLY GRAIL

'And I was lifted up in heart, and thought  
Of all my late-shown prowess in the lists,  
How my strong lance had beaten down the knights,  
So many and famous names; and never yet  
Had heaven appear'd so blue, nor earth so green,  
For all my blood danced in me, and I knew  
That I should light upon the Holy Grail.

'Thereafter, the dark warning of our King,  
That most of us would follow wandering fires,  
Came like a driving gloom across my mind.  
Then every evil word I had spoken once,  
And every evil thought I had thought of old,  
And every evil deed I ever did,  
Awoke and cried, "This Quest is not for thee."

And lifting up mine eyes, I found myself  
Alone, and in a land of sand and thorns,  
And I was thirsty even unto death;  
And I, too, cried, "This Quest is not for thee."

'And on I rode, and when I thought my thirst  
Would slay me, saw deep lawns, and then a brook,  
With one sharp rapid, where the crisping white  
Play'd ever back upon the sloping wave,  
And took both ear and eye; and o'er the brook  
Were apple-trees, and apples by the brook  
Fallen, and on the lawns. "I will rest here,"  
I said, "I am not worthy of the Quest;"  
But even while I drank the brook, and ate  
The goodly apples, all these things at once  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone,  
And thirsting, in a land of sand and thorns.

'And then behold a woman at a door  
Spinning; and fair the house whereby she sat,  
And kind the woman's eyes and innocent,

## THE HOLY GRAIL

And all her bearing gracious; and she rose  
Opening her arms to meet me, as who should say,  
"Rest here;" but when I touch'd her, lo! she, too,  
Fell into dust and nothing, and the house  
Became no better than a broken shed,  
And in it a dead babe; and also this  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone.

'And on I rode, and greater was my thirst.  
Then flash'd a yellow gleam across the world,  
And where it smote the plowshare in the field,  
The plowman left his plowing, and fell down  
Before it; where it glitter'd on her pail,  
The milkmaid left her milking, and fell down  
Before it, and I knew not why, but thought  
"The sun is rising," tho' the sun had risen.  
Then was I ware of one that on me moved  
In golden armour with a crown of gold  
About a casque all jewels; and his horse  
In golden armour jewell'd everywhere:  
And on the splendour came, flashing me blind;  
And seem'd to me the Lord of all the world,  
Being so huge. But when I thought he meant  
To crush me, moving on me, lo! he, too,  
Open'd his arms to embrace me as he came,  
And up I went and touch'd him, and he, too,  
Fell into dust, and I was left alone  
And wearying in a land of sand and thorns.

'And I rode on and found a mighty hill,  
And on the top, a city wall'd: the spires  
Prick'd with incredible pinnacles into heaven.  
And by the gateway stirr'd a crowd; and these  
Cried to me climbing, "Welcome, Percivale!  
Thou mightiest and thou purest among men!"

## THE HOLY GRAIL

And glad was I and clomb, but found at top  
No man, nor any voice. And thence I past  
Far thro' a ruinous city, and I saw  
That man had once dwelt there; but there I found  
Only one man of an exceeding age.  
"Where is that goodly company," said I,  
"That so cried out upon me?" and he had  
Scarce any voice to answer, and yet gasp'd,  
"Whence and what art thou?" and even as he spoke  
Fell into dust, and disappear'd, and I  
Was left alone once more, and cried in grief,  
"Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself  
And touch it, it will crumble into dust."  
'And thence I dropt into a lowly vale,  
Low as the hill was high, and where the vale  
Was lowest, found a chapel, and thereby  
A holy hermit in a hermitage,  
To whom I told my phantoms, and he said:  
' "O son, thou hast not true humility,  
The highest virtue, mother of them all;  
For when the Lord of all things made Himself  
Naked of glory for His mortal change,  
'Take thou my robe,' she said, 'for all is thine,'  
And all her form shone forth with sudden light  
So that the angels were amazed, and she  
Follow'd Him down, and like a flying star  
Led on the grey-hair'd wisdom of the east;  
But her thou hast not known: for what is this  
Thou thoughtest of thy prowess and thy sins?  
Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself  
As Galahad." When the hermit made an end,  
In silver armour suddenly Galahad shone  
Before us, and against the chapel door

## THE HOLY GRAIL

Laid lance, and enter'd, and we knelt in prayer.  
And there the hermit slaked my burning thirst,  
And at the sacring of the mass I saw  
The holy elements alone; but he,  
"Saw ye no more? I, Galahad, saw the Grail,  
The Holy Grail, descend upon the shrine:  
I saw the fiery face as of a child  
That smote itself into the bread, and went;  
And hither am I come; and never yet  
Hath what thy sister taught me first to see,  
This Holy Thing, fail'd from my side, nor come  
Cover'd, but moving with me night and day,  
Fainter by day, but always in the night  
Blood-red, and sliding down the blacken'd marsh  
Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top  
Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below  
Blood-red. And in the strength of this I rode,  
Shattering all evil customs everywhere,  
And past thro' Pagan realms, and made them mine,  
And clash'd with Pagan hordes, and bore them down,  
And broke thro' all, and in the strength of this  
Come victor. But my time is hard at hand,  
And hence I go; and one will crown me king  
Far in the spiritual city; and come thou, too,  
For thou shalt see the vision when I go."

