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From the Author

MONACELLA.

MONACELLA.

A POEM.

BY

AGNES STONEHEWER.

HENRY S. KING & CO., LONDON.

1876.

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The Legend of St. Monacella.

IN a very retired spot on the banks of the Tanat is Pennant Melangell—the shrine of St. Monacella, or, as the Welsh style her, Melangell. Her legend relates that she was the daughter of an Irish monarch, who had determined to marry her to a nobleman of his Court. The Princess had vowed celibacy. She fled from her father's dominions, and took refuge in this place, where she lived fifteen years without seeing the face of man. Brochmail, Prince of Powys (see p. 459), being one day hare-hunting, pursued his game till he came to a thicket, when he was amazed to find a virgin of surprising beauty, engaged in deep devotion, with the hare he had been pursuing under her robe, boldly facing the dogs, who had retired to a distance howling, notwithstanding all the efforts of the sportsman

THE LEGEND OF ST. MONACELLA.

to make them seize their prey. Even when the huntsman blew his horn, it stuck to his lips. Brochmail heard her story, and gave to God and to her a parcel of lands to be a sanctuary to all that fled there. He desired her to found an Abbey on the spot ; she did so, and died abbess, at a good old age. She was buried in a neighbouring church, called Pennant. Her hard bed is shown in a cleft of a neighbouring rock. The legend is perpetuated within the church by some rude wooden carvings of the Saint, with numbers of hares scuttling to her for protection. They were called St. Monacella's Lambs. Until the seventeenth century no one would kill a hare in the parish, and much later, when one was pursued by dogs, it was firmly believed that if any one cried "God and St. Monacella be with thee!" it was sure to escape. In the churchyard are two mutilated recumbent effigies, representing St. Monacella and Jorwerth Drwyndwm, or "Edward with the broken nose."—*Cliffe's "North Wales."*—*Timbs' "Abbeys and Castles."*

MONACELLA.

AODH was king long since across the seas,
Where life was slowly smouldered out amongst
A lonely race, to whom the outer world—
Whence few returned who ever ventured out—
Was twinned with Death : tho' he, the king, had come,
From long and weary wanderings, home to rule.

A withered, lean, and dwindling man, whose soul
And frame, seemed thrust within the narrowing bonds
Of too much wealth ; starved with the great excess,
Crushed with his gold, and with his love of it,
And holding life but scarcely worth his coin.

B

Not his the gathering of the golden hoard,
For only late in life he reached the throne :
The last and most rebellious of four sons,
He left the parent roof in early years,
And wandering, hardly pittance, hard of heart,
Pushed on a restless way through life, and lost,
Nor cared to seek, intelligence of home.

At length a sickness of the land through which
He passed, came to him. Long and hard he fought
The gathering force of fever in the blood :
He tarried not, tho' men seemed trees, and trees,
As drunken men, swayed with his reeling brain :
He grasped, with great despair he grasped his staff,
And staggered on, and lastly, staggering, fell.

The world is wide, life's path is wide, and men

In various domino pass to and fro,
Each far from other, till there be great need :
Then is the mask forsworn, and man with man
Clasps hands, and finds the brotherhood of race.
Joy separates a crowd ; each goes his way,
At most, with his few folk to have his jest
And wear his pleasure out : but woe bands men
Together, for the one who trips and falls
Draws many a wandering herd to watch and help,
Whilst he who saunters safe, wins no regard,—
Thus chanced the stricken pilgrim on a friend.

'Twas passing sweet that spot where he fell down,
Sweet with the blowing fragrance of the wind,
Which, gathering store of perfume from each flower,
Breaks like the sea-shore waves upon the land.

There, passed the hermit of the place, in quest
Of root and herb ; and there the holy man,
At evening wandering from his hermitage,
Found the sick man, helped him to consciousness,
And after, housed him till the fever sank,
Nor knew his name, nor cared to ask, nor thought
Of anything, save that the man was sick.

And after weary watching day by day,
With still more weary watching in the night,
This later-day Samaritan rejoiced :
His earnest eyes were met with eager look,
And life and light seemed given at his desire.

Then slowly dropt he, as the days passed by,
Pure words, grave counsel, holy thoughts and prayers,

Praise for the boon of life so nearly rent,
Prayers for the future strengthening of the soul :
Yet never asked that other of his life,
But laid his own soul open ; till at last
The stranger, in his turn, for courtesy,
Or some dim longing of the weakened brain
To hold to something of the stronger past,
Or else that trust begot like trust in him,
Told simply all his story and his name ;
Nor held aught back, nor lightly dwelt on things
Which bore him blame ; but passed throughout his life,
Until, the climax reached, he sharply asked,
'And now—what now?' and then forbore to speak.

A silence fell between them : both their lives
Seemed put so far apart by that strange tale.

The pilgrim prince foresaw his destiny,
Removed from hermit cells where he found rest ;
And he of lonely life now felt the thorn,
Which unobserved, had entered in his flesh.
He still loved earth, and things of earth, and men :
This stranger had absorbed his thoughts, and he
Had found companionship and cherished it,
Nor knew until the thorn should be withdrawn,
That yet man's worldly joys restrained his soul,
And pricked, as thorns will prick, when bud and rose
Have bloomed and passed.

His flattering dream was gone.

Wrapt round with pleasant pride of sacrifice,
Of singleness of heart, and life with God,
Vowed to pluck out the tares of earthly thoughts,
Far from the hum and hurry of life's work,

Was he not safe from every snare which tempts?
Should he not surely reach the perfect life,
And win an after-dole of human love,
As saintliest of men,—which now he missed?

Then learnt he in that silence bitter truth.
Not he the godly man, dead to the world;
Not he the purified; not his the life
Removed from all temptations which assail;
Not he the saint—but sinner, prone to sin;
And his the need, as to all other men,
To watch, and watching, pray.

At length he broke
The pause with those same words which had required
So terrible an answer from his heart.

“And now—what now?” My son, is it of me
Thou askest of to-day, or of a day
Not yet vouchsafed—to morrow, with its cares?
Whilst we will search within, we find enow
Made plain before our eyes. What we should do
Is scarcely ever veiled; but when we will,
Not what we should, but what we wish, then comes
The tangled web we call our future days;
When, had we gently wound the thread with care,
And prudent use of all our human skill,
The knot would never come, as thine to thee,
When thou must, vexed, inquire, “And now—what
now?”
That which thy hand and heart can find to do,
Do now. Not here thy work, not there—athwart
The world with aimless step.

‘ Ask me no more.

He who has held thy feet from hidden snares
Thro’ all the crooked changes of thy life,
Shall at thy prayer, make plain thy path to come.’

Then, with reproachful palms before his eyes,
To hide the sight of all his broken vows,
He turned aside to bear his grief alone.
Not with a kindred nature—not with those
Who offer pity, or bring love, as balm
For wounds which cannot heal—but just alone,
With all the sorrow spent, the anger dead,
The disappointment cast far out of mind,
And only all the bruised spirit laid
Low in the dust, poured out before the One,
Who, justly gauging every human heart,
Alone can commune with it and console.

Aodh, the sick man, answered not, but groaned,
And hid his eyes, and looked into his soul,
And knew his duty, and refused it not ;
But after some few days, rose from his place
Where he had lain in weakness, and essayed
His steps uncertainly.

‘ Not yet, my son,
Not yet.’

So said that other, watching him,
But nothing further : each one understood.

One night they lingered late ; the scanty fare
Had lost its usual savour : laggard words
Came haltingly, and with uneven sound :
They knew, but would not own, the end had come.

No farewell could be offered ; it was one,
Which born in silence, without power of speech,
Lived in their memories, an unbreathed tale.

Aodh was strong again—no hermit he,
His call was home unto his father's realm ;
Yet home of heart was here where he found peace.
He loathed to go ; he did not love the world—
To him a weary pilgrimage, where sun,
And rain, and all the changes of the skies,
Were always pitiless in strength. Till now
He had not cast an anchorage of heart,
And now the happy moorings must be slipped.
Here, he had found the aid his nature asked.
Unstable, easily impressed, he turned
This way or that, and lived an empty life

As best it came, nor aimed at any end
More or less worthy than as chance bestowed.

Perhaps, had he still lingered in the cell,
With constant exhortations from his friend,
To seek some better self, which he from pride
Or slothfulness refused to find, he had
Made different ending to his history—
For, till it crumbles, man may mould his clay—
But when the weakened tension of the nerves
Grew strong ; uncertain fibres of desires
Wrought when the mind was tottering helplessly,
Were shreds tossed to the wind, ere further use
Could weave them into fabrics wearable.

He would obey, but did he let his lips
Attest the strife within, resolve had died.

The hermit also was afraid of speech :
He dared not own within his heart regret,
For was it not rebellion—greater sin
Than when, from negligence or too much pride
In his secure self-righteousness, he lowered
His eyes from heaven to earth to find a friend—
If he still clung unto the source of sin,
And grieved that he was free to keep his vow,
Of utter loneliness and life with God?

So slipt that life together from the friends :
Ere the dim haze had been surprised by light,
The stranger went, and he that other, found—
For with a vague unrest he groped about—
The couch of leaves unpressed. He waved his hand,
And blessed in silence. That was all.

The prince

Went home—not of his own new-found desire,
But, being helped unto a better wish
By the wise hermit's words, found easier road
Where his sore pilgrim-feet well knew the track,
Than to press further foot-prints wanderingly.

A strange, cold man, whose poverty showed most
In sorry loneliness of heart, which told
Of beggary, beyond a pouch ill-lined ;
He felt no bounding pulse with thoughts of home,
No kindling of the blood, 'as fields and trees—
Old scenes which told their tale of bygone days—
Came crowding on the way as he passed by ;
He came—not that he loved the sire he sought,
Not that he wearied for some bonds of love

To fasten on his aimless, loveless life ;
But being told to go, he turned towards home,
Nor dreamed the home was void and desolate.

The last hill gained, which overlooked the town,
He paused, and then first pondered on the change.
He did not know the city : it was gone—
Gone as he knew it half a life ago,
When he, a witless urchin, foolishly,
Turned a last look exultant at that spot,
Where, shaking off the home-dust from his feet,
He passed, an alien, to his vagrancy.

Was he a stranger, then, in this strange place ?
Were all the faces new—was his too old ?
Was he accounted dead ; or, still more strange,

Too little known by any to be lost?
In weak, foolhardy boldness he had groped
Out in the dark, and now, alas! found not
One door where he might enter as a friend.
He was cast out—out of men's minds, beyond
Their knowledge or compassion, dead to them,
As they had been thro' all his life to him.

With such bleak thoughts he pressed on thro' the
gates
Into the city's midst, where its full heart
Throbbled quicker than its wont.

The men were grave ;
The women spoke between long silences ;
The children brawled their bickerings unproved ;
The dogs crept sidling for caresses missed ;

The city was disturbed ; the citizens
Had common bond of thought,—the king was dead ;
And one of his own realm, but not of blood,
Was left to guide the state, until a son
Long lost should come to take his heritage.

