

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05120-0 - The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by his Daughter

May Morris: Volume 6: The Earthly Paradise: A Poem 4

William Morris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

DECEMBER

DEAD lonely night and all streets quiet now,
Thin o'er the moon the hindmost cloud swims past
Of that great rack that brought us up the snow;
On earth strange shadows o'er the snow are cast;
Pale stars, bright moon, swift cloud make heaven so vast
That earth left silent by the wind of night
Seems shrunken 'neath the grey unmeasured height.

Ah! through the hush the looked-for midnight clangs!
And then, e'en while its last stroke's solemn drone
In the cold air by unlit windows hangs,
Out break the bells above the year foredone,
Change, kindness lost, love left unloved alone;
Till their despairing sweetness makes thee deem
Thou once wert loved, if but amidst a dream.

O thou who clingest still to life and love,
Though nought of good, no God thou mayst discern,
Though nought that is, thine utmost woe can move,
Though no soul knows wherewith thine heart doth yearn,
Yet, since thy weary lips no curse can learn,
Cast no least thing thou lovedst once away,
Since yet perchance thine eyes shall see the day.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05120-0 - The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by his Daughter

May Morris: Volume 6: The Earthly Paradise: A Poem 4

William Morris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

DECEMBER came, with mirth men needs must make
 E'en for the empty days and leisure's sake
 That earth's cold leaden sleep doth bring; so there
 Our elders sat within the guest-hall fair,
 Not looking older for the snow without;
 Cheery enough; remembering not old doubt,
 A gnawing pain once, grown too hard to bear,
 And so cast by; not thinking of old fear,
 That conquering once, e'en with its victory
 Must fade away, and like all things else, die;
 Not thinking of much else than that they had
 Enough of life to make them somewhat glad
 When all went well with them.

Now so it fell

That mariners were there, who 'gan to tell
 Mishaps betid upon the winter seas,
 Which set some younger men amidst of these
 To ask the Wanderers of their voyage vain,
 As knowing scarce the tale thereof. Small pain
 It gave them now to answer: yet belike
 On the old men, their hosts, the thing did strike
 In jarring wise, this turning o'er and o'er
 Of memories once so bitter, sharp and sore:
 Wherefore at last an elder said: "Let be,
 My masters! if about the troublous sea
 Ye needs must hear, hearken a tale once told
 By kin of ours in the dim days of old,
 Whose thoughts when turning to a peaceful home
 Unto this very west of ours must come—
 Scarce causelessly meseems when all is said,
 And I remember that years bow my head,
 And not the trouble of those days of war,
 Of loss and wrong that in old stories are."

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05120-0 - The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by his Daughter

May Morris: Volume 6: The Earthly Paradise: A Poem 4

William Morris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE GOLDEN APPLES

THE ARGUMENT

THIS TALE TELLS OF THE VOYAGE OF A SHIP OF TYRE, THAT, AGAINST THE WILL OF THE SHIPMEN, BORE HERCULES TO AN UNKNOWN LAND OF THE WEST, THAT HE MIGHT ACCOMPLISH A TASK LAID ON HIM BY THE FATES.

AS many as the leaves fall from the tree,
 From the world's life the years are fallen away
 Since King Eurystheus sat in majesty
 In fair Mycenæ; midmost of whose day
 It once befell that in a quiet bay
 A ship of Tyre was swinging nigh the shore,
 Her folk for sailing handling rope and oar.

Fresh was the summer morn, a soft wind stole
 Down from the sheep-browsed slopes the cliffs that crowned,
 And ruffled lightly the long gleaming roll
 Of the peaceful sea, and bore along the sound
 Of shepherd-folk and sheep and questing hound;
 For in the first dip of the hillside there
 Lay bosomed midst its trees a homestead fair.

Amid regrets for last night, when the moon,
 Risen on the soft dusk, shone on maidens' feet
 Brushing the gold-heart lilies to the tune
 Of pipes complaining, o'er the grass down-beat
 That mixed with dewy flowers its odour sweet,
 The shipmen laboured, till the sail unfurled
 Swung round the prow to meet another world.

