Medieval Answers to Modern Problems

Second Edition

Edited by Albrecht Classen
University of Arizona
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## Dateline for the Middle Ages

By Albrecht Classen

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<td>14th–15th c.</td>
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Until the fifth century A.D., much of western Europe lay within the Roman Empire, a vast collection of territories including parts of the Middle East and North Africa. In Europe itself during the centuries of Roman rule, much of the native Celtic population had become highly Romanized in its culture, political allegiance, and legal practices. In the last few centuries of the Roman Empire, the Germanic tribes that had long lived on the eastern fringes of the European provinces moved into the Romanized lands in large numbers. This wave of “barbarian” invasions, along with severe political and economic problems, gradually killed off the Roman Empire, which was replaced by a number of Germanic successor kingdoms, including those of the Franks in Gaul (modern France), the Visigoths in Spain, the Ostrogoths in Italy, the Burgundians in and around what is now Switzerland, and the Anglo-Saxons in England.

The Germanic tribes brought with them a very different society from that of Rome. Whereas Roman civilization was highly urbanized, for example, the Germans had until then seldom settled even in villages. The Romans had a long history of written legislation; the Germans used a system of customary law that had not yet been written down. Different practices regarding marriage and family can be seen in the extracts from Roman and Germanic law in this book. Centuries of contact between the Germans and the empire, however, had wrought changes on both sides, and now, as the Germans settled in what had long been Roman territory, further mingling of the two cultures occurred. The Germanic kingdoms that were established inside the old boundaries of the now defunct empire were by no means entirely Germanic in their ethnic makeup or their culture.

Even more influential than Roman tradition in this process of change was the religion of the late Roman Empire. Christianity had originated in Palestine, where a small group of Jews believed that the Jewish carpenter Jesus, who had been executed by the Roman authorities early in the first century A.D., was the “Christ,” the son of God and savior of humanity. Although Christians were persecuted at first by both the Jewish religious...
authorities and the Roman government, their religion survived and spread. In the year 313 it achieved official
sanction from the Roman emperor Constantine, and in the late fourth century it became the official religion of
the empire. The cultural initiative of the late Roman Empire passed from pagan writers to Christian theologians
such as St. Jerome and St. Augustine of Hippo, who explored the details of Christian belief and laid the
foundation for church law. It was the Christian church, too, which filled the vacuum in leadership during the
fifth century, as the Roman world faced widespread military, political, and economic crises and the Roman
government crumbled. Bishops began to provide the services for which the government had once been re-
sponsible; in particular, the bishop of Rome came to assume a prominent role in Italy, so much so that as the
pope he was eventually recognized as the leader of the church throughout the western Mediterranean regions.
Clergymen and monks also preserved what ancient learning survived the fall of the Roman Empire in the west,
and throughout most of the Middle Ages the church maintained a near monopoly on literacy and education.

The period from the fifth century to the eleventh is oft en designated the “Early Middle Ages.” This is the
time sometimes known as the “Dark Ages” in part because of the collapse of Roman civilization, with the loss
of much classical knowledge, but also because relatively few historical sources remain to tell us of the events
of these years. The documents that do survive include the laws which the Germanic kings were by now having
written down and the works of historians such as Gregory of Tours. Much of the essential character of medieval
Europe was already apparent in this early period, especially in religious matters. Monasteries and convents, for
example, came to play a key role in economic and cultural life, and many noble families dedicated sons and
daughters to the religious life, in which they lived according to a monastic “rule,” such as that of Benedict of
Nursia and Caesarius of Arles. Women were encouraged to be nuns, but their other options in the church—
serving as deaconesses or in partnership with husbands who were priests—were closed off by the decisions of
church councils. These councils established “canon law” or church law, which regulated the lives of members of
the clergy and many aspects of private life for lay people. For most of the laity, canon law was enforced by the
local priest, who heard one’s confession regularly and assigned penance for one’s sins. Thus the church gradually
succeeded in imposing on secular society its standards of behavior in areas such as marriage.

The political face of early medieval Europe was dominated by the Franks, and in the eighth century the
Frankish kingdom under Charlemagne (768–814 A.D.) and his descendants conquered and ruled many
neighboring kingdoms. The resulting Carolingian Empire included much of what is now France, Germany,
and Italy. Among their other activities, the emperors promulgated new rules for the administration of the empire
and their own estates, some of which survive to inform us about everyday life in Carolingian Europe. In this new
realm, cultural energy reached a height unknown since the days of Roman power. The rich intellectual life of
the royal court produced many of the written works of the period, but relatively isolated individuals, such as the
noblewoman Dhuoda, who lived in the pre-Carolingian time of the Merovingians, could also be well educated.

While the Carolingian Empire flourished, however, the west was beginning to suffer invasions by three new
groups: the Scandinavian Vikings, the North African Muslim Saracens, and the Asian Magyars. Under these
onslaughts and other stresses in the ninth and tenth centuries, imperial government once again collapsed, and
Europe entered another period of political fragmentation. This time, the surviving political units were small kingdoms, duchies, and counties, ruled by local nobles who could offer some degree of protection to their followers. The bond between a lord and each his followers, or vassals, became an important one in many parts of western Europe during these years. Noblemen put themselves under the lordship of more powerful men who could grant them estates called “fiefs” (from the Latin feudum) in return for loyalty and military service. Such feudal relationships dominated many aspects of life for the ruling classes in the centuries to follow.

The period from the eleventh century through the thirteenth is often called the “High Middle Ages.” Underlying much of the history of these years was a widespread economic revival in Europe, which had begun long before the eleventh century in some parts of the continent and continued throughout the High Middle Ages in others. New technology (new plow, field rotation, water mill, etc.), a slightly improved climate and expanding frontiers gradually raised the standard of living and produced surpluses which formed the basis for a commercial boom. Towns flourished as centers of trade, and the town-dwelling population, which made its living in trade and industry, grew. The use of money as a medium of exchange increased, along with banking and written record-keeping. Townspeople organized themselves into guilds: the merchant guild, which often served as a sort of town government, included only the wealthiest citizens, while each industry had its own craft guild, which set standards and regulated the industry and to which all practitioners of that trade belonged. Towns were often able to use their wealth to buy a certain amount of independence from their lords.

Christianity in the High Middle Ages was characterized by an increasing variety of activities and outlooks. In the eleventh century the church struggled overtly with secular authorities for ecclesiastical power and independence, and in the twelfth century canon lawyers like Gratian codified church policy and reasserted its pre-eminence in many areas of life. In 1095, the increasingly militant church launched the first of the Crusades, papally sanctioned holy wars against the Muslims of the Holy Land and Spain and against heretics in Europe. The Crusades would last through the thirteenth century (1291), and one of their unintended effects was the widespread persecution of the Jewish minority in Europe. Another characteristic of high medieval religion was dissatisfaction with the wealth, worldliness, and soft living that critics perceived in many monasteries and convents. New “reform” orders of monks—and less often of nuns—were founded in the late eleventh century, only to become so worldly themselves that a new wave of reform was called for in the early thirteenth century. From this second wave came the Dominican and Franciscan orders, including the Poor Clares. Large numbers of Christians also turned to less formal religious movements, such as that of the Beguines and their male counterparts, the Beghards. Mysticism, the direct communication of the soul with God, was practiced by such respected individuals as Hildegard of Bingen and St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Some groups, such as the Waldensians, found that their spiritual enthusiasm led them into beliefs and practices condemned by the church; and this upsurge in heresy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries caused the church to found the Inquisition to deal with Christians who had strayed from the fold.

Many of these religious developments centered on towns and cities, and so too did the new forms of higher education. The cathedral schools of the twelfth century and the universities of the thirteenth century were urban institutions. While women participated fully in the religious revival of these years, they were excluded from formal higher education once the university became the standard seat of learning. The universities also guarded their monopoly on certain fields, such as medicine, carefully. In other spheres of culture, however, noblewomen played a prominent role, serving as patrons and producers of music and poetry and shaping the codes of chivalry and courtly love, which softened the hard-working and unromantic lives of the nobility.
Medieval writers commonly divided the members of society into three estates or “orders”: those who fought, those who prayed, and those who worked. While the estates were often described in terms of men only, in reality women belonged to or were attached to each of them.

The “fighters” were the knights or noblemen, whose wealth, power, and status derived from their lands; for this reason, they were willing to swear allegiance to the lords who gave them fiefs and let their heirs inherit these. The women of this estate did not normally fight, but they shared in the other jobs of the nobility, running households and estates; and the concern with land shaped every noblewoman’s life in fundamental ways, such as the choice of a husband.

The praying estate consisted of the clergy and the monastic community, and while women were excluded from the former, they made up a sizeable and often active portion of the latter. The third estate, the workers, did not mean everyone who worked—for virtually everyone, including nobles, monks, and nuns, did work in medieval society—but those whose position in society was defined by their manual labor: artisans, servants, and the peasantry. Artisans might work for themselves or as employees; servants worked for employers or their lords. Peasants worked the land, raising their own food and supporting their lords. There were many degrees of social status within the working estate, even among the peasantry. Some peasants were free, but most were serfs or villeins, who were not slaves but were legally bound to the land and required to perform certain work for their lords. Serfs might hope to achieve freedom through manumission or by running away to a town, where the law often granted them freedom if they remained for a set length of time, often a year and a day. Women participated fully in the working life in industry, domestic service, and agriculture.

Many aspects of life, culture, and institutions were similar across medieval Europe, but there were also important differences from region to region, in agricultural and industrial products, in political and social organization, and in the ethnic and religious makeup of the population. The towns of Italy, for example, tended to be freer of outside control than were most European towns, and some of them specialized in Mediterranean trade, which brought eastern luxury goods to the west. The Iberian Peninsula comprised Muslim territories in the south along with a number of small Christian principalities in the north, and the warfare between them was a major factor in shaping Spanish society. At the same time, Germans were pushing eastward into the lands of the pagan Slavs, bringing new lands into cultivation, on which grain was grown for much of Europe and which drew surplus peasants eastward as settlers. The German king also claimed the prestigious title of Holy Roman Emperor and lands stretching as far south as central Italy; yet the real power in Germany usually lay with the territorial princes and the bishops, and few emperors were able to assert control in Italy. The kings of France, on the other hand, steadily enlarged their territories and their control over their vassals, forming alliances with rich towns and with the church. Wine was already one of the major products of the thriving French economy, and a new market for French wine was one of the results when a Norman French duke, William the Conqueror, conquered the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of England in 1066 and replaced the old Anglo-Saxon nobility there with French noble families. England’s greatest export was raw wool, large amounts of which were sold to the towns of Flanders, a particularly important center for cloth making on the northern French coast. Medieval merchants visited fairs across the continent, and while the vast majority of Europeans probably never traveled far from the place of their birth, pilgrims, scholars, and soldiers also helped to spread goods, news, and ideas.

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, known as the Later Middle Ages, are best known for the traumas they brought. Population growth had already begun to slow in the early fourteenth century, before the Black Death, or bubonic plague, killed between a quarter and a third of the entire population of Europe in 1347–49
or even 1351. For the next few centuries, this terrifying disease would continue to break out periodically. The initial plague left behind a land surplus and a severe labor shortage, which enabled peasants and workers to win improved legal status, pay, and conditions; their lords and employers then attempted to limit such gains through laws controlling wages and prices. Meanwhile, England and France engaged in a long series of wars known collectively as the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), which battered the French countryside and left England in political disarray. Yet this period of upheaval was also the backdrop to a great deal of cultural activity, such as the period in which Christine de Pizan participated at the French royal court and the literary and artistic developments in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy, which are known today as the Renaissance (Petrarch and Boccaccio).

The modern reader may encounter certain difficulties in reading medieval texts. For example, there are strong religious elements and ecclesiastical biases in many of the documents here, which may be alien or frustrating to the reader familiar with a more secular society. This is in part because medieval Europe was indeed a highly religious civilization, and the modern reader must therefore resist the urge to dismiss the true religious feelings and important religious motivations of the men and women who appear in these sources. Miracles and religious visions were accepted as real by many or most people. The church itself was an integral part of the power structure, controlling vast wealth and wielding great political influence and judicial power. Religious differences even defined marginal and persecuted groups within society (Jews, Muslims, and heretics). The church’s views played a large part in shaping secular laws and social norms, and sex roles and gender constructs are perhaps the areas in which this is most obvious. On the other hand, the religious viewpoint of the sources can sometimes distort our view of even religious subjects. Much of the written material that survives from the Middle Ages was written by churchmen, but this does not mean that churchmen spoke for everyone.

Similarly, the reader should be aware that medieval standards of truth, originality, and accuracy were not the same as ours. Supernatural explanations of events were more widely accepted than they are today. Authors of literature and history borrowed freely from other works, and the boundaries between myth, story, and history were not clear ones. But medieval thinkers were also keenly aware of mathematical precision, arithmetic, medical research, geometry, philosophical logic, etc. They were different from us, but in many ways still the same. We encounter the phenomenon of alterity—difference within the framework of similarity.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS TEXT, BY ALBRECHT CLASSEN

Considering the end of the Middle Ages, we face similarly difficult issues with identifying a clear historical limit, since the transition from one period to another cannot be easily determined. Whereas older research tended to conceive of a sharp divide between the Middle Ages and the (Italian) Renaissance, most modern scholars assume that we are dealing with a long transitional period which ultimately led to the establishment of the early modern world. There are many ways to identify the beginning of the Renaissance, whether with the discovery of the individual (Jules Michelet, Renaissance, 1855; Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, 1860), or with the emergence of a new style of painting, based on the principle of the central perspective and realism, or with the rediscovery of the classical world of antiquity, or with the development of Neoplatonism. Our critical examination of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century arts, literature, philosophy, music, religion, and architecture has, however, shattered this conviction of an absolutely innovative paradigm shift. Certainly, the Gothic style was replaced by the Renaissance style, and scholars and poets such as Petrarch, Boccaccio, and
Poggio Bracciolini rediscovered the language and literature of ancient Rome once again, but they were not the first ones to do so, and they were also not necessarily embracing an entirely different intellectual approach. In fact, both in the eighth and in the twelfth century a renewed interest in the philosophers and poets from antiquity had already triggered strong revivalism in the schools, in the administrations, at the courts, and within the Church. In other words, Petrarch and Boccaccio had significant forerunners, such as Alcuin at the court of Charlemagne (eighth century), and, about three hundred fifty years later, Peter Abelard, John of Salisbury, and Bernard of Clairvaux (twelfth century). It makes perfect sense to talk about the “Eighth-Century Renaissance” and the “Twelfth-Century Renaissance” as equally powerful periods of innovation and invigoration compared with the “Italian Renaissance.”

Scholars have oft en referred to the emergence of the early-modern city life with its money-based economy as a significant indication of the end of the Middle Age, but the ancient Roman cities had never fully ceased to exist throughout the centuries, and many of the major urban centers that dominated the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had been founded between the tenth and the twelfth century by the Vikings in the West, by French, Dutch, German, and Italian lords in the western and southern parts of the continent, and by the Slavic lords in the eastern parts. The rise of the class of burghers throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries did not necessarily imply a decline of the aristocracy, rather required them to adapt to a new way of life for their own survival. By the same token, we know of many wealthy bankers who quickly tried to imitate aristocracy, purchasing castles and adopting courtly manners. Many late-medieval cities organized knightly tournaments for their own entertainment, and the early-modern book market saw a strong interest in chapbooks with chivalric themes and heroes. Inversely, the development of a strongly capitalistic society can be traced back at least to the twelfth and thirteenth century when the Anglo-Norman poet Marie de France and the German poets Walther von der Vogelweide and Boppe clearly addressed the relevance of money as the foundation of a comfortable lifestyle irrespective of the personal standing within one specific class. We ought not to forget that even in military, or technological, terms, knighthood increasingly faced severe challenges, first by the establishment of English and Swiss armies of foot soldiers equipped with the longbow, the Swiss pike, the crossbow, and eventually, by the end of the fourteenth century, with early types of firearms. Gunpowder, allegedly invented around 1300 by the German monk Berthold Schwarz of Freiberg, or by the English scholar and scientist Francis Bacon (1214–1292)—if it was not imported by traders from China or Persia—ultimately doomed medieval knighthood, though the ideals of chivalry and the strict separation of estates—clergy, aristocracy, and common people—did not disappear until the nineteenth century. This also led to the rise of the early modern nation, or statehood, especially England, Spain, and France.

Several other monumental events lend themselves for the identification of the end of the Middle Ages. In 1453 the ancient city Constantinople was conquered by the Ottoman Turks, and with the fall of this city the end of the Eastern Roman Empire had arrived. Large numbers of Greek scholars, poets, and other intellectuals sought refuge in the West, primarily in Italy, where they introduced the knowledge of Greek. At first, the fall of Constantinople did not effect a tremendous change, but militarily the Turks had breached the final defense barrier against Europe and soon after began their constant onslaught against the Balkans, Hungary, and eventually Austria. This was to put the European powers, including Venice and Genoa, under tremendous pressure until they finally gained the upper hand in the early seventeenth century. On a different level, the introduction of Greek in Europe made it possible for many intellectuals to gain personal knowledge of the ancient sources of philosophy and religion in their original language. The refugees from Constantinople, however, were not the first Greek teachers in Europe. The conquest of Constantinople in 1204 in the course of the Fourth Crusade
had destroyed the old power structures there and opened, despite the cruel destruction of the city, the contacts between the Latin West and the Greek East. Many Greek manuscripts arrived in the West, along with such magnificent teachers as Manuel Chrysoloras, who assumed his assignment in Florence in 1397, and George of Trebizond, who began teaching Greek in Mantua in 1420.

The development of humanism, supported by intellectuals such as Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465–1536), made available the world of ancient Greek antiquity and slowly transformed the entire medieval world view. Martin Luther, for example, learned Greek and was thus able to translate the New Testament from the sources (ad fontes) in 1522, laying the textual foundation for the Protestant Reformation. Nevertheless, we should not forget that during the early twelfth century many texts by ancient Greek philosophers, medical experts, and scientists, which had been only preserved in Arabic translations, became known in Europe first through Hebrew then through Latin translations, most of them produced at the universities of Salerno (near Naples) and Toledo (Spain).

When Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press (movable type) in Mainz, Germany, ca. 1450, this did not immediately lead to a profound paradigm shift. In fact, for decades the traditional manuscript culture continued to dominate the book markets, whereas the early prints—incunabula (until ca. 1500)—remained very expensive and were used to reproduce the biblical texts. Beginning with the early sixteenth century, however, the print media gained the upper hand and ushered in a revolution in public communication, information transfer, data storage, and intellectual discourse. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to identify this transformation as a quick and absolute victory. On the contrary, the manuscript remained a strong element far into the sixteenth century, whereas the print culture did not replace the medieval tradition until the 1520s and 1530s.

Even the Protestant Reformation was not the absolute death knell to the Middle Ages. Martin Luther did not intend at all to destroy the Catholic Church when he allegedly nailed his ninety-five theses on the church door at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. On the contrary, the Church had been severely criticized by clerics such as the British John Wyclif (1328–1384) and the Czech John Hus (1369–1415), not to mention scores of other theologians throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Before that, the Albigensians, or Cathars, in Southern France and elsewhere, who were crushed in two crusades in 1209 and 1213, and the Waldensians in Eastern France, Southern Germany, and Western Switzerland, who were excommunicated in 1184 but later readmitted into the Church under strict regulations, had radically criticized the Catholic theology and Church practice. Luther in turn attempted to introduce reforms of a church that suffered from serious moral and ethical decline. Anti-clericalism had been rampant throughout the late Middle Ages, especially since the French Pope Clement V (1305–1314) had established himself in Avignon in 1309, the beginning of the so-called “Babylonian Captivity.” The subsequent six popes also stayed there because of political unrest in Italy and because they yielded to the pressure of the French kings. The time of Avignon came to an end in 1377 when Pope Gregory XI (1370–1378) finally returned the Holy See to Rome. Simony, a common practice in the late-medieval church to sell offices to the highest bidder, was furiously criticized, but mostly without any effect. Moreover, by the end of the Middle Ages the strict rule of celibacy for clerics, enforced since the early Middle Ages (eleventh century, above all, as part of the Gregorian Reform), was often broken and disregarded. Not surprisingly, late-medieval and early Renaissance literature is filled with satires and bitter attacks against lecherous priests and other clerics. Between 1387 and 1415, several popes competed against each other, each of them claiming to be the only representative of Saint Peter here on earth, until finally the German Emperor Sigismund dethroned all three and nominated Pope Martin V (1417–1431) as the true successor, thus ending the highly destructive schism within the Catholic Church. Finally, throughout the fifteenth century the common practice
of selling indulgence letters all over Europe for the redemption of one’s sins and even those of deceased family members led to excessive abuse and strongly contributed to the genesis of the Protestant Reformation. The latter seems to have been revolutionary because of its sudden and forceful development, but the general decline of the Catholic Church throughout the entire late Middle Ages led to this final point, which then rang in a new era in which at first just two, but soon many other, Christian churches emerged, all competing against each other for recognition, power, and influence. This eventually led to disastrous religious wars throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

We also must not forget the enormous widening of the geological perspective, begun with the (re-)discovery of America through Columbus in 1492. Soon, Vasco da Gama discovered the route around South Africa to reach India (1497–1499). The Bible had never even mentioned the New World, so this was a profound paradigm shift for the Europeans.

The Literary History

The literary history of medieval Europe can be generally divided into three major periods: the early Middle Ages, the high Middle Ages, and the late Middle Ages (the same applies to the history of arts and philosophy). Before courtly culture emerged in western and central Europe, Old English, Old High German, Old French, and Old Spanish poets produced predominantly heroic epics such as Beowulf (OE), the Hildebrandslied (OHG), the Waltharilied (medieval Latin), El poema di mio Cid (OS), the Chanson de Roland (OF), and, as a very late representative, the Nibelungenlied (Middle High German), which was followed by many Old Norse and Icelandic sagas and epics collected in the Edda. The common elements to them all are the heroic ideal, the fatalistic approach to life, the existential experience of the protagonists, and almost always the absence of religious concerns. Beowulf, for instance, confronts the monster Grendel and kills it. Subsequently, Grendel’s mother attacks Beowulf, but he manages to overcome her as well and kills her. At the end, probably in his old age, Beowulf fights against a dragon and slays it, but he as well succumbs in this struggle. In the Hildebrandslied, the old but war-experienced father Hildebrand is challenged by his son Hadubrand, who does not want to believe that Hildebrand is his father and who believes himself to be a Hun because of his appearance. The ensuing battle dooms them to their heroic destiny, though we are missing the conclusion because of text loss. Tragedy strikes them at any case, whether the father kills his son, or the son his father, or whether both die. Both in the Poema de Mio Cid and in the Chanson de Roland—the German poet Pfaff Konrad (Cleric Konrad) translated this as Rotandslied—the protagonists struggle primarily against Muslims (medieval sources: Saracens) and also traitors within the Christian camp. In the Njal’s Saga, the hero faces many opponents within his own community and eventually succumbs to its evil mindset, though he dies a heroic death and is glorified by the survivors. Remarkably, he struggles for a long time to avoid bloody conflicts and resorts to legal means, and yet his enemies eventually overpower him and burn him and his wife to death, along with other mighty family members. Heroic poetry, however, does not simply glorify the gory details and the existential struggle. In fact, most of the poems offer powerful messages about the consequences of failed human communication, the breakdown of a community, the loss of justice, ethical principles, and individual honor.
Mystical Literature

The high and late Middle Ages also witnessed the emergence of highly unusual but most powerful mystical literature in which religious visionaries related their spiritual experiences with the Godhead both in Latin and in the vernacular. Among the women mystics we find regular members of convents and abbesses, many beguines, and also religious individuals living in the world outside of the Church. The most important mystics were Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Elisabeth of Schönau (1129–1165), Marie d’Oignies (1177–1213), Hadewijch of Brabant (early thirteenth century), Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207–1282), St. Gertrude the Great (1241–1298), St. Clare of Assisi (1196–1253), Angela of Foligno (1248–1309), St. Bridget of Sweden (1302/03–1373), St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), Julian of Norwich (1343–1413), Margery Kempe (1373–1439). St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), Hugh (1096/1100–1141), Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), Heinrich Seuse (Henry Suso) (1295–1366), and Johannes Tauler (1300–1361). Not all of them had really mystical visions. Many worked more as intellectuals/theologians, enjoying the highest respect and influence among the male mystics, but they also deeply influenced some of the women mystics. In a way, we also would have to count St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), the founder of the Franciscans, who only wrote few texts (mostly rules for his order, *Opuscula*), but spurred a huge flood of Franciscan spiritual literature, and the Italian poet Jacopone da Todi (ca. 1236–1306) among the most significant mystical authors, though this stretches the definition of mysticism. There were also many Muslim and Jewish mystics in the wider sense of the word.

Religious literature also enjoyed tremendous popularity, both in Latin and in the various vernaculars, such as Iacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea*, or *Golden Legend* (1258–1270), consisting of 180 short lives of the saints. Many Latin authors wrote beast epics and bestiaries, hymns, biographies, hagiographies, pastoralia, debate poems, travel literature, dramas, exempla, proverbs and epigrams, and satires.

Literature of the High Middle Ages

In the wake of the crusades, and also as a consequence of the cultural contacts with the Arabic world—highly refined and sophisticated in its living conditions, scholarship, architecture, and philosophy at that time—European knighthood was familiarized with a much more advanced culture and quickly copied many of its features. At the same time, originating in the Provence, the ideas of courtly love emerged, expressed in courtly love poetry by the troubadours, who soon inspired the *trouvères* in northern France, and the minnesingers in Germany, finally followed by the Italian (and Sicilian) poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*.

From ca. 1165 onward the French poet Chrétien de Troyes, drawing from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Histories of the Kings of Britain* (ca. 1137) and Robert Wace’s *Roman de Brut* (ca. 1155), introduced the idea of King Arthur through his various courtly romances (*Erec et Enide, Cligés, Lancelot, Yvain*, and *Les Contes de Graal ou Perceval li Galois*). The Swabian poet Hartmann von Aue translated the first two romances into Middle High German, along with love poetry, a religious tale, *Gregorius*, and a love tale, *Poor Henry*, and the Bavarian poet Wolfram von Eschenbach adapted Chrétien’s *Perceval as Parzival*. The latter also composed the crusade epic *Willehalm*, beautiful dawn songs, and the fragmentary piece *Titurel*. Gottfried von Strassburg composed one of the most famous versions of the rich, European-wide tradition of the *Tristan* romance in ca. 1210, and this was followed by many other courtly romances and verse narratives written by other German, French, Italian, Spanish, and English poets.
In England, Marie de France, apart from her fables and a visionary text (Saint Patrick’s Purgatory) produced her famous amatory narratives, her lais (ca. 1170–1200). The French court chaplain Andreas Capellanus, on the basis of the classical source by Ovid, Ars amatoria, composed his highly influential treatise on love, De amore (ca. 1190). In France, at about the same time when Chrétien composed his earliest texts (ca. 1170), an anonymous poet wrote the highly influential romance Partonopeus de Blois, which was subsequently translated into many European languages, such as by Konrad von Würzburg (Partonopier und Meliur, ca. 1280).

Together, Latin and vernacular authors contributed to courtly literature all over Europe, perhaps best represented by the famous collection of religious and erotic love poems in the collections Cambridge Songs (eleventh century) and Carmina Burana (early thirteenth century). Concurrently, many poets explored the literary myth of King Alexander, and wrote monumental epics about the ancient conflict between the Saracens and Emperor Charlemagne and his Paladins, especially Roland (Chansons de gestes). Whole cycles of epic poetry were dedicated to Count William of Orange in his desperate struggles against the Saracens. Both an anonymous French author and the German poet Heinrich von Veldeke introduced the ancient topic of the Trojan Aeneas’s foundation of Rome to their audiences (Roman d’Eneas, Eneit).

Literature of the Late Middle Ages

This cannot be covered here well because of the enormous spread of new writers from that period. But we need to keep in mind, above all, Geoffrey Chaucer (d. ca. 1400), in England, Boccaccio, and Petrarch (d. 1374 and 1375 respectively) in Italy, Christine de Pizan (d. 1430) in France, Juan Ruiz (fourteenth century) in Spain), Johannes von Tepl (d. ca. 1430) in Bohemia/Germany.

Jewish History and Literature

Whereas in the early Middle Ages Jews experienced a remarkable degree of tolerance in most parts of Europe, beginning with the crusades in 1096 they increasingly faced anti-Jewish hostility, eventually leading to horrible pogroms, which finally resulted in their expulsion from England in 1291, from France in 1306, from Spain in 1492, and from Portugal in 1497. A majority of the Jews who did not accept forced conversion moved to Poland, Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire, but numerous Jewish communities remained in Germany, Italy, and neighboring territories.

Anti-Judaism grew significantly throughout the late Middle Ages because the Christians depended on Jewish financial loans and often accused their bankers of heavy usury. Religious-ideological aggression, strongly influenced by the fabricated accusations of ritual murder, provided additional ammunition against the Jews and inspired the mob.

Despite this tremendous hostility and excessive pressure exerted against the Jews, many of their Rabbis, such as Rashi in Tours (1040–1105) and Nahmanides (1194–ca. 1270), philosophers such as Ibn Gabirol (1021–1058) and Maimonides (1135–1204), exegetes, grammarians, translators, and teachers such as Joseph Kimhi (ca. 1105–ca. 1170), scholars and scientists such as Abraham bar Hija (1065–1135), travelers such as Benjamin of Tudela—who explored southern Europe, the Middle East, and China between 1153 and 1173—and lyric poets such as Jehuda Halevi (1086–1141) demonstrated that Jewish culture was a considerable force in medieval Europe. Joseph Ibn Zabara (ca. 1140–ca. 1200), for instance, composed a most remarkable
collection of tales, fables, and proverbs in his Sefer Shashuim (The Book of Delight) which shares many elements with ancient Roman and Greek and also with medieval Latin and vernacular exempla, anecdotes, and moral tales.

Although the heyday of medieval Jewish literature seems to have been the twelfth century, many other names of famous didactic, lyric, religious, and philosophical poets, and Kabbalists would have to be mentioned here, such as Shem Tob ben Joseph Ibn Falaquera (1225–1290), Yehiel of Eisenach (fl. 1235), Abraham Abulafia (1241–ca. 1292), Asher ben Yehiel (1250–1327), Immanuel ha-Romi (1265–1330), Solomon ben Meshulam da Piera (1340–1417), and Solomon ben Reuben Bonfed (1380–1450). Surprisingly, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many Jewish authors, particularly in the German-speaking lands, recreated medieval courtly themes and retold or recreated Arthurian romances, such as Gabain, Paris and Vienna, Tristan und Isolde, and Sigemunt und Magdalina.

REFERENCES


Often, and rightly so, called the “father of western education,” Boethius (ca. 480–ca. 524 or 525) was one of the most influential philosophers in late antiquity and has had a tremendous impact on the entire intellectual and cultural world of the West since then, powerfully straddling the divide between antiquity and the Middle Ages. Most famously, he composed a treatise shortly before his death, De consolatione philosophiae (On the Consolation of Philosophy), which promises to answer many of the fundamental questions humans face when they are treated unjustly, are afraid of dying, and have to deal with the quintessential unfairness of life in which the good seem to suffer and the bad seem to triumph. But Boethius also wrote many treatises on a wide range of scholarly subject matters through which he became, so to speak, the schoolmaster of the West. He laid the foundation for the artes liberales (liberal arts) through his studies of philosophy, science, music, and religion, and invented the term of quadrivium for the four-part study area comprising arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. He heavily relied on ancient Greek philosophy (Isocrates and Plato), and in his Principles of Arithmetic he drew much from Nicomachus of Gerasa’s Introduction to Arithmetic (early 2nd century C.E.). In his De institutione musica (Principles of Music, ca. 503), in part based on a treatise by Cassiodorus (ca. 490–ca. 590), on some thoughts by Vitruvius (1st c. B.C.E.) on architectural patterns and designs, and on Saint Augustine (354–430), he explored in great detail this subtle subject matter as well, providing guidelines for music that were to be followed for the next thousand years to come by theoreticians and practitioners.

In 524 Boethius was suddenly accused of state treason, and thrown into prison in Pavia (northern Italy). As far as we can tell today, his accusers had no solid ground, and only tried to undermine the political influence of this upright and sincerely concerned philosopher and advisor to the Ostrogothic King Theodoric (the Great; 454–526). Facing certain death by stoning, Boethius composed this famous treatise, De consolatione philosophiae, in order to sort his own thoughts, to regain his philosophical composure, and to provide fundamental answers to one of the most challenging questions in all of human life, why the innocent and “good” have to suffer and die an unjust and early death, while the guilty and “bad” ones triumph and live a long and seemingly good life. Very much being a Neo-Platonist, Boethius successfully developed one of the most powerful and insightful philosophical treatises ever written, which speaks to us as much as to all other medieval and early-modern readers who have consistently praised Boethius for his supreme accomplishments as a scholar and thinker.

PREFACE

The book called “The Consolation of Philosophy” was throughout the Middle Ages, and down to the beginnings of the modern epoch in the sixteenth century, the scholar’s familiar companion. Few books have exercised a wider influence in their time. It has been translated into every European tongue, and into English nearly a dozen times, from King Alfred’s paraphrase to the translations of Lord Preston, Causton, Ridpath, and Duncan, in the eighteenth century. The belief that what once pleased so widely must still have some charm is my excuse for attempting the present translation. The great work of Boethius, with its alternate prose and verse, skillfully fitted together like dialogue and chorus in a Greek play, is unique in literature, and has a pathetic interest from the time and circumstances of its composition. It ought not to be forgotten.

BOOK I

SONG I

Boethius’s Complaint

Who wrought my studious numbers Smoothly once in happier days, Now perforce in tears and sadness Learn a mournful strain to raise. Lo, the Muses, grief-dishevelled, Guide my pen and voice my woe; Down their cheeks unfeigned the tear drops To my sad complainings flow! These alone in danger’s hour Faithful found, have dared attend On the footsteps of the exile To his lonely journey’s end. These that were the pride and pleasure Of my youth and high estate Still remain the only solace Of the old man’s mournful fate.

Old? Ah yes; swift, ere I knew it, By these sorrows on me pressed Age hath come; lo, Grief hath bid me Wear the garb that fits her best. O’er my head untimely sprinkled These white hairs my woes proclaim, And the skin hangs loose and shrivelled On this sorrow-shrunken frame. Blest is death that intervenes not In the sweet, sweet years of peace, But unto the broken-hearted, When they call him, brings release! Yet Death passes by the wretched, Shuts his ear and slumbers deep; Will not heed the cry of anguish, Will not close the eyes that weep.

For, while yet inconstant Fortune Poured her gifts and all was bright, Death’s dark hour had all but whelmed me In the gloom of endless night. Now, because misfortune’s shadow Hath o’erclouded that false face, Cruel Life still halts and lingers, Though I loathe his weary race. Friends, why did ye once so lightly Vaunt me happy among men? Surely he who so hath fallen Was not firmly founded then.
I.

While I was thus mutely pondering within myself, and recording my sorrowful complainings with my pen, it seemed to me that there appeared above my head a woman of a countenance exceeding venerable. Her eyes were bright as fire, and of a more than human keenness; her complexion was lively, her vigour showed no trace of enfeeblement; and yet her years were right full, and she plainly seemed not of our age and time. Her stature was difficult to judge. At one moment it exceeded not the common height, at another her forehead seemed to strike the sky; and whenever she raised her head higher, she began to pierce within the very heavens, and to baffle the eyes of them that looked upon her. Her garments were of an imperishable fabric, wrought with the finest threads and of the most delicate workmanship; and these, as her own lips afterwards assured me, she had herself woven with her own hands. The beauty of this vesture had been somewhat tarnished by age and neglect, and wore that dingy look which marble contracts from exposure. On the lower-most edge was inwoven the Greek letter? [Greek: P], on the topmost the letter? [Greek: Th],[A] and between the two were to be seen steps, like a staircase, from the lower to the upper letter. This robe, moreover, had been torn by the hands of violent persons, who had each snatched away what he could clutch.[B] Her right hand held a note-book; in her left she bore a staff. And when she saw the Muses of Poesie standing by my bedside, dictating the words of my lamentations, she was moved awhile to wrath, and her eyes flashed sternly. 'Who,' said she, 'has allowed yon play-acting wantons to approach this sick man—these who, so far from giving medicine to heal his malady, even feed it with sweet poison? These it is who kill the rich crop of reason with the barren thorns of passion, who accustom men's minds to disease, instead of setting them free. Now, were it some common man whom your allurements were seducing, as is usually your way, I should be less indignant. On such a one I should not have spent my pains for naught. But this is one nurtured in the Eleatic and Academic philosophies. Nay, get ye gone, ye sirens, whose sweetness lasts not; leave him for my muses to tend and heal!' At these words of upbraiding, the whole band, in deepened sadness, with downcast eyes, and blushes that confessed their shame, dolefully left the chamber.

But I, because my sight was dimmed with much weeping, and I could not tell who was this woman of authority so commanding—I was dumfounded, and, with my gaze fastened on the earth, continued silently to await what she might do next. Then she drew near me and sat on the edge of my couch, and, looking into my face all heavy with grief and fixed in sadness on the ground, she bewailed in these words the disorder of my mind:

SONG II

His Despondency

Alas! in what abyss his mind Is plunged, how wildly tossed! Still, still towards the outer night She sinks, her true light lost, As oft as, lashed tumultuously By earth-born blasts, care's waves rise high.

Yet once he ranged the open heavens, The sun's bright pathway tracked; Watched how the cold moon waxed and waned; Nor rested, till there lacked To his wide ken no star that steers Amid the maze of circling spheres.

The causes why the blustering winds Vex ocean's tranquil face, Whose hand doth turn the stable globe, Or why his even race From out the ruddy east the sun Unto the western waves doth run:

What is it tempers cunningly The placid hours of spring, So that it blossoms with the rose For earth's engar-landing: Who loads the year's maturer prime With clustered grapes in autumn time:
All this he knew—thus ever strove Deep Nature’s lore to guess. Now, reft of reason’s light, he lies, And bonds his neck oppress; While by the heavy load constrained, His eyes to this dull earth are chained.