"While thus he spake, his eye, dwelling on mine,  
Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew  
One with him, to believe as he believed.  
Then, when the day began to wane, we went.

"There rose a hill that none but man could climb,  
Scarr'd with a hundred wintry water-courses -  
Storm at the top, and when we gain'd it, storm  
Round us and death; for every moment glanced



## THE HOLY GRAIL

His silver arms and gloom'd: so quick and thick  
The lightnings here and there to left and right  
Struck, till the dry old trunks about us, dead,  
Yea, rotten with a hundred years of death,  
Sprang into fire: and at the base we found  
On either hand, as far as eye could see,  
A great black swamp and of an evil smell,  
Part black, part whiten'd with the bones of men,  
Not to be crost, save that some ancient king  
Had built a way, where, link'd with many a bridge,  
A thousand piers ran into the great Sea.  
And Galahad fled along them bridge by bridge,  
And every bridge as quickly as he crost  
Sprang into fire and vanish'd, tho' I yearn'd  
To follow; and thrice above him all the heavens  
Open'd and blazed with thunder such as seem'd  
Shoutings of all the sons of God: and first  
At once I saw him far on the great Sea,  
In silver-shining armour starry-clear;  
And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung  
Clothed in white samite or a luminous cloud.  
And with exceeding swiftness ran the boat,  
If boat it were - I saw not whence it came.  
And when the heavens open'd and blazed again  
Roaring, I saw him like a silver star -  
And had he set the sail, or had the boat  
Become a living creature clad with wings?  
And o'er his head the Holy Vessel hung  
Redder than any rose, a joy to me,  
For now I knew the veil had been withdrawn.  
Then in a moment when they blazed again  
Opening, I saw the least of little stars  
Down on the waste, and straight beyond the star

## THE HOLY GRAIL

I saw the spiritual city and all her spires  
And gateways in a glory like one pearl –  
No larger, tho' the goal of all the saints –  
Strike from the sea; and from the star there shot  
A rose-red sparkle to the city, and there  
Dwelt, and I knew it was the Holy Grail,  
Which never eyes on earth again shall see.  
Then fell the floods of heaven drowning the deep.  
And how my feet recrost the deathful ridge  
No memory in me lives; but that I touch'd  
The chapel-doors at dawn I know; and thence  
Taking my war-horse from the holy man,  
Glad that no phantom vext me more, return'd  
To whence I came, the gate of Arthur's wars.'

'O brother,' ask'd Ambrosius, – 'for in sooth  
These ancient books – and they would win thee – teem,  
Only I find not there this Holy Grail,  
With miracles and marvels like to these,  
Not all unlike; which oftentime I read,  
Who read but on my breviary with ease,  
Till my head swims; and then go forth and pass  
Down to the little thorpe that lies so close,  
And almost plaster'd like a martin's nest  
To these old walls – and mingle with our folk;  
And knowing every honest face of theirs  
As well as every shepherd knew his sheep,  
And every homely secret in their hearts,  
Delight myself with gossip and old wives,  
And ills and aches, and teethings, lyings-in,  
And mirthful sayings, children of the place,  
That have no meaning half a league away:  
Or lulling random squabbles when they rise,  
Chafferings and chatterings at the market-cross,

## THE HOLY GRAIL

Rejoice, small man, in this small world of mine,  
Yea, even in their hens and in their eggs –  
O brother, saving this Sir Galahad,  
Came ye on none but phantoms in your quest,  
No man, no woman?’

Then Sir Percivale:

‘All men, to one so bound by such a vow,  
And women were as phantoms. O, my brother,  
Why wilt thou shame me to confess to thee  
How far I falter’d from my quest and vow?  
For after I had lain so many nights,  
A bedmate of the snail and eft and snake,  
In grass and burdock, I was charged to wan  
And meagre, and the vision had not come;  
And then I chanced upon a goodly town  
With one great dwelling in the middle of it;  
Thither I made, and there was I disarm’d  
By maidens each as fair as any flower:  
But when they led me into hall, behold,  
The Princess of that castle was the one,  
Brother, and that one only, who had ever  
Made my heart leap; for when I moved of old  
A slender page about her father’s hall,  
And she a slender maiden, all my heart  
Went after her with longing: yet we twain  
Had never kiss’d a kiss, or vow’d a vow.  
And now I came upon her once again,  
And one had wedded her, and he was dead,  
And all his land and wealth and state were hers.  
And while I tarried, every day she set  
A banquet richer than the day before  
By me; for all her longing and her will  
Was toward me as of old; till one fair morn,

## THE HOLY GRAIL

I walking to and fro beside a stream  
That flash'd across her orchard underneath  
Her castle-walls, she stole upon my walk,  
And calling me the greatest of all knights,  
Embraced me, and so kiss'd me the first time,  
And gave herself and all her wealth to me.  
Then I remember'd Arthur's warning word,  
That most of us would follow wandering fires,  
And the Quest faded in my heart. Anon,  
The heads of all her people drew to me,  
With supplication both of knees and tongue:  
"We have heard of thee: thou art our greatest knight,  
Our Lady says it, and we well believe:  
Wed thou our Lady, and rule over us,  
And thou shalt be as Arthur in our land."  
O me, my brother! but one night my vow  
Burnt me within, so that I rose and fled,  
But wail'd and wept, and hated mine own self,  
And ev'n the Holy Quest, and all but her;  
Then after I was join'd with Galahad  
Cared not for her, nor anything upon earth.'

