CLASSICS TO GO

CHIVALRY

JAMES BRANCH CABELL

Chivalry

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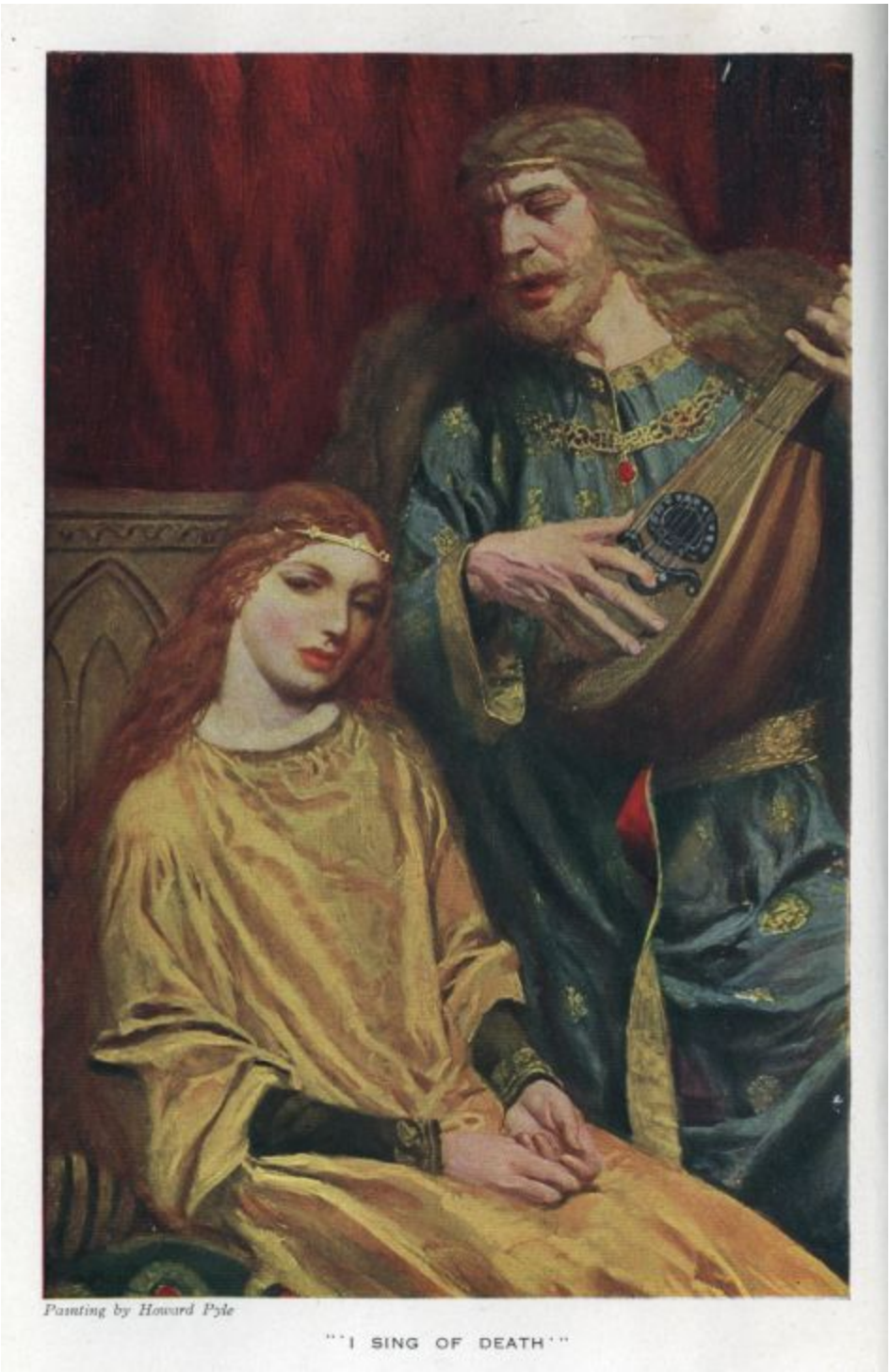

Painting by Howard Pyle

"'I SING OF DEATH'"

"'I SING OF DEATH'" ***Painting by Howard Pyle***

TO
Anne Branch Cabell

"AINSI À VOUS, MADAME, À MA TRÈS HAULTE ET TRÈS NOBLE DAME, À QUI J'AYME À DEVOIR ATTACHEMENT ET OBÉISSANCE, J'ENVOYE CE LIVRET."