II.

‘But the time,’ said she, ‘calls rather for healing than for lamentation.’ Then, with her eyes bent full upon me, ‘Art thou that man,’ she cries, ‘who, erstwhile fed with the milk and reared upon the nourishment which is mine to give, had grown up to the full vigor of a manly spirit? And yet I had bestowed such armor on thee as would have proved an invincible defense, had thou not first cast it away. Does thou know me? Why art thou silent? Is it shame or amazement that hath struck thee dumb? Would it were shame; but, as I see, a stupor hath seized upon thee.’ Then, when she saw me not only answering nothing, but mute and utterly incapable of speech, she gently touched my breast with her hand, and said: ‘There is no danger; these are the symptoms of lethargy, the usual sickness of deluded minds. For awhile he has forgotten himself; he will easily recover his memory, if only he first recognizes me. And that he may do so, let me now wipe his eyes that are clouded with a mist of mortal things.’ Thereat, with a fold of her robe, she dried my eyes all swimming with tears.

SONG III

The Mists dispelled

Then the gloom of night was scattered, Sight returned unto mine eyes. So, when haply rainy Caurus Rolls the storm-clouds through the skies, Hidden is the sun; all heaven Is obscured in starless night. But if, in wild onset sweeping, Boreas frees day’s prisoner light, All suddenly the radiant god outstreams, And strikes our dazzled eyesight with his beams.

III.

Even so the clouds of my melancholy were broken up. I saw the clear sky, and regained the power to recognize the face of my physician. Accordingly, when I had lifted my eyes and fixed my gaze upon her, I beheld my nurse, Philosophy, whose halls I had frequented from my youth up.

‘Ah! why,’ I cried, ‘mistress of all excellence, have thou come down from on high, and entered the solitude of this my exile? Is it that thou, too, even as I, mayst be persecuted with false accusations?’

‘Could I desert thee, child,’ said she, ‘and not lighten the burden which thou have taken upon thee through the hatred of my name, by sharing this trouble? Even forgetting that it were not lawful for Philosophy to leave companionless the way of the innocent, should I, do you really think, fear to incur reproach, or shrink from it, as though some strange new thing had befallen? Do you think that now, for the first time in an evil age, Wisdom hath been assailed by peril? Did I not often in days of old, before my servant Plato lived, wage stern warfare with the rashness of folly? In his lifetime, too, Socrates, his master, won with my aid the victory of an unjust death. And when, one after the other, the Epicurean herd, the Stoic, and the rest, each of them as far as in them lay, went about to seize the heritage he left, and were dragging me off protesting and resisting, as their booty, they tore in pieces the garment which I had woven with my own hands, and, clutching the torn pieces, went
off, believing that the whole of me had passed into their possession. And some of them, because some traces of my vesture were seen upon them, were destroyed through the mistake of the lewd multitude, who falsely deemed them to be my disciples. It may be that you do not know of the banishment of Anaxagoras, of the poison drought of Socrates, nor of Zeno’s torturing, because these things happened in a distant country; yet you might have learnt the fate of Arrius, of Seneca, of Soranus, whose stories are neither old nor unknown to fame. These men were brought to destruction for no other reason than that, settled as they were in my principles, their lives were a manifest contrast to the ways of the wicked. So there is nothing you should wonder at, if on the seas of this life we are tossed by storm-blasts, seeing that we have made it our loftiest aim to refuse compliance with evil-doers. And though, maybe, the host of the wicked is many in number, yet is it contemptible, since it is under no leadership, but is hurried hither and thither at the blind driving of mad error. And if at times and seasons they set in array against us, and fall on in overwhelming strength, our leader draws off her forces into the citadel while they are busy plundering the useless baggage. But we from our vantage ground, safe from all this wild work, laugh to see them making prize of the most valueless of things, protected by a bulwark which aggressive folly may not aspire to reach.’

SONG IV

Nothing can subdue Virtue

Whoso calm, serene, sedate, Sets his foot on haughty fate; Firm and steadfast, come what will, Keeps his mien unconquered still; Him the rage of furious seas, Tossing high wild menaces, Nor the flames from smoky forges That Vesuvius disgorges, Nor the bolt that from the sky Smites the tower, can terrify. Why, then, should thou feel affright At the tyrant’s weakling might? Dread him not, nor fear no harm, And thou shall his rage disarm; But who to hope or fear gives way—Lost his bosom’s rightful sway—He hath cast away his shield, Like a coward fled the field; He hath forged all unaware Fetters his own neck must bear!

IV.

‘Do you understand?’ she asks. Do my words sink into thy mind? Or art thou dull “as the ass to the sound of the lyre”? Why do you weep? Why do tears stream from thy eyes?

“Speak out, hide it not in thy heart.”

If you look for the physician’s help, thou must disclose thy wound.’

Then I, gathering together what strength I could, began: ‘Is there still need of telling? Is not the cruelty of fortune against me plain enough? Doth not the very aspect of this place move thee? Is this the library, the room which you had chosen as thy constant resort in my home, the place where we so often sat together and held discourse of all things in heaven and earth? Was my garb and mien like this when I explored with thee nature’s hid secrets, and you traced for me with thy wand the courses of the stars, molding the while my character and the whole conduct of my life after the pattern of the celestial order? Is this the recompense of my obedience? Yet thou have enjoined by Plato’s mouth the maxim, “that states would be happy, either if philosophers ruled them, or if it should so befall that their rulers would turn philosophers.” By his mouth likewise you did point out this imperative reason why philosophers should enter public life, to wit, lest, if the reins of government be left
to unprincipled and profligate citizens, trouble and destruction should come upon the good. Following these precepts, I have tried to apply in the business of public administration the principles which I learnt from thee in leisured seclusion. Thou art my witness and that divinity who hath implanted thee in the hearts of the wise, that I brought to my duties no aim but zeal for the public good. For this cause I have become involved in bitter and irreconcilable feuds, and, as happens inevitably, if a man holds fast to the independence of conscience, I have had to think nothing of giving offence to the powerful in the cause of justice.

How often have I encountered and balked Conigastus in his assaults on the fortunes of the weak? How often have I thwarted Trigguilla, steward of the king’s household, even when his villainous schemes were as good as accomplished? How often have I risked my position and influence to protect poor wretches from the false charges innumerable with which they were for ever being harassed by the greed and license of the barbarians? No one has ever drawn me aside from justice to oppression. When ruin was overtaking the fortunes of the provincials through the combined pressure of private rapine and public taxation, I grieved no less than the sufferers. When at a season of grievous scarcity a forced sale, disastrous as it was unjustifiable, was proclaimed, and threatened to overwhelm Campania with starvation, I embarked on a struggle with the praetorian prefect in the public interest, I fought the case at the king’s judgment-seat, and succeeded in preventing the enforcement of the sale. I rescued the consular Paulinus from the gaping jaws of the court bloodhounds, who in their covetous hopes had already made short work of his wealth. To save Albinus, who was of the same exalted rank, from the penalties of a prejudged charge, I exposed myself to the hatred of Cyprian, the informer.

‘Do you think I had laid up for myself store of enmities enough? Well, with the rest of my countrymen, at any rate, my safety should have been assured, since my love of justice had left me no hope of security at court. Yet who was it brought the charges by which I have been struck down? Why, one of my accusers is Basil, who, after being dismissed from the king’s household, was driven by his debts to lodge an information against my name. There is Opilio, there is Gaudentius, men who for many and various offences the king’s sentence had condemned to banishment; and when they declined to obey, and sought to save themselves by taking sanctuary, the king, as soon as he heard of it, decreed that, if they did not depart from the city of Ravenna within a prescribed time, they should be branded on the forehead and expelled. What would exceed the rigor of this severity? And yet on that same day these very men lodged an information against me, and the information was admitted. Just Heaven! had I deserved this by my way of life? Did it make them fit accusers that my condemnation was a foregone conclusion? Has fortune no shame—if not at the accusation of the innocent, at least for the vileness of the accusers? Perhaps you wondered what is the sum of the charges laid against me? I wished, they say, to save the senate. But how? I am accused of hindering an informer from producing evidence to prove the senate guilty of treason. Tell me, then, what is thy counsel, O my mistress. Shall I deny the charge, lest I bring shame on thee? But I did wish it, and I shall never cease to wish it. Shall I admit it? Then the work of thwarting the informer will come to an end. Shall I call the wish for the preservation of that illustrious house a crime? Of a truth the senate, by its decrees concerning me, has made it such! But blind folly, though it deceive itself with false names, cannot alter the true merits of things, and, mindful of the precept of Socrates, I do not think it right either to keep the truth concealed or allow falsehood to pass. But this, however it may be, I leave to thy judgment and to the verdict of the discerning. Moreover, lest the course of events and the true facts should be hidden from posterity, I have myself committed to writing an account of the transaction.
What need to speak of the forged letters by which an attempt is made to prove that I hoped for the freedom of Rome? Their falsity would have been manifest, if I had been allowed to use the confession of the informers themselves, evidence which has in all matters the most convincing force. Why, what hope of freedom is left to us? Would there were any! I should have answered with the epigram of Canius when Caligula declared him to have been cognizant of a conspiracy against him. “If I had known,” said he, “you should never have known.” Grief has not so blunted my perceptions in this matter that I should complain because impious wretches contrive their villainies against the virtuous, but at their achievement of their hopes I do exceedingly marvel. For evil purposes are, perchance, due to the imperfection of human nature; that it should be possible for scoundrels to carry out their worst schemes against the innocent, while God beholds, is verily monstrous. For this cause, not without reason, one of thy disciples asked, “If God exists, whence comes evil? Yet whence comes good, if He exists not?” However, it might well be that wretches who seek the blood of all honest men and of the whole senate should wish to destroy me also, whom they saw to be a bulwark of the senate and all honest men.

But did I deserve such a fate from the Fathers also? You remember, methinks—since you did ever stand by my side to direct what I should do or say—you remember, I say, how at Verona, when the king, eager for the general destruction, was bent on implicating the whole senatorial order in the charge of treason brought against Albinus, with what indifference to my own peril I maintained the innocence of its members, one and all. You know that what I say is the truth, and that I have never boasted of my good deeds in a spirit of self-praise. For whenever a man by proclaiming his good deeds receives the recompense of fame, he diminishes in a measure the secret reward of a good conscience. What issues have overtaken my innocency you sees. Instead of reaping the rewards of true virtue, I undergo the penalties of a guilt falsely laid to my charge—nay, more than this; never did an open confession of guilt cause such unanimous severity among the assessors, but that some consideration, either of the mere frailty of human nature, or of fortune’s universal instability, availed to soften the verdict of some few. Had I been accused of a design to fire the temples, to slaughter the priests with impious sword, of plotting the massacre of all honest men, I should yet have been produced in court, and only punished on due confession or conviction. Now for my too great zeal towards the senate I have been condemned to outlawry and death, unheard and undefended, at a distance of near five hundred miles away. Oh, my judges, well do ye deserve that no one should hereafter be convicted of a fault like mine!

Yet even my very accusers saw how honorable was the charge they brought against me, and, in order to overlay it with some shadow of guilt, they falsely asserted that in the pursuit of my ambition I had stained my conscience with sacrilegious acts. And yet thy spirit, indwelling in me, had driven from the chamber of my soul all lust of earthly success, and with thine eye ever upon me, there could be no place left for sacrilege. For you did daily repeat in my ear and instill into my mind the Pythagorean maxim, “Follow after God.” It was not likely, then, that I should covet the assistance of the vilest spirits, when you wert molding me to such an excellence as should conform me to the likeness of God. Again, the innocency of the inner sanctuary of my home, the company of friends of the highest probity, a father-in-law revered at once for his pure character and his active beneficence, shield me from the very suspicion of sacrilege. Yet—atrocious as it is—they even draw credence for this charge from thee; I am like to be thought implicated in wickedness on this very account, that I am imbued with thy teachings and established in thy ways. So it is not enough that my devotion to thee should profit me nothing, but thou also must be assailed by reason of the odium which I have incurred. Verily this is the very crown of my misfortunes, that men’s opinions for the most part look not to real merit, but to the event;
and only recognize foresight where Fortune has crowned the issue with her approval. Whereby it comes to pass that reputation is the first of all things to abandon the unfortunate. I remember with chagrin how perverse is popular report, how various and discordant men’s judgments. This only will I say, that the most crushing of misfortune’s burdens is, that as soon as a charge is fastened upon the unhappy, they are believed to have deserved their sufferings. I, for my part, who have been banished from all life’s blessings, stripped of my honors, stained in repute, am punished for well-doing.

And now methinks I see the villainous dens of the wicked surging with joy and gladness, all the most recklessly unscrupulous threatening a new crop of lying informations, the good prostrate with terror at my danger, every ruffian incited by impunity to new daring and to success by the profits of audacity, the guiltless not only robbed of their peace of mind, but even of all means of defence. Wherefore I would fain cry out:

**SONG V**

**Boethius’s Prayer**

‘Builder of yon starry dome, You that whirl, throned eternal, Heaven’s swift globe, and, as they roam, Guid the stars by laws supernal: So in full-sphered splendor dight Cynthia dims the lamps of night, But unto the orb fraternal Closer drawn,[D] doth lose her light.

‘Who at fall of eventide, Hesper, his cold radiance shows, Lucifer his beams doth hide, Paling as the sun’s light grows, Brief, while winter’s frost holds sway, By thy will the space of day; Swift, when summer’s fervor glows, Speed the hours of night away.

‘You do rule the changing year: When rude Boreas oppresses, Fall the leaves; they reappear, Wooed by Zephyr’s soft caresses. Fields that Sirius burns deep grown By Arcturus’ watch were sown: Each the reign of law confesses, Keeps the place that is his own.

‘Sovereign Ruler, Lord of all! Can it be that You disdain Only man? ’Against him, poor thrall, Wanton Fortune plays her vainest. Guilt’s deserved punishment Falls on the innocent; High uplifted, the most profane On the just their malice vent.

‘Virtue cowers in dark retreats, Crime’s foul stain the righteous bears, Perjury and false deceits Hurt not him the wrong who dares; But whene’er the wicked trust In ill strength to work their lust, Kings, whom nations’ awe declares Mighty, grovel in the dust.

‘Look, oh look upon this earth, You who on law’s sure foundation Framed all! Have we no worth, We poor men, of all creation? Sore we toss on fortune’s tide; Master, bid the waves subside! And earth’s ways with consummation Of Thy heaven’s order guide!’

**V.**

When I had poured out my griefs in this long and unbroken strain of lamentation, she, with calm countenance, and in no wise disturbed at my complainings, thus spake:

‘When I saw thee sorrowful, in tears, I straightway knew thee wretched and an exile. But how far distant that exile I should not know, had not thine own speech revealed it. Yet how far indeed from thy country have
you, not been banished, but rather have strayed; or, if you wilt have it banishment, have banished thyself!
For no one else could ever lawfully have had this power over thee. Now, if you will call to mind from what
country you art sprung, it is not ruled, as once was the Athenian polity, by the sovereignty of the multitude,
but “one is its Ruler, one its King,” who takes delight in the number of His citizens, not in their banishment; to
submit to whose governance and to obey whose ordinances is perfect freedom. Art you ignorant of that most
ancient law of this thy country, whereby it is decreed that no one whatsoever, who hath chosen to fix there his
dwelling, may be sent into exile? For truly there is no fear that one who is encompassed by its ramparts and
defenses should deserve to be exiled. But he who has ceased to wish to dwell therein, he likewise ceases to
deserve to do so.

And so it is not so much the aspect of this place which moves me, as thy aspect; not so much the library
walls set off with glass and ivory which I miss, as the chamber of thy mind, wherein I once placed, not books,
but that which gives books their value, the doctrines which my books contain. Now, what you have said of thy
services to the commonweal is true, only too little compared with the greatness of thy deservings. The things
laid to thy charge whereof you have spoken, whether such as redound to thy credit, or mere false accusations,
are publicly known. As for the crimes and deceptions of the informers, you have rightly deemed it fitting to pass
them over lightly, because the popular voice hath better and more fully pronounced upon them. You have
bitterly complained of the injustice of the senate. You have grieved over my calumination, and likewise have
lamented the damage to my good name. Finally, thine indignation blazed forth against fortune; you have com-
plained of the unfairness with which thy merits have been recompensed. Last of all thy frantic muse framed a
prayer that the peace which reigns in heaven might rule earth also. But since a throng of tumultuous passions
hath assailed thy soul, since you art distraught with anger, pain, and grief, strong remedies are not proper for
thee in this thy present mood. And so for a time I will use milder methods, that the tumors which have grown
hard through the influx of disturbing passion may be softened by gentle treatment, till they can bear the force
of sharper remedies.’

SONG VI

All Things have their Needful Order
He who to th’ unwilling furrows
Gives the generous grain,
When the Crab with baleful fervours
Scorches all the plain;
He shall find his garner bare,
Acorns for his scanty fare.

Go not forth to cull sweet violets
From the purpled steep,
While the furious blasts of winter
Through the valleys sweep;
Nor the grape overhavey bring to the press in days of spring.

For to each thing God hath given
Its appointed time;
No perplexing change permits He
In His plan sublime.
So who quits the order due
Shall a luckless issue rue.

VI.

‘First, then, wilt you suffer me by a few questions to make some attempt to test the state of thy mind, that I may
learn in what way to set about thy cure?’

‘Ask what you will,’ said I, ‘for I will answer whatever questions you choosest to put.’
'Then said she: ‘This world of ours—do you think it is governed haphazard and fortuitously, or do you believe you that there is in it any rational guidance?’

‘Nay,’ said I, ‘in no wise may I deem that such fixed motions can be determined by random hazard, but I know that God, the Creator, presides over His work, nor will the day ever come that shall drive me from holding fast the truth of this belief.’

‘Yes,’ said she; ‘you did even but now affirm it in song, lamenting that men alone had no portion in the divine care. As to the rest, you were unshaken in the belief that they were ruled by reason. Yet I marvel exceedingly how, in spite of thy firm hold on this opinion, you are fallen into sickness. But let us probe more deeply: something or other is missing, I think. Now, tell me, since you doubt not that God governs the world, do you perceive by what means He rules it?’

‘I scarcely understand what you meanest,’ I said, ‘much less can I answer thy question.’

‘Did I not say truly that something is missing, whereby, as through a breach in the ramparts, disease hath crept in to disturb thy mind? But, tell me, do you remember the universal end towards which the aim of all nature is directed?’

‘I once heard,’ said I, ‘but sorrow hath dulled my recollection.’

‘And yet you know whence all things have proceeded.’

‘Yes, that I know,’ said I, ‘and have answered that it is from God.’

‘Yet how is it possible that you know not what is the end of existence, when you do understand its source and origin? However, these disturbances of mind have force to shake a man’s position, but cannot pluck him up and root him altogether out of himself. But answer this also, I pray thee: do you remember the universal end towards which the aim of all nature is directed?’

‘I once heard,’ said I, ‘but sorrow hath dulled my recollection.’

‘And yet you know whence all things have proceeded.’

‘Yes, that I know,’ said I, ‘and have answered that it is from God.’

‘Yet how is it possible that you know not what is the end of existence, when you do understand its source and origin? However, these disturbances of mind have force to shake a man’s position, but cannot pluck him up and root him altogether out of himself. But answer this also, I pray thee: do you remember that you are a man?’

‘How should I not?’ said I.

‘Then, can you say what man is?’

‘Is this thy question: Whether I know myself for a being endowed with reason and subject to death? Surely I do acknowledge myself such.’

Then she: ‘Do you know nothing else that you are?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Now,’ said she, ‘I know another cause of thy disease, one, too, of grave moment. You have ceased to know thy own nature. So, then, I have made full discovery both of the causes of thy sickness and the means of restoring thy health. It is because forgetfulness of thyself hath bewildered thy mind that you have bewailed thee as an exile, as one stripped of the blessings that were his; it is because you know not the end of existence that you deem abominable and wicked men to be happy and powerful; while, because you have forgotten by what means the earth is governed, you deem that fortune’s changes ebb and flow without the restraint of a guiding hand. These are serious enough to cause not sickness only, but even death; but, thanks be to the Author of our health, the light of nature hath not yet left thee utterly. In thy true judgment concerning the world’s government, in that you believe it subject, not to the random drift of chance, but to divine reason, we have the divine spark from which thy recovery may be hoped. Have, then, no fear; from these weak embers the vital heat shall once more be kindled within thee. But seeing that it is not yet time for strong remedies, and that the mind is manifestly so constituted that when it casts off true opinions it straightway puts on false, wherefrom arises a cloud of confusion that disturbs its true vision, I will now try and disperse these mists by mild and soothing application, that so the darkness of misleading passion may be scattered, and you may come to discern the splendor of the true light.’
SONG VII

The Perturbations of Passion

Stars shed no light Through the black night, When the clouds hide; And the lashed wave, If the winds rave O’er ocean’s tide,—

Though once serene As day’s fair sheen,— Soon fouled and spoiled By the storm’s spite, Shows to the sight Turbid and soiled.

Oft the fair rill, Down the steep hill Seaward that strays, Some tumbled block Of fallen rock Hinders and stays.

Then art you fain Clear and most plain Truth to discern, In the right way Firmly to stay, Nor from it turn? Joy, hope and fear Suffer not near, Drive grief away: Shackled and blind And lost is the mind Where these have sway.
Now I would fain also reason with thee a little in Fortune’s own words. Do thou observe whether her contentions be just. “Man,” she might say, “why dost thou pursue me with thy daily complainings? What wrong have I done thee? What goods of thine have I taken from thee? Choose an thou wilt a judge, and let us dispute before him concerning the rightful ownership of wealth and rank. If thou succeedest in showing that any one of these things is the true property of mortal man, I freely grant those things to be thine which thou claimest. When nature brought thee forth out of thy mother’s womb, I took thee, naked and destitute as thou wast, I cherished thee with my substance, and, in the partiality of my favour for thee, I brought thee up somewhat too indulgently, and this it is which now makes thee rebellious against me. I surrounded thee with a royal abundance of all those things that are in my power. Now it is my pleasure to draw back my hand. Thou hast reason to thank me for the use of what was not thine own; thou hast no right to complain, as if thou hadst lost what was wholly thine. Why, then, dost bemoan thyself? I have done thee no violence. Wealth, honour, and all such things are placed under my control. My handmaidens know their mistress; with me they come, and at my going they depart. I might boldly affirm that if those things the loss of which thou lamentest had been thine, thou couldst never have lost them.

Am I alone to be forbidden to do what I will with my own? Unrebuked, the skies now reveal the brightness of day, now shroud the daylight in the darkness of night; the year may now engarland the face of the earth with flowers and fruits, now disfigure it with storms and cold. The sea is permitted to invite with smooth and tranquil surface to-day, to-morrow to roughen with wave and storm. Shall man’s insatiate greed bind me to a constancy foreign to my character? This is my art, this the game I never cease to play. I turn the wheel that spins. I delight to see the high come down and the low ascend. Mount up, if thou wilt, but only on condition that thou wilt not think it a hardship to come down when the rules of my game require it. Wert thou ignorant of my character? Didst not know how Crresus, King of the Lydians, erstwhile the dreaded rival of Cyrus, was afterwards pitiably consigned to the flame of the pyre, and only saved by a shower sent from heaven? Has it ’scaped thee how

Paullus paid a meed of pious tears to the misfortunes of King Perseus, his prisoner? What else do tragedies make such woeful outcry over save the overthrow of kingdoms by the indiscriminate strokes of Fortune? Didst thou not learn in thy childhood how there stand at the threshold of Zeus ‘two jars,’ ‘the one full of blessings, the other of calamities’? How if thou hast drawn over-liberally from the good jar? What if not even now have I departed wholly from thee? What if this very mutability of mine is a just ground for hoping better things? But listen now, and cease to let thy heart consume away with fretfulness, nor expect to live on thine own terms in a realm that is common to all.’

III.

‘If Fortune should plead thus against thee, assuredly thou wouldst not have one word to offer in reply; or, if thou canst find any justification of thy complainings, thou must show what it is. I will give thee space to speak.’

Then said I: ‘Verily, thy pleas are plausible—yea, steeped in the honeyed sweetness of music and rhetoric. But their charm lasts only while they are sounding in the ear; the sense of his misfortunes lies deeper in the heart of the wretched. So, when the sound ceases to vibrate upon the air, the heart’s indwelling sorrow is felt with renewed bitterness.’

Then said she: ‘It is indeed as thou sayest, for we have not yet come to the curing of thy sickness; as yet these are but lenitives conducing to the treatment of a malady hitherto obstinate. The remedies which go deep I will apply in due season. Nevertheless, to deprecate thy determination to be thought wretched, I ask thee, Hast thou forgotten the extent and bounds of thy felicity? I say nothing of how, when orphaned and desolate, thou wast taken into the care of illustrious men; how thou wast chosen for alliance with the highest in the state—and even before thou wert bound to their house by marriage, wert already dear to their love—which is the most precious of all ties. Did not all pronounce thee most happy in the virtues of thy wife, the splendid honours of her father, and the blessing of male issue?

I pass over—for I care not to speak of blessings in which others also have shared—the distinctions often denied to age which thou enjoyedst in thy youth. I choose rather to come to the unparalleled culmination of thy good fortune. If the fruition of any earthly success has weight in the scale of happiness, can the memory of that splendour be swept away by any rising flood of troubles? That day when thou didst see thy two sons ride forth from home joint consuls, followed by a train of senators, and welcomed by the goodwill of the people; when these two sat in curule chairs in the Senate-house, and thou by thy panegyric on the king didst earn the fame of eloquence and ability; when in the Circus, seated between the two consuls, thou didst glut the multitude thronging around with the triumphal largesses for which they looked—methinks thou didst cozen Fortune while she caressed thee, and made thee her darling. Thou didst bear off a boon which she had never before granted to any private person. Art thou, then, minded to cast up a reckoning with Fortune? Now for the first time she has turned a jealous glance upon thee. If thou compare the extent and bounds of thy blessings and misfortunes, thou canst not deny that thou art still fortunate. Or if thou esteem not thyself favoured by Fortune in that thy then seeming prosperity hath departed, deem not thyself wretched, since what thou now believest to be calamitous passeth also. What! art thou but now come suddenly and a stranger to the scene of this life? Thinkest thou there is any stability in human affairs, when man himself vanishes away in the swift course of time? It is true that there is little trust that the gifts of chance will abide; yet the last day of life is in a manner the death of all remaining Fortune. What difference, then, thinkest thou, is there, whether thou leavest her by dying, or she leave thee by fleeing away?’
Then said I: 'True are thine admonishings, thou nurse of all excellence; nor can I deny the wonder of my fortune's swift career. Yet it is this which chafes me the more cruelly in the recalling. For truly in adverse fortune the worst sting of misery is to have been happy.'

'Well,' said she, 'if thou art paying the penalty of a mistaken belief, thou canst not rightly impute the fault to circumstances. If it is the felicity which Fortune gives that moves thee—mere name though it be—come reckon up with me how rich thou art in the number and weightiness of thy blessings. Then if, by the blessing of Providence, thou hast still preserved unto thee safe and inviolate that which, howsoever thou mightest reckon thy fortune, thou wouldst have thought thy most precious possession, what right hast thou to talk of ill-fortune whilst keeping all Fortune's better gifts? Yet Symmachus, thy wife's father—a man whose splendid character does honour to the human race—is safe and unharmed; and while he bewails thy wrongs, this rare nature, in whom wisdom and virtue are so nobly blended, is himself out of danger—a boon thou wouldst have been quick to purchase at the price of life itself. Thy wife yet lives, with her gentle disposition, her peerless modesty and virtue—this the epitome of all her graces, that she is the true daughter of her sire—she lives, I say, and for thy sake only preserves the breath of life, though she loathes it, and pines away in grief and tears for thy absence, wherein, if in naught else, I would allow some marring of thy felicity. What shall I say of thy sons and their consular dignity—how in them, so far as may be in youths of their age, the example of their father's and grandfather's character shines out? Since, then, the chief care of mortal man is to preserve his life, how happy art thou, couldst thou but recognise thy blessings, who possessest even now what no one doubts to be dearer than life! Wherefore, now dry thy tears. Fortune's hate hath not involved all thy dear ones; the stress of the storm that has assailed thee is not beyond measure intolerable, since there are anchors still holding firm which suff er thee not to lack either consolation in the present or hope for the future.'

'I pray that they still may hold. For while they still remain, however things may go, I shall ride out the storm. Yet thou seest how much is shorn of the splendour of my fortunes.'

'We are gaining a little ground,' said she, 'if there is something in thy lot wherewith thou art not yet altogether discontented. But I cannot stomach thy daintiness when thou complainest with such violence of grief and anxiety because thy happiness falls short of completeness. Why, who enjoys such settled felicity as not to have some quarrel with the circumstances of his lot? A troublous matter are the conditions of human bliss; either they are never realized in full, or never stay permanently. One has abundant riches, but is shamed by his ignoble birth. Another is conspicuous for his nobility, but through the embarrassments of poverty would prefer to be obscure. A third, richly endowed with both, laments the loneliness of an unwedded life. Another, though happily married, is doomed to childlessness, and nurses his wealth for a stranger to inherit. Yet another, blest with children, mournfully bewails the misdeeds of son or daughter. Wherefore, it is not easy for anyone to be at perfect peace with the circumstances of his lot.

There lurks in each several portion something which they who experience it not know nothing of, but which makes the sufferer wince. Besides, the more favoured a man is by Fortune, the more fastidiously sensitive is he; and, unless all things answer to his whim, he is overwhelmed by the most trifling misfortunes, because utterly unschooled in adversity. So petty are the trifles which rob the most fortunate of perfect happiness! How many are there, dost thou imagine, who would think themselves nigh heaven, if but a small portion from the wreck of thy fortune should fall to them? This very place which thou callest exile is to them that dwell therein their native land. So true is it that nothing is wretched, but thinking makes it so, and conversely every lot is happy if borne with equanimity. Who is so blest by Fortune as not to wish to change his state, if once he gives rein
to a rebellious spirit? With how many bittermesses is the sweetness of human felicity blent! And even if that sweetness seem to him to bring delight in the enjoying, yet he cannot keep it from departing when it will. How manifestly wretched, then, is the bliss of earthly fortune, which lasts not for ever with those whose temper is equable, and can give no perfect satisfaction to the anxious-minded!

‘Why, then, ye children of mortality, seek ye from without that happiness whose seat is only within us? Error and ignorance bewilder you. I will show thee, in brief, the hinge on which perfect happiness turns. Is there anything more precious to thee than thyself? Nothing, thou wilt say. If, then, thou art master of thyself, thou wilt possess that which thou wilt never be willing to lose, and which Fortune cannot take from thee. And that thou mayst see that happiness cannot possibly consist in these things which are the sport of chance, reflect that, if happiness is the highest good of a creature living in accordance with reason, and if a thing which can in any wise be reft away is not the highest good, since that which cannot be taken away is better than it, it is plain that Fortune cannot aspire to bestow happiness by reason of its instability. And, besides, a man borne along by this transitory felicity must either know or not know its unstability. If he knows not, how poor is a happiness which depends on the blindness of ignorance! If he knows it, he needs must fear to lose a happiness whose loss he believes to be possible. Wherefore, a never-ceasing fear suffers him not to be happy. Or does he count the possibility of this loss a trifling matter? Insignificant, then, must be the good whose loss can be borne so equably.

And, further, I know thee to be one settled in the belief that the souls of men certainly die not with them, and convinced thereof by numerous proofs; it is clear also that the felicity which Fortune bestows is brought to an end with the death of the body: therefore, it cannot be doubted but that, if happiness is conferred in this way, the whole human race sinks into misery when death brings the close of all. But if we know that many have sought the joy of happiness not through death only, but also through pain and suffering, how can life make men happy by its presence when it makes them not wretched by its loss?’

V.

‘But since my reasonings begin to work a soothing effect within thy mind, methinks I may resort to remedies somewhat stronger. Come, suppose, now, the gifts of Fortune were not fleeting and transitory, what is there in them capable of ever becoming truly thine, or which does not lose value when looked at steadily and fairly weighed in the balance? Are riches, I pray thee, precious either through thy nature or in their own? What are they but mere gold and heaps of money? Yet these fine things show their quality better in the spending than in the hoarding; for I suppose ‘tis plain that greed Alva’s makes men hateful, while liberality brings fame. But that which is transferred to another cannot remain in one’s own possession; and if that be so, then money is only precious when it is given away, and, by being transferred to others, ceases to be one’s own. Again, if all the money in the world were heaped up in one man’s possession, all others would be made poor. Sound fills the ears of many at the same time without being broken into parts, but your riches cannot pass to many without being lessened in the process. And when this happens, they must needs impoverish those whom they leave. How poor and cramped a thing, then, is riches, which more than one cannot possess as an unbroken whole, which falls not to any one man’s lot without the impoverishment of everyone else! Or is it the glitter of gems that allures the eye? Yet, how rarely excellent soever may be their splendour, remember the flashing light is in the jewels, not in the man. Indeed, I greatly marvel at men’s admiration of them; for what can rightly seem beautiful to a being endowed with life and reason, if it lack the movement and structure of life? And although such things do in the
end take on them more beauty from their Maker’s care and their own brilliancy, still they in no wise merit your admiration since their excellence is set at a lower grade than your own.

‘Does the beauty of the fields delight you? Surely, yes; it is a beautiful part of a right beautiful whole. Fitly indeed do we at times enjoy the serene calm of the sea, admire the sky, the stars, the moon, the sun. Yet is any of these thy concern? Dost thou venture to boast thyself of the beauty of any one of them? Art thou decked with spring’s flowers? is it thy fertility that swelleth in the fruits of autumn? Why art thou moved with empty transports? why embracest thou an alien excellence as thine own? Never will fortune make thine that which the nature of things has excluded from thy ownership. Doubtless the fruits of the earth are given for the sustenance of living creatures. But if thou art content to supply thy wants so far as suffices nature, there is no need to resort to fortune’s bounty. Nature is content with few things, and with a very little of these. If thou art minded to force superfluities upon her when she is satisfied, that which thou addest will prove either unpleasant or harmful. But, now, thou thinkest it fine to shine in raiment of divers colours; yet—if, indeed, there is any pleasure in the sight of such things—it is the texture or the artist’s skill which I shall admire.

‘Or perhaps it is a long train of servants that makes thee happy? Why, if they behave viciously, they are a ruinous burden to thy house, and exceeding dangerous to their own master; while if they are honest, how canst thou count other men’s virtue in the sum of thy possessions? From all which ‘tis plainly proved that not one of these things which thou reckonest in the number of thy possessions is really thine. And if there is in them no beauty to be desired, why shouldst thou either grieve for their loss or find joy in their continued possession? While if they are beautiful in their own nature, what is that to thee? They would have been not less pleasing in themselves, though never included among thy possessions. For they derive not their preciousness from being counted in thy riches, but rather thou hast chosen to count them in thy riches because they seemed to thee precious.

‘Then, what seek ye by all this noisy outcry about fortune? To chase away poverty, I ween, by means of abundance. And yet ye find the result just contrary. Why, this varied array of precious furniture needs more accessories for its protection; it is a true saying that they want most who possess most, and, conversely, they want very little who measure their abundance by nature’s requirements, not by the superfluity of vain display. Have ye no good of your own implanted within you, that ye seek your good in things external and separate? Is the nature of things so reversed that a creature divine by right of reason can in no other way be splendid in his own eyes save by the possession of lifeless chattels? Yet, while other things are content with their own, ye who in your intellect are God-like seek from the lowest of things adornment for a nature of supreme excellence, and perceive not how great a wrong ye do your Maker. His will was that mankind should excel all things on earth. Ye thrust down your worth beneath the lowest of things. For if that in which each thing finds its good is plainly more precious than that whose good it is, by your own estimation ye put yourselves below the vilest of things, when ye deem these vile things to be your good: nor does this fall out undeservedly. Indeed, man is so constituted that he then only excels other things when he knows himself; but he is brought lower than the beasts if he lose this self-knowledge. For that other creatures should be ignorant of themselves is natural; in man it shows as a defect. How extravagant, then, is this error of yours, in thinking that anything can be embellished by adornments not its own. It cannot be. For if such accessories add any lustre, it is the accessories that get the praise, while that which they veil and cover remains in its pristine ugliness. And again I say, That is no good, which injures its possessor. Is this untrue? No, quite true, thou sayest. And yet riches have often hurt those that possessed them, since the worst of men, who are all the more covetous by reason of their wickedness, think none but themselves worthy to possess all the gold and gems the world contains. So thou, who now dreadest pike and sword, mightest have
trolled a carol “in the robber’s face,” hadst thou entered the road of life with empty pockets. Oh, wondrous blessedness of perishable wealth, whose acquisition robs thee of security!’

VI.

‘What now shall I say of rank and power, whereby, because ye know not true power and dignity, ye hope to reach the sky? Yet, when rank and power have fallen to the worst of men, did ever an Etna, belching forth flame and fiery deluge, work such mischief? Verily, as I think, thou dost remember how thine ancestors sought to abolish the consular power, which had been the foundation of their liberties, on account of the overweening pride of the consuls, and how for that self-same pride they had already abolished the kingly title! And if, as happens but rarely, these prerogatives are conferred on virtuous men, it is only the virtue of those who exercise them that pleases. So it appears that honour cometh not to virtue from rank, but to rank from virtue. Look, too, at the nature of that power which ye find so attractive and glorious! Do ye never consider, ye creatures of earth, what ye are, and over whom ye exercise your fancied lordship? Suppose, now, that in the mouse tribe there should rise up one claiming rights and powers for himself above the rest, would ye not laugh consumedly? Yet if thou lookest to his body alone, what creature canst thou find more feeble than man, who oftentimes is killed by the bite of a fly, or by some insect creeping into the inner passage of his system! Yet what rights can one exercise over another, save only as regards the body, and that which is lower than the body—I mean fortune? What! wilt thou bind with thy mandates the free spirit? Canst thou force from its due tranquillity the mind that is firmly composed by reason? A tyrant thought to drive a man of free birth to reveal his accomplices in a conspiracy, but the prisoner bit off his tongue and threw it into the furious tyrant’s face; thus, the tortures which the tyrant thought the instrument of his cruelty the sage made an opportunity for heroism. Moreover, what is there that one man can do to another which he himself may not have to undergo in his turn? We are told that Busiris, who used to kill his guests, was himself slain by his guest, Hercules. Regulus had thrown into bonds many of the Carthaginians whom he had taken in war; soon after he himself submitted his hands to the chains of the vanquished. Then, thinkest thou that man hath any power who cannot prevent another’s being able to do to him what he himself can do to others?

