

Accolon of Gaul

MADISON CAWEIN

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Prelude

O wondrous legends from the storied wells
Of lost Baranton! where old Merlin dwells,
Nodding a white poll and a grave, gray beard,
As if some Lake Ladyé he, listening, heard,
Who spake like water, danced like careful showers
With blown gold curls through drifts of wild-thorn flowers;
Loose, lazy arms upon her bosom crossed,
An instant seen, and in an instant lost,
With one peculiar note, like that you hear
Dropped by a reed-bird when the night is near,
A vocal gold blown through the atmosphere.

Lo! dreams from dreams in dreams remembered. Naught
That matters much, save that it seemed I thought
I wandered dim with some one, but I knew
Not whom; most beautiful, and young, and true,
And pale through suffering: with curl-crowned brow
Soft eyes and voice, so strange, they haunt me now
A dream, perhaps, in dreamland.

Seemed that she
Led me along a flower-showered lea
Trammeled with puckered pansy and the pea;
Where poppies spread great blood-red stain on stain,
So gorged with sunlight and the honeyed rain
Their hearts were weary; roses lavished beams;
Roses, wherein were huddled little dreams
That laughed coy, sidewise merriment, like dew,
Or from fair fingers fragrant kisses blew.
And suddenly a river cleft the sward;
And o'er it lay a mist: and it was hard
To see whence came it; whitherward it led;

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Like some wild, frightened thing, it foamed and fled,
Sighing and murmuring, from its fountain-head.
And following it, at last I came upon
The Region of Romance, from whence were drawn
Its wandering waters, and the storied wells
Of lost Baranton, where old Merlin dwells,
Nodding a white poll and a great, gray beard.
And then, far off, a woman's voice I heard,
Wilder than water, laughing in the bowers,
Like some strange bird: and then, through wild-thorn flowers,
I saw her limbs glance, twinkling as spring showers;
And then, with blown gold curls, tempestuous tossed,
White as a wood-nymph, she a vista crossed,
Laughing that laugh wherein there was no cheer,
But soulless scorn. And so to me drew near
Her sweet lascivious brow's white wonderment,
And gray, great eyes, and hair which had the scent
Of all the wild Brécèliande's perfumes
Drowned in it; and, a flame in gold, one bloom's
Blood-point thrust deep. And, "Viviane! Viviane!"
The wild seemed crying, as if swept with rain;
And all the young leaves laughed; and surge on surge
Swept the witch-haunted forest to its verge,
That shook and sighed and stammered, as, in sleep,
A giant half-aroused: and, with a leap,
That samite-hazy creature, blossom-white,
Showered mocking kisses down; then, like a light
Beat into gusty flutterings by the dawn,
Then quenched, she glimmered and, behold, was gone;
And in Brécèliande I stood alone
Gazing at Merlin, sitting on a stone;
Old Merlin, charmed there, dreaming drowsy dreams;
A wondrous company; as many as gleams
That stab the moted mazes of a beech.
And each grave dream, behold, had power to reach
My mind through magic; each one following each
In dim procession; and their beauty drew
Tears down my cheeks, and Merlin's gray cheeks, too,
One in his beard hung tangled, bright as dew.
Long pageants seemed to pass me, brave and fair,
Of courts and tournaments, with silvery blare
Of immaterial trumpets high in air;
And blazoned banners, shields, and many a spear
Of Uther, waved an incorporeal fear:
And forms of Arthur rose and Guenevere,
Of Tristram and of Isoud and of Mark,
And many others; glimmering in the dark
Of Merlin's mind, they rose and glared and then,
The instant's fostered phantoms, passed again.
Then all around me seemed a rippling stir
Of silken something, wilier, lovelier

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Than that witch-mothered beauty, Viviane,
Approaching with dead knights amid her train,
Pale through the vast Brécèliande. And then
A knight, steel-helmeted, a man of men,
Passed with a fool, King Arthur's Dagonet,
Who on his head a tinsel crown had set
In mockery. And as he went his way,
Behind the knight the leaves began to sway,
Then slightly parted and Morgane le Fay,
With haughty, wicked eyes and lovely face,
Studied him steadily a little space.

I

"Again I hold thee to my heart, Morgane;
Here where the restless forest hears the main
Toss as in troubled sleep. Now hear me, sweet,
While I that dream of yesternight repeat."

"First let us find some rock or mossed retreat
Where we may sit at ease. Why dost thou look
So serious? Nay! learn lightness from this brook,
And gladness from these flowers, my Accolon.
See the wild vista there! where purpling run
Long woodland shadows from the sinking sun;
Deeper the wood seems there, secluded as
The tame wild-deer that, in the moss and grass,
Gaze with their human eyes. Where grow those lines
Of pale-starred green; and where yon fountain shines,
Urned deep in tremulous ferns, let's rest upon
Yon oak-trunk by the tempest overthrown
Years, years ago. See, how 'tis rotted brown!
But here the red bark's firm and overgrown
Of trailing ivy darkly berried. Share
My throne with me. Come, cast away thy care!
Sit here and breathe with me this wildwood air,
Musk with the wood's decay that fills each way;
As if some shrub, while dreaming of the May,
In longing languor weakly tried to wake
Its perished blossoms and could only make
Ghosts of such dead aromas as it knew,
And shape a spectre of invisible dew
To haunt these sounding miles of solitude."

"Still, thou art troubled, Morgane! and the mood,
Deep in thy fathomless eyes, glows. Canst not keep
Mine eyes from seeing! Dark thy thought and deep

I

Accolon of Gaul

As that of some wild woman, found asleep
By some lost knight upon a precipice,
Whom he hath wakened with a sudden kiss:
As that of some frail elfin lady, light
As are the foggy moonbeams, filmy white,
Who waves diaphanous beauty on a cliff,
That, drowsing, purrs with moon-drenched pines; but if
The lone knight follow, foul fiends rise and drag
Him crashing down, while she, tall on the crag,
Triumphant, mocks him with glad sorcery
Till all the wildwood echoes shout with glee."

"Follow thy figure further, Accolon.
Right fair it is. Too soon, alas! art done,"
Said she; and tossing back her heavy hair,
Said smilingly, yet with a certain air
Of hurt impatience, "Why dost not compare
This dark expression of my eyes, ah me!
To something darker? say, it is to thee
As some bewildering mystery of a tarn,
A mountain water, that the mornings scorn
To anadem with fire and leave gray;
To which a champion cometh when the day
Hath tired of breeding for the twilight's head
Flame-petaled blooms, and, golden-chapleted,
Sits waiting, rosy with deep love, for night,
Who cometh sandaled with the moon; the light
Of the auroras round her; her vast hair
Tortuous with stars, that burn, as in a lair
The eyes of hunted wild things glare with rage,
And on her bosom doth his love assuage."

"Yea, even so," said Accolon, his eyes
Searching her face: "the knight, as I surmise,
Who cometh heated to that haunted place,
Stoops down to lave his forehead, and his face
Meets fairy faces; elfins in a ring
That shadow upward, smiling, beckoning
Down, down to wonders, magic built of old
For some dim witch. A city walled with gold,
With beryl battlements and paved with pearls;
Its lambent towers wrought of foamy swirls
Of alabaster; and that witch to love
More beautiful than any queen above.
He pauses, troubled: but a wizard power,
In all his bronzen harness, that mad hour
Plunges him whither? What if he should miss
Those cloudy beauties and that creature's kiss?
Ah, Morgane, that same power Accolon
Found potent in thine eyes, and it hath drawn
And plunged him whither? yea, to what far fate?"

Accolon of Gaul

To what dim end? what veiled and future state?"

With shadowy eyes long, long she gazed in his,
Then whispered dreamily the one word, "Bliss."
And like an echo on his sad mouth sate
The answer: "Bliss? deep have we drunk of late!
But death, I feel, some stealthy-footed death
Draws near! whose claws will clutch away whose breath? . . .
I dreamed last night thou gather'dst flowers with me,
Fairer than those of earth. And I did see
How woolly gold they were, how woven through
With fluffy flame, and webby with spun dew:
And 'Asphodels' I murmured: then, 'These sure
Are Eden amaranths, so angel pure
That love alone may touch them.' Thou didst lay
The flowers in my hands; alas! then gray
The world grew; and, meseemed, I passed away.
In some strange manner on a misty brook,
Between us flowing, striving still to look
Beyond it, while, around, the wild air shook
With torn farewells of pensive melody,
Aching with tears and hopeless utterly;
So merciless near, meseemed that I did hear
That music in those flowers, and yearned to tear
Their ingot-cored and gold-crowned hearts, and hush
Their voices into silence and to crush:
Yet o'er me was a something that restrained:
The melancholy presence of two pained
And awful, burning eyes that cowed and held
My spirit while that music died or swelled
Far out on shoreless waters, borne away
Like some wild-bird, that, blinded with the ray
Of dawn it wings tow'rds, lifting high its crest,
The glory round it, sings its heavenliest,
When suddenly all's changed; with drooping head,
Daggered of thorns it plunged on, fluttering, dead,
Still, still it seems to sing, though wrapped in night,
The slow blood beading on its breast of white.
And then I knew the flowers which thou hadst given
Were strays of parting grief and waifs of heaven
For tears and memories. Importunate
They spoke to me of loves that separate!
But, God! ah God! my God! thus was I left!
And these were with me who was so bereft.
The haunting torment of that dream of grief
Weighs on my soul and gives me no relief."

