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THE RETURN
AND OTHER POEMS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE COLLECTED POEMS

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THE RETURN
AND OTHER POEMS
BY MARGARET L. WOODS

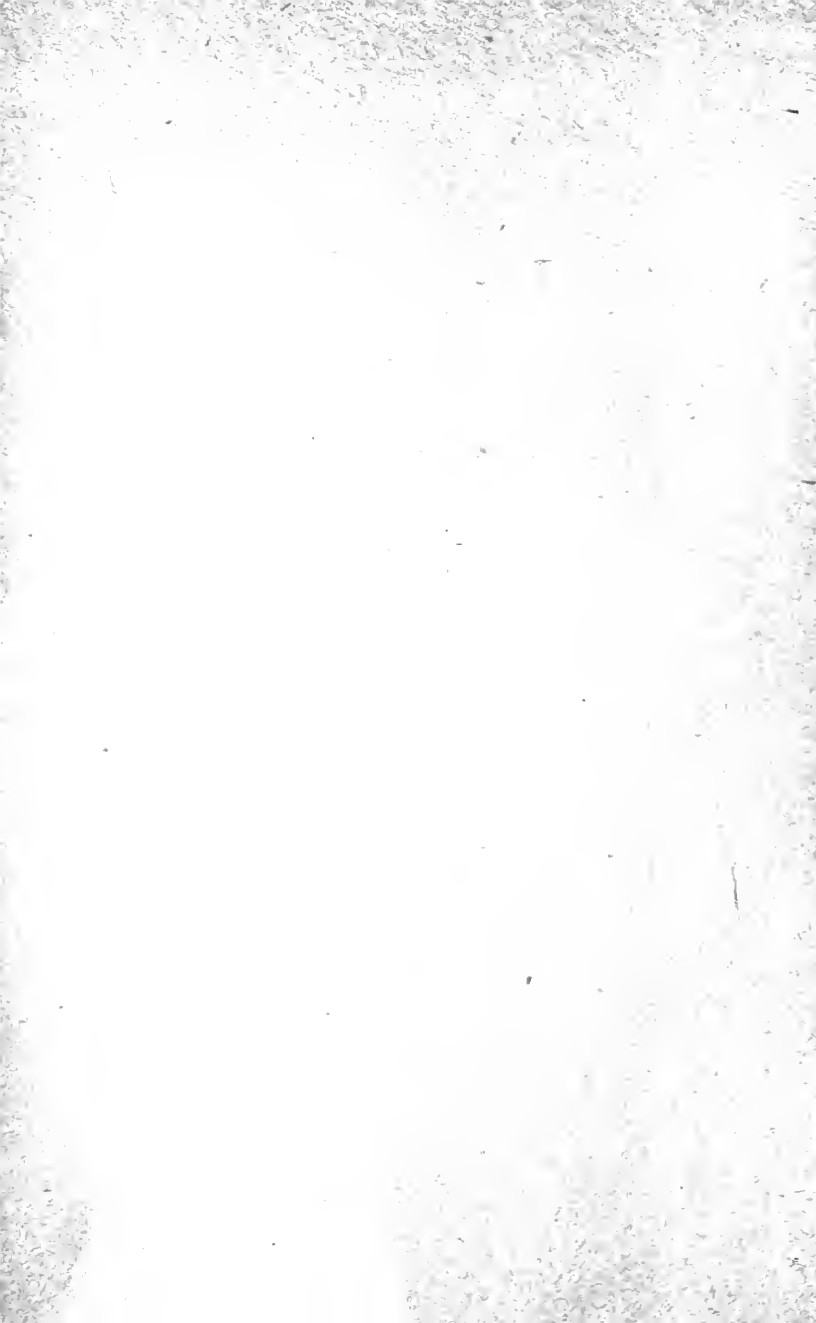
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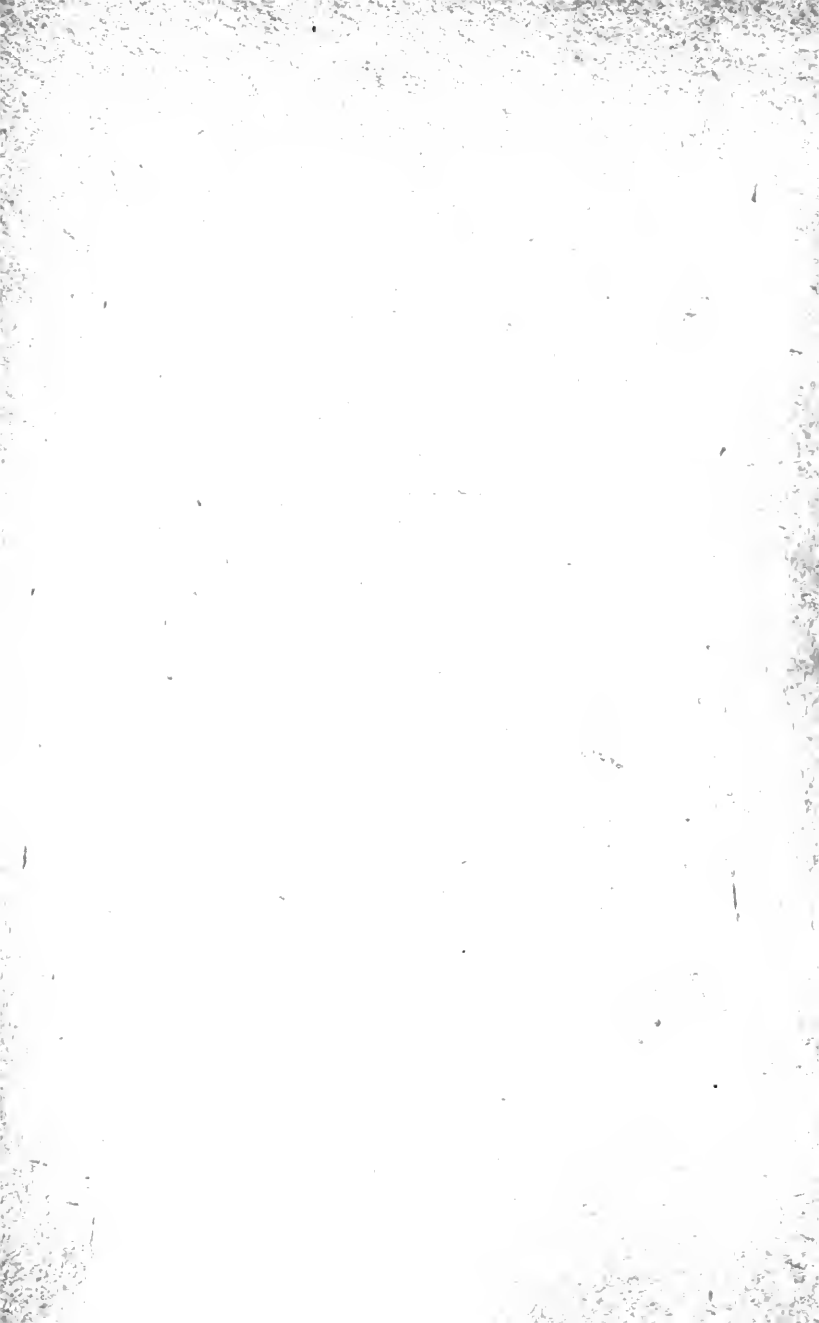
PREFACE

I HAVE to acknowledge the courtesy of the Editors of *The Times*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *The Poetry Review*, *The Windsor Magazine*, *The Blue Magazine*; also the Editors of *The Book of France* and *The Book of the Homeless*, in permitting me to include in this volume the various poems which have already appeared in their pages. The poem on the first battle of Ypres, as I have already stated in *The Fortnightly Review*, was not in any way suggested by the Angels of Mons fable, but by a private letter.

The writer, a young man of high character and intelligence, was acting as interpreter at the time of the battle. He questioned a considerable number of prisoners as to the cause of the apparently inexplicable withdrawal of the Germans on three occasions. The reply was always the same, "We dared not advance when we saw your immense reserves."

We had, in fact, no reserves.

MARGARET L. WOODS



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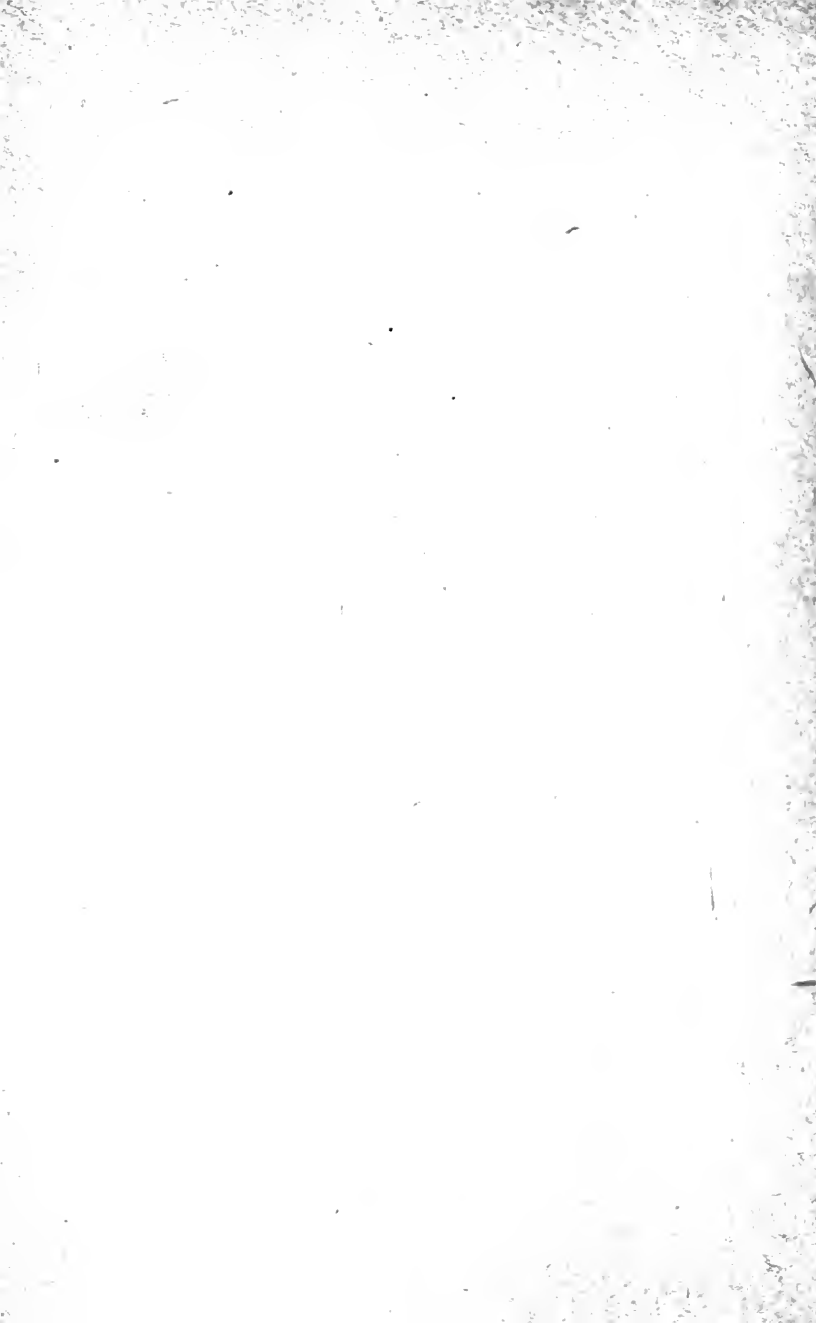
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THE RETURN
AND OTHER POEMS



THE RETURN

I

HEART of the world from which I wandered
Seeking life's lonely keen delight,
Soul of the world from which I severed,
Caught in the wheel of day and night,

To Thee for all it held I render
Here, in this transient dwelling, praise,
Ere from its glimmering door for ever
I pass on Thine unending ways.

II

Lamps of the inner shrine we cherish
Holding a handsbreadth from the door
We see the elusive highway vanish
Blindly, a bridge without a shore.

Thronged and apart and unfrequented
More than all deserts and all seas,

THE RETURN

Path of all ghosts and yet unhaunted,
Chill with incredible silences.

Sounds of our human voices crying
Drop muted, Love and Anguish fall
Bruised, like tempestuous swallows flying
Against an impenetrable wall,

And fragile souls we guard and treasure
Slip from our sheltering hands and dare
Singly the enormous darkness, venture
Shelterless, naked, lonely there.

III

Love, round my mortal being folded
As Earth's profound and ambient air
Wraps her, still moving guarded, clothed,
Not to Heaven's glittering lances bare,

Love my continual spirit renders,
As Earth from every shimmering plain,
Ocean or land, and all her rivers
Yields the deep treasures of the rain.

THE RETURN

My pilgrim feet have found no country
Alien where human creatures are,
Since on the earthly longest journey
Love was the compass and the star.

Now must I, human Love, forsake thee,
The outcry of the vain pursuit
Neither to pause nor turn shall make me,
Deaf shall I journey on and mute.

Lacking thee, shall the Pale Companion
Who never dogged my steps before,
Fear, the false friend without compassion,
Wait me beside the opening door ?

Fear ! Let me go as goes the swallow,
Fearless and swift, she knows not why,
Led from the darkening days of sorrow,
Launched on the illimitable sky.

When to the adventure of life mortal
I came, Love met me in the gate.
Shall I not past the further portal
Rush on her Everlasting Mate ?

THE RETURN

IV

As from their centre incandescent
Whirling the rhythmic planets sweep,
So, but in crowded race, in potent
Will to our separate life we leap.

Ever a Force beyond our vision
Drives us apart in sweat and strife,
Each with a blind insensate passion
Holding his little fort of Life.

Radiant and fierce it toils and forges,
Making, destroying without cease,
Till on its fiery diffluent surges
Moves the deep Spirit of our Peace.

Moves with a hidden power imperious
Drawing us towards a secret Pole,
Heart of the world, secure, mysterious,
Wherein our broken lives are whole.

