

ARTORIUS



A heroic poem in four books and eight episodes

JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

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TO THE MEMORY OF
CHARLES ALBERT HARWOOD
1938-1967

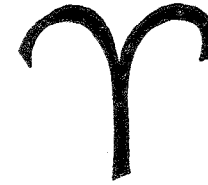
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Si quando indigenas revocabo in carmina reges,
Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem.

JOHN MILTON, *Mansus*

From the hag and hungry goblin
That into rags would rend ye,
All the spirits that stand
By the naked man
In the book of moons, defend ye.

Tom of Bedlam's Song



TAKE DOWN, CALLIOPE, YOUR TRUMPET FROM ITS TACK:
Rested has it long, and rusted? Give us a rouse, girl:
Your voice I invoke now, and your eight with violets crowned
Sisters to sing, to a star-dance I dispose them,
Through the zone of the zodiac, where Zeus's son,
And Leto's, Apollo, shall lead with his lyre.
Urania in a dialogue shall discourse delightfully;
Thalia come also, colloquial in a clown's mask;
Polyhymnia with a pompous pæan of encomium
Is commanded to a solemn ceremony of crowning,
And blithe Erato with ballads and with badinage
Promises prothalamion for a bride and her paranymph;
And Terpsichore, she too, with her castanets, shall testify,
With a sexual dance, a saraband of death;
Plain-suited Clio, in prose, though she plod;
And grave Melpomene shall give us a goat-song;
Lastly and lyrically Euterpe shall lament
Over the waves, at winter's and world's end.
But principally you, Calliope, I presume to ask preside
At equinox and at solstice, at the sun's turnings to sing
Of War and of Justice, of Warlockry and a Wounding.
Present then for man's life a paradigm, his passage,
Like the sun, through symbols; his season's progress
From spring's heyday to high summer and harvest,
And lastly to the laggard lagoon of old age
Where his son supplants him and the cycle returns.
Labour continual is his lot; Alcides learned this,
In his twelve month of toils, under a hard taskmaster—
Battling against beasts, and against brigands also,
Monsters whose hollow dens are in the mind of Man:
The heart of the human being is its own Heaven's ruler,
Through baleful constellations its course it must keep.

Let us learn then something of LUCIUS ARTORIUS
 Of cognomen CASTUS ; come of the Venetic gens ;
 From Illyria long since with the legionaries they came
 But British land they bought with blood now here established.
 The first that was his forebear, in former times directed
 The rearing and erecting of the rampart, which Hadrian
 Set from the Solway to the Germanic sea
 Against the blue-cheeked bandits of Scotland, and the bands
 Of the Picts beyond that pale, the peoples
 Of moss and of moorland, and of mournful forests.
 Afterwards in Armorica this first Artorius also
 Campaigned with his legion ; but no legend is left.
 From that stock he stemmed then, the steadfast man,
 Artorius name him or Arthur : some said Uther's son
 And some gave him Gorlois, the good Duke for a sire,
 And some that his battle-hardy blood he borrowed
 From Aurelius Ambrosius, that erstwhile endured
 In Britain the brunt of the Saxon boar-crests.
 But none for a certainty could say sooth of such things :
Comes he was by commission—and after to be King ?

The first labour is of the Lion—as in the lust of his days,
 In the youth of his years, a young man desirous
 In the crags of Kurdistan, his courage to establish :
 He seeks the den of the lion, in dry places of the desert,
 With a blade only, a brief one, and a bundle of twine,
 The black and harsh hair of a hirsute goat,
 To entangle and tie up the terrible predator ;
 Ranging among the rocks, at last he reaches
 The cavern of the cat-beast, the dark-maned carnivore,
 With taunts then he twits him, and rhetorical tirades :—
 'Come forth, you feline ; you flea-bitten quadruped ;
 You lousy old lion lounging in your cave !
 It is a man you must match—which will be the master ?
 Come out with your claws, and your canine teeth ;
 Or are you nervous, perhaps ? Naked am I, know you
 I bait you with only my blade, and a ball of twine !'
 Tempted by these taunts, the tawny and narrow-bellied
 Beast from among the boulders breaks forth ; he sees
 Dazzled in the daylight, the shadow delineated
 Of Man the murderer. He springs, ready to maul
 With cruel cusps and retractile claws.
 But his malice is muffled in the black mohair,
 All his swiftness is swaddled in the swathe of wool
 He is snarled in that softness and impotently swings,
 Until without haste the hunter hauls out

The sword he grips in his grasp, and suddenly
 Deals him the death-stroke with that Damascus blade,
 And the blood from the bowels of the beast makes royal,
 Crimsoning his handsome body, his hands and the whole of him.
 Now is his manhood known, and the women make much of him :
 All his village calls him valiant. With one voice they praise him.
 He is remembered by rhymers, and in rough ballads ;
 For in this kind was formerly the custom of kings—
 Bearded Lords of Babel, as bas reliefs show
 A huge hunting of lions in hieratic stone.

Now Artorius is urged to the establishment of empire,
 Embattled upon Badon mound—in former times it was built
 As a secure stronghold, with steep sides of earth
 And spiralling paths to the centre, a spearman might hold.

Man's woe is manifest in the night sky of March,
 In the darkness before dawn of that day of battles,
 And the lilting of the larks that salute the first light—
 Outrageous Ares that is arbiter of anger.

But the guardian of this house is the grey-eyed goddess,
 Pallas of the pure brow, with her plumed helmet,
 Brandisher of the spear, over her brazen breastplate,
 Yet patroness of peace, and of its pastimes—
 The women who weave their web upon the loom,
 Stability of the state ; she stands by the olive-press,
 For the glaucous-leaved olive is the gift that she gave.
 Pitted against Poseidon, she competed for the city—
 The lordship and the love of the land of Attica.
 The Earth-shaker to show his prowess shoved then
 His trident on the ground. It grumbled and groaned,
 And labouring it lifted to the light a marvel—
 A high spirited horse, in its harness complete,
 A war-steed for warriors, and worthy their courage.
 The gift of the god they acclaimed as glorious.
 But serenely she smiled, and the rich soil
 Touched with the tip of her spear for a token :
 Green shoots shot forth, and then the shrub
 Gnarly and knotted ; thus the olive was known,
 With oil for anointing and all other things,
 For the fairness of men, and full also of food,
 A wood to be worked—for peace and for wisdom.
 Then the seniors of the city as their protectress saluted her
 The virgin victorious for a virtuous people.
 And Poseidon in a pique plunged among the billows ;
 But evermore for Athens, Athenäis the ægis-bearer
 Is gracious and grateful, a favouring goddess.

Some say, when the great and horrible horde of the Goths
Marched over the mountains, through forest and morass,
Furious with fire and with sword affraying
The hills and the erstwhile holy earth of Hellas,
To Attica when they attained, and the approaches of Athens,
Sitting against that city, suddenly they beheld
Superhuman in size, the shape, it seemed, of a woman
In armour gleaming, glauque-eyed and glittering,
Walking about the walls, and waving her spear.
So they turned in their tracks, subdued with terror
Of that serene vision, and the city was saved.

But now he puts him in the power of another Parthenos—
Bearing on his shoulders the embroidered blazon;
Artorius exhibits the icon which images
The Bride unbrided, the Theotokos in brightness.
In a cartouche depicted, the corner of the courtyard,
Of the holy Temple, the House of the All-High,
The Virgin kneels at the knowledge of Annunciation,
And the angelic officer at the opposite end
Poised on the pavement with pinions streaming—
'Hail, highly favoured, Miriam, seed of Hannah,
Gifted with grace, and enhanced in glory,
Blessed be among women, and the breeding of your womb.'

So before the outbreak of the bloody battle
He makes, in a paradox, to the Author of peace, petition;
In the hour of annunciation of an ultramundane order
Prayer for the salvation and preservation of the City,
On the outcast edge of an enervate empire.

The remnant of Troia was entrenched on the ramparts,
The Brythonic band, badly caparisoned,
With ill assorted and out of date equipment—
Army Surplus from Imperial stores;
And a few battle-horses of Byzantine breed;
But also barbarian breastplates and byrnies,
Beautified with beads of black jet
Washed up at Whitby, and from Scottish waters
Pearls of price picked out of mussels,
Cairngorm stones, and studs of cornelian,
And gleaming torques of the twisted gold;
Elaborate enamels with abstract insignia.
The roll-call resounded of Roman pedigree,
And senatorial status in the remembered city—
Eugenius and Gerontius, and Urbanus of Gower,
Urbigena of Strathclyde, and Gaius the steward;
Bedwyr the butler, and Flaccus (a by-blow

Of Artorius), had arrived and augmented the armament,
And gaily and graciously the courteous Gwalchmai,
The Hawk of May, in the midst of the host,
With truest Tristan, whom Mark trusted.

In formation on the field, on all four sides,
With the mound in the midmost, the mighty army
Of the Saxons is assembled, with Cerdic as their leader—
The renegade who renounced his Roman citizenship;
With Mul his half-brother, whose blood was a mixture.
The ancestors of Aella and Offa led the Angles,
And, cheek by jowl, the Jutes joined with them.
There was heathenish headgear of high boar-crests,
And well-tempered swords welded by Weland,
And the serviceable and deadly dagger of the Saxons.
Kite-hawks and hoody crows hung around expectantly,
With a glad and gruesome gleam in their eyes;
The wolf also was waiting in the nearby wood,
And doubtless the Wælkures, the daughters of Woden,
Accompanied these carrion birds, ready to carry off
The souls of the heroes to their high-built hall,
For an imagined eternity of unending aggression,
Of brawling and barding, and unlimited bottle ale.

Cerdic addressed the spearmen and the swordsmen;
Exalted on an eminence, he uttered an exhortation:
'We are come up against this Cymric confederation,
This tattered remnant of the Roman rapaciousness;
It began as an asylum for bandits and brigands,
To spread its latrocinium at large over the lands.
But now the moth-eaten eagle moults its metal plumes,
They bandy you, honest farmers of the backwoods and the Baltic,
With the pernicious title of pirates and of predators.
We were no horde but a handful that hewed down this state,
A carcase wholly corrupt, and ready for its collapse;
Worm-eaten and warped by the contradictions within.
Was that small group of the Goths that glided across the Danube,
Suppliants to their ferriers, enough to sap the foundations?
Validly the Vandals were invited in as mercenaries—
And Hengist also and Horsa, at the behest of Vortigern
Were brought here into Britain, and established a bridgehead.
The people, the proletariat, receive us peacefully—
What cities have we sacked, excepting only Silchester?
The cities had been abandoned by the burghers and the bankers,
The peasantry were impoverished, or swept away by pestilence,
Crushed into thralldom by the Code of Theodosius.
Better an army of barbarian occupation than to bleed

From the teeth of the tax-collectors, and the taskmasters' whips.
It is of right we are ready here to possess
The all but empty areas which everywhere await us.
We come not as a jumble of Germanic janissaries,
But as Alemanni, the All-men, who are open to everybody,
As Franks the federation of all who would be free.

'I was reared, as you realise, in the Roman civility;
I ground my teeth on Cicero, on Sallust and on Cæsar,
The verses of Virgil, and the vanities of Ovid;
Also the odd conventions of the cultus of Christ.
Fair enough, freely I fling it all to the winds—
I save only the discipline, for the Saxon *duguth*,
Of the law and the lore of the legions and the cohorts.

Far away in the woods, beyond the wind-touched foam
Of the northern sea, with no one now to celebrate,
The shrines of your gods lie shrouded in shadows:
Who thinks now of Thor, who wielded the thunder,
Of the wiseacre Woden, with his vatic wisdom,
Of Frig the good housewife, or of phallic Frey?
In the wide empty welkin there is only Wyrð.
To Wyrð we submit, and the sentence of Wyrð—
And the stoutness of our strength, in our own stark existence.
Wyrð goes as it will; did some witty Greek
My tutor told me of, in the time I have forgotten—
Aristotle or Anaximander, or some another egg-head,
Denote that Destiny by a different title?
Anangke over all things everywhere is absolute,
Brute fact, that fastens us with her brazen nails;
For Necessity we therefore now nerve ourselves in our need:
In the freedom of the knowledge of necessity we fight them.'

The trumpets enunciated their traumatic *tantara-tantara*:
The battle was begun, in all its beastliness—
The hewing and the hacking of limbs and headpieces;
The divine icon defaced, in a devil's scrimmage.
In a tension of dubiety the tides turned about—
Assault upon the mound, and sortie from the mound.
Mars was the ruler, red with blood and with rust,
Manifestly, as men mashed one another below.

But frankly, Calliope, do you find this commodious
For the lilting of your lyre, so late in the day as this is?
I, at any rate, would avoid this argument,
And turn aside from the sanguine spectacle of battle:
Murder in the mass is no matter fitting
For a maiden lady, like you, to muse upon,
Or so I would presume—though precedents suggest themselves.

Let us glance aside then, and suppose there a glade
Of hazels on a hillside, within hailing distance,
With lambstail catkins, lucid in the light,
Dangling delightfully, and dallying with the wind.
In this place the poets, by the privilege of their office,
Stood as upon a stage, strategically apart:
Interested, they observed, objectively and with irony.
Beetle-browed Gwion was the bard of the Brythons,
And Daegrafn spoke for the sea-born Saxons.
They held in their hands their long-stringed harps,
Ready to rouse them to a rattling pæan
Of victory, for praising the virtue and the valour
Of the successful side, when the signal should be given,
Or in melting and mournful measures to set forth
An austere elegy, for the ignominy of the unfortunate,
Transforming defeat to a tremulous delight.

They talked of technicalities, of the terms of their art,
The rules of englyns, and of runic riddles.
They were aware of words, and as if unaware
Of the battle that rolled and rattled beneath them,
Though committed to conquest for their own countrymen.
Their warfare was against words; they wanted only
To muster a meaning from the bloody mellay.
They knew, whatever victory at nightfall should be vaunted,
The eventual issue at the end should be only
In long futurity a late told legend,
A matter for lays, and for lyrical laments.
The mind of the masters, in the midst of that tumult—
Or was this their temptation?—touched upon the timeless,
On the silence that remains behind the sound of all song.

Gwion said these staves, striking upon the strings:
'I have caught three drops from the cauldron of Ceridwen,
That flew up from the froth and foam of her brew.
They gave to my tongue the ungrateful gift
Of the telling of truth, and the terrible wisdom,
The bitter privilege the bard is bound to.
That moment transformed me; I moved out of time,
I become what I sing; and soothly I can say
I was in the height of Heaven with the Lord of Hosts
When Lucifer lapsed to the lowmost of Hell;
I bore a banner in the battle-order
Of Alexander, the offspring of Egyptian Ammon;
I was in Canaan when Absalom contested for the crown
And hung by his hair from the highest of the trees;
I was in the court of Danau, that dark deemstress,

Before the world had heard of your Woden and his wisdom ;
 Erstwhile I was instructor to Elijah and to Enoch ;
 I stood upon Calvary when the Christ was crucified ;
 For three periods was I penned in the prison of Arianrod ;
 A bystander, I directed, when Babylon was in building ;
 I was in Asia when the Ark anchored upon Ararat ;
 I saw the cities of the plain plunged in sulphur ;
 I was in the donkey's manger when Mary delivered,
 Lowly and blessedly, the Lord in Bethlehem ;
 I gave mastery to Moses as he marched by Jordan ;
 I mounted to the firmament with Mary Magdalene ;
 I was at the court of Cunobelinus in the castle of London ;
 I am teacher and tutor to all intelligences,
 To all cosmic powers I am called as a catechist,
 And I shall dwell upon the Earth till the day of doom ;
 We find that the poet is neither fish nor flesh.'

Dourly deliberating, Daegrafn said :

'I know nothing of Ceridwen, nor of her cauldron ;
 I brag of my bellyful of the blood-mixed mead
 Which Woden delivered from those dangerous dwarfs
 Who had murdered, in their murky cave, the primaeval minstrel.
 But I too am a traveller, in space and in time :
 It is the wyrd of the poet to wander widely :
 In the courts of kings and commanders of men,
 The mighty and munificent, for the most part I have been.
 With the lord of the Lombards in the land of Italy,
 Alboin, and elsewhere among the Ostrogoths ;
 I have vaunted in song the Vandals and the Vikings ;
 I have exalted Odoacer and Eormanric also,
 In the time before his mind was turned to tyranny,
 So savagely against Swanhild, that he commanded his servants
 To trample her under the hooves of his high-bred horses :
 But the horses held back at the horror of that thing—
 For the woman's eyes baffled them, they blazed so brightly,
 Till he called for her countenance to be covered with a napkin ;
 I was with Hrothulf and Hrothgar when they ruled together,
 And held sway in Heorot, that hall which was haunted ;
 I was with Finn Folcwalding who ruled over the Frisians ;
 I have sung my lays to the Letts and the Lithuanians,
 And the Finns, those sorcerers, that scud through their fens ;
 Among Edomites and Israelites and the utmost Indians ;
 Among Picts and Scots in the peat bogs beyond Solway ;
 Among Parthians and Medes, and the magian Persians ;
 And with the Cæsar of the Greeks in their great city.
 I can recite the names of rulers, and their racial history,

Monarchs over men, here in this middle garth ;
 I hold those most highly that are open-handed,
 And ready as ring-givers to reward the poet.
 These I will pay with praise, the one thing that is permanent
 In this world where all things waver, transitory and weak.
 Like the flight of a sparrow that fleetingly flits
 Through a lighted hall, where is high feasting and laughter,
 Dazzled, out of the darkness, and into the darkness once more,
 There to be lost, is man's life, and his lot in this world.
 At the end of all things shall be only existing
 The fire and the frost, as they were at the first.
 Things go as they will go ; and the gods themselves
 Shall know defeat—but they know also defeat
 Is no final refutation, when Ragnarok rages.
 Tiw, from the highest of the towers of heaven,
 Looking down, languished for the love of a woman—
 A sacrifice to that love, his sword was lost him ;
 Lacking that, he is fated at the last to fall
 To the fangs of Fenris, the fiendish wolf.
 I say this, and survey the uncertainty of this conflict.'

Gwion replied, rapt as in a reverie :

'Bound, in the womb of Britain, are those two Worms,
 Which Merddyn discovered by the craft of his magic—
 The red worm, as it rampages, stands for the Brythons,
 The white one signifies the Saxons from the sea ;
 They writhe in their wrath, ruthlessly shaking down
 All foundations from their fundaments, however fairly built—
 Nor shall they stand, save by the blood of a son
 From no mortal father ; but I find that all our myths
 And the horrors of our history, howsoever it is told,
 Are images of their dream, the dialectic of those dragons :
 They are Gwyrthyr ap Greidawl and Gwynn ap Nudd
 Who every May Day morning, for the maiden Cordelia,
 Are brought to a battle by the blossoming hawthorn ;
 They are Prince Ferrex, and Porrex whom he fought,
 Brothers of one womb ; they are Brennus and Belinus—
 Of the waning year and the waxing year
 Daimones, and doubtful their destructive conflict :
 Not till the tales of Time have all been told out
 Shall one have the upper hand over the other.
 I say this, and survey the uncertainty of this conflict.'

Such was their discourse, till the day star had passed its zenith,
 And evening began over the battlefield of Badon.
 The uncertain tide was turned ; Cerdic and his Saxons
 Fled from the field ; fiercely the Brythons

Hoisted to Heaven a raucous Hallelujah,
Vaunting in chorus their Christian victory.
Gwalchmai and his henchmen rode to the grove of hazels,
Saluting Gwion, as he gazed upon them gladly
By the resounding title of radiant-browed Taliesin;
Daegrafn was handed over as a hostage to his household.
Artorius was acclaimed: 'We acknowledge the Ymherawdr.

Restore in these islands the regimen of Rome,
By right, after this rout. As our ram-horned Alexander
We salute you, and as Cæsar; seize then the imperium—
By our Prætorian suffrage we promote you to that power.'
But the Comes stood brooding. He turned to Bedwyr his
butler:

'Am I hurried into hubris, or haltingly do I hesitate?
By what authority am I urged to the assumption of empire?
What precedents do they furnish, who put on the purple,
In these utmost islands, encouraged by ambition?—
Carausius cruising about our coasts with his pirates;
Or the murderous Maximus, who led away his mercenaries,
Depleting and debilitating the defences of Britain,
To the very walls of Rome—his reward for that recklessness
The scaffold, and the stroke of the public swordsman—
His end was vile, and Valentinian had the victory;
Or my great-grandsire, Constantine, who greedily
Aimed at empire, while Alaric attacked
The gates of Rome. He ravished Gaul
And seized on Spain. But Honorius sent
Forces to fight him. So he fell in battle;
And left the island leaderless and legionless.
Rome ruined. And we roughly fend
Now, for ourselves, in this northern outpost.
We have turned the tide, perhaps only for a time;
For a generation, maybe: let justice be enjoined—
Propping up a polity that belongs to the past,
Or a new-made redaction of republican rules,
Or count on customs which are local, the laws
Of the musty and mythical Mulmutius Dunwallo?
For the interim that is assigned, we will evoke an order.'

(Musing, Gwion muttered into his moustache:
'We evoke an order: an interim is assigned—
As a poet, perhaps, in the future predicament
Of the doubtfulness and dullness of a third Dark Age,
Might undertake the unfashionable inditing of an epic,
Though his colleagues and his confrères confined themselves merely
To little linguistic and logical constructs,

Or deployed their egos in the Dionysiac delirium
Of surreal illumination, or psychedelic self-indulgence—
He might establish an order, by the example of this experiment,
Driving his through-road across the thickets of thoughtlessness,
And he also if temporarily, might turn the tide—
But they come back, they come back again, those currents of
meaninglessness;
Language lags, and languishes away—
The Daughter of Chaos reconsolidates her reign,
Universal Darkness, and delivers it to the dunces.')

