CORNCRAKE

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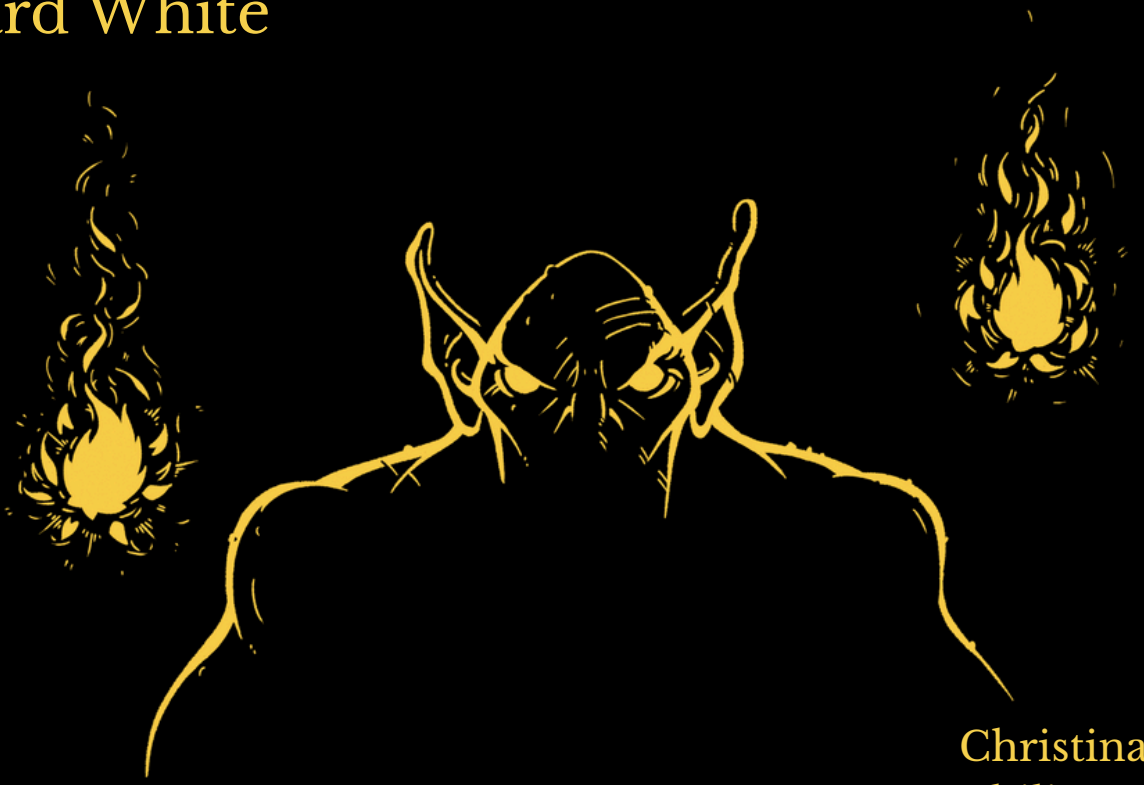
Rogerhath and the Goldenaxe
Edward White



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NESTING IN THE OAK OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

Spring

By Christina Rossetti

Frost-locked all the winter,
Seeds, and roots, and stones of fruits,
What shall make their sap ascend
That they may put forth shoots?
Tips of tender green,
Leaf, or blade, or sheath;
Telling of the hidden life
That breaks forth underneath,
Life nursed in its grave by Death.

Blows the thaw-wind pleasantly,
Drips the soaking rain,
By fits looks down the waking sun:
Young grass springs on the plain;
Young leaves clothe early hedgerow trees;
Seeds, and roots, and stones of fruits,
Swollen with sap put forth their shoots;
Curled-headed ferns sprout in the lane;
Birds sing and pair again.

There is no time like Spring,
When life's alive in everything,
Before new nestlings sing,
Before cleft swallows speed their journey back
Along the trackless track –
God guides their wing,
He spreads their table that they nothing lack, –
Before the daisy grows a common flower
Before the sun has power
To scorch the world up in his noontide hour.

There is no time like Spring,
Like Spring that passes by;
There is no life like Spring-life born to die,
Piercing the sod,
Clothing the uncouth clod,
Hatched in the nest,
Fledged on the windy bough,
Strong on the wing:
There is no time like Spring that passes by,
Now newly born, and now
Hastening to die.

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Happy Reading!

shieldmaiden

Editor-in-Chief

> Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape?... If we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can!
> JRR Tolkien

RODGERHATH & THE GOLDENAXE

EDWARD WHITE

Chapter One

"One day," Stronghath the dwarf blacksmith exclaimed,"one day and you have broken it already."

"You should have made a better axe," Rodgerhath taunted in response. "There was nothing wrong with that axe,"

Stronghath replied. "But I saw your sloppy swings on those logs and I might remind you that a war axe is not meant for lumberjacking."

"I had no choice."

"Oh, how come?" Stronghath asked, an eyebrow raised.

"... my wood axes are all broken."

Stronghath both sighed and laughed with his face. "Bring me your axes and I can fix them next week."

"Next week!" Rodgerhath cried, distraught. "I need them tomorrow. What is it with the slow turn around? Are the years finally catching up with you?" He gibed playfully.

Despite the age gap, Rodgerhath and Stronghath had been friends for years and such banter was their normal dialect.

Stronghath laughed aloud "The only thing that's catching up with me are the
dozen orders I've accepted that need to be done by the week's end. Your axes will have to wait."

Rodgerhath grumbled and cursed internally. There was nothing to be done, if his friend had work, he had work.

"I'm sure I'll manage until then. Farewell my friend."

The blacksmith bid him goodbye and Rodgerhath started the short stroll home. It was his custom – especially when he was in a bad mood – to stop at the brewery which was owned by his father-in-law. He saw him outside holding a keg. A promising sight for a down-in-the-dumps beer lover like himself.

"Culbert!"

"Rodgerhath my dear son-in-law!" the brewer replied, scratching his greying beard. "How has life been treating you?"

"All is well but my axe is broken."

Culbert laughed.

"A completely normal day then! Well this should cheer you up," Culbert said, he stopped scratching his beard and moved the hand to scratch his big red nose instead, "I have finished another batch. I've imported new hops from Heresford and I've been using a dark-roasted barley for flavour. Would you like to take this keg and tell me what you think?"

"With pleasure!"

The beer was a great pleasure. It tasted smoky because of the dark malt, but it had a certain levity as well because of the Heresford hops which Rodgerhath guessed had been applied liberally during the boil. Whatever the case for the strange flavour, Rodgerhath enjoyed the strong brown ale immensely.

"Another triumph from your father!" Rodgerhath said, slamming his empty tankard on the dining table, "although perhaps he should have left it to ferment longer to give the barley a chance to further darken the taste."

His wife, Flowergem, did not respond to his musings and praise.

While Rodgerhath did his best to ensure he only went on drinking sprees twice a week, he often broke this promise whenever he had a rough day or his father-in-law tempted him with new ale.

Flowergem did not take kindly to Rodgerhath's indulgences and she had gone to bed, upon noting this was the fourth over-indulgence that week.

Rodgerhath didn't notice her absence such was his focus on the ale keg which he had now completely polished off.

"Ah," he sighed, scratching his black beard, "if only I could get an axe which wouldn't break."

As he said this, his mind dimmed as it was by ale, fired up. He lumbered to the sitting room and stumbled over to the bookshelf opposite the fireplace. There was a green book on one of the shelves with a worn-out spine and title but Rodgerhath knew it. The book told the tale of Redbeard the greatest dwarf warrior of all time.
Rodgerhath took the book from the shelf and tumbled into his comfy armchair. He flipped through the pages, past the account of Redbeard's victory over the
dragon of the Mountain Hall, his battle with the stone giants and his journey across the distant sea. Rodgerhath skipped to the end of the book and to the chapter on Redbeard's death.

Redbeard had fallen to the fangs of a great serpent in a grove below the White Mountain, a great peak of white rock and stone in the middle of an otherwise level forest.

Rodgerhath's eyes glazed over the text and straight to the illustration. The black and white drawing depicted Redbeard lying on the ground in a pool of his own blood. Next to the mighty warrior lay a weapon and Rodgerhath furiously tapped it with a drunken finger.

"That! That is what I need!"

It was the Goldenaxe.

This weapon had seen the hands of hundreds of great warriors; some were legendary and famous but others has been forgotten to time. The axe was said to be unbreakable, un-scratchable, and ever keen and ever sharp. Redbeard was the last dwarf to wield the legendary weapon. Although his body had been found and buried, the axe with which he slew the serpent was never found. Some said that the great serpent had done the unthinkable and destroyed the weapon. Other more hopeful dwarves claimed the axe had left Redbeard and was now seeking the next great dwarf warrior to aid him in his battles.

But others said that the axe was still somewhere around the White Mountain, of course, hundreds of dwarves had scoured the grove and the nearby mountain over the centuries and never found it.

Despite the differing accounts of the axe's whereabouts, Rodgerhath decided in his ale-happy state that he should try to find the Goldenaxe.

He put the book back on the shelf and bumbled his way to the front door, picking up the shaft of his headless
axe.

Then he stopped.

Although he was drunk, he knew he'd have to take some provisions for his quest.

He walked back from the front door to the cellar door. He descended the steps, miraculously not tripping over his own two feet, and swayed in front of his collection of ales on the shelf walls.

"Gold, stout, brown, bitter, pale, cloudy..." he murmured in deep deliberation, "I shall go for the gold."

He pulled a keg of golden ale off the shelf and placed it under one arm and made to leave the cellar but stopped.

"Ah, and just one cheeky porter."

He took a dark bottle of black stout off another rack with his free hand and pulled the cork out with his teeth and took a mighty swig.

He sighed with satisfaction and trundled up the cellar steps and to his front door to embark upon his grand quest, leaving his axe shaft behind.

Rodgerhath awoke with a splitting headache and ringing ears. He opened his blurry eyes but didn't move otherwise because part of him hoped the hangover would pass over if he lay completely still.

Even with his groggy eyes, Rodgerhath got the impression that the ceiling of his bedroom was higher than before. He couldn't remember going into his bedroom but he knew he would have returned to the house at some point. As sensation returned to his now heavy and weary body, he felt an unusual soreness across his back and neck.

That's odd, I bought a new mattress recently, he thought. But it feels like I'm sleeping on naked metal. Rodgerhath also wondered where Flowergem was. He couldn't sense her warm and soft body next to him. He moved a hand to his eyes and felt his arm brush some metal objects beneath him followed by distinctive clinking sounds.

With mounting confusion, Rodgerhath rubbed his eyes and lifted his lead-heavy and pulsating head to look at what he was sprawled on in the dim light.

He saw three things. The first was that he was not in his bed, but instead lying on a gigantic heap of gold coins. The second was he wasn't in his bedroom or even his house; he was in some vast, gloomy cavern and stalactites and stalagmites were everywhere. Burning torches were mounted on the stalagmites and provided orange light around the chamber. The third was his keg and bottle were missing and his right hand was holding an axe.

An axe made of pure gold.

Rodgerhath froze, his mind cleared and focused, the pain and mental fog temporarily gone. It couldn't be but yet...

He staggered to his feet, ignoring the treasure hoard beneath him and looked around for a suitable target, something hard and solid.

One of the walls of the cavern was twenty feet away, there was a crude stone shelf carved into it and a solid steel helmet

was resting on it.

Rodgerhath dragged his heavy legs towards the helmet. When he had closed the distance, he adjusted his stance and raised the axe above his head. The weapon felt magical, its balance was perfect and its shaft fitted into his hands like a glove.

Rodgerhath's strike, although poorly executed due to his hangover, was powerful and mighty. The axe cut straight through the helmet as if it were butter and cracked the stone shelf as if it had been nothing harder than a pot of clay.

The axe struck with force and the clang echoed throughout the cavern and was so loud, Rodgerhath dropped it and brought his palms to his ears which were not ready for such noise.

When the echoes had ceased, Rodgerhath looked at the dropped weapon.

There wasn't a mark on it.

Rodgerhath gasped and he almost fell to the floor, shock overawing him.

It was the Goldenaxe!

Chapter Two

Rodgerhath couldn't believe his eyes. He had found the Goldenaxe. He had found it.

He'd found it!

He couldn't help but chuckle, joy and reverence flooded through him as he picked up the axe again with shaking hands.

Just wait till Flowergem sees this and Stronghath and Goldhelm! Oh, Goldhelm will go green with envy!

Rodgerhath's mirth was high and strong but it was not powerful enough to overwhelm the fear he felt as the nature of his situation dawned on him. He was alone in some cavern underground…

And he had no idea how he had got there.

He could remember leaving the house with his beer but he couldn't remember how he had arrived in this cave or how he had found the Goldenaxe. The events after he'd passed over his doorstep weren't a blur; they were a complete blank.

This worried him. What was more troubling was he didn't know where he was now and someone or some creature had to tend to the torches in the chamber.

He had no idea if he was safe or whether the beings who lived here were dangerous. Rodgerhath forced these worries out of his mind. Biting his nails and idling were not going to help him, only action would be of aid. Ignoring his drumming head, aching muscles and the desire to lie down and wait for the hangover to pass, he moved around the cavern looking for an exit. He found only one tunnel, he did not know where it led but it was his only option.

Rodgerhath moved slowly through the gloomy tunnel partly out of caution and partly because of his throbbing head. He had the Goldenaxe ready but he knew he was not prepared for a fight and it would be best to avoid violence if possible.

It's possible there's nothing dangerous here, he thought to himself, but he knew deep down this was unlikely. He'd been sleeping on a pile of gold coins and it was unlikely they had arrived there by accident or that the person who had hoarded such a great treasure was friendly or benevolent.

As he continued up the tunnel, he realized intuitively that it had been made by something other than the forces of nature. Someone or something had chiselled and mined their way through the rock with crude tools. Wherever this passage led, Rodgerhath knew it wouldn't be as safe as he hoped.

The tunnel wound on for what seemed to be hundreds of yards to Rodgerhath's booze-addled head but if he had been sober, he'd only have judged it to number fifty. The passage twisted through rugged rock before ending in another cavern – torches hung by entrances revealing a honeycomb of tunnels and underground pathways.

A chill crept down Rodgerhath's spine and his dry mouth became even more arid. He recognized the structure of these tunnels and the strange odour that had been irritating his nostrils, he was in the lair of a tribe of…

"Trogs!"

Startled by the command, Rodgerhath ducked behind the corner of a nearby passage to hide himself from the creature which was trampling down the main tunnel. He sensed motion from the other smaller tunnels and chambers.

"Trogs!" the voice bellowed and again the echoes grew louder as the brutish voice drew closer.

As much as Rodgerhath was willing to dare, he peeked around the edge of the passage to see what was happening.

Lumbering down the tunnel was a creature with skin as grey as stone and as tough as old leather, its face was a mess of black hair, pierced by yellow eyes which rested either side of a large potato-shaped nose.

He was a trog. A mighty trog, three heads taller than the tallest man Rodgerhath had met. He was nearly the width of two men but it was his arms that dominated his frame. His arms were like tree trunks and extended past his knobbly knees and ended in great hands that could swallow a man's face in their grip.

The thewy and muscular monster was wearing nought but a large loin-cloth around his waist which was made of cave moss and draped across his wide shoulders was the pelt of a brown bear, which looked as if it had been ripped off the unfortunate beast while it was still alive.

Atop the head of the cave dweller was a crown of bright shining gold, but Rodgerhath could tell that it wasn't trogish metallurgy that had crafted such a fine ornament.

Trogs were raiders and this beautiful crown was no doubt a spoil of war.

From the other passages, Rodgerhath could see the shapes of different trogs coming to the shouts of the crowned one. They were stout and stocky, shorter and less powerful than the tall one who was clearly their king.

Rodgerhath drew back and listened closely, his head pounding and his body sweating.

He gripped the Goldenaxe tightly.

"Warboss, what is it?" a voice grunted.

"Warclubs!" the deep voice commanded, ignoring the question. "Nug was attacked on watch duty. We have an invader in our wardom!"

"Attacked by what?"

"Something short and weak I imagine. Nug is such a weed that any weakling thing can beat him!" another trog shouted.

There was a roar of loud laughter from the trogs and Rodgerhath had to cover his ears to stop his head splitting open.

The warboss bellowed and the laughter stopped, only its echoes touched the ears.

"Whoever hurts one of us, hurts all of us. No matter how weak. Get your warclubs! Whoever gets this invader will keep his warspoils!"

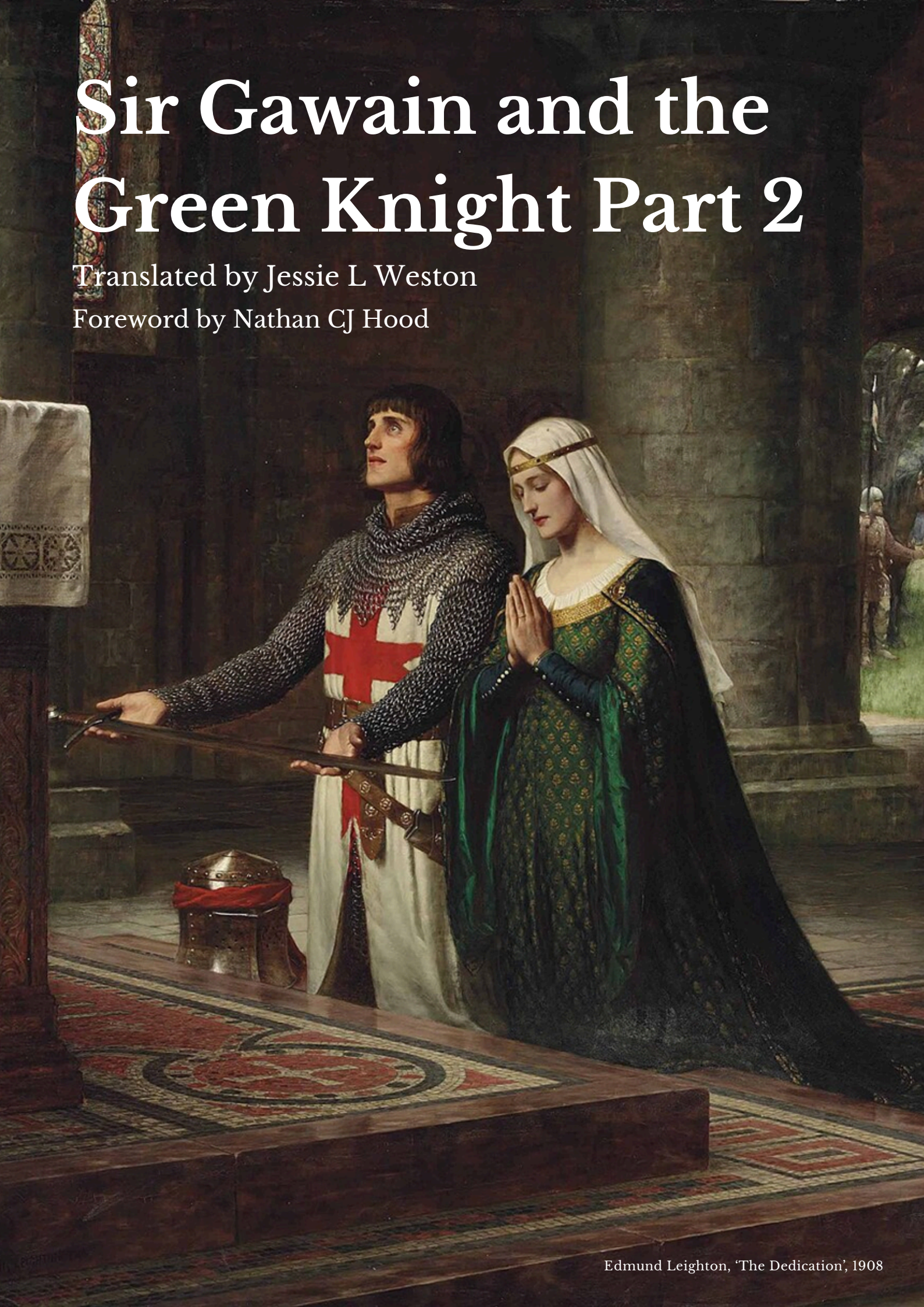
This command and promise of plunder excited the battle-hungry trogs into action.

Rodgerhath heard them charge through the tunnels to get their weapons and start hunting for him.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight Part 2

Translated by Jessie L Weston

Foreword by Nathan CJ Hood



Edmund Leighton, 'The Dedication', 1908

JRR Tolkien once argued that there was a major transition in the stories of the North following the rise of Christianity. In the pagan world, the main threat was death. As such, the great mythological cycles dealt with existential threats. It is the Norse gods fighting to save Valhalla from the monsters who wish to destroy the great hall during Ragnarok; it is Beowulf slaying the troll Grendel who devours men and causes chaos in Heorot. With the Christian story there is a gradual shift. As Christ's resurrection overcame death and promised a life hereafter, the prospect of death was no longer the primary danger or fear. Instead, it was the destination of the soul after death that became the primary concern. Would it end up in heaven or hell? Would a man receive everlasting life or an eternal damnation? With such questions, medieval Christian literature changed the arena of conflict from the physical to moral. Life was a war with sin and a struggle to reach heaven.

Whether this characterises all high and late-medieval literature, it is true that our present tale, one which Tolkien was strongly influenced by, has as its focus a moral challenge. Sir Gawain's primary foe is not a dragon, troll or monster he needs to vanquish. Rather, he faces a test of his character. Praised as the most noble of knights, he will face a brutal encounter that examines his loyalty, faithfulness, chastity, honesty and courage. This trial is twofold: he must face the allure of a woman; he must face the Green Knight's axe-edge, as he promised to do so one year ago. On top of the moral demands of the chivalrous code that he seeks to uphold are the niceties of the court. Gawain must navigate showing courtesy to his wife, the lady of the castle, while rejecting her advances and honouring his host. It is a moral tightrope – any fall will represent a failure of momentous proportions to the most perfect of knights, Gawain of Camelot.

Fitt III

The first day's hunting

Full early, ere daylight, the folk rose up; the guests who would depart called their grooms, and they made them ready, and saddled the steeds, tightened up the girths, and trussed up their mails. The knights, all arrayed for riding, leapt up lightly, and took their bridles, and each rode his way as pleased him best.

The lord of the land was not the last. Ready for the chase, with many of his men, he ate a sop hastily when he had heard Mass, and then with blast of the bugle fared forth to the field. He and his nobles were to horse ere daylight glimmered upon the earth.

Then the huntsmen coupled their hounds, unclosed the kennel door, and called them out. They blew three blasts gaily on the bugles, the hounds bayed fiercely, and they that would go a-hunting checked and chastised them. A hundred hunters there were of the best, so I have heard tell. Then the trackers gat them to the trysting-place and uncoupled the hounds, and the forest rang again with their gay blasts.

At the first sound of the hunt the game quaked for fear, and fled, trembling, along the vale. They betook them to the heights, but the liers in wait turned them back with loud cries; the harts they let pass them, and the stags with their spreading antlers, for the lord had forbidden that they should be slain, but the hinds and the does they turned back, and drave down into the valleys. Then might ye see much shooting of arrows. As the deer fled under the boughs a broad whistling shaft smote and wounded each sorely, so that, wounded and bleeding, they fell dying on the banks. The hounds followed swiftly on their tracks, and hunters, blowing the horn, sped after them with ringing shouts that well-nigh burst the cliffs asunder. What game escaped those that shot was run down at the outer ring. Thus were they driven on the hills, and harassed at the waters, so well did the men know their work, and the greyhounds were so great and swift that they ran them down as fast as the hunters could slay them. Thus the lord passed the day in mirth and joyfulness, even to nightfall.

How the lady of the castle came to Sir Gawain

So the lord roamed the woods, and Gawain, that good knight, lay ever a-bed, curtained about, under the costly coverlet, while the daylight gleamed on the walls. And as he lay half slumbering, he heard a little sound at the door, and he raised his head, and caught back a corner of the curtain, and waited to see what it might be. It was the lovely lady, the lord's wife; she shut the door softly behind her, and turned towards the bed; and Gawain laid him down softly and made as if he slept. And she came lightly to the bedside, within the curtain, and sat herself down beside him, to wait till he wakened. The knight lay there awhile, and marvelled within himself what her coming might betoken; and he said to himself, "'Twere more seemly if I asked her what hath brought her hither." Then he made feint to waken, and turned towards her and opened his eyes as one astonished, and crossed himself; and she looked on him laughing, with her cheeks red and white, lovely to behold.

"Good morrow, Sir Gawain," said that fair lady; "ye are but a careless sleeper, since one can enter thus. Now are ye taken unawares, and lest ye escape me I shall bind you in your bed; of that be ye assured!" Laughing, she spake these words.

"Good morrow, fair lady," quoth Gawain blithely. "I will do your will, as it likes me well. For I yield me readily, and pray your grace, and that is best, by my faith, since I needs must do so." Thus he jested again, laughing. "But an ye would, fair lady, grant me this grace that ye pray your prisoner to rise. I would get me from bed, and array me better, then could I talk with ye in more comfort."

"Nay, forsooth, fair sir," quoth the lady, "ye shall not rise, I will rede ye better. I shall keep ye here, since ye can do no other, and talk with my knight whom I have captured. For I know well that ye are Sir Gawain, whom all the world worships, wheresoever ye may ride. Your honour and your courtesy are praised by lords and ladies, by all who live. Now ye are here and we are alone, my lord and his men are afield; the serving men in their beds, and my maidens also, and the door shut upon us. And since in this hour I have him that all men love, I shall use my time well with speech, while it lasts. Ye are welcome to my company, for it behoves me in sooth to be your servant."

"In good faith," quoth Gawain, "I think me that I am not he of whom ye speak, for unworthy am I of such service as ye here proffer. In sooth, I were glad if I might set myself by word or service to your pleasure; a pure joy would it be to me!"

"In good faith, Sir Gawain," quoth the gay lady, "the praise and the prowess that pleases all ladies I lack them not, nor hold them light; yet are there ladies enough who would liever now have the knight in their hold, as I have ye here, to dally with your courteous words, to bring them comfort and to ease their cares, than much of the treasure and the gold that are theirs. And now, through the grace of Him who upholds the heavens, I have wholly in my power that which they all desire!"

Thus the lady, fair to look upon, made him great cheer, and Sir Gawain, with modest words, answered her again: "Madam," he quoth, "may Mary requite ye, for in good faith I have found in ye a noble frankness. Much courtesy have other folk shown me, but the honour they have done me is naught to the worship of yourself, who knoweth but good."

"By Mary," quoth the lady, "I think otherwise; for were I worth all the women alive, and had I the wealth of the world in my hand, and might choose me a lord to my liking, then, for all that I have seen in ye, Sir Knight, of beauty and courtesy and blithe semblance, and for all that I have hearkened and hold for true, there should be no knight on earth to be chosen before ye!"

"Well I wot," quoth Sir Gawain, "that ye have chosen a better; but I am proud that ye should so prize me, and as your servant do I hold ye my sovereign, and your knight am I, and may Christ reward ye."

So they talked of many matters till mid-morn was past, and ever the lady shewed her love to him, and the knight turned her speech aside. For though she were the brightest of maidens, yet had he forborne to shew her love for the danger that awaited him, and the blow that must be given without delay.

Then the lady prayed her leave from him, and he granted it readily. And she gave him good-day, with laughing glance, but he must needs marvel at her words:

"Now He that speeds fair speech reward ye this disport; but that ye be Gawain my mind misdoubts me greatly."

"Wherefore?" quoth the knight quickly, fearing lest he had lacked in some courtesy.

And the lady spake: "So true a knight as Gawain is holden, and one so perfect in courtesy, would never have tarried so long with a lady but he would of his courtesy have craved a kiss at parting."

How the lady kissed Sir Gawain

Then quoth Gawain, "I wot I will do even as it may please ye, and kiss at your commandment, as a true knight should who forbears to ask for fear of displeasure."

At that she came near and bent down and kissed the knight, and each commended the other to Christ, and she went forth from the chamber softly.

Then Sir Gawain arose and called his chamberlain and chose his garments, and when he was ready he gat him forth to Mass, and then went to meat, and made merry all day till the rising of the moon, and never had a knight fairer lodging than had he with those two noble ladies, the elder and the younger.

And ever the lord of the land chased the hinds through holt and heath till eventide, and then with much blowing of bugles

and baying of hounds they bore the game homeward; and by the time daylight was done all the folk had returned to that fair castle. And when the lord and Sir Gawain met together, then were they both well pleased. The lord commanded them all to assemble in the great hall, and the ladies to descend with their maidens, and there, before them all, he bade the men fetch in the spoil of the day's hunting, and he called unto Gawain, and counted the tale of the beasts, and showed them unto him, and said, "What think ye of this game, Sir Knight? Have I deserved of ye thanks for my woodcraft?"

"Yea, I wis," quoth the other, "here is the fairest spoil I have seen this seven year in the winter season."

How the covenant was kept

"And all this do I give ye, Gawain," quoth the host, "for by accord of covenant ye may claim it as your own."