Soul unto soul with infinite longing
Blindly it draws, we are blindly spun
Apart, though Love to Life untiring
Whispers her message, we are one.

THE RETURN

V

That which pursues through evanescence,
Which holds Creation in its clutch,
Deeper than knowledge or remembrance,
Surer than eyesight or than touch,

Vainly we call it less than Reason,
Weigh as we weigh the stars, like dust ;
Earth multitudinous 'neath its blazon
Marches in everlasting trust.

O mystery of the humble creature
That toils a little while Earth's guest,
Hoards for inscrutable ends her treasure
And leaves to unknown Powers the rest !

Nothing she knows of life behind her,
Nor shall her generation see,
Ignorant she obeys the laws that bind her
And builds the house of Life to be.

Oracles at the time appointed
Breathe to her gently Being's word.
We to our perilous height ascended,
Hear not what humble things have heard.

THE RETURN

Powers that to such unfold the secret
Way of their life, with touch as sure,
Guiding Man's immemorial spirit,
Whisper, "Thou art and shalt endure."

VI

Life of the World, from which we are riven,
Caught in this dancing, shining mesh,
Light in our life obscured and hidden
Here by this roseal veil of flesh !

As prisoners fear to leave their prison,
Locked in our rich illumined night,
We fear the boundless imminent vision,
Fear Thee, Thou naked sea of light.

Once in Creation's course unresting
Came we to Earth, when we shall come
Full circle back to the Everlasting,
Wondering we shall know it is our home.

VII

Heart of the World, they have returned
To Thee, whom here we need in vain.

THE RETURN

As unto us with gifts they journeyed,
With gifts they come to Thee again.

Soul of the World, from which I severed
To tend my wild infructuous vine,
Evil or good, the harvest gathered
Shall yet be mingled in Thy wine.

VIII

Blind in the flash of suns diurnal
We rush Earth's ineluctable way,
But one deep radiance of the Eternal
Encompasses our night and day.

Flame of the crashing Universes,
Wheel of the luminous nebulae,
Rage of corporeal life that presses
From form to form, lit not for thee,

O Love, thy lamp fragile and holy,
Here but a trembling altar-flame,
Here fugitive, uprising surely
More starry clear there whence it came.

THE RETURN

IX

Single we move and solitary,
Like stars companioned yet apart,
Heart unto heart a foreign country,
While heart for ever yearns to heart.

Alone they knew the taste of gladness
Theirs, the most dear who now are gone
Far off, and all their load of sadness
In deepest night they bore alone.

Law of our life whose iron limit
Something we are yet madly strives
To foil, to evade, break from within it,
Blend our lone life with other lives.

Vain, vain desire that haunts for ever
Our human heart unsatisfied,
Breathing of death, "It brings together,
Life is it, life that doth divide."

Here have we felt some vanishing moment
Close as our living thoughts are grown
The dead, as though a flower were fragrant
With sudden perfume not its own.

THE RETURN

So when this marvellous dream is over,
This brief enthralling puppet-show,
When down the dark sans love and lover,
Sinking in frozen gulfs we go,

There, in the ultimate night forsaken
By earthly all, ourselves unknown
Unto ourselves, perchance we waken
Slowly aware we are not alone ;

Feel in the misty dawn of being
Presences, every barrier past,
Loves unforgot in love undying
Perfect and ours and one at last.

X

Maker of all, Fount of existence,
Thy secret things who may reveal ?
Rather upon my lips be silence,
Thou on mine eyes having set a seal.

Continual in the transitory,
Thou who conceivedst in the blind
Pulp of the vague sea power and glory,
The eye and the vision of the mind.

THE RETURN

Thou Who when Man, having of pleasure
Drunken and cruelty and pride,
Stood before Thee in his royal vesture
Naked, ashamed, unsatisfied,

Then, when his wistful waiting spirit
Asked of Thee something of more price
Than the red sword or the reveller's fillet,
Gav'st him the Eternal Sacrifice.

Wherefore to this our passionate question
Of Life and Death, our bitter cry
Of Love deserted, in due season
It may be Thou shalt grant reply :

Or it may stand inalterable,
This dark, this gulf, a law whereby
Life mortal clear, self-centred, stable,
Globes itself in Immensity,

Shot through with thrills of God and glowing
Still with the fire of the Eternal Heart
Live at its core, travels pursuing
Its eager way, sustained, apart.

THE RETURN

Lord of the woven dance prodigious,
All the unimaginable array
Of spinning suns, Power as mysterious
That on her momentary way

Speeds the light moth and paints her pinion,
Such as Thou art, world without end,
Thou wert not if I, Earth's frail minion,
Could find Thee and measure and comprehend.

XI

With winds and waters flowing round it
Earth's beauty didst Thou build for me,
Deep in the abyss of Time unsounded.
Perchance I also toiled with Thee.

XII

Facing the sudden gulf, the silent
Precipice where the pathways stop,
Where flame by flame the silver constant
Lamps of our lives to darkness drop,
Life would I praise, this sentient being,
Careless, unpraised, unplumbed delights,

THE RETURN

Movement and speech, hearing and seeing,
Sleep and awakening, days and nights.

Glory to Life in all things lovely,
Birds and lithe beasts and flowers and trees,
Praise in the marvellous joy of Beauty,
Nameless contents and ecstasies.

Praise to the power within the creature
Creative, hand and brain and will
Toiling through endless Time in rapture,
Failure, achievement, seeking still.

Father of Life, with songs of wonder,
I praise Thee, even to this end,
Love unto Thee all loves surrender,
From Whom they flow, towards Whom they tend.

Mine is Thy Will, I yield the spirit
Still on Thine errand without cease
Gladly to run, or to inherit
In Thine eternal dwelling peace.

APOLLINARIS SIDONIUS DINES
WITH A NEIGHBOUR

COLUMNED beauty of marble where the roses
Twine their wreaths enwoven by subtle fingers
With vine tendrils ; heavy hangs the fruitage,
Purple drooping above the purple couches.

A slight silver thread the incessant fountain
Leaps and falls from the curled lip of a dolphin,
Antique bronze, and along the banquet table
Golden flash in the feast the lifted goblets.
Master hands fashioned them meet for Olympus
And about the edge adorned with golden verses.

Gods also are there. Noble Athene
Sculptured stands, and yonder in fading fresco,
Dance the nine on the windy height of Helicon ;
With blown hair circle the singing Muses,
About the lyred unshorn golden Apollo.

Who are these that revel with clanging beakers
In halls Arvernian, shaking their long tresses

APOLLINARIS SIDONIUS

Tawnier than lions', like lions hoarsely roaring
In rough speech, their eyes bluer than little
Lonely lakes 'mid inaccessible mountains ?

Pheidian gems from the wreck of ravaged cities,
Gold curiously wrought by Roman craftsmen,
Wrought in Rome for the necks of Roman Senators,
Bracelets, bosses of gold and pearls unvalued,
Warm once on the fairest bosom in Avaricum,
See now shimmer on bull-necks of barbarians,
Shine on arms sinewy with toil of battles,
Where furred like the pelt of a beast, the brutal
Naked chest breaks through embroidered borders.

Wherefore spread for these Burgundians couches
Romans use ? For they sit and sprawl carelessly
At the board, flushed with the wine of Gallic
vineyards,
Gorged with feasting and bawl one to another,
Or upstarting crash with a sounding clamour,
Golden goblet on ringing golden goblet.
One perplexed, peradventure eyes uncertain
Some rare joy of the epicure and whispers,
Questioning a slave, or regards attentive
Him there, sole it would seem at the festival.

ERRATUM

Page 16, line 17, *for* "clamour" *read* "clangour."



APOLLINARIS SIDONIUS

As a pale star on an eve of conflagration
Shines calm through tumultuous clouds of crimson,
So he, exquisite, on his couch reclining,
His dark head with a sober garland cinctured—
Clear cut as a gem the delicate profile—
He it is, Apollonaris Sidonius,
Renowned poet and pride of Consular nobles.

Huge blond barbarians humbly behold him,
All their brute strength of the sword and the buckler
Bowed before the image, the ghost and the glory
Of dead Rome. She is dead ; yet for a moment
Stark, wrapped a corpse in the Imperial mantle,
She towers, sitting on the Seven Hills, headlong
Down at a touch to fall.

The Arvernian noble,
Son of dead Rome, accepts the barbarians,
As just men, in their dealing honourable,
Chaste, worshippers of God : and His Plague also.

Peace, O Memory ! This was Constantius' villa.
Here many an evening has he lingered,
Summer eves, when the moon hung in the purple
Twilight, her silver lamp slowly illuming,
He, Juventius and perchance Lucillus.

APOLLINARIS SIDONIUS

Yet the Autumnal moon hangs in the twilight
'Twixt white grace of the columns. A few torches
Flare on the feast ; and up between the pillars
Stands high, even as the poised moon uplifted,
One Burgundian youth. Redder than beech-leaves,
Northern beeches that burn in a clear October
On massed hills, his hair ; whiter than petals
Of snow-born flowers his face and wide, illumined
His grey eyes.

The host leans to Sidonius ;
“ Far-famed poet, behold we have our poets,
We too honour the unshorn golden Apollo ! ”
Smiles the Roman, shifting upon his shoulder,
Austere gem unpriced, the head of Athene.
“ Not more beauteous came Apollo from Latmos,
Ardent-lyred,” he said, “ young as your poet,
Lovely Apollo—before he found the Muses.”
Thus he speaks. As the sound of wind blowing
Outside, the eager insistence of wild water
Tumbling sea-ward after the rain, the uncouth
Chant passes him by, while he remembers
Here oft-times he sat discoursing of verses,
Measures, delicate numbers, with laurelled poets,
Dead Constantius the host. Fade, O Apollo !
Crack, drop down in the dust ye offended Muses !

APOLLINARIS SIDONIUS

Lo, a wonder ! What dæmon dwells in the fresco ?
Apollo, faded no more, a living splendour,
Moves there, faintly sounds a clashing of cymbals,
Silver cymbals tossed by exultant Muses.

Phœbus Apollo hails the young barbarian.
“ Hail, thou Glory ! Myself in grey pavilion
Of chill dawn re-appearing, rayless, pallid—
Soon burningly throned, with long rays embracing
Transfigured worlds and canopied among roses
Whose leaves enfold the unfathomable light.
Day never dies. The god renews himself
In cool wells of the stars. Hail thou Avatar !
Before thee runs a rumour of strange voices,
Solemn chant as of rhythmic swaying forests
Dark with unknown grief ; the laughter of ocean
Crash upon crash, where in sport with the surges,
Wild prows come dancing over the billows,

Treble of spouting rills I hear, and the music
Of flower-bells, where little mocking spirits
Wanton under the moon on velvet pastures ;
Roar of furious fights—O angel voices !
What do ye utter ? I know not. New, undreamed of
Divine Loves, new rapture. Starrily dawning,
Face beyond face, the firmament of the poets

APOLLINARIS SIDONIUS

Brightens up there, the songs flutter about them
Like golden bees, with unborn songs are laden
Their sweet lips, as rose-petals with perfume,
Deep red roses. And thou too, my Virgilius,
Leading forth new Kings!—I haste, I am gathered
Up by a strong wind, my spirit is blended,
Young Apollo, with thine. Receive, receive me!
Usher us forth, ye shining and triumphant
Hours once more, charioted on clouds of morning!
With lyre and laurel bring Phœbus Apollo!”

Fuming upward like smoke from a swung censer,
Passed the pale god and the muses. Vacant
Stared the wall. Apollinaris Sidonius
Bowed his head and with covered eyes admonished
Thus himself: “Shame on thee, a Roman!
Thou too drunken, sittest among the barbarians.”

Hushed now the hall, as in luminous twilight
Some high valley that listens among the mountains,
With sheer rocks brooding black on the golden
Transparent eve, and smooth untenanted pastures.
Hushed, entranced, they appear to lean and to listen,
While always alone, threading the solitude,
A slender stream sings to the heart of silence.
So listened the warriors while the poignant

APOLLINARIS SIDONIUS

Silver poet voice sung to their ending
Lion loves, tragic and sweet and terrible.

Died at last the voice. Attentive the silence
Hung a moment ere it broke in a cataract,
Burst roaring about the trepidant table,
Where hurled beakers emptied their purple vintage
O'er the white feet of the singer and rolled there
Coin on coin, Imperial gold unhandled,
Roman treasure, and collars of gold and precious
Moon-white pearls. Yet unheeding the poet,
All white, crowned with his hair like autumn beech-
leaves,
Saw not these, but ever staring before him,
Beheld heroes dead and queenly women.

Then softly rose Sidonius, bidding farewell
Courteous and brief. He in the smooth litter
Homeward borne, between the embroidered curtains,
Saw how calm and noble under the ascended
Moon, lay there his dear familiar country,
Half gauzy veiled in silver-sheening moonlight,
Half darkling with woods and undulating ridges.
Ranked cypresses, upright each on his shadow,
Stood clear-cut and black and among them sometimes
Marble columns appeared of deserted temples,

APOLLINARIS SIDONIUS

While sprinkled far on mountain slopes and in valleys,
White villas with walls and princely porticos,
Shone in the moon, sleeping among their vineyards.

The mountains rose unsubstantial as spectres,
Bare rock and precipice blending their pallor
With wan sky. But up, up from the horizon
Of dim mountains, up over heaven's brightness,
Crawled swift, ominous, dark with calamity,
One black cloud. He saw it shape like a monster,
Climb with stretched paw on paw and enormous
Blind snout, seeking the predestined prey.

GOOD FRIDAY NIGHT

Now lies the Lord in a most quiet bed.

Stillness profound

Steeps like a balm the wounded body wholly,
More still than the hushed night brooding around.

The moon is overhead,

Sparkling and small, and somewhere a faint
sound

Of water dropping in a cistern slowly.

Now lies the Lord in a most quiet bed.

Now rests the Lord in perfect loneliness.