Then said the monk, 'Poor men, when yule is cold,  
Must be content to sit by little fires.  
And this am I, so that ye care for me  
Ever so little; yea, and blest be Heaven  
That brought thee here to this poor house of ours  
Where all the brethren are so hard, to warm  
My cold heart with a friend: but O the pity  
To find thine own first love once more - to hold,  
Hold her a wealthy bride within thine arms,  
Or all but hold, and then - cast her aside,  
Foregoing all her sweetness, like a weed.  
For we that want the warmth of double life,

## THE HOLY GRAIL

We that are plagued with dreams of something sweet  
Beyond all sweetness in a life so rich, —  
Ah, blessed Lord, I speak too earthlywise,  
Seeing I never stray'd beyond the cell,  
But live like an old badger in his earth,  
With earth about him everywhere, despite  
All fast and penance. Saw ye none beside,  
None of your knights?

'Yea so,' said Percivale:

'One night my pathway swerving east, I saw  
The pelican on the casque of our Sir Bors  
All in the middle of the rising moon:  
And toward him spurr'd, and hail'd him, and he me,  
And each made joy of either; then he ask'd,  
"Where is he? hast thou seen him — Lancelot? — Once,"  
Said good Sir Bors, "he dash'd across me — mad,  
And maddening what he rode: and when I cried,  
'Ridest thou then so hotly on a quest  
So holy,' Lancelot shouted, 'Stay me not!  
I have been the sluggard, and I ride apace,  
For now there is a lion in the way.'  
So vanish'd."

'Then Sir Bors had ridden on  
Softly, and sorrowing for our Lancelot,  
Because his former madness, once the talk  
And scandal of our table, had return'd;  
For Lancelot's kith and kin so worship him  
That ill to him is ill to them; to Bors  
Beyond the rest: he well had been content  
Not to have seen, so Lancelot might have seen,  
The Holy Cup of healing; and, indeed,  
Being so clouded with his grief and love,  
Small heart was his after the Holy Quest:

## THE HOLY GRAIL

If God would send the vision, well: if not,  
The Quest and he were in the hands of Heaven.

'And then, with small adventure met, Sir Bors  
Rode to the lonest tract of all the realm,  
And found a people there among their crags,  
Our race and blood, a remnant that were left  
Paynim amid their circles, and the stones  
They pitch up straight to heaven: and their wise men  
Were strong in that old magic which can trace  
The wandering of the stars, and scoff'd at him  
And this high Quest as at a simple thing:  
Told him he follow'd - almost Arthur's words -  
A mocking fire: "what other fire than he,  
Whereby the blood beats, and the blossom blows,  
And the sea rolls, and all the world is warm'd?"  
And when his answer chafed them, the rough crowd,  
Hearing he had a difference with their priests,  
Seized him, and bound and plunged him into a cell  
Of great piled stones; and lying bounden there  
In darkness thro' innumerable hours  
He heard the hollow-ringing heavens sweep  
Over him till by miracle - what else? -  
Heavy as it was, a great stone slipt and fell,  
Such as no wind could move: and thro' the gap  
Glimmer'd the streaming scud: then came a night  
Still as the day was loud; and thro' the gap  
The seven clear stars of Arthur's Table Round -  
For, brother, so one night, because they roll  
Thro' such a round in heaven, we named the stars,  
Rejoicing in ourselves and in our King -  
And these, like bright eyes of familiar friends,  
In on him shone: "And then to me, to me,"  
Said good Sir Bors, "beyond all hopes of mine,

## THE HOLY GRAIL

Who scarce had pray'd or ask'd it for myself –  
Across the seven clear stars – O grace to me –  
In colour like the fingers of a hand  
Before a burning taper, the sweet Grail  
Glided and past, and close upon it peal'd  
A sharp quick thunder." Afterwards, a maid,  
Who kept our holy faith among her kin  
In secret, entering, loosed and let him go.'

To whom the monk: 'And I remember now  
That pelican on the casque: Sir Bors it was  
Who spake so low and sadly at our board;  
And mighty reverent at our grace was he:  
A square-set man and honest; and his eyes,  
An out-door sign of all the warmth within,  
Smiled with his lips – a smile beneath a cloud,  
But heaven had meant it for a sunny one:  
Ay, ay, Sir Bors, who else? But when ye reach'd  
The city, found ye all your knights return'd,  
Or was there sooth in Arthur's prophecy,  
Tell me, and what said each, and what the King?'

