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TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

FROM THE GERMAN OF

RICHARD WAGNER

IN THE MIXED ALLITERATIVE AND RHYMING METRES
OF THE ORIGINAL BY

ALFRED FORMAN

TRANSLATOR OF DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN

*With facsimile of an inscription by the
Author to the Translator*

LONDON

DAVID NUTT, 270 STRAND

1897

THE WORLD'S FAREWELL TO
RICHARD WAGNER.

FEBRUARY 13TH, 1883.

FAREWELL, Great Spirit! Thou by whom alone,
Of all the Wonder-doers sent to be
My signs and sureties Time-ward, unto me
My inmost self has ceased to be unknown!
Others have been as glasses where was shown
The fashion of my face, or where to scan
The secrets of my utmost offspring—Man—
And learn to what his worth or shame had grown;
The worship of their names has filled the sky,
Their thunder has been heard, their lightning seen,
Yet after-suns have rolled themselves on high
And still have found me with unaltered mien;
Thou only so hast dealt with me that I
Can be no more as if thou hadst not been.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

The version here presented (a reprint of the privately circulated edition) is not intended to be taken in strict and continuous company with the music, and I have not considered it necessary to print the numerous alternative readings which would be requisite for such a purpose.

The reader is requested to make the following corrections:—
Page 12. After “What makes thee deem so madly” insert a

comma.

„ 13. For “Were he thou hast chosen” read “Were the one
by thee chosen”

„ 19. For “answer to my behest” read “in answer to my
behest.”

„ 20. After “ere as friend thy foe can own thee” insert full
stop.

„ 25. Line 10 from bottom, for “aud” read “and”

„ 34. For “fairest fiercest,” read “fairest, fiercest,”

„ 40. For “foresaken” read “forsaken”

„ 50. After “against both lords and land” insert a comma.

„ 71. In fourth stage-direction, after “The Herdsman”
insert a comma.

„ 72. After “through the gate no passage is gained” insert
a note of exclamation.

PERSONS.

TRISTAN.

KING MARKE.

ISOLDE.

KURWENAL.

MELOT.

BRANGÆNE.

A HERDSMAN.

A STEERSMAN.

SAILORS, KNIGHTS AND SQUIRES.

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE.

FIRST ACT.

(A tent-like room, on the fore-deck of a ship, richly hung with tapestry, at first quite closed in at the back; at one side a narrow stair-way leads down into the hold.)

(ISOLDE on a couch, with her face buried in the cushions. BRANGÆNE, holding back a fall of the tapestry, looks over the ship's side.)

A YOUNG SAILOR'S VOICE

(above, as if from the mast).

West-ward
sweeps my sight ;
east-ward
slides the ship.
The wind is wild
on homeward way ;
my Irish child,
where dost thou stay ?

Is it the sighs thou spendest,
that so to my sail thou sendest ?—
Wind, be woeful and wild !
Wild and woeful, my child !
Irish maid,
thou matchless, wildering maid !

ISOLDE

(starting up).

Who thus can have mocked me ?—

(She looks wildly about.)

Brangæne, thou ?—
Say, where are we ?

BRANGÆNE

(at the opening).

Lines of blue
are rising aloft in the west ;
fast and safely
sails the ship ;

Tristan and Isolde.

the billowless sea ere sunset
will bring us lightly to land.

ISOLDE.

To land? What land?

BRANGÆNE.

Cornwall's grassy strand.

ISOLDE.

Not to-night ;
nor ever after !

BRANGÆNE

(lets the curtain fall and runs in trepidation to ISOLDE).

What mean'st thou? Mistress! Ha!

ISOLDE

(wildly to herself).

O bastardly breed
to the blood of its fathers!
To whom, O mother,
mad'st thou away
thy might o'er the winds and the waters?
Unmeet and tame
the magic has turned,
that of nought but healing can tell!
Once more let me bring
its unwavering might
aloft from my bosom
where buried it lies!
Hark to my will,
you winds of the welkin!
With blaze and rush
of battle arise!
To wildering height
upharrow the water!
Drive from its dreams
this slumbering sea!
Rouse from the bottom
its billowing wrath;
bid it behold
the booty I bring it;
this heedless, unshuddering ship

let it hurl asunder and hide !
And of all that with breath
and being is on it,
I make to you breezes a meed !

BRANGÆNE

(in the greatest terror, pressing about ISOLDE).

Woe ! Ah, woe !
Alas ! Alas !
The sorrow that I foresaw !—
Isolde ! Mistress !
Sweetest life !
What hast thou hid so long ?
With tearless face
thou from father and mother wast taken ;
hardly a look
was left for thy home behind ;
to thy folk was wafted
no farewell word ;
on board we brought thee
dazed and blind ;
sleep and food
thou hast since forsworn ;
fierce hast been,
or fixed and breathless.
So to see thee
must I suffer—
stand before thee strange—
be found thy maid no more ?
From me O keep not
what it means !
Isolde ! Mistress !
Unseal thy mind ;
give me to know it !
Ungrudgingly show it !
Of solace, for what befell thee,
the right have I lost to tell thee ?

ISOLDE.

Air ! Air !
I am weak at heart !
Open ! Open it wide !

(BRANGÆNE hastily draws the curtains apart in the middle.)

Tristan and Isolde.

(A view is opened right along the ship to the stern, and thence overboard on to the sea, as far as the horizon. In the middle, round the main-mast, are groups of sailors, busied with ropes; beyond them, at the stern, are collected Knights and Squires; a little apart from them stands TRISTAN with folded arms, thoughtfully looking out to sea; KURWENAL lies carelessly at his feet. From above on the mast is heard again the song of the Young Sailor.)

ISOLDE

(whose look has swiftly lighted on TRISTAN, from whom it remains unmoved, gloomily to herself).

Led to choose him,—
left to lose him,—
whole and kingly,
bold and coward—;
death-behighten head!
Death-behighten heart!

(To BRANGÆNE, with a forced laugh.)

He makes a heedful henchman!

BRANGÆNE

(following her look).

Who, mistress?

ISOLDE.

He, the hero,
who keeps his manful
face from mine,
who shoots his glance
aside in shame:—
what looks he to thee like?

BRANGÆNE.

Canst thou of Tristan
in such wise talk,
the wonder past all others,
the man who spreads his name,
the hero beyond brothers,
the hold and haunt of fame?

ISOLDE

(mockingly).

Who bends his forehead faster
than blows he has to dread,

since here he has got for his master
a bride as good as dead !—
Should dark my saying
seem of drift,
seek from the matchless
man himself
if me he dares to meet ?
Of worship, heed,
and seemly wont
his rightful queen
he keeps bereft,
lest her look alone should strike him—
the leader with none like him !
O he well
can answer why !—
To his greatness go,
a message give him from me ;
on my will to wait
let him briskly follow thee back.

BRANGÆNE.

To seek thee here
shall I beseech him ?

ISOLDE.

Isolde bids,
as bound to hear her,
him her vassal
fitly fear her.

(At a sign of command from ISOLDE, BRANGÆNE leaves her and walks along the deck, past the sailors at their work, to the stern. ISOLDE, following her with fixed look, retires backwards to the couch again, where she remains during what follows with her eyes steadily directed towards the helm.)

KURWENAL

(who sees BRANGÆNE coming, without raising himself, pulls TRISTAN by the skirt).

Have heed, Tristan !
Hither sends Isolde.

TRISTAN

(starting).

How so !—Isolde ?—

(He quickly recovers himself as BRANGÆNE reaches him and bends before him.)

To me, my mistress?—
In words she will not
need to waste,
of what to mind me
comes her trusted maid ?

BRANGÆNE.

That hence to greet her
Sir Tristan go,
my queen and mistress
craves by me.

TRISTAN.

Irks her the seafare's length,
it soon will end ;
ere yet the sun is low
lie we at land :
the bidding, from her that thou bringest,
fitly be fulfilled !

BRANGÆNE.

Her side then let
Sir Tristan seek ;
such was her whole behest.

TRISTAN.

Where Cornwall's grassy borders
yet deep in blue are buried,
waits to claim her
Mark' my king ;
to set her safe before him,
my queen I soon shall come for ;
from Tristan none
shall take the task.

BRANGÆNE.

To me, Sir Tristan,
turn thy mind ;
I said before
that Frau Isold'
thy service craves, where yonder
she waits to see thee come.

TRISTAN.

No matter where
on earth we meet,
my heed is first for her,
the flow'r of woman's worth.
Rest I not near
the rudder now,
how lead I meetly the keel
to Mark' of Cornwall's land ?

BRANGÆNE.

What makes Sir Tristan
mock my task ?
Fail I so much
to yield her mind,
mark what herself she said !
Such was the message sent thee :—
Isolde bids,
as bound to hear her,
him her vassal
fitly fear her.

KURWENAL

(leaping up).

May I be left to answer ?

TRISTAN.

What from thy lips were the word ?

KURWENAL.

This let her say
to Frau Isold'.—
Who Cornwall's queen
and England's heir
of Ireland's daughter makes,
no might on him
can have the maid
he brings his uncle home.
A lord of earth
he is by birth !
My mind were so unfolded,
if a thousand Isoldes scolded.

(TRISTAN tries by gestures to silence him, and BRANGÆNE turns angrily to go. As she slowly retires KURWENAL sings after her with all his might.)

Tristan and Isolde.

“ Sir Morold went
 on board, that we
 to tithe-feast might be bidden ;
 an island swims
 the barren sea
 and holds his body hidden ;
 but safe at home
 his head is laid,
 as tithe by England
 truly paid.
 Tristan our hero hail,
 when tithe is found to fail ! ”

(Rebuked by TRISTAN, KURWENAL has gone below into the forehold. BRANGÆNE returns in confusion to ISOLDE and closes the curtains behind her, while the whole crew repeats from without the end of KURWENAL'S song.)

(ISOLDE rises with gestures of rage and despair.)

BRANGÆNE

(throwing herself at her feet).

Shame and sorrow,
 such to suffer !

ISOLDE

(on the brink of a terrible outburst, quickly collecting herself).

The news from Tristan !
 With truth see that thou tell it.

BRANGÆNE.

O, seek it not !

ISOLDE.

Forth speak without fear.

BRANGÆNE.

In courtly words
 aloof he kept.

ISOLDE.

But when he well had listened ? . . .

BRANGÆNE.

When plain I hither
 bade him haste,

his answer was ;
where'er he be,
his heed is first for her,
the flower of woman's worth ;
rests he not near
the rudder now,
how leads he meetly the keel
to Mark' of Cornwall's land ?

ISOLDE

(with bitter intensity).

“ How leads he meetly the keel
to Mark' of Cornwall's land ” . . .
to count him out his cargo
of tithe from Ireland's King !

BRANGÆNE.

At sound of what I told him
thy tongue itself had said,
his henchman-comrade Kurwenal . . .

ISOLDE.