One little grated window has the tomb,

A patch of gloom

Impenetrable, where the moonbeams whiten

And arabesque its wall

With leafy shadows, light as a caress.

The palms that brood above the garden brighten,

But in that quiet room

Darkness prevails, deep darkness fills it all.

Now rests the Lord in perfect loneliness.

GOOD FRIDAY NIGHT

Now sleeps the Lord secure from human sorrow.

The sorrowing women sometimes fall asleep

 Wrapped in their hair,

Which while they slumber yet warm tears will steep,

Because their hearts mourn in them ceaselessly.

 Uprising, half aware,

They myrrh and spices and rich balms put by

For their own burials, gather hastily,

 Dreaming it is that morrow

When they the precious body may prepare.

Now sleeps the Lord secure from human sorrow.

Now sleeps the Lord unhurt by Love's betrayal.

 Peter sleeps not,

He lies yet on his face and has not stirred

Since the iron entered in his soul red-hot.

The disciples trembling mourn their disillusion,

 That He whose word

Could raise the dead, on whom God had conferred

Power, as they trusted, to redeem Israel,

Had been that bitter day put to confusion,

 Crucified and interred.

Now sleeps the Lord unhurt by Love's betrayal.

Now rests the Lord, crowned with ineffable peace.

Have they not peace to-night who feared Him, hated

 And hounded to His doom,

GOOD FRIDAY NIGHT

The red thirst of their vengeance being sated ?

No, they still run about and bite the beard,

Confer, nor cease

To tease the contemptuous Pilate, are affeared

Still of Him tortured, crushed, humiliated,

Cold in a blood-stained tomb.

Now rests the Lord crowned with ineffable peace.

Now lies the Lord serene, august, apart,

That mortal life His mother gave Him ended.

No word save one

Of Mary more, but gently as a cloud

On her perdurable silence has descended.

Hush ! In her heart

Which first felt the faint life stir in her Son,

Perchance is apprehended

Even now dimly new mystery, grief less loud

Clamours, the Resurrection has begun.

Now lies the Lord serene, august, apart.

FINISTERRE

O THAT on some forsaken strand,
Lone ending of a lonely land,
On such an eve we two were lying,
To hear the quiet water sighing
And feel the coolness of the sand.

A red and broken moon would grow
Out of the dusk, and even so
As here to-night the street she faces,
Between the scarce distinguished spaces
Of sea and sky would burn and go.

The moon would go and overhead,
Like tapers lighted o'er the dead,
Star after silver star would glimmer,
The lonely night grow calmer, dimmer,
The quiet sea sink in its bed.

We at the end of Time and Fate,
Might unconcerned with love or hate

FINISTERRE

As the sea's voices, talk together,
Wherefore we went apart and whither,
And all the exiled years relate.

Thus were life's grey chance ravelled slieve
Outspread, we something might perceive
Which never would to Chance surrender,
But through the tangling woof its slender,
Golden, elusive pattern weave.

There, while the great stars larger shone,
Leaned to the sea and drew thereon
Faint paths of light, across them faring
Might steal the ship that comes for bearing
Sore wounded souls to Avalon.

THE NIGHTINGALE

ON yon hillside when Spring is here
The wild birds warble loud and clear.
In the hillside hollow, among the May
 A cuckoo is shouting the long day thro',
 From the morning dew to the evening dew :
But the nightingale sings far away.

When the moon floats over the hill,
The wan young moon, then all is still
Save the wind in the branches grey.
 No one hears what it says but I,
 If the flowers had wings they would not fly
Where the nightingale sings far away.

Once over hill and dale I sought
The nightingale and surely thought
To find her while it yet was day,
 Or at the worst when stars were few ;
 But ever as near her haunt I drew,
The nightingale flitted far away.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Perceiving therefore that my pain
And eager toil are wholly vain,
My pilgrim staff aside I lay.

 Linnet and lark on the hillside yet
 Merrily sing—I shall forget
How the nightingale sings far away.

AFTERGLOW

THESE are the pictures made in many lands
By one long dead—Greece, England, Italy,
The vivid Mediterranean and the sea
Where Dunstanburgh grim on black basalt stands,
The weird Matoppos and deep Nubian sands,
Poured round enormous gods. All are to me
Delightful, crowned with one clear memory,
One happy face bowed over busy hands.

Like festal lamps dead in a dawn of rain,
Like spirit flames that swift themselves consume,
So are my former joys gone out of mind,
But his a tranquil light have left behind,
As when the clouds their heavenly heights illumine
Long after sunset on the Egyptian plain.

IN TENNYSON'S GARDEN

1918

BARE tracery of February trees,
Earth's miracle, startling and old, below,
Snowdrops among the ivy, drifted snow,
Hiding in flower-hearts' pure fragilities
One green thought of the Spring ; and level seas
Murmur around in azure ebb and flow.
The lambs are crying and giddily to and fro
White gulls dance by the sea's white precipices.

Dreams are the years and phantoms all their suns.
I have imagined them. A moment stay
And he will come in sable mantle wound,
Pacing with timeless dreams the accustomed way,
The paths of Peace. Peace! But a thunder-sound
Breaks the enchanted mirror—War's grim guns.

THE GREY LOVER

To meet that look unansweringly, to stare
With an unmoved indifference on the face
Which once for its mere background, took all Space,
Time, Life, the world, to strip my memory bare
Of those rich thoughts of thee which harbour there—
So have I sworn to do and to deface
All our young gods. As lightly from its base
Could I the huge sky-smoking mountain tear.

Yet triumph not in this fidelity
Too much, nor of thine own make any oath,
Lest there should be fulfilled the prophecy
That one grey Lover shall seduce us both.
I hear his voice far off, a lazy chime,
The song of old unconquerable Time.

SONGS

I

IN TOWN

I SHALL not hear the cuckoo cry,
Nor in the deepening meadows lie
On golden mats the trefoil weaves,
Nor underneath the emerald eaves
Of downland copses listening,
Wonder what birds in the hawthorn sing.
I shall not hear the enamoured Spring
Breathe in the living woods at night,
Nor see the cherry's flash of white ;
But still with waves of men be tost,
And on the rocks of houses lost.

II

If all the tears thou madest mine
Set in thy heaven for stars could shine,
Thou shouldst not want for light,
Even in the darkest night.

SONGS

If all the joys thou madest one
To light my heart could be thy sun,
 So great would be the light
 Thou never shouldst have night.

III

The Spring will not seem to me so sad
 If I see it in strange places,
And smiles will not seem to me so sad
 If I see them on strange faces.

I will lead myself away by the hand
 As a weeping child is led.
Of me who my sorrow can understand,
 It can surely be comforted.

Like a child that covers its weeping face
 And will not look on its toy,
I will carry my sorrow from place to place
 And persuade it at length of joy.

We shall journey far over mountain and plain
 Through the day that is but a morrow ;
And suddenly we shall come again
 To bear away your sorrow.

SONGS

IV

“ WENN ICH DICH LIEBE, SAG’WASS GEHT’S
DIR AN ? ”

What if I love thee ? ’Tis for me alone
The wonder and the dream and the delight.

 The rose, the rose
That spends her perfume on the summer night,
Asks not across what highway it is blown,
 And well the wanderer knows
That where her hoarded sweetness overflows,
Though many may go in, he has no right.

What if I love thee ? What is that to thee ?
What of her purple vintage knows the vine ?

 Mine, mine alone
The intolerable wound, the rapture mine,
The vision of the god for me, for me
 The brimmed bowl of his wine ;
The bitter shaft in his bright hand when he
Pierced and with sanguine sign marked me his own.

What if I love not thee, ah no ! not thee,
But in thy semblance do a dream create
 And so adore ?

SONGS

Since all thou art will vanish soon or late,
And even thy beauty as a dream will be,
 Thy magic youth no more :
But this my dream, fairer than thou before,
Shall yet live on and glory against Fate.

V

Dim not the glorious sun
With care and cark.
After the day is done,
See how their trembling spark
The stars light one by one,
And watch the bright worlds run
When all thy world is dark.

POEMS WRITTEN IN WAR-TIME

SOLDIERS OF 1914

(From the French of the Comtesse de Noailles)

THEY died to save their country. Plenary
Glory is theirs. They need not to endure
The travail, the blind seeking, the obscure
And long struggle towards the light whereby
Others attain it. 'Tis enough to die.
So to the everlasting thrones they leap
Makers of Time to be ; by them the dove
Broods and the eagles their proud vigil keep.

'Neath that majestic epitaph they lie
The Greeks wrote large to ennoble and amaze
The world for evermore : " Look, Passer-by !
Go tell to Lacedæmon . . ." Words above
All else in beauty—even their young days.
None shall find death so good as theirs henceforth.
Music and verse, great monuments in vain
Shall seek to rival them. As things unworth,
Carelessly as a sower scatters grain,
They hurled their starry souls countless to heaven.

SOLDIERS OF 1914

They have made the clouds epic, the void deep
Of space, impregnate with their essence, keep
Their breath, their shining looks, their gestures proud.
The elements for bodies to them are given.
To us they leave a lonely death, to creep
Small and ashamed into a narrow shroud.

'Tis the grave's loneliness and utter dearth
Of love that makes it bitter. We shall know
When our thin flame of life is flickering low,
Our life or death a thing indifferent,
Since the grim gulp of War by night and day
Drew down young bodies that un murmuring went.
But they, heroic crowd, strewn on the breeze,
In charging squadrons, companies, left the earth
To ring the blue with an immortal frieze
And crown the arch of Heaven's stupendous Way.
And worlds shall fall and perish before these.

Dying we shall envy them their turbulent fate,
Thinking of their great sacrifice shall say :
'Twas a bright morning sometimes when the call
Came to the Front. Like waters through the small
Sea-shingle ebbing, leaves moved with cool sound.
The gentle life of beasts and birds awoke,

SOLDIERS OF 1914

The shutters flapped in the wind, there breathed
around

Scent of autumnal fields and cottage smoke,
Homely and sweet, yet interpenetrate
With a new breath of glory. It was gay,
The village, knowing it would be proud one day.

You heard the acorns from the oak let fall
By squirrels. The fountain, intermittent yet
Persistent, washed, refreshed their cheerful brows
Who left the bed of love without regret
For the last time. Women brought flowers and
boughs,

While children whispering to each other told
For what brave sports the elder boys were bound,
And hurrying wreathed the soldiers' panoply
With flowers as though for coming tombs enwound.

They marched. Already something in their port
Proclaimed them from the habitual yoke set free,
The daily bread and bed whose tyranny
No proud spirit may without tears support.
They marched—and each, where every man was bold,
Sought to be keenest and surprise his mate.
So must their joyous souls in rivalry
Have raced the heroes' road to Heaven's gate.

SOLDIERS OF 1914

They laughed, but laughing well the fate they knew
Of those who in that royal humour run
To the assault as to a game. They drew
On their white gloves, as though the enemy gun
Had been a bride, and like a bridegroom flew
Each to encounter that fierce kiss that lies
Now on their crushed and ever-darkened eyes.

.

THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES

GREY field of Flanders, grim old battle-plain,
What armies held the iron line round Ypres in the
rain,
From Bixschoote to Baecelaere and down to the
Lys river ?

Merry men of England,
Men of the green shires,
From the winding waters,
The elm-trees and the spires,
And the lone village dreaming in the downland
yonder.

Half a million Huns broke over them in thunder,
Roaring seas of Huns swept on and sunk again,
Where fought the men of England, round Ypres in
the rain,
On the grim plain of Flanders, whose earth is fed
with slaughter.

North country fighting men from the mine and the
loom,

THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES

Highlander and lowlander stood up to death and
doom,
From Bixschoote to Baecelaere and down to the
Lys river.

London men and Irish,
Indian men and French,
Charging with the bayonet,
Firing in the trench,
Fought in that furious fight, shoulder to shoulder.
Leapt from their saddles to charge in fierce disorder,
The Life-guards, mud and blood for the scarlet and
the plume,
And they bore back the foemen as the wind the sea
spume,
From Bixschoote to Baecelaere and down to the
Lys river.

But the huge Hun masses yet mounted more and
more,
Like a giant wave gathering to overwhelm the sweet
shore,
While swift the exultant foam runs on before and
over.

Where that foam was leaping,
With bayonets, or with none,

THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES

The cooks and the service men

Ran upon the Hun.

The cooks and the service men charged and charged
together

Moussy's cuirassiers, on foot, with spur and sabre ;
Helméd and shining fought they as warriors fought
of yore—

Till calm fell sinister as the hush at the whirlwind's
core,

From Bixschoote to Baecelaere and down to the
Lys river.

It was the Emperor launched on us his guard of old
renown,

Stepping in parade-march, as they stepped through
Berlin town,

On the chill road to Gheluveldt, in the dark before
the dawning.

Heavily tolled on them

Mortal mouths of guns,

Gallantly, gallantly

Came the flower of the Huns.

Proud men they marched, like an avalanche on us
falling,

Prouder men they met, in the dark before the
dawning.

THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES

Seven to one they came against us to shatter us and
drown,
One to seven in the woodland we fought them up and
down,
In the sad November woodland, when all the skies
were mourning.

The long battle thundered till a waxing moon might
wane.
Thrice they broke the exhausted line that held them
on the plain,
And thrice like billows they went back, from viewless
bounds retiring.

Why paused they and went backward,
With never a foe before,
Like a long wave dragging
Down a level shore
Its fierce reluctant surges, that came triumphant
storming
The land, and powers invisible drive to its deep
returning ?
On the grey field of Flanders again and yet again,
The Huns beheld the Great Reserves, on the old
battle-plain,

THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES

The blood-red field of Flanders, where all the skies
were mourning.

The fury of their marshalled guns might plough no
dreadful lane

Through those Reserves that waited in the ambush
of the rain

On the riven plain of Flanders, where hills of men
lay moaning.

They hurled upon an army
The bellowing heart of Hell.

