

Stonehenge

By Ann Radcliffe

I.

Whose were the hands, that upheaved these stones
Standing, like spectres, under the moon,
Steadfast and solemn and strange and alone.
As raised by a Wizard—a king of bones!
And whose was the mind, that willed them reign,
The wonder of ages, simply sublime?
The purpose is lost in the midnight of time;
And shadowy guessings alone remain.

II.

Yet a tale is told of these vast plains,
Which thus the mysterious truth explains:
'Tis set forth in a secret legend old,
Whose leaves none living did e'er unfold.
Quaint is the measure, and hard to follow,
Yet sometimes it flies, like the circling swallow.

III.

Near unto the western strand,
Lies a tract of sullen land,
Spreading 'neath the setting light,
Spreading, miles and miles around,
Which for ages still has frowned:
Be the sun all wintry white,
Or glowing in his summer ray,
Comes he with morning smile so bright,
Or sinks in evening peace away,
Yet still that land shows no delight!

IV.

There no forest leaves are seen,
Yellow corn, nor meadow green,
Glancing casement, grey-mossed roof,
Rain and hail and tempest proof;
Nor, peering o'er that dreary ground,
Is spied along the horizon's bound
The distant vane of village spire,
Nor far-off smoke from lone inn fire,
Where weary traveller might rest
With blazing hearth and brown ale blest,
Potent the long night to beguile,

While loud without raves the bleak wind;
No: his dark way he there must shivering find;
No signs of rest upon the wide waste smile.

V.

But the land lies in grievous sweep
Of hills not lofty, vales not deeps
Or endless plains where the traveller fears
No human voice shall reach his ears;
Where faintest peal of unknown bells
Never along the lone gale swells;
Till, folding his flock, some shepherd appear,
And Salisbury Steeple it's crest uprear;
But that's o'er miles yet many to tell,
O'er many a hollow, many a swell
And that shepherd sees it, now here now there,
Like a Will o'-the-wisp in the evening air,
As his way winds over each hill and dell,
Where once the ban of the Wizard fell!

VI.

Would you know why this country so desolate lies?
Why no sound but the tempest's is heard, as it flies,
Or the croak of the raven, or bustard's cries?
Why the corn does not spring nor a cottage rise?
Why no village-Church is here to raise
The blest hymn of humble heart-felt praise,
Nor ring for the passing soul a knell,
Nor give to the dead a hallowed cell,
Nor in wedlock-bonds unite a pair,
Nor sound one merry peal through the air?
All this and much more would you know? And why,
And how, Salisbury spire was built so high,
As fairies had meant it to prop the sky?
Then listen and watch, and you soon shall hear
What never till now hath met mortal ear!

VII.

It was far, far back in the dusky time,
Before Church-bells had learnt to chime,
That a Sorcerer ruled these gloomy lands
Far as old Ocean's southern sands.
He lived under oaks of a thousand years,
Where now not the root of an oak appears!
On each high bough a dark fiend dwelt,
Ready to go, when his name was spelt,
Down, down to the caves where the Earthquake slept,
Or up to the clouds, where the whirlwind swept.

VIII.

The Sorcerer never knew joy, or peace,
For still with his power did pride increase.
He could ride on a wolf from the North to South,
With a bridle of serpents held fast by the mouth;
And he minded no more the glare of his eyes,
That flashed about as the lightning flies,
Than the red darting tongue of the snake, that coil'd
Round his bridling hand, and for liberty toil'd.
He could sail on the clouds from East to West,
He rested not, he! nor let others rest;
And evil he wrought, wherever he went,
For, he worked, with Hela's and Luke's consent.
The BRANCH of SPECTRES she gave for his wand,
And nine hundred imps were at his command!
He could call up a storm from the vast sea-wave,
And, when ships were wrecked, not a man would he save!
He could call a thunder-bolt down from a cloud,
And wrap a whole town in a fiery shroud!

IX

He could chase a ghost down the road of the dead,
Through valleys of darkness, by snakes' eyes shown,
And pass o'er the bridge, that to Hela led,
Where afar off was heard the wolf Fenris' groan,
While it guarded her halls of pain and grief,
Where she nursed her children—Famine and Fear;
He could follow a spectre, even here,
With the dauntless eye of a Wizard-chief.
He could chase a ghost down the road of the dead,
Till it passed the halls of Hela the dread.
He could chase a ghost down the road of the dead,
Till it came where the northern lights flash red.
Then the ghost would vanish amid their glow,
But the Wizard's bold steps could no farther go!
And whether those lights were weal, or woe,
The Sorcerer's self might never know.
All this and more he full often had done,
And changed to an ice-ball the flaming Sun!

X.

Now Odin had watched from his halls of light
This dark Wizard's fell and increasing might;
And clearly he knew, that his craft he drew
From the Witch of Death¹ and the Evil Sprite;²
Who, though chain'd in darkness, and far below,

¹ Hela.

² Loke.