"That is sooth," quoth the other, "I grant you that same; and I have fairly won this within walls, and with as good will do I yield it to ye." With that he clasped his hands round the lord's neck and kissed him as courteously as he might. "Take ye here my spoils, no more have I won; ye should have it freely, though it were greater than this."

"'Tis good," said the host, "gramercy thereof. Yet were I fain to know where ye won this same favour, and if it were by your own wit?"

"Nay," answered Gawain, "that was not in the bond. Ask me no more: ye have taken what was yours by right, be content with that."

They laughed and jested together, and sat them down to supper, where they were served with many dainties; and after supper they sat by the hearth, and wine was served out to them; and oft in their jesting they promised to observe on the morrow the same covenant that they had made before, and whatever chance might betide to exchange their spoil, be it much or little, when they met at night. Thus they renewed their bargain before the whole court, and then the night-drink was served, and each courteously took leave of the other and gat him to bed.

Of the second day's hunting

By the time the cock had crowed thrice the lord of the castle had left his bed; Mass was sung and meat fitly served. The folk were forth to the wood ere the day broke, with hound and horn they rode over the plain, and uncoupled their dogs among the thorns. Soon they struck on the scent, and the hunt cheered on the hounds who were first to seize it, urging them with shouts. The others hastened to the cry, forty at once, and there rose such a clamour from the pack that the rocks rang again. The huntsmen followed hard after with shouting and blasts of the horn; and the hounds drew together to a thicket betwixt the water and a high crag in the cliff beneath the hillside. As the rough rocks were ill for riding the huntsmen sprang to earth and hastened on foot, and cast about round the hill and the thicket. The knights wist well what beast was within, and would drive him forth with the bloodhounds. And as they beat the bushes, suddenly over the beaters there rushed forth a wondrous great and fierce boar, long since had he left the herd to roam by himself. Grunting, he cast many to the ground, and fled forth at his best speed, without more mischief. The men hallooed loudly and cried, "Hay! Hay!" and blew the horns to urge on the hounds, and rode swiftly after the boar. Many a time did he turn to bay and tare the hounds, and they yelped, and howled shrilly. Then the men made ready their arrows and shot at him, but the points were turned on his thick hide, and the barbs would not bite upon him, for the shafts shivered in pieces, and the head but leapt again wherever it hit.

But when the boar felt the stroke of the arrows he waxed mad with rage, and turned on the hunters and tare many, so that, affrighted, they fled before him. But the lord on a swift steed pursued him, blowing his bugle; as a gallant knight he rode through the woodland chasing the boar till the sun grew low.

So did the hunters this day, while Sir Gawain lay in his bed lapped in rich gear; and the lady forgat not to salute him, for early was she at his side, to cheer his mood.

Of the lady and Sir Gawain

She came to the bedside and looked on the knight, and Gawain gave her fit greeting, and she greeted him again with ready words, and sat her by his side and laughed, and with a sweet look she spoke to him:

"Sir, if ye be Gawain, I think it a wonder that ye be so stern and cold, and care not for the courtesies of friendship, but if one teach ye to know them ye cast the lesson out of your mind. Ye have soon forgotten what I taught ye yesterday, by all the truest tokens that I knew!"

"What is that?" quoth the knight. "I trow I know not. If it be sooth that ye say, then is the blame mine own."

"But I taught ye of kissing," quoth the fair lady. "Wherever a fair countenance is shown him, it behoves a courteous knight quickly to claim a kiss."

"Nay, my dear," said Sir Gawain, "cease that speech; that durst I not do lest I were denied, for if I were forbidden I wot I were wrong did I further entreat."

"I' faith," quoth the lady merrily, "ye may not be forbid, ye are strong enough to constrain by strength an ye will, were any so discourteous as to give ye denial."

"Yea, by Heaven," said Gawain, "ye speak well; but threats profit little in the land where I dwell, and so with a gift that is given not of good will! I am at your commandment to kiss when ye like, to take or to leave as ye list."

Then the lady bent her down and kissed him courteously.

How the lady strove to beguile Sir Gawain with words of love

And as they spake together she said, "I would learn somewhat from ye, an ye would not be wroth, for young ye are and fair, and so courteous and knightly as ye are known to be, the head of all chivalry, and versed in all wisdom of love and war—'tis ever told of true knights how they adventured their lives for their true love, and endured hardships for her favours, and avenged her with valour, and eased her sorrows, and brought joy to her bower; and ye are the fairest knight of your time, and your fame and your honour are everywhere, yet I have sat by ye here twice, and never a word have heard of love! Ye who are so courteous and skilled in such lore ought surely to teach one so young and unskilled some little craft of true love! Why are ye so unlearned who art otherwise so famous? Or is it that ye deem me unworthy to hearken to your teaching? For shame, Sir Knight! I come hither alone and sit at your side to learn of ye some skill; teach me of your wit, while my lord is from home."

"In good faith," quoth Gawain, "great is my joy and my profit that so fair a lady as ye are should deign to come hither, and trouble ye with so poor a man, and make sport with your knight with kindly countenance, it pleaseth me much. But that I, in my turn, should take it upon me to tell of love and such like matters to ye who know more by half, or a hundred fold, of such craft than I do, or ever shall in all my lifetime, by my troth 'twere folly indeed! I will work your will to the best of my might as I am bounden, and evermore will I be your servant, so help me Christ!"

Then often with guile she questioned that knight that she might win him to woo her, but he defended himself so fairly that none might in any wise blame him, and naught but bliss and harmless jesting was there between them. They laughed and talked together till at last she kissed him, and craved her leave of him, and went her way.

How the boar was slain

Then the knight arose and went forth to Mass, and afterward dinner was served, and he sat and spake with the ladies all day. But the lord of the castle rode ever over the land chasing the wild boar, that fled through the thickets, slaying the best of his hounds and breaking their backs in sunder; till at last he was so weary he might run no longer, but made for a hole in a mound by a rock. He got the mound at his back and faced the hounds, whetting his white tusks and foaming at the mouth. The huntsmen stood aloof, fearing to draw nigh him; so many of them had been already wounded that they were loth to be torn with his tusks, so fierce he was and mad with rage. At length the lord himself came up, and saw the beast at bay, and the men standing aloof. Then quickly he sprang to the ground and drew out a bright blade, and waded through the stream to the boar.

When the beast was ware of the knight with weapon in hand, he set up his bristles and snorted loudly, and many feared for their lord lest he should be slain. Then the boar leapt upon the knight so that beast and man were one atop of the other in the water; but the boar had the worst of it, for the man had marked, even as he sprang, and set the point of his brand to the beast's chest, and drove it up to the hilt, so that the heart was split in twain, and the boar fell snarling, and was swept down by the water to where a hundred hounds seized on him, and the men drew him to shore for the dogs to slay.

Then was there loud blowing of horns and baying of hounds, the huntsmen smote off the boar's head, and hung the carcase by the four feet to a stout pole, and so went on their way homewards. The head they bore before the lord himself, who had slain the beast at the ford by force of his strong hand.

It seemed him o'er long ere he saw Sir Gawain in the hall, and he blew a blast on his horn to let all men know that he was come

again to take his part in the covenant. And when he saw Gawain the lord laughed aloud, and bade them call the ladies and the household together, and he showed them the game, and told them the tale, how they had hunted the wild boar through the woods, and of his length and breadth and height; and Sir Gawain commended his deeds and praised him for his valour, well proven, for so mighty a beast had he never seen before.

The keeping of the covenant

Then they handled the huge head, and the lord said aloud, "Now, Gawain, this game is your own by sure covenant, as ye right well know."

"'Tis sooth," quoth the knight, "and as truly will I give ye all I have gained." He took the host round the neck, and kissed him courteously twice. "Now are we quits," he said, "this eventide, of all the covenants that we made since I came hither."

And the lord answered, "By S. Giles, ye are the best I know; ye will be rich in a short space if ye drive such bargains!"

Then they set up the tables on trestles, and covered them with fair cloths, and lit waxen tapers on the walls. The knights sat and were served in the hall, and much game and glee was there round the hearth, with many songs, both at supper and after; songs of Christmas, and new carols, with all the mirth one may think of. And ever that lovely lady sat by the knight, and with still stolen looks made such feint of pleasing him, that Gawain marvelled much, and was wroth with himself, but he could not for his courtesy return her fair glances, but dealt with her cunningly, however she might strive to wrest the thing.

When they had tarried in the hall so long as it seemed them good, they turned to the inner chamber and the wide hearth-place, and there they drank wine, and the host proffered to renew the covenant for New Year's Eve; but the knight craved leave to depart on the morrow, for it was nigh to the term when he must fulfil his pledge. But the lord would withhold him from so doing, and prayed him to tarry, and said,

"As I am a true knight I swear my troth that ye shall come to the Green Chapel to achieve your task on New Year's morn, long before prime. Therefore abide ye in your bed, and I will hunt in this wood, and hold ye to the covenant to exchange with me against all the spoil I may bring hither. For twice have I tried ye, and found ye true, and the morrow shall be the third time and the best. Make we merry now while we may, and think on joy, for misfortune may take a man whensoever it wills."

Then Gawain granted his request, and they brought them drink, and they gat them with lights to bed.

Of the third day's hunting

Sir Gawain lay and slept softly, but the lord, who was keen on woodcraft, was afoot early. After Mass he and his men ate a morsel, and he asked for his steed; all the knights who should ride with him were already mounted before the hall gates.

'Twas a fair frosty morning, for the sun rose red in ruddy vapour, and the welkin was clear of clouds. The hunters scattered them by a forest side, and the rocks rang again with the blast of their horns. Some came on the scent of a fox, and a hound gave tongue; the huntsmen shouted, and the pack followed in a crowd on the trail. The fox ran before them, and when they saw him they pursued him with noise and much shouting, and he wound and turned through many a thick grove, often cowering and hearkening in a hedge. At last by a little ditch he leapt out of a spinney, stole away slily by a copse path, and so out of the wood and away from the bounds. But he went, ere he wist, to a chosen tryst, and three started forth on him at once, so he must needs double back, and betake him to the wood again.

Then was it joyful to hearken to the hounds; when all the pack had met together and had sight of their game they made as loud a din as if all the lofty cliffs had fallen clattering together. The huntsmen shouted and threatened, and followed close upon him so that he might scarce escape, but Reynard was wily, and he turned and doubled upon them, and led the lord and his men over the hills, now on the slopes, now in the vales, while the knight at home slept through the cold morning beneath his costly curtains.

How the lady came for the third time to Sir Gawain

But the fair lady of the castle rose betimes, and clad herself in a rich mantle that reached even to the ground, and was bordered and lined with costly furs. On her head she wore no golden circlet, but a network of precious stones, that gleamed and shone through her tresses in clusters of twenty together. Thus she came into the chamber and set open a window, and called to him gaily, "Sir Knight, how may ye sleep? The morning is so fair."

Sir Gawain was deep in slumber, and in his dream he vexed him much for the destiny that should befall him on the morrow, when he should meet the knight at the Green Chapel, and abide his blow; but when the lady spake he heard her, and came to himself, and roused from his dream and answered swiftly. The lady came laughing, and kissed him courteously, and he welcomed her fittingly with a cheerful countenance. He saw her so glorious and gaily dressed, so faultless of features and complexion, that it warmed his heart to look upon her.

They spake to each other smiling, and all was bliss and good cheer between them. They exchanged fair words, and much happiness was therein, yet was there a gulf between them, and she might win no more of her knight, for that gallant prince watched well his words—he would neither take her love, nor frankly refuse it. He cared for his courtesy, lest he be deemed churlish, and yet more for his honour lest he be traitor to his host. "God forbid," quoth he to himself, "that it should so befall." Thus with courteous words did he set aside all the special speeches that came from her lips.

Then spake the lady to the knight, "Ye deserve blame if ye hold not that lady who sits beside ye above all else in the world, if ye have not already a love whom ye hold dearer, and like better, and have sworn such firm faith to that lady that ye care not to loose it—as I scarce may believe. And now I pray ye straitly that ye tell me that in truth, and hide it not."

And the knight answered, "By S. John" (and he smiled as he spake) "no such love have I, nor do I think to have yet awhile."

"That is the worst word I may hear," quoth the lady, "but in sooth I have mine answer; kiss me now courteously, and I will go hence; I can but mourn as a maiden that loves much."

Sighing, she stooped down and kissed him, and then she rose up and spake as she stood, "Now, dear, at our parting do me this grace: give me some gift, if it were but thy glove, that I may bethink me of my knight, and lessen my mourning."

The lady would fain have a parting gift from Gawain

"Now, I wis," quoth the knight, "I would that I had here but the least thing that I possess on earth that I might leave ye as love-token, great or small, for ye have deserved forsooth more reward than I might give ye. But it is not to your honour to have at this time a glove for reward as gift from Gawain, and I am here on a strange errand, and have no man with me, nor mails with goodly things—that mislikes me much, lady, at this time; but each man must fare as he is taken, if for sorrow and ill."

She would give him her ring

"Nay, knight highly honoured," quoth that lovesome lady, "though I have naught of yours, yet shall ye have somewhat of mine." With that she reached him a ring of red gold with a sparkling stone therein, that shone even as the sun (wit ye well, it was worth many marks); but the knight refused it, and spake readily,

"I will take no gift, lady, at this time. I have none to give, and none will I take."

She prayed him to take it, but he refused her prayer, and sware in sooth that he would not have it.

Or her girdle

The lady was sorely vexed, and said, "If ye refuse my ring as too costly, that ye will not be so highly beholden to me, I will give ye my girdle as a lesser gift." With that she loosened a lace that was fastened at her side, knit upon her kirtle under her mantle. It was wrought of green silk, and gold, only braided by the fingers, and that she offered to the knight, and besought him though it were of little worth that he would take it, and he said nay, he would touch neither gold nor gear ere God give him grace to achieve the adventure for which he had come hither. "And therefore, I pray ye, displease ye not, and ask me no longer, for I may not grant it. I am dearly beholden to ye for the favour ye have shown me, and ever, in heat and cold, will I be your true servant."

The virtue of the girdle

"Now," said the lady, "ye refuse this silk, for it is simple in itself, and so it seems, indeed; lo, it is small to look upon and less in cost, but whoso knew the virtue that is knit therein he would, peradventure, value it more highly. For whatever knight is girded with this green lace, while he bears it knotted about him there is no man under heaven can overcome him, for he may not be slain for any magic on earth."

How Sir Gawain took the girdle

Then Gawain bethought him, and it came into his heart that this were a jewel for the jeopardy that awaited him when he came to the Green Chapel to seek the return blow—could he so order it that he should escape unslain, 'twere a craft worth trying. Then he bare with her chiding, and let her say her say, and she pressed the girdle on him and prayed him to take it, and he granted her prayer, and she gave it him with good will, and besought him for

her sake never to reveal it but to hide it loyally from her lord; and the knight agreed that never should any man know it, save they two alone. He thanked her often and heartily, and she kissed him for the third time.

Then she took her leave of him, and when she was gone Sir Gawain arose, and clad him in rich attire, and took the girdle, and knotted it round him, and hid it beneath his robes. Then he took his way to the chapel, and sought out a priest privily, and prayed him to teach him better how his soul might be saved when he should go hence; and there he shrived him, and showed his misdeeds, both great and small, and besought mercy and craved absolution; and the priest assoiled him, and set him as clean as if Doomsday had been on the morrow. And afterwards Sir Gawain made him merry with the ladies, with carols, and all kinds of joy, as never he did but that one day, even to nightfall; and all the men marvelled at him, and said that never since he came thither had he been so merry.

The death of the fox

Meanwhile the lord of the castle was abroad chasing the fox; awhile he lost him, and as he rode through a spinney he heard the hounds near at hand, and Reynard came creeping through a thick grove, with all the pack at his heels. Then the lord drew out his shining brand, and cast it at the beast, and the fox swerved aside for the sharp edge, and would have doubled back, but a hound was on him ere he might turn, and right before the horse's feet they all fell on him, and worried him fiercely, snarling the while.

Then the lord leapt from his saddle, and caught the fox from their jaws, and held it aloft over his head, and hallooed loudly, and the hunters hied them thither, blowing their horns; all that bare bugles blew them at once, and all the others shouted. 'Twas the merriest meeting that ever men heard, the clamour that was raised at the death of the fox. They rewarded the hounds, stroking them and rubbing their heads, and took Reynard and stripped him of his coat; then blowing their horns, they turned them homewards, for it was nigh nightfall.

How Sir Gawain kept not all the covenant

The lord was gladsome at his return, and found a bright fire on the hearth, and the knight beside it, the good Sir Gawain, who was in joyous mood for the pleasure he had had with the ladies. He wore a robe of blue, that reached even to the ground, and a surcoat richly furred, that became him well. A hood like to the surcoat fell on his shoulders, and all alike were done about with fur. He met the host in the midst of the floor, and jesting, he greeted him, and said, "Now shall I be first to fulfil our covenant which we made together when there was no lack of wine." Then he embraced the knight, and kissed him thrice, as solemnly as he might.

"Of a sooth," quoth the other, "ye have good luck in the matter of this covenant, if ye made a good exchange!"

"Yea, it matters naught of the exchange," quoth Gawain, "since what I owe is swiftly paid."

"Marry," said the other, "mine is behind, for I have hunted all this day, and naught have I got but this foul fox-skin, and that is but poor payment for three such kisses as ye have here given me."

"Enough," quoth Sir Gawain, "I thank ye, by the Rood." Then the lord told them of his hunting, and how the fox had been slain.

With mirth and minstrelsy, and dainties at their will, they made them as merry as a folk well might till 'twas time for them to sever, for at last they must needs betake them to their beds. Then the knight took his leave of the lord, and thanked him fairly.

"For the fair sojourn that I have had here at this high feast may the High King give ye honour. I give ye myself, as one of your servants, if ye so like; for I must needs, as ye know, go hence with the morn, and ye will give me, as ye promised, a guide to show me the way to the Green Chapel, an God will suffer me on New Year's Day to deal the doom of my weird."

"By my faith," quoth the host, "all that ever I promised, that shall I keep with good will." Then he gave him a servant to set him in the way, and lead him by the downs, that he should have no need to ford the stream, and should fare by the shortest road through the groves; and Gawain thanked the lord for the honour done him. Then he would take leave of the ladies, and courteously he kissed them, and spake, praying them to receive his thanks, and they made like reply; then with many sighs they commended him to Christ, and he departed courteously from that folk. Each man that he met he thanked him for his service and his solace, and the pains he had been at to do his will; and each found it as hard to part from the knight as if he had ever dwelt with him.

How Sir Gawain took leave of his host

Then they led him with torches to his chamber, and brought him to his bed to rest. That he slept soundly I may not say, for the morrow gave him much to think on. Let him rest a while, for he was near that which he sought, and if ye will but listen to me I will tell ye how it fared with him thereafter.

Fitt IV

Now the New Year drew nigh, and the night passed, and the day chased the darkness, as is God's will; but wild weather wakened therewith. The clouds cast the cold to the earth, with enough of the north to slay them that lacked clothing. The snow drave smartly, and the whistling wind blew from the heights, and made great drifts in the valleys. The knight, lying in his bed, listened, for though his eyes were shut he might sleep but little, and hearkened every cock that crew.

He arose ere the day broke, by the light of a lamp that burned in his chamber, and called to his chamberlain, bidding him bring his armour and saddle his steed. The other gat him up, and fetched his garments, and robed Sir Gawain.

The robing of Sir Gawain

First he clad him in his clothes to keep off the cold, and then in his harness, which was well and fairly kept. Both hauberk and plates were well burnished, the rings of the rich byrny freed from rust, and all as fresh as at first, so that the knight was fain to thank them. Then he did on each piece, and bade them bring his steed, while he put the fairest raiment on himself; his coat with its fair cognizance, adorned with precious stones upon velvet, with broidered seams, and all furred within with costly skins. And he left not the lace, the lady's gift, that Gawain forgot not, for his own good. When he had girded on his sword he wrapped the gift twice about him, swathed around his waist. The girdle of green silk set gaily and well upon the royal red cloth, rich to behold, but the knight ware it not for pride of the pendants, polished though they were, with fair gold that gleamed brightly on the ends, but to save himself from sword and knife, when it behoved him to abide his hurt without question. With that the hero went forth, and thanked that kindly folk full often.

How Sir Gawain went forth from the castle

Then was Gringalet ready, that was great and strong, and had been well cared for and tended in every wise; in fair condition was that proud steed, and fit for a journey. Then Gawain went to him, and looked on his coat, and said by his sooth, "There is a folk in this place that thinketh on honour; much joy may they have, and the lord who maintains them, and may all good betide that lovely lady all her life long. Since they for charity cherish a guest, and hold honour in their hands, may He who holds the heaven on high requite them, and also ye all. And if I might live anywhile on earth, I would give ye full reward, readily, if so I might." Then he set foot in the stirrup and bestrode his steed, and his squire gave him his shield, which he laid on his shoulder. Then he smote Gringalet with his golden spurs, and the steed pranced on the stones and would stand no longer.

By that his man was mounted, who bare his spear and lance, and Gawain quoth, "I commend this castle to Christ, may He give it ever good fortune." Then the drawbridge was let down, and the broad gates unbarred and opened on both sides; the knight crossed himself, and passed through the gateway, and praised the porter, who knelt before the prince, and gave him good-day, and commended him to God. Thus the knight went on his way with the one man who should guide him to that dread place where he should receive rueful payment.

The two went by hedges where the boughs were bare, and climbed the cliffs where the cold clings. Naught fell from the heavens, but 'twas ill beneath them; mist brooded over the moor and hung on the mountains; each hill had a cap, a great cloak, of mist. The streams foamed and bubbled between their banks, dashing sparkling on the shores where they shelved downwards. Rugged and dangerous was the way through the woods, till it was time for the sun-rising. Then were they on a high hill; the snow lay white beside them, and the man who rode with Gawain drew rein by his master.

The squire's warning

"Sir," he said, "I have brought ye hither, and now ye are not far from the place that ye have sought so specially. But I will tell ye for sooth, since I know ye well, and ye are such a knight as I well love, would ye follow my counsel ye would fare the better.

Of the knight of the Green Chapel

"The place whither ye go is accounted full perilous, for he who liveth in that waste is the worst on earth, for he is strong and

fierce, and loveth to deal mighty blows; taller is he than any man on earth, and greater of frame than any four in Arthur's court, or in any other. And this is his custom at the Green Chapel: there may no man pass by that place, however proud his arms, but he does him to death by force of his hand, for he is a discourteous knight, and shews no mercy. Be he churl or chaplain who rides by that chapel, monk or mass-priest, or any man else, he thinks it as pleasant to slay them as to pass alive himself. Therefore, I tell ye, as sooth as ye sit in saddle, if ye come there and that knight know it, ye shall be slain, though ye had twenty lives; trow me that truly! He has dwelt here full long and seen many a combat; ye may not defend ye against his blows. Therefore, good Sir Gawain, let the man be, and get ye away some other road; for God's sake seek ye another land, and there may Christ speed ye!

And I will hie me home again, and I promise ye further that I will swear by God and the saints, or any other oath ye please, that I will keep counsel faithfully, and never let any wit the tale that ye fled for fear of any man."

Sir Gawain is none dismayed

"Gramercy," quoth Gawain, but ill pleased. "Good fortune be his who wishes me good, and that thou wouldst keep faith with me I well believe; but didst thou keep it never so truly, an I passed here and fled for fear as thou sayest, then were I a coward knight, and might not be held guiltless. So I will to the chapel let chance what may, and talk with that man, even as I may list, whether for weal or for woe as fate may have it. Fierce though he may be in fight, yet God knoweth well how to save His servants."

"Well," quoth the other, "now that ye have said so much that ye will take your own harm on yourself, and ye be pleased to lose your life, I will neither let nor keep ye. Have here your helm and the spear in your hand, and ride down this same road beside the rock till ye come to the bottom of the valley, and there look a little to the left hand, and ye shall see in that vale the chapel, and the grim man who keeps it. Now fare ye well, noble Gawain; for all the gold on earth I would not go with ye nor bear ye fellowship one step further." With that the man turned his bridle into the wood, smote the horse with his spurs as hard as he could, and galloped off, leaving the knight alone.

Quoth Gawain, "I will neither greet nor groan, but commend myself to God, and yield me to His will."

Then the knight spurred Gringalet, and rode adown the path close in by a bank beside a grove. So he rode through the rough thicket, right into the dale, and there he halted, for it seemed him wild enough. No sign of a chapel could he see, but high and burnt banks on either side and rough rugged crags with great stones above. An ill-looking place he thought it.

Then he drew in his horse and looked around to seek the chapel, but he saw none and thought it strange. Then he saw as it were a mound on a level space of land by a bank beside the stream where it ran swiftly, the water bubbled within as if boiling. The knight turned his steed to the mound, and lighted down and tied the rein to the branch of a linden; and he turned to the mound and walked round it, questioning with himself what it might be. It had a hole at the end and at either side, and was overgrown with clumps of grass, and it was hollow within as an old cave or the crevice of a crag; he knew not what it might be.

The finding of the chapel

"Ah," quoth Gawain, "can this be the Green Chapel? Here might the devil say his mattins at midnight! Now I wis there is wizardry here. 'Tis an ugly oratory, all overgrown with grass, and 'twould well beseem that fellow in green to say his devotions on devil's wise. By my five wits, 'tis the foul fiend himself who hath set me this tryst, to destroy me here! This is a chapel of mischance: ill-luck betide it, 'tis the cursedest kirk that ever I came in!"

Helmet on head and lance in hand, he came up to the rough dwelling, when he heard over the high hill beyond the brook, as it were in a bank, a wondrous fierce noise, that rang in the cliff as if it would cleave asunder. 'Twas as if one ground a scythe on a grindstone, it whirred and whetted like water on a mill-wheel and rushed and rang, terrible to hear.

"By God," quoth Gawain, "I trow that gear is preparing for the knight who will meet me here. Alas! naught may help me, yet should my life be forfeit, I fear not a jot!" With that he called aloud. "Who waiteth in this place to give me tryst? Now is Gawain come hither: if any man will aught of him let him hasten hither now or never."

The coming of the Green Knight

"Stay," quoth one on the bank above his head, "and ye shall speedily have that which I promised ye." Yet for a while the noise of whetting went on ere he appeared, and then he came forth from a cave in the crag with a fell weapon, a Danish axe newly

George Frederic Watts, 'Sir Galahad', 1860-62

dight, wherewith to deal the blow. An evil head it had, four feet large, no less, sharply ground, and bound to the handle by the lace that gleamed brightly. And the knight himself was all green as before, face and foot, locks and beard, but now he was afoot. When he came to the water he would not wade it, but sprang over with the pole of his axe, and strode boldly over the brent that was white with snow.

Sir Gawain went to meet him, but he made no low bow. The other said, "Now, fair sir, one may trust thee to keep tryst. Thou art welcome, Gawain, to my place. Thou hast timed thy coming as befits a true man. Thou knowest the covenant set between us: at this time twelve months agone thou didst take that which fell to thee, and I at this New Year will readily requite thee. We are in this valley, verily alone, here are no knights to sever us, do what we will. Have off thy helm from thine head, and have here thy pay; make me no more talking than I did then when thou didst strike off my head with one blow."

"Nay," quoth Gawain, "by God that gave me life, I shall make no moan whatever befall me, but make thou ready for the blow and I shall stand still and say never a word to thee, do as thou wilt."

With that he bent his head and shewed his neck all bare, and made as if he had no fear, for he would not be thought a-dread.

How Sir Gawain failed to stand the blow

Then the Green Knight made him ready, and grasped his grim weapon to smite Gawain. With all his force he bore it aloft with a

mighty feint of slaying him: had it fallen as straight as he aimed he who was ever doughty of deed had been slain by the blow. But Gawain swerved aside as the axe came gliding down to slay him as he stood, and shrank a little with the shoulders, for the sharp iron. The other heaved up the blade and rebuked the prince with many proud words:

Of the Green Knight's reproaches

"Thou art not Gawain," he said, "who is held so valiant, that never feared he man by hill or vale, but thou shrinkest for fear ere thou feelest hurt. Such cowardice did I never hear of Gawain! Neither did I flinch from thy blow, or make strife in King Arthur's hall. My head fell to my feet, and yet I fled not, but thou didst wax faint of heart ere any harm befell. Wherefore must I be deemed the braver knight."

Quoth Gawain, "I shrank once, but so will I no more, though an my head fall on the stones I cannot replace it. But haste, Sir Knight, by thy faith, and bring me to the point, deal me my destiny, and do it out of hand, for I will stand thee a stroke and move no more till thine axe have hit me—my troth on it."

"Have at thee, then," quoth the other, and heaved aloft the axe with fierce mien, as if he were mad. He struck at him fiercely but wounded him not, withholding his hand ere it might strike him.

Gawain abode the stroke, and flinched in no limb, but stood still as a stone or the stump of a tree that is fast rooted in the rocky ground with a hundred roots.

Then spake gaily the man in green, "So now thou hast thine heart whole it behoves me to smite. Hold aside thy hood that Arthur gave thee, and keep thy neck thus bent lest it cover it again."

Then Gawain said angrily, "Why talk on thus? Thou dost threaten too long. I hope thy heart misgives thee."

