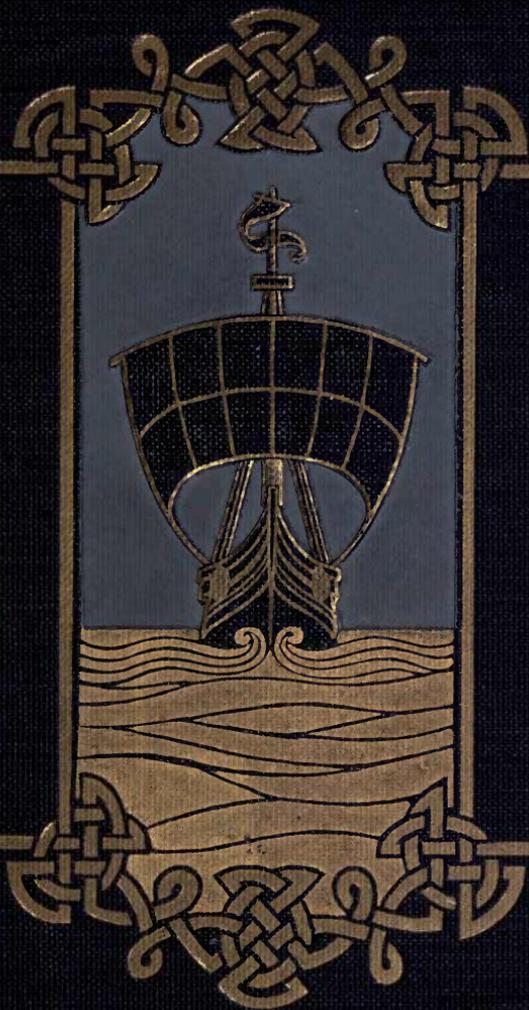


BEOWULF



SAMUEL HARDEN CHURCH

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BEOWULF



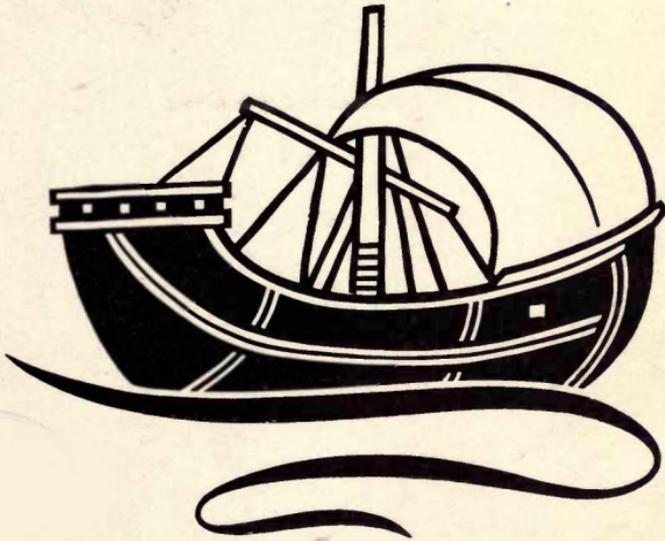
The Coming of Beowulf



BEOWULF

A POEM by SAMUEL
HARDEN CHURCH

Author of "OLIVER CROMWELL: A HISTORY"
"JOHN MARMADUKE: A ROMANCE" *Etc.*



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GENERAL

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PREFACE

FOR a long time I had it in mind to make a translation of the old Anglo-Saxon Saga, *Beowulf*, in poetical form, and pursued a preliminary study of the manuscript, charred from the Cottonian fire, in the British Museum. That work, the oldest monument of the Anglo-Saxon language, is a very noble heritage from a great, though unknown, authorship, full of rugged strength; and it should be read by every student of literature. But when I began to cast the materials over, I found them lacking in qualities of human interest that are necessary to modern poetical narrative.

The old *Beowulf* is a minstrel's song of hero deeds, in which a period of four generations is covered. The tale opens with *Scaef* the *Scylding*, who comes out of the sea, is made King, dies, and is sent back into the sea in the opening lines. There is his son, who is called *Beowulf*, and *Beowulf's* son is *Hrothgar*. While this *Hrothgar* is on the throne, there comes another

PREFACE

Beowulf, a Gothic warrior, who fights with Grendel and with the Water-Hag, and then goes back to his own country, where he is made King, and, after reigning for fifty years, is killed in extreme old age in a fight with a Dragon. The old poem has thus no unity of time or place; neither has it any portraiture of womanhood; and there is no suggestion of a love story. The action takes place in Denmark and in Sweden; yet the claim has been made that the scenery described is in England. It seems clear that the Angles and Saxons, who were neighbors of the Danes on the Continent, brought the story over to England, and that it was made to assume literary form before the Danes forced themselves into England as conquerors.

Besides, there were already literal translations of the Saga by Kemble, Thorp, Harrison and Sharp, Garnett, Earle, and William Morris; making another direct rendering a supererogant labor.

While adhering to the purpose to write a poem on the adventures of Beowulf, these circumstances impelled me to abandon the intention

PREFACE

of a general agreement with the ancient version. I have therefore composed an original narrative, in which the leading characters and some of the incidents of the early work have been freely used, but as materials only. I have transferred to my hero, Beowulf, the picturesque history of Scaef; have changed the relationship of characters and incidents; have invented the illumination of Beowulf's soul and his banishment; and have introduced the love motive between Beowulf and Freaware that runs through the poem to the end. Indeed, the structure, language, style, description, elaboration, interpretation, and development of the story are new. I have arbitrarily laid the scene in England, under purely idealized conditions; and have initiated nearly all that the poem contains of womanhood, of love, of religion and state policy, and of domestic life and manners. It is clear, therefore, that my work must not be judged either as a translation, version, or paraphrase of the old Beowulf.

Were the fabled monsters of olden times wholly creatures of the imagination? I think

PREFACE

not. Paleontology has already restored their bones to us — or bones very like theirs.* It requires no great strain of fancy to think of such creatures in the swamps, and of the King offering guerdon and his daughter's hand to him who would slay them. But perhaps they are allegorical of human ills. What man is there to-day who has not met his Dragon? What nation still lives that has not overcome its Grendel?

* In the Carnegie Museum at Pittsburg they have the fossil remains of a beast, the Terrible Lizard, nearly one hundred feet long; and the British Museum has just sent an expedition to Patagonia to find a living Megatherium.

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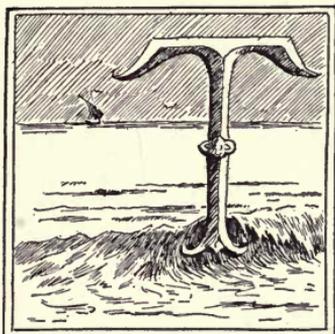
BOOK I.

THE SEA WAIF



THE SEA WAIF

I.



THE people came and
looked into the mist
And pushed their feet into
the rushing tide.

With straining eyes they
pierced the lifting fog,
And marvelled much to
see a little ship

Unworked by human hands leap toward the
shore.

Her sail tugged hard upon the yielding ropes ;
Her purple pennant gaily lashed the mast ;
And while the lookers grew upon the beach,
The flying boat shot high upon the sands.

II.

But fresh amazement filled their eager eyes
When in the boat a sleeping babe they saw.
No other soul it held, but solitude
Was that lad's portion in the tiny ship.

BEOWULF

Beside him there was armor laid with gold,
A mighty sword with sparkling jewelled hilt,
A battle axe, and spear with burnished point,
A belt and spurs, as for the bravest knight.

III.

The babe slept sound upon an ermine robe,
While all about him rich apparel lay,
And rings and bracelets set with precious stones,
And gold enough to ransom home a king.

IV.

This babe was Beowulf,—the name they found
Engraven on the jewels of his boat.
While still he slept they brought him soft away
Unto King Hrothgar there in Harot Hall.
The King and Queen received him with delight,
And woke his slumber with their gentle love.
The boy looked deep into their kindly eyes,
Then laughed,—for quick a baby knows its
 friends—
And they laughed, too, and ordered food soon
 brought.
Then while the lusty infant's wants were
 served,
They listened how the sea had cast him up
Unharm'd and fast asleep upon the coast.

THE SEA WAIF

V.

He was so large and strong, though recent born,
And wore so plain the stamp of royal birth,
The childless monarchs pressed him to their
 hearts,

As one of equal blood; and they declared
All ceremony his that's due a Prince.
The Queen appointed her most noble dames
To give a mother's comfort to the waif.
And Hrothgar vowed that if an heir came not
Through course of nature to his royal bed,
Then Beowulf should wear the kingdom's
 crown.

VI.

The affluent freight that lay around the boy
Was safely sealed within the royal vaults
Until the child should grow. And then the boat
Was drawn upon the shore and housed away.

VII.

Wise men who knew the learning of the world
Now taught the lad to count and read and think;
To speak no evil and abet no wrong.
Then others trained to arms instruction gave
In all accomplishments that fit a man,
With spear, and sword, and horse, until the youth,

BEOWULF

So nurtured in the wealth of Hrothgar's court,
Excelled in wisdom and in chivalry.
He shirked no danger in the game or hunt.
He loved the truth, and made the simple boast
That come what would he'd ne'er let honor go.
They found him gifted with a mighty strength,
Surpassing all who strove with him in games,
Till he could master ten of them in arms.

VIII.

King Hrothgar's castle, Harot Hall, was famed
For room, and strength, and beauty of design
Above all else that human hands had reared.
The antlers carved around its battlements
Gave it the name of Hart or Harot Hall.
A thousand silken flags with shining gold
Hung on its walls. Its mighty towers touched
The lowest clouds, defied the storm, and bade
The soaring eagle welcome in the sky.
Its battlements frowned dark upon the world,
Its moat was sunk too deep for men to ford,
Its drawbridge lay at rest for friendly foot,
But hung suspended when the warder's horn
Gave lofty signal of a foe's approach.
Its spacious rooms in stone and oak were built.
Five thousand souls abode beneath its roof.

THE SEA WAIF

The monarch reared it in the pride of life,
And swore that it should stand a thousand years.

IX.

The gods did give him fortune, health, and
power ; —
Or if they frowned, an altar in the wood
Appeased their idols with its sacrifice.

X.

Night found the spacious banquet hall alight
With torch and hearth-fire while the king did
sup.
Fair Wealthew, his Queen, beside him sat,
And all his earls and thanes, to feast with him.

XI.

The mead-cup passed around the joyous board,
And all drank deep the ale and pledged the king.
Brave laughter echoed from their knightly hearts.
Then stood the minstrel with his harp, and sang
The deeds of mighty men, and drew their lives
So lustrous with the burning tongue of fame
As made the company of noble guests
Spring up and draw their swords, and vow that
they

BEOWULF

Would ride abroad and die for honor, too :
Then called upon their gods to hear them swear.

XII.

In time the Queen gave birth to Freaware,
A maid with golden hair and soft blue eye,
Who grew to frolic childhood, then to youth,
And danced with Beowulf in forest glades,
And romped beneath the spreading linden trees.

XIII.

One day came Hunferth, a gigantic earl,
And would have joined their sport, but Freaware
Repelled him ; when more ardent grew the man
And sought to win the maid from Beowulf.
The Princess spurned his suit, upbraiding him
That he should woo the daughter of a King.
Whereon did Hunferth sneer at Beowulf,
That she a nameless playmate, a sea waif,
Should choose before the King's most ancient
earl.