He bowed and wept into his hands; and she,
Sorrowing beheld. Then, resting at her knee,
Raised slow her oblong lute and smote some chords.
But ere the impulse saddened into words,

Accolon of Gaul

Said: "And didst love me as thy lips would prove,
No visions wrought of sleep might move thy love.
Firm is all love in firmness of his power;
With flame, reverberant, moated stands his tower;
So built as not to admit from fact a beam
Of doubt, and much less of a doubt from dream:
All such th' alchemic fire of love's desires,
That moats its tower with flame, turns to gold wires
To chord the old lyre new whereon he lyres."
She ceased; and then, sad softness in her eye,
Sang to his dream a questioning reply:

"Will love be less, when dead the roguish Spring,
Who, with white hands, sowed violets, whispering?
When petals of her cheeks, wan-wasted through
Of withering grief, are laid beneath the dew,
Will love be less?

"Will love be less, when comes the Summer tall?
Her throat a lily, long and spiritual:
When like a poppied swath, hushed haunt of bees,
Her form is laid in slumber on the leas,
Will love be less?

"Will love be less, when Autumn, sighing there,
Droops with long frost streaks in her dark, dark hair?
When her grave eyes are closed to heaven above,
Deep, lost in memory's melancholy, love,
Will love be less?

"Will love be less, when Winter at the door
Shakes from gray locks th' icicles, long and hoar?
When Death's eyes, hollow o'er his shoulder, dart
Dark looks that wring with tears, then freeze the heart,
Will love be less?"

And in her hair wept softly, and her breast
Rose and was wet with tears as when, distressed,
Night steals on day, rain sobbing through her curls.

"Though tears become thee even as priceless pearls,
Weep not, Morgane. Mine no gloom of doubt,
But grief for sweet love's death I dreamed about,"
He said. "May love, the flame-anointed, be
Lord of our hearts, and king eternally!
Love, ruler of our lives, whose power shall cease
No majesty when we are laid at peace;
But still shall reign, when souls have loved thus well,
Our god in Heaven or our god in Hell."

So they communed. Afar her castle stood,

Accolon of Gaul

Its slender towers glimmering through the wood:
A forest lodge rose, ivy-buried, near
A woodland vista where faint herds of deer
Stalked like soft shadows: where, with many a run,
Mavis and throstle caroled in the sun:
And where through trees was seen a surf-white shore.
For this was Morgane's realm, embowered Gore;
And that her castle, sea-built Chariot,
That rocky pile, where, she a while forgot
Urience, her husband, now at Camelot.
Hurt in that battle where King Arthur strove
With the Five Heathen Kings, and, slaying, drove
The Five before him, Accolon was borne
To a gray castle on his shield one morn;
A castle like a dream, set high in scorn
Above the world and all its hungry herds,
Belted with woods melodious with birds,
Far from the rush of spears and roar of swords,
And the loud shields of battle-bloody lords,
And fields of silent slain where Havoc sprawled
Gorged to her eyes with carnage. Dim, high-halled,
And hushed it rose; and through the granite-walled
Huge gate, and court, up stairs of marble sheen,
Six damsels bore him, tiremaids of a queen,
Stately and dark, who moved as if a flame
Of starlight shone around her; and who came
With healing herbs and searched his wounds. A dame,
So radiant in raiment silvery,
So white, that she attendant seemed to be
On that high Holy Grail, which evermore
The Table Round hath sought by wood and shore;
The angel-guarded cup of mystery,
That but the pure in body and soul may see;
Thus not for him, a worldly one, to love,
Who loved her even to wonder; skied above
His worship as the moon above the main,
That strives and strives to reach her, pale with pain,
She with her peaceful, pitiless, virgin cheer
Watching his suffering year on weary year.
To Accolon such seemed she: Then, too late,
His heart's ideal, merciless as fate!
For whom his soul must yearn till death; and wait
And dream of; evermore with sighs and tears,
Through the long waste of unavailing years,
Seeing her ever luminously stand
In luminous heavens, beckoning with her hand:
Before which vision heart and soul were weak,
And dumb with love, that would, yet could not speak.
Her beauty filled him with divine despair.
Around his heart she seemed to wrap her hair,
Her raven hair, and drag him to his doom;

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Her looks were splendid daggers in the gloom
Of his sick soul, his heart's invaded tower,
Stabbing, yet never slaying, every hour.
Thus worshiping that queen, Morgane le Fay,
For many a day within his room he lay,
Longing to live now, then again to die,
As now her face, or now her glancing eye,
Bade his heart hope, with smiled approval of
His passion; now despair, with scorn of love;
His love, that dragged itself before her feet,
Dog-like, to whom even a blow were sweet.
Ah, never dreamed he of what was to be,
Nay, nay! how could he? while the agony
Of his unworth possessed his soul so much,
He never thought such loveliness and such
Perfection ever could stoop from its heaven,
Far as his world, and to his arms be given.

One night a tempest tore and tossed and lashed
The writhing forest, and deep thunders dashed
Sonorous shields together; and anon,
Vast in the thunder's pause, the sea would groan
Like some enormous curse a knight hath lured
From where it soared to maim it with his sword.
And Accolon, from where he lay, could see
The stormy, wide-wrenched night's immensity
Yawn hells of golden ghastriness, and sweep
Distending foam, tempestuous, up each steep
Of raucous iron. In a fever-fit,
He seemed to see, on crags the lightning lit,
With tangled hair wild-blown, nude mermaids sit,
Singing, and beckoning with foam-white arms
Some far ship struggling with the strangling storm's
Resistless exultation. And there came
One breaker, mountained heavenward, all aflame
With glow-worm green, that boomed against the cliff
Its bulkéd thunder and there, pale and stiff,
Tumbled in eddies of the howling rocks,
His dead, drawn face, with lidless eyes, and locks
Oozed close with brine; hurled upward streamingly
To streaming mermaids. Then he seemed to see
The vampire echoes of the hoarse wood, who,
With hooting, sought him: down the casement drew
Wet, shuddering, hag-like fingers; and, at last,
Thronged up the turrets with an elfin blast
Of baffled mockery, and whirled wildly off,
Back to the forest with a maniac scoff.
Then, far away, hoofs of a hundred gales,
As wave rams wave up windy bluffs of Wales,
Loosed from the battlemented hills, the loud
Herders of tempest drove their herds of cloud,

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That down the rocking night rolled, with the glare
Of swimming eyeballs, and the hurl of hair,
Blown, black as rain, from misty-manéd brows,
And mouths of bellowing storm; in mad carouse,
With whips of wind, rolling and ruining by,
Headlong, along the wild and headlong sky.

Once when the lightning made the casement glare,
Squares touched to gold, athwart it swept her hair,
As if a raven's wing had cut the storm
Death-driven seaward. And the vague alarm
Of her swift coming filled his soul with hope
And wild surmise, that winged beyond the scope
Of all his dreams had dreamed of, when he saw
'Twas she, the all-adored. He felt no awe
When low she kneeled beside him, beautiful
As some lone star and white, and said, "To lull
Thy soul to sleep, lo, I have come to thee.
Didst thou not call me?"

"Yea;" he said. "Maybe
Thou heard'st my heart, that calls continually:
But with my lips I called thee not. But, stay!
The night is wild. Thou wilt not go away!
The night is wild, and it is long till day!
To see thee like a benediction near,
To hear thy voice, to have thy cool hand here
Smoothing my feverish brow and matted curls;
To see thy white throat, whiter than its pearls,
Lean o'er me breathing; feel the influence
Of thy large eyes, like stars, whose sole defence
Against all storm is beauty, is to see
And feel a portion of divinity,
My heart's high dream come true, my dream of dreams! "
Then paused and said, "See, how the tempest streams!
How sweeps the tumult! and the thunder gleams
As, when King Arthur charged on battle-fields
Of Humber, glared the fiery spears and shields
Of all his knights! when the Five Kings went down!
In the wild hurl of onset overthrown. . . .
But thy white presence, like the moon, has sown
This room with calm; and all the storm in me,
The tempest of my soul, dies utterly.
So let me feel thy hand upon my cheek.
And speak! I love thy voice: beloved, speak."

"Thou lov'st a thing of air, fond Accolon!
Is thy love then so spiritual? Nay! anon
'T will change, methinks. Whatever may befall,
Earth-love, thou 'lt find, is better, after all."
She smiled; and, sudden, through the moon-rent wall

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Of storm, baptizing moonlight, foot and face,
Bathed and possessed her, as his soul the grace
And sweetness of her smile, whose life was brief,
But long enough to heal him of his grief.

"Now rest," she said; "I love thee with much love!
Thou didst not know I loved: but God above,
He knew and had divinement. Winds may blow!
To lie by thee to-night my mind is. So,"
She laughed, "sleep well! For me . . . give me thy word
Of knighthood! look thou! . . . and this naked sword
Laid here betwixt us! . . . Let it be a wall
Strong between love and lust an lov'st me all in all."

