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BEOWULF

A METRICAL TRANSLATION

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BEOWULF

A METRICAL TRANSLATION INTO MODERN ENGLISH

BY

JOHN R. CLARK HALL

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INTRODUCTION

THE Anglo-Saxon poem of *Beowulf*, of which only one manuscript, preserved in the British Museum, is known to be in existence, dates from about the end of the seventh century, and the hero, a chieftain of the tribe of the Geats (Weders, Hrethlings), who are supposed to have inhabited the south of Sweden, is thought to have lived in the sixth century. It relates three of his adventures—the first two being closely connected—and they are all obviously unhistorical and supernatural, although they may have had some basis of fact.

In the first, Beowulf comes before us as a comparatively young man, who, with a few chosen followers, sails to the country of the Danes (also called Scyldings and Ingwine) and undertakes the task of ridding their king Hrothgar's great Hall "Heorot" of a pestilent monster (Grendel) who comes by night and devours the occupants. Beowulf does, indeed, succeed in wrenching off the arm of the monster, who retreats to his refuge in

the moors to die. But (and this forms the second adventure) another monster, said to be the mother of the first, comes quickly to the Hall for revenge, and carries off Æschere, one of King Hrothgar's most trusted nobles, to devour him in her retreat among the fens. Beowulf then heads an expedition to the moor, where he runs this second monster to earth, or rather, to water, and kills her, returning to the court of his own king, Hygelac, with rich presents and much glory.

The third adventure occurs when Beowulf has grown old and become king of the Geats in succession to Heardred, the son of Hygelac. His territory has been ravaged by a fire-dragon, who keeps watch over a treasure-hoard, and has been roused to fury by some of the valuables having been stolen by an outlaw, and Beowulf, in spite of his great age, insists on setting forth to fight him single-handed. A small bodyguard goes with him, and when the fight is fiercest and it seems as though Beowulf were going to have the worst of it, they all run away except Wiglaf, a young courtier who goes to his aid. In a last desperate struggle the two kill the dragon, but Beowulf has been mortally wounded, and dies in Wiglaf's arms. There are several digressions, some apparently quite irrelevant,

and the poem begins with a sort of prologue about the Danish royal line and a member of that line also called Beowulf, the connection of which with the body of the poem is not clear.

The most important digressions relate, in all probability, to historical personages and events, the most interesting being those relating to the Swedes (Scylfings), who lived to the north of the Geats, and who overcame the latter and annexed their territory not very long after the death of Beowulf.

I should advise the reader who is making his first acquaintance with *Beowulf* through the medium of this translation, to omit the prologue and other digressions, which are distinguished from the rest of the poem by being printed in closer type. They are full of allusions which require a good deal of explanation, and are not of great interest except in relation to the history and antiquities of the time.[1]

The following is a list of the principal personages mentioned in the poem, grouped by nations, with

[1] Those who wish to make a detailed study of the poem, including the episodes, will find material more especially intended for them in the introduction, notes, and appendices to my prose translation entitled *Beowulf in Modern English Prose*. Second edition. G. Allen & Co., London, 1911.

a note of the line at which they are first mentioned. Names which occur only in the episodes, or only once elsewhere, have been omitted, especially where we know nothing more of them than is stated in the passage in which they are referred to.

Danes, also called Scyldings, Ingwine, and (indiscriminately!) East, West, North, and South Danes:

Æschere, one of Hrothgar's courtiers, 1323.
Beowulf (=Beaw), 18.
Ecglaf, father of Unferth, 499.
Ecgwela, an early king, 1710.
Freawaru, daughter of Hrothgar, 2022.
Halga, brother of Hrothgar, 61.
Healfdene, father of Hrothgar, 57.
Heorogar, Hrothgar's elder brother, 61.
Heremod, a bad king, 901.
Hrothgar, 61.
Hrothulf, treacherous nephew of Hrothgar, 1017.
Unferth, Hrothgar's orator, 499.
Wealhtheow the Helming, Hrothgar's queen, 612.
Wulfgar the Wendel, at Hrothgar's court, 348.

Geats, also called Weders, Hrethlings, and (?) Hrethmen:

Beowulf (the hero of the poem), 343.
Eofor, son-in-law of Hygelac, 2486.
Hæreth, father of Hygd, 1929.
Hæthcyn, son of Hrethel, 2434.
Heardred, king, son of Hygelac, 2202.
Herebeald, son of Hrethel, 2434.

Hrethel, king, 373.
Hygelac, 194.
Hygd, wife of Hygelac, 1926.
Wulf, brother of Eofor, 2965.

Swedes, also called Scylfings:

Eadgils (2392) and Eanmund (2622), sons of Ohthere, exiled for rebellion against Onela.
Ecgtheow the Wægmunding, father of Beowulf, 263.
Ohthere, son of Ongentheow, 2380.
Onela, king, son of Ongentheow, 62 (?), 2616.
Ongentheow, king, 1968.
Weohstan, father of Wiglaf, 2602.
Wiglaf, Beowulf's faithful follower, 2602.

The poem of *Beowulf* is of the highest interest to English people, as being the earliest considerable literary monument in the English language, and the first poem of any length in a Germanic language. Apart from this, and from its value as a unique source of information as to the social conditions of our ancestors in their continental home before they migrated hither, it has sufficient literary merit to be well worth reading for its own sake. It is very uneven, to be sure—it sinks every now and then to the level of the dullest prose, and has the prolixity which is characteristic of a primitive and leisurely age—but for the most part it is thoroughly good stuff, well up to the highest standard of Old English work.

The general reader should accustom himself to the constant recurrence of equivalent or parallel expressions, especially for proper names (*e.g.* Hrothgar is called "highly-famed king," "Healfdene's son," "widely-famed chief," "Ingwines' lord," "notable prince," "hoard-keeper of braves," all within lines 1039-1047), and bear in mind, as regards the frequent references to rings and treasure, that there was no coined money in those days, and that rings and other valuables supplied its place.

The present translation is an attempt to get as close as possible to the rhythm of the original, and yet at the same time to make the rendering acceptable to persons unfamiliar with the peculiar structure of Old English verse.

The existing verse translations (generally excellent from the point of view of scholarship) seem to me either to lack the smoothness necessary to make the poem attractive to modern ears, or to be too archaic in diction, while there is not infrequently as free a use of inversion as that which distinguishes the Psalms of David in metre according to the version approved by the Church of Scotland.

Obsolete expressions have been avoided wherever possible, the only exceptions being, I think, *atheling* (nobleman, king's son), *bale* (bale-fire, funeral pyre),

bill (as meaning sword), *burg* (fortified enclosure), *byrnie* (corslet), *forebears* (forefathers), *helm* (meaning helmet), *marks* (as meaning borderlands, uninhabited regions, 1347), *natheless* (nevertheless, 2577), *sark*, *war-sark* (coat of mail), *thane* (noble attendant), *worm* (in the sense of serpent, dragon), and *Wyrd* (Fate).

In a very few passages I have used a modern word, such as *obscene* (line 1505), in an archaic sense.

As regards the form of the translation, it has been my primary object to preserve four well-marked stresses in each verse, and I have tried as far as possible to translate line for line. Occasionally the metre has been varied, in order to break the monotony of the verse. I have not usually attempted to reproduce the alliteration of the original, mainly because it is so extremely difficult to avoid the use of words which are etymologically descended from the original Anglo-Saxon, but which have got, as Archbishop Trench had it, "depolarized" in their passage down the centuries, or of other words which do not represent the original quite correctly, but which happen to have the same initial letter. Moreover, the modern reader would probably not recognize the Old English habit of allowing any initial vowel to alliterate with any other as alliteration at all.

I have endeavoured to be as literal as possible, but at the same time have been more catholic in my choice of readings than in the prose translation, which had Wyatt's text[1] as its basis. The variations can easily be ascertained by reference to the notes in the prose translation, or to Wyatt's or any other recent edition of the text which records the various readings and emendations of scholars.

I hope the time will come when this fine poem, the very day-spring of our national literature, will be as well-known among us as the deservedly popular *Canterbury Tales*, which are at present too often regarded by English people as the first poetical collection of any merit in their language. If the following translation helps in any way to put the *Beowulf* in its rightful place in this respect, it will have attained its object.

J. R. C. H.

March 1914.

[1] *Beowulf*, edited by A. J. Wyatt. Second edition. Cambridge University Press, 1898.

BEOWULF:

A METRICAL TRANSLATION

THE PROLOGUE

Lo! We have heard tell how mighty the kings
of the Spear-bearing Danes were in days that are past,—
how these men of high birth did valorous deeds.
Scyld, child of the Sheaf, took mead-settles oft
from parties of foemen,— from many a tribe.
The earl inspired fear: from the time that they found him
unfriended, he got compensation for all,—
waxed under the welkin and prospered in fame,
till each of the peoples that dwelt round about
o'er the path of the whale, had to bow to his word,—
to render him tribute. A good king was he!
To him there was born in process of time
a son in the castle, and him had God sent
to the folk as a comfort. He knew the dire need
which in past times they suffered, while lacking a lord,
for many a long day. So the Lord of Life gave him—
the Wielder of Glory— a name in this world.
Beowulf was renowned; the repute of the offspring
of Scyld spread abroad throughout all Scedeland.
Even so a young man should compass by gifts,
rich presents of gold, to the friends of his sire,
that later in life there may stand by his side
willing comrades in turn when the tide of war comes—
the people do service. Deeds worthy of praise
will make a man prosper with all of the tribes.

So Scyld parted from life at the foreordained hour—
journeyed forth, skilled in war, to the fold of the Lord.
They bare him away,— his comrades beloved—
to the swirl of the sea, as he prayed them himself
while he, Friend of the Scyldings, still wielded his words.
Dear lord of his country, he long had held sway.
There stood at the haven with rings on its prow
all sheeny and eager the Atheling's bark.
Then laid they adown the ruler belov'd,
the giver of rings, in the lap of the ship,—
the chief by the mast. They brought there, moreabove,
great store of things costly, of treasures from far.
I never heard tell of a keel fitted out
more fairly with weapons and trappings of war,
with bills and with byrnies. There lay on his breast
of treasures a many, and these were to go
far away, as a prize for the ocean, with him.
They furnished him forth with less gifts not a whit,
with less tribal-treasures, than those did who once
sent him out on his way, at the spring-tide of life,
alone o'er the waves, being yet but a child.
And they set him thereto a banner of gold
high over his head; let the sea bear him off.
They gave him to ocean in sadness of soul,
and mourned in their spirits. No mortal can tell—
can say of a sooth— no ruler in hall,
no brave under heaven, to what place that load went.

I

THE ADVENTURE WITH GRENDEL

THUS Beowulf the Scylding was there in the strongholds,
dear king of the nation, for many a long year
renowned among peoples, (the chieftain his father
had gone from the earth) till to him there was born
the famous Healfdene, who all through his lifetime,
well-practised and warlike, ruled mildly the Scyldings.
To him there awoke in the world children four
told out in succession— four captains of hosts—
Heorogar and Hrothgar and Halga the Good.
I have heard that . . . was *Onela's* queen,[1]—
the consort beloved of the warrior Swede.

Then was granted to Hrothgar good fortune in battle—
such glory in war that his friends-and-relations
obeyed him with gladness; his henchmen waxed many,—
good plenty of fighters. He purposed in heart
to give orders to men for the work of erecting
a hall, a huge place for the drinkings of mead,—
(vaster) than men had ever seen,
and therewithin to young and old
to share out all he had from God,
except the lands and lives of men!

[1] This line is imperfect. Some syllables are missing, and Onela is a conjecture.

Then I heard far and wide that the work of adorning
the hall of the nation was put on tribes many
of this middle-world. So it fell on a time
which men counted short that all ready it was,
the greatest of hall-rooms: Heorot he dubbed it
who exercised sway by his word far and wide.
He belied not his promise, but portioned out rings,
costly gems at the feasting. The hall towered high
and broad 'twixt the horns: warring waves it awaited
of horrible fire. Nor again was it long
ere sword-hate 'twixt the father and spouse of a daughter
arose as a sequel to slaughterous strife.

Then the powerful sprite who abode in the gloom,
though full of ill-will the grievance endured
that day after day he heard in the hall
festivity loud; there was sound of the harp
and bright song of the bard.

He said, who could tell
the beginnings of men in far away times,
that the Lord of all might created the earth—
the bright-visaged plain which water surrounds—
and, for victory famed, set the sun and the moon
as a light for to lighten the dwellers on land;
and gave, to adorn the four quarters of earth,
the branches and leaves; and eke life he bestowed
on the various creatures which move and have life.
So then men of war in joy passed their time
and in prosperous wise, till a being began—
a fiend out of hell— to compass ill deeds.
Hight Grendel was he, the grim stranger-sprite,

the great border-haunter who dwelt in the moors,
the fens and the fastnesses. He, hapless wight,
abode for a while in the monster-brood's home,
since the Maker of all things had driven them forth.
The Lord everlasting had punished Cain's kin
for the murder of Abel, whose slayer he was.
Cain joyed not in that feud, but the Maker of all
drove him far from mankind on account of that crime.
All spawn misbegotten arose from that source,—
monsters and elves, and sea-serpents too
and giants as well who fought against God
a long while, and for that they received their reward.

When night had come on he[1] set out for to see
the high chamber, and how the Ring-Danes made therein
their quarters, what time the beer-drinking was done.
Then found he therein the nobly-born band
sleeping after the banquet; they recked not of sorrow,
the scourge of mankind.

The wight of ruin
soon was ready, grim and greedy
fierce and raging; took while resting
henchmen thirty; then departed
home, rejoicing in his booty
with the carrion,— sought his dwelling.

Then in the twilight as day was a-breaking
was Grendel's war-cunning apparent to men,
Then after the banquet was weeping upraised—

[1] Grendel.

a great cry at morning. The glorious ruler,
the prince long-distinguished, disconsolate sat,—
exceedingly suffered, and grieved for his lieges
what time they beheld the track of the loathed one,
the spirit accursèd: the strain was too strong,
too long-drawn and awful.

'Twas no length of time
but after one night he compassed again
more murderous deeds— he was not one to grieve
about vengeance and crime,— he was fixed on such things.
Then 'twas easy to find the man who sought out
a couch further off and elsewhere for himself—
a bed in the outbuildings— when there was shown
and told him in truth by a manifest sign
the hall-warder's hate. He who 'scaped from the fiend
for safety kept farther away, after that!

And thus he prevailed and unrighteously fought,
alone against all, until idle and void
stood the best of all houses. A long while passed by:
the Friend of the Scyldings[1] affliction endured,
all manner of woes, of sorrows profound,
for the space of twelve years, for that after a while
it was openly known to the children of men—
known sadly in song— that whiles Grendel fought
against Hrothgar, and waged feuds begotten of hate,
and treacherous war for many a half-year—
continual strife; nor would he make peace
with ever a man of the force of the Danes,

[1] Hrothgar.

avert doom of foul death, or for tribute make terms,
nor had any wise man a ground to expect
a fortune more bright at the murderer's hands,
but the terrible ghoul, the dark shadow-of-death
kept up the pursuit of young and of old,
laid wait for and trapped them, held, night after night,
the mist-laden moors. No mortal doth ken
where such wizards of hell in their wanderings go.
So many misdeeds did the foe of mankind,
the dread goer-alone achieve, time after time,—
iniquities hard. He held Heorot,
the gold-adorned hall, through the darkness of night,
nor could (Hrothgar) approach the gift-seat, that prize,
on account of the Lord, and he knew not His mind.
To the Scylding's kind lord there was fulness of woe,
and breaking of heart.
In conference often
sat many a chief and discussed about succour,—
what best it might speed for stout-hearted men
to contrive 'gainst the horror that came unforeseen.
They promised, at times, at their heathenish fanes
oblations on altars, and prayed in set speech
that the Slayer of Souls would furnish them help
for the woes of the folk. Such custom they had,
such heathenish hope; they bore hell in mind
in the thoughts of their hearts. They knew not the Lord,—
Appraiser of deeds,— knew no all-ruling God,
nor to worship had learned the Protector of heaven,
the glorious Ruler.

His portion is woe
who in direst distress must needs thrust his soul
in the grip of the flames;— may hope for no comfort,
no manner of change. But weal is for him
who after his death may look to the Lord
and reach longed-for peace in the Father's embrace.

So seethed Healfdene's son without ever a break
with the cares of the times. The sapient prince
could not ward off the woe. Too great was the hardship,
too loathly and long, which had come on the folk,—
malevolent outrage, of night-bales the worst.

These doings of Grendel had Hygelac's thane,[1]
a brave chief of the Geats, heard about in his home.
The greatest of all among mortals was he
in bodily strength in the days of this life,—
both noble and stalwart. He bade them prepare
a good wave-traverser, and said he would visit
the warrior-king, the notable prince,
across the swan's road,[2] as he had need of men.
For that journeying forth did men of good sense
blame him never a whit though they loved him right well;—
they urged on the brave soul, and sought omens of good.
From among the Geats' folk the warrior brave
had chosen armed men the most keen he could find.
As one of fifteen he went down to the ship
and—skilled seaman himself— the chief led them forth
to the coasts of the land.

[1] Beowulf. [2] *i.e.* the sea.

The time wore away. On the waves was the bark,
the boat under the cliff. Fighting men in full gear
stepped on to the ship: the eddies curled round it;
sea buffeted sand. To the lap of the vessel
were borne by the heroes the brilliant trappings,
magnificent war-gear. The men shoved it off,
the timber-bound bark, on its willing emprise.
Then over the wave-ridge, by wind hurried forward,
the foamy-necked floater,[1] most bird-like, departed,
until in due time with the lapse of a day
so far had she journeyed— the ship with curved prow—
that those voyaging in her caught sight of the land,
saw coast-cliffs to glisten and steep mountain slopes—
sea-headlands colossal. So the sea-path was traversed,
and ended the voyage.

Quickly from thence and upwards
folk from the Weders' country mounted the solid earth—
made fast their sea-wood[1]; corslets clattered,
gear of fighters. Thanked they God, who
made the sea-paths easy for them!