Precautional

Imprimis, as concerns the authenticity of these tales perhaps the less debate may be the higher wisdom, if only because this Nicolas de Caen, by common report, was never a Gradgrindian. And in this volume in particular, writing it (as Nicolas is supposed to have done) in 1470*, as a dependant on the Duke of Burgundy, it were but human nature should our author be a little niggardly in his ascription of praiseworthy traits to any member of the house of Lancaster or of Valois. Rather must one in common reason accept him as confessedly a partisan writer, who upon occasion will recolor an event with such nuances as will be least inconvenient to a Yorkist and Burgundian bias.*

The reteller of these stories needs in addition to plead guilty of having abridged the tales with a free hand. Item, these tales have been a trifle pulled about, most notably in "THE STORY OF THE SATRAPS," *where it seemed advantageous, on rejection, to put into Gloucester's mouth a history which in the original version was related ab ovo, and as a sort of bungling prologue to the story proper. Item, some passages have been restored in book-form—pre-eminently to* "THE STORY OF THE HOUSEWIFE"*—that in*

an anterior publication had been unavoidably deleted through consideration of space.

And—"sixth and lastly"—should confession be made that in the present rendering a purely arbitrary title has been assigned this little book; and chiefly for commercial reasons, since the word "dizain" has been adjudged both untranslatable and, in its pristine form, repellantly outré.

You are to give my makeshift, then, a wide interpretation; and are always to remember that in the bleak, florid age these tales commemorate this chivalry was much the rarelier significant of any personal trait than of a world-wide code in consonance with which all estimable people lived and died. Its root was the assumption (uncontested then) that a gentleman will always serve his God, his honor and his lady without any reservation; nor did the many emanating by-laws ever deal with special cases as concerns this triple, fixed, and fundamental homage.

So here you have a chance to peer at our world's youth when chivalry was regnant, and common-sense and cowardice were still at nurse. And, questionless, these same conditions were the source of an age-long mêlée—such as this week is, happily, impossible in any of our parishes—wherein contended "courtesy, and humanity, friendliness, hardihood, love and friendship, and murder, hate, and virtue, and sin." So that I can only counsel you to do after the excellencies and leave the iniquity.

And for the rest, since good wine needs no hush, and an inferior beverage is not likely to be bettered by arboreal adornment, the reteller of these tales prefers to piece out his exordium (however lamely) with "THE PRINTER'S PREFACE." *And it runs in this fashion:*

"Here begins the volume called and entitled the Dizain of Queens, composed and extracted from divers chronicles and other sources of information, by that extremely venerable person and worshipful man, Messire Nicolas de Caen, priest and chaplain to the right noble, glorious and mighty prince in his time, Philippe, Duke of Burgundy, of Brabant, etc., in the year of the Incarnation of our Lord God a thousand four hundred and seventy; and imprinted by me, Colard Mansion, at Bruges, in the year of our said Lord God a thousand four hundred and seventy-one; at the commandment of the right high, mighty and virtuous Princess, my redoubted Lady, Isabella of Portugal, by the grace of God Duchess of Burgundy and Lotharingia, of Brabant and Limbourg, of Luxembourg and of Gueldres, Countess of Flanders, of Artois, and of Burgundy, Palatine of Hainault, of Holland, of Zealand and of Namur, Marquesse of the Holy Empire, and Lady of Frisia, of Salins and of Mechlin; whom I beseech Almighty God less to increase than to continue in her virtuous disposition in this world, and after our poor fleet existence to receive eternally. Amen."

