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Painting by Howard Pyle

Illustration for "The Scabbard"

THE COMING OF LANCASTER

The Scabbard

RETOLD FROM THE FRENCH OF NICOLAS DE CAEN

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

HERE we have to do with the eighth tale of the Dizain of Queens. I abridge, as heretofore, at discretion; and the result is that to the Norman cleric appertains whatever the tale may have of merit, whereas what you find distasteful in it you must impute to my delinquencies in skill rather than in volition.

In the year of grace 1399 (Nicolas begins) King Richard, the second monarch of that name to rule in England, wrenched his own existence, and nothing more, from the close wiles of Bolingbroke. The circumstances have been recorded elsewhere. All persons, saving only Owain Glyndwyr and Henry of Lancaster, believed King Richard dead at that period when Richard attended his own funeral, as a proceeding taking to the fancy, and, among many others, saw the body of Edward Maudelain interred with every regal ceremony in the chapel at Langley Bower. Then alone Sire Richard crossed the seas, and at thirty-three set out to inspect a transformed and gratefully untrammelling world wherein not a foot of land belonged to him.

Holland was the surname he assumed, the name of his half-brothers; and to detail his Asian wanderings were both tedious and unprofitable. But at the end of each four months would come to him a certain messenger from Glyndwyr, whom Richard supposed to be the devil Bembo, who notoriously ran every day around the world upon the Welshman's business. It was in the Isle of Taprobane, where the pismires are as great as hounds, and mine and store the gold the inhabitants afterward rob them of through a very cunning device, that this emissary brought the letter which read simply, "Now is England fit pasture for the White Hart." Presently was Richard Holland in Wales, and then he rode to Sycharth.

There, after salutation, Glyndwyr gave an account of his long stewardship. It was a puzzling record of obscure and tireless machinations with which we have no immediate concern; in brief, the very barons who had ousted King Log had been the first to find King Stork intolerable; and Northumberland, Worcester, Douglas, Mortimer, and so on, were already pledged and in open revolt. "By the God I do not altogether serve," Owain ended, "you have but to declare yourself, sire, and within the moment England is yours."

More lately Richard spoke with narrowed eyes. "You forget that while Henry of Lancaster lives no other man will ever reign out a tranquil week in these islands. Come then! the hour strikes; and we will coax the devil for once in a way to serve God."

"Oh, but there is a boundary appointed," Glyndwyr moodily returned. "You, too, forget that in cold blood this Henry stabbed my only son. But I do not forget this, and I have tried divers methods which we need not speak of—I who can at will corrupt the air, and cause sickness and storms, raise heavy mists, and create plagues and fires and shipwrecks; yet the life itself I cannot take. For there is a boundary appointed, sire, and in the end the Master of our Sabbaths cannot serve us even though he would."

And Richard crossed himself. "You horribly mistake my meaning. Your practices are your own affair, and in them I decline to dabble. I design but to trap a tiger with his appropriate bait. For you have a fief at Caer Idion, I think?—Very well! I intend to herd your sheep there, for a week or two, after the honorable example of Apollo. It is your part merely to see that Henry knows I live alone and in disguise at Caer Idion."

The gaunt Welshman chuckled. "Yes,

Bolingbroke would cross the world, much less the Severn, to make quite sure of Richard's death. He would come in his own person with at most some twenty followers. I will have a hundred there; and certain aging scores will then be settled in that place." Glyndwyr meditated afterward, very evilly. "Sire," he said, without prelude, "I do not recognize Richard of Bordeaux. You have garnered much in travelling!"

"Why, look you," Richard returned, "I have garnered so much that I do not greatly care whether this scheme succeed or no. With age I begin to contend even more indomitably that a wise man will take nothing very seriously. You barons here consider it an affair of importance who may chance to be King of England this time next year; you take sides between Henry and myself. I tell you frankly that neither of us, that no man in the world, by reason of innate limitations, can ever rule otherwise than abominably, or, ruling, create anything save discord. Nor can I see that this matters, either, since the discomfort of an ant village is not, after all, a planet-wrecking disaster. Nay, if the planets do indeed sing together, it is, depend upon it, to the burden of *Fools All*. For I am as liberally endowed as most people; and when I consider my abilities, performances, instincts, and so on, quite aloofly, as I would those of another person, I can only shrug: and to conceive that common sense, much less omnipotence, would ever concern itself about the actions of a creature so entirely futile is, to me at least, impossible."