Bedwyr the butler embraced Artorius:
'That the ravished land, my lord, you have recovered—
Forgive me, if I find it, in my fondness a small thing;
Personally, I care little if the purple clothe you,
Or imperial ornaments, if urged, you shall assume.
But I bless the destiny that has brought your body
Safe out of this slaughter, and your breast unscarred,
That I may have you and hold you, as heretofore I have done,
The lord whom I love, and it is my luck to serve—
At season of feasting to set food before you,
To dispose your dishes, and dispense your drink;
It is the liquor of my heart that wholly I would hand you.'

Gwalchmai said: 'Gloriously and grimly,
The bodies of our brothers lie unburied here on the field.
Let them be coffined and the cross of Christ
Be scratched as a signal on the stones that cover them;
Let Bedwini the bishop set about his business,
To direct them with a dirge through the dreary mosses
Of Acheron or Annwyn—anyway to avoid
The prickles of the furze, and the fires of Purgatory.
For that carrion heap of heathenish corpses—
We relinquish them to the kites, the crows and the ravens;
And let their unsanctified souls sneak away to Hell,
Their ghastly goddess, blue-faced and grim,
Holding her court in her cloudy kingdom.'

Artorius with authority answered that asking:
'Send Bedwini to see to the bodies of the baptised.
But as for those others, annexed to this earthwork
Let them be given burial: they were brave in the battle.
Whatever rituals their religion, though wrong,
Prescribes for their passage, be duly paid them.'

Gaius the seneschal stood forth and said:
'If we were not here at Badbury, but in the hills above Bath,
We could go down to Bath, boys, and have a bath,
And remove, among the ruins, the relics of this mellay.

That city was first builded, they say, by King Bladud,
 Who set up a temple for Sul, whom he served,
 The palladium of that place, a peerless goddess,
 The white-stoled Minerva of the mineral waters.
 And from a pinnacle of that dome perilously he dared
 To essay, like Icarus, the unstable air,
 Leaping, with waxen wings, into the welkin;
 Down to the bottom he fell, and battered out his brains:
 A warning to the wise to beware of hubris.
 Without benefit of bath we must retain our bloodstains;
 But appetite urges us at any rate to eat.
 Precious little of the provender I provided you remains—
 Subsistence for a siege, surrounded on that mound.
 But do you see what I see?—They might have been sent us:
 Grazing upon the ground, on the further side of that grove,
 Sheep at pasture, peacefully but with no shepherd.
 Let us set to and slaughter them, and slake our hunger.'

No sooner had he said it, than they seized upon the flock,
 And briefly went to work on the business of butchery,
 Cutting their throats, and carving up the carcasses;
 And a fire being ready, they fetched them to roasting.
 But while their minds were merry at the prospect of the mutton,
 They were all at once astonished by an unexpected apparition—
 A fantastic figure, flailing its skinny arms,
 With a bristly beard blowing in the wind,
 And a patched cassock caught about his paunch.
 It was Cadoc, the holy man, who with a huddle of hermits,
 Woned in this wilderness, in wattle-built cabins,
 With *Aves* and orisons at the hours of office.
 His extreme squalor might be a scandal to the squeamish,
 But denoted, doubtless, to the faithful devotee
 He was set on the sanctified road towards Salem.
 His wasted body was unwashed, and his beard
 Uncombed and uncomely, his clothes all to tatters;
 A loathsome legion of lice were at grass
 Under his armpits, and all about
 The pubic hairs of his personal parts.
 He rushed towards the army, rabid in his rage,
 Banging his book, clanging his bell,
 Clutching his candle, and cantillating his bans:
 'The malison of the martyrs, and of the holy maidens,
 Of the apostles and of the evangelists, and of all the angels,
 Of the prophets and the patriarchs, and all the citizens of Paradise,
 Light upon you, you louts, for lawless brigands,
 That have filched my flock, and the sheep of my fellows!

Artorius, son of Utherius, against you I urge this—
 You bear of Britain, with your gang of bandits—
 For your worrisome warfare, and your worthless victories,
 Your senseless forays, and your sallies against the Saxons,
 You pillage and plunder, stealing your pecks
 Of barley-meal for your bag-pudding making,
 The property of the Saints, and sacred perquisites—
 Chalice and chasubles stripped from the churches,
 And the ornaments of the altar, apprehended for your armoury,
 The metal melted down to be made into weapons;
 And now it is my flock of muttons that you fall upon—
 Cadoc calls down his curses upon you!

Gruffly, Gaius gave him his answer:
 'You lazy layabout of a lubbardly priest,
 Christ put a curb on your tongue for its carping!
 Ungrateful and grudging—God has given us a victory
 Over the horde of the heathen for the honour of His house.
 You can say your prayers in peace now, by our leader's protection,
 Unscared by those Saxons, for a month of Sundays.
 Go back to your church and your chancel, and chant
 Psalms and hymns to Heaven on our behalf,
 Nor grudge us our dinner, after this day's doings.'

Artorius said to his steward and seneschal:
 'Cannily, my Kai, answer him with courtesy—
 Though I grant you such as he, and his greasy god-sibs,
 Penning their jeremiads, punish my patience.
 If we commandeered his cattle, we will pay compensation.
 He taxes us with taking the treasures of the churches—
 It was necessary; we needed them, or nothing would have remained
 Of the calling of Christians here among the Cymry
 In this savage onrush of the unbaptised Saxons.
 But all shall be set in order, now that advantage is ours—
 The chapels shall be restored, and the Church shall be cherished.'

Mollified somewhat, the sour-faced monk,
 In more aulic accents, answered Artorius:
 'If indeed it is your choice to cherish the Church,
 Let a synod be assembled for her inward sanitation.
 For the Hydra of heresy hisses through the land;
 And Manichæans, and Gnostics, and Modalists, and Montanists,
 And Monophysites, and Nestorians, and Millenarians, and
 Marciomites.
 And Ebionites, and Antinomians, and Origenists, and Arians,
 And every false and foolish, feather-pated opinion
 Breathes its infection abroad here in Britain—
 But principally the Pelagians, with porridge in their brainpans,

Morgan's mob, spread about their madness,
 Cunningly confounding the Catholic doctrine,
 Bid us haul ourselves into Heaven by our own bootstraps:
 A belief congenial to our blunt-headed Britons,
 As I daresay it always will be till the Day of Doom.
 Let them be anathematised—outlawed, by the outraged orthodox!
 I am moved by his zeal to admire Maximus that he meted out
 To the proud Priscillian for his puerile fancies
 The flame and the faggots, to pay for his falsity.'

Artorius said: 'That sending to the stake
 Was a horror unheard of heretofore in Christendom,
 And a pernicious precedent for the future to preserve;
 But the Roman pontiff, the Pope, was enraged
 Against Maximus for that murder, who had no mandate for it.
 All things shall be ordered, but by argument and exegesis
 Of learned men; and let the Lady of Love,
 Exalted Urania, be the arbiter of their acts.
 This then be my sentence; and a synod shall be summoned.'



ILLTUD. BEDWINI.

ILLTUD: I would ask you, reverend father, to furnish me with some account of that synod of the Church in Britain which Artorius summoned after he had been granted victory on the field of Mount Badon. For I was only a child at that time, and later I bore arms in others of the battles which Artorius fought. And only subsequently I put on the habit of religion.

BEDWINI: It was held to repress the hydra of heresy; but that mythical water-snake, you remember, grew three heads each time one of its nine necks was severed. After the victory at Badon, Artorius's forces pressed eastwards, with the object of recapturing the city of London, advancing along the valley of the Thames. Now where the Thame and the Isis are conjoined, to form the Thamesis, there is an island among the marshes. It is said that a certain royal virgin, who had embraced the Christian faith and who wished to consecrate her virginity to God, being pursued by a neighbouring prince, a pagan, who intended to make her his wife, came to this place. She was riding upon an ox, and the waters barred her progress. So she said to the beast: 'Ox, forth!', and obeying her it forded the river and carried her to that place of safety. And from that saying of hers the place took its name.

ILLTUD: It was at this spot then, that the synod was held? But I have heard that because of the extreme hostility of that holy maiden to the prince who so importunately pursued her, that island bodes ill luck to any Briton claiming the royal authority who presumes to set foot on it.

BEDWINI: Artorius was as yet only designated by the title of Comes or count. But afterwards he acceded to the requests of the people and assumed the royal and imperial crown.

ILLTUD : At what season of the year was this synod held?

BEDWINI : In the month of April, when the sun enters the sign of Taurus. The planet Venus is the ruler of that house, as astrologers say. And if we are to believe them, her influences might not be unpropitious for such a gathering: for we are to consider that Plato, in his *Symposium*, says that there are two Venuses. Venus Pandemia is she who presides over that love which springs from the senses. But Venus Urania is divine love, and leads the soul to the contemplation of truth.

ILLTUD : Manilius, in his poem, also makes Venus the guardian of that house. For his system differs somewhat from that of the generality of those who have written upon the subject of astronomy. For most of the latter divide the twelve signs of the Zodiac between the seven planetary rulers. They assign the Sun to Leo, and the Moon to Cancer, and to the remaining five planets two each of the other ten signs. Thus the sign of Virgo, which follows Leo, is given to the planet Mercury; and from thence, in succession, we move outwards to Saturn, who is the ruler of Capricorn. Saturn is also the ruler of the next sign, Aquarius; and from thence, again in succession, we move inwards till we reach Mercury, who is the ruler of Gemini, which precedes the sign of Cancer. But Manilius apportions the twelve signs to the twelve Olympian deities: beginning with Pallas in the sign of Aries. Then follow Venus, Apollo, Mercury, Jupiter (with Juno), Ceres, Vulcan, Mars, Diana, Vesta, and Juno (with Jupiter), ending with Neptune in the sign of Pisces.

BEDWINI : I do not possess your detailed learning on this subject. Nor do I think these matters should very much concern Christians. For does not the Apostle teach us that neither height nor depth, nor principalities nor powers, nor heavenly rulers, nor any creature is able to separate us from the Love of God?

ILLTUD : It was you, father, who first introduced this topic. But indeed, we seem to have strayed from the subject of our discourse. Let Urania, then, be our muse—to lift our eyes to the stars of doctrine, the constellations not of a visible but of an invisible heaven.

BEDWINI : The weather of April is uncertain, nevertheless the synod was held in the open air. Artorius presided under an oak tree, exercising that diaconal surveyance which in a Christian commonwealth is the prerogative, and the only prerogative,

of all lawfully constituted authority. He exercised it, not as having yet received the diaconal stole, but on behalf of the distant Emperor who sat at Byzantium.

ILLTUD : And the weather, it is to be hoped, remained clement?

BEDWINI : The air was loud with early nightingales. Some indeed complained that the song of these birds distracted their meditations, and a motion was put that they should be exorcised. But this suggestion was not generally favoured, and those who supported it were indeed suspected of being tainted with the Manichæan heresy.

ILLTUD : And were, in fact, many of the leaders of the heretical sects in Britain persuaded to attend?

BEDWINI : Very many. On the one side sat various sorts of Gnostics, twiddling their flowers and tinkling their cow-bells. It was said that demons in flying saucers descended from the celestial spheres to whisper instructions to them. But I cannot find that this was actually observed to occur. On the other side sat the bull-necked Pelagians, believing in the indomitable human spirit and in the march of progress—and with scourges ready for the backs of anyone who failed to live up to these ideals. And in the centre, between these two opposing parties, the Millenarians. They believed in the imminent return of the Saviour, with a large cargo of barrels of salt beef and bottles of cheap wine, and pension-books for all his followers. And hell-fire for everybody else. They were provided with massive documentation—measurements of the Great Pyramid, apocryphal apocalypses, and sibylline and hermetic palimpsests and pseudepigrapha.

ILLTUD : These are the adulteries of the rebellious head and the disordered heart. I hope you will tell me what arguments were put forward to rebut their unfortunate opinions.

BEDWINI : It was many years ago, and I am now an old man. I cannot say that I remember them exactly. Let it suffice that the great definitions of Nicaea and Chalcedon, of Ephesus and Constantinople, were reaffirmed; definitions which do not state what is to be believed, so much as what is not—saying to the deep, 'so far and no further.'

ILLTUD : For we are not wiser than our fathers. One might regard it as a satisfactory conclusion, and worthy of universal acceptance.

BEDWINI : Many did not accept, and excluded themselves. And I recall that the hermit Cadoc was expelled for an obscure heresy, which no one, including himself, had hitherto suspected that he entertained.

ILLTUD : I have been told that he was not chastened by this experience. Nor have his manners improved.

BEDWINI : But among the most there was great rejoicing that peace and order had been restored to the Church. And the same evening Artorius invited the holy fathers to a lavish supper. The poet Gwion composed an impromptu encomium for the occasion, and the Saxon poet Daegrafn also furnished the company with a specimen of the interesting but less subtle art of his people. The wine circulated freely with Artorius and his courtiers, and the abstract ideas previously mooted were re-discussed, not always with discretion. One must say with regret that Venus Pandemia replaced Venus Urania. For the sister of Artorius, the Queen of Orkney, was present. The love between them was more than is lawful between brother and sister, and on the night following the day on which purity of doctrine was restored to the Church in Britain, was Modred begotten.

ILLTUD : I am grateful for all the information you have given me, and I would gladly hear more. But the sun now begins to decline in the western sky.

BEDWINI : Let us then, at this hour, make our orisons to the Unbridled Bride, the Queen of Heaven. And at this season it will be fitting that we ask her to intercede for us that we may be guarded from the sin of immoderate laughter.

ILLTUD : In that prayer I will gladly join you.

II

(Scene: Marshy fenland country. Behind a stagnant pool stands a rude hut of reeds. Enter GWION and DAEGRAFN, accoutred as for hunting.)

GWION : That great white stag, with the nine tines,
Has led us far away from the rest of the party,
Artorius and Gwalchmai and the others
Hunting in these eastern marshes. It eludes us,
As the word continually eludes the idea.
Perhaps the white stag of Artemis
Which Heracles pursued through the Arcadian mountains,
Till the goddess, descending, claimed it for her own.
But I fear this is no innocent Arcadia,
For we have come to the frontiers where the East Angles
Possess the land, a hostile territory.

DAEGRAFN : I do not think they have found their way
Among these marshy windings of the Cam ;
And if they should, I have certain passwords,
Certain secret and runic symbols,
Which may serve to protect us both.
I received them as part of my instruction as a scop.

GWION : I hope then it is permitted
You teach them me sometime. It would be interesting.
Captured in the battle, you were delivered into my household,
And now I regard you as my brother and my colleague.

DAEGRAFN : I have of course sworn to preserve them inviolate,
With certain very bloody oaths—to gods
I do not any longer think I believe in.
You know that Bedwini receives me as a catechumen.
I have confessed those secrets to him, having an idea

Perhaps he may find them useful one day,
Going some mission behind the enemy lines.
We Saxons are a perfidious lot.

GWION : But at present the Saxon advance seems checked.
The voice of the people demands
Artorius assume the imperial dignity
Here in this island. He cannot long hold out.
Sooner or later he will go to Caerleon,
There to be crowned. And I shall be commissioned
To compose his coronation poem.
Well, I suppose a Pindaric ode might serve.

DAEGRAFN : The sunshine of May beats down upon these marshes,
Bright with ladies' smock and kingcups.
The cuckoo calls over the water meadows, and the sedge
warbler
Dryly discourses. The spot is pleasant enough.
Let us give up, then, the pursuit of that stag,
Which seems so hopeless. We are both fagged out,
And could do with some rest and refreshment,
If any sojourn here among the fens.

GWION : Now I think of it, there is an old tradition
That King Mulmutius Dunwallo,
The legendary law giver of this land,
Sought to establish here, in former times,
Long centuries ago, a seat of learning.
Philosophers from Athens settled here,
Academics and Peripatetics,
Epicureans far from their garden,
And the austere school of the painted Porch,
Together with rhetoricians and grammarians,
To instruct our blue-stained Brythons
In Ionian subtleties. Here they erected
A temple to the abstract mathematical muse,
Doubtless it is ruined now. But I have heard
One last descendant of those learned men,
Phyllidulus by name, still hangs on,
Delivering daily lectures on poetry.

DAEGRAFN : He must be, one might think,
A trifle short of students.

GWION : That is indeed the case.
He has no one to instruct except the tadpoles,
That swarm in these green pools, all swollen head

And ineffectual tail, and nothing in between.
Eagerly they absorb the Master's judgments;
But nourished only by the handfuls of stale breadcrumbs
He scatters for them on the water's surface,
They are not able to mature in growth,
Remaining fixed in their watery existence,
Instead of becoming, as benevolent Nature
Doubtless intended, mature amphibians—
High-skipping frogs, or respectable toads
(Each with a jewel hidden in his skull)
Or fiery-bellied newts and salamanders.

DAEGRAFN : Something ought to be done
To remedy this distressing situation.

GWION : Indeed it should.
And, as a matter of fact, Artorius
Commissioned the courteous Gwalchmai, who commissioned
me,
To clear the conduits of rhetoric in this land.
That was after the synod he held on the Thames,
By the Ox's ford. Ideas were clarified,
The hissing and indefinite hydra suppressed.
Let language also be clarified,
Here by the banks of Cam.

DAEGRAFN : Someone is coming.
Perhaps he can direct our way.

(Enter IANTO.)

GWION : Stop a minute, friend
Though you seem to be in a hurry. Can you kindly direct us
To the place where the learned Phyllidulus dwells?

IANTO : That I certainly can. And who better than I?—
For it's I who look after him. I am, in fact, his gyp.
I am just now going down to the river bank
To try and capture a roach or a perch or a pike
To furnish his dinner. This is the very place.
He lives in that reed hut, and he is inside now,
Mugging up the notes for his morning lecture.

GWION : Not a very commodious dwelling
For a distinguished scholar—I hope
You look after him well?

IANTO : I do my best, sir.
And then, there is, of course, Miss Lalage
To give a touch of feminine refinement.

DAEGRAFN : Miss Lalage?—Then, the learned Phyllidulus
Is not without the consolation
Of female companionship.

IANTO : Don't get the wrong idea—
Miss Lalage is his ward. Some sixteen years ago
He was walking among the swamps, and meditating
About a disputed interpretation in Alciphron,
When he came across the tender infant, lying
Upon a lily-pad, and suckled
By a female water vole, whose own young
Had been devoured by a marsh harrier.
He took her home to his reed hut,
And, being unmarried, reared her
As his own daughter, educating her
In grammar, rhetoric and dialectic.
She is, in fact, his most promising pupil.
And he has declared that he will give her hand
To whichever of his tadpoles
Shall first attain froghood. She helps about the place,
Rakes out the cinders, and sits among them
To warm her pretty toes; but then she pines
For that imperial palace, whence, she sometimes thinks, she
came.
In short, she dreams she dwelt in marble halls.

GWION : We would like to meet the learned Phyllidulus;
And we would certainly like to see poor Lalage—
Perhaps something can be done for her.

IANTO : The tadpoles will soon be assembling
To hear his morning lecture. You might
Discreetly hide behind this alder stump.
But I must go now.

(Exit IANTO, full pelt)

GWION : Let us certainly do as this fellow suggests.

*(GWION and DAEGRAFN conceal themselves. The CHORUS of
tadpoles surfaces in the pool.)*

CHORUS : Mighty Master of the schools,
Visit these green-mantled pools;
There's no problem but you'll fix it
With a resounding *ipse dixit*;
We, the tadpoles of this damp
Miasmatal and malarial swamp
Await you, son of Aristotle—
But each is but an axolotl;
Pituitary deficiency
Hampers our efficiency,
And not the strictest criticism
Can save us from infantilism.
Yet still we trust your scrutiny
In upper air shall make us free,
And from the waters liberate us,
Till we assume batrachian status.
Then, risen from this puddly deep
Through the meadows we shall leap,
Singing to the echoing backs
Our loud 'Brekekekek-Koax !'

*(Enter PHYLLIDULUS from the reed hut, LALAGE following
him.)*

PHYLLIDULUS : Ah, one sees we are all assembled on time.
Lalage, my dear, will you kindly fill up the class register,
And then take your accustomed seat at my feet.
Now I will begin my lecture.

Tadpoles and polywogs, I propose this morning to continue
the course I began last May. This is, I think, about the three
hundred and sixtieth lecture in the introductory series of my
prolegomena to poetry. One would much prefer to expatiate
upon one's contemporaries. But, living as we do at the
beginning of the Second Dark Age, we can detect little in the
landscape which is likely to serve to provide much
nourishment for our minds. One is aware that there are
grammarians in Massilia, but one is not sure whether one
has come across their productions. Here in this island, one
notes with a certain hopefulness that the victories of Artorius
have initiated a degree of stability—it may be only
temporary—in the social situation from which, one might
venture, with some optimism, to envisage eventually the
burgeoning, if not the flourishing, of a literature which might
go beyond, in some measure, the crudities of primordial epic
lays or the mere technical virtuositities of Celtic panegyric

and bardic exercises, but one cannot, with whatever a degree of sanguineness, even of charitable openness when one casts one's eye on what is currently being produced, discover much to substantiate such expectations. One is aware that a certain brother has made claims for, has even purported to find an interest in, not only the productions of Gwion, who occupies, one gathers, the position of a pensioned poet in the court, but even in those of his friend, the Saxon poet (if that is how one must describe him) Daegrafn. Such of their verses as have come one's way do not, one fears, prompt one to any measure of concurrence.