The Prologue

"*Afin que les entreprises honorables et les nobles aventures et faicts d'armes soyent noblement enregistrés et conservés, je vais traiter et raconter et inventer ung galimatias.*"

THE DIZAIN OF QUEENS OF THAT NOBLE MAKER IN THE FRENCH TONGUE, MESSIRE NICOLAS DE CAEN, DEDICATED TO THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS ISABELLA OF PORTUGAL, OF THE HOUSE OF THE INDOMITABLE ALFONSO HENRIQUES, AND DUCHESS DOWAGER OF BURGUNDY. HERE BEGINS IN AUSPICIOUS WISE THE PROLOGUE.

The Prologue

À sa Dame

Inasmuch as it was by your command, illustrious and exalted lady, that I have gathered together these stories to form the present little book, you should the less readily suppose I have presumed to dedicate to your Serenity this trivial offering because of my esteeming it to be not undeserving of your acceptance. The truth is otherwise; and your postulant now approaches as one not spurred toward you by vainglory but rather by plain equity, and simply in acknowledgment of the fact that he who seeks to write of noble ladies must necessarily implore at outset the patronage of her who is the light and mainstay of our age. In fine, I humbly bring my book to you as Phidyle approached another and less sacred shrine, *farre pio et salente mica*, and lay before you this my valueless mean tribute not as appropriate to you but as the best I have to offer.

It is a little book wherein I treat of divers queens and of their love-business; and with necessitated candor I concede my chosen field to have been harvested, and even

scrupulously gleaned, by many writers of innumerable conditions. Since Dares Phrygius wrote of Queen Heleine and Virgil (that shrewd necromancer) of Queen Dido, a preponderating mass of clerks, in casting about for high and serious matter, have chosen, as though it were by common instinct, to dilate upon the amours of royal women. Even in romance we scribblers must contrive it so that the fair Nicolette shall be discovered in the end to be no less than the King's daughter of Carthage, and that Sir Doon of Mayence shall never sink in his love-affairs beneath the degree of a Saracen princess; and we are backed in this old procedure not only by the authority of Aristotle but, oddly enough, by that of reason as well.

Kings have their policies and wars wherewith to drug each appetite. But their consorts are denied these makeshifts; and love may rationally be defined as the pivot of each normal woman's life, and in consequence as the arbiter of that ensuing life which is eternal. Because—as of old Horatius Flaccus demanded, though not, to speak the truth, of any woman,—

> *Quo fugis? ah demons! nulla est fuga, tu licet usque*
> *Ad Tanaim fugias, usque sequetur amor.*

And a dairymaid, let us say, may love whom she will, and nobody else be a penny the worse for her mistaking of the preferable nail whereon to hang her affections; whereas with a queen this choice is more portentous. She plays the game of life upon a loftier table, ruthlessly illuminated, and stakes by her least movement a tall pile of counters, some of which are, of necessity, the lives and happiness of persons whom she knows not, unless it be by vague report. Grandeur sells itself at this hard price, and at no other. A queen must always play, in fine, as the vicar of destiny, free to choose but very certainly compelled to justify that choice in the ensuing action; as is strikingly manifested by the

authentic histories of Brunhalt, and of Guenevere, and of swart Cleopatra, and of many others that were born to the barbaric queenhoods of a now extinct and dusty time.

For royal persons are (I take it) the immediate and the responsible stewards of Heaven; and since the nature of each man is like a troubled stream, now muddied and now clear, their prayer must ever be, *Defenda me, Dios, de me*! Yes, of exalted people, and even of their near associates, life, because it aims more high than the aforementioned Aristotle, demands upon occasion a more great catharsis which would purge any audience of unmanliness, through pity and through terror, because, by a quaint paradox, the players have been purged of all humanity. For in that aweful moment would Destiny have thrust her sceptre into the hands of a human being and Chance would have exalted a human being into usurpal of her chair. These two —with what immortal chucklings one may facilely imagine —would then have left the weakling thus enthroned, free to direct the pregnant outcome, free to choose, and free to steer the conjuration either in the fashion of Friar Bacon or of his man, but with no intermediate course unbarred. *Now prove thyself!* saith Destiny; and Chance appends: *Now prove thyself to be at bottom a god or else a beast, and now eternally abide that choice. And now* (O crowning irony!) *we may not tell thee clearly by which choice thou mayst prove either*.

It is of ten such moments that I treat within this little book.