How the Green Knight dealt the blow

"For sooth," quoth the other, "so fiercely thou speakest I will no longer let thine errand wait its reward." Then he braced himself to strike, frowning with lips and brow, 'twas no marvel that he who hoped for no rescue misliked him. He lifted the axe lightly and let it fall with the edge of the blade on the bare neck. Though he struck swiftly it hurt him no more than on the one side where it severed the skin. The sharp blade cut into the flesh so that the blood ran over his shoulder to the ground. And when the knight saw the blood staining the snow, he sprang forth, swift-foot, more than a spear's length, seized his helmet and set it on his head, cast his shield over his shoulder, drew out his bright sword, and spake boldly (never since he was born was he half so blithe), "Stop, Sir Knight, bid me no more blows. I have stood a stroke here without flinching, and if thou give me another, I shall requite thee, and give thee as good again. By the covenant made betwixt us in Arthur's hall but one blow falls to me here. Halt, therefore."

Of the three covenants

Then the Green Knight drew off from him, and leaned on his axe, setting the shaft on the ground, and looked on Gawain as he stood all armed and faced him fearlessly—at heart it pleased him well. Then he spake merrily in a loud voice, and said to the knight, "Bold sir, be not so fierce, no man here hath done thee wrong, nor will do, save by covenant, as we made at Arthur's court. I promised thee a blow and thou hast it—hold thyself well paid! I release thee of all other claims. If I had been so minded I might perchance have given thee a rougher buffet. First I menaced thee with a feigned one, and hurt thee not for the covenant that we made in the first night, and which thou didst hold truly. All the gain didst thou give me as a true man should. The other feint I proffered thee for the morrow: my fair wife kissed thee, and thou didst give me her kisses—for both those days I gave thee two blows without scathe—true man, true return. But the third time thou didst fail, and therefore hadst thou that blow. For 'tis my weed thou wearest, that same woven girdle, my own wife wrought it, that do I wot for sooth. Now know I well thy kisses, and thy conversation, and the wooing of my wife, for 'twas mine own doing. I sent her to try thee, and in sooth I think thou art the most faultless knight that ever trode earth. As a pearl among white peas is of more worth than they, so is Gawain, i' faith, by other knights. But thou didst lack a little, Sir Knight, and wast wanting in loyalty, yet that was for no evil work, nor for wooing neither, but because thou lovedst thy life—therefore I blame thee the less."

The shame of Sir Gawain

Then the other stood a great while still, sorely angered and vexed within himself; all the blood flew to his face, and he shrank for shame as the Green Knight spake; and the first words he said were, "Cursed be ye, cowardice and covetousness, for in ye is the destruction of virtue." Then he loosed the girdle, and gave it to the knight. "Lo, take there the falsity, may foul befall it! For fear of thy blow cowardice bade me make friends with covetousness and forsake the customs of largess and loyalty, which befit all knights. Now am I faulty and false and have been afeard: from treachery and untruth come sorrow and care. I avow to thee, Sir Knight, that I have ill done; do then thy will. I shall be more wary hereafter."

Then the other laughed and said gaily, "I wot I am whole of the hurt I had, and thou hast made such free confession of thy misdeeds, and hast so borne the penance of mine axe-edge, that I hold thee absolved from that sin, and purged as clean as if thou hadst never sinned since thou wast born. And this girdle that is wrought with gold and green, like my raiment, do I give thee, Sir Gawain, that thou mayest think upon this chance when thou goest forth among princes of renown, and keep this for a token of the adventure of the Green Chapel, as it chanced between chivalrous knights. And thou shalt come again with me to my dwelling and pass the rest of this feast in gladness." Then the lord laid hold of him, and said, "I wot we shall soon make peace with my wife, who was thy bitter enemy."

How Sir Gawain would keep the girdle

"Nay, forsooth," said Sir Gawain and seized his helmet and took it off swiftly, and thanked the knight: "I have fared ill, may bliss betide thee, and may He who rules all things reward thee swiftly. Commend me to that courteous lady, thy fair wife, and to the other my honoured ladies, who have beguiled their knight with skilful craft. But 'tis no marvel if one be made a fool and brought to sorrow by women's wiles, for so was Adam beguiled, and many a mighty man of old, Samson, and David, and Solomon—if one might love a woman and believe her not, 'twere great gain! And since all they were beguiled by women, methinks 'tis the less blame to me that I was misled! But as for thy girdle, that will I take with good will, not for gain of the gold, nor for samite, nor silk, nor the costly pendants, neither for weal nor for worship, but in sign of my frailty. I shall look upon it when I ride in renown and remind myself of the fault and faintness of the flesh; and so when pride uplifts me for prowess of arms, the sight of this lace shall humble my heart. But one thing would I pray, if it displease thee not: since thou art lord of yonder land wherein I have dwelt, tell me what thy rightful name may be, and I will ask no more."

How the marvel was wrought

"That will I truly," quoth the other. "Bernlak de Hautdesert am I called in this land. Morgain le Fay dwelleth in mine house, and through knowledge of clerkly craft hath she taken many. For long time was she the mistress of Merlin, who knew well all you knights of the court. Morgain the goddess is she called therefore, and there is none so haughty but she can bring him low. She sent me in this guise to yon fair hall to test the truth of the renown that is spread abroad of the valour of the Round Table. She taught me this marvel to betray your wits, to vex Guinevere and fright her to death by the man who spake with his head in his hand at the high table. That is she who is at home, that ancient lady, she is even thine aunt, Arthur's half-sister, the daughter of the Duchess of Tintagel, who afterward married King Uther. Therefore I bid thee, knight, come to thine aunt, and make merry in thine house; my folk love thee, and I wish thee as well as any man on earth, by my faith, for thy true dealing."

But Sir Gawain said nay, he would in no wise do so; so they embraced and kissed, and commended each other to the Prince of Paradise, and parted right there, on the cold ground. Gawain on his steed rode swiftly to the king's hall, and the Green Knight got him whithersoever he would.

How Sir Gawain came again to Camelot

Sir Gawain, who had thus won grace of his life, rode through wild ways on Gringalet; oft he lodged in a house, and oft without, and many adventures did he have and came off victor full often, as at this time I cannot relate in tale. The hurt that he had in his neck was healed, he bare the shining girdle as a baldric bound by his side, and made fast with a knot 'neath his left arm, in token that he was taken in a fault—and thus he came in safety again to the court.

Then joy awakened in that dwelling when the king knew that the good Sir Gawain was come, for he deemed it gain. King Arthur kissed the knight, and the queen also, and many valiant knights sought to embrace him. They asked him how he had fared, and he told them all that had chanced to him—the adventure of the chapel, the fashion of the knight, the love of the lady—at last of the lace. He showed them the wound in the neck which he won for his disloyalty at the hand of the knight, the blood flew to his face for shame as he told the tale.

Sir Gawain makes confession of his fault

"Lo, lady," he quoth, and handled the lace, "this is the bond of the blame that I bear in my neck, this is the harm and the loss I have suffered, the cowardice and covetousness in which I was caught, the token of my covenant in which I was taken. And I must needs wear it so long as I live, for none may hide his harm, but undone it may not be, for if it hath clung to thee once, it may never be severed."

The knights wear the lace in honour of Gawain

Then the king comforted the knight, and the court laughed loudly at the tale, and all made accord that the lords and the ladies who belonged to the Round Table, each hero among them, should wear bound about him a baldric of bright green for the sake of Sir Gawain. And to this was agreed all the honour of the Round Table, and he who ware it was honoured the more thereafter, as it is testified in the best book of romance.

The end of the tale

That in Arthur's days this adventure befell, the book of Brutus bears witness. For since that bold knight came hither first, and the siege and the assault were ceased at Troy, I wis

Many a venture herebefore
Hath fallen such as this:
May He that bare the crown of thorn
Bring us unto His bliss.

Amen

Sir Gawayn and þe Grene Kny3t
Author Unknown

siþen þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at troye
þe bor3 brittened and brent to brondez and askez
þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wro3t
watz tried for his tricherie þe trewest on erþe
hit watz ennias þe athel and his highe kynde
þat siþen depreced prouinces and patrounes bicome
welne3e of al þe wele in þe west iles
fro riche romulus to rome ricchis hym swyþe
with gret bobbaunce þat bur3e he biges vpon fyrst
and neuenes hit his aune nome as hit now hat
ticius to tuskan and teldes bigynnes
langaberde in lumbardie lyftes vp homes
and fer ouer þe french flod felix brutus
on mony bonkkes ful brode bretayn he settez
wyth wynne
where werre and wrake and wonder
bi syþez hatz wont þerinne
and oft boþe blysse and blunder
ful skete hatz skyfted synne

ande quen þis bretayn watz bigged bi þis burn rych
bolde bredden þerinne baret þat lofden
in mony turned tyme tene þat wro3ten
mo ferlyes on þis folde han fallen here oft
þen in any oþer þat I wot syn þat ilk tyme
bot of alle þat here bult of bretaygne kynges
ay watz arthur þe hendest as I haf herde telle
forþi an aunter in erde I attle to schawe
þat a selly in si3t summe men hit holden
and an outtrage awenture of arthurez wonderez
if 3e wyl lysten þis laye bot on littel quile
I schal telle hit as tit as I in toun herde
with tonge
as hit is stad and stoken
in stori stif and stronge
with lel letteres loken
in londe so hatz ben longe

þis kyng lay at camylot vpon kryst masse
with mony luflych lorde ledez of þe best
rekenly of þe rounde table alle þo rich breþer
with rych reuel ory3t and rechles merþes
þer tournayed tulkes by tymez ful mony
justed ful jolile þise gentyle kni3tes
syþen kayred to þe court caroles to make
for þer þe fest watz ilyche ful fiften dayes
with alle þe mete and þe mirþe þat men couþe avyse
such glaumande gle glorious to here
dere dyn vpon day daunsyng on ny3tes
al watz hap vpon he3e in hallez and chambrez
with lordez and ladies as leuest him þo3t
with all þe wele of þe worlde þay woned þer samen
þe most kyd kny3tez vnder krystes seluen
and þe louelokkest ladies þat euer lif haden
and he þe comlokest kyng þat þe court haldes
for al watz þis fayre folk in her first age
on sille
þe hapnest vnder heuen
kyng hy3est mon of wylle
hit werere now gret nye to neuen
so hardy a here on hille

Conall Cra Bhuidhe (Conall Yellowclaw)

Adapted from John Francis Campbell's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* by Joseph Jacobs

Battle scene, Gallic warrior on horseback
Theodore Chasseriau

Conall Yellowclaw was a sturdy tenant in Erin: he had three sons. There was at that time a king over every fifth of Erin. It fell out for the children of the king that was near Conall, that they themselves and the children of Conall came to blows. The children of Conall got the upper hand, and they killed the king's big son. The king sent a message for Conall, and he said to him —"Oh, Conall! what made your sons go to spring on my sons till my big son was killed by your children? but I see that though I follow you revengefully, I shall not be much better for it, and I will now set a thing before you, and if you will do it, I will not follow you with revenge. If you and your sons will get me the brown horse of the king of Lochlann, you shall get the souls of your sons."

"Why," said Conall, "should not I do the pleasure of the king, though there should be no souls of my sons in dread at all. Hard is the matter you require of me, but I will lose my own life, and the life of my sons, or else I will do the pleasure of the king." After these words Conall left the king, and he went home: when he got home he was under much trouble and perplexity. When he went to lie down he told his wife the thing the king had set before him. His wife took much sorrow that he was obliged to part from herself, while she knew not if she should see him more. "Oh, Conall," said she, "why didst not thou let the king do his own pleasure to thy sons, rather than be going now, while I know not if ever I shall see thee more?"

When he rose on the morrow, he set himself and his three sons in order, and they took their journey towards Lochlann, and they made no stop but tore through ocean till they reached it. When they reached Lochlann they did not know what they should do. Said the old man to his sons, "Stop ye, and we will seek out the house of the king's miller."

When they went into the house of the king's miller, the man asked them to stop there for the night. Conall told the miller that his own children and the children of his king had fallen out, and that his children had killed the king's son, and there was nothing that would please the king but that he should get the brown horse of the king of Lochlann.

"If you will do me a kindness, and will put me in a way to get him, for certain I will pay ye for it."

"The thing is silly that you are come to seek," said the miller; "for the king has laid his mind on him so greatly that you will not get him in any way unless you steal him; but if you can make out a way, I will keep it secret."

"This is what I am thinking," said Conall, "since you are working every day for the king, you and your gillies could put myself and my sons into five sacks of bran."

"The plan that has come into your head is not bad," said the miller.

The miller spoke to his gillies, and he said to them to do this, and they put them in five sacks. The king's gillies came to seek the bran, and they took the five sacks with them, and they emptied them before the horses. The servants locked the door, and they went away.

When they rose to lay hand on the brown horse, said Conall, "You shall not do that. It is hard to get out of this; let us make for ourselves five hiding holes, so that if they hear us we may go and hide." They made the holes, then they laid hands on the horse. The horse was pretty well unbroken, and he set to making a terrible noise through the stable. The king heard the noise. "It must be my brown horse," said he to his gillies; "find out what is wrong with him."

The servants went out, and when Conall and his sons saw them coming they went into the hiding holes. The servants looked amongst the horses, and they did not find anything wrong; and they returned and they told this to the king, and the king said to them that if nothing was wrong they should go to their places of rest. When the gillies had time to be gone, Conall and his sons laid their hands again on the horse. If the noise was great that he made before, the noise he made now was seven times greater. The king sent a message for his gillies again, and said for certain there was something troubling the brown horse. "Go and look well about him." The servants went out, and they went to their hiding holes. The servants rummaged well, and did not find a thing. They returned and they told this.

"That is marvellous for me," said the king: "go you to lie down again, and if I notice it again I will go out myself."

When Conall and his sons perceived that the gillies were gone, they laid hands again on the horse, and one of them caught him, and if the noise that the horse made on the two former times was great, he made more this time.

"Be this from me," said the king; "it must be that some one is troubling my brown horse." He sounded the bell hastily, and when his waiting-man came to him, he said to him to let the stable gillies know that something was wrong with the horse. The gillies came, and the king went with them. When Conall and his sons perceived the company coming they went to the hiding holes.

The king was a wary man, and he saw where the horses were making a noise.

"Be wary," said the king, "there are men within the stable, let us get at them somehow."

The king followed the tracks of the men, and he found them. Every one knew Conall, for he was a valued tenant of the king of Erin, and when the king brought them up out of the holes he said, "Oh, Conall, is it you that are here?"

"I am, O king, without question, and necessity made me come. I am under thy pardon, and under thine honour, and under thy grace." He told how it happened to him, and that he had to get the brown horse for the king of Erin, or that his sons were to be put to death. "I knew that I should not get him by asking, and I was going to steal him."

"Yes, Conall, it is well enough, but come in," said the king. He desired his look-out men to set a watch on the sons of Conall, and to give them meat. And a double watch was set that night on the sons of Conall.

"Now, O Conall," said the king, "were you ever in a harder place than to be seeing your lot of sons hanged tomorrow? But you set it to my goodness and to my grace, and say that it was necessity brought it on you, so I must not hang you. Tell me any case in which you were as hard as this, and if you tell that, you shall get the soul of your youngest son."

"I will tell a case as hard in which I was," said Conall. "I was once a young lad, and my father had much land, and he had parks of year-old cows, and one of them had just calved, and my father told me to bring her home. I found the cow, and took her with us. There fell a shower of snow. We went into the herd's bothy, and we took the cow and the calf in with us, and we were letting the shower pass from us. Who should come in but one cat and ten, and one great one-eyed fox-coloured cat as head bard over them. When they came in, in very deed I myself had no liking for their company. 'Strike up with you,' said the head bard, 'why should we be still? and sing a cronan to Conall Yellowclaw.' I was amazed that my name was known to the cats themselves. When they had sung the cronan, said the head bard, 'Now, O Conall, pay the reward of the cronan that the cats have sung to thee.' 'Well then,' said I myself, 'I have no reward whatsoever for you, unless you should go down and take that calf.' No sooner said I the word than the two cats and ten went down to attack the calf, and in very deed, he did not last them long. 'Play up with you, why should you be silent? Make a cronan to Conall Yellowclaw,' said the head bard. Certainly I had no liking at all for the cronan, but up came the one cat and ten, and if they did not sing me a cronan then and there! 'Pay them now their reward,' said the great fox-coloured cat. 'I am tired myself of yourselves and your rewards,' said I. 'I have no reward for you unless you take that cow down there.' They betook themselves to the cow, and indeed she did not last them long.

"'Why will you be silent? Go up and sing a cronan to Conall Yellowclaw,' said the head bard. And surely, oh king, I had no care for them or for their cronan, for I began to see that they were not good comrades. When they had sung me the cronan they betook themselves down where the head bard was. 'Pay now their reward, said the head bard; and for sure, oh king, I had no reward for them; and I said to them, 'I have no reward for you.' And surely, oh king, there was catterwauling between them. So I leapt out at a turf window that was at the back of the house. I took myself off as hard as I might into the wood. I was swift enough and strong at that time; and when I felt the rustling toirm of the cats after me I climbed into as high a tree as I saw in the place, and one that was close in the top; and I hid myself as well as I might. The cats began to search for me through the wood, and they could not find me; and when they were tired, each one said to the other that they would turn back. 'But,' said the one-eyed fox-coloured cat that was commander-in-chief over them, 'you saw him not with your two eyes, and though I have but one eye, there's the rascal up in the tree.' When he had said that, one of them went up in the tree, and as he was coming where I was, I drew a weapon that I had and I killed him. 'Be this from me!' said the one-eyed one—'I must not be losing my company thus; gather round the root of the tree and dig about it, and let down that villain to earth.' On this they gathered about the tree, and they dug about the root, and the first branching root that they

cut, she gave a shiver to fall, and I myself gave a shout, and it was not to be wondered at."There was in the neighbourhood of the wood a priest, and he had ten men with him delving, and he said, 'There is a shout of a man in extremity and I must not be without replying to it.' And the wisest of the men said, 'Let it alone till we hear it again.' The cats began again digging wildly, and they broke the next root; and I myself gave the next shout, and in very deed it was not a weak one. 'Certainly,' said the priest, 'it is a man in extremity—let us move.' They set themselves in order for moving. And the cats arose on the tree, and they broke the third root, and the tree fell on her elbow. Then I gave the third shout. The stalwart men hastened, and when they saw how the cats served the tree, they began at them with the spades; and they themselves and the cats began at each other, till the cats ran away. And surely, oh king, I did not move till I saw the last one of them off. And then I came home. And there's the hardest case in which I ever was; and it seems to me that tearing by the cats were harder than hanging to-morrow by the king of Lochlann."

"Och! Conall," said the king, "you are full of words. You have freed the soul of your son with your tale; and if you tell me a harder case than that you will get your second youngest son, and then you will have two sons."

"Well then," said Conall, "on condition that thou dost that, I will tell thee how I was once in a harder case than to be in thy power in prison to-night."

"Let's hear," said the king.

"I was then," said Conall, "quite a young lad, and I went out hunting, and my father's land was beside the sea, and it was rough with rocks, caves, and rifts. When I was going on the top of the shore, I saw as if there were a smoke coming up between two rocks, and I began to look what might be the meaning of the smoke coming up there. When I was looking, what should I do but fall; and the place was so full of heather, that neither bone nor skin was broken. I knew not how I should get out of this. I was not looking before me, but I kept looking overhead the way I came—and thinking that the day would never come that I could get up there. It was terrible for me to be there till I should die. I heard a great clattering coming, and what was there but a great giant and two dozen of goats with him, and a buck at their head. And when the giant had tied the goats, he came up and he said to me, 'Hao O! Conall, it's long since my knife has been rusting in my pouch waiting for thy tender flesh.' 'Och!' said I, 'it's not much you will be bettered by me, though you should tear me asunder; I will make but one meal for you. But I see that you are one-eyed. I am a good leech, and I will give you the sight of the other eye.' The giant went and he drew the great caldron on the site of the fire. I myself was telling him how he should heat the water, so that I should give its sight to the other eye. I got heather and I made a rubber of it, and I set him upright in the caldron. I began at the eye that was well, pretending to him that I would give its sight to the other one, till I left them as bad as each other; and surely it was easier to spoil the one that was well than to give sight to the other.

"When he saw that he could not see a glimpse, and when I myself said to him that I would get out in spite of him, he gave a spring out of the water, and he stood in the mouth of the cave, and he said that he would have revenge for the sight of his eye. I had but to stay there crouched the length of the night, holding in my breath in such a way that he might not find out where I was.

"When he felt the birds calling in the morning, and knew that the day was, he said—'Art thou sleeping? Awake and let out my lot of goats.' I killed the buck. He cried, 'I do believe that thou art killing my buck.'

"'I am not,' said I, 'but the ropes are so tight that I take long to loose them.' I let out one of the goats, and there he was caressing her, and he said to her, 'There thou art thou shaggy, hairy white goat; and thou seest me, but I see thee not.' I kept letting them out by the way of one and one, as I flayed the buck, and before the last one was out I had him flayed bag-wise. Then I went and I put my legs in place of his legs, and my hands in place of his forelegs, and my head in place of his head, and the horns on top of my head, so that the brute might think that it was the buck. I went out. When I was going out the giant laid his hand on me, and he said, 'There thou art, thou pretty buck; thou seest me, but I see thee not.' When I myself got out, and I saw the world about me, surely, oh, king! joy was on me. When I was out and had shaken the skin off me, I said to the brute, 'I am out now in spite of you.'

" 'Aha!' said he, 'hast thou done this to me. Since thou wert so stalwart that thou hast got out, I will give thee a ring that I have here; keep the ring, and it will do thee good.'

"'I will not take the ring from you,' said I, 'but throw it, and I will take it with me.' He threw the ring on the flat ground, I went myself and I lifted the ring, and I put it on my finger. When he said me then, 'Is the ring fitting thee?' I said to him, 'It is.' Then he said, 'Where art thou, ring?' And the ring said, 'I am here.' The brute went and went towards where the ring was speaking, and now I saw that I was in a harder case than ever I was. I drew a dirk. I cut the finger from off me, and I threw it from me as far as I could out on the loch, and there was a great depth in the place. He shouted, 'Where art thou, ring?' And the ring said, 'I am here,' though it was on the bed of ocean. He gave a spring after the ring, and out he went in the sea. And I was as pleased then when I saw him drowning, as though you should grant my own life and the life of my two sons with me, and not lay any more trouble on me.

"When the giant was drowned I went in, and I took with me all he had of gold and silver, and I went home, and surely great joy was on my people when I arrived. And as a sign now look, the finger is off me."

"Yes, indeed, Conall, you are wordy and wise," said the king. "I see the finger is off you. You have freed your two sons, but tell me a case in which you ever were that is harder than to be looking on your son being hanged tomorrow, and you shall get the soul of your eldest son."

"Then went my father," said Conall, "and he got me a wife, and I was married. I went to hunt. I was going beside the sea, and I saw an island over in the midst of the loch, and I came there where a boat was with a rope before her, and a rope behind her, and many precious things within her. I looked myself on the boat to see how I might get part of them. I put in the one foot, and the other foot was on the ground, and when I raised my head what was it but the boat over in the middle of the loch, and she never stopped till she reached the island. When I went out of the boat the boat returned where she was before. I did not know now what I should do. The place was without meat or clothing, without the appearance of a house on it. I came out on the top of a hill. Then I came to a glen; I saw in it, at the bottom of a hollow, a woman with a child, and the child was naked on her knee, and she had a knife in her hand. She tried to put the knife to the throat of the babe, and the babe began to laugh in her face, and she began to cry, and she threw the knife behind her. I thought to myself that I was near my foe and far from my friends, and I called to the woman, 'What are you doing here?' And she said to me, 'What brought you here?' I told her myself word upon word how I came. 'Well then,' said she, 'it was so I came also.' She showed me to the place where I should come in where she was. I went in, and I said to her, 'What was the matter that you were putting the knife on the neck of the child?' 'It is that he must be cooked for the giant who is here, or else no more of my world will be before me.' Just then we could be hearing the footsteps of the giant, 'What shall I do? what shall I do?' cried the woman. I went to the caldron, and by luck it was not hot, so in it I got just as the brute came in. 'Hast thou boiled that youngster for me?' he cried. 'He's not done yet,' said she, and I cried out from the caldron, 'Mammy, mammy, it's boiling I am.' Then the giant laughed out HAI, HAW, HOGARAICH, and heaped on wood under the caldron.

"And now I was sure I would scald before I could get out of that. As fortune favoured me, the brute slept beside the caldron. There I was scalded by the bottom of the caldron. When she perceived that he was asleep, she set her mouth quietly to the hole that was in the lid, and she said to me 'was I alive?' I said I was. I put up my head, and the hole in the lid was so large, that my head went through easily. Everything was coming easily with me till I began to bring up my hips. I left the skin of my hips behind me, but I came out. When I got out of the caldron I knew not what to do; and she said to me that there was no weapon that would kill him but his own weapon. I began to draw his spear and every breath that he drew I thought I would be down his throat, and when his breath came out I was back again just as far. But with every ill that befell me I got the spear loosed from him. Then I was as one under a bundle of straw in a great wind for I could not manage the spear. And it was fearful to look on the brute, who had but one eye in the midst of his face; and it was not agreeable for the like of me to attack him. I drew the dart as best I could, and I set it in his eye. When he felt this he gave his head a lift, and he struck the other end of the dart on the top of the cave, and it went through to the back of his head. And he fell cold dead where he was; and you may be sure, oh king, that joy was on me. I myself and the woman went out on clear ground, and we passed the night there. I went and got the boat with which I came, and she was no way lightened, and took the woman and the child over on dry land; and I returned home."

The king of Lochlann's mother was putting on a fire at this

time, and listening to Conall telling the tale about the child.

"Is it you," said she, "that were there?"

"Well then," said he, "'twas I."

"Och! och!" said she, "'twas I that was there, and the king is the child whose life you saved; and it is to you that life thanks should be given." Then they took great joy.

The king said, "Oh, Conall, you came through great hardships. And now the brown horse is yours, and his sack full of the most precious things that are in my treasury."

They lay down that night, and if it was early that Conall rose, it was earlier than that that the queen was on foot making ready. He got the brown horse and his sack full of gold and silver and stones of great price, and then Conall and his three sons went away, and they returned home to the Erin realm of gladness. He left the gold and silver in his house, and he went with the horse to the king. They were good friends evermore. He returned home to his wife, and they set in order a feast; and that was a feast if ever there was one, oh son and brother.

Ode to a Nightingale

By John Keats

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

Roses of Shadow

Chapter IV: Janus Is The World

Luke Gilfedder

Luke Gilfedder is a writer from Manchester. He has worked as a playwright with scripts produced at The Royal Exchange Manchester, the Lyric Hammersmith, and in London's West End. He has recently completed a PhD on the life and work of modernist writer Wyndham Lewis.

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The early moonrise lay like rime along the peaks encircling the abbey, as if nature were one vast cathedral of universal silence. In his turret room, Father Quintus stooped with his eye clapped to the telescope, training it—like some huge piece of artillery—upon the surrounding mountains. Their snow-tonsured summits glimmered in starlight, while along the ridges, various banners of the two hemispheres tangled in a rain-beaten confusion of colour.

He angled the telescope lower, his gaze working downward from the peaks, like in the movies where the cameraman is trying to be tantalising. First came the old oak forest, then the castle, where cloaked Eurasianist guards patrolled like portentous medieval silhouettes, moving to and fro in the shadows beyond the drawbridge. Lower still, he picked out a scatter of melancholy windmills, their sails turning wearily, as if slowly grinding down a patch of black sky. Quintus dared not lower the telescope another inch, for there he knew he would see the lines of crucified lions, nailed to crosses by their four limbs, like criminals—a warning to any other NATO marauders.

"Oh, Miro, you poor child," Quintus said under his breath, "at the centre of this sinful earth, how many world-wide powers surround you now…"

The door behind him opened with a scrape, and over the brassy strains of the Liebeserlösung motive, a gruff voice called: "Father Quintus, Brother Pray to see you."

Quintus jerked his head up from the telescope and turned. Two silhouettes stood black in the doorway, one as thin as the other was stout. The barrel-shaped priest—Father Anzelm—coughed, withdrew and snicked the door shut. Father Pray hovered a moment in the dust-moted light, stiff and pale as a pallbearer. He took a single, slow step forward and bowed—minimally. "God be with you, Brother Quintus."

Pray's voice was as sharp and featureless as his face; every trace of the music hall Frenchman had been purged from it. Quintus leaned on his cane, studying the young quinquagenarian as if to make up for the time he had not seen him. At last, he spoke in a dry-mouthed croak.

"Forgive me, Gregor, for not coming down to you. I find it difficult to move around these days."

"Then why do you insist on living in the highest room, Father?"

"For the view, simply. Life at the top has the best view of the depths man will crawl to."

The peaks of Pray's eyebrows made sharp angles against his forehead.

"Are you not moved, Father, by the many who are dying now?"

"I weep for the survivors, and there are more of those."

