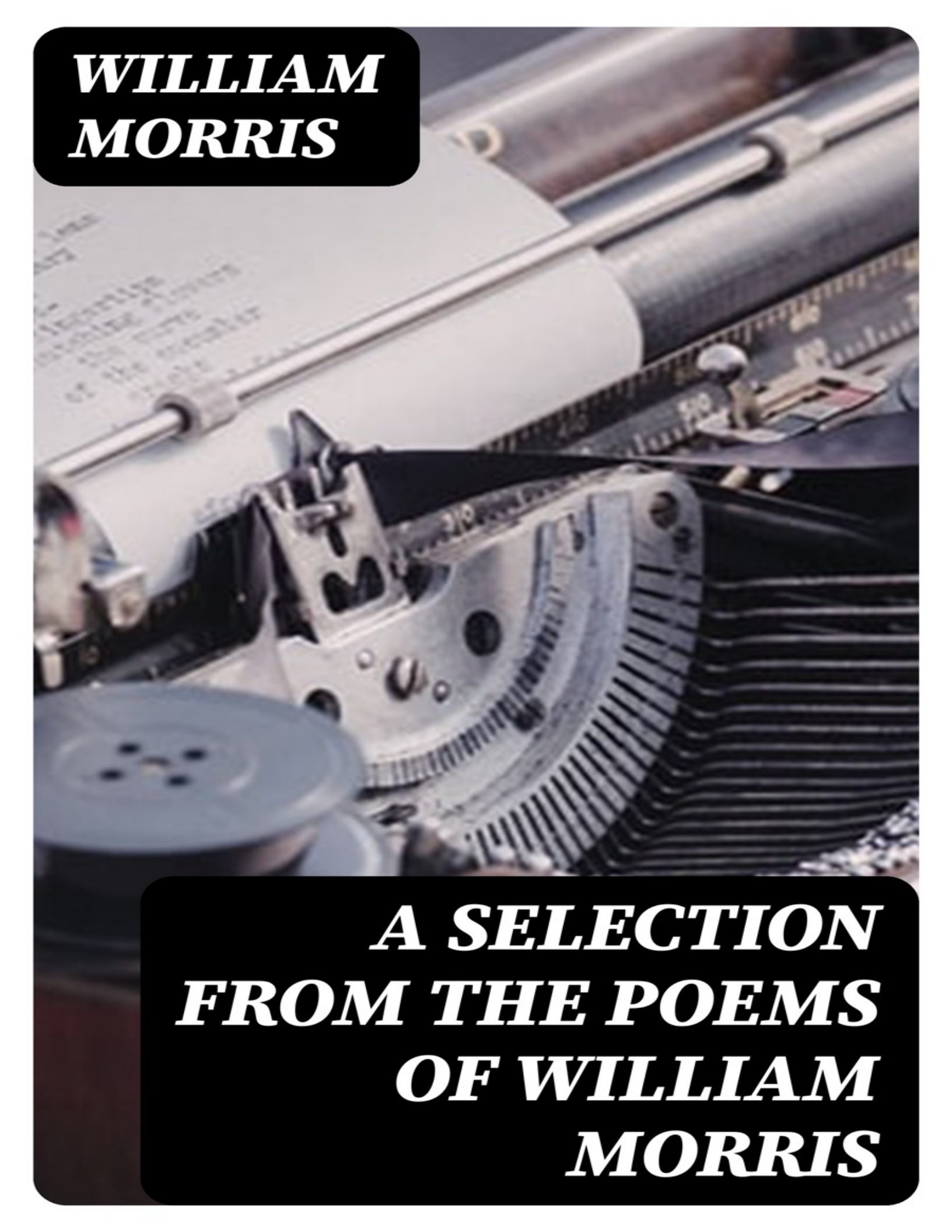




***WILLIAM
MORRIS***

***A SELECTION
FROM THE POEMS
OF WILLIAM
MORRIS***

William Morris

A Selection from the Poems of William Morris

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"THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE AND OTHER POEMS."