Then the Ward of the Scyldings, who had as his office
to watch o'er the sea-cliffs, saw men from the rampart
bear over the bulwarks the bright-gleaming bucklers,
—well-ordered war-gear. Much did he question
in the thoughts of his heart, who these persons might be.
Off started he then on his horse to the shore,
this servant of Hrothgar, and fiercely he shook
the stout spear in his hands, asked in parleying words

[1] Ship.

"What mortals are ye, ye bearers of shields,
"with byrnies bedight, who hither have brought
"a towering ship the flood-ways across,
"and over the seas? Lo! Long have I been
"a guard of the coast and kept border-watch,
"so that on Danish land we might not suffer hurt
"from a harrying force of foemen in ships.
"No bearers of shields have e'er made the attempt
"so coolly to land. Ye know not at all
"the pass-word of those who are comrades in arms,—
"permission of kinsfolk. Ne'er on earth have I seen
"a mightier earl, a chief in his armour,
"than one of you is. No serving-man he
"with weapons made brave, if his looks don't belie him,
"his features most fair. And now I must know
"from what stock ye are sprung, before ye go hence
"and as treacherous spies on the land of the Danes
"go further afield. Now, ye strangers from far,
"sailers over the sea, let my candid opinion
"sink into your ears. Ye had better make haste
"and do me to wit from what place ye are come."
To him then the head of them all made reply—
the chief of the troop— and his word-hoard unlocked.
"Geatish folk by race are we,
"table-friends of Hygelac.
"Known of all men was my sire,
"Ecgtheow hight, a noble prince.
"He lived many years before passing away,
"an old man, from his home. All over the world
"does many a sage remember him well.

" And now we have come to visit thy lord
" with friendly intent— the son of Healfdene—
" the shield of his folk. Do thou counsel us well!
" A great errand we have, to the notable prince—
" to the lord of the Danes. I think it is meet
" that none of it be hid. And now you will know
" if it really is true, as we credibly heard,
" that the Scyldings among there is some kind of foe,
" secret worker of ill, who grimly gives forth,
" in the darkness of night, inexpressible malice,
" blood-shedding and shame. For this I can give
" to Hrothgar good advice in largeness of heart,
" how he, wise and good, may the foe overmatch,
" if haply for him there should e'er be an end
" of this pressure of woes,— that solace may come
" and the wellings of care become cooler at last,
" nor for aye after this he may suffer hard times,
" the crushings of ill, so long as the best
" of all houses remains there above in its place."

The watchman replied as he sat on his horse,—
a fearless retainer— " The warrior keen,
" whose judgment is good, himself will find out
" if there difference is 'twixt your words and your works.
" I gather that this is a band of men true
" to the Scylding-folks' lord. Go forth and bear with you
" your harness and arms. I will show you the way.
" Moreabove, I will bid the men of my troop
" to faithfully guard against all kinds of foes
" that floater of yours,— your newly tarred ship

" where it lies on the sand, until, later on,
" the curly-prowed bark bears back the dear man
" o'er the streams of the sea to the Weders' confines.
" Sure a doer of good such as he will avail
" to pass safe and sound through the stress of the fray."

So they set out to go, and the bark remained still,
the broad-bellied ship swayed about on the ropes,
by anchor held. Swine-shapes glittered
o'er the cheek-guards; gilt and gleaming,
hardened by fire, the boar[1] watched o'er
the warlike man. They hurried on—
together went— until they saw
the timbered house splendid with gold,
to men on earth best known among
halls under heaven, where the chief dwelt.
Its lustre spread o'er many a land.

Then the valiant in fight pointed out to the men
the bright-shining home where the proud heroes dwelt,
that straight there they might go. Fighting man as he was,
he wheeled round on his horse, and then uttered these
words:
" My time for departing is come. May the Father
" all-powerful bring you by His gracious favour
" safe and sound through your journeys. I will to the sea-
board
" to keep the look out against parties of foemen."

The street was stone-paven; together they went

[1] The helmets were surmounted by figures of boars (sacred to the god Freyr).

with the path as their guide, and each war-byrnie shone,
each bright iron ring, hard and linked by the smith
sang out in their sarks as they hied them along
on their way to the hall, in their war-harness dread.
They put up their shields, these sea-weary men,
against the house-wall,— their bucklers right hard.
Then bent they to bench, the men's byrnies rang—
their harness of war. The javelins stood,
the mariners' arms, in a heap by themselves—
ash-wood gray at the tip, for the iron-clad troop
with weapons was brave. There, then, a proud chief[1]
asked the warrior-band to what stock they belonged :—
" Whence have ye brought these plated shields,
" these corslets gray and visored helms,—
" this heap of war-shafts ? I am Hrothgar's
" man and herald. Bolder strangers
" never have I seen so many.
" Ye seek Hrothgar not as exiles
" but, I ween, as daring heroes ! "
To him then made answer the Weder's proud lord
renowned for his strength ; the helmeted brave
said these words in reply : " We sit as companions
" at Hygelac's board. Beowulf is my name.
" To the son of Healfdene, the chieftain renowned,
" I desire to make known the errand I have—
" to speak to thy lord, if this boon he will grant
" that in goodness of heart he will let us go in."
Wulfgar, Vendel prince, made answer :—
his stoutness of heart was known far and wide,

[1] Wulfgar, see line 348.

his wisdom and pluck. "I will ask about that
"from the friend of the Danes,— from the Scylding-folks' lord,
"dispenser of rings, in accord with your prayer—
"the notable prince about your emprise—
"and quickly bring back whatever reply
"the chieftain thinks fit to give me for thee."
Then quickly he turned to where Hrothgar sat
ripe in years and most hoar with his body of earls,—
went fearlessly forth till he stood full in front
of the Danish lord's shoulders. Court custom he knew.
Thus Wulfgar outspake to his friend and his lord:
"Hither men from afar of the race of the Geats
"on their journey have come o'er the ocean's expanse.
"The chiefest of all is Beowulf named
"by the warrior-band; and these make request
"that they, O my prince, that they may with thee
"have exchangings of talk. Deny them not this—
"to have converse with thee, O Hrothgar the kind!
"In their harness of battle they seem to deserve
"the good will of earls; doughty, sure, is the chief
"who hither has led these heroes of war."
Then Hrothgar made speech, the Scylding-folks' shield:—
"I knew him of yore in his childhood's young days,
"men called his old sire by the name Ecgtheow.
"To him Hrethel the Great gave as wife in his home
"the one daughter he had; and now has his offspring
"come hardily here to see a true friend.
"Men who journeyed by sea and brought to this land
"their tribute of gifts, to make friends with the Geats

" were wont to say this— that the mighty-in-war
" had thirty men's strength in the grasp of his hands.
" And now hither to us, the West Danish folk,
" has the all-holy God directed the man
" Grendel's terror to meet, as a sign of His grace.
" On him, the brave man, I shall treasure bestow
" in return for the valorous thought of his heart.
" Now do thou make haste and bid them come in
" all together before me, these men of one blood;
" tell them also in words how welcome they are
" to the folk of the Danes."
Thereupon Wulfgar went
to the door of the hall and brought word from within.
" My conqu'ring prince, the East Danes' lord
" bids me to say he knows your stock
" and ye are welcome here to him,
" brave-minded men, across the sea.
" Now may ye go in your war-gear
" with helmets on and see Hrothgar.
" Here let your shields and wooden shafts
" abide the end of the debate."
Thereupon rose the chieftain. Many heroes were round him
a brave crowd of liegemen. Some stayed in their places
and guarded the arms as the Hardy one bade them.
Together they hied, under Heorot's roof
the messengers led them. On went the brave hero,
bold under his helmet, and stood by the hearth-place.
Thus Beowulf discoursed; the mail on him shone,
the armour-net, linked by the skill of the smith.

" Hail, Hrothgar, to thee! I am Hygelac's kin
" and his warrior-thane. I have tried in my youth
" to do many brave deeds. To me Grendel's affair
" has been plainly made known in the land of my birth.
" Now voyagers say that this paramount house,
" this hall-building, stands good for nothing and void
" when at evening the sun has its brightness concealed
" by the cloak of the heavens. Then folk of my land,
" the wisest of men, and the best in repute
" exhorted me thus; that to thee I should go
" O Hrothgar, my lord, for the virtue they knew
" of my bodily strength and had seen it themselves
" whenas, battered by foes, I returned from the fight
" at which I bound five,— laid the monster-brood low—
" and sea-devils I slew on the billows by night.
" I was at my last gasp but the Weders avenged,
" (they brought woe on themselves) and their enemies crushed.
" And now I will settle the matter alone
" with Grendel the giant, the hideous sprite.
" Of thee now, O lord of illustrious Danes,
" I make a request— O Shield of the Scyldings—
" for only one boon. Deny it me not,
" O Defence of brave men, Friend and Lord of the folk,
" now thus far I have come;— that I and my band
" of nobly-born men, this valiant troop,
" may purge Heorot alone: and besides, I have heard,
" that the terrible wight in bravado of soul
" about weapons recks not; and that on my account
" the lord Hygelac may rejoice in his heart,

" this do I renounce,— to carry a sword,
" or a yellow-hued shield and a broad, to the fray,
" but I with my grasp will seize hold of the fiend
" and contend for my life, deadly foe against foe.
" And the one whom death takes shall rest fully assured
" that his fate is from God. If he comes off the best
" I doubt not but that he will fearlessly eat
" these our men of the Geats, as so oft he has done
" the Hrethmens' fine flower. You will never have need
" to cover my head, but me he will have
" all dripping with blood if death takes me away.
" If he comes off the best the lone-goer will bear
" off the blood-beflecked corpse,— set his mind on a feast,
" without mercy will eat, and will stain his swamp-lair.
" You will not, after that, need to take any thought
" for my bodily food. Yet send Hygelac, pray,
" if the fight takes me off, this best of war-corslets,
" most splendid of garments, which covers my breast.
" Hrethel had it of yore,— it is Wayland's own work.
" Fate goes aye as it must ! "
Then Hrothgar outspake, the Scylding-folk's chief:
" O Beowulf, my friend, thou hast visited us
" for desperate fighting in kindness of heart.
" Thy father set going the greatest of feuds ;
" the hand-slayer he of Heatholaf,
" the Wylfings among, so that, fearing a war,
" the Weder-folk dared not to keep him with them.
" From thence he went forth to the South-Danish folk,
" the notable Scyldings, across the wild waves ;
" that was when I first ruled the folk of the Danes—

" held sway, as a youth, o'er a far-stretching realm
" and rich city of heroes. Then was Heorogar dead,
" he, though older than I, was no longer alive,—
" Healfdene's son too. He was better than I!
" After that I made up the quarrel with gold;
" to the Wylfings I sent ancient treasures across
" the sea-water's broad back; and he pledged me his troth.
" To let any man know what Grendel has wrought
" of wrack in Heorot, and by sudden attacks,
" with his plottings of hate, is a task which brings grief
" to my veriest heart. The guard of my house,
" my war-troop, is minished. Into Grendel's dread toils
" Fate has gathered them up. Yet God can restrain
" the wild worker of ill from his doings, with ease.
" Oftentimes fighting men, exalted by beer,
" have made it their boast, with their ale-cups in hand,
" that they would await the warfare of Grendel
" with terrible swords in this banqueting-hall.
" Then this mead-hall was stained, in the morning, with blood,
" this magnificent house, at the dawning of day;
" all the boards of the benches bespattered with gore
" and the hall with sword-blood. Then the fewer I had
" of dear trusty lieges, when death took them off.
" Now sit at the feast and unbosom thy thoughts,
" thy war-fame to our men, as thy spirit suggests."

Then they cleared them a bench in the hall where men drank,
for the men of the Geats, in a place by themselves,
and the stout-hearted fighters, went thither to sit
in the pride of their strength. A serving-man waited
and bare in his hands the ale-cup bejewelled—

poured out the bright mead, and a bard sang anon
clear-voiced in Heorot. There was revel of heroes—
a numerous band of Danes and of Weders.

Then Unferth discoursed, of Ecglaf the son,
who sat at the feet of the Scylding-folk's lord,
and disclosed hidden hate. The voyage of Beowulf,
the sea-goer bold, was most galling to him ;
he could not endure that among other men
any one under heaven should e'er have more fame
in this mid-world than he.

" Art thou the same Beowulf who strove against Breca,
" and on the wide sea contended in swimming
' and tempted the waves in presumptuous wise ;
" and ye ventured your lives on the waters so deep
" for a foolhardy boast ? Nor could ever a soul,
" be he foeman or friend, get you two to desist
" from your sorry emprise, when ye swam on the sea,
" when ye clasped with your arms ebb and flow of the deep—
" measured out the sea-paths— fought your way with your hands—
" glided over the ocean ; the sea surged with waves ;
" through the waters unrest seven whole nights did ye toil
" in the watery realm, and at swimming he beat you,
" he had the more strength. Him then in the morn
" did the ocean cast up on the Heathoremes' land,
" and thence, by his folk well-beloved, he sought out
" the land of the Brondings, his welcome domain,
" the fair stronghold city in which he had folk,
" and a castle and treasure. The son of Beanstan

" performed well against thee all he pledged himself to.
" And for thee I expect a much greater mishap
" though in onslaughts of war thou hast ever been good—
" in desperate fighting— if closely thou dar'st
" lay for Grendel in wait for the space of a night."
Then spake Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow:
" Comrade Unferth, much thou talkedst,
" beer-besotted, about Breca
" and his voyage. Soothly say I
" that I had more strength in swimming—
" might on water— than all others.
" In our youth we made a bargain
" and determined (we were both scarce
" out of boyhood) that we'd risk our
" lives on ocean; and we did so.
" While sea-swimming, bare swords had we—
" held them tightly for protection
" from whale-fishes. From myself far
" on the flood waves float he could not
" faster on water, nor could I leave him,
" Thus together we two abode on the sea
" for the space of five nights, till the flood, the rough seas,
" and the bitter-cold air, with the darkening night,
" drove us different ways, and a savage north wind
" blew dead in our teeth. How rough were the waves!
" The sea-beasts' wrath was set aflame;
" against the foes my body-sark,
" hard, linked by hand, furnished me help—
" the woven mail, adorned with gold,
" upon my breast. A grizzly ogre

" grimly clutching, gripping tightly,
" dragged me downwards. Yet I reached him—
" the sea-monster, by good fortune
" with my sword-point. By my hand the
" mighty sea-beast died from fighting.
" Thus and often did the wretches
" press me sorely. With my faithful
" sword I paid them what was owing.
" Evil doers ! Not in feasting
" on my person had they pleasure,
" sitting gorging under ocean ;
" but at morning, cut by sword-blades,
" up they lay along the foreshore ;—
" swords had killed them, and henceforward
" no man's voyage can they hinder
" on the wide sea. Eastwards, light came,
" God's bright beacon (lulled was ocean)
" so that sea-capes I could make out—
" windy bulwarks. Given courage,
" Fate saves undoomed heroes often !
" So I prospered that my sword killed
" nine sea-devils.
I have never heard tell
" of a worse night encounter below the heavens' roof
" nor of harder pressed men on the eddying seas.
" Thus I bore it alive— the grip of the foes—
" by my travels tired out. Then the sea bore me off,
" the flood, by its flow, the surge of the waves,
" to the land of the Finns. Never once have I heard
" such desperate fights, such peril of swords,

" related of thee. Never yet at the war-play
" did Breca so bravely, nor thou thyself either,
" such a deed with bright sword-blades (I boast not of that),
" though thou tookedst the life of thy very own brothers,
" the chief of thy kinsfolk— nor will thy wits save thee
" from reaping in hell thy accursed reward.
" In sooth, I tell thee, son of Ecglaf,
" Grendel, dread fiend, never would have
" worked such terrors to thy master—
" harm in Heorot— were thy pluck,
" thy soul, so warlike as thou sayest.
" But he has found out that he needs not to dread
" the sword-storming scare, the hate of your folk,
" the conquering Scyldings, exceedingly much.
" He takes pledges by force; for no Danish folk
" shows he any respect, but for pleasure he fights,
" he kills and he feasts; and he recks not a whit
" that the Spear-Danes oppose. But now shall I show him
" the power and the might, the war-craft of the Geats,
" nor will I delay. Then let whoso wills
" boldly go to drink mead when the glow of the morn
" of a new day has shone on the children of men,—
" the radiant sun from its place in the south!"
Then the Giver-of-treasure,[1] grey-haired, battle-famed,
was filled with delight. The Lord of the Bright-Danes
relied upon help; shepherd, he, of his people,
he gathered from Beowulf his settled resolve.

[1] Hrothgar.

There was laughter of heroes,— the din sounded forth,
and converse was gladsome. Wealhtheow came out—
Hrothgar's queen, who observed the customs of court;
gold-bedecked, she saluted the men in the hall,
and, as being a wife of high birth, she gave first
the cup to the Ruler [1] of all the East Danes,
and bade him have joy at the drinking of beer
and be kind to his folk. So he, victor and king,
partook in glad mood of the cup and the feast.
Then the Helming princess went about everywhere
to the old and the young, and she handed around
the richly-set cup, until the time came
for her, jewel-decked queen, to Beowulf to bear
the goblet of mead.
She greeted the prince of the Geats, and thanked God
in well-chosen words that her wish was fulfilled
and that now she might look to some noble for help
in these terrible times. He, the rough man of war,
took hold of the cup from Wealhtheow's hands,
and then uttered speech, all alert for the fray.
Out spake Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow:
" When I took to the sea, and sat with my band
" of men in a ship. I made up my mind
" that once and for all I would put into act
" the wish of your folk, or fall on the field
" in the grip of the foe. I purpose to show
" the courage of earls, or in this hall of mead
" to pass my last day ! "
The lady liked well these words of the Geat,
his boastful discourse, and went, gold-adorned,

[1] Hrothgar.

free-born queen of the folk, by her master to sit.
Then again, as of yore, inside of the hall
were spoken brave words; the people rejoiced
with the clamorous sound of a conquering folk,
till Healfdene's son straightway wished to retire
to his rest for the night; war was purposed, he knew,
'gainst the high hall when the sun's light
they could not see and darkening night
was over all, when shadowy forms
came striding on, pale 'neath the clouds!