You alone, I think, of all persons living have learned, as you have settled by so many instances, to rise above mortality in such a testing, and unfailingly to merit by your conduct the plaudits and the adoration of our otherwise dissentient world. You have sat often in this same high

chair of Chance; and in so doing have both graced and hallowed it. Yet I forbear to speak of this, simply because I dare not seem to couple your well-known perfection with any imperfect encomium.

Therefore to you, madame—most excellent and noble lady,
to whom I love to owe both loyalty and love—
I dedicate this little book.

I

The Story of the Sestina

"*Armatz de fust e de fer e d'acier,*
Mos ostal seran bosc, fregz, e semdier,
E mas cansos sestinas e descortz,
E mantenrai los frevols contra 'ls fortz."

THE FIRST NOVEL.—ALIANORA OF PROVENCE, COMING IN DISGUISE AND IN ADVERSITY TO A CERTAIN CLERK, IS BY HIM CONDUCTED ACROSS A HOSTILE COUNTRY; AND IN THAT TROUBLED JOURNEY ARE MADE MANIFEST TO EITHER THE SNARES WHICH HAD BEGUILED THEM AFORETIME.

The Story of the Sestina

In this place we have to do with the opening tale of the Dizain of Queens. I abridge, as afterward, at discretion; and an initial account of the Barons' War, among other superfluities, I amputate as more remarkable for veracity than interest. The result, we will agree at outset, is that to the Norman cleric appertains whatever these tales may have of merit, whereas what you find distasteful in them you must impute to my delinquencies in skill rather than in volition.

Within the half-hour after de Giars' death (here one overtakes Nicolas mid-course in narrative) Dame Alianora thus stood alone in the corridor of a strange house. Beyond the arras the steward and his lord were at irritable converse.

First, "If the woman be hungry," spoke a high and peevish voice, "feed her. If she need money, give it to her. But do not annoy me."

"This woman demands to see the master of the house," the steward then retorted.

"O incredible Boeotian, inform her that the master of the house has no time to waste upon vagabonds who select the middle of the night as an eligible time to pop out of nowhere. Why did you not do so in the beginning, you dolt?" He got for answer only a deferential cough, and very shortly continued: "This is remarkably vexatious. *Vox et praeterea nihil*,—which signifies, Yeck, that to converse with women is always delightful. Admit her." This was done, and Dame Alianora came into an apartment littered with papers, where a neat and shrivelled gentleman of fifty-odd sat at a desk and scowled.

He presently said, "You may go, Yeck." He had risen, the magisterial attitude with which he had awaited her advent cast aside. "O God!" he said; "you, madame!" His thin hands, scholarly hands, were plucking at the air.

Dame Alianora had paused, greatly astonished, and there was an interval before she said, "I do not recognize you, messire."

"And yet, madame, I recall very clearly that some thirty years ago Count Bérenger, then reigning in Provence, had about his court four daughters, each one of whom was afterward wedded to a king. First, Margaret, the eldest, now regnant in France; then Alianora, the second and most beautiful of these daughters, whom troubadours hymned as La Belle. She was married a long while ago, madame, to the King of England, Lord Henry, third of that name to reign in these islands."

Dame Alianora's eyes were narrowing. "There is something in your voice," she said, "which I recall."

He answered: "Madame and Queen, that is very likely, for it is a voice which sang a deal in Provence when both of us were younger. I concede with the Roman that I have somewhat deteriorated since the reign of good Cynara. Yet have you quite forgotten the Englishman who made so many songs of you? They called him Osmund Heleigh."

"He made the Sestina of Spring which my father envied," the Queen said; and then, with a new eagerness: "Messire, can it be that you are Osmund Heleigh?" He shrugged assent. She looked at him for a long time, rather sadly, and afterward demanded if he were the King's man or of the barons' party. The nervous hands were raised in deprecation.

"I have no politics," he began, and altered it, gallantly enough, to, "I am the Queen's man, madame."

"Then aid me, Osmund," she said; and he answered with a gravity which singularly became him:

"You have reason to understand that to my fullest power I will aid you."