Then she unbound the gold that clasped her waist:
Undid her hair: and, like a flower faced,
Stood sweet an unswayed stem that ran to bud
In bloom and beauty of young womanhood.
And fragrance was to her as natural
As odor to the rose. And white and tall,
All ardor and all fervor, through the room
She moved, a presence as of pale perfume.
And all his eyes and lips and limbs were fire:
His tongue, delirious, babbled of desire;
Cried, "Thine is devil's kindness, which is even
Worse than fiend's fury, since the soul sees Heaven
Among eternal torments unforgiven.
Temptation neighbored, like a bloody rust
On a bright blade, leaves ugly stains; and lust
Is love's undoing when love's limbs are cast
Naked before desire. What love so chaste
But that such nearness of what should be hid
Makes it a lawless love? But thou hast bid.
Rest thou. I love thee; love thee as dost know,
And all my love shall battle with love's foe."

"Thy word," she said. And pure as peaks that keep
Snow-drifted crowns, upon him seemed to sweep
An avalanche of virtue in one look.
And he, whose very soul within him shook,
Exclaimed, "'T is thine!" And hopes, that in his brain
Had risen with rainbow gleams, set sad as rain
At that high look she gave of chastest pain.
Then turned, his face deep in his hands: and she
Laid the broad blade between them instantly.
And so they lay its iron between them twain:
Unsleeping he, for all the brute disdain
Of passion in him struggled up and stood
A rebel wrangling with the brain and blood.
An hour stole by: she slept, or seemed to sleep.
The winds of night blew vigorous from the deep

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With rain-scents of storm-watered wood and wold,
And breathed of ocean breakers moonlight-rolled.
He drowed; and time passed stealing as for one
Whose life is but a dream in Avalon.
Vast bulks of black, wind-shattered rack went by
The casement's square of heaven, a crystal dye,
A crown of moonlight, round each cloudy head,
That seemed the ghosts of giant kings long-dead.
And then he thought she lightly laughed and sighed,
So soft a taper had not bent aside,
And leaned her warm face, seen through loosened hair,
Above him, whispering, soft as is a prayer,
"Behold! the sword! I take the sword away!"

It curved and clashed where the strewn rushes lay;
Shone glassy, glittering like a watery beam
Of moonlight, in the moonlight. He did deem
She moved in sleep and dreamed perverse nor wist
The thing she did, until two hot lips kissed
His wondering eyes to knowledge of her thought.
Then said he, "Love, my word! is it then naught?"
But now he felt fierce kisses over and over,
And laughter of "Thy word? Art thou my lover?
Kisses are more than words! Come, give them me!
As for thy word I give it back to thee!"

Sleep is a spirit, who beside us sits,
Or through our frames like some dim glamour flits;
From out her form a pearly light is shed,
As, from a lily in a lily-bed,
A firefly's gleam. Her face is pale as stone,
Uncertain as a cloud that lies alone
In empty heaven; her diaphanous feet
Are easy as the dew or opaline heat
Of summer meads. With ears aurora-pink
As dawn's she leans and listens on the brink
Of being, dark with dreadfulness and doubt,
Wherein vague lights and shadows move about,
And palpitations beat like some huge heart
Of Earth the surging pulse of which we're part.
One hand, that hollows her divining eyes,
Glow like the curved moon over twilight skies;
And with her gaze she fathoms life and death
Gulfs, where man's conscience, like a restless breath
Of wind, goes wandering; whispering low of things,
The irremediable, where sorrow clings.
Around her limbs a veil of woven mist
Wavers, and turns from fibered amethyst
To textured crystal; through which symbolized bars
Of silver burn, and cabalistic stars
Of nebulous gold. Shrouding her feet and hair,

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Within this woof, fantastic, everywhere,
Dreams come and go: the instant images
Of things she sees and thinks; realities,
Shadows, with which her heart and fancy swarm,
That in the veil take momentary form:
Now picturing heaven in celestial fire,
And now the hell of every soul's desire;
Hinting at worlds, God wraps in mystery,
Beyond the world we touch and know and see.

No, never, no! would they forget that night.
Too soon the sleepy birds awoke the light!
Too soon, for them, trailing gray skirts of breeze,
The drowsy dawn came wandering through the trees.
"Too soon," she sighed; and he, "Alas! too soon!"
But at their scutcheoned casement, overstrewn
Of dew and dreams, the dim wind knocked and cried,
"Arise! come forth, O bridegroom, and O bride!"

II

Morn; and the Autumn, dreaming, sat among
His ancient hills; Autumn, who now was wrung
By crafty ministers, sun, rain, and frost,
To don imperial pomp at any cost.
On each wild hill he reared his tents of war,
Flaunting barbaric standards wide and far,
Around which camp-fires of the red leaves raged:
His tottering state by flattering zephyrs paged,
Who, in a little fretful while, would soon
Work red rebellion under some wan moon:
Pluck his old beard, deriding; shriek and tear
His royalty; and scatter through the air
His tattered majesty: then from his head
Dash down its golden crown; and in its stead
Set up a death's-head mockery of snow,
And leave him stripped, a beggar bowed with woe.
Blow, wood wind, blow! the day is fair and fine
As autumn skies can make it; brisk as brine
The air is, rustling in the underbrush,
'Mid which the stag-hounds leap, the huntsmen rush.
Hark to the horns! the music of the bows!
À mort! à mort! The hunt is up and goes,
Beneath the acorn-dropping oaks, in green,
Dark woodland green, a boar-spear held between
His selle and hunter's head; and at his thigh
A good broad hanger; and one hand on high

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To wind his horn, that startles many a wing,
And makes the forest echoes reel and ring.
Away, away they flash, a belted band
From Camelot, through the haze-haunted land:
With many a leamer leashed, and many a hound,
With mouths of bell-like music, now that bound,
Uncoupled, forward; for, behold! the hart,
A ten-tined buck, doth from the covert dart.
And the big stag-hounds swing into the chase,
The wild horns sing. The pryce seems but a pace
On ere 'tis wound. But, see! where interlace
The dense-briared thickets, now the hounds have lost
The slot, there where their woodland way is crossed
By intercepting waters full of leaves.

Beyond, the hart a tangled labyrinth weaves
Through deeper boscaige; and it seems the sun
Makes many shadowy stags of this wild one,
That lead in different trails the foresters:
And in the trees the ceaseless wind, that stirs,
Seems some strange witchcraft, that, with baffling mirth,
Mocks them the unbayed hart, and fills the earth
With rustling sounds of running. Hastening thence,
Galloped King Arthur and King Urience,
With one small brachet-hound. Now far away
They heard their fellowship's faint horns; and day
Wore on to noon; yet, there before them, they
Still saw the hart plunge bravely through the brake,
Leaving the bracken shaking in his wake:
And on they followed; on, through many a copse,
Above whose brush, close on before, the tops
Of the great antlers swelled anon, then, lo,
Were gone where beat the heather to and fro.
But still they drave him hard; and ever near
Seemed that great hart unwearied, and 'twas clear
The chase would yet be long, when Arthur's horse
Gasped mightily and, lunging in his course,
Lay dead, a lordly bay; and Urience
Reined his gray hunter, laboring. And thence
King Arthur went afoot. When suddenly
He was aware of a wide waste of sea,
And, near the wood, the hart upon the sward,
Bayed, panting unto death and winded hard.
So with his sword he slew him; then the pryce
Wound loudly on his hunting-bugle thrice.

As if each echo, which that wild horn's blast
Roused from its sleep, the solitude had cast
For ages on it, had, a silvery band
Of moving sounds of gladness, hand in hand
Arisen, each a visible delight,

Accolon of Gaul

Came three fair damsels, sunny in snowy white,
From the red woodland gliding. They the knight,
For so they deemed the King, who came alone,
Graced with obeisance. And, "Our lord," said one,
"Tenders you courtesy until the dawn,
The Earl, Sir Damas. For the day is gone,
And you are weary. Safe in his strong keep,
Led thither with due worship, you shall sleep."
And so he came, o'erwearied, to a hall,
An owlet-haunted pile, whose weedy wall
Towered, rock on rock; its turrets, crowding high,
Loomed, ancient as the crags, against a sky
Wherein the moon hung, owl-eyed, round and full:
An old, gaunt giant-castle, like a gull
Hung on the weedy cliffs, where broke the dull
Vast monotone of ocean, that uprolled
Its windy waters; and where all was old,
And sad, and swept of winds, and slain of salt,
And haunted grim of ruin: where the vault
Of heav'n bent ever, clamorous as the rout
Of the defiant headlands, stretching out
Into the night, with their voluminous shout
Of wreck and wrath forever. Arthur then,
Among the gaunt Earl's followers, swarthy men,
Ate in the wild hall. Then a damsel led,
With flaring torch, the tired King to bed,
Down lonely labyrinths of that corridorred keep.
And soon he rested, sunk in heavy sleep.