But ere the anchor had come home, a shout
 Rang from the strand, as though the ship were hailed.
 Whereat the master bade them stay, in doubt
 That they without some needful thing had sailed;
 When, lo! from where the cliffs' steep grey sides failed
 Into a ragged stony slip, came twain
 Who seemed in haste the ready keel to gain.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05120-0 - The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by his Daughter

May Morris: Volume 6: The Earthly Paradise: A Poem 4

William Morris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

The Golden
Apples

Soon they drew nigh, and he who first came down
Unto the surf was a man huge of limb,
Grey-eyed, with crisp-curved hair 'twixt black and brown,
Who had a lion's skin cast over him,
So wrought with gold that the fell showed but dim
Betwixt the threads, and in his hand he bore
A mighty club with bands of steel done o'er.

Panting there followed him a grey old man,
Bearing a long staff, clad in gown of blue,
Feeble of aspect, hollow-cheeked and wan,
Who when unto his fellow's side he drew,
Said faintly: "Now, do that which thou shouldst do;
This is the ship." Then in the other's eye
A smile gleamed, and he spake out merrily:

"Masters, folk tell me that ye make for Tyre,
And after that still nearer to the sun;
And since Fate bids me look to die by fire,
Fain am I, ere my worldly day be done,
To know what from earth's hottest can be won;
And this old man, my kinsman, would with me.
How say ye, will ye bear us o'er the sea?"

"What is thy name?" the master said: "And know
That we are merchants, and for nought give nought;
What wilt thou pay?—thou seem'st full rich, I trow."
The old man muttered, stooped adown and caught
At something in the sand: "E'en so I thought,"
The younger said, "when I set out from home—
As to my name, perchance in days to come

"Thou shalt know that—but have heed, take this toy,
And call me the Strong Man." And as he spake
The master's deep-brown eyes 'gan gleam with joy,
For from his arm a huge ring did he take,
And cast it on the deck, where it did break
A water-jar, and in the wet shards lay
Golden, and gleaming like the end of day.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05120-0 - The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by his Daughter

May Morris: Volume 6: The Earthly Paradise: A Poem 4

William Morris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

But the old man held out a withered hand,
 Wherein there shone two pearls most great and fair,
 And said: "If any nigher I might stand,
 Then mightst thou see the things I give thee here—
 And for my name—a many names I bear,
 But call me Shepherd of the Shore this tide,
 And for more knowledge with a good will bide."

The Golden
 Apples

From one to other turned the master's eyes;
 The Strong Man laughed as at some hidden jest,
 And wild doubts in the shipman's heart did rise;
 But thinking on the thing, he deemed it best
 To bid them come aboard, and take such rest
 As they might have of the untrusty sea,
 Mid men who trusty fellows still should be.

Then no more words the Strong Man made, but straight
 Caught up the elder in his arms, and so,
 Making no whit of all that added weight,
 Strode to the ship, right through the breakers low,
 And catching at the rope that they did throw
 Out toward his hand, swung up into the ship:
 Then did the master let the hawser slip.

The shapely prow cleft the wet mead and green,
 And wandering drew the shipmen round to gaze
 Upon those limbs, the mightiest ever seen;
 And many deemed it no light thing to face
 The splendour of his eyes, though they did blaze
 With no wrath now, no hate for them to dread,
 As seaward 'twixt the summer isles they sped.

Freshened the wind, but ever fair it blew
 Unto the south-east; but as failed the land,
 Unto the plunging prow the Strong Man drew,
 And silent, gazing with wide eyes did stand,
 As though his heart found rest; but mid the band
 Of shipmen in the stern the old man sat,
 Telling them tales that no man there forgat.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05120-0 - The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by his Daughter

May Morris: Volume 6: The Earthly Paradise: A Poem 4

William Morris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

The Golden
Apples

As one who had beheld, he told them there
Of the sweet singer, whom, for his song's sake,
The dolphins back from choking death did bear;
How in the mid sea did the vine outbreak
O'er that ill bark when Bacchus 'gan to wake;
How anigh Cyprus, ruddy with the rose
The cold sea grew as any June-loved close;

While on the flowery shore all things alive
Grew faint with sense of birth of some delight,
And the nymphs waited trembling there, to give
Glad welcome to the glory of that sight:
He paused then, ere he told how, wild and white,
Rose ocean, breaking o'er a race accurst,
A world once good, now come unto its worst.