"I have known the thought," said Owain,—“though rarely since I found the woman that was afterward my wife, and never since my only son was murdered. You are as yet the empty scabbard, powerless alike for help or hurt. Ey! hate or love must be the sword, sire, that informs us here, and then, if only for a very little while, we are as gods.”

"Pardie! I have loved as often as Salomon, and in fourteen kingdoms."

"We of Cymry have a saying, sire, that when a man loves *par amours* the second time he may safely assume that he has never been in love at all."

"And I hate Henry of Lancaster as I do the devil."

"I greatly fear," said Owain, with a sigh, "lest it may be your irreparable malady to hate nothing, not even that which you dislike."

So then Glyndwyr rode south to besiege and burn the town of Caerdyf, while at Caer Idion Richard Holland tranquilly abode for some three weeks. There was in this place only Caradawc, the former shepherd, his wife Alundyne, and their sole daughter Branwen. They gladly perceived Sire Richard was no more a peasant than he was a curmudgeon; as Caradawc observed: "It is perfectly apparent that the robe of Padarn Beisrudd would fit him as a glove does the hand, but we will ask no questions, since it is not wholesome to dispute the orderings of Owain Glyndwyr."

They did not; and later day by day would Richard Holland drive the flocks to pasture near by the Severn, and loll there in the shade, and make songs to his lute. He grew to love this leisured life of bright and open spaces, and its long solitudes, grateful with the warm odors of growing things and with poignant bird noises; and the tranquillity of these meadows, that were always void of hurry, bedrugged the man through many fruitless and incurious hours. Each day at noon would Branwen bring his dinner, and sometimes chat with him while he ate. After supper he would discourse to Branwen of remote kingdoms, where-through he had ridden at adventure, as the wind veers, among sedate and alien peoples who adjudged him a madman; and she, in turn, would tell him many curious tales from the *Red Book of Hergest*,—as of Gwalchmai, and Peredur, and Geraint, in each one of whom she had presently discerned a pale forerunnership of Richard's existence.

This Branwen was a fair wench, slender as a wand, and in a harmless way of a bold demeanor twin to that of a child who is ignorant of evil and in consequence of suspicion. Happily, though, had she been named for that unhappy lady of old, the wife of King Matholwch, for this Branwen, too, had a white, thin, wistful face, like that of an empress on a silver coin which is a little worn. Her eyes were large and brilliant, colored like clear emeralds, and her abundant hair was so much cornfloss, only more brightly



Painting by Howard Pyle

BRANWEN

yellow and of immeasurably finer texture. In full sunlight her cheeks were frosted like the surface of a peach, but the underlying cool pink of them was rather that of a cloud, Richard decided. In all, a taking morsel! though her shapely hands were hard with labor, and she rarely laughed; for, as in recompense, her heart was tender and ignorant of discontent, and she rarely ceased to smile as over some peculiar and wonderful secret which she intended, in due time, to share with you alone. Branwen had many lovers, and preferred among them young Gwyllem ap Llyr, a portly lad, who was handsome enough, for all his tiny and piggish eyes, and sang divinely.

Presently this Gwyllem came to Richard with two quarter-staves. "Saxon," he said, "you appear a stout man. Take your pick of these, then, and have at you."

"Such are not the weapons I would have named," Richard answered, "yet in reason, messire, I may not deny you."

With that they laid aside their coats and fell to their exercise. In these unaccustomed bouts Richard was soundly drubbed, as he had anticipated, but throughout he found himself the stronger man, and he managed somehow to avoid an absolute overthrow. By what method he never ascertained.

"I have forgotten what we are fighting about," he observed, after a half hour of this; "or, to be perfectly exact, I never knew. But we will fight no more in this place. Come and go with me to Welshpool, Messire Gwyllem, and there we will fight to a conclusion over good sack and claret."

"Content!" cried Gwyllem, "but only if you yield me Branwen."

"Have we indeed wasted a whole half hour in squabbling over a woman?" Richard demanded; "like two children in a worldwide toyshop over any one particular toy? Then devil take me if I am not heartily ashamed of my folly! Though, look you, Gwyllem, I would speak naught save commendation of these delicate and livelily tinted creatures so long as one is able to approach them in a proper spirit of levity; it is only their not infrequent misuse which I would condemn; and in my opinion the person who elects to build a shrine for any one of them has only himself to blame if his

divinity will ascend no pedestal save the carcass of his happiness. Yet have many men since time was young been addicted to the practice, as were Hercules and Merlin to their illimitable sorrow; and, indeed, the more I reconsider the old gallantries of Salomon and of Constantine and of Samson, and of other venerable and sagacious potentates, the more profoundly am I ashamed of my sex."

