

William Morris (1834-96)

3 *Shameful Death*

There were four of us about that bed;  
The mass-priest knelt at the side,  
I and his mother stood at the head,  
Over his feet lay the bride;  
We were quite sure that he was dead, 5  
Though his eyes were open wide.

He did not die in the night,  
He did not die in the day,  
But in the morning twilight  
His spirit pass'd away, 10  
When neither sun nor moon was bright,  
And the trees were merely grey.

He was not slain with the sword,  
Knight's axe, or the knightly spear,  
Yet spoke he never a word 15  
After he came in here;  
I cut away the cord  
From the neck of my brother dear.

He did not strike one blow,  
For the recreants came behind, 20  
In a place where the hornbeams grow,  
A path right hard to find,  
For the hornbeam boughs swing so,  
That the twilight makes it blind.

They lighted a great torch then, 25  
When his arms were pinion'd fast,  
Sir John the knight of the Fen,  
Sir Guy of the Dolorous Blast,  
With knights threescore and ten,  
Hung brave Lord Hugh at last. 30

I am threescore and ten,  
    And my hair is all turn'd grey,  
But I met Sir John of the Fen  
    Long ago on a summer day,  
And am glad to think of the moment when                   35  
    I took his life away.

I am threescore and ten,  
    And my strength is mostly pass'd,  
But long ago I and my men,  
    When the sky was overcast,                                   40  
And the smoke roll'd over the reeds of the fen,  
    Slew Guy of the Dolorous Blast.

And now, knights all of you,  
    I pray you pray for Sir Hugh,  
A good knight and a true,                                       45  
    And for Alice, his wife, pray too.

*1858*

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