Taunt followed taunt, till Beowulf, enraged,
Contended with his foe, and raising him
Aloft, discharged him stunned upon the ground.
The agitated Princess seized his hand
And drew him from the scene of jealous strife.



“Taunt followed taunt”

THE SEA WAIF

XIV.

The adolescent days passed into years
While all the time their strong affection grew.
They heard the call of every bird that sang,
And loved those wingéd flowers, the butterflies,
That sipped pure dew from every nodding rose.
They watched the boistous waves break on the
shore,
And learned the mystic language of the sea.
They wooed the curlew from his stormcloud
home,
And in the deep glade calmed the startled deer.
Their life was laughter and their food was joy;—
Heigh ho, the eglantine and daffodil:—
Until the unknown passion of their blood
Begot at last a shyness in the pair;
Then walked they silent in the mesh of love.

XV.

But Beowulf resolved he ne'er would stop
To tell his melting tale to willing ears
Until his sword had done its deeds of praise.

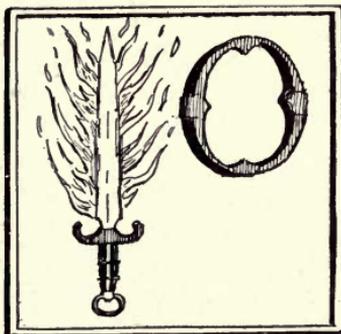
BOOK II.

THE FLAMING SWORD



THE FLAMING SWORD

I.



NE day the pensive
Beowulf set forth
And wandered through
the forest all alone.
So long he stay'd that
question soon arose
Why he should tarry in
his woodland stroll.

One said some hungry beast had eaten him,
Whereon the others vowed no beast that lived
Could overcome the strength of Beowulf.
But none could tell what kept the Prince away.

II.

Now when his vexéd friends had anxious grown
Lest accident had robbed the youth of life,
He homeward came, dejected and forlorn,
With halting step, all joy of visage gone,

BEOWULF

A deep and troubled look upon his face.
Avoiding all the greetings of the court,
And even Freaware's inquiring gaze,
He passed in silence to his solitude.

III.

That night he late came to the monarch's feast:
A world of sorrow hung upon his brow.

The mead-cup passed his lips untouched. The
mirth

Of jesting friend, the sway of minstrel song,
No longer moved the melancholy youth.
His sad behavior threw them all in gloom;
The banquet paused, the merriment was gone,
And Hrothgar asked the meaning of his mood.
The Prince grew pale and stammered an excuse,
Which only pricked their curiosity;
And when repeated questions failed to bring
A reason for his woe, the King was wroth,
And bade the youth to speak, yea, and at once.

IV.

Quick Beowulf arose, and cast his eye
On every guest, and then on Freaware.
He tried to speak, but failed; then tried again,
And with a voice suppressed and full of awe,
He told the King it was revealed to him

THE FLAMING SWORD

That all their gods were only vicious gods,
And helpless to uplift the souls of men.

V.

Deep gloomed King Hrothgar's brow, and at the
word
Each knightly hand made quick to grasp its
sword
Prepared to punish sacrilegious speech
Should the brave war-lord now condemn the
youth.
The Queen with apprehension viewed the scene,
While Freaware looked on in sad amaze.

VI.

Oh, thou, who came from out the boundless
deep —
Thus spake the King — in tender babyhood
Unto our shores. In thy extremity
We gave thee care and nourished thy sweet
years
In deep solicitude until this day.
All this thou has requited us again
By thy good conduct, modesty, and love.
Our people look upon you as our Prince,
While we, ourself, have thought thee, Beowulf,

BEOWULF

As dear to us as if thou wert our son.
— King Hrothgar shot a glance at Freaware.—
But now, with impious and profane tongue,
Thou hast impeached the honor of our gods,
And put our souls in jeopard by thy vaunt.
I do abjure thee, e'er my vengeance fall,
The vengeance of a deep insulted King, —
Recant, — thou foolish, froward, hapless boy!

VII.

The table breathed again. They felt assured
The King's rebuke would make the Prince
repent.

VIII.

But Beowulf stood fast in stern resolve.
O, King, he cried, to thee I do owe much; —
My education and a happy life,
And favor that hath raised me to a Prince.
I love this land and for it I would die.
But when I went alone into the wood,
My soul did meet the Spirit of the Truth,
Astride a horse winged for celestial paths,
In light more dazzling than the noonday sun.
He held across my way a flaming sword.
And while I looked upon the wondrous sight
Amazed, I feared it not, but did confide

THE FLAMING SWORD

That such a being would not do me hurt.
And while I stood in meek and reverent faith,
The Spirit told me there did dwell in Heaven
One God who ruled the nations of the earth, —
A God of love and pity, and but one.
He told me that the gods whom we revere
Are false and bloody idols of deceit.
He bade me come and tell thee this to-night,
Lest that the errors which o'ercast our faith
Do bring a dire affliction on this land.
When he full revelation of his truth
Had poured into my eager, constant heart,
He sped his steed into the far-off sky,
And soon was lost in Heaven's deepest blue.

IX.

Oh, Beowulf, our son, — thus spake the King;
A fearful dream is this that fills thy mind;
Or else an evil spirit haunts thy steps
Who with his damnéd arts of sorcery
Gives falsehood to thine eye the look of truth.
Avert, we do implore thee, Beowulf,
The quick approach of thy self-courted doom;
For if thou dost pursue thine error now,
And challenge still the virtue of our gods,
This very night we 'll judge thee for thy fault.

BEOWULF

X.

The Prince with resolution held his ground,
But turned his fleeting glance on Freaware.

XI.

O, King, he said; the truth can never lie,
Nor can a falsehood in the garb of truth
Deceive the yearning of a human soul.
What I have said is truth; I know 't is truth, —
The truth of God, eternal and supreme!

XII.

King Hrothgar struck his fist upon the board,
And he and all his earls stood on their feet,
Their swords unsheathed, and wrathful eyed
the youth;
While Wealthew the Queen, and Freaware,
Sat trembling for the daring Prince's life.

XIII.

Thou impious youth! — The rageful King thus
spoke.
Thou art an ingrate and a moping fool!
But that thy life came to us from the sea,
Thy birth a mystery beyond resolve,
We would condemn thee to an instant death.
But thou hast forfeited our deep respect



Beowulf Banished

THE FLAMING SWORD

And cast away the anchors of our love.
We therefore banish thee our kingdom's bounds ;
We bid thee quit our realm this very night,
For if the broad dominion of our rule
Shall hold thy person by to-morrow's dawn,
We swear thy life shall meet a bloody end.

XIV.

The young man heard, — with flashing eye he
heard,
Then drooped his lids and hushed his hidden
grief ;
And when a moment had restored his strength,
He slowly strode beyond the furied earls ;
But when he'd reached the table's end, quick
turned,
And through the sorrow beaming in his eye
He pierced the aching heart of Freaware,
And wished that all his yesterdays were back.
But saying, It is truth ! — the boy was gone.

XV.

Fierce silence sat upon the warrior band ;
There was no further appetite for feast,
So all dispersed and sought relief in sleep.
But Freaware the Princess found no sleep.

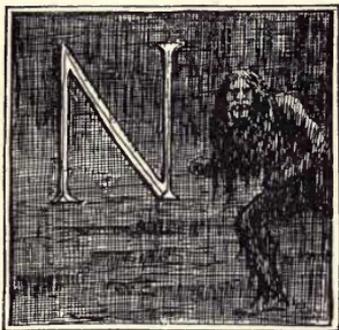
BOOK III.

G R E N D E L



GRENDEL

I.



OW Grendel in his pesti-
lential mere,
A frightful ogre, huge of
stature, dwelt ;—
A hairy beast, built some-
what like a man,
Yet fourfold large as any
man that was.

His face with many evil passions blazed.
He thrived on blood of things that lived in
swamps,
And with the Water-Hag that gave him birth
Made greedy ravage in his noisome lake.

II.

A grim tradition told that ancient Cain,
Who first wrought murder in the infant world,
Accursed of God, did wander o'er the earth,
An outlaw shunning men, and by men shunned,
And lived with wild beasts in the wilderness.
In time a brood of branded creatures grew ;

BEOWULF

The Swamp-Hag was an offspring of this line,
And she was mother to the Grendel beast.
And so through centuries, from Cain's own time,
This pair of huge mark-stalkers* held the moor—
No stranger pair was ever since create!

The Swamp-Hag was in beldam's likeness
built,

While Grendel held resemblance to a man,
Yet larger much. If father he e'er had,
Or sprang from wicked goblin, no man knows.
They lived in swamps most desolate and lone,
And walked beneath the frowning mountain
ness,†

Where falls the torrent in the dark earth caves.
Not many miles from Harot lay their mere,
And on its top burns every night a fire;—
No living man can tell the water's depth,
For none who ever touched their haunted pool
Came forth again, but stayed to feed the beasts.
When speeds the hunted stag before the hounds,
Emerging from the wood in breathless flight,
He stops in terror at the Nickers' ‡ lake,
And dies upon the brink e'er he will plunge
Into the nameless horrors of the mere.

* Mark, dark, darkness; mark-stalkers, night-walkers.

† Ness, bluff.

‡ Nickers, sea-beasts, water-beasts.

GRENDEL

III.

One night, made bold by hunger's biting edge,
This Grendel crept in torment from the mere,
And made his way in slow and savage pace
Through fen and tarn and brake, and over
moor,
Until he came at last to Harot Hall.

IV.

Amphibious, the monster swam the moat,
And reaching high his strong and hairy arms
To the machicolations of the wall,
Gained foothold on the barbican, and thence
Stood firm upon the battlements in glee.

V.

A sentinel, who saw the fearful thing,
And fleeing, told the captain of the guard,
Was straightway put into the gaoler's keep
For overdeep libation of his ale.

VI.

But soon an outcry rose upon the walls,
And stopped the King's enjoyment of his mead.
The earls drew sword and grouped about their
lord,
To ward his life against the unseen foe.

BEOWULF

VII.

Quick came, with ashen face and trembling knee,
The captain of the guard, who ne'er before
Had felt the palsied touch of craven fear.
With halting tongue he told the dreadful tale, —
How Grendel had appeared upon the wall,
Where shadows hid him from the soldiers' gaze,
And fiercely eaten one good man-at-arms.
Some bolder than the rest had struck their pikes
Upon his tough and shell-clad sides in vain;
For he was proof against the sharpest steel,
And never weapon pierced his outer skin.
When he had gorged himself on human flesh,
He clasped a shrieking victim round the waist,
And limped away to feed him to his dam,
The Swamp-Hag, who had given the monster
birth.

VIII.

King Hrothgar lifted up his voice and wept,
And all his thanes lent sorrow to his woe.
Nor King nor courtier sought his bed that night,
But held a frightened vigil in the Hall; —
For Grendel, whatso'er his power might be,
Nor any other superhuman beast,
Could brave the sacred presence of the King,
And they that dwelt beside him knew it well.

GRENDEL

IX.

A thought came quick into the monarch's mind
Of Beowulf, and what the youth had told
Of that fair vision in the lonely wood:
The Spirit of the Truth itself in light
More dazzling than the burning noonday sun,
And holding in his hand a flaming sword,
Who told him that one God in Heaven dwelt,
Who ruled all kings and nations in the earth
With love and pity. And King Hrothgar
groaned

In anguish of the soul when he bethought
How he 'd dismissed, in rudeness and contempt,
From his own presence and from Freaware,
The youth who drifted to him from the mist
To save his kingdom from the kingdom's ills.
The awe-struck thanes divined their master's
thought

And wished that Beowulf would come again;
For there was comfort in the thought of him.