We saw but the meadows

Torn with their shot and shell,

We heard not the march of the succours that were
coming,

Their old forgotten bugle-calls, the fifes and the
drumming,

But they gathered and they gathered from the graves
where they had lain

A hundred years, hundred of years, on the old
battle-plain

And the young graves of Flanders, all fresh with
dews of mourning.

Marlborough's men and Wellington's, the burghers
of Courtrai,

THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES

The warriors of Plantagenet, King Louis' *Gants glacés*,

And the young young dead from Mons and the Marne river.

Old heroic fighting men,
Who fought for chivalry,
Men who died for England,
Mother of Liberty.

In the world's dim heart, where the waiting spirits slumber,

Sounded a roar when the walls were rent asunder
That parted Earth from Hell, and summoning them
away,

Tremendous trumpets blew, as at the Judgement
Day—

And the dead came forth, each to his former banner.

On the grim field of Flanders, the old battle plain,
Their armies held the iron line round Ypres in the
rain,

From Bixschoote to Baecelaere, and down to the
Lys river.

IN HELL : AND OUT OF IT

1916

I

THEY have gone down to Hell,
The home-bound men who bought their evening
journal

Passing the Temple gate
Daily ; and all the while tremendous Fate,
Dogging them bloody-fanged, with deep internal
Chuckle—fierce mistress, from the fireside mate,
The soft-haired children, with persistence fell
Waiting to drag them, from the way diurnal
Down to the heart of Hell.

The Cockney tradesmen, butcher-boys and others
Who trudge from bell to bell,
The men in shops, all those unrealized
Façades of men, remote and negligible,
Their lives brushed by, caught up with them,
surprised,

IN HELL : AND OUT OF IT

The swift onrush of Fate
Has gathered in one crowd, like leaves, like brothers,
And hurried down to Hell.

The merry boys that now upon the vernal
 Young grass should leap and run,
All in fresh white, the country lads who wait
Under the blackthorn, whistling the eternal
Song of the Spring, young dreamers who talked late
 In Oxford rooms of a world to re-create,
New paths which they would follow, till the sun
Rose on their dreams—this Ineluctable
Brooded above, unseen, ironic Fate,
 Having one plan, but one
For all of them, one ancient and infernal
Road where they should be herded, small and great,
 In multitudes to Hell.

II

Still up and down the streets and country places
 By many a green hedgerow,
Where they, year in, year out, were wont to go,
Pass on their round new or familiar faces,
The little waves of Life still ebb and flow,
 But they are down in Hell.

IN HELL : AND OUT OF IT

Colourless, torn, lifeless, death-haunted spaces

Before them spread and spread,

As Earth lay an immense corpse, long dead

Of old prodigious wounds, killed long ago,

Yet in corruption mangled

By vampire Death, plunging the implacable shell

Deep, his fierce hand in her gaunt hair entangled.

The wild witch Spring warms her with dear embraces,

Laying a sun-bright head

On her chill heart and strewing a faint show

Of flowers like funeral blossoms. Daringly

The rapturous lark rides clear of her and races

Into the sky, where lovely clouds move slow,

The moon in awful blindness duly paces

There her accustomed path : but Earth is dead.

Her sides are packed with death, she disremembers

Her ancient Alchemy.

Her lustral salutary potency

Fails her, the mighty Priestess, pure, life-giving,

Only abhorred life breeds in her embers.

These who go down into the grave yet living,

Must all its dreadful naked secrets know,

Death elbows them, Death crouches in their bed,

Death's odour creeps through all they taste and

smell,

The atmosphere of Hell.

IN HELL : AND OUT OF IT

III

The Devil does not rest in his Creation.

He, indefatigable,

Wrought this accomplished Circle for our woe,

Making for good and evil one damnation.

Like flies in pitch they struggle in its slime,

They are swallowed up ; the very wind that so

Tameless and pure at its great will would blow,

Must here his hideous errand do and be

The creature of his crime,

Cruel, defiled, a poisonous exhalation

From furnaces of Hell.

Like lions about those fields of desolation

They creep after their prey

And have no business but to slay and slay,

The kindly boys whose pictures you may see

By many an arched door

Of country churches where they learned to pray ;

And faint caressing shadows wander o'er

Their faces, like blind fingers, touchingly.

The brief inscriptions tell

How some are dead and where : Gallipoli,

Ypres, Armentière, places unknown before

IN HELL : AND OUT OF IT

Here as the isles of an undiscovered sea,
Names that the village will forget no more.
The sunshine marks each low and lawny swell
 Where, generation after generation,
Their quiet fathers lie. But these who fell,
 Have left their bodies in Hell.

They have obtained release
From Hell's obscene and horrible uproar,
The hurtling heaven and maddened earth's vibration,
Sickness, fatigue ; strange and unmasked release.

Suddenly, like the shutting of a door,
A something happened, a complete surcease.
Wondering they poised upon the edge of Time
 To understand their Peace.

They have gone up from Hell.

IV

The living shall go up like a tide of Ocean,
Sweeping right over it, irresistible,
Obedient as the sea's tremendous motion
To unseen forces. Caught up in the Will
Of God, the strong and weak, the good and evil,

IN HELL : AND OUT OF IT

Genius and clown are in one substance blent,
Fused in Hell's furnace, hammered on God's anvil
 To be His instrument
Who not with angel armies doth fulfil
His purposes, but common men transform
 To be a match for Death,
To draw in Time Eternity's large breath,
And foot to foot grapple the undying Devil.
Him shall they by eternal doom compel
Back to his lair, like a retiring storm,
 Deep-thundering through Hell.

V

Again shall they be scattered in disunion,
 Fragments and samples of Humanity ;
Become again the phantoms of the street,
 The men who travel and eat
And buy and sell daily in company,
Yet man with man, do never hold communion.
Upon their garments will not hang the smell
 Of God's hand or of Hell.

So shall they seem, and many in derision
 Will mock at what they seem,
Ignorant each mortal keeps a soul in prison,

IN HELL : AND OUT OF IT

Deep-dungeoned in himself, and most men die
Nor ever of that other presence dream.
But these men in the Valley of Decision,
 In agony extreme
Of travail pangs or imperceptibly,
Brought forth their secret soul and marvelling,
Looked on its unknown face and said, "'Tis I."
Though it become again a secret thing,
Hid in the innumerable days gone by,
That soul shall always Be, still conquering,
In the Divine Idea move and dwell
One with the guard of God, the noble vision
 Of armed Michael,
Triumphing, his foot upon the neck of Hell.

“ KEEP TROTH ”

(Inscription on the tomb of Edward I.)

I

ENGLAND, 1808

EUROPE looked up and hailed thee unsubdued,
Proud England. Snared unconquerable Spain
Reared her wild hands to thee and gnawed her
chain,

And the dark-smouldering sullen Northern brood
Found for their trampled fires thy name a food,
A breath, a power to kindle and sustain.
The Polar star, high over Alp and plain,
Imaged thy splendour and thy fortitude.

And thou didst not betray thy heavy trust,
Sole steadfast in a reeling earth and sure,
Though by a pack of wolf-tongued perils bayed,
Firmly to grapple, grimly to endure,
Until that glorious tyranny was laid
Broken for ever in the inglorious dust.

“ KEEP TROTH ”

II

ENGLAND, 1918

England, in thee not Europe trusts alone,
Not noble France and long-loved Italy
And murdered Belgium in her agony,
But the immense world, deepening zone on zone,
With all her crowding eyes from far unknown,
Haunts of our human life looks up to thee,
In danger undismayed, because they see
Thy broad high-blazoned shield above her thrown.

And has thy mighty heart waned with thy growth ?
Shall the rich world for a mess of words be sold
And Freedom be in Freedom's name undone ?
Cheat thou Hell's hope. Stand firm now as of old,
Prizing beyond all words that ancient one
A King's dust cries to thee—England, “ Keep
Troth.”

January 1918



THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

KING EDWARD III.

FATHER WALTER, *a poor priest of Wycliffe, formerly a Knight of Edward's Court. Son to the Countess of Salisbury (beloved by Edward in his younger days).*

PETER DE BROCAS, *page to Alice Perrers.*

WILLIAM OF WYKEHAM, *Bishop of Winchester.*

BENET THE LEACH.

SIMON THE SOLDIER.

JOHN CARTER.

THE SPEAKER OF THE COMMONS.

TWO KNIGHTS OF THE SHIRE.

A MINSTREL.

ALICE PERRERS, *LADY WINDSOR, the King's Mistress.*

PHILIPPA DE BROCAS, *a child of twelve, wife to Peter.*

AN OLD SERVING WOMAN

Courtiers, Ladies, Knights, Peasants, etc.

SCENE : *The Courtyard and Hall of the Palace of Shene.*

A BALLAD OF CRÉCY

KING EDWARD rode a-hunting,
A-hunting over sea,
With his war-trumpets blowing,
His banner and pennons free.
Edward, Edward
Is the flower of Chivalrie !

Through the land of France he hunted,
His hounds were Famine and Fire.
“ For the hunting of hares,” quoth Edward,
“ Little is my desire.”
“ Amen,” quoth Edward,
The Prince who was his squire.

The King of France has mustered
Of Knights five hundred score,
Of bowmen and of men-at-arms
Eighty thousand more.
Merrily rode they
As men ride to hunt the boar.

A BALLAD OF CRÉCY

“ We’ll bring to bay these English
With the river at their backside.”
At the White Ford King Edward
Went over at ebb o’ the tide,
Three score marching
Abreast at ebb o’ the tide.

On the fair field of Crécy
The King made ready to fight,
“ This is my mother’s land
And here I’ll do me right.”
Forth came Edward
Riding his palfrey white.

He rode through the ranks of the English,
Marshalled in battle array,
“ Now eat my gallant fighting men,
And drink a cup, I pray,
For Frenchmen and Germans
You will have many to slay.”

Up came King Philip’s battle,
His bowmen on us ran,
Fiercely they roared in coming,
To shake the heart in a man.
The English untroubled
Waited till they began.

A BALLAD OF CRÉCY

Then one step made each archer
And drew his string to his ear,
O the whistle of the grey-goose shaft
Is a grim sound to hear !

Edward heard it
And it gave his heart good cheer.

On the east side of the crossbowmen
The crows hung black as night,
On t'other the English arrows flew
So fast they darkened the light.

“ Slay me these bowmen,”
Quoth Philip, “ that will not fight.”

Riding down the crossbowmen
Came the chivalry of France,
To left and right among them
You saw the long-swords glance,
On helm and hauberk
The grey-goose arrows dance.

They hammered on the chevron,
They searched the coat of mail,
The chivalry of France went down
Like corn under the hail.

Crest and coat of arms
Little might them avail.

A BALLAD OF CRÉCY

The Welshmen and the Cornishmen
Ran in with long knives,
Earl and Baron and Knight they reaped,
None might ransom their lives.
Noble ladies
Must weep like poor men's wives.

Now sweeping round that mellay,
A host came spurring hard
Against the English, Frenchman,
German and Savoyard,
To break our battle
And shatter it like a shard.

The King watched from a windmill—
Up rode a reeking Knight.
“ Succour, succour, Lord Edward !
Your son's in deadly fight.”
“ Lives he ? ” quoth Edward,
“ And hath he yet hands to smite ?
“ Now ride you back, Sir Thomas,
To Cobham and Chandos say,
To fight where the odds are four to one
Is the right English way,
And my son Edward
Shall win his spurs to-day.

A BALLAD OF CRÉCY

“ Say, to my sweet son Edward,
If well the sword he wield,
And the brave Knights about him
That give good blows, I'll yield,
By God and St Edward,
The honour of this Field.”

The blind King of Bohemia
To join the fight was fain.
“ For Christ His sake, my three good knights,
Make fast to yours my rein.”
Charged they together
And together we found them slain.

That summer day at noontide
Great darkness hid the sun,
Wherefore the bells chimed two o'clock
Or ever the fight begun.
Vespers rung they
Over a battle won.

Scarlet red was all the sky,
The plain at eve was red,
Save for the sheen of banner and mail
Among the heaps of dead—
Prince and villein,
Thirty thousand dead.

A BALLAD OF CRÉCY

Right glad was King Edward
To kiss his own sweet son.
“ Now God be praised for Englishmen
When the fight is four to one !
Rome and Jerusalem
We'll conquer ere all is done.”

The fame of that noble fight
Went forth o'er France and Spain.
Wept sore upon his throne
The Emperor of Almayne.
The bells of Avignon
Tolled seven days for the slain.

And the trumpets of England
Were heard by land and sea.
Since Arthur reigned was never a king
Of such renown as he,
Edward, Edward,
The flower of Chivalrie.

SCENE I

The Courtyard of the Palace of Shene. It is enclosed on three sides by buildings, on the other by a high wall having a gateway in it. Opposite the wall and gateway is the Hall of the Palace, a high building with many windows. A stone stair leads up to it, the lower part of the stair uncovered, the upper disappearing under an archway. A white-haired minstrel stands within the gateway. In a corner of the Courtyard peasants are loading a waggon with bales. SIMON THE SOLDIER is directing their operations, a waggoner's whip in his hand.

THE MINSTREL *sings* :

King Edward rode a-hunting
A-hunting over sea,
With his war-trumpets blowing,
His banner and pennons free.
Edward, Edward,
Is the flower of Chivalrie.

SIMON THE SOLDIER.

Yon is an old tale our fathers ha' told us.
I'll sing ye a new ballad, a tale o' the times.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

SIMON *sings* :

An ancient lion would after kind,

Trallala—

His teeth were long and his eyes were blind,

Aha ha !

His belly was weak and his wit was too

And who do you think he went to woo ?

PEASANTS. The cat, ha ha ! Just that, ha ha !

SIMON. “ My virtue’s dear,” quoth the cat, “ what offers ? ”

Trallala !

“ Rummage you shall in my old wife’s coffers,

Aha ha !

Her nouches of gold and her fair ermine,

Her pearls of price and her Ypres linen

And Manors three shall be your dole

If I win, ha ha !—you to sin, ha ha ! ”

PEASANTS. If he win, ha ha ! her to sin, ha ha !