Then answer'd Percivale: 'And that can I,  
Brother, and truly; since the living words  
Of so great men as Lancelot and our King  
Pass not from door to door and out again,  
But sit within the house. O, when we reach'd  
The city, our horses stumbling as they trode  
On heaps of ruin, hornless unicorns,  
Crack'd basilisks, and splinter'd cockatrices,  
And shatter'd talbots, which had left the stones  
Raw, that they fell from, brought us to the hall.

'And there sat Arthur on the daïs-throne,  
And those that had gone out upon the Quest,  
Wasted and worn, and but a tithe of them,

## THE HOLY GRAIL

And those that had not, stood before the King,  
Who, when he saw me, rose, and bade me hail,  
Saying, "A welfare in thine eye reproves  
Our fear of some disastrous chance for thee  
On hill, or plain, at sea, or flooding ford  
So fierce a gale made havoc here of late  
Among the strange devices of our kings;  
Yea, shook this newer, stronger hall of ours,  
And from the statue Merlin moulded for us  
Half-wrench'd a golden wing; but now - the Quest,  
This vision - hast thou seen the Holy Cup,  
That Joseph brought of old to Glastonbury?"

'So when I told him all thyself hast heard,  
Ambrosius, and my fresh but fixt resolve  
To pass away into the quiet life,  
He answer'd not, but, sharply turning, ask'd  
Of Gawain, "Gawain, was this Quest for thee?"

'"Nay, lord," said Gawain, "not for such as I.  
Therefore I communed with a saintly man,  
Who made me sure the Quest was not for me;  
For I was much awearied of the Quest:  
But found a silk pavilion in a field,  
And merry maidens in it; and then this gale  
Tore my pavilion from the tenting-pin,  
And blew my merry maidens all about  
With all discomfort; yea, and but for this,  
My twelvemonth and a day were pleasant to me."

'He ceased; and Arthur turn'd to whom at first  
He saw not, for Sir Bors, on entering, push'd  
Athwart the throng to Lancelot, caught his hand,  
Held it, and there, half-hidden by him, stood,  
Until the King espied him, saying to him,  
"Hail, Bors! if ever loyal man and true



## THE HOLY GRAIL

Could see it, thou hast seen the Grail;" and Bors,  
"Ask me not, for I may not speak of it:  
I saw it;" and the tears were in his eyes.

"Then there remain'd but Lancelot, for the rest  
Spake but of sundry perils in the storm;  
Perhaps, like him of Cana in Holy Writ,  
Our Arthur kept his best until the last;  
"Thou, too, my Lancelot," ask'd the King, "my friend,  
Our mightiest, hath this Quest avail'd for thee?"

' "Our mightiest!" answer'd Lancelot, with a groan;  
"O King!" – and when he paused, methought I spied  
A dying fire of madness in his eyes –

"O King, my friend, if friend of thine I be,  
Happier are those that welter in their sin,  
Swine in the mud, that cannot see for slime,  
Slime of the ditch: but in me lived a sin  
So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,  
Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung  
Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower  
And poisonous grew together, each as each,  
Not to be pluck'd asunder; and when thy knights  
Sware, I sware with them only in the hope  
That could I touch or see the Holy Grail  
They might be pluck'd asunder. Then I spake  
To one most holy saint, who wept and said,  
That save they could be pluck'd asunder, all  
My quest were but in vain; to whom I vow'd  
That I would work according as he will'd.  
And forth I went, and while I yearn'd and strove  
To tear the twain asunder in my heart,  
My madness came upon me as of old,  
And whipt me into waste fields far away;  
There was I beaten down by little men,

## THE HOLY GRAIL

Mean knights, to whom the moving of my sword  
And shadow of my spear had been enow  
To scare them from me once; and then I came  
All in my folly to the naked shore,  
Wide flats, where nothing but coarse grasses grew;  
But such a blast, my King, began to blow,  
So loud a blast along the shore and sea,  
Ye could not hear the waters for the blast,  
Tho' heapt in mounds and ridges all the sea  
Drove like a cataract, and all the sand  
Swept like a river, and the clouded heavens  
Were shaken with the motion and the sound.  
And blackening in the sea-foam sway'd a boat,  
Half-swallow'd in it, anchor'd with a chain;  
And in my madness to myself I said,  
'I will embark and I will lose myself,  
And in the great sea wash away my sin.'  
I burst the chain, I sprang into the boat.  
Seven days I drove along the dreary deep,  
And with me drove the moon and all the stars;  
And the wind fell, and on the seventh night  
I heard the shingle grinding in the surge,  
And felt the boat shock earth, and looking up,  
Behold, the enchanted towers of Carbonek,  
A castle like a rock upon a rock,  
With chasm-like portals open to the sea,  
And steps that met the breaker! there was none  
Stood near it but a lion on each side  
That kept the entry, and the moon was full.  
Then from the boat I leapt, and up the stairs.  
There drew my sword. With sudden-flaring manes  
Those two great beasts rose upright like a man,  
Each gript a shoulder, and I stood between;