No word of all he sent me,
but what I heard it well !
My wrong thou here hast witnessed,
now hearken whence it arose,—
In songs as loud
and suchlike laughter
with ease my lips might answer . . .
about a lost
and lonely boat,
on Ireland's coast that lit ;
a man inside it,
sick and maimed,
at door of death was seen.
Isolde's leech-craft
soon he learned ;
with balm-salves
and with balsam-sap
the hurt that so hard beset him
her hand was swift to soothe.
Though “ Tantris ”
was the name in whose craft he had caught
her,

Tristan and Isolde.

yet to "Tristan"
 to turn it, it soon was taught her,
 when nigh to his sword once seated,
 on a notch in it lo she lighted
 and found it fit
 a shard she brought it,
 which Morold's head,
 the day she thought it
 a scorn that scarred her land,
 had left in her heedful hand.—
 My deepest soul
 its groan upsent ;
 with the sheathless sword
 I tow'rds him went,
 with him for his over-mettle
 in Morold's death, to settle.
 From where he rested
 rose his look,—
 not on the sword,
 not on my hand,
 but fixed on my face he held it.
 With his wretched hap
 my heart was wrung ;
 the sword . . . I downward sank it ;
 from the wound, that so fretted and wore him,
 I healed him . . . and stood before him . . .
 and freed him without guerdon, . . .
 of his look to lose the burden.

BRANGÆNE.

O wonder ! Where had I my wits ?
 The guest I helped
 to guard and heal . . . ?

ISOLDE.

His praise but now thou heardest :
 "Tristan our hero hail !"—
 He was it we saw so pale !—
 A thousand oaths he swore me
 of faith and thankful service.
 Now hark how a hero's
 oaths are held ! . . .
 Who as Tantris,
 unseen had homeward slunken,

as Tristan,
boldly floats him back
a flaunting ship
of lordly shape ;
Ireland's heiress
he comes to ask
as bride for Mark' his kinsman,
for Cornwall's listless King.
Ere Morold's death
what man would have dared
a scorn of such depth to do us ?
For tithe-plaint Cornwall
at Ireland's crown
with open face to aim !—
Ah shame ! Unwittingly
I it was
who bared myself
to such a blow !
The venging sword
not in vain to have seized,
my fist should have plunged it faster ; . . .
now find I my vassal master.

BRANGÆNE.

When faith and peace and friendship
in sight of all were sworn to,
we deemed it a burdenless day ;
no trace I beheld
of the hurt that it tore in thy heart !

ISOLDE.

O blunted eyes !
O blinded bosoms !—
O daunted soul !
O dastard silence !—
How boldly out
he boasted the whole
of what so well I hid ! . . .
Whose dumbness kept him
safe from death,
whose silence foiled
his searching foes,
the secret of all

Tristan and Isolde.

her wordless aid
 to the light open he laid.
 With heart and look
 uplifted high,
 in my praise aloud
 he prated at lip !
 " Of such a Sweet,
 my kinsman-king,
 how ween you for a wife ?
 The Irish filly
 let me fetch ;
 I've stridden ev'ry
 step before ;
 a nod—I hie
 to her once more ;
 she's yours in little after ;
 the feat is light as laughter !"—
 For curses and hate
 be kept his head !
 Vengeance ! Death !
 Death to us both !

BRANGÈNE

(with impetuous tenderness, throwing her arms round ISOLDE).

Isolde ! Dearest !
 Fairest ! Sweetest !
 Thy fancy how
 with words thou heatest !
 Think not ! Mind not !
 Sit by me !—

(She draws ISOLDE gradually to the couch.)

Whence such a whim ?
 Such empty wildness ?
 What makes thee deem so madly,
 behold and hear so badly ?
 For aught, to what
 Sir Tristan owes thee,
 couldst thou better be beholden
 than a crown so great and golden ?
 King Mark' he serves
 by such a deed,
 and meets thee too
 with truest meed ;

his goodly heirdom
he all foregoes,
a gift at thy feet to make it,
as queen to behold thee take it.

(ISOLDE *turns away* ; BRANGÆNE *continues.*)

And when to his Uncle
it is that he weds thee,
is it meet that the choice be chidden?
In Mark' is thy worth not bidden?
So high of mood,
so mild of heart,
who matches the man
in light and might?
Whom such a hero
so truly serves,
who might not as mate abide him
and sit in his wealth beside him?

ISOLDE

(*with fixed and vacant look.*)

Unbeloved
of the lordly man,
to see him for ever near me . . .
like flame to the soul it would sear me !

BRANGÆNE.

What fills thy fancy?
Unbeloved?—
Where left is the man
who could fail to love thee,
who Isold' could see
and in Isold'
not madden to melt his soul?
Were he thou hast chosen
chill to the heart,
fixed him a spell
of freezing spite,
his unheeding mood
with haste were mended
by help of Frau Minne's might.
(*Mysteriously, going close to ISOLDE.*)

Tristan and Isolde.

Thy mother's arts
 forgettest thou all?
 Could it hap that she,
 so sharp of heed,
 without help in a strangers' land
 would send me beside thee to stand?

ISOLDE

(*gloomily*).

My mother's arts
 I keep in mind;
 of handiwork
 her ways I hail:
 vengeance wreaked upon wrong,
 balm for the heart when bursting!—
 The casket here let me have.

BRANGÆNE.

It holds thy safest help.

(*She fetches a small golden coffer, opens it, and points to its contents.*)

In row so ranged thy mother
 the mighty wonder-waters:
 for bite or wound
 the balsam-wash;
 for baneful draught
 its backward bane;—
 but here the master-
 drink I hold.

ISOLDE.

Forbear, I know it better;
 outside it deep
 a sign I dug;—
 but *this* there is none I shall need!

(*She seizes one of the flasks and shows it to BRANGÆNE.*)

BRANGÆNE

(*recoiling in horror*).

The death-water! No!

THE CREW

(*outside*).

Hi! Ha! Ho! Hi!

Slack the foresheet !
Lighten sail !
Hi ! Ha ! Ho ! Hi !

ISOLDE

(who has risen from the couch and listened with increasing horror to the sailors' cries).

That means we have made good way.
Woe to me ! Near is the land.

(KURWENAL comes boisterously in through the parted curtains.)

KURWENAL.

Up, up ! Make ready !
Look around !
Call the women !
See to your mistress at once !—

(With more moderation.)

To Frau Isolde
let me say
the word Sir Tristan
sent me with :—
from aloft the flag its flutter
of laughter flings to the land ;
in Cornwall's kingly dwelling
news of her nearness dawns ;
and Frau Isold'
he soon must fetch,
by him from deck to be handed,
that safe she may so be landed.

ISOLDE

(recovering from the tremor that had seized her at the beginning of the message, with calmness and dignity).

Sir Tristan greatly
from me greet,
and make him back my message :—
'tis not for him to shield me
till up to King Mark' he yield me,
ere first, by ways
of followed wont,
from me forgiveness
he has gained
for unoutblotted blame,—
which let him come to claim.

(KURWENAL *makes a gesture of defiance.* ISOLDE *continues more commandingly.*)

My message weigh
and bear it well !—
By him 'tis not meet I be handed,
that safe I may so be landed ;
it is not for him to shield me
till up to King Mark' he yield me ;
ere first, by ways
that wont has fixed,
my grace and pardon
he has got
for still-abiding blame,
which here await his claim.

KURWENAL.

Doubt me not,
he all shall know ;
from him back you will hear !
(*He hastily retires.*)

ISOLDE

(*goes swiftly to BRANGÆNE and passionately embraces her.*)

Farewell, Brangæne !
Farewell to the world !
Farewell to both father and mother !

BRANGÆNE.

What thought befalls thee ?
Think'st thou to flee ?
Thy feet to what goal shall I follow ?

ISOLDE

(*quickly recovering herself.*)

My mind thou hast heard ;
I move not hence,
for Tristan here I will tarry.—
Unguileful heed
give my behest ;
the cup of peace
and pardon fill ;—
thou know'st the flask it will need.

BRANGÆNE.

The drink is which?

ISOLDE

(takes a flask out of the coffer).

What means thy doubt?—

In the golden goblet

let it go ;

the whole will brim it home.

BRANGÆNE

(taking the flask with horror).

What are thy words !

ISOLDE.

Fails me thy faith ?

BRANGÆNE.

The drink—for whom ?

ISOLDE.

Him who was false.

BRANGÆNE.

Tristan ?

ISOLDE.

From me let him take it !

BRANGÆNE

(throwing herself at ISOLDE's feet).

Have mercy ! Speak not so madly !

ISOLDE

(impetuously).

Have mercy thyself,

unfaithful maid !

My mother's arts

forget'st thou all ?

Could it hap that she,

so sharp of heed,

without help in a strangers' land

would send me beside thee to stand ?

For bite or wound

she gave me balsam ;

Tristan and Isolde.

for baneful draught
 its backward bane ;
 for utmost ill,
 for worst of all—
 death-water was her gift.
 Now Death her praise uplift !

BRANGÆNE

(scarcely able to control herself).

O utmost ill !

ISOLDE.

Thy heed shall I have ?

BRANGÆNE.

O worst of all !

ISOLDE.

Wilt thou be true ?

BRANGÆNE.

The drink !

KURWENAL

(drawing back the curtains, from without).

Sir Tristan.

(BRANGÆNE, in terror and confusion, rises from ISOLDE'S feet.)

ISOLDE

(trying with great effort to calm herself).

Sir Tristan say I will see.

(KURWENAL goes back again. BRANGÆNE, almost beside herself, withdraws towards the background. ISOLDE, gathering her whole soul for the crisis, walks with slow steps imposingly to the couch, and, supporting herself at its head, turns her look towards the entrance.)

(TRISTAN comes in and remains standing respectfully at the entrance. ISOLDE, terribly moved, gazes fixedly at him. Long silence.)

TRISTAN.

I wait, mistress,
 to know your will.

ISOLDE.

Not of my will
hast thou the knowledge,
when nought, forsooth,
but fear to serve it,
kept thee out of my sight?

TRISTAN.

The homage I owe you
held me away.

ISOLDE.

Of homage looks
but little thy heed,
when open scorn
is all I hear
answer to my behest.

TRISTAN.

Behest already
held me in rein.

ISOLDE.

The thanks then are light
I owe thy lord,
if service to him
lets thee behave
uncomelily here to his queen!

TRISTAN.

Wont forbids,
where I was born,
on bride-way home
that the bride-beseecher
close should come to the bride.

ISOLDE.

For fear of what?

TRISTAN.

The wont be witness!

ISOLDE.

Since what is wonted
so mighty thou weenest,

Tristan and Isolde.

by me there may now
 a wont be named :
 that forgiveness he first shall have shown thee,
 ere as friend thy foe can own thee

TRISTAN.

The foe is who ?

ISOLDE.

Ask of thy fear !
 Blood-guilt
 between us abides.