The whole band rose;
then he,—Hrothgar— did Beowulf greet,
his fellow-man, and wished him luck,
the wine-hall's rule, and said these words:—
"Never since I could wield my hand and my sword
" have I given the charge of the Danes' noble hall
" to one of my men. Now I do so to thee!
" Now keep thou and hold this magnificent house;
" recollect thy repute, show thy daring and might,
" keep watch for the foe. If thou comest away
" from that feat with thy life, what thou wilt shall be thine!"
Then away from the hall with his escort of braves
did King Hrothgar depart, the Scylding's Defence.
The war-lord desired to rejoin Wealhtheow
his consort, the queen. The glorious king,
so people were told, had appointed a watch
against Grendel in hall who was specially charged
by the prince of the Danes, and watched for the monster.

The chief of the Geats trusted firmly withal
in the pride of his might and the grace of his God.
Then from off him he put his corslet of iron,
the helm from his head; to his henchman he gave
his richly chased sword, most precious of blades,
and bade him take care of those trappings of war.
Then Beowulf the brave, of the tribe of the Geats,
spoke a blusterous word ere he went up to bed—
" I account that in fights and in matters of war
" I am no whit less good than is Grendel himself,
" and hence with my sword I won't put him to death—
" deprive him of life,— though I very well might.
" He knows not the good art of the blow in return—
" how to hew at my shield, brave although he may be
" in the works of brute force. But we shall not by night
" bring the sword into use, if he'll venture to join
" in a weaponless fight. May God the All-wise,
" holy Lord, after that, give the victory so
" as it seemeth Him best!"
Then the hero lay down; the pillow received
the imprint of his face. Around him there sank
many seafarers keen on their couches in hall,
and not one of them thought that ever from thence
he would get back again to the home of his love,—
his folk and the borough where he was brought up;
for they had been told that by murderous death
far too many had died of the folk of the Danes
in that chamber of wine. But to them the Lord gave
battle-speed from His loom[1];— to the tribe of the Weders

[1] A strange mixture of Christianity and Northern mythology.

His favour and help, in such wise that they all
overmastered their foes through the prowess of one,—
through the might of one man. It is known of a truth
that the all-mighty God has ruled for all time
o'er the race of mankind.

Then in black night there came,
the Shade-goer, stalking. The fighters all slept,
save one of them, all who should over that house
of horn-gables have watched. Men knew it full well
that the worker of ill could not hurl him[1] below
to the shadowy world but by leave of the Lord.
And so he, wide awake, in rage and in anger
awaited in heat the result of the fray.
Then out from the moor and the mist-laden slopes
came Grendel apace; God's anger he bare.
The worker of ill thought within the high hall
to take one in his toils of the race of mankind.
On he went 'neath the clouds till he clearly descried
the banqueting house, the gold-hall of men,
with ornaments brave. That was not the first time
that a visit he'd made to Hrothgar's abode.
In the days of his life whether early or late
he had never such heroes— such hall-warders—found.
So thus to the hall this wight journeyed on,
of pleasures bereft. The door gave forthwith,
though bound with forged bands, when touched by his paws;
then he fiendishly tore down the mouth of the house,

[1] Beowulf.

overflowing with rage. And anon after that
he was treading, the fiend, the beautiful floor.
In anger he moved, and an unlovely light,
most like to a flame, stood forth from his eyes.
He saw in the hall a number of men,—
banded folk of a tribe— a body of braves
all together asleep. Then he laughed in his heart,
the hideous brute, and thought before day
to sever the life from the flesh of each man,
for hope had come to him of feasting his fill.
Yet after that night it was not again
the decision of Fate that more he should eat
of the race of mankind. Then Hygelac's kin,
great in prowess, observed how the doer of ill
would set him to work with his sudden attacks.
The terrible fiend had no mind to delay
but quickly he seized, as first victim of all,
a sleeping campaigner and ate him, unwarned,—
bit his bone-binding thews, drank the blood up in streams,
swallowed bite after bite. He had eaten him up—
the dead man—in a trice, yea, his feet and his hands.
And then, stepping forth, to close quarters he came
and seized with his hands the hero at rest—
the valiant in heart— he reached out against
the foe with his claw, who grasped him at once
and with purpose of mind threw his weight on his arm[1]
Then the master of crimes quickly realised this,—
that on this middle-world, these regions of earth,
he never had met with a bigger hand-grip

[1] *i.e.* Beowulf threw his weight on the monster's arm.

in any man else. In his heart and his soul
there came over him fear; yet could he not thence
any faster for that. His mind desired flight—
he would 'scape in the dark— seek the rabble of fiends.
At no time in the past had he been in such plight.
Then Hygelac's proud kin remembered his speech
of the evening before. Upright he stood
and held him [1] fast; his [1] fingers cracked,
the fiend moved off, the earl went too;
the monster thought, far off to wend,
where'er he might away from thence
and gain his fen-lair,— knew his fingers' power
was in the foeman's grip. A sorry journey that,
which he, the baleful fiend, had ta'en to Heorot.
The warriors' hall resounded; there came to all the Danes,
to every castle-dweller, brave heroes one and all,
confusion, to the earls. Both wardens of the house
were angry and enraged; the building rang again,
and great the marvel was the hall of wine withstood
the savage combatants, and fell not to the ground—
fair dwelling of mankind— but it was made so fast
within, and eke without, by clamping-bands of iron
be-smithed with cunning wit. There started from the sill,
as I have heard men say, many a drinker's seat
made beautiful with gold, where the two foemen fought.
Sage Scyldings ne'er dreamed in the days that were past
that ever a man could rend it apart,
horn-gabled and brave, by hook or by crook,
though a girdle of flames might enfold it in smoke.

[1] This refers to Grendel.

There rose up a sound then abundantly strange—
to the North-Danes there came a right hideous fear—
to each one of the men who heard with their ears
the shriek from the wall— the withstander of God
singing out his sad lay, his song of defeat—
the captive of hell wailing over his wound.
Fast held him the man who was above all
the strongest in might in the days of this life.
The Shelter of Earls would by no means allow
the murderous guest to escape with his life
and never supposed that that life was of use
to the race of mankind.
There many a chief
of Beowulf's clan old heirlooms swung ;
they wished to shield their leader's life,—
the famous prince— if so they might.
They knew not this— hard mettled men
and skilled in war who joined the fray
and thought to hew this way and that,—
to have his life— no sword on earth
however good, no battle-bill,
could ever touch the cursèd foe.
A spell he'd laid on conquering arms—
all sorts of blades. In this life's day
his breaking up must wretched be,
his alien soul must travel far
where fiends have rule.
Then he who of yore had carried out much
of the joy of his heart,— of crime 'gainst mankind
became ware of this— he, the foeman of God—

that his bodily frame did not stand him in stead,
but Hygelac's kinsman, the valorous man,
had him fast by the hands. Each, as long as he lived,
was abhorrent to each. The hideous monster
endured deadly hurt; on his shoulder appeared
a great manifest wound; the sinews flew open,
the bone-bindings burst, and to Beowulf there came
the triumph of warfare, for Grendel must thence
escape to the fen-side— seek out his sad home;
he knew only too well that the days of his life
had come to an end— the count of his days.
The desire of all Danes had issued in fact
through that murderous fight.

He who first came from far, wise and dauntless of heart,
had made a clean sweep of the hall of Hrothgar
and freed it from harm. In his night's work he joyed,
in his valorous deeds. The chief of the Geat-men
had turned into fact his boast to the East Danes,
and taken away all the trouble of mind—
sorrow gendered of spite,— which they felt in time past
and had to endure through pressure of force,—
no trifling grief. That was evident proof
when the Daring-in-war put beneath the wide roof
the hand, arm and shoulder of Grendel,—his grip
was together all there.

Then, as I have heard tell, there were in the morn
campaigners a many the gift-hall around.
The chiefs of the folk came from far and from near
along the highways the marvel to see,—

the track of the monster. His parting from life
seemed no cause for regret to any of those
who examined the trail of the infamous one—
how he went away thence in sadness of mood,
overcome in the fight, and made tracks for his life
to the water-sprites' mere, put to flight and accurst.
There was the water up-welling with blood,
the dread surge of the waves all commingled was
with the hot blood of swords— welled with gore of the battle.
The death-doomed dived downwards, and then, shorn of joys,
he laid aside life and his heathenish soul
in the fen hiding-place— was received into Hell.

Thence they turned themselves back, the veteran squires,—
many younger men too— from their jubilant course
and boldly they rode from the mere on their steeds,
campaigners on horseback. Then Beowulf's fame
was noised abroad; many times it was said
that between the two seas there was no other man
in the North or the South of the wide world's expanse
who was better than he among bearers of shields,
or fitter to rule 'neath the vault of the heavens.
Yet they did not decry their kind master at all—
the gracious Hrothgar,— he was still their good king.
Whiles the famous in war let gallop along
their bay-coloured steeds,— let them run in a race
where the cross-country tracks seemed fair to the eye
and were known to be good. Other whiles a king's thane,
a boast-laden man with a head full of tales,

who remembered great store of traditions of old,
framed another new speech, truly welded in one.
This warrior soon set to work to rehearse,
in dexterous wise, the adventure of Beowulf—
to tell with success a well-arranged tale—
to traffic in words.

THE EPISODE OF SIGEMUND THE VOLSUNG

He told all he had heard
of Sigemund's deeds— much unknown to the world
concerning the feuds of the offspring of Wæls—
his rovings afar— double-dealings and frays
known to no sons of men save to Fitela his comrade;
he knew them full well, when Sigemund his uncle
would tell him, the nephew, a something about them;
for they had been ever companions in peril
at every encounter, and had with their sword-blades
struck down in great numbers the brood of ill monsters.[1]
Now after his death-day
there sprang up for Sigemund no little renown,
since he, brave in battle, had slaughtered the dragon,
the warden of treasure. He, son of a prince,
had adventured alone this perilous deed
beneath the grey rock; nor was Fitela there.
And yet it befel that his sword pierced it through,—
the marvellous worm— and the glorious blade
stuck fast in the rock; the snake died from the blow.
By valour the hero had brought it to pass
that the hoard of rich things might be his to enjoy,
and to use as he pleased. The descendant of Wæls
loaded up a sea-boat, and put the bright gems

[1] Or, possibly, Eotens (a Frisian tribe? or Jutes?) see line 902.

in the lap of the ship ; and the snake burned with fire.
Of all vagabond men, he, warriors' defence,
was most widely renowned 'mong the tribes of mankind
for his daring exploits. So he throve in time past
when Heremod's warrings, his might and his courage
had lessened in vigour. 'Mid the Eotens he
was falsely drawn into the power of his foes
and quickly got rid of. The wellings of care
unhinged him too long ; to his folk he became
a desperate grief— to the nobles each one.
Yea, and oft in past times able men not a few
had mourned the emprise of the brave-hearted man—
those who looked up to him for a help from their woes,
that that child of a prince might have prosperous days,
reach the throne of his sire, and govern the folk,
the castle and hoard, the kingdom of braves,
the Scyldings' domain. He, Hygelac's kin,
was more lief to his friends and to all flesh, than he.
Him did guile overcome.

From time to time
they raced their steeds, pacing along
the dusty roads. The morning sun,
aroused, sped on. Went many a squire,
daring of mood, to the high hall
to see the marvel ; and the king's own self,
the treasure-warden, from his consort's bower,
advanced in pride of state with ample train,
famed for his virtues, and with him the queen
treading the mead-path with her suite of maids.
Then out spake Hrothgar ; to the Hall he went,
stood on the threshold, viewed the lofty roof
adorned with gold, and Grendel's hand thereto :

"For what I now behold let thanks arise at once
"to Him who governs all. Much have I borne of ill
"from Grendel, and of woes; yet God can ever work
"wonders and wonders more; of glory He is King.
"It seems not long ago that I despaired to find
"a balm for all my woes for ever and for aye,
"when this supremest Hall stood flecked about with gore
"and blood-stained from the fight;— a far-extending woe
"for each of those wise men who never dreamed that they,
"during a long-drawn life, could ever have availed
"to guard against the foes, the hobgoblins and sprites,
"the nation's public work. And now a young esquire
"has done a deed, through the Lord's might,
"which none of us could, ere this time,
"contrive by craft. Lo! she may say—
"(that woman who brought forth the child
"among mankind) if she still lives,
"that God eternal showed her favour
"in child-bearing. Now, O Beowulf,
"best of warriors, I will love thee
"in heart as a son, and do thou from henceforth
"observe this new bond. No thing shalt thou lack
"of worldly delights that I have at command.
"I have paid with rewards— honoured out of the store—
"for less services oft a less valiant man,
"a weaker in fight. Thou hast for thyself
"accomplished by deeds that thy fame shall endure
"for ever and aye. May Almighty God
"requite thee with good as He did only now!"

Then spake Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow:
" Right gladly we finished that fight,—
" that daring deed. We boldly faced
" the Unknown's might. I only wish
" you could yourself have seen the foe
" ready to faint in all his gear.
" Quickly I thought to bind him to
" his bed of death by lusty grips,
" that through my grasp of hand he might
" in death-throes lie, had he not gone.
" God willed it not, and so his flight
" I could not stop,— hold tight enough
" the deadly foe; too over-strong
" was he at going. Yet he left his hand
" his life to ransom, and to show his track,—
" his arm and shoulder. But the luckless wight
" bought him no respite thus. No longer will he live,
" the evil spirit, tortured by his sins,
" but anguish has him in its forceful grip,
" straitly encompassèd with bonds of bale.
" Sin-sullied mortal, thus shall he abide
" the great Last Judgment,— how the radiant Lord
" will sentence him."

A man more sparing then the son of Ecglaf[1] was
of boasting in his talk concerning warlike deeds,
after the high-born men, through the earl's might and main,
had gazed upon the hand— the fingers of the foe—
over the lofty roof. Each one was, at the tip,—

[1] Unferth.

each of the firm-fixed nails, the heathen one's hand-
spurs,—
most like as if 't were steel;— the fingers of the ghoul,
the creature full of fight. And every one agreed
that among swords of braves good from old time, there was
not one to scotch him, none that could have taken off
the monster's fighting-limb, all blood-stained as it was.

Forthwith it was ordered that Heorot within
should by hand be embellished; and many there were
both of women and men who made ready that wine-hall,—
that chamber of guests. Brave with gold shone the hangings
that covered the walls,— wonders many to view
for those among men who look at such things.
That radiant house, although fastened within
with clampings of iron, was shattered full sore;
the hinges were parted, and only the roof
had kept wholly sound when the horrible sprite,
stained with treacherous deeds, had turned him to flight,
reft of hope for his life. Let him try it who will,
it is no easy thing for a man to escape,
but he needs must attain the place which awaits
the possessors of souls,— the children of men
and dwellers on earth— forced on him by fate,
where his bodily frame in its narrow bed fixed
after feasting, shall sleep.

Then time and tide was
that Healfdene's son should go to the Hall;
the king himself wished to take part in the feast.

I never heard tell that a folk bore themselves
in seemlier wise and a greater array
round their Giver-of-wealth. The notable band
then turned to their seats, and rejoiced in the feast.
Hrothgar and Hrothulf, stout-hearted kinsmen,
quaffed many a mead-cup inside the high building
in courteous fashion. Within, Heorot was
with friendly folk filled; for the Scylding-tribe never
in those days resorted to treacherous schemings.
Then the son of Healfdene presented to Beowulf,
as meed for his triumph, a gold-adorned standard,
a broidered staff-banner, a byrnie and helmet,
and many beheld how a fine treasure-sword
was borne 'fore the hero.
Then Beowulf received
the cup in the Hall. Of that giving of gifts
'fore the bowmen had he no need to feel shame.
Of not many men have I ever heard tell
that to others they gave four such gold-bedecked gifts
in friendlier wise at the drinkings of ale.
Round the crown of the helm, as guard for the head,
without, ran a rib to which plates were made fast
so that iron from the file,[1] in battle-stress hard,
might do it no hurt, when a man with his shield
must needs issue forth and encounter his foes.
Then the Shelter-of-Earls[2] gave command that eight steeds
with trappings of worth should be brought into Hall
and under the roof. And one of them bore

[1] *i.e.* swords. [2] Hrothgar.

a jewel-decked saddle, with cunning inlaid,—
the mount, in war-times, of that highly famed king,
when, Healfdene's son, he was minded to go
to the pastime of swords;[1] for courage failed never
the widely famed chief in the front, where men fell.
Then the Ingwine's lord gave Beowulf control
over both kinds of things,— the weapons and steeds,
bade him use them right well.
In such generous wise did the notable prince,
the hoard-keeper of braves, pay for daring in fight
with horses and wealth: so that never a man
who will tell honest truth could speak ill of his gifts.
Then the Chief-over-Earls gave a present of worth,
which he had from his sires, on the mead-bench to each
of the men who had crossed with Beowulf the sea,
and for one of them, bade that gold should be paid
whom Grendel erewhile had wickedly killed,
as he would have killed more, if God the All-wise
and the courage of man had not kept off that fate.
The Creator controlled the race of mankind,
and He still does so now. To understand this
and use forethought of mind is everywhere best.
Much of evil and good shall he have to pass through
who here dwells for long upon earth, in these days
of sorrow and woe.

Sounds of music there were, and singing as well,
in concert before Healfdene's war-chief.[2]
The glee-wood[3] was played, many lays were rehearsed,

[1] War. [2] Hrothgar. [3] Harp.

when Hrothgar's bard was to give sport
to mead-bench folk about Finn's sons,
on whom there came the sudden blow.