## THE HOLY GRAIL

And, when I would have smitten them, heard a voice,  
'Doubt not, go forward; if thou doubt, the beasts  
Will tear thee piecemeal.' Then with violence  
The sword was dash'd from out my hand, and fell.  
And up into the sounding hall I past;  
But nothing in the sounding hall I saw,  
No bench nor table, painting on the wall  
Or shield of knight; only the rounded moon  
Thro' the tall oriel on the rolling sea.  
But always in the quiet house I heard,  
Clear as a lark, high o'er me as a lark,  
A sweet voice singing in the topmost tower  
To the eastward: up I climb'd a thousand steps  
With pain: as in a dream I seem'd to climb  
For ever: at the last I reach'd a door,  
A light was in the crannies, and I heard,  
'Glory and joy and honour to our Lord  
And to the Holy Vessel of the Grail.'  
Then in my madness I essay'd the door;  
It gave; and thro' a stormy glare, a heat  
As from a seventimes-heated furnace, I,  
Blasted and burnt, and blinded as I was,  
With such a fierceness that I swoon'd away -  
O, yet methought I saw the Holy Grail,  
All pall'd in crimson samite, and around  
Great angels, awful shapes, and wings and eyes.  
And but for all my madness and my sin,  
And then my swooning, I had sworn I saw  
That which I saw; but what I saw was veil'd  
And cover'd; and this Quest was not for me."  
'So speaking, and here ceasing, Lancelot left  
The hall long silent, till Sir Gawain - nay,  
Brother, I need not tell thee foolish words, -

## THE HOLY GRAIL

A reckless and irreverent knight was he,  
Now bolden'd by the silence of his King, -  
Well, I will tell thee: "O King, my liege," he said,  
"Hath Gawain fail'd in any quest of thine?  
When have I stinted stroke in foughten field?  
But as for thine, my good friend Percivale,  
Thy holy nun and thou have driven men mad,  
Yea, made our mightiest madder than our least  
But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,  
I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,  
And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,  
To holy virgins in their ecstasies,  
Henceforward."

' "Deafer," said the blameless King,  
"Gawain, and blinder unto holy things  
Hope not to make thyself by idle vows,  
Being too blind to have desire to see.  
But if indeed there came a sign from heaven,  
Blessed are Bors, Lancelot and Percivale,  
For these have seen according to their sight.  
For every fiery prophet in old times,  
And all the sacred madness of the bard,  
When God made music thro' them, could but speak  
His music by the framework and the chord;  
And as ye saw it ye have spoken truth.

' "Nay - but thou errest, Lancelot: never yet  
Could all of true and noble in knight and man  
Twine round one sin, whatever it might be,  
With such a closeness, but apart there grew,  
Save that he were the swine thou spakest of,  
Some root of knighthood and pure nobleness;  
Whereto see thou, that it may bear its flower.

' "And spake I not too truly, O my knights?

## THE HOLY GRAIL

Was I too dark a prophet when I said  
To those who went upon the Holy Quest,  
That most of them would follow wandering fires,  
Lost in the quagmire? – lost to me and gone,  
And left me gazing at a barren board,  
And a lean Order – scarce return'd a tithe –  
And out of those to whom the vision came  
My greatest hardly will believe he saw;  
Another hath beheld it afar off,  
And leaving human wrongs to right themselves,  
Cares but to pass into the silent life.  
And one hath had the vision face to face,  
And now his chair desires him here in vain,  
However they may crown him elsewhere.

“And some among you held, that if the King  
Had seen the sight he would have sworn the vow:  
Not easily, seeing that the King must guard  
That which he rules, and is but as the hind  
To whom a space of land is given to plow,  
Who may not wander from the allotted field  
Before his work be done; but, being done,  
Let visions of the night or of the day  
Come, as they will; and many a time they come  
Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,  
This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,  
This air that smites his forehead is not air  
But vision – yea, his very hand and foot –  
In moments when he feels he cannot die,  
And knows himself no vision to himself,  
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One  
Who rose again: ye have seen what ye have seen.”

‘So spake the King: I knew not all he meant.’

## THE REVENGE

### A BALLAD OF THE FLEET

#### I

AT Flores in the Azores Sir Richard Grenville lay,  
And a pinnace, like a flutter'd bird, came flying from far away:  
'Spanish ships of war at sea! we have sighted fifty-three!'  
Then swore Lord Thomas Howard: 'Fore God I am no  
coward;  
But I cannot meet them here, for my ships are out of gear,  
And the half my men are sick. I must fly, but follow quick.  
We are six ships of the line; can we fight with fifty-three?'

#### II

Then spake Sir Richard Grenville: 'I know you are no  
coward;  
You fly them for a moment to fight with them again.  
But I've ninety men and more that are lying sick ashore.  
I should count myself the coward if I left them, my Lord  
Howard,  
To these Inquisition dogs and the devildoms of Spain.'

