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	35
Shalt fill my royal seat!"	
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;	
Genevra's hair! like gold it lay; For Time, though stern, is just,	
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For Time, though stern, is just,	45
For Time, though stern, is just, And humbler things feel last his sway,	45
For Time, though stern, is just, And humbler things feel last his sway, And Death reveres his trust. —	45
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