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THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE.

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But, knowing now that they
 would have her speak,
She threw her wet hair
 backward from her
 brow,
Her hand close to her mouth
 touching her cheek,
As though she had had there
 a shameful blow,
And feeling it shameful to
 feel ought but shame,
All through her heart, yet
 felt her cheek burned
 so,
She must a little touch it;
 like one lame
She walked away from
 Gauwaine, with her
 head
Still lifted up; and on her
 cheek of flame
The tears dried quick; she
 stopped at last and
 said:
"O knights and lords, it
 seems but little skill
To talk of well-known things
 past now and dead.

"God wot I ought to say, I
have done ill,
And pray you all forgiveness
heartily!

Because you must be right
such great lords—still

"Listen, suppose your time
were come to die,
And you were quite alone
and very weak;
Yea, laid a dying while very
mightily

"The wind was ruffling up the
narrow streak
Of river through your broad
lands running well:
Suppose a hush should
come, then some one
speak:

"One of these cloths is
heaven, and one is hell,
Now choose one cloth for
ever, which they be,
I will not tell you, you must
somehow tell

"Of your own strength and
mightiness; here, see!"
Yea, yea, my lord, and you to
ope your eyes,
At foot of your familiar bed
to see

"A great God's angel
standing, with such
dyes,
Not known on earth, on his
great wings, and hands,

Held out two ways, light
from the inner skies
"Showing him well, and
making his commands
Seem to be God's commands,
moreover, too,
Holding within his hands the
cloths on wands;
"And one of these strange
choosing cloths was
blue,
Wavy and long, and one cut
short and red;
No man could tell the better
of the two.
"After a shivering half-hour
you said,
'God help! heaven's colour,
the blue;' and he said,
'hell.'
Perhaps you then would roll
upon your bed,
"And cry to all good men that
loved you well,
'Ah Christ! if only I had
known, known, known;'
Launcelot went away, then I
could tell,
"Like wisest man how all
things would be, moan,
And roll and hurt myself, and
long to die,
And yet fear much to die for
what was sown.
"Nevertheless you, O Sir
Gauwaine, lie,

Whatever may have
happened through
these years,
God knows I speak truth,
saying that you lie."
Her voice was low at first,
being full of tears,
But as it cleared, it grew full
loud and shrill,
Growing a windy shriek in all
men's ears,
A ringing in their startled
brains, until
She said that Gauwaine lied,
then her voice sunk,
And her great eyes began
again to fill,
Though still she stood right
up, and never shrunk,
But spoke on bravely,
glorious lady fair!
Whatever tears her full lips
may have drunk,
She stood, and seemed to
think, and wrung her
hair,
Spoke out at last with no
more trace of shame,
With passionate twisting of
her body there:
"It chanced upon a day
Launcelot came
To dwell at Arthur's Court; at
Christmas-time
This happened; when the
heralds sung his name,

"Son of King Ban of
Benwick,' seemed to
chime
Along with all the bells that
rang that day,
O'er the white roofs, with
little change of rhyme.
"Christmas and whitened
winter passed away,
And over me the April
sunshine came,
Made very awful with black
hail-clouds, yea
"And in the Summer I grew
white with flame,
And bowed my head down—
Autumn, and the sick
Sure knowledge things
would never be the
same,
"However often Spring might
be most thick
Of blossoms and buds, smote
on me, and I grew
Careless of most things, let
the clock tick, tick,
"To my unhappy pulse, that
beat right through
My eager body; while I
laughed out loud,
And let my lips curl up at
false or true,
"Seemed cold and shallow
without any cloud.
Behold my judges, then the
cloths were brought:

While I was dizzied thus, old
thoughts would crowd,
"Belonging to the time ere I
was bought
By Arthur's great name and
his little love,
Must I give up for ever then,
I thought,
"That which I deemed would
ever round me move
Glorifying all things; for a
little word,
Scarce ever meant at all,
must I now prove
"Stone-cold for ever? Pray
you, does the Lord
Will that all folks should be
quite happy and good?
I love God now a little, if this
cord
"Were broken, once for all
what striving could
Make me love anything in
earth or heaven.
So day by day it grew, as if
one should
"Slip slowly down some path
worn smooth and even,
Down to a cool sea on a
summer day;
Yet still in slipping there was
some small leaven
"Of stretched hands catching
small stones by the
way,

Until one surely reached the
 sea at last,
And felt strange new joy as
 the worn head lay
"Back, with the hair like sea-
 weed; yea all past
Sweat of the forehead,
 dryness of the lips,
Washed utterly out by the
 dear waves o'ercast,
"In the lone sea, far off from
 any ships!
Do I not know now of a day
 in Spring?
No minute of that wild day
 ever slips
"From out my memory; I hear
 thrushes sing,
And wheresoever I may be,
 straightway
Thoughts of it all come up
 with most fresh sting:
"I was half mad with beauty
 on that day,
And went without my ladies
 all alone,
In a quiet garden walled
 round every way;
"I was right joyful of that wall
 of stone,
That shut the flowers and
 trees up with the sky,
And trebled all the beauty: to
 the bone,
"Yea right through to my
 heart, grown very shy

With weary thoughts, it
 pierced, and made me
 glad;
Exceedingly glad, and I knew
 verily,
"A little thing just then had
 made me mad;
I dared not think, as I was
 wont to do,
Sometimes, upon my beauty;
 If I had
"Held out my long hand up
 against the blue,
And, looking on the tenderly
 darken'd fingers,
Thought that by rights one
 ought to see quite
 through,
"There, see you, where the
 soft still light yet
 lingers,
Round by the edges; what
 should I have done,
If this had joined with yellow
 spotted singers,
"And startling green drawn
 upward by the sun?
But shouting, loosed out, see
 now! all my hair,
And trancedly stood
 watching the west wind
 run
"With faintest half-heard
 breathing sound—why
 there

I lose my head e'en now in
doing this;
But shortly listen—In that
garden fair
"Came Launcelot walking;
this is true, the kiss
Wherewith we kissed in
meeting that spring
day,
I scarce dare talk of the
remember'd bliss,
"When both our mouths went
wandering in one way,
And aching sorely, met
among the leaves;
Our hands being left behind
strained far away.
"Never within a yard of my
bright sleeves
Had Launcelot come before
—and now, so nigh!
After that day why is it
Guenevere grieves?
"Nevertheless you, O Sir
Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever happened on
through all those years,
God knows I speak truth,
saying that you lie.
"Being such a lady could I
weep these tears
If this were true? A great
queen such as I
Having sinn'd this way,
straight her conscience
sears;

"And afterwards she liveth
hatefully,
Slaying and poisoning,
certes never weeps—
Gauwaine be friends now,
speak me lovingly.
"Do I not see how God's dear
pity creeps
All through your frame, and
trembles in your
mouth?
Remember in what grave
your mother sleeps,
"Buried in some place far
down in the south,
Men are forgetting as I
speak to you;
By her head sever'd in that
awful drouth
"Of pity that drew
Agravaine's fell blow,
I pray your pity! let me not
scream out
For ever after, when the
shrill winds blow
"Through half your castle-
locks! let me not shout
For ever after in the winter
night
When you ride out alone! in
battle-rout
"Let not my rusting tears
make your sword light!
Ah! God of mercy how he
turns away!