Sent his shadows on earth, to work it woe.
This Wizard had even defied his power,
For once, in the dins and lonely hour,
When Odin had seen him riding the air,
And bid him with his bright glance forbear,
Great Odin's look he would not obey,
But went, on his cloud, his evil way!
He had dared to usurp, when invoking a storm,
The likeness of Odin's shadowy form.
And, when Odin sang his famed song of Peace,
That hushes and bids the wild winds cease,³
While it died the sleepy woods among,
And the moon-light vale had owned the song,
The Wizard called back the stormy gust,
O'er the spell-struck vale, and bade it burst!
The woods their murmuring branches tossed,
And the song—the song of Peace—was lost—
Then Odin heard the groan of thrilling Fear
Ascend from all the region, far and near,
And, as it slowly gained upon the skies,
He heard the solemn call of Pity rise!

XI.

Then Odin swore,
By the hour that is no more!
By the twilight hour to come!
By the darkness of the tomb!
By the flying warrior's doom!
Then Odin swore,
By the storm-light's lurid glare!
By the shape, that watches there!
By the battle's deadly field!
By his terrible sword and snow-white shield,⁴
The Sorcerer's might to his might should yield.

XII.

While Odin spoke, the clouds were furled,
And those beneath, as stories say,
Lost the sight
Of our earthly light,
And caught a glimpse above the world!
But the phantasma did not stay:
It passed in the growing gloom away!
And from that hour these stories date

³ Odin boasts of possessing such a song. Had Milton seen the boast of it in the Edda, when he wrote?—
“He, with his soft pipe and smooth-dittied song,
Well knew to still the wild waves, when they roar,
And hush the waving woods.”

⁴ The shield of Odin was said to be white as snow.

The fateful strife we now relate.

XIII.

Now, there was a Hermit, an ancient man,
Who oft lay deep in solemn trance,
Watching bright dreams of bliss advance;
And marvellous things of him there ran;
He had lived almost since the world began!
The people feared him, day and night,
And loved him, too, for they knew that he
Abhorred their wizard-enemy,
And wished and hoped to do them right.
HE OWNED THE SPELL OF MINSTRELSY!
And in the hour of deepest shade,
When he would seek his forest-glade,
(It was of grey oaks in a gloomy hollow
Where never footsteps dared to follow,)
And called from his harp a certain sound,
Pale shadows would stand in his presence 'round!
How this could be known, without a spell,
I must briefly own I never could tell.
—But, be that as it may—on that note's swell,
Whether they sleeping were in halls of light,
Or followed the stars down the deeps of night,
Or watched the wounded Warrior's mortal sigh,
Or after some ill-doing Sprite did fly,
On that note's swell they to the Hermit hie;
And heed his questions wait on his command;
These were the Spirits white of Odin's band.

XIV.

Odin had marked this renowned old Seer,
And to him, at times, his favour lent;
He was the first of the Druids here;
And did all their laws and rites invent.
Some stories say a Druid never bent
At Odin's shrine; and others may have told
The self-same tale, that here for truth I hold;
He was the first of all the Druid race:
Owning the spell serene of Minstrelsy!
But though he oft the Runic rhyme did trace,
No wizard he!
No fiend he called, no fiend he served,
And never had from justice swerved.
From mystic learning came his power,
His name was from his oaken-bower,
HE WAS THE FIRST OF ALL THE DRUID RACE!

XV.

And Odin had marked this renowned old Seer,
And, when the solemn call for pity rose,
This goodly man to do his bidding chose,
A sage like whom was found not far or near:
Upon his head the snows of ages lay,
Hung o'er his glowing eyes and waving beard,
Touched every wrinkle with a paler grey,
And made him marvelled at, and shunned, and feared;
Yet, with this awe, love, as I said, appeared.

XVI.

He was gone to his home of oak;
Starlight 'twas and midnight nigh
Not one wistful word he spoke,
But his magic harp strung high;
As he touched the calling string,
Hear it through the branches ring,
Till on lower clouds it broke.
Straight in his bower dim shapes were seen
By the fitful light, that rose within,
And reddened the dark boughs above,
And chequered all the shadowy grove,
And tinged his robe and his beard of snow,
And waked in his eyes their early glow!
While, as alternate rose and sunk the gleam,
The tree itself a bower or cave would seem!

XVII.

The Druid, wrapt in silence, lay;
No need of words; his thoughts were known;
"Odin has heard his people's groan,"
Spoke a loud voice and passed away.
Another rose, of milder tone!
"The mighty task is now thine own,
To free the land from wizard-guile;
If thou hast wisdom to obey,
And courage to fulfil the toil,
Odin, for ages, to thy sway
Gives each long plain and every sloping dell,
Now suffering by the sinful Sorcerer's spell."

XVIII.