X.

So every night the thing came from the mere
And fed upon the children of the King.
In agony prolonged the nation dwelt,
And weltered in atrocity and blood.

BEOWULF

The old and young, the women and the men,
The rich and poor, and even tender babes,
Were sacrificed to that remorseless beast,
To feed his hunger and the Swamp-Hag's lust.
The trail of death ran red to every door,
And many houses stood in soulless gloom.
The monster prowled about and lay in wait,
And no man knew when he would be attacked.
The fearful ear in silence of the night
Can hear the tiny footfall of a mouse.
How much more terrible was Grendel's tread!

XI.

The King called all the nobles of his realm,
And drew the nation's wisdom round his throne,
And eagerly besought a remedy
From the combined judgment of the land.
Some offered sacrifice unto the gods;
A hundred made oblations to the sun;
The moon and stars received obsequious court,
And rolling clouds were worshipped in dumb
fear.
But still the demon drank the blood of all.
The King was tempest-tossed upon his throne,
And helpless to avert his people's doom,
Yet safe himself from Grendel's rageful thirst.



The Sentinel

GRENDDEL

XII.

When two long years had passed, and on the
land
A mark of fatal devastation lay,
Came Beowulf again across the wave.
The cry of woe had reached beyond the sea
Where he was winning an immortal fame.
It called him to redress his country's wrong,
Forgetting he was banished from her shore.
But when his boat was ready to set sail
No man dared go with him upon his quest
To meet a bloody and impermeable foe.
So he, unfaltering at duty's call,
Embarked alone and sailed for England's shore.
One day and night he sped across the waves,
And then arrived in safety on the beach.

XIII.

Sharp-eyed, the warder on King Hrothgar's
wall
Beheld the knight in panoply of steel,
With visor closed, leap out upon the sand.

XIV.

The man descended and his steed bestrode,
And galloping whence Beowulf debarked,

BEOWULF

He brandished in his hand a burnished lance,
And challengéd the bold invader's bent
In coming there in shining armor clad.

XV.

Who art thou? — thus he cried — mail-coated
man,
Who solitary sails the ocean's crest?
In many years my vigil on the wall
Has never seen a ship so strange as thine —
One sailor only, he with chain-knit sark.
Our pass-word is not thine; then hie thee hence —
This is no land for courtesy or war.
Give me thy name and country; raise thy helm,
And let me look into thy knightly face;
For by my soul I never saw before
So tall and strong a man indeed as thou.

XVI.

Behind his casque the knight quick answer made.
I come from Hygelac the Goth, whose ranks
I sometime joined to take the chance of war.
One year ago the royal Hygelac
Made me the captain of his valiant host.

XVII.

Thy name? — the sentinel demanded — speak!

GRENDEL

XVIII.

I will not give it save unto the King!
Yet know thou this: the dark atrocity
That nightly devastates this hapless land,
I came to overthrow. Then let us hence!

XIX.

They dropped the anchor and made fast their
rope.
Then Beowulf pressed on behind the steed
Unto the castle where King Hrothgar dwelt.
When they did reach the gate the warder gave
The pass-word, and bade Beowulf go in.

XX.

The knight trod quickly down the stone-paved
street,
His sword and spurs resounding as he walked.
His gilded byrnie * and his body-sark †
Threw back the sun in splendor magnified.
Without direction well he knew the way,
And after giving many times the word,
He passed the portals of the presence room
And deep obeisance made before the King.

* Byrnie, breast plate.

† Body-sark, shirt, — shirt of chain links.

BEOWULF

XXI.

Now old and hoary sat King Hrothgar there,
His earls about him, and his guard of state.
His face was furrowed by an awful woe,
And ever and anon a deep-drawn sigh
Gave witness of the sorrow in his heart.

XXII.

Thy name? he kindly said to Beowulf.

XXIII.

I am from Hygelac, said Beowulf,
And Ecgtheow, his chiefest counsellor.
Both Hygelac, the King, and Ecgtheow
Do testify by many precious gifts
Which now are hidden in my vessel's hold
How they do cherish love for thee and thine.

XXIV.

The royal Hygelac I ne'er have met
Though I do love him as a brother King.
But Ecgtheow, thy counsellor and friend,
Hath been our guest in bygone happier days;
A man of wisdom and accomplishment,
And we esteem thee if thou art from him.
Thy helmet, therefore — put thy visor up
That we may learn the fashion of thy face.

GRENDEL

XXV.

Then Beowulf his visor raised, and knelt
In humble pity at the monarch's feet.
The King a moment peered into his face,
Then with a cry of joy he seized the knight
And hugged him to his breast, and shed those
tears
That withering adversity had kept
For many months deep in their fountains locked.
A new-born hope now bade them freely flow
And give refreshment to a broken heart.

XXVI.

When stronger grew the King he raised his
eyes,
And, yearning for a champion to come,
Yet fearing disappointment, slowly asked:
O Beowulf, my son — why art thou here?

XXVII.

The gallant army of King Hygelac,
Said Beowulf, did pause before a town,
And while they parleyed to capitulate,
One of their side, an old seafaring man,
Related how no trooper's life was safe
Beneath the mighty fabric of this roof,

BEOWULF

All through the night, but with the darkness
came

A horrid beast with sateless appetite
To feed upon the people of the King.
On hearing this the noble Hygelac
Demanded if his ranks contained a knight
To face the monster and arrest his woe.
The city then surrendering, I came.

XXVIII.

Brave Beowulf, cried Hrothgar, gallant son!

XXIX.

This letter then writes Hygelac to thee.

XXX.

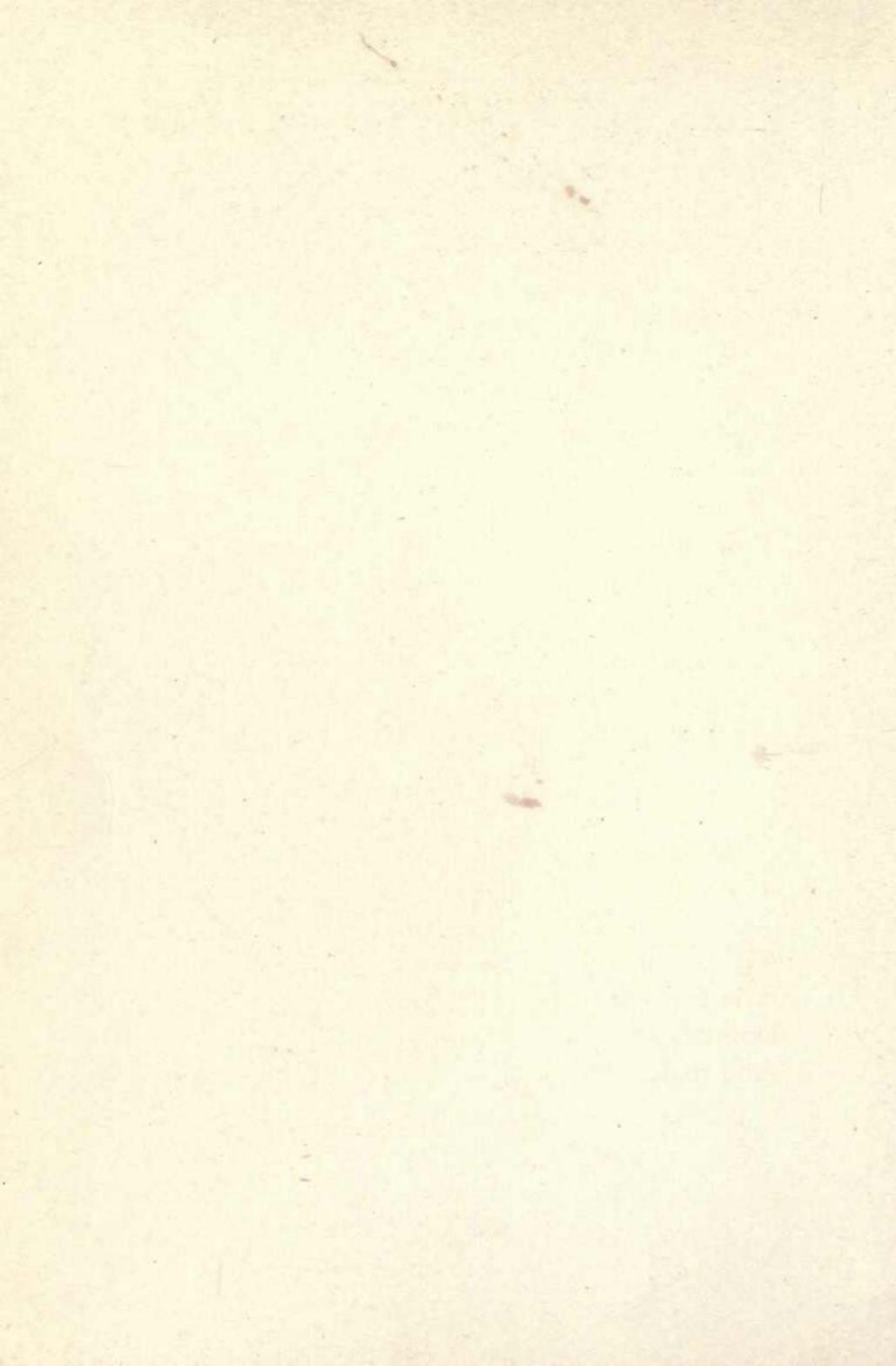
The King received it and did read aloud.

XXXI.

To Hrothgar, royal brother, send we these:
Thou knowest Beowulf, our army's chief;
Bright honor sits enthroned upon his helm.
His arm contains the strength of twenty men.
Oft have I seen him, battered by his foes,
Return victorious from a hopeless fight.
Once saw I him a deadly monster seize



“I do implore thee, answered Beowulf, that single-handed thou wilt let me go against this monster, Grendel”



GRENDEL

And bind his raging limbs with rope of steel.
He has the Eoten-race * laid low in death.
He has slain nickers on the tempest wave,
And many of our grievances avenged.
Quick goes he now, great Hrothgar, to thy land,
To slay this Grendel, or be slain by him.
We bid him pale all honor yet achieved,
Or die attempting honor's highest prize.

XXXII.

Thus writes good Hygelac the King to me.
Oh, son, — for thou art son unto my heart,
We do avoid at this most fateful hour
The topic that dissevered once our souls.
Thou wert eternal right; we ever wrong.
Let that suffice. But dost thou know the risk?

XXXIII.

I do implore thee, answered Beowulf,
That single-handed thou wilt let me go
Against this monster, Grendel. I full well
Remember that his shell-clad hide resists
The point and edge of weapons, and his eyes
Do look such horror as destroys the sense,
And makes his foe a nerveless victim die.

* Eoten-race, race of giants.

BEOWULF

Still will I go unarmed against the beast
And try to kill him with my naked hands.
But if I fall before the doom of God,
No mound needst thou to pile above my head,
For he will bear me to his poisoned lake
To eat me with exulting appetite.
And should that fate o'ertake me, send I pray
The gilded byrnie that I cast aside
To Hygelac, that he may know I'm dead.

XXXIV.