Quintus flashed Pray a wry glance as he rounded his desk. The record-player still blared and thudded, while behind him, over towards Budapest, distant shellbursts flared like golden fire-flakes against the night sky.

"Here, take a seat. Have you eaten since you arrived?"

"No. Every second day, I fast."

"How admirable. You know, I once imposed such disciplines upon myself when I was your age—Disciplina voluntatis, yes? Come, come, sit by the fire."

"No, thank you." Pray frowned at the rosewood writing desk, set under a chandelier that impended like a glass stalactite forest. "I prefer to stand."

"Viens donc, my young friend, don't overdo it. I know it's hard to let the will relax when you've held it taut for so long—but that is all the more reason to do so. Believe me, you'll only end up fleshly in both your love of the soul and your hatred of the body."

"Oh, I believe you." Pray let the insinuation hang in the air, then lowered himself into a chair—as close to the fire and as far from Quintus as he could get. Quintus caught the gesture and smiled faintly.

"Good. Now, would you like a little wine?"

Pray opened his mouth a little in a queer grimace. "If you insist. Thank you."

"From Lake Balaton," said Quintus easily, pouring. "One of the last vintages before the war."

The orchestra played a scratchy coda as Quintus handed Pray a glass. The needle hissed; it was the end of the side. Pray took his wine, saying:

"Götterdämmerung? I thought you detested Wagner. Have your tastes changed as well as—"

"As well as my principles? Oh no, men more easily renounce their principles than their tastes." Quintus flicked a glance out the window. "But it's hardly the time for waltzing to The Blue Danube, wouldn't you say?"

Pray mm-hmmed, crossed his knees and tapped his sandal buckle against the table leg, slowly.

"I recall reading your 'Tra le sollecitudini' during my novitiate. All the monks admired it, but I always felt it an odd contradiction on your part to revere the last scene of Faust Part Two and yet excommunicate Parsifal. Many poets known to be religious and Catholic strike me as coming nowhere near Wagner's level of religious feeling."

"Religious feeling?" Quintus chuckled through a wheeze. "Oh no, Gregor, it is a trick Wagner plays on your young emotions. It is the extreme 'romantic' work."

Quintus slipped the record back into its sleeve, smiling knowingly—an idol in his own twilight. Flares backlit the mountains, the eastern sky staging a Bayreuth montage of Valhalla. Heaving a sigh, Quintus eased into the abbatial chair opposite Pray, who stared back with his mouth in the shape of a disgusted turbot.

"I hope you do not object to my referring to my age, Gregor?"

"No," Pray said, not smiling. "Why should I?"

"Good… You must understand it is hard for me to tell what is happening in your mind. And I have had so few people to talk to these past years… You see, there are only two other priests my age on this continent, and both are senile."

"Are you sure you aren't senile?"

Quintus gave a dry chuckle. "Oh no, just now, listening to Wagner, I was remembering the time I went wandervogeling along the Rhine with a boy from my grammar school. Well, we were not so much best friends as…"

"Father!" Pray's voice reached C in alt. "Is this the secret you wanted to discuss?"

"I wish it were." Devilishly drôle, Quintus took a sip of wine and shook a brown cigarette from his gilt-metal case. The sky continued its low grumble, and something flashed through the underbelly of the clouds, lighting the abbey's lichened roofscape an infernal red.

"Tell me, Gregor, about Carta. Did you all escape alive? Was anyone hit in the attack?"

Pray's face looked as if he had swallowed a bee. He smoothed it out with an effort.

"Three of our eldest monks. They were killed outright. The rest of us were hiding in the ruins of a village half a mile away."

"Did you leave anything behind? Reliquaries, paintings—anything of value?"

"My order possesses nothing of value."

"No books?"

Pray cast his eyes on the circular shelves, groaning with manuscripts from obscure Göttingen publishing houses that no one would read in two months, let alone two centuries. He swilled his wine and said,

"Nothing like this."

Quintus pretended not to notice the venom in the words. He fitted the cigarette to his lips and gave it fire from his gold Dunhill lighter. "I am, I confess, rather attached to my collection. I once knew a priest whose only regret when dying was having to leave his books—suggesting perhaps that the pleasure of eternal life may not greatly exceed that of reading." He flashed his eyes over Pray's reddened face —the fact that his face was more grey than red did not alter the principle of the thing."So tonight, Gregor, I have begun moving them all into the cellars, where they stand a better chance of escaping damage…"

"That boy I saw in the courtyard, carrying a book—"

"Miro—"

"Who is he? Another enfant trouvé from your humble camp of heathens?"

"They cause no trouble."

"Hmm… We had to walk through them on our way from the landing pad. All those who are because they do not think, thus refuting Cartesianism…" Pray lifted his glass, sniffed and sipped a tiny sip. "They look like gypsies."

"They are gypsies. And deserters. And peasants whose homes were destroyed. Some are of the faith."

"Oh, really? How many?"

Quintus blew smoke and smiled through it. "A few hundred."

"Men and women?"

"Men, mostly. Fathers who lost their wives to la peste. That young lad who showed you up—Jack—"

"Family? Why, how many children has he?"

"Six."

"Six? He looked to me to be a very young man to have such a large family."

"He's twenty-two. He married when he was seventeen."

"Six children at twenty-two. Such a beautiful Roman Catholic family."

"He is a Protestant, Father Gregor."

Pray spluttered on his wine. "Then he is a sex maniac." He wiped his thin lips with a handkerchief. "From the Burgenland, I presume."

"Yes—they came here to escape infection."

"Infection? But Paris was the last city hit by Alexei's bacillus missiles."

"Yes, but Alexei fired them from Lockenhaus Castle, just beyond those mountains. When NATO retaliated last winter, the whole stockpile went up in flames. The women began to die first, in the hamlets nearby. A few made it here, as late as Easter... but they died as well."

"It is a chlorious war," Pray snarked.

Quintus narrowed his eyes but produced a smile. "Quite."

The rain fingertipped against the windows as the abbot turned his chair to gaze down at the riparian camp below, huddled between the Danube's bend and the foot of the montane abbey. His eye roamed from Terek's wagon to all the ragged tents blustered by the winds—chastised, like a village in the Old Testament, by the innumerable spears and arrows of the storm. Beyond, moonlight fell on the plain in uneven shafts, like the rays of a monstrance upon an altar.

"The war's shadow grows too long, Brother Quintus," Pray observed, with academic inutility. "Soon it will fall over this abbey too. A feud between two clans, yes; a skirmish between two nations, yes; a border dispute with a few barns burned and a handful murdered, yes. But a feud between two superpowers? Nay, two civilisations? A foray involving eight billion souls? What can such a war ever decide?"

Quintus gave a profound shrug.

"No more than that Christianity was too weak to prevent it." Pray tut-tutted. "You must trust in God's providence. We can overcome them in time."

"Time we probably don't have."

Quintus's gaze lingered a moment on the camp—on the caterpillar tracks that ran down to the munition barges bobbing on the Danube. He sighed deeply, his cigarette held interdigitally, forgotten, while his mind drifted above the smell of its burning. Turning with decision, he said: "Gregor, I am going to tell you something—something I have told no one else. Now, you may dispute me if you will—"

Pray gave a snort in place of the laugh he might not give.

"Oh my. Disputandi pruritus ecclesiarum scabies. The itch for controversy indeed is the scab of the Church. No, as I told Brother Anzelm—I want none of your confessions."

"How do you know that's what I intended to offer?" Pray cleared his throat with deliberate emphasis. "Allow me to say something. I am grateful, Father, for your hospitality—for granting refuge to me and my order. But there is something I must make clear, before we go any further."

"...Go on."

"Do you know what a heretic is?"

"Celui qui a une opinion?" Quintus smiled a faint superior smile. "As the last remaining historian of the Catholic Church, I know what a heretic was."

Pray pushed his wine glass away—about four inches away. "I said is. And I mean is. A heretic is someone who offers new opinions as a result of his own pride—who believes what he likes of the gospels and rejects what he does not, who believes in himself rather than the gospel, who requires the shadow of falsity to establish a—"

"—a ray of light. I know. And this is what you think I have become—a heretic?"

Quintus creaked his chair suddenly forward, looking, in the antique light of the glowglobe, like one of the ancient patriarchs before the flood. Pray stiffened—if it is possible for someone already as stiff as a side of coarse leather to stiffen still further.

"When we were novitiates in Budapest," Pray resumed, his voice an octave lower, "we admired you as if you were a Pope in posse; we would quote you as Augustine quotes Aristotle. You might say we were romantics, but we admired even your classicism... how it made you seem... scarcely human."

Quintus nodded. "Thank you."

Pray ignored that. "We called you the Éminence grise of the new millennium, a second Daniel. It was the stuff of legend, how you passed from the school of Plato to the teachings of the patristic fathers. You said, 'Cursed be the man that trusteth in man,' and we said it with you—"

"But then—"

"But then?"

"But then you 'threw your body into the struggle', as you said. I remember it well: your address to the Synod of Bishops in 2045 — 'Justice in the World'. How to know God is to do justice — that God's temple is human history. That poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order. And only through building such an order will we be able to discover what the Kingdom of God means." Pray paused to run a hand through his well-greased black hair. "We could hardly believe our ears. A man who said we must never mix the divine up with the pettiness and corruption of mankind — to hear you sacralising revolution in the name of—"

"In the name of world peace."

"In the name of earthly peace," reproved Pray, "for the earthly community, for the sake of enjoying earthly goods. The same peace which Herrut makes war to attain. Not the eternal peace of the Heavenly City. Did you forget that true justice has no existence save in that republic whose founder and ruler is Christ —in that City of which Holy Scripture says, Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God? Did you not see that in serving history, you were prostituting yourself? And worse, prostituting the Church?"

A rumble shook the window. Quintus waved the question away with his rank smoke. Pray scolded on, red, aware his neck was growing thicker.

"The more I thought back to all the great theologians you had taught me, from Tertullian to Kuehnelt-Leddihn, the more I realised you were, in the most poisonous sense of the word, a heretic. You were only eighty-eight then, and I knew that if you were to live on, I must dedicate my life to proving that your influence on the Church had been subtly evil."

Quintus stared long at Pray, piercing him with two guardian eyes. "Do you know what evil is, Gregor?"

"Yes. Evil is the privation of good."

"Evil is human suffering."

Pray snorted defiance. "I was wrong to call you senile—you're just drunk on the fine wine of your 'Liberation Theology'"—his scare quotes were like birds' claws—"I am sorry. But you had better understand this: for me, you are the most corrosive influence to befall the Church since Rudolf Bultmann—nay, since Luther himself. I reject your vision of the Church as a sacrament of history, and your childish vision of Christ as some revolutionary, some subversive of Nazareth. A folly and a heresy, and one I thought a man of your years should long have—"

Quintus waved his cigarette, and a pale grey tendril of smoke curled past his grey eyes. "I will cease to be a revolutionary, Father, when this world is as mature as me. Look, my young friend—please forgive the note of patronage—you may dedicate yourself to ridding the Church of my influence if you like. I'd quite understand. But I only think you will live to make a fool of yourself. No—listen." He tap-tapped cigarette ash into the onyx tray. "Just as flesh and spirit are not juxtaposed domains, but intermesh in the life of the Christian, so you will come to find there are not two histories, one profane and one sacred, but rather one human destiny. We can find the Lord in our encounters with others, in the poor, marginalised, and exploited —an act of love towards them is an act of love towards God. Take the boy you mentioned, Miro—"

Thunder rumbled violently around the hills, and the strange glare over Budapest pulsed its unnatural red. Pray's voice squeezed tight, as if the words were struggling past his teeth.

"Your sophistry has all the effect that you can reasonably expect it should have: it puzzles, but it doesn't convince."

"I was not trying to convince—"

"You were. You were implying that because you are my senior, you are therefore wiser — but I say that your experience is simply a syllabus of your errors." Pray leaned forward hotly, his blue-veined neck swelling redder as he worked up to his climax. "Sometimes I wonder if you ever truly believed. If you ever truly left the school of Plato. Or whether, even before 2045, you only postulated your radically transcendent God not out of any deep theological or still less religious need, but as a kind of hidden support for the artist's world of forms."

"Father Gregor, I had just as strong anti-liberal tendencies at your age, but—"

"Leave my age out of it."

Quintus killed his cigarette. "I beg your pardon, but it happens to be true. I wrote my treatise on T.E. Hulme, remember — on how the first European war stemmed from Renaissance humanism, which thrust man into the position once occupied by God. I said the Church must revive the truth of John's Gospel —

that no one can see God. That He is a necessary symbol of man's separation and of our limited transcendence — and must remain so." Quintus gazed back out the window, down on the craggy canvas of towers spread below him. "If my younger self could see me now, he would rage at me just as you are doing. He would call me a sentimental fool for preaching that we are not exiles from a lost paradise, but a people marching forward towards a new city — a human and comradely city whose heart is Christ..."

"Then why did you turn your coat?"

"I have not turned my coat. But figure to yourself—" Quintus frowned, wondering why he was using a French idiom, "what your attitude might be at my age. I grew tired, Gregor, of all this dialectic and contradiction. Only in opposition now do I believe."

His eye travelled down the cliff face toward the rain-harassed camp, and he added, as if to himself, "Only when I think of the hope that is hidden in the faces of the poor, only then do I find the will to live again and—" His voice trailed off, and came back in a flat tone. "Never mind. Here, have some more wine." Quintus's hand, dark and scaly as an eagle's claw, reached out for the bottle. Pray scraped back his chair and stood.

"No. I will not listen to this any longer, and be talked down to like an adolescent novice.! You can play the orator as well as Nestor, deceive more slyly than Ulysses could — but that does not make your words any nearer the truth. If Paul himself, yes Saint Paul, flew down to agree with you, I'd tell him he was mad."

"He was mad. Listen, Gregor. I am telling you the truth."

"The truth!" Pray glared down at the smoking, ringed ancient — shocked, for a moment, by his own defiance. "The truth is that you have lost faith in the Christian God, and so believe all the more firmly that you must cling to Christian morality. How Englishly consistent of you."

Quintus held up his wizened hand in protest, but Pray turned, his cloak whipping behind him, and made for the door.

"Wait, Father Gregor—"

Without turning, Pray halted on the threshold.

"Gregor, you have expressed your doctrinal position, and I accept it as reasonable. But there is an important circumstance that compels me to ask for your help. Anzelm mentioned—"

"What 'circumstance'?"

Quintus took another cigarette from the case. Against its lid, he tapped the tube end several times—more times than he usually did.

"Gregor, let me put it bluntly. You and I are the sole representatives of the Christian religion left on this continent."

"...'Doctrinal position,'" muttered Pray, not listening. "What a wretchedly reductive phrase..."

Distant flares boomed and faded like mute fireworks as Quintus lit his cigarette, his hand shaking just a little.

"That is beside the point. What I say is substantially true. Our disagreement about the Church's ecclesiological direction changes nothing. Look out this window. This world is torn between two civilisations—two mongrel dogs fighting over the old bone we once called Christendom. It has been sixty years since I fled the West, and I am told there is even less religion there now than when I left. You recall that little bon mot about strangling the last king with the entrails of the last priest? And in the East,"—he swept an arthritic hand over the plain—"there are only two orders of any consequence: yours and mine. And we have about as much influence in shaping our civilisation as the mummies of the Pharaohs. We are tolerated only as propaganda —so that Herrut can pontificate about Moscow as a Third Rome. Do you agree?"

The question had a weird urgency — like a whipcrack of premonition. Pray conceded a sigh.

"Go on."

Quintus leaned forward and stared at the younger priest, his ancient face cratered by firelight and shadow.

"I have it in my power to end this insane war and restore Christianity to an eminence it has not enjoyed since Pope Innocent III. What, Gregor, do you say to that?"

A HYMN ON THE SEASONS

James Thomson

THESE, as they change, Almighty Father! these,
Are but the varied God. The rolling Year
Is full of Thee. Forth in the pleasing Spring
Thy Beauty walks, Thy Tenderness and Love.
Wide-flush the fields; the softening air is balm;
Echo the mountains round; the forests live;
And every sense, and every heart is joy.
Then comes thy glory in the Summer-months,
With light, and heat, severe. Prone, then thy Sun
Shoots full perfection thro' the swelling year.
And oft thy voice in awful thunder speaks;
And oft at dawn, deep noon, or falling eve,
By brooks and groves, in hollow-whispering gales.
A yellow-floating pomp, thy Bounty shines
In Autumn unconfin'd. Thrown from thy lap,
Profuse o'er nature, falls the lucid shower
Of beamy fruits; and, in a radiant stream,
Into the stores of steril Winter pours.
In Winter dreadful Thou! with clouds and storms
Around Thee thrown, tempest o'er tempest roll'd,
Horrible blackness! On the whirlwind's wing,
Riding sublime, Thou bid'st the world be low,
And humblest nature with thy northern blast.

Mysterious round! what skill, what force divine,
Deep-felt, in these appear! a simple train,
Yet so harmonious mix'd, so fitly join'd,
One following one in such inchanting sort,
Shade, unperceiv'd, so softening into shade,
And all so forming such a perfect whole,
That as they still succeed, they ravish still.
But wondering oft, with brute unconscious gaze,
Man marks Thee not, marks not the mighty hand,
That, ever-busy, wheels the silent spheres;
Works in the secret deep; shoots, steaming, thence
The fair profusion that o'erspreads the Spring;
Flings from the sun direct the flaming Day;
Feeds every creature; hurls the Tempest forth;
And, as on earth this grateful change revolves,
With transport touches all the springs of life.

Nature, attend; join every living soul,
Beneath the spacious temple of the sky,
In adoration join; and, ardent, raise
An universal Hymn! to Him, ye gales,
Breathe soft; whose spirit teaches you to breathe.
Oh talk of Him in solitary glooms!
Where, o'er the rock, the scarcely-waving pine
Fills the brown void with a religious awe.
And ye, whose bolder note is heard afar,
Who shake th' astonish'd world, lift high to heaven
Th' impetuous song, and say from whom you rage.
His praise, ye brooks, attune, ye trembling rills;
And let me catch it as I muse along.
Ye headlong torrents, rapid, and profound;
Ye softer floods, that lead the humid maze
Along the vale; and thou, majestic main,
A secret world of wonders in thyself,
Sound His tremendous praise; whose greater voice
Or bids you roar, or bids your roarings fall,
Roll up your incense, herbs, and fruits, and flowers,
In mingled clouds to Him; whose sun elates,
Whose hand perfumes you, and whose pencil paints
Come then, expressive Silence, muse his praise.
Ye forests, bend; ye harvests, wave to Him:
Breathe your still song into the reaper's heart,
Homeward, rejoycing with the joyous moon.
Ye that keep watch in heaven, as earth asleep
Unconscious lies, effuse your mildest beams,
Ye constellations, while your angles strike,
Amid the spangled sky, the silver lyre.
Great source of day! best image here below
Of thy creator, ever darting wide,
From world to world, the vital ocean round,
On nature write with every beam his praise.
The thunder rolls: be hush'd the prostrate world;
While cloud to cloud returns the dreadful hymn.
Bleat out afresh, ye hills; ye mossy rocks,
Retain the sound: the broad responsive low,
Ye vallies, raise; for the great Shepherd reigns;
And yet again the golden age returns.
Wildest of creatures, be not silent here;
But, hymning horrid, let the desart roar.
Ye woodlands all, awake: a general song
Burst from the groves; and when the restless day,
Expiring, lays the warbling world asleep,
Sweetest of birds! sweet Philomela, charm
The listening shades; and thro' the midnight hour;
Trilling, prolong the wildly-luscious note;
That night, as well as day, may vouch His praise.
Ye chief, for whom the whole creation smiles;
At once the head, the heart, and mouth of all,
Crown the great Hymn! in swarming cities vast,
Concourse of men, to the deep organ join
The long-resounding voice, oft-breaking clear,
At solemn pauses, thro' the swelling base;
And, as each mingling frame encreases each,
In one united ardor rise to heaven.
Or if you rather chuse the rural shade,
To find a fane in every sacred grove;
There let the shepherd's flute, the virgin's chaunt,
The prompting seraph, and the poet's lyre,
Still sing the God of Seasons, as they roll.
For me, when I forget the darling theme,
Whether the Blossom blows, the Summer-Ray,
Russets the plain, delicious Autumn gleams;
Or Winter rises in the reddening east;
Be my tongue mute, may fancy paint no more,
And, dead to joy, forget my heart to beat.

Should fate command me to the farthest verge
Of the green earth, to hostile barbarous climes,
Rivers unknown to song; where first the sun
Gilds Indian mountains, or his setting beam
Flames on th' Atlantic isles; 'tis nought to me;
Since God is ever present, ever felt,
In the void waste, as in the city full;
Rolls the same kindred Seasons round the world,
In all apparent, wise, and good in all;
Since He sustains, and animates the whole;
From seeming evil still educes good,
And better thence again, and better still,
In infinite progression. — But I lose
Myself in Him, in light ineffable!

Featured Artist
David Cox

David Cox by William Radclyffe

David Cox (29 April 1783 – 7 June 1859) was an English landscape painter, one of the most important members of the Birmingham School of landscape artists and an early precursor of Impressionism.

He is considered one of the greatest English landscape painters, and a major figure of the Golden age of English watercolour.

Although most popularly known for his works in watercolour, he also painted over 300 works in oil towards the end of his career, now considered "one of the greatest, but least recognised, achievements of any British painter."

His son, known as David Cox the Younger (1809–1885), was also a successful artist.

View of Harlech Castle

Travellers on a Path

Boys Fishing by David Cox

Raglan Castle

Rainbow over the Shrewsbury Battlefield

Rhyl Sands by David Cox

Bolton Abbey by David Cox. Watercolour

Tolkien and the Fight Against Entropy

By Nathan CJ Hood

Fenrir and Odin (by Lorenz Frølich, 1895)

(*Major Spoilers for The Lord of the Rings trilogy included in this article).*

The Lord of the Rings wrestles with the problem of entropy. Its heroes battle against the ever-increasing power of darkness. The walls of the keep crumble, the nations are in decline and the will of the warrior is shaken. Evil stretches its long fingers into many places. Only one course of action will lead to victory. The probability of success is very low. Middle-earth's people appear to be in a losing fight against their inevitable doom.

The fraught setting of JRR Tolkien's story was informed by his interpretation of Anglo-Saxon and Norse mythology. In his lecture 'Beowulf: the Monsters and its Critics' (1936) he advanced the idea that the ancient Germanic tribes had a dualistic view of the world. There was Odin and the gods who lived in Asgard on the mountain top. He has established the cosmological and moral order of the world. From the corpse of Ymir he fashioned the universe and reigns as king of the Aesir. The gods are at war with the monsters. Their enemies include the jötnar, the giants, Jörmungandr, the world-serpent, and Fenrisúlfr the wolf. These creatures exist on the margins of this world, encroaching upon the fabric of Odin's domain from their realm, 'The Other'.

To help the Aesir in their fight, Odin has sent out the Valkyrie to bring the greatest warriors to Valhalla. In the midst of battle, they are appointed to die. Most people descend to Helheim in the afterlife, but these mighty men ascend to Odin's hall.

There they will become the Einherjar. They will feast and train, preparing to fight at Odin's side against the monsters at Ragnarök. Reality is a perpetual conflict, the gods and men facing off against the giants who threaten fabric of being. Humanity's greatest heroes join the fight against entropy.

Using the Norse myths as a guide to pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon beliefs, Tolkien interpreted the metaphysical geography of the Old English poem Beowulf in a similar way. Men live in great halls like Heorot, the home of King Hrothgar. In these dwellings lords give gold, warriors feast and bards recount the deeds of the brave and the bold. It is a place of safety. Beyond the walls of the hold lies a wilderness. In the wild places we find Grendel, a man-eating giant or troll. He is a cursed 'Son of Cain'; he is an enemy of God. There are witches and dragons that wreak havoc. The icy weather afflicts those who venture forth from the warmth of the hearth. Within the landscape of the Saxon imagination there were islands of safety surrounded by seas of monstrous foes who are at war with man and God.

The Saxon worldview is present in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. The reader first encounters the Shire, the land of the Hobbits. It is an idyllic place inspired by rural England. With its green fields, rustic simplicity and homely comforts, the lives of the hobbits seem to be untouched by evil. As the characters move beyond its borders, we learn that the outside world is a dangerous place. Orcs, wolves and trolls lurk in wait for the weary traveller. The servants of the Dark Lord Sauron are in pursuit of Frodo as he carries the Ring of Power. The heroes are in a race to stay one step ahead of the dark forces that wish to ensnare them. Even the natural world is a threat. In the Old Forest, the tree Old Man Willow attempts to devour Merry and Pippin. The mountain Caradhras seems to be a malevolent force that uses the weather against the advance of the Fellowship. There are places of refuge. The heroes find rest in the Elven dwellings of Rivendell and Lothlórien. But these paradises are only kept safe by a vigilant watch. The same is true of the Shire. The Rangers of the North patrol its border. They hunt down and kill those monsters who would harm the defenceless hobbits. Outside of these harbours of respite there is, for the most part, a hostile landscape. And the shadows are encroaching upon these fragile oases. They face a 'Long Defeat'. Tolkien believed that Germanic mythologies were tragic in character. Everything ends in defeat. At Ragnarök, the gods and men are killed by the monsters. Odin is devoured by Fenrir; Thor and the World Serpent slay each other; Sutr envelops Asgard and the Earth in fire. Tolkien ignores the possibility of renewal hinted at with the return of Baldr and the dead from Helheim because it is the inevitability of loss that characterises Anglo-Saxon literature. In Beowulf, Grendel invades the sanctuary of Heorot. He terrorises its inhabitants. The titular hero restores order by killing the giant and its mother. However, the darkness is only held at bay. Many years later, Beowulf, now king of his people, sets forth to fight a dragon that is ravaging his lands. Though he, with the aid of his nephew Wiglaf, slays the monster, he is mortally wounded during the fight. At his funeral, an old woman breaks out in lament.

She gave voice, of her worst fears, a wild litany of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded, enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles, slavery and abasement.

Like Beowulf, Saxon elegiac poetry expresses a deep sense that entropy will be victorious. The author of The Ruin ambles through a once mighty Roman town reduced to rubble. The Wanderer remembers a past time of merriment and gold-giving that is now reduced by fate to a crumbling wreck. The whole world has become 'a wilderness'.

Tolkien thought that it was important that in this ancient literature that it was the monsters who overcame the gods and men. If the enemy was another tribe, the conflict would be political. But Grendel is a threat to all people. He is an enemy of God and humanity. He represents something that afflicts us all. Giants, dragons, orcs: each in their own way symbolise or express the threat of time, suffering and death. These foes erode a man's life regardless of what side he is on. No civilisation is immune from their reach. Even the immortal elves could not maintain their paradises forever. Entropy is a perennial threat to every individual and group. It attacks us all, paying no heed to who we are, where we come from or how virtuous we are. The Grim Reaper visits the wicked and the righteous, the young and the old, the strong and the weak. We struggle with and eventually succumb to a hostile world.

The heroes of Middle-earth also face 'The Long Defeat'. On several occasions they are placed in situations where they are up against overwhelming odds. This dynamic, repeated throughout the story, is in play at the Barrow Downs. Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin have left the house of Tom Bombadil and are on their way to the village of Bree. It is there that they will meet the wizard Gandalf the Grey. To get there they must pass through a dangerous country. In that land lie the tombs of ancient kings. Despite their best efforts, the group are ensnared by a Barrow-wight, a ghost. The spirit sets a spell on the four hobbits. Frodo wakes up inside a barrow.

His friends are comatose on the floor. As he gropes around in the dark for anything that will help, he hears a chilling song.

Cold be hand and heart and bone,
And cold be sleep under stone:
Never more to wake on stony bed,
Never, till Sun fails and moon is dead.
In the black wind the stars shall die,
And still on gold here let them lie,
Till the dark lord lifts his hand
Over dead sea and withered land.

All seems lost. Darkness will engulf the hobbits. The Ring of Power will return to Sauron. The world will become a wilderness. This is fate.

The Norse and Saxon response to impending defeat was that of heroic spirit. Odin did not wallow in pity at the prospect of unalterable doom. He rose to meet it in battle. Tolkien called this attitude 'Northern Courage'. It was characteristic of Old English legends. In The Battle of Maldon, the beleaguered Anglo-Saxon warriors take a last stand against their Viking adversaries. As the oncoming foe advances to meet them, an old housecarl cries out, Our hearts must grow resolute, our courage more valiant, Our spirits must be greater, though our strength grows less.

In the Anglo-Saxon mind it was imperative to show indomitable will in the face of death. Defeat did not invalidate the cause or heart of those who stood their ground to the very last. This steely resolve was particularly praiseworthy when motivated by a love of one's lord or kin. To go down swinging was glorious. For this reason, some men might be reckless, risking themselves and those under their command for the sake of honour. For example, Beowulf intends to fight the dragon alone, rather than with his bodyguard, in pursuit of greater glory. He thereby needlessly endangers himself and the governance of his people.