THE EPISODE OF KING FINN

Hnæf of the Scyldings, hero and Half-Dane,
was fated to fall in the Frisian slaughter.
No cause for all that had Hildeburh to praise
the Eotens' good faith. For no fault of her own
she was reft of her loves— her brother and son,—
at the contest of shields. As was fated, they fell,
done to death by the spear. A sad woman was she !
Not causeless did she, the daughter of Hoc,
mourn her foreordained lot, after morning had come,
and under the sky she was able to see
the carnage of kinsfolk where once she possessed
the world's greatest joy. War had taken off all
of the henchmen of Finn, saving only a few,
so he could by no means challenge Hengest to fight
at the place of debate,[1] nor the sad remnant save
from the thane of the prince by the process of war.
But they offered them terms ;— to grant for their use
a building apart,— a hall and high seat,
and equally share the governing power
with the Eotens' sons ; and at givings of gifts
that Folcwalda's son should day after day
remember the Danes, and Hengest's war-troop
would honour with rings— with treasure most rare
of overlaid gold,— in equal degree
as he used to make glad the Frisian folk
in the hall of carouse.
Then each other they pledged on behalf of both sides

[1] *i.e.* by force of arms.

by a fast pact of peace. With oaths solemnly made
and in perfect good faith Finn gave Hengest pledges
in honour to keep, as his court might think fit,
the vanquished remainder, provided none broke,
by word or by deed, the covenant there,
or ever (although being reft of a chief
they had followed the man who had murdered their prince),
bemoan it through guile, for to that they were driven.
If some Frisian man, on the other hand, brought
the blood-feud to mind by taunts in his speech,
then the edge of the sword should settle the thing.
Duly sworn was the oath, and treasure of gold
was brought up from the hoard.
Of the brave Scyldings all
the best battle-hero was there on the bale.
At the funeral pyre it was easy to see
the blood-spattered sark and swine-image all-gold,
the boar, hard as iron, and many a noble
who died of his wounds, having fall'n in the slaughter.
Then Hildeburh bade that her very own son
should be giv'n to the flames at Hnæf's funeral pyre—
that his body be put on the bale-fire and burned
by the side of his uncle. The woman complained,
and bewailed him in song. Up rose the war-hero
and curled to the clouds. The greatest of bale-fires
roared over the pyre; heads crumbled to pieces
and wounds burst apart; blood sprang forth from the body,
from gashes of war. Most greedy of spirits,
the fire consumed all among both of the nations
whom war had despatched; their picked men were gone.

So the warriors departed, bereft of their comrades,
to visit their dwellings, the Frisian country,
their home and chief city. Still Hengest, however,
made his dwelling with Finn through the dead dreary winter,
abstaining from strife, with home in his mind,

though it was not for him to guide over the sea
a ship with ringed prow (the sea welled with storms
and fought with the winds, the waves were held fast
by winter's ice-chain), till a new year came round,
as still it does now, to men in their homes
and the seasons all-bright which keep to their times.
Then the winter was past,
fair the lap of the earth, and the stranger-guest hied
from the place where he dwelt. He [1] bethought him far more
about taking revenge than of crossing the sea,—
if he could not contrive to stir up some dispute
and remember for ill the Eotens' sons.
So he yielded himself to the way of the world,
when Hunlaf's son laid Hildeleoma,[2] best
of swords, in his lap. Its edges became
familiar enough the Eotens among.
Cruel death by the sword befel Finn after that,
the daring of soul, in his very own home.
When Guthlaf and Oslaf about the fierce raid
made mournful complaint, their sea-voyage past,
him they blamed for their woes. His flickering soul
could not keep in his breast. Then the hall was made red
with the corpses of foes. And Finn also was slain
in the midst of his guard, and the queen carried off.
The chattels and goods of the king of the land
Scylding bowmen bore off and bestowed in their ships,
and whatever they found at Finn's home of sun-discs,[3]
and of curious gems. O'er the paths of the sea
they bore to the Danes and led back to her folk
his highly-born wife.

The poem was sung,
the glee-man's account. High rose mirth again,

[1] *i.e.* Hengest. [2] Gleam of battle.
[3] Sun-shaped ornaments.

bench-joy brightened up, and servers gave wine
out of wonderful cups. Then Wealhtheow came forth
with a circlet of gold, and went where they sat,
uncle, nephew, the two both of noble descent,
together at peace, each true to his kin.
Moreover there sat at the Scylding lord's feet
the spokesman, Unferth. Men trusted his pluck,—
that his courage was great, though he never was true
to his kin in a fight.

Then the Scylding queen spoke :

" Receive thou this cup, my master and lord,
" dispenser of wealth ; be joyous of mood,
" thou gold-giver of men, and speak to the Geats
" with words that are mild, for thus one must do.
" Smile thou on the Geats, and be mindful of gifts ;
" now art thou at peace both at home and abroad.
" I have heard people say thou would'st have as a son
" this hero in war. Heorot is made clean,
" the bright chamber of rings ;[1] dispose, while thou mayst,
" of many rewards, and leave to thy kin
" thy folk and thy realm, when thou shalt go forth
" to the doom of the Lord. Moreover I know
" my gracious Hrothulf that with honour he'll rule
" those younger than he, if thou, Scyldings' lord,
" dost part from this world ere he leaves it himself.
" Our offspring, I ween, with good he'll repay,
" if he keeps in his mind all we two in the past
" did for him when a child to meet his desires
" and to honour his rank."

[1] *i.e.* where rings—the moneys of those times—were given out.

Then she turned to the bench where her two children were,
Hrethric and Hrothmund, and the sons of the braves,
the youths all together, where Beowulf the Geat,
the champion, sat by the brethren twain.
Then to him there was borne the cup, and by speech
invitation was given, and they proffered him eke
in his honour, wrought gold, two armlets thereto
and a mantle and rings, with the finest of torques
I e'er saw upon earth. 'Mong the treasures that braves
have amassed, I ne'er heard that a better there was
Since Hama bore off to his radiant king—
the Brising's neck-chain [1] the gem and its case—
he fled from the toils of Eormanric's craft:
life eternal he chose. Now Hygelac the Geat
(Swerting's nephew was he), had that ornament on,
on the last of his raids, when with banner aloft
his booty he kept, and guarded the spoil
he had captured in war. But Fate took him off,
when in foolhardy wise he brought woe on himself
and the Frisians' feud. He, powerful chief,
bore the jewels away, the brilliant stones,
o'er the cup of the waves, but died under his shield.
Into Frankish power then passed the life of the king,
the mail on his breast and his necklace as well.
Lesser captains than he took their toll of those slain
by the fortune of war, and the men of the Geats
filled the place of the dead.

[1] This was the subject of a Germanic (and old Norse) legend, with which the name of the historic king Ermanric of the Ostrogoths (*ob.* A.D. 395) is connected.

Then the hall was filled full
of the clamour of men, and Wealhtheow spake—
said before the whole band: "O Beowulf, loved youth,
" have joy of this ring and with it good luck,
" this mantle to boot, with treasures of state,
" and prosper thou well. Let thy might bring thee fame,
" and friendly be thou to these boys, in advice.
" I shall not forget to give thee thy meed.
" Thou hast brought it to pass that near and far off
" men will magnify thee, henceforth and for aye,
" wherever the sea laps the weather-worn cliffs.
" So long as thou liv'st be happy, O prince!
" I wish thou may'st own many treasures most rare.
" Be thou to my sons a helper in deeds,
" thou fortunate one! Each earl in this land
" to his fellows is true and kindly of heart,
" faithful eke to his lord. Well disposed are the thanes,
" the people alert. Men of war primed with wine
" perform my behests."

Then she went to her seat. There was rarest of feasts,
whereat men drank wine;[1] they recked not of fate,
the destiny grim, whose decrees had gone forth
for many an earl, when evening had come
and Hrothgar had left and gone to his house,—
the chief to his rest. Great plenty of earls
kept watch o'er the hall, as they oft did before.
The bench-boards they cleared and the Hall was bespread
with bolsters and beds. Of the revellers one
on his pallet lay down, a doomed man, near his time.

[1] Wine was a rarer beverage than mead or beer.

They set at their heads their bucklers of war,
their bright wooden shields, and there on the bench,
the athelings above, where all men could see,
was the towering helm, the corslet of rings
and the strong-shafted spear. That indeed was their wont,
that they constantly held themselves ready for war,
for defence or attack, and each of them too
at exactly those times when there happened the need
to their master and lord. Trusty clansmen were they !

II

THE ADVENTURE WITH GRENDEL'S MOTHER

Then they laid down and slept. And sorely did one
for his evening's rest pay ; as had happened full oft
since Grendel was wont the gold-hall to frequent,
and practised un-right, until the end came—
death after his crimes. And then it was seen,—
widely known among men— that, after the ghoul,
an avenger still lived who survived a long time
the harassing feud, to wit, Grendel's dam,
a fiend of woman, who harboured her griefs ;
dread waters had she as a place of abode,—
chilly streams—since the time when Cain took the life
of his one only brother, an edge-slayer he [1]
of the seed of his father. An outlaw he went,
being branded for murder, and fled human joys,
dwelling out in the wilds. From thence there arose
doomed creatures a many, and Grendel was one,
detestable outcast, who found at Heorot
a mortal in watching, and waiting to fight.
And there did the monster come at him with grips,
yet he bore well in mind the power of his might,
the generous gift granted to him by God,
and he trusted for grace to the Wielder of all—

[1] *i.e.* slayer by the edge of the sword.

for help and support. Thus he vanquished the fiend,—
struck down the hell-sprite, who went off abased
and severed from joy, that foe of mankind,
his death-house to see. Yet his mother thereto,
greedy, gloomy of mood, was minded to go
on a sorry emprise and wreak her son's death.
So to Heorot she came and the Ring-Danes were there
asleep in the Hall. Soon then on the earls
the tables were turned, what time Grendel's dam
had thrust herself in; but the terror was less
by exactly so much as the strength and the dread
of a woman in fight are, compared with a man's,
when the hammer-forged blade with adornment bedecked,
the sword, doughty of edge and spattered with gore,
the boar-image cleaves which stands out on the helm.

Then the sword hard of edge was in Hall taken down
from over the seats, and many a broad shield
raised firm in the hand. None thought of his helm
or broad coat of mail when the panic arose.
She was in haste and would be off
to save her life when she was seen.
Quickly she grasped a noble tight
and then made off towards the fen.
Dearest of braves between the seas
to Hrothgar he, in comradeship,
great shield-wielder, hero of note.
Him had she seized upon his bed.

Now Beowulf was not there: to him, the noted Geat,
the treasure-giving o'er, another place was given.
Clamour filled Heorot! She took the well-known hand
all reeking in its gore, and sorrow was renewed—
came to the homes again. Nor was the business good
that with the lives of friends on both sides they should
pay.

Then was the old king,
the warrior hoar, cast down in his heart,
when he knew his chief thane, the dearest he had,
was not living, but dead.

Quickly then to the bower was Beowulf brought,
with victory blest. At the dawning of day
he went, with his earls, himself with his friends,
the captain high-born,[1] where waited the sage[2]
if ever for him the Almighty might cause
a change to take place from the spell of distress.
Then the war-worthy man[1] advanced over the floor
(the hall-timbers rang), with his followers few,
that with words he might greet the Ingwine's wise lord,[2]
and ask if for him the night had been calm
as he would have wished.
Hrothgar replied, the Scyldings' lord—
"Ask not of joy! Fresh woe has come
"to Danish folk. Æschere's dead,
"the elder brother of Yrmenlaf,
"my counsellor, my monitor,

[1] Beowulf. [2] Hrothgar

" my right-hand man, when from our heads
" we parried blows; when footmen fought
" and boar-crests hacked. A trusty peer,
" an earl, should be like Æschere.
" The wandering carnage-sprite has been his murderer
" by hand, in Heorot; nor do I know which way
" the ghoul, proud of her meal, has taken in retreat,
" rejoicing in her fill. She has avenged the feud—
" that thou, a night agone, Grendel did'st put to death
" in thy vehement way by tightness of thy grip
" because that he too long has made my people few
" and given them to death. So he has fall'n in fight—
" paid forfeit of his life,— and now again has come
" another mighty foe, and would avenge her son
" and carry on the feud farther and farther yet,
" and this to many a thane who mourns within his breast
" his giver of rewards, hard grief of heart may seem.
" Now doth the hand lie still which was of such avail
" to further your desires of whatsoever kind.
" This have I heard my folk, the dwellers in the land,
" masters of homesteads, say, that they have seen
" two wights of this kind, huge haunters of marks,
" ranging over the moors,— sprites from some other world.
" So far as they could well make out
" one of these like a woman was.
" The other wretch trode exile-paths
" in semblance male, but greater he
" than all men else. Him in past days
" the country folk Grendel did name.
" His father knew they not, or whether before him

" any mysterious sprites had ever been begot.
" In a lone land they dwell, amid wolf-haunted slopes—
" headlands swept by the winds: fearsome paths through the fens
" where the stream from the heights passes down to the depths
" amid mists from the cliffs— a flood under the earth.
" Not far is't from hence, by measure, in miles,
" that standeth the mere; and over it hang
" thickets covered with rime; the wood fixed by its roots
" the water o'ershades. And there, every night
" may a horror be seen— light of fire on the flood!
" Of the children of men not one liveth so wise
" as to fathom its depth. Though the heath-ranging deer,
" the hart strong in its horns, closely pressed by the hounds,
" may repair to the wood, thither chased from afar,
' he will yield up his soul, his life, on the bank
" ere he'll venture therein to cover his head.
" That is no pleasant spot. Thence riseth aloft
" the vaporous blend and dark, to the clouds,
" when the wind stirreth up the bale-bringing storms
" till the air becomes misty,— the very heavens weep.
" Now only with thee is help once again.
" Thou know'st not yet the land, the awe-inspiring spot,
" in which thou mayest find the wight of many crimes.
" Now seek it if thou dar'st!
" Thee will I recompense with treasure for the fight,—
" with old and precious things, as once I did before,—
" with twisted rings of gold if thou dost come away."
Then Beowulf spake: Ecgtheow's son:—
" Grieve not, wise man! 'Tis better each

" should wreak his friend, than greatly mourn.
" We all of us await the end
" of this world's life. Let him who can
" win fame ere death. That is the best
" at last for braves where life is o'er.
" Rise, Realm's Defence ! Come, let us haste,
" and spy the track of Grendel's dam.
" I vow thee this :— to cover she
" shall not escape, to lap of earth
" or mountain wood, or ocean's depth,
" go where she may. Be patient as
" to all thy woes, for this one day,
" as I expect."

Then the old man sprang up and gave thanks to God,
the Lord of all might, for what the man said.
Then a bridle was put on a horse for Hrothgar,
a steed with curled mane. The sapient prince
went onwards in state ; a troop bearing shields
marched forward on foot. Along the wood-paths
the marks of her spoor were frequently seen—
her course o'er the ground. Across the dark moor
she had taken her way, and lifeless had borne
the best of the thanes among those who kept guard
with Hrothgar o'er the home.

Then the atheling's son went forth on his way,
over steep rocky slopes and narrow defiles ;
by thin lonesome paths, a passage unknown,—
by beetling crags,— many water-sprites homes.

With a few able men he went on before

to examine the ground, until all at once
he found mountain trees slanting o'er the grey rock—
a wood of ill cheer. Below, water stood,
bedrabbled with blood and cloudy to view.
It was travail of soul to each of the Danes,
the notable Scyldings, and anguish of mind
to many a thane to suffer; distress
to the earls every one, when Æschere's head
they descried later on upon the sea-cliff.
The flood surged with blood;— welled up with hot gore.
At times the horn sang its eager war-note.
The troop all sat down: then of snake-broods enow
in the water they saw,— sea-reptiles uncouth
exploring the deep,— and on the cliff-slopes
beheld sea-monsters lie, who as morning draws on
often take their dread course on the mariner's path,—
wild creatures and snakes. They hied them away
being bitter in heart and swelling with rage,
when the clamour they heard,— the battle-horn's blast.
One, the lord of the Geats cut adrift from his life
with a shaft from his bow as he strove in the sea,
the hard battle-dart in his vitals stood fast.
The slower was he in his flight through the deep,
in that death took him off. Then while still in the waves
he was quickly hard pressed with boar-hunting spears,
furnished forth with sharp barbs, overcome by main force
and dragged on to the cliff. The warriors gazed
on the horrible sprite.

Then Beowulf put on

his harness as chief, and feared not for his life;
his corslet of war was to fathom the flood,
wide, cunningly worked, and woven by hand,
the which could avail his chest to protect,
that no grip of the foe might injure his breast,
or wild creature's grasp do hurt to his life.
Thereto the white helm protected his head,
the helm meant to disturb the depths of the sea
and visit the wave-blend, with jewels made brave
with lordly bands belted, as in days long past
the armourer made it and wondrously wrought,
with boar-figures beset it, that no brandished blades
might e'er after that bite into its substance.
Of mighty helps that was by no means the least
which the spokesman of Hrothgar him lent in his need.
Now Hrunting was hight that same hilted sword,
among old heirlooms it was one of the best.
Its blade was of iron, by poison-twigs dyed,
and with battle-blood steeled. It ne'er failed in war
any one of the men who grasped it in hand,
who dared venture himself on perilous paths,
to the camp-stead of foes. Nor was that the first time
it was destined to do a brave piece of work.
The son of Ecglaf, so lusty in strength,
when the weapon he lent to a swordsman more brave,
had surely forgot what he said once before
when drunken with wine. He dared not himself
to adventure his life 'neath the weltering waves
and do valorous deeds: thus his glory he lost,

his knightly renown. When the other [1] had made
himself ready for war, it was not so with him.
Then Beowulf spake, the son of Ecgtheow:
" Great son of Healfdene, bethink thyself now
" that I start on my way, O gold-friend of men,
" thou sapient chief, what we two said erewhile,
" if I for thy need should cease from my life;
" that when I am gone thou would'st ever for me
" take the place of a sire. The guardian be thou
" of my comrades-and-kin, if war takes me off,
" and to Hygelac send the treasures, besides,
" which thou gavest to me, beloved Hrothgar.
" The lord of the Geats, Hrethel's son, will perceive,
" will see from the gold, when he looks on the gems
" that a giver of rings I had found who was good,—
" surpassing in worth— and had joy while I could.
" And do thou let Unferth the widely famed man
" have the relic of eld, the strange wavy sword,
" so hard of its edge. With Hrunting as help
" I will get me renown, or let death take me off."