"You know that at Lewes these swine overcame us." He nodded assent. "And now they hold the King my husband captive at Kenilworth. I am content that he remain there, for he is of all the King's enemies the most dangerous. But, at Wallingford, Leicester has imprisoned my son, Prince Edward. The Prince must be freed, my Osmund. Warren de Basingbourne commands what is left of the royal army, now entrenched at Bristol, and it is he who must liberate him. Get me to Bristol, then. Afterward we will take Wallingford." The Queen issued these orders in cheery, practical fashion, and did not admit opposition into the account, for she was a capable woman.

"But you, madame?" he stammered. "You came alone?"

"I come from France, where I have been entreating—and vainly entreating—succor from yet another monkish king, the pious Lewis of that realm. Eh, what is God about when He enthrones these cowards, Osmund? Were I a king, were I even a man, I would drive these smug English out of their foggy isle in three days' space! I would leave alive not one of these curs that dare yelp at me! I would—" She paused, the sudden anger veering into amusement. "See how I enrage myself when I think of what your people have made me suffer," the Queen said, and shrugged her shoulders. "In effect, I skulked back to this detestable island in disguise, accompanied by Avenel de Giars and Hubert Fitz-Herveis. To-night some half-dozen fellows—robbers, thorough knaves, like all you English,—suddenly attacked us on the common yonder and slew the men of our party. While they were cutting de Giars' throat I slipped away in the dark and tumbled through many ditches till I spied your light. There you have my story. Now get me an escort to Bristol."

It was a long while before Messire Heleigh spoke. Then, "These men," he said—"this de Giars and this Fitz-Herveis—they gave their lives for yours, as I understand it,—*pro caris amicis*. And yet you do not grieve for them."

"I shall regret de Giars," the Queen said, "for he made excellent songs. But Fitz-Herveis?—foh! the man had a face like a horse." Then again her mood changed. "Many men have died for me, my friend. At first I wept for them, but now I am dry of tears."

He shook his head. "Cato very wisely says, 'If thou hast need of help, ask it of thy friends.' But the sweet friend that I remember was a clean-eyed girl, joyous and exceedingly beautiful. Now you appear to me one of those ladies of

remoter times—Faustina, or Jael, or Artemis, the King's wife of Tauris,—they that slew men, laughing. I am somewhat afraid of you, madame."

She was angry at first; then her face softened. "You English!" she said, only half mirthful. "Eh, my God! you remember me when I was happy. Now you behold me in my misery. Yet even now I am your Queen, messire, and it is not yours to pass judgment upon me."

"I do not judge you," he hastily returned. "Rather I cry with him of old, *Omnia incerta ratione*! and I cry with Salomon that he who meddles with the strife of another man is like to him that takes a hound by the ears. Yet listen, madame and Queen. I cannot afford you an escort to Bristol. This house, of which I am in temporary charge, is Longaville, my brother's manor. And Lord Brudenel, as you doubtless know, is of the barons' party and—scant cause for grief!—with Leicester at this moment. I can trust none of my brother's people, for I believe them to be of much the same opinion as those Londoners who not long ago stoned you and would have sunk your barge in Thames River. Oh, let us not blink the fact that you are not overbeloved in England. So an escort is out of the question. Yet I, madame, if you so elect, will see you safe to Bristol."

"You? singly?" the Queen demanded.

"My plan is this: Singing folk alone travel whither they will. We will go as jongleurs, then. I can yet manage a song to the viol, I dare affirm. And you must pass as my wife."

He said this with a very curious simplicity. The plan seemed unreasonable, and at first Dame Alianora waved it aside. Out of the question! But reflection suggested nothing better; it was impossible to remain at Longaville, and the

man spoke sober truth when he declared any escort other than himself to be unprocurable. Besides, the lunar madness of the scheme was its strength; that the Queen would venture to cross half England unprotected—and Messire Heleigh on the face of him was a paste-board buckler,—was an event which Leicester would neither anticipate nor on report credit. There you were! these English had no imagination. The Queen snapped her fingers and said: "Very willingly will I be your wife, my Osmund. But how do I know that I can trust you? Leicester would give a deal for me,—any price in reason for the Sorceress of Provence. And you are not wealthy, I suspect."