A third voice spoke, and thus it said—
"Listen and watch! for thou must brave
The wily Wizard's inmost cave;
And, while he sleeps, around his head
Bind a charm, that shall help thee draw

Each fang from his enormous jaw;
There lies the force of all his spells.
Hundred and forty teeth are there
In triple rows ; his art they share.
Hundred and forty thou must draw,
From upper and from under jaw.
Quick must thou be; for, if the charm
Break, and his bond of sleep is o'er,
Ere yet thy task is done, no power
Can save thee from his vengeful arm.
Thence from his cave, at magic's hour,
Speed thou; and close beneath his bower
Bury the fangs nine fathom deep,
Or ere thine eyelids close in sleep:
With them his guile for ever laid,
Thine is the land, which late he swayed."

XIX.

The voice is passed, and once more stillness reigns:
The Druid's trance is o'er; yet he retains
A wildered and a haggard look,
As pondering still the urgent word,
And wonderous call he just had heard.
And sure instruction from that call he took!

XX.

And from this hour he was not seen,
Neither on hill, nor yet in dale;
By the brown heath, nor forest green,
Nor by the rills, where waters wail;
By sun-light, nor by moonbeam pale.
But his shape was seen, by star-light sheen
Or so the earle dreamt, who thus told the tale!

XXI.

For many a night and many a day,
Close within his bower he lay,
For many a day and many a night,
Hid from sight, and hid from light,
Trying the force of his mystic might;
Working the charm should shield him from harm,
When he in the Wizard's cave should be,
To set the wretched country free.
HE OWNED THE SPELL OF MINSTRELSY.

XXII.

It boots not that I here should say
What arts the Druid did essay:

How with the misletoe he wrought,
That twined upon his oldest oak,
How midnight dew he careful caught
From nightshade, nor the words he spoke,
When he mixed the charm with a moonbeam cold,
To form a web, that should fast enfold
The Sorcerer's eyes—vast Warwolf the bold.
Nor boots it, that I here should say
The dangers and changes, that him befell
On his murky course to Warwolf's cell;—
For, circled safe with many a subtle charm.
Was his dark path along the forest-way;
The lamp he bore sent forth its little ray,
And sometimes showed around strange shapes of harm
Gliding beneath the trees, now close beside;
Now distant they would stand, obscurely seen
Among the old oaks' deep-withdrawing green.

XXIII.

But the calm Druid touched th' according string
Of the small harp he bore, with skill so true
That straight they left their shape and faithless hue!
Then voices strange would in the tempest sing,
Calling along the wind, now loud, now low,
And now, far off, would into silence go:
Seeming the very fiends of wail and woe!
Again th' enchanting chord the Druid woke,
('Twas as the seraph Peace herself had spoke,)
And hushed to silence every wizard-foe.

XXIV.

The story could unfold much more,
That thin daring wanderer bore,
O'er valley and rock and starless wood,
Ere at the Sorcerer's cave he stood.
There come, he paused; for even he, I ween,
Confessed the secret horrors of the scene.
A place like this in all the spreading bound
Of these low plains can nowhere now be found.
And scarcely will it be, I fear, believed
That beetling cliffs did ever rear the head
O'er lands as wavy now as ocean's bed.
But these huge rocks on rocks by fright extinct were heaved.

XXV.

It was where the high trees withdrew their boughs,
And let the midnight-moon behold the scene,
That hoary cliffs unlocked their marble jaws,
And showed a melancholy cave between,

With deadly nightshade hung and aconite,
And every plant and shrub, that worketh spite;
Upon their shuddering leaves the moonlight fell
But left no silver tinges there to tell
The winning power of simple Beauty's spell;
Nor touched the rocks, that hung in air,
With glimpse of lustre, passing fair;
A dull and dismal tinge it sired,
Such as might gleam on buried dead!
And led, as with a harbingering ray,
The Druid's steps, where the grim Wizard lay.

XXVI.

It led his steps; but he, in silent thought,
Stood long before thr' expected cave;
For he beheld what none could brave,
Who had not yet with magic weapon fought;
He stood, the unknown cave before;
High shot the little flame he bore,
Then sunk as low, then spired again,
And gleamed throughout the Warwolf's den;
It glanced on the harp at the Druid's breast;
It brightened the folds of his gathered vest!
And chased the shade, that hung o'er his brow,
Bound with the sacred misletoe;
It silvered the snow of his wavy beard,
It showed the strong lines of age and care,
But the lines of Virtue mingled there,
And wisdom benignant, yet stern, appeared.

XXVII.

Long before that cave he stood,
For, hovering near,
Dark shapes of fear
Among the nightshade seemed to brood,
And watchful eyes, between the leaves,
Now here, now there, portentous glare,
Direful to him, who fears and grieves,
As meteors fly
Through a troubled sky,
When the autumn thunder-storm is near.

XXVIII.

And thrice he turned him to the east,
And sprinkled the juice of the misletoe;
And thrice he turned him to the east,
And the flame he bore then changed it's glow;
And thrice he turned him to the east,
And the flame he bore burned high, burned low.