Gwyllem said: "That is all very fine. Perhaps it is also reasonable. Only when you love you do not reason."

"I was endeavoring to prove that," said Richard, gently. Then they went to Welshpool, ride and tie on Gwyllem's horse. Tongue loosened by the claret, Gwyllem raved aloud of Branwen, like a babbling faun, while to each rapture Richard affably assented. In his heart he likened the boy to Dionysos at Naxos, and could find no blame for Ariadne. Moreover, the room was comfortably dark and cool, for thick vines hung about either window, rustling and tapping pleasantly, and Richard was content.

"She does not love me?" Gwyllem cried. "It is well enough. I do not come to her as one merchant to another, since love was never bartered. Listen, Saxon!" He caught up Richard's lute. The strings shrieked beneath Gwyllem's fingers as he fashioned his rude song.

Sang Gwyllem:

"Love me or love me not, it is enough
That I have loved you, seeing my whole
life is
Uplifted and made glad by the glory of
Love—
My life that was a scroll all marred
and blurred
With tavern catches, which that pity of
his
Erased, and writ instead one perfect
word,
O Branwen!

"I have accorded you incessant praise
And song and service long, O Love, for
this,
And always I have dreamed incessantly
Who always dreamed, *When in oncoming
days*
*This man or that shall love you, and at
last*
*This man or that shall win you, it must
be*
*That loving him you will have pity on
me,*
When happiness engenders memory
*And long thoughts, nor unkindly, of the
past,*
O Branwen!

"I know not!—ah, I know not, who am
 sure
 That I shall always love you while I
 live!
 And being dead, and with no more to
 give
 Of song or service!—Love shall yet en-
 dure,
 And yet retain his last prerogative,
 When I lie still, through many centuries,
 And dream of you and the exceeding love
 I bore you, and am glad dreaming thereof,
 And give God thanks therefor, and so
 find peace,
 O Branwen!"

"Now, were I to get as tipsy as that," Richard enviously thought, midway in a return to his stolid sheep, "I would simply go to sleep and wake up with a headache. And were I to fall as many fathoms deep in love as this Gwyllem has fallen without any astonishment I would perform—I wonder, now, what miracle?"

For he was, though vaguely, discontent. This Gwyllem was so young, so earnest over every trifle, and above all so unvexed by any rational afterthought; and all desires controlled him as varying winds sport with a bit of paper, whose frank submission to superior vagaries the boy appeared to emulate. Richard saw that in a fashion Gwyllem was superb. "And heigho!" said Richard, "I am attestedly a greater fool than he, but I begin to weary of a folly so thin-blooded."

The next morning came a ragged man, riding upon a mule. He claimed to be a tinker. He chatted out an hour with Richard, who perfectly recognized him as Sir Walter Blount; and then this tinker crossed over into England.

And Richard whistled. "Now will my cousin be quite sure, and now will my anxious cousin come to speak with Richard of Bordeaux. And now, by every saint in the calendar! I am as good as King of England."

He sat down beneath a young oak and twisted four or five blades of grass between his fingers what while he meditated. Undoubtedly he would kill Henry of Lancaster with a clear conscience and even with a certain relish, much as one crushes the uglier sort of vermin, but, hand upon heart, he was unable to protest any particularly ardent desire for the scoundrel's death. Thus crudely to demolish the knave's adroit and year-long

schemings savored of a tyranny a shade too gross. The spider was venomous, and his destruction laudable; granted, but in crushing him you ruined his web, a miracle of patient malevolence, which, despite yourself, compelled both admiration and envy. True, the process would recrown a certain Richard, but then, as he recalled it, being King was rather tedious. Richard was not now quite sure that he wanted to be King, and in consequence be daily plagued by a host of vexatious and ever squabbling barons. "I shall miss the little huzzy, too," he thought.

"Heigho!" said Richard, "I shall console myself with purchasing all beautiful things that can be touched and handled. Life is a flimsy vapor which passes and is not any more: presently is Branwen married to this Gwyllem and grown fat and old, and I am married to Dame Isabel of France, and am King of England: and a trifle later all four of us will be dead. Pending this deplorable consummation a wise man will endeavor to amuse himself."

