

Aubrey de Vere (1814-1902)

1 *At the Tomb of King Arthur*

Through Glastonbury's cloister dim
The midnight winds were sighing;
Chanting a low funereal hymn
For those in silence lying,
Death's gentle flock, 'mid shadows grim 5
Fast bound, and unreplying.

Hard by the monks their mass were saying;
The organ evermore
Its wave in alternation swaying
On that smooth swell upbore 10
The voice of their melodious praying
Toward heaven's eternal shore.

Erelong a princely multitude
Moved on through arches grey,
Which yet, though shattered, stand where stood 15
(God grant they stand for aye!)
St. Joseph's church of woven wood
On England's baptism day.

The grave they found; their swift strokes fell,
Piercing dull earth and stone. 20
They reached ere long an oaken cell,
And cross of oak, whereon
Was graved, "Here sleeps King Arthur well,
In the isle of Avalon."

The mail on every knightly breast, 25
The steel at each man's side,
Sent forth a sudden gleam; each crest
Bowed low its plumèd pride;
Down o'er the coffin stooped a priest —
But first the monarch cried: 30

“Great king! in youth I made a vow,
Earth’s mightiest son to greet;
His hand to worship; on his brow
To gaze; his grace entreat.
Therefore, though dead, till noontide thou
Shalt fill my royal seat!” 35

Away the massive lid they roll’d —
Alas! what found they there?
No kingly brow, no shapely mould;
But dust where such things were. 40
Ashes o’er ashes, fold on fold —
And one bright wreath of hair.

Genevra’s hair! like gold it lay;
For Time, though stern, is just,
And humbler things feel last his sway, 45
And Death reveres his trust. —
They touched that wreath: it sank away
From sunshine into dust!

Then Henry lifted from his head
The Conqueror’s iron crown; 50
That crown upon that dust he laid,
And knelt in reverence down,
And raised both hands to heaven, and said,
“Thou, God, art King alone!”

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