

men, a helpless prey, but passed Hrothgár by. God set his finger on the king that the Jötun should not harm him. Hrothgár grew wearied that he was spared while his dear friends were taken; and when men came to him for counsel, he, the wise counsellor, had none to give but sat in silence, his head bowed in sorrow on his hands. Vainly the people prayed in the tabernacles to their idols that they would send a spirit-slayer down to save them.

Away to the westward among the people of the Geáts lived a man, strongest of his race, tall, mighty-handed, and clean made. He was a thane, kinsman to Hygelác the Geátish chief, and nobly born, being son of Ecgtheow the Wægmunding, a war-prince who wedded with the daughter of Hrethel the Geát. This man heard of Grendel's deeds, of Hrothgár's sorrow, and the sore distress of the Danes, and having sought out fifteen warriors, he entered into a new-pitched ship to seek the war-king across the sea. Bird-like the vessel's swan-necked prow breasted the white sea-foam till the warriors reached the windy walls of cliff and the steep mountains of the Danish shores. They thanked God because the wave-ways had been easy to them; then, sea-wearied, lashed their wide-bosomed ship to an anchorage, donned their war-weeds, and came to Heorot, the gold and jewelled house. Brightly gleamed their armour, and merrily sang the ring-iron of their trappings as they marched into the palace; and having leaned their ample shields against the wall, and piled their ashen javelins, steel-headed, in a heap, they came to where sat Hrothgár, old and bald, among his earls. Hrothgár looked upon the Geátish warriors, chief of whom Hygelác's servant, the mighty son of Ecgtheow, towered tall above the rest, god-like in his shining armour and the dazzling war-net of mail woven by the armourer. Seeing him, Hrothgár knew that the son of Ecgtheow was Beowulf, raised up of God to be a champion against Grendel the evil spirit,—Beowulf the mighty-handed one, in the gripe of whose fingers was the strength of thirty men. And while wonderingly he gave him welcome, Beowulf spake, 'Hail, O King Hrothgár! Alone and at night I have fought with evil-beings, both Jötuns and Nicors, and have overcome; and now, in order to deliver the bright Danes from their peril, have I sailed across the sea

to undertake battle with Grendel the Ogre. And since no weapon may avail to wound the flinty-hidden fiend, I will lay by my sword and shield, and empty-handed go to meet him. I will grapple with him, strength against strength, till God shall doom whether of us two Death taketh. If I should be bereft of life, send back to Hygelác the war-shroud which Wayland forged to guard my breast, but make no corpse-feast for me: bury my body, and mark its resting place; but let the passer-by eat without mourning; fate goeth ever as it must.'

Hrothgár answered, 'Well know I, O my friend Beowulf, of your bravery, and the might that dwelleth in your fingers! But very terrible is Grendel. Full oft my hardy warriors fierce over the ale-cup at night, have promised to await the Ogre with the terror of their swords and dare his wrath; but as oft at morning-tide the benched floor of the palace has reeked with their blood. But since your mind is valiant, sit down with us to our evening feast, where by old custom we incite each other to a brave and careless mind before night set in, and Grendel come to choose his prey.'

Then were the benches cleared and Beowulf and the Geáts sate in the mead-hall at the banquet with the Danes. Freely flowed the bright sweet liquor from the twisted ale-cup borne by the cup-bearer in his office, whilst the Skald sang of old deeds of valour.

Then said Beowulf, 'Full many a man of you hath Grendel made to sleep the sleep of the sword, and now he looketh for no battle from your hands. But I, a Geát, who in the old time have slain strange shapes of horror in the air or deep down underneath the waves, will encounter him, and alone; unarmed, I will guard this mead-hall through the night. Alone with the fiend will I await the shining of the morrow's sun on victory, or else sink down into death's darkness fast in the Ogre's grasp. Hrothgár, the old-haired king, took comfort at his steadfast intent, and Wealtheow the Queen, so fair and royally hung with gold, herself bare forth the mead-cup to Beowulf, and greeted him with winsome words as champion of her people. Beowulf took the cup from Wealtheow's hands saying, 'No more shall Grendel prey upon the javelin-bearing Danes till he has felt the might of my fingers.' Happy were the