TRISTAN.

We wiped it out.

ISOLDE.

Not thou and I.

TRISTAN.

On open field
 in sight of all
 were peace and pardon sworn to.

ISOLDE.

But not where hidden
 I Tantris held,
 where Tristan in forfeit I had.—
 In lordly state there
 aloft he stood,
 but what he swore
 I swore no whit ;—
 my lips to be silent had learned.
 When in darkened lodging
 low he lay,
 in his sight the sword
 I dumbly swung ;
 tied felt I my tongue,
 held found I my hand ;
 but the oath I had taken
 with hand and with tongue,
 to keep it my soul I plighted.
 Now seek I to show it unslighted.

TRISTAN.

What vowed you, Mistress ?

Tristan and Isolde.

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ISOLDE.

Vengeance for Morold.

TRISTAN.

For him are you vexed?

ISOLDE.

Mean'st thou to mock me?—
Tied to me was he by troth,
the matchless Irish man ;
of his sword I had hallowed the might ;
for me fared he to fight.

On the day he fell
was darkened my fame ;
with blight in my soul
I bitterly swore :—

“ would a man not bring thee to rue it,
that a maid should be ready to do it.”—

When maimed and lone
thou lay'st in my might,
why I list not to slay thee so,
it is light enough now to know ;
thy sickness I tended,
that when it was ended,
to slay thee the man might be free
who should win thee away from me.—

Now be thyself
thy fortune's swayer ;
since he meets in a man not his payer,
who now should be Tristan's slayer?

TRISTAN

(pale and gloomy).

Was Morold so worth thy pain,
here take the sword again,
and wield it strongly and straight,
ere thou weaken beneath its weight.

(He offers her his sword.)

ISOLDE.

I light should look
to hold thy lord,
and how would Mark'
the king be minded,

Tristan and Isolde.

through me were his boldest
 bondman lost ;
 who crown and land for him gained,—
 whose truth was never stained ?
 Deem'st thou such doubtful
 thanks are thy due
 for bringing home
 his Irish bride,
 that me he would blame not
 for blood of him
 who safe sets in his hand
 a pledge that the peace shall stand?—
 Put up thy sword,
 that once I swung
 when wrath the heart
 in my bosom wrung,
 when thy measuring look
 my likeness stole
 home to King Mark'
 to carry it whole ;
 the sword—from my grasp it was driven.
 Now drink, and be forgiven !

(She makes a sign to BRANGÆNE, who shudders, wavers, and scarcely moves from her place. ISOLDE urges her with more commanding gestures. As BRANGÆNE proceeds to get the drink, from without is heard the cry of THE CREW.)

Ho ! hi ! ha ! hi !
 Slack the mainsheet !
 Shorten sail !
 Ho ! hi ! ha ! hi !

TRISTAN

(starting out of gloomy thought).

Where are we ?

ISOLDE.

Off the shore.

Peace shall we drink between us ?
 'Tis time for thee to tell me !

TRISTAN

(gloomily).

The queen herself of silence
 lays on my lips a seal ;

if I fathom what hid she kept,
let me hide what she fathoms not here.

ISOLDE.

Aright thy silence

I see to read.

Spurn'st thou my bidden boon?

(Fresh cries from the crew. At an impatient sign from ISOLDE, BRANGÆNE hands her the filled drinking-cup.)

ISOLDE

(with the cup, approaching TRISTAN who looks fixedly into her face).

Thou hear'st the shout?

It hails the shore;

in little more

stand we—

(With light mockery.)

before King Marke.

With me at thy side

seems it not good

that so should sound thy greeting?

“ My uncle-lord,

look at her here !

A kindlier woman

thou could'st not win,

Her betrothed I once

on a time for her slew,

his head home to her sent :

the wound, with which

his weapon left me hurt,

she salved and sweetly healed ;

my life was hers,

to leave or have ;

she mildly gave

it me again,

and made, with loss

that shamed her land,

the gift of it more great,—

in mind to be thy mate.

That of thanks so warm

for my work she should think,

was due to a sweet

Tristan and Isolde.

forgiveness-drink,
that by her kindness came
to blot out all my blame."

CRY FROM THE CREW

(without).

Cable out !
Anchor down !

TRISTAN

(starting wildly).

To anchor bring !
Let her swing from the bow !
Sails and mast to the breeze !

(He violently seizes the cup from ISOLDE.)

Well know I Ireland's
queen of old,
and well her might
in wonder-works :
her balms once greatly
did me good ;
her goblet here to-day
shall heal me altogether !
And mark the peace-
and-pardon-oath,
that back for it I owe you.—
Tristan's honour—
utmost truth :
Tristan's bale—
unbending scorn.
Heart-betrayal ;
dream-foretold :
unending sorrow's
only salve,
the good forgetful drink,
I drain without a blink !

(He puts the cup to his mouth and drinks.)

ISOLDE.

False once more ?
Mine the half is,

(She snatches the cup from him.)

betrayed, to drink to thee here !

(She drinks and then throws the cup from her. Both are seized with a shudder and, in fiercest emotion though in fixed attitude, look immovably into each other's eyes in whose expression defiance of death soon gives way to fire of love. They tremble and convulsively put their hands to their hearts, then again, press them to their foreheads. Their eyes meet anew, sink in confusion, and once more fasten on each other with looks of increasing passion.)

ISOLDE

(with trembling voice).

Tristan !

TRISTAN

(uncontrollably).

Isolde !

ISOLDE

(sinking on his breast).

Faithlessly fondest !

TRISTAN

(pressing her to him with fire).

Deathlessly dearest !

(They remain in a speechless embrace. From the distance are heard horns and trumpets, and from the deck outside MEN'S CRIES of:)

Hail ! Hail !

Mark' of Cornwall !

Mark' of Cornwall hail !

BRANGÆNE

(who, with her face turned away in terror and confusion, was leaning over the ship's side, now catches sight of them as they stand lost in their embrace, and, wringing her hands in despair, rushes into the foreground).

Sorrow ! Sorrow !

Life-long bale,

abiding dread,

of stingless death instead !

O witless faith,

thy work of fraud

leaps to harrowing light !

(TRISTAN and ISOLDE start asunder.)

Tristan and Isolde.

TRISTAN.

Who said to me aught
of Tristan's honour?

ISOLDE.

Who said to me aught
of Isolde's shame?

TRISTAN.

Lost did I think thee?

ISOLDE.

Thrust was I from thee?

TRISTAN.

Beclouding magic's
merciless craft!

ISOLDE.

Unthinking anger's
empty threat!

TRISTAN.

Isolde!

ISOLDE.

Tristan!

Man of my soul!

TRISTAN.

Woman of mine!

BOTH.

Seas in our hearts
to billows are shaken!
My mind in a tempest
of madness is taken!
Lifts me the surge
of a sense beyond name!
Fills me a goading,
gladdening flame!
My bosom the bliss
can bear not of this!
Isolde! Tristan!
Tristan! Isolde!
Un-Worlded, un-Willed,
I am full with thee filled!

Of nought I know but thee ;
more blest can love not be !

(The curtains are torn wide asunder. The whole ship is filled with knights and seamen making joyful signals towards the shore that is seen close at hand and crowned with a lofty castle on a rock.)

BRANGÆNE

(to the women, who, at a sign from her, come up from below deck).

Quick, the mantle,
the queenly gear !

(Rushing between TRISTAN and ISOLDE.)

Woe to us ! Up !
Hark where we are !

(She throws the mantle round ISOLDE without her being aware that it is done.)

(Horns and trumpets with growing clearness from the land.)

ALL THE MEN.

Hail ! Hail !
Mark' of Cornwall !
Mark' of Cornwall hail !

KURWENAL

(approaching with animation).

Hail Tristan !
Glad is thy hap !
With court and crowd about him,
look where comes
Sir Mark' from land.
No stint of state or pride
will behold at his hands the bride !

TRISTAN

(looking up in confusion).

Who comes ?

KURWENAL.

The King.

TRISTAN.

What King ?

THE MEN.

King Marke !
Hail ! King Marke !

Tristan and Isolde.

TRISTAN.

Marke? What will he?

(He stares, as if stupefied, towards the land.)

ISOLDE

(in perplexity to BRANGÆNE).

Hark! Brangæne!

How they shout!

BRANGÆNE.

Isolde! Mistress!

Let them not see!

ISOLDE.

Where am I? Alive?

Which was the drink?

BRANGÆNE

(in despair).

The love-water! Woe to it!

Woe to myself!

ISOLDE

(stares with terror at TRISTAN).

Tristan!

TRISTAN.

Isolde!

ISOLDE.

Must I live?

(She falls fainting on his breast.)

BRANGÆNE

(to the women).

Look to your mistress!

TRISTAN.

O sweetness bitter-fruited!

O bliss in faith-break rooted!

THE MEN.

Hail, the King!

Cornwall, hail!

(Some of the men have climbed over the ship's side, others have laid out a bridge, and, as the curtain quickly falls, the attitude of all indicates the immediate arrival of those who were expected.)

SECOND ACT.

(A garden with high trees before ISOLDE'S chamber, to which steps at the side lead up. Clear, sweet summer night. A burning torch is set up at the open door.)

(Sounds of hunting. BRANGÆNE, from the steps leading to the chamber, listens to the noise of the hunt as in the distance it grows fainter and fainter. ISOLDE, in fiery agitation, approaches her from the chamber.)

ISOLDE.

Hear'st thou them still?
I long have lost the stir.

BRANGÆNE.

Nay, they are near;
no fainter is yet the noise.

ISOLDE

(listening).

Flustering fear
unfits thy sense;
the sound is but
of whispering boughs,
that bend to the laugh of the breeze.

BRANGÆNE.

Thy wish itself
bewilders thee so
that fancy thou takest for truth;—
the horns I tell thee I hear.

ISOLDE

(again listening).

What horn so soft
were heard of sound?
The stream, with words
of love in its water,
wells so gladly along;
in midst of horns
how might I hear it?
Its laugh in the night
is all that is loud.

Tristan and Isolde.

Who waits for me now
 in noiseless night,
 as if horns of a danger still told,
 far from me him wilt thou hold ?

BRANGÆNE.

For him who waits—
 O heed my warning !—
 the night with spies is awake.—
 Deem'st thou thy blindness
 darkens the world,
 and saves your doings from sight ?
 When here, on board the ship,
 from Tristan's shivering hand
 the bloodless bride
 hardly could hear
 how called her Marke the King,—
 when all for thy step,
 as it staggered, had eyes,—
 when the King with kindness
 mildly was moved
 the toils of the length of sea
 thou hadst suffered aloud to soothe,—
 one watcher there was
 I noted well,
 who for Tristan only was wakeful ;
 with lowering look
 from under his lids
 sought he in Tristan's seeming
 something to suit his own deeming.
 Fixed on you often
 I find his eye ;
 he sets you a hidden snare,
 of him I say beware.