Next day he despatched Caradawc to Owain Glyndwyr to bid the latter send the promised men to Caer Idion. Richard, returning to the hut the same evening, found Alundyne there, alone, and grovelling at the threshold. Her forehead was bloodied when she raised it and through tearless sobs told of the day's happenings. A half hour since, while she and Branwen were intent upon their milking, Gwyllem had ridden up, somewhat the worse for liquor. Branwen had called him sot, had bidden him go home. "That will I do," said Gwyllem, and suddenly caught up the girl. Alundyne sprang for him, and with clenched fist Gwyllem struck her twice full in the face, and, laughing, rode away with Branwen.

Richard made no observation. In silence he fetched his horse, and did not pause to saddle it. Quickly he rode to Gwyllem's house, and broke in the door. Against the farther wall stood lithe Branwen fighting silently in a hideous conflict; her breasts and shoulders were naked, where Gwyllem had torn away her garments. He wheedled, laughed, swore, and hiccoughed, turn by turn, but she was silent.

"On guard!" Richard barked. Gwyl-

lem wheeled. His head twisted toward his left shoulder, and one corner of his mouth convulsively snapped upward, so that his teeth were bared. There was a knife at Richard's girdle, which he now unsheathed and flung away. He stepped eagerly toward the snarling Welshman, and with either hand seized the thick and hairy throat. What followed was rather brutal.

For many minutes Branwen stood with averted face, shuddering. She very dimly heard the sound of Gwylllem's impotent great fists as they beat against the countenance and body of Richard, and the thin splitting vicious noise of torn cloth as Gwylllem clutched at Richard's tunic and tore it many times. Richard uttered no articulate sound, and Gwylllem could not. There was entire silence for a heartbeat, and then the fall of something ponderous and limp.

"Come!" Richard said. Through the hut's twilight, glorious in her eyes as Michael fresh from that primal battle, Richard came to her, his face all blood, and lifted her in his arms lest Branwen's skirt be soiled by the demolished thing which sprawled across their path. She never spoke. She could not. In his arms she rode presently, passive and incuriously content. The horse trod with deliberation. In the east the young moon was taking heart as the darkness thickened about them, and innumerable stars awoke.

Richard was horribly afraid. He it had been, in sober verity it had been Richard of Bordeaux, that some monstrous force had seized, and had lifted, and had curtly utilized as its handiest implement. He had been, and in the moment had known himself to be, the thrown spear as yet in air, about to kill and quite powerless to refrain therefrom. It was a full three minutes before he got the better of his bewilderment and laughed, very softly, lest he disturb this Branwen, who was so near his heart. . . .

Next day she came to him at noon, bearing as always the little basket. It contained to-day a napkin, some garlic, a ham, and a small soft cheese; some shalots, salt, nuts, wild apples, lettuce, onions, and mushrooms. "Behold a feast!" said Richard. He noted then that she carried also a blue pitcher filled

with thin wine and two cups of oak bark. She thanked him for last night's performance, and drank a little wine to his health.

"Decidedly, I shall be sorry to have done with shepherding," said Richard, as he ate.

Branwen answered, "I too shall be sorry, lord, when the masquerade is ended." And it seemed to Richard that she sighed, and he was the happier.

But he only shrugged. "I am the wisest person unchanged, since I comprehend my own folly. And so, I think, was once the minstrel of old time that sang: 'Over wide lands and tumbling seas flits Love, at will, and maddens the heart and beguiles the senses of all whom he attacks, whether his quarry be some monster of the ocean or some wild denizen of the forest, or man, for thine, O Love, thine alone is the power to make playthings of us all.'"

"Your bard was wise, no doubt, yet it was not in similar terms that Gwylllem sang of this passion. Lord," she demanded, shyly, "how would you sing of love?"

Richard was replete and quite contented with the world. He took up the lute, in full consciousness that his compliance was in large part cenatory. "In courtesy, thus."

Sang Richard:

"The gods in honor of fair Branwen's
worth
Bore gifts to her,—and Jove, Olympus'
lord,
Co-rule of Earth and Heaven did accord,
And Venus gave her slender body's girth,
And Mercury the lyre he framed at birth,
And Mars his jewelled and resistless
sword,
And wrinkled Plutus all the secret
hoard
And immemorial treasure of the earth,—

"And while the puzzled gods were pondering
Which of these goodly gifts the goodliest was,
Dan Cupid came among them carolling
And proffered unto her a looking-glass,
Wherein she gazed and saw the goodliest
thing
That Earth had borne and Heaven
might not surpass."