‘What chance was there to find the rightful heir?
If found, what likely good in his wild brains,
Who’d begged or starved abroad?’

So spoke the men.

The women dwelt on bygone days.

The king
Had lived a lonely life since his great loss,
When his three sons put out upon the lough,

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And they on shore wished God-speed to the craft ;
Then watched the darkening clouds and sudden gusts,
Till prayers for speed, were changed to prayers for life.
Then told they each to each, with gathering tears,
How nevermore the boat came in, but planks,
And oars, and spars, and tangled cords, and more—
Five corpses—five !—with seaweed in the hands,
The straws the cruel waves give to their prey ;
And three were royal blood—the king's own sons.
The other two were—well, they scarcely knew.
(Souls are not souls to some ; men draw a mark,
But He who counts the sparrows surely tells).
And then the little ones who listened, drawn
By all the newness of the tale, cried out,
To be hushed fondly up, or kissed, or told
To mind their play and leave all doleful tales,

As fitting to their age ; and then they passed,
The dames, to happier things,—how now, altho'
This ruler had no wife, he owned one child,
An opening bud of maidenhood, and she,
Thus raised to royalty, would shine a star
Of new-found brightness on their world, made dark
So long by sorrow for the king. Thus wore
The noon and afternoon, and none observed
Aodh, who lingered in their midst—ashamed
To speak, ashamed to hold his peace, and awed
With curious dread of dreams which came with words
Gleaned from the crowd, until an agèd crone
Bent low with much infirmity, and tired,
Essayed to gain a wayside stone, whereon,
With head drooped on his knee-supported arms,
The moody stranger sat.

‘Nay, surely, friend,
Thou’lt miss thy place an’ thou rest here aside.
Thou’rt lustier than I, without the weight
Of four-score years and more upon thy back,
And it were worth some weariness of limb
To bid him a farewell. Go back, go back,
Rest after. It were well for thee to see
The very last of him—ay, yes, the last.’

‘Peace, peace, good dame! I have not come to see
The sights which move as whirlwinds little worlds.
I’m here to rest. It is not that I’m worn
Or faint with waiting in the sun’s full glare,
As those who’ve yonder lost the last few hours;
I am not of this crowd nor that.’

Then spoke

The woman, querulously :

‘ Little need

To say so. Those ungentle words were proof

That you are strange in blood and heart to us.

We citizens are friends, and he, our king,

Our chiefest friend and brother, is no more.

We mourn him, Sir ; and, tho’ you be so strange,

It were good chance, methinks, for you to see

Our sight. No loss were it to learn how one,

A king, can father us, a race, and how

The crowd, as sons, do bear him to the grave.

The idlers there, on whom you waste your blame,

Long loved the king ; and he, the king, loved them.

It then were profit that you see how crowds

Own one more largely loving heart than yours ;

No loss of time to bid him a farewell,
To ponder on his life, and pray, that God
May send us safe deliverance from his heir.'

And with impatient gest she clutched her stick,
Nor would have spoken more, but that the man,
With tact, gave her garrulity free vent,
By venturing a question as reply :

'What king, what heir? I thought your king had
sons.

Yon men talked strangely. I but overheard
A little here, a little there, and so
I cannot weave the truth from tangled threads.
Unravel them for me, and tell your tale.'

Then gladly spoke she, pleased to wear the hour

Of waiting, and more pleased to find an ear
To whom her ready gossip should be new.
So passed she through her life, with all she knew
Of change unto herself, the State, and king ;
Told all the story of the shipwrecked boat,
Nor marked the stranger hang upon her words ;
And lastly, little knowing, spoke of him.

‘ No king as yet, until we find the heir,
That other son who left us ere a beard
Could hide the supercilious smile which set
A bar between his brothers’ hearts and his.
It made the people glad that he was last
Of all our good king’s sons,—he was so cold,
So wrapt within himself with love of self.
But now, alas ! perchance he lives, to reign,

And vex us with indifference and pride.
Ah! no; we wish him well, but no return—
So crooked a sapling could not grow ungnarled.'

Then was the crowd bestirred, and thro' the air
An ever-swelling wail swept by; and then
Above the wail came words of chanted hymn,
And while the stranger rose and bared his head,
The dead king passed, and he knew he was king.

Stript of his pilgrim cloak, with head erect,
Long, ill-kept curls flung back defiantly,
He strode towards the crowd, which, with dismay,
Made wide a pathway for him. Scornfully,
As chief, with pride he pressed up to the bier,
Then foremost followed as a son.

No word

Escaped, no murmur of dissent. Perchance
The act itself bore with it weight of truth ;
Perchance the elders traced instinctively
The lines upon his face, and felt no doubt ;
Or else the others, who but knew the tale
About the wandering heir, and dimly mixed
It with traditions of the place, half looked
For some strange end to crown the mystery :
Howbeit he passed unto his place, and took
Thenceforward to his heritage.

It was

A simple burial. No pall, no plumes
With solemn noddings, no black steeds, no crape,
Nor sombre coaches, nor paid mutes, nor aught
That makes such dreariness of grief to-day :

And yet, in those bare times, ere men began
To cumber up the world with new-found wants
Which scarcely smooth their lives, and, after death,
Cannot affect their dust, none could aver
The funeral lacked state or reverence.
And when the closely-following pageant came—
The day of coronation—there were eyes,
Still red with recent weeping, turned aside.
The citizens were troubled with mistrust :
They gave the new king greeting, nothing more ;
For this he loved them not, he knew the truth,
And meted them full payment for their doubt.
Thus drifted to the throne, with ease he slipt
From all his former life as from his cloak,
And put on royalty with royal robes.
He needed nought of kingship save the name,

That life might fall more smoothly on him now—

It was more pleasant to exchange his staff

And restless pilgrimage for quiet days—

And so in name he reigned, but did not rule.

Once only came a gleam of kingly show :

Aodh would wed. The simple folk were pleased,

And all the land was quickened with new hope.

They could but love his choice, she was so fair,

Daughter of him who faithfully dispensed

The duties left in trust by the dead king,

And further thrust upon him by the son.

The maiden, reared in courtly ways, knew not

Of better, happier life, than in her own

To reach the highest goal and be the queen,

And so was led with willing heart to him,

Her sovereign-husband, tho' she knew not love.
But after solemn rite and feast, and all
The strange bewilderment had passed, the gleam
Merged once again in gloom. The child-love, pleased
With all the small delights and vanities—
Toys for the hour, which break when interest flags—
Possessed no power of passion in itself
To kindle warmth of love within the spouse ;
And when the expanse of larger life became
A new, untravelled plain before her eyes,
Which stretched and broadened dimly out of sight,
She learned the need within her heart, and searched
For love, but found it not at all. Not his
For her, and worse, not hers for him ; so bore
The yoke which should be poised betwixt the two,
Unequally, and overburdened, sank.

A blight seemed hanging darkly round the throne,
A cloud shut out the people from their king ;
And when the news was brought,

‘ An heir is born,’

None marvelled at its close,

‘ The queen is dead.’

A daughter, not a son, was sent as heir—
The queen’s, his consort’s life had passed away :
The king received the words, as one who hears
Tidings of troubles fallen in other lands,
Which come not near the borders of his own.
He sighed, then rose, and as he passed within
The secrecy of his own chamber, said,
‘ Her name is MONACELLA, should she live.’
And that night, while she wailed, they named the babe,

Lest name should be unneeded at the dawn.

But with the light, to those who watched, came hope—

The child would thrive ; and ere the week had passed,

The lonely mother found a lonely grave.

What of the comfortable days and life

Free from all work and care, unvexed by noise

And clamour of the crowd, nor asking aught

Of it? What of this quiet, aimless life?

Did he, the king, thus live within himself,

Nor know a joy, nor need it? No!

As king,

He vainly dreamed that love, divinely poured

Within man's heart, might waste itself on self,

Nor thought that, dammed within unlawful bounds,

It must burst forth and flood his life with sin.

Then came upon him, in his lonely hours,

That hunger of the heart, which, if debarred
From wholesome food, will satisfy itself,
Despite the puny human will that boasts
Its own exemption from great Nature's laws.

He had been poor, this haughty king, so poor
That pence once were his prayer; pence then meant
bread.

He had been cold—cold e'en to sleeplessness;
Then money had been warmth, and clothes, and rest.
He had been friendless in his youth, and saw
Those with full purse had friends; then gold was love.
Now, with his brimming coffers, he had food,
Fare for a king, and covering, and sleep;
And having these, he missed not unknown joys.
What was the throne without his glittering piles?

What was the crown had he still empty pouch ?
Gold was the crown, and golden now his days,
And all his hoarded love made gold his god.

He had not lived to love, nor yet by love
To win from others love, which makes love life.
His life was dead, his love had never lived ;
The salt and savour of his days was lost,
And all his heart was broken with disuse.

In such a growing gloom, he missed the light
Which should have brought him sunshine : his fair
child,
Sweet Monacella, whom the whole race loved,
Bloomed at his threshold, but he knew it not.
He could not reach so high, nor feel so far,

Nor bring her to the level of his life,
And, like his other blessings, passed her by.
The people called her, not princess, but saint,—
Saint Monacella, Heaven-sent, they said,
When God had called the broken-hearted queen.

She with her foster-mother lost the years
Of happy childhood—never fully known,
But always counted happy, being passed
Ere Time can shape some misery to fit—
And thus passed into early womanhood.

Then, word by word, she learned the woful tale,
And wove it, whilst her skilful fingers plied
The silks and threads in many a curious maze

D

Of broideries, into a fantasy

Which henceforth was to her, more than her life.

‘Again, good mother, tell me once again,
Tell me how fair she was, how good, how pure.
I love to listen till I hear no sound,
Not e’en the murmur of thy voice ; for then
I close my eyes and see, within, a face
More strangely beautiful than aught thy words
Can picture to me, and I know ’tis she.’

‘Tush, foolish child ! what fancies fill thy brain ?’

‘No fancies, mother. I will tell thee more.
At night, when thou art gone and I am left
To sleep, I do not think sleep comes to me

Until the morning breaks ; and I am glad,
For when the sky is dark, without a star,
And clouds assail the moon and bandage her,
Then, then my mother comes. I lie quite still ;
I feel her arms—I know they must be hers,
For never arms pressed round me like to those ;
I feel her lips—thou dost not kiss like that ;
And then her eyes, her spirit eyes, look down,
And once, but only once, she spoke to me.'

'Alas ! O child, how shall I compass thee
If thou thus wander lightly in thy words ?
Chase not such wild imaginings ; they lead
To misery, like evil sprites who call
Lone travellers at night across the mere,
And these, unknowing, follow to their doom.'

‘But, dame, I am not wild ; I speak God’s truth.
I do not dream ; I only see and hear.
I tell thee truly that my mother comes.
Is it so strange a thing that God should send,
As guardian angels, wandering mothers’ souls
To every child bereft of mother’s care ?
Perchance all do not know it—and no need,—
They may have nearer love to bless their lives ;
But I, what have I ?

‘What am I to thee ?