The Weder-Geats' chief hastened, after these words,
courageously on; nor did he await
an answer at all; the watery swirl
lapped the warrior round. The day was far gone
ere he could descry the bed (of the lake).
Then speedily she, the ravenous one,
the greedy and grim, who had held as her own
the wat'ry expanse for a hundred half-years,

[1] Beowulf.

took knowledge that one of the race of mankind
spied out from above the strange creatures' home.
Then at him she clutched, the warrior she seized
with her hideous claws; and yet for all that
could not scathe his strong frame. His mail hedged him round,
that she might not break through his doublet of war,
his linked shirt of mail, with her fingers obscene.
Then the water-wolf bare, when she came to the ground,
the ring-giving prince away to her den,
so that brave though he was he could not contrive
his weapons to wield; for so many sprites
pressed him hard in the deep; sea-beasts not a few
his battle-sark crushed with their weapon-like tusks,
the hero they chased. Then it came to the mind
of the earl that he was in some horrible vault
where no water at all could harm him a whit,
and that in that roofed hall he could not be touched
by the flood's sudden rush; a fire-flame he saw,
a dazzling gleam, to shine brightly forth.
Then the brave man descried the underground wolf,
the mighty mere-wife. He gave his war-sword
a powerful swing, his hand kept not back
the impulse, and thus on her head the ringed blade
sang a greedy war-song. Then the visitor found
that the flashing war-blade had no power to bite
or do harm to her life, but the edge disappointed
the prince in his need. Many hand to hand fights
it had known in times past— often cut through the helm,
the war-dress of the doomed; the first time was that

when the dearly-loved prize laid its glory aside.
Again Hygelac's kin had only one thought;
he did not lose heart but minded his fame.
He, fighter enraged, threw aside the chased blade,
with jewels bound round, strong and steely of edge,
that it lay on the earth, and put trust in his strength,
the hand-grip of his might. Thus should a man do,
who thinketh at war to gain for himself
long-lasting renown— careth not for his life.
Then the Fighting-Geats' prince by the shoulder laid hold
of Grendel his dam— ne'er regretted the fight,
and he, strong in war and all swelling with rage,
so flung his life's foe, that she fell on the ground.
But she soon paid him back his wages by hand
with terrible grips— clasping him to herself.
She then overthrew the strongest of warriors,
the weary foot-fighter, that prostrate he fell.
Then the hall-guest sat on him and drew out her knife,
broad and gleaming of edge, and her bairn would avenge—
all the offspring she had. On his shoulder there lay
his woven breast-armour, which shielded his life,
and the entrance withstood of point and of edge.
Then had Ecgtheow's son, fighting-chief of the Geats,
ta'en his journey from hence, the broad bottom beneath,
had his corslet of war, his hard battle-net,
not afforded him help, and the All-holy God
ruled the fortunes of war. He, the Lord who knows all
and is Ruler of heaven, decided aright.
Thus easily rose the chieftain again.

'Mid the war-gear he saw then a conquering blade,
titanic and old, a sword doughty of edge,
by fighters much prized: of weapons the pick,
and yet greater it was than any man else
was able to take to the pastime of war;
good and comely to view and of giants the work.
The Scyldings' envoy seized then the linked hilt,
fierce and grim in the fray he drew the ringed blade,
despairing of life, and so angrily thrust
that it stuck hard and fast in her neck, and broke through
the bone-rings therein, and the bill passed right through
her doomed fleshy coat, and she fell to the ground.
Stained with blood was the sword; the man joyed in his work.
A fire-flame flashed up, the light stood within
as when in the heavens the lamp of the sky
doth brightly shine forth. Then he, Hygelac's thane,
angry, firm of resolve, looked round the abode,
and then turned to the wall and raised by its hilt
the weapon so hard. Not useless the edge
to the warrior-chief, for quickly he meant
to pay Grendel back for many attacks,
namely those which he made against the West Danes
times many and oft, and not only that once
when he slew in their sleep the comrades of Hrothgar
who sat at his hearth, and ate fifteen men
of the folk of the Danes as they slumbered, and bare
other fifteen away, a hideous spoil.
Back he paid him for that, the fierce man of war,
so much so, indeed, that Grendel he saw

lying still and at rest, worn out with his wars
and parted from life, as his fight at Heorot
had maimed him erewhile. Wide gaped open the corpse,
since after his death it suffered a blow,
a hard stroke by the sword, . . . and he cut off its head.

Keen men after that, who with Hrothgar looked down
on the water, soon saw that the swirl of the waves
was all mingled with blood,— the water was dyed.
Then grey-haired old men spake together and said
about the brave man, the offspring of earls,
that they did not suppose he would come back again
in victory glad, and seek their great prince,
for to many it seemed that the water-wolf there
had done him to death.

Then came the ninth hour, and the brave Scyldings left
the ness, and from thence the gold-friend of men
departed for home. The strangers sat on
sick at heart as they were and stared at the mere.
They longed, yet hoped not, that they ever should see
their dear lord himself.

Then the sword, battle-blade,
began to dissolve in war-icicles,
through the blood of the foe. A marvel it was
how it all melted down, most like unto ice
when the Father lets go the bands of the frost—
unwinds the flood-ropes— He who has in his power
the seasons and times; true Ruler is He.
The Weder-Geats' prince carried off from the lair

no more costly gems (though a many he saw)
but only the head, and with it the hilt,
with jewels adorned; already the blade
had melted away, the chased sword been burnt up,
so hot was the blood, full of venom the ghoul,
who had died in that place.

He was soon swimming off who withstood in the fight
the attacks of the foes; through the water he rose,
and the blend of the waves all purified was,
the ample expanse where the alien sprite
yielded up his life's days and this fleeting estate.
Then came to the land the Seafarers' Shield
swimming sturdily up, and in sea-spoils rejoiced—
the ponderous load which upon him he bore.
To meet him they went, the picked band of thanes,
gave thanks unto God, and rejoiced in their lord,
because safe and sound they beheld him again.
From the valiant one were the byrnie and helm
then quickly unloosed. Grew tranquil the lake,
the over-cast deep with murder-blood dyed. . . .

From thence they fared forth the footpaths along
with joy in their hearts, the land-ways traversed,
familiar roads. The kingly-bold men
the courage of whom, every one, was so great,
then had much ado to carry the head
from the cliff by the mere. 'Twas the business of four
to bear Grendel's head on the slaughterous pole,
to the gold-adorned hall, and that with much toil,

until at the last there suddenly came
campaigners fourteen, brave men of the Geats,
and arrived at the hall and with them their lord
trode the meadowy plain, stout of heart in their midst.
Then entered therein the chief of the thanes,
the man brave in deeds, and honoured by fame,
the stout man of war, and greeted Hrothgar.
And then was brought in to the floor of the hall,
where men used to drink, Grendel's head by the hair,
a dread thing to view for the earls and the queen.
This strange gruesome sight the men gazed upon there.

Then spake Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow:
" We have brought thee with joy, O son of Healfdene
" and lord of the Scyldings, this spoil from the water
" which here thou dost look on, in token of triumph.
" 'Twas no easy matter alive to accomplish.
" I toilsomely ventured on war under water—
" a difficult business, and likely enough
" my strife had been ended, but God was my shield.
" I could in the fighting do nothing with Hrunting,
" however trustworthy that weapon might be;
" but the Ruler of mortals so ordered the matter
" that on the wall hanging I saw an old sword,
" gigantic and fair (oft He acts as the guide
" of those who lack friends), so the weapon I drew.
" Then I smote at the fray the guards of the house,
" for good fortune was mine. Then the war-knife was burned,
" the finely worked blade, when the blood issued forth,

" hottest gore, from the fight. I bore thence the hilt
" away from my foes— avenged their foul deeds,
" the death-throes of the Danes, as was meet that I should.
" I promise thee then that thou mayest sleep
" secure in Heorot with thy warrior band
" and each several thane thy people among—
" the young and the old. Thou needest not now,
" O prince of the Scyldings, to fear for thy earls
" any peril to life from that quarter again
" as aforetime thou didst."

Then was Goldenhilt given— the giant's old work,
to the veteran prince, the hoar battle-chief,—
put into his hand. It came to be owned
by the Lord of the Danes, the cunning smith's work,
the fiends having perished. The evil-souled wight,
the withstander of God, by murder-crime stained,
had gone from this world and his mother as well,
and it passed to the power of the worthiest man
of all the world's kings between the two seas
who distributed gifts in Scandian land.
Then Hrothgar harangued : he examined the hilt,
the relic of old, on which was the rise
of the ancient strife marked when the flood carried off,—
the on-flowing deep— the breed of the giants ;
they suffered full sore. That race was estranged
from the Lord of all-time ; requital for that
the Ruler dealt out by the water's o'erflow.
Thus was it engraved on the guard of bright gold

by markings of runes,— set down rightly and said,
for what person that sword, most precious of blades,
with interlaced hilt and adornment of snakes
had been fashioned at first.
Then spake the wise son
of Healfdene, and all sank down into silence:
" Lo, this may he say who deals with the folk
" in justice and truth— the land-warden old
" who recalls all the past— that this earl has been born
" of a nobler race! O Beowulf, my friend,
" thy fame is raised high above the broad ways
" and o'er every land. Thou bear'st it all modestly
" thy might with a prudent heart; now I'll fulfil to thee
" my troth, as we spake of old. A comfort shalt thou become,
" long-lasting, every way, to the people of thy tribe—
" a help to men of battle.
Not so was Heremod,
" towards Ecgwela's sons, the Scyldings' noble kin.
" He grew not up to do the will, but butchery
" and punishment of death unto the Danish folk.
" In swelling rage of heart he slew his closest friends,
" the comrades by his side, until he, mighty prince,
" gave up the joys of life, a solitary soul.
" Although the mighty God gave him the joys of power,
" strength in his body, too, yea, and exalted him
" over all other men, still in his mind and heart
" there grew the thirst for blood. Ne'er gave he to the Danes
" rings, as his rank required. He led a cheerless life,
" had trouble through this feud, the people's long-drawn
hate.

" From that do thou learn ; on virtue lay hold.
" This speech for thy sake, wise in years I have said.
" 'Tis a marvel to tell how the Almighty God
" with bounteous heart granteth wisdom to men,
" noble blood and estates. He hath power over all.
" At times He allows the thoughts of a man
" of notable state in pleasure to roam ;
" gives him in his land the joys of the earth,
" a strong city of men, to hold as his own,—
" causeth him to bear rule over tracts of the world,
" a far-reaching realm, in such wise that he thinks,
" through his smallness of wit, that his luck will ne'er end.
" Amid plenty he dwells, nothing stands in his way,
" nor disease nor old age, no anguish of mind
" clouds over his soul, nowhere is there war—
" hate that useth the sword,— but the whole of the world
" bends itself to his will. Sadder times he knows not,
" until in the man a measure of pride
" doth wax and increase, while sleepeth the shepherd,
" the ward of his soul. That sleep is too sound
" and is wedded to woes ; the slayer full nigh
" who with evil intent doth shoot from his bow.
" Then under his helm is he struck at his heart
" by an arrow's keen shaft. He cannot ward off
" the crooked behests of the Spirit malign.
" What he held for so long seems too little for him ;
" morosely he covets, nor proudly gives out
" the gold-plated rings ;— forgets and despises
" the things of the future, because of what God,
" the Glorious Ruler, has given him already—

" his share of earth's goods. And so in the end
" it befalls him at last that this fleeting life-shell
" droops and falls to its doom. Another succeeds him
" who deals treasure out, the chief's old possessions,
" in ungrudging wise, and recks not of alarms.
" Keep from bale-bringing rancour, O Beowulf beloved,
" thou first among men, and choose the best course—
" the plans that will last. Harbour not too much pride,
" O fighter renowned! Thy heyday of strength
" will last but a while, and soon it will be
" that sickness or sword, the grasp of the fire,
" or the welling of flood, the grip of the knife,
" or the flight of the spear, or wretched old age
" will cut off thy might, or the light of thine eyes
" will fail and grow dim; until in a trice
" it happens that death overcomes thee, O prince!
" In such wise did I rule the Ring-Danes under heaven
" for a hundred half-years, and saved them in war
" from many a tribe, on this middle-earth,
" by spear and by sword, that I reckoned myself
" not to have any foe 'neath the circuit of heaven.
" But lo! a change came to me in my land,
" distress after joy, when Grendel began
" his inroads on me,— the foe from old time.
" I constantly bore great sorrow of mind
" on account of these raids. To the Ruler be thanks,
" the Aye-lasting Lord for this, that in life
" I can gaze on this head, wet with blood from the sword,
" the long struggling o'er. Go now to thy seat,
" in warfare renowned, and have joy of the feast.

" Many treasures shall be our common affair
" when morning comes round."

Glad at heart was the Geat[1] and went forward at once
to get to his place, as the wise chieftain bade.
Then again, as before, rich provision was made
for the hardy in strength who sat in the hall.
O'er the warrior-troop the cover of night
grew darksome and thick. All the company rose;
the veteran Scylding, the hoary-haired chief,
wished to go to his bed; and much did the Geat,
the shield-warrior brave, desire to repose.
Soon, the chamberlain-thane who, as custom required,
had all the earl's needs to see to,—such needs
as farers by sea used to have in those days—
conducted him forth, the comer from far,
weary after his quest.
Then Great-heart[1] reposed: the chamber rose high,
gold-spangled and wide, and the guest slept within
till the raven, dark-hued, foretold, blithe of heart,
the rejoicer of heaven.[2] And so came the bright sun,
gliding over the plain. The warriors hasted,
the nobly-born men were eager to go
again to their folk. The stout-hearted stranger
would fain to his ship and get far away.

Then bade the brave man,[1] that the son of Ecglaf,
should take Hrunting back, the weapon beloved—
bade him carry his sword, gave him thanks for its loan,—
said he held it to be a friend trusty in war,

[1] Beowulf. [2] The sun.

full of force in the fray: no word did he speak
against the blade's edge, so large-hearted was he.
And when the campaigners, equipped in their armour,
were ready to start, the prince dear to the Danes
advanced to the other who sat on the high seat—
the battle-brave hero, and Hrothgar he greeted.

Beowulf harangued; Ecgtheow's son:—
"Now we sea-faring folk who have come from afar
"desire to say this: that we purpose to go
"back to Hygelac again. Here all things have gone
"as we should have wished. Thou hast treated us well.
"If, then, on this earth, O Ruler of men,
"I can any more of the love of thy heart
"in any way gain than I so far have done
"by valorous deeds, I'll be ready at once.
"If I should hear this across the broad sea,
"that neighbouring tribes oppress thee with fear,
"as they erstwhile have done, who were haters of thee,
"I will bring to thy help a thousand brave men,
"retainers of mine. Of Hygelac I know,
"the Lord of the Geats and herd of his folk,
"that although he is young he will help me by word
"as well as by deed, to second thee well,
"and bring to thy aid my wood-shafted spear—
"the help of my force— when of men thou hast need.
"And if Hrethric should come, that son of a prince,
"to the court of the Geats, he will certainly meet
"there with many a friend. For the man of good parts
"to visit far lands is all the more gain."

Then Hrothgar outspake in answer to him:
" These sentences hath the wise God
" put in thy mind. I never heard
" a man so young more sagely speak.
" Art strong in might and ripe in mind,—
" wise in thy speech.
I reckon there is chance
" that if it fell out so that sickness, spear, or sword,
" or combat fierce and grim should take away thy lord—
" take Hrethel's offspring off, the shepherd of thy folk—
" and thou wert then alive, that the sea-roving Geats
" could have no better man to choose them as their king,
" as paymaster of braves, if thou shouldst will to rule
" the kingdom of thy kin.
O Beowulf beloved,
" the bent of thy mind doth charm me the more
" the longer I live. Thou hast brought it about
" that to both of the tribes,— the folk of the Geats
" and the Spear-bearing Danes,— peace in common shall be,
" and the fightings shall cease, the treacherous raids
" which they suffered of yore; that while I hold sway
" o'er this far-reaching realm, our wealth shall be shared,
" and many a man, his fellow shall greet
" with presents, across the sea-gannet's bath.
" Over the waves the ringèd ship
" shall carry gifts and love-tokens
" to friend or foes. I know the folk
" act steadfastly, blameless in all
" as in past times."

Then the Shelter of nobles, the son of Healfdene,
within, did present him with twelve costly gifts,
and bade him in health with the treasures rejoin
his people beloved,— and come soon again.
After that did the king— the prince nobly-born,
the Scyldings' high chief,— kiss the best of all thanes
and clung to his neck, while tears streamed adown
the hoary-haired man. He, aged and wise,
might one of two things expect, and this most—
that, bold in debate, they might ne'er meet again.
The man was beloved by him to that point
that he could not hold back the surge of his breast,
but in his heart's core, cabined fast in his soul,
there burned in his blood a longing deep-hid.

Thence Beowulf strode, the gold-proud man of war,
the greensward across, exulting in wealth.
The sea-goer awaited its master and owner
and rode on its anchor. And then, on the journey,[1]
the present of Hrothgar was often belauded:
a monarch was he in every way perfect,
till old age took from him, so often a victor,
the glad gift of strength.
Then came to the flood
the band of retainers— the men of much courage—
their ring-mail they wore, limb-sarks interlocked.
The coast-warden observed the return of the earls
as he once did before: nor did he accost
the strangers with taunts from the brow of the cliff,

[1] *i.e.* to the coast.

but towards them he rode, the Weder-Geats folk,
and said they took ship, the rangers bright-mailed,
with a welcome from him. Then the spacious sea-boat,—
the vessel ring-prowed, with war-weeds was filled,
with horses and gifts ; the masts towered high
over objects of worth from the hoard of Hrothgar.
He [1] gave to the man who watched over the boat,
a gold-mounted sword, so that on the mead-bench
he was ever thenceforth a more honoured man
for that treasured heir-loom. Then he got off by ship
the deep water to cleave ; the Danes' land he left.

