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ORȚE D'AR ȚHUR

A POEM BY

ALFRED LORD
GENNYSON



SOLI DEO GLORIA



O all day long
the noise of battle
roll'd

Among the moun-
tains by the winter
sea ;

Until King Arthur's
table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyon-
ness about
their Lord ,

King **A**rthur : then,
because his wound



was deep
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted
him,
IR·BEDIVERE, the last of
all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh
the field,
A broken chancel with a broken
cross,
That stood on a dark strait
of barren land.

On one side
lay the Ocean,
and on one
Lay a great
water, and
the moon
was full.



hen spake King Arthur
to Sir Bedivere:

The sequel of to-day
unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship
of famous knights
Whereof this world holds
record. Such a

sleep
They sleep — the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly
deeds,

Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.

I perish by this people which I made, —
Who' Merlin sware that I should come
again

To rule once more — but let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou remember
est how



In those old days, one summer noon
an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the
lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic,
wonderful,
Holding the sword — and how I
row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like
a king :

And, wheresoever I am sung or told

In aftertime, this also shall be known :

But now delay not : take Excalibur,

And sling him far into the middle mere :

Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me
word."

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :

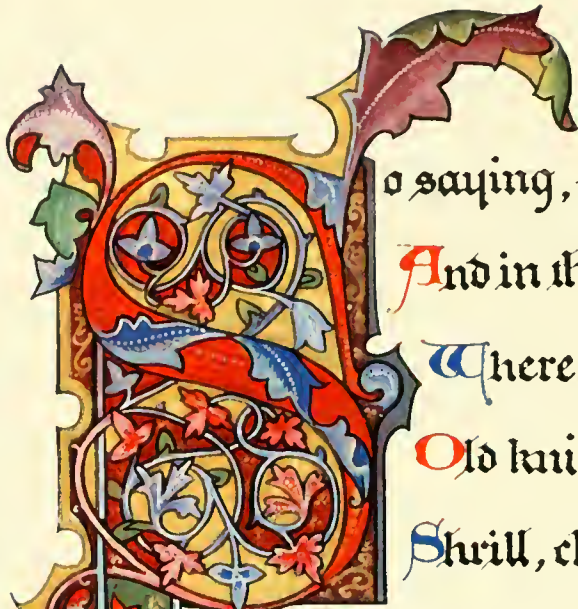
"It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,

Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm

A little thing may harm a wounded man,

Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,

Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word."



o saying, from the ruin'd shrine
he stept

And in the moon athwart the
place of tombs,

Where lay the mighty bones
of ancient men,

Old knights, and over them
the sea-wind sang

Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam.

He, stepping down

By zig-zag paths, and juls of pointed
rock,

Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand

Excalibur,



And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud,

ran forth

And sparkled keen with frost against the
hilt:

For all the haft twinkled with diamond studs
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work

Of subtilest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,



This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted water flags,
That whistled sliff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded king.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:

“Hast thou perform'd my mission which I
gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?”

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:

“I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.”

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and
pale:

Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy
name

Not rendering true answer, as besem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight:
Nor surer sign had follow'd, either hand,



Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me
word. "

hen went Sir Hedivere the
second time

Across the ridge, and
paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy peb-
bles, fix'd in thought;

But when he saw the
wonder of the hilt,

How curiously and strangely chased, he

His palms together, and he cried aloud .
smote

" And if indeed I cast the brand
away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note.

Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of
many men.

What good should follow this, if this were
done?

What harm, undone? Deep harm to dis-
obey,

Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king
demand

An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what
he does.

What record, or what relic of
my lord

Should be to aftertime, but
empty breath

And rumours of a doubt?
but were this
kept,

Stored in some treasure-house of
mighty kings,

Some one might show it at a joust of
arms,



aying, "King Arthur's sword
Excalibur
Wrought by the lonely maiden
of the Lake.

Nine years she wrought it,
sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the
hills."

So might some old man speak
in the aftertime
To all the people, winning



reverence.
But now much honour and much fame
were lost."