Then a solemn strain from his harp arose;
'Mong the leaves the watching eyes 'gan close;
One by one, they were closed in night,
Till sunk in sleep was the Wizard's might.
For, by his art, the Druid knew,
That Warwolf, though he lay unseen,
His deepest, darkest cave within,
Closed his eyes, when these eyes closed,
And now in death-like swoon reposed.
And the Druid knew, that hitherto
The spell of Minstrelsy was true
But the Druid knew, that he must rue,
If the magic sound of his harping ceased
Ere his terrible task was fully done;
For Warwolf would wake, and, from spell released,
Call from their slumber the fiends it had won.

XXIX.

The Druid knew this; and he knew moreo'er,
That, the moment he trod in the Wizard's den,
Other fiends would spring from their sleep within,
To clamour and curse, with a horrible din,
If he left not his harp at the cave's door;
If he left it there, and the winds should deign
To call out it's sweet and magic strain,
The strain of his harp would with theirs contend
And if theirs were baffled, his toil would end;
If their's should triumph, his life was o'er.
Yet he left his harp at the cavern door;
But he traced a just circle where it hung,
And high in an oak's green branches swung.

XXX.

As now the Druid took his way
In the untried cave, where the Wizard lay,
Often he lingered and listened oft,
Still the distant harp was swelling soft;
And he paced up the cave, without dismay,
Under scowling rocks, between shaggy walls,
Where the gleam of his lamp, as it faintly falls,
Shows a frowning face, or a beckoning hand.
Or a gliding foot, or the glance of a wand.
Yet oft at a distance he sweetly hears
The joy of his harp, and he nothing fears.
Till he comes, where a light now flashed and fled.
Which darted, he knew, from the Wizard's bed.
There opened the wall to a lofty hall,
And he viewed what must mortal heart appal.

XXXI.

Outstretched and grim on his stony bed,
All ghastly-pale, like a giant dead,
With eyes half closed the Wizard lay,
His half-shut mouth his fangs display.
The skin of a dragon unsealed was his shroud;
A rock was his bier; his watcher was Fear,
And the winds were his mourners shrill and loud.
And the caverns groaned their echoes severe,
At his couch's foot lay a wolf at length,
But harmless in sleep was his sinewy strength,
'Twas the wolf he had ridden from north to south;
All uncurled were the serpents, that bridled his mouth,
And the black, clotted stains might yet be seen
Of his yesterday's prey the teeth between.

XXXII.

The Druid approached, with caution and dread;
The Wizard was pale; but, was he dead?
Here waited the Druid his harp's sweet sound.
It's note was now changed; like a deep-drawn sigh,
He heard it's faint swell, and he heard it die;
Then knew he full well, that danger was nigh.
He often and steadfastly looked around:
No spectre appeared in the dim-seen bound!
The Druid approached, with caution and dread; the Wizard was pale;
but, was he dead?
As the Druid bent o'er that giant form,
While his lamp glared pale on the haggard brow,
And showed the huge teeth in a triple row,
He muttered the words, that will still a storm,
That can struggle with Loke and all his swarm.

XXXIII.

The mourning winds o'er vast Warwolf were still;
No breath from the Wizard's pale lips bodes ill,
Yet could not the Druid those fangs once view,
And know the task he was bidden to do,
Without feeling his very heart-blood chill.
He hung his lamp on a sharp rock near,
He bent again o'er vast Warwolf's bier,
And he touched one fang, with prudent fear.

XXXIV.

But, why does he start, and why does he stand
As through he saw Hela's shadowy hand?
He has heard the shriek of his harp afar!
He has felt the glance of his evil star!

And he hastens to fold his charmed band
Round the cold damp brows of his foe.
But not all the strength of his magic might
Can lift the head from its stony bed,
Or the strong bandage pass below,
To press the Wizard's forehead tight;
So he laid it loosely on the brow.

XXXV.

Then he took from the rock his faithful lamp,
And sprinkled the flame on the forehead damp.
Straight the head uprose, and the lips unclosed,
And each of the terrible fangs exposed.
And now he hastened to pass the band;
He tied the knot with a shaking hand,
But tied it firm—he tied it fast,
That it might well and sure outlast
The struggle of every mighty pang.
And then he seized one hideous fang,
And threw it on the ground!
No blood escaped the wound.
Hark, to the harp's now rising sound!
He knew the fiends were fighting round it,
But he knew that his charmed circle bound it.

XXXVI.

And when he had seized the second tooth,
He thought that he heard the Wizard sigh!
The third required the strength of youth,
But he won it, and the Wizard unclosed an eye
Senseless and dim, at first, it showed,
But quickly a livid glare outspread,
Which changed to a light of enraged red,
And strongly as a furnace glowed.
But the glow died away in the livid ray;
And, touched by the spell, the eyelid fell,
Like a storm-cloud over the setting day.

XXXVII.