ISOLDE.

Thou meanest Sir Melot.
 But dark is thy mind !
 Is he not Tristan's
 truest friend ?
 From me when my love is sundered,
 his solace is Melot alone.

BRANGÆNE.

What warns me to dread him
thou deemest him dear for.
From Tristan to Marke
his way he takes
with harmful seed to sow.
The folk who to-day
in the council fixed
so hotly this evening's hunt,
at higher game, *(hear the ...)*
than thy guess has hit
aimed for their craft to earn.

ISOLDE.

For sake of his friend
on foot it was set
by Melot in fondest
and faithfullest mood ;
how canst thou upbraid his kindness
He serves me better
than thou thyself ;
he uncloses to him
what from me thou keepst :
O spare me this waiting's woe !
The signal, Brangæne !
The signal O give !
Lower the torch's
torturing light !
To sink on us wholly
make sign to the Night !
Her peace is already
around us spread ;
she swells my heart
with the sweetness I dread.
By the darkness he waits to be led.
Smother thy fire of fear !
Let my beloved be here !

BRANGÆNE.

O touch not the warning torch !
Of danger too rightly it tells !—
O sorrow ! Sorrow !
Woe to me ! Woe !

Tristan and Isolde.

The dread wildering drink !
 O that untruly
 I once should have turned
 to question the will of my queen !
 Had I but blindly bowed,
 thy—deed
 had then been death ;
 now for thy woe,
 for thy withering shame,
 my—work
 am I not bound to blame ?

ISOLDE.

Thy—work ?
 O witless maid !
 Frau Minne knewest thou not ?
 Of her magic saw'st not the sign ?
 The queen with heart
 of matchless height,
 who brings by will
 the worlds to light ;
 life and death
 are left in her sway
 to be woven of sweetness and woe ;
 while to love she lets hatred grow.
 To work of death
 I daringly set my hand,
 Frau Minne balked
 the mischief I blindly had planned ;
 from death in pledge
 she took me to stand,
 filled with the work
 her holy hand ;
 where she will bend it,
 when she will end it,
 how she will speed me,
 whither will lead me,
 her lordship I learned to be needful ;—
 now let her behold me heedful !

BRANGÆNE.

Though may the o'ermastering
 love-water's spite

have set its spell on thy senses,
 fail'st thou to see
 why I warn thee so,
 to-night at least
 O heed a little !
 In sign that the danger stays—
 to-day alone—
 the beacon O leave ablaze !

ISOLDE

(hastening to the torch and seizing it).

Who fans my bosom's
 flame to height,
 who burns my heart
 with boundless might,
 whose laughter drowns
 my soul in light,
 Frau Minne bids
 me make it night,
 that here she high may lighten,
 whom thy fire was set to frighten.—
 Away to watch !
 Be wide of heed !
 The torch—
 though to it my life were bound,—
 let laughter,
 as I slake it, be the sound !

(She has snatched down the torch and extinguishes it upon the ground. BRANGÆNE in consternation turns away to reach the turret by an outside stair, where she slowly disappears.)

(ISOLDE, full of expectation, looks down an alley of trees. She makes a signal. A joyous gesture shows that she has caught sight of her lover as he approaches from the distance. A moment of extreme and impatient suspense. TRISTAN rushes in. With a cry of joy she flies to meet him. Passionate embraces.)

TRISTAN.

Isolde ! Beloved !

ISOLDE.

Tristan ! Beloved !

BOTH.

Mine once more ?

Fast to me folded ?
 So may I seize thee ?
 Dare I to dream it ?
 Wildly watched for !
 Bears thee my breast ?
 Feel I thee fully ?
 See I thyself ?
 These are thine eyes ?
 This is thy mouth ?
 Here is thy hand ?
 Here thy heart ?
 Is it I ? Is it thou ?
 Fill'st thou my arms ?
 Is it no trick ?
 Is it no tale ?
 O'ersways me the sweetness !
 O highest, wholest,
 fairest fiercest,
 brimmingest bliss !
 Priceless ! Peerless !
 Fixed and fearless !
 Blind and breathless !
 Deathless ! Deathless !
 With name to go by
 never gifted !
 Past the search
 of sense uplifted !
 Light beyond
 the reach of leaven !
 Flight from earth
 to farthest heaven !
 Mine, Tristan !
 Mine, Isolde !
 Tristan !
 Isolde !
 Mine and Thine !
 For ever only one,
 till World and Will be done !

ISOLDE

How long so far !
 How far so long !

TRISTAN.

Apart, yet near !
Though near, apart !

ISOLDE.

O lovers' curse,
unkindly farness !
O lagging time's
o'erburdening longness !

TRISTAN.

O farness, nearness,
foes unflinching !
Blessed nearness,
baneful farness !

ISOLDE.

In the dark wast thou,
in the light was I !

TRISTAN.

The light ! The light !
O speak not its name !
How long ere it quenched its flame !
The sun went down,
the Day withdrew ;
but its hate, no less,
it left behind ;
its luring signal
aloft it set,
from the sight of my Love to lock me,
with farness from her to mock me.

ISOLDE.

But thy Love it was
who quenched it at last.
What her maid would do not,
herself she did ;
with Frau Minne for guard and stay,
to its face I defied the Day.

TRISTAN.

The Day ! The Day !
The hateful Day !

Tristan and Isolde.

The foe on whom most
 my curse I lay !
 As thou the torch,
 the Day in its turn
 let me quench for ever, that so
 of Love I may venge the woe !
 Is there named a grief,
 is there known a pain,
 that Day wakes not
 with its dawn again ?
 When even there waits
 the Night at her gates,
 Isolde clings to the Day,
 with sign of it keeps me away.

ISOLDE.

Kept it Isolde
 beside her door,
 in his bosom it was
 that Tristan bore,
 fierce and wakeful,
 once its fire,
 when false to me lo he was found.
 Was it aught but the Day
 that in him lied,
 when the sea he crossed
 to beseech a bride
 for Mark', and in self-same breath
 to devote his Dearest to death ?

TRISTAN.

The Day ! The Day,
 while it round her gleamed
 till like the sun
 to grow she seemed,
 in queenly glory's
 quenchless blaze
 had rapt her from my gaze !
 With what my eyes
 so feasting found,
 my heart was weighted
 to the ground ;
 in the Day's bedazzling shine,
 how could I hold her mine ?

ISOLDE.

Was thine not she
who chose thee hers?
The Day in whom
all falsehood stirs,—
did it teach thee so light to rate
the heart that was thine by fate?

TRISTAN.

What round thee shed
their blinding haze,
the height of rank,
the might of praise,—
in such to seek its gladness,
my heart was seized with madness.

When, with its full
unflinching flame,
on eyes and forehead
downward came
the sun of worldly
worship's day
in darts of blind
and blissful sway,
through eyes and forehead
fell its shine
into my heart's
most sunken shrine.

What there in hallowed night
I harboured out of sight,—
what, e'en to thought unknown,
within my soul had grown,—
a likeness, of which my eyes
but dimly knew the guise,—
now, reached by light of day,
before them gleaming lay.

What seemed so fit
to give to fame
I widely boasted
out by name ;
in ear of all
I told with pride
where kings might meet
a matchless bride.

The grudge the Day
 had 'gainst me raised,
 the greed it pained
 to hear me praised,
 the taint that had begun
 across my fame to run,—
 my scorn I let them see,
 then swift and free,
 ere name and fame forsook me,
 to Ireland I betook me.

ISOLDE.

O empty slave of Day!—
 Beguiled as thyself
 by its lying glare,
 for love how sore
 I had to suffer,
 when thee, whom blind
 the Day had smitten,
 whose mind was with
 its madness bitten,
 for whom my love
 yet burned unbated,
 in deepest heart
 I hotly hated!—
 To stab my inmost breast,
 how sharp the pang that pressed!
 Whom deep I harboured there,
 what sin he seemed to dare,
 when out to Daylight's face,
 from Love's most secret place,
 he came in guise of foe,
 and stood before me so!
 Since like a traitor
 it made thee seem,
 I forth from the Daylight
 now yearned to flee,
 to take thee hence
 to the Night with me,—
 where my soul the falsehood's
 end foresaw,
 where I knew so well
 that its might would sink,—

and quaff to thee love's
ever-binding drink ;
with myself in a single breath
pledge thee to saving Death.

TRISTAN.

When in thy hand
a death so sweet
I saw was held
for me to meet,—
when dawned in my heart
the hallowed thought
of what by thy potion
of peace would be wrought,—
to my bosom in mild
and queenly might
of darkness came the Night ;
so sank my Day from sight.

ISOLDE.

But false was found
the potion's aid,
when back the Night
it forced to fade,
when it drew thee from death away,
and gave thee again to Day !

TRISTAN.

O hail to the potion !
Hail to its spell !
Hail to the wonder
it wrought so well !
Through the door of death
that backward rolled
it let me, no longer
in dream, behold,
but clear to waking sight,
the wonder-realm of Night.
From the likeness I bore
in my bosom's shrine
it drove the Day's
bewildering shine,—
that, night-eyed, now to see
its truth I might be free.

Tristan and Isolde.

ISOLDE.

But the day was swift
 its wrath to sate ;
 thy faults it took
 to counsel straight ;
 what shown thou hadst been
 in glimpse of the Night,
 to the broad-blazed sun
 of kingly might
 by no hand but thine own was yielded,
 and lone was left
 in the barren light
 of pomp to pine unshielded.—
 How bore I the sting ?
 How bear it still ?

TRISTAN.

But hallowed we now
 had become to the Night ;
 the Day, with its hate
 and its hungry spite,
 could keep us perhaps apart,
 but no longer beguile us at heart.
 At its seething show,
 at its loud unrest
 he laughs, whose look
 the Night has blest ;
 its fitful lightning's
 flickering blaze
 our eyes no more
 has might to daze.
 Who, led by love,
 death's Night beholds,
 to whom she fully
 her riddle unfolds,
 the lies of daylight—
 name and fame,
 greatness and goods
 that share its flame,
 he leaves as soon foresaken
 as dust he forth has shaken.
 The fancied faith
 to friend or kin

to fade in his soul
must soon begin,
who into the Night
of love can look,
to whom she opens
her secret book.
'Mid the daylight's blindfold burning
he keeps a single yearning,
the yearning hence
to the heart of Night,
where, never-ending,
only-true,
laughs to him love's delight.

BOTH

(sinking into deeper and deeper embraces upon a bank of flowers).