"Three sounds are rarely heard," said Branwen; "and these are the song of

the birds of Rhiannon, an invitation to feast with a miser, and a speech of wisdom from the mouth of a Saxon. The song you have made of courtesy is tinsel. Sing now in verity."

Richard laughed, though he was sensibly nettled and perhaps a shade abashed; and presently he sang again.

Sang Richard:

"Catullus might have made of words that seek
With rippling sound, in soft, recurrent ways,
The perfect song, or in the old dead days
Theocritus have hymned you in glad Greek;—
Not I, dear heart—not I, that may not speak
Of you unworthily, nor strive to praise
Perfection with imperfect roundelays,
And desecrate the prize I dare to seek.

"I do not woo you, then, by fashioning
Vext similes of you and Guenevere,
And durst not come with agile lips that bring
The sugared periods of a sonneteer,
And bring no more,—but just with lips that cling
To yours, and murmur against them, *I love you, dear!*"

For he had resolved that Branwen should believe him. Tinsel, indeed! then here was yet more tinsel which she must and should receive as gold. He was very angry, because his vanity was hurt, and the pinprick spurred him to a counterfeit so specious that consciously he gloried in it. He was superb, and she believed him now; there was no questioning the fact, he saw it plainly, and with exultant cruelty; and curt as lightning came the knowledge that she believed the absolute truth.

Richard had taken just two strides toward her. Branwen stayed motionless, her lips a little parted. The affairs of earth and heaven were motionless throughout the moment, attendant, it seemed to him; and his whole life was like a wave, to him, that trembled now at full height, and he was aware of a new world all made of beauty and of pity. Then the lute snapped between his fingers, and Richard shuddered, and his countenance was the face of a man only.

"There is a task," he said, hoarsely—"it is God's work, I think. But I do not know—I only know that you are

very beautiful, Branwen," he said, and in the name he found a new and piercing loveliness.

More lately he said: "Go! For I have loved so many women, and, God help me! I know that I have but to wheedle you and you, too, will yield! Yonder is God's work to be done, and within me rages a commonwealth of devils. Child, child!" he cried, in agony, "I am, and ever was, a coward, too timid to face life without reserve, and always I laughed because I was afraid to concede that anything is serious!"

For a long while Richard lay at his ease in the lengthening shadows of the afternoon.

"I love her. She thinks me an elderly imbecile with a flat and reedy singing voice, and she is perfectly right. She has never even entertained the notion of loving me. That is well, for to-morrow, or, it may be, the day after, we must part forever. I would not have the parting make her sorrowful—or not, at least, too unalterably sorrowful. It is very well that Branwen does not love me.

"How should she? I am almost twice her age, an old fellow now, battered and selfish and too indolent to love her—say, as Gwyllem did. I did well to kill that Gwyllem. I am profoundly glad I killed him, and I thoroughly enjoyed doing it; but, after all, the man loved her in his fashion, and to the uttermost reach of his gross nature. I love her in a rather more decorous and acceptable fashion, it is true, but only a half of me loves her; and the other half of me remembers always that I am aging, that Caradawc's hut is leaky, that, in fine, bodily comfort is the one luxury of which one never tires. I am a very contemptible creature, the handsome scabbard of a man, precisely as Owain said." This settled, he whistled to his dog.

The sun had set, but it was not more than dusk. There were no shadows anywhere as Richard and his sheep went homeward, but on every side the colors of the world were more sombre. Twice his flock roused a covey of partridges that had settled for the night. The screech-owl had come out of his hole, and bats were already blundering about, and the air was more cool. There was as yet but one star in the green and cloudless heaven,

but it was very large, like a beacon, and it appeared to him symbolical that he trudged away from it.

Next day the Welshmen came, and now the trap was ready for Henry of Lancaster.

It came about just two days later, about noon, that while Richard idly talked with Branwen a party of soldiers, some fifteen in number, rode down the river's bank from the ford above. Their leader paused, then gave an order. The men drew rein, while he cantered forward.

"God give you joy, fair sir," said Richard, when the knight was at his elbow.

The newcomer raised his visor. "God give you eternal joy, my fair cousin," he said, "and very soon. Now send away this woman before that happens which must happen."

"You design murder?" Richard said.

"I design my own preservation," King Henry answered, "for while you live my rule is insecure."

"I am sorry," Richard said, "since in part my blood is yours."