‘Besides, if there were any element of natural and proper good in rank and power, they would never come to the utterly bad, since opposites are not wont to be associated. Nature brooks not the union of contraries. So, seeing there is no doubt that wicked wretches are oftentimes set in high places, it is also clear that things which suffer association with the worst of men cannot be good in their own nature. Indeed, this judgment may with some reason be passed concerning all the gifts of fortune which fall so plentifully to all the most wicked. This ought also to be considered here, I think: No one doubts a man to be brave in whom he has observed a brave spirit residing. It is plain that one who is endowed with speed is swift-footed. So also music makes men musical, the healing art physicians, rhetoric public speakers. For each of these has naturally its own proper working; there is no confusion with the effects of contrary things—nay, even of itself it rejects what is incompatible. And yet wealth cannot extinguish insatiable greed, nor has power ever made him master of himself whom vicious lusts kept bound in indissoluble fetters; dignity conferred on the wicked not only fails to make them worthy, but contrarily reveals and displays their unworthiness. Why does it so happen? Because ye take pleasure in calling by false names things whose nature is quite incongruous thereto—by names which are easily proved false by the very effects of the things themselves; even so it is; these riches, that power, this dignity, are none of them rightly so called. Finally, we may draw the same conclusion concerning the whole sphere of Fortune, within which
there is plainly nothing to be truly desired, nothing of intrinsic excellence; for she neither always joins herself to the good, nor does she make good men of those to whom she is united.’

VII.

Then said I: ‘Thou knowest thyself that ambition for worldly success hath but little swayed me. Yet I have desired opportunity for action, lest virtue, in default of exercise, should languish away.’

Then she: ‘This is that “last infirmity” which is able to allure minds which, though of noble quality, have not yet been moulded to any exquisite refinement by the perfecting of the virtues—I mean, the love of glory—and fame for high services rendered to the commonweal. And yet consider with me how poor and unsubstantial a thing this glory is! The whole of this earth’s globe, as thou hast learnt from the demonstration of astronomy, compared with the expanse of heaven, is found no bigger than a point; that is to say, if measured by the vastness of heaven’s sphere, it is held to occupy absolutely no space at all. Now, of this so insignificant portion of the universe, it is about a fourth part, as Ptolemy’s proofs have taught us, which is inhabited by living creatures known to us. If from this fourth part you take away in thought all that is usurped by seas and marshes, or lies a vast waste of waterless desert, barely is an exceeding narrow area left for human habitation. You, then, who are shut in and prisoned in this merest fraction of a point’s space, do ye take thought for the blazoning of your fame, for the spreading abroad of your renown? Why, what amplitude or magnificence has glory when confined to such narrow and petty limits?

‘Besides, the straitened bounds of this scant dwelling-place are inhabited by many nations differing widely in speech, in usages, in mode of life; to many of these, from the difficulty of travel, from diversities of speech, from want of commercial intercourse, the fame not only of individual men, but even of cities, is unable to reach. Why, in Cicero’s days, as he himself somewhere points out, the fame of the Roman Republic had not yet crossed the Caucasus, and yet by that time her name had grown formidable to the Parthians and other nations of those parts. Seest thou, then, how narrow, how confined, is the glory ye take pains to spread abroad and extend! Can the fame of a single Roman penetrate where the glory of the Roman name fails to pass? Moreover, the customs and institutions of different races agree not together, so that what is deemed praise worthy in one country is thought punishable in another. Wherefore, if any love the applause of fame, it shall not profit him to publish his name among many peoples. Then, each must be content to have the range of his glory limited to his own people; the splendid immortality of fame must be confined within the bounds of a single race.

‘Once more, how many of high renown in their own times have been lost in oblivion for want of a record! Indeed, of what avail are written records even, which, with their authors, are overtaken by the dimness of age after a somewhat longer time? But ye, when ye think on future fame, fancy it an immortality that ye are begetting for yourselves. Why, if thou scanrest the infinite spaces of eternity, what room hast thou left for rejoicing in the durability of thy name? Verily, if a single moment’s space be compared with ten thousand years, it has a certain relative duration, however little, since each period is definite. But this same number of years—ay, and a number many times as great—cannot even be compared with endless duration; for, indeed, finite periods may in a sort be compared one with another, but a finite and an infinite never. So it comes to pass that fame, though it extend to ever so wide a space of years, if it be compared to never-lessening eternity, seems not short-lived merely, but altogether nothing. But as for you, ye know not how to act aright, unless it be to court the popular breeze, and win the empty applause of the multitude—nay, ye abandon the superlative worth of conscience and virtue, and ask a recompense from the poor words of others. Let me tell thee how wittily one did mock the shallowness of
this sort of arrogance. A certain man assailed one who had put on the name of philosopher as a cloak to pride and vain-glory, not for the practice of real virtue, and added: “Now shall I know if thou art a philosopher if thou bearest reproaches calmly and patiently.” The other for awhile affected to be patient, and, having endured to be abused, cried out derisively: “Now, do you see that I am a philosopher?” The other, with biting sarcasm, retorted: “I should have hadst thou held thy peace.” Moreover, what concern have choice spirits—for it is of such men we speak, men who seek glory by virtue—what concern, I say, have these with fame after the dissolution of the body in death’s last hour? For if men die wholly—which our reasonings forbid us to believe—there is no such thing as glory at all, since he to whom the glory is said to belong is altogether non-existent. But if the mind, conscious of its own rectitude, is released from its earthly prison, and seeks heaven in free flight, doth it not despise all earthly things when it rejoices in its deliverance from earthly bonds, and enters upon the joys of heaven?

VIII.

“But that thou mayst not think that I wage implacable warfare against Fortune, I own there is a time when the deceitful goddess serves men well—I mean when she reveals herself, uncovers her face, and confesses her true character. Perhaps thou dost not yet grasp my meaning. Strange is the thing I am trying to express, and for this cause I can scarce find words to make clear my thought. For truly I believe that Ill Fortune is of more use to men than Good Fortune. For Good Fortune, when she wears the guise of happiness, and most seems to caress, is always lying; Ill Fortune is always truthful, since, in changing, she shows her inconstancy. The one deceives, the other teaches; the one enchains the minds of those who enjoy her favour by the semblance of delusive good, the other delivers them by the knowledge of the frail nature of happiness. Accordingly, thou mayst see the one fickle, shifting as the breeze, and ever self-deceived; the other sober-minded, alert, and wary, by reason of the very discipline of adversity. Finally, Good Fortune, by her allurements, draws men far from the true good; Ill Fortune oft times draws men back to true good with grappling-irons. Again, should it be esteemed a trifling boon, thinkest thou, that this cruel, this odious Fortune hath discovered to thee the hearts of thy faithful friends—that other hid from thee alike the faces of the true friends and of the false, but in departing she hath taken away her friends, and left thee thine? What price wouldst thou not have given for this service in the fulness of thy prosperity when thou seemedst to thyself fortunate? Cease, then, to seek the wealth thou hast lost, since in true friends thou hast found the most precious of all riches.”
She ceased, but I stood fixed by the sweetness of the song in wonderment and eager expectation, my ears still strained to listen. And then after a little I said: ‘Thou sovereign solace of the stricken soul, what refreshment hast thou brought me, no less by the sweetness of thy singing than by the weightiness of thy discourse! Verily, I think not that I shall hereafter be unequal to the blows of Fortune. Wherefore, I no longer dread the remedies which thou saidst were something too severe for my strength; nay, rather, I am eager to hear of them and call for them with all vehemence.’

Then said she: ‘I marked thee fastening upon my words silently and intently, and I expected, or—to speak more truly—I myself brought about in thee, this state of mind. What now remains is of such sort that to the taste indeed it is biting, but when received within it turns to sweetness. But whereas thou dost profess thyself desirous of hearing, with what ardour wouldst thou not burn didst thou but perceive whither it is my task to lead thee!’

‘Whither?’ said I.

‘To true felicity,’ said she, ‘which even now thy spirit sees in dreams, but cannot behold in very truth, while thine eyes are engrossed with semblances.’

Then said I: ‘I beseech thee, do thou show to me her true shape without a moment’s loss.’

‘Gladly will I, for thy sake,’ said she. ‘But first I will try to sketch in words, and describe a cause which is more familiar to thee, that, when thou hast viewed this carefully, thou mayst turn thy eyes the other way, and recognise the beauty of true happiness.’

For a little space she remained in a fixed gaze, withdrawn, as it were, into the august chamber of her mind; then she thus began:

‘All mortal creatures in those anxious aims which find employment in so many varied pursuits, though they take many paths, yet strive to reach one goal—the goal of happiness. Now, the good is that which, when a man hath got, he can lack nothing further. This it is which is the supreme good of all, containing within
itself all particular good; so that if anything is still wanting thereto, this cannot be the supreme good, since something would be left outside which might be desired. 'Tis clear, then, that happiness is a state perfected by the assembling together of all good things. To this state, as we have said, all men try to attain, but by different paths. For the desire of the true good is naturally implanted in the minds of men; only error leads them aside out of the way in pursuit of the false. Some, deeming it the highest good to want nothing, spare no pains to attain affluence; others, judging the good to be that to which respect is most worthily paid, strive to win the reverence of their fellow-citizens by the attainment of official dignity. Some there are who fix the chief good in supreme power; these either wish themselves to enjoy sovereignty, or try to attach themselves to those who have it. Those, again, who think renown to be something of supreme excellence are in haste to spread abroad the glory of their name either through the arts of war or of peace. A great many measure the attainment of good by joy and gladness of heart; these think it the height of happiness to give themselves over to pleasure. Others there are, again, who interchange the ends and means one with the other in their aims; for instance, some want riches for the sake of pleasure and power, some covet power either for the sake of money or in order to bring renown to their name. So it is on these ends, then, that the aim of human acts and wishes is centred, and on others like to these—for instance, noble birth and popularity, which seem to compass a certain renown; wife and children, which are sought for the sweetness of their possession; while as for friendship, the most sacred kind indeed is counted in the category of virtue, not of fortune; but other kinds are entered upon for the sake of power or of enjoyment. And as for bodily excellences, it is obvious that they are to be ranged with the above. For strength and stature surely manifest power; beauty and fleetness of foot bring celebrity; health brings pleasure. It is plain, then, that the only object sought for in all these ways is happiness. For that which each seeks in preference to all else, that is in his judgment the supreme good. And we have defined the supreme good to be happiness. Therefore, that state which each wishes in preference to all others is in his judgment happy.

‘Thou hast, then, set before thine eyes something like a scheme of human happiness—wealth, rank, power, glory, pleasure. Now Epicurus, from a sole regard to these considerations, with some consistency concluded the highest good to be pleasure, because all the other objects seem to bring some delight to the soul. But to return to human pursuits and aims: man’s mind seeks to recover its proper good, in spite of the mistiness of its recollection, but, like a drunken man, knows not by what path to return home. Think you they are wrong who strive to escape want? Nay, truly there is nothing which can so well complete happiness as a state abounding in all good things, needing nothing from outside, but wholly self-sufficing. Do they fall into error who deem that which is best to be also best deserving to receive the homage of reverence? Not at all. That cannot possibly be vile and contemptible, to attain which the endeavours of nearly all mankind are directed. Then, is power not to be reckoned in the category of good? Why, can that which is plainly more efficacious than anything else be esteemed a thing feeble and void of strength? Or is renown to be thought of no account? Nay, it cannot be ignored that the highest renown is constantly associated with the highest excellence. And what need is there to say that happiness is not haunted by care and gloom, nor exposed to trouble and vexation, since that is a condition we ask of the very least of things, from the possession and enjoyment of which we expect delight? So, then, these are the blessings men wish to win; they want riches, rank, sovereignty, glory, pleasure, because they believe that by these means they will secure independence, reverence, power, renown, and joy of heart. Therefore, it is the good which men seek by such divers courses; and herein is easily shown the might of Nature’s power, since, although opinions are so various and discordant, yet they agree in cherishing good as the end.’ [summary of wrong path toward happiness!]
'Ye, too, creatures of earth, have some glimmering of your origin, however faint, and though in a vision dim and clouded, yet in some wise, notwithstanding, ye discern the true end of happiness, and so the aim of nature leads you thither—to that true good—while error in many forms leads you astray therefrom. For reflect whether men are able to win happiness by those means through which they think to reach the proposed end. Truly, if either wealth, rank, or any of the rest, bring with them anything of such sort as seems to have nothing wanting to it that is good, we, too, acknowledge that some are made happy by the acquisition of these things. But if they are not able to fulfil their promises, and, moreover, lack many good things, is not the happiness men seek in them clearly discovered to be a false show? Therefore do I first ask thee thyself, who but lately were living in affluence, amid all that abundance of wealth, was thy mind never troubled in consequence of some wrong done to thee?

‘Nay,’ said I, ‘I cannot ever remember a time when my mind was so completely at peace as not to feel the pang of some uneasiness.’

‘Was it not because either something was absent which thou wouldst not have absent, or present which thou wouldst have away?’

‘Yes,’ said I.

‘Then, thou didst want the presence of the one, the absence of the other?’

‘Admitted.’

‘But a man lacks that of which he is in want?’ ‘He does.’

‘And he who lacks something is not in all points self-sufficing?’

‘No; certainly not,’ said I.

‘So were thou, then, in the plenitude of thy wealth, supporting this insufficiency?’ ‘I must have been.’

‘Wealth, then, cannot make its possessor independent and free from all want, yet this was what it seemed to promise. Moreover, I think this also well deserves to be considered—that there is nothing in the special nature of money to hinder its being taken away from those who possess it against their will.’

‘I admit it.’

‘Why, of course, when every day the stronger wrests it from the weaker without his consent. Else, whence come lawsuits, except in seeking to recover moneys which have been taken away against their owner’s will by force or fraud?’

‘True,’ said I.

‘Then, everyone will need some extraneous means of protection to keep his money safe.’

‘Who can venture to deny it?’

‘Yet he would not, unless he possessed the money which it is possible to lose.’

‘No; he certainly would not.’

‘Then, we have worked round to an opposite conclusion: the wealth which was thought to make a man independent rather puts him in need of further protection. How in the world, then, can want be driven away by riches? Cannot the rich feel hunger? Cannot they thirst? Are not the limbs of the wealthy sensitive to the winter’s cold? “But,” thou wilt say, “the rich have the wherewithal to sate their hunger, the means to get rid of thirst and cold.” True enough; want can thus be soothed by riches, wholly removed it cannot be. For if this ever-gaping, ever-craving want is glutted by wealth, it needs must be that the want itself which can be so glutted still remains. I do not speak of how very little suffices for nature, and how for avarice nothing is enough. Wherefore, if wealth cannot get rid of want, and makes new wants of its own, how can ye believe that it bestows independence?’ [true happiness rests in independence]
'Well, but official dignity clothes him to whom it comes with honour and reverence! Have, then, offices of state such power as to plant virtue in the minds of their possessors, and drive out vice? Nay, they are rather wont to signalize iniquity than to chase it away, and hence arises our indignation that honours so often fall to the most iniquitous of men. Accordingly, Catullus calls Nonius an “ulcer-spot,” though “sitting in the curule chair.” Dost not see what infamy high position brings upon the bad? Surely their unworthiness will be less conspicuous if their rank does not draw upon them the public notice! In thy own case, wouldst thou ever have been induced by all these perils to think of sharing office with Decoratus, since thou hast discerned in him the spirit of a rascally parasite and informer? No; we cannot deem men worthy of reverence on account of their office, whom we deem unworthy of the office itself. But didst thou see a man endued with wisdom, couldst thou suppose him not worthy of reverence, nor of that wisdom with which he was endued?

‘No; certainly not.’

‘There is in Virtue a dignity of her own which she forthwith passes over to those to whom she is united. And since public honours cannot do this, it is clear that they do not possess the true beauty of dignity. And here this well deserves to be noticed—that if a man is the more scorned in proportion as he is despised by a greater number, high position not only fails to win reverence for the wicked, but even loads them the more with contempt by drawing more attention to them. But not without retribution; for the wicked pay back a return in kind to the dignities they put on by the pollution of their touch. Perhaps, too, another consideration may teach thee to confess that true reverence cannot come through these counterfeit dignities. It is this: If one who had been many times consul chanced to visit barbaric lands, would his office win him the reverence of the barbarians? And yet if reverence were the natural effect of dignities, they would not forego their proper function in any part of the world, even as fire never anywhere fails to give forth heat. But since this effect is not due to their own efficacy, but is attached to them by the mistaken opinion of mankind, they disappear straightway when they are set before those who do not esteem them dignities. Thus the case stands with foreign peoples. But does their repute last for ever, even in the land of their origin? Why, the prefecture, which was once a great power, is now an empty name—a burden merely on the senator’s fortune; the commissioner of the public corn supply was once a personage—now what is more contemptible than this office? For, as we said just now, that which hath no true comeliness of its own now receives, now loses, lustre at the caprice of those who have to do with it. So, then, if dignities cannot win men reverence, if they are actually sullied by the contamination of the wicked, if they lose their splendour through time’s changes, if they come into contempt merely for lack of public estimation, what precious beauty have they in themselves, much less to give to others? [does office give people inherent dignity, or the other way around?]

‘Well, then, does sovereignty and the intimacy of kings prove able to confer power? Why, surely does not the happiness of kings endure for ever? And yet antiquity is full of examples, and these days also, of kings whose happiness has turned into calamity. How glorious a power, which is not even found effectual for its own preservation! But if happiness has its source in sovereign power, is not happiness diminished, and misery inflicted in its stead, in so far as that power falls short of completeness? [so, what is true happiness, if not political power?] Yet, however widely human sovereignty be extended, there must still be more peoples left, over whom each several king holds no sway. Now, at whatever point the power on which happiness depends ceases, here powerlessness steals in and makes wretchedness; so, by this way of reckoning, there must needs be a balance of wretchedness in the lot of the king. The tyrant who had made trial of the perils of his condition figured the fears that haunt a throne under the image of a sword hanging over a man’s head. [G] What sort of power, then, is this which cannot drive away the gnawings of anxiety, or shun the stings of terror? Fain would
they themselves have lived secure, but they cannot; then they boast about their power! Dost thou count him to possess power whom thou seest to wish what he cannot bring to pass? Dost thou count him to possess power who encompasses himself with a _body-guard_, who fears those he terrifies more than they fear him, who, to keep up the semblance of power, is himself at the mercy of his slaves? Need I say anything of the _friends of kings_, when I show royal dominion itself so utterly and miserably weak—why oftentimes the royal power in its plentitude brings them low, ofttimes involves them in its fall? Nero drove his friend and preceptor, Seneca, to the choice of the manner of his death. Antoninus exposed Papinianus, who was long powerful at court, to the swords of the soldiery. Yet each of these was willing to renounce his power. Seneca tried to surrender his wealth also to Nero, and go into retirement; but neither achieved his purpose. When they tottered, their very greatness dragged them down. What manner of thing, then, is this power which keeps men in fear while they possess it—which when thou art fain to keep, thou art not safe, and when thou desirest to lay it aside thou canst not rid thyself of? Are friends any protection who have been attached by fortune, not by virtue? Nay; him whom good fortune has made a friend, ill fortune will make an enemy. And what plague is more effectual to do hurt than a foe of one's own household? [temporary happiness through power]

VI.

For many have won a great name through the mistaken beliefs of the multitude—and what can be imagined more shameful than that? Nay, they who are praised falsely must needs themselves blush at their own praises! And even when praise is won by merit, still, how does it add to the good conscience of the wise man who measures his good not by popular repute, but by the truth of inner conviction? And if at all it does seem a fair thing to get this same renown spread abroad, it follows that any failure so to spread it is held foul. But if, as I set forth but now, there must needs be many tribes and peoples whom the fame of any single man cannot reach, it follows that he whom thou esteemest glorious seems all inglorious in a neighbouring quarter of the globe. As to _popular favour_, I do not think it even worthy of mention in this place, since it never cometh of judgment, and never lasteth steadily.

‘Then, again, who does not see how empty, how foolish, is the _fame of noble birth_? Why, if the nobility is based on renown, the renown is another’s! For, truly, nobility seems to be a sort of reputation coming from the _merits of ancestors_. But if it is the praise which brings renown, of necessity it is they who are praised that are famous. Wherefore, the fame of another clothes thee not with splendour if thou hast none of thine own. So, if there is any excellence in nobility of birth, methinks it is this alone—that it would seem to impose upon the nobly born the obligation not to degenerate from the virtue of their ancestors.’

‘Then, what shall I say of the _pleasures of the body_? The lust thereof is full of uneasiness; the satiating, of repentance. What sicknesses, what intolerable pains, are they wont to bring on the bodies of those who enjoy them—the fruits of iniquity, as it were! Now, what sweetness the stimulus of pleasure may have I do not know. But that the issues of pleasure are painful everyone may understand who chooses to recall the memory of his own fleshly lusts. Nay, if these can make happiness, there is no reason why the beasts also should not be happy, since all their efforts are eagerly set upon satisfying the bodily wants. I know, indeed, that the sweetness of _wife and children_ should be right comely, yet only too true to nature is what was said of one—that he found in _his sons his tormentors_. And how galling such a _contingency_ would be, I must needs put thee in mind, since thou hast never in any wise suffered such experiences, nor art thou now under any uneasiness. In such a case, I agree with my servant Euripides, who said that a man without children was fortunate in his misfortune.’[H]
'It is beyond doubt, then, that these paths do not lead to happiness; they cannot guide anyone to the promised goal. Now, I will very briefly show what serious evils are involved in following them. Just consider. Is it thy endeavour to heap up money? Why, thou must wrest it from its present possessor! Art thou minded to put on the splendour of official dignity? Thou must beg from those who have the giving of it; thou who covetest to outvie others in honour must lower thyself to the humble posture of petition. Dost thou long for power? Thou must face perils, for thou wilt be at the mercy of thy subjects' plots. Is glory thy aim? Thou art lured on through all manner of hardships, and there is an end to thy peace of mind. Art fain to lead a life of pleasure? Yet who does not scorn and contemn one who is the slave of the weakest and vilest of things—the body? Again, on how slight and perishable a possession do they rely who set before themselves bodily excellences! Can ye ever surpass the elephant in bulk or the bull in strength? Can ye excel the tiger in swiftness? Look upon the infinitude, the solidity, the swift motion, of the heavens, and for once cease to admire things mean and worthless. And yet the heavens are not so much to be admired on this account as for the reason which guides them. Then, how transient is the lustre of beauty! how soon gone!—more fleeting than the fading bloom of spring flowers. And yet if, as Aristotle says, men should see with the eyes of Lynceus, so that their sight might pierce through obstructions, would not that body of Alcibiades, so gloriously fair in outward seeming, appear altogether loathsome when all its inward parts lay open to the view? Therefore, it is not thy own nature that makes thee seem beautiful, but the weakness of the eyes that see thee. Yet prize as unduly as ye will that body's excellences; so long as ye know that this that ye admire, whatever its worth, can be dissolved away by the feeble flame of a three days' fever. From all which considerations we may conclude as a whole, that these things which cannot make good the advantages they promise, which are never made perfect by the assemblage of all good things—these neither lead as by-ways to happiness, nor themselves make men completely happy.‘

IX.

This much may well suffice to set forth the form of false happiness; if this is now clear to thine eyes, the next step is to show what true happiness is.‘

‘Indeed,’ said I, ‘I see clearly enough that neither is independence to be found in wealth, nor power in sovereignty, nor reverence in dignities, nor fame in glory, nor true joy in pleasures.’

‘Hast thou discerned also the causes why this is so?’

‘I seem to have some inkling, but I should like to learn more at large from thee.’

‘Why, truly the reason is hard at hand. That which is simple and indivisible by nature human error separates, and transforms from the true and perfect to the false and imperfect. Dost thou imagine that which lacketh nothing can want power?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Right; for if there is any feebleness of strength in anything, in this there must necessarily be need of external protection.’

‘That is so.’

‘Accordingly, the nature of independence and power is one and the same.’

‘It seems so.’

‘Well, but dost think that anything of such a nature as this can be looked upon with contempt, or is it rather of all things most worthy of veneration?’
‘Nay; there can be no doubt as to that.’

‘Let us, then, add reverence to independence and power, and conclude these three to be one.’

‘We must if we will acknowledge the truth.’

‘Thinkest thou, then, this combination of qualities to be obscure and without distinction, or rather famous in all renown? Just consider: can that want renown which has been agreed to be lacking in nothing, to be supreme in power, and right worthy of honour, for the reason that it cannot bestow this upon itself, and so comes to appear somewhat poor in esteem?’

‘I cannot but acknowledge that, being what it is, this union of qualities is also right famous.’ ‘It follows, then, that we must admit that renown is not different from the other three.’ ‘It does,’ said I.

‘That, then, which needs nothing outside itself, which can accomplish all things in its own strength, which enjoys fame and compels reverence, must not this evidently be also fully crowned with joy?’

‘In sooth, I cannot conceive,’ said I, ‘how any sadness can find entrance into such a state; wherefore I must needs acknowledge it full of joy—at least, if our former conclusions are to hold.’

‘Then, for the same reasons, this also is necessary—that independence, power, renown, reverence, and sweetness of delight, are different only in name, but in substance differ no wise one from the other.’

‘It is,’ said I.

‘This, then, which is one, and simple by nature, human perversity separates, and, in trying to win a part of that which has no parts, fails to attain not only that portion (since there are no portions), but also the whole, to which it does not dream of aspiring.’

‘How so?’ said I.

‘He who, to escape want, seeks riches, gives himself no concern about power; he prefers a mean and low estate, and also denies himself many pleasures dear to nature to avoid losing the money which he has gained. But at this rate he does not even attain to independence—a weakling void of strength, vexed by distresses, mean and despised, and buried in obscurity. He, again, who thirsts alone for power squanders his wealth, despises pleasure, and thinks fame and rank alike worthless without power. But thou seest in how many ways his state also is defective. Sometimes it happens that he lacks necessaries, that he is gnawed by anxieties, and, since he cannot rid himself of these inconveniences, even ceases to have that power which was his whole end and aim. In like manner may we cast up the reckoning in case of rank, of glory, or of pleasure. For since each one of these severally is identical with the rest, whosoever seeks any one of them without the others does not even lay hold of that one which he makes his aim.’

‘Well,’ said I, ‘what then?’

‘Suppose anyone desire to obtain them together, he does indeed wish for happiness as a whole; but will he find it in these things which, as we have proved, are unable to bestow what they promise?’

‘Nay; by no means,’ said I.

‘Then, happiness must certainly not be sought in these things which severally are believed to afford some one of the blessings most to be desired.’

‘They must not, I admit. No conclusion could be more true.’

‘So, then, the form and the causes of false happiness are set before thine eyes. Now turn thy gaze to the other side; there thou wilt straightway see the true happiness I promised.’

‘Yea, indeed, ’tis plain to the blind.’ said I. ‘Thou didst point it out even now in seeking to unfold the causes of the false. For, unless I am mistaken, that is true and perfect happiness which crowns one with the union of independence, power, reverence, renown, and joy. And to prove to thee with how deep an insight I have
listened—since all these are the same—that which can truly bestow one of them I know to be without doubt full and complete happiness.’

‘Happy art thou, my scholar, in this thy conviction; only one thing shouldst thou add.’

‘What is that?’ said I.

‘Is there aught, thinkest thou, amid these mortal and perishable things which can produce a state such as this?’ [mortals cannot achieve this goal]

‘Nay, surely not; and this thou hast so amply demonstrated that no word more is needed.’

‘Well, then, these things seem to give to mortals shadows of the true good, or some kind of imperfect good; but the true and perfect good they cannot bestow.’

‘Even so,’ said I.

‘Since, then, thou hast learnt what that true happiness is, and what men falsely call happiness, it now remains that thou shouldst learn from what source to seek this.’

‘Yes; to this I have long been eagerly looking forward.’

‘Well, since, as Plato maintains in the “Timæus,” we ought even in the most trivial matters to implore the Divine protection, what thinkest thou should we now do in order to deserve to find the seat of that highest good?’

‘We must invoke the Father of all things,’ said I; ‘for without this no enterprise sets out from a right beginning.’

‘Thou sayest well,’ said she; and forthwith lifted up her voice and sang:

X.

‘Since now thou hast seen what is the form of the imperfect good, and what the form of the perfect also, methinks I should next show in what manner this perfection of felicity is built up. And here I conceive it proper to inquire, first, whether any excellence, such as thou hast lately defined, can exist in the nature of things, lest we be deceived by an empty fiction of thought to which no true reality answers. But it cannot be denied that such does exist, and is, as it were, the source of all things good. For everything which is called imperfect is spoken of as imperfect by reason of the privation of some perfection; so it comes to pass that, whenever imperfection is found in any particular, there must necessarily be a perfection in respect of that particular also. For were there no such perfection, it is utterly inconceivable how that so-called imperfection should come into existence. Nature does not make a beginning with things mutilated and imperfect; she starts with what is whole and perfect, and falls away later to these feeble and inferior productions. So if there is, as we showed before, a happiness of a frail and imperfect kind, it cannot be doubted but there is also a happiness substantial and perfect.’

‘Most true is thy conclusion, and most sure,’ said I.

‘Next to consider where the dwelling-place of this happiness may be. The common belief of all mankind agrees that God, the supreme of all things, is good. For since nothing can be imagined better than God, how can we doubt Him to be good than whom there is nothing better? Now, reason shows God to be good in such wise as to prove that in Him is perfect good. For were it not so, He would not be supreme of all things; for there would be something else more excellent, possessed of perfect good, which would seem to have the advantage in priority and dignity, since it has clearly appeared that all perfect things are prior to those less complete. Wherefore, lest we fall into an infinite regression, we must acknowledge the supreme God to be full
of supreme and perfect good. But we have determined that true happiness is the perfect good; therefore true happiness must dwell in the supreme Deity.'

'I accept thy reasonings,' said I; 'they cannot in any wise be disputed.'

'But, come, see how strictly and incontrovertibly thou mayst prove this our assertion that the supreme Godhead hath fullest possession of the highest good.'

'In what way, pray?' said I.

'Do not rashly suppose that He who is the Father of all things hath received that highest good of which He is said to be possessed either from some external source, or hath it as a natural endowment in such sort that thou mightest consider the essence of the happiness possessed, and of the God who possesses it, distinct and different. For if thou deemest it received from without, thou mayst esteem that which gives more excellent than that which has received. But Him we most worthily acknowledge to be the most supremely excellent of all things. If, however, it is in Him by nature, yet is logically distinct, the thought is inconceivable, since we are speaking of God, who is supreme of all things. Who was there to join these distinct essences? Finally, when one thing is different from another, the things so conceived as distinct cannot be identical. Therefore that which of its own nature is distinct from the highest good is not itself the highest good—an impious thought of Him than whom, 'tis plain, nothing can be more excellent. For universally nothing can be better in nature than the source from which it has come; therefore on most true grounds of reason would I conclude that which is the source of all things to be in its own essence the highest good.'

'And most justly,' said I.

'But the highest good has been admitted to be happiness.'

'Yes.'

'Then,' said she, 'it is necessary to acknowledge that God is very happiness.'

'Yes,' said I; 'I cannot gainsay my former admissions, and I see clearly that this is a necessary inference therefrom.'

'Reflect, also,' said she, 'whether the same conclusion is not further confirmed by considering that there cannot be two supreme goods distinct one from the other. For the goods which are different clearly cannot be severally each what the other is: wherefore neither of the two can be perfect, since to either the other is wanting; but since it is not perfect, it cannot manifestly be the supreme good. By no means, then, can goods which are supreme be different one from the other. But we have concluded that both happiness and God are the supreme good; wherefore that which is highest Divinity must also necessarily be supreme happiness.'

'No conclusion,' said I, 'could be truer to fact, nor more soundly reasoned out, nor more worthy of God.'

'Yes,' said she, 'as geometricians are wont to draw inferences from their demonstrations to which they give the name “deductions,” so will I add here a sort of corollary. For since men become happy by the acquisition of happiness, while happiness is very Godship, it is manifest that they become happy by the acquisition of Godship. But as by the acquisition of justice men become just, and wise by the acquisition of wisdom, so by parity of reasoning by acquiring Godship they must of necessity become gods. So every man who is happy is a god; and though in nature God is One only, yet there is nothing to hinder that very many should be gods by participation in that nature.' [happiness rests in God, in goodness, in unity, in harmony, in the origin of all things]

'A fair conclusion, and a precious,' said I, 'deduction or corollary, by whichever name thou wilt call it.'

'And yet,' said she, 'not one whit fairer than this which reason persuades us to add.'

'Why, what?' said I.
‘Why, seeing happiness has many particulars included under it, should all these be regarded as forming
one body of happiness, as it were, made up of various parts, or is there some one of them which forms the full
essence of happiness, while all the rest are relative to this?’

‘I would thou wouldst unfold the whole matter to me at large.’

‘We judge happiness to be good, do we not?’

‘Yea, the supreme good.’

‘And this superlative applies to all; for this same happiness is adjudged to be the completest independence,
the highest power, reverence, renown, and pleasure.’

‘What then?’

‘Are all these goods— independence, power, and the rest—to be deemed members of happiness, as it were,
or are they all relative to good as to their summit and crown?’

‘I understand the problem, but I desire to hear how thou wouldst solve it.’

‘Well, then, listen to the determination of the matter. Were all these members composing happiness, they
would differ severally one from the other. For this is the nature of parts—that by their difference they compose
one body. All these, however, have been proved to be the same; therefore they cannot possibly be members,
otherwise happiness will seem to be built up out of one member, which cannot be.’

‘There can be no doubt as to that,’ said I; ‘but I am impatient to hear what remains.’

‘Why, it is manifest that all the others are relative to the good. For the very reason why independence is
sought is that it is judged good, and so power also, because it is believed to be good. The same, too, may be
supposed of reverence, of renown, and of pleasant delight. Good, then, is the sum and source of all desirable things. That which has not in itself any good, either in reality or in semblance, can in no wise be desired. Contrariwise, even things which by nature are not good are desired as if they were truly good, if they seem to
be so. Whereby it comes to pass that goodness is rightly believed to be the sum and hinge and cause of all
things desirable. Now, that for the sake of which anything is desired itself seems to be most wished for. For
instance, if anyone wishes to ride for the sake of health, he does not so much wish for the exercise of riding as the
benefit of his health. Since, then, all things are sought for the sake of the good, it is not these so much as good
itself that is sought by all. But that on account of which all other things are wished for was, we agreed, happiness;
wherefore thus also it appears that it is happiness alone which is sought. From all which it is transparently
clear that the essence of absolute good and of happiness is one and the same.’ [we all aim for happiness, hence
goodness, hence unity, hence oneness with God]

‘I cannot see how anyone can dissent from these conclusions.’

‘But we have also proved that God and true happiness are one and the same.’

‘Yes,’ said I.

‘Then we can safely conclude, also, that God’s essence is seated in absolute good, and nowhere else.’

‘I quite agree,’ said I, ‘truly all thy reasonings hold admirably together.’

XII.

Then said she: ‘What value wouldst thou put upon the boon shouldst thou come to the knowledge of the
absolute good?’

‘Oh, an infinite,’ said I, ‘if only I were so blest as to learn to know God also who is the good.’

‘Yet this will I make clear to thee on truest grounds of reason, if only our recent conclusions stand fast.’
“They will.’
‘Have we not shown that those things which most men desire are not true and perfect good precisely for this cause—that they differ severally one from another, and, seeing that one is wanting to another, they cannot bestow full and absolute good; but that they become the true good when they are gathered, as it were, into one form and agency, so that that which is independence is likewise power, reverence, renown, and pleasant delight, and unless they are all one and the same, they have no claim to be counted among things desirable?’
‘Yes; this was clearly proved, and cannot in any wise be doubted.’
‘Now, when things are far from being good while they are different, but become good as soon as they are one, is it not true that these become good by acquiring unity?’
‘It seems so,’ said I.
‘But dost not thou allow that all which is good is good by participation in goodness?’
‘It is.’
‘Then, thou must on similar grounds admit that unity and goodness are the same; for when the effects of things in their natural working differ not, their essence is one and the same.’
‘There is no denying it.’
‘Now, dost thou know,’ said she, ‘that all which is abides and subsists so long as it continues one, but so soon as it ceases to be one it perishes and falls to pieces?’ [loss of unity means loss of happiness]
‘In what way?’
‘Why, take animals, for example. When soul and body come together, and continue in one, this is, we say, a living creature; but when this unity is broken by the separation of these two, the creature dies, and is clearly no longer living. The body also, while it remains in one form by the joining together of its members, presents a human appearance; but if the separation and dispersal of the parts break up the body’s unity, it ceases to be what it was. And if we extend our survey to all other things, without doubt it will manifestly appear that each several thing subsists while it is one, but when it ceases to be one perishes.’
‘Yes; when I consider further, I see it to be even as thou sayest.’
‘Well, is there aught,’ said she, ‘which, in so far as it acts conformably to nature, abandons the wish for life, and desires to come to death and corruption?’
‘Looking to living creatures, which have some faults of choice, I find none that, without external compulsion, forego the will to live, and of their own accord hasten to destruction. For every creature diligently pursues the end of self-preservation, and shuns death and destruction! As to herbs and trees, and inanimate things generally, I am altogether in doubt what to think.’ [we all want to live]
‘And yet there is no possibility of question about this either, since thou seest how herbs and trees grow in places suitable for them, where, as far as their nature admits, they cannot quickly wither and die. Some spring up in the plains, others in the mountains; some grow in marshes, others cling to rocks; and others, again, find a fertile soil in the barren sands; and if you try to transplant these elsewhere, they wither away. Nature gives to each the soil that suits it, and uses her diligence to prevent any of them dying, so long as it is possible for them to continue alive. Why do they all draw their nourishment from roots as from a mouth dipped into the earth, and distribute the strong bark over the pith? Why are all the softer parts like the pith deeply encased within, while the external parts have the strong texture of wood, and outside of all is the bark to resist the weather’s inclemency, like a champion stout in endurance? Again, how great is nature’s diligence to secure universal propagation by multiplying seed! Who does not know all these to be contrivances, not only for the present maintenance of a species, but for its lasting continuance, generation after generation, for ever? And do
not also the things believed inanimate on like grounds of reason seek each what is proper to itself? Why do the
flames shoot lightly upward, while the earth presses downward with its weight, if it is not that these motions
and situations are suitable to their respective natures? Moreover, each several thing is preserved by that which
is agreeable to its nature, even as it is destroyed by things inimical. Things solid like stones resist disintegration
by the close adhesion of their parts. Things fluid like air and water yield easily to what divides them, but swiftly
flow back and mingle with those parts from which they have been severed, while fire, again, refuses to be cut
at all. And we are not now treating of the voluntary motions of an intelligent soul, but of the drift of nature.
Even so it is that we digest our food without thinking about it, and draw our breath unconsciously in sleep;
nay, even in living creatures the love of life cometh not of conscious will, but from the principles of nature. For
oftentimes in the stress of circumstances will chooses the death which nature shrinks from; and contrarily, in
spite of natural appetite, will restrains that work of reproduction by which alone the persistence of perishable
creatures is maintained. So entirely does this love of self come from drift of nature, not from animal impulse.