So spake he, clouded with his own
conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded
King.

When spake King Arthur, breathing
heavily:

"What is 't thou hast seen? or what hast
heard?"

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:

"I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds."

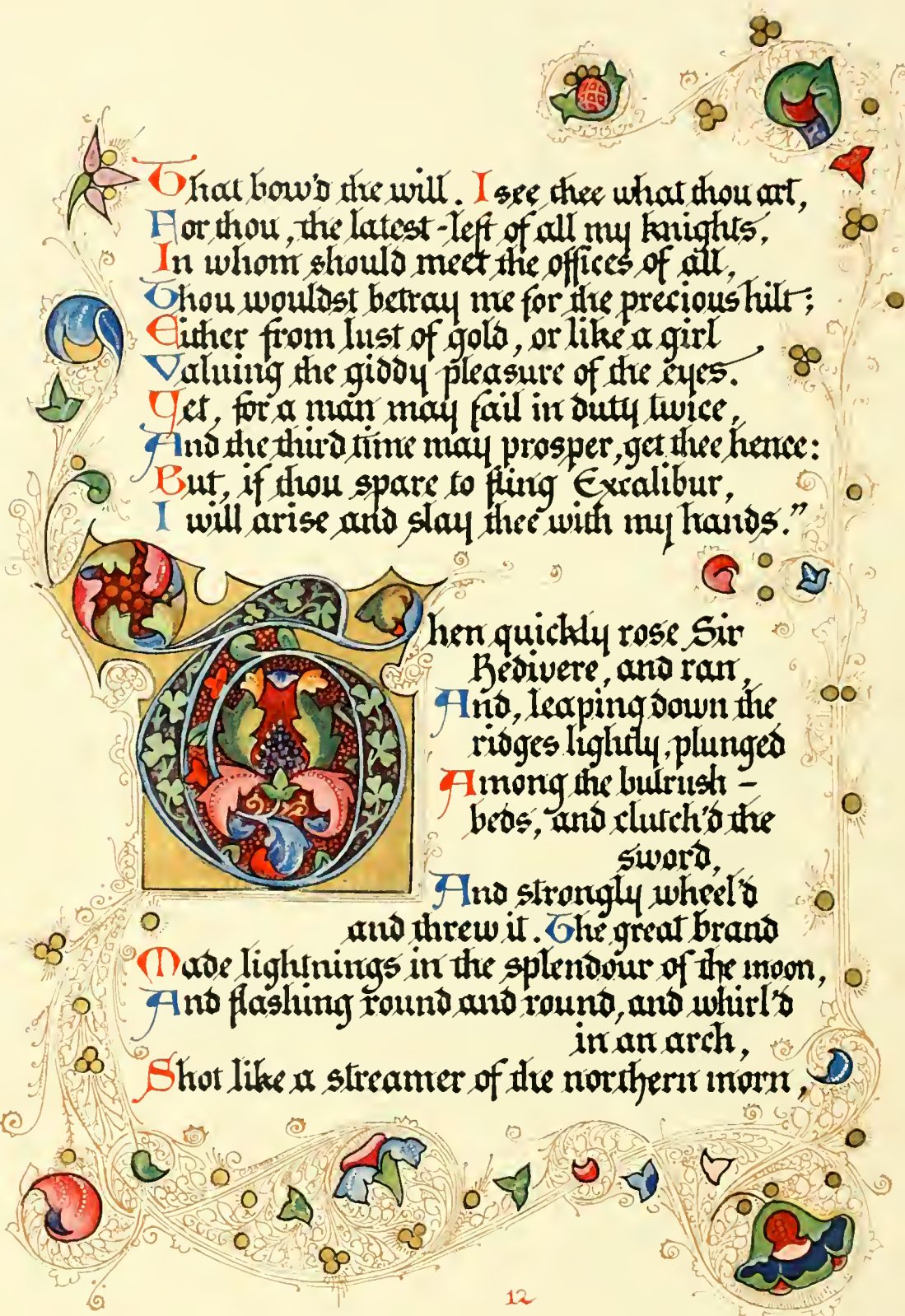
To whom replied King Arthur, much in
wrath:

Ho, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted!