So, ever must I dress me to
the fight,
"So—let God's justice work!
Gauwaine, I say,
See me hew down your
proofs: yea all men
know
Even as you said how
Mellyagraunce one day,
"One bitter day in *la Fausse*
Garde, for so
All good knights held it after,
saw—
Yea, sirs, by cursed
unknightly outrage;
though
"You, Gauwaine, held his
word without a flaw,
This Mellyagraunce saw
blood upon my bed—
Whose blood then pray you?
is there any law
"To make a queen say why
some spots of red
Lie on her coverlet? or will
you say,
'Your hands are white, lady,
as when you wed,
"'Where did you bleed?' and
must I stammer out
—'Nay',
I blush indeed, fair lord, only
to rend
My sleeve up to my shoulder,
where there lay

"A knife-point last night:' so
must I defend
The honour of the lady
Guenevere?
Not so, fair lords, even if the
world should end
"This very day, and you were
judges here
Instead of God. Did you see
Mellyagraunce
When Launcelot stood by
him? what white fear
"Curdled his blood, and how
his teeth did dance,
His side sink in? as my
knight cried and said,
'Slayer of unarm'd men, here
is a chance!
""Setter of traps, I pray you
guard your head,
By God I am so glad to fight
with you,
Stripper of ladies, that my
hand feels lead
""For driving weight; hurrah
now! draw and do,
For all my wounds are
moving in my breast,
And I am getting mad with
waiting so.'
"He struck his hands together
o'er the beast,
Who fell down flat, and
grovell'd at his feet,
And groan'd at being slain so
young—at least.'

"My knight said, 'Rise you,
sir, who are so fleet
At catching ladies, half-arm'd
will I fight,
My left side all uncover'd!
then I weet,
"Up sprang Sir
Mellyagraunce with
great delight
Upon his knave's face; not
until just then
Did I quite hate him, as I saw
my knight
"Along the lists look to my
stake and pen
With such a joyous smile, it
made me sigh
From agony beneath my
waist-chain, when
"The fight began, and to me
they drew nigh;
Ever Sir Launcelot kept him
on the right,
And traversed warily, and
ever high
"And fast leapt caitiff's
sword, until my knight
Sudden threw up his sword
to his left hand,
Caught it, and swung it; that
was all the fight.
"Except a spout of blood on
the hot land;
For it was hottest summer;
and I know

I wonder'd how the fire,
while I should stand,
"And burn, against the heat,
would quiver so,
Yards above my head; thus
these matters went:
Which things were only
warnings of the woe
"That fell on me. Yet
Mellyagraunce was
shent,
For Mellyagraunce had
fought against the
Lord;
Therefore, my lords, take
heed lest you be blent
"With all this wickedness; say
no rash word
Against me, being so
beautiful; my eyes,
Wept all away the grey, may
bring some sword
"To drown you in your blood;
see my breast rise,
Like waves of purple sea, as
here I stand;
And how my arms are moved
in wonderful wise,
"Yea also at my full heart's
strong command,
See through my long throat
how the words go up
In ripples to my mouth; how
in my hand
"The shadow lies like wine
within a cup

Of marvellously colour'd
gold; yea now
This little wind is rising, look
you up,
"And wonder how the light is
falling so
Within my moving tresses:
will you dare
When you have looked a
little on my brow,
"To say this thing is vile? or
will you care
For any plausible lies of
cunning woof,
When you can see my face
with no lie there
"For ever? am I not a
gracious proof—
'But in your chamber
Launcelot was found'—
Is there a good knight then
would stand aloof,
"When a queen says with
gentle queenly sound:
'O true as steel come now
and talk with me,
I love to see your step upon
the ground
""Unwavering, also well I love
to see
That gracious smile light up
your face, and hear
Your wonderful words, that
all mean verily
""The thing they seem to
mean: good friend, so

dear
To me in everything, come
here to-night,
Or else the hours will pass
most dull and drear;
"If you come not, I fear this
time I might
Get thinking over much of
times gone by,
When I was young, and
green hope was in
sight:
"For no man cares now to
know why I sigh;
And no man comes to sing
me pleasant songs,
Nor any brings me the sweet
flowers that lie
"So thick in the gardens;
therefore one so longs
To see you, Launcelot; that
we may be
Like children once again,
free from all wrongs
"Just for one night.' Did he
not come to me?
What thing could keep true
Launcelot away
If I said 'Come?' there was
one less than three
"In my quiet room that night,
and we were gay;
Till sudden I rose up, weak,
pale, and sick,
Because a bawling broke our
dream up, yea