Then a kind of sea-cloth, a sail, was made fast
by a rope to the mast ; the sea-timbers groaned,
yet did not the wind o'er the billows divide
the bark from her course. On went the sea-goer,
the foamy-necked floater, the ship with wreathed prow,
along o'er the waves— the streams of the ocean—
until they could see the cliffs of the Geats' land—
familiar headlands. By the wind driven on,
the keel bounded upwards and stuck on the land.
Quickly then at the shore was the port-warden ready
who for long before that had eagerly gazed
far out from the beach for the men whom he loved.
The broad-bosomed ship with anchoring ropes
he made fast to the beach, lest the thrust of the waves
should drive it away,— the winsome wave-wood.
Then he bade carry up the gems and wrought gold,
the atheling's wealth. Not far was it thence

[1] Beowulf.

that he went to seek out the giver of treasure—
Hrethel's son, Hygelac, where he sojourned at home,
and his followers with him, hard by the sea-wall.
The building was splendid, and in the high hall
the king a brave chief. Very youthful was Hygd,
Hæreth's daughter was she, wise, of manners discreet,
although she had dwelt for years but a few
within palace walls. Nor yet was she mean
or too sparing of gifts— of objects of worth—
to the folk of the Geats.

THE EPISODE OF THRYTH

She, the people's high queen,
showed none of the pride, the fierce spite of Thryth.
On her [1] durst no brave 'mong the liegemen so dear
ever gaze with his eyes, while yet it was day
(excepting her lord), but he might count on this—
that murderous bonds would for him be prepared
and woven by hand. Soon after, the knife
was brought into play, when once he was seized,
that the damascened blade might set matters at rest,—
pronounce his death-knell. No queenly course that
for a lady to take, peerless though she might be,
that a weaver-of-peace should threaten the life
of a dearly-loved man for a fancied affront.
Yet the kinsman of Hemming [2] detested all this.
At their ale-drinking, men used to say this, besides,—
that among her own folk she compassed less harm,
less spiteful revenge, when once she was given,
bejewelled with gold, to the young man of war,—
for virtues beloved, when, journeying forth,

[1] Thryth. [2] Offa, or perhaps Eomær (v. 1960).

she sought Offa's hall at her father's behest
o'er the dun-coloured flood. As long as she lived
after that, she made use of her life's fortunes well
in her royal estate, for goodness renowned,
and held highest love towards him who ruled
over heroes, and was, among all mankind,
as I have heard tell, in excellence first
over all the wide world and between the two seas.
Hence Offa, the man who was bold with the spear,
was famed far and wide for his gifts and campaigns,
and with wisdom ruled over his own fatherland.
And then there was born, as helper of heroes,
to him Eomær, the mighty in war,
the kinsman of Hemming and grandson of Garmund.

Then the brave man went forth, himself and his comrades,
along by the sands and trode the sea-beach,—
the roomy foreshore. The world's candle shone,
the keen sun, from the south ; they passed on their road—
went forward with speed— to where they heard say
the good young war-king,[1] protector of earls,
who Ongentheow slew, was giving out rings
the castle within. To Hygelac then
it was made known at once that Beowulf had come—
that the Warriors' Shield, his comrade in arms,
had arrived back alive at the royal abode
and was coming to court from the battle-play, sound !
Forthwith was prepared, as the ruler ordained,
the chamber within for the warrior-band.
Then he who had 'scaped from the battle, sat down
in front of his kinsman, first greeting his prince,

[1] Hygelac.

the kind lord of men, in courteous speech,
with warm-hearted words. And in the wide hall
Hæreth's daughter went round, looked after the folk
and bare the mead-cup to the hands of the brave.
So Hygelac began with fair words to ask
his comrade in arms, in that chamber so high—
for he thirsted for news— what fortunes they had,
the sea-roving Geats. "Dear Beowulf, how fell
"it out on thy course, when thou didst resolve
"of a sudden to seek out a quarrel far off,
"across the salt sea; at Heorot, war?
"And didst thou at all reduce for Hrothgar,
"that notable prince, any part of his woes?
"With care at my heart, and surgings of grief
"I seethed for his sake; nor did I put faith
"in my liege's emprise. I prayed thee for long
"that ne'er wouldst thou face the murderous ghoul,
"but wouldst let the South-Danes fight out their dispute
"with Grendel themselves. I give thanks to God
"that now safe and sound I may see thee again."
Then Beowulf replied, the son of Ecgtheow:
"O, Lord Hygelac, that combat renowned—
"was openly known to many a man—
"what a passage of arms between Grendel and me
"took place on that field. To the Victor-Scyldings
"he there brought to pass sorrows many a time—
"unending distress. All that I avenged,
"so that none of the kin of Grendel can boast
"of that twilight-fracas— not he who of all
"that odious race the longest survives,

"hedged in by the fens. When once I was there
"to the ring-hall I went and greeted Hrothgar.
"The worshipful son of Healfdene forthwith,
"assigned me a seat beside his own son,
"so soon as he knew of my purpose of heart.
"A glad party was that: I have ne'er in my life
"seen more joy at the mead among sitters in hall
"'neath the compass of heaven. At times the famed queen—
"pledge of peace for the folk— went the round of the hall
"the young servers urged on, and not seldom gave
"a ring to some guest ere she went to her seat.
"Among the high lords Hrothgar's daughter at times
"bare to each of the earls the ale-cup in turn.
"Freawaru I heard she was called by the guests
"what time she gave out the finely wrought stoup
"among the war heroes."

THE EPISODE OF FREAWARU

Young, shining with gold,
"she was promised as bride to Froda's kind son,
"for thus it seemed good to the Friend of the Scyldings;[1]
"he counted it wise to settle a host
"of blood-feuds and disputes by that woman's means.
"Yet it seldom falls out anywhere in the world
"that after a prince is fall'n from his place
"the murderous spear rests for e'en a short space,
"albeit the bride may be worthy enough.
"Well may it displease the Heathobard chief
"and the thanes every one that belong to his race

[1] Hrothgar.

" when he with the lady goes into the hall,
" that his high lords should wait on a young Danish prince.
" Upon him there shine their father's heirlooms,
" hard and fashioned with rings— the Heathobards' wealth
" so long as they held the sway with their swords,
" and until they had led to a fatal shield-play
" their comrades beloved as well as themselves.
" Then over his beer while the treasure he eyes
" an old spearman speaks out who recollects all—
" the men's death by the spear. He is bitter at heart,
" and in soreness of soul he begins to assay
" a young captain's mood by his musings of mind—
" to rouse cursèd strife; and talks in these words:—
" 'Dost thou, O my friend, the blade recognise,
" 'that weapon of worth which thy veteran sire
" 'bore himself to the fight with his battle-mask on
" 'for the very last time, when the Danes struck him down,—
" 'when the brave Scylding host held the field as their own,
" 'and Withergyld fell, after heroes had died?
" 'And now comes some spawn of this murderous crew,
" 'and here in our hall, with ornaments brave,
" 'makes the carnage his boast, and wears the same prize
" 'which rightfully you should have in your power!'
" Thus he urges and prompts him once and again
" with rankling words, until the time comes
" that the thane of the lady lies spattered with gore
" from a slash of the sword, having forfeited life
" for the deeds of his sire. The other one gets
" away thence with his life, for he knows the land well.
" The oaths that were sworn by the chiefs on both sides
" are then set at nought, what time savage spleen
" in Ingeld boils up, and his love for his wife
" becomes the more cool with the increase of care.
" Hence I do not account the Heathobards' faith—
" their share in the peace— with the Dane-folk sincere

" or their friendship assured.

Now further I'll speak
" about Grendel again; that well thou may'st know,
" O Giver of rings, how the hand to hand fight
" of the champions went. When the gem of the heavens
" had passed over the earth, the dread ogre of night,
" the angry ghoul, came to close quarters with us
" where we, still unscathed, kept ward in the hall.
" And there Hondscio was marked out for attack—
" doomed to violent death. Belted champion he,
" and he fell first of all. Famous thane of our race
" for him Grendel became the slayer, by mouth—
" he swallowed up all the body beloved.
" Yet the bloody-toothed ghoul, on evil intent
" would not, for all that, empty-handed depart
" from the gold-bedecked hall, but lusty in strength
" he made an attempt to snatch out at me
" with quickness of hand. His game-bag[1] hung down,
" both ample and strange, fixed by curious clasps;
" the same was with skill manufactured throughout
" by devilish craft, and of dragon-skins made;
" and into it he, the dire doer of deeds,
" was minded to put my innocent self,
" as one out of many. That could he not do
" when once I had stood in my anger erect.
" It were too long to tell how I paid the folks' scourge
" a quittance by hand for all his ill-deeds.
" There, O my prince, to the fame of thy folk

[1] So Tinker.

" did I add by my works. Away he escaped—
" and partook of the joys of life for a span.
" Still his right hand betrayed his path in Heorot—
" And thereafter he fell, with anguish of soul,
" to the ground of the mere in pitiful wise.
" The Scyldings' kind lord rewarded me well
" for that deadly fight with jewels of gold
" and many a prize when morning had come
" and we at the banquet had seated ourselves.
" There was singing and glee, and the old Scylding prince
" asked about many things, and spake of past days.
" A chieftain [1] at times called forth joy from the harp,
" that wood of delight; at times framed a true
" and a sorrowful lay: the great-hearted king
" told rightly anon some happening strange,
" or the veteran began, although trammelled by age,
" sometimes to lament for the days of his youth
" and his old battle-might. His heart heaved within him
" as he, old in years, recalled many events.
" Thus all the day long it befell that we took
" our pleasure therein, until the night closed
" again over men. Grendel's mother was then
" quickly ready once more to avenge her mishap.
" She set off full of care— death had taken her son—
" the Weders' war-hate. The hideous hag
" took revenge for her son, and daringly laid
" a warrior low. The aged adviser,
" Æschere, was there deprived of his life.

[1] Perhaps *the* chieftain, *i.e.* Hrothgar himself.

" Nor when morning had come could they, the Danes' folk,
" consume him with fire, lying helpless in death,
" or lay the dear man on the funeral pile.
" In her devilish grasp she carried away
" that body of his beneath the cascade.[1]
" For Hrothgar was that the keenest of woes
" which the folk's prince had felt for many a long day.
" Then, in anguish of mind, me the sovereign besought,
" invoking thy life, that my powers I'd show—
" adventure my self in the eddying streams
" and do valorous deeds. To reward me he vowed.
" Then, as many men know, I found the ground-guard,
" the fearful and grim, of the billowy deep,
" and there for a while we were hand against hand.
" The flood welled with gore in that chamber of strife,
" and I cut off the head of Grendel his dam
" with my powerful blade. I hardly escaped
" away thence with my life, but was not as yet doomed,
" for Healfdene's son, the Shelter of earls,
" gave me afterwards many an object of worth.
" So lived the folks' king, and followed old ways.
" Far was I from going without my reward,—
" the meed of my might— nay, Healfdene's son
" gave me treasures as if I were choosing myself,
" and these will I bring and offer with joy
" to thee, hero-king. My prosperity still
" depends upon thee. Of kinsmen by blood
" hardly any have I, O Hygelac, save thee!"

[1] So Lawrence.

Then he bade them bear in the boar's head ensign,
the battle-steep helm and corslet gray-hued,
the splendid war-sword— and then made this speech:
"To me did Hrothgar, the sapient prince,
"give this harness of war, and bade me in words
"that first I should tell what its history was:
"He said that for long King Heorogar,
"the Scylding-folks' chief, had possession of it:
"yet had he no mind to give to his son
"Heoroward the brave the mail for his breast
"true to him though he was. Now enjoy it all well!"

Four horses, they say, exactly alike,
apple-fallow in hue, to the same quarter went
as the armour had done,— he put in his power
both treasures and steeds. Thus a kinsman should do,
nor weave for his fellow a net of deceit
or compass the death of a comrade and friend
by underhand craft. His nephew most true
to Hygelac was, the doughty in war,
and each had a care for the other's good speed.
I heard he bestowed the collar on Hygd,
that strange wondrous gem which Wealhtheow gave him
(daughter, she, of a prince), and three horses as well,
saddle-bright and trim-built: thenceforward her breast
was adorned, after she had that jewel received.

Thus Ecgtheow's son, the man famed in war,
gave proof of his worth by valorous deeds—
lived according to right and when drunk never slew
his hearth-fellows at all. Not brutal his soul,

but, bold in the fray, he kept the rich gifts,
which were given him by God, with the best human skill.

For long he was scorned; as the sons of the Geats
did not reckon him brave, nor the captain of hosts
take much notice of him at the drinkings of mead.
They very much thought he was sluggish and slack—
a spiritless prince; but a recompense came
to the glorious man for all this disdain.

Then the Shelter of earls, the battle-brave king,
gave orders to fetch Hrethel's legacy in,
with gold overlaid; there was not at that time
a treasure more rare in the shape of a sword
among the Geat folk. That he laid in the lap
of Beowulf, and gave him seven thousands besides
with a house and high seat. To both men alike
land had come by descent among their own folk—
an estate and its rights; but Hygelac had
the broad kingdom as well, and was greater through that.

III

THE ADVENTURE WITH THE FIRE-DRAGON

AFTER that it befell, in following days,
through battle-shocks, thus: After Hygelac died
and blades used in war piercing under the shield,
for Heardred became the engines of death,
when those fierce fighting-men, the War-Scylfings, among
his brave folk sought him out, and Hereric's nephew[1]
pressed hard in the fight; after those times it passed—
the far-stretching realm,— into Beowulf's hands.
He governed it well, fifty years, and was then
a veteran king, a land-warden old:
until one began to exercise sway,
a dragon, to wit, who on a high heath
watched over a hoard in a stone-barrow steep
throughout the dark nights: below it there lay
a path unknown to men. Therein went some man

[*Here follow six imperfect lines, apparently to the effect that the man took of the monster's hoard while he was asleep, and roused his ire.*]

Not of purpose had he who got himself hurt,
or of his own will sought out the rich store,
the hoard of the Worm, but he, slave of one

[1] Heardred.

of the sons of mankind, under pressure of need
fled from blows given in wrath, and, when lacking a home,
betook himself there, a man tortured by guilt.
And soon it befell that grim horror rose up
before the strange guest

[*Three more lines imperfect.*]

In that earthly house there were many of such
ancient heirlooms, as one of the children of men
had concealed in that place, who had thoughtful care
for the leavings untold of his noble forebears :
precious treasures were they.

Death took them all off
in times now long past, and the one tribal chief
who longest survived, sad at losing his friends
hoped only for this,— that he might have the joy,
if but for a short while, of the long treasured wealth.
All ready a barrow there stood on the plain,
newly made by a cape near the swirl of the waves,
by cunning made strong. He, the keeper of rings,
carried into it there a ponderous mass
of the treasures of chiefs— of overlaid gold,
and pronounced these few words :
" Now hold thou, O Earth, since heroes could not,
" the ownings of earls. Lo, these did brave souls
" get aforetime from thee. Dread bale of mankind,
" death in war, took away every one of the men,
" the folk of my tribe who gave up this life,—

" their hall-joy was past. I have none to bear sword
" or to furnish for me the overlaid bowl,—
" drinking-vessel of worth. Otherwhere are my men.
" The helmet so hard, embellished with gold,
" shall be shorn of its platings; the furbishers sleep
" whose office it was to polish the war-masks.
" Moreover the war-dress which bore in the battle
" the bite of the sword-blades, amid the shield-clashings,
" decays with its owner; nor may the ringed byrnie
" go far on its travels along with the chieftains,—
" attendant of heroes. No harp gives out gladness,
" the glee-wood no pastime.
No good hawk sweeps
" around the hall, nor no swift horse
" the court-yard paws. The bale of death
" has banished hence hosts of our race."
Thus with sadness of soul his troubles he mourned,
alone after them all, and unblithely wept
by day and by night, till the surging of death
rose up to his heart.

The old twilight foe
found the glorious hoard standing open to view—
the naked spite-dragon, who, breathing out fire,
pays visits to barrows and makes flights by night,
enveloped in flame: sorely dreaded is he
by the folk of the land. His it was to seek out
the hoard under the earth where he, old in years,
watched o'er heathen gold— and it did him no good!
Thus this scourge of the folk occupied on the land

a hoard-chamber strong with unparalleled strength,
until that same man made him angry at heart,
for he bare to his lord the overlaid cup,
and his master he begged for a compact of peace.
Then the hoard was ransacked, rings in heaps carried off,
and the unhappy wight had his prayer granted him.
The first time was that when the master explored
the old work of mankind.

When the dragon awoke strife began once again ;
he sniffed round the rock, and, dauntless in heart,
found the track of his foe. With his underhand craft
the man went too far— and close to the head
of the dragon withal. Thus a mortal undoomed,
whom the grace of the Lord Almighty upholds,
may lightly pass through both exile and woe.
The hoard-keeper searched with care over the ground :
he would fain find the man who had done him this hurt
while he was asleep ; hot and angry at heart
he went oftentimes round all the barrow without,
but no man was there upon that waste place ;
still, gladly he thought of fighting and war,
whiles turned back to the mound and he quickly perceived
that some one of mankind had found out the gold,
the treasure sublime. The hoard-keeper waited,
impatient of mood, till the evening came on.
He, the barrow's defender, was bursting with rage ;
the monster was minded with fire to be paid
for the dear drinking cup. Then the daylight was gone,

as the dragon had wished; no longer would he
keep guard on the wall, but he went forth with flame,
with fire was he charged.
The outbreak was dire
for the folk of the land, and it speedily came
to a pitiful end for their giver of rings.
Then the demon began to vomit forth gleeds
and burn smiling homesteads; the fire-gleam blazed out,
a terror to mortals— the loathly air-flier
would not leave behind him a thing that had life.
The serpent's reprisals were seen right and left—
the deadly foe's vengeance— both near and far off,
how the fighting-pest hated and humbled the Geats.
Ere the breaking of day he shot back to his hoard—
to his lordly and secret head-quarters again.
He had compassed with fire, with burning and flame,
the folk of the land. In his barrow he trusted—
his wall and his warfare— and trusted in vain.

Then the terrible truth was to Beowulf made known,
and that with all speed, that his very own home
the fairest of buildings— gift-seat of the Geats—
was burnt by fire-waves. A trial it was
to the noble king's soul, of heart-sorrows the chief.
The wise man supposed that bitterly he
had angered the Ruler, the Aye-Lasting Lord,
against law eternal. His breast heaved within him
with sinister thoughts, which was never his wont.