Woe is me!


Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his
eye





That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-*left* of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to sling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands."

When quickly rose Sir
Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the
ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush-
beds, and clutch'd the
sword,
And strongly wheel'd
and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd
in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,




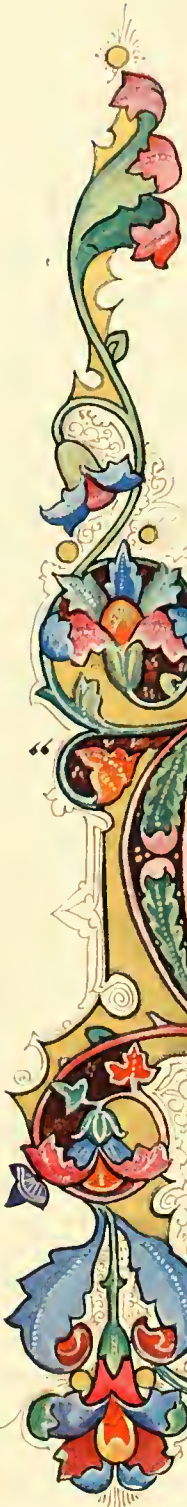
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the northern sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd
him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing
thicker breath:

How see I by thine eyes that
this is done.
Speak out: what is it
thou hast heard, or seen?"


And answer made the
bold Sir Bedivere:

"Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the
gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,



Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
When with both hands I swung him, wheeling
him;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd
him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere."

And answer made King Arthur,
breathing hard :



My end draws nigh; 'tis
time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoul-
ders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the
margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken
cold, and I shall die."

So saying, from the pavement he half
rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,

And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Redivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not
words,
Then took with care, and kneeling on one
knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid
hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur
panted hard,
Like one that feels a night
mare on his bed
When all the house is mute.
So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear
"Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die."
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to
ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking as he
walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.

He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a
goad.

Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as
he based

His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed
heels —

And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

When saw they how there hove
a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from
stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending
they were ware
That all the decks were dense
with stately forms
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream —
by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold — and
from them rose

A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one
comes,
Or hadh come, since the making of the
world.

Then murmur'd Arthur,
"Place me in the barge."



nd to the barge
they came.

There those three

Queens


Put forth their
hands, and took
the King, and
wept.