"I looked at Launcelot's face
and could not speak,
For he looked helpless too,
for a little while;
Then I remember how I tried
to shriek,
"And could not, but fell down;
from tile to tile
The stones they threw up
rattled o'er my head
And made me dizzier; till
within a while
"My maids were all about me,
and my head
On Launcelot's breast was
being soothed away
From its white chattering,
until Launcelot said—
"By God! I will not tell you
more to-day,
Judge any way you will—
what matters it?
You know quite well the
story of that fray,
"How Launcelot still'd their
bawling, the mad fit
That caught up Gauwaine—
all, all, verily,
But just that which would
save me; these things
flit.
"Nevertheless you, O Sir
Gauwaine, lie,
Whatever may have
happen'd these long
years,

God knows I speak truth,
saying that you lie!
"All I have said is truth, by
Christ's dear tears."
She would not speak another
word, but stood
Turn'd sideways; listening,
like a man who hears
His brother's trumpet
sounding through the
wood
Of his foe's lances. She
lean'd eagerly,
And gave a slight spring
sometimes, as she
could
At last hear something
really; joyfully
Her cheek grew crimson, as
the headlong speed
Of the roan charger drew all
men to see,
The knight who came was
Launcelot at good need.

A GOOD KNIGHT IN PRISON.

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SIR GUY, *being in the court of a Pagan castle.*

This castle where I dwell, it
stands
A long way off from Christian
lands,
A long way off my lady's
hands,
A long way off the aspen
trees,
And murmur of the lime-tree
bees.
But down the Valley of the
Rose
My lady often hawking goes,
Heavy of cheer; oft turns
behind,
Leaning towards the western
wind,
Because it bringeth to her
mind
Sad whisperings of happy
times,
The face of him who sings
these rhymes.
King Guilbert rides
beside her there,
Bends low and calls her very
fair,
And strives, by pulling down
his hair,
To hide from my dear lady's
ken
The grisly gash I gave him,
when
I cut him down at Camelot;

However he strives, he hides
it not,
That tourney will not be
forgot,
Besides, it is King Guilbert's
lot,
Whatever he says she
answers not.
Now tell me, you that are in
love,
From the king's son to the
wood-dove,
Which is the better, he or I?
For this king means that I
should die
In this lone Pagan castle,
where
The flowers droop in the bad
air
On the September evening.
Look, now I take mine
ease and sing,
Counting as but a little thing
The foolish spite of a bad
king.
For these vile things that
hem me in,
These Pagan beasts who live
in sin,
The sickly flowers pale and
wan,
The grim blue-bearded
castellan,
The stanchions half worn-out
with rust,

Whereto their banner vile
 they trust—
Why, all these things I hold
 them just
Like dragons in a missal
 book,
Wherein, whenever we may
 look,
We see no horror, yea, delight
We have, the colours are so
 bright;
Likewise we note the specks
 of white,
And the great plates of
 burnish'd gold.
 Just so this Pagan castle
 old,
And everything I can see
 there,
Sick-pining in the marshland
 air,
I note; I will go over now,
Like one who paints with
 knitted brow,
The flowers and all things
 one by one,
From the snail on the wall to
 the setting sun.
 Four great walls, and a
 little one
That leads down to the
 barbican,
Which walls with many
 spears they man,
When news comes to the
 castellan

Of Launcelot being in the
land.

And as I sit here, close at
hand

Four spikes of sad sick
sunflowers stand,

The castellan with a long
wand

Cuts down their leaves as he
goes by,

Ponderingly, with screw'd-up
eye,

And fingers twisted in his
beard—

Nay, was it a knight's shout I
heard?

I have a hope makes me
afeard:

It cannot be, but if some
dream

Just for a minute made me
deem

I saw among the flowers
there

My lady's face with long red
hair,

Pale, ivory-colour'd dear face
come,

As I was wont to see her
some

Fading September afternoon,
And kiss me, saying nothing,
soon

To leave me by myself again;
Could I get this by
longing: vain!