ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE



Algernon Charles Swinburne

The Tale of Balen

EAN 8596547224655

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: <u>DigiCat@okpublishing.info</u>



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents

In hawthorn-time the heart grows light,
The world is sweet in sound and sight,
Glad thoughts and birds take flower and flight,
The heather kindles toward the light,
The whin is frankincense and flame.
And be it for strife or be it for love
The falcon quickens as the dove
When earth is touched from heaven above
With joy that knows no name.

And glad in spirit and sad in soul
With dream and doubt of days that roll
As waves that race and find no goal
Rode on by bush and brake and bole
A northern child of earth and sea.
The pride of life before him lay
Radiant: the heavens of night and day
Shone less than shone before his way
His ways and days to be.

And all his life of blood and breath
Sang out within him: time and death
Were even as words a dreamer saith
When sleep within him slackeneth,
And light and life and spring were one.
The steed between his knees that sprang,
The moors and woods that shone and sang,
The hours where through the spring's breath rang,
Seemed ageless as the sun.

But alway through the bounteous bloom
That earth gives thanks if heaven illume
His soul forefelt a shadow of doom,
His heart foreknew a gloomier gloom
Than closes all men's equal ways,
Albeit the spirit of life's light spring
With pride of heart upheld him, king
And lord of hours like snakes that sting
And nights that darken days.

And as the strong spring round him grew Stronger, and all blithe winds that blew Blither, and flowers that flowered anew More glad of sun and air and dew, The shadow lightened on his soul And brightened into death and died Like winter, as the bloom waxed wide From woodside on to riverside And southward goal to goal.

Along the wandering ways of Tyne,
By beech and birch and thorn that shine
And laugh when life's requickening wine
Makes night and noon and dawn divine
And stirs in all the veins of spring,
And past the brightening banks of Tees,
He rode as one that breathes and sees
A sun more blithe, a merrier breeze,
A life that hails him king.

And down the softening south that knows No more how glad the heather glows, Nor how, when winter's clarion blows Across the bright Northumbrian snows,
Sea-mists from east and westward meet,
Past Avon senseless yet of song
And Thames that bore but swans in throng
He rode elate in heart and strong
In trust of days as sweet.

So came he through to Camelot,
Glad, though for shame his heart waxed hot,
For hope within it withered not
To see the shaft it dreamed of shot
Fair toward the glimmering goal of fame,
And all King Arthur's knightliest there
Approved him knightly, swift to dare
And keen to bid their records bear
Sir Balen's northern name.

Sir Balen of Northumberland
Gat grace before the king to stand
High as his heart was, and his hand
Wrought honour toward the strange north strand
That sent him south so goodly a knight.
And envy, sick with sense of sin,
Began as poisonous herbs begin
To work in base men's blood, akin
To men's of nobler might.

And even so fell it that his doom,
For all his bright life's kindling bloom
And light that took no thought for gloom,
Fell as a breath from the opening tomb
Full on him ere he wist or thought.
For once a churl of royal seed,

King Arthur's kinsman, faint in deed And loud in word that knew not heed, Spake shame where shame was nought.

"What doth one here in Camelot
Whose birth was northward? Wot we not
As all his brethren borderers wot
How blind of heart, how keen and hot,
The wild north lives and hates the south?
Men of the narrowing march that knows
Nought save the strength of storms and snows,
What would these carles where knighthood blows
A trump of kinglike mouth?"

Swift from his place leapt Balen, smote
The liar across his face, and wrote
His wrath in blood upon the bloat
Brute cheek that challenged shame for note
How vile a king-born knave might be.
Forth sprang their swords, and Balen slew
The knave ere well one witness knew
Of all that round them stood or drew
What sight was there to see.

Then spake the great king's wrathful will A doom for six dark months to fill Wherein close prison held him, still And steadfast-souled for good or ill. But when those weary days lay dead His lordliest knights and barons spake Before the king for Balen's sake Good speech and wise, of force to break The bonds that bowed his head.

Table of Contents

In linden-time the heart is high
For pride of summer passing by
With lordly laughter in her eye;
A heavy splendour in the sky
Uplifts and bows it down again.
The spring had waned from wood and wold
Since Balen left his prison hold
And lowlier-hearted than of old
Beheld it wax and wane.

Though humble heart and poor array
Kept not from spirit and sense away
Their noble nature, nor could slay
The pride they bade but pause and stay
Till time should bring its trust to flower,
Yet even for noble shame's sake, born
Of hope that smiled on hate and scorn,
He held him still as earth ere morn
Ring forth her rapturous hour.

But even as earth when dawn takes flight
And beats her wings of dewy light
Full in the faltering face of night,
His soul awoke to claim by right
The life and death of deed and doom,
When once before the king there came
A maiden clad with grief and shame
And anguish burning her like flame
That feeds on flowers in bloom.