Then suddenly he woke; it seemed, 'mid groans
And dolorous sighs: and round him lay the bones
Of many men, and bodies mouldering.
And he could hear the wind-swept ocean swing
Its sighing surge above. And so he thought,
"It is some nightmare weighing me, distraught
By that long hunt." And then he sought to shake
The horror off and to himself awake.
But still he heard sad groans and whispering sighs:
And gaunt, from iron-ribbed cells, the eyes
Of pale, cadaverous knights regarded him,
Unhappy: and he felt his senses swim
With foulness of that dungeon. "What are ye?
Ghosts? or chained champions? or a company
Of fiends?" he cried. Then, "Speak! if speak ye can!
Speak, in God's name! for I am here a man!"
Then groaned the shaggy throat of one who lay,
A wasted nightmare, dying day by day,
Yet once a knight of comeliness, and strong
And great and young, but now, through hunger long,
A skeleton with hollow hands and cheeks:
"Sir knight," said he, "know that the wretch who speaks

Is only one of twenty knights entombed
By Damas here; the Earl who so hath doomed
Us in this dungeon, where starvation lairs;
Around you lie the bones, whence famine stares,
Of many knights. And would to God that soon
My liberated ghost might see the moon
Freed from the horror of this prisonment!"
With that he sighed, and round the dungeon went
A rustling sigh, as of the damned; and so
Another dim, thin voice complained their woe:
"Know, he doth starve us to obtain this end:
Because not one of us his strength will lend
To battle for what still he calls his rights,
This castle and its lands. For, of all knights,
He is most base; lacks most in hardihood.
A younger brother, Ontzlake, hath he; good
And courteous; withal most noble; whom
This Damas hates yea, even seeks his doom;
Denying him to his estate all right
Save that he holds by main of arms and might.
Through puissance hath Ontzlake some few fields
And one right sumptuous manor, where he deals
With knights as knights should, with an open hand,
Though ill he can afford it. Through the land
He is far-famed for hospitality.
Ontzlake is brave, but Damas cowardly.
For Ontzlake would decide with sword and lance,
Body to body, this inheritance:
But Damas, vile as he is courageless,
Doth on all knights, his guests, lay this duress,
To fight for him or starve. For you must know
That in this country he is hated so
There is no champion who will take the fight.
Thus fortunes it our plight is such a plight."
Quoth he and ceased. And, wondering at the tale,
The King lay silent, while each wasted, pale,
Poor countenance perused him; then he spake:
"And what reward if one this cause should take?"
"Deliverance for all if of us one
Consent to be his party's champion.
But treachery and he are so close kin
We loathe the part as some misshapen sin;
And here would rather with the rats find death
Than, serving him, serve wrong, and save our breath,
And on our heads, perhaps, bring down God's curse."

"May God deliver you in mercy, sirs,
And help us all!" said Arthur. At which word
Straightway a groaning sound of iron was heard,
Of chains rushed loose and bolts jarred rusty back,
And hoarse the gate croaked open; and the black

Accolon of Gaul

Of that rank cell astonished was with light,
That danced fantastic with the frantic night.
One high torch, sidewise worried by the gust,
Sunned that dark den of hunger, death and dust;
And one tall damsel, vaguely vested, fair,
With shadowy hair, poised on the rocky stair:
And laughing on the King, "What cheer?" said she.
"God's life! the keep stinks vilely! And to see
Such noble knights endungeoned, starving here,
Doth pain me sore with pity. But, what cheer?"
"Thou mockest us. For me, the sorriest
Since I was suckled; and of any quest
This is the most imperiling and strange.
But what wouldst thou?" said Arthur. She,
 "A change
I offer thee; through thee to these with thee,
If thou wilt promise, in love's courtesy,
To fight for Damas and his brotherhood.
And if thou wilt not look! behold this brood
Of lean and dwindled bellies, spectre-eyed,
Keen knights once, who refused me. So decide."

Then thought the King of the sweet sky, the breeze
That blew delirious over waves and trees;
Thick fields of grasses and the sunny Earth,
Whose beating heat filled the high heart with mirth,
And made the world one sovereign pleasure-house
Where king and serf might revel and carouse:
Then of the hunt on autumn-plaintive hills;
Lone forest lodges by their radiant rills;
His palace at Caerleon upon Usk,
And Camelot's loud halls that through the dusk
Blazed far and bloomed, a rose of revelry;
Or, in the misty morning, shadowy
Loomed, grave with audience. And then he thought
Of his Round Table, and the Grael wide sought
In haunted holds by many a haunted shore.
Then marveled of what wars would rise and roar
With dragon heads unconquered and devour
This realm of Britain and crush out that flower
Of chivalry whence ripened his renown:
And then the reign of some besotted crown,
Some bandit king of lust, idolatry
And with that thought for tears he could not see.
Then of his best-loved champions, King Ban's son,
And Galahad and Tristram, Accolon:
And then, ah God! of his loved Guenevere:
And with that thought to starve 'mid horrors here!
For, being unfriend to Arthur and his Court,
Well knew he this grim Earl would bless that sport
Of fortune which had fortune'd him so well

Accolon of Gaul

As t' have his King to starve within a cell,
In the entombing rock beside the deep.
And all the life, large in his limbs, did leap
Through eager veins and sinews, fierce and red,
Stung on to action; and he rose and said:
"That which thou askest is right hard, but, lo!
To rot here, harder. I will fight his foe.
But, mark, I have no weapons and no mail;
No steed against that other to avail."

She laughed again; "If we must beg or hire,
Fear not for that: these thou shalt lack not, sire."
And so she led the way; her torch's fire
Sprawling with spidery shadows at each stride
The cob-webbed coignes of scowling arches wide.
At length they reached an iron-studded door,
Which she unlocked with one harsh key she bore
'Mid many keys bunched at her girdle; thence
They issued on a terraced eminence.
Below, the sea broke sounding; and the King
Breathed open air again that had the sting
And scent of brine, the far, blue-billowed foam:
And in the east the second dawning's gloam,
Since that unlucky chase, was freaked with streaks
Red as the ripe stripes of an apple's cheeks.
And so, within that larger light of dawn
It seemed to Arthur now that he had known
This maiden at his Court, and so he asked.
But she, well tutored, her real person masked,
And answered falsely, "Nay, deceive thee not.
Thou saw'st me ne'er at Arthur's Court, I wot.
For here it likes me best to sing and spin,
And needle hangings, listening to the din
Of ocean, sitting some high tower within.
No courts or tournaments or hunts I crave,
No knights to flatter me! For me the wave,
The cliffs, the sea and sky, in calm or storm;
My garth, wherein I walk at morn; the charm
Of ocean, redolent at bounteous noon,
And sprayed with sunlight; night's free stars and moon:
White ships that pass, some several every year;
These ancient towers; and those wild mews to hear."
"An owlet maid," the King laughed. But untrue
Was she, and of false Morgane's treasonous crew,
Deep in intrigues, even for the slaying of
The King, her brother, whom she did not love.
And presently she brought him where, in state,
This swarthy Damas, 'mid his wildmen sate.

And Accolon, at Castle Chariot still,
Had lost long weeks in love. Her husband ill,

Accolon of Gaul

Morgane, perforce, must leave her lover here
Among the hills of Gore. A lodge stood near
A cascade in the forest, where their wont
Was to sit listening the falling fount,
That, through sweet talks of many idle hours
On moss-banks, varied with the violet flowers,
Had learned the lovers' language, sighed above,
And seemed, in every fall, to whisper, "love";
That echoed through the lodge, her hands had draped
With curious hangings; where were worked and shaped
Remembered hours of pleasure, body and soul;
Imperishable passions, which made whole
The past again in pictures; and could mate
The heart with loves long dead; and re-create
The very kisses of those perished knights
With woven records of long-dead delights.
Below the lodge within an urnéd shell
The water pooled, and made a tinkling well,
Then, slipping thence, through dripping shadows fell
From rippling rock to rock. Here Accolon,
With Morgane's hollow lute, as eve drew on
Came all alone: not ev'n her brindled hound
To bound before him o'er the gleaming ground;
No handmaid lovely of his loveliest fair,
Or paging dwarf in purple with him there;
Only her lute, about which her perfume
Clung, odorous of memories, that made bloom
Her absent features, making them arise,
Like some rich flower, before his memory's eyes,
That seemed to see her lips and to surmise
The words they fashioned; then the smile that drank
Her soul's deep fire from eyes wherein it sank
And slowly waned away to deeper dreams,
Fathomless with thought, down in their dove-gray streams.
And so for her imagined eyes and lips,
Heart-fashioned features, all the music slips
Of all his soul, himseems, into his voice,
To sing her praises. And, with nervous poise,
His fleet, trained fingers waken in her lute
Such mellow riot as must make envy-mute
The nightingale that listens quivering.
And well he hopes that, winging thence, 't will sing
A similar song; whose passions burn and pain
Its anguished soul, now silent, not in vain
Beneath her casement, in that garden old
Dingled with heavy roses; in the gold
Of Camelot's stars and pearl-encrusted moon:
And still he hopes the heartache of the tune
Will clamor secret memories in her ear,
Of life, less dear than death with her not near;
Of love, who longs for her, to have her here:

Accolon of Gaul

Till melt her eyes with tears; and sighs and sobs
O'erwhelm her soul, and separation throbs
Hard at her heart, that, longing, lifts to death
A prayerful pleading, crying, "But a breath,
One moment of real heaven, there! in his arms!
Close, close! And, for that moment, then these charms,
This body, hell, canst have forevermore!"
And sweet to know, perhaps its song will pour
Into the dull ear of her drowsy lord
A vague suspicion of some secret word,
Borne by the bird, love's wingéd messenger,
To her who lies beside him; even her,
His wife, whom still he loves; whom Accolon
Thus sings of where the woods of Gore grow wan:

"The thought of thy white coming, like a song
Breathed soft of lovely lips and lute-like tongue,
Sways all my bosom with a sweet unrest;
Makes wild my heart that oft thy heart hath pressed.
Come! press it once again, for it is strong
To bear that weight which never yet distressed.