One is compelled, in short, to go back to the Romans. My remarks this morning will therefore be designed towards a brief reevaluation of those Latin poets, which established academic criticism continues to accord, however mistakenly, one may suspect, a certain degree of reverence. One cannot find, for example, that the attempt of Lucretius to unite with poetry the aridities of atomic physics engendered in him any degree of unification of sensibility. There was also, of course, Catullus. One can only peruse with a certain feeling of distaste the lyrics prompted by that unfortunate young man's affair with the notorious Clodia. '*Odi et Amo*', he says,—and what kind of logical sense, one asks, does that make? One must conclude, with regret, that that in which some not unperceptive minds have been prepared to detect an expression of passion can only furnish to the reader habituated to a more stringent critical approach to what he reads, little more than the outpourings of a self-indulgent and essentially puerile (one must, it is to be feared, too often add, and prurient) emotionalism. It was said that Augustus found Rome brick and left it marble—and something analogous occurred to poetry in the same generation. One may happen to prefer brick. Marmoreal is a term that has been applied to the *Odes* of Horace. If this style be marble, it is a veneer which does not serve to conceal the writer's essential commonplaces of mind—a commonplaceness which infuses likewise the whole corpus of his epistles: the superficial observations of a man about town, even if he chooses to make them from a convenient country retirement. One has on several previous occasions, one hopes with sufficient cogency, demonstrated the case against the style of Virgil. One presumes, therefore, that it is unnecessary, at this juncture, to go over yet again the *Aeneid*, with its uncolloquial rhetoric and its empty melodising. As for the *Eclogues*, they present us with an unreal world, without even in any effectual degree attempting

to imitate the simplicity of rusticity or, for that matter, the rusticity of simplicity. Of the poetry of Ovid, little, one may hope, need now be said. Apart from its diffuseness, and the banality which some would appear to have mistaken for wit, it presents, one can only say, the loose (in every sense of that word) expression of a peculiarly unpleasant mind. This consideration leads me now to Propertius and Tibullus . . .

(GWION and DAEGRAFN come forward.)

GWION : Stop! Stop! One cannot bear any more of this.

DAEGRAFN : By what right, sir, do you thus sit adjudicating the poets?
By our English custom, they should be judged by their peers.

PHYLLIDULUS : And who, may I ask, are you gentlemen?
Having so discourteously interrupted my lecture,
What account can you give of yourselves?

GWION : Tutor and instructor to all intelligences,
I was loquacious before the beginning of speech;
I am of a nature which is not certainly known,
None can tell if I am fish or flesh.
I was bound in the cauldron of the hag Ceridwen,
And now I am come to the remnant of Troia.
I rode to Canterbury in the sweet showers of April,
And was fined for beating a Franciscan in Fish Street;
I was with Samson in the mill of Gaza,
And in blindness I gazed on the throne of the Distributor;
I paid the reckoning in the inn of Deptford,
And was with Tamberlaine when Bajazeth was taken;
I marked the curfew in the churchyard of Stoke Poges;
I saw the ladder between Heaven and Charing Cross;
I howled like a dog in the cloisters of Chichester;
I was in the firmament at the fall of Hyperion;
I was subject to an assault in the narrowness of Rose Alley,
And was with the evil counsellor of Absalom;
I distributed a pamphlet on the Necessity of Atheism,
And was with Prometheus in the rocks of Caucasus.

DAEGRAFN : I was instructed by an angel in the cow-byre of Whitby:
I was distributor of stamps for the County of Westmorland,
And encountered the leech-gatherer by the solitary pool;
I administered an emetic to the pornographer in the tavern,
And saw the Anarch let fall the curtain;
I heard the chorus of Pities when the Dynasts contended;
I constructed the pleasuredome of Kubla Khan;

I dreamed a dream on the hills of Malvern;
I scrawled the Song of David on the walls of Bedlam;
I perpetrated forgery, I choked upon arsenic;
I held horses outside the Theatre—
And made a threne for the phoenix and the turtle;
I marked the dead stroke of St Mary Woolnoth;
When the bell tolled, it tolled for me.

GWION : I danced around perambulators on Putney Common;
I was in Golgonooza when Albion was awakened;
I was under milkwood on the hill of Llaregyb;
I was with Rustom when Sohrab was slain;
I saw the vanity of testimony in a book and a ring;
I was captive in the Castle of Indolence;
I served the altar in the temple of Bemerton;
I was the queen of the island of Gondal;
I composed the epitaph for a hare never hunted;
I hung on cliffs of fall, in the mind's mountains.

DAEGRAFN : I spoke as a parrot against the pride of the cardinal;
I indited an ode for the Palace of Crystal;
I was in Amalfi when the Duchess was strangled;
I declined a cup of water on the field of Zutphen;
I was present when the congress of philosophers
Detected in astonishment an elephant in the moon;
I suffered the fever at Missolonghi,
And was with Juan in the court of Catherine;
I was in Ireland when the house was burnt,
And by the waters of Thames running softly to my song;
I was alone in the asylum of Northampton . . .

PHYLLIDULUS : Just now you asked me, somewhat peremptorily,
If I would stop. I think I have the right
To ask the same of you. What is all this?
It can hardly be said to convey
Information in answer to my question.
And if it is supposed to be poetry,
One can only venture the opinion that it is . . .

DAEGRAFN : Pray sir, do not re-commence your lecture.
We boasted our credentials here as poets.

PHYLLIDULUS : If poets are to be judged by their peers, who is to
establish
Which are indeed the true poets? One can only answer
A trained, objective, critical mind.

GWION : Such, one presumes, as yours?

PHYLLIDULUS : Well, if not, what else would you propose?
Will you substantiate your claims by miracle?

GWION : Look well at this.

(They draw small phials from the folds of their garments.)

DAEGRAFN : And this.
It contains one drop of the blood-mixed mead,
That Woden stole from the dwarfs who guarded it.

GWION : And this, one drop from the cauldron of Ceridwen—
The nightmare hag at the world centre—
Kindled by the breath of nine maidens.

DAEGRAFN : The contents of these phials
We will pour into your pool,
And then you will see what you will see.

*(They do so. The pool froths and bubbles. Then the waters
turn clear, and a large golden waterlily rises in the centre and
opens to the sun. The tadpoles become frogs and other
amphibians, and leap onto the dry land.)*

CHORUS : Transformed into a higher kind,
At last we leave our tails behind;
Each is now a toad or frog
Hopping gaily round the bog,
Eft or newt or salamander,
In the upper air we wander;
Conforming to a different norm,
And almost, now, of human form;
By water meadow, stream and ford
We will sing unto the Lord—
Sing unto the Lord, by heck!—
Koax-brekekekek!
Is not that a witticism?
A fig for your old criticism!

PHYLLIDULUS : What is all this? Student unrest among the tadpoles?

GWION : No. Dr Phyllidulus, they have simply
All of a sudden grown up. And remember
You are committed to give your ward, Lalage here,
In marriage to whichever of them
Should first become a frog.

LALAGE : Oh dear,
 But they have all become frogs,
 At one and the same identical moment;
 I can't possibly marry all of them.

PHYLLIDULUS : Then you will have to choose
 Whichever of them you think most beautiful.

DAEGRAFN : Perhaps she may not think any of them very beautiful.
 But maybe they have beautiful voices.

GWION : Then let her choose by that. Come, little frogs,
 Now sing a serenade to Lalage.

CHORUS : Lalage, oh Lalage,
 Our love is like an allergy;
 Your delicious curves and dimples
 Raise upon our skin goose pimples.
 Though we are amphibious
 Do not tell a fib to us;

Deign, o deign to take in hand
 One of us batrachians.
 You shall have a lover fond
 At the bottom of the pond;
 A bridal bower, it's understood,
 Finely dight in the rich mud,
 Where the mud nymphs dance and play
 To celebrate your wedding day.

PHYLLIDULUS : Bless my soul, this is intolerable!
 All the principles of criticism
 One has been teaching them for years
 Seem completely to be forgotten!

GWION : Well, dear frogs, if your master means by that
 It is not particularly good poetry
 I am forced to agree with him. But it is a beginning.

PHYLLIDULUS : Now, Lalage, my dear
 Which of them will you choose?

LALAGE : They are good creatures in their way, and I suppose
 They even have a certain beauty. But I must confess
 I personally find them very unattractive.
 I don't really want to marry any of them.
 And I don't want to live at the bottom of a pond,
 With only the water scorpions and the whirligig beetles
 To provide me entertainment. I sometimes fancy

I was meant for better things. Oh sirs,
 Is there nothing you can do for me
 To rescue me from this predicament?

GWION : In cases like this, the only solution
 Is to petition a god or so
 To descend to earth in a machine
 And set things to rights.

DAEGRAFN : Which gods shall we invoke then?

GWION : Whom, but our special patrons, the masters
 Of Eloquence and Poetry: the bright-haired
 Hyperborean Apollo, whom in our Celtic tongue
 We call Maonos, and Mercury—
 Master of the roads and of communication—
 Who is the same with your Germanic Woden,
 The broad-hatted and vatic wanderer.
 Shall we call on them both together, antiphonally?

DAEGRAFN : You have more learning in these things than I.
 I am quite content you should speak for the two of us.

GWION : Bright Apollo, master
 Of the golden lyre, ruler
 Of the Delphian plain, where you quelled
 The mud-engendered snake, and where
 Your sacred prophetess, inspired
 By the toxic laurel, seated upon her tripod,
 Over the cleft of the earth, speaks oracles;

And you, Hermes, herald, and guide
 Of wayfarers, and of the bloodless
 Wavering shades of the dead
 On their last journey—you we invoke
 Brothers, and friends on Olympus:
 Descend, and attend the supplication
 Which here we offer, prayer on behalf of one
 Distressed in the dark dilemmas of this world!

You, Hermes, when you had been born
 In the Cylenian cave, ventured out
 Into the air, and left
 Your mother, the white-armed Maia, sleeping:

At the mouth of the cave you found
 A slow-paced tortoise—Chelone,
 The unpunctual nymph, who was late

For the wedding feast of Zeus and Hera, transformed,
As punishment into that shape.

With a sharp stone you scooped
The creature from its portable house, and from the entrails
You made vibrating chords; and these you strung
Across the empty shell. The lyre was invented.

And then you spoke; 'Chelone,
From now onwards you will be an honoured guest
At wedding feasts and festivals—the sweet-toned lyre,
Dear to the hearts of men !'

Then you went on your way, until you found
The white oxen of Apollo, feeding
Within a flowery meadow; and these you stole,
Dragging them by their tails back to the cave—
Patron of thieves—and made a hearty breakfast.

When Apollo, the Lycian archer,
Descending from Olympus, found that his property
Had vanished thus, he was distinctly enraged.

No crime can be concealed from those pure eyes,
Nor go unavenged ! the celestial inspector
Examined the clues, put two and two together
And traced his stolen cattle to the cave.

And there he found a marvel, the precocious child
Sitting among the sucked-dry marrow bones,
And contentedly strumming on his new-made toy.

Furious, he haled the delinquent to Olympus,
To appear before the high court of the gods,
And made his accusation. Zeus frowned;
But when the marvellous boy played on his lyre
They were all enchanted, and their hearts softened with
pleasure.

He offered the wonderful invention to his brother,
As compensation for his theft. Apollo accepted it,
And ever afterwards the lyre
Has been the peculiar delight of the bright god;
With it he leads the Muses in their dances.

Apollo and Hermes are firm friends now on Olympus;
For what is the good of the abstraction of pure Mind
Without Communication? What good is Communication,
Without the grace of Beauty? These we invoke.

(APOLLO and MERCURY descend from heaven in a machine.)

MERCURY : We are here at your prayer. And kindly tell us
Of what particular assistance we can be.

GWION : Here is, we have every reason to think, a virgin
In dire distress. Unless you do something about it
She is fated to marry a clammy cold-blooded frog.
Can you not rescue her, as once the Dioscuri
Delivered their little sister Helen
From the cold embrace of the ageing Theseus?

APOLLO : Let me observe this virgin. Ah yes,
My all-seeing eye, which discerns the inner nature
Of things in heaven and earth, informs me who she is.
Lalage, child—for so you are called
By mortal men—know that among the gods
You are named Chrysophone: the youngest of the bright
Choir of Muses, that sing eternally
About the throne of Zeus.

MERCURY : Allow me to explain. Mnemosyne,
The Great Memory of the World, is the Mother of the Muses,
Nine sweet-voiced sisters whose immortal names
Are honoured far and wide by gods and men.
But Mnemosyne had a tenth daughter, the child
Of her old age; and, I regret to say,
In her old age, Mnemosyne
Grew somewhat absent minded. Walking one day
By the clear river of heaven, the streaming Galaxy,
She put the child down, intending
To take a brief siesta. But while she nodded
The infant slipped into the starry stream,
And was carried along to the limits of the sky,
Where it fell, like a glittering meteor, down to earth;
But none exactly knew upon what spot
Of earth the child landed. Ever since,
The gods have been looking everywhere for you.
Zeus has offered a reward of ten golden apples
To anyone who can find you. We shall claim that now.

APPOLLO : Lalage, you must ascend to heaven with us;
So say farewell to the frogs, and say farewell
To the marshy banks of Cam, and the learned Phyllidulus
Who has so kindly looked after you all these years.

LALAGE : So it's goodbye then. And I am half sorry to go;
And if Olympian regulations permit,
I shall come again to visit this western island,
And be its special Muse. And, by the lucid streams
Of Cam and Isis, Thames and Usk and Duddon,
And silver Trent, I'll seek out my elect
And favoured friends—young poets, dreaming
In chequered rides of sunlit woods,
On moon-touched mountains, or in foetid dens,
Urban or suburban; and I will teach them
The secrets of my new home,
Apollo's music, and swift Hermes' eloquence.

DAEGRAFN : Well, frogs, it seems you must be disappointed.
Lalage shall be bride to none of you. But put a good face on it.
Sing her a final chorus as she ascends—
A song in praise of this island she has chosen !

(The GODS, with LALAGE, begin to ascend in their machine.)

GWION : I will give you the tune, frogs.
Henry Purcell will compose it,
One day, for an opera on King Arthur.

CHORUS : Fairest Isle, all isles excelling,
Vironing the bogs and fens,
Here the Muse shall fix her dwelling,
And forsake Parnassian glens.

Phœbus, from his fav'rite nation
Shall remove (as he thinks fit)
All that curbs poetic passion,
Dullness, too, that stifles wit.

Every critic, as in duty,
To the poets shall be kind:
Those shall be the priests of beauty
These the prophets of the Mind.

DAEGRAFN : You begin to improve, little frogs, so be it.

PHYLLIDULUS : One has, if grudgingly, to concede that. But I
Have been made the protagonist of a shoddy farce—
An improper blend of the Old and the New Comedy.
I shall abandon these ungrateful tadpoles, and these soggy
fens,

And become a shepherd on the northern hills,
Instructing the woolly sheep with a hemlock pipe.

GWION : It would be better, Phyllidulus, if you would consent
To take up residence at the court of Artorius.
Our half-barbarous, half-Roman nobles
Could benefit from contact with a mind
Of critical discrimination.

PHYLLIDULUS : Well, perhaps,
One might bring oneself to consider that.
But Lalage is gone !

GWION : Where none of us can follow her.
But the way up is the way down—so Heraclitus says:
He who would seek the Muse, he who would seek
To marry himself to any kind of sovereignty,
Must make the descent down to the earth's centre,
To face his utmost fears, and his most secret anxieties.

DAEGRAFN : Come, my friend, it is time to continue the chase
Of the White Stag, of the unattainable.

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Come back, Calliope, at call; we have been straying
With some of your sisters down sylvan byways.
But now it is the solstice, and the sun in splendour,
Caught in the claws of the watery Crab,
At the topmost of his career turns at the tropic,
And at Midsummer moves to a retrograde motion.
This is the mansion of the Moon, and a time for mysteries:
This sign also signalled the beginning of my sojourn
Upon the earth, and by that augury I am oblique,
Cradled by the Crab, crustaceous and devious,
And moved by the subjective moods of Selene—
The more fitted, by that potency, for this project which I pass to;
To describe a descent to the depths of creation,
And Artorius even underneath the earth
Moving his wars; warily I make for it.

It is the Vigil of the Baptist; now bonfires are built
To feed and furnish the Sun with fire
At his height, and with heat for the ripening harvest.
But my scene is placed on the plain of Sarum,
In the huge circle of the hanging stones;
At the centre of a city of the dead, surrounded
By a vast necropolis of nameless notabilities,
The cairns and barrows of the kings of Britain,
Unmarked and unhonoured from utmost ages.
At midnight, the moon mysteriously casts down,
And lucidly, her cold and colourless light,
On two figures which I find there; and the first I recognise—
It is Artorius, indeed, in armour for his initiation,
As the moonlight glimmers and glances on his greaves.
But the other is of aspect more antique and more awe-ful,
Uncouth and unkempt, and crowned with oak leaves:
The son who had no human, as they say, for a sire,

An incubus of the air, that urged its embraces
On an enclosed vestal, vowed to virginity,
A Christian nun, clandestinely in the night.
It seems that the devils in their den had devised this,
That the actual Antichrist might issue upon earth,
Being brought to birth; but baptism forestalled it,
And frustrated the filthy politics of the fiends.
It is Merddyn, last master of the magian traditions
Which the Druids deliberated and divulged to their pupils,
Closely guarded in collegiate confraternities,
Among the stone circles and the solitary groves.

With authority he addressed the armoured Artorius:
'By the popular acclaim of the crown now, the crown
Will be placed upon your brow; to that power you are bidden—
Useless to avoid it; accept the anointing,
And the blessing that Bedwini the bishop shall confer on you.
But first you must be sent to find what you shall find,
To the centre of the earth, to shred off all your shells,
And know your own nakedness, and your utmost nothingness.
By stages descend through the deepest strata,
Through marl and minerals, to the heart of matter,
Formed at the first by the primæval fires,
Till finally you come to Ceridwen and her cauldron,
Where she sits at the centre; and seek her gift,
Your Luck—and may it last you as long as you live.

'Hold your heart high, for this is no hunting
Of the Erymanthian Boar, nor his bristly brother
The tusker Trwyth, I tell you. You go after
The subterranean Sow who consumes her farrow.
Do you accept this, Uther's son?' And Artorius made answer:
'If so your wisdom directs. But where is the way,
The gate through which I shall go to this grim descent?'
Merdyddyn replied, the magian master:
'Then entrance to the Underworld is everywhere and anywhere;
But we seek it here in the centre of this Circle.
And I put into your hand a passport to purvey you thither.'

Then he drew from the folds of his dress a flower,
Golden and bright; no botanist gathers it:
The flower of the fern, that is found only
In a timeless moment, at a Midsummer midnight.
He gave it to Artorius, who gazed upon it awestruck.
And he said: 'Touch with this that stone which you see
In the heart of the Henge; it was the high altar,
In times long since, of this temple of the Sun.'
Artorius obeyed the offspring of the incubus,

Touching the great block with that tremulous blossom;
 And with a rending at its roots the rugged slab
 Slowly reared up, sucking at the soil.
 And underneath was uncovered an enormous abyss,
 Darkness going down to the depths of the earth,
 Like an unplumbed well; in wonder he peered in,
 Nor shrank back in horror of the shadows that showed there.
 'I am ready to descend,' he said, 'But dearly would I desire
 You should go with me as my guide into that dim gulf—
 As the Cumæan Sybil, for his comfort companioned
 Our ancestor Aeneas exploring Avernus,
 Or as the sire, Africanus, Scipio in his *Somnium*.'
 'Or as Virgil himself,' said Merddyn, 'In a vision as yet
 unvouched.
 But I cannot undertake to guide you; it is not time for me to go
 Down into that womb, though one day I will—
 When the Sow, by her name of Nimue, shall ensnare me,
 And I am penned in her dungeon till the day of Doom;
 You will call them in vain for my comfort and my counsel.
 But I will send for a Guide, assigned for your going.'
 Then Merddyn forthwith put two fingers in his mouth,
 With a shrill, sharp whistle, just as a shepherd
 Summons his dog to his side to do him service.
 Then silently, silhouetted in the silver of the moonlight,
 A shadowy shape showed itself to their gaze,
 Stepping from behind the standing stones.
 The form was human, but its forehead and face
 The pointed muzzle of a dog, a prick-eared pariah,
 Such as haunts in cemeteries, on solitary hillsides.
 Cringingly, the creature crouched before Merddyn,
 Who playfully patted it, with the palm of his hand,
 And, turning to Artorius: 'Accept this towser—
 Hermes, Psychopomp of the highroad to Hades,
 Acknowledged anciently in Egypt as Anubis.
 You will find this fellow a faithful conductor;
 For he serves the Sphinx, the Strangler below.'
 Artorius with Anubis, entering into that emptiness,
 Down into the gulf descending with his guide.
 Through grinding gravel, and gritty sand,
 They climbed down, clutching at clinging root stocks.
 Then the citizens of the subsoil all about surrounded them,
 With the faces of infants and feeble accents—
 The annulose Earthworm, the Ant and the Earwig,
 The mucous Slug, the Snail and the Centipede,
 The Cockroach, the Dor-beetle, and the Devil's Coach-horse,

The Burying Beetle, the Wood-louse and the Blaps,
 The maggot of the Blow-fly, the Millipede, and the Mole-cricket
 With Truffles and Toadstools, and tiny Bacteria;
 Eagerly and avidly, encircling Anubis,
 Crying: 'Daddy, you have brought us a delicious dinner,
 He is fresh and fleshy, and full of blood;
 We will munch him with our mandibles, and mumble him with our
 labia!'

'Patience, my children, my pretty poppets!'
 Anubis answered that assembly, 'Enough!
 I bring no dead man, darlings, to dine with you.
 We make no stay here, but into the sterile stone
 We must force our way firmly and so wend further.'
 Then they struck into the substance of the solid minerals,
 As divers through the waters divide the waves;
 They cleft the Cretaceous and Carboniferous strata,
 The Permian, the Liassic, and the lithographic limestone,
 To the depths of the dusty Devonian, and the Ordovician.
 No life was left there, but long-dead relics—
 The fossils of a fearsome pre-Adamite fauna
 Silently slumbered in sempiternal oblivion.
 But they awoke in wonderment at the unwonted intrusion;
 In a macabre saraband the monsters surrounded them:
 The dunderheaded Diplodocus, with all the tribe of Dinosaurs,
 The Stegosaurus, and the spindly Struthiomimus,
 The horned Triceratops, and the terrible Tyrannosaurus,
 The Ichthyosaurus, the Iguanodon, the Ichthyornis, and the
 Archæopteryx,
 The monstrous Mastodon, and the Megatherium,
 The Sabre-toothed Tiger, and the savage Smilodon,
 And, pathetically half-human, at their head, the Pithecanthropus.
 Hollowly they hailed the traveller from the Holocene:
 'Stay with us, in our wonderful and static world,
 While silently and steadily the geological centuries,
 Unmarked, march on, over your magnificent bones,
 Till the palaeontologists exhume you, and put you on exhibition
 In a glass case in a museum for the masses to gawp at!'
 But Anubis, the good barker, bayed at those animals,
 Sharply snapping at their shanks and their shin-bones:
 'Traipse off, you riff-raff, you rejects of Time!
 And to Artorius he exclaimed: 'In these ante-chambers of Annwyn
 It is not convenient to linger. Cast off your carapace.
 To the first circle I send you and what you shall find there.'
 Darkness came down, and consciousness departed;
 In an unknown environment Artorius awoke—

In a stable stinking of the stale of horses—
Age-long accumulations of excremental effluvia,
Fæcal matter, muck and merds.
In that fœtid mansion he found himself mastered
To shovel away the shit, and to try to shift it.
But the more he laboured, the loathsome mess
Piled up in heaps, horrible and putrescent,
Till stupefied by the stench, he faltered and swooned away.
But dimly he heard the dog-headed divinity—
'I send you further, to the second circle.'