SIMON. The old wife’s dead, God rest her soul !

For she loved good Englishmen.

PEASANTS.

God rest her soul !

For she loved good Englishmen.

SIMON. The cat has teeth and the cat has claws,

Trallala !

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

“What matter,” quoth she, “if the mice make laws,”

Aha ha !

The leopard and dog, the buck and the boar

Pay her tax and toll and she cries for more.

The cat, ha ha ! grows fat, ha ha !

PEASANTS. The cat, ha ha ! grows fat, ha ha !

A PEASANT. Hush ! Sh ! Here comes her wizard.

[BENET THE LEACH, *a pale, dark young man, dressed in black, comes into the gateway, takes the MINSTREL by the hand and leads him to the foot of the stair. BENET then retires. The peasants cross themselves each time he passes them.*

SIMON.

Sign yourselves !

That way you baulk a wizard's malice. Boys,

Teach me the bouncing sign will baulk a woman's.

JOHN CARTER. Take thee a badge of my lord of Gaunt's.

SIMON.

No lords

Nor liveries for me ! Lord John of Gaunt !

His brother of Wales now was a good soldier,

So was the King. So by God's blood am I !

I, naked man, have fought in France with
Knights,

I've stuck 'em, boys, I've slit their noble throats,

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

For all their lobster-shells, I've fought and
beat 'em,

Scutcheon or no. Why may I not live easy
At home without I wear a lord's livery ?

CARTER. Why ? Because they be lords and they
be differ'nt.

SIMON. How different ?

CARTER. Thee wears a differ'nt coat.

SIMON. Ay, we wear clouted smocks to buy them
backs

As bright as dragon-flies, our light-o'-loves
Bear a bad name—different from theirs. Our
crops

Lie rotting while we gather this goodly harvest
[*Pointing to the bales in the waggon.*

For the Lady Perrers. Sirs, we were all dead
men

If we helped Kate o' Cock Lane to lift a purse
From her leman——

CARTER. Ay, thee puts me in mind
Of a raton that would squeak in the cat's
pantry—

And was a dead raton.

[*While the MINSTREL is singing ALICE PERRERS,
LADY WINDSOR, comes out on to the steps
leading to the Hall. She is a dark, hand-*

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

some woman over thirty. Her dress is cloth of gold on one side and on the other scarlet. Her head-dress is scarlet and gold. She wears royal jewels. She is attended by her page, PETER DE BROCAS, a beautiful youth of eighteen.

MINSTREL *sings* :

King Edward rode a-hunting,
A-hunting over sea,
With his war-trumpets blowing,
His banner and pennons free.
Edward, Edward,
Is the flower of Chivalrie !

Through the land of France he hunted,
His hounds were Famine and Fire,
“ For the hunting of hares,” quoth Edward,
“ Little is my desire.”
“ Amen,” quoth Edward,
The Prince who was his squire.

ALICE PERRERS. Come hither, Minstrel !

[*The MINSTREL bows, but does not advance.*

MINSTREL. Hail, Lady, whose title
I cannot tell.

ALICE. I am the Lady of Windsor,

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

The King's Grace would hear your ballad of
Crécy.

MINSTREL. Our Sovereign Lord? Edward himself?

Alas,

Lady, great honours often prove great shames!

ALICE. He is weary of fine French lays and wants a
bald

English ballad. Tired of hearing of Arthur,
And wants the praise of Edward.

You smile, Peter?

You should not smile.

PETER. I cannot help smiling

When a fair lady is witty.

ALICE. [*To the MINSTREL*] Follow this gentleman.

MINSTREL. I cannot see

The gentleman. Mine eyes are almost dark.

ALICE. Lead him to the Hall, Peter. I'd have a
word

With Master Leach.

PETER. A word? Only a word?

ALICE. Art jealous? Foolish Peter!

[*PETER and the MINSTREL go away up the steps. BENET crosses the Courtyard, and at the foot of the steps ceremoniously salutes ALICE PERRERS, then mounts them and retires with her just within the archway.*]

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

ALICE. Thou hast the phial? Haste! Render it up.

BENET. Must I make haste to seal my own
damnation,

And no glimpse of Paradise?

ALICE. My dear!

Soon shalt thou come to me. But now be
speedy.

When last I had your potion John o' Gaddesden
Suspected me.

BENET. He is not wholly ignorant,
For a Court Physician.

ALICE. I've sent him packing.

BENET. I tell you, Alice, the drug's not dangerous
Once taken or twice, but so repeated—He's old,
Outworn—God curse the old dotard! What
do I care?

Kill him then! Kill the King! Thou fierce
woman,

Thou killest me and car'st not!

ALICE. I care not?

Care not for thee, Benet? The immediate
matter

Is to fend off these wicked priests and princes
Till I've secured myself. They come presently
To make Edward renounce me, rob me of all
The wretched price of my irredeemable years,

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

My wronged youth, post me at Paul's or Westminster

In a white sheet. But I will kill myself,
By the Holy Blood I have sworn—

[She makes a gesture as of stabbing herself.]

BENET. No! Never!

Is not my life yours? I will protect you
Against the world.

ALICE. Poor boy!

BENET. Think you I have nought?
I have a soul to sell and know to invoke
Potencies beyond princes.

ALICE. Very soon
My private fortune will be garnered safely
At certain manors. Then, sweetheart, we'll
follow it,
And leave Edward to make a good end.

BENET. Your foes?

ALICE. Let the dogs gnash! I do not
fear them,
I shall be rich. Gold is stronger than Hate
And much stronger than Love, my poor Benet.
Give me the cordial.

BENET. What if he died?
What if the King died?

ALICE. It would take more

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Than that to kill Edward. It gave him courage
And will do so again.

Thou wilt not give it ?

Thou wilt not do me service ? Go, then !

[She turns from him and begins to ascend the steps. He clutches her skirt and draws a phial from his sleeve.]

BENET. Alice !

The cordial's here. What care I for the King,
Myself—may we all perish everlastingly,
So you will love me, Alice !

ALICE. *[Snatching the phial]* That will I !

Thou shalt have kisses presently—such kisses !
Now speed away ! Vanish !

BENET. Until my hour.

[BENET departs, and as he does so PETER appears coming down the steps to the Hall and carrying a lute.]

PETER. Is the black fellow a leech or a lover ?

ALICE. Peter !

What make you here ? Why have you left the
King ?

PETER. Perchance for the reason you did, Lady.

ALICE. I ?

PETER. The old man's blood's too cold. High
Midsummer

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Flushes the world with roses, far away
The deep bosom of Earth undulates, warm,
Soft, scented, like a woman's. 'Tis high noon,
Yet all the King's hearth is a quiver of flame
And fume, the blind man is droning his ballad.
I'll sing you a ballad, Lady, I learnt in Cornwall.

“ Old and grey was Mark the King,
A fair woman the bride——”

ALICE. Not now, Peter.

See-est yon tall fellow
Beside the waggon? Tell him to come hither,
I would confer with him.

PETER. A goodly knave,
Though clad in caurimaury.

ALICE. Little monster!
The animal's my villain. Bid him come.
Meanwhile haste to the buttery and procure us
A flagon of cool Ausay from underground,
And a fair cup, all gold. Music and wine
Agree like a lover and his mistress.

[PETER goes. SIMON THE SOLDIER comes to
the foot of the steps and salutes ALICE
PERRERS.

ALICE. Simon,
Bid those my churls yonder be quicker loading

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

And off home immediately. But do thou
Stay and choose out a team from the Royal
stables,

The best draft-horses. Bring hither also
A waggon and men for lading it. By dawn
Be at the postern. Thou shalt have for escort
A livery-man or twain. There be robbers about.

SIMON. Ay, there be robbers.

If I do stay,

Who'll drive my team home? And there's my
hay

Should ha' been stacked long since. Your
ladyship

Forgets to reckon up the days of service

Due to her. Mine are paid and twice over.

ALICE. How? Thou wouldst dare? Be warned,
Simon the Soldier!

There is a challenging spirit abroad to-day

Among you mean people. I'll not endure it.

The first villein or labourer on my land

Who breathes rebellion shall be certainly hanged,

There's not a jury in England shall protect him

From me, Alice Perrers. Obey my orders!

[SIMON *withdraws sullenly*. PETER *descends
the steps carrying a silver-gilt platter with
a flagon of wine and a goblet upon it.*

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

PETER. An excellent vintage excellently cool.

I have tested it myself.

ALICE. I am sure thou hast.

[He sets the platter down, pours wine into the goblet and presents it to ALICE PERRERS.]

PETER. Drink, Lady! Is't not rare as summer sherbet,

Cellared in mountain snows for a Queen o' the East?

[ALICE drinks and hands him back the goblet.]

ALICE. Empty the cup and sing me that old ballad
You learnt in Cornwall.

PETER. Truly the air is Cornish,
But the words are mine, and being a song of
Love
And new, it is better than a ballad of War
Thirty years old.

ALICE. Thou lov'st not War, child?
I fear thou art a coward.

PETER. That's very likely.
I am a harmless coward, at any rate,
Not a coward cased in armour, who makes
mincemeat
Of naked men, a coward who burns down cities
And slaughters shrieking women and children—

ALICE. Nay,

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Why talk of tedious matters, thou and I,
My beautiful youth ? Tell me a tale of Love,
I care not whose, because all loves are one
To me, and all ours. What's Time to Love ?
Yesterday or To-morrow ? Vain words !

PETER. Love only knows Now and Forever.

ALICE. Now

Suffices me, this wonderful To-day,
Wherein all other days dissolve like pearls
In potent wine.

But sing your ballad of Love.

[PETER takes the lute and after a prelude
sings. When ALICE sees him to be intent
upon the song, she draws BENET'S phial
from her sleeve and empties the contents
into the goblet, which she then fills up with
wine.]

PETER sings :

Old and grey was Mark the King,
A fair woman the bride.
In merry May-month the throstle will sing
In greenwood far and wide.
O the sweet of her !
Head to feet of her,
Frail and fresh as the hawthorn flower.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

A Knight-at-arms had Mark the King,
Young and of high renown,
When waters have gathered in mountain
spring

Both men and meadows will drown.
Worn on the crest of him,
Borne on the breast of him,
Branch and blossom the hawthorn flower.

“ A torch ! a torch ! ” cried Mark the King,
“ False fellow is this to me.”

He ran the bolt into the ring
And fired the Knight's roof-tree.
Fiercely the flames of it
Roared round the rames of it.
Dust are the Knight and the hawthorn flower.

Old and grey was Mark the King,
Lean and withered and bowed.
“ I would the twain to life I could bring
That were lapped in a flaming shroud.

Long is it dying here,
Better were lying there
Under the grass and the hawthorn flower.”

ALICE. Call you that a song of Love ? Never a word
Of how the youth pined for the Queen's love,
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SCENE II

A long Hall with a fireplace in which logs are burning. Across the further end are drawn curtains. At the lowest end of the Hall are servants and men-at-arms. Courtiers sitting and standing about in groups. A Knight and lady are playing Chess, pages are playing marbles. A young man with a hawk on his wrist is showing its points to other young men. PHILIPPA DE BROCCAS, Peter's wife, a pretty child of twelve, at the centre of a group is showing off her dog's tricks. A Jester in a corner is making people laugh; but all passes in a subdued tone, because the KING is asleep behind the curtains. The MINSTREL, standing just outside the curtains, is singing.

MINSTREL sings :

The King of France has mustered
Of Knights five hundred score,
Of bowmen and of men-at-arms
Eighty thousand more.
Merrily rode they
As men ride to hunt the boar.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

“ We'll bring to bay these English
With the river at their backside.”
At the White Ford King Edward
Went over at ebb o' the tide.
Three score marching
Abreast at ebb o' the tide.

COURTIER. Why dost thou go on droning? The
King is asleep.

MINSTREL. I was bidden sing—

COURTIER. And now thou art bidden cease.

CHESS-PLAYING LADY. Checkmate, Sir Eustace!

SIR EUSTACE. It was your fair hands
Undid me—not your craft.

*[He seizes her hand, and in the struggle which
ensues the chessmen are upset. Two old
Knights talk in low voices.]*

1ST KNIGHT. Bad news from France
As usual.

2ND KNIGHT. What?

1ST KNIGHT. A riot in Gascony,
A garrison of our men put to the sword,
And the King of France rolling an army up
Like a snowball.

2ND KNIGHT. Ay. Where are our preparations?
Look upon that?

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

[Indicating the curtains and the groups in the Hall.]

And on these cut-purses.

And they are dead—Chandos, Cobham, the
Prince,

All dead !

CHESS-PLAYING LADY. *[To SIR EUSTACE, holding up a Chessman]* Fie, sir ! Now it is broken,

The King's ivory chessman ! What shall we say ?

SIR EUSTACE. Pocket it and say nothing.

CHESS-PLAYING LADY. Merry Andrew !

[The KING'S voice is heard speaking faintly, querulously behind the curtains.]

KING. Martin ! My valets, I say ! Where are ye ?
Pillows !

More pillows !

[Two gaily dressed young men throw down their cards and pass behind the curtains.]

I swoon for air. Draw me the curtains.

[The curtains are drawn, disclosing a high carved oak bedstead facing the Hall, and in it KING EDWARD propped up on pillows. His regular features appear as though carved in ivory, his long hair and beard are snowy white. His eyes are closed, but when he opens them they are as blue as a child's.]

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

KING. Ah, Christ! Ah, good St Edward!—Philippa!

[PHILIPPA DE BROCAS *runs to his bedside.*

PHILIPPA. My lord, you called me ?

KING. Thee ? I called not thee.

PHILIPPA. [*Confused*] My lord, I am Philippa.

KING. Thou Philippa ?

