

you remember that before the poem came to be written down, in the eighth century, the English people had become Christians, and so we find the writer speaking about one true God, and calling Him the Creator and Ruler of the world, as a Christian would do.

But this change in their religion is by no means the only thing that the poem tells us about our English forefathers. It gives us a very clear picture of their life; it tells about their houses, their dress and jewels, their armour, weapons and ways of fighting; their ships; their use of pictures and of music; their customs at feasts and at funerals; the relations between a king or a leader and his followers, and between men and women. It shows us their ways of speaking and of thinking, what they loved and hated, admired and despised. There is a great deal of fighting and adventure in it, a great deal about ships and sailing, and the dangers and mysteries of the sea. It makes clear that the virtues which were held in the highest honour were courage and loyalty.

After all, you see it is quite true to call it an English poem. It began among the forefathers of our English race; it was written down in a language out of which, though it looks foreign to us, grew our English tongue; and it tells of ways of living and thinking that have always been dear to our people, for Englishmen have always been sailors and fighters and adventurers, and we like to think that, as a nation, they have been loyal and brave. The story of Beowulf is the first of those records of "high deeds and honourable thoughts" that are not yet ended, and that make the glory of English literature.

THE STORY.

And now for the story itself: Hrothgar, the king of the Danes, had built close to the sea a banquet-hall, the grandest and most beautiful that had ever been seen, and adorned it richly with gold. This hall was called Heorot, and here the king and his earls feasted, and, when night came, lay down on the benches to sleep. In the marsh-lands near by lived a horrible monster called Grendel, half man and half fiend. Grendel hated the sounds of singing and rejoicing that came from Heorot; so one night, while the Danes were sleeping, he entered the hall and carried off thirty of Hrothgar's men and devoured them. The next night he came again and carried away another thirty, and thus he went on, until no man dared to sleep in Heorot. For twelve years Hrothgar and his people bore the shame and misery of being in the power of this

terrible monster. At last, news of their troubles came to Gotland, in Sweden. The king of this country was Hygelac, and he had a very brave thane named Beowulf, who was marvellously strong and a famous swimmer. Beowulf got leave from the king to go to the help of the Danes, and he and fourteen brave companions sailed over the cold and stormy seas until they reached Denmark. They anchored their ship, which had a gilded figurehead of a boar, and climbed up the cliff, and, as soon as they reached a level place, they gave thanks to God who had brought them safe over the waves. A Danish sentinel challenged them, wondering at their boldness in landing, all armed, in a strange country, and at the grand and noble looks of their leader. When they told him their errand, he led them to within sight of the king's palace, and then rode back to guard the sea-coast. They went on through the stone-paved streets to the palace wall, where they piled up their spears, which were made of steel with ash handles. Then they rested, for they were weary with travelling. A herald went and told the king who they were and why they had come. Hrothgar and his earls welcomed them gladly; but one man was envious and scoffed at Beowulf, calling him a vain boaster. That night there was a great feast in Heorot; place was made for the Gotland men to sit together; they drank ale out of beautiful flagons; the minstrels sang, and everyone rejoiced. Then the queen came in, carrying a cup of mead, which she offered first to the king, and then to the rest of the company in turn. After the feast, Beowulf and his men lay down to sleep on the benches. Then, when all was quiet, Grendel came stealing up from the misty marshes, and seizing upon one of the heroes, tore him limb from limb and devoured him. Next, he seized upon Beowulf himself. Then there was a mighty struggle, so that the great hall rocked; but at last Beowulf tore out one of Grendel's arms, and the fiend fled away to his lair.

There was great triumph and rejoicing, and Hrothgar gave rich gifts to the hero and his friends.

Grendel was dying, but the danger was not over yet. The monster had a mother, yet more terrible than himself, who lived in a cave at the bottom of the sea. The next night she came to Heorot, and carried away Beowulf's favorite companion. To avenge his death, Beowulf pursued the sea-wolf, as she was called, and dived into the sea in all his armour, and carrying a famous sword called Hrunting. The monster grappled with him and carried