Artorius stood in a summer arbour,
Golden with sunlight, and the gladsome song
Of garden warblers, linnets, goldfinches and larks;
In a corner of that garden, in courtship of a girl,
A stripling stood, strumming upon a lute.
But the sense of his song, and the words he was singing,
Eluded Artorius; eagerly he advanced,
Hoping he might hear that haunting stave.
But suddenly, from the bushes, a swarm of birds
Flew out, fluttering, with ferocious cries,
Attacking him, and clutching with their clammy talons,
Beating him with their wings, and their beaks for weapons.
That ugly onslaught exhausted Artorius;
He faltered and fell, but the barker followed up:
'Think yourself summoned to the third circle!'

When Artorius again awoke, was extended
To his vision a vast and vaulted hall,
Consecrate to justice; and to judgment he was come.
In the hushed and solemn silence he saw
A pair of scales, with pans of silver,
Set up upon a stage, and standing beside it
A being, that balanced the ponderous cross-beam;
Human the hands and the body which it boasted,
From the shoulders it showed the shape of a bird—
The neck a whimbrel's or a whaup's, and the neb;
The figure of a crescent flashed on the forehead.
In long garments of linen, gravely
Ministers moved, and mounted to that balancer,
Holding in their hands the hearts of men,
Watchfully to be poised and weighed in those pans.
In awe and astonishment Artorius anxiously,
And in wonder, watched that weighing; till, at length,
A minister, as it seemed, in silence marched
To where he was standing, stark as a stone,
Who held in his hand the haft of a knife

With a fine blade, and formed of the flint;
And suddenly struck, swiftly, at his breast,
And cut out the heart, complete from his carcass—
Yet he did not die, but heartless still, descried
How it fluttered like a bird, in its frantic beating,
As that other held it in his hands aloft,
And bore it to the bird-headed god with the balances;
Finally to be weighed against a frail feather,
A white one, from the wide wing of Truth.

Then numbly he knew the necessity—on those scales
His living heart must lightly be lifted,
And the feather be forced by its weight to fall,
Or judgment in justice be enjoined. Then he saw,
Crouched by those balances, a beast, like a crocodile,
And half hippopotamus, with hideous jaws,
Ready to devour when his doom was recorded.
In a horror of darkness he heard it divulged—
The sound, not the sense; then suddenly, behind him,
The voice, vouchsafed, of the vigilant Anubis:
'From this sentence you are sent to the fourth circle!'

On a wide plain, whipped by the wind,
He found himself running, and full and round
The Hunter's Moon hung in the heavens;
Not running alone, but around him a rout
Of men and women, moaning and wailing.
Fair had been their faces, and their flesh, but now
Passion had pined them, and pinched and distorted.
And some, in that vision, that he viewed he seemed
To know and to number, but most were unknown:
With streaming tresses, Sappho and Semiramis,
Catullus and Clodia, Cynthia, and Corinna,
Tibullus with his Delia, Delilah, and Dido,
The incestuous Myrrha, Messalina, and Medea,
Diarmuid and Graine, Deirdre, and Gwendolen,
White-breasted Bronwen, and the blossom-faced Blodeuwodd
With Llew her lord, and many more of the lost.
Through thickets and through thorns precipitously they thrust,
In their terror and their torment, at the sound of the tally-ho
They heard behind them, and the red-eared hounds
Which Gwynn, son of Nudd, through those northern glades
Set upon their scent; through hail and through sleet,
Frantically and frenziedly they fled into the darkness.
Till the barking of another Dog through that dimness bayed:
'To the fifth circle go down, and find a further defeat!'

Artorius, in armour, in an open arena

Stood, and perceived, opposing him, positioned
An immense array, an army of eunuchs
And bearded hermaphrodites—battalions of half-men;
At the head of this host, imperial and hieratic
A female figure, in formal vestments
Bedizened with diamonds, with dark eyes glaring.
Fiercely, their fiery darts they discharged,
Filling the heavens with flakes of flame,
Against Artorius; then that august Empress
(Who had once been a harlot for the whomasters of the
Hippodrome)

Shifted her crouching shape to a Cat's,
The monstrous Malkin, ferociously miauling,
Pelug, a deadly and Dianic pussy.
Craftily she crouched, then pounced with claws
Extended and eager on Artorius in that area,
Breaking his spine—he lay senseless, but somewhere
A prim and pedantic and prosy voice,
In a lengthy discourse growing louder and louder,
For futurity defined his defeat and his failure.
Then the bark of Anubis broke in on that bore;
'To the sixth circle go down, the most searing.'

A winter wood—windless, but snow
Hung on the branches and the hollow boles,
Glittering and gleaming coldly through the glade.
From a bush of holly a hideous boar
Rushed upon the man, robbing him of his manhood,
Tearing at his testicles with its scything tusks.
From a thicket of ivy then issued another—
A female form, with hairy flanks,
Shameless and nude, with the nipples of a nanny-goat.
She embraced that brute, unbridled and amorous.
Impotent, and in pain, he witnessed the postures
Of that salacious satyress and her swinish paramour.

Then Artorius, in anguish, to Anubis: 'Is this the end?
Have I reached the butt and the bottom of these rounds?'

Anubis answered: 'Artorius, awaits you
The seventh circle. That also you must suffer.'

In mizzling rain and in rolling mist,
He lay, at his length on a lonesome plain.
A field of battle, and feebly through the fog
The moans and the death-rattles of dying men.
A fearful, fervid, and feverish thirst
Tormented his tongue. In that terrible agony
He craved for a cup, and cried for water.

Then it seemed, among those butchered that Bedwyr,
his butler,

The man that most of all men had loved him,
Came and approached him, carrying a cup,
But leering lewdly, with a loose-lipped mouth.
The cup of water that he wanted he clasped,
And lifted it to his lips, but loathingly he shrank back,
Struck by the stale stench of the blood
That cruelly tainted it, and tinged it with crimson.

At that bafflement, Bedwyr, with a brash enunciation:
'Sup it up, Cæsar—a suitable potation:
On the blood of the people plenteously you have battened.'
In the horror of that humiliation he heard, yet once more,
The growls of Anubis, the gruff guide-dog:
'To the eighth circle I send you, and the uttermost.'

He found himself submerged in a subterranean sea;
Cephalopods and hydroids, sea-anemones and holothurians
Groped with their ghastly and gristly feelers;
Tentatively he was touched by their coiling tentacles,
Mumbled by their horny and horrible mouths.
Dreadfully, as an oyster is drunk, he was devoured;
His body melted, his marrow and his bones.
The glutinous hag-fish glided into his guts,
Insidiously eating him inwardly.

'Artorius, awake!'—the accents of Anubis—
'From this darkness descend, from this total diminishment!
Cast your last shell in the cave of Ceridwen.'

In a long gallery, lit by the glimmer
Of crystals of quartz and carbuncles, Artorius
Stood astounded, stark as he was born,
Still clutching in his fist the flower of the fern.
Distantly through the dimness he discerned a light,
At the other end in an enormous archway—
The bright flicker of flames (by the breath
Of nine maidens mysteriously ignited);
A copper cauldron was set on those coals—
Through the steam continually streaming from it was distinguished,
Fitfully, what seemed a female figure:
Ceridwen, the mother and mistress of that kingdom.
Awe-ful, and unspeakably ugly her appearance:
Full-face her visage, but two vipers formed
With their heads in profile, a horrific portrait;
Around her neck a necklace noisomely displayed
A chain of skulls, suitable for a charnel,
With severed hands, horribly suspended;

Her own hands were claws, hooked and cruel;
No garment, but at her waist a gruesome girdle
Of hanging snakes that harshly sibilated—
Livelily those reptiles writhed and lashed.
At the aspect of that august one, Anubis advanced,
Fawning like a favourite dog at her feet.

Artorius gazed at that great goddess—
It seemed for centuries—in silence; then a voice
Hoarsely was heard from that ghastly head:
'Artorius, Uther's son, adventured into Annwyn,
I have chosen you, child, if the choice be yours.
By numerous names I am known among men,
In many lands, and in multifarious languages;
In these islands I am argent and astral Arianrod,
Creiddylad, and Modron, and the crow-faced Morigan,
Rhiannon, and Danau the dark deemstress,
And many more; but those who most
Firmly and fearlessly have looked on my face
Know that my name is *Rerum Natura*.
As Ceridwen I am guardian of this great cauldron,
This grail, the gift which I grant you for your luck.
Will you take, Artorius, in trust this talisman?'

Artorius answered the arbitress of Annwyn:
'Princely one, I will take it—but what price must I pay?'
Croakingly then came the voice of Ceridwen:
'Look into the steam. Look well, and see.'
Visionary shadows shifted in the vapour:
He beheld once more the mound of Badon—
One with his own face stood there with his followers;
It seemed that Cerdic still led the Saxons;
But as both their bands were joined in the battle
The issue was altered, to another outcome:
The Brythons fled, and the fierce barbarians
Drove them from the field, in disarray and defeat.
Then the voice of Ceridwen vibrated through the cavern:
'Look further yet; learn of futurity.'

He saw into the steam; you, too, know what he saw—
The horrors of history, huddling through the years,
Endlessly extended through oncoming ages:
The White Worm he saw driving the Red Worm
Westward to its den in the desolate wilderness;
The shapes of the ships that dragon-like shifted,
Avenging, over the eastern ocean,
From the larch and fir-clad fjords of Lochlin—
The raven of the Vikings raucously victorious;

Then the king of the Saxons slain at Senlac;
The Norman bastard, and his noble brigands,
Oppressing with tolls the poor and the peasantry;
The Red King carried on the collier's cart;
The blood of Becket, the bishop in Canterbury;
Hideously he heard the hollow screams
Of Berkeley and Pontefract, of pitiful butchery;
He saw the people pinched by famine and by pestilence,
And Jack Straw's falchion in the flesh of the Flemings;
The raging of the Roses, the white one and the red one,
In the wasteful wilderness, and the wanted crown
Hanging on a bush, the hawthorn of Bosworth,
The monstrous Tudor mightily towering—
In schism, the shrines shattered and dishallowed;
The headless bodies of the Bullen and the Howard,
The smoke and the torments of Tyburn and Smithfield;
A pedantic Solomon slobbering over Steenie,
And the neck of his son outstretched on the scaffold;
Cumberland in the carnage of the moor of Culloden,
And the sluggish succession—a saturnian age
Of lead and gold—of the loutish Guelphs,
The Germanic Georges, heavily jowled;
New Troy become Sidon and Tyrus and the sons
And daughters of Albion enslaved in the darkness
Of the satanic mills, for the mansions of Mammon.

And through the whole of those showings, the howls and the
shrieks
Of war, like a wind, wuthered and blustered;
Till in the mud of Flanders and the Marne, the flower
Of the manhood of Britain was bogged down in murder;
And the fury of flames fell upon London,
Scorching and searing the Augustan city.

Like a ship, offshore, with shattered masts,
Battered and betrayed, the island of Britain,
Through the thickening dusk of a third Dark Age,
Drifted into dimness in a tedious decline,
With two rival crews of contending rats.

Came through the cavern the voice of Ceridwen,
Asking: 'Do you accept, Artorius?' And he 'I accept.'
'Then take me, and give me in token of that gift,
One kiss on my lips, of your love and of your courage;
You may find me less unlovely and less foul than you fear.'
He heard the goddess, and aghast he hesitated;
Then stepped forward steadfastly on the stones of the cave,
And embraced her in his arms in all her ugliness,

And kissed that cruel and uncomely mouth.

An intense flash of flame enfolded them:
He found himself in a green and flowering garden;
Around him were lilies and royal roses;
The swish of fountains, and the sweet fluting
Of song-birds saluted him, and ravished his senses;
He embraced in his arms, amazed and enchanted,
A graceful girl, in the gladness of her youth,
Garlanded, in a loose gown of silk.
'My name,' she said, 'Now know as Sovereignty.
I will serve you, my prince, sweetly for a season;
And lightly give you this Luck for my gift.'

Laughingly she held out to him, in her left hand,
A crystal cup, clearer than moonlight,
And in her right, a bright and burnished blade,
A sword of steel, strongly tempered.
'Keep this well,' she said, and call it Caliburn;
While your luck holds fast, it will not fail you in fight.'

Intenser and more brilliant the brightness blazed,
Seeming to consume with its sweetness the senses,
Till consciousness departed in that dazzling clarity.

When Artorius awoke, he was aware
Of the stark outlines of the circle of stones.
The altar stone was lying where for long ages it had lain.
The moon was setting over the mounds of Sarum.
His armour was heavy on him, but in his hands he held
That cup of crystal, and the great sword Caliburn,
And a brown and bloomless frond of bracken.
Merddyn awaited him, the master of his wanderings
Through the caverns below to the court of Ceridwen—
But those visions in the darkness vanished now like dreams,
Sinking, seminal, to the depths of his soul.

'Look now,' said Merddyn, 'At length the light
Of dawn is silvering the skirts of the sky.
The sun will be hoisted, soon over the Heel Stone,
To signal the moment of the Midsummer Solstice.
Come, you must go to your crowning at Cærlleon;
The blessing of Bedwini the bishop, and the anointing,
The diaconal stole designate to you for service
Of the imperium in this island. August be the omens.
Look well to your Luck, and keep it while it lasts you,
And the sword likewise: see, in these, symbols
Of the active and passive principles of power.'



Tangling in the Lion's mane,
The Sun, cast up from the Underworld,
Swelters the Cæsarean month; where now
Kronion, gatherer of the clouds,
Directs his rumbling car across
The arid vault of the air, the unsickled fields. And I,

Tutor to all intelligences,
Frame for the diaconal
Anointing, a strophic pæan; for, Samson, you set
Your torch-tailed foxes, aflame
Among the Philistine corn
Bring sweetness out of the lion's strength, as you assume

The radial and imperial diadem:
Victor, son of Scorcher, diaconal
Son of the griddle, remember
What treasure it is you husband.

Victor of the May Day hawthorn,
Remember your course is set towards the Scorpion's
Claws, and the resurgence of your adversary.
The storm-god, with his hammer, drives above,
Breaking the heads of the dragons of the deep,
Releasing the waters of the firmament; and so must you

Sluice out the stables of your land
And turn the straw to sweeten in
The universal justice of the sun's great eye.
The bride, the sister of the corn,
Journeys now across the Gallic
And ripening fields. Bridegroom, prepare to greet her then, as Zeus,

When regal and virginal Hera stood alone
Upon the glacial summit of Ida—he raised
A sudden and seasonal storm,
With mist, and battering hail.

Then Zeus assumed the form of a grey
Cuckoo, with a catch in its throat; bedraggled,
And shivering in the unmerciful rain he flew to her:
The scornful and inaccessible queen
In pity took the seductive traitor
Into her breast, to warm him. The clouds dispersed, and all the
luxurious

Flowers of the summer cast away their
Vivid corollas to deck their couch.
Now spread for the people the banquet of your opulence:
Your cup-bearer stands before you, ready
To pour the new wine and the mead.
Scour and sluice the cup. Honour ascended Astræ.

In July prepare to fly, beyond the solstice
Where the Scorcher is trapped in the bag, and baited
Like a honey-badger; the sun-king
Shorn of his locks, and blinded.



Hermes, master of the roads, is the tutelar of all those who cross frontiers. His is the standing stone of the cairn to which each traveller adds his pebble so that a landmark may remain. By that stone, in the silent trade, are left goods for others to come and take, and leave what they think a fair equivalent; therefore he is Mercury of the mercatores. Patron of thieves also, for they likewise make silent excursion into alien territory; and immediately he had been born he went as a cattle-reever to carry off the oxen of his brother, Apollo. The herald, in his diplomatic immunity, goes under his protection, with his eloquence and his ribbon-bound staff. And he is also the guide of souls on their last journey to the house of Hades.

Alliance between peoples is sealed by exchange of gifts, and exchange of women as brides. After Artorius had received the imperial crown of Britain in the City of the Legions, those who counselled him held it fitting that he should take a wife, so that he might beget an heir. It was determined that he should marry Guanhumara, the daughter of Leodegrance, the king of Massilia in Gaul. They said to Artorius, 'Let the courteous Gwalchmai, your sister's son, be sent to seal the treaty, and to conduct the lady to this island.' But Artorius said, 'I cannot spare Gwalchmai from my wars.' Then Modred, Gwalchmai's younger brother, said 'Sir, let me go.' He was so charming that it is told of him that no one could refuse any request that he made, and Artorius regarded him with special affection. Artorius said, 'By all means let Modred go on this errand. We hear that Guanhumara is an accomplished lady, and Modred has some skill in music and poetry and will be able to entertain her on her tedious journey.' Eugenius said, 'That seems an excellent notion. But Modred is young, and only amateur in these matters. I move that the learned Phyllidulus should accompany him. Then the grammarians of Massilia will recognise that we are not without solid scholarship even in remote Britain.' This plan was generally agreed

on, and, with a suitable escort of fighting men, Modred and Phyllidulus were despatched to Gaul.

Leodegrance, with his men-at-arms, rode out with his daughter, and the waiting women who were to accompany her to Britain, from his city of Massilia. That city had been founded in ancient times as a colony of Greeks from Ephesus; their patroness was the many-breasted Great Mother of Asia. The appointed meeting-place was at the mouth of the River Rhône, where stands the shrine of the Three Marys of the Sea, *Matres Gallix*. For the Jews had put them on the sea in a rudderless and sailless boat, and they drifted to that spot. And with them was their black servant, the Egyptian Sara: the dark moon, honoured by outcasts and vagabonds, tinkers and itinerant smiths, fortune-tellers, horse-thieves and musicians. To pay his respects to her, Modred descended to the unconsecrated crypt which had been a Mithræum. He said, 'Inspire me, Muse,' but what other prayers he uttered is not reported. Phyllidulus did not go with him. He remained in the clear air, for he worshipped Apollo Maponos, bright god of day.

When Modred had received Guanhumara, on behalf of Artorius, from her father King Leodegrance, they set out on their northward journey along the valley of the Rhône. Curious birds, pelicans, flamingoes and purple coots, looked at them from between the reeds as they passed. Under the burning southern sun they crossed the desert of the Camargue, and came at length to the fertile lands of central Gaul. They saw olives and vines, and corn ripe for the harvest, the gift of kindly Ceres. On a certain day they rested at noon in the shade of a grove of poplars. The cicadas sang in the heat, and the crested lark from the top of a broken stone wall. Then Guanhumara said to Modred, 'Have you any skill in music?' And he replied, 'I have such skill, and I will sing if it please you. Music lightens a journey, and we hope it may sound along our last journey on the roads of the dead. You are about to cross the frontier from the unmarried to the married state, and music will serve for that passage also. I will sing you a song in praise of the married state, a song of a scholar and the birds; and I will sing it also for the learned Phyllidulus.' Then he took his lute and began to sing:—

He sat within a vernal grove
Where birds were practising their scales,
His problems, poverty and love,
Exhaling to the conscious gales;
The conscious gales did not reply,
Of course, but the officious birds,
In loud and various harmony,
Answered his words, answered his words.

'If I pursue the abstract Muse,
A difficult and thankless task,
Will all her gifts the world refuse
(Though little it may be I ask)
Until at length I'm bent and balding?
What then shall my dry senses please?'
Replied the monotonous Yellow Yalding:
'A little bit of bread and no cheese!'

'Perhaps, like most, I'll find instead
That flesh and blood will do as well
To bless my board, and grace my bed—
But how to win her, who can tell?'
It was the jolly speckled Thrush
That heard his weak despondent sigh,
And hollowed from an ivy-bush:
'Cheer up, cheer up, cheerily, never say die!'

'The hard and learned terms I own
Are not the ones with which to greet her;
My tongue must catch a different tone
If I encountered such a creature.'
The bachelor Chaffinch on the spray
(His was a joyful note to hear)
Taught him the words that he must say:
'Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet come kiss me dear!'

'Kind birds, you tell me how to choose,
Partly direct the way to woo;
I know what language I must use,
But language spent, what's then to do?'
The little greenish Willow Wren,
With tones that none could have denied
And silver liquid chimes came in:
'Ah, lay her down, adown, adown, adown.' it sighed.

'My feathered friends, I'll take your cue,
When time and place, and chance appoint—
And all that after may ensue;
But how am I to reach that point?'
The plump dactylisonant quail
Taught him how he should come to it;
Among the grass roots told the tale
Of 'Bit by bit, bit by bit.'

'But love is jealousy and pain ;
 With doubtful anguish I am vexed.
 Can so much risk be worth the gain—
 Perhaps the Cuckoo answers next?'
 A Ring Dove, sensible and fat,
 On beech-mast corn, and acorns fed,
 Lifted its head, and told him flat:
 'You fool you, you fool you, you!' it said.

'Inhuman birds, who are involved
 Only in the instinctive minute,
 When shall my question be resolved—
 You seem to find no problem in it?'
 A Raven, on the topmost oak,
 Watching, keen-eyed, for things to die,
 Opened its sable bill, and spoke:
 'In hora mortis' was its cry.