Providence has furnished things with this most cogent reason for continuance: they must desire life, so long
as it is naturally possible for them to continue living. Wherefore in no way mayst thou doubt but that things
naturally aim at continuance of existence, and shun destruction.

'I confess,' said I, 'that what I lately thought uncertain, I now perceive to be indubitably clear.'

'Now, that which seeks to subsist and continue desires to be one; for if its oneness be gone, its very existence
cannot continue.' [what do we all desire and need to be happy, or good?]

'True,' said I.

'All things, then, desire to be one.'

'I agree.'

'But we have proved that one is the very same thing as good.'

'We have.'

'All things, then, seek the good; indeed, you may express the fact by defining good as that which all desire.'

'Nothing could be more truly thought out. Either there is no single end to which all things are relative, or
else the end to which all things universally hasten must be the highest good of all.'

Then she: 'Exceedingly do I rejoice, dear pupil; thine eye is now fixed on the very central mark of truth.
Moreover, herein is revealed that of which thou didst erstwhile profess thyself ignorant.'

'What is that?' said I.

'The end and aim of the whole universe. Surely it is that which is desired of all; and, since we have con-
cluded the good to be such, we ought to acknowledge the end and aim of the whole universe to be “the good.”
[this is the key message]

XII.

Then said I: 'With all my heart I agree with Plato; indeed, this is now the second time that these things have
been brought back to my mind—first I lost them through the clogging contact of the body; then after through
the stress of heavy grief.'

Then she continued: 'If thou wilt reflect upon thy former admissions, it will not be long before thou dost also
recollect that of which erstwhile thou didst confess thyself ignorant.'

'What is that?' said I.

'The principles of the world’s government,’ said she.
‘Yes; I remember my confession, and, although I now anticipate what thou intendest, I have a desire to hear
the argument plainly set forth.’

‘Awhile ago thou deemedst it beyond all doubt that God doth govern the world.’

‘I do not think it doubtful now, nor shall I ever; and by what reasons I am brought to this assurance I will
briefly set forth. This world could never have taken shape as a single system out of parts so diverse and opposite
were it not that there is One who joins together these so diverse things. And when it had once come together,
the very diversity of natures would have disjoined it and torn it asunder in universal discord were there not
One who keeps together what He has joined. Nor would the order of nature proceed so regularly, nor could
its course exhibit motions so fixed in respect of position, time, range, efficacy, and character, unless there were
One who, Himself abiding, disposed these various vicissitudes of change. This power, whatsoever it be, whereby
they remain as they were created, and are kept in motion, I call by the name which all recognise—God.’

Then said she: ‘Seeing that such is thy belief, it will cost me little trouble, I think, to enable thee to
win happiness, and return in safety to thy own country. But let us give our attention to the task that we have
set before ourselves. Have we not counted independence in the category of happiness, and agreed that God is
absolute happiness?’

‘Truly, we have.’

‘Then, He will need no external assistance for the ruling of the world. Otherwise, if He stands in need of
aught, He will not possess complete independence.’

‘That is necessarily so,’ said I.

‘Then, by His own power alone He disposes all things.’

‘It cannot be denied.’

‘Now, God was proved to be absolute good.’ ‘Yes; I remember.’

‘Then, He disposes all things by the agency of good, if it be true that He rules all things by His own power
whom we have agreed to be good; and He is, as it were, the rudder and helm by which the world’s mechanism
is kept steady and in order.’

‘Heartily do I agree; and, indeed, I anticipated what thou wouldst say, though it may be in feeble surmise
only.’

‘I well believe it,’ said she; ‘for, as I think, thou now bringest to the search eyes quicker in discerning truth;
but what I shall say next is no less plain and easy to see.’

‘What is it?’ said I.

‘Why,’ said she, ‘since God is rightly believed to govern all things with the rudder of goodness, and since all
things do likewise, as I have taught, haste towards good by the very aim of nature, can it be doubted that His
governance is willingly accepted, and that all submit themselves to the sway of the Disposer as conformed and
attempted to His rule?’ [the natural drive goes toward the good, or God]

‘Necessarily so,’ said I; ‘no rule would seem happy if it were a yoke imposed on reluctant wills, and not the
safe-keeping of obedient subjects.’

‘There is nothing, then, which, while it follows nature, endeavours to resist good.’

‘No; nothing.’

‘But if anything should, will it have the least success against Him whom we rightly agreed to be supreme
Lord of happiness?’

‘It would be utterly impotent.’

‘There is nothing, then, which has either the will or the power to oppose this supreme good.’
‘No; I think not.’
‘So, then,’ said she, ‘it is the supreme good which rules in strength, and graciously disposes all things.’

Then said I: ‘How delighted am I at thy reasonings, and the conclusion to which thou hast brought them, but most of all at these very words which thou usest! I am now at last ashamed of the folly that so sorely vexed me.’

‘Thou hast heard the story of the giants assailing heaven; but a beneficent strength disposed of them also, as they deserved. But shall we submit our arguments to the shock of mutual collision?—it may be from the impact some fair spark of truth may be struck out.’

‘If it be thy good pleasure,’ said I.
‘No one can doubt that God is all-powerful.’
‘No one at all can question it who thinks consistently.’
‘Now, there is nothing which One who is all-powerful cannot do.’
‘Nothing.’
‘But can God do evil, then?’
‘Nay; by no means.’

‘Then, evil is nothing,’ said she, ‘since He to whom nothing is impossible is unable to do evil.’

‘Art thou mocking me,’ said I, ‘weaving a labyrinth of tangled arguments, now seeming to begin where thou didst end, and now to end where thou didst begin, or dost thou build up some wondrous circle of Divine simplicity? For, truly, a little before thou didst begin with happiness, and say it was the supreme good, and didst declare it to be seated in the supreme Godhead. God Himself, too, thou didst affirm to be supreme good and all-complete happiness; and from this thou didst go on to add, as by the way, the proof that no one would be happy unless he were likewise God. Again, thou didst say that the very form of good was the essence both of God and of happiness, and didst teach that the absolute One was the absolute good which was sought by universal nature. Thou didst maintain, also, that God rules the universe by the governance of goodness, that all things obey Him willingly, and that evil has no existence in nature. And all this thou didst unfold without the help of assumptions from without, but by inherent and proper proofs, drawing credence one from the other.’

Then answered she: ‘Far is it from me to mock thee; nay, by the blessing of God, whom we lately addressed in prayer, we have achieved the most important of all objects. For such is the form of the Divine essence, that neither can it pass into things external, nor take up anything external into itself; but, as Parmenides says of it, “In body like to a sphere on all sides perfectly rounded,”

... it rolls the restless orb of the universe, keeping itself motionless the while. And if I have also employed reasonings not drawn from without, but lying within the compass of our subject, there is no cause for thee to marvel, since thou hast learnt on Plato’s authority that words ought to be akin to the matter of which they treat.’

[He concludes by saying in Book IV that the evil ones in life, who truly exist, really do not exist because they move deliberately away from good, hence destroy themselves, since they turn against their own instinct, and so deserve only pity!]
The Song of Hildebrand

By Anonymous

This is the oldest medieval German literary text, and the first heroic poem, copied down in a liturgical manuscript sometime during the early ninth century in the famous Benedictine monastery of Fulda, today northeast of Frankfurt and south of Kassel. We do not know why this fragmentary text was even written down in the first place in a liturgical manuscript (first and last page), but we can be certain that the monks considered it an important text, perhaps building intriguing bridges to the pagan cultures that they tried to convert to Christianity. The tragic development between father and son, both leaders of hostile armies, strongly suggests that the poem reflects on the collapse of ancient tribal values among the Germanic people, on the devastating consequences of failed communication between close family members, and on the desperate need to abandon traditional heroic values and to subscribe to new, perhaps Christian, ideals and principles of personal exchanges. The two pages of this epic were stored in presumably safe salt mines at the end of the Second World War, but were nevertheless stolen by some American soldier. The first leaf reappeared in the USA during the 1950s and was returned to Kassel in 1955, the second one was restored to Germany in 1972.

The first part of this heroic poem might be hard to understand because the poet manipulated the historical account, turning everything on its head. Theoderic, here Dietrich, had actually conquered Italy with the silent approval of the Eastern Roman emperor Zeno in Constantinople, and in that process had defeated the general-king Odoacer, whom he personally murdered in 493. This Theoderic was also the Ostrogothic ruler in whose service we find Boethius (see above). Later poets and chroniclers changed all those events, and made Theoderic/Dietrich to Odoacer’s victim who had to flee and to go into exile with the Hunnish ruler Attila/Etzel. Hildebrand is described as one of Dietrich’s liege men who had to follow his lord into exile.
(Old High German, *circa* 800 C.E.)

Ik gihorta ēat seggen,
ēat sih urhettun aenon muotin,
Hiltibrant enti Hadubrant untar hereiun tuem.

I heard this tale [of hap and harm],
That two warriors wielded their weapons against each other,
Hildebrand and Hadubrand, between two hosts.
The father and son fastened their armor,
Buckled their harness, belted their swords on
Over coat of mail as to combat they rode.
Hildebrand spoke then, the hoary-hair’d warrior,
More wise in life’s wisdom: he warily asked,
And few were his words, who his father was
In the folk of the foemen. “[Thy friends would I know,
And kindly tell me] what kin thou dost claim.
If thou namest but one, I shall know then the others:
The kin of this kingdom are couth to me all.”
Hadubrand answer’d, Hildebrand’s son:
“This lore I learned from long ago,
From the wise and old who were of yore,
That Hildebrand hight my father: my name is Hadubrand.
Off to the east he wander’d, the anger of Ottokar fleeing,
Marching away with Dietrich, and many a man went with him.
He left in the land a little one lorn,
A babe at the breast in the bower of the bride,
Bereft of his rights: thus he rode to the east.
But later Dietrich lost my father
And lived henceforth a lonely man.
For the foe of Ottokar, so fierce and keen,
Was the dearest of thanes to Dietrich his lord.
He was fain to fight where the fray was thick:
Known was his bravery among bold warriors.
I can not believe that he lives longer.
“I swear by the God who sways the heavens
That the bonds of blood forbid our strife.”
Then he unclaspt from his arm the clinging gold,
Which was wrought of coin that the king had given.
The lord of the Huns: “With love I give it.”
But Hadubrand answer’d, Hildebrand’s son:
“With the tip of the spear one takes the gift
From the sharpened edge of the foeman’s shaft.
Thou thinkest, old Hun, thy thoughts are deep,
Thou speakest alluring words with the spear it would like thee
to wound me.
With untruth art thou come to old age for trickery clings to thee ever.
It was said to me by seafarers
Coming west over the wave that war slew him.
Dead is Hildebrand, Heribrand’s son.”
“Great Weirdwielder, woe worth the day!
For sixty winters and summers I wander’d,
Battling with foemen where blows keen fell.
From the scarped wall unscathed I came.
Now the son of my loins with the sword will hew me;
He will deal me death or I dash him to earth.
But now canst thou strike, if strong be thine arm,
Canst win the harness from so hoary a man.
And strip the spoils from the stricken foe.
Hadubrand answer’d, Hildebrand’s son:
“Full well I hold from thy harness rich.
That thou comest hither from a kindly lord,
In whose kingdom thou wast not a wandering wretch.”
“The heart of a coward would the Hun now have
Who would shrink from a foe so fain to fight.
To struggle together. Let each now strive
To see whether today he must bite the dust
Or may bear from the field the byrnies of both.35
Then first they hurled the hurtling spears
In sharpest showers that shook the shields.
Then they clasht with their brands, the battle-boards bursting
And hewed with might the white linden
Till they shivered the shields with shattering strokes,
As they wielded their weapons. …

[trans. Francis A. Wood]
The Nibelungenlied

By Anonymous (circa. 1200)

The anonymous Nibelungenlied was composed around 1200 at the court of Bishop Wolfger von Erlau in Passau, today at the border of Germany and Austria, northwest of Salzburg. Although surviving as a written heroic epic in numerous manuscripts, the anonymous poet drew on a variety of oral sources dating back to the fifth and sixth centuries. In fact, the appearance of the Hunnish King Etzel/Attila who marries the Burgundian princess Kriemhild proves to be a strangely modified historical reference to the highly feared Hunnish ruler Attila (d. 453) who had tried to attack Rome but was defeated in 451 in the area of modern-day northeastern France. The Middle High German poet might have been a scribe in the service of Bishop Wolfger, and he managed to preserve, or create once again, one of the most important heroic epics from the entire Middle Ages with this work. Although there are two distinct parts, the first taking us to the death of the hero Siegfried, the second one to the total annihilation of all Burgundians (by then mysteriously called “Nibelungen”) and the death of the entire dynasty of King Gunther, including his own sister Kriemhild, the scribe managed to merge both parts, and others, and created a most ominous heroic poem, which enjoyed great popularity far into the sixteenth century. Its rediscovery began in the middle of the eighteenth century, and the Nibelungenlied has been regarded one of the greatest German heroic epics ever since.

(1) In old tales they tell us many wonders of heroes and of high courage, of glad feasting, of weeping and of mourning; herein ye shall read of the marvellous deeds and of the strife of brave men.

There grew up in Burgundy a noble maiden; in no land was a fairer. Kriemhild was her name. Well favoured was the damsel, and by reason of her died many warriors. Doughty knights in plenty wooed her, as was meet, for of her body she was exceeding comely, and her virtues were an adornment to all women.

Three kings noble and rich guarded her, Gunther and Gernot, warriors of fame, and Giselher the youth, a chosen knight. The damsel was their sister, and the care of her fell on them. These lords were courteous and of high lineage, bold and very strong, each of them the pick of knights. The name of their country was Burgundy, and they did great deeds, after, in Etzel’s land. At Worms, by the Rhine, they dwelled in might with many a proud lord for vassal.

Their mother was a rich queen and hight Uta, and the name of their father was Dankrat, who, when his life was ended, left them his lands. A strong man was he in his time, and one that in his youth won great worship.

Now it so fell that Kriemhild, the pure maid, dreamed a dream that she fondled a wild falcon, and eagles wrested it from her; the which to see grieved her more than any ill that had happened to her heretofore.

This dream she told to Uta, her mother, who interpreted it on this wise. “The falcon that thou sawest is a noble man; yet if God keep him not, he is a lost man to thee.”

“What speakest thou to me of a man, mother mine? Without their love would I still abide, that I may remain fair till my death, nor suffer dole from any man’s love.”

Said her mother then, “Be not so sure; for wouldst thou ever on this earth have heart’s gladness, it cometh from the love of a man. And a fair wife wilt thou be, if God but lead hither to thee a true and trusty knight.”

“Say not so, mother mine,” answered the maiden, “for on many a woman and oft hath it been proven that the meed of love is sorrow. From both I will keep me, that evil betide not.”

Long in such wise abode the high, pure maiden, nor thought to love any. Nevertheless, at the last, she wedded a brave man; that was the falcon she dreamed of erstwhile, as her mother foretold it. Yea, bitter was her vengeance on her kinsmen that slew him, and by reason of his death died many a mother’s son.

(2) There grew up in the Netherland a rich king’s child, whose father was called Siegmund and his mother Sieglind, in a castle high and famous called Xanten, down by the Rhine’s side. Goodly was this knight, by my troth, his body without blemish, a strong and valiant man of great worship; abroad, through the whole earth, went his fame. The hero hight Siegfried, and he rode boldly into many lands. Ha! in Burgundy, I trow, he found warriors to his liking. Or he was a man grown he had done marvels with his hand, as is said and sung, albeit now there is no time for more word thereof.

(3) No love pangs ever entered the heart of the hero Siegfried until one day he received news that there was a fair maid in Burgundy of utmost beauty. Because of her he was later to experience many joys and also many troubles.

Her beauty was rumoured far and wide, and the fame of her virtues, joined thereto, brought many strangers into Gunther’s land. Yet, though many wooed her, Kriemhild was firm-minded to wed none. The man that was to win her was yet a stranger.

Thereupon Siegmund’s son yearned to her with true love. Weighed with him all other suitors were as wind, for he was meet to be chosen of fair women; and, or long, Kriemhild the high maiden was bold Sir Siegfried’s bride.
The tidings came to Siegmund’s ear. His knight told him Siegfried’s intent, and it irked him that his son should woo the royal maiden. To Sieglind, the king’s wife, they told it also, and she feared for his life, for she knew Gunther and his men.

They would have turned him from his quest.

Spoke bold Siegfried then, “Dearest father mine, either I will think no more on women at all, or I will woo where my heart’s desire is.” And for all they could say, he changed not his purpose.

Then said the king, “If thou wilt not yield in this, by my faith, I approve thy choice, and will further thee therein as I best can. Nevertheless, Gunther hath many mighty men, were it none other than Hagen, an arrogant and overweening knight. I fear both thou and I must rue that thou goest after this king’s daughter.”

Siegfried answered, “I will not ride with an army of warriors to the Rhine; it would shame me so to win the maiden by force. I would win her with mine own hand. One of twelve I will forth to Gunther’s land, and to this shalt thou help me, my father Siegmund.”

They gave to his knights cloaks of fur, some grey and some striped.

Now the time was come to ride forth, and all the folk, men and women, made dole, lest they should return never more.

The knights were downcast, and the maidens wept. Their hearts told them, I ween, that by reason of this day’s doings, many a dear one would lie dead. Needs made they dole, for they were sorrowful.

On the seventh morning after this, the fearless band drew toward Worms on the Rhine.

They told the king that a valiant knight, fair equipped and apparelled, that knew none in Burgundy, was come thither. And the king marvelled where these proud knights in shining harness, with their shields new and massy, might hie from. It irked him that none knew it.

Ortwin of Metz, a goodly man of high courage, spoke to the king then, “Since we know nothing thereof, bid to thee Hagen mine uncle, and show them to him. For he hath knowledge of the mighty men of all lands; and what he knoweth he will tell us.”

The king summoned Hagen with his vassals, and he drew nigh with proud step, and asked the king his will. “Strange knights are come to my court that none knoweth. If thou hast ever seen them afore, tell me thereof truly.”

“That will I,” spoke Hagen, and went to the window, and looked down on the strangers below. The show of them and their equipment pleased him, but he had not seen them afore in Burgundy. And he said, ‘From wheresoever they be come, they must be princes, or princes’ envoys. Their horses are good, and wonderly rich their vesture. From whatsoever they hie, they be seemly men. But for this I vouch, that, though I never saw Siegfried, yonder knight that goeth so proud is, of a surety, none but he. New adventures he bringeth hither. By this hero’s hand fell the brave Nibelungen, Shilbung and Nibelung, the high princes. Wonders hath he wrought by his prowess. I have heard tell that on a day when he rode alone, he came to a mountain, and chanced on a company of brave men that guarded the Nibelungen hoard, whereof he knew nothing. The Nibelung men had, at that moment, made an end of bringing it forth from a hole in the hill, and oddly enow, they were about to share it. Siegfried saw them and marvelled thereat. He drew so close that they were ware of him and he of them. Whéreupon one said, ‘Here cometh Siegfried, the hero of the Netherland!’ Strange adventure met he amidst of them. Shilbung and Nibelung welcomed him, and with one accord the princely youths asked him to divide the treasure atween them, and begged this so eagerly that he could not say them nay. The tale goeth that he saw there more precious stones than an hundred double waggons had sufficed to carry, and of the red Nibelung gold yet more. This must bold Siegfried divide. In guerdon therefor they gave him the sword of the Nibelungen, and
were ill paid by Siegfried for the service. He strove vainly to end the task, whereat they were wroth. And when he could not bear it through, the kings, with their men, fell upon him. But with their father's sword that hight Balmung, he wrested from both hoard and land. The princes had twelve champions—strong giants, yet little it bested them. Siegfried slew them wrathfully with his hand, and, with Balmung, vanquished seven hundred knights; and many youths there, afraid of the man and his sword, did homage for castles and land. He smote the two kings dead. Then he, himself, came in scathe by Alberic, that would have avenged the death of his masters then and there, till that he felt Siegfried's exceeding might. When the dwarf could not overcome him, they ran like lions to the mountain, where Siegfried won from Alberic the cloud-cloak that hight Tarnkappe. Then was Siegfried, the terrible man, master of the hoard. They that had dared the combat lay slain; and he bade carry the treasure back whence the Nibelungen had brought it forth; and he made Alberic the keeper thereof, after that he had sworn an oath to serve him as his man, and to do all that he commanded him.

"These are his deeds," said Hagen; "bolder knight there never was. Yet more I might tell of him. With his hand he slew a dragon, and bathed him in its blood, that his skin is as horn, and no weapon can cut him, as hath been proven on him oft times.

"Let us welcome the young lord, that we come not in his hate. So fair is he of his body that one may not look unfriendly thereon; with his strength he hath done great deeds."

"Thou art welcome," said Uta's son; "thou and thy comrades that are with thee. We will serve thee gladly, I and my kinsmen."

They let pour for them Gunther's wine, and the host of the land, even Gunther the king, said, "All that is ours, and whatsoever thou mayest with honour desire, is thine to share with us, body and goods."

The king and his men busied them with sports, and in each undertaking Siegfried still approved him the best. Whether they threw the stone or shot with the shaft, none came near him by reason of his great strength. Held the doughty warriors tourney before the women, then looked these all with favour on the knight of the Netherland. But, as for him, he thought only on his high love. The fair women of the court demanded who the proud stranger was. "He is so goodly," they said, "and so rich his apparel."

And there answered them folk enow, "It is the king of the Netherland." Whate'er sport they followed, he was ready. In his heart he bare the beautiful maiden that as yet he had not seen: the which spoke in secret kind words also of him. When the youths tilted in the courtyard, Kriemhild, the high princess, looked down at them from her window; nor, at that time, desired she better pastime. Neither had he asked better, had he known that his heart's dear one gazed upon him.

When the rich kings rode abroad, it behoved the knights to go with them, wherefore Siegfried also rode forth, the which irked the damsel sore; and likewise, for love of her, he was heavy enow of his cheer.

So a year (I say honestly) he abode by these princes, nor in all that time had once seen his dear one, that afterward brought him much gladness and dole.

(5) On Whitsun morning there drew toward the hightide a goodly company of brave men, fairly clad: five thousand or more, and they made merry far and wide, and strove with one another in friendly combat.

Now Gunther knew well how, truly and from his heart, the hero of the Netherland loved his sister whom he had not yet seen, and whose beauty the people praised before that of all other maidens.

And he said, "Now counsel me, my kinsmen and my lieges, how we may order this hightide, that none may blame us in anything; for only unto such deeds as are good, pertaineth lasting fame."
Then answered Ortwin, the knight, to the king, “If thou wilt win for thyself glory from the hightide, let now the maidens that dwell with honour in our midst appear before us. For what shall pleasure or glad a man more than to behold beautiful damsels and fair women? Bid thy sister come forth and show herself to thy guests.”

And this word pleased the knights.

“That will I gladly do,” said the king; and they that heard him rejoiced. He sent a messenger to Queen Uta, and besought her that she would come to the court with her daughter and her womenfolk.

And these took from the presses rich apparel, and what lay therein in wrapping-cloths; they took also brooches, and their silken girdles worked with gold, and attired themselves in haste. Many a noble maiden adorned herself with care, and the youths longed exceedingly to find favour in their eyes, and had not taken a rich king’s land in lieu thereof. And they that knew not one another before looked each upon each right gladly.

The rich king commanded an hundred men of his household, his kinsmen and hers, to escort his sister, their swords in their hand. Uta, with an hundred and more of her women, gorgeously attired, came forth from the female apartments, and many noble damsels followed after her daughter. The knights pressed in upon them, thinking thereby to behold the beautiful maiden.

And lo! the fair one appeared, like the dawn from out the dark clouds. And he that had borne her so long in his heart was no more aweary, for the beloved one, his sweet lady, stood before him in her beauty. Bright jewels sparkled on her garments, and bright was the rose-red of her hue, and all they that saw her proclaimed her peerless among maidens.

As the moon excelleth in light the stars shining clear from the clouds, so stood she, fair before the other women, and the hearts of the warriors were uplifted. The chamberlains made way for her through them that pressed in to behold her. And Siegfried joyed, and sorrowed likewise, for he said in his heart, “How should I woo such as thee? Surely it was a vain dream; yet I were liefer dead than a stranger to thee.”

Thinking thus he waxed oft white and red; yea, graceful and proud stood the son Sieglind, goodliest of heroes to behold, as he were drawn on parchment by the skill of a cunning master. And the knights fell back as the escort commanded, and made way for the high-hearted women, and gazed on them with glad eyes. Many a dame of high degree was there.

She greeted him mild and maidenly, and her colour was kindled when she saw before her the high-minded man, and she said, “Welcome, Sir Siegfried, noble knight and good.” His courage rose at her words, and graceful, as beseemed a knight, he bowed himself before her and thanked her. And love that is mighty constrained them, and they yearned with their eyes in secret. I know not whether, from his great love, the youth pressed her white hand, but two love-desirous hearts, I trow, had else done amiss.

Nevermore, in summer or in May, bore Siegfried in his heart such high joy, as when he went by the side of her whom he coveted for his dear one. And many a knight, thought, “Had it been my hap to walk with her, as I have seen him do, or to lie by her side, certes, I had suffered it gladly! Yet never, truly, hath warrior served better to win a queen.” From what land soever the guests came, they were ware only of these two. And she was bidden kiss the hero. He had never had like joy before in this world.

(6) A fresh rumour from Iceland spread down to the Rhine. It was reported that many maidens dwelt there; and Gunther was minded to woo one of them, whereat his knights and his liegeman were well pleased.

There was a queen high throned across the sea, that had not her like, beyond measure fair and of mickle strength, and her love was for that knight only that could pass her at the spear. She hurled the stone and leapt...
after it to the mark. Any that desired the noble damsel’s love must first win boldly in these three games. If he failed but in one, he lost his head.

On a day that the king sat with his men, and they cast to and fro whom their prince might best take to wife for his own comfort and the good of his land, the lord of Rhineland said, “I will hence across the sea to Brunhild, let what will betide. For her sake I will peril my body, for I lose it if I win her not to wife.”

“Do not so,” said Siegfried. “Cruel is the queen, and he that would woo her playeth too high a stake. Make not this journey.”

But King Gunther answered, “Never yet was woman born so strong and bold, that, with this single hand, I could not vanquish her in strife.”

“Then I counsel thee,” said Hagen, “to ask Siegfried to share with thee this hard emprise. It were well, since he knoweth so much of Brunhild.”

So the king spoke, “Wilt thou help me, most noble Siegfried, to woo the damsel? Grant me this, and if I win the royal maiden for my dear one, I will adventure honour and life for thy sake.”

Siegfried, the son of Siegmund, made answer, “Give me thy sister Kriemhild, the high princess, and I will do it. Other meed I ask not.”

Said Gunther, “I swear it, Siegfried, on thy hand. If Brunhild come hither, I will give thee my sister to wife; and mayest thou live joyfully with her to thy life’s end.”

The noble warriors sware an oath; and travail enow they endured, or they led back the fair one to the Rhine; yea, oftentimes they were straightened sore.

I have heard tell of wild dwarfs: how that they dwell in hollow mountains, and wear wonderful cloaks called *Tarnkappes*. And whoso hath this on his body cometh not in scathe by blows or spear-thrusts; nor is he seen of any man so long as he weareth it, but may spy and hearken at his will. His strength also waxeth thereby; so runneth the tale.

Siegfried took the *Tarnkappe* with him that he had wrested from Alberic the dwarf. And these high and noble knights made ready for the journey. When strong Siegfried did on the *Tarnkappe*, he was strong with the strength of twelve men, and with these cunning devices he won the royal maiden; for the cloak of cloud was fashioned on such wise, that whoso wore it did what him listed, none seeing; and he won Brunhild thereby, that after brought him dole.

Kriemhild said, “Dear brother, thou didst better to stay here and woo other women without risk to thy body. It were easy to find, nigh at hand, a wife of as high lineage.”

I ween her heart told her the dole that was to come.

She spoke further, “Sir Siegfried, to thy care and good faith I commend my dear brother, that no evil betide him in Brunhild’s land.” The knight gave his hand thereon, and promised it. He said, “Fear not, lady; if I live, I will bring him back safe to the Rhine. I swear it by mine own body.”

And the fair maiden thanked him.

They say that by the twelfth morning the wind had blown them afar to Isenstein in Brunhild’s land, the which none had seen before that, save Siegfried. When King Gunther beheld so many towers and broad marches, he cried out, “Now say, friend Siegfried; knowest thou whose are these castles and these fair lands? By my troth, I have never in my life seen castles so many and so goodly as stand there before us. A mighty man he must be that hath builded them.”

Whereunto Siegfried made answer, “Yea, I know well. They are all Brunhild’s—towers and lands, and the castle of Isenstein. I say honestly; and many fair women shall ye behold this day. Now I counsel you, O knights, for so it
seemeth good to me, that ye be all of one mind and one word; we must stand warily before Brunhild the queen. And when we see the fair one amidst of her folk, be sure ye tell all the same story: that Gunther is my lord and I his liegeman. So shall he win to his desire. Yet this I do less for love of thee than for the fair maid, thy sister, that is to me as my soul and mine own body, and for whom I gladly serve, that I may win her to wife.”

They promised with one accord, and none gainsayed him through pride, the which stood them in good stead when the king came to stand before Brunhild.

(7) They left the vessel unguarded on the beach, and rode up to the castle. There they saw eighty and six towers, three great palaces, and a stately hall of costly marble, green like grass, wherein the queen sat with her courtiers.

Brunhild’s men unlocked the castle gate and threw it wide, and ran toward them, and welcomed the guests to their queen’s land. They bade hold the horses, and take the shields from their hands. And the chamberlain said, “Do off your swords now, and your bright armour.” “Not so,” answered Hagen of Troneck; “we will bear these ourselves.”

But Siegfried told them the custom of the court. “It is the law here that no guest shall bear arms. Wherefore ye did well to give them up.”

Gunther’s man obeyed, much loth. They bade pour out the wine for the guests, and see that they were well lodged. Willing knights in princely attire ran to and fro to serve them, spies with many glances at the strangers.

They brought word to Brunhild that unknown warriors in rich apparel were come thither, sailing on the sea, and the beautiful maiden questioned them. “Tell me,” said the queen, “who these strangers be that stand yonder so proudly, and for whose sake they be come.” And one of the courtiers made answer. “In honesty, Lady, albeit I never set eyes on them, one among them much resembleth Siegfried, and him I counsel thee to welcome. The second of the company hath so lofty a mien that, if his power be equal thereto, he might well be a great king and a ruler of wide lands, for he standeth right proudly before the others. The third, O Queen, is grim, yet a goodly man withal. His glance is swift and dark; he is fierce-tempered, I ween. The youngest pleaseth me well. Maidenly and modest he standeth, yet it went hard, methinketh, with any that angered him. For all that he seemeth gentle, and is fashioned daintily, if his wrath were once kindled, many a woman might weep, for he is a bold and virtuous knight, and right worshipful.”

The queen said, “Bring me my robe. If strong Siegfried be come into my land to woo me, he shall pay for it with his life. I fear him not so greatly that I should yield me to be his wife.”

Then Brunhild attired her in haste. An hundred or more of her damsels went with her, richly adorned, whom the guests beheld gladly. Brunhild’s knights of Issland gave them escort, to the number of five hundred or thereabout, their swords in their hands, the which irked the bold strangers. They stood up from their seats; and the queen spoke courteously to them when she saw Siegfried, “Thou art welcome, Siegfried, to this land. To what end art thou come? I prithee tell me.”

“I thank thee, O Brunhild, fair daughter of a king, that thou greetest me before this worshipful knight. Thou showest Siegfried too much honour, for he is my lord, and the king of Rhineland.”

She answered, “If he be thy lord, and thou be his man, let him withstand me at the games. If he have the mastery, then am I his wife, but let him fail in one of them, and ye be all dead men.”

Then said Hagen of Troneck, “Lady, show us the games that thou proposest. It will go hard with Gunther or he yield thee the mastery, for he trueth well to win so fair a maiden.”

“He must put the stone, and leap after it, and throw the spear with me. Ye may easily forfeit honour and life; wherefore be not so confident, but bethink you well.”
Then bold Siegfried went to the king, and bade him fear nothing, but speak freely to the queen. “For,” said he, “I will aid thee with cunning devices.”

And King Gunther said, “Command me, great queen, and were it more yet, I would risk it for thy sake. I will lose my head, or win thee to wife.”

When the queen heard this word, she bade haste to the sports, as was meet, and let them bring her harness, a golden buckler and a goodly shield. She did on a surcoat of silk from Libya, that had never been pierced in combat, cunningly fashioned and embroidered, and shining with precious stones. Her pride greatly angered the knights, and Dankwart and Hagen were downcast, for they feared for their lord, and thought, “Ill-starred was this journey.”

Meanwhile, Siegfried, the cunning man, went, when none spied him, to the ship, where he found the Tarnkappe, and he did it on swiftly, that none knew. Then he hasted back to the crowd of knights, where the queen gave order for the sports, and, by his magic, he stole in among them, that no man was ware of him. The ring was marked out in the presence of armed knights to the number of seven hundred. These were the umpires, that should tell truly who won in the sports.

Then came Brunhild. She stood armed, as she had meant to do battle with all the kings of all the world. The silk was covered with gold spangles that showed her white skin. Her attendants brought her, for the strife, a shield of ruddy gold with iron studs, mickle and broad. The maid’s thong was an embroidered band, whereon lay stones green like grass, that sparkled among the gold. The knight must, certes, be bold that won such a lady. They say the shield the maiden bore was three spans thick under the folds, rich with steel and gold, that four of her chamberlains scarce could carry it.

When strong Hagen saw them drag the shield forward, the hero of Troneck was wroth, and cried, “How now, King Gunther? We be dead men, for thou wooest the Devil’s wife!”

Yet more must ye hear of her vesture. Her coat of mail was covered with silk from Azagouc, costly and rich, and the stones thereof sparkled on the queen’s body. They brought her the spear, heavy and big and sharp, that she was wont to throw. Strong and huge it was, mickle and broad, and made grim wounds with its edges. And hear, now, the marvel of its heaviness. Three weights and a half of iron were welded for it. Three of Brunhild’s lords scarce carried it. A woeful man was King Gunther, and he thought, “Lo! now, not the Devil in Hell could escape her. Were I in Burgundy with my life, she might wait long enough for my wooing.” He stood dismayed.

Then they brought him his armour, and he did it on.

Brunhild’s great strength appeared. They brought her a stone into the circle, heavy and huge, round also, and broad. Twelve strong knights scarce sufficed thereto. And this she threw when she had hurled the spear. Whereat the Burgundians were sore troubled, and Hagen cried, “Who is this that Gunther wooeth? Would she were the Devil’s bride in Hell!”

Then she turned back the sleeves from her white arms, and seized the shield, and brandished the spear above her head, and the contest began. Gunther was sore dismayed. If Siegfried had not helped him, certes he had lost his life; but Siegfried went up to him secretly, and touched his hand. Gunther fell in fear by reason of his magic, and he thought, “Who touched me?” He looked round and saw no man. But Siegfried said, “It is I, Siegfried, thy friend. Fear nothing from the queen. Give me the shield from thy hands, and let me carry it, and give heed to what I say. Make thou the gestures, and I will do the work.” And Gunther was glad when he knew him. “Guard well the secret of my magic, for all our sakes, lest the queen slay thee. See how boldly she challengeth thee.”

Thereupon the royal maiden hurled her spear against the mickle and broad shield of Sieglind’s child, that sparks flew from it, as before a wind. The strong spear pierced through the shield, and struck fire from the coat of
mail below. And the mighty man fell, and had perished but for the Tarnkappe. The blood gushed from Siegfried’s mouth. But he sprang up swiftly, and took the spear that she had shot through his buckler, and threw it back again with great force. He thought, “I will not slay so fair a maiden,” and he turned the spear, and hurled it with the haft loud against her harness. From her mail, also, the sparks flew as on the wind, for Siegmund’s child threw mightily; and her strength failed before the blow. King Gunther, I ween, had never done it alone.

Brunhild sprang to her feet again, and cried, “I thank thee, Gunther, for that blow.” For she thought he had done it with his own strength, nor guessed that a far mightier man had felled her.

