



Beowulf

Francis B. Gummere

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LO, praise of the prowess of people-kings of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped, we have heard, and what honor the athelings won! Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes, from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore, awing the earls. Since erst he lay friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him: for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve, till before him the folk, both far and near, who house by the whale-path, heard his mandate, gave him gifts: a good king he! To him an heir was afterward born, a son in his halls, whom heaven sent to favor the folk, feeling their woe that erst they had lacked an earl for leader so long a while; the Lord endowed him, the Wielder of Wonder, with world's renown. Famed was this Beowulf:[1] far flew the boast of him, son of Scyld, in the Scandian lands. So becomes it a youth to quit him well with his father's friends, by fee and gift, that to aid him, aged, in after days, come warriors willing, should war draw nigh, liegemen loyal: by lauded deeds shall an earl have honor in every clan. Forth he fared at the fated moment, sturdy Scyld to the shelter of God. Then they bore him over to ocean's billow, loving clansmen, as late he charged them, while wielded words the winsome Scyld, the leader beloved who long had ruled... . In the roadstead rocked a ring-dight vessel, ice-flecked, outbound, atheling's barge: there laid they down their darling lord on the breast of the boat, the breaker-of-rings,[2] by the mast the mighty one. Many a treasure fetched from far was freighted with him. No ship have I known so nobly dight with weapons of war and weeds of battle, with breastplate and blade: on his bosom lay a heaped hoard that hence should go far o'er the flood with him floating away. No less these loaded the lordly gifts, thanes' huge treasure, than those had done who in former time forth had sent him sole on the seas, a suckling child. High o'er his head they hoist the standard, a gold-wove banner; let billows take him, gave him to ocean. Grave were their spirits, mournful their mood. No man is able to say in sooth, no son of the halls, no hero 'neath heaven,—who harbored that freight! [1] Not, of course, Beowulf the Great, hero of the epic. [2] Kenning for king or chieftain of a comitatus: he breaks off gold from the spiral rings—often worn on the arm—and so rewards his followers.

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