Thy nurse-child, loved and tended faithfully,
Caressed, admired, called tender names—supplied,
E’en to satiety with every need ;
But, take it at its best, not child of thine,
Not of thy flesh and bone, like him who died,
That little one. Now tell me : comes he not

In sudden silences unto thy soul?
Are all these shining hairs thou lov'st to plait
With so much vanity—which is not vain,
Because thy pride is only love of me,—
Are all my tresses half as dear to thee
As that one tiny baby-curl thou hast?
No, no, good mother! I am quite content
To hold a lower place in thy fond love,
And give thee all I have to spare of mine.'

So saying, Monacella tenderly
Glanced upwards at the dame, and forward strained
To give atoning kiss, for fear her words
Had savour of indifference; and she,
The foster-mother, stooping towards the maid,
Sighed an assent reluctantly. She knew

The child was child no longer, and the truth
Could not be further gainsaid. Then she spoke :

‘Thou art too much alone, sweet-heart. I err
In having kept thee thus, with no young heart
To commune with. Thy sire, the king, shall choose
Some damsels of fair blood and fitting age
To bear thee company. I grow too old,
And he too stern and occupied of late ;
The duties of the State do cumber him.’

‘ Ay, so,’ replied the girl, ‘ the king is worn,
Harassed, and vexed, and grieved—and so am I ;’
And rising from the stool whereon she’d sat—
In homely way, prone to the nurse’s knee—
To glean the recollections which she loved

Of all her unknown mother's ways and words,
Again she said, with bitterness :

‘ Ay, so,

Vexed am I, grieved, sick almost unto death,
Till life seems death, and death a happier life.’

‘ Thou should'st not thus hold grief unto thy heart :
She were strange company for thy green years,
Which may not thrice be told upon my hand
Until the summer roses come again.
'Tis not for thee to hurry towards the noon
Of after-life ; thy day has scarcely dawned.
Vex not thyself with brooding over cares
Which should be packs laid on to others' backs,
And borne by each according to his strength.
A time will come when thou shalt bear thine own.

Out, out upon thy grief—just fears were well ;
Solicitude—fornbearance with the quips
And whims, the growing weaknesses of age—
Sorrow which vents itself in patience,—thus,
Thus, may'st thou grieve that his last years should be
So mured apart from thee and all his folk,
But not with idleness of words to prate
Of life and death. Child, take my word. If thou
Would'st know the glory of a summer day,
Watch at the dawn and take thy pleasure then.
Roam breathlessly in haste, drink in delight
With early air, pluck every flower, and climb
To points of vantage to observe the sun
Ascending in the heav'ns ; then, ere he gains
The fierce meridian, thou'lt have had thy joy,
A spell of joy, not found in later hours.

Bliss dwells upon the threshold of a life :

Wait there to meet it, child, turn not away.'

'I cannot heed thy words, good dame. To me
The evening claims the crown of happiness.
Man's days must surely look their best when he
Is nigh the end of them. I would my noon
And sunset too were passed.

'Bear with me more.

I do not mourn, as thou believ'st I mourn,
With selfish disappointment that the king
Forgets, amongst his people, me his child.
I do not mourn his life, so overborne
With clouds—perplexities beyond my reach—
Nor would I wish him idly loosed from work,
Which is the crest and dignity of man,

To dally with my pleasure for an hour,—
My grief is none of these.

‘ Dost thou not mind
The page in Holy Writ, where once a cloud,
From bigness of a hand, grew slowly large,
Until it filled the sky and threatened rain ;
And he who watched the cloud girt up his loins
To run before a chariot and the cloud,
And running, reached the city ere the flood
Descended on his head ?

‘ I see such cloud :
It shadows all my life : it grows each hour.

‘ Born with the breath which left my mother dead,
Thrust into arms which pitied ere they loved,
Scarce known from other maidens of the court

Unto my loveless sire, what is there left
To bid me love these days, or those to come?
Is it not so? Will not my troubles grow?
Is hope for me, whilst I can watch that cloud?
Not so, but rather, watching, I must long
To gird my loins, and then outstrip the cloud
Before it comes to its full weight, and bursts
Its endless rain of grief on me. Tell me,
Good mother, now, would it be sin to die?’

She ended breathlessly, as if some need,
Urgent and fierce, were nigh beyond her will,
And stretching far her clenched hands, as tho’
To stay the approach of what she dimly feared,
She dropt upon her knees and hid her eyes.

With careful circling arms the nurse crept close,

Upraised the drooping head, put back the hair
From off the brow, unlocked the hands, caressed
The cheeks, flushed feverously, until the face
Lost all the weird, wild look.

Then answered she :

‘ O Monacella, O princess ! How hard
Is it for those so faint of heart to read
God’s word, and understand. Truth is not truth
If we will twist the sense of it, to fit
The sinful wishes of our hearts. The cloud
Did cover up the sky, the prophet fled,—
Thou dost not mark !—the cloud was blessèd rain,
Rain to make glad his heart, refresh the land :
He feared no harm, he did not ask escape ;
He watched the cloud, and knew it was of God.
If thou wilt watch thy cloud—I will not say

Thy sky is clear—watch like Elijah watched,
Gird up thy loins with faith and humble prayer,
And wait God's rain upon thy heart. He knows
The fittest time for drought, or sends men clouds
That they may seek for refuge in the rain.
Go forth, then, like the prophet ; thou canst fly,
Not from God's will, but unto Him for aid ;
He is a surer refuge than Jezreel.'

And Monacella cowered shudderingly,
Yet closer still, within the clinging arms,
And tossed her head with childish restlessness ;
While the fond nurse, with oft-recurring touch,
Laid soothing hands upon her, like a babe
Who needs the tender weight of measured stroke
To coax it to lie still.

' My words are dark ;

Thou dost not understand. Did I not say,

"Once, once she spoke to me"? How shouldst thou
know?—

Thou, who hast but thy single, simple life,

To shape thy days with laws of gentleness,

And bear thee honestly with all thy kind,—

Thou hast but this : 'twere well—it is enough :

I, with my twofold mission, life in life,

Ranged with the living world, yet with the dead

To hold communion,—how canst thou receive

My thoughts and ways, or comprehend them, nurse?

Pains hast thou borne, and pangs of earthly kind,—

For these I take thy counsel and am glad ;

But, for those spirit-griefs and thoughts I bear,

Thou canst not aid nor comfort me. I am

Like some lone tree, from boulder stone outgrown
Half-way across the stream, far from each bank,
And left to bloom and fade, perchance to die,
Amid the roaring flood.

‘ All night I lie

To watch for her : all day I wait again,
Until another night comes with new hope,
To meet fresh disappointment at the dawn.’

‘ Good child, unriddle me thy foolish speech.

Shall this one dream, long past, so blur thy days
That henceforth thou must see thy life thro’ mist
Of childish fancies waywardly indulged ?

It were not wise, sweet princess, thus to seek

A dream within a dream. Are not all lives

As dreams which pass ? Hold firmly, then, to this,

This outer life—as real as may be
Our days to us—and let that other go.
Take up thy heart, as thou tak'st up thy glass
To see thy face, approve thy tire, or learn
A pleasing smile—peer well within, watch all
Reflected there. It will not twist thy face
Nor show thee falsely, if thou look aright.
Wipe out this other dream as though 'twere dust
Upon thy mirror and so spoilt its use.

'The days are not so long that there is time
To wait for fancied work of life at night.
Bestir thyself, wear thy soft frame, my child.
Those find no rest who never need the boon.
Seek stronger food than dreams for thy young brain.
Leave fairy lore until the time when thou

Shalt be a child once more with child of thine.

Read others' lives, that thou may'st rule thine own :

Then shalt thou own the double life thou claim'st,—

A life of faith and duty intertwined,

Till one is both, and both are truly thine.'

Chafed with the chiding, Monacella spoke :

' Not mine the dreams ; no dreamer, nurse, am I ;

But rather thou, to dream that I so dream.

Give me but heed this once, and after this,

I will not vex thee further with my tales,

Or dreams, or whims, or—call them what thou wilt :

If thou wilt listen, listen patiently.

' One night—thou must remember it to-day—

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The king sent for me—rare event—and thou
Didst dress me sumptuously, and laid thy hands
On all that best should give me comeliness ;
And when my robes were on, dost thou recall
How, throwing back thy head, thou stood'st aloof
And laughed approvingly, then kissed and laughed
Again, till I laughed too, and looked each side,
Then glanced within the glass, until I knew
That I was fair ? And thou, my nurse, wert pleased,
For each one thought (altho' we did not speak)
That he, my sire, would find some pleasure too,
And thus my reign of maidenhood should dawn,
To ripen slowly, and to break his gloom.

'We waited patiently, till one should come
To bid me to his presence ; but none came.

At last a word was sent : the king was tired,
Had slept—forgotten that I waited. He
Would choose some other fitting time. And thou
Wert tired, so said'st “ Good night ;” and I was left
In all my gewgaws decked, which no one saw.
My pride was bruised, my vanity despised,
My heart was hurt, that he should so forget,
And love his quiet slumber more than me.
My damsel came ; I bid her hence. I would
Unslip the knots myself ; and then I thought,
Tho' he, the king, knew not that I was fair,
And slept, nor noticed me, she would not sleep ;
My mother would admire, and she should see
And praise me in my beauty : so I lay
Long hours awaiting her, but she came not.
I longed so for her ; I stretched out my hand—

I called her oft—I pleaded I was tired ;
But still she did not come.

‘ Then I looked out
Across the fields : ’twas summer. It was light,
The moon was full, and in my heart I felt
She could not come because it was not dark.
So, nurse, thou’lt think me foolish, but I went,
Went straight to her, my mother, in her grave :
Passed by thee sleeping, and my steps aroused
Thee, till, half-wakefully, thou saidst, “ God bless,”
As thou hadst said when parting, and then turned
To sleep again. I lifted latch and went,
Out through the postern, ’cross the court, nor stayed
Until I touched the door, where thou and I
Alone have entrance to the church for prayer.
I know not how it opened, but I gained

The altar, where the Virgin Mother holds
Her child the Christ, and to her I cried out :
“ Give to my mother thus to hold her child,
Myself, my lonely self, against her heart.”

‘ And then I groped to where, with folded hands,
And mute stone face, and largely sculptured form,
They say my mother rests. I clambered up
On to the space of flat, hard stone, by her,
Where some day the cold king shall coldly lie,
And then I flung my arms about her neck,
Crouched close against her breast.

‘ I thought no more
Of all my gorgeous dress, forgot my hurt,
Nor asked her anything. I only knew
I loved my mother, and had come to her

As other children go, to tell their pains ;
But then to them, their mothers often run,
But mine not coming, I had gone to her.

‘ Long, long I laid upon her heart, until
I dared to raise my eyes, and then I knew
I had not prayed in vain. The mother’s heart
Within the Holy Virgin had been moved,
And she had bid my mother come to me.