But she, that rose
the tallest of them
all

And fairest, laid
his head upon her lap,



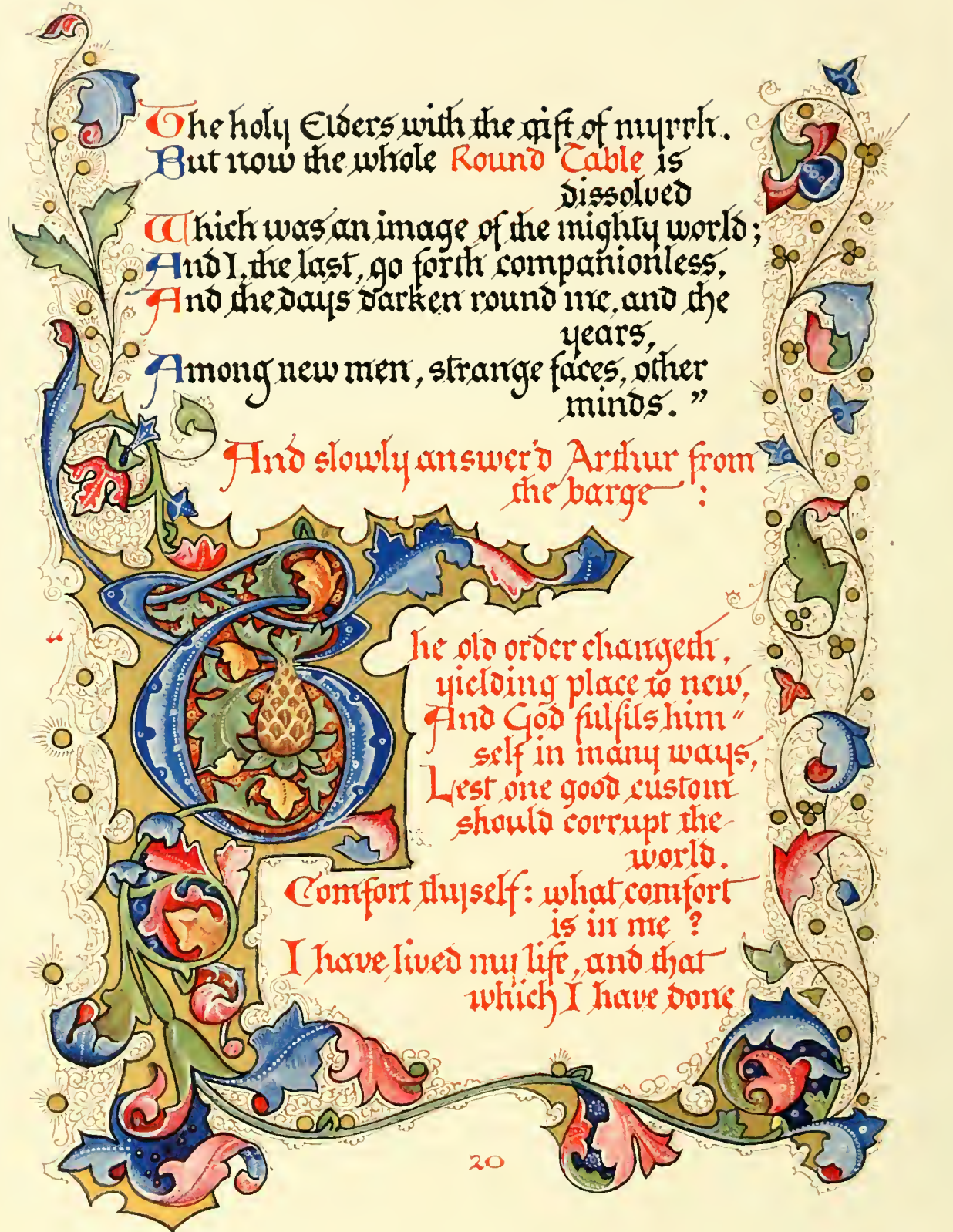
And loosed the shatter'd casque,
and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name,
complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears
against his brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his
face was white
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing
east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd
with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls -
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the dais - throne - were parch'd
with dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose
Mix'd with the knightly growth that
fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King;



Not like that Arthur who, with lance in
rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.


When loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere,

Ah ! my Lord Arthur, whither
shall I go ?
Where shall I hide my fore-
head and my eyes ?
For now I see the true old
times are dead,
When every morning
brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble
knight.
Such times have been not since the light
that led



The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is
dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the
years,
Among new men, strange faces, other
minds."

And slowly answer'd Arthur from
the barge:



he old order changeth,
yielding place to new,
And God fulfils him
self in many ways,
Lest one good custom
should corrupt the
world.

Comfort thyself: what comfort
is in me?
I have lived my life, and that
which I have done

May he within himself make pure! but
thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,

pray for my soul. More
things are wrought by
prayer
Than this world dreams
of. Wherefore, let thy
voice
Rise like a fountain
for me night and day.
For what are men
better than sheep or
goats

That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of
prayer

Both for themselves and those who call
them friend?

For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest — if indeed I go —
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt.)
To the island-valley of Avilion;

Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-
lawn
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer
sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

O said he, and the barge
with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like
some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol
ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume,
and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long
stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories,
till the hull
Look'd one black dot against
the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing
died away.





Here ends *Morte D'Arthur*
a Poem by
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