Then, greatly wroth, she hasted and lifted the stone on high; she flung it far from her, and leaped after it with loud-ringing armour. The stone landed twenty and four paces off; but the maid sprang further. Then Siegfried went swiftly where the stone lay. Gunther lifted it, but it was the man they saw not that threw it. Siegfried was mighty, bold and big. He hurled the stone further, and he leaped further; moreover, through his magic, he had strength enow to bear King Gunther with him. The spring was made, the stone lay on the ground, and none was seen there but Gunther, the knight. Fair Brunhild was red with anger.

So Siegfried saved Gunther from death.

Then Brunhild said aloud to her folk, when she saw the hero at the far end of the ring unhurt, “Gome hither at once, my kinsmen and my lieges. Ye are subject henceforth to King Gunther.”

The bold men laid the weapons from their hands at the feet of great Gunther of Burgundy. For they deemed he had won the game by his own strength.

He greeted them fair, for he was a courteous man, and he took the beautiful maiden by the hand. She gave him power in her kingdom, whereat bold Hagen rejoiced.

(8) She chose from among her knights two thousand men to follow her to the Rhine, and the thousand Nibelung warriors. Then she made ready for the journey, and rode down to the shore. She took with her six and eighty women, and an hundred fair damsels, and they tarried not longer, but set out. They that were left behind wept sore! Graciously and sweetly the lady quitted her land. She kissed her nearest of kin that stood round. With loving farewells they reached the sea. To the land of her fathers the maiden returned nevermore.

(10) On the far bank of the Rhine appeared a mighty host—the king with his guests—and they drew nigh to the strand, where damsels, led by the bridle, stood ready with welcome.

Gunther, with his friends, went down from the ships; he led Brunhild by the hand; garments and precious stones shone bright and sparkled. And Kriemhild went eagerly toward them and greeted Brunhild and her following. They drew back their, headbands with white fingers, and kissed one another through love. Then Kriemhild the maid spoke courteously, “Thou are right welcome in this land, to me and to my mother, and to our friends.” And they courted and embraced. Never, I ween, was any greeted fairer than the bride by Uta and her daughter, for they ceased not to kiss her sweet mouth.

When Brunhild’s women were all gotten to land, the knights led them before the queen, where welcome was not stinted them and where many a red mouth was kissed. The rich kings’ daughters stood long side by side, and the warriors gazed on them. What these had heard tell they saw with their eyes, that none surpassed those two women in beauty, neither was any blemish found in them. They that esteem women for the comeliness of the body and what the eye beholdeth, extolled King Gunther’s wife, but the wise that look deeper said, “Praised shall Kriemhild be before Brunhild.” And the bright-attired women drew together where the silken canopies were spread, and the goodly tents, in the field before Worms.
The chairs were set, for the king was ready to go to table with his guests, and beautiful Brunhild stood by him and wore her crown in Gunther’s land. Certes, she was proud enough.

Many were the seats, they say, and the tables goodly and broad and laden with food. Little, I trow, was lacking! And many a noble guest sat there with the king. Gunther’s chamberlains carried round water in golden ewers. If any tell you of a prince’s table better served, believe it not.

Or Gunther took the water, Siegfried, as was meet, minded him of his oath that he had sworn or ever he saw Brunhild in Issland.

He said, “Forget not the vow thou swarest with thy hand that, if Brunhild came into Burgundy, thou wouldst give me thy sister. Where is thine oath now? Mickle toil was mine on the journey.”

The king answered his guest, “Thou hast done well to remind me. I go not back from the oath of my hand. What I can do therein I will do.”

They bade Kriemhild to the court before the king. She went up to the hall with her maidens, but Giselher sprang down the stair and cried, “Send back these maidens. My sister goeth alone to the king.”

They brought Kriemhild before Gunther, where he stood amidst of knights from many lands. And they bade her stand in the middle of the hall. Brunhild, by this time, was come to the table, and knew nothing of what was toward. Then said Dankrat’s son to his kinsmen, “Help me now, that my sister take Siegfried to her husband.”

And they answered with one accord, “That may she do with honour.”

Gunther said, “Dear sister, I prithee of thy goodness, loose me from mine oath. I promised thee to a knight; and truly thou wilt do my will, if thou take him to husband.”

The maiden answered, “Dear brother mine, thou needest not to entreat. Command and I will obey. Him that thou givest me to husband I will gladly wed.”

Siegfried grew red for love and joy, and vowed his service to Kriemhild. And they bade them stand together in a circle, and asked her if she would take the knight.

On maidenly wise she was shamefast at the first, yet so great was Siegfried’s good fortune and his grace that she refused not his hand; and the king of the Netherland, from his side also, plighted his troth to Kriemhild.

When their word was given, Siegfried took his queen in his arms straightway, and kissed her before the warriors. The circle brake up when this was ended, and Siegfried took the seat of honour with Kriemhild. The vassals served before them, and his Nibelung knights stood nigh.

The king and Brunhild were seated and Brunhild saw Kriemhild sitting by Siegfried, the which irked her sore; she fell to weeping, and the hot tears ran down her bright cheeks.

Whereupon the host said, “What aileth thee sweet Lady, that the light of thine eyes is dim? Rejoice shouldst thou rather, for my land and rich castles and true liegeman are all subject to thee.”

“I have cause to weep,” said the maiden. “I grieve from my heart for thy sister, that she sitteth there by thy vassal. I must ever weep to see her so shamed.”

But King Gunther answered, “I prithee, silence! Another time I will tell thee why I gave my sister to Siegfried. May she live happily with the knight.”

But she said, “I must grieve for her beauty and her birth. If I knew whither I might flee, I would not suffer thee by me, till that thou hast told me how Siegfried hath gotten Kriemhild.”

Gunther answered then, “Hearken, and I will tell thee. Know that he hath lands and castles even as I, and is a rich king; wherefore I give him my beautiful sister gladly to wife.” Yet, for all the king could say to her, she was downcast.
The knights rose from the table, and the tourney waxed so fierce that the castle rang with the noise. But the king wearied amidst of his guests. He thought, “It were softer alone with my wife.” And his heart dwelled on the mickle joy her love must bring him, and he looked at her sweetly.

Then they stopped the tourney, that the king might retire with his wife.

At the foot of the stair that led forth from the hall, Kriemhild and Brunhild came face to face. They were not foes yet. Their attendants followed them, and longer they tarried not. The chamberlains brought candles, and the knights of the two kings parted in two companies, and many followed Siegfried.

Then came the heroes where they were to lie, and each thought to win his wife’s favour, whereat their hearts melted.

With Siegfried all went well. He caressed the maiden lovingly, and she was as his life. He had not given her alone for a thousand other women.

Of them I will tell no further. Hear now how it fared with Gunther. Better had been his case with any but Brunhild.

The folk had departed, dames and knights. The door was made fast. He thought to win her love, but it was long yet or she became his wife. He lay down in a white garment and thought, “Now have I my heart’s desire.” The king’s hand hid the light. He went to Brunhild and embraced her with his arm. He was greatly glad. He would have caressed her sweetly if she had let him. But she was so wroth that he was dismayed. He thought to find joy, but found deep hate.

She said, “Noble knight, let me alone, for it shall not be as thou desirest. Mark well that I will have nothing to do with thee, till that thou hast answered me concerning Kriemhild.”

Then Gunther began to be angry with her, and fought with her, and tore her raiment. And the royal maiden seized a girdle, a strong embroidered silk cord that she wore round her waist, and did hurt enow to the knight. She bound his hands and his feet, and carried him to a nail, and hung him on the wall. She forbade him to touch her because he disturbed her sleep. He almost perished from her strength.

Then he that should have been master began to pray, “Now loose my bands, most noble queen. I promise never to touch thee, or even to come nigh thee.”

She asked not how he fared while she lay soft. There must he hang the long night through till the day, when the bright morning-shone through the window. If he had ever had strength, he had litt le in his body now.

“Tell me, Sir Gunther,” said the beautiful maiden, “doth it not irk thee that thy chamberlains find thee bound by the hand of a woman.”

The noble knight answered, “It were the worse for thee. Also little were my honour therein. Of thy charity allow me to lie down. Seeing thou hatest my love, I will not so much as touch thy garment with my hand.”

Then she loosed his bands, and let him go, and he laid him down, but so far from her that he ruffl ed not her beautiful gown. Even that she had gladly foregone.

Thereupon their attendants came and brought them new apparel, as much as they could wear, that had been made ready against the wedding morn. But, amidst of them that rejoiced, the king was heavy of his cheer beneath his crown that day.

According to the good custom of the land, Gunther and Brunhild tarried not longer, but went to the minster to hear mass. Thither also went Siegfried and there was great press of people.

He and Siegfried were different in their moods. The hero guessed what ailed him, and went to him and asked him, “Tell me how it hath fared with thee.”
Then said the host to his guest, “Shame and hurt have I suffered from my wife in my house. When I would have caressed her, she bound me tight, and took me to a nail, and hung me up on the wall. There I dangled in fear the night through till the day, or she loosed me. How soft she lay there! I tell thee this in secret.”

And strong Siegfried said, “I grieve for thee. I will tell thee a remedy if thou keep it from her. I will so contrive it that this night she will defy thee no longer.” The word was welcome to Gunther after his pain.

“Now see my hands, how they are swollen. She overmastered me, as I had been a child, that the blood spurted all over me from my nails. I thought not to come off with my life.”

Siegfried, “It will yet be well. Unequal was our fortune last night. Thy sister Kriemhild is dearer to me than mine own body. This day must Brunhild be thy wife. I will come to-night to thy room secretly in my Tarnkappe, that none may guess the trick. Send the chamberlains to their beds. I will put out the lights in the hands of the pages, and by this sign thou shalt know that I am nigh. I will win thy wife for thee or perish.”

“If only thou winnest her not for thy self. She is my dear wife. Otherwise I rejoice. Do to her what thou wilt. If thou tookest her life, I would bear it. She is a terrible woman.”

“I vow to thee on mine honour that I will have nothing to do with her. Thy dear sister is more to me than any I have ever seen.” And Gunther believed Siegfried’s word.

Fair Kriemhild and also Brunhild were led to their chambers. Ha! what bold knights went before the queens! Joyful and without hate Siegfried the knight sat sweetly beside his beautiful wife. With her white hand she caressed his, till, she knew now how, he vanished from before her eyes. When she played with him and saw him no longer, she said to her maidens, “I marvel much where the king is gone. Who took his hands out of mine?” And so the matter dropped.

He had gone where he found the chamberlains with the lights, which he began to put out. By this sign Gunther perceived that it was Siegfried. He knew well what he wanted, and he sent away the women and maids. When that was done, the king himself locked the door, and shot two strong bolts before it. He hid the light quickly behind the bed curtain, and the struggle that had to come began between strong Siegfried and the beautiful maiden, King Gunther was both glad and sorry.

Siegfried lay down by the queen, but she said “Stop, Gunther, lest thou suffer as afore. Thou mayest again receive a hurt at my hand.”

Siegfried concealed his voice and spoke not. Gunther heard well all that passed, albeit he saw nothing. There was little ease for the two. Siegfried feigned that he was Gunther and put his arm round the valiant maiden. She threw him on to a bench, that his head rang loud against a foot-stool.

The bold man sprang up undaunted, but evil befell him. Such defence from a woman I ween the world will never see more. Because he would not let her be, Brunhild rose up.

“It is unseemly of thee,” said the brave maiden. “Thou wilt tear my beautiful gown. Thou art churlish and must suffer for it. Thou shalt see!”

She caught the good knight in her arms, and would have bound him as she had done to the king, that she might have peace. Grimly she avenged her torn raiment.

What availed him then his strength and his prowess? She proved to him the mastery of her body, and carried him by force, since there was no other way, and squeezed him hard against a press that stood by the bed.

“Alas!” thought the knight, “if I lose my life by the hand of a woman, all wives evermore will make light of their husbands, that, without this, would not dare.”

The king heard it well. He feared for the man. Then Siegfried was ashamed and waxed furious. He grappled fiercely with her, and, in terror of his life, strove to overcome Brunhild. When she squeezed him down, he got
up again in spite of her, by dint of his anger and his mickle strength. He came in great scathe. In the chamber there was smiting with many blows. King Gunther, likewise, stood in peril. He danced to and fro quickly before them. So mightily they strove, it was a wonder they came off with their lives. The trouble of the king was twofold, yet most he feared Siegfried’s death. For she had almost killed the knight. Had he dared, he had gone to his help.

The strife endured long atwixt them. Then Siegfried got hold of Brunhild., Albeit she fought valiantly, her defence was grown weak. It seemed long to the king, that stood there, till Siegfried had won. She squeezed his hands till, by her strength, the blood spurted out from his nails. Then he brake the strong will that she had shown at the first. The king heard it all, but he spoke no word. Siegfried pressed her down till she cried aloud, for his might hurt her greatly. She clutched at her side, where she found her girdle, and sought to tie his hands. But he gripped her till the joints of her body cracked. So the strife was ended.

She said, “Noble king, let me live. I will make good to thee what I have done, and strive no more; truly I have found thee to be my master.”

Siegfried rose up then and left her, as though he would throw off his clothes. He drew from her hand a gold ring, without that she was ware of it. He took her girdle also, a good silken band. I know not if he did it from pride. He gave them to his wife, and suffered for it after.

The king and the fair maiden were left together, and, for that she was grown weak, she hid her anger, for it availed her nothing. So they abode there till the bright day.

Meanwhile Siegfried went back to his sweet love, that received him kindly. He turned the questions aside that she asked him, and hid from her for long what he had brought with him, till at the last, when they were gotten home to the Netherland, he gave her the jewel; the which brought him and many knights to their graves.

Much merrier was Gunther of his cheer the next morning than before. Throughout his lands many a noble knight rejoiced, and the guests that he had bidden to the hightide were well feasted and served.

(14) One day, before vespers, there arose in the court of the castle a mighty din of knights that tilted for pastime, and the folk ran to see them.

The queens sat together there, thinking each on a doughty warrior. Then said fair Kriemhild, “I have a husband of such might that all these lands might well be his.”

But Brunhild answered, “How so? If there lived none other save thou and he, our kingdom might haply be his, but while Gunther is alive it could never be.”

But Kriemhild said, “See him there. How he surpasseth the other knights, as the bright moon the stars! My heart is uplifted with cause.”

Whereupon Brunhild answered, “Howso valiant thy husband, comely and fair, thy brother Gunther excelleth him, for know that he is the first among kings.”

But Kriemhild said, “My praise was not idle; for worshipful is my husband in many things. Trow it, Brunhild. He is, at the least, thy husband’s equal.”

“Mistake me not in thine anger, Kriemhild. Neither is my word idle; for they both said, when I saw them first, and the king vanquished me in the sports, and on knightly wise won my love, that Siegfried was his man. Wherefore I hold him for a vassal, since I heard him say it.”

Then Kriemhild cried, “Evil were my lot if that were true. How had my brothers given me to a vassal to wife? Prithee, of thy courtesy, cease from such discourse.”

“That will I not,” answered Brunhild. “Thereby should I lose many knights that, with him, owe us homage.”
Whereat fair Kriemhild waxed very wroth. “Lose them thou must, then, for any service he will do thee. He is nobler even than Gunther, my noble brother. Wherefore, spare me thy foolish words. I wonder, since he is thy vassal, and thou art so much mightier than we, that for so long time he hath failed to pay tribute. Of a truth thine arrogancy irketh me.”

“Thou vauntest thyself too high,” cried the queen; “I would see now whether thy body be holden in like honour with mine.”

Both the women were angry.

Kriemhild answered, “That shalt thou see straightway. Since thou hast called Siegfried thy vassal, the knights of both kings shall see this day whether I dare enter the minster before thee, the queen. For I would have thee know that I am noble and free, and that my husband is of more worship than thine. Nor will I be chidden by thee. To-day thou shalt see thy vassals go at court before the Burgundian knights, and me more honoured than any queen that ever wore a crown.” Fierce was the wrath of the women.

“If thou art no vassal,” said Brunhild, “thou and thy women shall walk separate from my train when we go to the minster.” And Kriemhild answered, “Be it so.”

“Now adorn ye, my maidens,” said Siegfried’s wife, “that I be not shamed. If ye have rich apparel, show it this day. She shall take back what her mouth hath spoken.”

She needed not to bid twice; they sought out their richest vesture, and dames and damsels were soon arrayed.

Then the wife of the royal host went forth with her attendants. Fair to heart’s desire were clad Kriemhild and the forty and three maidens that she had brought with her to the Rhine. Bright shone the stuffs, woven in Araby, whereof their robes were fashioned. And they came to the minster, where Siegfried’s knights waited for them.

The folk marvelled much to see the queens apart, and going not together as afore. Many a warrior was to rue it.

Gunther’s wife stood before the minster, and the knights dallied in converse with the women, till that Kriemhild came up with her company. All that noble maidens had ever worn was but as a wind to what these had on. So rich was Kriemhild that thirty king’s wives together had not been as gorgeous as she was. None could deny, though they had wished it, that the apparel Kriemhild’s maidens wore that day was the richest they had ever seen. Kriemhild did this on purpose to anger Brunhild.

So they met before the minster. And Brunhild, with deadly spite, cried out to Kriemhild to stand still. “Before the queen shall no vassal go.”

Out then spoke Kriemhild, for she was wroth. “Better hadst thou held thy peace. Thou hast shamed thine own body. How should the leman of a vassal become a king’s wife?”

“Whom namest thou leman?” cried the queen.

“Even thee,” answered Kriemhild. “For it was Siegfried my husband, and not my brother, that won thee first. Where were thy senses? It was surely ill done to favour a vassal so. reproaches from thee are much amiss.”

“Verily,” cried Brunhild, “Gunther shall hear of it.”

“What is that to me? Thine arrogancy hath deceived thee. Thou hast called me thy vassal. Know now of a truth it hath irked me, and I am thine enemy evermore.”

Then Brunhild began to weep, and Kriemhild tarried not longer, but went with her attendants into the minster before the king’s wife. There was deadly hate, and bright eyes grew wet and dim.

Whether they prayed or sang, the service seemed too long to Brunhild, for her heart and her mind were troubled, the which many a bold and good man paid for afterward.
Brunhild stopped before the minster with her women, for she thought, “Kriemhild, the foul-mouthed woman, shall tell me further whereof she so loud accuseth me. If he hath boasted of this thing, he shall answer for it with his life.”

Then Kriemhild with her knights came forth, and Brunhild began, “Stop! thou hast called me a wanton and shalt prove it, for know that thy words irk me sore.”

Said Kriemhild, “Let me pass. With this gold that I have on my hand I can prove it. Siegfried brought it when he came from thee.”

It was a heavy day for Brunhild. She said, “That gold so precious was stolen from me, and hath been hidden these many years. Now I know who hath taken it.” Both the women were furious.

“I am no thief,” cried Kriemhild. “Hadst thou prized thine honour thou hadst held thy peace, for, with this girdle round my waist, I can prove my word, and that Siegfried was verily thy leman.” She wore a girdle of silk of Nineveh, goodly enow, and worked with precious stones.

When Brunhild saw it she started to weep. And soon Gunther knew it, and all his men, for the queen cried, “Bring hither the King of Rhineland; I would tell him how his sister hath mocked me, and sayeth openly that I be Siegfried’s leman.”

The king came with his warriors, and, when he saw that his dear one wept, he spoke kindly, “What aileth thee, dear wife?”

She answered, “Shamed must I stand, for thy sister would part me from mine honour? I make my plaint to thee. She proclaimeth aloud that Siegfried hath had me to his leman.”

Gunther answered, “Evilly hath she done.”

“She weareth here a girdle that I have long lost, and my red gold. Woe is me that ever I was born! If thou clearest me not from this shame, I will never love thee more.”

Said Gunther, “Bid him hither, that he confess whether he hath boasted of this, or no.”

They summoned Siegfried, who, when he saw their anger and knew not the cause, spoke quickly, “Why weep these women? Tell me straight; and wherefore am I summoned?”

Whereeto Gunther answered, “Right vexed am I. Brunhild, my wife, telleth me here that thou hast boasted thou wert her leman. Kriemhild declareth this. Hast thou done it, O knight?”

Siegfried answered, “Not I. If she hath said so, I will rest not till she repent it. I swear with a high oath in the presence of all thy knights, that I said not this one thing.”

The king of the Rhine made answer, “So be it. If thou swear the oath here, I will acquit thee of the falsehood.” Then the Burgundians stood round in a ring, and Siegfried swore it with his hand; whereupon the great king said, “Verily, I hold thee guiltless, nor lay to thy charge the word my sister imputeth to thee.”

Said Siegfried further, “If she rejoiceth to have troubled thy fair wife, I am grieved beyond measure.” The knights glanced at each other.

“Women must be taught to bridle their tongues. Forbid proud speech to thy wife: I will do the like to mine. Such bitterness and pride are a shame.”

Angry words have divided many women. Brunhild made such dole, that Gunther’s men had pity on her. And Hagen of Troneck went to her and asked what ailed her, for he found her weeping. She told him the tale, and he swore straightway that Kriemhild’s husband should pay for it, or never would Hagen be glad again.

While they talked together, Ortwin and Gernot came up, and the warriors counselled Siegfried’s death. But when Giselher, Uta’s fair child, drew nigh and heard them, he spoke out with true heart, “Alas, good knights,
what would ye do? How hath Siegfried deserved such hate that he should lose his life? A woman is lightly angered."

"Shall we rear fools?" cried Hagen. "That were small honour to good knights. I will avenge on him the boast that he hath made, or I will die."

But the king himself said, "Good, and not evil, hath he done to us. Let him live. Wherefore should I hate the knight? He hath ever been true to me."

"Not so," said Hagen. "Assure thee on that score. For I will contrive secretly that he pay for Brunhild's weeping. Hagen is his foe evermore."

(15) Then went Hagen of Troneck to Kriemhild.

"Well for me," said Kriemhild, "that ever I won to husband a man that standeth so true by his friends, as doth Siegfried by my kinsmen. Right proud am I. Bethink thee now, Hagen, dear friend, how that in all things I am at thy service, and have ever willed thee well. Requite me through my husband, that I love, and avenge not on him what I did to Brunhild. Already it repenteth me sore. My body hath smarted for it, that ever I troubled her with my words. Siegfried, the good knight, hath seen to that."

Whereto Hagen answered, "Ye will shortly be at one again. But Kriemhild, prithee tell me wherein I can serve thee with Siegfried, thy husband, and I will do it, for I love none better."

"I should fear nothing for his life in battle, but that he is foolhardy, and of too proud a courage. Save for that, he were safe enow."

Then said Hagen, "Lady, if thou fearest hurt for him in battle, tell me now by what device I may hinder it, and I will guard him afoot and on horse."

She answered, "Thou art my cousin, and I thine. To thy faith I commend my dear husband, that thou mayst watch and keep him."

Then she told him what she had better have left unsaid.

"My husband is strong and bold. When that he slew the dragon on the mountain, he bathed him in its blood; wherefore no weapon can pierce him. Nevertheless, when he rideth in battle, and spears fly from the hands of heroes, I tremble lest I lose him. Alas! for Siegfried's sake how oft have I been heavy of my cheer! And now, dear cousin, I will trust thee with the secret, and tell thee, that thou mayst prove thy faith, where my husband may be wounded. For that I know thee honourable, I do this. When the hot blood flowed from the wound of the dragon, and Siegfried bathed therein, there fell atween his shoulders the broad leaf of a lime tree. There one might stab him, and thence is my care and dole."

Then answered Hagen of Troneck, "Sew, with thine own hand, a small sign upon his outer garment, that I may know where to defend him when we stand in battle."

She did it to profit the knight, and worked his doom thereby. She said, "I will sew secretly, with fine silk, a little cross upon his garment, and there, O knight, shalt thou guard to me my husband when ye ride in the thick of the strife, and he withstandeth his foemen in the fierce onset."

"That will I do, dear lady," answered Hagen.

Kriemhild thought to serve Siegfried; so was the hero betrayed.

Then Hagen took his leave and went forth glad; and his king bade him say what he had learned.

"Let us go hunting; for I have learned the secret, and have him in my hand. Wilt thou contrive this?"

"That will I," said the king.
The next morning Siegfried rode to the king, that thanked him. “I hold thee trustiest of all my friends. Seeing we be quit of war, let us ride a hunting to the Odenwald after the bear and the boar, as I have often done.” Hagen, the false man, had counselled this.

“Let it be told to my guests straightway that I will ride early. Whoso would hunt with me, let him be ready betimes. But if any would tarry behind for pastime with the women, he shall do it, and please me thereby.”

Siegfried answered on courtly wise, “I will hunt with thee gladly, and will ride to the forest, if thou lend me a huntsman and some brachs.”

(16) But or he set out, and when the hunting-gear was laid ready on the sumpters that they were to take across the Rhine, he went to Kriemhild, and that was right doleful of her cheer. He kissed his lady on the mouth. “God grant I may see thee safe and well again, and thou me. Bide here merry among thy kinsfolk, for I must forth.”

Then she thought on the secret she had betrayed to Hagen, but durst not tell him. The queen wept sore that ever she was born, and made measureless dole.

She said, “Go not hunting. Last night I dreamed an evil dream: how that two wild boars chased thee over the heath; and the flowers were red with blood. Have pity on my tears, for I fear some treachery. There be haply some offended, that pursue us with deadly hate. Go not, dear lord; in good faith I counsel it.”

But he answered, “Dear love, I go but for a few days. I know not any that beareth me hate. Thy kinsmen will me well, nor have I deserved otherwise at their hand.”

“Nay, Siegfried, I fear some mischance. Last night I dreamed an evil dream: how that two mountains fell on thee, and I saw thee no more. If thou goest, thou wilt grieve me bitterly.”

But he caught his dear one in his arms and kissed her close; then he took leave of her and rode off.

She never saw him alive again.

Siegfried’s horse bare him smoothly, and the others pricked fast behind. The noise roused a grim bear, whereat the knight cried to them that came after him, “Now for sport! Slip the dog, for I see a bear that shall with us to the tryst-fire. He cannot escape us, if he ran ever so fast.”

They slipped the limehound; off rushed the bear. Siegfried thought to run him down, but he came to a ravine and could not get to him; then the bear deemed him safe. But the proud knight sprang from his horse, and pursued him. The beast had no shelter. It could not escape from him, and was caught by his hand, and, or it could wound him, he had bound it, that it could neither scratch nor bite. Then he tied it to his saddle, and, when he had mounted up himself, he brought it to the tryst-fire for pastime.

When he had alighted, he loosed the band from the paws and from the mouth of the bear that he had bound to his saddle.

So soon as they saw the bear, the dogs began to bark. The animal tried to win back to the wood, and all the folk fell in great fear. Affrighted by the noise, it ran through the kitchen. Nimbly started the scullions from their place by the fire. Pots were upset and the brands strewed over all. Alas! the good meats that tumbled into the ashes!

Then sprang the princes and their men. The bear began to growl, and the king gave order to slip the hounds that were on leash. I’ faith, it had been a merry day if it had ended so.

Hastily, with their bows and spears, the warriors, swift of foot, chased the bear, but there were so many dogs that none durst shoot among them, and the forest rang with the din. Then the bear fled before the dogs, and none could keep pace with him save Kriemhild’s husband, that ran up to him and pierced him dead with his sword, and carried the carcase back with him to the fire. They that saw it said he was a mighty man.
Then they bade the sportsmen to the table, and they sat down a goodly company enow, on a fair meadow. Ha! what dishes, meet for heroes, were set before them. But the cup-bearers were tardy, that should have brought the wine. Save for that, knights were never better served. If there had not been false-hearted men among them, they had been without reproach. The doomed man had no suspicion that might have warned him, for his own heart was pure of all deceit. Many that his death profited not at all had to pay for it bitterly.

Then said Sir Siegfried, “I marvel, since they bring us so much from the kitchen, that they bring not the wine. If good hunters be entreated so, I will hunt no more. Certes, I have deserved better at your hands.”

Whereto the king at the table answered falsely, “What lacketh to-day we will make good another time. The blame is Hagen’s, that would have us perish of thirst.”

Then said Hagen of Troneck, “Dear master, methought we were to hunt to-day at Spessart, and I sent the wine thither. For the present we must go thirsty; another time I will take better care.”

But Siegfried cried, “Small thank to him. Seven sumpters with meat and spiced wines should he have sent here at the least, or, if that might not be, we should have gone nigher to the Rhine.”

Hagen of Troneck answered, “I know of a cool spring close at hand. Be not wroth with me, but take my counsel, and go thither.” The which was done, to the hurt of many warriors. Siegfried was sore athirst and bade push back the table, that he might go to the spring at the foot of the mountain. Falsely had the knights contrived it. The wild beasts that Siegfried’s hand had slain they let pile on a waggon and take home, and all they that saw it praised him.

Foully did Hagen break faith with Siegfried. He said, when they were starting for the broad lime tree, “I hear from all sides that none can keep pace with Kriemhild’s husband when he runneth. Let us see now.”

Bold Siegfried of the Netherland answered, “Thou mayst easily prove it, if thou wilt run with me to the brook for a wager. The praise shall be to him that winneth there first.”

“Let us see then,” said Hagen the knight.

And strong Siegfried answered, “If I lose, I will lay me at thy feet in the grass.”

A glad man was King Gunther when he heard that!

Siegfried further, “Nay, I will undertake more. I will carry on me all that I wear—spear, shield, and hunting gear.” Whereupon he girded on his sword and his quiver in haste. Then the others did off their clothes, till they stood in their white shirts, and they ran through the clover like two wild panthers; but bold Siegfried was seen there the first. Before all men he won the prize in everything. He loosed his sword straightway, and laid down his quiver. His good spear he leaned against the lime tree; then the noble guest stood and waited, for his courtesy was great. He laid down his shield by the stream. Albeit he was sore athirst, he drank not till that the king had finished, who gave him evil thanks.

The stream was cool, pure, and good. Gunther bent down to the water, and rose again when he had drunk. Siegfried had gladly done the like, but he suffered for his courtesy. Hagen carried his bow and his sword out of his reach, and sprang back and gripped the spear. Then he spied for the secret mark on his vesture; and while Siegfried drank from the stream, Hagen stabbed him where the cross was, that his heart’s blood spurted out on the traitor’s clothes. Never since hath knight done so wickedly. He left the spear sticking deep in his heart, and fled in grimmer haste than ever he had done from any man on this earth afore.

When strong Siegfried felt the deep wound, he sprang up maddened from the water, for the long boar spear stuck out from his heart. He thought to find bow or sword; if he had, Hagen had got his due. But the sore-wounded man saw no sword, and had nothing save his shield. He picked it up from the water’s edge and
ran at Hagen. King Gunther’s man could not escape him. For all that he was wounded to the death, he smote mightily that the shield well-nigh brake, and the precious stones flew out. The noble guest had fain taken vengeance.

Hagen fell beneath his stroke. The meadow rang loud with the noise of the blow. If he had had his sword to hand, Hagen had been a dead man. But the anguish of his wound constrained him. His colour was wan; he could not stand upright; and the strength of his body failed him, for he bare death’s mark on his white cheek. Fair women enow made dole for him.

Then Kriemhild’s husband fell among the flowers. The blood flowed fast from his wound, and in his great anguish he began to upbraid them that had falsely contrived his death. “False cowards!” cried the dying knight. “What availeth all my service to you, since ye have slain me? I was true to you, and pay the price for it. Ye have done ill by your friends. Cursed by this deed are your sons yet unborn. Ye have avenged your spite on my body all too bitterly. For your crime ye shall be shunned by good knights.”

All the warriors ran where he lay stabbed. To many among them it was a woeful day. They that were true mourned for him, the which the hero had well deserved of all men.

The King of Burgundy also wept for his death, but the dying man said, “He needeth not to weep for the evil, by whom the evil cometh. Better had he left it undone, for mickle is his blame.”

Then said grim Hagen, “I know not what ye rue. All is ended for us—care and trouble. Few are they now that will withstand us. Glad am I that, through me, his might is fallen.”

“Lightly mayst thou boast now,” said Siegfried; “if I had known thy murderous hate, it had been an easy thing to guard my body from thee. My bitterest dole is for Kriemhild, my wife. God pity me that ever I had a son. For all men will reproach him that he hath murderers to his kinsmen. I would grieve for that, had I the time.”

He said to the king, “Never in this world was so foul a murder as thou hast done on me. In thy sore need I saved thy life and thine honour. Dear have I paid for that I did well by thee.” With a groan the wounded man said further, “Yet if thou canst show truth to any on this earth, O King, show it to my dear wife, that I commend to thee. Let it advantage her to be thy sister. By all princely honour stand by her. Long must my father and my knights wait for my coming. Never hath woman won such woe through a dear one.”

He writhed in his bitter anguish, and spoke painfully, “Ye shall rue this foul deed in the days to come. Know this of a truth, that in slaying me ye have slain yourselves.”

The flowers were all wet with blood. He strove with death, but not for long, for the weapon of death cut too deep. And the bold knight and good spoke no more.

When the warriors saw that the hero was dead, they laid him on a shield of ruddy gold, and took counsel how they should conceal that Hagen had done it. Many of them said, “Evil hath befallen us. Ye shall all hide it, and hold to one tale—when Kriemhild’s husband was riding alone in the forest, robbers slew him.”

But Hagen of Troneck said, “I will take him back to Burgundy. If she that hath troubled Brunhild know it, I care not. It concerneth me little if she weep.”

Of that very brook where Siegfried was slain ye shall hear the truth from me. In the Odenwald is a village that hight Odenheim, and there the stream runneth still; beyond doubt it is the same.

(17) They tarried there that night, and then crossed the Rhine. Heroes never went to so woeful a hunt. For one thing that they slew, many women wept, and many a good knight’s body paid for it. Of overweening pride ye shall hear now, and grim vengeance.
Hagen bade them bear dead Siegfried of the Nibelung land before the chamber where Kriemhild was, and charged them to lay him secretly outside the door, that she might find him there when she went forth to mass or it was day, the which she was wont to do.

The minster bell was rung as the custom was. Fair Kriemhild waked her maidens, and bade them bring her a light and her vesture.

Then a chamberlain came and found Siegfried. He saw him red with blood, and his garment all wet, but he knew not yet that he was his king. He carried the light into the room in his hand, and from him Kriemhild heard evil tidings.

When she would have gone with her women to the minster, the chamberlain said, “Lady, stop! A murdered knight lieth on the threshold.”

“Woe is me!” cried Kriemhild. “What meanest thou by such news?”

Or she knew for certain that it was her husband, she began to think on Hagen’s question, how he might guard him. From that moment her dole began; for, with his death, she took leave of all joy. She sank on the floor speechless; they saw the miserable woman lying there. Kriemhild’s woe was great beyond measure, and after her swoon she cried out, that all the chamber rang.

Then said her attendants, “What if it be a stranger?”

But the blood burst from her mouth by reason of her heart’s anguish, and she said, “Nay, it is Siegfried, my dear husband. Brunhild hath counselled it, and Hagen hath done it.”

Gunther said, “Dear sister, woe is me for this grief of thine, and that this great misadventure hath befallen us. We must ever mourn Siegfried’s death.”

“Ye do wrongly,” said the wailing queen. “If it grieved thee, it had never happed. I was clean forgotten by thee when thou didst part me from my dear husband. Would to God thou hadst done it to me instead!”

But they held to their lie, and Kriemhild went on, “Let him that is guiltless prove it. Let him go up to the bier before all the folk, and soon we shall know the truth.”

It is a great marvel, and oft times seen even now, how that, when the murderer standeth by the dead, the wounds bleed again. And so it fell then, and Hagen’s guilt was plain to all.

The wounds burst open and bled as they had done afore; and they that had wept already wept now much more. King Gunther said, “Hear the truth. He was slain by robbers. Hagen did it not.”

“These robbers,” she answered, “I know well. God grant that his kinsmen’s hands may avenge it. By you, Gunther and Hagen, was it done.”

(19) When noble Kriemhild was widowed, Count Eckewart stayed by her in Burgundy with his men, as honour bade him, and served his mistress with goodwill till his death.

At Worms, by the minster, they gave her a room, wide and high, rich and spacious, where she sat joyless with her attendants. To church she went often and gladly. Since her dear one was buried, how seldom she failed there! She went thither sorrowfully every day, and prayed to great God for his soul. Faithfully and without stint the knight was mourned.

Soon after, they contrived that Kriemhild won the great hoard from the land of the Nibelungen, and brought it to the Rhine. It was her marriage-morning gift, and rightly hers. Giselher and Gemot went for it. Kriemhild sent eighty hundred men to fetch it from where it lay hid, and where Alberic with his nearest kinsmen guarded it.

When they saw the men of the Rhine come for the treasure, bold Alberic spoke to his friends, “We dare not refuse her the treasure, for it is the noble queen’s wedding gift. Yet we had never parted with it, if we had not lost
with Siegfried the good *Tarnkappe*. At all times it was worn by fair Kriemhild’s husband. A woeful thing hath it proved for Siegfried that he took from us the *Tarnkappe*, and won all this land to his service.”

Then the chamberlain went and got the keys. Kriemhild’s men and some of her kinsmen stood before the mountain. They carried the hoard to the sea, on to the ships, and bare it across the waves from the mountain to the Rhine.

Now hear the marvels of this treasure. Twelve waggons scarce carried it thence in four days and four nights, albeit each of them made the journey three times. It was all precious stones and gold, and had the whole world been bought therewith, there had not been one coin the less. Certes, Hagen did not covet it without cause.

The wishing-rod lay among it, the which, if any discovered it, made him master over every man in all the world.

Many of Alberic’s kinsmen went with Gernot. When Gernot and Giselher the youth got possession of the hoard, there came into their power lands, and castles, also, and many a good warrior, that served them through fear of their might.

When the hoard came into Gunther’s land, and the queen got it in her keeping, chambers and towers were filled full therewith. One never heard tell of so marvelous a treasure. But if it had been a thousand times more, but to have Siegfried alive again, Kriemhild had gladly stood bare by his side. Never had hero truer wife.

Now that she had the hoard, it brought into the land many stranger knights; for the lady’s hand gave more freely than any had ever seen. She was kind and good; that must one say of her.