Twice he sounded his horn, and everywhere from rustling underwoods arose the half naked Welshmen. "Your men are one to ten. You are alone. Now, now we balance our accounts!" cried Richard. "These persons here will first deal with your followers. Then will they conduct you to Glyndwyr, who has long desired to deal with you himself, in privacy, since that time you stabbed his only son."

The King began: "In mercy, sire—!" and Richard laughed a little.

"That virtue is not overabundant among us Plantagenets, as both we know. Nay, Fate and Time are merry jesters. See, now, their latest mockery! You the King of England ride to Sycharth to your death, and I the tender of sheep ride into London, without any hindrance, to reign henceforward over all these islands. To-morrow you are worm's meat; and to-morrow, as aforetime, I am King of England."

Then Branwen gave one sharp, brief cry, and Richard forgot all things saving this girl, and strode toward her. He had caught up either of her hard, lithe hands, and to his lips he strained them close and very close.

"Branwen—!" he said. His eyes devoured her.

"Yes, King," she answered. "O King of England! oh, fool that I had been to think you less!"

In a while Richard said: "Now I choose between a peasant wench and England. Now I choose, and, ah, how gladly! O Branwen, help me to be more than King of England!"

Low and very low he spoke, and long and very long he gazed, and neither seemed to breathe. Of what she thought I cannot tell you, but in Richard there was no power of thought, only a great wonderment. Why, between this woman and aught else there was no choice for him, he knew upon a sudden, and could never be! He was very glad. He loved the tiniest content of the world.

Meanwhile as from an immense distance came the dogged voice of Henry of Lancaster. "It is of common report in this country that I have a better right to the throne than you. As much was told our grandfather, King Edward of happy memory, when he educated you and had you acknowledged heir to the crown; but his love was so strong for his son the Prince of Wales, that nothing could alter his purpose. And indeed if you had followed even the example of the Black Prince you might still have been our King; but you have always acted so contrarily to his admirable precedents as to occasion the rumor to be generally believed throughout England that you were not, after all, his son—"

Richard had turned impatiently. "For the love of Heaven, truncate your abominable periods. Be off with you. Yonder across that river is the throne of England, which you appear, through some hallucination, to consider a desirable possession. Take it, then; for, praise God! the sword has found its sheath."

The King answered: "I do not ask you to reconsider your dismissal, assuredly.—Richard," he cried, a little shaken, "I perceive that until your death you will win contempt and love from every person."

"Ay, for many years I have been the playmate of the world," said Richard; "but to-day I wash my hands, and set about another and more laudable business. I had dreamed certain dreams, in-

deed—but what had I to do with all this strife between the devil and the tiger? Nay, Glyndwyr will set up Mortimer against you now, and you two must fight it out. I am no more his tool, and no more your enemy, my cousin.—Henry,” he said, with quickening voice, “there was a time when we were boys and played together, and there was no hatred between us, and I regret that time!”

“As God lives, I too regret that time!” the King said presently. He stared at Richard for an appreciable while. “Dear fool,” he said, “there is no man in all the world but hates me saving only you.” Then the King clapped spurs to his horse and rode away.

More lately Richard dismissed his wondering marauders. Now were only he and Branwen left, alone and yet a little troubled, since either was afraid of that oncoming moment when their eyes must meet.

Then Richard laughed. “Praise God!” he wildly cried, “I am the greatest fool unchanged!”

She answered: “I am the happier. I am the happiest of God’s creatures,” Branwen said.

And Richard meditated. “Faith of a gentleman!” he declared; “but you are nothing of the sort, and of this fact I happen to be quite certain.” Their lips met then, and afterward their eyes; and either was too glad for laughter.

The Signal

BY ALICE BROWN

WHEN I awoke and it was morning time,
I said, “I cannot stay.
This is a goodly place to walk or rhyme,
Yet I would fain away.
For loving Death, he wears so kind a face.
Sweet, sighing, sadheart Death—he hath all grace.”

Now full sun taps the dial, and too soon,—
And turning toward the west,
I see the shadows of mid-afternoon.
Henceforth I may not rest.
I rather work, and while I work I pray,—
“Lord, let me dig Thy ground another day!”

The Lord of gardens then He answers me:
“Why, thou insatiate child!
Thou hast had fellowship of plant and tree
And grass and thicket wild.
Pass on therefore and leave the enchanting earth
To babies entering at the gate of birth.

“Why shouldst thou gather all the dear bouquet
Bloomed out of love and grief?
Others, dawn-lighted, dance this very way,
For lingering as brief.
Leave my fair garden weeded, and come see
What sweet, still coverts I have sown for thee!”