At the ninth drawn fang, the Wizard's hair
Rose up and began to twine and twist,
Like serpents, and like to serpents hissed!
Till it curled all on fire,
In many a spire,
Amid the bridle—snakes, that lay on the ground.
Began to stir, and to coil them around;
And the wolf reared up his grisly head,
And fiercely bristled his watchful ears;
His foamy jaws grinned close and red,

And a rolling fire in his eye appears,
As he looks back o'er the Wizard's bed.

XXXVIII.

Is that the harp? or is it the wind,
Murmuring from the cave behind?
It is the wind! 'tis not the harp!
See! Warwolf's face grows long and sharp;
About his mouth a grim smile draws,
And the fiends know well his dire applause!
The charmed band can scarcely bear
The struggling of his writhing brow.
Watching that horrid strife, the Druid stood,
His harp's tones answered to his fearful mood;
Then he thought of the deeds of Balder good;
He muttered the Helper song of Odin;
He faced to the frost, that has fire within;
And thrice he bowed him o'er the bier,
Sprinkling the mystic misletoe.
Now Warwolf's fiendly smile is gone,
His brow is steadfast and severe;
Slow falls each hair to it's dark lair,
Quenched are the fire-snakes every one.
The wolf, half-raised on his worn claws,
Stands fixed as stone, with grinning jaws
And upward eyes, as watchful still
To do his Wizard's vengeful will;
His bridle of serpents, coiled o'er his head,
Remains, and their tongues are yet living-red;
But they dart no death, and no malice they shed;
And their hisses have ceased; for their venom is dead!

XXXIX.

Hark! hark! afar what feeble note
Begins, like dawn of day, to float?
Hark! it is the rejoicing string,
Sounding sweetly along the wind!
Never did mortal music fling
Notes so cheering, notes so kind.
The Druid hoped, yet feared and sighed,
And then again his task he plied.

XL.

Three times nine of the fangs he drew,
And the Wizard did not change his hue!
Three times three and three times nine,
And his lamp more dimly 'gan to shine.
When he tried the very last fang of all,
Warwolf lifted an arm on high;

And faintly waved the hand,
That held the SPECTRE-WAND,
As though he would some evil Spirit call.
His arm he did but feebly ply,
Like one, who, in an agitating dream,
Mimicks some action of his waking hour,
Pursuing still his often-baffled aim,
And struggling with the wish, without the power,
To chase the phantoms, that all living seem!

XLI.

The SPECTRE-WAND had lurked within
The dragon's many-folded skin,
That was the Wizard's shroud.
Now, firmly grasping that dread wand,
Which ne'er disowned its master's hand,
He called on Hela loud!—
But he called Hela! once alone.
Low sunk the muttered spell;
No fiends th' imperfect summons own,
His lifted arm down fell.
Now tried the Seer, but tried in vain,
The hateful SPECTRE-WAND to gain;
Which still vast Warwolf's fingers grasped,
As though his only hope they clasped,
Till every tendon seemed to strain.

XLII.

The Druid tried to break the wand,
But, by its forceful charm secured,
And held, as if by iron hand,
The mighty struggle it endured.
In the long strife the Druid turned,
And spoke again dread Hela's name;
The Druid's lamp then faintly burned,
Quivered again the failing flame.
He, by the signal undismayed,
Another daring effort made:
He tried again the last strong fang:
The Wizard started at the pang,
But, though his lips moved at his will,
His wish they could not now fulfill.
The wolf, though standing fixed as stone,
Uttered one long and yelling groan;
And his kindling eyes began to stream;
Then sunk the Druid's lamp's last gleam!

XLIII.

Oh! what is become of the harp's far sound?

Sadder it mourns, and yet more weak;
I hear it but faintly, faintly speak;
And I see the Druid upon the ground
 In speechless alarm
 Despairing his charm;—
The last of his spells had the fiends now found?
Whence is the light, that 'gins to wave?
'Tis not his lamp, it's beams are shorn.
Nor fire, nor flame, through all the cave
The Druid sees, aghast, forlorn.
But look not on the Wizard's bier,
For, the red light is streaming there,
 That threatens unknown ill;
Both, both his glaring eyes unclose!
The hall with lurid lightning glows;
 As if at Warwolf's will.
The harp, the harp! where is it's note?
I hear no distant music float!
 He tried to lift his head
 From off his rocky bed,
 But the charmed band was true and strong;
 Vast Warwolf's groans were loud and long,
And every mighty limb convulsive heaved.
 Could I have told the horrors of his face,
The tale, too fearful, would not be believed.
 Th' astonished Druid stood some little space;
So hideous and so ghastly was the sight,
That e'en his firmness viewed it with affright;
What then he thought may ne'er be told;
But what his fate this story may unfold.

XLV.

Then lifting his eyes from off the bier,
A pallid shade confronts him near.
It surely is the form of Fear!
It has her wild red look, her spectre-eye,
Her attitude, as in the act to fly;
Her backward glance, her face of livid lure,
Her quivering lip, dropping with coldest dew
Her breathless pause, as waiting to descry
The nameless, shapeless, harm, that must be nigh!
He waved the BRANCH of SPECTRES o'er the bier;
'Twas Hela's self—the mother of wan Fear!
Tine Druid knew her by that dreadful wand
And by the glimpses of her flitting band.
 When he saw the berried misletoe,
 Profaned to conjure deeds of woe,
Fear was subdued, indignant ire arose,
The Druid-soul, disdainful of repose,
Knew not to tamper with his Order's foes.