The heroes in The Lord of the Rings are not afflicted by vainglory or pride. They display Northern Heroic Courage at its most pure. When all seems lost, King Theoden leads his men in a final charge against Saruman's Uruk-hai at the Battle of Helm's Deep. He does so again at the Pelenor Fields. Aragorn marshals his forces for one last stand at the Black Gate of Mordor in the hope that it will buy time for those attempting to destroy the Ring. But nowhere is the spirit of the Saxon imagination better expressed than when Frodo wakes up in the Barrow-wight's lair. When he came to himself again, for a moment he recall nothing except a sense of dread. Then suddenly he knew he was imprisoned, caught hopelessly; he was in a barrow. A barrow-wight had taken him, and he was probably already under the dreadful spells of the Barrow-wights

about which whispered tales spoke. He dared not move, but lay as he found himself: flat on his back upon a cold stone with his hands on his breast.

But though his fear was so great that it seemed to be part of the very darkness that was round him, he found himself as he lay thinking about Bilbo Baggins and his stories, of their jogging along together in the lanes of the Shire and talking about roads and adventures. There is a seed of courage hidden (often deeply, it is true) in the heart of the fattest and most timid hobbit, waiting for some final and desperate danger to make it grow. Frodo was neither very fat nor very timid; indeed, though he did not know it, Bilbo (and Gandalf) had though him the best hobbit in the Shire. He thought he had come to the end of his adventure, and a terrible end, but the thought hardened him. He found himself stiffening, as if for a final spring; he no longer felt limp like a helpless prey.

While Frodo encapsulates the warrior spirit in this episode, he also shows its apparent futility. He is tasked with taking the Ring of Power to Mordor so that it can be destroyed in the fires of Mount Doom, thereby overcoming the threat of Sauron. If he fails, Sauron will regain the Ring and, with its power, take over Middle-earth.

Throughout the story, the Ring ensnares characters with false promises. It tempts Boromir, a mighty warrior of Gondor, to take it from Frodo by force so that he can defend his people with its power. The wizard Saruman is lured by the possibility of using the Ring to bring order to the world. But such noble ambitions are blurred with the desire for power itself. Those who give into these temptations become a husk of themselves, as seen in the figure of Gollum. Once a normal hobbit, he has given his whole being to the service of the Ring. It has left him an emaciated ghoul, an unnatural creature that drinks the blood of men. He has become an inversion of what he should be.

Throughout his journey, Frodo battles with the Ring and, in so doing, with himself. He resists the temptation to take the Ring as his own. Tolkien goes so far as to say that nobody could have done as well as Frodo during the Third Age. Using all his willpower, the hobbit manages to take the Ring into the heart of Mount Doom. Yet, when all he must do is let the Ring fall from his hand into the molten flames below, he is overcome. It is a failure, but not in the sense of any wrongful behaviour on Frodo's part. He was beaten by a stronger foe. The Ring was just too powerful, too alluring, and in the end his resolute will was snapped. Even Northern Courage and Heroic Spirit falters before the darkness. No creature is strong enough to resist the forces of evil forever. No one can resist the desire for power indefinitely. We all fall.

This, for Tolkien, is where the Saxon worldview ends. At best we can hope for a glorious defeat. But our heroes are overcome and fall into moral failure. It is a dark, depressing perspective. It is a worldview that accepts the reign of entropy. However, this is not the end of the story. The Lord of the Rings delivers a message of hope.

When evil is about to triumph, rescue is at hand. As King Theoden leads his knights in one final charge against the Uruk-hai, Gandalf the White arrives with Erkenbrand and many warriors. They charge down the hill and relieve the beleaguered defenders. The day is won. Saruman's forces are routed. The same pattern repeats throughout the tale, reaching its climax at Mount Doom. When Frodo takes the Ring for himself, it looks like Sauron will be victorious. Slavery, domination and death are on the horizon for the free peoples of Middle-earth. But at that moment Gollum, overcome with lust for the Ring, attacks Frodo. He manages to take it off the hobbit and, dancing with joy, slips into the fires below. The Ring is destroyed and Sauron is defeated. Gollum saved the world, albeit unintentionally.

This narrative arc is what Tolkien called a 'eucatastrophe', a good catastrophe. In his 1939 lecture 'On Fairy Stories' he put forward the case that this kind of plot was at the heart of fantasy and fairy stories. The heroes are placed into an impossible situation. Destruction seems inevitable. The tide of battle turns when an unexpected saving force intervenes. Defeat becomes victory, despair and terror turn into joy and laughter. Crucially, this plot structure presupposes the possibility and reality of time, suffering and death, for they provide the context for the great reversal. The sudden, unlooked for help that rescues the day evokes an overwhelming delight in characters and readers. This profound relief and happiness arising from this act of 'grace' can move grown men to tears.

In Middle-earth, eucatastrophes are not coincidences. They are not the result of luck or blind chance. Throughout the story, it is hinted that there is something going on beyond what is immediately apparent. Gandalf the Grey explains to Frodo that when Bilbo Baggins found the Ring of Power,

There was more than one power at work, Frodo. The Ring was trying to get back to its master. It had slipped from Isildur's hand and betrayed him; then when a chance came it caught poor Déagol, and he was murdered; and after that Gollum, and it had devoured him. It could make no further use of him: he was too small and mean; and as long as it stayed with him he would never leave his deep pool again. So now, when its master was awake once more and sending out his dark thought from Mirkwood, it abandoned Gollum. Only to be picked up by the most unlikely person imaginable: Bilbo from the Shire!

Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring- maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker. In which case you also were meant to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought.

In Letter 192 to Amy Ronald, Tolkien made a similar point regarding the events at Mount Doom. When Frodo failed to destroy the Ring, 'The Other Power then took over: the Writer of the Story (by which I do not mean myself), 'that one ever-present Person who is never absent and never named' (as one critic has said).' These comments leave many more questions than answers. Who or what is this Other Power? How does it relate to Middle-earth? How does it act in the world? Why does it do so? Why is it present and yet apparently absent?

These questions go beyond the scope of this article (though those who would like to know more may find some suggestive answers in The Silmarillion). What matters here is that Tolkien attributes to this reality the eucatastrophe at the climax of the book. Though there is no mention of this power or person when Gollum takes the Ring from Frodo and, accidentally, falls to his doom, in some sense it was behind the free actions of Frodo, the Ring and Gollum. It 'wrote' the story of Middle-earth in this way. And, by extension, it directed, in some way, all the events of history so that they would consist in a series of eucatastrophes.

This feature of The Lord of the Rings was influenced by Tolkien's Roman Catholic and Christian faith. Towards the end of 'On Fairy Stories', Tolkien claimed that there had been a eucatastrophe in real history. The coming of Christ, the incarnation of the Son of God, is the great reversal of human history. Human nature has been redeemed by its union with the Divine in the life of Jesus Christ. The estrangement between God and man has been overcome. In turn, the resurrection of Christ is the eucatastrophe of the incarnation. The crucifixion of Jesus seemed to herald the victory of evil and death over God's love. But Christ rose from the dead, an event that was not expected. The ravages of time, suffering and death have been overcome in Christ. The eucatastrophe of the Gospel is the decisive answer to the entropic darkness that threatens to drag us down into the abyss.

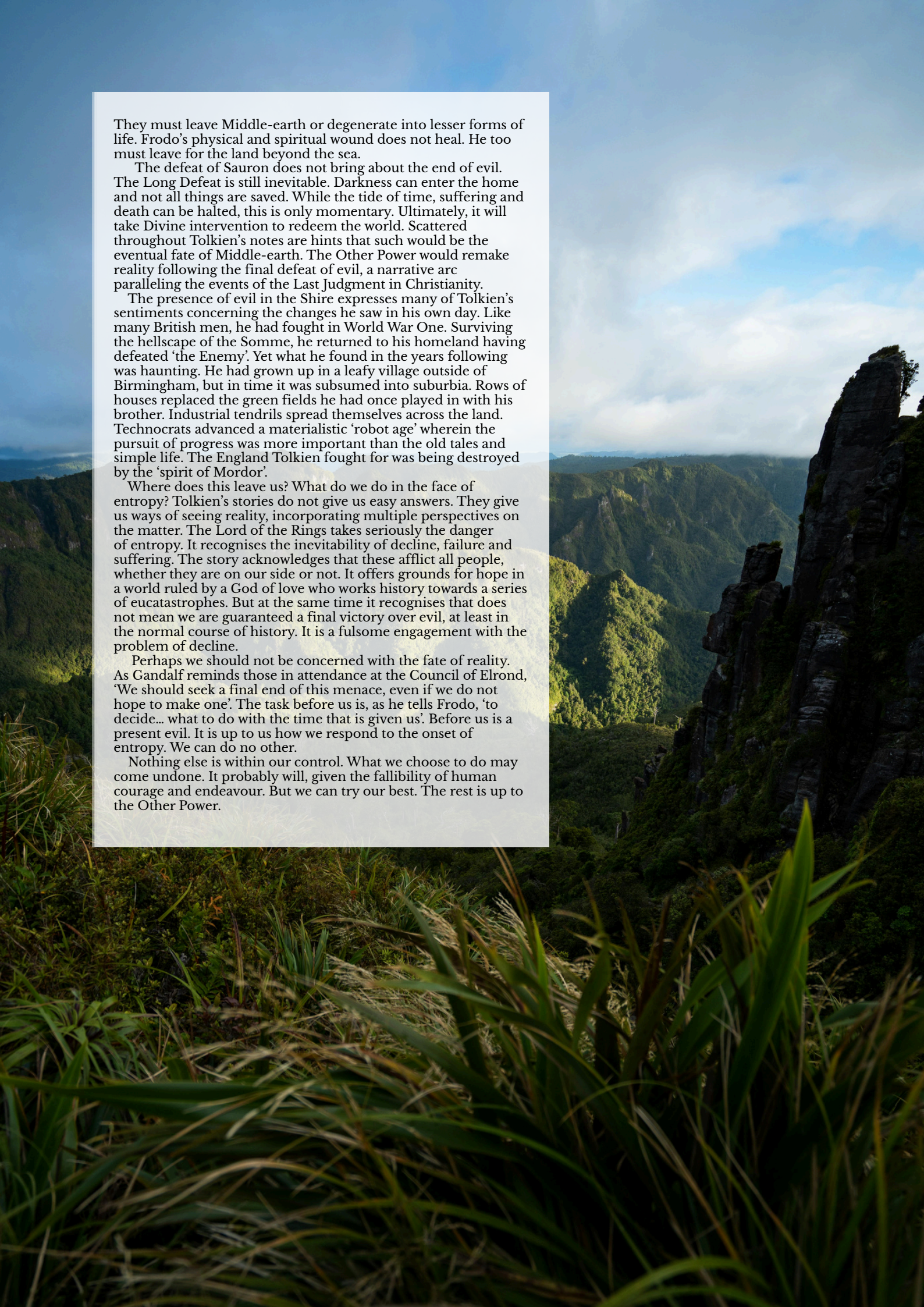
Tolkien's belief in the 'myth made history' or 'myth made fact' was the basis for his hope in the future. He affirmed the Old English conviction that, when left to human strength, all ends in defeat. He went further. He thought that even our heroes fall into moral failure. This view was informed by the Roman Catholic doctrine of original sin.

But it seems that Tolkien thought that the Gospel answered the tragedy recognised by the Norse view of the world. The Divine has already achieved ultimate victory and can bring about eucatastrophes today and tomorrow.

This may seem like the natural place to end the discussion. But The Lord of the Rings does not finish with the defeat of Sauron. Tolkien has something more to say.

After their adventures, the hobbits return to the Shire. When they arrive home, they find their beloved paradise turned into a dystopian nightmare. Saruman's thugs have enslaved the defenceless hobbits. Ugly buildings have been erected, basic freedoms curtailed. Trees have been hacked down and the mill pumps pollution into the waters. Those who have resisted are locked away and one hobbit may have been the victim of cannibalism. Just as Grendel violated Heorot, so too has the Shire been ravaged by evil.

Though the heroes drive out the ruffians and renew the Shire, a doubt has been planted by Tolkien in the reader's mind. Could this happen again? If malevolence could break into this rural paradise once, can it return? And while the Shire was saved, not everything survived the ravages of the war. With the destruction of the Ring the power of the elves has diminished.



They must leave Middle-earth or degenerate into lesser forms of life. Frodo's physical and spiritual wound does not heal. He too must leave for the land beyond the sea.

The defeat of Sauron does not bring about the end of evil. The Long Defeat is still inevitable. Darkness can enter the home and not all things are saved. While the tide of time, suffering and death can be halted, this is only momentary. Ultimately, it will take Divine intervention to redeem the world. Scattered throughout Tolkien's notes are hints that such would be the eventual fate of Middle-earth. The Other Power would remake reality following the final defeat of evil, a narrative arc paralleling the events of the Last Judgment in Christianity.

The presence of evil in the Shire expresses many of Tolkien's sentiments concerning the changes he saw in his own day. Like many British men, he had fought in World War One. Surviving the hellscape of the Somme, he returned to his homeland having defeated 'the Enemy'. Yet what he found in the years following was haunting. He had grown up in a leafy village outside of Birmingham, but in time it was subsumed into suburbia. Rows of houses replaced the green fields he had once played in with his brother. Industrial tendrils spread themselves across the land. Technocrats advanced a materialistic 'robot age' wherein the pursuit of progress was more important than the old tales and simple life. The England Tolkien fought for was being destroyed by the 'spirit of Mordor'.

Where does this leave us? What do we do in the face of entropy? Tolkien's stories do not give us easy answers. They give us ways of seeing reality, incorporating multiple perspectives on the matter. The Lord of the Rings takes seriously the danger of entropy. It recognises the inevitability of decline, failure and suffering. The story acknowledges that these afflict all people, whether they are on our side or not. It offers grounds for hope in a world ruled by a God of love who works history towards a series of eucatastrophes. But at the same time it recognises that does not mean we are guaranteed a final victory over evil, at least in the normal course of history. It is a fulsome engagement with the problem of decline.

Perhaps we should not be concerned with the fate of reality. As Gandalf reminds those in attendance at the Council of Elrond, 'We should seek a final end of this menace, even if we do not hope to make one'. The task before us is, as he tells Frodo, 'to decide… what to do with the time that is given us'. Before us is a present evil. It is up to us how we respond to the onset of entropy. We can do no other.

Nothing else is within our control. What we choose to do may come undone. It probably will, given the fallibility of human courage and endeavour. But we can try our best. The rest is up to the Other Power.

The Wind in the Willows

By Kenneth Grahame

IV Mr Badger

They waited patiently for what seemed a very long time, stamping in the snow to keep their feet warm. At last they heard the sound of slow shuffling footsteps approaching the door from the inside. It seemed, as the Mole remarked to the Rat, like some one walking in carpet slippers that were too large for him and down at heel; which was intelligent of Mole, because that was exactly what it was.

There was the noise of a bolt shot back, and the door opened a few inches, enough to show a long snout and a pair of sleepy blinking eyes.

"Now, the very next time this happens," said a gruff and suspicious voice, "I shall be exceedingly angry. Who is it this time, disturbing people on such a night? Speak up!"

"Oh, Badger," cried the Rat, "let us in, please. It's me, Rat, and my friend Mole, and we've lost our way in the snow."

"What, Ratty, my dear little man!" exclaimed the Badger, in quite a different voice. "Come along in, both of you, at once. Why, you must be perished. Well I never! Lost in the snow! And in the Wild Wood, too, and at this time of night! But come in with you."

The two animals tumbled over each other in their eagerness to get inside, and heard the door shut behind them with great joy and relief.

The Badger, who wore a long dressing-gown, and whose slippers were indeed very down at heel, carried a flat candlestick in his paw and had probably been on his way to bed when their summons sounded. He looked kindly down on them and patted both their heads. "This is not the sort of night for small animals to be out," he said paternally. "I'm afraid you've been up to some of your pranks again, Ratty. But come along; come into the kitchen. There's a first-rate fire there, and supper and everything."

He shuffled on in front of them, carrying the light, and they followed him, nudging each other in an anticipating sort of way, down a long, gloomy, and, to tell the truth, decidedly shabby passage, into a sort of a central hall, out of which they could dimly see other long tunnel-like passages branching, passages mysterious and without apparent end. But there were doors in the hall as well—stout oaken, comfortable-looking doors. One of these the Badger flung open, and at once they found themselves in all the glow and warmth of a large fire-lit kitchen.

The floor was well-worn red brick, and on the wide hearth burnt a fire of logs, between two attractive chimney-corners tucked away in the wall, well out of any suspicion of draught. A couple of high-backed settles, facing each other on either side of the fire, gave further sitting accommodations for the sociably disposed. In the middle of the room stood a long table of plain boards placed on trestles, with benches down each side. At one end of it, where an arm-chair stood pushed back, were spread the remains of the Badger's plain but ample supper. Rows of spotless plates winked from the shelves of the dresser at the far end of the room, and from the rafters overhead hung hams, bundles of dried herbs, nets of onions, and baskets of eggs. It seemed a place where heroes could fitly feast after victory, where weary harvesters could line up in scores along the table and keep their Harvest Home with mirth and song, or where two or three friends of simple tastes could sit about as they pleased and eat and smoke and talk in comfort and contentment. The ruddy brick floor smiled up at the smoky ceiling; the oaken settles, shiny with long wear, exchanged cheerful glances with each other; plates on the dresser grinned at pots on the shelf, and the merry firelight flickered and played over everything without distinction.

The kindly Badger thrust them down on a settle to toast themselves at the fire, and bade them remove their wet coats and boots. Then he fetched them dressing-gowns and slippers, and himself bathed the Mole's shin with warm water and mended the cut with sticking-plaster, till the whole thing was just as good as new, if not better. In the embracing light and warmth, warm and dry at last, with weary legs propped up in front of them, and a suggestive clink of plates being arranged on the table behind, it seemed to the storm-driven animals, now in safe anchorage, that the cold and trackless Wild Wood just left outside was miles and miles away, and all that they had suffered in it a half-forgotten dream.

When at last they were thoroughly toasted, the Badger summoned them to the table, where he had been busy laying a repast. They had felt pretty hungry before, but when they actually saw at last the supper that was spread for them, really it seemed only a question of what they should attack first where all was so attractive, and whether the other things would obligingly wait for them till they had time to give them attention. Conversation was impossible for a long time; and when it was slowly resumed, it was that regrettable sort of conversation that results from talking with your mouth full. The Badger did not mind that sort of thing at all, nor did he take any notice of elbows on the table, or everybody speaking at once. As he did not go into Society himself, he had got an idea that these things belonged to the things that didn't really matter. (We know of course that he was wrong, and took too narrow a view; because they do matter very much, though it would take too long to explain why.) He sat in his arm-chair at the head of the table, and nodded gravely at intervals as the animals told their story; and he did not seem surprised or shocked at anything, and he never said, "I told you so," or, "Just what I always said," or remarked that they ought to have done so-and-so, or ought not to have done something else. The Mole began to feel very friendly towards him.

When supper was really finished at last, and each animal felt that his skin was now as tight as was decently safe, and that by this time he didn't care a hang for anybody or anything, they gathered round the glowing embers of the great wood fire, and thought how jolly it was to be sitting up so late, and so independent, and so full; and after they had chatted for a time about things in general, the Badger said heartily, "Now then! tell us the news from your part of the world. How's old Toad going on?"

"Oh, from bad to worse," said the Rat gravely, while the Mole, cocked up on a settle and basking in the firelight, his heels higher than his head, tried to look properly mournful. "Another smash-up only last week, and a bad one. You see, he will insist on driving himself, and he's hopelessly incapable. If he'd only employ a decent, steady, well-trained animal, pay him good wages, and leave everything to him, he'd get on all right. But no; he's convinced he's a heaven-born driver, and nobody can teach him anything; and all the rest follows."

"How many has he had?" inquired the Badger gloomily.

"Smashes, or machines?" asked the Rat. "Oh, well, after all, it's the same thing—with Toad. This is the seventh. As for the others—you know that coach-house of his? Well, it's piled up—literally piled up to the roof—with fragments of motor-cars, none of them bigger than your hat! That accounts for the other six—so far as they can be accounted for."

"He's been in hospital three times," put in the Mole; "and as for the fines he's had to pay, it's simply awful to think of."

"Yes, and that's part of the trouble," continued the Rat. "Toad's rich, we all know; but he's not a millionaire. And he's a hopelessly bad driver, and quite regardless of law and order. Killed or ruined—it's got to be one of the two things, sooner or later. Badger! we're his friends—oughtn't we to do something?"

The Badger went through a bit of hard thinking. "Now look here!" he said at last, rather severely; "of course you know I can't do anything now?"

His two friends assented, quite understanding his point. No animal, according to the rules of animal etiquette, is ever expected to do anything strenuous, or heroic, or even moderately active during the off-season of winter. All are sleepy—some actually asleep. All are weather-bound, more or less; and all are resting from arduous days and nights, during which every muscle in them has been severely tested, and every energy kept at full stretch.

"Very well then!" continued the Badger. "But, when once the year has really turned, and the nights are shorter, and half-way through them one rouses and feels fidgety and wanting to be up and doing by sunrise, if not before—you know!—"

Both animals nodded gravely. They knew!

"Well, then," went on the Badger, "we—that is, you and me and our friend the Mole here—we'll take Toad seriously in hand. We'll stand no nonsense whatever. We'll bring him back to reason, by force if need be. We'll make him be a sensible Toad. We'll—you're asleep, Rat!"

"Not me!" said the Rat, waking up with a jerk.

"He's been asleep two or three times since supper," said the Mole, laughing. He himself was feeling quite wakeful and even lively, though he didn't know why. The reason was, of course, that he being naturally an underground animal by birth and breeding, the situation of Badger's house exactly suited him and made him feel at home; while the Rat, who slept every night in a bedroom the windows of which opened on a breezy river, naturally felt the atmosphere still and oppressive.

"Well, it's time we were all in bed," said the Badger, getting up and fetching flat candlesticks. "Come along, you two, and I'll show you your quarters. And take your time tomorrow morning—breakfast at any hour you please!"

He conducted the two animals to a long room that seemed half

bedchamber and half loft. The Badger's winter stores, which indeed were visible everywhere, took up half the room—piles of apples, turnips, and potatoes, baskets full of nuts, and jars of honey; but the two little white beds on the remainder of the floor looked soft and inviting, and the linen on them, though coarse, was clean and smelt beautifully of lavender; and the Mole and the Water Rat, shaking off their garments in some thirty seconds, tumbled in between the sheets in great joy and contentment. In accordance with the kindly Badger's injunctions, the two tired animals came down to breakfast very late next morning, and found a bright fire burning in the kitchen, and two young hedgehogs sitting on a bench at the table, eating oatmeal porridge out of wooden bowls. The hedgehogs dropped their spoons, rose to their feet, and ducked their heads respectfully as the two entered.

"There, sit down, sit down," said the Rat pleasantly, "and go on with your porridge. Where have you youngsters come from? Lost your way in the snow, I suppose?"

"Yes, please, sir," said the elder of the two hedgehogs respectfully. "Me and little Billy here, we was trying to find our way to school—mother would have us go, was the weather ever so—and of course we lost ourselves, sir, and Billy he got frightened and took and cried, being young and faint-hearted. And at last we happened up against Mr. Badger's back door, and made so bold as to knock, sir, for Mr. Badger he's a kind-hearted gentleman, as every one knows—" "I understand," said the Rat, cutting himself some rashers from a side of bacon, while the Mole dropped some eggs into a saucepan. "And what's the weather like outside? You needn't 'sir' me quite so much," he added.

"O, terrible bad, sir, terrible deep the snow is," said the hedgehog. "No getting out for the likes of you gentlemen to-day."

"Where's Mr. Badger?" inquired the Mole, as he warmed the coffee-pot before the fire.

"The master's gone into his study, sir," replied the hedgehog, "and he said as how he was going to be particular busy this morning, and on no account was he to be disturbed."

This explanation, of course, was thoroughly understood by every one present. The fact is, as already set forth, when you live a life of intense activity for six months in the year, and of comparative or actual somnolence for the other six, during the latter period you cannot be continually pleading sleepiness when there are people about or things to be done. The excuse gets monotonous. The animals well knew that Badger, having eaten a hearty breakfast, had retired to his study and settled himself in an arm-chair with his legs up on another and a red cotton handkerchief over his face, and was being "busy" in the usual way at this time of the year.

The front-door bell clanged loudly, and the Rat, who was very greasy with buttered toast, sent Billy, the smaller hedgehog, to see who it might be. There was a sound of much stamping in the hall, and presently Billy returned in front of the Otter, who threw himself on the Rat with an embrace and a shout of affectionate greeting.

"Get off!" spluttered the Rat, with his mouth full.

"Thought I should find you here all right," said the Otter cheerfully. "They were all in a great state of alarm along River Bank when I arrived this morning. Rat never been home all night—nor Mole either—something dreadful must have happened, they said; and the snow had covered up all your tracks, of course. But I knew that when people were in any fix they mostly went to Badger, or else Badger got to know of it somehow, so I came straight off here, through the Wild Wood and the snow! My! it was fine, coming through the snow as the red sun was rising and showing against the black tree-trunks! As you went along in the stillness, every now and then masses of snow slid off the branches suddenly with a flop! making you jump and run for cover. Snow-castles and snow-caverns had sprung up out of nowhere in the night—and snow bridges, terraces, ramparts—I could have stayed and played with them for hours. Here and there great branches had been torn away by the sheer weight of the snow, and robins perched and hopped on them in their perky conceited way, just as if they had done it themselves. A ragged string of wild geese passed overhead, high on the grey sky, and a few rooks whirled over the trees, inspected, and flapped off homewards with a disgusted expression; but I met no sensible being to ask the news of. About halfway across I came on a rabbit sitting on a stump, cleaning his silly face with his paws. He was a pretty scared animal when I crept up behind him and placed a heavy fore-paw on his shoulder. I had to cuff his head once or twice to get any sense out of it at all. At last I managed to extract from him that Mole had been seen in the Wild Wood last night by one of them. It was the talk of the burrows, he said, how Mole, Mr. Rat's particular friend, was in a bad fix; how he had lost his way, and 'They' were up and out hunting, and were chivvying him round and round. 'Then why didn't any of you do something?' I asked. 'You mayn't be blessed with brains, but there are hundreds and hundreds of you, big, stout fellows, as fat as butter, and your burrows running in all directions, and you could have taken him in and made him safe and comfortable, or tried to, at all events.' 'What, us?' he merely said: 'do something? us rabbits?' So I cuffed him again and left him. There was nothing else to be done. At any rate, I had learnt something; and if I had had the luck to meet any of 'Them' I'd have learnt something more—or they would."

"Weren't you at all—er—nervous?" asked the Mole, some of yesterday's terror coming back to him at the mention of the Wild Wood.

"Nervous?" The Otter showed a gleaming set of strong white teeth as he laughed. "I'd give 'em nerves if any of them tried anything on with me. Here, Mole, fry me some slices of ham, like the good little chap you are. I'm frightfully hungry, and I've got any amount to say to Ratty here. Haven't seen him for an age." So the good-natured Mole, having cut some slices of ham, set the hedgehogs to fry it, and returned to his own breakfast, while the Otter and the Rat, their heads together, eagerly talked river-shop, which is long shop and talk that is endless, running on like the babbling river itself.

A plate of fried ham had just been cleared and sent back for more, when the Badger entered, yawning and rubbing his eyes, and greeted them all in his quiet, simple way, with kind enquiries for every one. "It must be getting on for luncheon time," he remarked to the Otter. "Better stop and have it with us. You must be hungry, this cold morning." "Rather!" replied the Otter, winking at the Mole. "The sight of these greedy young hedgehogs stuffing themselves with fried ham makes me feel positively famished."

The hedgehogs, who were just beginning to feel hungry again after their porridge, and after working so hard at their frying, looked timidly up at Mr. Badger, but were too shy to say anything.

"Here, you two youngsters, be off home to your mother," said the Badger kindly. "I'll send some one with you to show you the way. You won't want any dinner to-day, I'll be bound."

He gave them sixpence apiece and a pat on the head, and they went off with much respectful swinging of caps and touching of forelocks.

Presently they all sat down to luncheon together. The Mole found himself placed next to Mr. Badger, and, as the other two were still deep in river-gossip from which nothing could divert them, he took the opportunity to tell Badger how comfortable and home-like it all felt to him. "Once well underground," he said, "you know exactly where you are. Nothing can happen to you, and nothing can get at you. You're entirely your own master, and you don't have to consult anybody or mind what they say. Things go on all the same overhead, and you let 'em, and don't bother about 'em. When you want to, up you go, and there the things are, waiting for you."

The Badger simply beamed on him. "That's exactly what I say," he replied. "There's no security, or peace and tranquillity, except underground. And then, if your ideas get larger and you want to expand—why, a dig and a scrape, and there you are! If you feel your house is a bit too big, you stop up a hole or two, and there you are again! No builders, no tradesmen, no remarks passed on you by fellows looking over your wall, and, above all, no weather. Look at Rat, now. A couple of feet of flood water, and he's got to move into hired lodgings; uncomfortable, inconveniently situated, and horribly expensive. Take Toad. I say nothing against Toad Hall; quite the best house in these parts, as a house. But supposing a fire breaks out—where's Toad? Supposing tiles are blown off, or walls sink or crack, or windows get broken—where's Toad? Supposing the rooms are draughty—I hate a draught myself—where's Toad? No, up and out of doors is good enough to roam about and get one's living in; but underground to come back to at last—that's my idea of home!"