"O come! and straight the woodland is stormed through
With wilder wings, and brighter with bright dew:
And every flow'r, where thy fair feet have passed,
Puts forth a fairer blossom than the last,
Thrilled of thine eyes, those arsenals of blue,
Wherein the arrows of all love are cast.

"O Love, she comes! O Love, I feel her breath,
Like the soft South, that idly wandereth
Through musical leaves of laughing laziness,
Page on before her, how sweet, none can guess:
Sighing, 'She comes! thy heart's dear life and death;
In whom is all thy bliss and thy distress.'

"She comes! she comes! and all my mind doth rave
For words to tell her how she doth enslave
My soul with beauty: then o'erwhelm with love
That loveliness, no words can tell whereof;
Words, words, like roses, every path to pave,
Each path to strew, and no word sweet enough!

"She comes! Thro' me a passion as the moon
Works wonder in the sea through me doth swoon
Ungovernable glory; and her soul
Seems blent with mine; and now, to some bright goal,
Compels me, throbbing like a tender tune,
Exhausting all my efforts of control.

"She comes! ah, God! ye little stars that grace

Accolon of Gaul

The fragmentary skies, and scatter space,
Brighter her steps that golden all my gloom!
Ah, wood-indulging, violet-vague perfume,
Sweeter the presence of her wild-flower face,
That fragrance-fills my life, and stars with bloom!

"Oh, boundless exultation of the blood!
That now compels me to some higher mood,
Diviner sense of something that outsoars
The Earth her kiss! that all love's splendor pours
Into me; all delicious womanhood,
So all the heart that hesitates adores.

"Sweet, my soul's victor! heart's triumphant Sweet!
Within thy bosom Love hath raised his seat;
There he sits crowned; and, from thy eyes and hair,
Shoots his soft arrows, as the moonbeams fair,
That long have laid me supine at thy feet,
And changed my clay to ardent fire and air.

"My love! my witch! whose kiss, like some wild wine,
Has subtly filled me with a flame divine,
An aspiration, whose fierce pulses urge
In all my veins, with rosy surge on surge,
To hurl me in that heaven, all which is mine,
Thine arms! from which I never would emerge."

His ecstasy the very foliage shook;
The wood seemed hushed to hear, and hushed the brook;
And even the heavens, wherein one star shone clear,
Seemed leaning nearer, his glad song to hear,
To which its wild star throbbled, all golden-pale:
And after which, deep in the purple vale,
Awoke the passion of the nightingale.



As one hath seen a green-gowned huntress fair,
Morn in her cheeks and midnight in her hair;
Keen eyes as gray as rain, young limbs as lithe
As the wild fawn's; and silvery voice as blithe
As is the wind that breathes of flowers and dews,
Breast through the bramble-tangled avenues;
Through brier and thorn, that pluck her gown of green,
And snag it here and there, through which the sheen
Of her white skin gleams rosy; eyes and face,
Ardent and flushed, fixed on the lordly chase:

Accolon of Gaul

So came the Evening to that shadowy wood,
Or so it seemed to Accolon, who stood
Watching the sunset through the solitude.
So Evening came; and shadows cowered the way
Like ghostly pilgrims who kneel down to pray
Before a wayside shrine: and, radiant-rolled,
Along the west, the battlemented gold
Of sunset walled the opal-tinted skies,
That seemed to open gates of Paradise
On soundless hinges of the winds, and blaze
A glory, far within, of chrysopease,
Towering in topaz through the purple haze.
And from the sunset, down the roseate ways,
To Accolon, who, with his idle lute,
Reclined in reverie against the root
Of a great oak, a fragment of the west,
A dwarf, in crimson satin tightly dressed,
Skipped like a leaf the early frosts have burned,
A red oak-leaf; and like a leaf he turned,
And danced and rustled. And it seemed he came
From Camelot; from his beloved dame,
Morgane le Fay. He on his shoulder bore
A mighty blade, wrought strangely o'er and o'er
With mystic runes, drawn from a scabbard which
Glared venomous, with angry jewels rich.
He, louting to the knight, "Sir knight," said he,
"Your Lady, with all tenderest courtesy,
Assures you ah, unworthy bearer I
Of her good message! of her constancy."
Then, doffing the great baldric, with the sword,
To him he gave them, saying, "From my lord,
King Arthur: even his Excalibur,
The magic blade which Merlin gat of her,
The Ladye of the Lake, who, as you wot,
Fostered in infancy Sir Launcelot,
Upon some isle in Briogne's tangled lands
Of meres and mists; where filmy fairy bands,
By lazy moons of summer, dancing, fill
With rings of morrice every grassy hill.
Through her fair favor is this weapon sent,
Who begged it of the King with this intent:
That, for her honor, soon would be begun
A desperate battle with a champion,
Of wondrous prowess, by Sir Accolon:
And with the sword, Excalibur, more sure
Were she that he against him would endure.
Magic the blade, and magic, too, the sheath,
Which, while 'tis worn, wards from the wearer death."
He ceased: and Accolon held up the sword
Excalibur and said, "It shall go hard
With him through thee, unconquerable blade,

Accolon of Gaul

Whoe'er he be, who on my Queen hath laid
Insult or injury! And hours as slow
As palsied hours in Purgatory go
For those unmassed, till I have slain this foe!
Here, page, my purse. And now, to her who gave,
Despatch! and say: To all commands, her slave,
To death obedient, I! In love or war
Her love to make me all the warrior.
Bid her have mercy, nor too long delay
From him, who dies an hourly death each day
Till, her white hands kissed, he shall kiss her face,
Through which his life lives on, and still finds grace."
Thus he commanded. And, incontinent,
The dwarf departed, like a red shaft sent
Into the sunset's sea of scarlet light
Burning through wildwood glooms. And as the night
With votaress cypress veiled the dying strife
Sadly of day, and closed his book of life
And clasped with golden stars, in dreamy thought
Of what this fight was that must soon be fought,
Belting the blade about him, Accolon,
Through the dark woods tow'rds Chariot passed on.

And it befell him thus, the following dawn,
As he was wandering on a dew-drenched lawn,
Glad with the freshness and elastic health
Of sky and earth, that lavished all their wealth
Of heady winds and racy scents, a knight
And gentle lady met him, gay bedight,
With following of six esquires; and they
Held on gloved wrists the hooded falcon gray,
And rode a-hawking o'er the leas of Gore
From Ontzlake's manor, where he languished; sore
Hurt in the lists, a spear wound in his thigh:
Who had besought for much he feared to die
This knight and his fair lady, as they rode
To hawk near Chariot, Morgane's abode,
That they would beg her in all charity
To come to him (for in chirurgery
Of all that land she was the greatest leach),
And her for his recovery beseech.
So, Accolon saluted, they drew rein,
And spake their message, for, right over fain
Were they toward their sport, that he would bear
Petition to that lady. But, not there
Was Arthur's sister, as they well must wot;
But now a sennight lay at Camelot,
The guest of Guenevere; and with her there
Four other queens of Farther Britain were:
Isoud of Ireland, she of Cornwall Queen,
King Mark's wife, who right rarely then was seen

Accolon of Gaul

At Court for jealousy of Mark, who knew
Her to that lance of Lyonesse how true
Since mutual quaffing of a philter; while
How guilty Guenevere on such could smile:
She of Northgales and she of Eastland; and
She of the Out Isles Queen. A fairer band,
For sovereignty and love and loveliness,
Was not in any realm to grace and bless.
So Accolon informed them. In distress
Then quoth that knight: "Ay? see how fortune turns
And varies like an April day, that burns
Now welkins blue with calm; now scowls them down,
Revengeful, with a black storm's wrinkled frown.
For, look! this Damas, who so long hath lain
A hiding vermin, fearful of all pain,
Dark in his bandit towers by the deep,
Wakes from a five years' torpor and a sleep,
And sends despatch a courier to my lord,
Sir Ontzlake, with, 'To-morrow, with the sword,
Earl Damas and his knight, at point of lance,
Decides the issue of inheritance,
Body to body, or by champion.'
Right hard to find such ere to-morrow dawn.
Though sore bestead lies Ontzlake, if he could,
He would arise and save his livelihood."