O hide me, Night
of love, beneath thee ;
make me that I
live unmindful ;
take me wholly
to thy heart,
put me from
the world apart !
The latest light
at length is darkened.
Hopes that held us
while we hearkened—
speechless whispers—
warnings spoken—
at holy twilight's
full foretoken
fade, till sense and thought
and will and world are nought.
Soon as the sun
in our bosom dwindled,
laughing stars
instead were kindled.—
In sweetness of
thy wonder sunken !—
With softness of
thine eyelight drunken !—
Mouth to mouth

and heart to heart !—
 Breaths but one
 where each was part !—
 Mine eyes with blessing
 blinded fail !
 The world with all
 its shows is pale !
 The world that Day
 so lyingly lit,
 the wildering dream
 no meanings fit,
 I—so —
 myself am it,—
 bliss with none above,
 life of wholest love,
 blest, boundless, unblinded,
 sweet and swooning
 wish-no-more-to-wake.

(They sink backwards in a long and silent embrace

BRANGÆNE

(out of sight, from the height of the turret).

Lonely watch
 aloft I lead,
 laughing dreams
 of love you read ;
 give my warning
 wistful heed ;
 harm for such
 as sleep I dread ;
 light the eye
 and lift the head !
 Have heed !
 Have heed !
 Night is now at speed.

ISOLDE *(lightly)*.

Hark, beloved !

TRISTAN *(lightly)*.

Leave me lifeless !

ISOLDE.

Hateful warning !

TRISTAN.

Wherefore waken ?

ISOLDE.

Was the Day
not bound to wake thee ?

TRISTAN.

Back let Day
by death be driven !

ISOLDE.

Day and death
with strokes alike,
can they hope
our love to strike ?

TRISTAN.

The love between us ?
Tristan's love ?
Thine and mine,—
Isolde's love ?

Where dwells the death whose dart
could reach our love at heart ?

Were death before me
firmly set,
with hand uplift
my life to threat,—
that here to Love
I so lightly offer,—

though me he might reach with his blow,
our love he could touch not so.

Died I to-day for it,
that so willing I were to die for,
with me together
would Love be gone ?
My end be Love's,
the Ever-living ?

Yet if death it be thus above,
how then can Tristan
die for his love ?

ISOLDE.

But the love between us,

Tristan and Isolde.

is Tristan *and*
 Isolde not its name?
 This small sweet word—this “and,”
 love’s unfailing
 and flawless band,
 if Tristan died,
 unloosed would it yet abide?

TRISTAN.

What else by his death
 were ended but all
 that forbids him be
 Isolde’s only for ever,
 that our love still threatens to sever?

ISOLDE.

But this little “and,”
 if once it were lost,
 at price of what
 but Isolde’s life alone,
 could be ended Tristan’s own?

TRISTAN.

So should we die
 that ne’er again
 our souls might suffer
 parting’s pain,—
 that unawakened,
 unforbidden,
 for reach of name
 too deeply hidden,
 our beings we might blend
 in love without an end.

ISOLDE.

So should we die,
 that ne’er again—

TRISTAN.

our souls might suffer—

ISOLDE.

parting’s pain,—

TRISTAN.
that unawakened—

ISOLDE.
unforbidden—

TRISTAN.
for reach of name
too deeply hidden—

ISOLDE.
our beings we might blend
in love without an end.

BRANGÈNE.
(as before).
Heed and hark !
Heed and hark !
To daylight wanes the dark.

TRISTAN.
Shall I listen ?

ISOLDE.
Leave me lifeless !

TRISTAN.
Comes the warning ?

ISOLDE.
Wherefore waken ?

TRISTAN.
Was the Day
yet bound to wake me ?

ISOLDE.
Back let Day
by death be driven !

TRISTAN.
With his threat
shall death not fright
the Day for ever
from our sight ?

Tristan and Isolde.

ISOLDE.

Who makes us one,
 his let us be,
 sweet Death's, whom once
 I offered thee !
 Though fast he held
 the door that day
 where rashly we dared to wait,
 by love now led
 we find our way,
 and stand at the lawful gate.

TRISTAN.

That so we might thwart
 the threatening Day ?

ISOLDE.

From its falseness for ever to fly.

TRISTAN.

That its glimmering dawn
 no more we might dread ?

ISOLDE.

Let the Night for us never be done !

BOTH.

O longed-for, ever-
 lasting Night !
 Love's all-healing,
 holy Night !
 Whom once with its laughter
 thy darkness has fed,
 how can he wake thereafter
 to daylight without dread ?
 But dread, with thy sweetness,
 now set us above,
 O bitterly burned-for
 death-by-love !
 O warmly wind us
 at thy heart,
 O hallow now and bind us
 from awakening's woe apart.—
 How to grasp it ?

How unclasp it ?
Bliss like none
that sees the sun
of day and fears
to end in tears !
Driftless yearning
sweetly burning ;—
dreadless longing
mildly thronging ;—
woeless fleeing
out of being ;—
soft unfrighting
deep benighting ;—
safe from smarting,
spared from parting,
left and lone,
inmost-own,
on seas of shoreless streaming
blest unbroken dreaming.

Thou Isolde,
Tristan I,
no more Tristan,
nor Isolde ;
not by naming
barred of meeting,
freshly flaming,
newly greeting,
ceaseless, whole,
and single soul ;
heart to utmost height
burned with love's delight.

(A cry from BRANGÆNE is heard at the same time as the clash of weapons. KURWENAL rushes in with drawn sword.)

KURWENAL.

Treachery, Tristan !

(He is immediately and impetuously followed by MARKE, MELOT, and many of the court-people, who pause at the side, opposite the lovers, and with varied gestures fix their eyes upon them. BRANGÆNE at the same time comes down from the turret and rushes to ISOLDE, who, seized with involuntary shame, leans with averted face upon the bank. TRISTAN, with equally involuntary movement,

with one arm stretches his mantle broadly out so that it covers ISOLDE from the looks of the comers. In this position he remains for some time without movement, gazing vacantly at them. Daybreak.)

TRISTAN

(after a lengthened silence).

The dreary day,
its latest dawn !

MELOT

(to MARKE, who stands in speechless surprise and pain).

Now tell me, king, if truly
I bared to thee his blame ?
If safe I hold the head
I pledged upon his sin ?
Unshielded here
his deed I show ;
thy kingly name
from reach of cloud
I clear for thee have kept.

MARKE

(with trembling voice).

Such is thy service ?
Deemest thou so ?—
Him behold,
in truth the most unturning ;
note him now,
as friend the most unfailing,—
who used his freest
deed of faith,
to deal my heart
so base and hateful a blow.
In Tristan's treason
out is blotted
hope that what
his guile has spotted
be by Melot's care
like to find repair !

TRISTAN

(convulsively and impetuously).

Dreams of morning !
Ghosts of daylight—

groundless and waste—
away, begone !

MARKE

(with deep emotion).

To me—this ?
Tristan—this—to me ?
Where looks he now for trueness,
whom Tristan has betrayed ?
Where now can faith
and right be found,
from him who was their guide
and guardian, when they go ?
The fence he chose
'neath which to fight,
how far must virtue
now be flown,
since from my friend it flew !
Since Tristan was untrue !

(Silence. TRISTAN slowly sinks his eyes towards the ground ; in his looks, while MARKE goes on, signs of increasing sorrow become visible.)

What counts thy service
never slacked,
the name and fame,
the means and might,
thy work for Mark' has won ;
if name and fame,
means and might,
the service never
slacked, must now
with price of his shame be paid ?
Seemed he but shallow
thanks to show,
when to what thou hadst won him,
realm and fame,
he owned thee freely the heir ?
Whom childless his wife
had left in woe,
he loved thee so
that never more
had Mark' a will to marry.
When loud his folk,

Tristan and Isolde.

of throne and field,
 with prayers and threats
 upon him pressed
 a queen amid his kingdom,
 a mate by his side to settle,
 when thou thyself
 thine uncle sued'st
 the hope of lords
 and land to flatter
 mildly in the matter,—
 against both lords and land
 against thyself to plot,
 with fruitful skill
 contrived he not,
 till, Tristan, vow thou tookest
 to leave for ever
 his throne and land,
 wert thou not sent
 with speedy hand
 to bring him the bride o'ersea?
 And so he bade it be.—
 This wife of wildering worth,
 that mine thy means had made,—
 who might behold her,
 who might know her,
 who as his
 might freely show her,
 and be not blind with his blessing?
 Her to whom
 my wildest wish was lowly,—
 her for whom
 my will was hushed and holy,—
 her that I felt
 so far uplifted,—
 in whom my soul
 with peace was gifted,—
 the queenly bride,
 by foes unbarred,
 thou broughtest safe to my side.
 Now when, with wealth
 of its bliss, my heart
 thou swifter hadst made,
 than wont, to smart,—

in the place where its weakness
most plainly was written,
in which were it bitten,
dead would be smitten
the hope of hap that might heal me,—
a wound so savage
and unforeseen
why,—wast thou driven to deal me ?
Why,—with a weapon
whose withering bane
so sears the sense
of bosom and brain,
that it proves my faith
to my friend to be vain,
that it leads my heart's
mistrust into light,
that it hunts me darkly
in depth of night
on my friend to spy from behind,
the end of my honour to find ?
That no heaven can quench,
why was this hell for me kindled ?
That no suffering serves
to atone for, why reached me this wrong ?
The fathomless,
the fearful, dark,
unanswerable cause
to light who is it draws ?

TRISTAN

(with a sympathizing look at MARKE).

O king, in truth
I cannot tell thee,—
and none there is
that e'er can give thee answer.—

(He turns towards ISOLDE, who has raised her eyes longingly to him.)

To where now Tristan goes,
Isolde, wilt thou follow ?
Amid the land I mean
no sun is ever seen ;
the land where dark
it is and dumb,

Tristan and Isolde.

from whence my mother
 let me come,
 when to him, in death
 who was begot,
 in death, of life
 she gave the lot.

When me she bore, the ground
 where she love-shelter found,—
 the wonder-realm of night
 from whence I woke to light,—
 'tis thither that to-day
 I show Isold' the way.

If she will follow
 sweet and bold,
 now say to me Isold' !

ISOLDE.

When for a strangers' land
 her friend once sought Isold',
 though foe he seemed to her,
 sweet and bold
 the way he bid she went.

Now to thine own thou goest,
 thine heirdom now thou showest ;
 how then should I shun the land
 by which the world is spanned ?
 To Tristan's house and home
 who but Isold' should come ?

The way she will not
 shrink to go

Isold' thou now shalt show !

(TRISTAN *kisses her softly on the forehead.*)

MELOT

(*breaking into rage.*)

Betrayer ! Ha !

My king, behold him !

Canst thou suffer the shame ?

TRISTAN

(*draws his sword and turns quickly round.*)

Who seeks with mine
 his life to measure ?

(He fixes his eyes on MELOT.)

My friend was he ;
in love I beheld him foremost ;
my name and fame
to none as to him were beholden.
’Twas he who set
my heart to heave ;
he moved the crowd
who called on me
my fame further to kindle,
and bring thee as bride to the King.—
Thy blaze, Isolde,
blinded him too ;
for envy betrays me
my truest friend
to the king whom myself I betrayed.—
Beware me, Melot !