Spake Hrothgar: 'T is a sorrow in my soul,
A deep humiliation, to describe
To any mortal man this helpless plight.
My fearless thanes, my heroes bold and brave,
Near all have fed the passion of the beast.
Full oft they drank the courage-giving cup
And held their swords to wait the onslaught
here ;
But when the morning came, this spacious Hall
Was stained with gore, and naught else could
we find.
Thus night by night my kingdom's strength is
sapped.
If thou wilt therefore undertake his death
Thou wilt unslave a King and kingdom both.

GRENDEL

XXXV.

Now came the serving men to bring the feast,
And Beowulf sat at the King's right hand.
Then came Queen Wealthew, and Freaware,
And Beowulf a deep obeisance made.
And when the Queen had learned his gallant
quest
She smiled in gracious favor on the knight.
But Freaware in seeming coldness sat,
Nor looked at him, save secretly and quick.
The King's best earl attended Beowulf;
A minstrel to his harp the hero sang.
The dying hope of rescue took new life;
The banished note of revelry came home; —
So much assurance brings a fearless soul.

XXXVI.

The giant Hunferth, Ecglaf's son, renowned
In Hrothgar's service, felt a jealous pang
To see another go against the beast
Whose overthrow the whole world would
acclaim.
Yet ne'er had he begged eager for the task.

XXXVII.

With scoffing eye he looked on Beowulf; —
Contemptuously laughed and bitter spoke :

BEOWULF

I have been told that thou with Breca strove
In swimming-match across the open sea,
Where in bravado, ye explored the floods,
Against advice of friend and foe alike,
And foolishly in peril put your lives.
Ye twain swam fast and buffeted the waves
And plied all day and night the ocean's foam ;
But thou wert worsted in the wintry surf,
And Breca reached the goal far ahead,
And was acclaimed the city's feudal lord.

XXXVIII.

With burning cheek stood Beowulf, and spoke :
When men in drink o'erstep a temperate thirst
Their tongues grow larger than their bravest
deeds.

Thou hast not swam the wave so much as I,
Nor overcome its deadly foes so much.
My match with Breca was in friendship made ;
He was my bravest comrade in the wars.
Each clothed in body-sark of linkéd steel,
Our shields away, we plunged into the sea,
Our swords held drawn to fight against the
whales.

All day and night we swam the waves abreast
Till from the north there came a mighty wind

GRENDEL

That drove the seething billows o'er our heads
And parted us upon the raging main.
While I swam on alone the walrus came
And struck his tusks against my body-sark.
My gilded byrnie held the monster off,
But he, returning, dragged me to the depths
Until the bottom of the sea we touched,
Where I dispatched him with my sword, and
rose

Exhausted to the top to breathe the air.
So hard a fight ne'er Breca had, nor you.
The waves then cast me on the Finland beach
Where Breca had been washed an hour before;
And while 't is true they chose him for their lord
The post was his hereditarily;
And he confessed that, — for his strength had
waned
When mine was at the full, — the match was
mine,
And bade his people pledge me in their cups.

XXXIX.

Then Hunferth raged, and said, I too, can tell
Of monsters vanquished on the sea and land.

XL.

Then why not Grendel, too? cried Beowulf.

BEOWULF

Pray answer why thou hast not vanquished
him?

Oh, Hunferth, when thou tellest here thy deeds,
And would disparage those of other men,
Forget not, I beseech thee, to relate
How thou didst kill thy brother in his bed
That his estate might pass into thy hand.
No further tempt me, Hunferth. Thou art one
Who sees no urgent duty in to-day
But lives among his yesterdays, content
To close the eye to present evils felt
And satisfy the mind with glories past.
I stand here now to fight my King's worst foe.
Wilt thou encounter him beside me, man?

XLI.

In deep humiliation Hunferth said,
This is a task I cannot undertake.
To fight a demon is no game for me.
I'll own thy better skill if thou prevail.

XLII.

Then much deploring to hear angry speech
When common peril made sweet peace preferred,
Queen Wealtheow arose in gracious smiles,
Resplendent in her gold-embroidered gown;
And going first unto her sovereign lord,

GRENDEL

Gave him to drink the mead from her own cup,
Then handed it to Beowulf, and soothed
His troubled spirit as a woman can
When all else turns a man's repose to gall.
She said, Thou shalt have love and honor both
If thou prevail against the wicked beast ; —
And Beowulf looked down at Freaware.

XLIII.

Full soon was laughter in the Hall restored,
Till Hrothgar rose to bid his friend good-night,
Then all stood up and Hrothgar spake these
words :

Bold Prince, good-night. I give unto the Lord
To keep thee safe from hurt. May he endue
Thine arm with strength beyond thy former
deeds.

This splendid Castle place I in thy charge ;
Thou art its master, — master then its foe.
Be vigilant, be wary, guard thyself ;
And if thou do prevail against the beast,
Thy dearest wish shall quick fruition find,
E'en though it compass half our kingdom's
wealth !

XLIV.

All hail the King ! The cry rang through the
Hall.

BEOWULF

Then Hrothgar drew away, and all his court ;
And Beowulf, with one attendant, stayed.

XLV.

Then Beowulf called up the man-at-arms,
And stripped himself of all his jewelled steel.
His gilded byrnie, helmet, belt, and sword
Were given to the man to put away.
Then in the simple furnishing of peace
He knelt him down and prayed unto the Lord :
Oh, Thou, who art the father of all men,
Who governest the nations of the earth,
Thou knowest that my heart now holds no fear
And that in Thy dear love I look to win.
This Grendel knows no courtesy of life ;
No gentle mercy of the sword or shield
That knights in combat one another show.
With horror only is his warfare marked.
Then let me, Lord, encounter him to-night
With naked arms, and if my heart be pure,
Then give thou me the battle over him.

XLVI.

In simple faith thus trusting in the Lord,
The brave knight laid him down, but not to
sleep.
He knew that other men of valiant heart

GRENDEL

Had dared to seek repose in Harot Hall,
And never waked but to an awful death.
His pillow therefore used he but for rest,
And kept his eye undimmed upon the door,
While near it soon his comrade fell asleep.

XLVII.

In darkest night came Grendel from the mere
Where dwelt he with the nickers and his Hag.
Across the lonely moor he dragged his way,
In hunger growling till he neared the Hall,
When joy of sure repast increased his speed
And changed his fury to malignant mirth.
His oft invasion of the royal house
Had taught him to expect abundant food.
He therefore confidently scaled the wall;
With labored breathing gained the battlement;
Then straight descended toward the banquet
room,
Unconscious of the man on guard within.
His pace grew quick as near the prize he drew,
And, with a roar prolonged, in savage wrath
He flung himself against the oaken doors,
And burst their fastenings of hammered iron;
Then stood within the fair and spacious Hall,
His feet upon the many-colored floor,

BEOWULF

His eyes two flashing balls of evil flame :
A gloating demon on destruction bent.

XLVIII.

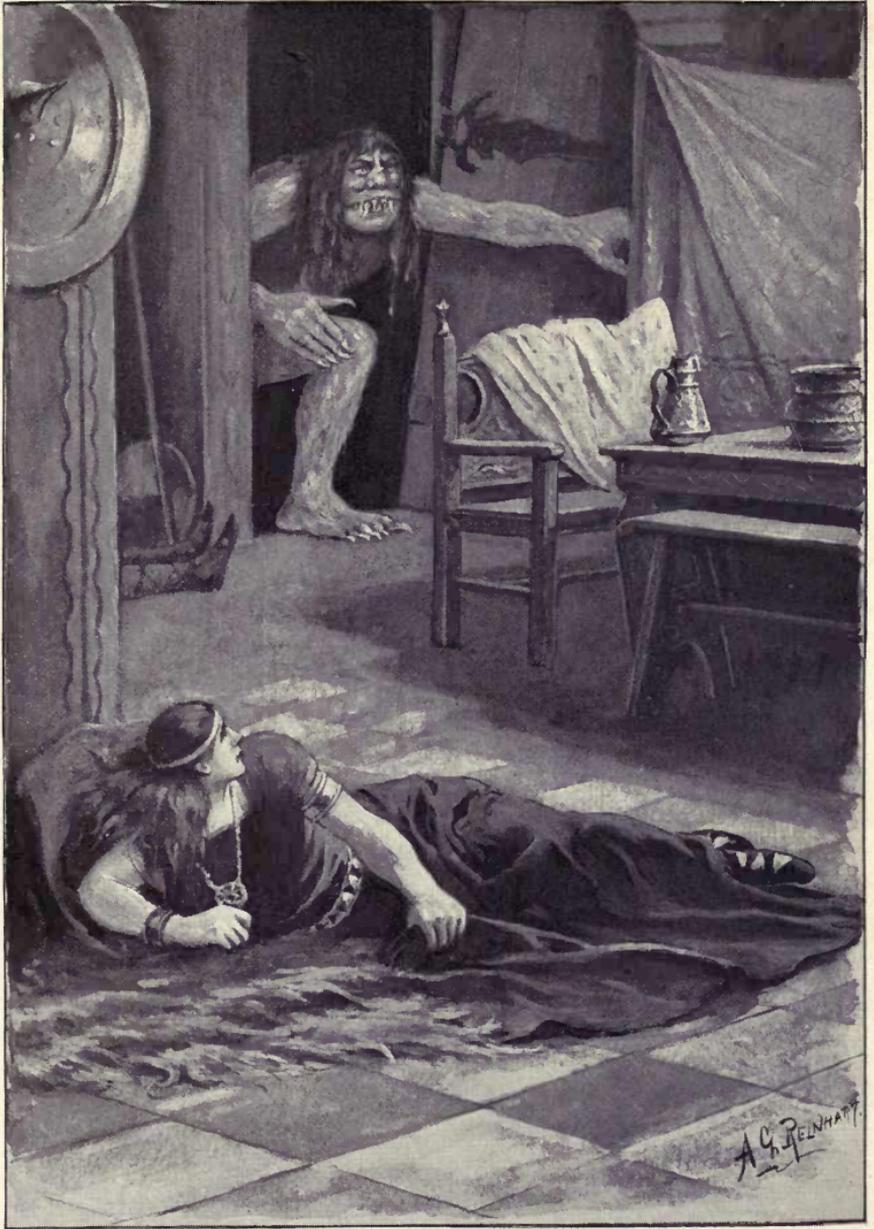
He saw the sleeping groom upon the floor
And laughed to think how quickly he would part
His body from his soul. He seized the man,
Who waked, and gave a sudden shriek, and
died.

XLIX.

Then came the monster upon Beowulf.

L.

The Sea-Prince quick advanced in knightly rage.
The mere-beast sought to grasp him in his teeth,
But Beowulf seized Grendel's bulky arm
And grappled him with a tremendous force,
Until the evil thing was made to know
That ne'er before had he felt such a grip.
He stood affrighted at this unarmed man ;
The first that ever checked his savage lust.
He tried to flee away into the dark
To join the Devil's pack beneath the lake ;
But Beowulf's tight grasp now cracked his
arm,
And then began a fight for life and death.



Grendel

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GRENDEL

LI.

The combat grew more deadly in the Hall;
The oaken rafters shook, the ale was spilled.
The tables and the chairs were overturned;
The walls seemed nigh to topple and fall in;
King Hrothgar's golden throne was pushed
aside.