Then thought Sir Accolon: "One might suppose,
So soon this follows on her message, those
Same things befall through Morgane's arts who knows?
Howe'er it be, as 'twere for her own sake,
This battle I myself will undertake."
Then said to those, "I know the good Ontzlake.
If he be so conditioned, harried of
Estate and life, in knighthood and for love
Of justice I his quarrel will assume.
My limbs are keen for armor. Let the groom
Prepare my steed. Right good 'twill be again
To feel him under me." Then, of that train,
Asked that one gentleman with him remain,
And men to squire his horse and arms. And then,
When this was granted, mounted with his men
And thence departed. And, ere noontide, they
Came to a lone, dismantled priory
Hard by a castle 'gainst whose square, grey towers,
Machicolated, mossed, in forest bowers,
Full many a siege had beat and onset rushed:
A forest fortress, old and deep-imbused
In wild and woody hills. And then one wound
A hoarse slug-horn, and at the savage sound
The drawbridge rumbled moatward, clanking, and
Into a paved court rode that little band.

Accolon of Gaul

When all the world was morning, gleam and glare
Of autumn glory; and the frost-touched air
Rang with the rooks as rings a silver lyre
Swept swift of minstrel fingers, wire on wire;
Ere that fixed hour of prime, came Arthur, armed
For battle royally. A black steed warmed
A keen impatience 'neath him, cased in mail
Of foreign make; accoutered head and tail
In costly sendal; rearward, wine-dark red,
Amber as sunlight to his fretful head.
Blue armor of linked steel had Arthur on,
Beneath a robe of honor made of drawn,
Ribbed satin, diapered and purfled deep
With lordly gold and purple; whence did sweep
Two acorn-tufted bangles of fine gold:
And at his thigh a falchion, battle-old
And triple-edged; its rune-stamped scabbard, of
Cordovan leather, baldric'd rich above
With new-cut deer-skin, that, laborious wrought,
And curiously, with slides of gold was fraught,
And buckled with a buckle white, that shone,
Tongued red with gold, and carved of walrus' bone.
And, sapphire-set, a burgonet of gold,
Whereon a wyvern sprawled, whose jaws unrolled
A tongue of garnet agate, of great prize;
Its orbs of glaring ruby, great in size,
Incased his head and visor-barred his eyes.
And in his hand a wiry lance of ash,
Lattened with sapphire silver, like a flash,
A splinter of sunlight, in the morning's zeal
Glittered, its point, as 'twere, a star of steel.
A squire attended him; a youth, whose head
Waved many a jaunty curl; whereon a red
Cock-feathered cap shone brave: 'neath which, as keen
As some wild hawk's, his green-gray eyes were seen:
And parti-colored leather shoes he had
Upon his feet; his legs were silken clad
In hose of rarest Totness: and a spear,
Bannered and bronzen, dappled as a deer,
One hand upheld, like some bright beam of morn;
And round his neck was hung a bugle-horn.
So with his following, while, bar on bar,
The blue mist lay on woodside and on scar,
Through mist and dew, through shadow and through ray,
Joustward Earl Damas led the forest way.
Then to King Arthur, when arrived were these
Where bright the lists shone, bannered, through the trees,
A wimpled damsel with a falchion came,
Mounted upon a palfrey, all aflame
With sweat and heat of hurry; and, "From her,

Accolon of Gaul

Your sister, Morgane, your Excalibur!
With tender greeting. For you well may need
Its aid in this adventure. So, God speed!"
Said and departed suddenly: nor knew
The King that this was not his weapon true:
A brittle forgery, in likeness of
That blade, of baser metal; in unlove
And treason made by her, of all his kin
The nearest, Morgane; who, her end to win,
Stopped at no thing; thinking, with Arthur dead,
The crown would grace her own and Accolon's head.
Then, heralded, into the lists he rode.
Opposed flashed Accolon, whose strength bestrode,
Exultant, strong in talisman of that sword,
A dun horse lofty as a haughty lord,
White-pasterned, and of small, impatient hoof:
Both knight and steed shone armed in mail of proof,
Of yellow-dappled, variegated plate
Of Spanish laton. And of sovereign state
His surcoat robe of honor, white and black,
Of satin, crimson-orphreyed, at his back
The wind made billow: and, from forth this robe,
Excalibur, a throbbing golden globe
Of vicious jewels, thrust its splendid hilt;
Its broad belt, tawny and with goldwork gilt,
An eyelid clasped, black, of the black seahorse,
Tongued red with rosy gold. And pride and force
Sat on his wingéd helmet, plumed, of rich
Bronze-hammered laton; blazing upon which
A hundred brilliants glittered, thick as on
A silver web bright-studding dew of dawn:
Its crest, a taloned griffin, high that ramped;
In whose horned brow one blood-red gem was stamped.
A spear of ash, long-shafted, overlaid
With azure silver, whereon colors played,
Firm in his iron gauntlet lithely swayed.

Intense on either side the champions stood,
Shining as serpents that, with spring renewed,
In gleaming scales, meet on a wild-wood way,
Their angry tongues flickering at poisonous play.
Then clanged a herald's trumpet: and harsh heels,
Sharp-thrust, each courser felt; the roweled steels
Spurred forward; and the couched and fiery spears,
Flashed, as two bolts of storm the tempest steers
With adverse thunder; and, in middle course,
Crashed full the unpierced shields, and horse from horse
Lashed, madly pawing. And a hoarse roar rang
From the loud lists, till far the echoes sang
Of hill and rock-hung forest and wild cliff.
Rigid the champions rode where, standing stiff,

Accolon of Gaul

Their esquires tendered them the spears they held.
Again the trumpet blew, and, firmly selled,
Forward they galloped, shield to savage shield,
And crest to angry crest: the wyvern reeled,
Towering, against the griffin: scorn and scath
Upon their fiery fronts and in the wrath
Of their gem-blazing eyes: each figure stood
A symbol of the heart beneath the hood.
The lance of Accolon, as on a rock
The storm-launched foam breaks baffled, with the shock,
On Arthur's sounding shield burst splintered force;
But him resistless Arthur's, high from horse
Uplifted, headlong bore, and crashed him down;
A long sword's length unsaddled. Accolon
For one stunned moment lay. Then, rising, drew
The great sword at his hip that shone like dew
Smitten with morn. "Descend!" he grimly said,
"To proof of better weapons, head to head!
Enough of spears! to swords!" And from his height
The King clanged down. And quick, like some swift light,
His moon-bright brand unsheathed. And, hollowed high,
Each covering shield gleamed, slantwise, to'ards the sky,
A blazoned eye of bronze: and underneath,
As 'neath two clouds, the lightning and the death
Of the fierce swords played. Now a shield descends
A long blade leaps; and now, a fang that rends,
Another blade, loud as a battle word,
Beats downward, trenchant; and, resounding heard,
A shield's fierce face replies: again a sword
Swings for a giant blow, and, balked again,
Burns crashing from a sword. Thus, o'er the plain,
Over and over, blade on baleful blade;
Teeth clenched; and eyes, behind their visors' shade,
Like wild beasts' eyes in caverns; shield to shield,
The champions strove, each scorning still to yield.

Then Arthur drew aside to rest upon
His falchion for a space. But Accolon,
As yet, through virtue of that magic sheath,
Fresh and almighty, and no nearer death
Now than when first the fight to death begun,
Chafed at delay. But Arthur, with the sun,
His heavy mail, his wounds, and loss of blood,
Made weary, ceased and for a moment stood
Leaning upon his sword. Then, "Dost thou tire?"
Sneered Accolon. And then, with fiercer fire,
"Defend thee! yield thee! or die recreant!"
And at the King aimed a wild blow, aslant,
That beat a flying fire from the steel.
Stunned by that blow, the King, with brain a-reel,
Sank on one knee; then rose, infuriate,

Accolon of Gaul

Nerved with new vigor; and with heat and hate
Gnarled all his strength into one blow of might,
And in both fists his huge blade knotted tight,
And swung, terrific, for a final stroke,
And, as the lightning flames upon an oak,
Boomed on the burgonet his foeman wore;
Hacked through and through its crest, and cleanly shore,
With hollow clamor, from his head and ears,
The brag and boasting of that griffin fierce:
Then, in an instant, as if made of glass,
That brittle blade burst, shattered; and the grass
Shone, strewn with shards; as 'twere a broken ray,
It fell and bright in feverish fragments lay.
Then groaned the King, disarmed. And straight he knew
This sword was not Excalibur: too true
And perfect tempered, runed and mystical,
That weapon of old wars! and then withal,
Looking upon his foe, who still with stress
Fought on, untiring, and with no distress
Of wounds or heat, he thought, "I am betrayed!"
Then as the sunlight struck along that blade,
He knew it, by the hilt, for his own brand,
The true Excalibur, that high in hand
Now rose avenging. For Sir Accolon
In madness urged th' unequal battle on
His King defenseless; who, the hilted cross
Of that false weapon grasped, beneath the boss
Of his deep-dented shield crouched; and around,
Like some great beetle, labored o'er the ground,
Whereon the shards of shattered spears and bits
Of shivered steel and gold made sombre fits
Of flame, 'mid which, hard-pressed and cowering
Beneath his shield's defense, the dauntless King
Crawled still defiant. And, devising still
How to secure his sword and by what skill,
Him thus it fortune'd when most desperate:
In that close chase they came where, shattered late,
Lay, tossed, the truncheon of a bursten lance,
Which, deftly seized, to Accolon's advance
He wielded with effect. Against the fist
Smote, where the gauntlet clasped the nervous wrist,
That heaved Excalibur for one last blow;
Sudden the palsied sinews of his foe
Relaxed in effort, and, the great sword seized,
Was wrenched away: and straight the wroth King eased
Himself of his huge shield, and hurled it far;
And clasping in both arms of wiry war
His foe, Sir Accolon, as one hath seen
A strong wind take an ash tree, rocking green,
And swing its sappy bulk, then, trunk and boughs,
Crash down its thundering height in wild carouse