(He rushes at him ; as MELOT raises his sword against him TRISTAN lets his own drop and sinks wounded into KURWENAL’S arms. ISOLDE flings herself on his breast. MARKE holds MELOT back.—The curtain falls quickly.)



THIRD ACT.

(*The garden of a castle. At one side the lofty walls of the building, at the other side a low parapet interrupted by a watch-tower; in the background the castle-gate. The situation is supposed to be on a rocky height; through openings is seen a wide horizon of sea. The whole place has a masterless, neglected appearance; here and there crumbled and overgrown.*)

(*In the foreground, on the inner side, under the shade of a great lime-tree lies TRISTAN, in a lifeless attitude, asleep on a couch. At his head sits KURWENAL in grief, bending over him and anxiously listening to his breath. From the outside is heard, as the curtain rises, a sorrowful yearning herdsman's-tune, played on a pipe. At length the HERDSMAN himself becomes partly visible above the parapet and looks sympathisingly in.*)

THE HERDSMAN.

Kurwenal! Hi!
Hark, Kurwenal!—
Give me a word!

(*As KURWENAL turns his head towards him.*)

Wakes he not yet?

KURWENAL

(*despondingly shakes his head.*)

If once he woke,
it only were
to be gone again for ever,—
while yet the leech,
whom now alone
we count on, fails to come.
Is yonder seen
no sail yet on the sea?

HERDSMAN.

With another tune
the sight would be told;
to laugh my pipe would have learned.
But tell me freely,
trusty friend,
what ill has our master met?

KURWENAL.

Ask me no further ;—
no answer I have for thine ear.—
Sharply search,
and, see'st thou the ship,
thy pipe then laughingly play.

HERDSMAN

(turning round and, with his hand over his eyes, scanning the distance).

Sailless yet is the sea !

(He puts the pipe to his mouth and disappears blowing it ; from a little distance for some time his tune is still heard.)

TRISTAN

(after long silence, hollowly and without moving).

The olden tune—
it wakes me up !

(Opening his eyes and turning his head.)

Where—am I ?

KURWENAL

(has started in alarm, he listens and watches).

Ha !—Did I hear him ?
Truly hear him ?
Tristan ! My hero !
My lord ! My Tristan !

TRISTAN.

Who—calls me ?

KURWENAL.

Behold him ! Behold him !
The life at last,
that from him went,
back to Tristan
sweetly sent !

TRISTAN

(raising himself a little on the couch).

Kurwenal—thou ?
Where—was I ?
Where—am I ?

KURWENAL.

Where thou art?—
In freedom, safety and ease.
Kareol, see!
Know'st thou thy fathers'
fastness not?

TRISTAN.

My fathers' fastness?

KURWENAL.

Lift but thy look!

TRISTAN.

What awoke me?

KURWENAL.

The herdsman's pipe
again thou heardest;
thy flocks he here
heeds and feeds on the hill.

TRISTAN.

Flocks of mine?

KURWENAL.

Master, I mean it!
Thine the house,
land and herds.
Thy folk, in faith
to the lord they loved,
as best they could,
abode and land have kept,
which whole my hero
for gift and guerdon
to folk and followers gave,
when all he left behind,
a land afar to find.

TRISTAN.

What land afar?

KURWENAL.

The Cornish land.
With his fearless might

and his winsome mien,
what glory yonder
by Tristan was left ungained ?

TRISTAN.

Am I in Cornwall ?

KURWENAL.

No ; in Kareol.

TRISTAN.

How came I here ?

KURWENAL.

Eh now, how thou cam'st ?
No horse hadst thou to ride ;
on board a boat was the run ;
but to its brim
the shoulders that helped thee,
here behold ; on my back
I bore thee straight to the strand.
Now liest thou at home on land,
thy bounden land,
thy land of birth,
in fields of old that fed thee,
beneath the sun that bred thee,
whose sight from death and pain
shali make thee sound again.

TRISTAN

(after a short silence).

Is such the truth ?
Not so I take it,
but how I cannot tell thee.
Where I awoke,
I tarried not ;
but where I tarried,
I truly cannot tell thee.
The sun I did not see,
my land and folk I saw not ;
but what I saw,
the task were hard to tell thee.
I—was—
where I had always been,

whither I go for ever ;
 in boundless night
 of worlds unborn.
 Of nought we there
 the knowledge have
 but godlike ever-
 all-forgetting ;—
 how fled me its foretaste again ?
 What deep and hungry pain
 urged me once more
 to seek the shore
 of day with stress unturning ?
 The one unweakened yearning
 yet left within me burning,
 from death and dread and sweetness
 goads me with fevered fleetness,
 to where the lying gold
 of Day yet floods Isold'!—
 Isold' abides
 where beams the sun !
 Where Day can see her
 Isolde dwells !
 How forth I am borne,
 how back I am thrust,
 with need to be near her
 I parch to dust !
 Loud behind me
 I heard at last
 death his sounding
 door make fast ;
 but open now
 it stands anew ;
 beneath the sun-blaze
 back it flew ;
 the night from my eyes is driven,
 to light they again are given,—
 her to seek,
 her to see,
 her to find,
 in whom alone
 lost to be
 like sunken wind,
 to Tristan hope is known.

Woe, now gathers,
dread and wide,
round me Day's
unruly tide !
Its strong beguiling
star again
brings to doubt
and dream my brain !
Thou cursèd Day,
must still thy shine
always waken
woe of mine ?
By night itself
must thy torch yet lighten,
me from her
with its flame to frighten ?
Isolde ! Say !
Why must it stay ?
The torch—O when
will thou count it time
its torturing blaze to slake,
that my bliss I may come to take ?
When fades its lasting light ?
When fills the house with night ?

KURWENAL

(greatly moved).

Whom once for thy sake
I sorely mocked,
for her I now
long no less than thou !
Trust what I say
and look to see her
here—to-day,—
to the hope I bid thee hold,
if earth yet keeps Isold'.

TRISTAN.

The torch seems not to fade,
nor night within be made,
She lives and sees the light,
she calls me back from night.

Tristan and Isolde.

KURWENAL.

If alive she is,
 then hope may laugh within thee.—
 Though fool thou wast wont to name me,
 as such thou no more shall blame me.

Half-dead I have deemed thee
 since the day
 when Melot's scoundrel blade
 its mark in thy body made.

The wasting wound,
 O how to heal it?
 Though light of wit,
 I weened it like,
 who made thee well
 of Morold's wound,
 that she the hurt could heal
 thou hadst from Melot's steel.

The leech when now
 my thought had found,
 I sent for her
 from Cornish ground ;
 a trusty captain
 across the sea
 comes with Isold' to thee.

TRISTAN.

Isold' thou say'st?
 She now is near?—
 O Kurwenal,
 thou blest and dear !
 In faith once more
 I find thee firm ;
 for all that now I owe thee
 my thanks how shall I show thee ?

My shield in fight
 ne'er seen to fail,
 my stedfast help
 in bliss or bale ;
 the man I hate
 thou hatest too :
 to him I love
 thy love is true.

To Mark', while yet
he found me leal,
thou stauncher wast than steel.
When needs to betray him
my time was now,
who forsook him sooner than thou ?
No more thine own,
but mine alone,
thy heart is sore
when Tristan suffers ;—
but what he suffers
thou canst not suffer as he !
This hunger that heaves me
like a flood ;
this billowing fire
that fills my blood,—
were I in words to show it,
couldst thou be made to know it,—
me thou wouldst linger not nigh to,
the beacon-height thou wouldst fly to,
with every sense
thou hast from thence
to search where the sea is whitened,
where above it her sails are tightened,
where, me to find,
before the wind,
with love that burns unwasted,
Isold' is hither hasted !—
It nears, it nears !
How gladly ! How fast !
It rears, it rears
its flag at the mast !
The ship ! How it braves
the reef-water's waves !
Kurwenal, canst thou not see ?
Comes it not now to thy sight ?

(As KURWENAL, unwilling to leave TRISTAN, lingers, and TRISTAN looks at him in silent eagerness, there is heard, as at the beginning, nearer, then further off, the mournful tune of the HERDSMAN.)

KURWENAL
(dejectedly).

No ship is yet to be seen !

TRISTAN

(has listened with gradually fading animation, and now begins with increasing sadness).

Is such what to me thou must mean,
 thou old unaltered tune
 with thy sound of teeming sorrow?—
 On breath of evening
 slowly borne,
 to the child it first
 his father's death unfolded;
 in mist of morning
 drearly muffled,
 it told the son
 of the fate his mother suffered.
 When he begat me and died,
 when birth in her death she gave me,
 the olden tune
 by them as well
 was heard in its wailing
 fall and swell,
 that ask me to-day,
 as they oft have done,
 what fate there lay before me,
 to which my mother bore me?
 What fate for me?—
 The olden tune
 both asks and answers;—
 to yearn—and to die,
 to die—and to yearn!
 No! ah, no!
 It means not so!
 To yearn! To yearn!
 To yearn, with death upon me,—
 of yearning, yet, to die not!

(The HERDSMAN'S pipe is heard again.)

It ends not ever!
 For rest-by-death
 it calls to-day
 to the Healer from far away.—
 The boat I lay in
 scarce alive,

the hurt with its venom,
gnawed my heart ;
with its yearning tones
the tune o'ertook me ;
the wind in my sail was strong,
to Isold' it sped me along.
The wound her hand
so wholly shut,
with the sword again
she open cut ;
but swift then was she
the sword to sink ;
a deadly draught
she made me drink ;
when healing I hoped now
for ever was found me,
in might of her fiercest
spell she bound me,
that by death I might linger unfriended,
that my torture might never be ended.
The drink ! The drink !
With its fearful bane
it festered my blood
from heart to brain !
No salve can now—
no soothing death—
the yearning quench
that I waste beneath.
Nowhere, ah nowhere
rest I may ;
I back from Night
am hurled to Day,
that at pangs, in whose pow'r I am maddened,
the eye of the sun may be gladdened.
How sears me the blaze
of this beating sun,
my bosom how through
with its beam it has run !
For heat like this
with which I am wasted,
no cooling darkness
comes to be tasted !
From pains that press

and plough like these,
 what balsam is ready
 that brings me ease ?
 The drink, that its flame
 in my blood has fixed,
 myself, myself
 it was who mixed !
 From father's bale
 and mother's woe,
 from tears of love
 in blinding flow,
 from sweetness and suffering,
 laughter and sorrow,
 its deadly banes
 I dared to borrow !
 Whom first I brewed,
 whose flowing followed,
 whose foam with bliss
 I sipped and swallowed,—
 thou fearful Drink, be cursed,
 with him who brewed thee first !

(He falls fainting back.)

KURWENAL

(who has in vain tried to calm TRISTAN, cries aloud with terror).