The Mole assented heartily; and the Badger in consequence got very friendly with him. "When lunch is over," he said, "I'll take you all round this little place of mine. I can see you'll appreciate it. You understand what domestic architecture ought to be, you do." After luncheon, accordingly, when the other two had settled themselves into the chimney-corner and had started a heated argument on the subject of eels, the Badger lighted a lantern and bade the Mole follow him. Crossing the hall, they passed down

one of the principal tunnels, and the wavering light of the lantern gave glimpses on either side of rooms both large and small, some mere cupboards, others nearly as broad and imposing as Toad's dining-hall. A narrow passage at right angles led them into another corridor, and here the same thing was repeated. The Mole was staggered at the size, the extent, the ramifications of it all; at the length of the dim passages, the solid vaultings of the crammed store-chambers, the masonry everywhere, the pillars, the arches, the pavements. "How on earth, Badger," he said at last, "did you ever find time and strength to do all this? It's astonishing!"

"It would be astonishing indeed," said the Badger simply, "if I had done it. But as a matter of fact I did none of it—only cleaned out the passages and chambers, as far as I had need of them. There's lots more of it, all round about. I see you don't understand, and I must explain it to you. Well, very long ago, on the spot where the Wild Wood waves now, before ever it had planted itself and grown up to what it now is, there was a city—a city of people, you know. Here, where we are standing, they lived, and walked, and talked, and slept, and carried on their business. Here they stabled their horses and feasted, from here they rode out to fight or drove out to trade. They were a powerful people, and rich, and great builders. They built to last, for they thought their city would last for ever."

"But what has become of them all?" asked the Mole.

"Who can tell?" said the Badger. "People come—they stay for a while, they flourish, they build—and they go. It is their way. But we remain. There were badgers here, I've been told, long before that same city ever came to be. And now there are badgers here again. We are an enduring lot, and we may move out for a time, but we wait, and are patient, and back we come. And so it will ever be."

"Well, and when they went at last, those people?" said the Mole.

"When they went," continued the Badger, "the strong winds and persistent rains took the matter in hand, patiently, ceaselessly, year after year. Perhaps we badgers too, in our small way, helped a little—who knows? It was all down, down, down, gradually—ruin and levelling and disappearance. Then it was all up, up, up, gradually, as seeds grew to saplings, and saplings to forest trees, and bramble and fern came creeping in to help. Leaf-mould rose and obliterated, streams in their winter freshets brought sand and soil to clog and to cover, and in course of time our home was ready for us again, and we moved in. Up above us, on the surface, the same thing happened. Animals arrived, liked the look of the place, took up their quarters, settled down, spread, and flourished. They didn't bother themselves about the past—they never do; they're too busy. The place was a bit humpy and hillocky, naturally, and full of holes; but that was rather an advantage. And they don't bother about the future, either—the future when perhaps the people will move in again—for a time—as may very well be. The Wild Wood is pretty well populated by now; with all the usual lot, good, bad, and indifferent—I name no names. It takes all sorts to make a world. But I fancy you know something about them yourself by this time." "I do indeed," said the Mole, with a slight shiver.

"Well, well," said the Badger, patting him on the shoulder, "it was your first experience of them, you see. They're not so bad really; and we must all live and let live. But I'll pass the word around to-morrow, and I think you'll have no further trouble. Any friend of mine walks where he likes in this country, or I'll know the reason why!"

When they got back to the kitchen again, they found the Rat walking up and down, very restless. The underground atmosphere was oppressing him and getting on his nerves, and he seemed really to be afraid that the river would run away if he wasn't there to look after it. So he had his overcoat on, and his pistols thrust into his belt again. "Come along, Mole," he said anxiously, as soon as he caught sight of them. "We must get off while it's daylight. Don't want to spend another night in the Wild Wood again."

"It'll be all right, my fine fellow," said the Otter. "I'm coming along with you, and I know every path blindfold; and if there's a head that needs to be punched, you can confidently rely upon me to punch it."

"You really needn't fret, Ratty," added the Badger placidly. "My passages run further than you think, and I've bolt-holes to the edge of the wood in several directions, though I don't care for everybody to know about them. When you really have to go, you shall leave by one of my short cuts. Meantime, make yourself easy, and sit down again."

The Rat was nevertheless still anxious to be off and attend to his river, so the Badger, taking up his lantern again, led the way along a damp and airless tunnel that wound and dipped, part vaulted, part hewn through solid rock, for a weary distance that seemed to be miles. At last daylight began to show itself confusedly through tangled growth overhanging the mouth of the passage; and the Badger, bidding them a hasty good-bye, pushed them hurriedly through the opening, made everything look as natural as possible again, with creepers, brushwood, and dead leaves, and retreated. They found themselves standing on the very edge of the Wild Wood. Rocks and brambles and tree-roots behind them, confusedly heaped and tangled; in front, a great space of quiet fields, hemmed by lines of hedges black on the snow, and, far ahead, a glint of the familiar old river, while the wintry sun hung red and low on the horizon. The Otter, as knowing all the paths, took charge of the party, and they trailed out on a bee-line for a distant stile. Pausing there a moment and looking back, they saw the whole mass of the Wild Wood, dense, menacing, compact, grimly set in vast white surroundings; simultaneously they turned and made swiftly for home, for firelight and the familiar things it played on, for the voice, sounding cheerily outside their window, of the river that they knew and trusted in all its moods, that never made them afraid with any amazement.

As he hurried along, eagerly anticipating the moment when he would be at home again among the things he knew and liked, the Mole saw clearly that he was an animal of tilled field and hedge-row, linked to the ploughed furrow, the frequented pasture, the lane of evening lingerings, the cultivated garden-plot. For others the asperities, the stubborn endurance, or the clash of actual conflict, that went with Nature in the rough; he must be wise, must keep to the pleasant places in which his lines were laid and which held adventure enough, in their way, to last for a lifetime.

To Autumn

By John Keats

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloomthe soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

The Black Poodle

By F. Anstey

Woman on a Striped Sofa with a Dog Mary Cassatt

I have set myself the task of relating in the course of this story, without suppressing or altering a single detail, the most painful and humiliating episode of my life.

I do this, not because it will give me the least pleasure, but simply because it affords me an opportunity of extenuating myself, which has hitherto been wholly denied to me.

As a general rule, I am quite aware that to publish a lengthy explanation of one's conduct in any questionable transaction is not the best means of recovering a lost reputation; but in my own case there is one to whom I shall nevermore be permitted to justify by word of mouth—even if I found myself able to attempt it. And as she could not possibly think worse of me than she does at present, I write this, knowing it can do me no harm, and faintly hoping that it may come to her notice and suggest a doubt whether I am quite so unscrupulous a villain, so consummate a hypocrite, as I have been forced to appear in her eyes.

The bare chance of such a result makes me perfectly indifferent to all else; I cheerfully expose to the derision of the whole reading world the story of my weakness and my shame, since by doing so I may possibly rehabilitate myself somewhat in the good opinion of one person.

Having said so much, I will begin my confession without further delay.

My name is Algernon Weatherhead, and I may add that I am in one of the government departments, that I am an only son, and live at home with my mother.

We had had a house at Hammersmith until just before the period covered by this history, when, our lease expiring, my mother decided that my health required country air at the close of the day, and so we took a "desirable villa residence" on one of the many new building estates which have lately sprung up in such profusion in the home counties.

We have called it "Wistaria Villa." It is a pretty little place, the last of a row of detached villas, each with its tiny rustic carriage-gate and gravel sweep in front, and lawn enough for a tennis-court behind, which lines the road leading over the hill to the railway-station.

I could certainly have wished that our landlord, shortly after giving us the agreement, could have found some other place to hang himself in than one of our attics, for the consequence was that a housemaid left us in violent hysterics about every two months, having learned the tragedy from the tradespeople, and naturally "seen a somethink" immediately afterward.
Still it is a pleasant house, and I can now almost forgive the landlord for what I shall always consider an act of gross selfishness on his part.

In the country, even so near town, a next-door neighbor is something more than a mere numeral; he is a possible acquaintance, who will at least consider a new-comer as worth the experiment of a call. I soon knew that "Shuturgarden," the next house to our own, was occupied by a Colonel Currie, a retired Indian officer; and often, as across the low boundary wall I caught a glimpse of a graceful girlish figure flitting about among the rose-bushes in the neighbouring garden, I would lose myself in pleasant anticipations of a time not too far distant when the wall which separated us would be (metaphorically) levelled.
I remember—ah, how vividly!—the thrill of excitement with which I heard from my mother, on returning from town one evening, that the Curries had called, and seemed disposed to be all that was neighbourly and kind.

I remember, too, the Sunday afternoon on which I returned their call—alone, as my mother had already done so during the week. I was standing on the steps of the colonel's villa, waiting for the door to open, when I was startled by a furious snarling and yapping behind, and, looking round, discovered a large poodle in the act of making for my legs.

He was a coal-black poodle, with half of his right ear gone, and absurd little thick moustaches at the end of his nose; he was shaved in the shamlion fashion, which is considered, for some mysterious reason, to improve a poodle, but the barber had left sundry little tufts of hair, which studded his haunches capriciously.

I could not help being reminded, as I looked at him, of another black poodle, which Faust entertained for a short time with unhappy results, and I thought that a very moderate degree of incantation would be enough to bring the fiend out of this brute.

He made me intensely uncomfortable, for I am of a slightly nervous temperament, with a constitutional horror of dogs, and a liability to attacks of diffidence on performing the ordinary social rites under the most favourable conditions, and certainly the consciousness that a strange and apparently savage dog was engaged in worrying the heels of my boots was the reverse of reassuring.

The Currie family received me with all possible kindness. "So charmed to make your acquaintance, Mr. Weatherhead," said Mrs. Currie, as I shook hands. "I see," she added, pleasantly, "you've brought the doggie in with you." As a matter of fact, I had brought the doggie in at the ends of my coat-tails; but it was evidently no unusual occurrence for visitors to appear in this undignified manner, for she detached him quite as a matter of course, and as soon as I was sufficiently collected we fell into conversation.

I discovered that the colonel and his wife were childless, and the slender willowy figure I had seen across the garden wall was that of Lilian Roseblade, their niece and adopted daughter. She came into the room shortly afterward, and I felt, as I went through the form of an introduction, that her sweet, fresh face, shaded by soft masses of dusky-brown hair, more than justified all the dreamy hopes and fancies with which I had looked forward to that moment.

She talked to me in a pretty, confidential, appealing way, which I have heard her dearest friends censure as childish and affected; but I thought then that her manner had an indescribable charm and fascination about it, and the memory of it makes my heart ache now with a pang that is not all pain.

Even before the colonel made his appearance I had begun to see that my enemy, the poodle, occupied an exceptional position in that household. It was abundantly clear by the time I took my leave.

He seemed to be the centre of their domestic system, and even lovely Lilian revolved contentedly around him as a kind of satellite; he could do no wrong in his owner's eyes, his prejudices (and he was a narrow-minded animal) were rigorously respected, and all domestic arrangements were made with a primary view to his convenience.

I may be wrong, but I cannot think that it is wise to put any poodle upon such a pedestal as that. How this one in particular, as ordinary a quadruped as ever breathed, had contrived to impose thus upon his infatuated proprietors, I never could understand, but so it was; he even engrossed the chief part of the conversation, which after any lull seemed to veer round to him by a sort of natural law.

I had to endure a long biographical sketch of him,—what a society paper would call an "anecdotal photo,"—and each fresh anecdote seemed to me to exhibit the depraved malignity of the beast in a more glaring light, and render the doting admiration of the family more astounding than ever.

"Did you tell Mr. Weatherhead, Lily, about Bingo" (Bingo was the poodle's preposterous name) "and Tacks? No? Oh, I must tell him that; it'll make him laugh. Tacks is our gardener down in the village (d' ye know Tacks?). Well, Tacks was up here the other day, nailing up some trellis-work at the top of a ladder, and all the time there was Master Bingo sitting quietly at the foot of it looking on; wouldn't leave it on any account. Tacks said he was quite company for him. Well, at last, when Tacks had finished and was coming down, what do you thing that rascal there did? Just sneaked quietly up behind and nipped him in both calves and ran off. Been looking out for that the whole time! Ha, ha!—deep that, eh?"

I agreed, with an inward shudder, that it was very deep, thinking privately that, if this was a specimen of Bingo's usual treatment of the natives, it would be odd if he did not find himself deeper still before—probably just before—he died.

"Poor, faithful old doggie!" murmured Mrs. Currie; "he thought Tacks was a nasty burglar, didn't he? He wasn't going to see master robbed was he?"

"Capital house-dog, sir," struck in the colonel. "Gad, I shall never forget how he made poor Heavisides run for it the other day! Ever met Heavisides of the Bombay Fusileers? Well, Heavisides was staying here, and the dog met him one morning as he was coming down from the bath-room. Didn't recognise him in 'pajamas' and a dressing-gown, of course, and made at him. He kept poor old Heavisides outside the landing window on top of the cistern for a quarter of an hour, till I had to come and raise the siege!"

Such were the stories of that abandoned dog's blunderheaded ferocity to which I was forced to listen, while all the time the brute sat opposite me on the hearth-rug, blinking at me from under his shaggy mane with his evil, bleared eyes, and deliberating where he would have me when I rose to go.

This was the beginning of an intimacy which soon displaced all ceremony. It was very pleasant to go in there after dinner, even to sit with the colonel over his claret, and hear more stories about

Bingo; for afterward I could go into the pretty drawing-room and take my tea from Lilian's hands, and listen while she played Schubert to us in the summer twilight.

The poodle was always in the way, to be sure, but even his ugly black head seemed to lose some of its ugliness and ferocity when Lilian laid her pretty hand on it.

On the whole, I think that the Currie family were well disposed toward me, the colonel considering me as a harmless specimen of the average eligible young man,—which I certainly was,—and Mrs. Currie showing me favour for my mother's sake, for whom she had taken a strong liking.

As for Lilian, I believed I saw that she soon suspected the state of my feelings toward her, and was not displeased by it. I looked forward with some hopefulness to a day when I could declare myself with no fear of a repulse.

But it was a serious obstacle in my path that I could not secure Bingo's good opinion on any terms. The family would often lament this pathetically themselves. "You see," Mrs. Currie would observe in apology, "Bingo is a dog that does not attach himself easily to strangers"—though, for that matter, I thought he was unpleasantly ready to attach himself to me.

I did try hard to conciliate him. I brought him propitiatory buns, which was weak and ineffectual, as he ate them with avidity, and hated me as bitterly as ever; for he had conceived from the first a profound contempt for me, and a distrust which no blandishments of mine could remove. Looking back now, I am inclined to think it was a prophetic instinct that warned him of what was to come upon him through my instrumentality.

Only his approbation was wanting to establish for me a firm footing with the Curries, and perhaps determine Lilian's wavering heart in my direction; but, though I wooed that inflexible poodle with an assiduity I blush to remember, he remained obstinately firm.

Still, day by day, Lilian's treatment of me was more encouraging; day by day I gained in the esteem of her uncle and aunt; I began to hope that soon I should be able to disregard canine influence altogether.

Now there was one inconvenience about our villa (besides its flavour of suicide) which it is necessary to mention here. By common consent all the cats of the neighbourhood had selected our garden for their evening reunions. I fancy that a tortoise-shell kitchen cat of ours must have been a sort of leader of local feline society—I know she was "at home," with music and recitations, on most evenings.

My poor mother found this to interfere with her after-dinner nap, and no wonder; for if a cohort of ghosts had been "shrieking and squealing," as Calpurnia puts it, in our back garden, or it had been fitted up as a creche for a nursery of goblin infants in the agonies of teething, the noise could not possibly have been more unearthly.

We sought for some means of getting rid of the nuisance: there was poison, of course; but we thought it would have an invidious appearance, and even lead to legal difficulties, if each dawn were to discover an assortment of cats expiring in hideous convulsions in various parts of the same garden.

Firearms too were open to objection, and would scarcely assist my mother's slumbers; so for some time we were at a loss for a remedy. At last, one day, walking down the Strand, I chanced to see (in an evil hour) what struck me as the very thing: it was an air-gun of superior construction, displayed in a gunsmith's window. I went in at once, purchased it, and took it home in triumph; it would be noiseless, and would reduce the local average of cats without scandal,—one or two examples,—and feline fashion would soon migrate to a more secluded spot.

I lost no time in putting this to the proof. That same evening I lay in wait after dusk at the study window, protecting my mother's repose. As soon as I heard the long-drawn wail, the preliminary sputter, and the wild stampede that followed, I let fly in the direction of the sound. I suppose I must have something of the national sporting instinct in me, for my blood was tingling with excitement; but the feline constitution assimilates lead without serious inconvenience, and I began to fear that no trophy would remain to bear witness to my marksmanship.

But all at once I made out a dark, indistinct form slinking in from behind the bushes. I waited till it crossed a belt of light which streamed from the back kitchen below me, and then I took careful aim and pulled the trigger.

This time at least I had not failed; there was a smothered yell, a rustle, and then silence again. I ran out with the calm pride of a successful revenge to bring in the body of my victim, and I found underneath a laurel no predatory tom-cat, but (as the discerning reader will no doubt have foreseen long since) the quivering carcass of the colonel's black poodle!I intend to set down here the exact unvarnished truth, and I confess that at first, when I knew what I had done, I was not sorry. I was quite innocent of any intention of doing it, but I felt no regret. I even laughed—madman that I was—at the thought that there was the end of Bingo, at all events; that impediment was removed; my weary task of conciliation was over for ever!

But soon the reaction came; I realised the tremendous nature of my deed, and shuddered. I had done that which might banish me from Lilian's side for ever! All unwittingly I had slaughtered a kind of sacred beast, the animal around which the Currie household had wreathed their choicest affections! How was I to break it to them? Should I send Bingo in, with a card tied to his neck and my regrets and compliments? That was too much like a present of game. Ought I not to carry him in myself? I would wreathe him in the best crape, I would put on black for him; the Curries would hardly consider a taper and a white sheet, or sack-cloth and ashes, an excessive form of atonement, but I could not grovel to quite such an abject extent.

I wondered what the colonel would say. Simple and hearty, as a general rule, he had a hot temper on occasions, and it made me ill as I thought, would he and, worse still, would Lilian believe it was really an accident? They knew what an interest I had in silencing the deceased poodle—would they believe the simple truth?

I vowed that they should believe me. My genuine remorse and the absence of all concealment on my part would speak powerfully for me. I would choose a favourable time for my confession; that very evening I would tell all.

Still I shrank from the duty before me, and, as I knelt down sorrowfully by the dead form and respectfully composed his stiffening limbs, I thought that it was unjust of fate to place a well-meaning man, whose nerves were not of iron, in such a position.

Then, to my horror, I heard a well-known ringing tramp on the road outside, and smelled the peculiar fragrance of a Burmese cheroot. It was the colonel himself, who had been taking out the doomed Bingo for his usual evening run.
I don't know how it was, exactly, but a sudden panic came over me. I held my breath, and tried to crouch down unseen behind the laurels; but he had seen me, and came over at once to speak to me across the hedge.

He stood there, not two yards from his favourite's body! Fortunately it was unusually dark that evening.

"Ha, there you are, eh!" he began, heartily; "don't rise, my boy, don't rise."

I was trying to put myself in front of the poodle, and did not rise—at least, only my hair did.

"You're out late, ain't you?" he went on; "laying out your garden, hey?"

I could not tell him that I was laying out his poodle! My voice shook as, with a guilty confusion that was veiled by the dusk, I said it was a fine evening—which it was not.

"Cloudy, sir," said the colonel, "cloudy; rain before morning, I think. By the way, have you seen anything of Bingo in here?"
This was the turning-point. What I ought to have done was to say mournfully, "Yes, I'm sorry to say I've had a most unfortunate accident with him. Here he is; the fact is, I'm afraid I've shot him!"

But I couldn't. I could have told him at my own time, in a prepared form of words—but not then. I felt I must use all my wits to gain time, and fence with the questions.
"Why," I said, with a leaden airiness, "he hasn't given you the slip, has he?"

"Never did such a thing in his life!" said the colonel, warmly; "he rushed off after a rat or a frog or something a few minutes ago, and as I stopped to light another cheroot I lost sight of him. I thought I saw him slip in under your gate, but I've been calling him from the front there and he won't come out."

No, and he never would come out any more. But the colonel must not be told that just yet. I temporised again: "If," I said, unsteadily—"if he had slipped in under the gate I should have seen him. Perhaps he took it into his head to run home?"

"Oh, I shall find him on the door-step, I expect, the knowing old scamp! Why, what d' ye think was the last thing he did, now?"
I could have given him the very latest intelligence, but I dared not. However, it was altogether too ghastly to kneel there and laugh at anecdotes of Bingo told across Bingo's dead body; I could not stand that. "Listen," I said, suddenly, "wasn't that his bark? There, again; it seems to come from the front of your

house, don't you think?"

"Well," said the colonel, "I'll go and fasten him up before he's off again. How your teeth are chattering! You've caught a chill, man; go indoors at once, and, if you feel equal to it, look in half an hour later, about grog-time, and I'll tell you all about it. Compliments to your mother. Don't forget—about grog-time!"

I had got rid of him at last, and I wiped my forehead, gasping with relief. I would go round in half an hour, and then I should be prepared to make my melancholy announcement. For, even then, I never thought of any other course, until suddenly it flashed upon me with terrible clearness that my miserable shuffling by the hedge had made it impossible to tell the truth! I had not told a direct lie, to be sure, but then I had given the colonel the impression that I had denied having seen the dog. Many people can appease their consciences by reflecting that, whatever may be the effect their words produce, they did contrive to steer clear of a downright lie. I never quite knew where the distinction lay morally, but there is that feeling—I have it myself.

Unfortunately, prevarication has this drawback: that, if ever the truth comes to light, the prevaricator is in just the same case as if he had lied to the most shameless extent, and for a man to point out that the words he used contained no absolute falsehood will seldom restore confidence.

I might, of course, still tell the colonel of my misfortune, and leave him to infer that it had happened after our interview; but the poodle was fast becoming cold and stiff, and they would most probably suspect the real time of the occurrence. And then Lilian would hear that I had told a string of falsehoods to her uncle over the dead body of their idolised Bingo—an act, no doubt, of abominable desecration, of unspeakable profanity, in her eyes.

If it would have been difficult before to prevail on her to accept a blood-stained hand, it would be impossible after that. No, I had burned my ships, I was cut off for ever from the straightforward course; that one moment of indecision had decided my conduct in spite of me; I must go on with it now, and keep up the deception at all hazards.

It was bitter. I had always tried to preserve as many of the moral principles which had been instilled into me as can be conveniently retained in this grasping world, and it had been my pride that, roughly speaking, I had never been guilty of an unmistakable falsehood.

But henceforth, if I meant to win Lilian, that boast must be relinquished for ever. I should have to lie now with all my might, without limit or scruple, to dissemble incessantly, and "wear a mask," as the poet Bunn beautifully expressed it long ago, "over my hollow heart." I felt all this keenly; I did not think it was right, but what was I to do?

After thinking all this out very carefully, I decided that my only course was to bury the poor animal where he fell, and say nothing about it. With some vague idea of precaution, I first took off the silver collar he wore, and then hastily interred him with a garden-trowel, and succeeded in removing all traces of the disaster.

I fancy I felt a certain relief in the knowledge that there would now be no necessity to tell my pitiful story and risk the loss of my neighbours' esteem.

By-and-by, I thought, I would plant a rose-tree over his remains, and some day, as Lilian and I, in the noontide of our domestic bliss, stood before it admiring its creamy luxuriance, I might (perhaps) find courage to confess that the tree owed some of that luxuriance to the long-lost Bingo.

There was a touch of poetry in this idea that lightened my gloom for the moment.

I need scarcely say that I did not go round to Shuturgarden that evening. I was not hardened enough for that yet; my manner might betray me, and so I very prudently stayed at home. But that night my sleep was broken by frightful dreams. I was perpetually trying to bury a great, gaunt poodle, which would persist in rising up through the damp mould as fast as I covered him up. . . . Lilian and I were engaged, and we were in church together on Sunday, and the poodle, resisting all attempts to eject him, forbade our banns with sepulchral barks. . . . It was our wedding-day, and at the critical moment the poodle leaped between us and swallowed the ring. . . . Or we were at the wedding-breakfast, and Bingo, a grisly black skeleton with flaming eyes, sat on the cake and would not allow Lilian to cut it.

Even the rose-tree fancy was reproduced in a distorted form—the tree grew, and every blossom contained a miniature Bingo, which barked; and as I woke I was desperately trying to persuade the colonel that they were ordinary dog-roses.

I went up to the office next day with my gloomy secret gnawing my bosom, and, whatever I did, the spectre of the murdered poodle rose before me. For two days after that I dared not go near the Curries, until at last one evening after dinner I forced myself to call, feeling that it was really not safe to keep away any longer.

My conscience smote me as I went in. I put on an unconscious, easy manner, which was such a dismal failure that it was lucky for me that they were too much engrossed to notice it.

I never before saw a family so stricken down by a domestic misfortune as the group I found in the drawing-room, making a dejected pretence of reading or working. We talked at first—and hollow talk it was—on indifferent subjects, till I could bear it no longer, and plunged boldly into danger.

"I don't see the dog," I began, "I suppose you—you found him all right the other evening, colonel?" I wondered, as I spoke, whether they would not notice the break in my voice, but they did not.

"Why, the fact is," said the colonel, heavily, gnawing his gray moustache, "we've not heard anything of him since; he's—he's run off!"

"Gone, Mr. Weatherhead; gone without a word!" said Mrs. Currie, plaintively, as if she thought the dog might at least have left an address.

"I wouldn't have believed it of him," said the colonel; "it has completely knocked me over. Haven't been so cut up for years—the ungrateful rascal!"

"O uncle!" pleaded Lilian, "don't talk like that; perhaps Bingo couldn't help it—perhaps some one has s-s-shot him!"

"Shot!" cried the colonel, angrily. "By heaven! if I thought there was a villain on earth capable of shooting that poor inoffensive dog, I'd—Why should they shoot him, Lilian? Tell me that! I—I hope you won't let me hear you talk like that again. You don't think he's shot, eh, Weatherhead?"

I said—Heaven forgive me!—that I thought it highly improbable.

"He's not dead!" cried Mrs. Currie. "If he were dead I should know it somehow—I'm sure I should! But I'm certain he's alive. Only last night I had such a beautiful dream about him. I thought he came back to us, Mr. Weatherhead, driving up in a hansom-cab, and he was just the same as ever—only he wore blue spectacles, and the shaved part of him was painted a bright red. And I woke up with the joy—so, you know, it's sure to come true!"

It will be easily understood what torture conversations like these were to me, and how I hated myself as I sympathised and spoke encouraging words concerning the dog's recovery, when I knew all the time he was lying hid under my garden mould. But I took it as a part of my punishment, and bore it all uncomplainingly; practice even made me an adept in the art of consolation—I believe I really was a great comfort to them. I had hoped that they would soon get over the first bitterness of their loss, and that Bingo would be first replaced and then forgotten in the usual way; but there seemed no signs of this coming to pass.

The poor colonel was too plainly fretting himself ill about it; he went pottering about forlornly, advertising, searching, and seeing people, but all, of course, to no purpose; and it told upon him. He was more like a man whose only son and heir had been stolen than an Anglo-Indian officer who had lost a poodle. I had to affect the liveliest interest in all his inquiries and expeditions, and to listen to and echo the most extravagant eulogies of the departed; and the wear and tear of so much duplicity made me at last almost as ill as the colonel himself.

I could not help seeing that Lilian was not nearly so much impressed by my elaborate concern as her relatives, and sometimes I detected an incredulous look in her frank brown eyes that made me very uneasy. Little by little, a rift widened between us, until at last in despair I determined to know the worst before the time came when it would be hopeless to speak at all. I chose a Sunday evening as we were walking across the green from church in the golden dusk, and then I ventured to speak to her of my love. She heard me to the end, and was evidently very much agitated. At last she murmured that it could not be, unless—no, it never could be now.

"Unless, what?" I asked. "Lilian—Miss Roseblade, something has come between us lately; you will tell me what that something is, won't you?"

"Do you want to know really?" she said, looking up at me through her tears. "Then I'll tell you; it—it's Bingo!"

I started back overwhelmed. Did she know all? If not, how much did she suspect? I must find out that at once. "What about Bingo?" I managed to pronounce, with a dry tongue.

"You never l-loved him when he was here," she sobbed; "you know you didn't!"

I was relieved to find it was no worse than this.

"No," I said, candidly; "I did not love Bingo. Bingo didn't love me, Lilian; he was always looking out for a chance of nipping me somewhere. Surely you won't quarrel with me for that!"

"Not for that," she said; "only, why do you pretend to be so fond of him now, and so anxious to get him back again? Uncle John believes you, but I don't. I can see quite well that you wouldn't be glad to find him. You could find him easily if you wanted to!"