Dear soul of God !—Ay, so thou art, sweetheart,
And I did call thee. Lay thy hand in mine,
Thy small hand, that softer is than rose-leaves
And fresh as they. Long ago, Philippa,
When I was a boy in Flanders, long ago
There was a child—her name was Philippa—
Would lay her hand in mine, and so walk
 swinging

Our joined hands, the while we talked together
Of God knows what and laughed endlessly.
That was a wonderful year for fruit-blossom,
And I remember under an apple-tree
A single scarlet tulip. She and I
Raced over the grass to gather it.
Sad was my heart to leave her, yet I bore me
Courteously, bending low to the lords and ladies,
As due was, till I came to Philippa.
Then what must she do, she before all the
 Court

But clap her dear hands to her face and weep,

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Ay, weep like any calf.

For those sweet tears
I made her Queen of England,

PHILIPPA. I should weep
If Peter left me, but he is my husband.

KING. POOR INNOCENT ! Do not tell anyone—
I had forgotten Philippa was dead.
But she is dead. She lies at Westminster.
Scarcely an hour before this dear lady
Resigned her soul, which certainly the angels
Bore to eternal bliss, she drew her hand
Out of the bed and held therewith my hand,
Entreating me to grant her yet one grace—
Which by St Edward's bones I promised her—
That I too in the cloister at Westminster
Would lie at last and sleep for ever by her.
Nay, child, what's death to thee ?
Sing again, Minstrel !
Tell them again of that great summer day
When the sun's self turned to a sable blot
In heaven under the triumphing star of Edward;
Of Crécy field sing and the old fame.

THE MINSTREL *sings* :

On the fair field of Crécy
The King made ready to fight,

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

“ This is my mother’s land
And here I’ll do me right.”
Forth came Edward
Riding his palfrey white.

He rode through the ranks of English
Marshalled in battle array :
“ Now eat, my gallant fighting men,
And drink a cup, I pray,
For Frenchmen and Germans
You will have many to slay.”

Up came King Philip’s battle,
His bowmen on us ran,
Fiercely they roared in coming,
To shake the heart in a man.
The English untroubled
Waited till they began.

Then one step made each archer
And drew his string to his ear,
O the whistle of the grey-goose shaft
Is a grim sound to hear !
Edward heard it
And it gave his heart good cheer.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

On the east side of the crossbowmen
The crows hung black as night
On t'other the English arrows flew
So fast they darkened the light.
"Slay me these bowmen,"
Quoth Philip, "that will not fight."

Riding down the crossbowmen
Came the chivalry of France,
To left and right among them
You saw the long swords glance,
On helm and hauberk
The grey-goose arrows dance.

They hammered on the chevron,
They searched the coat of mail,
The chivalry of France went down
Like corn under the hail.
Crest and coat-of-arms
Little might them avail.

[ALICE PERRERS *walks up the Hall, followed by PETER, holding high a platter with the golden cup upon it. She brushes PHILIPPA aside, signs to the MINSTREL to cease singing, and presents the cup to the KING.*

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

ALICE. Awake, my fair lord ! This midsummer heat
Is heavy on you, but I bring you a treasure,

KING. Item one platter silver-gilt, one goblet
Of chased gold. I give you thanks, Lady,
Wondering to see that of your courtesy
You have left the King so much.

ALICE. What says my lord ?
Awake, my King, and pledge your gay lady
In rare wine of Ausay, as cool as Christmas,
Ay and as merry. Wine was ever a medicine
For noble Knights, better than foul potions
That leeches brew.

KING. I was a noble Knight,
I shall be a great memory. What I am—
Comfort us, fair St Edward !

Minstrel sing !

MINSTREL *sings* :

The Welshmen and the Cornishmen
Ran in with long knives,
Earl and baron and Knight they reaped,
None might ransom their lives,
Noble ladies must weep like poor men's wives.

ALICE. How sayest thou ? Churls kill nobles ?
Shalt be whipped
Presently, if thy manners mend not.

KING. Shame !

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Whipping for a minstrel ? But his art is royal.
The meanest minstrel holds in sovereignty
Some nobler country, more unconquerable,
Fortunate, spacious, rich than all this garden
Of mine, this little flowery, lovely England,
Or the wide realm of France. Kings may grow
old,

Unmeet for ladies' love, but ragged minstrels,
Though ne'er so wrinkled, poor, despised, are
lovers

Of exquisite ladies, beautiful and brave
And pure as that white swan of Salisbury
Whom I once—

ALICE. Will not my lord drink,
Pledge his poor Alice and forgive her offence ?

[The KING remains silent, lost in recollection.]

*ALICE replaces the cup on the platter, and
notices PHILIPPA, who stands close to PETER,
holding his long sleeve.*

ALICE. What dost thou here by the King's bed ?
How durst thou

Lay hand upon my page, spill the King's wine ?

PHILIPPA. I did not spill it, Lady.

ALICE. *[Striking PHILIPPA]* Thou glass-eyed poppet !
There's for thee ! There ! *[Striking her
again.]*

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

PHILIPPA.

Peter !

My lord, the King !

KING. [*Trembling with agitation*] Let the child be,
Alice !

Nay, now, I pray you, Alice ! Be content !

ALICE. Content ! I am despised,

I and my offering rejected, spurned,

A child, anybody preferred to me [*sobs*].

KING. Nay, my sweet Alice—

ALICE. I am not sweet to you,

You have found some fairer woman, I am cast off,

Not all my long love, not all my service

Avail me—I must begone— Ah woe,

That ever I loved your false heart !

KING. I pray you

Weep not, accuse me not. What have I done ?

Some fretful words—Alas ! I am old and sick,

Too old and sick for wooing fair women ;

I would be loved a little, tended quietly,

Quietly, until I die.

ALICE. Wring not my heart

With talk of death, dear lord. You shall not die,

'Tis of this thought of dying you are sick,

Which certain friends of yours put in your mind,

Because they wish you dead. But I am here,

My love watches beside you.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

[*Presenting the cup again*] Drink one mouthful,
To comfort your poor Alice !

[*The KING takes the cup and drinks.*

Generous wine

Will fill your heart with sunshine, ay and
Kingship,
Such as you'll need presently.

'Tis reported

William of Wykeham, the Speaker of the
Commons,

And other such—God's blood ! If I had my way
Their heads should blacken on your battle-
ments !—

Will come asking an audience. They will come
To mark how much you fail, snatch at your
sceptre

Before it falls to inheritance. Resolve
Whether you deny it, or receive them kingly.

KING. Most like they will not come, I will consider
If they should come.

Now have I no desire
Save to lie quiet and hear some chronicle,
Some plain song that the minstrels make of me
To sing year after year by the open hearth
In Franklins' halls, while in the firelight
The women's wheels hum low, and eager boys
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THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Leave shaping of their swords to question of us,
King Edward and the Prince—and we already
Unreal, remote.

His tomb at Canterbury
Is nobly wrought. Let William Orchard fashion
Also our effigy and about the tomb,
In niches, sweetly carved, set the brave brood
A brave Queen bore us.

ALICE. Wherefore talk of tombs ?
We will be merry many a year yet.

Minstrel,
Sing on. The King is well pleased with your
song.

MINSTREL *sings* :

Now sweeping round that mellay
A host came spurring hard
Against the English, Frenchman,
German and Savoyard,
To break our battle
And shatter it like a shard.

The King watched from a windmill,
Up rode a reeking Knight ;
“ Succour, succour, Lord Edward !
Your son’s in deadly fight.”

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

“ Lives he ? ” quoth Edward,
“ And hath he yet hands to smite ?

“ Nay, ride you back, Sir Thomas,
To Cobham and Chandos say :
To fight where the odds are four to one
Is the right English way ;
And my son Edward
Shall win his spurs to-day.

“ Say, to my sweet son Edward
If well the sword he wield,
And the brave Knights about him
That give good blows, I'll yield,
By God and St Edward,
The honour of this field.”

The blind King of Bohemia
To join the fight was fain,
“ For Christ His sake my three good Knights,
Make fast to yours my rein.”
Charged they together,
And together we found them slain.

*[As the KING listens to the MINSTREL, he
gradually sits up straight, his eyes brighten,
he beats time to the ballad. ALICE PERRERS*

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

observes him with satisfaction. The Courtiers do not attend to the MINSTREL'S song, but continue their games and converse in low voices. At length the KING flings back the coverlid and starts up, sitting on the side of the bed.

KING. Bring me my robe, varlets! The white
samite

Broidered with gold. Bring forth my royal
robes.

Now by God's soul I'll show these lords and
lieges—!

Minstrel, sing on. This English ballad of yours
Reminds me what I was and what I will be—
I, Edward Plantagenet, the King.

MINSTREL *sings*:

That summer day at noontide
Great darkness hid the sun,
Wherefore the bells chimed two o'clock
Or ever the fight begun.
Vespers rung they
Over a battle won.

Scarlet red was all the sky,
The plain at eve was red,

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Save for the sheen of banner and mail

Among the heaps of dead—

Prince and villein,

Thirty thousand dead.

Right glad was King Edward

To kiss his own sweet son ;

“ Now God be praised for Englishmen

When the fight is four to one !

Rome and Jerusalem

We'll conquer ere all is done.”

The fame of that noble fight

Went forth o'er France and Spain,

Wept sore upon his throne

The Emperor of Almayne.

The bells of Avignon

Tolled seven days for the slain.

And the trumpets of England

Were heard by land and sea,

Since Arthur reigned was never a King

Of such renown as he,

Edward, Edward,

The flower of Chivalrie.

SCENE III

The same. KING EDWARD sits royally robed in a gilded and painted chair. Tumblers perform before him, while japers accompany their antics with patter. The Courtiers standing round in a circle laugh and applaud, as does the KING. ALICE PERRERS sits near him on a stool. PETER comes in and speaks to her apart.

PETER. They are arrived. The lord Bishop of
Winchester

Is here, also the Speaker of the Commons
And two Knights of the Shire. Must I tell my
Lord ?

ALICE. Not so. Let them be suddenly announced,
So shall they see, contrary to their desire,
How pleasantly the King passes the time,
Not dying as they pretend.

[*To the performers*] Again ! Again !

At it merrily, rogues ! Look how the ladies
Are laughing in their wimples, the sly hypocrites !

KING. [*Recovering from a fit of laughter to the japer*]
Thou'rt a droll fellow ! Yet should we be seemly

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Where gentle ladies are. I'll stop thy throat
And pay thy wit also. Come hither, dog,
Open thy mouth wide and catch this coin
I'll toss thee into it.

[*The KING tosses a coin which the japer tries to catch in his open mouth, but fails to do so. A Courtier picks up the coin and aims it more successfully. All the tumblers and japers run about trying to catch in their mouths coins which the KING and Courtiers fling to them, amid great hubbub and merriment. The main door of the Hall is set open unobserved, until a Marshal in a gold chain, and bearing a white wand, announces the LORD BISHOP OF WINCHESTER, the SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, and two KNIGHTS OF THE SHIRE. The BISHOP is accompanied by a Chaplain. They all stand just inside the Hall until brought before the KING by the Marshal. Behind them enters a very tall slight man in the dress of a poor priest—FATHER WALTER. His head is covered with a hood. Only his red pointed beard shows. He stands at the lower end of the Hall, among the tumblers and japers, who soon slink out.*

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

BISHOP. [*To the KING*] *Pax tecum fili!*

KING. You are welcome, trusty friend and Father
in God,

So no ill news bring you.

BISHOP. There was ill news
Of you, my Lord. Your sickness was reported
To grow upon you—

KING. The devil take my sickness!
Do I look like a dying man? I'll not be angry.
All Englishmen delight to babble of Kings,
And lie about Princes because they love them.

[*Turning to the SPEAKER and KNIGHTS who
are kneeling before him.*]

My very good lieges,
Ye also come doubtless to bring me comfort
In articulo mortis.

Rise, Master Speaker. What is your petition?

SPEAKER. My Sovereign Lord, regarding this poor
realm,

And following precedents of ancient Kings,
We would petition your Grace, while yet you
are spared
To your loyal subjects—

KING. Reckon me as spared
Another ten years at the least.

SPEAKER. My Lord,

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Might you be pleased convoke princes and peers
Of all England and cause them swear allegiance
To the Lord Richard of Wales, your true heir,
Since he being yet a young child—

KING. Good lieges,

The kitten shall be a cat, the boy Dickon
Shall wear a beard on his face before that hour
Which calls for the anointing of a King,
I'll not grant this your petition. What else ?

SPEAKER. We have complaints, my lord. You have
set your seal

To wholesome laws, they stand upon our
statutes,

But what follows on that ? Nothing at all.

The lords'-liverymen—

FIRST KNIGHT OF THE SHIRE. Rapacious devils !

SPEAKER. Ravage our lands, rob, slay our tenantry—

SECOND KNIGHT OF THE SHIRE. Hell broken loose !

KING. We have approved your statutes.

SPEAKER. My lord, will you enforce them ?

KING. We will consider

How it may be done. Meanwhile our foes in
France,

Behind the arras of an armed truce,

Creep in upon our garrisons. We wait,

We crouch as a lion crouches in his covert

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Before the leap, to bound upon our enemies
And whelm them as of old.

Then by St Edward

You'll not complain that there are here in
England

Too many idle hands.

SPEAKER.

We do not, my lord.

Rather our complaint is, since the Pestilence

The labourers are too few and insolently

Refuse labour to their lords, hire themselves out

Whereso they will, for an extortionate wage.

As men bewitched are they, full of strange
doctrine

And very foul, as that all men are equal,

Noble or bond—

KING.

Sirs, I will not be ennuyed

To hear such fool's talk.

To your homes, gentlemen,

And bring your rabble to order.

[FATHER WALTER *steps forward, putting back
his hood.*

FATHER WALTER.

Hear me first.

Are ye such men, such free-born Englishmen

As will not crouch under the arrogant heel

Of mailed masters, they who sit down to eat

And rise to rob, who drink and rise to ravish,

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

To kill, and to destroy ? Ye will not endure it.
What ask ye of the King ? Justice ?

SPEAKER AND KNIGHTS. Ay, justice!

FATHER WALTER. Sovereign of England, these men
ask for justice,

And they do well. But from those very mouths
Which toll of justice, rights and liberty
So endlessly they mock the tongues of Time,
So loud your embattled castles rock to them,
Now they demand injustice.