‘ Thou know’st the spot : ’tis grey and dim at noon,
All round the royal shrine, but in the dark
It was more dark than I knew night could be.
I seemed to feel it cling about my flesh,
And when I looked across, beneath the arch
Through which one sees the altar, when the glare

Of tapers at the mass do make it plain,
I saw a shaft of light from roof to floor,
And in the light a woman. It was she !
The shaft outspread until the light was wide,
And blazed throughout the chancel, blinding me.
I was pressed close—not with the darkness now,
Scorched with hot bonds of such great light ; and last—
No fear had I, although I could not see—
I heard her voice quite close against my ear,
And this my grief, my lasting grief thro' life,
Her words my grief, her bitter fate my doom.'

'Child, thou dost err. I can recall that eve
When thou wert vexed : I also. For the rest,
A dream, I say—or, worse, a foolish prank,
Which ended in a sudden fear. If dream,

A lantern flashed across the court at night,
And they who bore it, talking as they passed,
Made all the shaft of light and spirit-voice.
If not a dream, and thou didst really stray
To yonder church and prayed such prayer, it was
Thy passion shook thy strength, and left thee weak,
And thou didst sleep, until the dawn crept thro'
The chapel aisles, and bright beams, slanting, struck
The Holy Mother's face, and then thine own,
Whereat aroused, thou saw'st this sleepful sight,—
Nor dream, nor fact, nor mystery at all.'

But Monacella, scarce allowing close
Of such unwelcome words, broke in :

'Not so,

O nurse ! Give patience yet awhile. When all

The light had died, and I was loosed and left
To look on earthly things, I straightly went
Back to the altar-step where I had prayed,
To offer thanks and praise, and there I vowed
A vow which shall henceforward bind my life :
For this one boon, this marvel of her speech,
This one embrace within her ghostly arms,
This lifting of my flesh beyond the flesh,—
For this I vowed that never earthly taint
Should touch my life, but that my days should pass
In care of virgins, as poor thanks to her
Who thus had helped me to my only bliss ;
In care of mothers, sad as mine was sad ;
In care of souls—lone, wandering, careless souls,
Who need such helpful cure. This is my vow,
And this my fear—lest I shall never reach

To fill my days with such unceasing care.
If so, I falsely swore, and break my vow,
And all my seeming best is but my worst.'

'So count it, Monacella, and take heart.
If grace be given thee thus to see thyself,
And know as evil all thou didst as good,
This were great comfort, and a surer proof
That thy intent was pure, and reckoned such,
Than if, left miserably blind, to grope
To outer darkness in thine own self-pride,
Thou deem'st thy vow accounted thee for good :
Thus would'st thou further sin.

' Be not deceived :

Thy vow is but the climax of thy dream.
Forget the terror of that night, nor let

It weight thy days with heaviness ; but learn
A lesson for thy life, and vow no vows.
Be this thy care hereafter, ceaselessly
To minister throughout the realm as queen ;
And now thy care, to plant and sow thy heart
With seed which best gives promise of good store,
When time demands the harvest for thy land.

‘ Great grief have I for thee, princess, great grief,
As I had never dreamed to feel again,
Since that brief blight which clung throughout the week
Which mingled widow’s tears with mother’s throes,
And found no after-joy,—my child was dead.
I thought my heart had no new pang to learn ;
But now I know that thou didst keep alive

The power of love within me with thy lips—
New, hungry, infant lips, which pressed so close,
And drew first taste of life and love from me.
For if I love, I love but thee, princess,
And if I grieve, it is thy grief makes mine.
Not any thought have I beyond thyself,
Nor any life, except to see thee live ;
Scarce any prayer, save I may love thee well,
So well, that I withhold not any blame,
Nor save myself the pain of crossing thee,
Nor idly miss the pruning of the twig
Within my reach of hand to graft and bend.
Yes, one prayer more have I,—that yet some days
Be added to my years, until this plant
Shall have outspanned the prop in grasp and strength ;
To see thee bravely blooming, bearing fruit,

A far-outrspreading shelter to thy race,
A pride unto thy children and thy spouse.'

'Pray not such prayer, good mother. Life as that
Is not for me. If thou wouldst pray for me,
Ask, rather, if my days should linger long,
That I may lose the scar of those dread words
Which burned my brain, have branded my young heart,
And closed it against love for evermore.
I wish them not unsaid ; I am content
That I, her child, should bear her sorrow too,
And mete her pity for those dreadful days—
Those slowly dragging days which starved her heart,
When she droopt, famishing for lack of love.
I am content that after death she wins
From me the sympathy she missed on earth.

Well am I pleased to give her all my grief,
My sighs, my tears, my love, and by this vow,
Escape a famine for my heart like hers.

Dear nurse, hadst thou but heard one-hundredth part
Of those few spirit-words revealed to me,
Thou hadst vowed thrice upon my vow, to hide
My days from such unutterable grief,
As wedded bonds unsanctified by love.'

'Nay, Monacella, child; but thou shalt love,
And well be loved. For this I hourly pray—
For this, I strive to shape thy mind, that thou
May'st know God's best, and cleave to nothing less :
Thus shalt thou choose, and, loving, wed.'

But she,

The princess, answered, 'I have vowed my vow.'

The days slept each in other with slight change ;
The summer slumbered in the trees, till blasts
Awoke the leaves and shook them, wailing, down,
And silent snows brought burial for their blight.
Then came a darker gloom than shortening days
Within the palace walls : the nurse lay sick,
And Monacella learned to pray for life.
The sickness was no sudden smite, but more
A slowly-growing languor in the frame,
A gradual slacking of her hold on life ;
Not strength of ailment, only loss of strength.
So Monacella daily watched and prayed ;
And she, the nurse, watched also wistfully,
And followed her, the damsel, with keen eyes,
Which would have told the longing of the heart
To speak about the vow, but silence kept,

Not knowing which were best—to speak or pray;
So, doubtful, prayed the vow might prove no vow,
Or childishness which yet should melt with years.

Once more there came a message from the king.
He did require the princess. So she went,
Not now in rich apparel, lovingly
Put on. The nurse's hands were weak, her eyes
And ears were closed in fitful sleep, nor heard
The royal word. Then Monacella sped,
Straight from the couch of sickness where she watched,
Unto her sire, nor stayed to add unto
Her simple robe, nor coil her hair, nor yet
To sandal her bare feet, lest aught should rouse
The sufferer's slumber till she had returned.
Wrapt in white garments clinging flutteringly

She passed into the presence-hall, and looked
As though a spirit, folded reverently
In subtle, earthly clothes, had come to wait
Upon the king from other realms.

Her step,
Lighter than most that trod the sombre floor,
Told not her coming, till the embers' blaze
Warmed her bright hair and made a glory there,
Which seeing suddenly, amazed the king,
And, moved to restlessness, he spoke to her :

'Too hurriedly, fair daughter. It were well
Thou learn'st to lose thy childish haste. We were
Scarce worthily advised that thou wert here,

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And nigh had bid thee wait, which were not due
From us to thee, our daughter and our heir.'

'Sire, thy commands so seldom greet my ear,
That I would never have thee think I held
Them lightly, or found tardy wish to do
Whatever thou hast sought of me.'

'Enough!

We grant thee favour then, for thy sweet speech.
Obedience befits thy royal blood.
Thus wilt thou learn hereafter to require
From all thy people that which thou hast given
With such meet willingness thyself.

'We are

Rejoiced to see thy mind accepts so well
The duties of thy state, and we are fixed

'To test thy love and reverence to us
As sire and king. Whence comest thou?'

'I come,
Oppressed with sorrow for the sick. The dame,
My faithful nurse, is ill. Great fear have I
Lest all the lessening sand be nearly spent,
And her dear life hold but few lingering grains.'

'These tidings are not strange, and our new wish
Appears well-formed and fitting. Should thy nurse
Lose, shortly, further days, thine own will be
Left lonelier than before.

'We like it not,
And some long time have pondered on a change
Which needs must soon occur. So it were best

That thou should'st know our mind, and learn to leave
Thy nurse's thrall for other bonds, which, if
Not better—tho' some men aver we err—
Are yet more worthy of thy womanhood.'

Then Monacella swayed, rocked to and fro
With such a ruthless blast as sometimes comes,
Blown over waves from off some wandering isle
Of ice—too far to see, but whose chill heart
Can freeze the journeying air which beats the sails
Of a lone ship, and sweeps across the deck,
And makes the crew's teeth chatter shiveringly.
The coldest winter of her life seemed there,
With heaped-up snows, with thickest, meltless ice
And frozen water-spikes, which surely closed
Around her body. Was she frozen too?

What could he mean, her icily cold sire ?
What could he know of those dear links between
Her only friend and her ? What thrall was hers ?
Was ever chain of woven daisies half
As lightly worn as that dear nurse's sway ?
Would he now snap that bond ? Were love-spent years
Of close companionship, as nothing worth,
Or to be wrenched as wisps of straw which bind
The gathered sheaves ? Should all her future days
Be loosed like ears upon the granary floor,
Or shattered, tossed, and blown about the land,
Nor ever reined again with gentle hold ?
She could not speak, she only grew so cold
That all the numbness of his heart gained ground
Upon her lips ; and so the king pursued
His words, nor asked reply :

‘ We wish thee wed.

Our choice is made ; and, with due courtesy,
We wait the seal of thine own “yes” to crest
Our own consent with further graciousness.’

Uneasily he twisted his lean limbs,
Rested upon his elbows, turned his eyes
To look at this and that, but nothing saw ;
Then sought with twitching fingers ’midst the folds
Of his too ample mantle—which had wrapped
The late more comely, larger-living king—
To still their clutching eagerness, but yet
He could not miss the cold, impassive stare
Which Monacella gave ere she found words :

‘ Thy pardon, sire, but are these marrying days,
When we are housing sickness, and when death

Awaits, perchance, to enter? Is this time,
When gates are forced by such unwelcome guests,
To throw them open for a bridal train?
Or should we risk a marriage-peal which might
Be broken, ere its close, in solemn knell?
Grant me, of thy compassion, other time
For this discourse; my heart is out of tune,
And makes strange discords with these notes of thine.
If so be all my fear is lost in fact,
I claim thy pity ere thou bidd'st me wed;
And should my nurse yet live, I still ask grace.
She, of her weakness, would still need my care;
I, of my youth, need more a nurse than spouse.
Delay would surely profit thee and me,—
Me with the larger fruit of further years,
Thee with a child the worthier to be won.

'I pray thee be not wroth with my poor speech ;
Forbid me not to gently use a right
Which none but I can claim : be not the king
To me, but be my father, and so lend
Thy will unto thy pleasure, to accede
To this thy daughter's prayer.'

'Or king, or sire,
We understand thee not. To both, thy words
Are marvellously bold. We do not trust
Delays ; and for thy future "yes" no need.
We do command obedience : thou wilt wed.'

With one tumultuous leap her heart-blood throbbed,
Back thro' the veins the life-stream flowed again,
And all her soul blazed out in crimson blush.

The thaw was mighty, and an avalanche
Hurled fear for ever from her maiden breast.