XLVI

She waved it o'er the half-gone Wizard's head;
A tremour crept upon his bloodless cheek;
And see! he turns upon his rocky bed,
He moves his lips, that have not strength to speak.
She spoke: "Wake, Warwolf, from thy trance
The phantoms of thy fate advance;
Or wake not; th' abject plain shall tell
The change, that still awaits thy spell.
The sun shall set, the moon shall rise;
Four and twenty hours shall go;
The sun shall set, the moon shall rise;
Then each oak of the forest dies!
For thy bones shall have rule below."

XLVII.

With shaded eyes the Druid stood,
Wrapt in dismay and fearful thought;
But now, awaking from his mood,
The last of all his spells he wrought.
Three bands he tore from his night-woven vest,
And sprinkled the oil of his failing lamp.
The Wizard sunk on his bed in rest!
Thrice on the ground did the Prophetess stamp,
And shook her streaming hair
In dæmon-like despair,
And stretched athwart the bier her withering hand,
And, shrieking, waved three times the SPECTRE-WAND.

XLVIII.

At the first shriek, dark spreading mists appear;
And, in the midst a Spectre, trembling Fear
A wreath of aspin quivered round her hair.
More grisly pale than the Prophetess she;
More wild and haggard face could never be.
At the next shriek, distorted Pain,
Within rolling eyes, that seemed to strain,
Started along th' affrighted ground,
With dreadful yell and fitful bound;
Even dark Hela shuddered, as he rose,
For Hela could not grant him short repose.
To the third shriek the SPECTRE-BRANCH waved high.
A dim Shape came more dread than Pain or Fear;
Fell woe was in her eye, hurt not one tear!
A poniard in her breast, but not one sigh!
All ghastly was her face, and yet a smile
Was wandering on, but owned no thought, the while;
Unnoticed blood distilled from her loose hair!
She spoke not, wept not, looked not—'twas Despair!

XLIX.

Hela, as touched by her cold hand,
Stood, when she saw these shadows rise
To the false summons of her wand,
Stood, like a wretch, who guilty dies.
“Ye come uncalled. Why are ye here?”
“We wait around vast Warwolf’s bier.”
“Ye come unwelcomed. Hence, away!”
But Hela saw, with dire dismay,
Her children would no more obey.
They gathered round the Wizard’s bed,
Despair drooped mutely o’er his head,
And Hela sunk, in mist, down to the dead!

L.

Then the flame of the Druid’s lamp returned,
And as clear as the morning-light it burned,
And the harp’s triumphant sound
Lightly danced the cavern round,
And filled the vaulted roof, on high,
With the loud song of truth and joy;
Through every hollow rock it rung;
The Echoes tell not all the notes,
For ne’er before had they heard sung
Such song as now around them floats.

LI.

At the first note, round Warwolf’s bier,
The ghastly shadows disappear,
And a dark cloud began to rise,
That wrapt him from the Druid’s eyes,
Who gathered and counted the conquered fangs;
Then, thankful, from the cave he hies,
To seek the lorn place, where the cymbal clangs
Of the Wizard’s imp, as it watches his bower;
There to bury the teeth, at the magic hour.

LII.

From the mouth of the cave his harp he took,
And hung it near his grateful heart;
The wires with answering rapture shook,
And hope and courage did impart.
But its cautious master, true
To the whole task he had to do,
Bent, with tempered mind, his way,
Whither the Sorcerer’s bower lay.
Through the forest be heard afar

The cymbal's hoarsely-clanging jar,
Till he came to a widely-spreading plain,
Then ceased the Wizard's threatening strain;
All was still as yon setting star.
But, for the bower he looked around in vain,
Unless that giant-tree be his strange bower,
A ruin now like him, and 'reft of power.

LIII.

In the centre it stood—a withered oak;
It's shadow was gone, and it's branches broke;
It's mighty trunk, knotted all round and round,
And gnarled roots, o'erspreading the ground,
Were proofs of summers that on it had shone,
And honours of old from the tempests won,
In generations all past and gone.
And a scant foliage yet was seen,
Wreathing it's hoary brows with green;
Like to a crown of victory,
On some old Warrior's forehead grey.
So reverend was it's look, it seemed to speak
Of times long buried, that had passed it by
And left it there thus desolate to sigh
To the wild winter-winds, in murmurs weak;
A spectre of the woods, shadeless and pale,
A form of vanished ages, whose dark tale
It once beheld, and seemed by fits to wail.

LIV.