And then he smiled, and said: "And yet ye won,
Ye men, and tremble not on days like these,
Nor think with what a mind Prometheus' son
Beheld the last of the torn reeling trees
From high Parnassus: slipping through the seas
Ye never think, ye men-folk, how ye seem
From down below through the green waters' gleam."

Dusk was it now when these last words he said,
And little of his visage might they see,
But o'er their hearts stole vague and troublous dread,
They knew not why; yet ever quietly
They sailed that night; nor might a morning be
Fairer than was the next morn; and they went
Along their due course after their intent.

The fourth day, about sunrise, from the mast
The watch cried out he saw Phœnician land;
Whereat the Strong Man on the elder cast
A look askance, and he straight took his stand
Anigh the prow, and gazed beneath his hand
Upon the low sun and the scarce-seen shore,
Till cloud-flecks rose, and gathered and drew o'er.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05120-0 - The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by his Daughter

May Morris: Volume 6: The Earthly Paradise: A Poem 4

William Morris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

The morn grown cold; then small rain 'gan to fall, The Golden
 And all the wind dropped dead, and hearts of men Apples
 Sank, and their bark seemed helpless now and small;
 Then suddenly the wind 'gan moan again;
 Sails flapped, and ropes beat wild about; and then
 Down came the great east wind; and the ship ran
 Straining, heeled o'er, through seas all changed and wan.

Westward, scarce knowing night from day, they drave
 Through sea and sky grown one; the Strong Man wrought
 With mighty hands, and seemed a God to save;
 But on the prow, heeding all weather nought,
 The elder stood, nor any prop he sought,
 But swayed to the ship's wallowing, as on wings
 He there were set above the wrack of things.

And westward still they drave; and if they saw
 Land upon either side, as on they sped,
 'Twas but as faces in a dream may draw
 Anigh, and fade, and leave nought in their stead;
 And in the shipmen's hearts grew heavy dread
 To sick despair; they deemed they should drive on
 Till the world's edge and empty space were won.

But 'neath the Strong Man's eyes e'en as they might
 They toiled on still; and he sang to the wind,
 And spread his arms to meet the waters white,
 As o'er the deck they tumbled, making blind
 The brine-drenched shipmen; nor with eye unkind
 He gazed up at the lightning; nor would frown
 When o'er the wet waste Jove's bolt rattled down.

And they, who at the last had come to think
 Their guests were very Gods, with all their fear
 Feared nought belike that their good ship would sink
 Amid the storm; but rather looked to hear
 The last moan of the wind that them should bear
 Into the windless stream of ocean grey,
 Where they should float till dead was every day.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05120-0 - The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by his Daughter

May Morris: Volume 6: The Earthly Paradise: A Poem 4

William Morris

Excerpt

[More information](#)The Golden
Apples

Yet their fear mocked them; for the storm 'gan die
 About the tenth day, though unto the west
 They drave on still; soon fair and quietly
 The morn would break; and though amid their rest
 Nought but long evil wanderings seemed the best
 That they might hope for; still, despite their dread,
 Sweet was the quiet sea and goodlihead

Of the bright sun at last come back again;
 And as the days passed, less and less fear grew,
 If without cause, till faded all their pain;
 And they 'gan turn unto their guests anew,
 Yet durst ask nought of what that evil drew
 Upon their heads; or of returning speak.
 Happy they felt, but listless, spent, and weak.

And now as at the first the elder was,
 And sat and told them tales of yore agone;
 But still the Strong Man up and down would pass
 About the deck, or on the prow alone
 Would stand and stare out westward; and still on
 Through a fair summer sea they went, nor thought
 Of what would come when these days turned to nought.