‘No “yes” of mine, great king, shall make me wed,
Nor second oath forswear my white-souled vow.
I am thy subject : if I break thy law,
Bind hands and feet, deliver me to bonds.
I am thine heir : annul my heritage :
I am thy child, and I would fain obey ;
But, sire, I am the keeper of my soul,
God’s steward of His gift—His child as well.
My flesh—if thou so wilt—I give it thee,
Not living flesh—for that has soul—but dead,
Dead here before thee now, as sign that I
Would rather die than live to disobey ;
But for my soul, God gave it of Himself,

And I have vowed it shall return as pure
As when He hid my spirit in this shape
And bid it breathe. I cannot stain my soul,
Nor can I falsely cross my vow to God,
With plea of fair obedience to thee.'

So, breathless, turned and passed unto her place.

'My child, my princess, why so long away?
I think I slept, for I had curious dreams,
And as I held thee, in my vision, back,
And vainly tossed my arms for help, they fell
Athwart thy empty seat, and so I woke
To find thee gone. Come close, take both my hands;
I do not wish to feel that thou could'st slip
Away from me, as in my sleep I saw

Thee lose thy foothold on the land, and glide
I knew not whither from my sight. I thought
We journeyed, thou and I, thro' wide-spread lands,
Where only one long ridge of hills was seen,
And that so far before, we never spoke
Of days to come when we should climb the hills
And gain the land beyond. But as we passed
Where all the grass seemed smooth, thick-set with
flowers,
A hedge sprang up near thee, and thou didst try
To part the twigs, but thou wert scratched and torn ;
Then thou didst strive to overlook it, but
It reached too high. I, with many a kiss
And coaxings—just as I once won thy will
And bent it unto mine, long summers past—
Besought thee not to stay for such poor sport,

But gently saunter on ; and I made feint
To leave thee near the hedge, and turned my head ;
But when I cast an anxious glance behind,
I saw the ground beneath thy feet divide,
And as I reached to save thee, thou didst stretch
Thy hand unto the hedge, and all its roots
Gave way with thy firm hold. I called aloud,
But no help came, and, covered with the hedge,
I missed thee from my sight. I read my dream :
Take heed lest thy rash vow prove like this hedge,
With root in such unstable ground that thou
Lose heart—nay, life—and find thy days thus lost
Within a terrible abyss.'

‘ Dear nurse,

Thy weakness gains upon thee. I am here.

I was not long away, and now am back,

No more to leave thee.'

'Ay, sweet one, "no more!"

Thou sayest well; thou wilt not loiter long,
For when there is no poor sick nurse to watch,
Thou wilt be glad thou didst not leave her side
Until there was "no more" on earth for her.'

'Good mother, speak: thou wilt not leave me thus?

Thou canst not, wilt not die? unless—ah! yes—
Say, tell me, thou wilt also come with her—
Thou knowest whom. If so, I'll let thee go;
Yes, go,—go now; and I will go as well.
Clasp close my hand; now let me lay my head
Where thy warm breath can wander to my lips,
And when *he* comes (say, dost thou think he's near—
The angel, with his ready wings outspread,

To hide thy soul, that we may see it not),
Perchance he may take both, and draw my breath
As well as thine, and set my spirit free.
Oh ! mother, rest me ; I am tired, so tired ;
Thou shalt not die unless I die with thee.'

‘Hush, child ! thou canst not hear thyself. These
thoughts
Are rebels in thy mind's estate : trust not
Such crew, on mutiny intent, with speech.
Pray softly for me now, and let me die,
With all earth's best of happiness—thy love ;
Thy love, which taught me God was tender still,
Which helped me bravely bide His own good time.'

Whilst the grim darkness of the night crept on,

And closelier claspt those waiting souls, he came,
The angel Death, to work God's will, and took
The soul made ready for its rest, but left
That other to awaken by the dead.

And when the women of the household came,
With kindly questions, to arouse the nurse—
For none looked forward to such speedy end—
They found the twain laid side by side ; then went,
With finger on the lip and stealthy step,
To chatter of the marvel they had seen.

“No picture ever was so beautiful—
Such types of life and death were never limned.
The princess, with her showering, waving hair,
Which rippled in the early morning sun ;

The lessening shades of rose upon her cheek,
Which from a dimpled centre widening spread ;
The gentle outline of her rounded limbs ;
The restless quiver of the mouth and lips,—
Youth, life, seemed wrestling 'gainst a forced repose,
Whilst age lay still, so still, in placid rest ;
So coldly calm, so glad of the deep sleep
Fallen upon her, that scarce she seemed to breathe :
'Twas strange—'twas marvellously beautiful."

But whilst they talked the princess had been roused,
And Monacella saw the nurse was dead.

No cry came from her, no great fear, no drops
Which fall from eyes when hearts are not too dried,
Too withered up, too frozen at the spring
With sorrow, to have lost their chance of tears,

She felt the truth, accepted it, knew not
Surprise, desired not any change, and learned,
When she had clasped her hands to feel her heart,
But one large disappointment—that she lived,—

‘Not dead, O God! not dead! Not dead indeed!’

Like startled deer, she saw the nearing troop
Of hunters and of dogs upon her track,
And, too amazed to fly, she stood at bay
’Midst all the howling clamour of her thoughts,
And all the echoing bugle-blast of words
With which the king had stunned her yesternight.

At length the earliest bell for prayer impelled
Her feet in answer to the call, and she
Passed once again within the chapel-door,

G

Not to her wonted place, but to the shrine
Where she had lain before, and, unobserved,
Remained throughout the day, nor heard the cry
When others found the corpse, nor knew they missed
Her presence, nor the anxious quests, on foot
And horse throughout the land, nor saw the fear
Possess men's faces when they came at night
And darkly hinted what they dared not speak—
How this great curse had fallen upon the king,
And that his only heir was now his gold,—
Of all this she knew nothing ; but at night,
When the last benediction had been sung,
And one by one those bless'd had gone their way,
The princess also went, tho' none saw where.

For some who followed the unhappy quest

To seek her in the flesh, returned at dawn
And told how they had watched her spirit pass,
And how a white-robed ghost had flitted by,
And when they would have grasped or followed on,
It suddenly dissolved, and so was lost.

But others, watching with strained eyes from out
The palace-doors, replied, "Not so ;" for they
Had seen the dead queen's form come from the church :
So she had fetched the princess to herself.
And thus the days wore out the simple tale,
For ere twelve moons had waned, the marvel died,
And passed into the folk-lore of the place.

How the strange king died later, how his gold
And throne were seized by him who should have been
His son, and how the kingdom fared, none sang ;

But by the coast, they said, on calm, clear nights,
They saw a maiden drifting in a boat,
And watched her steering thro' a shaft of light,
And that the princess Monacella fled
Thus in an open boat to keep her vow.

It was a lonely place, where rush, and sedge,
And snaring water-weed contrived to weave
A net across the stream, lest otherwise
Too curious man should find his boat a path
Upon the river's breast and spy the spot.
The tall trees swayed with interlocking arms,
And girt the land beyond, while thicket-growth
Throve with a stubborn wildness to obstruct
Chance wanderers from rambles through the wood.
Flowers lived their little day, and forests dreamed,

With ample, swelling girths, from age to age ;
The myriad tribes of insects hummed and whirred
Their pleasant work of wonders undisturbed ;
All lesser life attained its perfect end,
A world within itself, where Nature reigned,
And life was law, for man and law came not.
There, spirit-led, came Monacella, saint
And virgin-vowed, God's purest amongst souls—
Vowed to retain the oneness of her life,
Nor part herself, nor add unto with bond
Of holiest ties, which knit so close that scarce
The double being can be scanned ; and so,
Fleeing her father's court and seeking rest,
Found by the banks of Tanat shrine and peace.

Full fifteen years had notched their marks upon

Time's changing monument, the world, to tell
A race to come the measure of the past,
Since Monacella, veiled from human gaze,
Beat out her life like beetles in the grass,
Nor saw the shadow of her soul in eyes
Which sought their shadow in her own, nor heard
A voice beyond the pleasant notes of birds,—
Sweet music when the heart is well attuned,
But dumb, intensely dumb, when man craves speech.
Perchance, with all the mystery of her vow,
And all the awe and stillness of the place,
She knew no loss, nor dreamed of happier hours,
Till one chanced near, and broke her loneliness.

Brochmail was Prince of Powys—far-spread lands
Which sloped up to a ruddy height, whereon

The lonely castle, perched like eagle's nest,
Stared beacon-wise, with curious mis-matched towers,
Devices wrought by men of different times.
"Red" was the castle called, and red the prince—
Red from the scorch of weather, wind, and sun,
And sometimes red with wine ; for after sport,
Long quests of game, hallooing to the dogs,
And long-breathed windings of the bugle-horn,
He would return unto the castle spent,
Nor wait until he reached the hall, wherein
The board was amply served with princely fare ;
But he, unhorsed, would quickly call for wine,
And there upon the threshold drain the cups.
Perchance had wife or maiden met him there,
He had drunk purer nectar from their lips,
And found new strength and rest in love, not wine.

But he, alone, roved thro' his rugged days,
Unsmoothed by contact with the gentler race
Of worthy womankind, whose sway affects
Man's outward bearing, and leaves impress too
Upon the inward fashion of his mind.
Tall was Brochmail beyond his fellows, and
As far beyond their grasp of mind. No faith
So true, no honour so severe, nor yet
One stronger arm, one fleeter foot ; and when
With double strides he strode amongst his men,
He looked the master that he was—in power,
In person, great. His deep-set eyes, which saw
Whilst others' searched the missing game, or seemed
To read the heart of shuffling knave, were fierce ;
Yet something lurked behind the glance which told
That all the kindling beams within could change,

And all the hard-set lines about the mouth,
Could ripple into smiles, and those strong arms
Could close as tenderly as mothers' arms
Around their sleeping babes. Such was Brochmail,
And so he lived his life; strode, chased, drank, slept,
Then strode and chased again, nor knew beyond,
Until pursuing, with his favourite hounds,
One day he followed close upon the hare,
And rived the thicket where she fled to hide,
There found the game crouched coweringly, beneath
The spreading skirt of one who knelt in prayer,
And Brochmail with the dogs stood still for fear.

Dreams had he had, this prince of thirty years—
Dreams in the night of pure, fair womankind—
Dreams in the daylight conjured in his brain—

And dreams which were no dreams, but closed as such,
Because rude facts were not like dreams at all—
For maids he wooed, tore all his vision's veil
And let a streak of daylight through the rent,
And so the mist dissolved in vulgar glare ;
But all the sleeping, waking dreams were lost,
And all his pent-up love leapt into life,
When Monacella looked upon Brochmail.

No fancy this, no frenzy of the cups,
No sprite, nor phantom, nor unfleshly fay—
A woman, past the blush of tender youth
With half its petals curled, one who had reached
The full attainment of rare womanhood ;
Past, like a brave ship floating to the sea,
The little storms and eddies of the stream,

And ready, with full-swelling sails, to steer
A steady course—not to be blown aside
By this small wind or that, not lured 'mid rocks,
Nor caught with far-off mirage ; but prepared
With power and skill to choose the rightful road,
And, pressing forward, follow to the end.