Here came the Druid, with firm, silent tread,
To bury deep the fangs of Warwolf dread.
Now, by the waning Moon's red, slanting ray,
By her long, gloomy shadows on the way,
Two circles round about the oak he traced,
And, as with measured step and slow he paced,
And Runic words of secret import drew,
The mighty lines wider and wider grew,
As watery circles o'er a lake increase;
At length they rested, where he bade them cease.
Watching the minutes of the downward moon,
He walked th' enchanted Celtic circles duly o'er;
Dropping, at every bidden step, a fang.
One fang to every step he gave, no more,
Meanwhile his harp, unsmote, with strange notes rang!
The vast circumference he paced not soon;
One hundred and forty minute-steps past,
Ere was paced the widest circle and last;
And the pale moon, behind the forest-shade,
Sunk with a small and smaller curve of light;
O'er the wood-tops he watched her last glow fade,

Till every lingering ray was lost in night.
The hour is won!—the spell is done!
The Druid to rest in his bower is gone!

LV.

Now LISTEN AND WATCH, and you shall see
What passed around that old oak-tree.
The marvellous story must now be told
Of the ban's last force of Warwolf bold.
When next the midnight-moon was seen,
The Druid returned to the forest green;
That forest green on yester-night,
Now mourned in all its leaves a blight!
And now were its branches shattered and bare;
Nor tree, nor bough, did the Sorcerer spare,
Dire was the hour when he waked from his swoon!
 O'er all the region, far and nigh,
 Far as the Druid cast his eye,
(Under the glimpses of the low-hung moon)
 The lands all black and desolate lie!
But whither the Wizard his-self was fled,
And whether still living in trance, or dead,
Or what was become of his horrid den,
Were matters not reached by the Druid's ken.
Nor cliff, nor rock, was e'er seen from that hour,
On wilds, that had owned the Sorcerer's power;
Not an oak, or green bank, on hill or dale,
That once waved in Summer's and Winter's gale.

LVI.

The Druid pressed on through the lifeless wood,
Till he reached the plain, where the old oak stood.
Now listen and watch, and you shall see
What was done around that warrior tree.
Scarce could the Druid now believe,
That phantoms did not his eyes deceive,
 As he looked o'er this desert land,
 Far as his vision could command.
Is it the light, that mocks his sight?
Or shadows, that now the low moon throws?
What dark and mighty shapes are those,
 Standing like diemons of the night?
Nearer and nearer the Seer now goes,
Taller and taller the figures arose!
Astonished he saw, on the plain around,
In the circles he traced on the teeth-sown ground,
A hundred and forty figures stand,
A lofty and motionless giant-band!
He paused in the midst, and calmly viewed
Their strange array and their sullen mood.

High wonder filled his mind, as this he saw.
And wonder still and reverential awe,
From age to age, have filled the gazer's mind,
With sweet yet melancholy dread combined.
Stonehenge is the name of the place this day,
But what more it means no man may say.

LVII.

Who, that beholds these solid masses rude,
Could guess they ever were with life endued?
And yet, receive the marvel that I tell,
These mighty masses held the Wizard's spell!
They were his buried fangs, and upward sprung
By nerve of magic, which they yet retained,
Dilating to enormous size and shape,
While from their prison-grave they strove t' escape.
But here their effort ceased, and, wildly flung,
They in their mighty shapes have since remained.
Their effort, but not yet their power, has ceased,
For, as the ages of the world increased,
Still with the charm of wonder they have bound
Whoever stepped in their enchanted ring,
And when the learned held the truth was found,
The daily and the nightly thought,
So long pursued, so closely caught,
Has proved a feather dropped from Fancy's wing!
And thus have two thousand ages rolled,
But the truth till now was never told!
Unsuspected it lay,
Closely hid from the day,
Till some smatterer bold
Should the secrets of Druid lore unfold.

LVIII

The Hermit, by the wondrous vision won,
Felt not the shuddering earth, nor heard the gale
O'er the far wilderness come sweeping on,
With gathering strength and wildly sweeping yell,
Till, like some fiendly voice it burst around,
And gradual died along the hollow ground.
Then he knew it the Wizard's blast;
It was his fiercest and his last,
And came for vengeance on the Druid's head;
But with his fangs his evil power was fled.
And, when rung out the harp's rejoicing swell,
The Druid knew that all was once more well.
Then to his bowery home his steps he turned,
And slept the sleep by conscious virtue earned.
His fortitude the Wizard's spell had braved;
His patient wisdom a wide land had saved!

LIX.

From forth that day began the Druid sway
O'er all this widely stretching plain,
And hamlets few that on their border lay.
Still did the Druids long remain
In the lone desert, far from vulgar eye,
'Wrapt in high thought and solemn mystery.
The circle of the Wizard's fangs, 'tis said,
Was their great temple, where, on certain days,
In triumph for the tyrant-dæmon fled,
They gathered from the country far around,
And sang, with nameless rites, their mystic lays,
Here on this rescued memorable ground.

LX.