"You may trust me, mon bel esper"—his eyes here were those of a beaten child,—"since my memory is better than yours." Messire Osmund Heleigh gathered his papers into a neat pile. "This room is mine. To-night I keep guard in the corridor, madame. We will start at dawn."

When he had gone, Dame Alianora laughed contentedly. "Mon bel esper! my fairest hope! The man called me that in his verses—thirty years ago! Yes, I may trust you, my poor Osmund."

So they set out at cockcrow. He had procured a viol and a long falchion for himself, and had somewhere got suitable clothes for the Queen; and in their aging but decent garb the two approached near enough to the similitude of what they desired to be esteemed. In the courtyard a knot of servants gaped, nudged one another, but openly said nothing. Messire Heleigh, as they interpreted it, was brazening out an affair of gallantry before the countryside; and they appeared to consider his casual observation that they would find a couple of dead men on the common exceedingly diverting.

When the Queen asked him the same morning: "And what will you sing, my Osmund? Shall we begin with the Sestina of Spring"? Osmund Heleigh grunted.

"I have forgotten that rubbish long ago. *Omnis amans, amens*, saith the satirist of Rome town, and with some show of reason."

Followed silence.

One sees them thus trudging the brown, naked plains under a sky of steel. In a pageant the woman, full-veined and comely, her russet gown girded up like a harvester's, might not inaptly have prefigured October; and for less comfortable November you could nowhere have found a symbol more precise than her lank companion, humorously peevish under his white thatch of hair, and so constantly fretted by the sword tapping at his ankles.

They made Hurlburt prosperously and found it vacant, for the news of Falmouth's advance had driven the villagers hillward. There was in this place a child, a naked boy of some two years, lying on a doorstep, overlooked in their gross terror. As the Queen with a sob lifted this boy the child died.

"Starved!" said Osmund Heleigh; "and within a stone's-throw of my snug home!"

The Queen laid down the tiny corpse, and, stooping, lightly caressed its sparse flaxen hair. She answered nothing, though her lips moved.

Past Vachel, scene of a recent skirmish, with many dead in the gutters, they were overtaken by Falmouth himself, and stood at the roadside to afford his troop passage. The Marquess, as he went by, flung the Queen a coin, with a

jest sufficiently high-flavored. She knew the man her inveterate enemy, knew that on recognition he would have killed her as he would a wolf; she smiled at him and dropped a curtsey.

Painting by Howard Pyle

"THEY WERE OVERTAKEN BY FALMOUTH HIMSELF"

"THEY WERE OVERTAKEN BY FALMOUTH HIMSELF"
Painting by Howard Pyle

"That is very remarkable," Messire Heleigh observed. "I was hideously afraid, and am yet shaking. But you, madame, laughed."

The Queen replied: "I laughed because I know that some day I shall have Lord Falmouth's head. It will be very sweet to see it roll in the dust, my Osmund."

Messire Heleigh somewhat dryly observed that tastes differed.

At Jessop Minor a more threatening adventure befell. Seeking food at the *Cat and Hautbois* in that village, they blundered upon the same troop at dinner in the square about the inn. Falmouth and his lieutenants were somewhere inside the house. The men greeted the supposed purveyors of amusement with a shout; and one among them—a swarthy rascal with his head tied in a napkin—demanded that the jongleurs grace their meal with a song.

At first Osmund put him off with a tale of a broken viol.

But, "Haro!" the fellow blustered; "by blood and by nails! you will sing more sweetly with a broken viol than with a broken head. I would have you understand, you hedge-thief, that we gentlemen of the sword are not partial to wordy argument." Messire Heleigh fluttered inefficient hands as the men-at-arms gathered about them, scenting some genial piece of cruelty. "Oh, you rabbit!" the trooper jeered, and caught him by the throat, shaking him. In the act this rascal tore open Messire Heleigh's tunic, disclosing a thin chain about his neck and a small locket, which the fellow wrested from its fastening. "Ahoi!" he continued.

"Ahoi, my comrades, what species of minstrel is this, who goes about England all hung with gold like a Cathedral Virgin! He and his sweetheart"—the actual word was grosser—"will be none the worse for an interview with the Marquess."