Guanhumara thanked him for his song. 'I found that charming,' she said, 'But the learned Phyllidulus will be able to express a more considered judgment on the merits of your poem.'

'Since you ask my opinion,' said Phyllidulus, 'I fear one must say that it is an emotionally dishonest and self-indulgent piece. What is it supposed to say? On one level of interpretation the birds appear to put forward a plan of action of doubtful moral validity. Or, if, on the other hand, we are to consider the birds as unfallen creatures, not subject to a morality incumbent upon Man, then their advice can be of no possible service to the scholar. I will say nothing of the too easy slackness of the rhythm, nor of the provincial affectation of calling a yellowhammer a yellow yalding for the sake of a rhyme which has, anyway, a certain touch of, may one venture to call it, vulgarity about it, except that such want of discipline is the correlative of the intellectual slackness which appears to pervade the entire conception. You make the raven talk Latin: the macaronic depends for its effect on a kind of scholarly in-group humour, which is not only pedantic but presents social implications which one must deprecate; and in any case, the phrase given to the raven does not, to my ear at least, seem, in any effectual way to reproduce the cry of that bird—which I presume to be the rather pointless intention of the author in the closing line of each of his stanzas.'

'Come,' said Modred mildly, 'You are not now lecturing to your tadpoles. But I will endeavour something on rather more intellectual lines, which may stand up better under your scrutiny.' So, laying his lute aside, and looking ardently upon the princess Guanhumara, he spoke the following quatrains:

[50]

When Jove, and his two brothers, in their rage,
 Their sire, old Saturn, from Olympus hurled,
 Astræa, weeping, left the stricken world,
 And from our earth faded the Golden Age;

She stands among the constellations:
 So do not ask for Justice here below—
 Justice is gone, and Earth's proud rulers now
 Chastise us with their whips and scorpions.

Justice is gone. But Mercy has her seat,
 Ladies, within those other stars your eyes:
 It may be granted for a lover's sighs,
 To him, and her that grants it, proving sweet.

'One cannot say' said Phyllidulus, 'That one is aware of anything approaching serious intellectual activity in these lines. The first two stanzas are nothing more than a piece of stale mythologising, and the diction throughout is flat and conventional—their sire, old Saturn,' 'Astræa, weeping' and so forth. What is the distinction between 'the stricken world' and 'our earth?' If there is none, this is a tautology; and 'from Olympus hurled' is an ugly and awkward inversion. The connection of the final stanza with the rest appears to me to be spurious, as well as morally suspect. Granted the idea that perfect justice is something not to be discerned in any contemporary social situation, the facile romantic solution suggested by the concluding lines is no solution at all. Mature sensibility would recognise that it does not absolve us from the necessity of seeking to establish and of maintaining some sort of social order, however imperfect. To this end the relaxed emotions to which the poem's conclusion points us would, one is obliged to say, in no way conduce. Frankly, one is disturbed.'

'Well,' said Guanhumara, 'It must be very nice to be so clever. I liked Modred's poem, but you seem to have got far more meaning out of it than I was able to do. But the sun is now declined from his midday height, and I think we had better proceed on our journey.'

They went on their way, the two young people slyly laughing together at that bumbling marsh-bird, the old butterbump of the fens as he was. They went on along the valleys of the Rhône and the Loire until they reached the port of Burdigala, where they took ship for Britain. And Modred delivered to Artorius his kore, his corn-dolly, his færie queene.

* * *

[51]

The nuptials of Artorius were celebrated with great pomp at Carlisle. He held his court there that year, for there were rumours that the Picts were mustering beyond the wall of Hadrian. And after Gwion had sung his epithalamium, the planet Venus was shining brightly in the soft sky of a summer evening.

A kite, a long-tongued magpie, and a hoody crow, Stymphalian birds, perched by the midden behind the castle. And this was the song they sang:

THE KITE : Chicken bones, and beef bones,
And bones of the mountain deer—
Fragments of a royal feast
Make us royal cheer.
Fat of mutton, fat of pork,
And yellow goose's fat—
Shall we dine richer, sisters,
Daintier than that?

THE MAGPIE : Better than that, sisters—listen
To tattling Margot Pie,
Who can perch on window sills,
Who can peep and spy.
A worthy king—but not so young—
Has taken a youthful wife:
May such a match breed jealousy?
Jealousy breeds strife.

THE HOODY CROW : Hark to my prophetic voice,
The chooser of the slain:
I see a bloody field of war,
In January rain.
Marrow-fat, and marrow-bones
Such pickings are delight;
But a fairer prize is the fine blue eyes
Of young men fallen in fight.

This was their song. None heard it, but an old blind beggar, who had crawled to the midden to feed on the scraps from the feast. He had no name but Poverty, lying at the door of Justice.



At the autumnal equinox, in even opposition,
The bright and heavenly Balances hold
The softness of summer and the savagery of winter;
As on a field of fighting, the fierce tides
Doubtfully turn, in indecisive tumult.
Yet the doom of Summer is sealed, though the sun
Suffuses the landscape serenely with light.
There is an edge of death in the dank air,
And the fading leaves, as listlessly they fall.
The swallow and the swift, and the sylvan warblers
Have moved off on migration; no more is heard
The note of the nightingale, nor the nightjar's churning,
The calling of the cuckoo, nor the dry-voiced corncrake;
Richly the apples ripen in the orchards;
The harvest is garnered and hauled into granges;
Geese are set in the stubble to glean,
With relish, the residue of the reaped grain,
Fattening their flesh for the feast of Michaelmas.

Such was the season when Myrddyn suddenly
Came to the king, Artorius, in his court.
The wizard addressed these words to Ymherawdr:
'Confide no more in my counsel and my comfort;
The time is near; for Nimue the nightmare
Summons me to her secret and subterranean kingdom.
I must abide there in darkness till the Day of Doom;
The sweet sunlight will see me no more
On the upper earth, nor the air embrace me.

Listen to my words, the last of my wisdom:
In the sign of the Ram, in the raging slaughter
Of the field of Badon, the four-sided fortress,
You prosecuted war for the promotion of peace,
Establishing externally the order of empire;

In the sign of the Bull, the bishops in synod
 Determined by dogma the *limes* of doctrine;
 In the sign of the Twins, song and sentence,
 The lines of communication, by your laureates were cleared;
 The conduits of rhetoric were cleansed of rubble:
 The frogs of the fens found their vocabulary;
 In the sign of the Crab, I sent you to Ceridwen,
 From the maddening moonlight to the Mother's cauldron,
 To face your futurity, and encounter your fears
 And your utmost anxieties—an inner order
 Was created in that descent to the darkness of her cavern;
 In the sign of the Lion, the loud suffrage
 And the plea of the people prompted you to your crowning;
 In the sign of the Virgin, this was validated by the solemnity
 Of wedlock to a bride—the wine and bread
 And the common cup, signify the completeness,
 The consummation of life: to the crowned couple
 The guests do homage, in gladness of that grace:
 May the screaming birds of scandal be sent
 To their Stymphalian marsh, nor mar that merriment.

‘Now is the time for this knowledge to be translated
 Into forms of government, to guide those who follow;
 That stability of the state may stand the firmer,
 And a code of law be left to the land.
 Summon then to council your senators and your commons,
 To deliberate and determine, in form of debate,
 Wisely and lucidly—of weight and learning,
 Knowledgeable for this matter: I shall not be of the number.’

Artorius, with awe, answered his utterance:
 ‘Legislation lodges in the letter that killeth;
 For the hardness of the heart it is held a necessity;
 But, as who trusts in the sword by the sword shall be slain,
 Who leans on the law shall be judged by the Law.
 I call to my memory that merciless king,
 Feasting in Babylon; but fingers of flame
 Scrawled on the stonework the sentence of his doom:
 “You are weighed in the balance, and wanting, Belshazzar!”
 In that night he was slain, and the sovereignty was to Cyrus.’

Myrddyn, the master, answered his misgivings:
 ‘Justice is fixed on no firmer a foundation
 Than a fallible construct, for the conservation of freedom;
 Apart from her arbitration, in error and anguish,
 We wander in the wildness of the primæval wood,
 Treacherous and trackless; and terrifying beasts,
 Monsters whose dens are in the mind of man,

Perilously couch there—Passion and Pride.
 Remember Minos, who mightily and marvellously
 Reigned at Knossos, in the realm of Crete:
 With the sails of his galleons he swayed the seas
 And the isles of the Aegean, and even Athens
 Was a feudatory fief, in fear of that potentate;
 He laid on them his rule, and the laws he received
 From the divine Distributor, in the cavern of Dictæ.
 In the halls of the dead he is held now as doomster,
 With righteous Rhadamanthus, rigid and incorruptible,
 And Aeacus also, acting as assessors.
 Yet lust and covetousness came upon that king:
 The bull he had promised as a present for Poseidon,
 To be slaughtered in sacrifice, he slyly withheld,
 Captivated by its beauty, he kept it in his byre.
 But his queen, likewise, was caught up by love
 Of that horned brute, by a hideous and heinous
 Stratagem she sought to solace her desire;
 Begotten of her body, was brought forth the Minotaur,
 The loathsome man-eater, that was lodged in the labyrinth,
 Where Theseus subsequently sought it out and slew it.
 But the ravished ruminant, in rabid must,
 Went raging and rampaging round about the island,
 Destroying the cities in seismic disturbance,
 Till Heracles butchered the horrible beast:
 You have learned the lot of Minos the lawgiver—
 How animality injured that island emperor.

‘But supposing the story has a different significance?—
 Maybe by the labyrinth is meant the law,
 With all its tortuosities, its illogical turns,
 Containing the monster of cruelty and malice.
 The cunning Dædalus was the craftsman who designed it:
 The favoured fosterling of Hephæstus the farrier
 (The only honest Olympian, who alone
 Toiled, though lame, at a trade for his living).
 Put in that dungeon for his part in devising
 That prurient subterfuge for salacious Pasiphæe,
 He escaped, issuing into the upper air
 Flying on wide-spread wings of feathers;
 Reasonably, he ranged through the middle regions
 Of atmosphere, but Icarus, exalted and enjoying
 The new sensation, soared to the sphere
 Of the blazing sun, but those burning beams
 Mollified the wax of his wings, and they melted—
 Downwards he crashed in disaster to death.

Alas for Icarus, alas for all
Young men men who fly too fast and too far,
Too superbly soaring, so near the sun!
I leave you to negotiate the labyrinth of law,
And ponder this fable. So, farewell my friend.
'By your departure,' said Artorius, 'I also am diminished.'

It came thus about, that were called together for conference
Rulers and ruled, from the regions of Britain—
A motley congeries: from Celtic clans,
Hereditary holders of hillside raths,
With men of their tribes, a mixture of tongues,
And some who claimed senatorial status,
And relics, by tradition, of Roman rank;
A few traders, who forwarded their traffic
In sea ports undestroyed, or cities undeserted.

Lud's town, London now lay for a season,
With the region adjacent, in the rule of Artorius.
The congress was convened on the hill (Cornhill
Subsequently to be denominated under Saxon dominion),
In the Church of Michael, which memory maintained
Lucius, that lord, who first in this land
Embraced and established by his authority, the Evangel
Of the Prince of Peace, had founded for his people.

On the westward wall was displayed for worship
An image of the Assize of the end of the ages:
The Judge Tremendous, with tokens of terror
And majesty of mercy, was enthroned in the midmost,
On the clouds in glory—were gathered the goats
And the sheep for deeming, sharply divided,
At the sides of His seat; and before Him was set
A pair of balances with brazen pans,
Where Michael, the bird-winged minister and messenger,
Poised for scrutiny the small souls;
Lower down on the left, loathsome Hell,
Cavernous jowled, with crocodile jaws,
Grim and gluttonous, gaped for the reprobate.

Artorius addressed the assembled auditors:
'Friends and colleagues, we are come here to consider
A matter of moment—the making of Law,
And the framing of a polity to preserve our freedom:
Stability of the state, and the establishment of justice.

'Essentially law is love in action:
It is Venus that grants this—that gracious goddess,
Sprung from the foam of the Cyprian seas;
She who couples the beasts in covert and brake,

The birds of the air, and bride with bridegroom,
Sets her seal on the social bond
Of human solidarity, as habitants of cities.
Aphrodite, like Athene, is exhibited in armour,
Not necessarily like a naked hetaira,
No shameless profligate, but protectress of the *polis*,
And memorialised as the mighty mother of Rome.
Not the hot and hurtful Ares is her husband
(Though sometimes she goes whoring with that handsome sargeant)—
The gods in council consulted on her case;
In their wit they assigned her as wife to the Artificer,
The muscular Vulcan, the master of metallurgy,
Lame, and labouring on Lemnos—smeared
With the sweat of his forge, and the smoke of his fires.
On the anvil of Hephæstus it behoves us to hammer out
The forms of the framework we design, not forgetting
The wisdom of Aphrodite that overlooks the work.

'Let each of you set forth his sentence on this subject,
Urging, from experience, what we ought to aver,
What form of polity it is fitting we proclaim;
But first in this concourse I call on the father,
Bedwini the bishop, to bring forth his words.'

At the behest of Artorius, Bedwini arose:
'Am I supposed, as a Christian, to speak on this subject?—
When the theologians have thrashed out the whole of their theories
Of Law and Grace, what is left but Love?
What sanction for judicature, when we are enjoined not to judge?
What place for forfeits and penalties, when forgiveness,
To seventy times seven, is still the command?
When the Saviour constrained the casters of stones,
Dismissing the adulteress detected in the act,
What remained, my lords, of the rulings of Law?
But we are come to be pilgrims, pitifully, where the creatures
Groan and travail for a grand transformation—
That existential order we ask in our anguish,
Crying, *de profundis*, for the Kingdom to come:
Freedom without knowledge, finally, of Necessity.
But Sovereignty behoves, and sanctions must stand,
Or monsters of murder would stalk at midday,
Cruelty without a curb, carousing on blood.

'At your coronation, O King, your sovereignty was confirmed,
And signalled by the donation of the deacon's stole:
In that manner you are summoned to a ministry of service—
Husbanding the goods of the household of God,
Particularly for the protection of the widows and the poor.

It is earthly imitation of the angelic orders.

‘Unknown modes of majestic existence
Augustly encompass us; in exalted adoration,
The Dominations and Principalities, in the Divine Presence,
And the ineffable Powers, persisting in that activity;
The excess of brightness those beings absorb,
Flows outward to the flights which they oversee—
The swift winged Cherubim, and the sweet voiced Seraphim,
With the terrific Thrones, transmit and transmute,
In sacerdotal guise, the sacramental glory
To the orders of Virtues, Archangels and Angels,
Who are given surveyance over states and cities,
And a ministry as messengers to men in particularity.
Thus comes the source of the service you are called to.

‘Allow me to illustrate my argument with an exemplum,
A tale which warns us to watch against the temptation
Of Pride, which not seldom princes are subject to:
It seems there was a Cæsar—some say Jovinian;
Confident in his authority, he overheard the choristers
One evening as they celebrated the office in the sanctuary—
The song that Mary sang, the Magnificat.
He asked for interpretation, and an acolyte answered
With the meaning of these verses: “The mighty and magnificent.
The powerful in their pride, from their seats Thou hast put down,
The humble and the meek Thou hast hoisted to the heights.”
Lightly and recklessly the ruler laughed;
Secure in his royalty, and the stability of his state,
He reckoned himself free from the revolutions of Fortune;
Softly in his chamber he slept like a child.
When the daylight dawned, he found things were different:
Opening his eyelids, he was aware—it was odd—
No grooms nor lackeys graced his levée;
For he lay in straw, in a stinking stable,
In the precincts of his palace, a pitiful buffoon.
He called out, but no one came at his clamour;
He rushed through corridors, claiming he was the ruler;
No one recognised him, though he raged and ranted—
They mocked him for a madman, as mazed in the head.
He hurried, though hindered, to his presence hall,
Breaking through the guards, and gazed bewildered—
For regally enthroned, in the robes of royalty,
Was a figure whose face and features were his own.
In angered authority, as usurper and imposter
He denounced that phantom—as a fake and a deceiver,
A counterfeit ruler. Calm came the reply:

“This pathetic person is a deluded paranoiac;
It is to be hoped, however, he is fairly harmless:
Carry him to the kitchens, and look after him kindly
With suitable sedatives; when he has calmed down somewhat
We will cast him as our clown, to brighten up this court—
His ragged royalty will be light relief”

For the six months that succeeded this strange turnabout
The Cæsar continued in his calling as a clown
(It is said, with a certain degree of success)
While that unknown other exercised his authority.
Never was the realm more righteously regulated—
Justice and mercy were manifest to the multitude;
The poor were succoured, and peace prevailed,
As not heretofore in the history of humanity.
But finally it faded, that fabulous season.
At its ending, he awoke, with the accustomed accoutrements,
Of his courtly bedchamber, but, beside his bed,
That mysterious figure, with his own face and features,
Was standing still, and spoke these words:
“You are restored now, O Cæsar, to your rule and your royalty,
And I depart, who deprived you of those dignities.
Look on me and learn that a Messenger of Light,
From the courts of Heaven, to curb your hubris,
Was sent to you to govern and to guide your state.
Learn you your lesson, with humility and love
Enjoy and exercise the authority assigned you.”
Then the visitant vanished, on vast wings
Climbing skyward; and the Cæsar continued
To manage his realm as that Messenger recommended,
Though frequently failing, through human frailty;
And did so, they say, till the day of his death.’

Gwion, the bard to Bedwini the bishop
Replied: ‘The myth Your Reverence relates
Is a tale that has been told, at different times,
In various versions, in verse or in prose:
We have heard of Pwyll, that princely hero—
Hunting with his hounds, he followed a hart,
Which led him at last to the lordly ruler
Arawn of Annwyn, the archon of the Underworld;
By agreement they exchanged each other’s empery—
The Dark One for a season, swayed in Dyved,
The patrimony of Pwyll, while Pwyll was throned
In the realm of the shades in their ruler’s shape.
It proceeds, I presume, from a pagan custom
Of far-off times: the tragic fate

Of the king, to be slain for a sacrifice at seed time—
Mystically and magically his blood to be mixed
With the sacred soil, for the setting of the crops;
But as time succeeded they tempered this savagery:
A slave or a criminal was surrogate for the king;
He was housed in his palace and possessed his prerogatives
For the sacrificial season, and thereafter he was slain;
The king, reborn, reassumed his royalty.

'Pardon this pedantry. But permit me a gloss
To tack on your fable in the form that you told it;
I question if the realm of that ruler was really
So impeccably ordered by the angelic oversight
As you seem to suggest. Could discarnate spirit
Be capable of coping with human confusion?
Maybe not only the monarch was educated,
But the angel also, by that extraordinary episode.
Perhaps peering over the heavenly palisades.
He surveyed our lot with a certain superciliousness.
For this fault, for his correction, he was fated—not to fall—
But to suffer for a season terrestrial sojourn,
Returning with a new and more real knowledge.'

Bedwini smiled benevolently, but suspected
A touch of heterodoxy in the tone of such talk.
But the poet continued to put his case:
'We organise not abstractly for angels and archangels
But for men, who are muddled and mixed by nature.
We are setting up laws for no City of the Sun,
Utopia, or Oceania, or New Atlantis;
To be ground by the politics of Platonic Guardians,
Dedicated to the diffusion of the Noble Deceit,
But propelling the grudgingly garlanded poets,
For falsely fabling, from the frontiers of their State.
I want no such systems. The words I work with
Come to me with the marks of common currency;
Language is to be moulded, not mathematical logic,
To constitute the perfect consort of a poem.
The wise in such matters will work so with men,
Kneading their fallibility to the fruition of freedom,
Which is also an art to be acquired by application.'

Gerontius said, with senatorial gravity:
'The fallibility of subjects, swayed by faction,
Asks for authority to be asserted and exercised.
The Roman Republic was torn by such rivalries
That the sickening state seemed sinking into chaos;
But after Actium, Octavius assumed

The title of *Princeps*, and the public peace
Of that Apollonian avatar overshadowed the Empire;
Overweening Antony, honoured with the attributes
Of dizzy Dionysus, in misery and disaster
Fell on his sword, and that silken seductress,
Cleopatra, in her vanity who claimed to be Venus,
Was blasted by the serpent sucking at her breasts.

'Primitive freedom was in the primæval forest,
Where, nasty and brutish, beset by nightmares,
And the struggle for survival, men lived as savages;
To liberate them from the fear of force and lawlessness
They surrendered their freedom to the first sovereign.
To authority thus instituted absolute obedience
Is due, and is demanded—who here can doubt this?'

Urbigena, in alliance, urged this argument:
'That absolute obedience is owing to authority
I will not dispute, but differ in the definition.
The sovereignty of a prince, I say, is patriarchal;
He is the father of his nation, which has the nature of a family,
By ties of blood we are bound as brothers,
To a common father conceding our faith.
This authority was exercised archetypally by Adam,
And devolves, under Christ, on the kings of Christendom.'

Gaius the seneschal, with a growing and surly
Impatience, had attended the antecedent argument.
He sprang to his feet: 'As your friend and foster-sib,
And your comrade in battle, my king, I conjure you
To take no heed of this high-flown talk.
As your steward and seneschal, my task is to supply
Food to your fighting men, to fill their bellies.
The needs of the people I know—they are paramount;
The suffrage of the people is the source of power.
The monarch rules as magistrate of a republic:
His power being perverted, by process of law
They are dispensed from their duty. A tyrant may be deposed.
A civil contract conveys you your sovereignty.'

Further to this, Flaccus, the fair-haired bastard
Of Artorius, advised: 'The exercise and advantage
Of the forms of liberty and law are fallacies,
If concentration of property be permitted to the powerful.
Augustine avers accumulation of affluence
As *magnum latrocinium*. It mocks at legality.
The property of the people, possessed in common
By natural right, the ruler is to regulate.
The logic of love in this is ineluctable—

For who, having knowledge of the needs of his neighbour,
Would fail to send him, to furnish him sustenance,
Such of his superfluity as most readily he could spare?
Not otherwise the commonwealth should curb our covetousness—
For gross greed is a cankerous growth
That the sword of justice surgently must excise.'