All this Brochmail grasped with his single glance,
And read his life of love within her eyes ;
Then turning, left her silently, nor spoke,
Nor whistled to the dogs, nor marked the spot,
Nor noticed aught to 'mind him of the place,
But, out of hearing, called unto his men,
And mounting horse, shook rein, and rode back home.

Still Monacella knelt, but ceased to pray ;
And when the last hound turned reluctantly

To cast a lingering look upon the hare,
She felt dismay, and would have called aloud,
But that the panting prisoner 'neath her robe
Compelled her tongue with pity to be dumb.

He gone, she rose and strove to close the bush
Which the intruder clove ; there in the grass
Saw sparkling a large gem, and as she stooped
To take it, found a wish within her heart,
That he should miss, and come to claim it soon.

Then handled she the treasure curiously,
And sought to guess its place or use to wear ;
But these not knowing, slipt it in her dress,
To let it lie 'twixt breast and bodice safe.
That night it pressed and hurt her in her sleep,

And gave her dreams that one had wounded her,
Had taken out her heart and left a stone ;
So woke uneasily and felt the gem,
And thought it sparkled better than before ;
Then mused how those long years ago she owned
Such toys as this, and wandered in her mind
Back to her youth, to mother, sire, and nurse,
Recalling all last thoughts, last acts, ere she
Had fled across the land and over sea,
And never speaking, passed for spirit-maid,
Until she found that spot and made her shrine :
And lastly, when she dwelt on that dear voice
Which only asked her at the last for love,
Her love, a dewy mist before her eyes
Shut out the light, and tears fell plashing down,
Dimming the gem ; and then she asked aloud,

' Will ever love be asked of me again ?

God grant it me to love and be beloved !'

Thenceforward paced she daily in the wood,
With the one jewel pressing 'gainst her heart,
And that one prayer re-echoing in her soul.
The rescued hare brought thither his glad mate,
The birds and beasts feared not her step nor voice,
And Monacella tamed them for her friends.
But all the while she wailed her wasted life,
Knowing a vow not fully kept was lost,
Yet without power to find an open road
To reach unto fulfilment of the bond.

Brochmail rode home, nor reckoned heads of game,
Nor knew vexation at the empty bags,
Nor on the morrow sought to mend the sport,

But pondered how to gain that spot once more,
When she should yield her gentle presence there,
Not knowing that it was her home and shrine.

Then followed doubtful times, when joy and fear
Made havoc, with mad rule, within his heart—
Now wildly rearing each caprice of love,
Now lying dashed with spasms of despair—
But always gathering great distrust of self,
And of his own unworthiness, to win
So large a blessing as her heart, until,
Vexed with unproved dismay and torturing dread,
He knew that he must either ask or die.
So called for horse and casque, and one keen hound,
And sought to find excuse, lest idle tongues
Should wag too freely on his lonely quest.
Then only, missing from the golden claws

The jewel, that made base for towering plume
Which flaunted from the cap (for since that eve
Had he not sallied out, nor heeded it),
The reason gave to wondering serving men,
That he must seek alone the charmed lost gem,
And sternly bid that none should follow him,
Lest others finding, it should lose its charm.

By field and wood, up hill, down steeps, through ford,
On with the sun by the full river's flood—
The pleasant Tanat—following all its course,
Until the stream was lost in wilderness,
Where travellers turned aside to skirt the wood,
Or else retraced their steps to find new road.

With hasty glance around, lest some should spy,
And share his venture, Brochmail entrance made

Thro' copse which darkened into forest, till
The thick, close trees made vaults of brilliant green,
Where e'en the footfalls of the horse and dog,
Or else their deep-mouthed breathings, vexed his ear,
And spoil the solitude with too much sound.

No sky was seen, no sun to mark the course,
No careful henchman marking tell-tale notch
On every tree along his path, to help
Him to remembrance of the way. He had
No magnet but his own strong heart, drawn towards
His love—he knew he could not help but find.
All suddenly he came upon her, where
He left her praying.

On the sward she sat,
With all the wild wood flowers about her feet,

H

His large lost jewel shining in her hand,
And murmuring ever and again her song—
' Will ever love be asked of me again ?
God grant it me to love and be beloved !'

The horse, reined in, stretched out his haughty neck,
And plucking at the tender leaves, made stir,
Whilst Brochmail greeted her surprise with words
' Thy pardon, maiden ; not in idle sport
I break upon thy presence. I am here
To find some treasure, lost, I fear me, when
I followed hotly on some game, and nigh
Discourteously amazed thee in thy prayers.
I crave thy pardon doubly, for that day
When so unknowingly I seemed so rude,
And further now, that I thus trouble thee.'

‘Not so, not so. No need of my poor grace :
Thou hast no debt of rudeness to acquit.
My heart is glad that I can now restore
Thy treasure to thy hand. Here is thy gem.
Whilst thou hast spent thy days in careful search,
I’ve passèd sweet hours in toying with it here,
Pleased with the thoughts of when I too owned such.
It made me happy, knight ; but happier now
Am I to give thee of thine own again,
And thereby learn my life is yet of use.
Long days have passed since I had chance to know
That my small help could aid in aught my kind,
And joy is better prized when coming long.’

‘Dear was the bauble always unto me,
Since she, my mother, dying, with small strength,

Claspt it herself, with plume, upon my cap,
And bid me wear it, for her sake, until
A holier love than son for mother, made
Me loose it, to place there another badge
From her I wooed for wife ; and now more dear
That it is blessed with power to pleasure thee,
How shall I prove my thanks, and how wilt thou
Prove thy forgiveness of my trespass here ?'

'Give me, for thanks, assent to my request :
Tell me thy name, and promise at my need
To grant me aught I may demand of thee—
Of help, of alms, or of great courtesy—
I come of kings, am Monacella called.'

And, gently, Monacella put a foot
More space between them, for Brochmail had tied

His steed to neighbouring branch, and moved towards
The princess passionately. In his heart
His love glowed fiercer when he looked on her ;
But her proud words, more proudly said, restrained
His over-boldness, whilst he spoke :

‘ My name,

Brochmail ; the castle Coch my home ; and lands
To east and west, those Powys called, are mine.
“ Of help, of alms, or of great courtesy ”—
Of all of these desire of me, princess.
In all, my will shall add unto my power,
And power and will are subject unto thee.’

And Brochmail bent from his full height low down,
And made obeisance fittingly. Then she
Extended her small hand, holding the gem,

And dropt it carefully into his own,
Till palm met palm and closed on it, and he
Set seal of kiss upon her hand, and she
Accepted it, nor wrestled 'gainst the bonds.

'Thy proof,' said he, 'thy proof! Thou hast my vow,
And I of thee have nought. Thy pardon prove.'

'Do now my bidding, prince : go now, and I,
To prove my pardon, will allow thee here
To-morrow, and will claim thy services.'

'No other proof, princess, no word but—hence?'

'Not so,' said she, 'but rather I said—come.'

And he, not waiting, quickly turned to go,
To prove he loved her wish, more than his own.

To-morrow and to-morrow ran, and each
Was only like the other, for he came
Ere yet the sun had reached unto full noon,
And lingered till it dropt ; and if by chance
He left her in the light, she thought it dark,
Nor knew the day until he came again.
Not to her heart avowed she this great change,
But like a lily opening in the sun,
Felt the warm air unconsciously, and bloomed.

And Brochmail, wiser than a furious youth,
Who with mad snatch breaks all his chance in haste,
Forbore to tell his secret, prudently,
Choosing to feed on crumbs dropped one by one,
Than lose at once all hope of better feast,
And counting also that at last, large share

Accrues to those who have the wit to wait,
Sowed tender words and loving courtesies,
And paused ere he should prove her yea or nay.

They each found fair excuse for being friends.
He with keen tact had called her thus, and she
Accepted trustfully the sign of aid
Which she might ask of him, if her true friend.
So 'friend' he named her, but she answered 'prince ;'
For tho' she craved as crown to her lone life
Some helpful hand, and tho' she'd learned to need
Some love which she but dimly knew, yet missed,
Still ever met the pair with stateliness :
She in her purity most purely proud,
He in his love respectfully afraid ;
He giving his protection, she her trust,

And wearing out the budding time of love
With a wise reticence that knew no blush,
Nor sweeter taking leave than touch of hands.
Brochmail, the prince, ruled her large woman's heart,
And Monacella ruled the strong man's will.
He came because he loved to come, and she
Loved his own pleasure, and so made it her's;
Though he forbore to vex her with his hope,
Or thrust his love on her till her's was ripe,
To make the wish of both their hearts accord.
But when the gradual shortening days, made hours
Betwixt their tryst more long and laggard still,
And leaves were tipped and rimmed with hint of
 frost,
He felt true love meant also truer care,
And longed to give beyond his heart,—his home

To house her, and his name to bless—to claim
By right, with dignity of spouse, the power
To shield her, love her, help her through her life.

Of all her days he knew the oft-told tale,
Her sire, her youth, her flight; but of her vow
No word had passed. She waited some vague chance
To claim his aid, and with this plea was mute.

At length one eve, at sunset, when the sky
Was furrowed up with stormy streaks of rain,
And angry gusts shook showers of leaves, the prince
Had lingered late, and ere he reached the spot
Where every night he took one parting look,
On which to feed his fancy till the dawn,
He turned impatiently to gaze on her.

He saw the breezes tossing her bright hair—
He saw, or thought he saw, the wild wind cling
And flutter through her robes, until she drew
Them closer, shivering. With one fierce bound
He gained her side, impetuously flung
His own cloak over her, and closely stood
Before her, to put hand to clasp it round
Her slender throat, until his down-bent eyes
Saw not the clasp at all, but her two eyes,
And then his love was told in one word—

‘Come!’

There seemed no strangeness to him in the word,
It came as rightful close to such rare court
As he had given her, long and patiently.
He looked for nothing but assenting act
Was not his yea met always with a yea?

Was not his nay more stern because it fell
Without the chance of change amongst his folk ?
How could he sue but with a fond command ?
Or more display his love than by his grace,
Which asked her, bid her, wished her to come home ?
Home, which henceforth must be a home with her,
Home, to enshrine her presence on his hearth.

‘ Come, Monacella, come,—come home ! ’

He spoke

With loitering accents, fondling the new name,
Half curiously thoughtful of its sound,
For this the first time he had called her so.
He asked no answer, had no more to say,
But wrapt the cloak about her, and his arms,
And waited wistfully for some small hint

Of willingness from her to be so bid.
His word to her must gain obedience
From her own wish, not fettered by command ;
And tho' he bade her come—though he should live
From day to day, and ever tell her thus—
Yet till in deed she answered him and came,
He could not take her further to himself.

But Monacella moved not, gave no sign,
Nor yielded to his stress of hands, nor yet
Withheld against his hold, but let it be.