My master ! Speak !—
 The frightful spell !—
 O false and fierce-
 o'erlording love !
 Of dreams beneath the sun
 the fairest is over and done !—
 Here lies he, robbed
 of life and strength,
 who loved as no other beside ;
 and love from him gains
 such guerdon at length
 as for love must ever abide !
 Dead canst thou be ?
 Or breath'st thou still ?
 Too strong did the curse for thee prove ?—
 O bliss, for look !
 He stirs ! He lives !
 His lips begin lightly to move !

TRISTAN

(slowly coming to himself).

The ship, is it yet in sight ?

KURWENAL.

The ship ! What doubt
it comes to-day ?

It cannot much longer linger.

TRISTAN.

And brings Isold' ;
she becks, methinks ;—
to me she peace
and pardon drinks !—
Say if thou sees't her !

Is she not yet to be seen ?
She comes, the island's
queenly daughter,
through field on field
of sunny water !
She fares on waves
of laughing flow'rs,
lightly tow'rd
this land of ours ;
she smiles to rest
my sorest smart ;
she heals with softest
balm my heart.

Isolde ! Ah, Isolde,
how sweet, how fair thou art !—

And, Kurwenal, her
thou canst not see ?
Aloft to the beacon !
Unblinded be !

That to me what is clear and unclouded
from thee may no longer be shrouded.

Hearest thou not ?
To the beacon hence !
In haste to the tower !
Hail it from thence !
The ship, the ship !
Isolde's ship—

Tristan and Isolde.

thou canst not miss it,
 see it thou must !
 The ship—is it close to the shore ?

(*While KURWENAL, still lingering, struggles to restrain TRISTAN, the HERDSMAN from without begins to play a joyous tune.*)

KURWENAL

(*leaping joyfully up and hastening to the watch-tower.*)

O gladness ! Hearken !
 Ha ! The ship !
 From northward swiftly it nears.

TRISTAN

(*with growing exaltation.*)

Knew I not so ?
 Said I not now ?
 That she lives, with her breath
 to lift me from death ?
 How from the world,
 that holds alone
 Isold' for me,
 could I deem her gone ?

KURWENAL

(*from the watch-tower.*)

Hahei ! Hahei !
 How it sweeps the billows !
 How boldly bellies the sail !
 How it fleets ! How it flies !

TRISTAN.

The flag ? The flag ?

KURWENAL.

The flag of bliss
 from the mast unfettered is blown.

TRISTAN.

Of bliss ! Through height
 of daylight hastens
 to me Isolde !
 Isolde to me !—
 See'st thou herself ?

KURWENAL.

Behind the rock
the vessel is hid.

TRISTAN.

Hides it the reef?
Is danger at hand?
With breakers it boils,
ships on it shatter!—
The helm, who holds it?

KURWENAL.

The trustiest hand.

TRISTAN.

Betrays he me?
Were he Melot's man!

KURWENAL.

His truth is as mine!

TRISTAN.

Betray'st thou me too?—
Ill betide thee!
O look! Has it past?

KURWENAL.

Not yet.

TRISTAN.

It is lost!

KURWENAL.

Haha! Heihaha!
It has past! It has past!
Safe it has past!
On the steady stream
to the harbour unhindered they steer.

TRISTAN.

Heiaha! Kurwenal!
Faithfullest friend!
All that I own
to-day thou art heir to.

Tristan and Isolde.

KURWENAL.

Like lightning it nears.

TRISTAN.

See'st thou her now ?

See'st thou Isolde ?

KURWENAL.

She beckons ! 'Tis she !

TRISTAN.

O blessing ! O bliss !

KURWENAL.

At anchor it swings !—

Isolde—ha !

A single leap,

and safe on the land she is seen.

TRISTAN.

Bide not on high

like a bootless beholder !

Below ! Below

like light to the strand !

To lend her the help of thy hand !

KURWENAL.

Up I will carry her ;

count on my arm !

But thou, Tristan,

be true, and budge not from bed !

(He hastens out through the gateway.)

TRISTAN

(tossing on his couch).

Ha, what a sunlight !

Ha, what a day !

Ha, what a bliss

of sunniest ray !

The blaze of my blood,

the beat of its flood,

the measureless gladness,

the mastering madness,

I can bear them not here

in my burying pillow,
so hence to where hearts
are as billow on billow !
Tristan the hero,
in towering strength,
from death uplifts
himself at length !

(He raises himself on the couch.)

In blood of my wound
I Morold once did slay ;
in blood of my wound
Isold' I win to-day.

(He tears the bandage from his wound.)

Welcome to flow
is the flood that stains me !

(He springs up and staggers forward.)

To heal for ever
the hurt that pains me,
like a hero she nears
ere wholly I waste ;
to nought with the world
in the storm of my haste !

ISOLDE.

(from outside).

Tristan ! Tristan ! Belovèd !

TRISTAN

(in utmost exaltation).

How hear I the light !
The torch—at last !
Behold it quenched !
To her ! To her !

(He rushes headlong towards ISOLDE as she hastens in, and meets her in the middle of the stage.)

ISOLDE.

Tristan ! Ha !

TRISTAN

(falling into her arms).

Isolde !—

(He fixes his look on her face, and, in her arms, sinks slowly lifeless to the ground.)

ISOLDE

(after a cry).

It is I, it is I—
 belovèd, what ails thee?
 Up! once more!
 Hark to my cry!
 Hearest thou not?
 Isolde calls;
 Isold' is nigh,
 with Tristan truly to die.—
 Wilt thou not answer?
 Only an hour
 I would thou abodest
 longer awake!
 When weary days
 awake she has waited,
 one waking hour
 to share with him in,—
 beguiles he Isolde,
 beguiles her Tristan,
 so, of this single
 briefest-lived
 and latest earthly bliss?—
 The wound—let me staunch it,
 that open has started;
 that glad to the Night
 we may go and unparted.
 Let it kill thee not!
 Of thy hurt thou must whole be made,
 for us both at once
 that the light of life may fade.—
 Unlifted thy look?—
 Thy heart is still?—
 Treacherous Tristan,
 to me this ill?
 Not a fleeting breath
 to his lips can I bring?
 With woe here before thee
 her hands must she wring,
 who in death with thee joined to be,
 undauntedly crossed the sea?

Too late, though ! Too late !
Unpardoning man !
Lay'st thou upon me
so bitter a ban ?
Add'st thou thy scorn
to the ill I have borne ?
My cry to thee wherefore
hast thou no care for ?—
Once only—ah !
Once only—yet !—
Tristan look
in his eye the light
Beloved !
. . . . Night !

(She falls senseless upon TRISTAN'S body.)

(KURWENAL, who had re-entered immediately behind ISOLDE, has stood by during the scene in speechless consternation with his eyes fixed upon TRISTAN.)

(From below is now heard an indistinct tumult mixed with the clash of weapons. The HERDSMAN climbs over the wall and goes swiftly and softly towards KURWENAL.)

HERDSMAN.

Kurwenal ! See !
A second ship !

(KURWENAL starts and looks over the wall. The HERDSMAN from a distance, gazes awe-struck at TRISTAN and ISOLDE.)

KURWENAL

(furiously).

Hell and murder !
All to me here !
'Tis Mark' and Melot,
I see them clear,—
Weapons, and stones !
This way ! To the door !

(He and the HERDSMAN spring to the gate and try hastily to block it up.)

THE STEERSMAN

(rushing in).

Mark' with his folk
follows me hard !—

Tristan and Isolde.

'Twas bootless all !
Behold us beaten !

KURWENAL.

Hither, and help !
As long as I live,
through the gate no passage is gained

BRANGÆNE

(outside, from below).

Isolde ! Mistress !

KURWENAL.

Brangæne's shout !

(Calling downwards.)

What seek'st thou here ?

BRANGÆNE.

Wait for me, Kurwenal !

Where is Isolde ?

KURWENAL.

Thou too hast betrayed her ?

Woe to thee, woman !

MELOT

(from without).

Stand back, thou fool !

Block not the way !

KURWENAL.

Heiaha for the day

that hither has sent thee !

Die, thou dastardly slave !

*(MELOT, with armed followers, appears on the threshold.
KURWENAL rushes at him and strikes him to the ground.)*

MELOT

(dying).

Woe to me !—Tristan !

BRANGÆNE

(still outside).

Kurwenal ! Wildly

the truth thou mistakest !

KURWENAL.

Treacherous maid !—
After me ! On them !
Back with them all !

(They fight.)

MARKE

(from without).

Hold, and hark to me !
Madly thou dealest !

KURWENAL.

Here rages Death.
Nought else, O king,
thou here canst count on ;
for him if thou woo not, beware !

(He presses towards him.)

MARKE.

Madman ! what meanest thou ?

BRANGÆNE

(has climbed over the side-wall and rushes to the foreground).

Isolde ! Mistress !
Bliss and safety !—
What sight is this ?
Isolde ! Dead ?

(She rushes to ISOLDE and tries to revive her. Meanwhile MARKE, with his followers, has driven back KURWENAL and his men, and presses in. KURWENAL, grievously wounded, totters before him towards the foreground.)

MARKE.

O empty toil !
Tristan, where art thou ?

KURWENAL.

Here lies he—lo—
here where I lie—!
(He sinks down at TRISTAN'S feet.)

MARKE.

Tristan ! Tristan !
Isolde ! Woe !

Tristan and Isolde.

KURWENAL

(feeling for TRISTAN'S hand).

Tristan ! Tarry—
 blame me not—
 if I faithfully follow thee now !
(He dies.)

MARKE.

Dead behold them !
 Dead, then, all ?
 My hero ! My Tristan !
 Friend of my heart !
 Yet once again
 must thou to-day beguile me ?
 To-day, when I come
 my faithfulness tow'rd thee to crown ?
 Awake ! Awake !
 So dumb lie not before me,
 thou truthless and truest friend !

BRANGÆNE

(with ISOLDE, reviving, in her arms).

She wakes ! She lives !
 Isolde, listen !
 Mistress, mark what I say !
 Happy tidings
 have I to tell ;
 to trust me wast thou not wont ?
 Of my heedless fault
 the harm I have healed ;
 thou hardly wast gone,
 when in haste to the king I hied ;
 the love-water's secret
 soon as he learned,
 in swiftest vessel
 he put to sea,
 that again he might seize thee—
 then fully forego thee,
 and leave thee to him that thou lovedst.

MARKE.

Why this, Isolde,
 why this to me ?

As soon as clearly I saw
what before I could not fathom,
how blest I felt to find
in my friend no blot of blame !
 With the man, whom most
 I loved, to mate thee,
 with brimming sails
 I followed thy boat ;
 but woe in its course
 let him hope not to catch,
who comes with its cure in his hand !
To death I have furnished his fill ;
my haste has but heightened the ill !

BRANGÆNE.

Dost thou not hear us ?
Isolde ! Dearest !
What keeps thee so deaf to my call ?