"What do you mean, Lilian?" I said, hoarsely. "How could I find him?" Again I feared the worst.

"You're in a government office," cried Lilian, "and if you only chose, you could easily g-get g-government to find Bingo! What's the use of government if it can't do that? Mr. Travers would have found him long ago if I'd asked him!"

Lilian had never been so childishly unreasonable as this before, and yet I loved her more madly than ever; but I did not like this allusion to Travers, a rising barrister, who lived with his sister in a pretty cottage near the station, and had shown symptoms of being attracted by Lilian.

He was away on circuit just then, luckily; but, at least, even he would have found it a hard task to find Bingo—there was comfort in that.

"You know that isn't just, Lilian," I observed; "but only tell me what you want me to do."

"Bub-bub-bring back Bingo!" she said.

"Bring back Bingo!" I cried, in horror. "But suppose I can't—suppose he's out of the country, or—dead, what then Lilian?"

"I can't help it," she said, "but I don't believe he is out of the country or dead. And while I see you pretending to uncle that you cared awfully about him, and going on doing nothing at all, it makes me think you're not quite—quite sincere! And I couldn't possibly marry any one while I thought that of him. And I shall always have that feeling unless you find Bingo!"

It was of no use to argue with her; I knew Lilian by that time. With her pretty, caressing manner she united a latent obstinacy which it was hopeless to attempt to shake. I feared, too, that she was not quite certain as yet whether she cared for me or not, and that this condition of hers was an expedient to gain time.

I left her with a heavy heart. Unless I proved my worth by bringing back Bingo within a very short time, Travers would probably have everything his own way. And Bingo was dead!

However, I took heart. I thought that perhaps if I could succeed by my earnest efforts in persuading Lilian that I really was doing all in my power to recover the poodle, she might relent in time, and dispense with his actual production.

So, partly with this object, and partly to appease the remorse which now revived and stung me deeper than before, I undertook long and weary pilgrimages after office hours. I spent many pounds in advertisements; I interviewed dogs of every size, colour, and breed, and of course I took care to keep Lilian informed of each successive failure. But still her heart was not touched; she was firm. If I went on like that, she told me, I was certain to find Bingo one day; then, but not before, would her doubts be set at rest.

I was walking one day through the somewhat squalid district which lies between Bow Street and High Holborn, when I saw, in a small theatrical costumer's window, a hand-bill stating that a black poodle had "followed a gentleman" on a certain date, and if not claimed and the finder remunerated before a stated time would be sold to pay expenses.

I went in and got a copy of the bill to show Lilian, and, although by that time I scarcely dared to look a poodle in the face, I thought I would go to the address given and see the animal, simply to be able to tell Lilian I had done so.

The gentleman whom the dog had very unaccountably followed was a certain Mr. William Blagg, who kept a little shop near Endell Street, and called himself a bird-fancier, though I should scarcely have credited him with the necessary imagination. He was an evil-browed ruffian in a fur cap, with a broad broken nose and little shifty red eyes; and after I had told him what I wanted he took me through a horrible little den, stacked with piles of wooden, wire, and wicker prisons, each quivering with restless, twittering life, and then out into a back yard, in which were two or three rotten old kennels and tubs. "That there's him," he said, jerking his thumb to the farthest tub; "follered me all the way 'ome from Kinsington Gardens, he did. Kim out, will yer?"

And out of the tub there crawled slowly, with a snuffling whimper and a rattling of its chain, the identical dog I had slain a few evenings before!

At least, so I thought for a moment, and felt as if I had seen a spectre; the resemblance was so exact—in size, in every detail, even to the little clumps of hair about the hind parts, even to the lop of half an ear, this dog might have been the doppelganger of the deceased Bingo. I suppose, after all, one black poodle is very like any other black poodle of the same size, but the likeness startled me.

I think it was then that the idea occurred to me that here was a miraculous chance of securing the sweetest girl in the whole world, and at the same time atoning for my wrong by bringing back gladness with me to Shuturgarden. It only needed a little boldness; one last deception, and I could embrace truthfulness once more.

Almost unconsciously, when my guide turned round and asked, "Is that there dawg yourn?" I said hurriedly, "Yes, yes; that's the dog I want; that—that's Bingo!"

"He don't seem to be a-puttin' of 'isself out about seein' you again," observed Mr. Blagg, as the poodle studied me with calm interest.

"Oh, he's not exactly my dog, you see," I said; "he belongs to a friend of mine!"

He gave me a quick, furtive glance. "Then maybe you're mistook about him," he said, "and I can't run no risks. I was a-goin' down in the country this 'ere werry evenin' to see a party as lives at Wistaria Willa; he's been a-hadwertisin' about a black poodle, he has!"

"But look here," I said; "that's me."

He gave me a curious leer. "No offence, you know, guv'nor," he said, "but I should wish for some evidence as to that afore I part with a vallyable dawg like this 'ere!"

"Well," I said, "here's one of my cards; will that do for you?"

He took it and spelled it out with a pretence of great caution; but I saw well enough that the old schoundrel suspected that if I had lost a dog at all it was not this particular dog. "Ah," he said, as he put it in his pocket, "if I part with him to you I must be cleared of all risks. I can't afford to get into trouble about no mistakes. Unless you likes to leave him for a day or two you must pay accordin', you see."

I wanted to get the hateful business over as soon as possible. I did not care what I paid—Lilian was worth all the expense! I said I had no doubt myself as to the real ownership of the animal, but I would give him any sum in reason, and would remove the dog at once.

And so we settled it. I paid him an extortionate sum, and came away with a duplicate poodle, a canine counterfeit, which I hoped to pass off at Shuturgarden as the long-lost Bingo.

I know it was wrong,—it even came unpleasantly near dog-stealing,—but I was a desperate man. I saw Lilian gradually slipping away from me, I knew that nothing short of this could ever recall her, I was sorely tempted, I had gone far on the same road already; it was the old story of being hung for a sheep. And so I fell.

Surely some who read this will be generous enough to consider the peculiar state of the case, and mingle a little pity with their contempt.

I was dining in town that evening, and took my purchase home by a late train; his demeanour was grave and intensely respectable; he was not the animal to commit himself by any flagrant indiscretion; he was gentle and tractable too, and in all respects an agreeable contrast in character to the original. Still, it may have been the after-dinner workings of conscience, but I could not help fancying that I saw a certain look in the creature's eyes, as if he were aware that he was required to connive at a fraud, and rather resented it.

If he would only be good enough to back me up! Fortunately, however, he was such a perfect facsimile of the outward Bingo that the risk of detection was really inconsiderable.

When I got him home I put Bingo's silver collar round his neck, congratulating myself on my forethought in preserving it, and took him in to see my mother. She accepted him as what he seemed without the slightest misgiving; but this, though it encouraged me to go on, was not decisive—the spurious poodle would have to encounter the scrutiny of those who knew every tuft on the genuine animal's body!

Nothing would have induced me to undergo such an ordeal as that of personally restoring him to the Curries. We gave him

supper, and tied him up on the lawn, where he howled dolefully all night and buried bones.

The next morning I wrote a note to Mrs. Currie, expressing my pleasure at being able to restore the lost one, and another to Lilian, containing only the words, "Will you believe now that I am sincere?" Then I tied both round the poodle's neck, and dropped him over the wall into the colonel's garden just before I started to catch my train to town.

I had an anxious walk home from the station that evening; I went round by the longer way, trembling the whole time lest I should meet any of the Currie household, to which I felt myself entirely unequal just then. I could not rest until I knew whether my fraud had succeeded, or if the poodle to which I had intrusted my fate had basely betrayed me; but my suspense was happily ended as soon as I entered my mother's room. "You can't think how delighted those poor Curries were to see Bingo again," she said at once; "and they said such charming things about you, Algy—Lilian particularly; quite affected she seemed, poor child! And they wanted you to go round and dine there and be thanked to-night, but at last I persuaded them to come to us instead. And they're going to bring the dog to make friends. Oh, and I met Frank Travers; he's back from circuit again now, so I asked him in too to meet them!"

I drew a deep breath of relief. I had played a desperate game, but I had won! I could have wished, to be sure, that my mother had not thought of bringing in Travers on that of all evenings, but I hoped that I could defy him after this.

The colonel and his people were the first to arrive, he and his wife being so effusively grateful that they made me very uncomfortable indeed; Lilian met me with downcast eyes and the faintest possible blush, but she said nothing just then. Five minutes afterward, when she and I were alone together in the conservatory, where I had brought her on pretence of showing a new begonia, she laid her hand on my sleeve and whispered, almost shyly, "Mr. Weatherhead—Algernon! Can you ever forgive me for being so cruel and unjust to you?" And I replied that, upon the whole, I could.

We were not in the conservatory long, but before we left it beautiful Lilian Roseblade had consented to make my life happy. When we reentered the drawing-room we found Frank Travers, who had been told the story of the recovery; and I observed his jaw fall as he glanced at our faces, and noted the triumphant smile which I have no doubt mine wore, and the tender, dreamy look in Lilian's soft eyes. Poor Travers! I was sorry for him, although I was not fond of him. Travers was a good type of rising young common-law barrister, tall, not bad-looking, with keen dark eyes, black whiskers, and the mobile forensic mouth which can express every shade of feeling, from deferential assent to cynical incredulity; possessed, too, of an endless flow of conversation that was decidedly agreeable, if a trifling too laboriously so, he had been a dangerous rival. But all that was over now; he saw it himself at once, and during dinner sank into dismal silence, gazing pathetically at Lilian, and sighing almost obtrusively between the courses. His stream of small talk seemed to have been cut off at the main.

"You've done a kind thing, Weatherhead," said the colonel. "I can't tell you all that dog is to me, and how I missed the poor beast. I'd quite given up all hope of ever seeing him again, and all the time there was Weatherhead, Mr. Travers, quietly searching all London till he found him! I sha'n't forget it. It shows a really kind feeling."

I saw by Travers's face that he was telling himself he would have found fifty Bingos in half the time—if he had only thought of it; he smiled a melancholy assent to all the colonel said, and then began to study me with an obviously depreciatory air.

"You can't think," I heard Mrs. Currie telling my mother, "how really touching it was to see poor Bingo's emotion at seeing all the old familiar objects again! He went up and sniffed at them all in turn, quite plainly recognising everything. And he was quite put out to find that we had moved his favourite ottoman out of the drawing-room. But he is so penitent too, and so ashamed of having run away; he kept under a chair in the hall all the morning; he wouldn't come in here, either, so we had to leave him in your garden."

"He's been sadly out of spirits all day," said Lilian; "he hasn't bitten one of the tradespeople."

"Oh, he's all right, the rascal!" said the colonel, cheerily. "He'll be after the cats again as well as ever in a day or two."

"Ah, those cats!" said my poor innocent mother. "Algy, you haven't tried the air-gun on them again lately, have you? They're worse than ever."

I troubled the colonel to pass the claret. Travers laughed for the first time. "That's a good idea," he said, in that carrying "bar-mess" voice of his; "an air-gun for cats, ha, ha! Make good bags, eh, Weatherhead?" I said that I did, very good bags, and felt I was getting painfully red in the face.

"Oh, Algy is an excellent shot—quite a sportsman," said my mother. "I remember, oh, long ago, when we lived at Hammersmith, he had a pistol, and he used to strew crumbs in the garden for the sparrows, and shoot at them out of the pantry window; he frequently hit one."

"Well," said the colonel, not much impressed by these sporting reminiscences, "don't go rolling over our Bingo by mistake, you know, Weatherhead, my boy. Not but what you've a sort of right after this—only don't. I wouldn't go through it all twice for anything."

"If you really won't take any more wine," I said, hurriedly, addressing the colonel and Travers, "suppose we all go out and have our coffee on the lawn? It—it will be cooler there." For it was getting very hot indoors, I thought.

I left Travers to amuse the ladies—he could do no more harm now; and, taking the colonel aside, I seized the opportunity, as we strolled up and down the garden path, to ask his consent to Lilian's engagement to me. He gave it cordially. "There's not a man in England," he said, "that I'd sooner see her married to after to-day. You're a quiet, steady young fellow, and you've a good kind heart. As for the money, that's neither here nor there; Lilian won't come to you without a penny, you know. But really, my boy, you can hardly believe what it is to my poor wife and me to see that dog. Why, bless my soul, look at him now! What's the matter with him, eh?"

To my unutterable horror, I saw that that miserable poodle, after begging unnoticed at the tea-table for some time, had retired to an open space before it, where he was industriously standing on his head.

We gathered round and examined the animal curiously, as he continued to balance himself gravely in his abnormal position. "Good gracious, John," cried Mrs. Currie, "I never saw Bingo do such a thing before in his life!"

"Very odd," said the colonel, putting up his glasses; "never learned that from me."

"I tell you what I fancy it is," I suggested wildly. "You see, he was always a sensitive, excitable animal, and perhaps the—the sudden joy of his return has gone to his head—upset him, you know."

They seemed disposed to accept this solution, and, indeed, I believe they would have credited Bingo with every conceivable degree of sensibility; but I felt myself that if this unhappy animal had many more of these accomplishments I was undone, for the original Bingo had never been a dog of parts.

"It's very odd," said Travers, reflectively, as the dog recovered his proper level, "but I always thought that it was half the right ear that Bingo had lost."

"So it is, isn't it?" said the colonel. "Left, eh? Well, I thought myself it was the right."

My heart almost stopped with terror; I had altogether forgotten that. I hastened to set the point at rest. "Oh, it was the left," I said, positively; "I know it because I remember so particularly thinking how odd it was that it should be the left ear, and not the right!" I told myself this should be positively my last lie.

"Why odd?" asked Frank Travers, with his most offensive Socratic manner.

"My dear fellow, I can't tell you," I said, impatiently; "everything seems odd when you come to think at all about it."

"Algernon," said Lilian, later on, "will you tell Aunt Mary and Mr. Travers and—me how it was you came to find Bingo? Mr. Travers is quite anxious to hear all about it."

I could not very well refuse; I sat down and told the story, all my own way. I painted Blagg perhaps rather bigger and blacker than life, and described an exciting scene, in which I recognised Bingo by his collar in the streets, and claimed and bore him off then and there in spite of all opposition.

I had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing Travers grinding his teeth with envy as I went on, and feeling Lilian's soft, slender hand glide silently into mine as I told my tale in the twilight.

All at once, just as I reached the climax, we heard the poodle barking furiously at the hedge which separated my garden from the road.

"There's a foreign-looking man staring over the hedge," said Lilian; "Bingo always did hate foreigners."

There certainly was a swarthy man there, and, though I had no reason for it then, somehow my heart died within me at the sight

of him.

"Don't be alarmed, sir," cried the colonel; "the dog won't bite you—unless there's a hole in the hedge anywhere."

The stranger took off his small straw hat with a sweep. "Ah, I am not afraid," he said, and his accent proclaimed him a Frenchman; "he is not enrage at me. May I ask, it is pairmeet to speak viz Misterre Vezzered?"

I felt I must deal with this person alone, for I feared the worst; and, asking them to excuse me, I went to the hedge and faced the Frenchman with the frightful calm of despair. He was a short, stout little man, with blue cheeks, sparkling black eyes, and a vivacious walnut-coloured countenance; he wore a short black alpaca coat, and a large white cravat, with an immense oval malachite brooch in the centre of it, which I mention because I found myself staring mechanically at it during the interview.

"My name is Weatherhead," I began with the bearing of a detected pickpocket. "Can I be of any service to you?"

"Of a great service," he said, emphatically; "you can restore to me ze poodle vich I see zere!"

Nemesis had called at last in the shape of a rival claimant. I staggered for an instant; then I said, "Oh, I think you are under a mistake; that dog is not mine."

"I know it," he said; "zere 'as been leetle mistake, so if ze dog is not to you, you give him back to me, hein?"

"I tell you," I said, "that poodle belongs to the gentleman over there." And I pointed to the colonel, seeing that it was best now to bring him into the affair without delay.

"You are wrong," he said, doggedly; "ze poodle is my poodle! And I was direct to you—it is your name on ze carte!" And he presented me with that fatal card which I had been foolish enough to give to Blagg as a proof of my identity. I saw it all now; the old villain had betrayed me, and to earn a double reward had put the real owner on my track.

I decided to call the colonel at once, and attempt to brazen it out with the help of his sincere belief in the dog.

"Eh, what's that; what's it all about?" said the colonel, bustling up, followed at intervals by the others.

The Frenchman raised his hat again. "I do not vant to make a trouble," he began, "but zere is leetle mistake. My word of honour, sare, I see my own poodle in your garden. Ven I appeal to zis gentilman to restore 'im he reffer me to you."

"You must allow me to know my own dog, sir," said the colonel. "Why, I've had him from a pup. Bingo, old boy, you know your name, don't you?"

But the brute ignored him altogether, and began to leap wildly at the hedge in frantic efforts to join the Frenchman. It needed no Solomon to decide his ownership!

"I tell you, you 'ave got ze wrong poodle—it is my own dog, my Azor! He remember me well, you see? I lose him, it is three, four days. . . . I see a nottice zat he is found, and ven I go to ze address zey tell me, 'Oh, he is reclaim, he is gone viz a strangaire who has advertise.' Zey show me ze placard; I follow 'ere, and ven I arrive I see my poodle in ze garden before me!"

"But look here," said the colonel, impatiently; "it's all very well to say that, but how can you prove it? I give you my word that the dog belongs to me! You must prove your claim, eh, Travers?"

"Yes," said Travers, judicially; "mere assertion is no proof; it's oath against oath at present."

"Attend an instant; your poodle, was he 'ighly train, had he some talents—a dog viz tricks, eh?"

"No, he's not," said the colonel; "I don't like to see dogs taught to play the fool; there's none of that nonsense about him, sir!"

"Ah, remark him well, then. Azor, mon chou, danse donc un peu!"

And, on the foreigner's whistling a lively air, that infernal poodle rose on his hind legs and danced solemnly about half-way round the garden! We inside followed his movements with dismay.

"Why, dash it all!" cried the disgusted colonel, "he's dancing along like a d—d mountebank! But it's my Bingo, for all that!"

"You are not convince? You shall see more. Azor, ici! Pour Beesmarck, Azor!" (the poodle barked ferociously.) "Pour Gambetta!" (He wagged his tail and began to leap with joy.) "Meurs pour la patrie!" And the too accomplished animal rolled over as if killed in battle!

"Where could Bingo have picked up so much French?" cried Lilian, incredulously.

"Or so much French history?" added that serpent, Travers.

"Shall I command 'im to jump, or reverse 'imself?" inquired the obliging Frenchman.

"We've seen that, thank you," said the colonel, gloomily. "Upon my word, I don't know what to think. It can't be that that's not my Bingo after all—I'll never believe it!"

I tried a last desperate stroke. "Will you come round to the front?" I said to the Frenchman. "I'll let you in, and we can discuss the matter quietly." Then, as we walked back together, I asked him eagerly what he would take to abandon his claims and let the colonel think the poodle was his after all.

He was furious—he considered himself insulted; with great emotion he informed me that the dog was the pride of his life (it seems to be the mission of black poodles to serve as domestic comforts of this priceless kind!), that he would not part with him for twice his weight in gold.

"Figure," he began, as we joined the others, "zat zis gentilman 'ere 'as offer me money for ze dog! He agrees zat it is to me, you see? Ver' well, zen, zere is no more to be said!"

"Why, Weatherhead, have you lost faith too, then?" said the colonel.

I saw it was no good; all I wanted now was to get out of it creditably and get rid of the Frenchman. "I'm sorry to say," I replied, "that I'm afraid I've been deceived by the extraordinary likeness. I don't think, on reflection, that that is Bingo!"

"What do you think, Travers?" asked the colonel.

"Well, since you ask me," said Travers, with quite unnecessary dryness, "I never did think so."

"Nor I," said the colonel; "I thought from the first that was never my Bingo. Why, Bingo would make two of that beast!" And Lilian and her aunt both protested that they had had their doubts from the first.

"Zen you pairmeet zat I remove 'im?" said the Frenchman.

"Certainly," said the colonel; and, after some apologies on our part for the mistake, he went off in triumph, with the detestable poodle frisking after him.

When he had gone the colonel laid his hand kindly on my shoulder. "Don't look so cut up about it, my boy," he said; "you did your best—there was a sort of likeness to any one who didn't know Bingo as we did."

Just then the Frenchman again appeared at the hedge. "A thousand pardons," he said, "but I find zis upon my dog; it is not to me. Suffer me to restore it viz many compliments."

It was Bingo's collar. Travers took it from his hand and brought it to us.

"This was on the dog when you stopped that fellow, didn't you say?" he asked me.

One more lie—and I was so weary of falsehood! "Y-yes," I said, reluctantly; "that was so."

"Very extraordinary," said Travers; "that's the wrong poodle beyond a doubt, but when he's found he's wearing the right dog's collar! Now how do you account for that?"

"My good fellow," I said, impatiently, "I'm not in the witness-box. I can't account for it. It-it's a mere coincidence!"

"But look here, my dear Weatherhead," argued Travers (whether in good faith or not I never could quite make out), "don't you see what a tremendously important link it is? Here's a dog who (as I understand the facts) had a silver collar, with his name engraved on it, round his neck at the time he was lost. Here's that identical collar turning up soon afterward round the neck of a totally different dog! We must follow this up; we must get at the bottom of it somehow! With a clue like this, we're sure to find out either the dog himself, or what's become of him! Just try to recollect exactly what happened, there's a good fellow. This is just the sort of thing I like!"

It was the sort of thing I did not enjoy at all. "You must excuse me to-night, Travers," I said, uncomfortably; "you see, just now it's rather a sore subject for me, and I'm not feeling very well!" I was grateful just then for a reassuring glance of pity and confidence from Lilian's sweet eyes, which revived my drooping spirits for the moment.

"Yes, we'll go into it to-morrow, Travers," said the colonel; "and then—hullo, why, there's that confounded Frenchman again!" It was indeed; he came prancing back delicately, with a malicious enjoyment on his wrinkled face. "Once more I return to apologise," he said. "My poodle 'as permit 'imself ze grave indiscretion to make a very big 'ole at ze bottom of ze garden!"

I assured him that it was of no consequence. "Perhaps," he replied, looking steadily at me through his keen, half-shut eyes, "you vill not say zat ven you regard ze 'ole. And you others, I spik to you: sometimes von loses a somzing vich is qvite near all ze time. It is ver' droll, eh? my vord, ha, ha, ha!" And he ambled off, with an aggressively fiendish laugh that chilled my blood.

"What the deuce did he mean by that, eh?" said the colonel, blankly.

"Don't know," said Travers; "suppose we go and inspect the hole?"

But before that I had contrived to draw near it myself, in deadly fear lest the Frenchman's last words had contained some innuendo which I had not understood.

It was light enough still for me to see something, at the unexpected horror of which I very nearly fainted.

That thrice accursed poodle which I had been insane enough to attempt to foist upon the colonel must, it seems, have buried his supper the night before very near the spot in which I had laid Bingo, and in his attempts to exhume his bone had brought the remains of my victim to the surface!

There the corpse lay, on the very top of the excavations. Time had not, of course, improved its appearance, which was ghastly in the extreme, but still plainly recognisable by the eye of affection.

"It's a very ordinary hole," I gasped, putting myself before it and trying to turn them back. "Nothing in it—nothing at all!"

"Except one Algernon Weatherhead, Esq., eh?" whispered Travers, jocosely, in my ear.

"No; but," persisted the colonel, advancing, "look here! Has the dog damaged any of your shrubs?"

"No, no!" I cried, piteously; "quite the reverse. Let's all go indoors now; it's getting so cold!"

"See, there is a shrub or something uprooted," said the colonel, still coming nearer that fatal hole. "Why, hullo, look there! What's that?"

Lilian, who was by his side, gave a slight scream. "Uncle," she cried, "it looks like—like Bingo!"

The colonel turned suddenly upon me. "Do you hear?" he demanded, in a choked voice. "You hear what she says? Can't you speak out? Is that our Bingo?"

I gave it up at last; I only longed to be allowed to crawl away under something! "Yes," I said in a dull whisper, as I sat down heavily on a garden seat, "yes . . . that's Bingo . . . misfortune . . . shoot him . . . quite an accident!"

There was a terrible explosion after that; they saw at last how I had deceived them, and put the very worst construction upon everything. Even now I writhe impotently at times, and my cheeks smart and tingle with humiliation, as I recall that scene—the colonel's very plain speaking, Lilian's passionate reproaches and contempt, and her aunt's speechless prostration of disappointment.

I made no attempt to defend myself; I was not, perhaps, the complete villain they deemed me, but I felt dully that no doubt it all served me perfectly right.

Still I do not think I am under any obligation to put their remarks down in black and white here.

Travers had vanished at the first opportunity—whether out of delicacy, or the fear of breaking out into unseasonable mirth, I cannot say; and shortly afterward the others came to where I sat silent with bowed head, and bade me a stern and final farewell.

And then, as the last gleam of Lilian's white dress vanished down the garden path, I laid my head down on the table among the coffee-cups, and cried like a beaten child.

I got leave as soon as I could, and went abroad. The morning after my return I noticed, while shaving, that there was a small square marble tablet placed against the wall of the colonel's garden. I got my opera-glass and read—and pleasant reading it was—the following inscription:

IN AFFECTIONATE MEMORY OF B I N G O, SECRETLY AND CRUELLY PUT TO DEATH, IN COLD BLOOD, BY A NEIGHBOUR AND FRIEND. JUNE, 1881.

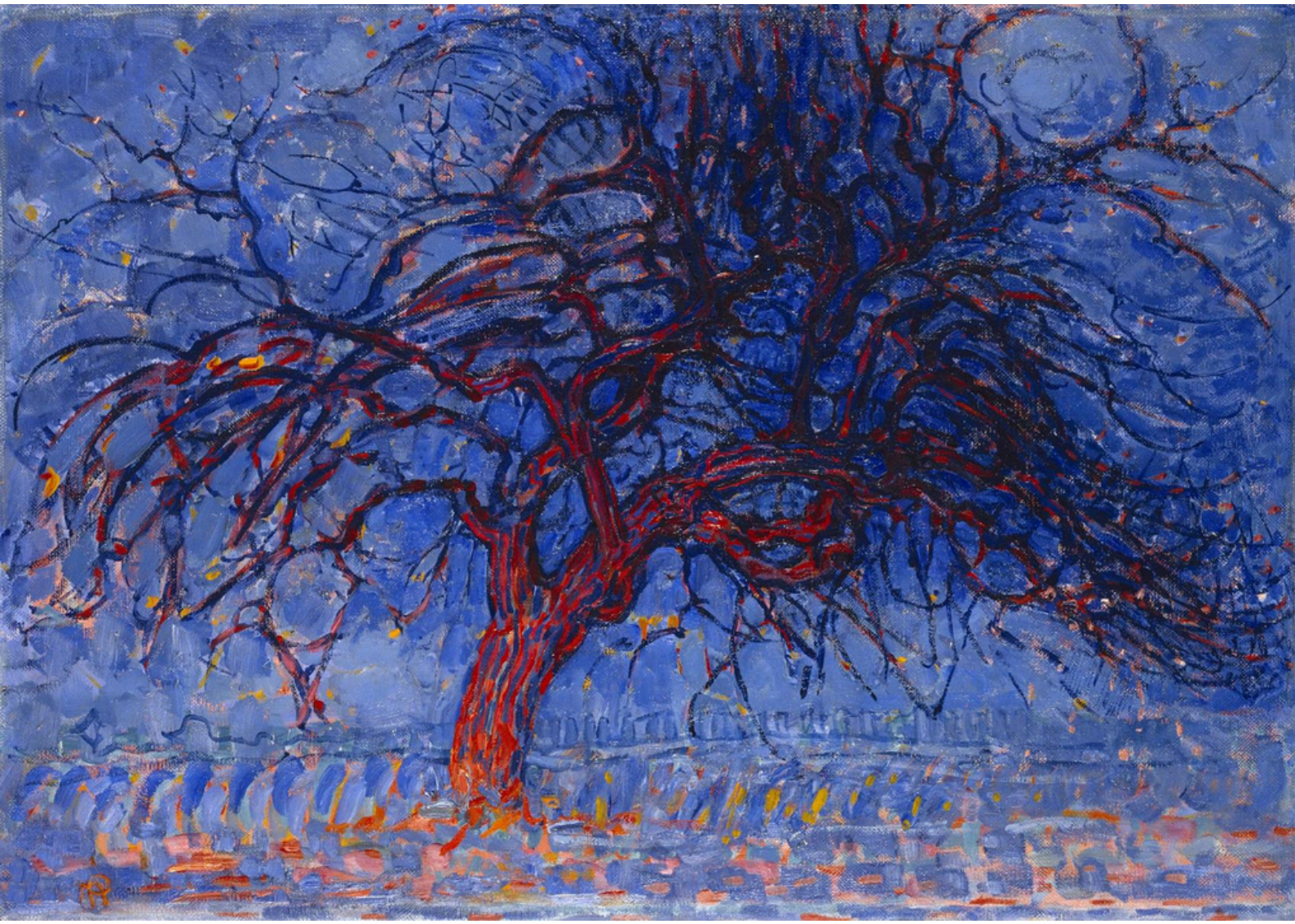
If this explanation of mine ever reaches my neighbours' eyes, I humbly hope they will have the humanity either to take away or tone down that tablet. They cannot conceive what I suffer when curious visitors insist, as they do every day, on spelling out the words from our windows, and asking me countless questions about them!