#### III

So Lord Howard past away with five ships of war that day,  
Till he melted like a cloud in the silent summer heaven;  
But Sir Richard bore in hand all his sick men from the land  
Very carefully and slow,  
Men of Bideford in Devon,  
And we laid them on the ballast down below;  
For we brought them all aboard,

## THE REVENGE

And they blest him in their pain, that they were not left to  
Spain,  
To the thumbscrew and the stake, for the glory of the Lord.

### IV

He had only a hundred seamen to work the ship and to fight,  
And he sailed away from Flores till the Spaniard came in  
sight,  
With his huge sea-castles heaving upon the weather bow.  
'Shall we fight or shall we fly?  
Good Sir Richard, tell us now,  
For to fight is but to die!  
There'll be little of us left by the time this sun be set.'  
And Sir Richard said again: 'We be all good English men.  
Let us bang these dogs of Seville, the children of the devil,  
For I never turn'd my back upon Don or devil yet.'

### V

Sir Richard spoke and he laugh'd, and we roar'd a hurrah,  
and so  
The little Revenge ran on sheer into the heart of the foe,  
With her hundred fighters on deck, and her ninety sick  
below;  
For half of their fleet to the right and half to the left were  
seen;  
And the little Revenge ran on thro' the long sea-lane between.

### VI

Thousands of their soldiers look'd down from their decks and  
laugh'd,  
Thousands of their seamen made mock at the mad little craft

## THE REVENGE

Running on and on, till delay'd  
By their mountain-like San Philip that, of fifteen hundred  
tons,  
And up-shadowing high above us with her yawning tiers of  
guns,  
Took the breath from our sails, and we stay'd.

### VII

And while now the great San Philip hung above us like a  
cloud  
Whence the thunderbolt will fall  
Long and loud,  
Four galleons drew away  
From the Spanish fleet that day,  
And two upon the larboard and two upon the starboard lay,  
And the battle-thunder broke from them all.

### VIII

But anon the great San Philip, she bethought herself and  
went  
Having that within her womb that had left her ill content;  
And the rest they came aboard us, and they fought us hand  
to hand,  
For a dozen times they came with their pikes and musqueteers,  
And a dozen times we shook 'em off as a dog that shakes his  
ears  
When he leaps from the water to the land.

### IX

And the sun went down, and the stars came out far over the  
summer sea,  
But never a moment ceased the fight of the one and the  
fifty-three.



## THE REVENGE

Ship after ship, the whole night long, their high-built  
galleons came,  
Ship after ship, the whole night long, with her battle-thunder  
and flame;  
Ship after ship, the whole night long, drew back with her  
dead and her shame.  
For some were sunk and many were shatter'd, and so could  
fight us no more –  
God of battles, was ever a battle-like this in the world before?

### X

For he said 'Fight on! fight on!'  
Tho' his vessel was all but a wreck;  
And it chanced that, when half of the short summer night  
was gone,  
With a grisly wound to be drest he had left the deck,  
But a bullet struck him that was dressing it suddenly dead,  
And himself he was wounded again in the side and the head,  
And he said 'Fight on! fight on!'

### XI

And the night went down, and the sun smiled out far over  
the summer sea,  
And the Spanish fleet with broken sides lay round us all in a  
ring;  
But they dared not touch us again, for they fear'd that we  
still could sting,  
So they watch'd what the end would be.  
And we had not fought them in vain,  
But in perilous plight were we,  
Seeing forty of our poor hundred were slain,

## THE REVENGE

And half of the rest of us maim'd for life  
In the crash of the cannonades and the desperate strife;  
And the sick men down in the hold were most of them stark  
and cold,  
And the pikes were all broken or bent, and the powder was  
all of it spent;  
And the masts and the rigging were lying over the side;  
But Sir Richard cried in his English pride,  
'We have fought such a fight for a day and a night  
As may never be fought again!  
We have won great glory, my men!  
And a day less or more  
At sea or ashore,  
We die - does it matter when?  
Sink me the ship, Master Gunner - sink her, split her in  
twain!  
Fall into the hands of God, not into the hands of Spain!'

## XII

And the gunner said 'Ay, ay,' but the seamen made reply:  
'We have children, we have wives,  
And the Lord hath spared our lives.  
We will make the Spaniard promise, if we yield, to let us go;  
We shall live to fight again and to strike another blow.'  
And the lion there lay dying, and they yielded to the foe.

## XIII

And the stately Spanish men to their flagship bore him then  
Where they laid him by the mast, old Sir Richard caught at  
last,  
And they praised him to his face with their courtly foreign  
grace;

## THE REVENGE

But he rose upon their decks, and he cried:  
'I have fought for Queen and Faith like a valiant man and  
true;  
I have only done my duty as a man is bound to do:  
With a joyful spirit I Sir Richard Grenville die!'  
And he fell upon their decks, and he died.