SPEAKER AND KNIGHTS. Injustice ?

FATHER WALTER. These men, my Lord, clamour
against oppression,

And roar again to oppress. Your liberties,
Your rights and your possessions the wrath of
Hell

Shall not tear from you, but to poor labourers
Ye would leave nothing, not the power God gave
them

To move upon His earth. Your property
Perchance God gave you. Lo, a man's limbs
Who may bestow save God ? No other goods
On them hath He bestowed, and you would steal
Basely the usufruct.

SPEAKER. We would have the law,
Only the law.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

FATHER WALTER. Had not the Jews a law
Whereby they slew Christ ?

Look you, these labourers
Are born also of England, born to breathe
Her salt and turbulent air, whose taste is
freedom.

Hear me, my Lord and King ! I, God's poor
priest,
Demand justice for the poor.

KING. Walter, I wonder
Thy noble nurture is so much forgot.

SPEAKER. Nay, my Lord, he remembers it marvellous
well.

This poor priest, a preacher of strange opinions
Concerning God and man, is yet Sir Walter
Of Salisbury. He is bold, remembering his kin,
He trusts in his father.

ALICE. Ay.—He trusts in his father.

FATHER WALTER. Trust in my father ? I do
trust in Thee,

My Father in Heaven, whose children I remember
Perpetually, my kin, wounded of the world,
Bleeding by all the ways of the world and robbed
And naked. I must intercede for them
Before all thrones and dominations, weep
For them before all angels—

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

I ask mercy,

My Sovereign Lord, compassion for Christ's poor.

KING. Stay with us, Walter. You, Master Speaker
And worthy Knights, we will not remediless
Leave your substantial grievances. Depart
Until again in the cloister at Westminster
We meet you in Assembly. This poor priest,
Once our most perfect gentle knight-at-arms,
Walter of Salisbury, shall the Bishop instruct
In wiser doctrine.

Farewell, gentlemen.

[*The SPEAKER and the two KNIGHTS OF THE
SHIRE make their obeisance, and are ushered
out by the Marshal.*]

KING. My sweet Walter—why art so disguised
In poor habiliments? What office, my lord,
Is vacant in our Chancellery?

BISHOP. None,
For men with straws in their hair. My son
Walter
Might have enjoyed offices. He prefers
To enjoy his mad opinions.

KING. I am astonished
Hearing thee utter things elsewhere abominable,
Here, above all, foolish.

FATHER WALTER. Utterly.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

KING. Peace, foul tongue !
Thou slanderest a most honourable lady,
And very fair.

[*Sighs*] Would I had loved none other
Save her and the good Queen, no other woman !

FATHER WALTER. Now Christ speaks in your heart.
O mercy of God !

Dear soul of my King, ask absolution,
Come clean before the Judgement ! There so
shortly

All naked, all discrowned, how will it stand
With your dear soul ?

KING. Another day, Walter,
We will talk of holy things. You and the
Bishop

Must purge my soul for me another day.

FATHER WALTER. There is no other day. Woe, woe
is me !

Edward of England, early, about sunrise
To-morrow, you will die.

KING. [*Leaping to his feet*] Dar'st thou to say it ?
Now by the body of Christ ! . . .

Who sent thee here ? Who bade thee say so ?

FATHER WALTER. [*Very quietly and sadly*] God.

KING. Hence with this mad priest, this heretic
And treasonable wretch ! Dungeon him safely

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Until to-morrow, when if I live not,

[*Laughs scornfully.*]

Shall he inter my body. But if I live,

As I intend, some one shall bury his.

[*FATHER WALTER is removed by men-at-arms.*]

WILLIAM OF WYKEHAM makes an attempt to intervene.

BISHOP. The Church, my Lord—

KING. Ay, you are one of them !

Kind loyal friends who came like ravenous crows

Crawing out death over the living. Bishop,

The sun has set, you have some lonesome leagues

To travel ere you are home. So fare you well.

Here is a mort of fair and frolic ladies

Impatient for our mirth.

BISHOP. Farewell, my King,

May you live long—and in cleaner company.

[*The BISHOP and his Chaplain withdraw. As they do so, ALICE PERRERS claps her hands and speaks.*]

ALICE. Shuh ! Shuh ! Shuh !

Fly away, you black birds !

Now to our sport again. Where are the japers ?

LADY. All slunk away, under the hollow eyes

Of yon red-bearded priest.

ALICE. I think the crows

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Will not be afraid of Walter's eyes to-morrow.
Music there ! Dance music ! No court measure,
But a rollicking Maypole tune. Up, minstrels !
Blare us a prancing frolic. Peter !
Shall us dance Green Garters ?

PETER. Why, what's that ?

ALICE. A dance for a jolly lover. Nay—go to !

PETER. Come hither, my lady wife ! Come, Philippa,
Thou art expert in country dances. Show me
This Green Garters.

ALICE. Go ! I want no children.
Thou art my man, Peter.

PETER. I cannot dance it.

PHILIPPA. Peter is not her man.

ALICE. Peronel Proud-heart
Shall be beat presently.

PETER. My wife shall not.

ALICE. A pair of naughty babes ! Shall beat each
other.

What wilt thou dance then, Sir Petulance ?
What ?

KING. A sword dance, I say. It is very comely
When ladies mingle in't. Where are the
swords ?

COURTIERS. [*Presenting swords*] Here are they, here !
Measure them. Here, my Lord !

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

KING. Toy blades for toying times ! My own—bring
it me,

The huge two-handed sword I swung in France.
Why should it rust yonder ? My hands are
athirst

To handle it. Last night when the wind blew
Heard you not how it rung and sung on the
wall

The song of old wars ?

Give me my sword.

[Squires bring him a two-handed sword.]

Ha, Lady Sword ! My one true Lady, thou
and I

Have had good joys together.

Come again—wilt thou ?—

Triumphing to the heart of battle !

ALICE. That sword !

My lord, it is too great and heavy a blade.

KING. But I wielded it lightly. . . .

A good Knight was he. Body to body

We shocked and reeled and smote and parried
and smote,

I down on my knee, up again, hemming him

With blows—fierce, rapid, irresistible. So

I won. I beat Eustace de Ribau mont,

A very valiant Knight—

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Then was there lacing of helm and corselet and
greave,

And clang of steel and blowing of war-trumpets.

Ha, Lady Sword !

Did we not tremble for joy, thou and I ?

Then shocked the ships. The little cog Thomas

Rushed on the St Christopher, body to body,

Crashed and ground one on the other. Down
went

Our mainmast, and seas were awash in the waist

Of the brave Thomas ; but whether she sank or
swam

Little we recked, who were up the St
Christopher,

Clambering, shouting, fighting her plank by
plank,

Heaving this way and that, heaving and hurling

With bare hands the enemy overboard, creeping

In with poniard and knife,—archer and earl,

Knight and villein, squire and mariner, all,

All of my Englishmen, up the St Christo-
pher. . . .

A good battle, by God, is three to one,

But a better is four.

We captured of great galleons

A score and over. The rest, crowding their sails,

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Fled, billowing away into the sunset.

That night were we merry in hall at Winchelsea
With the good Queen, and our Minstrels over-
head

Were playing the German dance, while fair
ladies

Devised joyously of love.

Such was the sea-fight of Les Espagnols.

I, Edward the King, am Lord of the Sea.

ALICE. Battles as famous

My Lord shall fight again, and leave us weeping.
Now to the dance.

[*To the Courtiers*] I'll not have a sword dance.

Nobody knows it. Bid them play Robin Hood's
Round.

[*The music begins. ALICE PERRERS seizes PETER by the hand, and all the Courtiers join in a boisterous dance, except PHILIPPA, who stands behind the KING'S chair. He sits leaning on his sword, his eyes fixed, regardless of what is passing around him. At length he rises and begins slowly to swing his two-handed sword, until it is whirling round his head. Then he rushes among the Courtiers.*

KING. Ha, good St Edward!

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Traitors, ye have betrayed my castle ! Kill !

[The dancers rush wildly round, shrieking and remonstrating until they all escape, bolting the doors behind them. PHILIPPA meanwhile runs up the Hall, climbs into the KING'S bed and hides there. The KING stands alone in the Hall.]

KING. Pursue ! Pursue ! Kill !

What ! Art thou there,

Edward, my sweet son ? I come ! I follow !

[He starts forward, waving his sword.]

Rome and Jerusalem

We'll conquer ere all is done.

[He falls backward and lies motionless on the ground before his chair.]

SCENE IV

The same. The moon shines through the windows of the Hall. The KING lies on the floor as he fell. The main door of the Hall is unbolted without. An old woman in the dress of a servant comes in, carrying a taper. She sees the KING and approaches him.

OLD WOMAN. Mother o' God! So have they left
the King?

And all closed! Maybe this very moment
His poor soul beats like a fly on the window!

*[She puts down the taper, opens some casements,
then returns to the KING.]*

At least they might ha' straightened a's limbs
for un.

*[Kneels down and begins arranging his robes
and limbs.]*

So!

Life's a queer story! Who would think us two
Had a light folly o' love once? A King
And a serving wench! I'd a' most forgotten it
Till I see thee here lie dead like other folk.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

But now because I once ha' kissed thee's eyes
I'll close 'em for ee kindly.

Ah! Ah!

He yet lives! The King! His eyes are alive,
They stare, they roll upon me! Mercy, Mary!

*[The old woman flies from the Hall, leaving
her taper still burning and the door open.
Shortly afterwards ALICE PERRERS comes in
wrapped in a cloak and followed by BENET
THE LEACH.]*

ALICE. See here! It is thy doing, thou must mend it.

*[BENET looks at the KING and shrugs his
shoulders.]*

Somewhat thou must and shalt do. Where's
thy lancet.

BENET. Nothing now would avail.

ALICE. His eyes move, he lives yet,
Monster, thou hast poisoned him!
Give him the antidote, or die horribly!

BENET. I warned you, Alice, the drug was dangerous,
But you urged me—

ALICE. Peace!

BENET. Do not be afraid.
The King will not utter before he dies,
Which will be soon.

Now has the hour sounded

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

For thee and me, the hour of terror and joy.
Fly quickly, before your implacable foes
Have their fingers at your throat !

ALICE. Away, fool !

Hence, if thou wilt not succour the King.

BENET. I cannot.

Fear nothing—

ALICE. I do not fear. Go ! Get thee gone !

BENET. Do you not love me, Alice ?

ALICE. I love thee ?

Delay another instant and I'll hound thee
To death. Easily, for a little money,
Can I do it, thou notorious poisoner,
Wizard !

BENET. Are those the lips that learned me
love ?

ALICE. Fool ! Art thou in love with the gallows !
Hence, madman !

BENET. Christ ! Can it be ?

You ? You, Alice ?

ALICE. I bid thee go or die.

[BENET *rushes from the Hall.* ALICE PERRERS
kneels down by the KING and feels him.

ALICE. Already cold. It is a fearful thing
A corpse should have live eyes and stare so.
Sire,

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Close them and ask the good saints to have
mercy.

Angels and Patriarchs, pray for his soul !

[She crosses herself and mutters invocations.

Were not your tongue muted, would you not
bid me

Take your fair chaplet ? They'll not bury you
in it,

'Tis too good for a grave.

*[She draws a bag from under cloak, takes off
the KING'S golden chaplet and slips it into
her bag.*

Your rings also ;

Your table-emerald and the fine turquoise.

Pest ! How the knotted knuckles hold them !

*[Taking off the KING'S rings and putting them
in her bag.*

Sire,

I know you would rather Alice had your jewels
Than my Lord of Gaunt's mistress.

'Twas ill done

To keep those last glorious pearls of the
Queen

Back from your lady. Since I had the others

Why might I not have those ? 'Twould surely
irk you

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Even in the tomb, if the proud Princess of Wales
Preened her white neck in them. Shall I not

have

Those great fair pearls? God's blood! I will
have them!

The key of your treasure—somewhere you
carry it—

Come, let us see.

*[Searches the KING and pulls out a dagger with
a key attached to it.]*

So! Attached to your dagger.

*[She moves the taper to the upper end of the
Hall, unlocks a coffer standing by the KING'S
bed, examines the contents and crams them
into her bag.]*

Jewels and gold too! The sly old man!

I never thought you had hoarded so great
riches.

*[She returns to the KING and makes as though
to replace the dagger.]*

Here is your dagger.

*[She pauses, takes it half from the sheath and
admires it.]*

Yet it is a toy

Delicately wrought, would grace a young man
well.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

[*PHILIPPA slips out of the KING's bed and comes running down the Hall.*]

PHILIPPA. Help! help! O succour! She will kill the King.

ALICE. Ah! Mother of God! Who is that? Who? Stop that insensate noise!

Seest not the King is dead? Hush, screaming fool!

Dost thou not know me? I am the Lady Windsor.

How cam'st thou here?

PHILIPPA. I was frightened, I climbed up in the King's bed,

And suddenly fell asleep. Then I waked up— I saw you— O, you wicked woman! I saw you

Robbing the King's coffer.

ALICE. [*Seizing PHILIPPA*] I'll strangle thee.

PHILIPPA. Help, Peter! O, she is wicked!

ALICE. Little cat! Art thou so strong?

PHILIPPA. Peter! O husband! Help!

ALICE. He cares nothing for thee, he loves me only.

Thou Peter's wife? Never! Take that—that—

[*She strikes PHILIPPA, first with the hilt, then with the blade of the dagger.* PHILIPPA

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

falls to the ground. ALICE stands as though petrified.

ALICE. What have I done? Jesu! What shall I do?

The poisonous, creeping cat to spy on me!

And now I have killed her. Silly, silly fool!

[Turning to the KING.

You? Curse you! Why do your eyes follow me?

You saw me kill the child, did you? No matter—

You'll never speak word more.

I must hide her

Before the blood spreads. Where? Where?

[She looks wildly round, then carries PHILIPPA to the KING'S bed and covers her with the bed-clothes. Taking up her bag she hurries to the door of the Hall, but just as she gains the door it is opened by PETER.