To poor and rich she began to give, till Hagen said that if she lived but a while longer, she would win so many knights to her service that it must go hard with the others.

But King Gunther said, “It is her own. It concerneth me not how she useth it. Scarcely did I win her pardon. And now I ask not who she divideth her jewels and her red gold.”

But Hagen said to the king, “A wise man would leave such a treasure to no woman. By reason of her largess, a day will come that the bold Burgundians may rue.”

Then King Gunther said, “I sware an oath to her that I would do her no more hurt, nor will I do it. She is my sister.”

But Hagen said, “Let me be the guilty one.”

And so they brake their oath and took from the widow her rich hoard. Hagen got hold of all the keys.

Gemot was wroth when he heard thereof, and Giselher said, “Hagen hath greatly wronged Kriemhild. I should have withstood him. Were he not my kinsman, he should answer for it with his life.”

Then Siegfried’s wife began to weep anew.

And Gemot said, “Sooner than be troubled with this gold, let us sink it in the Rhine. Then it were no man’s.”

She went wailing to Giselher, and said, “Dear brother, forsake me not, but be my kind and good steward.”

He answered her, “I will, when we win home again. For the present we ride on a journey.”

The king and his kinsmen left the land. He took the best he had with him. Only Hagen tarried behind through the hate he bare Kriemhild, and that he might work her ill.

Or the great king came back, Hagen had seized all the treasure and sunk it in the Rhine at Lochheim. He thought to profit thereby, but did not.

Or Hagen hid the treasure, they had sworn a mighty oath that it should remain a secret so long as they lived. Neither could they take it themselves nor give it to another.
It was in the days when Queen Helche died, and King Etzel wooed other women, that his friends commended to him a proud widow in the land of Burgundy, that hight Queen Kriemhild.

Seeing fair Helche was dead, they said, “If thou wouldst win a noble wife, the highest and the best that ever a king won, take this woman. Strong Siegfried was her husband.”

The great king answered, “How could that be, since I am a heathen, and have not received baptism? The woman is a Christian—she will not consent. It were a wonder, truly, if it came to pass.”

But the good knights said, “What if she do it gladly, for thy high name’s sake, and thy great possessions? One can ask her at the least; she were a fitting and comely mate for thee.”

Then the noble king answered, “Which among ye knoweth the folk by the Rhine, and their land?”

Said good Rudeger of Bechlaren, “From a child I have known the high and noble kings, Gunther and Gemot, good knights both. The third hight Giselher; each of these doeth whatso goeth best with honour and virtue. The like did their fathers,”

He said, “Then woo her, Rudeger, in my name and for my sake. And come I ever to wed Kriemhild, I will reward thee as I best can. Thereto, thou wilt have done my will faithfully. From my store I will bid them give thee what thou requirest of horses and apparel, that thou and thy fellows may live merrily. They shall give thee therefrom without stint for thine embassy.”

Within twelve days they came to the Rhine. The news was not slow to spread. They told the king and his men that stranger guests had arrived. Then the king began to ask that, if any knew them, he might declare it. They perceived that their sumpters were heavy laden, and saw that they were rich; and they gave them lodging in the wide city straightway.

When the strangers arrived, the folk spied at them curiously. They wondered whence they had journeyed to the Rhine.

The king asked Hagen who the knights were, and the hero of Troneck answered, “So far as I know, for it is long since I saw the knights, they ride like the men of Rudeger, a bold warrior from the land of the Huns.”

Then said the faithful envoy, “My great lord commendeth his true service to thee at the Rhine, and to all the friends thou hast. This he doth with true heart. The noble king biddeth thee mourn for his loss. His people are joyless, for my mistress, great Helche, my lord’s wife is dead; whereby many high-born maidens, children of great princes, that she hath reared, are orphaned. By reason thereof the land is full of sorrow, for these, alas! have none now to care for them. The king also ceaseth not to make dole.”

Then said Gernot of Burgundy, “The world may well rue beautiful Helche’s death, for the sake of her many virtues.”

Hagen and many another knight said the same.

But Rudeger, the noble envoy, went on: “If thou allow it, O king, I will tell thee further what my dear master hath charged me with. Dolefully hath he lived since Helche’s death. And it hath been told him that Kriemhild is without a husband, for that Siegfried is dead. If that be so, and thou grant it, she shall wear the crown before Etzel’s knights. This hath my lord bidden me say.”

Then the great king spoke courteously, “If she be willing, she followeth my desire therein. In three days I will let thee know. If she say not nay to Etzel, wherefore should I?”

Meanwhile they gave the guests good lodging. On such wise were they entreated that Rudeger was fain to confess he had friends among Gunther’s men. Hagen served him gladly, the which Rudeger had done to Hagen aforetime.
So Rudeger tarried there till the third day. The king did prudently, and called a counsel, to ask his friends whether it seemed good to them that Kriemhild should take King Etzel to husband.

And they all counselled it save Hagen, that said to Gunther, the bold knight, “If thou be wise, thou wilt see to it that she do it not, even if she desire it.”

“Why should I hinder it?” said Gunther. “If any good fall to the queen, I may well grant it. She is my sister. If it be to her honour, we ourselves should seek the alliance.”

But Hagen answered, “Say not so. Didst thou know Etzel as I do, thou wouldst see that thou, first of all, must suffer if she wedded him as thou counsellest.”

“How so?” answered Gunther. “Were she his wife, I need not come so nigh him that I must feel his hate.”

But Hagen said, “I will never approve it.”

They summoned Gemot and Giselher, and asked whether it seemed good to them that Kriemhild should take the great king. And none save Hagen was against it.

Gemot and Giselher, the proud knights and good, and Gunther, the great king, agreed in the end, that they would allow it gladly, if Kriemhild were so minded.

They brought Rudeger to Kriemhild. And the knight asked the queen gently to let him bear the message she sent to Etzel. He won nothing from her but denial, for never could she love another man.

Then said the Margrave, “That were ill done. Wherefore ruin so fair a body? Still mayest thou with honour become a good man’s wife.” Yet all their entreaty availed not, till that Rudeger said secretly to the queen that he would make good to her any hurt that might befall her. At that, her grief abated somewhat.

He said to the queen, “Weep no more. If thou hadst none among the Huns save me, by faithful kinsmen, and my men, sore must he pay for it that did thee wrong.”

Much milder was the lady’s mood, and she said, “Swear me an oath that, should any do anything against me, thou wilt be the first to avenge it.”

The Margrave answered, “I will swear.”

So Rudeger swore with all his men alway to serve her truly, and to deny her nothing in Etzel’s land that her honour called for, and he confirmed it with his hand.

Then thought the faithful woman, “Since I, a forlorn woman, can win so many friends, I will let the folk say what they please. Haply I may yet avenge my dear husband’s death. Etzel hath so many knights, that, were they mine to command, I could do what I would. Thereto, he is so wealthy that I shall have wherewith to bestow gifts. Cruel Hagen hath taken my treasure from me.”

She said to Rudeger, “Had I not heard he was a heathen, I would go gladly at his bidding, and take him to husband.”

The Margrave answered, “Say no more of that, Lady. He is not quite a heathen, be assured, for my dear master hath been christened; albeit he hath turned again. Haply he will think better of it shouldst thou wed him. He hath so many Christian knights that no ill could betide thee. And thou mightst easily win back the good prince, heart and soul, to God.”

Her brothers said, “Promise it, sister, and give over grieving.”

They begged it so long that at the last the sorrowful woman promised, before the warriors, to become Etzel’s wife.

She said, “Poor queen that I am, I will follow you! I will go to the Huns, if I find friends to lead me thither.” Fair Kriemhild gave her hand on it before the knights.
Etzel’s household, that Helche had aforetime ruled, passed many a happy day with Kriemhild. Noble maidens stood waiting, that since Helche’s death had suffered heart’s dole. Kriemhild found there seven kings’ daughters that were an adornment to Etzel’s whole land. The charge of the damsels was with Herrat, Helche’s sister’s daughter, famed for virtue, and the betrothed of Dietrich, a noble king’s child, the daughter of Nentwine; the which afterward had much worship. Glad of her cheer was she at the coming of the guests, and many a goodly thing was made ready. What tongue might tell how merrily King Etzel dwelled there? Never under any queen fared the Huns better.

When the king rode up with his wife from the strand, Kriemhild was told the name of them that led forward the maidens, that she might greet them the more fitly. Ha! how mightily she ruled in Helche’s stead! She had true servants in plenty. The queen gave gold and vesture, silver and precious stones. All that she had brought with her from over the Rhine to the Huns, she divided among them. All the king’s kinsmen and liegemen vowed their service to her, and were subject to her, so that Helche herself had never ruled so mightily as Kriemhild, that they had all to serve till her death.

So famous was the court and the country, that each found there, at all times, the pastime he desired; so kind was the king and so good the queen.

So in high honour (I say honestly), they dwelled together till the seventh year. Meanwhile Kriemhild had borne a son. Nothing could have rejoiced Etzel more. She set her heart on it that he should receive Christian baptism. He was named Ortlieb, and glad was all Etzel’s land.

When now she saw that none withstood her (the which a king’s knights will sometimes do to their prince’s wife), and that twelve kings stood ever before her, she thought on the grievous wrongs that had befallen her in her home. She remembered also the honour that was hers among the Nibelungen, and that Hagen’s hand had robbed her of by Siegfried’s death, and she pondered how she might work him woe.

One night, when she lay by the king, and he held her in his arms, as was his wont, for she was to him as his life, the royal woman thought on her foes, and said to him, “My dearest lord, I would fain beg a boon of thee. I would have thee show, if I have deserved it at thy hand, that my kinsmen have found favour in thy sight.”

The great king answered with true heart, “That will I readily prove to thee. All that profiteth and doth honour to the knights rejoiceth me, for through no woman’s love have I won better friends.”

Then said the queen, “Thou knowest well that I have noble kinsmen. It irketh me that they visit me so sel-

Whereto King Etzel answered, “If it seem good to thee, dearest wife, I will send my minstrels as envoys to thy friends in Burgundy.”

He bade summon the good fiddlers straightway, that hasted to where he sat by the queen, and he told them both to go as envoys to Burgundy.

Then said the great king, “I will tell ye what ye shall do. I send to my friends love and every good wish, and pray them to ride hither to my land. I know few other guests so dear. And if Kriemhild’s kinsmen be minded to do my will, bid them fail not to come, for love of me, to my hightide, for my heart yearneth toward the brethren of my wife.”

Whereto Schwemmel, the proud minstrel, answered, “When shall thy hightide fall, that we may tell thy friends yonder?”

King Etzel said, “Next midsummer.”

“Thy command shall be obeyed,” answered Werbel.
The queen bade summon the envoys secretly to her chamber, and spoke with them. Little good came thereof. She said to the two envoys, “Ye shall deserve great reward if ye do my bidding well, and deliver the message wherewith I charge you, at home, in my land. I will make you rich in goods, and give you sumptuous apparel. See that ye say not to any of my friends at Worms, by the Rhine, that ye have ever seen me sad of my cheer, and commend my service to the heroes bold and good. Beg them to grant the king’s prayer and end all my sorrow. The Huns deem me without kin. Were I a knight, I would go to them myself. Say to Gernot, my noble brother, that none is better minded to him in the world than I.

Bid him bring here our best friends, that we win honour. And tell Giselher to remember that never, through his fault, did ill betide me; for which reason mine eyes are fain to behold him. Evermore I would serve him. Tell my mother, also, what worship is mine. And if Hagen of Troneck tarry behind who shall lead them through the land? From a child up he hath known the roads hither to the Huns.”

The envoys guessed not why she could not leave Hagen of Troneck at the Rhine. They knew it afterward to their cost, for, through him, many a knight was brought face to face with grim death.

Letters and greetings were given to them. They rode forth rich in goods, that they might live merrily by the way. They took leave of Etzel and his fair wife. Their bodies were adorned with goodly vesture.

(24) Within twelve days Werbel and Schwemmel reached Worms on the Rhine. And the kings and their men were told the news, that foreign envoys were come.

The gracious prince greeted them, and said, “Ye are both welcome, Etzel’s minstrels, ye and your followers. Wherefore hath the mighty Etzel sent you into Burgundy?”

They bowed before him, and Werbel answered, “First of all, we are sent to the king, to invite you to ride into Etzel’s land, and Sir Gemot with you. Mighty Etzel commanded me to say to you all that, even if ye desire not to see your sister, he would fain learn what wrong he hath done you, that ye are such strangers to him and his court. Had ye never known the queen, he deserveth no less of you than that ye come to see him. If ye consent to this, ye shall please him well.”

And Gunther answered, “A sennight from now I will let thee know what I and my friends have determined on. Go meanwhile to thy lodging and rest.”

The Huns went to their lodging. Meanwhile, the great king had sent for his friends, and noble Gunther asked his men how the message pleased them. And many of them began to say that he might well ride into Etzel’s land. The best among them counselled him thereto—all save Hagen. Him it irked exceedingly. He said to the king apart, “Ye strike at your own life. Surely ye know what we have done. Evermore we stand in danger from Kriemhild. I smote her husband dead with my hand. How dare we ride into Etzel’s land?”

But the great king answered, “My sister forgot her anger. With a loving kiss she forgave us for all we had done to her or she rode away. Hath she anything against any, it is against thee alone, Hagen.”

“Be not deceived,” said Hagen, “by the words of the Hunnish envoys. If thou goest to see Kriemhild, thou mayst lose thine honour and thy life. The wife of King Etzel hath a long memory.”

Then Gemot spoke out before the assembly, “Because thou fearest death with reason among the Huns, it were ill done on our part to keep away from our sister.”

And Sir Giselher said to the knight, “Since thou knowest thyself guilty, friend Hagen, stay thou at home, and guard thyself well, and let them that dare, journey with us to the Huns.”

Then the knight of Troneck fell in a passion. “None that ye take with you will be readier to ride to the court than I. And well I will prove it, since ye will not be turned.”
But knight Rumolt, the cook, said, “Strangers and friends ye can entertain at home, at your pleasure. For here is abundance. Hagen, I trow, hath never held ye back afore. If ye will not follow him in this, be counselled by Rumolt (for your true and loving servant am I) and tarry here as I would have ye do, and leave King Etzel yonder by Kriemhild. Where in the wide world could ye be better? Here ye are safe from your enemies. Ye can adorn your bodies with goodly vesture, drink the best wine, and woo fair women. Thereto, ye are given meats, the best on earth that ever king ate. The land is prosperous. Ye may give up Etzel’s hightide with honour, and live merrily at home with your friends. Even had ye nothing else to feast on here, I could always give you your fill of one dish—cutlets fried in oil. This is Rumolt’s advice, my masters, since there is danger among the Huns.”

And there were many that would not go, and said, “God guard you among the Huns.”

The king was wroth when he saw they desired to take their ease at home. “We will go none the less. The prudent are safe in the midst of danger.”

Hagen answered, “Be not wroth at my word. Whatever betide, I counsel thee in good faith to ride strongly armed to the Huns, Since thou wilt not be turned, summon the best men thou canst find, or knowest of, among thy vassals, and from among them I will choose a thousand good knights, that thou come not in scathe by Kriemhild’s anger.”

Kriemhild’s envoys were bidden to Gunther’s presence. When they appeared, Gemot said, “The king will obey Etzel’s wish. We go gladly to his hightide to see our sister. She may count on us.”

Gunther asked, “Can ye tell us when the hightide falleth, or when we must set forth?”

And Schwemmel answered, “Next midsummer, without fail.”

The king gave them leave, for the first time, to visit Brunhild, but Volker, to please her, said them nay.

(25) Hagen counselled them now to the journey, but he rued it later. He had withstood them, but that Gemot had mocked him. He minded him on Siegfried, Kriemhild’s husband, and said, “It is for that, that Hagen durst not go.”

But Hagen said, “I hold not back from fear. If ye will have it so, heroes, go forward. I am ready to ride with you to Etzel’s land.” Soon many a helmet and shield were pierced by him.

The Christian faith was still weak in those days. Nevertheless they had a chaplain with them to say mass. He returned alive, escaped from much peril. The rest tarried dead among the Huns.

Gunther’s men shaped their course toward the Main, up through East Frankland. Hagen led them, that knew the way well. Their marshal was Dankwart, the knight of Burgundy. As they rode from East Frankland to Schwanfeld, the princes and their kinsmen, knights of worship, were known by their stately mien.

On the twelfth morning the king reached the Danube. Hagen of Troneck rode in front of the rest. He was the helper and comforter of the Nibelungen. The bold knight alighted there on the bank, and tied his horse to a tree. The river was swoln, there was no boat, and the knights were troubled how to win across. The water was too wide. Many a bold knight sprang to the ground.

“Mischief might easily befall thee here, King of Rhineland,” said Hagen; “thou canst see for thyself that the river is swoln, and the current very strong. I fear me we shall lose here to-day not a few good knights.”

Then he sought the ferrymen up and down. He heard the splash of water and began to listen. It came from mermaidens that bathed their bodies in a clear brook to cool them.

Hagen spied them, and stole up secretly. When they were ware of him, they fled. Well pleased were they to escape him. The hero took their garments, but did them no further annoy.
Then one of the mermaids (she hight Hadburg) said, “We will tell thee, noble Hagen, if thou give us our clothes again, how ye shall all fare on this journey among the Huns.”

They swayed like birds in the water before him. He deemed them wise and worthy of belief, so that he trusted the more what they told him. They informed him concerning all he asked them. Hadburg said, “Ye may ride safely into Etzel’s land; I pledge my faith thereon, that never yet heroes journeyed to any court to win more worship. I say honestly.”

Hagen’s heart was uplifted at her word; he gave them back their clothes and stayed no longer. When they had put on their wonderful raiment, they told him the truth about the journey.

The other mermaid, that hight Sieglind, said, “Be warned, Hagen, son of Aldrian. My aunt hath lied to thee because of her clothes. If ye go to the Huns, ye are ill-advised. Turn while there is time, for ye bold knights have been bidden that ye may die in Etzel’s land. Who rideth thither hath death at his hand.”

But Hagen said, “Your deceit is vain. How should we all tarry there, dead, through the hate of one woman?”

Then they began to foretell it plainer, and Hadburg said also, “Ye are doomed. Not one of you shall escape, save the king’s chaplain: this we know for a truth. He, only, shall return alive into Gunther’s land.”

Grimly wroth spoke bold Hagen then. “It were a pleasant thing to tell my masters that we must all perish among the Huns! Show us a way across the water, thou wisest of womankind.”

She answered, “Since thou wilt not be turned from the journey, up yonder by the river standeth an inn. Within it is a boatman; there is none beside.”

He betook him thither to ask further. But the mermaiden cried after the wrothful knight, “Stay, Sir Hagen. Thou art too hasty. Hearken first concerning the way. The lord of this march hight Elsy. The name of his brother is Gelfrat, a prince in Bavaria. It might go hard with thee if thou wentest through his march. Look well to thyself, and proceed warily with the boatman. He is so grim of his mood that he will kill thee, if thou speak him not fair. If thou wouldst have him ferry thee across, give him hire. He guardeth this land, and is Gelfrat’s friend. If he come not straight way, cry across the river to him that thou art Amelrich; he was a good knight, that a feud drove from this land. The boatman will come when he heareth that name.”

Proud Hagen thanked the women for their warning and their counsel, and said no more. He went up the river’s bank, till he came to an inn that stood on the far side. He began to shout across the water, “Boatman, row me over, and I will give thee, for thy meed, an armlet of red gold. I must across.”

The boatman was so rich that he needed not to serve for hire, and seldom took reward from any. His men also were overweening, and Hagen was left standing on the bank of the river.

Thereupon he shouted so loud that all the shore rang with it. He was a strong man. “Row across for Amelrich, I am Elsy’s liegeman, that, for a feud, fled the country.” He swung the armlet aloft on his sword—it was of red gold, bright and shining—that they might ferry him over to Gelfrat’s march. At this the haughty boatman himself took the oar, for he was greedy and covetous of gain, the which bringeth oft to a bad end. He thought to win Hagen’s red gold, but won, in lieu thereof, a grim death by his sword.

He rowed over to the shore with mighty strokes. When he found not him that had been named, he fell in a fury; he saw Hagen, and spoke wrothfully to the hero, “Thy name may be Amelrich, but, or I greatly err, thy face is none of his. By one father and one mother he was my brother. Since thou hast deceived me, thou canst stay where thou art.”

“Nay, for the love of God,” said Hagen. “I am a stranger knight that have the charge of other warriors. Take thy fee and row me over, for I am a friend.”
But the boatman answered, “I will not. My dear masters have foemen, wherefore I must bring no stranger across. If thou lovest thy life, step out on to the shore again.”

“Nay now,” said Hagen, “I am sore bested. Take, as a keepsake, this goodly gold, and ferry us over with our thousand horses and our many men.”

But the grim boatman answered, “Never!” He seized an oar, mickle and broad, and smote Hagen (soon he rued it), that he staggered and fell on his knees. Seldom had he of Troneck encountered so grim a ferryman. Further, to anger the bold stranger, he brake a boat-pole over his head, for he was a strong man. But he did it to his own hurt.

Grimly wroth, Hagen drew a weapon from the sheath, and cut off his head, and threw it on the ground. The Burgundians were soon ware of the tidings.

In the same moment that he slew the ferryman, the boat was caught by the current, which irked him no little, for he was weary or he could bring her head round, albeit Gunther’s man rowed stoutly. With swift strokes he sought to turn it, till the oar brake in his hand. He strove to reach the knights on the strand, but had no other oar. Ha! how nimbly he bound it together with the thong of his shield, a narrow broidered band, and rowed to a wood down the river.

There he found his masters waiting on the beach. Many a valiant knight ran to meet him, and greeted him joyfully. But when they saw the boat full of blood from the grim wound he had given the ferryman, they began to question him.

When Gunther saw the hot blood heaving in the boat, he said quickly, “Tell me what thou hast done with the ferryman. I ween he hath fallen by thy strength.”

But he answered with a lie, “I found the boat by a waste meadow, and loosed it. I have seen no ferryman this day, nor hath any suffered hurt at my hand.”

Then said Sir Gernot of Burgundy, “I am heavy of my cheer because of the dear friends that must die or night, for boatmen we have none. Sorrowfully I stand, nor know how we shall win over.”

But Hagen cried, “Lay down your burdens on the grass, ye squires. I was the best boatman by the Rhine, and safe, I trow, I shall bring you into Gelfrat’s land.”

That they might cross the quicker, they drave in the horses. These swam so well that none were drowned, albeit a few, grown weary, were borne down some length by the tide. Then they carried their gold and harness on board, since they must needs make the passage. Hagen was the helmsman, and steered many a gallant knight to the unknown land. First he took over a thousand, and thereto his own band of warriors. Then followed more: nine thousand squires. The knight of Troneck was not idle that day. The ship was huge, strongly built and wide enow. Five hundred of their folk and more, with their meats and weapons, it carried easily at a time. Many a good warrior that day pulled sturdily at the oar.

When he had brought them safe across the water, the bold knight and good thought on the strange prophecy of the wild mermaids. Through this the king’s chaplain came nigh to lose his life. He found the priest beside the sacred vessels, leaning with his hand upon the holy relics. This helped him not. When Hagen saw him, it went hard with the poor servant of God. He threw him out of the ship on the instant. Many cried, “Stop, Hagen, stop!” Giselher, the youth, was very wroth, but Hagen ceased not, till he had done him a hurt.

Then strong Gemot of Burgundy said, “What profiteth thee the chaplain’s death, Hagen? Had another done this, he had paid dear for it. What hast thou against the priest?”

The chaplain swam with all his might. He had gotten on board again had any helped him. But none could do it, for strong Hagen pushed him fiercely under. None approved his deed.
When the poor man saw that they would not aid him, he turned and made for the shore. He was in sore peril. But, albeit he could not swim, the hand of God upbore him, that he won safe to the dry land again. There he stood, and shook his clothes,

By this sign Hagen knew there was no escape from what the wild women of the sea had foretold. He thought, “These knights be all dead men.”

When they had unloaded the ship, and brought all across that belonged to the three kings, Hagen brake it in pieces and threw these on the water. Much the bold knights marvelled thereat.

“Wherefore dost thou so, brother?” said Dankwart. “How shall we get over when we ride home from the Huns to the Rhine?”

Hagen told him, after, that that would never be, but for the meantime he said, “I did it a-purpose. If we have any coward with us on this journey, that would forsake us in our need, he shall die a shameful death in these waves.”

(26) Then they rode into Rudeger’s country. When Rudeger had heard the news, he was glad.

(27) The Margrave went to find his wife and daughter, and told them the good news that he had heard, how that their queen’s brethren were coming to the house.

“Dear love,” said Rudeger, “receive the high and noble kings well when they come here with their followers. Hagen, Gunther’s man, thou shalt also greet fair. There is one with them that hight Dankwart; another hight Volker, a man of much worship. These six thou shalt kiss—thou and my daughter. Entreat the warriors courteously.”

The women promised it, nothing loath. They took goodly apparel from their chests, wherein to meet the knights. The fair women made haste now. Their cheeks needed little false colour. They wore fillets of bright gold on their heads, fashioned like rich wreaths, that the wind might not ruffl e their beautiful hair. They were dainty and fresh.

The noble Margravine came out before the castle with her beautiful daughter. Lovely women and fair maids not a few stood beside her, adorned with bracelets and fine apparel. Precious stones sparked bright on their rich vesture. Goodly was their raiment.

The guests rode up and sprang to the ground. Ha! courteous men all were they of Burgundy! Six and thirty maidens and many women beside, fair to heart’s desire, came forth to meet them, with bold men in plenty. The noble women welcomed them sweetly. The Margravine kissed the kings all three. Her daughter did the like. Hagen stood by. Him also her father bade her kiss. She looked up at him, and he was so grim that she had gladly let it be. Yet must she do as the host bade her. Her colour came and went, white and red. She kissed Dankwart, too, and, after him, the fiddler. By reason of his body’s strength he won this greeting. Then the young Margravine took Giselher, the youth of Burgundy, by the hand. Her mother did the same to Gunther, and they went in merrily with the heroes.

The host led Gernot into a wide hall. There knights and ladies sat down, and good wine was poured out for the guests. Never were warriors better entreated.

Rudeger’s daughter was looked at with loving eyes, she was so fair; and many a good knight loved her in his heart. And well they might, for she was an high-hearted maiden. But their thoughts were vain: it could not be.

Women and knights were parted then, as was the custom, and went into separate rooms. The table was made ready in the great hall, and willing service was done to the strangers.
To show love to the guests, the Margravine went to table with them. She left her daughter with the damsels, as was seemly, albeit it irked the guests to see her no longer.

When they had all drunk and eaten, they brought the fair ones into the hall again, and there was no lack of sweet words. Volker, a knight bold and good, spoke plenty of them. This same fiddler said openly, “Great Margrave, God hath done well by thee, for he hath given thee a right beautiful wife, and happy days. Were I a king,” said the minstrel, “and wore a crown, I would choose thy sweet daughter for my queen. She would be the choice of my heart, for she is fair to look upon, and thereto, noble and good.”

The Margrave answered, “How should a king covet my dear daughter? My wife and I are both strangers here, and have nothing to give. What availeth then her beauty?”

But said Gernot, the courteous man, “Might I choose where I would, such a wife were my heart’s desire.”

Then said Hagen graciously, “It is time Giselher wedded. Of such high lineage is the noble Margravine, that we would gladly serve her, I and his men, if she wore the crown in Burgundy.”

The word pleased both Rudeger and Gotelind greatly. Their hearts were uplifted. So it was agreed among the heroes that noble Giselher should take her to wife; the which a king might well do without shame.

If a thing be right, who can withstand it? They bade the maiden before them, and they swore to give her to him, whereupon he vowed to cherish her. They gave her castles and lands for her share. The king and Gernot swore with the hand that it should be even as they had promised.

Then said the Margrave, “Since I have no castles, I can only prove me your true friend evermore. I will give my daughter as much silver and gold as an hundred sumpters may carry, that ye warriors may, with honour, be content.”

Then the two were put in a circle, as the custom was. Many a young knight stood opposite in merry mood, and thought in his heart as young folk will. They asked the lovely maiden if she would have the hero. She was half sorry, yet her heart inclined to the goodly man. She was shamefast at the question, as many a maid hath been.

Rudeger her father counselled her to say “yes,” and to take him gladly. Giselher, the youth, was not slow to clasp her to him with his white hands. Yet how little while she had him!

Then said the Margrave, “Great and noble kings, I will give you my child to take with you, for this were fittest, when ye ride home again into your land.” And it was so agreed.

The din of tourney was bidden cease. The damsels were sent to their chambers, and the guests to sleep and to take their rest till the day. Then meats were made ready, for their host saw well to their comfort.

When they had eaten, they would have set out again for the country of the Huns, but Rudeger said, “Go not, I pray you. Tarry here yet a while, for I had never dearer guests.”

Dankwart answered, “It may not be. Where couldst thou find the meat, the bread and the wine, for so many knights?”

But when the host heard him, he said, “Speak not of that. Deny me not, my dear lords. I can give you and all them that are with you, meat for fourteen days. Little hath King Etzel ever taken of my substance.”

Albeit they made excuse, they had to tarry till the fourth morning. He gave both horses and apparel so freely that the fame of it spread abroad.

But longer than this it could not last, for they must needs forth. Rudeger was not sparing of his goods. If any craved for anything, none denied him. Each got his desire.

The attendants brought the saddled horses to the door. There many stranger knights joined them, shield in hand, to ride with them to Etzel’s court. To each of the noble guests Rudeger offered a gift, or he left the hall. He had wherewithal to live in honour and give freely. Upon Giselher he had bestowed his fair daughter. He gave to
Gernot a goodly weapon enow, that he wielded well afterward in strife. The Margrave’s wife grudged him not the gift, yet Rudeger, or long, was slain thereby.

To Gunther, the valiant knight, he gave a coat of mail, that did the rich king honour, albeit he seldom took gifts. He bowed before Rudeger and thanked him.

Gotelind offered Hagen a fair gift, as was fitting, since the king had taken one, that he might not fare to the hightide without a keepsake from her, but he refused.

“Nothing that I ever saw would I so fain bear away with me as yonder shield on the wall. I would gladly carry it into Etzel’s land.”

When the Margravine heard Hagen’s word, it reminded her of her sorrow, and she fell to weeping. She thought sadly on the death of Nudung, that Wittich had slain; and her heart was heavy.

She said to the knight, “I will give thee the shield. Would to God he yet lived that once bore it! He died in battle. I must ever weep when I think on him, for my woman’s heart is sore.”

The noble Margravine rose from her seat, and took down the shield with her white hands and carried it to Hagen, that used it as a hero should. A covering of bright stuff lay over its device. The light never shone on better shield. It was so rich with precious stones that had any wanted to buy it it had cost him at the least a thousand marks.

The knight bade his attendants bear it away. Then came his brother Dankwart, to whom the Margrave’s daughter gave richly brodered apparel, that afterward he wore merrily among the Huns.

None had touched any of these things but for love of the host that offered them so kindly. Yet, or long, they bare him such hate that they slew him.

Bold Volker then stepped forth with knightly bearing and stood before Gotelind with his viol. He played a sweet tune and sang her his song. Then he took his leave and left Bechlaren. But first the Margravine bade them bring a drawer nearer. Of loving gifts now hear the cale. She took therefrom twelve armlets, and drew them over his hand, saying, “These shalt thou take with thee and wear for my sake at Etzel’s court. When thou comest again, I will hear how thou hast served me at the hightide.” Well he did her behest.

The host said to the guest, “That ye may journey the safer, I will myself escort you, and see that none fall on you by the way.” And forthwith they loaded his sumpter. He stood ready for the road with five hundred men, mounted and equipped. These he led merrily to the hightide. Not one of them came back alive to Bechlaren.

The swift envoys pressed down through Austria, and soon the folk knew, far and near, that the heroes were on their way from Worms beyond the Rhine. It was welcome news to the king’s vassals. The envoys spurred forward with the tidings that the Nibelungen were come to the Huns.

“Receive them well, Kriemhild, my wife. Thy brethren are come to show thee great honour.”

Kriemhild stood at a window and looked out as a friend might for friends. Many drew thither from her father’s land. The king was joyful when he heard the news.

“Glad am I,” said Kriemhild, “my kinsmen come with many new shields and shining bucklers. I will ever be his friend that taketh my gold and remembereth my wrong.”

She thought in her heart, “Now for the reckoning! If I can contrive it, it will go hard at this hightide with him that killed all my happiness. Fain would I work his doom. I care not what may come of it: my vengeance shall fall on the hateful body of him that stole my joy from me. He shall pay dear for my sorrow.”

(28) King Etzel saw them, and asked, “I would know who yonder knight is that Dietrich welcometh so lovingly. He beareth him proudly. Howso is his father hight, he is, certes, a goodly warrior.”
One of Kriemhild’s men answered the king, “He was born at Troneck. The name of his father was Aldrian. Albeit now he goeth gently, he is a grim man. I will prove to thee yet that I lie not.”

“How shall I find him so grim?” He knew nothing, as yet, of all that the queen contrived against her kinsmen by reason whereof not one of them escaped alive from the Huns.

“I know Hagen well. He was my vassal. Praise and mickle honour he won here by me. I made him a knight, and gave him my gold. For that he proved him faithful, I was ever kind to him. Wherefore I may well know all about him. I brought two noble children captive to this land—him and Walter of Spain. Here they grew to manhood. Hagen I sent home again. Walter fled with Hildegund.”

So he mused on the good old days, and what had happened long ago, for he had seen Hagen, that did him strong service in his youth. Yet now that he was old, he lost by him many a dear friend.

(29) The Huns gaped at the proud heroes as they had been wild beasts, and Etzel’s wife saw them through a window and was troubled anew. She thought on her old wrong and began to weep. Etzel’s men marvelled much what had grieved her so sore. She said, “Good knights, it is Hagen that hath done it.”

Then said they to the queen, “How came it to pass? A moment ago we saw thee of good cheer. There is no man so bold, had he done thee a hurt and thou badest us avenge thee, but he should answer for it with his life.”

“Him that avenged my wrong I would thank evermore. All that he asked I would give him. I fall at your feet; only avenge me on Hagen, that he lose his life.”

Thereupon sixty bold men armed them swiftly, and would have gone out with one accord to slay Hagen, the bold knight, and the fiddler, for Kriemhild’s sake.

But when the queen saw so small a number, she spoke wrothfully to the heroes, “Think not to withstand Hagen with so few. Strong and bold as is Hagen of Troneck, much stronger is he that sitteth by him, Volker the fiddler by name, a wicked man. Ye shall not so lightly overcome them.”

(30) They led the guests to a spacious hall, where they found beds, big and costly, standing ready. Gladly had the queen worked their doom. Coverlets of bright stuffs from Arras were there, and testers of silk of Araby, the goodliest that could be, brodered and shining with gold. The bed-clothes were of ermine and black sable, for them to rest under, the night through, till the day. In such state never king lay before with his men.

“Woe is me for our lodging!” said Giselher the youth, “and for my friends that came hither with us. My sister sent us fair words, but I fear we must all soon lie dead through her.”

“Grieve not,” said Hagen the knight. “I will myself keep watch, and will guard thee well, I trow, till the day. Fear nothing till then. After that, each shall look to himself.”

They bowed to him and thanked him. They went to their beds, and, or long, the valiant men were lying soft. Then bold Hagen began to arm him.

Volker the fiddler said, “If thou scorn not my help, Hagen, I would keep watch with thee till the morning.”

The hero thanked Volker, “God in Heaven quit you, dear Volker. In all my troubles and my straits I desire thee only and no other. I will do as much for thee, if death hinder it not.”

They both did on their shining harness. Each took his shield in his hand, and went out before the door to keep watch over the strangers. They did it faithfully.

Brave Volker leaned his good shield against the wall, and went back and took his fiddle, and did fair and seemly service to his friends. He sat down under the lintel upon the stone. There never was a bolder minstrel. When the sweet tones sounded from his strings, the proud homeless ones all thanked him. He struck so loud
that the house echoed. Great were his skill and strength both. Then he played sweeter and softer, till he had lulled many a careworn man to sleep. When Volker found they were all asleep, he took his shield in his hand again, and went out and stood before the door, to guard his friends from Kriemhild’s men.

About the middle of the night, or sooner, bold Volker saw a helmet in the distance, shining in the dark. Kriemhild’s vassals were fain to do them a hurt. Or she sent them forth, she said, “For God’s sake, if ye win at them, slay none save the one man, false Hagen; let the others live.”

Then spoke the fiddler, “Friend Hagen, we must bear this matter through together. I see armed folk before the house. I ween they come against us.”

“Hold thy peace,” answered Hagen. “Let them come nigher. Or they are ware of us, there will be helmets cloven by the swords in our two hands. They shall be sent back to Kriemhild in sorry plight.”

One of the Hunnish knights saw that the door was guarded, and said hastily, “We cannot carry this thing through. I see the fiddler standing guard. He hath on his head a shining helmet, bright and goodly, with no dint therein, and strong thereto. The rings of his harness glow like fire. Hagen standeth by him. The strangers are well watched.”

They turned without more ado. When Volker saw this, he spoke angrily to his comrade, “Let me go out to these knights. I would ask Kriemhild’s men a question.”

“Nay, as thou lovest me,” said Hagen. “If thou wentest to them, thou wouldst fall in such strait by their swords that I must help thee, though all my kinsmen perished thereby. If both the two of us fell to fighting, two or three of them might easily spring into the house, and do such hurt to the sleepers as we could never mourn enow.”

But Volker said, “Let us tell them that we have seen them, that they deny not their treachery.” Then Volker called out to them, “Why go ye there armed, valiant knights? Is it murder ye are after, ye men of Kriemhild? Take me and my comrade to help you.”

None answered him. Right wroth was he.

“Shame on you, cowards! Would ye have slain us sleeping? Seldom afore hath so foul a deed been done on good knights.”

The queen was heavy of her cheer when they told her that her messengers had failed. She began to contrive it otherwise, for grim was her mood, and by reason thereof many a good knight and bold soon perished.