### XIV

And they stared at the dead that had been so valiant and true,  
And had holden the power and glory of Spain so cheap  
That he dared her with one little ship and his English few!  
Was he devil or man? He was devil for aught they knew,  
But they sank his body with honour down into the deep,  
And they mann'd the Revenge with a swarthier alien crew,  
And away she sail'd with her loss and long'd for her own;  
When a wind from the lands they had ruin'd awoke from  
sleep,  
And the water began to heave and the weather to moan,  
And or ever that evening ended a great gale blew,  
And a wave like the wave that is raised by an earthquake  
grew,  
Till it smote on their hulls and their sails and their masts and  
their flags,  
And the whole sea plunged and fell on the shot-shatter'd  
navy of Spain,  
And the little Revenge herself went down by the island crags  
To be lost evermore in the main.

## THE VOYAGE OF MAELDUNE

(FOUNDED ON AN IRISH LEGEND. A.D. 700)

### I

I WAS the chief of the race – he had stricken my father dead –  
But I gather'd my fellows together, I swore I would strike off  
his head.

Each of them look'd like a king, and was noble in birth as in  
worth,

And each of them boasted he sprang from the oldest race upon  
earth.

Each was as brave in the fight as the bravest hero of song,  
And each of them liefer had died than have done one another  
a wrong.

He lived on an isle in the ocean – we sail'd on a Friday morn –  
He that had slain my father the day before I was born.

### II

And we came to the isle in the ocean, and there on the shore  
was he.

But a sudden blast blew us out and away thro' a boundless  
sea.

### III

And we came to the Silent Isle that we never had touch'd at  
before,

Where a silent ocean always broke on a silent shore,  
And the brooks glitter'd on in the light without sound, and  
the long waterfalls

Pour'd in a thunderless plunge to the base of the mountain  
walls,

## THE VOYAGE OF MAELDUNE

And the poplar and cypress unshaken by storm flourish'd up  
beyond sight,

And the pine shot aloft from the crag to an unbelievable  
height,

And high in the heaven above it there flicker'd a songless  
lark,

And the cock couldn't crow, and the bull couldn't low, and  
the dog couldn't bark.

And round it we went, and thro' it, but never a murmur, a  
breath –

It was all of it fair as life, it was all of it quiet as death,

And we hated the beautiful Isle, for whenever we strove to  
speak

Our voices were thinner and fainter than any flittermouse-  
shriek;

And the men that were mighty of tongue and could raise such  
a battle-cry

That a hundred who heard it would rush on a thousand lances  
and die –

O they to be dumb'd by the charm! – so fluster'd with anger  
were they

They almost fell on each other; but after we sail'd away.

### IV

And we came to the Isle of Shouting, we landed, a score of  
wild birds

Cried from the topmost summit with human voices and  
words;

Once in an hour they cried, and whenever their voices peal'd  
The steer fell down at the plow and the harvest died from the  
field,

And the men dropt dead in the valleys and half of the cattle  
went lame,

## THE VOYAGE OF MAELDUNE

And the roof sank in on the hearth, and the dwelling broke  
into flame;  
And the shouting of these wild birds ran into the hearts of  
my crew,  
Till they shouted along with the shouting and seized one  
another and slew;  
But I drew them the one from the other; I saw that we could  
not stay,  
And we left the dead to the birds and we sail'd with our  
wounded away.

### V

And we came to the Isle of Flowers: their breath met us out  
on the seas,  
For the Spring and the middle Summer sat each on the lap  
of the breeze;  
And the red passion-flower to the cliffs, and the dark-blue  
clematis, clung,  
And starr'd with a myriad blossom the long convolvulus hung;  
And the topmost spire of the mountain was lilies in lieu of  
snow,  
And the lilies like glaciers winded down, running out below  
Thro' the fire of the tulip and poppy, the blaze of gorse, and  
the blush  
Of millions of roses that sprang without leaf or a thorn from  
the bush;  
And the whole isle-side flashing down from the peak without  
ever a tree  
Swept like a torrent of gems from the sky to the blue of the  
sea;  
And we roll'd upon capes of crocus and vaunted our kith and  
our kin,

## THE VOYAGE OF MAELDUNE

And we wallow'd in beds of lilies, and chanted the triumph  
of Finn,  
Till each like a golden image was pollen'd from head to feet  
And each was as dry as a cricket, with thirst in the middle-  
day heat.  
Blossom and blossom, and promise of blossom, but never a  
fruit!  
And we hated the Flowering Isle, as we hated the isle that  
was mute,  
And we tore up the flowers by the million and flung them in  
bight and bay,  
And we left but a naked rock, and in anger we sail'd away.