In those few moments a new life was bared—
A life of love, with canker at the root
Which bore untoward bloom—her vow and prayer
Both madly sown, both fruiting out of time,

Both blots of man's own making on God's work :
And while she rested, waiting to find strength
To grapple fearlessly with that which now
Must be upton, dismembered from her soul,
She sunned herself for one brief breath beneath
The brightest earthly beam His creatures know—
The love-light in the eye of him who loves
With high, pure love, one woman, faithfully.

Then gently laid her hands on both his arms
And bravely, calmly looked into his face.

‘ “Of help, of alms, or of great courtesy” —
I claim thy promise now, to-night, Brochmail.’

‘ Ay so, assuredly, my help to-night—
Henceforward *all* my help and courtesy ;

But of my alms—why so? Mine shall be thine,
And both but thine in sweeter dole from thee.'

' Not alms, Brochmail, but greater courtesy
Than I have scarcely right to ask of thee :
Yet not of thee I ask it ; of thy love,
Of thy great love confessed, I ask it now.'

' Love less than mine, ere now, has rashly sworn,
And madlier kept, love-treaties faithfully.
Ask what thou wilt. There is no royal law
Of courtesy which I would leave unproved,
No stately homage which I would not court,
To show thee, tho' I love, I honour more.'

' Not only courtesy, but help, Brochmail,
Not help as man to man, or man to maid,

Not help in outward form of outward gain,
But such as I despise myself to need—
Beyond thyself and thy life's narrow scope,
Beyond our love, with its small dwarfed intent.
Help me, Brochmail ; help me against myself !
False have I been to God, myself, and thee.
My sin has followed me ; and now unearthed,
Thy hand is chosen wherewithal to smite.
Forbear ! enough ! thy words have madly whipped ;
Thy eyes have scorched my soul with their fierce light ;
Thy press of hands has tortured. Turn thee, then.
Look not again ; speak not, touch not ! Begone !
Thus help me, Brochmail, help me, or I die !'

'Thou false ! thou sinful ! What are words like
these ?

What in thy life has so obscured thy mind
With such mis-shapen forms of truth and sin?
Know not I all thy story? Then what sin
Of thine could need such sweeping blight to both
Our lives, as now to part? What tender words
Upon my lips have turned to scourging rods?
What burning bolts has Heaven ever forged
From lovers' eyes, that thou complain'st mine scorch?
Speak, Monacella, ere thou claim'st my word;
Unbosom me thy fear: and if so be,
When thou hast stript thy self-accusing words
And laid their meaning bare before my eyes—
If so be then my conscience links with thine,
And, by God's grace, I see what now is hid—
Then, then, as I am knight and true, and seek
Beyond all life, and hope, and thought, thy weal,

Will I admit thy words and leave thee here :
Not cease to come, not cease to love and look,
Not cease to bless and fill my former vows ;
But leave thee here, of that great courtesy
Which thou hast asked, in proof that I do love.'

' False have I been to God to swear an oath
Of which till now I never knew the weight—
To pledge myself, when I but lightly dreamt
Of all the glory of the vast estate
God-given to me—a woman's heart and life—
To rob and cramp that gift of half its power ;
False to myself to sing such soothing song
And lull to sleep my conscience, lest, aroused,
It knew as evil what I held as good—
Self-blinded wilfully to risk a sin ;

And false to thee, Brochmail, till now to hide
The oath which binds my life. I can not come.

‘ Then help, Brochmail, help me thyself to bar
Such easy, swift descent to pleasant sin,
As now to yield my lips unto my heart
And lose my former vow in love for thee.

‘ When in that dreadful night my mother spoke,
I vowed, that ever free from marriage bonds,
My days should pass in care of lonely souls—
In care of mothers, sad as mine was sad—
In care of virgins, as poor thanks to her
Who heard my prayer, and gave me that short bliss—
In care of women who need women’s care.
Whilst hidden here, I idly grieve that I

Half keep, half break my vow, yet make no way
To better compass it.

‘ When first I saw
Thy eyes, Brochmail, and felt anew the wish
And pleasure to have contact with my kind,
I prayed for end unto my loneliness,
And asked that love might once more come to me—
That love might be required of me again :
Love as my mother gave me when she tore
My life from others’ lives, by that embrace
Within her ghostly arms : love as from her,
My tender mother-nurse, who loved my love :
Love from those souls whom I had vowed to love,
But, never seeking them, have lost their track.
Such love I asked ; God knows I asked no more,
Not knowing then, what since my heart has taught.

But having vowed, Brochmail, and having prayed,
And being utterly alone and weak,
I pray thee, of thy knightly courtesy
Help me to keep that vow, and pray that prayer,
Until in both I win the highest end.'

' Of help, princess, *my* princess (surely mine
As never other princess unto prince)—
Of help, *my* help—God give it thee. For me,
My God, give me such help to reach beyond—
Through all my love—poor tho' it be, and small,
And but as other men's—to such a love
As shall be more than love, and which shall cling
Unto thy memory, that those who come
In times hereafter, shall by it appraise

Thy worth more worthily, and understand
How Monacella, saint, proved prince Brochmail.'

Then, lest his weakness should outweigh his strength,
His love forget his loyalty, he went ;
Not roughly nor in haste, but with slow step.
Ploughing the ground he trod, as tho' his feet
Were shares, like the sharp thoughts which scored his
heart ;

And in the darkness tempted, even turned :
There saw her standing—not in darkness now.
The driven clouds, chased furiously, had fled,
The maiden moon shone on her loveliness :
Wrapt in the moonshine, smitten in the face
With such a glory trebled in the gloom,
She looked the spirit of the shaft of light,

Beyond his hope—almost beyond his wish—
And therewith Brochmail held his purpose fixt.
But Monacella, listening whilst he went,
To lose no lessening sound of farther steps,
When the last died, found ready words.

Not loud

Nor fierce her wailings, little save his name.
At length, as tho' to shrive her of her sin,
She framed a benediction, and so sang :

‘ Peace to thee, heart, great peace thro’ all this life ;
Peace, tho’ I knew not peace might mate with strife—
Peace, even peace, though I am not his wife.

‘ Love crowned with peace, as saints love when they
die ;

Love passing love, which comes not suddenly ;
Love which is glory coming by-and-by.

‘ Peace—peace and love together—doubly crowned :
Thrice happy heart in such blessed union bound :
Thy love, thy peace, together, lost and found.’

As one who dreams of undiscovered lands,
Sets out on such vague errand secretly,
Brochmail had ever kept his wanderings close ;
And as such one, long absent, comes at last,
And panting with the secret, blazoned out
In all the changing colours of the face,
Tells by his presence better than by words,
How he has found the region that he sought,—
So those who met Brochmail that night at home,

Knew that his quest was over ; that a land
Of virgin forests and untrodden plains,
Of wondrous heights and still more marvellous
 depths,
Was opened to him ; that the old home fields
Had lost their master.

 His one friend, Concenn—
True man, as steel is true, as bright and keen—
Well understood the change, yet passed no jest
Nor word, but compassed him with kindness,
And on the morrow laid a pleading hand
On Brochmail's shoulder when he would have stayed
Within his castle, and so drave him out
Across the wolds, and in and out the tarn,
Until, in a drear spot, which matched his mind,
He laid his burden down, and told his friend.

To which full cheerfully Concenn replied :

‘ Is this thy tale then, cousin—nothing more ?

For this thy cheek is paled, thy step has lost

Its usual space, thy arm its vigorous force

Because one woman—granted she is fair—

Has vowed to be mewed up and tend her kind ;

Because one woman, asking alms and help,

Stole thy large heart, and turned thy blood to milk—

Milk which would starve a babe, thou art so white.

Tut, man ! thy spirit is too spiritual :

Woo no more hidden virgins, who have scared

Themselves into the piety they plan,

And thus unfit themselves for either world

By doubtful use, of work they do in this :

For even, prince, if that new time to come

Will not be vexed by any evil act,
There surely will be larger field for good :
So to my mind thy love is lost on one,
A misplaced woman or too small a saint.

‘ Stay, I will show thee how once I too blew
As large a bubble for myself, which burst.

‘ I knew a little maiden, pert and plump,
Whose very beauty pouted, flouting me,
Until I thought I’d vex her sauciness,
And trying, vexed myself. But thou shalt hear.

‘ My maid had no saint-fashioning of mind.
Half child, half woman, dangerously free,
Then shy with sudden treachery, she trapt
A dozen men, and laughed and told me so ;

Then, spider-hearted, sighed, and half complained ;

“ A damsel could not help it if she pleased—

Not her's the choice to angle such poor sport

As those weak, foolish youths her net enclosed,

Who crazed her with their courting. If she once

Had chance to draw one worthier”—here she

looked

At me and dropt her eyes—“ there would be end

To all the harmless cobwebs where she held

The silly flies, who, if they missed her web,

Would only strangle in some other mesh,

Or, wanderingly, scorch themselves with fire,

Less innocently burned than her small flame.

She could not help her beauty. If it were

Her looks, and not her little ways, that lured,

She'd go blindfold, she would—or never smile”—

And here she braced her lips and clenched her
fists,

And seemed more harmful in her shrewishness—

“ And risk a life discreet and sober-wise,

If she could find one worthy so much pain ;

For she was certain love was very dull—

So many pangs and aches of head and heart ;

At least, so people said. Perhaps they were wrong ;

But love in jest, at any rate, was gay.”

‘ I made no answer to her babbling—yawned—

Whistled our drinking songs—or stroked my beard

And stared indifferently—or broke her talk

With “ What ?” or “ Didst thou speak ?” or “ Ay,” or

“ Nay,”

Alternately, and quite misplaced, until,

Her gentle mood dispersed, she murmured, "Loon!"
And gathering her wide garments up, swept by,
A curious look of marvel on her face.

'That night she changed, and many days passed by,
Until I felt I missed her sauciness
Which had so maddened me. She kept aloof,
And so did I; but still I thought 'twas I
Who'd broken her wild ways, and found myself
Making a picture in my heart of her
As she had flitted thro' the days, before
I spoilt her with my scorn that afternoon;
And growing vexed and testy, would not seek
To bridge the little gulf which gaped, by look
Or sign of friendliness to her, but sulked,
And snarled unto myself, and thought life dark,

The world askew, and slid aside from all

My wonted ways.

‘ One night I wandered out,
To find the peevish owls, whose note kept tune
With mine ; and straying, found a hollow oak,
Rugged and bare, with all its heart worn out,
Looking as though a hundred fires had snapped
Its living limbs and licked its life’s blood up,
Until they left no tree, but useless log—
An ugly shape at night for guilty minds—
Each gnarl a goblin with ten spectre arms.
Into its empty trunk I went to rest,
Pleased with the dreary shelter : there I slept,
And woke at sudden hearing of my name—
Not loudly called, but spoken as in talk,

And then a little laugh, and then my name :

“ Concenn, uncouth Concenn!”—I knew the voice,
The same that had said “ Loon!”—

And presently

Two figures passed—a maiden and a man—

And passing, noticed the old oak, whose feet

Of straggling roots, upheaved and bare, made
seats,

Curious and zigzag, all about its base.