The fiery dragon had wasted with gleeds

the nation's stronghold, the sea-bordered land,
all that region of earth. For that the war-king,
the Weder-folks' prince, devised vengeance for him.
The Warriors' Ward, the captain of earls
bade a shield of all-iron, a battle-board strange,
be constructed for him. He knew well enough
that wood from the forest— a linden-wood shield,—
would not help against fire. The excellent prince
was destined to meet with this earthly life's end—
the loan of his days— and the serpent as well,
though for long he possessed the wealth of the hoard.
Then the master-of-rings disdained to seek out
the flier abroad with a great troop—a host.
The fight he feared not, nor did he account
the Worm's war-might for aught,— his powers and strength,
for that he in times past, the Daring-in-straits,
had gone through many fights, many crashes of war
after he, the brave man, for victories famed,
cleansed Hrothgar's guest-hall, and seized Grendel's kin,
of the odious breed, in his struggling with him.
Nor was that the least of hand-to-hand fights
in which Hygelac was slain, when the king of the Geats,
gracious lord of the tribes, the offspring of Hrethel,
died felled by the blade when the sword drank his blood.
Thence Beowulf escaped by his own lustihood,—
his swimming power used, and all by himself
he had on his arms thirty suits of war-gear
when he plunged in the sea. The Hetwara folk
who, bringing their shields, went forth against him
had no cause to boast of their fighting on foot ;

but few got them back from that war-wolf again
to visit their homes.
Thus Ecgtheow's son
swam back to his folk o'er the breast of the sea,
a poor lonesome man, and was offered by Hygd
a kingdom and wealth— a treasure and throne—
forasmuch as she did not put trust in her child,
that he would have power to hold royal seats
against foreign tribes, now that Hygelac was dead.
But not for all that could the rulerless folk
the noble persuade, on whatever terms,
to be Heardred's high lord,— he would not accept
the office of king, but he upheld him[1] still
with the love of a friend among his own folk,
and showed him respect and kindness withal
until he grew up and the Weder-Geats ruled.
Men exiled from home who were Ohthere's sons
resorted to him from over the sea;
they had been in revolt 'gainst the Scylfings' Defence,[2]
the best of sea-kings, who portioned out wealth
in the realm of the Swedes— a glorious prince.
So Hygelac's son came thus by his end,
he had as his lot for harbouring them
a murderous wound from the blows of a sword,
and Ongentheow's son departed again
to visit his home when Heardred lay low,
but let Beowulf keep his place on the throne
and govern the Geats; a good king was he!
In the days after that he took care to requite

[1] Heardred. [2] Onela, Ongentheow's son.

the fall of his prince. The friend he became
of Eadgils the lone, and Ohthere's son [1]
he helped with a host across the wide sea,
with weapons and men— and then he [1] repaid him [2]
for chill paths of sorrow, and took the king's life.

So he, Ecgtheow's son, had passed safely through
every one of his wars and savage affrays
and desperate deeds, till that notable day
when he had to encounter the dragon in fight.
Then, Lord of the Geats, he went, one among twelve,
boiling over with rage, the dragon to view;
he had learned in what way the feud came about,—
the hate baleful to men; the famed treasure-cup
had come by the hand of the finder to him.
He [3] who brought it about— the beginning of strife—
was thirteenth in the band, a thrall sad of soul.
He had to go thence, submissive in mien,
and show them the place. Unwilling he went
to the spot where he knew that earth-hall to be—
a vault under the ground by the waves' ebb and flow,—
the watery surge,— which was all full within
of jewels and rings. The guardian dread,
the war-fiend alert, long under the earth,
kept the treasure of gold. That property none
of the children of men could easily get.

So the king bold in war, the gold-friend of the Geats,
on the headland sat down, spake his greeting from thence

[1] Eadgils. [2] Onela, Ongentheow's son. [3] The finder.

to his hearth-comrades all. His spirit was sad,
quaking, nigh unto death, the Fate terribly near
which was coming to meet the man stricken in years,
his soul's treasure to seek, and to sunder apart
his body and soul. Not long after that
was the life of the prince enveloped in flesh.
Beowulf discoursed, Ecgtheow's son:
" Many onsets of war, times of battle, have I
" come safe through in my youth. I remember it all.
" I was seven winters old when the giver of rings,
" dear lord of the tribes, received me from my sire—
" held and had me as his. He, Hrethel the king,
" gave me treasure and food,— bore our kinship in mind.
" No whit during life was I less dear to him
" as page in his hall than were his own sons,
" Herebeald and Hæthcyn, or my own Hygelac.
" For the eldest there was a death-bed prepared
" in unseemly wise by his relative's deed,
" when Hæthcyn struck him down, his lord and his friend,
" by means of a shaft from his bow tipped with horn;
" in missing the mark his kinsman he shot—
" one brother his mate— by his blood-beflecked dart.
" An onset was that for which gold could not pay,
" a horrible sin, cause of grief to the heart.
" Be that as it may, the atheling had
" to part with his life without being avenged.
" Painful thus it must be for a man in old age
" to experience this— that his offspring should ride
" on the gallows when young, and he gives forth a dirge,
" a sorrowful song, what time his son hangs,

" to the ravens a joy, while old, stricken in years,
" he is lacking the power to come to his help.
" As each morning appears his son's journey hence
" is brought to his mind; he cares not to wait
" for a new son and heir his castle within,
" where already one has through violent death
" had his taste of ill-deeds.
" With sorrow weighed down the wine-hall he sees
" in his son's dwelling void, a lodgement for winds,
" its revelry gone. The cavalier sleeps,—
" man of war,—in his grave. There is no sound of harp,
" of mirth in the courts, as there was in past days.
" So he goes to his couch and lonesome he sings
" a dirge for the lost. For him all seems too large—
" his dwelling and fields.
Thus the Weder-folks' Shield
" his heart-sorrow bore about Herebeald
" with heaving of breast, nor could he avenge
" himself for the feud on the slayer at all,
" nor visit his hate on that captain of war
" with rancorous deeds, though he loved him no whit.
" So, because of the grief, which his trouble had brought,
" he resigned human joys and made choice of God's light.
" When he gave up his life he left to his sons
" his castles and land as a wealthy man does.

" There was conflict and war between Geat-men and Swedes
" the wide water across, harsh, harrying strife,
" and Ongentheow's sons were bold against him
" and keen for the fray, having never a care

" to keep peace overseas, but they oft brought to pass
" many treacherous raids round Hreosnabeorh.
" Friendly men of my clan exacted revenge
" for that outrage and feud, as is commonly known,
" though one of them paid with the loss of his life
" (a hard bargain that), for the battle was cause
" to Hæthcyn, the prince of the Geatmen, of death.
" Then, as I have heard tell, one kinsman avenged
" his brother at morn by the edge of the sword
" on his slayer, for there 'twas Ongentheow's hap
" to confront Eofor. His helm came apart,
" the old Scylfing fell, pale under the stroke,
" his[1] hand kept in mind many feuds, nor held back
" the death-dealing blow.
" I gave him[2] return for his presents to me
" by fighting, for thus it was granted to me,
" with my glistening sword, and he gave me land,
" glad estate and a home. There was no need for him
" to be driven to seek— to buy for a price—
" a less brave man of war in the tribe of the Gifths
" or the realm of the Swedes, or among the Spear-Danes.
" I would always for him be in front of the host,—
" to the fore by myself— and so, through my life
" will do battle for him while this sword doth remain
" which early and late has served me full oft
" since by bravery I became for Dæghrefn,
" fighting man of the Hugs, the slayer by hand.
" 'Twas never his lot the jewel to take—
" breast-pendant, to wit— to the Frisian king,

[1] Eofor's. [2] Hygelac.

" but, guard of the standard, a lord in his might,
" he fell in the battle, not slain by the sword,
" but my hostile embrace crushed the bones of his frame,—
" stopped the beat of his heart. Now the edge of my bill,
" my hand and hard sword, shall contend for the hoard."
For the very last time did Beowulf discourse
and speak boastful words. " I ventured upon
" many wars in my youth; now will I once more,
" aged shield of my folk, in battle engage,
" and get myself fame, if the worker of ill
" will face me in fight outside his earth-hall."
Then his greeting he gave to each one of the men,
brave wearers of helms, his comrades beloved,
for the last time of all. " No weapon, no sword,
" 'gainst the Worm would I bear, if only I knew
" how else to make good my boast 'gainst the foe,
" as 'gainst Grendel I did in times now long past.
" But now I look forward to hot deadly fire,
" to venomous breath, and so on me I have
" my corslet and shield. I will not give way
" the space of a foot from the Guard of the Mound,
" but to us it shall be as Wyrd, giver out
" of men's fortunes, decides. I am eager of mood
" and so need not boast against the winged foe.
" Do ye watch on the hill, ye armed men of war,
" protected by mail, which one of us two
" can best stand the woundings when fighting is o'er.
" This is not your affair, nor fitting for any,
" save only for me, that one should put forth
" his power 'gainst the foe and do knightly deeds.

" By my bravery I will get me the gold
" or if not so, war, the dread bale of life,
" shall take off your lord."
Then the champion bold stood up by his shield
strong under his helm, went clad in his mail
beneath the stone cliffs, and trusted himself
to the strength of one man ;— no coward's way that !
Then he who had gone through many campaigns,—
many clashes of arms when battle-hosts meet—
the man of high worth observed by the wall
that a stony arch stood and that there broke out
a stream from the mound— the surge of the flood
with war-fire was hot. He could not endure
without being burnt to be any while in
the dip by the mound, for the flame of the dragon.
Then the Weder-Geats' lord let go from his breast
a word in his rage,— the stout-hearted stormed.
Clear in battle his voice went ringing along
beneath the grey rock.

His hate was aroused ; the Hoard-guard was ware
of the voice of a man. No time was there then
to think about peace. There came first of all
from out of the rock the breath of the brute—
the hot battle-reek,— the ground rang again.
The lord of the Geats, the hero, upraised
the disc of his shield against the fell sprite.
Then the Thing of ring-bows was eager at heart
to join in the fray ; the doughty war-prince
had just drawn his sword, an ancient heirloom,

not slow of its edge. Of these beings, both
bent on war to the death, each of other had fear.
The prince of friends stood stout-heartedly up
beside his high shield— in his armour abode—
while the dragon with speed coiled himself in a heap.
Then the fiery beast came twisting along—
hastened forth to his fate. The shield sheltered well
the body and life of the glorious prince,
but not for so long as his heart would have wished
if at that special time and on that first day [1]
he was to obtain (what Wyrd did not grant)
success in the fight. The lord of the Geats
swung upwards his hand, struck the many-hued beast
with the heirloom of Ing ; natheless the brown blade
gave way on his bone with less of a bite
than the warrior-king, who was driven to straits,
required in his need. Then the Ward of the mound
in heart was enraged at that murderous stroke,
and threw out deadly fire ; his weapon-like flames
shot forth far and wide. The Geats' generous friend
could not boast of success ; his bared weapon of war,
the excellent blade, had failed in the fray,
as it should not have done. For the son of Ecgtheow,
renowned as he was, it was no pleasant course
to be forced to withdraw from the plains of this world.
Against his own will he had to take up
his quarters elsewhere, and, like other men,
let his fleeting days go. There was not a long truce
ere the combatants twain charged each other anew.

[1] *i.e.* of its user, see vv. 2337-2341.

The hoard-warden took heart; his breast heaved again
with his fiery breath, and he who had ruled
the folk was in straits, with flame hedged about.
And never a whit did those noblemen's sons,
his own bosom friends, stand round in a heap
doing valorous deeds, but they fled to the wood
and took care of their lives. Yet the spirit of one
overflowed with regret. . . . in a right-minded man
nought can e'er set aside the claims of his kin.
Wiglaf was he called, he was Weohstan's son,
shield-warrior beloved— a prince of the Scylfings,
of Ælfhere's kin— and he saw that his lord
was faint from the heat beneath his war-mask.
Then there came to his mind all the grants that from him [1]
he had had in times past— the rich dwelling place
of the Wægmunding line, and all the folk-rights
that his father had owned.
Then he could not forbear, but his hand seized the shield
of linden-wood yellow and drew his old sword
which was known among men as relic of Eanmund,
Ohthere's son, of whom, friendless exile,
Weohstan by the edge of his sword was the slayer,
and bare off to his kinsman the brown-coloured helmet,
the corslet of ring-mail and old sword of giants
that Onela gave him— his kinsman's war-harness;
a battle equipment all ready for warring.
He [2] spake not of the feud although he [3] had felled
the son of his brother.[4]

[1] Beowulf. [2] Onela. [3] Weohstan.
[4] Eanmund, who was Onela's brother.

These treasures he kept for many a year—
the sword and the mail— till his son [1] could perform
the deeds of an earl like his old father did.
When he went on his way, full of years, from this life,
he gave him, in Geatland, all manner of war-gear
and that without number.

The first time was that
when the young man of war was destined to join
with his master and lord in the stress of a fight.
His heart did not melt, nor his kinsman's heirloom
in battle give way, as the dragon found out
when together they met.

Wiglaf uttered a speech— spoke many fit words
to his brothers in arms, for his spirit was sad :—
" I remember the time when we drank of the mead
" in the banqueting hall, and we promised our lord
" who enriched us with rings, that him we'd repay
" for our harness of war, our helms and hard swords,
" if he ever should hap on a need of this kind.
" He of his own will chose us out from the host
" for this enterprise— brought fame to our thoughts,
" gave these treasures to me, because he supposed
" we were spear-fighters brave, bold wearers of helms,
" although he, our lord, the herd of his folk,
" intended alone to do this brave deed,
" inasmuch as among the children of men
" he had done the most feats, the most venturesome deeds.
" Now the day has arrived when our master and lord

[1] Wiglaf.

" has need of the help of valiant men.
" Come, let us go forth our captain to help
" for so long as the heat, the grim fire-horror, lasts.
" For my own part, God knows, I had liefer by far
" that the flame should eat up this body of mine
" with that of my prince. I think it unmeet
" that we should take back our shields to our homes
" unless we may first lay prostrate the foe,
" and the body defend of the Weder-Geats' prince.
" Full well do I know these are not his deserts
" that of all the chief Geats he should suffer distress
" and fall in the fray. I shall join him in use
" of helmet and sword, shield and habit of mail."

Then he plunged through the death-reek and helmeted went
to the help of his lord; words he spake but a few:—
" O Beowulf beloved, put forth all thy strength;
" as thou saidst long ago, in the time of thy youth,
" that while life did last thou never wouldst let
" thy glory decline. Now, O resolute chief,
" renowned for thy deeds, thou must fight for thy life;
" I will come to thine aid."
When these words had been said, the dread vicious sprite,
the dragon, came forth in anger again,
bright with surges of flame, to fall on his foes,
the men whom he loathed. His [1] shield was burnt up
to the boss by flame-waves, nor could his war-mail
afford any help to the young battle-chief.

[1] Wiglaf's.

But the youthful esquire went quickly behind
his relative's shield, forasmuch as his own
was burnt up by the gleeds. Then the warrior-king
thought of glory again, and struck by main force
with his sword, in such wise that it stuck in the head,
urged on by his hate. Nægling, Beowulf's sword,
gray in colour and old, had parted asunder,—
had failed in the fray. Not to him was it given
that edges of iron should help in the fight.
The hand was too strong, which, so I have heard,
by its stroke overstrained all manner of swords.
When he bare to the fray the weapon so hard
that a wonder it was, it booted him not.

Then the scourge of the people, the dreadful fire-dragon,
was minded for warfare a third time, and rushed
on the valiant fighter when room was allowed him,
hot, fierce in the battle,— took in his whole neck
with his sharp-cutting jaws. He was bathed in life-blood,
the gore welled forth in streams.
Then, as I have heard say,
in the folk-king's dire need the earl stood upright
and made manifest the courage and skill
and the daring with which he by nature was armed.
He recked not of the head, but when he went forth
to the help of his kin the brave man's [1] hand burned
so that he, in his mail, struck the virulent foe
a shade lower down, and the sword entered in,
adorned, overlaid, in such wise that the fire
began then to abate. Then once more did the king

[1] Wiglaf's.

to his senses come back, and drew forth the dirk,
sharp, keen in the fight, which he wore on his mail.

The Weder-Geats' Helm clave the Worm in the midst.
They had slaughtered the foe— force had ruined his life;
in that place had those two noble men of one blood
effected his death. Thus should a man be,
and a captain, at need. That was for the prince
the last of his days of glorious deeds,—
of work in the world. Then the wound which erewhile
the earth-dragon gave him began after that
to burn and to swell, and he quickly found out
that the venom of hate welled up in his breast,—
poison working within. Then the atheling went,
still clear in his mind, and sat on a seat,
the rampart hard by; he gazed on the work
of giants, and saw how the age-long earth-house
had stone arches within, by pillars held up.

Then the thane passing good with his hands the famed prince,
his friend and his lord, all dripping with blood,
and faint from the fight, with water did bathe
and undid his helm.
Beowulf discoursed— spake in spite of his hurt,
his life-draining wound— he knew well enough
he had got to the end of his portion of life
and the joys of this world. It had all passed away,
the tale of his days, and death was full nigh:—
"Now should I have wished to give to my son
"this harness of war, had it been so ordained

" that an heir of my body should come after me
" to keep what I owned. O'er this people my sway
" has endured fifty years ; there was never a king
" among all of those who reigned round about
" that could face me in fight with his weapons of war,
" or inspire me with fear. I waited at home
" for what fortune would bring, and held my own well ;
" sought no treacherous feuds, nor ever swore oaths
" in defiance of right. And now all these things
" are a comfort to me sick to death from my wounds ;
" for the Ruler of men can never charge me
" with the murder of kin when the life takes its flight
" from this body of mine. Now, go thou with speed,
" O Wiglaf beloved, and look at the hoard
" beneath the gray rock, now the dragon lies dead—
" sleeps, wounded full sore, of his treasure bereft.
" Now haste thee, that I may behold the old wealth,
" the treasure of gold,— may closely survey
" the gems bright and strange, so that after the view
" of this store of rich things I may more calmly leave
" my life, and the realm I have ruled for so long."

