

hot and poisonous was her blood that the mighty sword which reeked therewith melted and burnt away, all save the hilt. So it wasted like the ice when the sun loosens the frost-chain and unwinds the wave-ropes. Then Beówulf swam upwards with his heavy burden, the sea-woman's head and the sword-hilt, and having reached the shore he saw the lake dry up. By its hair he carried the woman's head, awful and glaring, to the mead-hall, and showed the wondering Danes the golden sword-hilt wrought in fashion as a snake, and marked with Runic characters wherein the history of its forging was set forth. Beówulf said, 'God and my strong hand prospered me and gave me victory. Yea, in my strength I have wrested away the sword wherewith the giants before the Flood defied the Eternal God! I have overcome the enemies of God, who have battled with Him unsubdued for countless years! Wherefore fear not, King Hrothgár, for thou and thine rest sleep secure in Heorot which I have cleansed.'

The wise and hoary king, the mingled-haired, gazed long in silence on the sword-hilt, reading of the wondrous smiths that made it after the fall of the devils. Then he spake gently, 'O my friend Beówulf, great is thy glory and uplifted high, and wondrous are the ways of God who through the wisdom of His great mind distributeth so much strength to one man, making him a refuge-city for the peoples. But suffer a kindly word of counsel, dear warrior. When all things are subject to a man, when the world turneth at his will, he forgetteth that the flower of his strength and his glory are but for a little while before he leave these poor days and fade away forgotten and another come in his place. But the great Shepherd of the Heavens liveth on, and raiseth up and putteth down whom He will. Dear friend, beware of pride, which groweth up and anon beguileth the heart so fast to sleep that the warrior remembereth not how Death will overpower him at the last. So gloried I, when with spear and sword having freed the Hring-Danes from all their enemies under heaven, I built this mead-hall in my pride and reckoned not upon an adversary. But God sent Grendel many years to trouble me, till my pride was humbled, and He brought me a deliverer in thee. Wherefore I give Him thanks and pray thee to be-like-minded, to bear thine honours meekly, and to choose eternal

gains. Go now with gladness to the feast, and to-morrow we will give forth treasure, the dear meed of warriors.'

Great joy was there in many-windowed Heorot, and when Night covered the land with her dusky helmet the warriors laid them down in peace and slept beneath the lofty arches, various with gold: no foe came near the noble dwelling-place; for Heorot was fully purged.

After that, when Beówulf would make ready his vessel to cross the sea again to his kinsman Hygelác, lord of the Geáts, King Hrothgár loaded him with a multitude of gifts of gold and rings and battle-harness, and made a treaty with him that there should be peace for ever betwixt the Gar-Danes and the Geáts, and that the treasures of both peoples should be held in common. So Beówulf and his companions entered their sharp-keeled ship and sailed to their home across the wide sea-plain, the sea-gull's path. Hygelác welcomed him returning spoil-laden from the game of war, and Beówulf shared his treasures with his friends and kinsfolk. Yet was it for a long time a shame and reproach to the Geáts that they held the might and courage of Beówulf in but little esteem, neither made they him a ruler or a chief among them. During many years the son of Ecgtheow grew old in good and quiet deeds; for he, the fierce in war, was gentle of mind, and meekly held the might and strength wherewith he was endued of God. But the Swedes came up to battle against the Geáts, and in his time of need Hygelác went to his treasure-house and brought forth Nagling, the wound-hardened sword, old and grey-spotted, of Hrethel, Beówulf's grandfather, and gave it to the strong Wægmunding, and made him captain over seven thousand warriors and gave him a royal seat. So Beówulf went to battle and drave out the enemy. But Hygelác fell in the war-tumult. Thereby the broad kingdom came by inheritance into Beówulf's hand; and he was made king, and held it fifty years with a strong arm against all foes, ruling wisely as a prudent guardian of his people.

Now, in those days, a terrible flaming dragon began to rule in the dark nights, a fire-drake which long had abode in the cavern of a rocky cliff hard by the sea, along a difficult and stony path unknown to men. All his cavern