(31) “My harness is grown so cold,” said Volker, “that I ween the night is far spent. I feel, by the air, that it will soon be day.”

Then they waked the knights that still slept.

The bright morning shone in on the warriors in the hall, and Hagen began to ask them if they would go to the minster to hear mass. The bells were ringing according to Christian custom.

The folk sang out of tune: it was not mickle wonder, when Christian and heathen sang together. Gunther’s men were minded to go to church, and rose from their beds. They did on their fine apparel—never knights brought goodlier weed into any king’s land. But Hagen was wroth, and said, “Ye did better to wear other raiment. Ye know how it standeth with us here. Instead of roses, bear weapons in your hands, and instead of jewelled caps, bright-helmets. Of wicked Kriemhild’s mood we are well aware. I tell you there will be fighting this day. For your silken tunics wear your hauberks, and good broad shields for rich mantles, that, if any fall on you, ye may be ready. My masters dear, my kinsmen, and my men, go to the church and bewail your sorrow and your need before great God, for know, of a surety, that death draweth nigh. Forget not wherein ye have sinned, and
stand humbly before your Maker. Be warned, most noble knights. If God in heaven help you not, ye will hear
mass no more.”

So the kings and their men went to the minster. Hagen bade them pause in the churchyard, that they might
not be parted. He said, “None knoweth yet what the Huns may attempt on us. Lay your shields at your feet, my
friends, and if any give you hostile greeting, answer him with deep wounds and deadly. That is Hagen’s counsel,
that ye may be found ready, as beseemeth you.”

Volker and Hagen went and stood before the great minster. They did this that the queen might be forced to
push past them. Right grim was their mood.

Then came the king and his beautiful wife. Her body was adorned with rich apparel, and the knights in her
train were fealty clad. The dust rose high before the queen’s attendants.

When the rich king saw the princes and their followers armed, he said hastily, “Why go my friends armed?
By my troth it would grieve me if any had done anything to them. I will make it good to them on any wise they
ask it. Hath any troubled their hearts, he shall feel my displeasure. Whatso they demand of me I will do.”

Hagen answered, “None hath wrought us annoy. It is the custom of my masters to go armed at all hightides
for full three days. If any did us a mischief, Etzel should hear thereof.”

Right well Kriemhild heard Hagen’s word. She looked at him from under her eyelids with bitter hate. Y et
she told not the custom of her land, albeit she knew it well from aforetime. Hows grim and deadly the queen’s
anger was, none had told Etzel how it stood, else he had hindered what afterward befell They scorned, through
pride, to tell their wrong.

The queen advanced with a great crowd of folk, but the two moved not two hands’ breadth, whereat the
Huns were wroth, for they had to press past the heroes. This pleased not Etzel’s chamberlains, and they had
gladly quarrelled with them, had they dared before the king. There was much jostling, and nothing more.

When mass was over, many a Hun sprang to horse.

The host went with his guests into the palace, and bade the anger cease. They set the table, and brought water.
The knights of the Rhine had strong foemen enow. Though it irked Etzel, many armed knights pressed in after
the kings, when they went to table, by reason of their hate. They waited a chance to avenge their kinsman.

“Ye be too unmannerly,” said the host, “to sit down armed to eat. Whoso among you toucheth my guests
shall pay for it with his head. I have spoken, O Huns.”

It was long or the knights were all seated. Bitter was Kriemhild’s wrath. She said, “Prince of Bern, I seek thy
counsel and thy kind help in my sore need.”

But Hildebrand, the good knight, answered, “Who slayeth the Nibelungen shall do it without me; I care not
what price thou offerest. None shall essay it but he shall rue it, for never yet have these doughty knights been
vanquished.”

“I ask the death of none save Hagen, that hath wronged me. He slew Siegfried, my dear husband. He that
chose him from among the others for vengeance should have my gold without stint. I were inly grieved did any
suffer save Hagen.”

But Hildebrand answered, “How could one slay him alone? Thou canst see for thyself, that if he be set upon,
they will all to battle, and poor and rich alike must perish.”

Said Dietrich also, courteously, “Great queen, say no more. Thy kinsmen have done nothing to me that I
should defy them to the death. It is little to thine honour that thou wouldst compass the doom of thy kinsmen.
They came hither under safe conduct, and not by the hand of Dietrich shall Siegfried be avenged.”
When she found no treachery in the knight of Bern, she tempted Bloedel with the promise of a goodly estate that had been Nudung’s. Dankwart slew him after, that he clean forgot the gift.

She said, “Help me, Sir Bloedel. In this house are the foes that slew Siegfried, my dear husband. If any avenge me, I will ever serve him.”

Bloedel, that sat by her, answered, “I dare not show thy kinsmen such hate, so long as my brother showeth them favour. The king would not forgive me if I defied them.”

“Nay now, Sir Bloedel, I will stand by thee, and give thee silver and gold for meed, and, thereto, a beautiful woman, the widow of Nudung, that thou mayest have her to thy dear one. I will give thee all, land and castles, and thou shalt live joyfully with her on the march that was Nudung’s. In good honesty I will do what I promise.”

When Bloedel heard the fee, and because the woman pleased him for her fairness, he resolved to win her by battle. So came he to lose his life.

He said to the queen, “Go back into the hall. Or any is ware thereof, I will raise a great tumult. Hagen shall pay for what he hath done. I will bring thee King Gunther’s man bound.”

“Now arm ye, my men,” cried Bloedel, “and let us fall on the foemen in their lodging. King Etzel’s wife giveth me no peace, and at her bidding we must risk our lives.”

When the queen had left Bloedel to begin the strife, she went in to table with King Etzel and his men. She had woven an evil snare against the guests.

I will tell you now how they went into the hall. Crowned kings went before her; many high princes and knights of worship attended the queen. Etzel assigned to all the guests their places, the highest and the best in the hall. Christians and heathens had their different meats, whereof they ate to the full; for so the wise king ordered it. The yeomen feasted in their own quarters, where sewers served them, that had been charged with the care of their food. But revel and merriment were soon turned to weeping.

Kriemhild’s old wrong lay buried in her heart, and when the strife could not be kindled otherwise, she bade them bring Etzel’s son to table. Did ever any woman so fearful a thing for vengeance?

Four of Etzel’s men went straightway and brought in Ortlieb, the young king, to the princes’ table, where Hagen also sat. Through his murderous hate the child perished.

When Etzel saw his son, he spoke kindly to his wife’s brethren, “See now, my friends, that is my only son, and your sister’s child. Some day he will serve you well. If he take after his kin, he will be a valiant man, rich and right noble, strong and comely. If I live, I will give him the lordship of twelve countries. Fair service ye may yet have from young Ortlieb’s hand. Wherefore I pray ye, my dear friends, that, when ye ride back to the Rhine, ye take with you your sister’s son, and do well by the child. Rear him in honour till he be a man, and when he is full grown, if any harry your land, he will help you to avenge it.” Kriemhild, the wife of Etzel, heard all that the king said.

Hagen answered, “If he grow to be a man, he may well help these knights. But he hath a weakly look. Methinketh I shall seldom go to Ortlieb’s court.”

The king eyed Hagen sternly, for his word irked him. Albeit he answered not again, he was troubled, and heavy of his cheer. Hagen was no friend to merriment.

The king and his liegemen misliked sore what Hagen had said of the child, and were wroth that they must bear it. They knew not yet what the warrior was to do after. Not a few that heard it, and that bare him hate, had gladly fallen upon him: the king also, had not honour forbidden him. Ill had Hagen sped. Yet soon he did worse: he slew his child before his eyes.
Bloedel's knights all stood ready. With a thousand hauberks they went where Dankwart sat at table with the yeomen. Grim was soon the hate between the heroes.

When Sir Bloedel strode up to the table, Dankwart the marshal greeted him fair. “Welcome to this house, Sir Bloedel. What news dost thou bring?”

“Greet me not,” said Bloedel. “My coming meaneth thy death, because of Hagen, thy brother, that slew Siegfried. Thou and many another knight shall pay for it.”

“Nay now, Sir Bloedel,” said Dankwart. “So might we well rue this hightide. I was a little child when Siegfried lost his life. I know not what King Etzel’s wife hath against me.”

“I can tell thee nothing, save that thy kinsmen, Gunther and Hagen, did it. Now stand on your defense, ye homeless ones. Ye must die, for your lives are forfeit to Kriemhild.”

“Dost thou persist?” said Dankwart. “Then it irketh me that I asked it. I had better have spared my words.”

The good knight and bold sprang up from the table, and drew a sharp weapon that was mickle and long, and smote Bloedel a swift blow therewith, that his head, in its helmet, fell at their feet.

“That be thy wedding-gift to Nudung’s bride, that thou though test to win!” he cried. “Let them mate her tomorrow with another man; if he ask the dowry, he can have the like.” A faithful Hun had told him that morning, secretly, that the queen plotted their doom.

When Bloedel’s men saw their master lying slain, they endured it no longer, but fell with drawn swords in grim wrath on the youths.

The homeless youths made grim defence. They drove the armed men from the house. Yet five hundred and more lay therein dead. They were red and wet with blood.

He fought his way through his foemen like a wild boar in the forest through the hounds—bolder he could not have been. His path was ever wet anew with hot blood. When did single knight withstand foemen better? Proudly Hagen’s brother went to court.

Bold Dankwart strode in through the door, and bade Etzel’s followers void the way; all his harness was covered with blood. It was at the time they were carrying Ortlieb to and fro from table to table among the princes, and through the terrible news the child perished.

Dankwart cried aloud to one of the knights, “Thou sittest here too long, brother Hagen. To thee, and God in Heaven, I bewail our wrong. Knights and squires lie dead in our hall.”

Hagen called back to him, “Who hath done it?”

“Sir Bloedel and his men. He paid for it bitterly, I can tell thee. I smote off his head with my hands.”

“He hath paid too little,” said Hagen, “since it can be said of him that he hath died by the hand of a hero. His womenfolk have the less cause to weep. Now tell me, dear brother; wherefore art thou so red? I ween thy wounds are deep. If he be anywhere near that hath done it, and the devil help him not, he is a dead man.”

“Unwounded I stand. My harness is wet with the blood of other men, whereof I have today slain so many, that I cannot swear to the number.”

Hagen said, “Brother Dankwart, keep the door, and let not a single Hun out; I will speak with the knights as our wrong constraineth me. Guiltless, our followers lie dead.”

“To such great kings will I gladly be chamberlain,” said the bold man; “I will guard the stairs faithfully.”

Kriemhild’s men were sore dismayed.

“I marvel much,” said Hagen, “what the Hunnish knights whisper in each other’s ears. I ween they could well spare him that standeth at the door, and hath brought this court news to the Burgundians. I have long heard
Kriemhild say that she could not bear her heart’s dole. Now drink we to Love, and taste the king’s wine. The young prince of the Huns shall be the first.”

With that, Hagen slew the child Ortlieb, that the blood gushed down on his hand from his sword, and the head flew up into the queen’s lap. Then a slaughter grim and great arose among the knights. He slew the child’s guardian with a sword stroke from both his hands, that the head fell down before the table. It was sorry pay he gave the tutor. He saw a minstrel sitting at Etzel’s table, and sprang at him in wrath, and lopped off his right hand on his viol: “Take that for the message thou broughtest to the Burgundians.”

“Woe is me for my hand!” cried Werbel. “Sir Hagen of Troneck, what have I done to thee? I rode with true heart to thy master’s land. How shall I make my music now?”

Little recked Hagen if he never fiddled more. He quenched on Etzel’s knights, in the house there, his grim lust for blood, and smote to death not a few.

Swift Volker sprang from the table; his fiddle-bow rang loud. Harsh were the tunes of Gunther’s minstrel. Ha! many a foe he made among the Huns!

The three kings, too, rose hastily. They would have parted them or more harm was done. But they could not, for Volker and Hagen were beside themselves with rage.

When the King of Rhineland could not stint the strife, he, also, smote many a deep wound through the shining harness of his foemen. Well he showed his hardihood.

Then strong Gernot came into the battle, and slew many Huns with the sharp sword that Rudeger had given him. He brought many of Etzel’s knights to their graves therewith.

Uta’s youngest son sprang into the fray, and pierced the helmets of Etzel’s knights valiantly with his weapon. Bold Giselher’s hand did wonderly.

But howsso valiant all the others were, the kings and their men, Volker stood up bolder than any against the foes. He was a hero; he wounded many, that they fell down in their blood.

Etzel’s liegemen warded them well, but the guests hewed their way with their bright swords up and down the hall. From all sides came the sound of wailing. They that were without would gladly have won in to their friends, but could not; and they that were within would have won out, but Dankwart let none of them up the stair or down.

The host and his wife fell in great fear. Many a dear friend was slain before their eyes. Etzel himself scarce escaped from his foemen. He sat there affrighted. What did it profit him that he was a king?

Proud Kriemhild cried to Dietrich, “Help me, noble knight, by the princely charity of an Amelung king, to come hence alive. If Hagen reach me, death standeth by my side.”

“How can I help thee, noble queen? I cannot help myself. Gunther’s men are so grimly wroth that I can win grace for none.”

“Nay now, good Sir Dietrich, show thy mercy, and help me hence or I die. Save me and the king from this great peril.”

“I will try. Albeit, for long, I have not seen good knights in such a fury. The blood gusheth from the helmets at their sword-strokes.”

The chosen knight shouted with a loud voice that rang out like the blast of a buffalo horn, so that all the castle echoed with its strength, for strong and of mickle might was Dietrich.

King Gunther heard his cry above the din of strife, and hearkened. He said, “The voice of Dietrich hath reached me. I ween our knights have slain some of his men. I see him on the table, beckoning with his hand. Friends and kinsmen of Burgundy, hold, that we may learn what we have done to Dietrich’s hurt.”
When King Gunther had begged and prayed them, they lowered their swords. Thereby Gunther showed his might, that they smote no blow. Then he asked the Prince of Bern what he wanted. He said, “Most noble Dietrich, what hurt have my friends done thee? I will make it good. Sore grieved were I, had any done thee scathe.”

But Sir Dietrich answered, “Nothing hath been done against me. With thy safe-conduct let me quit this hall, and the bitter strife, with my men. For this I will ever serve thee.”

“Why ask this grace?” said Wolfhart. “The fiddler hath not barred the door so fast that we cannot set it wide, and go forth.”

“Hold thy peace,” cried Dietrich. “Thou hast played the devil.”

Then Gunther answered, “I give thee leave. Lead forth few or many, so they be not my foes. These shall tarry within, for great wrong have I suffered from the Huns.”

When the knight of Bern heard that, he put one arm round the queen, for she was greatly affrighted, and with the other he led out Etzel. Six hundred good knights followed Dietrich.

Then said noble Rudeger, the Margrave, “If any more of them that love and would serve thee may win from this hall, let us hear it; that peace may endure, as is seemly, betwixt faithful friends.”

Straightway Giselher answered his father-in-law. “Peace and love be betwixt us. Thou and thy liegemen have been ever true to us, wherefore depart with thy friends, fearing nothing.”

When Sir Rudeger left the hall, five hundred or more went out with him. The Burgundian knights did honourably therein, but King Gunther suffered scathe for it after.

One of the Huns would have saved himself when he saw King Etzel go out with Dietrich, but the fiddler smote him such a blow that his head fell down at Etzel’s feet.

All that they would let go were gone. Then arose a mighty din. The guests avenged them bitterly. Ha! many a helmet did Volker break!

Of the Huns that had been in the hall, not one was left alive. The tumult fell, for there was none to fight, and the bold warriors laid down their swords.

(34) The knights sat down through weariness. Volker and Hagen went out before the hall. There the overweening men leaned on their shields and spoke together.

Then said Giselher of Burgundy, “Rest not yet, dear friends. Ye must carry the dead out of the house. We shall be set upon again; trow my word. These cannot lie longer among our feet. Or the Huns overcome us, we will hew many wounds; to the which I am nothing loth.”

“Well for me that I have such a lord,” answered Hagen. “This counsel suiteth well such a knight as our young master hath approved him this day. Ye Burgundians have cause to rejoice.”

They did as he commanded, and bare the seven thousand dead bodies to the door, and threw them out. They fell down at the foot of the stair, Then arose a great wail from their kinsmen. Some of them were so little wounded that, with softer nursing, they had come to. Now, from the fall, these died also. Their friends’ wept and made bitter dole.

Then said bold Volker the fiddler, “Now I perceive they spoke the truth that told me the Huns were cowards. They weep like women, when they might tend these wounded bodies.”

A Margrave that was there deemed he meant this truly. He saw one of his kinsmen lying in his blood, and put his arms round him to bear him away. Him the minstrel shot dead.
(35) When the Thuringians and Danes saw their masters slain, they rushed yet fiercer against the house, and grisly was the strife or they won to the door. Many a helmet and buckler were hewn in pieces.

“Give way,” cried Volker, “and let them in. They shall not have their will, but, in lieu thereof, shall perish. They will earn the queen’s gift with their death.”

The proud warriors thronged into the hall, but many an one bowed his head, slain by swift blows. Well fought bold Gernot; the like did Giselher.

A thousand and four came in. Keen and bright flashed the swords; but all the knights died. Great wonders might be told of the Burgundians.

When the tumult fell, there was silence. Over all the blood of the dead men trickled through the crannies into the gutters below. They of the Rhine had done this by their prowess.

Then the Burgundians sat and rested, and laid down their weapons and their shields.

(36) Before nightfall the king and queen had prevailed on the men of Hungary to dare the combat anew. Twenty thousand or more stood before them ready for battle. These hasted to fall on the strangers.

The day was done; they were in sore straits. They deemed a quick death had been better than long anguish. The proud knights would fain have had a truce. They asked that the king might be brought to them.

The heroes, red with blood, and blackened with the soil of their harness, stepped out of the hall with the three kings. They knew not whom to bewail their bitter woe to.

Both Etzel and Kriemhild came.

Then said young Giselher, “Fairest sister mine, right evil I deem it that thou badest me across the Rhine to this bitter woe. How have I deserved death from the Huns? I was ever true to thee, nor did thee any hurt. I rode hither, dearest sister, for that I trusted to thy love. Needs must thou show mercy.”

“I will show no mercy, for I got none. Bitter wrong did Hagen of Troneck to me in my home yonder, and here he hath slain my child. They that came with him must pay for it. Yet, if ye will deliver Hagen captive, I will grant your prayer, and let you live; for ye are my brothers, and the children of one mother. I will prevail upon my knights here to grant a truce.”

“God in heaven forbid!” cried Gernot. “Though we were a thousand, liefer would we all die by thy kinsmen, then give one single man for our ransom. That we will never do.”

“We must perish then,” said Giselher; “but we will fall as good knights. We are still here; would any fight with us? I will never do falsely by my friend.”

Cried bold Dankwart too (he had done ill to hold his peace), “My brother Hagen standeth not alone. They that have denied us quarter may rue it yet. By my troth, ye will find it to your cost.”

Then said the queen, “Ye heroes undismayed, go forward to the steps and avenge our wrong. I will thank you forever, and with cause. I will requite Hagen’s insolence to the full. Let not one of them forth at any point, and I will let kindle the hall at its four sides. So will my heart’s dole be avenged.”

Etzel’s knights were not loth. With darts and with blows they drave back into the house them that stood without. Loud was the din; but the princes and their men were not parted, nor failed they in faith to one another. Etzel’s wife bade the hall be kindled, and they tormented the bodies of the heroes with fire. The wind blew, and the house was soon all aflame. Folk never suffered worse, I ween. There were many that cried, “Woe is me for this pain! Liefer had we died in battle. God pity us, for we are all lost. The queen taketh bitter vengeance.”

One among them wailed, “We perish by the smoke and the fire. Grim is our torment. The strong heat maketh me so athirst, that I die.”
Said Hagen of Troneck, “Ye noble knights and good, let any that are athirst drink the blood. In this heat it is better than wine, and there is nothing sweeter here.”

Then went one where he found a dead body. He knelt by the wounds, and did off his helmet, and began to drink the streaming blood. Albeit he was little used thereto, he deemed it right good. “God quit thee, Sir Hagen!” said the weary man, “I have learned a good drink. Never did I taste better wine. If I live, I will thank thee.”

When the others heard his praise, many more of them drank the blood, and their bodies were strengthened, for the which many a noble woman paid through her dear ones.

The fire-flakes fell down on them in the hall, but they warded them off with their shields. Both the smoke and the fire tormented them. Never before suff ered heroes such sore pain.

Then said Hagen of Troneck, “Stand fast by the wall. Let not the brands fall on your helmets. Trample them with your feet deeper in the blood. A woeful hightide is the queen’s.”

The night ended at last. The bold gleeman, and Hagen, his comrade, stood before the house and leaned upon their shields. They waited for further hurt from Etzel’s knights. It advantaged the strangers much that the roof was vaulted. By reason thereof more were left alive.

Etzel deemed the guests were all dead of their travail and the stress of the fire. But six hundred bold men yet lived. Never king had better knights. They that kept ward over the strangers had seen that some were left, albeit the princes and their men had suffered loss and dole. They saw many that walked up and down in the house.

They told Kriemhild that many were left alive, but the queen answered, “It cannot be. None could live in that fire. I trow they all lie dead.”

The kings and their men had still gladly asked for mercy, had there been any to show it. But there was none in the whole country of the Huns. Wherefore they avenged their death with willing hand.

They were greeted early in the morning with a fierce onslaught, and came in great scathe. Strong spears were hurled at them. Well the knights within stood on their defence.

Etzel’s men were the bolder, that they might win Kriemhild’s fee. Thereto, they obeyed the king gladly; but soon they looked on death.

One might tell marvels of her gifts and promises. She bade them bear forth red gold upon shields, and gave thereof to all that desired it, or would take it. So great treasure was never given against foemen.

Twelve hundred warriors strove once and again to win entrance. The guests cooled their hardihood with wounds. None could part the strife. The blood flowed from death-deep wounds. Many were slain. Each bewailed some friend. All Etzel’s worthy knights perished. Their kinsmen sorrowed bitterly.

(37) The strangers did valiantly that morning. Gotelind’s husband came into the courtyard and saw the heavy loss on both sides, whereat the true man wept inly.

“Woe is me,” said the knight, “that ever I was born, since none can stop this strife! Fain would I have them at one again, but the king holdeth back, for he seeth alway more done to his hurt.”

Good Rudeger sent to Dietrich, that they might seek to move the great king. But the knight of Bern sent back answer, “Who can hinder it? King Etzel letteth none intercede.”

A knight of the Huns, that had oft seen Rudeger standing with wet eyes, said to the queen, “Look how he standeth yonder, that Etzel hath raised above all others, and that hath land and folk at his service. Why hath Rudeger so many castles from the king? He hath struck no blow in this battle. I ween he careth little for our scathe, so long as he has enow for himself. They say he is bolder than any other. Ill hath he shown it in our need.”
The faithful man, when he heard that word, looked angrily at the knight. He thought, “Thou shalt pay for this. Thou callest me a coward. Thou hast told thy tale too loud at court.”

He clenched his fist, and ran at him, and smote the Hun so fiercely that he fell down at his feet, dead. Whereat Etzel’s grief waxed anew.

“Away with thee, false babbler!” cried Rudeger. “I had trouble and sorrow enow. What was it to thee that I fought not? Good cause have I also to hate the strangers, and had done what I could against them, but that I brought them hither. I was their escort into my master’s land, and may not lift my wretched hand against them.”

Then said Etzel, the great king, to the Margrave, “How hast thou helped us, most noble Rudeger? We had dead men enow in the land, and needed no more. Evilly hast thou done.”

But the knight answered, “He angered me, and twitted me with the honour and the wealth thou hast bestowed on me so plenteously. It hath cost the liar dear.”

Then came the queen, that had seen the Hun perish by Rudeger’s wrath. She mourned for him with wet eyes, and said to Rudeger, “What have we ever done to thee that thou shouldst add to our sorrow? Thou hast oft times promised, noble Rudeger, that thou wouldst risk, for our sake, both honour and life, and I have heard many warriors praise thee for thy valour. Hast thou forgotten the oath thou swearest to me with thy hand, good knight, when thou didst woo me for King Etzel—how that thou wouldst serve me till my life’s end, or till thine? Never was my need greater than now.”

“It is true, noble lady. I promised to risk for thee honour and life, but I sware not to lose my soul. I brought the princes to this hightide.”

She said, “Remember, Rudeger, thy faith, and thine oath to avenge all my hurt and my woe.”

The Margrave answered, “I have never said thee nay.”

Etzel began to entreat likewise. They fell at his feet. Sore troubled was the good Margrave. Full of grief, he cried, “Woe is me that ever I saw this hour, for God hath forsaken me. All my duty to heaven, mine honour, my good faith, my knightliness, I must forego. God above have pity, and let me die! Whether I do this thing, or do it not, I sin. And if I take the part of neither, all the world will blame me. Let Him that made me guide me.”

Then the bold man said to the king, “Take back what thou hast given me—castles and land. Leave me nothing at all. I will go forth afoot into exile. I will take my wife and my daughter by the hand, and I will quit thy country empty, rather than I will die dishonoured. I took thy red gold to my hurt.”

King Etzel answered, “Who will help me then? Land and folk I gave to thee, Rudeger, that thou mightest avenge me on my foes. Thou shalt rule with Etzel as a great king.”

But Rudeger said, “How can I do it? I bade them to my house and home; I set meat and drink before them, and gave them my gifts. Shall I also smite them dead? The folk may deem me a coward. But I have always served them well. Should I fight with them now, it were ill done. Deep must I rue past friendship. I gave my daughter to Giselher. None better in this world had she found, of so great lineage and honour, and faith, and wealth. Never saw I young king so virtuous.”

But Kriemhild answered, “Most noble Rudeger, take pity on us both. Bethink thee that never host had guests like these.”

Then said the Margrave, “What thou and my master have given me I must pay for, this day, with my life. I shall die, and that quickly. Well I know that, or nightfall, my lands and castles will return to your keeping. To your grace I commend my wife and my child, and the homeless ones that are at Bechlaren.”

“God reward thee, Rudeger,” cried the king. He and the queen were both glad. “Thy folk shall be well seen to; but thou thyself, I trow, will come off scatheless.”
So he put his soul and body on the hazard. Etzel’s wife began to weep. He said, “I must keep my vow to thee. Woe is me for my friends, that I must fall upon in mine own despite!”

They saw him turn heavily from the king. To his knights that stood close by, he said, “Arm ye, my men all. For I must fight the Burgundians, to my sorrow.”

The heroes called for their harness, and the attendants brought helm and buckler. Soon the proud strangers heard the sad news.

Rudeger stood armed with five hundred men, and twelve knights that went with him, to win worship in the fray. They knew not that death was so near.

Rudeger went forth with his helmet on; his men carried sharp swords, and, thereto, broad shields and bright. The fiddler saw this, and was dismayed. But when Giselher beheld his father-in-law with his helmet on, he weened that he meant them well. The noble king was right glad. “Well for me that I have such friends,” cried Giselher, “as these we won by the way! For my wife’s sake he will save us. By my faith, I am glad to be wed.”

“Thy trust is vain,” said the fiddler. “When ever did ye see so many knights come in peace, with helmets laced on, and with swords? Rudeger cometh to serve for his castles and his lands.”

Or the fiddler had made an end of speaking, Rudeger, the noble man, stood before the house. He laid his good shield before his feet. He must needs deny greeting to his friends.

Then the Margrave shouted into the hall, “Stand on your defence, ye bold Nibelungen. I would have helped you, but must slay you. Once we were friends, but I cannot keep my faith.”

The sore-tried men were dismayed at this word. Their comfort was gone, for he that they loved was come against them. From their foemen they had suffered enough.

“God in Heaven forbid,” said Gunther the knight, “that thou shouldst be false to the friendship and the faith wherein we trusted. It cannot be.”

“I cannot help it,” said Rudeger. “I must fight with you, for I have vowed it. As ye love your lives, bold warriors, ward you well. King Etzel’s wife will have it so.”

Then said the youngest of fair Uta’s sons, “How canst thou do this thing, Sir Rudeger? All that came hither with me are thy friends. A vile deed is this. Thou makest thy daughter too soon a widow. If thou and thy knights defy us, ill am I apayed, that I trusted thee before all other men, when I won thy daughter for my wife.”

“Forget not thy troth, noble king, if God send thee hence,” answered Rudeger. “Let not the maiden suffer for my sin. By thine own princely virtue, withdraw not thy favour from her.”

“Fain would I promise it,” said Giselher the youth. “Yet if my high-born kinsmen perish here by thy hand, my love for thee and thy daughter must perish also.”

“Then God have mercy!” cried the brave man; whereat he lifted his shield, and would have fallen upon the guests in Kriemhild’s hall.

But Hagen called out to him from the stairhead, “Tarry awhile, noble Rudeger. Let me and my masters speak with thee yet awhile in our need. What shall it profit Etzel if we knights die in a strange land? I am in evil case,” said Hagen. “The shield that Gotelind gave me to carry, the Huns have hewn from my hand. In good faith I bore it hither. Would to God I had such a shield as thou hast, noble Rudeger! A better I would not ask for in the battle.”

“I would gladly give thee my shield, durst I offer it before Kriemhild. Yet take it, Hagen, and wear it. Ha! mightst thou but win with it to Burgundy!”

When they saw him give the shield so readily, there were eyes enow red with hot tears. It was the last gift that Rudeger of Bechlaren ever gave.
Then the Margrave’s men ran at their foemen, and followed their master like good knights. They carried sharp weapons, wherewith they clove many a helmet and buckler. The weary ones answered the men of Bechlaren with swift blows that pierced deep and straight through their harness to their life’s blood. They did wonderly in the battle.

Gernot cried out to the Margrave, “Noble Rudeger, thou leavest none of my men alive. It irketh me sore; I will bear it no longer. I will turn thy gift against thee, for thou hast taken many friends from me. Come hither, thou bold man. What thou gavest me I will earn to the uttermost.”

Or the Margrave had fought his way to him, bright bucklers grew dim with blood. Then, greedy of fame, the men ran at each other, and began to ward off the deadly wounds. But their swords were so sharp that nothing could withstand them. Rudeger the knight smote Gernot through his flint-hard helmet, that the blood brake out. Soon the good warrior was avenged. He swung Rudeger’s gift on high, and, albeit he was wounded to the death, he smote him through his good shield and his helmet, that Gotelind’s husband died. So rich a gift was never worse requited. So they fell in the strife—Gernot and Rudeger—slain by each other’s hand.

(38) So loud they wept on all sides, that palace and towers echoed with the sound. One of Dietrich’s men of Bern heard it, and hasted with the news.

The prince of Amelung bade them inquire further. He sat down at a window sore troubled, and bade Hildebrand go to the guests, and ask them what had happened.

Master Hildebrand, bold in strife, took with him neither shield nor sword, and would have gone to them on peaceful wise. But his sister’s child chid him. Grim Wolfhart cried, “Why goest thou naked? If they revile thee, thou wilt have the worst of the quarrel, and return shamed. If thou goest armed, none will withstand thee.”

The old man armed him as the youth had counselled. Or he had ended, all Dietrich’s knights stood in their harness, sword in hand.

Hildebrand laid his shield at his feet, and said to Gunther’s men, “Alas! ye good knights! What have ye done to Rudeger? Dietrich, my master, sent me hither to ask if any here slew the good Margrave, as they tell us. We could ill endure such loss.”

Hagen of Troneck answered, “The news is true. Glad were I had the messenger lied to thee, for Rudeger’s sake, and that he lived still. Both men and women must evermore bewail him.”

Hildebrand could ask no more for grief. He said, “Grant now, ye warriors, that for which my master sent me. Give us dead Rudeger from out the hall, with whom all our joy hath perished, and let us requite him for all the kindness he hath shown to us and many another. Like him we are homeless. Why tarry ye? Let us bear him hence, and serve him dead, as we had gladly served him living.”

But Volker answered, “Ye shall get him from none here. Come and take him out of the house, where he lieth with his death-wounds in the blood. So shall ye serve Rudeger truly.”

Then Dietrich’s men rushed in from all sides. They smote till the links of their foemen’s mail whistled asunder, and their broken sword-points flew on high. They struck hot-flowing streams from the helmets.

When Hagen of Troneck saw Volker dead, he grieved more bitterly than he had done yet, all the hightide, for kinsmen or vassal. Alas! how grimly he began to avenge him!

“Old Hildebrand shall not go scatheless, for his hand hath slain my friend, the best comrade I ever had.”

Hagen thought on the fiddler that old Hildebrand had slain, and he said to the knight, “Thou shalt pay for my teen. Thou hast robbed us of many a good warrior.” He smote Hildebrand, that Balmung, the sword he had taken from Siegfried when he slew him, rang loud. But the old man stood boldly on his defence. He brought
his sharp-edged sword down on Hagen, but could not wound him. Then Hagen pierced him through his good harness.

When Master Hildebrand felt the wound, he feared more scathe from Hagen, so he threw his shield over his back and fled.

Now, of all the knights, none were left alive save two, Gunther and Hagen.

Old Hildebrand, covered with blood, ran with the news to Dietrich, that he saw sitting sadly where he had left him. Soon the prince had more cause for woe. When he saw Hildebrand in his bloody harness, he asked fearfully for his tale. “Now tell me. Master Hildebrand, why thou art so wet with thy life’s blood? Who did it? I ween thou hast fought with the guests in the hall, albeit I so sternly forbade it. Thou hast better have forborne.”

Hildebrand answered his master, “Hagen did it. He gave me this wound in the hall when I turned to flee from him. I scarce escaped the devil with my life.”

Said the prince of Bern, “Thou art rightly served. Thou heardest me vow friendship to the knights, and thou hast broken the peace I gave them. Were it not that I shame me to slay thee, thy life were forfeit.”

“Be not so wroth, my lord Dietrich. Enough woe hath befallen me and mine. We would have borne away Rudeger’s body, but Gunther’s men denied it.”

“Woe is me for this wrong! Is Rudeger then dead? That is the bitterest of my dole. Noble Gotelind is my cousin’s child. Alas! The poor orphans of Bechlaren!” With ruth and sorrow he wept for Rudeger. “Woe is me for the true comrade I have lost. I must mourn Etzel’s liegeman forever. Canst thou tell me, Master Hildebrand, who slew him?”

Hildebrand answered, “It was strong Gernot, but the hero fell by Rudeger’s hand.”

Said Dietrich, “Bid my men arm them, for I will thither straight-way. Send me my shining harness. I, myself, will question the knights of Burgundy.”

But Master Hildebrand answered, “Who is there to call? They sole living liegeman standeth here. I am the only one. The rest are dead.”

Dietrich trembled at the news, and was passing doleful, for never in this world had he known such woe. He cried, “Are all my men slain? Then God hath forgotten poor Dietrich! I was a great king, rich and proud. Yet how could they all die, these valiant heroes, by foemen so battle-weary and sore beset? Death had spared them, but that I am doomed to sorrow. Since this hard fate is needs mine, tell me if any of the guests be left alive.”

Hildebrand answered, “None save Hagen, and Gunther, the king. God knoweth I say honestly.”

(39) Dietrich came where both the knights stood outside the house, leaning against the wall. Good Dietrich laid down his shield, and, moved with deep woe, he said, “There is nothing for it. Of thy knighthood, atone to me for the wrong thou hast done me, and I will avenge it no further. Yield thee captive, thee and thy man, and I will defend thee to the uttermost against the wrath of the Huns. Thou wilt find me faithful and true.”

“God in Heaven forbid,” cried Hagen, “that two knights, armed as we are for battle, should yield them to thee! I would hold it a great shame, and ill done.”

“Deny me not,” said Dietrich. “Ye have made me heavy-hearted enow, O Gunther and Hagen; and it is no more than just, that ye make it good. I swear to you, and give you my hand thereon, that I will ride back with you to your own country. I will bring you safely thither, or die with you, and forget my great wrong for your sakes.”

“Ask us no more,” said Hagen. “It were a shameful tale to tell of us, that two such bold men yielded them captive. I see none save Hildebrand by thy side.”
When Dietrich heard grim Hagen's mind, he caught up his shield, and sprang up the steps. The Nibelung sword rang loud on his mail. Sir Dietrich knew well that the bold man was fierce. The prince of Bern warded off the strokes. He needed not to learn that Hagen was a valiant knight. Thereto, he feared strong Balmung. But ever and anon he struck out warily, till he had overcome Hagen in the strife. He gave him a wound that was deep and wide. Then thought Sir Dietrich, “Thy long travail hath made thee weak. I had little honour in thy death. Liefer will I take thee captive.” Not lightly did he prevail. He threw down his shield. He was strong and bold, and he caught Hagen of Troneck in his arms. So the valiant man was vanquished. King Gunther grieved sore.

Dietrich bound Hagen, and led him to the queen, and delivered into her hand the boldest knight that ever bare a sword. After her bitter dole, she was glad enow. She bowed before the knight for joy. “Blest be thou in soul and body. Thou hast made good to me all my woe. I will thank thee till my dying day.”

Then said Dietrich, “Let him live, noble queen. His service may yet atone to thee for what he hath done to thy hurt. Take not vengeance on him for that he is bound.”

She bade them lead Hagen to a dungeon. There he lay locked up, and none saw him.

Then King Gunther called aloud, “Where is the hero of Bern? He hath done me a grievous wrong.”

Sir Dietrich went to meet him. Gunther was a man of might. He tarried not, but ran toward him from the hall. Loud was the din of their swords.

Howso famed Dietrich was from aforetime, Gunther was so wroth and so fell, and so bitterly his foeman, by reason of the wrong he had endured, that it was a marvel Sir Dietrich came off alive. They were strong and mighty men both. Palace and towers echoed with their blows, as their swift swords hewed their good helmets. A high-hearted king was Gunther.

But the knight of Bern overcame him, as he had done Hagen. His blood gushed from his harness by reason of the good sword that Dietrich carried. Yet Gunther had defended him well, for all he was so weary.

The knight was bound by Dietrich’s hand, albeit a king should never wear such bonds. Dietrich deemed, if he left Gunther and his man free, they would kill all they met.