And now when twenty days were well passed o'er
 They made a new land; cloudy mountains high
 Rose from the sea at first; then a green shore
 Spread fair below them: as they drew anigh,
 No sloping stony strand could they espy,
 And no surf breaking; the green sea and wide
 Wherethrough they slipped was driven by no tide.

Dark fell ere they might set their eager feet
 Upon the shore; but night-long their ship lay
 As in a deep stream, by the blossoms sweet
 That flecked the grass whence flowers ne'er passed away.
 But when the cloud-barred east brought back the day,
 And turned the western mountain-tops to gold,
 Fresh fear the shipmen in their bark did hold.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05120-0 - The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by his Daughter

May Morris: Volume 6: The Earthly Paradise: A Poem 4

William Morris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

For as a dream seemed all: too fair for those
 Who needs must die; moreover they could see,
 A furlong off, 'twixt apple-tree and rose,
 A brazen wall that gleamed out wondrously
 In the young sun, and seemed right long to be;
 And memory of all marvels lay upon
 Their shrinking hearts now this sweet place was won.

The Golden
 Apples

But when unto the nameless guests they turned,
 Who stood together nigh the plank shot out
 Shoreward, within the Strong Man's eyes there burned
 A wild light, as the other one in doubt
 He eyed a moment; then with a great shout
 Leaped into the blossomed grass; the echoes rolled
 Back from the hills, harsh still and over-bold.

Slowly the old man followed him, and still
 The crew held back: they knew now they were brought
 Over the sea the purpose to fulfil
 Of these strange men; and in their hearts they thought:
 "Perchance we yet shall live, if, meddling nought
 With dreams, we bide here till these twain come back;
 But prying eyes the fire-blast seldom lack."

Yet 'mongst them were two fellows bold and young,
 Who, looking each upon the other's face,
 Their hearts to meet the unknown danger strung,
 And went ashore, and at a gentle pace
 Followed the strangers, who unto the place
 Where the wall gleamed had turned; peace and desire
 Mingled together in their hearts, as nigher

They drew unto that wall, and dulled their fear:
 Fair wrought it was, as though with bricks of brass;
 And images upon its face there were,
 Stories of things a long while come to pass:
 Nor that alone—as looking in a glass
 Its maker knew the tales of what should be,
 And wrought them there for bird and beast to see.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05120-0 - The Collected Works of William Morris: With Introductions by his Daughter

May Morris: Volume 6: The Earthly Paradise: A Poem 4

William Morris

Excerpt

[More information](#)

The Golden
Apples

So on they went; the many birds sang sweet
Through all that blossomed thicket from above,
And unknown flowers bent down before their feet;
The very air, cleft by the grey-winged dove,
Throbbled with sweet scent, and smote their souls with love.
Slowly they went till those twain stayed before
A strangely-wrought and iron-covered door.

They stayed, too, till o'er noise of wind, and bird,
And falling flower, there rang a mighty shout
As the Strong Man his steel-bound club upreared,
And drave it 'gainst the hammered iron stout,
Where 'neath his blows flew bolt and rivet out,
Till shattered on the ground the great door lay,
And into the guarded place bright poured the day.

The Strong Man entered, but his fellow stayed,
Leaning against a tree-trunk as they deemed.
They faltered now, and yet all things being weighed
Went on again; and thought they must have dreamed
Of the old man, for now the sunlight streamed
Full on the tree he had been leaning on,
And him they saw not go, yet was he gone:

Only a slim green lizard flitted there
Amidst the dry leaves; him they noted nought,
But trembling, through the doorway 'gan to peer,
And still of strange and dreadful saw not aught,
Only a garden fair beyond all thought.
And there, 'twixt sun and shade, the Strong Man went
On some long-sought-for end belike intent.

They 'gan to follow down a narrow way
Of green-sward that the lilies trembled o'er,
And whereon thick the scattered rose-leaves lay;
But a great wonder weighed upon them sore,
And well they thought they should return no more,
Yet scarce a pain that seemed; they looked to meet
Before they died things strange and fair and sweet.