The situation smacked of awkwardness, for Lord Falmouth was familiar with the Queen, and to be brought specifically to his attention meant death for two detected masqueraders. Hastily Osmund Heleigh said:

"Messire, the locket contains the portrait of a lady whom in youth I loved very greatly. Save to me, it is valueless. I pray you, do not rob me of it."

But the trooper shook his head with drunken solemnity. "I do not like the looks of this. Yet I will sell it to you, as the saying is, for a song."

"It shall be the king of songs," said Osmund—"the song that Arnaut Daniel first made. I will sing for you a Sestina, messieurs—a Sestina in salutation of Spring."

The men disposed themselves about the dying grass, and presently he sang.

Sang Messire Heleigh:

"*Awaken! for the servitors of Spring*
Marshal his triumph! ah, make haste to see
With what tempestuous pageantry they bring
Mirth back to earth! hasten, for this is he
That cast out Winter and the woes that cling
To Winter's garments, and bade April be!

"*And now that Spring is master, let us be*
Content, and laugh as anciently in Spring
The battle-wearied Tristan laughed, when he
Was come again Tintagel-ward—to bring

Glad news of Arthur's victory and see
Ysoude, with parted lips, that waver and cling.

"*Anon in Brittany must Tristan cling*
To this or that sad memory, and be
Alone, as she in Cornwall, for in Spring
Love sows, and lovers reap anon—and he
Is blind, and scatters baleful seed that bring
Such fruitage as blind Love lacks eyes to see!"

Osmund paused here for an appreciable interval, staring at the Queen. You saw his flabby throat a-quiver, his eyes melting, saw his cheeks kindle, and youth ebb back into the lean man like water over a crumbling dam. His voice was now big and desirous.

Sang Messire Heleigh:

"*Love sows, and lovers reap; and ye will see*
The loved eyes lighten, feel the loved lips cling
Never again when in the grave ye be
Incurious of your happiness in Spring,
And get no grace of Love there, whither he
That bartered life for love no love may bring.

"*Here Death is;—and no Heracles may bring*
Alcestis hence, nor here may Roland see
The eyes of Aude, nor here the wakening spring
Vex any man with memory, for there be
No memories that cling as cerements cling,
No Love that baffles Death, more strong than he.

"*Us hath he noted, and for us hath he*
An how appointed, and that hour will bring
Oblivion.—Then, laugh! Laugh, love, and see
The tyrant mocked, what time our bosoms cling,
What time our lips are red, what time we be
Exultant in our little hour of spring!

"*Thus in the spring we mock at Death, though he*
Will see our children perish and will bring
Asunder all that cling while love may be."

Then Osmund put the viol aside and sat quite silent. The soldiery judged, and with cordial frankness stated, that the

difficulty of his rhyming scheme did not atone for his lack of indecency, but when the Queen of England went among them with Messire Heleigh's hat she found them liberal. Even the fellow with the broken head admitted that a bargain was proverbially a bargain, and returned the locket with the addition of a coin. So for the present these two went safe, and quitted the *Cat and Hautbois* both fed and unmolested.

"My Osmund," Dame Alianora said, presently, "your memory is better than I had thought."

"I remembered a boy and a girl," he returned. "And I grieved that they were dead."

Afterward they plodded on toward Bowater, and the ensuing night rested in Chantrell Wood. They had the good-fortune there to encounter dry and windless weather and a sufficiency of brushwood, with which Osmund constructed an agreeable fire. In its glow these two sat, eating bread and cheese.

But talk languished at the outset. The Queen had complained of an ague, and Messire Heleigh was sedately suggesting three spiders hung about the neck as an infallible corrective for this ailment, when Dame Alianora rose to her feet.

"Eh, my God!" she said; "I am wearied of such ungracious aid! Not an inch of the way but you have been thinking of your filthy books and longing to be back at them! No; I except the moments when you were frightened into forgetfulness—first by Falmouth, then by the trooper. O Eternal Father! fraid of a single dirty soldier!"

"Indeed, I was very much afraid," said Messire Heleigh, with perfect simplicity; "*timidus perire*, madame."