Then, after these words, as I have been told,
the offspring of Wihstan [1] did quickly obey
his maimed, wounded lord. In his corslet he went,
his woven war-sark, beneath the mound's roof.
As he went by the seat the brave kinsman-thane,
in victory proud, saw many a gem,
the glittering gold lying there on the ground,—

[1] Elsewhere Weohstan.

rare things on the wall; in the lair of the Worm,
the old flier-by-night, goblets standing about,—
cups of men of old time,— their lustre bedimmed
and their plating all gone. There was many a helm
old and covered with rust, and armlets galore
of skilful design. Treasure, gold in the earth,
may easily turn the head of a man,
conceal it who will!

Moreover he saw, high over the hoard,
an all-golden banner, a hand-wonder rare,
put together with skill. From this a light shone
by which he could see the ground of the cave
and the treasure survey. Of the dragon was there
no sight to be seen, for the sword took him off.

Then, as I was told, one man plundered the hoard
in the hollowed out mound,— the old giant-work—
and loaded his lap with dishes and cups
quite after his will, and the standard he took,
brightest beacon, as well. The old chieftain's sword
with its edges of iron had already scotched him
who for many long years the keeper had been
of the store of rich things and had caused dread by flame
and by heat, round the hoard— waves of fire at midnight,
till by violent means he met with his death.

The messenger hastened, intent on return,
spurred on by the riches; he thirsted to know
whether he, brave of heart, would find still alive

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the Weder-Geats' lord on the open champaign
where he left him erewhile, bereft of his strength.
Then, bearing the loot, he discovered his lord,
the much renowned prince, bedrabbled with blood,
at the last gasp of life. Him once more he began
with water to lave, till a firstling of speech
broke forth from his breast. In anguish of heart
the old Beowulf spake, and gazed on the gold :—
" I utter in words to the Lord over all,
" the glorious King and Ruler eterne,
" my thanks for these gems which I look upon here ;—
" that to me it is given such things to acquire
" for the folk of my realm ere the day of my death.
" Since now I have given my old remnant of life
" as the treasure-hoard's price, do ye now supply
" the needs of my folk. I can be here no more.
" Bid my captains of war, when the bale-fire is dead,
" rear a fair barrow up on a cape by the sea
" which shall tower on high at the Ness of the Whales
" and shall be to my folk a memorial of me,
" so that sea-faring men, who urge their tall ships
" o'er the spray of the deep, shall call it the mound
" of Beowulf, in days that are yet for to come."
Then he, bold-hearted prince, took off from his neck
the circlet of gold and gave to the thane,
the spear-fighting youth, his gold-adorned helm,
his corslet and torque— bade him use them with joy.[1]
" Of our Wægmunding race thou alone hast been left
" since Wyrd has swept off every one of my kin,

[1] So Gummere.

" brave and gentle of birth, to their foreordained doom.
" I must go after them."
With the aged man that was the finishing word
of the thoughts in his breast, ere the bale was his fate
and the hot warring flames. His spirit went forth
from his body, to meet with a righteous man's lot.

It went very hard with the young man of war
when he saw on the ground his most beloved friend
in pitiful state at the end of his life.
The earth-dragon dread, his destroyer, lay too,
of existence bereft, and by ruin o'ercome.
No longer could he, the sinuous snake,
the ring-hoard control, but the edges of swords
the hard, battle-sharp outcome of the forge,
had taken him off, and the far-flier thus,
rendered still by his wounds, had fall'n to the ground
near his treasure-abode. No more in the air
did he sportively whirl, exulting in wealth,
by rich treasure made proud, in the dead of the night
displaying his form, for he fell to the earth
by the power of hand of the warrior-chief.
Yea, I have heard tell that no strong-bodied man
in the land could prevail, daring though he might be
in all manner of deeds, to rush forward against
the poisonous breath of the murderous beast,
or disturb with his hands the chamber of rings
if so be that he found the keeper at home
and awake on his mound. In Beowulf's case
the store of rich gems was paid for with death,

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and the combatants twain had both reached the end
of this transient life.

It was soon after that
that the laggards in fight came out of the wood,
the timid troth-breakers, ten of them, all told,
who erewhile had shrunk from wielding their spears
in the desperate need of their master-and-lord,
but ashamed of themselves they carried their shields,
their armour, to where the aged chief lay,
and on Wiglaf they gazed. He, the fighter on foot,
in weariness sat by the side of his lord—
tried to rouse him with water but speeded no whit.
Though he yearned for it sore he could not hold back
the life of his chief any longer on earth,
nor bring about change in the will of the Lord.
The judgment of God must needs have its way
o'er the deeds of mankind, as still it does now.

Then a savage rebuke came quickly enough
from the young man for those who had erewhile lost nerve.
Wiglaf spoke out, Weohstan's son ;
the sad man gazed on the unloved crew :
" Lo, he who tells the truth, may say
" that he, the chief, who gave you gems,—
" the war-gear that you stand there in
" when he, the prince, on the ale-bench
" often bestowed corslets and helms,
" the trustiest that he could find
" far off or near, on hall-sitters,

" his followers, quite threw away
" his battle-weeds; yea, woefully,
" when war broke out.
" No cause had the king of the people to boast
" of his comrades in war; but the Giver of victory,
" God, granted him to avenge, single-handed,
" himself with the sword when prowess was needed.
" I could do but a little in shielding his life
" when the fighting was on, but for all that began
" my kinsman to help, overstraining my powers.
" When I smote with my sword the murderous foe
" he was always the weaker— the fire from his head
" welled ever less freely. There thronged round the chief
" too few to defend him when need pressed him sore.
" Now shall your kin no more take part
" in loot-sharing and gifts of swords—
" all landed rights and things you love.
" Each man of you in his own town
" shall be outside the country's laws,
" when athelings hear far and wide
" about your flight, your shameless deed.
" Better is death to any earl
" than craven life!"

Then he bade the exploit be told in the camp
up over the sea-cliff where, gloomy of mood,
the warrior-troop sat holding their shields
all the wearisome morn, in suspense twixt the two—
the coming again of the chieftain beloved,
or the day of his death. He who rode to the ness

kept back little indeed of the last piece of news,
but told it with truth in the hearing of all :—
" Now the lord of the Geats, the giver of joy
" to the Weders, lies still in slaughterous rest,
" on his death-bed held fast by the deeds of the Worm.
" Beside him there lies his murderous foe,
" from knife-gashes limp. By means of his sword
" he could not avail to wound any way
" the hideous sprite. Sitteth Wiglaf, the son
" of Weohstan, hard by Beowulf's side—
" one earl by his fellow, no longer alive,
" he stands as chief guard o'er the loved and the loathed
" with sorrow of soul.
Now our folk may expect
" a season of war, when the fall of the king
" is known far and wide among Frisians and Franks.
" Hard fighting was planned 'gainst the tribe of the Hugs[1]
" when Hygelac came with his harrying fleet
" to the Frisians' land, where the Hetware gained
" the advantage in fight— bravely brought it to pass
" by their paramount strength that he, armoured chief,
" was forced to give way. 'Mid his troopers he fell,
" the prince to his captains no ornaments gave,
" and ever since that we have lost the good-will
" of the Meroving lord.

THE EPISODE OF THE GEATO-SWEDISH WAR

" Nor do I expect either peace or good faith
" from the Swede-folk at all, for every one knows

[1] The Hugs and Hetware were at that time subject to the Merovingian kings.

" how Ongentheow took the life of Hæthcyn,
" Hrethel's son, near the Wood of the Ravens, what time
" the War-Scylfings first attacked the Geat folk
" in the pride of their hearts.
" The veteran father of Ohthere soon
" gave his blow in return; old and terrible he,—
" and killed the sea-king.[1] The old man got back
" his wife, who Ohthere and Onela bare,
" though reft of her gold; and then he pursued
" his bloodthirsty foes until they escaped
" to the Wood of the Ravens, deprived of their lord
" and sorely beset.
" Then with a great host he compassed about
" those left by the sword, tired out with their wounds,
" and through the long night he oft threatened with woe,
" the pitiful band, and said that by morn
" he would put them to death by the edge of the sword,
" and that he would some on the gallows-trees hang,
" as a sport for the birds.
Yet again there came help
" to the sad-hearted ones with the dawning of day,
" when they made out the blast of Hygelac's horn
" and his trumpet of wood,— when that warrior came
" bearing down on their track with the pick of his troops.
" The blood-bemired path of the Swedes and the Geats,
" the men's deadly strife, was seen far and wide,—
" how between them these folks had stirred up a feud.
" Then the brave king went forth, old and sorrowing much,
" his fastness to reach with the men of his tribe.
" Ongentheow, the prince, moved farther away.
" He had heard of proud Hygelac's prowess in war,
" his skill in the battle; to face him he feared,
" to stand up against his sea-roving crew

[1] Hæthcyn.

" and keep his hoard safe, his children and wife
" from the farers by sea. Once more the old man
" turned behind his earth-wall. And the Swedes after that
" were put to the flight, and Hygelac's banners
" passed over the fastness, till Hrethel's men thronged
" in the fortified camp.
" Ongentheow there, the hoary-haired chief,
" was driven to bay by the edges of swords,
" and he, king of the folk, had to bow to the will
" of Eofor alone. Wulf, son of Wonred,
" reached forward to him with his weapon, in wrath,
" in such wise that the blood sprang forth from his veins
" 'neath his hair, at the stroke. Yet the veteran Scylfing
" was never afeared, but quickly paid back
" the death-dealing blow with a worse counter-stroke,
" when he, the folks' king, towards him had turned.
" But Wonred's deft son could not give back the blow
" before the old man had cleft on his head
" the helmet, and so had made him to budge,
" bespattered with gore. He fell to the ground
" and yet was not doomed, but came to himself
" though oppressed by his wound. While his brother lay prone
" did Hygelac's brave thane let fly his broad blade,
" his old titan-sword, across the shield-wall
" at the giant-made helm: then bowed the king down,—
" the people's defence— he was wounded to death.
" Then many there were who his brother bound up
" and lifted with speed when control of the field
" was left in their hands.
" The one captain stripped his foe after that—
" took the corslet of iron from Ongentheow,
" his strong hilted sword and helmet to boot,
" and the old man's belongings to Hygelac bare.
" So [that prince] took the spoils and faithfully vowed
" him rewards 'fore the folk— and performed his vow too.
" For he, Hrethel's kinsman, the lord of the Geats,

" repaid their war-deeds— Eofor's and Wulf's—
" when he came to his home with treasure untold,
" and gave to them each a hundred of thousands
" in land and linked rings.
On this earth not a soul
" could speak ill of his gifts, since by fighting they earned
" high repute for themselves. And he gave Eofor
" the one daughter he had as a pledge of his favour
" and prize for his home.

" Such, then, is the feud and the enmity such—
" deadly hate of the men— of the folk of the Swedes,
" the Scylfings brave race, that I have little doubt
" against us they will march, since their champions have fall'n,
" when once they have heard that our master is gone—
" is departed from life— who held in the past
" our treasure and land against unfriendly men,
" who advanced the folks' weal and performed furthermore
" the exploits of an earl. Now hasting is best
" that there we should gaze on the king of our race
" and bring on his way to the funeral pyre
" him who gave us our rings. Nor shall this or that
" with the hero be burned; but there, dearly bought,
" is a hoard of rich things, gold that no man may tell,
" and now at the last he has got us these rings
" with his very own life— the fire shall eat these,
" the flames swallow them up. No chieftain shall bear
" a jewel as keepsake, nor radiant maid
" shall have on her neck an adornment of rings,
" but bereft of her gold, and mournful of mood,

" she shall tread exiles' land far more often than once
" now the leader of hosts has laid aside laughter
" and frolic and joy. Many times shall the spear
" for this reason be held cold at morn in the grip—
" be lifted by hand— and no sound of a harp
" shall awaken the brave, but the raven, dark-hued,
" all alert for the slain, shall busily talk,
" and the eagle will tell how, at feasting, he sped
" when confronting the wolf, he took toll of the dead ! "
Thus the valiant man was a teller abroad
of tidings most dread ; nor was he far out
in his facts and his words.

Then arose the whole band,
and sadly they went below Eagles' ness,
brimming over with tears, to see the strange sight.
There they found on the sand, bereft of his life,
on his last bed, at rest, him who gave them their rings
in times now no more ; there the last of the days
of the hero had gone, when the warrior-king,
the Weders' prince, died that his marvellous death.
But also they saw an object more strange,
the hideous Worm, lying there on the ground
and opposite him. The fire-dragon grim,
a horrible beast, was scorched by the gleeds ;
by measure it was fifty feet as it lay
and aforetime it took its delight in the air,
in flying by night. Then it used to come down
again to its lair, and, rigid in death,
there it was—it had dwelt in its last earthly cave.

Hard by it there stood drinking vessels and jugs,
and dishes there lay with swords of great worth,
corroded and rusty, as if they had lodged
in the bosom of earth for a thousand years long,
forasmuch as that heritage, vasty and huge—
gold-store of the ancients— was bound with a spell,
so that no man might rifle that chamber of rings
unless God himself, the victor's true king
and the shield of mankind, should allow whom He would
to open the hoard, even him among men
whom He judged the most meet.

Then 'twas plain to be seen that the action of him
who unrighteously kept the treasure beneath
the wall, prospered not. The keeper at first
had killed off some few, and then was the feud
with fierceness avenged. A wonder it is
when a valiant earl may be destined to reach
to the end of his life— when the man may no more
the mead-hall frequent with his own kith and kin.
Such was Beowulf's case when the ward of the mound
he sought, and shrewd conflict; himself he knew not
in what sort his departure from earth would take place.

Then the powerful chiefs who put the things there
had laid a deep curse till doomsday on them,—
that the man who should rifle that place should be guilty
of sin and confined in the haunts of bad spirits—
with hell-bonds be fettered and punished with plagues.
Yet he for his part was not eager for gold
but looked first of all for the grace of the Lord.

Wiglaf discoursed, Weohstan's son:
" Often a many chieftains must suffer
" woe at one's bidding, as now is our fortune.
" We could not impress on our master beloved,—
" the Shield of our kingdom— our counsel, that he
" should not go forth to meet the keeper of gold,
" but let him lie there, where he long time had been,
" and live in his quarters until the world's end.
" We have High God's decree. The hoard is exposed—
" bought at terrible cost; the fate was too hard
" which the king of his folk there ventured to tempt.
" I was in there myself, and took stock of it all—
" the wealth in the house— when favoured by chance,
" for not as a friend was the journey allowed
" me beneath the earth wall. In haste with my hands
" I grasped a huge load and vast, of the hoard
" of treasured-up wealth, and carried it out
" hither unto my king— he was then still alive,
" in his senses and keen; in his pain the old man
" said many a word. He told me to greet you
" and bade you should form where the bale-fire had been,
" a great barrow, high and conspicuous, fit
" to attest your friend's deeds, for that he, of all men,
" was the worthiest brave in all the wide earth
" so long as he might his possessions enjoy.
" Come now, let us haste, and view once again
" and examine the heap of curious gems,—
" wonders under the bank (I will show you the way),
" that ye for yourselves may see very near
" the rings and thick gold. Let the bier, all complete,

" be fashioned with speed against we come forth,
" and then let us bear our prince, the loved man,
" to where he must long and patiently wait
" in the keeping of God ! "

Then Weohstan's son, the chief, bold in war,
bade orders be given to many head men,
who were owners of houses and masters of folk,
that they should bring wood from afar, for the fire,
to where the king lay. Now the gleeds shall eat up
the wan flame tower round the warriors' stay,
him who often withstood the shower of iron
when the volley of darts, impelled by the strings,
shot over the shield-wall,— the shaft did its work
and urged forth the barb by feather-gear sped.
And so the wise son of Weohstan called
from out of the troop seven thanes of the king,
each man one of his best, and he himself went,
as eighth man of the band, beneath the foe's roof,
and one of the warriors went on in front
and bare in his hand a torch all ablaze.
When the heroes beheld some part of the hoard
lying there in the cave unguarded and waste,
there was no casting lots as to whose it should be,
and none showed regret when men carried with haste
the dear treasures out. Besides that they shoved
the dragon, that reptile, the warder of wealth,
right over the cliff— let the sea bear him off,—
the flood lap him round.
Then an untold amount of intertwined gold

was placed on a wain, and the atheling borne,
the veteran brave, to the Ness of the Whales.
Then the folk of the Geats made ready for him
a funeral pyre firmly built on the earth,
with helmets hung round and bucklers of war
and bright coats of mail, even as he had wished.
Then the sad men at arms laid down in the midst
their illustrious prince and dearly loved lord.
The warriors then began on the mound
to light up the greatest of funeral fires.
The swarthy wood-smoke rose on high o'er the flame;
With the crackling fire sounds of weeping were mixed
(the wind's blast was lulled), till hot through and through
it had broken apart the framework of bone.
Cast down in their souls they voiced forth their woe—
(mourned) their master's decease.
His aged wife,[1] too,
with tresses bound up, sang a pitiful dirge—
said again and again that she very much feared
evil days for herself— and great slaughter of men,
the warriors' dread, disgrace and duress.
The smoke disappeared, swallowed up by the heavens.

Then the Weder-folk raised a mound on the cliff
which was lofty and broad and easy to view
from afar by such folk as voyaged on sea,
and they built in ten days the beacon, in mind
of the valiant-in-war, and begirt with a wall

[1] The text from v. 3150 to v. 3158 is very imperfect.

the remains of the fire, in such sort as skilled men
could most worthily plan.
In the barrow they placed sun-shaped jewels and rings—
all the ornaments which the brave minded men
had before that removed from the place of the hoard.
The treasure of earls they left earth to keep—
left the gold in the ground, where it still exists now,
as useless to men as it had been before.
Then all round the barrow the battle-braves rode,—
the scions of nobles, twelve of them all told.
They would tell out their sorrow and mourn for their king,
would utter a dirge and speak of him as man.
His valour they praised and his brave deed extolled
to the best of their powers. Yea, thus it is meet
that a man should exalt his lord by his words—
hold him dear in his heart— when he needs must go forth
and take his release from his wrapping of flesh.
Thus folk of the Geats, his familiar friends,
did show forth their grief at the fall of their lord,
and said that a world- famous monarch was he,
the mildest of men and most gracious withal,
most kind to his people, most keen after praise.

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