A fearful panic fell upon the house.
The great contention split the ears of all.
The guard, the earls, the women stood aghast,
Yet none dared see the bold titanic strife,
But heard its growing violence and rage,
And wondered what the penalty might be
Should victory now crown the maddened beast.

LII.

The Princess Freaware in horror fled
Unto the chamber of Queen Wealthew.
Then knelt the two in mutual embrace
And prayed for Beowulf a victory.
The old King entered, and his thanes came, too,
And listened to the frightful sounds of war;
While on the walls the men went mad with fear.
The King's attendants were brave men and true;
They would have joined the combat in the Hall
And hacked their swords against the shell-clad
thing,

BEOWULF

But knew full well the choicest blade on earth
Could not incise the fell destroyer's skin.
So stayed they all, and heard the yelling beast,
And hoped deliverance from the strife prolonged.

LIII.

Now Grendel raged and sought to find escape,
But Beowulf maintained his fearful grip
Until he burst the sinews of the arm
And made the juncture of the bones appear.
Then tore he from the beast his arm and breast,
And Grendel stood in terror unto death.
Full well he knew his days had reached the end.
Then fled he to the coverts of the mere,
His arm and shoulder in the hero's grasp; —
And Beowulf stood victor in the Hall!

LIV.

The wise and valiant Sea-Prince had prevailed;
Redeemed the land from thralldom of the beast,
And brilliantly performed his promised task.

LV.

His trophy of the bloody hand and arm
He now affixed beneath the gabled roof.
Then broke the morning light into the Hall,

GRENDEL

And soon King Hrothgar came, and all his
court,
Who greeted Beowulf with loud acclaim,
While multitudes took up the cry without
And hailed him as the saviour of the land.

LVI.

Vast groups of people drew toward the lake
Where late the ogre lived. On foot and horse
They came in glee until the distant sounds
Of evil life about the nickers' mere
Appalled their souls and gave them instant
pause.

But when they started back for their abodes
Their spirits rose with animated joy,
And Beowulf's achievement was rehearsed
With speech that rose to clamor of delight.
The horsemen praised his fight with knightly
words;
A minstrel in the throng sang cunning verse;
The yeomen threw their caps into the air
And kissed their sweethearts' lips for Beowulf.

LVII.

The happy laughing crowd pushed through the
gates
And peered in wonder on the monster's arm.

BEOWULF

They saw its finger-nails stick out like hooks ;
They saw its shell-like skin that swords defied,
And still the wonder grew that mortal man
Could overcome a demon foe like this ;
And all declared for such a deed the world
Contained no hero like to Beowulf.

LVIII.

King Hrothgar called the people unto him.
I bid you reverently thank the Lord,
He cried, for sending Beowulf to us
To rid the nation of its fatal curse.
With grief I have beheld our bravest men
Turn cowards in the presence of this foe ;
While superstition sapped our wisest minds
When dire affliction they were forced to meet.
Now hath a youth, by God's most tender love,
Prevailed against the thing which shocked the
world ;
And if his mother, though unknown to us,
Abideth where her eyes may follow him
She 'll deem herself most blessed of her sex
To know that son of hers hath won this fame.

LIX.

The people cheered King Hrothgar's gracious
speech,

GRENDEL

And Beowulf smiled happily and bowed;
Then went into the palace with the King.

LX.

King Hrothgar took his hand. My son, he said,
Full often for less service I've bestowed
A monarch's recompense on knightly men.
No deed in history compares with thine.
I know not what reward to give to thee,
For thy deserving is so boundless vast
That wealth and high advancement in the state
Leave still a debt of gratitude to pay.
Thou hast the kingdom saved: it shall be thine.
We will anon expound our wish in this.

LXI.

I am not worthy of so high reward,
But sweet it is to think you hold me so.
For men high-minded deem approval best
That from high-minded souls is freely given.
True love, not gold, is fame's best recompense,
And he's a slave that would reach out for more.
I am content, King Hrothgar, with thy thanks.

LXII.

The King embraced the hero, and declared
His modesty did lustre his renown.

BEOWULF

LXIII.

Now men and women came to cleanse the Hall,
And soon restored its beauty of design.
Its tapestry and gold, its polished wood,
Its ivory, its fine mosaic floor,
And all the splendor of its furniture,
Were made as though the ogre had not lived.

LXIV.

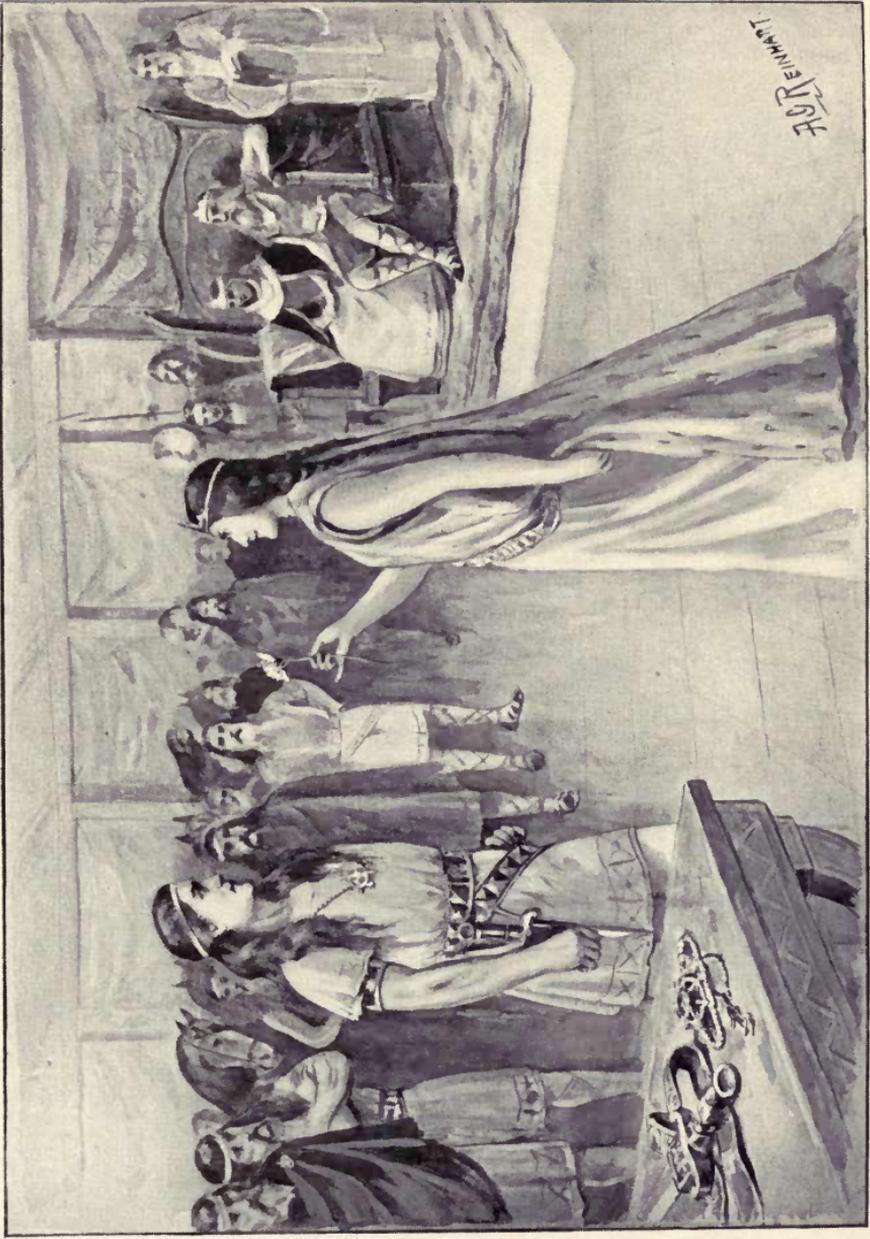
Then Hrothgar gave to Beowulf a flag
With decorated cloth; a coat-of-mail
Inlaid with gold, a fine-wrought silver casque,
A jewelled sword, with belt, and spurs of gold;
Eight earls led in eight horses for the youth,
Luxuriously saddled and bedight.
Then went the King and brought his own war
horse,
The finest steed in England, and gave all
To Beowulf in gratitude of heart.

LXV.

The Queen brought Beowulf a velvet robe,
And fastened round his neck her carcanet
With diamonds more brilliant than the stars.

LXVI.

Then Freaware took Beowulf's great hand,
And tried to speak the fulness of her heart;



THE MERCHANT

FERRARO'S GIFT

GRENDEL

But found that only tears could tell her thanks.
She took a fragrant flower from her breast
And gave to him; and heard his whispered vow
That it was far more precious than all else.

LXVII.

Then all to supper and the mead-cup's mirth.

LXVIII.

When Hrothgar and his court withdrew for
sleep,
The knights and men pushed tables to the wall
And laid their beds upon the polished floor.
Beside them were their good swords and their
shields,
Their helmets and their coats of ringéd mail.
They drank themselves to sleep all armed for
war;
For such the custom of the country was,
That sleeping or awake, in court or field,
The King's men were prepared to fight his
wars.

BOOK IV.

THE SWAMP-HAG



THE SWAMP-HAG

I.



HAT very night when all
were locked in sleep
Except the guards upon
the outer wall,
Came Grendel's horrid
mother from the lake,
The Swamp-Hag, far
more hideous than he.

She climbed the wall as he had often done
And tore his arm away to take it home.
A soldier, seeing, struck her with his bill —
She seized him and made speed unto the mere.

II.

When morning came they told the King his
woes
Were not yet spent. Then called he Beowulf
And unto him described the new-found ills.
With tears he said a soldier whom he loved
Had been destroyed by Grendel's vengeful dam.
Oh, now, bold Prince, we look once more to thee.

BEOWULF

The Swamp-Hag's haunt as yet thou knowest
not,
But if thou wilt combat her in the lake,
And take revenge for our fond guardsman slain,
And God will give thee strength to kill her there,
Our daughter thou shalt wed, and wear our
crown!

III.

My King, said Beowulf, Grieve not afresh;
'T is better to avenge than mourn his death.
Death comes to all. Who can achieve renown
Through consecration to the common weal
Ere death do come, gains best memorial.
Rouse thee from sorrow's stupor, gallant King.
Let me explore the way to Grendel's dam;
I vow to track her in the bowelled earth,
The haunted wood, or ocean's lowest depth;—
Go where it will, this thing I shall pursue.

IV.

Then rode the King and Beowulf abroad,
With mounted earls and men on foot behind.
The Swamp-Hag's tracks were easily discerned.
They followed her through haunted paths, steep
banks,
And narrow gulleys where the nickers dwell.

THE SWAMP-HAG

At last they pushed their way into a wood
Where drooping trees o'erhung the grizzled rock,
And nature seemed to languish in decay.
Here in the midst of all stood Grendel's lake,
A dreary pool all turbulent and red.
The warriors now shrank with fear to see
Upon the bank their last-night's comrade's head.
The bugler blew a note upon his horn
That made the gruesome haunters of the pool
Disport themselves in gambols on the banks.
Great sea-snakes swam upon the water's edge,
While on the jutting scaurs the nickers lay.
Green dragons and weird beasts abounded there,
Which angry grew to be invaded thus.
One wing'd and hornéd thing that sought the
 wave
Received a shaft from Beowulf's strong bow
That sent him to a spiteful, roaring death.
The men threw ropes around the goblin's head
And hauled the beast ashore in great amaze.

V.