Accolon of Gaul

And wrath of tempest, so King Arthur shook
And headlong flung Sir Accolon. Then took,
Tearing away, that scabbard from his side
And hurled it through the lists, that far and wide
Gulped in the battle breathless. Then, still wroth,
He seized Excalibur; and grasped of both
Wild hands, swung trenchant, and brought glittering down
On rising Accolon. Steel, bone and brawn
That blow hewed through. Unsettled every sense.
Bathed in a world of blood, his limbs lay tense
A moment, then grew limp, relaxed in death.
And bending o'er him, from the brow beneath,
The King unlaced the helm. When dark, uncasqued,
The knight's slow eyelids opened, Arthur asked:
"Say, ere thou diest, whence and who thou art!
What king, what court is thine? And from what part
Of Britain dost thou come? Speak! for, methinks,
I have beheld thee where? Some memory links
Me strangely with thy face, thy eyes . . . thou art
Who art thou? speak!"

He answered, slow, then short,
With labored breathing: "I? one, Accolon,
Of Gaul a knight of Arthur's court anon
But to what end yea, tell me am I slain?"
Then bent King Arthur nearer and again
Drew back: then, anguish in his utterance, sighed:
"One of my Table!" Then asked softly, "Say,
Whence hadst thou this, my sword? say, in what way
Thou cam'st by it?" But, wandering, that knight
Heard with dull ears, divining but by sight
The question asked; and answered, "Woe! the sword!
Woe worth the sword! Lean down! Canst hear my word?
From Morgane! Arthur's sister, who had made
Me king of all this kingdom, so she said
Hadst thou not 'risen, accurséd, like a fate,
To make our schemes miscarry! Wait! nay, wait!
A king! dost hear? a gold and blood-crowned king,
I! Arthur's sister, queen! No bird can wing
Higher than her ambition! that resolved
Her brother's death was needed, and evolved
Plots that should ripen with the ripening year,
And here be reaped, perhaps nay, nay! not here!
Farewell, my Morgane! Yea, 'twas she who schemed
While there at Chariot we loved and dreamed
Gone some six months. There nothing gave us care.
Each morning was a liberal almoner
Prodigal of silver to the earth and air:
Each eve, a fiery dragon, cloud-enrolled,
Convulsive, dying overwhelmed with gold;
On such an eve it was, that, redolent,

She sat by me and said, 'My message sent,
Some night within the forest thou, my knight!
Thou and the king! my men the forest fight!
Murder perhaps. But, well? who is to blame?' . . .
So with her blood-red thoughts to me she came.
To me! that woman, brighter than a flame,
And wooed my soul to hell, with love accurs'd;
With harlot lips, from which my being first
Drank hell and heaven. She, who was in sooth
My heaven and hell. But now, behind her youth
She shrivels to a hag! I see the truth!
Harlot! nay, spouse of Urience, King of Gore!
Wanton! nay, witch! sweet witch! what wouldst thou more?
Hast thou not had thy dream? and wilt thou grieve
That death so ruins it? Thou dost perceive
How I still love thee! witness bear this field,
This field and he to whom I would not yield!
Would thou wert here to kiss me ere I die!"

Then anger in the good King's gloomy eye
Glowed, instant-embered, as one oft may see
A star blaze up in heaven, then cease to be.
Slow from his visage he his visor raised,
And on the dying knight a moment gazed;
Then grimly said, "Look on me, Accolon!
I am thy King!" He, with an awful groan,
Blade-battered as he was, beheld and knew;
Strained to his tottering knees; and, gasping, drew
Up full his armored height and hoarsely cried,
"The King!" and at his mailed feet crashed and died.

Then came a world of anxious faces, pressed
About King Arthur; who, though sore distressed,
Bespake that multitude: "While breath and power
Remain, judge we these brothers: This hard hour
Hath given to Damas all this rich estate:
So it is his; allotted his by fate
And force of arms. So let it be to him.
For, stood our oath on knighthood not so slim
But that it hath this strong conclusion.
This much by us as errant knight is done.
Now our decree, as King of Britain, hear:
We do command Earl Damas to appear
No more upon our shores, or any isles
Of farthest Britain in its many miles.
One week be his, no more! then will we come,
Even with an iron host, to seal his doom:
If he be not departed overseas,
With all his men and all his outlawries,
From his own towers, around which sea-birds clang,
Alive and naked shall he starve and hang

And rot! vile food for kites and carrion crows.
Thus much for him! . . . But all our favor goes
Toward Sir Ontzlake, whom it likes the King
To take into his knightly following
Of the Round Table. Bear to him our word.
But I am over weary. Take my sword.
Unharness me, for more and more I tire;
And all my wounds are so much aching fire.
Yea; help me hence. To-morrow I would fain
To Glastonbury and with me the slain."
So bore they then the wounded King away,
The dead behind, as closed the autumn day.

But when, within that abbey, he waxed strong,
The King, remembering the marauder wrong
Which Damas had inflicted on that land,
Commanded Lionell, with a stanch band,
To stamp this weed out if still rooted there.
He, riding thither to that robber lair,
Led Arthur's hopefulest helms, when, thorn on thorn,
Reddened an hundred spears one winter morn:
And found a ruin of fire-blackened rock,
Of tottering towers, that shook to every shock
Of the wild waves; and loomed above the bents
Turrets and cloudy-clustered battlements,
Wailing with wind that swept those clamorous lands:
Above the foam, that climbed with haling hands,
Desolate and gaunt; reflected in the flats;
Hollow and huge, the haunt of owls and bats.

IV

Hate, born of Wrath and mother red of Crime,
In Hell was whelped ere the hot hands of Time,
Artificer of God, had coined our world
Within the formless void, and round it furled
Its lordly raiment of the day and night,
And germed its womb with beauty and delight:
And Hell sent Hate to Earth, that it might use
And serve Hell's ends, filling with flame its cruse. . . .

For her half-brother Morgane had conceived
Unnatural hatred; so much so, she grieved,
Envious and jealous, for the high renown
And might the King had gathered round his crown
Through truth and honor. And who was it said,
"Those nearest to the crown are those to dread"?

Warm in your breast a serpent, it will sting
 The breast that warms it: and albeit the King
 Knew of his sister's hate, he passed it by,
 Thinking that love and kindness gradually
 Would win her heart to him. He little knew
 The witch he dealt with, beautiful to view,
 And all the poison she could stoop to brew.
 She, who, well knowing how much mightier
 The King than Accolon, rejoiced that her
 Wits had secured from him Excalibur,
 Without which, she was certain, in the joust
 The King were as a foe unarmed. Her trust
 Smiled, confident of conclusion: eloquent
 Within her, whispered of success, that lent
 Her heart a lofty hope; and at large eyes
 Piled up imperial dreams of power and prize.
 And in her carven chamber, oaken-dark,
 Traceried and arrased, when the barren park
 Dripped, drenched with autumn, for November lay
 Swathed frostily in fog on every spray,
 She at her tri-arched casement sate one night,
 Ere yet came courier from that test of might.
 Her lord in slumber and the castle full
 Of drowsy silence and the rain's dull lull:
 "The King removed? my soul! he *is* removed!
 Ere now dog-dead he lies. His sword hath proved
 Too much for him. Yet! let him lie in state,
 The great king, Arthur! But, regenerate,
 Now crown our other monarch, Accolon!
 And, with him, Love, the ermined! balmy son
 Of gods, not men; and nobler hence to rule.
 Love, Love almighty; beautiful to school
 The hearts and souls of mortals! Then this realm's
 Iron-huskéd flower of war, that overwhelms
 The world with havoc, will explode and bloom
 The amaranth, peace, with love for its perfume.
 And then, O Launcelots and Tristrams, vowed
 To Gueneveres and Isouds, now allowed
 No pleasure but what hour by stolen hour,
 In secret places, brings to flaming flower,
 You shall have feasts of passion evermore!
 And out-thrust Love, now shivering at the door,
 No more shalt stand neglected and cast off,
 Insulted and derided; and the scoff
 Of War, the bully, whose hands of insult fling
 Off, for the iron of arms, thy hands that cling
 About his brutal feet, that crush thy face,
 Bleeding, into the dust. Here, in War's place,
 We will erect a shrine of sacrifice;
 Love's sacrifice; a shrine of purest price;
 Where each shall lay his heart and each his soul

For Love, for earthly Love! who shall control
The world, and make it as the Heaven whole;
Being to it its stars and moon and sun,
Its firmament and all its lights in one.
And if by such Love Heaven should be debarred,
Its God, its spheres, with spiritual love instarred,
Hell will be Heaven, our Heaven, while Love shall thus
Remain earth Love, that God encouraged in us.