ISOLDE

*(who, unconscious of everything around her, has been gazing vacantly
before her, fixes her eyes at last upon TRISTAN).*

A smile his lips
has softly lighted ;
his eyes are sweetly
on me opened ;
friends, you see not ?
Say you so ?
More he beams
and more he brightens ;
mightier grows
his mien and gladder ;
with stars beset
aloft he soars ;
friends, you see not ?
Say you so ?
How his heart,
too high to rest,
burns and pulses
in his breast ;
how apart
his lips are pressed
by swell of breath
he through them sends ?—

You see not, friends,
 and feel not what I say?—
 For me alone
 can be the sound
 that fills and fades
 and floats around ;
 for gladness grieves,
 unspoken leaves
 nought at all ;
 in rise and fall
 seems, by bringing
 peace, his singing ?
 Will not wane,
 burns my brain,
 sweeter round me
 swells again ?
 Clearer growing,
 deeper flowing,
 is it waves
 of breezes blended ?
 Is it seas
 of scent unended ?
 How they stream
 and storm and darken !
 Shall I breathe them ?
 Shall I hearken ?
 Shall I drink,
 or dive below,
 spend my breath
 beneath their flow ?—
 Where the ocean of bliss
 is unbounded and whole,
 where in sound upon sound
 the scent-billows roll,
 in the World's yet one
 all-swallowing soul—
 to drown—
 go down—
 to nameless night—
 last delight !

*(She sinks, as if transfigured, softly, in BRANGÆNE'S arms,
 down upon TRISTAN'S body. Emotion and awe among the by-
 standers. MARKE blesses the bodies. The curtain falls slowly.)*

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE.

“THE translator’s field of work is hedged around with many a bristling difficulty. Even in prose these obstacles are often of the most deterrent nature ; a happy turn of phrase obstinately refuses to take the appropriate curve in the alien tongue ; a subtle shade of meaning finds no equivalent hue on the interpreter’s pallet. But when the object of translation is not only a poem, but a great drama written for musical presentation on the stage, none but those equipped with the fullest panoply of word and idea can hope to render justice to the task.

“It is this barrier which has so long shut off from the English public the poetic aspect of Richard Wagner’s creations. No greater proof of this assertion could be adduced than the manner in which a well-known musical authority not long since handled the text of the *Ring des Nibelungen*. Wrenching from their context certain lines of a version intended solely to fit in with the music, he held up the whole original poem to unmerited obloquy. That matter, however, has already been dealt with in these columns, and we now proceed to a pleasanter task : a notice of Mr. Alfred Forman’s translation of Wagner’s magnificent poem, *Tristan und Isolde*.

“Setting out from the principle that the highest flights of poetic thought cannot be followed by a mere slavish adherence to the letter of expression, Mr. Forman has endowed our literature with a work that will stand alone in that department which bears the heading “Richard Wagner ;” for we feel justified in ranking it even higher than this gentleman’s own version of the *Ring*. Mr. Forman has seen at once that to rightly convey the thought of the original, he must interpret it in words that differ in some instances from the exact counterpart of the German ; that to transmit the beauty of his model, he must place it in that light in which our eyes can gather the fullest force of its reflected rays ; in one word, that his *translation* must be a *poem*.

“That this could not be done without in some few minor, unessential details departing from the photographic method of procedure, will be evident to all who have attempted dealing with a great work written in a foreign tongue. But these variations are so slight that the best acquainted with *Tristan und Isolde* will not detect the deviations until, in *Tristan and Isolde* they take the verses one by one and compare the parallel passages. As an example we would instance the line ‘*Ewig! Ewig!*’ rendered by Mr. Forman as ‘Deathless! Deathless!’ where the idea is far more correctly given than by the use of any literal ‘ever, ever!’ ‘eternal,’ and so forth ; and again, the immediately succeeding lines, ‘*Ungeahnte, nie gekannte, überschwänglich hoch erhabne!*’ which are translated, ‘With name to go by never gifted! Past the search of sense uplifted!’ than which, though the critical may detect a verbal departure, we contend that no happier transmutation could have been invented, nor any that would so completely convey the sense of the utterance.

“On the other hand, there are lines translated with a fidelity, both of sound and sense, that might well have appeared impossible ; thus we have ‘Death-

behighten head! Death-behighten heart!’ for ‘*Tod geweihtes Haupt! Tod geweihtes Herz!*’, the ‘behighten’, being a welcome addition to our store of recently reclaimed, once almost lost, expressions, and at the same time a musical avoidance of the more obvious ‘devoted.’ Again, what more felicitous rendering could we have of the ‘*Liebested*’ than ‘Death-by-love’? There are hundreds of such instances in Mr. Forman’s work; but we pass from them to a more important point, *i.e.* the method in which the deep philosophy of the original is treated.

“It is well known that Wagner, when writing *Tristan und Isolde*, was deeply imbued with the philosophy of Schopenhauer, with whose writings he had but lately made acquaintance, though their essence was entirely at one with his own already printed *Ring des Nibelungen*. Distinct articles of the Schopenhauerian creed may be found embedded in this superb drama, and none but an accomplished student of that philosopher’s works could have so conveyed their central thought as has Mr. Forman, to whom the ‘*Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*’ is as a household word. Occasionally the primary idea of this system peeps out of the lines in a place where Wagner had not introduced it, as in the paraphrase of ‘*Immer ein! ewig, ewig ein,*’ by ‘For ever only one, till World and Will be done;’ but we consider these rare intrusions completely justified by the exigencies of the metre, and the reverent care with which they preserve the spirit of the poem.

“Our present purpose would not be fulfilled, did we not adduce one or two quotations from the work before us. We select them from the Second Act, as it is that which bears the richest bloom of the whole garland. We append the following :—

“ ‘ ISOLDE—Frau Minne knewest thou not?
Of her magic saw’st not the sign?’ etc.

“The lilt of these lines reminds us of one of Swinburne’s sonnets, and the manner in which the rhyme, the alliteration, and the rhythm of the original have been preserved, is beyond all praise. The music seems to have leapt from the score into the text. Again :—

“ ‘ TRISTAN—Is there named a grief,
is there known a pain,
that Day wakes not
with its dawn again?’ etc.

“Only one more passage can we cite, where the lovers, almost lost to the world in the whirlwind of their love, breathe out to one another :—

“ ‘ Hopes that held us
while we hearkened—
speechless whispers—
warnings spoken—
at holy twilight’s
full foretoken
fade, till sense and thought
and will and world are nought.’ etc.

“Such is the strain in which this dialogue is maintained, that we feel, as with the German words themselves, that we have here no rhapsodising of a love-sick pair of mortals, but the yearning of a universe for return into its primeval one-ness, the longing of all creation for its resolution into that which the Indian sages dimly foreshadow when they sing of the World’s *Nirvana*.

“In conclusion, we must add that Mr. Forman, in a brief introductory note, silences the objection that his version cannot be ‘taken in strict and continuous company with the music,’ by suggesting ‘the alternative readings,’ which he apparently has at hand in case it were ever attempted to produce this music-drama in the English. His work has been approached from the purely poetical side, and as such it may well take place among the finest of our island’s poems. We may fairly say that, had Richard Wagner been an Englishman, these are the words that he would have chosen wherewith to clothe his thoughts.”—*Musical World*.

THE NIBELUNG’S RING.

“THOUGH Mr. Alfred Forman’s translation of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* has been for some time before the public, the present is a peculiarly apt moment for calling renewed attention to it, being, as it unquestionably is, a work of capital literary importance, and bearing, as it does, the impress of a genuine poetic style and of an executive inventiveness such as is but rarely met with either in translated or original poetry. By the possession of these qualities it stands widely apart from the ordinary run of *libretto* work, and fulfils the condition which, in dealing with Wagner’s music-drama, is the first and absolutely indispensable one. The careful reading of a very few pages is enough to make manifest that, before proceeding to his task, Mr. Forman must have clearly settled in his mind upon certain philological and poetic principles to carry him through the work unexposed to the constant liability of falling a victim to the rhythmical and metrical necessities of the moment. The principles themselves are obvious enough to any attentive reader, and, at a first acquaintanceship with the translation, should not be lost sight of, since, as in the case of all poetic work of any distinctive manner, we here and there meet with a matter of detail which does not at first sight betray its precise *raison d’être*. Such now and then, for instance, is the use of an Anglo-Saxon word or derivative in place of a classic or Romance one, where the latter might be considered the more literal equivalent of the German, or the substitution of a word of strong sound and colour for the usually accepted English synonym when such would be found comparatively insignificant and characterless. From this point of view, indeed, the philological import of Mr. Forman’s work is as great as its poetic charm, inasmuch as it presents a perfect store-house of vigorous words and unconventional expressions (the latter often formed with the happiest effect upon the analogy of familiar idiomatic phrases), an intelligent study of which might do much to counteract the disastrous modern tendency towards over-civilized and unemotional modes of speech.

“As a whole, the English poem is undoubtedly as true and *spiritually* literal a reproduction of its prototype as is not only possible, but even desirable, amid the complicated and often mutually destructive conditions which beset the translation of any poem of the first magnitude. By this it is meant that we rise from perusal of the transcription with the consciousness that we have passed through the same world and received the same impressions as during our reading of the original, and that this effect has been produced by language of the utmost poetic richness and terseness and in strictest accordance with the form and varying spirit of the German.

“When all this has been said, the question of the extent to which *verbal* literalness has been adhered to or departed from becomes one of altogether minor importance, more calculated to interest the student of the two languages than the reader of the two poems, for in the words of Samuel Johnson, ‘It is not by comparing line with line that the merit of works is to be estimated, but by their general effects and ultimate result. That book is good in vain that the reader throws away.’

“The greatness of Mr. Forman’s work is thus, as it would seem, only a question of the greatness of Wagner’s. This has long ago been admitted in Germany even by those who do not sympathize with his musical theories or practice; and of late years even in this country the view has been steadily gaining ground that the poem of ‘Der Ring des Nibelungen’ will sooner or later obtain world-wide recognition as one of the crowning achievements of the human mind, for, besides being a poem and tragedy of the first order and on the largest scale, it is the artistic embodiment of views on man’s significance and responsibility closely allied to those of the greatest German thinker since Kant, and, from the ethical standpoint, none the less weighty because perhaps they are as unreconcilable with current English modes of thought as are those of Æschylus himself in his Orestean trilogy.”—*Musical Standard*.

SONNETS.

“MRS. ALFRED FORMAN (Miss Alma Murray) has undertaken to issue by private subscription a small volume of her husband’s Sonnets. Mr. Forman has long been known to have a well-stocked portfolio of original compositions which he has not felt called upon to offer to public criticism; but he has not unnaturally given way to the wish of his friends. The little volume, of which the subscribers’ list filled up immediately, will contain fifty Sonnets; and the issue will consist of fifty copies, printed on hand-made paper and bound in parchment.”—*Athenæum*, April 10, 1886.