The champion was dressed complete in steel —
In gilded byrnie to protect his breast,
And silver helmet wonderfully wrought.
But Hrothgar, in this moment of his need,

BEOWULF

Gave unto him a sword of mystery —
A sword named Hrunting, oldest of heirlooms.
No man that ever drew it met defeat.
Its blade was rusted now with battle-gore,
And Hunferth was the last to use it so,
Who now, though bold, durst offer not himself.
In superhuman perils Hunferth quailed.
Not so brave Beowulf, who bade farewell
To King and comrades, and plunged in the lake.

VI.

Far down he swam past huge, malicious beasts
That struck their fangs at him and met his
sword.

But soon the Swamp-Hag saw the hero dive
Into her waste domain, and flew at him.
She struck her talons in his body-sark —
His ring-mail saved his flesh from her attack.
But down she drew him to the rocky depths,
All compassed he with water-fiends the while,
And in her subterranean abode
The Sea-Wolf thrust him for her next repast.

VII.

The brave adventurer perceived himself
In an abysmal hall; no water there,



In the Nickers' Mere

THE SWAMP-HAG

Nor flood to touch him, and a shining light
Illuminated all the rocky cave.
The Swamp-Hag came upon him and he struck
The mystic sword against her brazen throat ;
But his discomfiture was great indeed
When it rebounded back without a wound.
The boasted sword had failed his hour of need,
And far he flung it from his hand in wrath.
Now, mindful of his fame, he trembled not,
But trusting to his wondrous grip of hand
He seized the Swamp-Hag in his mighty clasp
And sought to overcome her in her den.

VIII.

His strength had been enfeebled in the lake
By battling with the scaly monsters there,
And now he found he could not long maintain
His prowess, but fell back upon the floor.
The Swamp-Hag bit his body-sark in vain,
Then seized his banished weapon in her claw
And sought to thrust it through his silver casque.
But now, in part restored, he gained his feet,
And seeing midst a heap of arms a blade
That seemed to flash miraculous with light,
He gripped its heavy hilt with stalwart hands
And pierced the Swamp-Hag to her very heart
She fell in death, and Beowulf prevailed!

BEOWULF

IX.

The hero breathed until his strength came back,
Then looked about the rock-bound cave until
He found dead Grendel's body on the floor.
He seized the magic sword, the flashing sword,
And hewed the head of Grendel from the trunk
Until the demon's blood flowed through the cave,
And reaching water rose unto the top.
This made the King and all his guard believe
The gory stream was Beowulf's, and he
The Swamp-Hag's victim had become that day.
And so, with many tears and deep-drawn sighs
The cavalcade rode back to Harot Hall
To tell how Beowulf at last had died
In valiant combat with their country's foe.

X.

The blood from Grendel was so steaming hot
It melted to the hilt the magic blade;
So finding Hunferth's sword once more, the
knight
Secured it in his belt and swam aloft,
With Grendel's head for trophy of his deeds.

XI.

He reached the shore deserted by his friends,
Then wound a call on his reboant horn

THE SWAMP-HAG

That brought six huntsmen to the water's edge,
Who much rejoiced to find him there alive.
On spear and shield they laid the ogre's head,
And bore it as a present to the King.

XII.

The King was sad at dinner with his thanes
When came the grim procession with the head.
The noble men and women stood aghast
To see the monster indescribable
Borne suddenly into the Banquet Hall.
But when the mourned-for Beowulf appeared
Their shout of joy quick made the rafters ring,
And Hrothgar bade all hail the Prince restored!

XIII.

King Hrothgar! Thus spake Beowulf the
Prince;
Not easily did I come off with life.
But for God's love, most surely had I died.
I could not harm the beast with Hunferth's
sword,
But from the wall a blade of wondrous size
And flashing light I seized and did the deed,
And killed the hateful tenant of the mere.
The hilt of that great sword I hand you now
To keep among the trophies of thy realm.

BEOWULF

XIV.

The King enfolded him upon his heart
And wept as though restored unto a son.
Thy recompense, brave Beowulf, thy wish,
Though in the softest whisper to our ear,
Encompassing, perchance, the crown itself,
We will fulfil it and bethink ourself
Indebted still unto thy noble deeds.
Bespeak thy wish, I pray thee, Beowulf!

XV.

Then Beowulf looked round upon the court
And stayed his eye on lovely Freaware.
The maiden blushed and hung her golden head
And felt her heart beat double fast within.

XVI.

Oh, King! cried Beowulf, with trembling voice,
Through all my years of conscious thought and
strength,
In school-room, or at play, or in the chase
When flying stag enticed us far from home,
Or in those games where honor was the prize,
Or fighting for my country in the wars,
Or battling with repulsive, horrid foes
That sap the nation's strength if unrestrained;
In each and every pastime of my life

THE SWAMP-HAG

The overwhelming passion of my soul
Has been my love for gentle Freaware!
Her smile has been the spur to every deed;
Her love will be the crown of all my work.
If I at last stand worthy of this prize,
Bestow thy daughter's hand upon her knight!

XVII.

With flowing tears King Hrothgar's eyes were
filled.

My little maid, I bid thee come! he said.
Then came she to him with slow-measured step
Until he put her hand in Beowulf's.

XVIII.

My daughter and my son — all hail! he cried.
And all the court did hail the loving pair.

XIX.

The maid looked bashfully upon her knight,
And he with fond emotion gazed on her.
His eyes were bright with sacred passion's fire.
He folded her upon his breast and told
His love in words that burnt into her heart.
Once more the court acclaimed them with a
shout,
And Hrothgar vowed their marriage to perform
This very day. And all again cried, Hail!

BEOWULF

XX.

The Princess, with her mother and her maids,
Withdrew, the royal nuptials to prepare ;
While Beowulf betook himself away
To don the bright apparel of a groom.
The courtiers, too, put on their best attire,
And expectation set the Hall agape.

XXI.

The King's best earl with sword of state appears,
Surrounded by the gallants of the court,
And usher in with many stately bows
The King and Queen, who sit upon the throne.
Then comes a noble man of ancient years,
The wisest in the kingdom and the best,
Who had not scorned to learn from Beowulf
The revelations of a better faith
As from the Spirit of the Truth it came
That day to him, deep in the forest path.
This thane, Helifric, deep obeisance made,
And stood in sable robe beside the throne.

XXII.

But soon the heralds shout, the trumpets sound,
The haut-boys play, the drum gives martial roll,
The melody of music fills the air ;

THE SWAMP-HAG

The people press upon the space reserved ; —
And now at last the royal pair are come.

XXIII.

A gallant man is Beowulf, in garb
Of shining satin and resplendent gold.
But she beside him in white velvet dressed,
With jewelled hair and eyes of tender blue,
Is fairer than all women of the earth.

XXIV.

The venerable thane, Helferic, now
Advances, and the two clasp hands and kneel,
And plight their troth, and vow before the Lord
To cherish one another until death ;
To love no other, but in passion true
To cleave unto this marriage to the end.

XXV.

Helferic then declared them man and wife,
The King and Queen embraced them with
much love,
The courtiers kissed their hands and wished
them joy.
The people passed the shout beyond the walls
And all the countryside acclaimed their troth.

BEOWULF

XXVI.

What need their nuptial bliss to amplify?
Love unconfessed is grievance on the soul, —
A sad sweet sorrow and a pensive joy.
But when the yearning heart hath told its tale,
Love gives a sweeter atmosphere to life
As floating perfume to the Southern sea.
Earth hides her beauty from unloving eyes,
But Love doth limn his moods on nature's face.
They strolled beneath the ancient linden tree —
Five hundred years of rings within its bole —
While feathered warblers thrilled the vibrant
 world
And summer tarried to enlarge their joy.

XXVII.

As time sped on, the King and Queen expired
And passed beyond the sorrows of this life.
Their calm endurance of adversity,
Their patient living of a righteous life,
Their deep solicitude for others' weal,
Their freedom from the arrogance of rank,
Their love of justice as a social force,
Their character for all that virtue makes,
Had won the nation's most profound esteem.
And in their death they were profoundly wept.

THE SWAMP-HAG

XXVIII.

But when the time of mourning had gone by,
King Beowulf and lovely Freaware
Were crowned in regal state at Harot Hall.
Helferic placed the crowns upon their brows,
And told them that the people did consent
To delegate into their hands through life
All power and dominion under God.
Their little children came into the court, —
The pledges of a happy married love, —
In wide-eyed wonder to behold the scene.
And when the coronation act was o'er,
And King and Queen together stood alone,
The King embraced his beauteous Freaware
And told her she grew dearer every day,
Developing new grace of womanhood,
Of motherhood and wifehood all the time,
Until she was the paragon of queens.

XXIX.

And so they lived and ruled, and blessed the
earth
By living close to nature's heart and God's.
King Beowulf assembled to his court
Good men approved in thought and deed and
life

BEOWULF

From every section of his broad domain.
When they had gathered in his council hall
He called them a free Parliament, sent here
To make wise laws and guard the people's
rights.

He told them what he thought they should
enact

And swore to sign the bills he had described;
And if they knew of other laws desired
To help the people and improve the state,
To keep the public peace though Heaven fall,
To guard their heritage of liberty,
Forbid a future tyrant to oppress,
Or stay a cruel subject from revenge, —
They must enact them, and their King would
sign.

XXX.

The people from their idols turned away,
And drew from Beowulf a truer faith.
He taught them free salvation came from God,
That every mortal was a child of God;
That life eternal and the way to it
Belonged to all and never to a few.
Each heart must breathe its prayer to God direct,
And never lean for succor on a man.
No other men must look into their thoughts,

THE SWAMP-HAG

Nor rules prescribe to lift them to the skies.
Each soul should be its own interpreter
And yield obedience to God alone.
His wisest men he sent abroad to teach
The spirit of religion undefiled ;
But charged them no authority to claim
O'er mind or conscience, and to speak no threat.
Where all was love no error could creep in.
No bigot ever nursed his dogma there
To save himself and damn his fellow-men.
Nor creed nor doctrine reached the public ear
Except the love of God to life supreme.
Each man to God, and God unto each man —
No interloper dared to come between,
Nor King nor prophet in that land e'er broke
The sacred counsel of a soul with God.
This was the spirit of the truth divine
Which Beowulf had gathered in the wood.
It made his people free and happy men,
And gave the King a larger love from them.

XXXI.

The poor who feel the biting tooth of want
Were given room to win their part in life.

XXXII.

No man might ask for service in the state ;
The state, because of merit, sought the man.

BEOWULF

There is no trust so high in all the world
As human government; and Beowulf
Looked far and near for honest men and true,
Who wise in council, valiant on the field,
And ripe in knowledge of the world's affairs,
Were fit to make the state perdurable.

XXXIII.

His army he kept trained for war's demands,
And many ships at anchor in the bay;
But only to enforce the peace, he said.
For war in conquest or vainglory fought
He deemed a brutal and atrocious thing
And bound to stir in men the lust of beasts.
But in the last extremity of wrong
There is no more exalted end than war.
He said the mind should be enriched to plead
For justice, and the heart made soft to grant.
A nation must prevail that dares to stand
And ask for what is right with sword insheathed,
Most patient when it knows itself most strong,
Most peaceful when for war 't is best prepared,
Enduring bluff denials and rude slights,
Till much ingemination of its plea
Compels the stubborn tyrant to amend
His harsh oppression of the weak or poor.