And thus they ruled, for age succeeding age.
There is one later record, which doth spell,
But in what scroll, or rhyme, or numbered page,
Or letter black, or white, I cannot tell—
There is one record, could it now be found,
Doth spell the words which, spoken on that ground,
By the wan light of the setting moon,
When night is far past her highest noon—
Words, that make sight so strong and fine,
As will the Druids' shadowy figures show,
When in their long and stately march they go,
Around and round that mighty line,
Where yet the Wizard's fangs uprear
Their monstrous shapes upon the air.
And, as they glide those shapes between,
A beam-touched harp does sometimes shine,
Or golden fillet's glance is seen;
While long devolving robes of snow,
Wave on the wind, and round their footsteps flow.
And then are heard the wild, fantastic strains,
Which Druid-charm has left to dignify these plains.

LXI.

Such was the scene, and such are the sounds,
Linked with the history of these grounds!
Nay, 'tis said that, at this very hour,
Without aid from any words of power,
If mortal has courage to go alone
To that remote circle and count each stone,
When the midnight-moon doth silently reign
Over the pathless and desolate plain,
Gliding forms may ev'n yet be viewed,
Of lofty port and solemn mood,

Performing rites ill understood
By people of this latter day!
How this may be I cannot say;
For nobody of these days can be found
To venture alone to that distant ground,
When the midnight moon walks over the land,
With slow, soundless step and beckoning wand,
And cold shadows following her command.

LXII.

But, not for kindly sprites alone,
Is now that haunted region known,
Since the antique Seers are gone.
'Tis said that, sometimes, even there
Fiendish sprites will ride on the air!
To lone shepherd their forms appear.
Their forms in the tempest's first gloom he finds;
And this is the cause that the hurrying winds
Sweep so swiftly, and moan so loud,
As o'er those haunted downs they crowd;
On the waste's edge they gather and brood;
Then, meeting the wild fiend's fiercest mood.
They scud o'er the desert, through clouds, through rain,
Like ship, with her storm—sail set, on the main.
While the Druids lived, these evil bands
Kept far aloof from the guarded lands.
But, when the last died, the Sorcerer's ban
Gained part of the force, with which it began.

LXIII.

And this is the cause why corn will not spring,
Nor a bird of summer will rest his wing,
Nor will the cottager here build his home,
Nor hospitable mansion spread its dome;
Why the plain never hears merry peal,
Announcing benefactor's weal,
Nor e'en lone bell in village tower
Knells the irrevocable hour;
Why the dead find not here a hallowed grave,
Why the bush will not bud, nor tall tree wave.
And why Salisbury steeple was built so high
As though fairies had reared it to prop the sky!
For the mischievous sprites they once came so nigh
They threatened all the country round,
Castles and woods, and meadow-ground,
That kindly peer o'er the edge of the plain,
Like a sunny shore o'er a stormy main;
Nay, they came so near to Salisbury town,
The people within feared the walls would down.

LXIV.

Then they built a tower, as by charmed hands,
So grand, yet so simple, its airy form!
To guard the good town from all fiendish bands,
And avert the dreaded pitiless storm.
And they fenced the tower with pinnacles light,
And they traced fine open-work all around;
It is, at this day, a beautiful sight!
And they piled on the tower a spire so high,
That it looked o'er all the Sorcerer's ground,
And almost it vanished into the sky.
So lofty a steeple the world cannot show
Nor, drawn on the air with the truth of a line,
A form so majestic, so gracefully fine;
Nor a tower more richly adorned below,
Where fretted pinnacles attend,
The spire's first ascent to defend,
And catch the bright purple of evening's glow,
While, sinking in shadows, the long roofs go.
This spire, viewed by the dawn's blue light.
Or rising darkly on the night,
As with tall black line to measure the sphere,
While stars beside it more glorious appear,
Has so holy a look, not of earth it seems,
But some vision unknown save in Fancy's dreams.

LXV.

Now this good spire thus high they made,
All the land to watch and ward,
That the ill sprites, whene'er they strayed,
To their confines might be awed.
It could see on the wide horizon's bound
Each shade, good or bad, as it walked its round,
Whether a fairy or fiend,
Whether a foe or a friend.
It could see the procession move along
With glittering harps, in robes of white;
It could hear the responsive far-borne song
Faintly swell o'er the wide-stretched plain,
Then sink, till all was still again,
And sleeping in the clear moonlight.
So this beautiful spire did watch and wake,
And guarded the land for Innocence' sake.

LXVI.

And, at this very day,
Let but the feeblest ray,
Or gleam, of moonshine chance to fall
Over this steeple so slenderly tall,
Or but glimmer upon the trembling vane;
Though the 'nighted traveller on the plain,
While he perceives it faintly shine,
Peering over upland downs afar,—
Though he hails it for the morning-star,
Yet all too well the warning sign
Know the bands of the Wizard's line!
Soon as they spy its watching eye,
Whether by moonlight, or by morn,
Sullen they sigh, and shrink and fly,
Where sun, or moonbeam, never warn.
So this beautiful spire does watch and wake,
And still guards the land for Innocence' sake.