

mother. She slays *Æschere*, a trusty thegn of *Hrothgar*. Then *Beowulf* descends into her sea-cave and slays her also; feasts in triumph with *Hrothgar*, and returns to his own land. The second part of the poem opens fifty years later. *Beowulf* is now king; his land is happy under his rule. But his fate is at hand. A fire-drake, who guards a treasure, is robbed and comes from his den to harry and burn the country. The gray-haired king goes forth to fight his last fight, slays the dragon, but dies of its fiery breath, and the poem closes with the tale of his burial, burned on a lofty pyre on the top of *Hronesnæs*.

Its social interest lies in what it tells us of the manners and customs of our forefathers before they came to England. Their mode of life in peace and war is described; their ships, their towns, the scenery in which they lived, their feasts, amusements—we have the account of a whole day from morning to night—the close union between the chieftain and his war-brothers; their women and the reverence given them; the way in which they faced death, in which they sang, in which they gave gifts and rewards. The story is told with Homeric directness and simplicity, but not with Homeric rapidity. A deep fatalism broods over it. "*Wyrd* (the fate-goddess) goes ever as it must," *Beowulf* says, when he thinks he may be torn to pieces by *Grendel*. "It shall be," he cries when he goes to fight the dragon, "for us in the fight as *Wyrd* shall foresee." But a daring spirit fills the fatalism. "Let him who can," he says, "gain honour