"And now for Urience, my gaunt old lord!
There lies my worry. Yet, hath he no sword
No dangerous dagger I, hid softly here,
Sharp as an adder's fang? or for his ear
No instant poison to insinuate
Ice in his pulses, and with death abate?"
So did she then determine; on that night
Of lonely autumn, when no haggard, white,
Wan, watery moon dreamed on the streaming pane;
But, on the leads, beat the incessant rain,
And the lamenting wind wailed wild among
The trees and turrets, like a phantom throng.
So grew her face severe as skies that take
Suggestions of far storm whose thunders shake
The distant hills with wrath, and cleave with fire
A pine the moaning forest mourns as sire
So touched her countenance that dark intent:
And in still eyes her thoughts were evident,
As in dark waters, luminous and deep,
The heavens glass themselves when o'er them sweep
The clouds of storm and austere stars they keep,
Ghostly and gray, locked in their steadfast gloom.
Then, as if some great wind had swept the room,
Silent, intense, she rose up from her seat.
As if dim arms had made her a retreat,
Secret as thought to move in, like a ghost,
Noiseless as sleep and subtle as the frost,
Poised like a light and borne as carefully,
She trod the gusty hall where shadowy
The hangings rolled a dim Pendragon war.
And there the mail of Urience shone. A star,
Glimmering above, a dying cresset dropped
From the stone vault and flared. And here she stopped,
And took the sword, fresh-burnished by his page,
Long as a flame of pale, arrested rage.
For she had thought that, when they found him dead,
His sword laid by him on the bloody bed
Would be convictive that his own hand had
Done him this violence when fever-mad.
The sword she took; and to the chamber, where
King Urience slept, she glided; like an air,
Smooth in seductive sendal; or a fit

Of faery song, a wicked charm in it,
 That slays; an incantation full of guile.
 She paused upon his threshold; for a while
 Listened; and, sure he slept, stole in and stood
 Crouched o'er his couch. About her heart the blood
 Caught, strangling; then rose throbbing, thud on thud,
 Up to her wide-stretched eyes, and up and up,
 As wine might, whirling wildly in a cup.
 Then came rare Recollection, with a mouth.
 Sweet as the honeyed sunbeams of the South
 Trickling through perplexed ripples of the leaves;
 To whose faint form a veil of starshine cleaves
 Intricate gauze from memoried eyes to feet
 Feet softer than the sifted snows and fleet
 To come and go and airy anxiously.
 She, trembling to her, like a flower a bee
 Nests in and makes an audible mouth of musk,
 Lispering a downy message to the dusk,
 Laid lips to ears and languaged memories of
 Now hateful Urience: How her maiden love
 Had left Caerleon secretly for Gore,
 With him, one day of autumn. How a boar,
 Wild as the wildness of the solitude,
 Raged at her from a cavern of the wood,
 That, crimson-creepered, yawning the bristling curse,
 Murderous upon her. As her steed grew worse
 And, terrified, fled snorting down the dell,
 How she had flung herself from out the selle,
 In fear, upon a bank of springly moss,
 Where she lay swooning: in an utter loss
 Of mind and limbs; wherein she seemed to see,
 Or saw in horror, half unconsciously,
 As one who pants beneath an incubus
 And strives to shriek or move, delirious,
 The monster-thing thrust tow'rds her, tusked and fanged,
 And hideous snouted: how the whole wood clanged
 And buzzed and boomed a hundred sounds and lights
 Lawless about her brain, like leaves wild nights
 Of hurrican harvest, shouting. Then it seemed
 A fury thundered 'twixt them and she screamed
 As round her flew th' uprooted loam that held
 Leaves, twigs and matted moss; and, clanging, swelled
 Continual echoes with the thud of strife,
 And groan of man and brute that warred for life:
 How all the air, gone mad with foam and forms,
 Spun froth and, 'twixt her, wrestled hair and arms,
 And hoofs and feet that crushed the leaves and shred,
 Whirling them wildly, brown, and yellow, and red.
 And how she rose and leaned her throbbing head,
 With all its uncoifed braids of raven hair
 Disheveled, on one arm, as white and fair

Accolon of Gaul

And smooth as milk, and saw, as through a haze,
The brute thing throttled and the frowning face
Of Urience bent above it, browed with might;
One red swol'n arm, that pinned the hairy fright,
Strong as a god's, iron at the gullet's brawn:
Dug in its midriff, the close knees, updrawn,
Wedged, as with steel, the glutton sides that strove,
A shaggy bulk, with hoofs that drove and drove.
And then she saw how Urience swiftly slipped
One arm, the monster's tearing tusks had ripped
And ribboned redly, to the dagger's hilt,
Which at his hip hung long, its haft gold-gilt;
Flame-like it flashed; and then, as bright as ice,
Plunged, and replunged; again, now twice, now thrice;
And the huge boar, stretched out in sullen death,
Lay, bubbling blood, with harsh, laborious breath.
Then how he brought her water from a well,
That rustled freshly near them as it fell
From its full-manteled urn, in his deep casque,
And begged her drink; then bathed her brow, a task
That had accompanying tears of joy and vows
Of love, and intercourse of eyes and brows,
And many kisses: then, beneath the boughs,
His wound dressed, and her steed still violent
From fear, she mounted and behind him bent
And clasped him on the same steed; and they went
On through the gold wood tow'rds the golden west,
Till, on one low hill's forest-covered crest,
Gray from the gold, his castle's battlements pressed.
And then she felt she'd love him till had come
Fame of the love of Isoud, whom, from home,
Tristram had brought across the Irish foam;
And Guenevere's for Launcelot of the Lake:
Then how her thought from these did seem to take
Reflex of longing; and within her wake
Desire for some great lover who should slake;
And such found Accolon.

And then she thought
How far she'd fallen, and how darkly fraught
With consequence was this. Then what distress
Were hers and his her lover's and success
How doubly difficult if, Arthur slain,
King Urience lived to assert his right to reign.
So she stood pondering with the sword; her lips
Breathless, and tight as were her finger-tips
About the weapon's hilt. And so she sighed,
"Nay, nay! too long hast lived who shouldst have died
Even in the womb, my sorrow! who for years
Hast leashed my life to thine, a bond of tears,
A weight of care, a knot that thus I part!

Accolon of Gaul

Thus harshly sever! Ugly that thou art
Into the elements naked!"

O'er his heart

The long blade paused and then descended hard.
Unfleshed, she flung it by her murdered lord,
And watched the blood spread darkly through the sheet,
And drip, a horror, at impassive feet
Pooling the polished oak. Regretless she
Stood, and relentless; in her ecstasy
A lovely devil: demon crowned, that cried
For Accolon, with passion that defied
Control in all her senses; clamorous as
A torrent in a cavernous mountain pass
That sweeps to wreck and ruin; at that hour
So swept her longing tow'rds her paramour.
Him whom, King Arthur had commanded when
Borne from the lists, she should receive again;
Her lover, her dear Accolon, as was just,
As was but due her for her love and lust.
And while she stood revolving if her deed's
Secret were safe, behold! a noise of steeds,
Arms, jingling, stirrups, voices loud that cursed
Fierce in the northern court. To her, athirst
For him her lover, war and power it spoke,
Him victor and so king. And then awoke
Desire to see and greet him: and she fled,
Like some wild spectre, down the stairs; and, red,
Burst on a glare of links and glittering mail,
That shrunk her eyes and made her senses quail.
To her a bulk of iron, bearded fierce,
Down from a steaming steed into her ears,
"This from the King, O Queen!" laughed harsh and hoarse:
Two henchmen beckoned, who pitched sheer, with force,
Loud clanging at her feet, hacked, hewn, and red,
Crusted with blood, a knight in armor dead:
Her Accolon, flung in his battered arms
By what to her seemed fiends and demon forms,
Wild-torched, who mocked; then, with the parting scoff,
"This from the King!" phantoms in fog, rode off.

And what remains? From Camelot to Gore
That night she, wailing, fled; thence, to the shore,
As old romances tell, of Avalon;
Where she hath majesty gold-crowned and wan:
Clothed dark in cypress, still her lovely face
Is young and queenly; sweeter though in grace,
And softer for the sorrow there; the trace
Of immemorial tears as for some crime,
Attempted or committed at some time,
Some old, unhappy time of long ago,

Accolon of Gaul

That haunts her eyes and fills them with its woe:
Sad eyes, dark, future-fixed, expectant of
That far-off hour awaited of her love,
When the forgiving Arthur cometh and
Shall rule, dim King, o'er all that golden land,
That Isle of Avalon, where none grows old,
Where spring is ever, and never a wind blows cold;
That lifts its mountains from forgotten seas
Of surgeless turquoise deep with mysteries.
And so was seen Morgana nevermore,
Save once, when from the Cornwall coast she bore
The wounded Arthur from that last fought fight
Of Camlan in a black barge into the night.
But some may see her, with palfried band
Of serge-stoled maidens, through the drowsy land
Of autumn glimmer, when are sadly strewn
The red leaves, and, broad in the east, the moon
Hangs, full of frost, a lustrous globe of gleams,
Faint on the mooning hills as shapes in dreams.