PETER. Your litter is at the postern.

Merciful Mother!

The King! Left on the ground! Help me to lift him.

ALICE. *[Holding PETER back.]* He is dead, it is all nothing to him, but I

Am in instant danger, I must not remain.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

My enemies will be hot-foot after me,
Hungering for my blood, yelling to drag my
body

Through the sewers of their city.

[*Clinging to PETER*] Peter, take me !

Carry me away before I am Bedlam mad.

PETER. Lady, I beseech you, do not fear anything.
You shall away. The horses of your litter
Are fleetier than March winds, I'll see you hence
Immediately.

ALICE. Not without thee, boy,
I will not budge without. Never, I know,
Would'st thou follow after me. I will not go
Without thee, Peter.

PETER. Lady, I plight my troth
I will follow you—but how can I leave
The King here ?

ALICE. Why not ? The King is dead :
Done with and dead as any cofined corpse
That has lain rotting a century.

Sweet lover,
Thou shalt come with me, shalt !

PETER. But, sweet lady,
If he be dead, Philippa lives, my wife,
Though God knows where she is fled—

ALICE. Philippa !

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Torment me not with Philippa. She is nothing,
A dog was as dear to her as thou. But I
Am a Woman, one that loves and loves and loves
thee.

Waste no more thought on Philippa.

Beside,

I know she's gone, she fled some while ago
And in good company—

PETER. Without me?—

Why did she go?

ALICE. Jesu! How can I tell?

She was afeared of the King's frenzy. Everyone
Has fled one way or another. I say, I saw
Philippa in my Lady Dacre's litter.

PETER. Strange to go thus—no word to me—

ALICE. Oh! strange!

Everything's strange to-night, horrible and
strange.

—Would it be strange, Peter,

If thou sawest me lie there with a knife in my
heart?

Strange if the dead King bellowed out suddenly,
“Vengeance! Vengeance! Vengeance!” on
thee and me?

Take no heed of my words. My mind wanders
With fear and apprehension. Comfort me!

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

PETER. In truth, lady, you are trembling like a leaf.
Do you suspect? Alice, can it be possible
The King was murdered?

ALICE. No. Do not approach him,
He died of the Plague. Hence! Why do we
hesitate?

We shall be secure, abundantly protected,
If we can win my manor.

[PETER makes a gesture of refusal.

How? Thou wilt not?
Dost thou abandon me? Dishonourable,
Unthankful, cowardly, as the rest are!

PETER. No!

No, Alice, I am true!

ALICE. Honey-sweet lad!

Does not Alice know all thy desires,
Thy chosen delights? They are prepared for
thee,

Lutes out of Italy, all kinds of music,
Delicious cates and wines of the east, and hawks
And proud, smooth-pacing palfreys—and Love,
dearest,

O thou shalt learn a thousand ways of Love
Yet undiscovered! I will teach thee— Dawn!

[Daylight is stealing into the Hall and footsteps
are heard crossing the Courtyard.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Dawn ! And the night seemed hardly begun.
Listen, listen ! I hear the feet of Vengeance !
Come away !

[*She tries to drag PETER out of the Hall. PETER resists, and advances towards the spot where PHILIPPA fell.*

PETER. [*Pointing to the floor*] Go you, lady. Here is blood,

And again blood. What does it mean ? Who's wounded ?

ALICE. Some one the King thrust at in his frenzy.
It is nothing, nothing. Come !

PETER. [*Going towards the bed*] There by the bed !
[*ALICE gets in front of him, stretching out her arm.*

PETER. God's wounds ! There's blood on your sleeve.

ALICE. 'Tis nothing. Come !

O come away, Peter ! Help me, St Thomas !

PETER. [*Putting her aside*] Did you not hear moaning ? There's some one hurt.

I saw the bedclothes move.

[*A low moaning voice from the bed*] Peter !

PETER. I am coming.

ALICE. [*Wringing her hands and muttering to herself*]

To our Lady of Walsingham a gold candlestick !

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

The pearls, kind St Edward, the Queen's pearls !

PETER. [*Having pulled the coverlid off the bed*]

Philippa ! Blessed Virgin ! She is killed. —

ALICE. O dreadful day ! Dear Saints have mercy
upon her !

She is dead. Alas, poor child. In his high
frenzy

The King unwitting slew her.

PHILIPPA. Save me, Peter !

PETER. Poor Philippa ! My little one ! Lie still,
Poor child. I'll fetch thee a surgeon instantly.

PHILIPPA. No—do not leave me. I am afraid of her,
Of her there, with her dagger—she hurt me.

PETER. That is the Lady Windsor.

PHILIPPA. She did it.

ALICE. What does Philippa say ? That *I* wounded
her ?

I struck her ? Nay, she is not in her senses.

She raves, poor child, knows not a word she
says.

The King gave her a thrust—a deadly wound.

Leave her alone to die in peace.

PHILIPPA. Not die !

O do not let me die ! Carry me away.

Don't let her kill me, Peter. Succour me,

Let me not die.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

PETER. [*Lifting PHILIPPA*] I'll take thee to old Nurse.

Canst lay thine arms about my neck, sweetheart ?

We'll call a leech. Thou shalt not die, pretty one.

[*He goes down the hall carrying PHILIPPA.*

ALICE PERRERS *catches him by the sleeve.*

ALICE. And I? What of me? Must I be left alone ?

What shall I do? Ah, God!

PETER. To your litter! Go!

You have liverymen, stout fellows, to defend you.

Go hence, lady.

ALICE. Dear, I will wait for thee.

PETER. Do not. I am not coming. I stay here.

ALICE. Thou abandonest me? Ah, no, no, no!

PETER. Let go, lady. The child's in danger of death.

ALICE. And so am I. But O, thou lovest me

No more! Look not upon me with those eyes
That seem brimful of hate! Thou couldst
not hate me,

Not me, thy love, Peter, thy poor Alice?

A wretch who sinned solely for love of thee,

For love of thee, thou cruel, cruel heart.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Here I lie down to die.

PETER. Delay no longer.

Escape. Farewell.

[He leaves the hall, carrying PHILIPPA.]

ALICE. Peter! Peter! One word!

Ah, wretched woman! Forsaken utterly!

Not one true heart, not one—save thine, old
King.

Thou truly didst love me. Alas, Edward!

Would that thou couldst be whole of this
sickness,

Then wouldst thou punish our enemies. Out
on traitors!

Vengeance on all traitors!

[Steps are heard in the Courtyard. She listens, snatches up her bag and hurries from the Hall. Slow heavy feet are heard on the steps without. Then two Peasants, their tools on their backs, look in at the open door.]

FIRST PEASANT. Do say as King be dead.

SECOND PEASANT. Doors be all open.

Strange happenings.

FIRST PEASANT. Ay. Mighty strange.

SECOND PEASANT. Be no man here. Us med go in.

FIRST PEASANT. *[Holding him back]* Noa!

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Happen they'll say us killed the King.

[SIMON THE SOLDIER *comes up quickly.*

SIMON. Be the Lady Windsor here? She bad me
find her

A team from the King's stable. Devil a horse
Is left there, saving a few spavined brutes.

FIRST PEASANT. Ay, they be gone. Thee knows how,
Mester?

SIMON. As I hear, the King's merry courtiers
Laid hands on all o' the old man's goods and
chattels

A certain lady had left 'em, and so to horse.

FIRST PEASANT. They say so.

SECOND PEASANT. Dare us go in? All's empty.

SIMON. Dare! What's to fear, looking on a dead
man?

[SIMON *and the two Peasants enter the Hall.*

Lying low i' the rushes! Poor old King!

FIRST PEASANT. Why should a not? A lies as well
as we do,

And us be living. It does my heart good
To see un lie so.

SECOND PEASANT. Nay! Yet oftentimes
When I lout to a lord, I'd liever say to un,
"Us be both sons of Adam, thou proud
piece

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

Wert born as weak a worm, and when thou'rt
dead

There's no man's nose will tell the difference
Betwix thy flesh and mine. Put that in thy
poke

And suck it."

SIMON. We be all sons of Adam,
So I am sorry for him. A good fighter
In his young days, when my father fought under
him.

Ah, my good Sire! Ye had better ha' died
yonder,

Where ye ha' sent many a brave fellow
To fatten French earth, better ha' made
A good end earlier than so outlive
Honour, renown, and loving-kindness.

Poor,

Poor old man! Christ's mother keep your
soul!

I must be gone. Here comes one who will know
How to handle this matter.

[SIMON hurries away.]

FIRST PEASANT. [To SECOND] We'd best be gone;
They'd say else us killed the King.

[The First Peasant shuffles off and the Second
Peasant follows him a few yards, then turns to

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

await FATHER WALTER, *who enters the Hall.*

FATHER WALTER *goes up to the KING.*

SECOND PEASANT. I counsel ye
Not to bide here, Father. Archbishop's men
Be after ye.

FATHER WALTER. Thanks, friend. Help me to carry
The King's body and lay it on his bed.

[They lift the KING and carry him to the bed.]

SECOND PEASANT. The Saints pity us! Did see un
roll a's eyes?

I be afeared—I'll not bide by un,
Not I!

[He leaves the Hall precipitately.]

FATHER WALTER. O Crucified! Great is thy Mercy!

[FATHER WALTER leans over the KING a few moments, then takes out his crucifix and stands at the foot of the bed, saying prayers for the dying in a low, half-audible voice.]

FATHER WALTER. Parce ei Domine! Ab ira tua libera.

Ab omne malo libera, a potestate diaboli, libera.

Per crucem et passionem tuam, libera.

Miserere Jesu!

Peccatores te rogamus, audi nos ut ei parcas.

Miserere Domine!

Proficiscere, anima Christiana de hoc mundo.

THE DEATH OF EDWARD III

[A long ray of sunlight strikes across the Hall.

FATHER WALTER, *still muttering prayers, leans over the KING'S body, closes the eyes and lays his crucifix on the breast. Then he departs, leaving the door open. A morning breeze blows through the Hall, the banners on the walls wave gently, and there is a faint clang of shields and other arms hanging there. Presently the MINSTREL appears in the doorway, groping his way.*

MINSTREL. Is this the Courtyard? Is there none will guide me?

Ho, friends! Do ye all sleep?

Perchance if I should sing somewhat they'd waken.

Sings:

And the trumpets of England
Were heard by land and sea,
Since Arthur reigned was never a King
Of such renown as he,
Edward, Edward,
The flower of Chivalrie.



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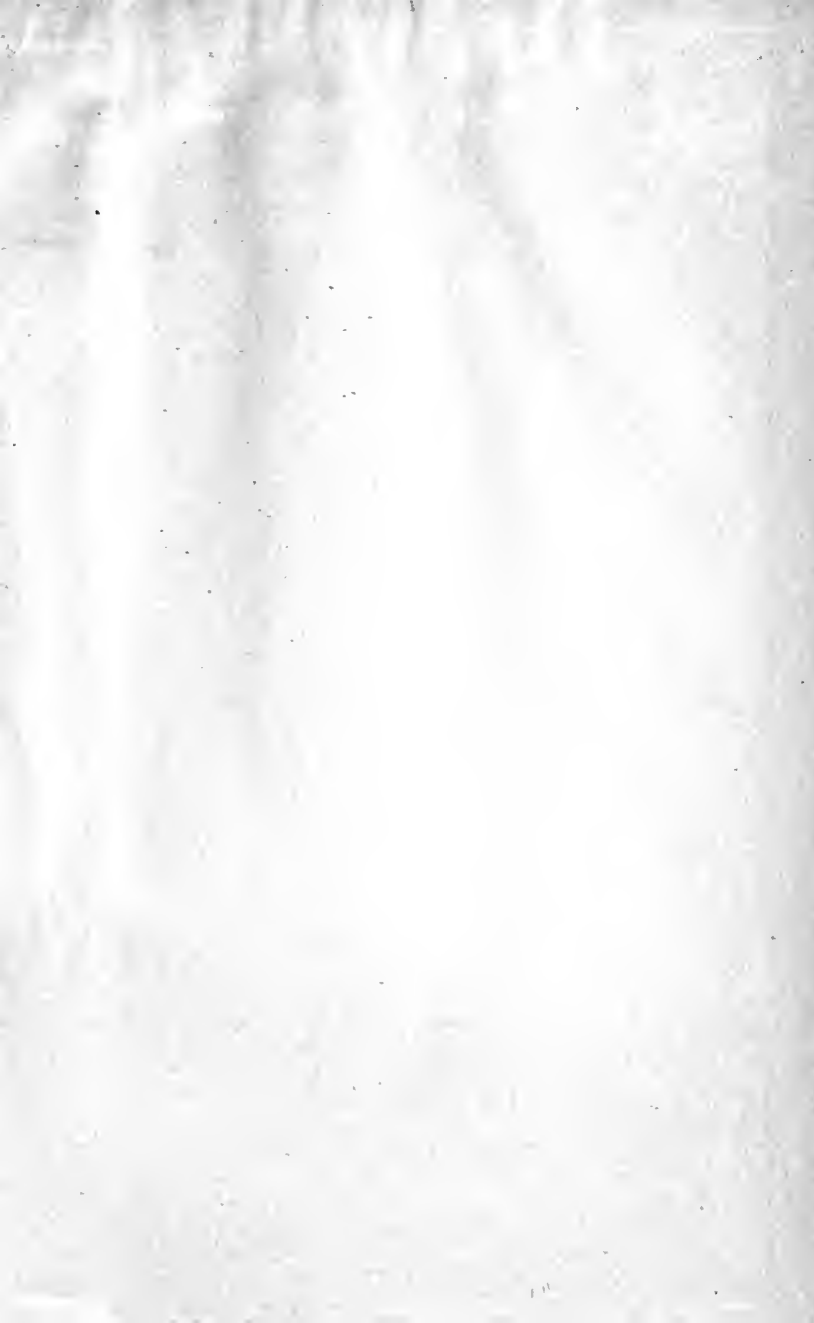
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