### VI

And we came to the Isle of Fruits: all round from the cliffs  
and the capes,  
Purple or amber, dangled a hundred fathom of grapes,  
And the warm melon lay like a little sun on the tawny sand,  
And the fig ran up from the beach and rioted over the land,  
And the mountain arose like a jewell'd throne thro' the  
fragrant air,  
Glowing with all-colour'd plums and with golden masses of  
pear,  
And the crimson and scarlet of berries that flamed upon bine  
and vine,  
But in every berry and fruit was the poisonous pleasure of  
wine;  
And the peak of the mountain was apples, the hugest that  
ever were seen,  
And they prest, as they grew, on each other, with hardly a  
leaflet between,  
And all of them redder than rosiest health or than utterest  
shame,

## THE VOYAGE OF MAELDUNE

And setting, when Even descended, the very sunset aflame;  
And we stay'd three days, and we gorged and we madden'd,  
till every one drew  
His sword on his fellow to slay him, and ever they struck and  
they slew;  
And myself, I had eaten but sparely, and fought till I sunder'd  
the fray,  
Then I bad them remember my father's death, and we sail'd  
away.

### VII

And we came to the Isle of Fire: we were lured by the light  
from afar,  
For the peak sent up one league of fire to the Northern Star;  
Lured by the glare and the blare, but scarcely could stand  
upright,  
For the whole isle shudder'd and shook like a man in a mortal  
affright;  
We were giddy besides with the fruits we had gorged, and so  
crazed that at last  
There were some leap'd into the fire; and away we sail'd, and  
we past  
Over that undersea isle, where the water is clearer than air:  
Down we look'd: what a garden! O bliss, what a Paradise  
there!  
Towers of a happier time, low down in a rainbow deep  
Silent palaces, quiet fields of eternal sleep!  
And three of the gentlest and best of my people, whate'er I  
could say,  
Plunged head down in the sea, and the Paradise trembled  
away.



## THE VOYAGE OF MAELDUNE

### VIII

And we came to the Bounteous Isle, where the heavens lean  
low on the land,  
And ever at dawn from the cloud glitter'd o'er us a sunbright  
hand,  
Then it open'd and dropt at the side of each man, as he rose  
from his rest,  
Bread enough for his need till the labourless day dipt under  
the West;  
And we wander'd about it and thro' it. O never was time so  
good!  
And we sang of the triumphs of Finn, and the boast of our  
ancient blood,  
And we gazed at the wandering wave as we sat by the gurgle  
of springs,  
And we chanted the songs of the Bards and the glories of fairy  
kings;  
But at length we began to be weary, to sigh, and to stretch  
and yawn,  
Till we hated the Bounteous Isle and the sunbright hand of  
the dawn,  
For there was not an enemy near, but the whole green Isle  
was our own,  
And we took to playing at ball, and we took to throwing the  
stone,  
And we took to playing at battle, but that was a perilous play,  
For the passion of battle was in us, we slew and we sail'd  
away.

### IX

And we past to the Isle of Witches and heard their musical  
cry -  
'Come to us, O come, come' in the stormy red of a sky

## THE VOYAGE OF MAELDUNE

Dashing the fires and the shadows of dawn on the beautiful  
shapes,  
For a wild witch naked as heaven stood on each of the loftiest  
capes,  
And a hundred ranged on the rock like white sea-birds in a  
row,  
And a hundred gamboll'd and pranced on the wrecks in the  
sand below,  
And a hundred splash'd from the ledges, and bosom'd the  
burst of the spray,  
But I knew we should fall on each other, and hastily sail'd  
away.

### X

And we came in an evil time to the Isle of the Double  
Towers,  
One was of smooth-cut stone, one carved all over with flowers,  
But an earthquake always moved in the hollows under the  
dells,  
And they shock'd on each other and butted each other with  
clashing of bells,  
And the daws flew out of the Towers and jangled and  
wrangled in vain,  
And the clash and boom of the bells rang into the heart and  
the brain,  
Till the passion of battle was on us, and all took sides with the  
Towers,  
There were some for the clean-cut stone, there were more for  
the carven flowers,  
And the wrathful thunder of God peal'd over us all the day,  
For the one half slew the other, and after we sail'd away.

THE VOYAGE OF MAELDUNE

XI

And we came to the Isle of a Saint who had sail'd with St  
Brendan of yore,  
He had lived ever since on the Isle and his winters were  
fifteen score,  
And his voice was low as from other worlds, and his eyes were  
sweet,  
And his white hair sank to his heels and his white beard fell  
to his feet,  
And he spake to me, 'O Maeldune, let be this purpose of  
thine!  
Remember the words of the Lord when he told us "Venge-  
ance is mine!"  
His fathers have slain thy fathers in war or in single strife,  
Thy fathers have slain his fathers, each taken a life for a life,  
Thy father had slain his father, how long shall the murder  
last?  
Go back to the Isle of Finn and suffer the Past to be Past.'  
And we kiss'd the fringe of his beard and we pray'd as we  
heard him pray,  
And the Holy man he assoil'd us, and sadly we sail'd away.

XII

And we came to the Isle we were blown from, and there on  
the shore was he,  
The man that had slain my father. I saw him and let him be.  
O weary was I of the travel, the trouble, the strife and the sin,  
When I landed again, with a tithe of my men, on the Isle of  
Finn.

## CROSSING THE BAR

SUNSET and evening star,  
And one clear call for me.  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark:  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face,  
When I have crost the bar.

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