THE SWAMP-HAG

This was his policy toward other kings,
Until they came to know that when a cause
Did gain his favor they would quick agree
Lest he should press relentless for the right.

XXXIV.

And so his people learned from Beowulf
The blessings of a strong and righteous reign.



BOOK V.

THE FIRE-DRAGON



THE FIRE-DRAGON

I.



O time sped on until great
Beowulf

In joy of love had come to
fifty years.

All dangers in the state he
thought were past.

But so unsure are life and
dignity

That turmoil springs where peace seemed most
secure —

Like deep-toned thunder in the tranquil sky.

II.

A race of sea-kings, long ago forgot,
Had found a harbor on the English coast,
And gathered in a cave a common store
Of precious trophies from their pirate fleet.
When death at last had claimed them one by
one,

Their solitary chieftain mournful stood
Beholding wealth to buy a kingdom's crown,

BEOWULF

Yet hapless he for solace of true friend.
In youth he 'd fled from home in search of gold,
Resigning all that truly blessed his life,
And now he had it to his utmost bent !
But in the awful plenitude of wealth
There was nor human sympathy nor love.
And so he cursed, and laughed a hollow laugh,
Declared himself a fool, and straightway died.

III.

The Flying-Dragon, pest of twilight, came,
And for a score of winters kept the hoard ; —
While undisturbed, without disturbing, dwelt.

IV.

At last, a culprit, to avoid the lash,
Escaped and fled into the far-off hills.
Keen hunger led him deep into a cave
Where he, enravished, gazed upon the hoard
Of gold, and sparkling jewels, and bright arms.
With gloating eyes he seized a golden cup
And with it thought his master to appease.
But when he turned to go his blood was chilled,
Beholding the Fire-Dragon fast asleep.
Full fifty feet in length the monster lay
With wings and legs equipped for any speed.

THE FIRE-DRAGON

Its panting nostrils shot a breath of flame
That burnt the earth and lighted up the cave.
The churl, affrighted, sped him from the lair,
And to his master brought the wondrous tale,
And proved it with the cup of shining gold.

V.

The Dragon woke and scented human theft,
And roared until the country heard his wrath.
Against the darkened sky in green and fire
The monster winged his swift, revengeful flight,
And burned their houses with his flaming breath,
Till far and near destruction marked his path,
And devastation ravaged every home.
The hateful pest laid towns in smoking waste.
All night he wrought in ruin through the land,
And at the dawn his mountain hole regained,
Believing, in the fastness of the hills,
No foe could track him to his punishment.

VI.

One fateful night the palace of the King,
The noble Hall of Harot, caught the fire.
Imperishable was the building thought —
The splendid house should stand a thousand
years!

BEOWULF

Yet morning came and found it quite destroyed —
The castle and its walls were gone in smoke.

VII.

When falls calamity on happy men
'T is God's sure way of spurring them to work.

VIII.

The King looked on and saw his castle fall,
While rage and sorrow mingled in his heart;
And when 't was done he made an instant oath
To go and fight the Fire-Drake in his den.

IX.

No champion had yet vouchsafed this quest,
And while the people feared to see their King
In jeopardy once more from mortal strife,
They felt that he alone could now prevail
Against this new destroyer of their peace;
And with a tearful hope they cried, Godspeed!

X.

He bade them make a war-shield of wrought
iron —
For toughest oak the Dragon's breath would
burn —
And when they brought it 't was a masterpiece,

THE FINE DRAGON

So beautiful they were the cars it
For Eowyn the old ones stayed within
And carved about the rougher world with ease,
Until the people shared their delights.

XI

They told him he should lead an army there,
But this he scorned, and vowed to go alone,
Except twelve men to follow him behind:
A chieftain was the man who was the cap,
And he was chosen but to lead the way.

XII

When all was ready and the King had armed,
He went within to bid his wife adieu,
His eyes the full of agonies for years,
Dust bringing upon her valiant head,
Oh, Eowyn! — she whispered, — Thine, my eyes,
Thine, my and pride and wonder of my life,
Must you now leave me on this deadly day?

XIII

It is the will of God — the King replied,
He hath afflicted but to raise me up,
My dear wife, thy love for me hath been
Unbroken in endurance and respect,
Thy tenderness through all our married years

BEOWULF

Comes to me now in overwhelming force,
And bids me ward my life for thy dear sake.
My deeds are thine. Thou art my soul's delight.
Through all my life, dear Freaware, my aim
Hath been to ease the fardels of my folk —
For God requires that men for others live;
And when we bide in dalliance to ourselves
He swift remindeth us there's work to do.
May God protect me in this enterprise
And bring me back to further life with thee.
All honor born of duty in a man
Gains lustre from the love of a good wife.
I know not whence I come nor where I go,
But this I feel to be eternal truth:
I have been trusted with a soul divine
And am resolved its destiny to fend
Until it quits me and returns to God.
No higher fate has man that ever lived
Than to develop his immortal soul
With full compassion for his fellow men.
His life hath then borne fruit for half the world;
And then, when it is done, 't is done, and he —
With fond caress to those whom he loves best,
With everlasting soft and fond good night,
With fainting strength a' groping in the dark,
Yet with a soul undaunted in its hope —

THE FIRE-DRAGON

Speaks brave farewells and speeds among the
stars!

I'll ne'er forget thee, nor forsake thee, dear,
And if I'm not to live, let's ask the Lord
That my last sigh may be upon thy heart.

XIV.

Then Beowulf was gone.

XV.

The King's black horse
In fretting humor champed his silver bit,
And beat his hoof upon the empty air.
The King was soon astride the noble beast,
And bade his little company advance.
Ten thousand people stood to see him go
And shouted forth their hope for victory.
He smiled into their faces and rode forth; —
Twelve knights behind him and a guide in front;
All sheathed in splendid panoply of war; —
And soon was lost upon the winding road.

XVI.

The King called to him Wiglaf, a young earl,
To whom, because he loved him and esteemed
The youth both wise and brave, he since had
given

BEOWULF

A homestead with hereditary rights,
And afterward a seat at council board.
With Wiglaf he spoke gravely of this task,
Of its most difficult and fatal risk,
And told him some deep wishes of his heart
In case the Fire-Drake should at last prevail.
The earl assured the King in truest faith
He would obey his last commands; but hoped
For Beowulf long life and happiness,
And new reward of honor from this fight.

XVII.

The King had much to say about his wife,
And of his children spoke with trembling lip.
He 'd always tried to teach them lofty scorn
Of arrogance, and pride, and every sin
That sinks the mind to feel itself upheld
By brief prosperity above its kind.
He hoped their virtue would adorn the world
For only so the world could be adorned.
If they would bear the good and ill of life
With equal courage and unflinching hearts,
No care would gnaw the conscience of their sire.
He felt great pity, in his boundless love,
For tender childhood, and would have them
know
That if he died, his love could never die.

THE FIRE-DRAGON

XVIII.

They wound their way far up into the hills,
Where stopped the guide and pointed to the cave,
And told the King the Dragon was within.

XIX.

The supernatural encounter now
Blanched white the faces of those fearful men,
Except the King and Wiglaf. All the rest
Made quick excuse to draw them far away
Where they could see but not participate.
The King dismounted and his horse they took.

XX.

Now when the Fire-Drake came not forth to
fight,
Brave Beowulf sent Wiglaf up the cliff
To seek another entrance to the cave.
Then stood the King alone, and on his horn
He wound a note, in bold, defiant wrath,
That echoed through the hills a thousand times.

XXI.

The Fire-Drake heard it as he slept within,
And Beowulf beheld a flame come forth,
And after that the fiery foe himself.

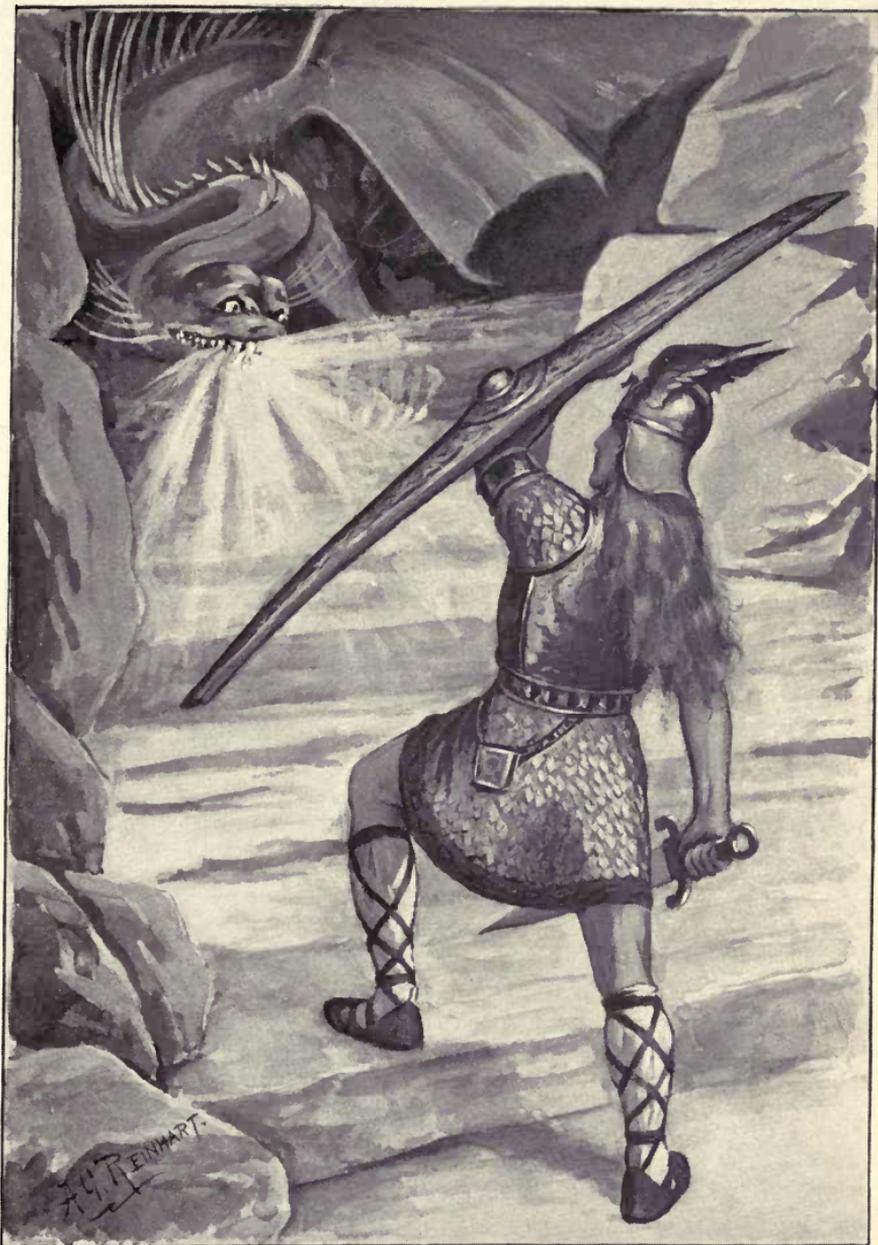


BEOWULF

The King raised up his mighty shield to check
The heat which burnt a path straight to his feet.
The Dragon beat his head against the shield
In rage, while Beowulf did thrust his sword
Into the monster's neck, which turned the point
And would not take a wound from sharpest steel.
Then was the King enveloped in the flame
Until his shield and armor hot were grown.
His daring soul for one brief moment quailed —
He knew his portion now was certain death.
But on the instant he resolved to die,
And die a hero, fighting to the last.
Again he struck the Drake a mighty blow,
Again his sword recoiled without a wound.
He seemed but to enrage his foe the more.
Yet once again a last foudroyant stroke
He dealt the beast, and gained a moment's pause.