The direction the debate was taking disturbed
The mind of Gwalchmai. With the modest grace
Of an aristocrat, he arose, and expressed his opinion:
'Tyranny and Democracy are the twin dragons
That struggle in their den of darkness. They spawn
The rampant and clawed cockatrice, Revolution,
The Orc that issues out of the abyss;
Sorest of evils that afflict the state,
Savagely it consumes continuity and stability,
Which men by nature have as much need of
As of equity, and the enjoyment of an ordered existence,
The bloodstained and murderous blade in the market-place
Reared, to power the most ruthless promoted.

'What freedom is possible, if we fall in the power
Of either the anger and the ambition and the arrogance
Of the perverse soul of a single potentate,
Or the mobile many, in its merciless cruelty?
Let the Prince rule as prime amongst his peers—
An independent assembly, an elite of excellence,
Rich, yet responsible, recognising a trust
Inherent in wealth, for the welfare of others.'

Flaccus, the bastard, flashed out in his bravery:
'O Hawk of May, if your humane manners,
And your gift of courtesy, more commonly were granted,
What you propose might be pertinent and profitable!
But property is the consummate corrupter of courtesy:
The ugliest of all the orders we envisage
Is a soulless republic of rich senators,
Casting its wedding ring to the cold waves
Of the cruel sea, its suitable spouse.
Its hard-faced hierarchs repress the humanities,
Love of letters, for vocational learning,
And the flamboyant pictures which furbish its palaces.'

'The republic of rich men' Gwalchmai rejoined
'Appals you? I postulate a more heinous polity,
Raised on the pushing of party power
To a total tyranny — the ten-horned Antichrist:
John the Divine dreamed this dictatorship
In a penal camp, the cavern of Patmos.'

Said Artorius, anxious to assuage their argument:
'We are lost in the labyrinth of law; on all sides
We gaze on pitfalls protending perdition,
And gaping monsters, mouthing in the gloom.
Aristotle opined, indeed, from the anatomy
Of the constitutions he collated (a conscientious biologist)
Greek and barbarian, that the best government
Was a mixed polity—partly monarchical,
Partly popular, and in part oligarchical:
With its checks and balances, it might chance to bear up:
Liberty, like Truth, lies in a tension.
But no temporal forms finally translate
The idea or order, which evermore we are urged to.
Politicians are necessary, like policemen and prostitutes;
We will build our polity with bricks of brothels,
And hammer out an order on the anvil of Hephæstus.
While in justice exists, action is imperative.'

Modred had been silent. He spoke now: 'It seems
You underrate, my uncle, the advantages of your authority.
I make no connoisseur's claims in this matter;
But listening to these deliberations, this debate on law,
I am earnestly impressed by the august assembly—
Diversity of views—but, doubtless, virtue
Springs from such roots, and is ready to ripen,
Building an order for the island of Britain.
For Britain solely? Sits in Byzantium
The distant Cæsar, serene and dim.
Justinian will be subject, in his season, to senility.
The proud Theodora, the prop of his throne,
Will go to her rest, if rest can reward
So restless a spirit. Is his writ subscribed
Westward in Gaul, now wasted and worried
By the hordes of the Franks—or, further, in Hesperia?
Will Belisarius, rugged in battle, restore,
Indeed, the order of the Empire in Italy,
Grinding to powder the power of the Goths
In the name of Rome? Even now, in their rage,
The fierce Lombards fall on that land,
In armed array, over Alp and Apennine;
Barbarism is born anew in the homeland of Brutus.

'Supposing you extended, Artorius, the sovereignty
Founded here in Britain, to a broader field?
There are precedents, I fancy, for framing such a project
With justice. The undervalued apostate, Julian—
His lordship was acclaimed by the legions in Lutetia;

Sent by their suffrages to Rome, he successfully
Provided a polity, till the Parthian javelin
Pierced his liver, and laid him prostrate,
His virtue vanquished—'Vicisti Galilæe!'
But a king who is a Christian need fear no such contingency.'

The king made no comment on this piece of counsel—
Modred's suggestion of a civilising mission;
Was it seen in his face that a seed had fallen?
He adjourned the assembly to another occasion.
In formal procession they passed from the fane.

But Flaccus delayed by the door, dallying
In talk for a time with the trusted Modred:
The two brothers, both of them begotten
Erstwhile by Artorius, each of them uncanonically,
Of different dams. Delicate Modred
Was the likely lad of the Lady of Orkney,
Artorius's sister; at the sacred session,
The synod of the bishops, she seemed to him bonny.
But Flaccus was begotten on a flaxen bondwoman,
A peasant's daughter, dowered but with poverty.

'We have heard' said Flaccus 'here much hammering
Of words and wisdom, but I wonder to what purpose.
Theoretic propositions these princelings put forward,
But the poor and the simple, in this assembly of the powerful
It seemed to me were lacking, not summoned to these seats.
Differently indeed might those have determined
Of the forms of justice, if their judgment were forthcoming.
And others also were excluded from this assembly—
Guanhumara the Queen, with her gladsome garland
Of waiting-women—their suffrages were wanting.
I learned from my mother, no lady, alas!
The ways of this world go at the will of men—
Of men of property. When the meek and the poor
Are the heirs of the earth, at the end of the ages,
When in the fulness of the Faith there is nor bond nor free,
Nor male nor female, as formerly foretold
By Paul the Apostle, perhaps we shall apprehend
Far different devices framed for our fellowship.
Hasten the happiness of that hoped for day!
I leave you, cousin, to consider this counsel.'

So Modred remained, in religious meditation.
He asked no intercession from the angelic orders,
Nor the pure Virgin. To Venus Pandemia
He proffered his prayers: 'Goddess and pastmistress,
Weaver of stratagems, I want your support.

I know more law in the lust of my loins;
I observe more order in the inclination of an arm,
In the glance of sunlight on the golden softness
Of a halo of hair, in the smoothness of a hip,
Than in all the abstractions of these old man's arguments.
The suggestion I set forth—the seed that I planted—
Was the single thing that slipped into my thought;
So bored with those boors booming out their platitudes—
It appeared I was supposed to say something serious.
The deviation will provide a diversion for Dad—
Invading the Empire in the interests of order—
Or a passage to power? And this mouse will play.

'The queen, I fancy, conceives a kindness for me—
My aunt and my stepmother. I am no stoic nor stickler,
Nor high-minded Hippolytus, whom the wild horses
Tore and savaged by the tumbling sea,
As they panicked at the bull that plunged from the billows.
Shamefast and fearful, he shunned Phædra—
The febrile passion of that foreign princess,
The daughter of Minos. Modred is different.

'Shoulder to shoulder, as my shield-companion,
Fight out, O Cyprian, this fight of my senses!'

Thus Modred mused, in the fane of Michael,
While softly the sunlight faded from the sky;
Antares uprose in the arch of the evening,
The heart of the Scorpion at the heel of the Hunter,
Who sank, defeated, in the southern sea.



THE TRAVELLER :

*Requiem æternum dona eis, Domine,
Et lux perpetua luceat in eos.*

I am Professor of History in the ancient University of Fen-bridge, though not yet a Fellow of All Souls'. I am a specialist on the Roman and post-Roman period in Britain, poring over the documents of a time often too sparsely documented. But why that Latin tag should now be running through my head, I do not know. On vacations and at weekends I am something of an amateur archæologist, and folk-lorist too. I have visited most of the Neolithic stone monuments of Britain: Avebury, and Stonehenge, and others, from the Orkneys and Cumberland to Wales and Cornwall. But there is one, set among the Scottish hills, which I have not seen — Bury Hill, in Strathmore. This seems a good opportunity to go and look at it.

I pass by the green wolds of Lincoln,
I traverse the moors of Yorkshire, where in summer
The ring ouzel perched and flirted, and now
The bilberries are ripening to purple,
Where the grouse call: 'Go back, go back !'
Among the shoots of the heather.

I cross the Tees and the Tyne, and I go
By the brown fells of Northumberland,
Into Scotland I go over the border, and now
I am among these wind-swept uplands.

I see before me the great stone circle, impressive in its antiquity, in the fading light of an autumn evening. In such places as this the presence of a human figure seems only to emphasise the solitude. I remark a woman walking among the stones, picking blackberries. And that is rather strange — tomorrow will be November the first, and by the old way of

reckoning, from the setting of the sun, it is already November. I have heard that country people will not eat blackberries in November—the devil spits on them, they say, and, indeed, at that time of year they are past their best, small and mawkish and full of maggots. But perhaps it is really because this black fruit is the food of the Dead, who, during this month, are released for a season and wander about our world.

THE WOMAN : 'Your fause luvè ca'd you till the dance,
And tuik you by the hand ;
But frae your faut comes the bluidy war
That rages throch the land.

'Ye liggèd the nicht in your leman's airms,
And ye thocht nae thocht o' me ;
But ye thocht that the play o' luvè was sweet
As the flow'r o' the hawthorn tree.

'Ye may wear the stanes wi' your knees in prayer,
And wet wi' your tears your bread ;
But ye willna bring back the braw, braw men
That lig in a clay-cold bed'.

THE TRAVELLER : What is that song you are singing? I do not seem to have heard it before.

THE WOMAN : It is an auld sang I learned lang syne. I dinna mind the lave. But those are the words of Arthur the king to his Queen Gaynor, the faithless woman.

THE TRAVELLER : Queen Gaynor—that is Guinevere, or Guanhumara as the earliest sources call her. Now I remember it, is there not some old story connecting Arthur with these very stones?

THE WOMAN : They do say that it was here that he had her drawn in pieces by the wild horses.
And it was for nae guid thing that she did.

THE TRAVELLER : She was the wild mare he could not tame, like Hercules taming the wild horses of the king of Thrace.
Was it for her adultery with Lancelot?

THE WOMAN : I ken nae thing of yon laddie, Lancelot.
It was the fause knight, Sir Modred, the King's son
And his sister's son, that tuik her
By the lang hair o' her heid, and pu'd her
Frae the royal throne, while her man
Was awa at his Roman wars.

THE TRAVELLER : That, I think, is the most primitive form of the story.

THE WOMAN : But for your wild horses, that
Is a foolish tale. The King Arthur wadna do sic a thing, and
the Queen Gaynor
Turnit a nun and made a guid end, they say.

THE TRAVELLER : You seem very certain of what you tell me.
You are a strange woman. And, now I look again,
Strangely dressed too. Why that red,
On the one side of your dress, and the blue on the other?

THE WOMAN : It is a fashion that befits me well—it shows
Whilk side is brennand i' the flames,
And whilk is peinnit i' the cauld.
Pray for me.

THE TRAVELLER : I am not used to pray, unless
The patient study of the actions of the dead,
The search for the truth of the past, may be a kind of prayer.

THE WOMAN : The stream of time is an illusion, the past
Is not dead; it cannot die,
Though it would seek to. The dead are present to you.
And I, who was Guanhumara, the faithless
Queen of Artorius, tell you this,
And bid you to pray for me.

(she vanishes)

* * *

(The WOMAN returns as the ghost of QUEEN GUANHUMARA)

QUEEN GUANHUMARA : The Scorpion, the scorpion in the loins—
Its burning heart is Antares,
The fixed brother of Mars;
Swords, swords—the clouds
Rain swords down from the sky;
Blood, blood—the earth
Is drinking the red dew.

THE TRAVELLER : The battle of Camlan—that last battle,
Where the son and the father lay dead,
Each slain by the other's hand.

QUEEN GUANHUMARA : The starling and the long-tongued magpie
Are tale-bearers about us;

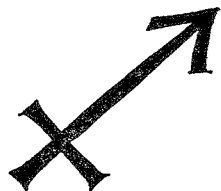
Even in the closed garden the anemone opens her red mouth,
A scandalmonger against me;
The roses are in inquisition
Upon my heresy in love.

Like Ishtar I go down,
Dancing a dance of seven veils,
Through the gates of the Underworld;
At each gate I give up
A piece of finery to the scorpion-guardians;
The watchmen of the City of Dis
Have stripped me of my garments.

The men with the masks of goats
Are come against me, they compass me around;
They draw their daggers from under their hairy pelts;
My love takes off his mask:
I look into his eyes, for the first time,
And see no love of me, but love of power.
Pray for me. I cannot tarry. I hear
The red-eared hounds give tongue;
The Wild Hunstman pursues on the autumn wind.

Pray for me—that I may receive
Enlightenment, that even on me
The light perpetual shine.

THE TRAVELLER : *In paradisum. Amen.*



Ladies and Gentlemen: It was with the very greatest pleasure that I accepted the invitation to address this distinguished Society. It is only right that I should begin by paying my tribute to that great scholar in whose memory this Annual Lecture was founded. Whose name for the moment escapes me. I must ask your indulgence; I am not, as one may say, wholly myself. Since I encountered the White Phantom in the circle of stones. White-footed Jennifer, dancing in her foam. The scorpion in the loins, and the mating dance of the scorpions. But we do not have any scorpions in these islands. Only the harmless book-scorpion, *Chelifer*, which has no sting. It is found under mossy stones, and between the pages of old books; feeding on psocids or book-lice, and, I suppose, on the book-worms themselves, which are, in fact, the larvæ of one of the boring beetles. They may sometimes be observed—the book-scorpions, I mean—clinging to the legs of long-legged flies, as they make use of this mode of transport from one place to another.

All this is very interesting. It is only right that I should begin; it is only right that I should begin by—by offering my apologies for not delivering a written paper. I draw a bow, as it were, at a venture. My notes are probably scattered over the uplands of Scotland, driven by the November wind, that drives the withered leaves, and the poor souls that wander between the worlds, while the planet of the god of storms rules above. I hope that is quite clear. The subject of my discourse is, as you know, 'The Possible Historical Basis for King Arthur's Conquest of the Roman Empire.' Now, anyone who has familiarised himself at all widely with Arthurian source material will know that this, on the face of it improbable, legend occupies a prominent position in it. Malory, you will remember, devotes a whole book to it. He

is simply following the northern alliterative *Morte Arthure*, reproducing indeed much of its language (this is even more marked in the Winchester Manuscript than in Caxton's text). But if we go back to Geoffrey of Monmouth, we may say that he is almost primarily concerned with this episode, and knows practically nothing of those elements in the story which have preoccupied the minds of later poets and romancers.

Now it is tempting to see, in Geoffrey, the Vergil, or rather the Livy, of Henry II's Angevin empire. Attempts have been made to identify the list which he gives of Arthur's conquests with the actual domains, in Britain and France, of Henry Plantagenet. Alternatively, the theory has been put forward that Geoffrey sought to popularise this body of Celtic legend among the Norman (and in fact they were, of course, to a large extent Breton as much as Norman) ruling caste, at the time when Henry was attempting to incorporate the Celts of Wales and Ireland into his English kingdom, as well as extending his influence over the still Celtic realm of Scotland. According to this hypothesis, the purpose of the *Historia Regum Britonum* was to unite the Norman and Celtic aristocracies by a common myth, in the traditions of which the subjugated Saxon population of England would have no part. But, though this may indeed have been the reason for the later popularity of Geoffrey's work, it can scarcely have been his original intention. For it now appears that he wrote in the reign of Henry's predecessor, Stephen. A difficult time to work in, by any standards. And men said openly that God and his Hallows slept. Geoffrey, it seems, was of the party of Robert of Gloucester and of Henry's mother, Matilda. The Empress fleeing at night, like a white phantom over the white snow. But Clio also is a muse, in prose though she plod, that hard mistress whom I serve. Living as I do somewhere near the beginning of the third Dark Age of European civilisation. The first was that which intervened between the collapse of the Minoan-Mycenæan culture and the flowering of Hellas. Ilion falling, and Hector slain, and blind Homer turning even defeat to a tremulous delight. The second from the fall of the Western Empire to the First Crusade. And that also an age for epic and not for history. And whether the third began in nineteen hundred and forty five, or in nineteen hundred and fourteen, or as I am much more inclined to think, in seventeen hundred and eighty nine, I must leave you to decide. But where is our epic?

But Geoffrey's pseudo-history was turned, not only into verse by the Norman Wace, but also into poetry by the Saxon

Layamon. A priest, dreaming on the banks of Severn, by the Welsh Marshes, his belly full of the blood mixed mead. And Arthur is carried off at last to Argante, of all the elves the fairest. And she is Arianrod whose castle is the silver circle of the *Corona Borealis* in the northern sky. Ariadne's bridal crown. 'And on the mere the wailing died away.' But King Arthur became an English king, and Malory's Camelot is Winchester. But Camelodunum was Cymbeline's capital, founded in honour of the sky god. And Shakespeare makes him reject the demands, for suzerainty for Rome, of Caius Lucius, as Arthur defies Lucius, Consul or Emperor of Rome. I was at the court of Cunobelinus in the castle of London.

This is my point, which I trust by this time is becoming entirely clear. The imperial character of Arthur, which may be considered as Geoffrey's creation, as it continued to develop in the mediæval tradition, may be regarded as an English attempt to produce a counterpart to the French history of Charlemagne. But that is surely an over-simplification. In the Welsh sources, Arthur is never called king, but always *Ymherawdr*, that is, Emperor. And there had indeed been Emperors of Britain, such as Maximus, that Spanish usurper, who made a bid for Rome itself, and burnt the heretic Priscillian, which became an old Spanish custom. He is the Maccen Gwledig of the *Red Book of Hergest*. And there his ignominious defeat at the hands of Valentinian and Gratian is turned into a triumph. And if we may suppose that the Arthurian tradition subsumed that earlier one, so that also subsumed those of Constantine, and Constantius Clorus, as the presence of Helena in the Maccen legend shows.

All writers, at least in recent years, who have attempted to elucidate the historical basis of the Arthurian legend—Chambers, Collingwood, Ashe, to say nothing of Saklatvala—have been unanimous in identifying Arthur as a Romano-British leader of the sixth century A.D. Not a king, but a *comes*, or count. We may put aside the views of those who postulate a purely mythological Arthur. Some have seen in him a bear-totem, and it is true that Nennius tells us that his name signified in the British tongue *ursus horribilis*. Others have identified him with the ploughman god Artaios, attested by Gallic inscriptions. The constellation of the Great Bear, or the Plough, is called in Welsh Arthur's Chariot.

But the name Artorius seems to be good Latin; it occurs in Juvenal. The Artorii were a Venetic gens, and it is in the province of their origin, near Split in Dalmatia, that a fragment of a sarcophagus of a Roman officer called Lucius

Artorius Castus has been unearthed. But this Artorius belonged to the second century, and according to the inscription, was in command of the legion which we know to have been stationed on the northern frontier of the province of Britain at the time Hadrian's Wall was erected. He also saw service in Armorica. Is he perhaps the true historical Arthur, whose name was associated with a prominent monument, and who became the focus of heroic legend centuries later? Most of the twelve battles of Arthur recorded by Nennius can fairly plausibly be identified with sites not too distant from Hadrian's Wall. The exception, of course, is Mount Badon. This may have been Badbury Rings, an Iron Age hill fort in Dorset; or possibly the downs above Bath.

I stood with my confrère in the glade of hazels when the battle of Badon was fought. And I rode with him in pursuit of the unattainable stag of Artemis into the marshes of Cam, where we found myself lecturing to you tadpoles, as still I do. I have been instructor to Elijah and Enoch. To Elijah Jones of Cardiff and Enoch Pritchard of Pontypridd—both rather awkward pupils, but very good Calvinistic Methodists. Cheiron Chelifer, preceptor to heroes: to Peleus, the father of Achilles, who seized the silver-footed, shape-shifting cuttle fish goddess (Thetis, Tethys, and teuthys, I take to be the same word); much-travelled Jason, who established his right to kingship by ploughing and sowing, and securing the rain-fleece—and Hera was his friend; and the great Alcides, enduring his twelvemonth of toils, under Hera's anger.

It was said that St Ursula and her eleven thousand virgins were intended as brides for the mercenaries whom Maximus had taken overseas to Armorica, depleting and debilitating the defences of Britain. But she begged her father's leave to go first on a three years' pilgrimage with her companions. S. Baring-Gould sees in her the Nordic goddess Hersel, whom he takes to be the Moon 'cluster'd about by all her starry Fays.' Onward, Christian soldiers, Amazons of the spirit, votaries of Diana. But they fell to the spears of the marauding Huns.

These nomad archers of the steppes are so entirely dependent on their horses as to be almost permanently united to them, drinking the fermented milk of the mares and the blood from a vein in the neck which they open when required. The mongoloid type is almost beardless, and it is said that it is difficult for a European to distinguish a man from a woman among them at a short distance. It is not completely obvious to me how SS Ursula and Undecimilla, Virgin

Martyrs, found their way into this lecture. And the Huns also, for that matter. Tartars out of Tartarus, like the Titans in rebellion against the Emperor of the Universe.

I become what I sing. I bore a banner in the battle order of Artorius. I behold him among the dark forests of Armorica, in rebellion against the Emperor, an act of hubris. And to him comes a travel-stained messenger, with tidings of disaster. It is the courteous Gwalchmai, with the news of the wounding of his honour. The unnatural rebellion of Modred, the nephew against his mother's brother. Of the son against the father, unnaturally and incestuously begotten. And I, Taliesin-Tiresias, churchwarden in Gloucester Road or proof-reader for the Press, and evening lecturer in Stukeley Street, foreknew and foresuffered all, and the waste land and the dolorous blow. And I thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your attention.

Mr Longbotham, in the chair, thanked Professor C. Chelifer, on behalf of the Society, for a most lucid and stimulating lecture. The motion was seconded by Miss Vita Brevis, who expressed the opinion that all their ideas on the subject would now be very much clearer. Coffee and mince pies were then served.