He took him by the hand, and led him before Kriemhild. Her sorrow was lighter when she saw him. She said, “Thou art welcome, King Gunther.”

He answered, “I would thank thee, dear sister, if thy greeting were in love. But I know thy fierce mind, and that thou mockest me and Hagen.”

Then said the prince of Bern, “Most high queen, there were never nobler captives than these I have delivered here into thy hands. Let the homeless knights live for my sake.”

She promised him she would do it gladly, and good Dietrich went forth weeping. Yet soon Etzel’s wife took grim vengeance, by reason whereof both the valiant men perished. She kept them in dungeons, apart, that neither saw the other again, till she bore her brother’s head to Hagen. Certes, Kriemhild’s vengeance was bitter.

The queen went to Hagen, and spoke angrily to the knight. “Give me back what thou hast taken from me, and ye may both win back alive to Burgundy.”

But grim Hagen answered, “Thy words are wasted, noble queen. I have sworn to show the hoard to none. While one of my masters liveth, none other shall have it.”

“I will end the matter,” said the queen. Then she bade them slay her brother, and they smote off his head. She carried it by the hair to the knight of Troneck. He was grieved enow.

When the sorrowful man saw his master’s head, he cried to Kriemhild, “Thou hast wrought all thy will. It hath fallen out as I deemed it must. The noble King of Burgundy is dead, and Giselher the youth, and eke Gernot. None knoweth of the treasure now save God and me. Thou shalt never see it, devil that thou art.”
She said, “I come off ill in the reckoning. I will keep Siegfried’s sword at the least. My true love wore it when I saw him last. My bitterest heart’s dole was for him.”

She drew it from the sheath. He could not hinder it. She purposed to slay the knight. She lifted it high with both hands, and smote off his head.

King Etzel saw it, and sorrowed. “Alas!” cried the king, “The best warrior that ever rode to battle, or bore a shield, hath fallen by the hand of a woman! Albeit I was his foeman, I must grieve.”

Then said Master Hildebrand, “His death shall not profit her. I care not what come of it. Though I came in scathe by him myself, I will avenge the death of the bold knight of Troneck.”

Hildebrand sprang fiercely at Kriemhild, and slew her with his sword. She suffered sore by his anger. Her loud cry helped her not.

Dead bodies lay stretched over all. The queen was hewn in pieces. Etzel and Dietrich began to weep. They wailed piteously for kinsmen and vassals. Mickle valour lay there slain. The folk were doleful and dreary.

The end of the king’s hightide was woe, even as, at the last all joy turneth to sorrow.

I know not what fell after. Christian and heathen, wife, man, and maid, were seen weeping and mourning for their friends.

I will tell you no more. Let the dead lie.

However it fared after with the Huns, my tale is ended. This is the fall of the Nibelungen.

[trans. Margaret Armour]
This charming religious narrative dates from the end of the twelfth or early thirteenth century and was created somewhere in northern France. It is a powerful and also delightful tale about the result of deep personal devotion, irrespective of any formal training as a member of the clergy. The author reflects on the world of the Cistercian Order with its harsh ascetic rules, but he also allows glimpses of the activities on the ordinary city market or any other stage where performers tried to gain money by means of their athletic or dance acts and performances. Essentially, however, here we can observe the profound cult of the Virgin Mary prevalent since the twelfth century.

In the “Lives of the Fathers,” the matter of which is of profit, a story is told, which I dare say none more pleasing has been heard, but this one is not so without worth that it may not well be told. Now will I tell and rehearse unto you of that which happened to a minstrel.

So much had he journeyed to and fro in so many places, and so prodigal had he been, that he became a monk of a holy Order, for that he was weary of the world. Therefore he entered this holy profession at Clairvaux.

And when that this tumbler, who was so graceful, and fair, and comely, and well formed, became a monk, he knew not how to perform any office that fell to be done there. Of a truth, he had lived only to tumble, to turn somersaults, to spring, and to dance. To leap and to jump, this he knew, but nothing else, and truly no other learning had he, neither the “Paternoster,” nor the “Canticles,” nor the “Credo,” nor the “Ave Maria,” nor anything that could make for his salvation. He was sore affrighted in their midst, for he knew not what to say, or what to do of all that fell to be done there. And because of this, he was very sad and pensive. And everywhere he saw the monks and the novices each one serving God in such office as he held. He saw the priests at the altars, for such was their office, the deacons at the Gospels, and the subdeacons at the epistles. And at the proper time, the acolytes straightway rang the bell at the vigils. One recited a verse, and another a lesson, and the young priests were at the psalter, and the novices at the misereres, and the least experienced were at the paternosters, for in suchwise was their work ordered. And he looked everywhere throughout the offices and the cloisters, and saw hidden in the corners here four, here three, here two, here one. And he observed each one as closely as he was able. One made lamentation, another wept, and another groaned and sighed. And much did he marvel what ailed them.

And at length he said, “Holy Mary, what ails these folk that they deport themselves thus, and make show in this manner of such grief? Much disquieted must they be, it seems to me, when they all with one accord make such great dole! And then he said, “Ah, miserable being! By the Holy Mary, what have I said? I trow that they pray God’s grace. But, unhappy being that I am, what do I here, when that he who, in his calling, serves God with all his might, is thus enslaved? Never shall I render any service here, for nothing can I do or say. Very hapless was I when that I became a monk, for I know not how even to pray aright. I look hither and thither, and nothing do I, save to waste time and to eat bread to no purpose. If in this I am found out, I shall be utterly undone. I am a lusty villain, and if I do nothing here but eat, I shall be turned out into the fields. Very miserable am I in this high office!”

Then he wept to allay his grief, and truly did he desire to be dead. “Holy Mother Mary” said he, “beseech your sovereign Father of His grace to guide me, and to bestow upon me such wisdom that I may be able to serve both Him and you in suchwise as to be worthy of the food which I eat here, for well know I that now I do wrong.”

And when he had thus made lament, he went prying about the Church until that he entered a crypt, and he crouched down nigh unto an altar, and hid himself there as best he could. And above the altar was the image of Our Lady, the Holy Mary. And in nowise did it surprise him that he felt in safety there, and he perceived not that it was God, who well knows how to guide His own, who had led him there.

And when he had heard the bell ring for the Mass, he rushed forth from the crypt all trembling. “Ah!” said he, “I am like unto a traitor! Even now each one is saying his response, and here am I a tethered ox, and I do nothing here but browse, and waste food in vain. Shall I therefore neither speak nor act? By the Mother of God, this will I do, and never shall I be blamed for it. I will do that which I have learnt, and thus, after mine own manner, will I serve the Mother of God in her Church. The others do service with song, and I will do service with tumbling.”

And he took off his habit, and then stripped himself, and laid his garments beside the altar, but so that his body should not be uncovered, he kept on a tunic, the which was very clinging and close fitting. Little better was it than a shift; nevertheless was his body wholly covered. And thus was he fitly clad and equipped, and he girded his tunic, and duly prepared him, and he turned him to the image, and gazed on it very humbly. “Lady,” said he, “to your keeping I commend my body and my soul. Gentle Queen and Lady, despise not that which I am acquainted with, for, without ado, I will essay me to serve you in good faith, if so be that God will aid me.”

Then he began to turn somersaults, now high, now low, first forwards, then backwards, and then he fell on his knees before the image, and bowed his head. “Ah, very gentle Queen!” said he, “of your pity, and of your generosity, despise not that which I am acquainted with, for, without ado, I will essay me to serve you in good faith, if so be that God will aid me.”

And after that, he did the Roman somersault, and then he put his hand before his face, and bowed to the image, and worshipped it, for he paid homage to it as much as he was able. And anon he turned the French somersault, and then the somersault of Champagne, and after that, those of Spain and of Brittany, and then that of Lorraine. And he laboured to the utmost of his power.

And after that, he did the Roman somersault, and then he put his hand before his face, and turned him with great grace, and looked very humbly at the image of the Mother of God. “Lady,” said he, “I do homage to you with my heart, and my body, and my feet, and my hands, for nothing beside this do I understand. Now would I be your gleeman. Yonder they are singing, but I am come here to divert you. Lady, you who can protect me, for God’s sake do not despise me.” Then he beat his breast, and sighed, and mourned very grievously that he knew not how to do service in other manner. And then he turned a somersault backwards. “Lady,” said he, “so help me God, never before have I done this. Lady! How that one would have his utmost desire, who could dwell with you in your right glorious mansion! For God’s sake, Lady, receive me there. I do this for your sake, and in nowise for mine own.” Then he again turned the somersault of Metz, and tumbled and capered full many a time.
And when he heard the monks celebrating, he began to exert himself, and so long as the Mass dured, he ceased not to dance, and to jump, and to leap, until that he was on the point to faint, and he could not stand up, and thus he fell to the ground, and dropped from sheer fatigue. And like as the grease issues from the spitted meat, so the sweat issued from him all over, from head to foot. “Lady,” said he, “no more can I do now, but of a surety I shall come back again.”

And he was quite overcome of heat. And he took up his clothing, and when that he was dressed, he took his leave, and he bowed to the image, and went his way. “Farewell, very gentle friend,” said he. “For God’s sake, grieve not at all, for if that I am able, and it is permitted unto me, I will come back, for each hour would I serve you to the utmost of my power, so gracious are you.”

And longwhiles he led this life, and, at each hour precisely he repaired to the image, to render service and homage. Certes, so greatly did it please him, and with such right good will did he do this, that never a day was he so tired that he could not do his very utmost to delight the Mother of God, and never did he desire to do other service.

Well known was it that he went each day into the crypt, but no one, save God, knew what he did there, nor would he, for all the riches of the whole world, that any, save the supreme God alone, should know of his doings. Think you now that God would have prized his service if that he had not loved Him? By no means, however much he tumbled. But He prized it because of his love. Much labour and fatigue, many fasts and vigils, many tears and sighs and groans and prayers, much diligence in discipline, both at Mass and at matins, the bestowal of all that you have and the payment of whatsoever you owe, if you love not God with all your heart, all these are wholly thrown away in such manner, understand well, that they avail nothing for true salvation. Of a truth, without love and without pity, before God all counts for nothing. God asks not for gold or for silver, but only for true love in the hearts of men, and this one loved God truly. And because of this, God prized his service.

Longwhiles did the good man live thus, but for how long time he so lived contented, I cannot tell unto you, but in the course of time sore trouble came to him, for one of the monks, who in his heart greatly blamed him that he came not to matins, kept watch on him. And he much marvelled what happened, and said that never would he desist until that he knew who he was, and for what he was worth, and in what manner he earned his bread. And so closely did the monk pursue him, and follow him, and keep watch on him, that he distinctly saw him perform his service in a simple manner, even as I have told it unto you. “By my faith,” said he, “he has a good time of it, and much greater diversion, it seemeth to me, than we have all together. Whiles that the others are at prayer, and at work in the house, this one dances with as much vigour as if he had an hundred silver marks. Right well does he perform his service, and in this manner he pays for us that which is his due. A goodly proceeding, this, forsooth! We sing for him, and he tumbles for us! We pray for him, and he plays for us! If we weep, he soothes us! I would that all the convent could see him at this very moment just as I do, even if I had to fast for it till dusk! Not one would there be, me-thinks, who would be able to restrain his laughter if that he witnessed the tumbling of this fellow, who thus kills himself, and who so excites him by tumbling, that he has no pity on himself. God counts it unto him for penance, for he does it without evil intent, and, certes, I hold it not to be ill, for, as I believe, he does it, according to his lights, in good faith, for he wishes not to be idle.”

And the monk saw how that he laboured without ceasing all the day long. And he laughed much, and made merry over the matter, but it caused him sorrow as well as merriment. And he went to the abbot, and rehearsed unto him, from beginning to end, all that he had learnt, even as you have heard it.

And the abbot arose, and said to the monk, “On your vow of obedience, I command that you keep silence, and noise this not abroad, and that you so well observe this command, that you speak not of this matter save
to me alone, and we will both go thither, and we shall see if this can be, and we will beseech the heavenly King, and His very gentle and dear Mother, who is so precious, and of so great renown, that she, of her sweetness, will go pray of her Son, her Father, and her Lord, that if it so pleases Him, He will this day suffer me to witness this service in such sort that God may be the more loved on account of this, and that, if thus it pleases Him, the good man may not be found worthy of blame for it."

And then they went thither quite quietly, and without delay they hid themselves in a covert nook nigh unto the altar, so that he saw them not. And the abbot, watching there, observed all the service of the novice, and the divers somersaults the which he turned, and how that he capered, and danced, and bowed before the image, and jumped, and leaped, until that he was nigh fainting. And so greatly was he overcome of fatigue, that he fell heavily to the ground, and so exhausted was he, that he sweated all over from his efforts, so that the sweat ran all down the middle of the crypt. But in a little, the Mother of God, whom he served all without guile, came to his succour, and well knew she how to aid him.

And anon the abbot looked, and he saw descend from the vaulting so glorious a lady, that never had he seen one so fair or so richly crowned, and never had another so beautiful been created. Her vesture was all wrought with gold and precious stones, and with her were the angels and the archangels from the heavens above, who came around the tumbler, and solaced and sustained him. And when that they were ranged around him, he was wholly comforted, and they made ready to tend him, for they desired to make recompense unto him for the services the which he had rendered unto their Lady, who is so precious a gem. And the sweet and noble Queen took a white cloth, and with it she very gently fanned her minstrel before the altar. And the noble and gracious Lady fanned his neck and body and face to cool him, and greatly did she concern herself to aid him, and gave herself up to the care of him; but of this the good man took no heed, for he neither perceived, nor did he know, that he was in such fair company.

And the holy angels who remained with him, paid him much honour, but the Lady no longer sojourned there, and she made the sign of the cross as she turned away, and the holy angels, who greatly rejoiced to keep watch over their companion, took charge over him, and they did but await the hour when God would take him from this life, and they might bear away his soul.

And full four times did the abbot and the monk witness, without hindrance, how that each hour he went there, and how that the Mother of God came there to aid and succour her liegeman, for well knows she how to protect her own. And the abbot had much joy of it, for very desirous had he been to know the truth concerning it. Now had God verily shown unto him that the services the which this poor man rendered were pleasing unto Him. And the monk was quite bewildered by it, and from anguish he glowed like fire. “Your mercy, Sire!” said he to the abbot, “this is a holy man whom I see here. If that I have said anything concerning him that is evil, it is right that my body should make amends for it. Therefore ordain me a penance, for without doubt he is altogether an upright man. Verily have we seen all, and no longer can we be mistaken.”

And the abbot said, “You speak truly. God has indeed made us to know that He loves him with a very great love. And now I straightway give command unto you that, in virtue of obedience, and so that you fall not under condemnation, you speak to no one of that which you have seen, save to God or to me.”

“Sire,” said he, “to this do I assent.”

And at these words they departed, and no longer did they stay in the crypt, and the good man did not remain, but when that he had done all his service, he clothed himself again in his garments, and went to divert himself in the monastery.
And thus passed the time, until that, a little while after, it came to pass that the abbot sent for him who was so good. And when he heard that he was sent for, and that it was the abbot who made enquiry for him, so greatly was he troubled, that he knew not what he should say. “Alas,” said he, “I am found out. Never a day passes without distress, or without toil or disgrace, for my service counts for nothing. Methinks it is not pleasing unto God. Gentle Lady, Holy Mary, how troubled is my mind! I know not, Lady, from whom to get counsel, so come now to mine aid. And at the first word, anon will they say, ‘Away with you!’ Woe is me! How shall I be able to make answer when I know not one single word with the which to make explanation? But what avails this? It behoves me to go.”

And weeping, so that his face was all wet, he came before the abbot, and he knelt before him in tears. “Sire,” said he, “for God’s sake, have mercy! Would you drive me hence? Tell me all your behests, and all your bidding will I do.”

Then said the abbot, “This would I know, and I would that you answer me truly. Longwhiles have you been here, both winter and summer, and I would know by what services, and in what manner, you earn your bread.”

“Alas,” said he, “well knew I that all would become known, and that when all my doings were known, no longer would any one have to do with me. Sire,” said he, “now will I depart hence. Miserable am I, and miserable shall I be, for I never do anything that is right.”

Then the abbot made answer, “Never have I said this, but I pray and demand of you, and further I command you, that, in virtue of obedience, you wholly reveal unto me your thoughts, and tell unto me in what manner you serve us in our monastery.”

“Sire,” said he, “this will be my death! This command will kill me.”

Then he straightway unfolded unto him, howsoever grievous it was, his whole life, from beginning to end, in such sort that he left nothing unsaid, just as I have told it unto you. And with clasped hands, and weeping, he told and rehearsed unto him everything, and, sighing, he kissed his feet.

And the holy abbot turned to him, and, all weeping, raised him up. And he kissed both his eyes. “Brother,” said he, “be silent now, for truly do I promise unto you that you shall be at peace with us. God grant that we may have your fellowship so long as we are deserving of it. Good friends shall we be. Fair, gentle brother, pray for me and I will pray in return for you. And so I beseech and command of you, my sweet friend, that you forthwith render this service openly, just as you have done it, and still better even, if that you know how.”

“Sire,” said he, “are you in good earnest?”

“Yea, truly,” said the abbot, “and I charge you, on pain of penance, that you no longer doubt it.”

Then was the good man so very joyous, so the story relates, that he scarce knew what he did. But despite himself, he was constrained to rest, for he had become all pale. And when that he was come to himself again, he was so overcome of joy, that he was seized with a sickness, of the which in a short space he died. But very cheerfully did he perform his service without ceasing, morning and evening, by night and by day, so that not an hour did he miss, until that he fell ill. Then verily such great sickness laid hold upon him, that he could no longer move from his bed. But that which distressed him the most, since never did he make complaint of his sufferings, was that he could not pay for his sustenance, for the which he was much troubled in mind, and moreover he feared that his penance would be in vain, for that he did not busy himself with such service as was his wont, and very deserving of blame did he seem unto himself to be.

And the good man, who was so filled with anguish, besought of God that He would receive him before that more shame came unto him. For so much grieved was he that his doings were become known, that he could not endure it. And he was constrained to lie down forthwith.
And greatly did the holy abbot hold him in honour, and he and his monks went each hour to chant beside his bed, and such great delight had he in that which was sung to him of God, that in nowise did he long for Poitou, so much did it pleasure him to learn that all would be pardoned unto him. And he made a good confession and repentance, but nevertheless he was fearful. And, as I have told unto you, at last it came to pass that he died.

And the abbot was there, and all his monks, and the novices and good folk, who kept watch over him very humbly, and quite clearly did they see a right wondrous miracle. Of a truth they saw how that, at his death, the angels, and the Mother of God, and the archangels, were ranged around him. And there, also, were the very evil and cruel and violent devils, for to possess them of his soul, and no fancy is this. But to no purpose had they so long lain in wait for him, and striven so earnestly for him and pursued him, for now no power had they over his soul. And forthwith his soul quitted his body, but in nowise was it lost, for the Mother of God received it. And the holy angels who were there, sang for joy, and then they departed, and bare it to heaven, and this was seen of all the monks, and of all the others who were there.

Now they wholly knew and perceived that God willed it that the love of His good servant should no longer be hid, and that all should know and perceive his goodness, and they had great joy and great wonderment of it, and much honour did they pay to his body, and they carried it into the Church, and heartily did they celebrate the service of God. And they buried him with honour in the choir of the mother-church.

With great honour did they bury him, and then, like some saintly body, they kept watch over him. And anon, without concealing anything, the abbot told unto them all his doings, and his whole life, and all that he had seen in the crypt, even as you have heard it. And eagerly did the monks listen unto him. “Certes,” said they, “well may it be believed. It cannot be misdoubted, for the truth bears witness to it. Fully is the matter proven, and certain is it that he has done his penance.” And greatly did they rejoice together there.

Thus died the minstrel. Cheerfully did he tumble, and cheerfully did he serve, for the which he merited great honour, and none was there to compare unto him.

And the holy Fathers have related unto us that it thus befell this minstrel. Now let us pray God, without ceasing, that He may grant unto us so worthily to serve Him, that we may be deserving of His love. The story of the Tumbler is set forth.

[trans. Alice Kemp-Welch]
Sir Lanval

By Marie de France

Marie de France, whose identity has not yet been determined, lived at the end of the twelfth century either at the English royal court (perhaps she was the sister of King Henry II) or in a monastery (Reading). We know of three major works by her, the Lais (verse narratives), the Fables (animal fables; here often with strong political and social criticism), and the religious, hagiographical work of Saint Patrick’s Purgatory (L'Espurgatoire de Saint Patrice). She also might have composed another religious work, La vie Seinte Audree, but full evidence escapes us. In the Lais she regularly outlines most centrally ponderous problems between man and woman, the ideal of love (within and outside of marriage), and the basics of courtly values. Often we come across a discussion of marital issues, intimately connected with love, but then we also hear of considerable social criticism against the king and the court, as in Lanval. Marie de France ranks among the best twelfth-century European authors. Not only did she compose some of the most intriguing erotic tales, her lais, but she also proved to be an expert in writing of fables, based ultimately on the ancient Aesop.

This is the adventure of the rich and noble night Sir Lanval, even as the Breton lay recounts it

The valiant and courteous King Arthur was sojourning at Carduel, because of the Picts and the Scots who had greatly destroyed the land, for they were in the kingdom of Logres and often wrought mischief therein.

In Carduel, at Pentecost, the king held his summer court, and gave rich gifts to the counts, the barons, and all the knights of the Round Table. Never before in all the world were such gifts given. Honours and lands he shared forth to all, save to one alone, of those who served him.

This was Sir Lanval; of him and his the king thought not. And yet all men loved him, for worthy he was, free of hand, very valiant, and fair to look upon. Had any ill happened to this knight, his fellows would have been but ill-pleased.

Lanval was son to a king of high descent, but his heritage was far hence in a distant land; he was of the household of King Arthur, but all his money was spent, for the king gave him nothing, and nothing would Lanval ask from him. But now Sir Lanval was much perplexed, very sorrowful, and heavy of heart. Nor need ye wonder at it, for one who is a stranger and without counsel is but sorrowful in a foreign land when he knows not where to seek for aid.

This knight of whom I tell ye, who had served the king so well, one day mounted his horse and rode forth for diversion. He left the city behind him, and came all alone into a fair meadow through which ran a swift water. As
he rode downwards to the stream, his horse shivered beneath him. Then the knight dismounted, and loosening the girth let the steed go free to feed at its will on the grass of the meadow. Then folding his mantle beneath his head he laid himself down; but his thoughts were troubled by his ill fortune, and as he lay on the grass he knew nothing that might please him.

Suddenly, as he looked downward toward the bank of the river, he saw two maidens coming toward him; never before had he seen maidens so fair. They were richly clad in robes of purple grey, and their faces were wondrous beautiful. The elder bore in her hands a basin of gold finely wrought (indeed it is but truth I tell you); the other held a snow-white towel.

They came straight to where the knight was lying, and Lanval, who was well taught in courteous ways, sprang to his feet in their presence. Then they saluted him, and delivered to him their message. “Sir Lanval,” said the elder, “my lady, who is most fair and courteous, has sent us to you, for she wills that you shall return with us. See, her pavilion is near at hand. We will lead you thither in all safety.”

Then Lanval went with them, taking no thought for his steed, which was grazing beside him in the meadow. The maidens led him to the tent; rich it was and well placed. Not even the Queen Semiramis in the days of her greatest wealth and power and wisdom, nor the Emperor Octavian, could have equalled from their treasures the drapery alone.

Above the tent was an eagle of gold, its worth I know not how to tell you; neither can I tell that of the silken cords and shining lances which upheld the tent; there is no king under heaven who could purchase its equal, let him offer what he would for it.

Within this pavilion was a maiden, of beauty surpassing even that of the lily and the new-blown rose, when they flower in the fair summer-tide. She lay upon a rich couch, the covering of which was worth the price of a castle, her fair and gracious body clothed only in a simple vest. Her costly mantle of white ermine, covered with purple of Alexandria, had she cast from her for the heat, and face and throat and neck were whiter than flower of the thorn. Then the maiden called the knight to her, and he came near and seated himself beside the couch.

“Lanval,” she said, “fair friend, for you have I come forth from my own land; even from Lains have I come to seek you. If you be of very truth valiant and courteous then neither emperor, count, nor king have known such joy as shall be yours, for I love you above all things.”

Then Love smote him swiftly, and seized and kindled his heart, and he answered:

“Fair lady, if it so please you, and such joy may be my portion that you deign to love me, then be the thing folly or wisdom you can command nothing that I will not do to the utmost of my power. All your wishes will I fulfil. For you I will renounce folk and my land. Nor will I ever ask to leave you, if that be what you most desire of me.”

When the maiden heard him whom she could love well speak thus, she granted him all her heart and her love.

And now was Lanval in the way to good fortune. A gift the lady bestowed upon him: there should be nothing so costly but that it might be his if he so willed it. Let him give or spend as freely as he would he should always have enough for his need. Happy indeed was Lanval, for the more largely he spent the more gold and silver should he have.

“Friend,” said the maiden, “of one thing must I now warn you, nay more, I command and pray you, reveal this your adventure to no man. The reason will I tell you; if this our love be known you would lose me for ever, never again might you look upon me, never again embrace me.”
Then he answered that he would keep faithfully all that she should command him.

Thus were the two together even till the vesper-tide, and if his lady would have consented fain would Lanval have remained longer.

“Friend,” said she, “rise up, no longer may you linger here, you must go and I must remain. But one thing will I tell you: When you wish to speak with me (and I would that may ever be when a knight may meet his lady without shame and without reproach) I shall be ever there at your will, but no man save you shall see me or hear me speak.”

When the knight heard that, he was joyful; and he kissed his lady and rose up and the maidens who led him to the tent brought him new and rich garments, and when he was clad in them there was no fairer knight under heaven. Then they brought him water for his hands, and a towel whereon to dry them, and laid food before him, and he supped with his lady. Courteously were they served, and great was the joy of Sir Lanval, for ever and again his love kissed him and he embraced her tenderly.

When they were risen from supper his horse was brought to him, saddled and bridled; right well had they tended it. Then the knight took leave of his lady, and mounted and rode toward the city; but oft en he looked behind him, for he marvelled greatly at all that had befallen him, and he rode ever thinking of his adventure, amazed and half-doubting, for he scarcely knew what the end thereof should be.

Then he entered his hostel and found all his men well clad, and he held great state but knew not whence the money came to him. In all the city there was no knight that had need of lodging but Lanval made him come unto him and gave him rich service. Lanval gave costly gifts; Lanval ransomed prisoners; Lanval clothed the minstrels; Lanval lavished wealth and honours; there was neither friend nor stranger to whom he gave not gifts. Great were his joy and gladness, for whether by day or by night he might full oft en look upon his lady, and all things were at his commandment.

Now in the self-same year, aft er the feast of St. John, thirty of the knights went forth to disport themselves in a meadow below the tower wherein the queen had her lodging. With them went Sir Gawain and his cousin, the gallant Iwein. Then said Gawain, the fair and courteous, who was loved of all: “Pardieu, my lords, we do ill in that we have not brought with us our companion, Sir Lanval, who is so free-handed and courteous, and son to so rich a king.” Then they turned back to his hostelry, and by their prayers persuaded Lanval to come with them.

It so chanced that the queen leant forth from an open casement, and three of her chosen ladies with her. She looked upon Sir Lanval and knew him. Then she called one of her ladies, and bade her command the fairest and most graceful of her maidens to make ready and come forth with her to the meadow. Thirty or more she took with her, and descended the stairway of the tower. The knights were joyful at their coming, and hastened to meet them, and took them by the hand with all courtesy. But Sir Lanval went apart from the others, for the time seemed long to him ere he could see his lady, kiss her, and hold her in his arms. All other joys were but small to him if he had not that one delight of his heart.

When the queen saw him alone she went straight toward him, and seated herself beside him; then, calling him by his name, she opened her heart to him.

“Lanval,” she said, “greatly have I honoured, cherished, and loved you. All my love is yours if you will have it, and if I thus grant you my favour, then ought you to be joyful indeed.”

“Lady,” said the knight, “let me be; I have small desire of your love. Long have I served King Arthur; I will not now deny my faith. Neither for you nor for your love will I betray my liege lord.”

The queen was angry, and in her wrath she spoke scoffingly. “They but spoke the truth,” she said, “who told me that you knew not how to love: that you do not like women. You prefer handsome young men, and you take
your pleasure with them. Coward and traitor, false knight, my lord has done ill to suffer you so long about him; he loses much by it, to my thinking.

When Sir Lanval heard that, he was wroth and answered her swiftly, and by misfortune he said that of which he afterwards repented sorely. “Lady,” he said, “you have been ill-advised. I love and I am loved by one who deserves the prize of beauty above all whom I know. One thing I will tell you, hear and mark it well; one of her serving maidens, even the meanest among them, is worth more than you. my lady queen, in face and figure, in beauty, wisdom, and goodness.”

Then the queen rose up and went weeping to her chamber, shamed and angered that Lanval should have thus insulted her. She laid herself down on her bed as if sick; never, she said, would she arise off it till the king did justice on the plaint she would lay before him.

King Arthur came back from the woods after a fair day’s hunting and sought the queen’s chamber. When she saw him she cried out, and fell at his feet, beseeching his favour, and saying that Sir Lanval had shamed her, for he had asked her love, and when she refused him had mocked and insulted her, for he had boasted of his lady that she was so fair, so noble, and so proud that even the lowest of her waiting women was worth more than the queen.

At this King Arthur fell into a rage, and swore a solemn oath that unless the knight could defend himself well and fully in open court, he should be hanged or burnt.

Forth from the chamber went the king and called three of his barons to him, and bade them fetch Sir Lanval, who indeed was sad and sorry enough. He had returned to his hostelry, but alas! he learnt all too soon that he had lost his lady, since he had revealed the secret of their love. He was all alone in his chamber, full of anguish. Again and again he called upon his love, but it availed him nothing. He wept and sighed, and once and again fell on the ground in his despair. A hundred times he besought her to have mercy on him, and to speak once more to her true knight. He cursed his heart and his mouth that had betrayed him; ’twas a marvel he did not slay himself. But neither cries nor blows nor lamentations sufficed to awaken her pity and make her show herself to his eyes.

Alas, what comfort might there be for the unhappy knight who had thus made an enemy of his king? The barons came and bade him follow them to court without delay, for the queen had accused him, and the king, by their mouth, commanded his presence. Lanval followed them, sorrowing greatly; had they slain him it would have pleased him well. He stood before the king, mute and speechless, his countenance changed for sorrow.

The king spoke in anger: “Vassal,” he said, “you have greatly wronged me; and evil excuse have you found to shame and injure me and insult the queen. Foolish was your boast, and foolish must be your lady to hold that her maid-servant is fairer than my queen.”

Sir Lanval denied that he had dishonoured himself or insulted his liege lord. Word by word he repeated what the queen had said to him; but of the words he himself had spoken, and the boast he had made concerning his love, he owned the truth; sorrowful enough he was, since by so doing he had lost her. And for this speech he would make amends, as the court might require.

The king was sorely enraged against him, and conjured his knights to say what might rightfully be done in such a case, and how Lanval should be punished. And the knights did as he bade them, and some spoke fair, and some spoke ill. Then they all took counsel together and decreed that judgment should be given on a fixed day; and that Sir Lanval should give pledges to his lord that he would return to his hostelry and await the verdict. Otherwise, he should be held a prisoner till the day came. The barons returned to the king, and told him what
they had agreed upon; and King Arthur demanded pledges, but Lanval was alone, a stranger in a strange land, without friend or kindred.

Then Sir Gawain came near, with all his companions, and said to the king: “I offer to give bail,” and all his companions did the same. And when they had thus given bail for him who had nothing of his own, he was free to go to his hostelry. The knights bore Sir Lanval company, chiding him as they went for his grief, and cursing the mad love that had brought him to this pass. Every day they visited him that they might see if he ate and drank, for they feared much that he would go mad for sorrow.

At the day they had named the barons were all assembled, the king was there, and the queen, and sureties delivered up Lanval. Very sorrowful they were for him. I think there were even three hundred of them who had done all in their power without being able to deliver him from peril. Of a great offence did they accuse him, and the king demanded that sentence should be given according to the accusation and the defence.

Then the barons went forth to consider their judgment, heavy at heart, many of them, for the gallant stranger who was in such stress among them. Others, indeed, were ready to sacrifice Lanval to the will of their seigneur.

Then spoke the Duke of Cornwall, for the right was his. Whoever might weep or rage, to him it pertained to have the first word, and he said:

“The king lays his plea against a vassal, Lanval ye call him, of felony and misdeed he accuses him in the matter of a love of which he boasted himself, thus making my lady, the queen, wrathful. None save the king, has anything against him; therefore do ye as I say, for he who would speak the truth must have respect unto no man, save only such honour as shall be due to his liege lord. Let Lanval be put upon his oath (the king will surely have nothing against it) and if he can prove his words, and bring forward his lady, and that which he said and which so angered the queen be true, then he shall be pardoned; ’twas no villany that he spoke. But if he cannot bring proof of his word, then shall we make him to know that the king no longer desires his service and gives him dismissal from his court.”

Then they sent messengers to the knight, and spoke, and made clear to him that he must bring forth his lady that his word might be proved, and he held guiltless. But he told them that was beyond his power, never through her might succour come to him. Then the messengers returned to the judges, who saw there was no chance of aid, for the king pressed them hard, urged thereto by the queen, who was weary of awaiting their judgment.

But as they arose to seek the king they saw two maidens come riding on white palfreys. Very fair they were to look upon, clad in green sendal over their white skin. The knights beheld them gladly, and Gawain, with three others, hastened to Sir Lanval and told him what had chanced, and bade him look upon the maidens; and they prayed him eagerly to say whether one of the two were his lady, but he answered them nay.

The two, so fair to look upon, had gone forward to the palace, and dismounted before the dais whereon King Arthur was seated. If their beauty was great, so also was their speech courteous.

“King,” they said, “command that chambers be assigned to us, fair with silken hangings, wherein our mistress can fitly lodge, for with you will she sojourn awhile.”

They said no more, and the king called two knights, and bade them lead the maidens to the upper chambers.

Then the king demanded from his barons their judgment and their verdict, and said he was greatly wroth with them for their long delay.

“Sire” they answered, “we were stayed by the coming of the damsels. Our decision is not yet made, we go but now to take counsel together.” Then they reassembled, sad and thoughtful, and great was the clamour and strife among them.
While they were yet in perplexity, they saw, descending the street, two maidens of noble aspect, clad in robes brodered with gold, and mounted on Spanish mules. Then all the knights were very joyful, and said each to the other: “Surely now shall Sir Lanval, the valiant and courteous, be safe.”

Gawain and six companions went to seek the knight. “Sir,” they said, “be of good courage, for the love of God speak to us. Hither come two damaels, most beautiful, and richly clad, one of them must of a truth be your lady!” But Lanval answered simply: “Never before today have I looked upon, or known, or loved them.”

Meantime, the maidens had come to the palace and stood before the king. Many praised them for their beauty and bright colour, and some deemed them fairer even than the queen.

The elder was wise and courteous, and she delivered her message gracefully. “King,” she said, “bid your folk give us chambers wherein we may lodge with our lady; she comes hither to speak with you.”

Then the king commanded that they should be led to their companions who had come before them. Nor as yet was the judgment spoken. So when the maidens had left the hall, he commanded his barons to deliver their verdict, their judgment already tarried too long, and the queen waxed wrathful for their delay.

But even as they sought the king, through the city came riding a maiden, in all the world was none so fair. She rode a white palfrey, that bore her well and easily. Well shaped were its head and neck, no better trained steed was there in all the world. Costly were the trappings of that palfrey, under heaven was there no king rich enough to purchase the like, save that he sold or pledged his land.

And thus was the lady clad: her raiment was all of white, laced on either side. Slender was her shape, and her neck whiter than snow on the bough. Her eyes were blue, her skin fair. Straight was her nose, and lovely her mouth. Her eyebrows were brown, her forehead white, and her hair fair and curling. Her mantle was of purple, and the skirts were folded about her; on her hand she bare a hawk, and a hound followed behind her.

In all the burg there was no one, small nor great, young nor old, but was eager to look upon her as she passed. She came riding swiftly, and her beauty was no mere empty boast, but all men who looked upon her held her for a marvel, and not one of those who beheld her but felt his heart verily kindled with love.

Then those who loved Sir Lanval went to him, and told him of the maiden who came, if by the will of heaven she might deliver him. “Sir knight and comrade, hither comes one, no nutbrown maid is she, but the fairest of all fair women in this world.” And Lanval heard, and sighed, for well he knew her. He raised his head and the blood flew to his cheek as he made swift answer: “Of a faith,” he said, “this is my lady! Now let them slay me if they will and she has no mercy on me. I am whole if I do but see her.”

The maiden reached the palace; fairer was she than any who had entered there. She dismounted before the king that all might behold her; she had let her mantle fall that they might the better see her beauty. King Arthur, in his courtesy, had risen to meet her, and all around him sprang to their feet and were eager to offer their service. When they had looked well upon her and praised her beauty, she spoke in these words, for no will had she to delay:

“King Arthur, I have loved one of your knights, behold him there, seigneur. Sir Lanval. He hath been accused at your court, but it is not my will that harm shall befall him. Concerning that which he said, know that the queen was in the wrong; never on any day did he pray her for her love. Of the boast that he hath made, if he may by me be acquitted, then shall your barons speak him free, as they have rightfully engaged to do.”

The king granted that so it might be nor was there a single voice but declared that Lanval was guiltless of wrong, for their own eyes had acquitted him.
And the maiden departed; in vain did the king pray her to remain; and many there were who would fain have served her. Without the hall was there a great block of grey marble, from which the chief knights of the kings court were wont to mount their steeds; on this Lanval took his stand, and when the maiden rode forth from the palace he sprang swiftly upon the palfrey behind her. Thus, as the Bretons tell us, he departed with her for that most fair island, Avalon; thither the fairy maiden had carried her knight, and none hath heard man speak further of Sir Lanval. Nor know I more of his story.

trans. Jessie L. Weston