XXII.

Now, Wiglaf, while he sought the Dragon's
cave,
Came face to face with the deserting earls, —
Among them Hunferth, still avoiding harm : —
Who told him of the fight that then progressed.
He fierce rebuked them for their backward
march.



The Last Foe

THE FIRE-DRAGON

I do remember when in Harot Hall, —
He said, the King in token of his love
Did give us arms and horses of great worth.
And every earl then swore that if there came
A time of deadly peril like to this,
He'd gladly give his life to save the King.
Confiding in that oath did Beowulf
Choose us from all his court for escort here,
Reserving to his single hand this fight.
Now let us fly to help him in his need
While stands he there encompassed with the fire.
How can we e'er go home without the King?
A quick assault may yet o'erwhelve his foe!
His royal bounty now we can requite.
Not one dare stir? Oh, false and coward
knights!

XXIII.

No man would follow Wiglaf, so alone
He sped the hills to join his valiant lord,
And from the cliff, while running, cried he thus:

XXIV.

Oh, Beowulf, beloved, bear thee well!
Remember, thou in youth were wont to say
That come what would thou'd ne'er let honor go.

BEOWULF

Firm-minded Prince, thou hero strong in deeds,
Ward well thy life. I come unto thy side!

XXV.

The King heard Wiglaf's shout and bade him
stay

Beyond the reach of the destroying flame.
But now the earl stood close beside his liege,
And when the Dragon came again to fight,
The linden shield of Wiglaf was consumed,
And he took shelter 'neath the King's iron
shield.

Now Beowulf raised up his sword and struck
A giant's blow upon the monster's head.
The sword at last a penetration finds.
The Drake draws off and bears the blade
along

And leaves the King disarmed upon the field.
A moment, and the Dragon comes again,
And sets his teeth upon the King's mailed chest.
Then Wiglaf strikes his sword much lower
down

And deals the Drake a fearful, vital wound.
The injured King a knife draws from his belt
And 'cross the middle cuts the Drake in two,
Who roars and welters, gasps again, and dies.

THE FIRE-DRAGON

XXVI.

Brave Beowulf fell in a heavy swoond.
Then quickly Wiglaf called the recreant earls,
And one of them took horse to tell the court,
While all the rest explored the Dragon's den
And clutched the shining gold with greedy
 hands,
And brought it out to view it in the light,
Where each with gloating eye did guess his
 wealth.

XXVII.

But only Wiglaf held the brave King's head —
With cooling water bathed his bloody face,
Until three hours sped away, and then
The Queen and all the court came there in haste.
The valiant nobles cursed the craven lords,
Compelled them to put down their ravished gold,
Declared the council would attain their blood,
And drove them from the field in deep contempt.

XXVIII.

The lovely Freaware from Wiglaf's arms
Received the precious body of the King,
And called him with a thousand tender words
To come again to life and speak to her.

BEOWULF

Cease not to beat, dear heart of mine, she
cried.

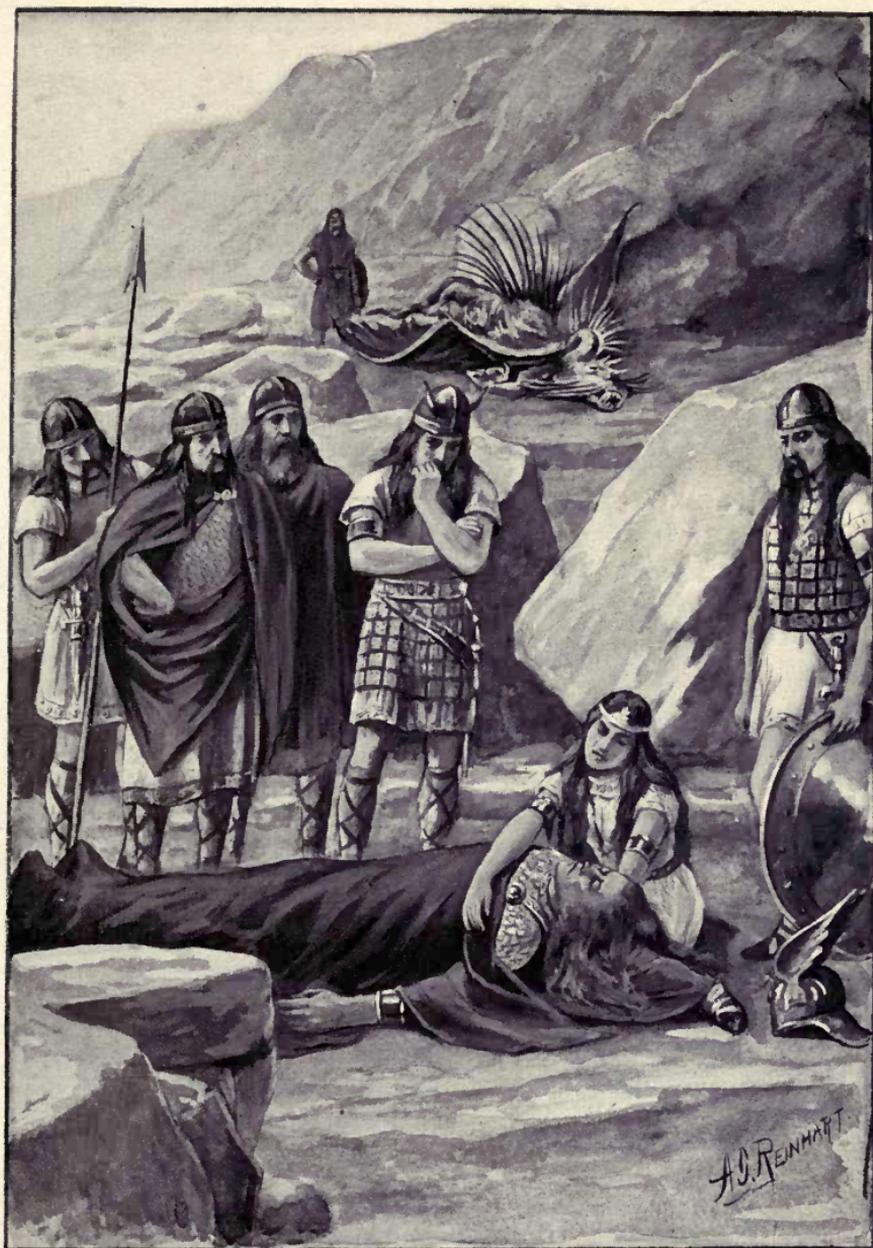
Thou art the sun of my adoring soul, —
All earth a moon that sheds no light but thine.
Put not the fire of love forever out.
Thou wilt not leave my world a wilderness!
And Beowulf afar did hear his wife,
E'en while he seemed to speed among the stars,
And by a mighty effort brought his soul
Once more into his body. Then his eyes,
So great and lustrous, shed their love on her.

XXIX.

It is the will of our almighty God —
He said. Most gracious hath he ever been
To me and to our people, Freaware.
He hath in mercy granted it to me
To save the kingdom from this horrid pest.
When men have strength to fight a nation's
wrongs
'T is sweet to die in killing that which kills.

XXX.

Once more the King fell back in deadly swoon —
Once more he heard that gentle voice, and
spake:



Death of Beowulf

THE FIRE-DRAGON

XXXI.

If I am ne'er to see thy face again,
Dear Freaware, my spirit will return
And hang upon the thin, faint veil of life
So close that thou wilt know I'm by thy side.
And when thy tears fall hot in lonely grief,
I'll hear each tender sob, each whispered word,
And speak thee comfort in a voice so soft
That it will seem but Heaven's gentlest sigh,
Yet thou wilt know it for my very soul,
And it will fill thy heart at last with peace.
Death is not fearful when he comes like this.
He only opes the door to richer life,
But not to sweeter life till you do come!
Dear wife, good night. I'll watch for thee and
wait.

XXXII.

A marble whiteness came upon his brow.
The Queen gazed deep into his fading eyes
And cherished him until his soul was gone;
Then laid him down. Brave Beowulf was dead.

XXXIII.

They pushed the Dragon o'er the jutting cliff,
And saw the sea engulf the bloody thing.

BEOWULF

XXXIV.

They took Ongentheow, the King's first born,
And girded on his thigh his father's sword,
And, with a grief suppressed, did hail him King.

XXXV.

The court resolved to use the Dragon's wealth
To build a monument to Beowulf,
And to restore his ruined Harot Hall.
Then, while his body lay in Kingly state,
They built upon the cliff a mighty tower,
And hung his arms and trophies on its walls.
And every night on top they burned a fire
That warned the sailors off the deadly rocks,
Till Beowulf's fire-tower blessed the world.

XXXVI.

Then all the nobles, mounted on their steeds,
And dressed in shining byrnie and war-sarks,
Around the monument, with stately pace,
Pursued their way and told his valiant deeds.
They said he was the mildest mannered man,
Most loving in his home, most firm in state,
The purest in his heart, most wise in speech,
Most fearless in the time of greatest risk,
The best deserving of a lasting fame,

THE FIRE-DRAGON

And worthy always of enduring praise.
He spurred the thought and action of his time,
And made his land a safer, wiser world.

XXXVII.

Then, when they did remember how their King
Had floated to them from the boundless sea,
When he, a babe, had come in helpless state,
Unknown, from out the mist, in that frail boat,
They brought the boat and all that it contained
From its most careful custody of years,
And laid the King once more within the bark.
Then all the people gathered on the shore
And saw it drift far off into the sea.

A
WARWICK NIGHTINGALE



A WARWICK NIGHTINGALE

IN Warwick on the bridge one summer night
I heard the Avon river, soft and low,
From Stratford with a mystic murmur flow.
Close stood the feudal castle in its might,
And ancient elms outran its magic height.
Through cloud and trees the moon's fantastic
glow
Fell sparkling on the purling stream below,
My homeward thoughts beguiling with its light.
In fancy's vision ghostly shapes sped by
Of valiant knights pent up in shining mail.
But list, oh, list! That song against the sky,
Its quick notes rising, bade all nature hail.
O! bird of passion, bird of love's lorn sigh,
Thou king of song, thou lordly nightingale!

OLIVER CROMWELL



OLIVER CROMWELL

His Three Hundredth Birthday

April 25, 1599-1899

GREAT Cromwell, son of battle thunder, live!
Thy privilege fears not prerogative.
With clearer view the Titan strife we see
When England's truth fought England's chivalry.
You chose a hero's life of storm and rage,
That nations might be free in every age;
Before the King the Roundhead hosts all yield
Until you flash across the reeking field.
Like stubble to your sword the foe goes down;
You strike at error perched upon the crown,
Till right divine, affrighted, flies afar
And leaves you there, a mighty conqueror.
With tender feeling and compassion true,
You give the race its jeopard rights anew;
Then conscience from dogmatic creed stands free,

OLIVER CROMWELL

And England grows in strength o'er land and
sea.

Inspired by you, she speeds her steel-sheathed
ark

To carry light into remotest dark;
And now, before the Lord of Hosts, expands
Your heritage throughout a hundred lands.