16

Not even on Olympos are the Immortals exempt
From the ravages of change, and the revolutions of chance;
The sadness of senility likewise seizes them,
Entailing its empty and impotent wisdom.
Saturn with his sceptre once swayed the universe;
And governed the earth in the Age of Gold—
The first men in scattered families followed
The herds of beasts, hunting the bison,
The mammoth and the reindeer, as they ranged, for meat.
A simple collectivity, a classless society,
Not ploughing the soil, nor in seedtime sowing.
Their craft, from the flint crudely to fashion
The tools for their tasks, and with tinted ochre,
In lightless caverns, to limn and character,
Magically, the beasts, to make them breed,
Or slide into the pit, to be pierced by spears.
The bones of their dead they daubed and bedabbled
Likewise with red, for luck and for life,
And gold—prized for its grace and its gladness,
Mysteriously life-giving, not the miser's loot.
But Jove revolted; in rebellion he wrested
The sceptre from his sire, and sent him into exile
To a western island, in the wide ocean;
There he sleeps through time, with the Titans, his siblings—
Grimly, the huge Hundred-hander guards them.
A new age now was known on the earth:
Agriculture was invented, and astronomy also,
To mark the succession of the circling seasons,
For hoeing and sowing, and the hauling in of harvest.
In the stone circles men hallowed the sun,
And the feminine and magical mysteries of the moon.
Human blood, holy and blessing

The soil, was sacrificed, the priest-king was slaughtered
Yearly, for the plenty he yielded to the plants.
Priests also and traders, in the towns, proliferated,
Subsisting from the labour of their serfs on their land;
Silver was hoarded, and a hieratic script
Enrolled their secrets, and recorded their revenues.

The Age of Bronze awoke now in brutality:
Barbarian warriors blustered out of the wastelands,
And wars were waged with more effective weapons.
The handsome heroes exhibited their hardihood
In wild tumult, by windy Troys,
Fighting in chariots, fiercely cheered on
To plunder and pillage, by Homeric poets.

The Age of Iron, out of Asia, extended
A worse development of destruction—war
Become less human, more horrible and more hideous;
The wheel is in motion, willy-nilly we march on
To the uses of artillery, and atomic overkill.
Each technical gain entails the giving up
Of a spiritual good, of certainty and security.
This puts paid, we presume, to that specious puerility
Which professes to hail, in history, a progress.
Mutability masters us—no myth of improvement
Is the law of life; laugh it off, if you will—
Ananke is the arbitress, and enjoins us: 'Adapt!'

The Saturnalia was celebrated at the Winter Solstice
In remembrance, by the Romans, of the reign of Saturn:
By ritualised ribaldry, and licensed riot—
The posts are decked, the porticos and the doorways,
With gaiety and greenery, and gifts exchanged;
The slaves sit down and are served by their masters,
Reconstructing a far-off and irrecoverable freedom
Nostalgically lost in the long-ago of legend,
When the world was governed by wiser gods.
But at this season of midwinter mirth, the Saviour,
Christ was born, in the cavern at Bethlehem,
To oust from Olympus the etiolated eidola;
Jove and his fellows fell under the judgment
Of old age also, and entered that emptiness
Where man's lost dreams dwindle in darkness.
The stable, for once, was the centre of the world;
Not the dialectical dragons, but the dumb ox
And the ass in humility, hung their heads
By a manger of straw, where Mary the Mother
Looked at her Love and hushed Him with a lullaby.

From the Solstice of Capricorn the Cross stems up,
The ends of the transom transfixing the equinoxes,
The summit at Cancer—Christ in the circle
Of the stars of fatality, to ensure our freedom,
Slain for our salvation, in the celestial wheel,
From the foundation of the world; He was found worthy.

At this feast it is the kindly custom of Christians
To honour in each other the Divine Image
By the giving of gifts; as with incense and gold,
And with myrrh, the Magi from the marches of the world
Were beckoned to Bethlehem by a bright comet.
Feasting and frolic and jollity are found here—
Not the mirth of Saturn's mythical magisterium,
But the felt prescience of a possible freedom
Eschatologically offered at the end of the ages,
Whose shoots are burgeoning, and begin now to show.

But the Prince of Darkness delights to pervert this:
The affluent honour Gluttony and Avarice,
In spewing drunkenness and a spending spree,
Guzzling their guts and giving for advantage,
Disdaining the Lazaruses who languish at their doors.
In Gehenna these gourmets will get their reward—
Trussed up and transformed into battery turkeys,
With sprigs of holly stuck in their holes;
In the form of a foolish and florid Santa Claus,
With cottonwool whiskers, as a witty contrivance,
Beelzebub bastes them with their own butter.

They kept the feast at the castle of Cadbury;
While solid snow silvered the landscape,
And hungrily the wolves howled to the wind.
Artorius and his army were abroad—in Armorica,
Some said. They slogged through sombre forests;
There were rumours that he reared at the authority of Rome,
As Carausius and Constantine and Maximus had claimed to.
No certainty was divulged; despatches were sparse;
A dreary and disappointing campaign dragged on.

The governance of his realm was given to Guanhumara—
The Queen ruling, with a Council of Regency;
The sons of his sister had seemed the most fitting:
The courteous Gwalchmai kept at the court,
Arranging all things in the absence of Artorius;
With his younger brother, black-haired and beloved
Of the popular party—for plainly men saw
In Modred the most charming and mannerly of mortals;
Nor guessed, under the guise of that graciousness, his heart

Inwardly consumed, cankered and calloused.
The ferocious passion of a frustrated poet,
Self-regarding romanticism, ravaged his soul.

Resinous pine torches perfumed the palace,
Casting through the gloom a guttering glare.
The hall was gay and garnished with greenery—
The bright holly, with bloody berries,
Decked it, and the ivy dedicate to Dionysus:
Rubicund and pugnacious, the robin redbreast,
Who murders, they say, each midsummer his sire,
Harbours in the holly, and the ivy holds
The King of the ramage, the cutty wren,
A trilling troglodyte. From the topmost rafter
Was suspended a sprig of the sacral mistletoe,
A Golden Bough, from the great boles
Of ancient oaks and Avalonian apple trees
Darkly with incantations by the Druids castrated—
Mysterious, as the flower of the midsummer fern:
It hung there for lovers lightly to hallow.

The boards were loaded with baked boars' heads,
Venison, and various seasonable viands;
Barrels were broached, of beer and mead.
The dinner being done, they called for diversions
Of mirth and pastime, for the promoting of merriment.
Bards and buffoons and minstrels were brought in.
Dwarfish jesters, and jugglers disported;
Self-pitying songs of amatory suffering,
By acclaimed artists were executed for the auditors.

Popular plaudits hailed this performance;
But somewhat sadly smiling, the Queen,
Guanhumara, gravely gave her opinion:
'This jejune jangling jars on our nerves;
Nor charms nor cheers us, but the revolutions of chance
Brings into mind, and the bitter memory
Of Artorius, absent oversea in Amorica:
News of his campaign comes niggard to our knowledge.
This occasion asks entertainment more aulic—
Gwion, our poet, is pensioned for this purpose;
Let him touch the high tones of his harp,
And bring forth some lay or legend—of Bronwen,
White-bosomed sister of Bran the Blessed;
Of her sorrow, the victim of a vicious slander;
Of her heart's breaking for the brave men, the heroes
Laid in the cold clay for her cause,
Two islands destroyed—her tragic destiny.'

Gwion answered the Empress: 'Alas,
My heart is sick and my senses heavy.
I am haunted by visions of violence and horror,
Of doom and disaster—distinctly imaged,
But the words will not come to their work at my call.
The numbered words are numb and weary;
My play with them seems all a paltry subterfuge.
More potent were Myrddyn's prophetic madness.
But Ceridwen now, by her name of Nimue,
In her dark cavern till the Day of Doom,
Secretes him, like Saturn sleeping on the island,
Grimly guarded. With shame, Guanhumara,
I say that I cannot sing for your solace.'
Thus Gwion, stupid and silent in his grief.

Then Modred spoke, with mildness and malice:
'If our pensioned poet grudges to produce,
Radiant-browed Taliesin, his treasured talent,
Perhaps, Gloriana, your princeliness will permit
An unworthy amateur offer an entertainment?
I have devised some mirth, a dance in masquerade.
Some mummers I have summoned for this merry season
Are waiting without in the winter snow.
Shall I fetch them in to furbish our festival?'

Gladly Guanhumara (for she loved the grace
Of Modred, the manners and the charm of the man)
Granted him permission to produce this garnish.
He went out into the darkness; for some delay they waited
In the fadng flicker of the flaming torches,
In silent surmise of the promised spectacle.

In the castle of Cadbury the Happening commenced:
A grotesque gallimaufry of horned goat-men,
Satyrs and sylvans in a savage rout,
Misshapen forms, monstrously masked,
Trotted into the hall, traipsing among the tables.
The diners in wonderment, dizzy with wine,
Watched this cortège capering and cavorting.
Covered with hair, with clattering hooves,
Their prodigious and priapic codpieces and pricks
They waggled and wobbled, as wildly they lurched
In capriole or carmagnole—a double chorus,
Each team led by a taller leader;
And one, like a black and bearded billy,
Marched in the foremost, framing their music,
Squeezing the bellows of a squalling bagpipe,
As brutishly and boorishly they bleated a carol:

'On the first day of Christmas my true love sent to me
The horned man in the holly tree.

'On the second day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Two cut-throat kinsmen, and the horned man in the holly tree.

'On the third day of Christmas my true love sent to me
A three-headed dog, and a three-pronged fork,
Two cut-throat kinsmen, and the horned man in the holly tree.

'On the fourth day of Christmas my true love sent to me
A four-sided fortress, a three-headed dog, and a three-pronged
fork,
Two cut-throat kinsmen, and the horned man in the holly tree.

'The tune' said Guanhumara, 'is a gavotte and Gallic;
It calls to my mind my carefree maidenhood,
The sunshine of Provence, and the pretty salutation
As they finished with a kindly kiss each figure.'
'But I wonder at the words, so wild and uncouth;
They do not seem such as are commonly sung
To this burden.' Said Gwalchmai, 'They bode no good.'
But relentlessly the rout roared on its chant:

'On the fifth day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Five bishops belching,
A four-sided fortress, a three-headed dog, and a three-pronged
fork,
Two cut-throat kinsmen, and the horned man in the holly tree.

'On the sixth day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Six frogs a-croaking, five bishops belching,
A four-sided fortress, a three-headed dog, and a three-pronged
fork,
Two cut-throat kinsmen, and the horned man in the holly tree.

'On the seventh day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Seven maddening moons,
Six frogs a-croaking, five bishops belching,
A four-sided fortress, a three-headed dog, and a three-pronged
fork,
Two cut-throat kinsmen, and the horned man in the holly tree.

'On the eighth day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Eight crooked crowns, seven maddening moons,
Six frogs a-croaking, five bishops belching,
A four-sided fortress, a three-headed dog, and a three-pronged
fork,
Two cut-throat kinsmen, and the horned man in the holly tree.

Gradually the goat-men in their grotesque dance,
Had thronged round the dais where the throne was displayed,
On all sides surrounding the Queen where she sat
With Gwalchmai and Gerontius and the rest of her guards.
A menacing meaning was almost manifest;
Unease awakened; the audience was aware.
Fuddled by the fumes of the goatish fætor,
Suddenly sick, some sought for the exits,
And left for the darkness, looking for the latrines.
But the Queen and her company of courtiers about her
Seemed like rabbits, when red-haired Reynard,
The furtive fox, charms them with his frisking,
Playing his tricks to puzzle them; transfixed,
Foolishly fascinated, they follow his gambols,
In wide-eyed curiosity, and incautious wonder,
Till, swift as thought, he seizes one by the throat.
But the raucous carol roared up to the rafters:

'On the ninth day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Nine screaming birds,
Eight crooked crowns, seven maddening moons,
Six frogs a-croaking, five bishops belching,
A four-sided fortress, a three-headed dog, and a three-pronged
fork,
Two cut-throat kinsmen, and the horned man in the holly tree.

'On the tenth day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Ten stone tables, nine screaming birds,
Eight crooked crowns, seven maddening moons,
Six frogs a-croaking, five bishops belching,
A four-sided fortress, a three-headed dog, and a three-pronged
fork,
Two cut-throat kinsmen, and the horned man in the holly tree.

'On the eleventh day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Eleven ghosts a-gibbering,
Ten stone tables, nine screaming birds,
Eight crooked crowns, seven maddening moons,

Six frogs a-croaking, five bishops belching,
A four-sided fortress, a three-headed dog, and a three-pronged
fork,
Two cut-throat kinsmen, and the horned man in the holly tree.

'On the twelfth day of Christmas my true love sent to me
Twelve slaughtered Cæsars, eleven ghosts a-gibbering,
Ten stone tables, nine screaming birds,
Eight crooked crowns, seven maddening moons,
Six frogs a-croaking, five bishops belching,
A four-sided fortress, a three-headed dog, and a three-pronged
fork,
Two cut-throat kinsmen, and the horned man in the holly tree.

They had crowded in now, and closely compassed them;
From their hairy disguises they drew the hafts
Of dangerous daggers, and deadly falchions.
There were murmurs of treason. And the traitors unmasked—
The leader of one set of the satyrs was seen:
Cerdic, at the head of his Saxon horde;
And the other, outrageously, outlandish in expression,
The blue stained features of Fergus, the bloody
King of the Picts, with his painted clansmen.
Then the black musician, the monstrous billy,
Slid off his visor, and they saw in view
Modred under the mask, with features moulded
In the cast of Iscariot—and the eyes of Catiline.

Modred spoke: 'Sirs, and madam,
We have you in our hands. Do not be so hardy
To counter or resist. This castle is surrounded.
Outside there are others to augment this ambushade.
The guards are suborned. My Saxon guests
And my Pictish friends will persist in their purpose;
And there are plenty of your own proletariat,
Young men of Britain, who belong to our band.
I come as the leader of a confederate league
Weary of the protracted and wasteful war
Artorius, your Emperor, engages in Amorica.
The times demand a different discipline,
A clean sweep. I claim the sovereignty;
By seizure of the Queen a sanction is conveyed,
Through a Celtic custom. I claim that person.
The lady will grant she has given me her love,
Solemnised secretly by sacred vows,
Long years since. So, I scorn

Clandestine adultery. I claim my consort.'

In the incredulous horror of the cruelty of heart,
And of the malice of the man she had made her lover,
Of his secret frustration like a smothered fire,
A banked up furnace, now breaking into flame,
Thus ruthlessly revealed, the wretched Queen
Reddened, and seemed ready to speak,
But no words sounded. Then, white and silent,
She gazed in her guilt. But the grey haired veteran,
Gerontius, retorted to the rebel and his rabble:
'Appropriately, indeed, you entered as animals,
Disturbing the decency and the dignity of our feast
With brutish slogans and barbarian brags.
You would seize a sovereignty unsanctified by right,
Subverting the law which is the source of liberty—
The authority Artorius established in this island.
The truths we uphold were transmitted by tradition:
The venerable rules of the Roman *res publica*,
Furnished by our fathers aforesaid in their wisdom.
Not liberty but license is furthered by your lust,
In course to be turned to a total tyranny—
Ever and inevitably the outcome of anarchy.'

Cerdic, the ruler of the Saxons, replied:
'Old man, the mystifications you mutter,
These archaic arguments, do not even amuse.
I think that I had them thrust down my throat
By my tutor who taught me in the times I have forgotten.
These sordid rags, these remnants of Rome,
Are ripe for burning. A better regimen
I will forge with my sword, and the force of my Saxons.'

Fierce and youthful, Fergus yelled:
'Roman or Saxon, I spit on this rubbish
Of law and logic, a thing to be laughed at!
His head was elated with the heather ale
Distilled on the heaths of his distant Highlands,
And the psychedelic and spotted scarlet toadstool
Which he gulped at one go down his gullet—it engendered
Leprechauns in his brain, and the lucid brightness
Of terrestrial paradises, the plain of Tira na Og.
Understandably uninterested in abstract ideas
He would rather fool you with fables of the fairies.
In his view was the vision of a vasty palace
With battlements of bannocks and ramparts of bacon
For himself and his comrades to keep and to hold.
'Who is high in heart need take no heed

Of law—' he said, 'It is for louts and lubbers;
I am bound by honour and my own boast.'

Mordantly, Gwalchmai, glancing at Modred:
'Brother, you command a curious band
Of Saxon pirates and Pictish savages—
Are you come to be reckoned with the cattle-reevers?'

Modred laughed: 'Maybe I match
With the potent Hercules in that high profession:
The cattle of Geryon, the king of Gades,
The triple giant, we are told that he took.
My friends Fergus and Cerdic formulate
Arguments to account for their actions—his honour,
Or the workings of wyrd. I want no pretexts.
A cattle-reever, I claim this cow!'

Then starkly he strode to the exalted stage
Where, silent, the Queen sat, and seizing her
By the hair of her head, he hauled her down.
By that ruthless act, a relationship that had ripened,
Declined, and dragged on, was destroyed; she became
No longer a person, for power possessed him,
But an object only, to be acquired and used.

Swiftly the sword of Gwalchmai from its scabbard
Flashed, but it faltered to flesh itself in the body
Of the brother of his blood; but the battle-ried Gerontius,
Ineffectual in his age, offered to intervene.
Cerdic and Fergus as with one stroke felled him;
He toppled like a tall tree to the floor.

Then a frenzy of fierce fighting broke out;
In the hall of Cadbury was wholesale carnage.
There were few to resist the relentless fury
Of the Saxons and the Picts, with swords and poniards.
The able-bodied were with the army of Artorius in Armorica;
And these feasters were fuddled with the fumes of wine,
And unprepared altogether for the unexpected onslaught.
In that murderous confusion Modred carried off
The Queen on his horse's crupper from the hall.
They galloped over the plain; Gwalchmai pursued,
But lost them at length in the lowering darkness.

* * *

In the White Tower, which traditions told
Cæsar had erected to seal his sovereignty,
In the town of London, in the loamy lagoon,
Was a secluded cell—there was kept solitary,
And closely guarded, Guanhumara the Queen.

The Middle Saxons, a stolid sept,
Possessed the place. She was put into their keeping.

On a night of January her gaolers nodded,
It seemed, for silently slid on the waters
A barge under the battlements, on the breast of Thames.
The Queen heard a hurried conference
With the guard at the gate, and the chink of gold,
As a pouch or a bag presumably was passed;
The steps on the stone of the stairs, and a key
Grated in the lock. Guanhumara looked,
As the door, opening, disclosed to her eyes
Three figures—the form and features
Of Bedwini the bishop, and Modred's brother,
The courteous Gwalchmai, and concealed in a cowl,
Another, unknown, but whose eyes examined her
Searchingly, and it seemed with disapproving scorn.

Gwalchmai spoke, swiftly and softly:
'We come to deliver you from this dark captivity.
How we found out the place, through what perils we passed,
Braving the barbarians; how we bribed your guards,
There is no time to tell—we may talk of it hereafter.
Suffice it to say that somehow we got here.
Daegrafn, now dead, to Bedwini delivered
Certain secrets, and runic symbols:
They have come in useful, to convey us in this contingency.
The boat is ready by the bank of the river.
You shall sail to a place of succour and safety.
I go, Guanhumara, overseas to Gaul,
To alert Artorius of this attempt on his imperium.
Rapidly he will return; order will be restored.
Modred, my brother, the miscreant and his mob
Of Picts and Saxons, will pay for their perversity,
And flee, as before on the field of Badon.'

Guanhumara answered: 'Gwalchmai, I guess
Order, annihilated once, not so easy
To build anew, being broken; have you the knowledge
To organise an omelette again into eggs?'
(Gallic Guanhumara, the good housewife,
Smiled slightly at the kitchen similitude).
'It seems not likely I shall see my lord,
Artorius again. With anguish I admit
My disordered passion produced this predicament.
I would seek out somewhere some solitary refuge,
A place of religion, where with prayers and penitence,
Austerely I may endeavour to expiate these acts.'

Bedwini replied: 'It is ready, as you bid;
 Away in the island of Ireland it awaits you.
 Bridget petitioned the blessed Patrick
 For a piece of ground, a place where to plan
 A convent for her nuns, a convenient cloister.
 But Patrick was grudging of that parcel of ground:
 "How much" he said, "will serve for your sisters?"
 "And sure" she answered, "for this shrine I ask
 No more than my cloak will cover." Then she cast it
 Down on the mould—this Dido, meditating
 Her Christian Carthage—and a miracle was consummated,
 For it covered the whole of the County Kildare.
 Nine virgins, vestals in vigil,
 Feed and tend there an unfailling flame,
 On a holy hearth, in the heart of the land.
 In that sacred place you shall be put for protection.
 I cannot go with you, Guanhumara, to convey you:
 It is a time of testing and turmoil in Britain—
 Everywhere, as always, the innocents will undergo
 Furious massacre; I must feed my flock,
 And, if the Lord require it, lay down my life.'

'Gladly I will go,' said Guanhumara, 'But who
 Will escort me to Ireland, among uncertainties and evils?'

Bedwini said: 'This stranger, and brother,
 Is come to convey you. His name is Cadoc.
 Cast out, at the council from communion, for his stubbornness,
 Churlishness and uncharity, I have chosen him for this—
 There is no one else now, to serve us in our need.'

Then Cadoc, harshly: 'Have we here the whore,
 Whom in holy courtesy I must convoy to Kildare—
 Whose deed of darkness has brought us to this destruction?'

Said Gwalchmai, grimly: 'More gracious be your tongue,
 And cautious, to a Queen, and with that my kinswoman;
 And call to your memory "*quia multum amavit.*"'

Cadoc replied: 'In religion, I am ready
 To take on, in holiness and humility, this task.
 The poorest of creatures, I crave this for a penance.
 I will escort the adulteress, your aunt, to Ireland.'

* * *

In the shrine of Kildare, shone and coruscated
 The perpetual flame as it flickered and flashed.
 Guanhumara knelt, in that ground, on her knees.
 In a midnight vigil she mourned among the vestals.
 Broken with contrition, the Queen of Britain,

In anguished orisons asking intercession,
 Held up her heart to the Queen of Heaven.

Brutally lowered over the land of Britain
 Civil war, in the wanness of winter,
 And savage death; and still in the darkness
 The perpetual flame of prayer persisted.