There the two turned and sat, and there she told

The story of that afternoon—to him—

One of the crazing youths—not crazy now,

But sitting on the writhed and wriggled roots,

Won with the pleasure of her wily love,

Whilst I within the hollowness writhed too.

' I saw her face thro' a small slitted chink,
And felt within my heart I loved her well ;
But, as I looked and overheard, a mask
Fell from her features : ere I moved I learned
A lesson from the picture painted there—
The picture of a woman with no heart.

' I had forgotten her indignant " Loon !"
I should have blessed her chatter of " Concenn,
Uncouth Concenn"—I could have pardoned all
Her flippancy, have missed her love, content
To wait and earn a worthier woman,
In some more worthy way at some far time ;
But as I watched her there, and heard her tell
How she had tried to cozen me, to play
My suit, if she had won it, off against

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Some blurred, bleared, bloated noble, thrice her age,
Whom she had ogled for his carcanets.
O prince ! when I learned that, and how she dashed
In haste from me that afternoon, against
This smooth-faced youth, and won him with her wrath,
And for wrath's sake had kept him, not for love's,
Why, then I all but cursed her—left my hole
And burst upon them there, thanked her for all
Her treachery to me, thanked him as well
For wooing her, and ere they breathed reply,
Turned on my heel, and on the morrow rose,
Cured of my jaundice, and at peace with life.

‘There, Brochmail, there’s my tale from first to
last—

Make end to yours : the moral is the same.

The women's garments do not match, 'tis true—
Your's wraps in white and mine in black—but that
Is little matter, for my end is your's.
We both took aim, we both have missed our mark.
They played whilst they so wished to play : Amen
With all my heart, and now we'll wait until
Our playing time is past.'

Then spoke Brochmail :

'What end unto my story would'st thou have ?
Dost thou conceive that I can also lose
The scar where love has wounded me so soon ?
Our tales are different. Thou dost well to blot
From out thy mind so sad a scene of life,
With such dark picture of a woman's ways ;
Blind thy vexed eyes and never look again,
Make dumb thy lips to such unwelcome sound

As words which tell this tale of hideousness,
And open thy warm heart once more to me.

‘Thou wrong’st my love—as thou hast wronged my
maid

By coupling her hard “no,” wrung from her lips,
Which won no echo from her breaking heart,
With thy jade’s lying licence of foul play—
If thou hast spanned its growth by meed of thine.
I deal my words perhaps harshly, but the cure
For many a malady exceeds the pain
Itself had caused. Be patient ; tho’ I scourge,
I’ll heal thy life, which yet has open wound—
I know it by the colour of thy words.
The jaundice may be gone, but still thy blood
Is not yet free,—there is some rancour there.

Thou may'st find peace in life, but having missed
The honey in the cup, beware lest gall
Fill up the emptied measure unawares !
Concenn, thou mad'st a marriage in thy heart,
Whim wedded Idle-sport, and these begot
A child to suffer for its parentage ;
Thy love the offspring of the ill-matched pair.
How bud a rose on such ungainly brier ?
A flower may come, thine did, and fair enow ;
But, friend, the bloom came on a twisted stock
Which bent before the wind, and broke, and fell.
No honest race is won from a false start,
Nor holy passion from a foolish jest.
Thy thistle, as of old, cannot bear figs.
Make no mistake ; it was a shade thou chased'st—
The baseless shadow of a baseless love,

Which only lasts whilst sunshine causes it.
A real love comes only unto those
Who seek and know fit soil where they dare sow,
Then carefully, drop deeply down a grain
Never to be laid bare, nor looked upon,
But which takes root and grows, and by-and-by
Makes food which feeds the heart for life.

‘ I sowed

Such seed ; and tho' a frost has come to nip
The perfect growth, reached only by a spouse,
Yet I am sure its roots so net my heart,
That they will linger there, incorporate
With me, till breath shall cease.’

To which Concenn,

Abashed and utterly confused with feud

Of many-sided passions in his mind,
Made answer, with humility :

‘ Prince, friend,

Most noble brother of my heart, I take
Thy lofty scorn for my poor love.

‘ I know

Not yet awhile what best shall hurt or heal ;
But even knowing not, I take thy words
To lay aside in store. Perchance, some hour
Ere eventide has closed, the mist which hid
With suddenness the noon-day sun will melt,
And then my eyes may better see the blight
Which stained and spotted the bright blade of love
When I first nurtured it. Give me, instead,
Some scope for usefulness : my life, thus bent
From high desires, is profitless and flat.

Perchance, if I may follow thee thro' thine—
Be to thee as thy shadow—I may knit
Thy ways and thoughts to mine, and ravel out
The false from what is true, and make amends
For what I twisted in my heedlessness.'

Then Brochmail answered him :

'So let it be,
And thou shalt share my journey to the end :
If I should find that bourne, whene'er it be,
And thou canst also reach with me, Concenn,
We shall not live our little lives in vain.
When first I opened for myself a path
Distinct and separate, as every man
Must find and make when he sets out in life,
I chose a road which I thought best would lead

Unto my aim—contentment of desire—
And for that end pursued my days with zeal,
Cherished my soul with every fancied joy,
Conceived no wish without foreseen success,
Nor understood the chance of being crossed.
At length I found the princess. A new light
Shone in the distance : I pressed on once more,
Not doubting that for me the beacon burned.
Thou knowest the rest—yet not quite to the end,
So give me ear. When I turned from my love
At her desire, I thought the light went out,
The way was lost—the journey at an end ;
But when I looked again I saw a road
Which I had missed before.

‘ Concenn, ’tis this :

Throughout my thirty years I paced the world

To find peace for myself—to reach a crown
Of happiness to place on mine own head,
And through each path have chased a spectred self.
But now, God knows, my course is changed—

‘ I seek

Not my own wish, not my own love, but her's ;
And I believe that when I fully come
To lose my love of self, and use my life,
Not for my own small good, then I shall win
That goodly crown for man—content of mind.
Wilt thou go forward, too, towards the goal ?’

‘ Ay, prince, and were it fifty times more far,
I'd follow thee, and wear for my own crown
The shadow of thy peace ; for, truth to tell,
I, who have missed the sunlight, love the shade ;

And if a shade thrown by thy brighter life
Should fall upon me, better such a shade
Than coarser light without thy fellowship.
Show me the landmarks, Brochmail, on thy road :
Unless I read the signs with thy clear eyes,
I may not hope to happen on the goal !'

'Nay, friend, in such a path each reads his own.
The post which points with friendly help to one
Would lead another hopelessly astray :
The end is reached by many winding ways ;
I take my own,—come with me, and take thine.'

Then Concenn answered, 'I will surely go.'

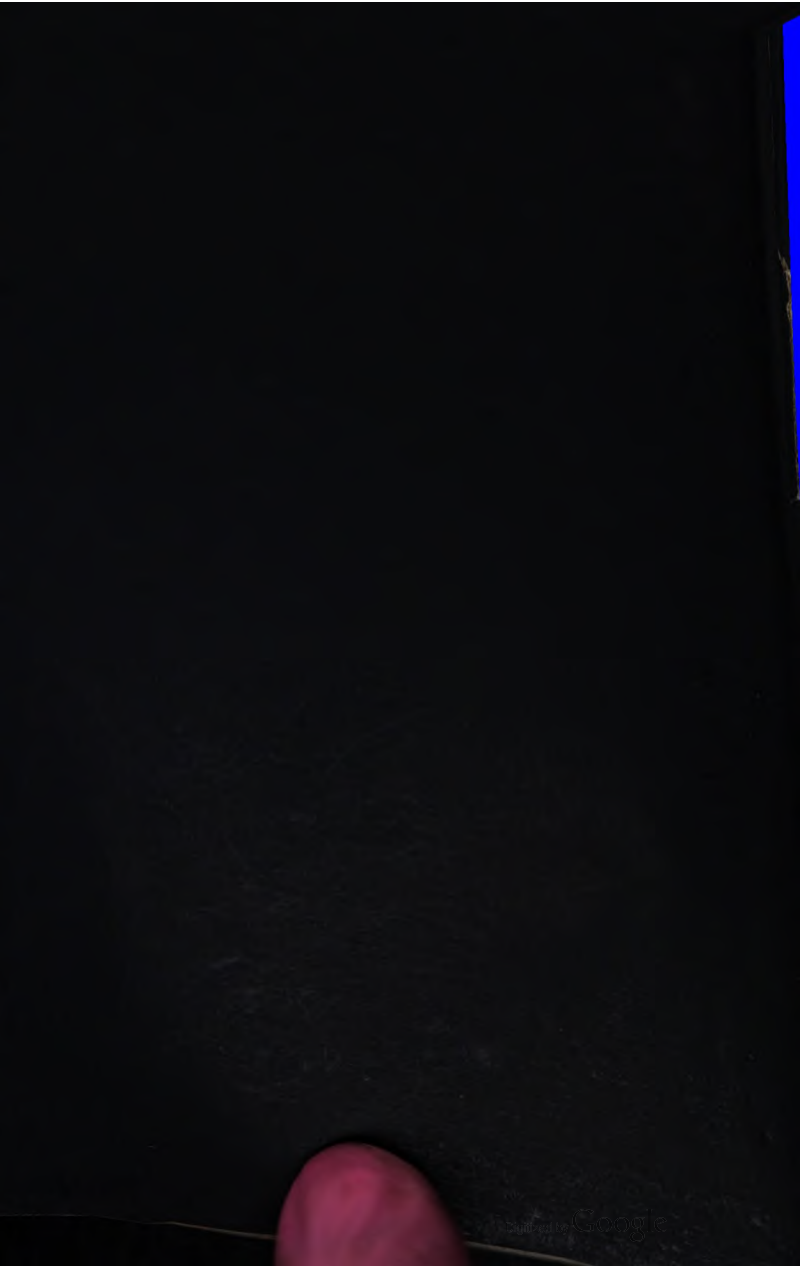
Thenceforward they were friends, as best true men
Make friendship, and by all the people known

For largest charity and their pure lives.
And day by day the two passed thro' the woods
To Monacella, and to her brought all
The folk, wherever they might find them sick,
And to them all she ministered within
The lonely spot where she had made her shrine ;
There lent her bed, cleft rudely in the rock,
To many a houseless maid, and found new skill
In ever-growing frequency of need,
For those she healed or cheered soon spread her fame :
There, afterwards, Brochmail, for her dear sake,
And having found contentment in his life
Of usefulness, and helped by his true friend,
Laid stone on stone until an abbey rose,
In lasting memory of his great love,
The closing seal of promised help to her.

From far and near crowds came to her, and with
Such love and blessings as sick souls can give,
Her prayer was answered, and she kept her vow.
Some say she reached the high life of the soul ;
Some say she narrowed it, shut from God's world,
Howbeit, she dwelt within the abbey, long :
Within its hospitable walls, screened those
Who, harried with the rough use of their kind,
Sought rest and shelter for their blunted lives.
Such sanctuary she made there : through her days
Was abbess called, and after, when God blessed
Her quiet life with still more quiet death,
Lived in the people's minds, a holy maid.

THE END.

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