Sometimes I meet the Curries about the village, and as they pass me with averted heads I feel myself growing crimson. Travers is almost always with Lilian now. He has given her a dog, —a fox-terrier,—and they take ostentatiously elaborate precautions to keep it out of my garden.

I should like to assure them here that they need not be under any alarm. I have shot one dog.

Like Wrothy Nostrils

A Chapter from The House of Noth
By Philip Wortmann



Avond (Evening): The Red Tree Piet Mondrian

From the southern gate of the city, the highway led to a cliff that jutted from the hill like the shallow prow of a longboat. This was skirted by a broad stair, called the Styg ov Baugweraz (the Climb of Kaupmen) up onto a courtyard of stone, housing the great oak of skalds. Above it all, the cliffs held high the Nornburg. Into those cliffs were hewn two great, arched passages that presently poured out smoke like raging nostrils, and from them echoed the ring and clamour of hammering iron.

A man with a mane of golden hair, and a newly washed cloak that furled rubine on the mountain winds, climbed the stair that led up to the courtyard. There he strode over the flagstones and by the great oak tree with sprightly step, greeting the merchants that had gathered along the edges of the court absently. Beneath the oak, a man was reciting an epic poem about a farmer in the Hills of Min. The Lion nodded to the guards gathered around the braziers on either end of the mountain's nostrils, then he entered the glowing red of the smith's workshop. This was the workplace of the Forge-bear of Glimwæth, the place where many a legendary weapon had been hammered into lethal shape by the Forge-bear's forebears.

The ringing of yellow-hot iron on the anvil pounded out a rhythm to which the stride of the Lion Pen-tooth matched itself as if by its own will, so mighty were the shudders that pushed through the air from the forge.

After the tunnels that led in from the outside, the scrivener now lowered himself by a broad, curved stair into a round chamber, the arching ceiling of which was still of stone uncut. In the middle of the room, an octagonal pillar held up the roof, and about the bottom of this pillar were ringed shelves of all manner of tool and ore.

Tens of different hammers and tongs there were, as well as great spoons and shovels, pokers and crooks, clamps and drills, and much else. From the pillar, reaching into the other-most end of the workshop, went a long foundry, which in turn led to the smelter. To the right of the smelter was the forge, and alongside this stood the mightily renowned pounder of metals, grunting with every sparking stroke of his muse.

As though he were enraptured in the web of a wondrous dance, the Lion Pen-tooth stopped, and watched the master at his work. His broad figure was larger than any other man the scrivener had met before, and the mechanical ripple beneath the hairy coarseness of his besmirched skin was like the tensile tug of so many strings on a puppet. The smith was bare from head to waist, and about his waist he wore a fur loincloth over fur breaches. His feet stuck bare, black, and large, like those of a frog, onto the stone beneath. His beard was short and welded in places by stray fires past. His head was shaven, and all over he was shimmering with the gemstones of labour as they perspired on his hulking form.

His eyes did not look up as his rhythmic drumming of that iron firmament came momentarily to an end. He returned the raw head of a spear to the bright coals, then drew forth a new, yet formless bar of metal with his tongs. On this he freshly went to work. First, he hammered it arhythmically, and the Lion took another few steps towards him. Yet then the rhythm of before took the mighty machinery of his limbs, and the smith began to hum a low drone. As he then sang, the words which rumbled from his skaldic tongue made the walls melt away with memory of what he sang, and the Lion Pen-tooth felt himself drawn into the imagery of the Forge-bear's song like a fly is drawn in by the quick fingers of a spider.

Hear oh hear,
Father of the Forge-bear!
Bend thine ear
To the calling of the frozen.
In dark north,
Where the night-time draweth near,
Hail sunlight, pale sunlight;
From the south now wend your way!
In the dark
Of ages before daybreak,
Came the ring
Of the hammer-holding king.
He that wrought
In the shadows that were given
Bending midnight into starlight
Forged the sinews of an oak.
Yore-day tree,
Keeper of all mem'ry,
Singing sagas,
Of the roots beneath your crown.
And this crown,
Is the forge-work of the daylight.
Hail daylight, frail daylight!
Speed thy welder back this way.
Iron boughs,
Darkly looming above,
Need their fixing
By the fire of thine forge.
Bring the blue,
Not of night-time but of morrow
Take the sorrow; bleak, cold sorrow.
The long winter drive away.

The smith was about to sing another verse of the ancient song, when his eyes drifted up in the motion by which he swept the sweat from his brow. There the golden visage of the Lion Pen-tooth and that of the Forge-bear met in a momentary tension, both standing motionless. The silence on the thick air in this moment was alive with hesitation.

Finally, the smith sighed in relief, his faraway mind having returned to this earthen cavern to recognise the man that stood before him. Looking down, he saw that the spearhead was not bright enough to finish shaping, and so he returned it to the hot bed of coals behind him. Then he turned back to his visitor, wiping his hand in the fur of his loincloth, and smiling.

"To what mischief has my brother-in-law sent you now, Pen-tooth? Would you like to write the tale of my journeys to Steornufol?" asked the Forge-bear. "You could write: 'Forsooth! 'twas cold in thither bleak and barren desert-land of snow and stone!' I think that is about all you would need for an honest account."

This cracked the face of the Lion into a smile. "No fighting with trolls then?" asked he.

"Oh!" said the Forge-bear. "Yes, that you could add, if you thought it captured the spirit of the venture somewhat better. That damned height is something like a stone-goblin to conquer, I tell you."

"It is strange how your close family seeks to draw away from the truth of their heroism, great metal- master," said the Lion. "I know that you did fight trolls there above. Why are you not proud of such a feat?"

The Forge-bear suddenly looked away from the scrivener, his face scowling at these words. Said he: "What
for some may seem heroic has left my spirit scarred with silence, scrivener. Why have you come?"

"I have come to ask after a blade," said the other. "I have let the word be proclaimed loud enough in the fore-burg: I shall not forge swords in this time where metal is needed for axes and spears! All must be armed when that ogre returns, not only the few! Besides which, you have a blade already. Has the rusty decay of age finally broken its bite?"

"No, the sword of Athilan is still as bitter as when I found it, my friend. I have not come to ask after the forging of a new blade, however. I have come to ask after a blade that bears your mark over its fuller, and a charge to one Ystrith king's-daughter."

The face of the smith waxed with astonishment, then it grew bright with delight, then it fell with concern.

"You have found the blade?" whispered this hulk.

"Just so, strung to a young woman by leather thongs," said the other.

"Ystrith lives? Is she here?"

"She was living when last I saw her," said the Lion, "but listen to me, Forge-bear: she has run into Darkholt, fleeing from the hunter whom she sought out in the east. They were married a time, it seems, and then she departed from his tent to slay a river-dragon."

"She has slain one?" breathed the other in disbelief. "Then it was not idle that she ran into those murky eaves."

"There is more, Forge-bear," said the Lion. "She was carrying two bones large enough that they might have once been the leg bones of the dragon, and she also had a cloak full of its scales and teeth."

"Mighty deeds," said the smith, "but was there no flask nor bottle amongst her treasures? There was no vial holding a red liquid, perchance?"

The Lion frowned and cocked his head to one side. "No." The other put away the instruments of his craft and pushed by the scrivener, making for the exit, but stopped again, as the scrivener motioned that he still wished to speak with the Bear. "What else?" said the Forge-bear irritably. "Can you not ask your

questions on the wending way? I want to search these things that my niece has brought us myself!"

"I only want to know what your designs were," said the Lion. "You fear for my brother-in-law, the king. I have no designs against him. You know that I love him well, scrivener. I only wished to learn better songs from the birds. They say that the blood of the river-dragons can grant a man the speech of birds, and what a skald I could be, were I to learn from the little masters of singing themselves! Imagine what rhymes lie hidden in their music!"

The Lion Pen-tooth laughed. "Now I understand better why you chose the forge, and not the throne, my friend; and for that I love you well."

"Good, good. Then let me rummage about in this horde that my niece has left you. If she has slain a dragon, then I do not think her brother stands much of a chance against her," said the Forge-bear.

He sighed, lowering his face into his scarred hands, muttering: "The poor boy seemed so sensible after his return from the fjords. I cannot understand what happened between him and Mathydras."

"None of us can, my friend," said the Lion Pen-tooth sadly. "I doubt that even Mathydras himself could help us understand. Such things are too often the work of overpowering passions; a mystery captured by dreadful deeds in a moment of utter consumption."

"Another song I would cringe to hear, that of Mathydras, yet my niece seeks it out as though it were the only song that mattered."

"I think she will not get very far before she realises that it is a vain song. At the most she will slay the ogre, and find herself the greater monster," said the Lion Pen-tooth.

The two friends of the king departed the warmth of the forge-works, bursting into the cold winds without as purposed and bold as true arrows. There they navigated the fur-clad masses that shifted in the currents of daily business. The skald that had been reciting the tale from the Hills of Min had gathered quite an audience from the passers by today.

The Lion led the Forge-bear down to the stables, where the wagon of Jithron on which Ystrith had slept still held her treasures, hidden beneath the furs that had made her journey comfortable. Beside them, the steepled houses smoked whilst silently regarding their descent. From the odd window, every so often, a curious face would peer out to observe them, pipe or friendly word in mouth. And then the houses climbed up behind the retaining wall that fell into the stabled tier before the gates.

The master blacksmith began searching the bundled up cloak of the king's-daughter the moment the scrivener unveiled it to him. He marvelled at the scales. "I could make a coat of mail from these!" said he with a shine in his eyes. "And these leg bones, those would also serve well for an armour that even legends would return to life for, that they might bask a day in its glory."

At this, there was a commotion beyond the gate. Above, Gildolf made his way to see what his hound was barking at. He cried down onto the causeway outside: "Who wills to fare into our fore-burg? What is your business in the stead under Imnir's house?" And to his hound: "Hush now, boy! There's a good dog."

"One who, having endured much ridicule in the house of Imnir, now hopes that he has won double-glory in the eyes of Imnir's sons. I see my handiwork is strung up to the king's mead-hall.

"By the… By the things! By the things that are!" cried Gildolf. He turned to where the scrivener and the blacksmith looked up at him bemusedly.

"What is it, Gildolf?" asked the Lion.

"The…" he pointed, but the words were fast in his throat.

"Then open the gate, so we might see for ourselves!" cried the Forge-bear impatiently. "If it is someone that my brother-in-law has insulted, let me add the salt of my black fingers to his wounds."

"Yea!" cried Gildolf, "but nay, Bear, harm not the man. It is the Master Gaba. He bringeth with him another of the dokolvir, and also a child, it seems to mine eyes. Open the gates, ye wardens! Open the gates!"

At once there was a great shudder in the oak. Two men at either gate lifted a great beam of wood and laid it aside, then the clinking of vast chains and tooth-wheels could be heard to draw back the iron-bound wood. There, in the dying light of a winter's day, stood three weathered figures against whom the tugging winds were as proper as their beards or garbs; two horses at their hind.

"The scrivener and the smith!" said Gaba at once, raising his arms, and approaching those that awaited the travellers in the entry court. He embraced the friends of the king, one after the other. Some folk had gathered above again, on the stoops of the public houses that looked into the stabled tier. Behind Gaba, Authæn led in their horses, and found a place for them to be tethered. He went to work, unsaddling them, laying blankets over them, to ward away the biting chill. Then he also went to where the Forge-bear was prodding the gnome with his hammer.

"And what do you know of artful craft, you ugly little wretch!" said the blacksmith, laughing. "If you had half a mind for art your face would be dressed daily with a mask."

"Oh, dearest, friendliest of fools," said the gron, barely any passion to his tone. He sounded as though he were speaking to an irritating child. "If you knew ought of artful craft you'd be careful with that hammer. I must admit you have a pretty face, but I can rearrange it until it looks even worse than mine. The journey to beauty from ugliness is a long one, and those that walk it have learned the lessons of beauty that the natural-born beauties could never know. Should I teach you them?"

"Oh," uttered the Forge-bear, standing up straight. "I take my words, as hard as they were, and I shall put them in my pocket for one less witty."

"May they burn a hole there," said the gron. Gaba chuckled, and said, "I would have thought you to have learned your lesson by now, Forge-bear, insulting strangers at the gate like a fatherless street-wight looking for a beating."

"Oh, my black brother," said the blacksmith, "it is our way to test everything that meets us like the forge tests metal."

"Then I say as well, let your words burn a hole in your pocket," said Gaba.

"To you I am almost willing to listen, Master Gaba" said the Forge-bear. "For all your gentle manners, you have the mettle to break the helm of the Ibex. That is a frightful feat! But where is the twig with which you did it?"

"It is no more," said the southerner sadly. "It could not be helped."

"Well, if it could not be otherwise, then we shall have to find a new stick for you to scold children with, my friend," said the Forge-bear. "As they say: 'It is better to light a fire, than curse the dark'."

"I like that saying," said Authæn.

"My, you should follow this thick-skulled block of iron around, weird-eye; write down his profound wisdoms," said the gnome bitterly.

"I already serve that purpose to what degree it is needed, little fellow," said the scrivener. "And I am quite willing to retain it by blade."

"No need, I have no desire to become a chronicler. We are here to speak to your king, masters. We have come to return something that belonged to his daughter." As Authæn said this, he brought forth the manifold blade of Ystrith, and the eyes of the scrivener and the smith waxed with surprise.

"What have you done, Master Gaba!" cried the Forge-bear in sudden dismay.

"We only found it lying in new snows in the wood, Forge-bear," said Gaba. "We would not have taken it from the girl, and were we to have tried we may not have ended up standing before you, from what young Authæn has told me regarding her violence."

"That is a welcome relief, and yet… Do you always send dark elves to deliver the fruits of your great deeds, Master Gaba?" asked the Forge-bear then.

The southerner laughed, shaking his head. "No, Forge-bear. These river-folk, and particularly this river-man before you, have carried me on their shoulders as I travelled the east. Every step that I have taken forward was as though they led me blind by the hand. I have trusted them, and they have not betrayed me. That speaks more of their mercy, and of my folly, than it does of any great works I may have accidentally stumbled over in my blind tapping."

"Yes, the river-people that travelled with my company are also a greatly venerable people," said the Lion Pen-tooth, looking carefully at Authæn through his shadowed eyeglasses.

"Some of my people are here in the city?" asked Authæn, and he now recognised the wagons of his village, docked alongside the stables. "Those are the wagons of Thænim!" said he.

Said the scrivener: "Then it is as I thought. You are the lost shepherd of your people. They have hoped for your arrival ardently, Authæn son of Thuineith. They will rejoice at your coming. As will our king, now that he can speak with one who

answers properly for his kin. We are in need of as many violent hands as we can get. A shame that those of young Ystrith are not here to share in the glorious doom that awaits us. The heralds of war are soon to blow their horn, and a great shadow is soon to benight us."

A Bird in Bishopswood

By John Tickhill

In a sesone of somere þat souerayne ys of alle,
Þat was þe myry monþ of May when many myrthys spryng,
Þe sonne ys somnore and syre and sendyth tyl vs doun,
And byddyth vs bisy for to be oure bodys for to glade;
Man for to myrth hym in al maner wys,
Bestys for to buske ham on bentys tyl abyde,
Bryddys in buschys bysy ham with songys,
Flourys for to florych and flauour ȝyf about,
Grys for to grow grene and glade mennys hartys;
Þus ech creature comfort hym caght,
And laxt lust for to lyf in likyng of somer.
And I had lenyd me long al a Lentyn tyme
In vnlust of my lyf and lost al my joye;
And þen I heuyd vp myn hert and myn hede aftyr
And welk forth to þe wodys as oþer wyes dydene,
Al vnpouruayd of play þat pryuete askyth.
And as I welk þus and wandryd, wery of myself,
I abode vndyr a busch at Byschopys Woode
For to se þe fayr fo[wly]s ech with his felaw play.
And as I sat in my solas and alle þes syghtys sawe,
A bryd bode on a bough, fast me besyde,
Þe fayrest fowyl of fethyrs þat I had say beforne;
Fyguryd in feturys fourmyd so clene
Þat sche nad lyme ne lyth þat lakke myȝt hafe;
Sade in al semblant, sayd bot a lytyl,
Naythyr chauntyd ne chatryd bot cheryd herself,
And naythyr fluschyd ne frayd as oþer fowlys dydyne,
Bot euer stode in a stody as sche astonyd were.
And as hyt semyd to my syght by semblant sche made
Þat sche myssyd a make myrth for to mak here.
Þen was I ferd of þis fowle þat I affray her schuld
ȝyf I bowyd to þe bowgh þe bryd sat vpon,
And I was wo and euer waytyd when sche away wold flye,
For sche had wengys at her wylle and wantyd neuer a fethyr
And I vnlyght of my lymys and lyme had I none
Ne couth noght cheuysch me with charmys ne chauntyng of bryddys.
And thus I buskyd fro þis bryd and hyt abode stylle,
And þorg no spech þat I spak aspyed sche me noght;
And euer I wischyd in my wyl þat I her weld myȝt,
For to kepyn in my cage tyl wynter comyn were,
Þat sche were wery of þat wedyr and wold abyd somer.

The Minor Canon

By Anonymous

Self-Portrait with Hand by his face. Oskar Kokoschka

It was Monday, and in the afternoon, as I was walking along the High Street of Marchbury, I was met by a distinguished-looking person whom I had observed at the services in the cathedral on the previous day. Now it chanced on that Sunday that I was singing the service. Properly speaking, it was not my turn; but, as my brother minor canons were either away from Marchbury or ill in bed, I was the only one left to perform the necessary duty. The distinguished-looking person was a tall, big man with a round fat face and small features. His eyes, his hair and mustache (his face was bare but for a small mustache) were quite black, and he had a very pleasant and genial expression. He wore a tall hat, set rather jauntily on his head, and he was dressed in black with a long frock coat buttoned across the chest and fitting him close to the body. As he came, with a half saunter, half swagger, along the street, I knew him again at once by his appearance; and, as he came nearer, I saw from his manner that he was intending to stop and speak to me, for he slightly raised his hat and in a soft, melodious voice with a colonial "twang" which was far from being disagreeable, and which, indeed, to my ear gave a certain additional interest to his remarks, he saluted me with "Good day, sir!"

"Good day," I answered, with just a little reserve in my tone.

"I hope, sir," he began, "you will excuse my stopping you in the street, but I wish to tell you how very much I enjoyed the music at your cathedral yesterday. I am an Australian, sir, and we have no such music in my country."

"I suppose not," I said.

"No, sir," he went on, "nothing nearly so fine. I am very fond of music, and as my business brought me in this direction, I thought I would stop at your city and take the opportunity of paying a visit to your grand cathedral. And I am delighted I came; so pleased, indeed, that I should like to leave some memorial of my visit behind me. I should like, sir, to do something for your choir."

"I am sure it is very kind of you," I replied.

"Yes, I should certainly be glad if you could suggest to me something I might do in this way. As regards money, I may say that I have plenty of it. I am the owner of a most valuable property. My business relations extend throughout the world, and if I am as fortunate in the projects of the future as I have been in the past, I shall probably one day achieve the proud position of being the richest man in the world."

I did not like to undertake myself the responsibility of advising or suggesting, so I simply said:

"I cannot venture to say, offhand, what would be the most acceptable way of showing your great kindness and generosity, but I should certainly recommend you to put yourself in communication with the dean."

"Thank you, sir," said my Australian friend, "I will do so. And now, sir," he continued, "let me say how much I admire your voice. It is, without exception, the very finest and clearest voice I have ever heard."

"Really," I answered, quite overcome with such unqualified praise, "really it is very good of you to say so."

"Ah, but I feel it, my dear sir. I have been round the world, from Sydney to Frisco, across the continent of America" (he called it Amerrker) "to New York City, then on to England, and to-morrow I shall leave your city to continue my travels. But in all my experience I have never heard so grand a voice as your own." This and a great deal more he said in the same strain, which modesty forbids me to reproduce.

Now I am not without some knowledge of the world outside the close of Marchbury Cathedral, and I could not listen to such a "flattering tale" without having my suspicions aroused. Who and what is this man? thought I. I looked at him narrowly. At first the thought flashed across me that he might be a "swell mobsman." But no, his face was too good for that; besides, no man with that huge frame, that personality so marked and so easily recognizable, could be a swindler; he could not escape detection a single hour. I dismissed the ungenerous thought. Perhaps he is rich, as he says. We do hear of munificent donations by benevolent millionaires now and then. What if this Australian, attracted by the glories of the old cathedral, should now appear as a deus ex machina to reëndow the choir, or to found a musical professoriate in connection with the choir, appointing me the first occupant of the professorial chair?

These thoughts flashed across my mind in the momentary pause of his fluent tongue.

"As for yourself, sir," he began again, "I have something to propose which I trust may not prove unwelcome. But the public street is hardly a suitable place to discuss my proposal. May I call upon you this evening at your house in the close? I know which it is, for I happened to see you go into it yesterday after the morning service."

"I shall be very pleased to see you," I replied. "We are going out to dinner this evening, but I shall be at home and disengaged till about seven."

"Thank you very much. Then I shall do myself the pleasure of calling upon you about six o'clock. Till then, farewell!" A graceful wave of the hand, and my unknown friend had disappeared round the corner of the street.

Now at last, I thought, something is going to happen in my uneventful life—something to break the monotony of existence. Of course, he must have inquired my name—he could get that from any of the cathedral vergers—and, as he said, he had observed whereabouts in the close I lived. What is he coming to see me for? I wondered. I spent the rest of the afternoon in making the wildest surmises. I was castle-building in Spain at a furious rate. At one time I imagined that this faithful son of the church—as he appeared to me—was going to build and endow a grand cathedral in Australia on condition that I should be appointed dean at a yearly stipend of, say, ten thousand pounds. Or perhaps, I said to myself, he will beg me to accept a sum of money—I never thought of it as less than a thousand pounds—as a slight recognition of and tribute to my remarkable vocal ability. I took a long, lonely walk into the country to correct these ridiculous fancies and to steady my mind, and when I reached home and had refreshed myself with a quiet cup of afternoon tea, I felt I was morally and physically prepared for my interview with the opulent stranger.

Punctually as the cathedral clock struck six there was a ring at the visitor's bell. In a moment or two my unknown friend was shown into the drawing-room, which he entered with the easy air of a man of the world. I noticed he was carrying a small black bag.

"How do you do again, Mr. Dale?" he said as though we were old acquaintances; "you see I have come sharp to my time."

"Yes," I answered, "and I am pleased to see you; do sit down." He sank into my best armchair, and placed his bag on the floor beside him.

"Since we met in the afternoon," he said, "I have written a letter to your dean, expressing the great pleasure I felt in listening to your choir, and at the same time I inclosed a five-pound note, which I begged him to divide among the choir boys and men, from Alexander Poulter, Esq., of Poulter's Pills. You have of course heard of the world-renowned Poulter's Pills. I am Poulter!" Poulter of Poulter's Pills! My heart sank within me! A five-pound note! My airy castles were tottering!

"I also sent him a couple of hundred of my pamphlets, which I said I trusted he would be so kind as to distribute in the close." I was aghast!

"And now, with regard to the special object of my call, Mr. Dale. If you will allow me to say so, you are not making the most of that grand voice of yours; you are hidden under an ecclesiastical bushel here—lost to the world. You are wasting your vocal strength and sweetness on the desert air, so to speak. Why, if I may hazard a guess, I don't suppose you make five hundred a year here, at the outside?"

I could say nothing.

"Well, now, I can put you into the way of making at least three or four times as much as that. Listen! I am Alexander Poulter, of Poulter's Pills. I have a proposal to make to you. The scheme is bound to succeed, but I want your help. Accept my proposal and your fortune's made. Did you ever hear Moody and Sankey?" he asked abruptly.

The man is an idiot, thought I; he is now fairly carried away with his particular mania. Will it last long? Shall I ring?

"Novelty, my dear sir," he went on, "is the rule of the day; and there must be novelty in advertising, as in everything else, to catch the public interest. So I intend to go on a tour, lecturing on the merits of Poulter's Pills in all the principal halls of all the principal towns all over the world. But I have been delayed in carrying out my idea till I could associate myself with a gentleman such as yourself. Will you join me? I should be the Moody of the tour; you would be its Sankey. I would speak my patter, and you would intersperse my orations with melodious ballads bearing upon the virtues of Poulter's Pills. The ballads are all ready!"

So saying, he opened that bag and drew forth from its recesses nothing more alarming than a thick roll of manuscript music. "The verses are my own," he said, with a little touch of pride; "and as for the music, I thought it better to make use of popular

melodies, so as to enable an audience to join in the chorus. See, here is one of the ballads: 'Darling, I am better now.' It describes the woes of a fond lover, or rather his physical ailments, until he went through a course of Poulter. Here's another: 'I'm ninety-five! I'm ninety-five!' You catch the drift of that, of course—a healthy old age, secured by taking Poulter's Pills. Ah! what's this? 'Little sister's last request.' I fancy the idea of that is to beg the family never to be without Poulter's Pills. Here again: 'Then you'll remember me!' I'm afraid that title is not original; never mind, the song is. And here is—but there are many more, and I won't detain you with them now." He saw, perhaps, I was getting impatient. Thank Heaven, however, he was no escaped lunatic. I was safe!

"Mr. Poulter," said I, "I took you this afternoon for a disinterested and philanthropic millionaire; you take me for—for—something different from what I am. We have both made mistakes. In a word, it is impossible for me to accept your offer!"

"Is that final?" asked Poulter.

"Certainly," said I.

Poulter gathered his manuscripts together and replaced them in the bag, and got up to leave the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Dale," he said mournfully, as I opened the door of the room. "Good evening"—he kept on talking till he was fairly out of the house—"mark my words, you'll be sorry—very sorry—one day that you did not fall in with my scheme. Offers like mine don't come every day, and you will one day regret having refused it."

With these words he left the house.

I had little appetite for my dinner that evening.

Psalm 102

By Mary Sidney Herbert Countess of Pembroke

O Lord, my praying hear;
Lord, let my cry come to thine ear.
Hide not thy face away,
But haste, and answer me,
In this my most, most miserable day,
Wherein I pray and cry to thee.

My days as smoke are past;
My bones as flaming fuel waste,
Mown down in me, alas.
With scythe of sharpest pain.
My heart is withered like the wounded grass;
My stomach doth all food disdain.

So lean my woes me leave,
That to my flesh my bones do cleave;
And so I bray and howl,
As use to howl and bray
The lonely pelican and desert owl,
Like whom I languish long the day.

I languish so the day,
The night in watch I waste away;
Right as the sparrow sits,
Bereft of spouse, or son,
Which irked alone with dolor's deadly fits
To company will not be won.

As day to day succeeds,
So shame on shame to me proceeds
From them that do me hate,
Who of my wrack so boast,
That wishing ill, they wish but my estate,
Yet think they wish of ills the most.

Therefore my bread is clay;
Therefore my tears my wine allay.
For how else should it be,
Sith thou still angry art,
And seem'st for naught to have advanced me,
But me advanced to subvert?

The sun of my life-days
Inclines to west with falling rays,
And I as hay am dried,
While yet in steadfast seat
Eternal thou eternally dost bide,
Thy memory no years can fret.

Oh, then at length arise;
On Zion cast thy mercy's eyes.
Now is the time that thou
To mercy shouldst incline
Concerning her: O Lord, the time is now
Thyself for mercy didst assign.

Thy servants wait the day
When she, who like a carcass lay
Stretched forth in ruin's bier,
Shall so arise and live,
The nations all Jehova's name shall fear,
All kings to thee shall glory give.

Because thou hast anew
Made Zion stand, restored to view
Thy glorious presence there,
Because thou hast, I say,
Beheld our woes and not refused to hear
What wretched we did plaining pray,

This of record shall bide
To this and every age beside.
And they commend thee shall
Whom thou anew shall make,
That from the prospect of thy heav'nly hall
Thy eye of earth survey did take,

Heark'ning to prisoners' groans,
And setting free condemned ones,
That they, when nations come,
And realms to serve the Lord,
In Zion and in Salem might become
Fit means his honor to record.

But what is this if I
In the mid way should fall and die?
My God, to thee I pray,
Who canst my prayer give.
Turn not to night the noontide of my day,
Since endless thou dost ageless live.

The earth, the heaven stands
Once founded, formed by thy hands:
They perish, thou shalt bide;
They old, as clothes shall wear,
Till changing still, full change shall them betide,
Unclothed of all the clothes they bear.

But thou art one, still one:
Time interest in thee hath none.
Then hope, who godly be,
Or come of godly race:
Endless your bliss, as never ending he,
His presence your unchanged place.

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Love is enough: though the World be a-waning,
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark wonder
And this day draw a veil over all deeds pass'd over,
Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not falter;
The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter
These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.

From Love is Enough by William Morris