In the castle of Cadbury, casks were broached,
 Beer bubbled from the broken tuns,
 And wine, wasted wantonly by the plunderers.
 A party of Picts, with Fergus presiding,
 Tunelessly still ground out the garbled goat-song.
 Somewhat more sober, the Saxons apart
 Marked their merriment with a certain menace.

Cerdic motioned to Mul his sibling:
 'Brother, I would breathe it in your ear—this Briton,
 This madman Modred, thinks he is master,
 Consumed with pride—a peacock, a capercailzie,
 He spreads his tail, and trumpets his taunts,
 With tight-closed eyes. Eagerly he will take
 The brunt of the battle to brave his father.
 If they eat each other, it is our advantage.
 For this fellow, Fergus, and our friends the Picts,
 Their anarchic energy augments our army,
 Disdaining discipline, with a desperate courage;
 When the fighting is finished, we can settle them finally,
 By massacre, cut them down carousing in their cups.
 Trust in Wyrde, and your trenchant weapons:
 Anangke relegates this realm to the English.'

The drinking was deep: they honoured Dionysus,
 The ivy-crowned deity, in exalted dizziness
 And transported frenzy—the father of Tragedy.



(Scene: Near the battlefield of Camlann, outside the tent of Artorius. It is the late afternoon of a bleak January day. The flap of the tent lifts, and a tall woman with the head of a crow emerges. She holds in her hands a crystal cup).

THE MORIGAN : I am the Queen of Heaven—of the empty spaces
Between the stars, and consort
Of silver-handed Nuada, rider of the storm ;
I am arbitress of battles, and chooser of the slain.
This field is Camlann, the sedgy moor
In the western marshes : Oh Absalom, Absalom,
In the vale of Hebron, by Avalon's isle !
But now it is Modred who challenges Artorius ;
He heads the band of the yelling Picts,
And the silent Saxons. And I have come
To take back my Luck, the luck of Artorius,
This gleaming grail. And do not ask me
Why, feminine, my mind is changed,
Nor to whom I shall deliver it. I do not choose
Modred—the onion man ; he will play any part, but peel off
His masks and skins, he has no centre
To be committed to. And I do not choose
Fergus and his blue tattoo of Picts :
They go to battle and they always fall,
An æsthetically satisfying gesture. And as for Cerdic,
He trusts in wyrd and his own sword ;
His seed shall reign at Winchester, and in course of time
Maybe my irony ensures
A better and gentler civilisation out of these cinders
Than the wildness of the Celt, and the relics of Rome :
And England's Darling fights once more
The battles of Artorius by Athelney and Avalon,

Against a further threat from the Germanic sea.
To the uncertain battle now
I flap on my crow's wing.

(Exit)

(Enter the CHORUS of superannuated non-combatants).

CHORUS : They contend, they contend, the kinsmen contend—
As on the banks of the sacred Nile,
The red-haired Set, the wild ass, and Horus,
Kestrel of the morning—the hot wind
Out of the desert, the green strip
By the bank of the river, where the lettuce sprouts.
It is past midwinter, but not yet
The sun glints on the candour
Of Abyssinian snows ; not yet
The heavenly Water-bearer reverses
His fruitful urn.

Blessing on the wells and springs of Britain—
The red dew falls from the incensed heaven ;
There shall be a stirring in the waters, the river comes down,
From the cataracts, from the anemonied woods
Of Lebanon, tinged with the blood
Of the eternally slain and slain eternal
Master of the garden, of the buried, burgeoning wheat.

They contend, they contend—the remnant of Troia,
The reliques of Rome, and the inchoate hordes
Of the unharvested sea, and the sterile moorlands.
Under the razor of the January wind,
We, old men of Britain, children
Of Lochrine and Llyr, recalling
The misfortunes of Arthur, await,
From the arbitress of battles, the uncertain event.
But who approaches now, his figure marred
With the shed blood ? I discern the features
Of Bedwyr, the king's butler ; and it is shame
If, wearied, he shifts from the field.

(Enter BEDWYR)

BEDWYR : Weep, men of Britain, lament
For the flower of the land this day scorched up
Shed your tears for Urien of Rheged,
And Urien of Gower, lopped like trees
Under the woodman's axe ; lament

For the Hawk of May, for the grace
Of courtesy cut off, for Gwalchmai;
For Owain, his brother, whose fine eyes
The kite and the crow are ready to pluck out;
For Kai, the steward, who was not niggard
To furnish the tables with bread and flesh.
In the morning they rode out, a brilliant company,
Adorned with gold torques and bright enamels,
To make good their words that they boasted aforetime,
In the hall of their king on the eve of battle,
Over the red wine and the yellow mead;
The close of the day sees them fallen, and trodden
In the iron-hard ground of winter. The well-whetted spear
Has failed them, and the keen sword is shattered,
The shield-wall is broken to the foe's onrush.
Let your tears be down dropping for this field of disaster!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS : But what of the emperor? What of
Artorius?

BEDWYR : Artorius fights on, and seeks out his opponent.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS : And why is Bedwyr absent from the field?

BEDWYR : Only at the hest of my king and my dear love,
Do I shift from the field. When Artorius saw
How many of his men were fallen in the fight,
He turned to me and spoke: 'It is the guilty issue
Of my own blood that has brought this upon us.
In the thick of the battle I must seek out Modred
In single combat, and conclude this matter.
Retire you, my friend and my faithful servitor,
To my tent by the field. And there you will find
That cup of crystal which I call my Luck.
Make it ready for my return. If I come victorious,
We will drink again from it. And if otherwise,
Put it between my hands, for burial with my body.'
And for this I am come here, as he commanded.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS : Let him come victorious, and the tide be
turned!

BEDWYR : But lament, O men, for those who have fallen!

CHORUS : To the shadowy paths of Annwyn, and the wan
Eddies of Acheron, they are passing now,
The spirits of men. They went out to find
If it was real, this life they were leading.

Fame is their proper meed. Fame should run on
To ages of futurity, but it rests on the tongues
Of old men, chirping like crickets
By a cooling oven. Old men who soon
Will lie cold and forgotten in the frozen ground.
We are less real than those who we celebrate.
But one comes running, stained with the dust
Of the labour of this day.

(Enter a MESSENGER)

MESSENGER : I seek for Bedwyr, the cup-bearer of the king.

BEDWYR : I am present. Do you come from Artorius?

MESSENGER : Artorius lives. But now they are carrying
His body from the field, stricken
With a deadly wound.

BEDWYR : Who struck the blow? And what of Modred?

MESSENGER : Modred, who struck the blow, has perished.

BEDWYR : What brought about this double wounding?

MESSENGER : In the thickest part of the battle, Artorius
Sought out his son and his sister's son.
At last they confronted each other, but seemed
As if transformed, their nature changed
To that of the twin dragons, the warring worms of the earth.
Artorius lifted Caliburn his sword,
Firmly gripping it in both of his hands,
And made to strike down on the helmet of Modred.
But out of its scabbard Modred disced
His subtle rapier—they say that the tip
Was smeared with a secret and corrosive poison;
The Black Annis of the Dane Hills,
The hag who has her cave there, who lurks
Concealed in the branches of trees to snatch and devour
Straying children, it was who gave it him
On a moonless night in summer. It seemed
In a timeless moment each stood there poised,
And ready to deal the other his death. Then, as if by chance,
Down from the sky distraction swooped:
A crow, one of the many necrophilous coveys,
That hung and haunted about the field,
Came cawing and croaking down, its black
And fœtid wings beating about

The eyes of the combatant kinsmen. Blindly and confusedly
Their arms and weapons flailed. Caliburn
Glanced from the helmet and breastplate, and thrust
Deep into the belly and bowels of Modred. At that moment
The rebel's thin and envenomed rapier
Found a mark in the groin of Artorius. Modred
Stumbled and swooned to the slippery ground, and, dying,
Gasp'd out a final and raucous word:
'*Vicisti!*'—to his sire was it said?
It seem'd rather to the emptiness of the air.

Seeing their Ymherawdr stricken, the Brythonic
Host falter'd, appall'd. And then,
From behind the horde of the disorganised Picts,
Cerdic and his Saxons swung into action,
Moving as if they mastered a Roman regimen.
They are pressing hard the dispirited remnant,
Who still fight on; but defeat seems certain.

BEDWYR : These disasters that power, who rules
The turbulent tides of our being, has brought upon us,
For the destruction of the island. And who can tell
Out of what depths she sprang at her birth?

CHORUS : Three drops of blood mingled with sperm
(Kronos of crooked councils reaping
His father's sex—mandrake and mistletoe)
Through the bright æther slid,
Like dragon's teeth.
The first drop fell on the earth.
Unsheathed from harsh bark
Nymphs of the Melian grove, of ash trees, shaking
Their straight and deadly spears. Possession,
Beserk fury, bitter frenzy of battle,
Bane to the sons of men.

A second drop into the unfathomable,
Unnamed reaches of Night and Erebus—
Realms of the dead, regions of the unborn:
Blood-lipp'd, serpent-skirted, leaden-cheeked, upreared
The unmentionable Avengers.

Into the jewell'd, light-enraptur'd sea
A third drop spurtd. Caress'd by favouring winds
A delicate scallop-shell drift'd to Cyprus.
Naked, virgin she rose, and cleansed
The brine from pearly flanks and sun-bright hair.

She also is possession; blood-born and laughter-loving
Even as those others.

(ARTORIUS, wounded, is brought in).

ARTORIUS : Fetch me, Bedwyr, water to drink. The poison
Runs through my veins. My brain
Begins to cloud. I see
A fire flickering before my eyes,
Kindled by the breath of nine maidens—the cauldron
Of Ceridwen, as once I beheld it
At the centre of the earth? Or is it
The perpetual flame that burns in the shrine of Kildare,
Tended by vestals? A solitary, veiled woman
Kneels before it, holding a small candle,
As if for the feast of the Purification.
It is the pale face of Guanhumara I see.
The wild horses, the wild horses—
Tear the white limbs of the false woman!

BEDWYR : Forgive her, Oh king, forgive your wife—
Who now, in the sanctuary of Bridget,
Repents, and prays for you in her repentance.

ARTORIUS : Oh you lay all night in your lover's arms
And you took no thought of me;
But you thought that the play of love was sweet
As the flower of the hawthorn tree.

Oh you may wear the stones with your knees . . .
But you will not bring back . . .
Poor woman

I should rather ask forgiveness of her! What good did I do
her?
I gave her no child but only a false lover,
That issued from my incestuous loins. And now I am dying
With no one to follow me to prop the falling realm. Llachew
Perished in the Caledonian wood,
Pierced by a Pictish dart.
I must not die, Bedwyr, pour water
Onto the crystal cup I call my Luck,
And bring it to me here.

(BEDWYR goes into the tent).

ARTORIUS : . . . will not bring back the brave young men,
That lie in a clay cold bed.

(BEDWYR comes out of the tent again).

BEDWYR : Your Luck is gone. It stands no more
In its appropriate place. The tent is dark.
The strange light that used to glow from that crystal
No longer illumines it. Has some sneak-thief
Slunk in, under cover of the battle's tumult?

ARTORIUS : She who formerly gave it me in trust
Has taken back her lending. This was the thief.

BEDWYR : The sword remains. The active power remains.

ARTORIUS : It did not fail me in the fight, but its stroke
Swerved awry from my will. There is no right potency
In the active power when the passive power departs. Take it—
Fling it to the oblivion of the stagnant lake of sedges!

BEDWYR : I return it with reverence to her who gave it.

ARTORIUS : Fling it rather with scorn to that fickle
Lady of the glimmering lake—with scorn and defiance.
But I am freed now from the grasp of Necessity;
So bring me, in an earthen cup, some drink.

BEDWYR : By privilege of my office I have already brought it.
(He proffers a cup to ARTORIUS, who is about to drink, but hesitates).

ARTORIUS : The water is red. It is tinged with the people's blood.

BEDWYR : Not water, but wine—Falernian,
The last of it, from the cellars
Of Constantine, your great-grandsire, or perhaps
From the store of Aurelius Ambrosius. Drink, Cæsar—
A suitable potation.

ARTORIUS : I drink it for the love it is offered with. Bedwyr,
You were silent when we sat in the fane of Michael,
Debating about the laws.

BEDWYR : Was I supposed to say something serious?—
The single thing that slipped into my thought
Was my simple love. And it could find no word.

ARTORIUS : Let that wordless word endure. For the makeshift
Of law is shattered now. The polity crumbles.

The radial crown that was placed on me,
Under the uncertain weather of July,
Devolves, by right, on Custennyn my cousin;
But what can he achieve, leading a band
Of refugees and guerillas in the mountains of Wales?
Anangke assigns this realm to the English.
And the stables are still to be cleansed. But not by me.
Carry me now out of the biting air.

(ARTORIUS is carried into the tent, BEDWYR following).

CHORUS : In that island of the apple trees,
Contraries are reconciled; the great
Beneficent and ancient Snake is coiled
About the gnarly bole, where from the boughs
Depend the golden fruit; and lean
The hazels over the deep pool, and the salmon plunging.
Quietly they walk in the shade and on green lawns,
The lovers there, and the friends;
Those whose hearts had beaten with integrity.
They listen to the timeless song of the white-breasted
Birds of Rhiannon, and they forget
Their bitter anguish, their rage and pride,
And all they endured for passion, or in war.

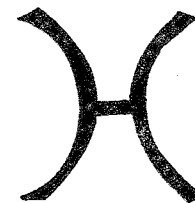
Thither you too Artorius, are passing now—
To rest in the softened sunset of our dream
For long, long ages; till the circling, starry wheel
Summon you once again into the tumult
To save your falling island.

(Re-enter BEDWYR).

BEDWYR : Artorius is dead—your friend and mine:
The prop is fallen—the image of an order
That momentarily flashed, a meteor in the night, is gone.
Returns the darkness and the accustomed horror.
As for the dead, it is not possible,
In the shock of such a loss, for the mind to imagine
Them wholly gone, a snuffed-out candle flame.
But if they anywhere exist
It is in another mode of being, and further
Than the furthest star that flickers in the utmost galaxy;
Yet, in this aching wound of our bereavement,
Nearer than the neck-vein. But I cannot help
But think of him as stumbling through the darkness on a
strange path.

And I want to be there
 Where he is, if I could help and comfort him
 With the touch of a hand. But I must not :
 We stand as sentries, and the order
 For knock-off is not yet given.
 And I have his orders too. I go
 To throw the bitter sword into the bitter lake.
 By that gesture, I affirm, on his behalf,
 My own and his existence—not bound
 By myth, the starry returning wheels.

CHORUS : As the darkness gathers, enrol him
 With those whose human stature
 Is heightened, not diminished, by their death.
 Not true, not true what the ancient poet said
 Speaking of the misfortune
 Of birth into this harsh world—for not
 Not to be born, to exist,
 This is the best for man.



After the last battle, Camlann, three men only
 Survived, it is said; and the first
 Was Sandde Bryd Angel—so beautiful
 The grace of his limbs and the light of his face,
 Men would not strike him; they took him for an angel
 Ministering in that agony. And the second
 Was Morvran the son of Tegid, hideous,
 Shagged with hair like a rutting stag.
 Men took him for a devil, auxiliary
 In that unnatural fight, and would not strike him.
 And the third was Glewlwyd Gavælvawr,
 The dusky hero of the mighty grasp,
 A thick-thewed muscleman, the porter
 Of the court of Artorius.
 None struck at him, not risking
 That terrible grip. So these lived on
 In the extremes of their humanity.
 The heart of Bedwyr broke beside the body of his emperor,
 And they buried him there on the field of Camlann.
 After the battle, silence. Silence, not peace,
 Over the exhausted land. And then
 The pluvial god sent rain,
 A steady drizzle, filling the dykes,
 Flooding the brown fallows,
 In purification, till fishes of the sea
 Played in the empty furrows.

They passed to westward, those three men,
 Dragging on a rough sled or raft of boughs
 The confined body. They crossed the dark moors
 Of Damnonia, and reached at last
 The ancient igneous rocks—granite, alabaster
 And serpentine—of the horn of the land.

The edge of time, the frayed edge:
Ghosts of the dead and of the unborn
Began to crowd upon them. Beneath their feet
Were subterranean knockings, the spirits
Of Phœnician slaves in the hollow tin-mines.

As they passed by
The holy place of Morwenstow, an old priest
In a fisherman's jersey and heavy sea-boots,
And the green headgear of an Armenian archimandrite,
Looked out and blessed them. At length they came
To a bare treeless headland, with a few dwellings:
The village where the cow ate the bell rope.

A sea-morgan, a mermaid, haunted those coasts,
Lily-white and lustful, insatiate and frigid.
Fishermen, stripped to the waist, mending their nets
In lonely coves, or boys,
With unbroken voices, on the edge of puberty,
Singing in the choir, awakened her desires.
She scrambled up the grating shingle, or slithered
Into the chancel, and seized them in her arms.
She dragged them down to her coral and pearl dight hall;
But as the waters closed over them, she found she held
Only a draggled corpse. Her terrible,
Frustrated shrieks thickened men's blood,
Made cattle drop their calves untimely.

With difficulty they hauled down to the beach
The body on its raft of boughs. And stood there,
Gazing out over the endless waters
To the last lurid glow of the sinking sun.
A flock of red-footed choughs wheeled inshore to the cliffs.
Sandde said: 'Maybe
His soul flies free among that lot.'
And Morvran: 'But we must shove his body
Into the waves. The tide will take it.'
And Glewlwyd: 'There is here no priest
To hallow his parting. Modred,
With his Saxon and Pictish friends, has hunted and harried
The priests through the land. And there is no poet
To speak the praise of our Ymherawdr:
Gwion fell in the fight in the hall
Under the holly and ivy boughs; and Daegrafn also,
The hostage, knifed by his own kith.
And we have no heart to sing.' Then, as they looked,

They saw a figure striding over the sands,
A woman taller than a man, clothed from head to foot
In a coarse dark gown. Her hair was white
As the cotton-grass, and her face dead-white,
Like a bleached bone that lay upon the shore.

It was the virgin Zennora, who dwelt
In a cranny of the cliff, among the scooped-out holes
Of shearwater and puffin. None could remember
A time when she did not dwell there, even the oldest;
Nor knew for a certainty what manner of woman she was.
Some said a Christian votaress, and some
A Druid lady of the standing stones;
And some said Myrddyn's sister.
Her food was the bulbs of the wild garlic
That flourished all about, and fish
Which her three seals brought her
Out of the deep waters—
Silkie, Sæhund and Slippa.
And these attended her now,
Clumsily lolloping along behind her.
When the men saw those creatures,
With their great liquid eyes, they crossed themselves.
They thought them human souls who, for some unknown sin,
Did penance in those bodies. They were wrong,
Construing thus those harmless beasts.

They saw that she held in her hands a great crowd,
Or a lyre, formed from the shell of a green sea-turtle,
Strung with dolphin's sinews. She greeted them
In a gruff deep voice: 'Men, what do you here,
In your beauty, strength, and hideousness,
Carrying a corpse?' And Glewlwyd: 'This body is
Artorius, erstwhile Emperor in this island;
And we consign it to the sea. It is our wyrd.'
And she: 'You do well:
Not wise the thought, a grave for Arthur.'
Then Morvran: 'There is no one here
To hallow this parting, or to sing
The praises of the dead. Lady, if you have any skill
In music, sing for us.' And she: 'I have such skill,
And I will sing.'

Then, while they pushed the raft of boughs and the coffin
Into the outgoing tide, she took her crowd,
Preluding among the strings—they awoke

Sea-echoes of deep caves, and the moan of breakers
On grinding shingle. Enchanted by the sound,
Silkie, Sæhund and Slippa
Were still and listened, their eyes wide,
Forgetting their fear of man. The raft drifted
Further and further from the shore,
Over the darkening waves. Then she began to sing,
Her voice booming over the waters:

'We send you, body of a notable man,
By the waste paths of the sea,
The salt, unharvested element,

'To the polity of the fish,
To the furtiveness of the crab,
To the tentacle of the squid,

'To the red ruler of the tornado,
To the green ruler of the undersea,
To the black ruler of the dead,

'To the three-headed dog,
To the sharp-toothed Scylla—
Cuttle fish, and sea-bitch.

'O Lord, who said to the deep:
"So far, and no further!"
Deliver Thy darling from the tooth of the shark.

'O Christ descending
To the profound, redeem him
From the belly of the fish.

'O Spirit, brooding on tohu-bohu, save
From the embrace of the sea-morgan,
From Tiamat, the formless—

'Dove, bearing your olive leaf
Through the rains of the new year,
Breathe into the nostrils of the drowned.

'Star of the Sea,
In intercession gleam
Over the black waters.

'And our vows follow him,
Like petrels flittering
Over the crests and troughs of the waves.

'To the verdict and oblivion of the sea,
Artorius, we consign
Your actions, your defeat.'

She ceased; and Silkie and his two brothers
Shook themselves out of their trance, and saw
The strangers standing by.
Then Sæhund gave a soft and sudden 'Bao !'
They slid into the sea, following the raft
Far out from shore. They bobbed and plunged,
Joyfully, in the rolling waves.
The unfallen creatures danced in the salt element:
The source and origin of all life.

Hang up Euterpe, on the coral bough your harp:
Take down, Calliope your trumpet

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Through the rains of the new year,
Breathe into the nostrils of the drowned.

'Star of the Sea,
In intercession gleam
Over the black waters.

'And our vows follow him,
Like petrels flittering
Over the crests and troughs of the waves.

'To the verdict and oblivion of the sea,
Artorius, we consign
Your actions, your defeat.'

She ceased; and Silkie and his two brothers
Shook themselves out of their trance, and saw
The strangers standing by.
Then Sæhund gave a soft and sudden 'Bao !'
They slid into the sea, following the raft
Far out from shore. They bobbed and plunged,
Joyfully, in the rolling waves.
The unfallen creatures danced in the salt element:
The source and origin of all life.

Hang up Euterpe, on the coral bough your harp:
Take down, Calliope your trumpet