

LITERATURE

TO ACCOMPANY
LONG'S "OUTLINES OF ENGLISH
LITERATURE"

EDITED BY
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AND
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**READINGS IN ENGLISH
LITERATURE**

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BEGINNINGS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

THE TALE OF BEOWULF¹

[Beowulf and the Dragon]

Greeted he then each one of men,
The brave helmet-bearers, for the last time,
His own dear comrades: "I would not the sword bear,
Weapon 'gainst worm,² if I knew how
Upon this monster I might otherwise 5
My boast maintain, as once upon Grendel.
But I there expect hot battle-fire,
Breath and poison: therefore I have on me
Shield and burnie.³ I will not the hill's guard,
The foe, flee from even part of one foot, 10
But at wall it shall be as for us Weird⁴ provides,
Each man's Creator: I am in mind brave,
So that 'gainst the war-flier² from boast I refrain.
Await ye on mountain, clad in your burnies,
Heroes in armor, which one may better, 15
After the contest, from wounds escape
Of both of us. That is not your work,
Nor the might of a man but of me alone,
That he 'gainst the monster his strength should try,
Heroic deeds do. I shall with might 20
The gold obtain, or war shall take off,
Terrible life-bale,⁵ your own sovereign."
Arose then by the rock the warrior fierce

¹ Reprinted from Garnett: *Beowulf*, Ginn and Company, publishers.

² dragon. ³ coat of mail. ⁴ Fate. ⁵ evil, calamity.

Brave under his helmet, his battle-sark¹ bore
'Neath the stone-cliffs, to the strength trusted
Of one man alone ; such is no coward's work.
He saw then by the wall (he who very many,
5 In man's virtues good, of contests survived,
Struggles of battle, when warriors contended)
A stony arch stand, a stream out thence
Break from the mountain ; the burn's² flood was
With battle-fire hot ; might not near the hoard
10 One without burning any while then
Endure the deep for the flame of the dragon.
Let then from his breast, since he was enraged,
The Wedergeats' prince his words go forth,
The strong-hearted stormed : his voice came in,
15 In battle clear-sounding, 'neath the hoar stone.
Strife was stirred up ; the hoard-keeper knew
The voice of a man : there was not more time
Friendship to seek. First there came forth
The breath of the monster out of the rock,
20 Hot battle-sweat ; the earth resounded.
The man 'neath the mountain his shield upraised
'Gainst the terrible demon, the lord of the Geats :
Then was the ring-bowed³ eager in heart
The contest to seek. The sword ere brandished
25 The good war-king, the ancient relic
Sharp in its edges : to each one was
Of those bent on bale dread from the other.
The strong-minded stood against the steep rock,
The prince of friends, when the worm bent
30 Quickly together : he in armor awaited.
Went he then burning advancing in curves,
To his fate hasting ; the shield well protected
In life and in body a lesser while
The mighty chief than his wish sought,

¹ garment, armor.

² brook's.

³ the dragon, with back curved into the shape of a bow.

If he that time, on the first day,
 Was to control, as Weird did not permit him
 Triumph in battle. His hand he uplifted,
 The prince of the Geats, the fearful foe struck
 With the mighty relic, so that the edge softened 5
 Brown on the bone, bit less strongly
 Than the folk-king need of it had,
 Oppressed with the fight. Then was the hill's keeper,
 After the battle-blow, fierce in his mood,
 Threw with death-fire; far and wide spread 10
 The flame of the battle. Of triumphs he boasted not,
 The gold-friend of the Geats: the war-bill¹ failed
 Naked in fight, as it should not,
 Excellent weapon. That was no easy task,
 So that the mighty kinsman of Ecgtheow 15
 The plain of this earth was to forsake,
 Must at the worm's will take up his abode
 Elsewhere than here; so shall every man
 His fleeting life leave. It was not then long
 That the fierce ones again each other met. 20
 The hoard-keeper raged, his breast swelled with breath:
 A second time he suffered distress
 Surrounded by fire, who before ruled his folk.
 Not at all in a band did his companions,
 Children of nobles, him stand around 25
 With warlike virtues, but they to wood went,
 Protected their lives. In one of them welled
 His mind with sorrows; friendship may never
 Be at all put aside by one who thinks well.

.
 He might not then refrain, his hand seized the shield, 30
 The yellow wood, he drew his old sword:

.
 Went he then through the flame, his war-helmet bore
 For help to his lord, spoke a few words:

¹sword.

“Beowulf dear! do thou all well,
As thou in thy youth long ago said'st,
That thou would'st not let for thyself living
Honor e'er cease; now shalt thou, strong in deeds,
5 Firm-minded prince, with all thy might
Thy life protect; I shall assist thee.”
After these words the angry worm came,
The terrible demon, a second time
With fire-waves shining to seek his foes,
10 The hostile men. With flame-billows burned
The shield to the rim: the burnie might not
To the young spear-warrior assistance afford.
But the young hero 'neath the shield of his kinsman
With courage went, when his own was
15 Destroyed by flames.

.
Then I heard say in the folk-king's need
The earl displayed unceasing bravery,
Strength and valor, as was natural to him:
He cared not for his head, but the hand burned
20 Of the brave man, where he helped with his strength,
So that the fell demon he struck somewhat lower,
The hero in armor, that the sword sank in,
Shining and gold-plated, that the fire began
After to lessen. Then still the king
25 His senses possessed, struck with his war-knife,
Cutting and battle-sharp, which he bore on his burnie:
The Weders' defence cut the serpent in two.
The foe they felled, force drove out life,
And they him then both had destroyed,
30 Kindred princes: such should a man be,
A thane¹ in need. That was to the prince
The last of his victories by his own deeds,
Of work in the world. . . .

.
¹ military follower, warrior.

[Of the Burial of Beowulf]

For him then prepared the folk of the Geats
A funeral-pyre on the earth firm,
Hung with helmets, with shields of war,
With burnies bright, as he had begged.
Laid they then in the midst the mighty prince, 5
The mourning warriors their lord beloved.
'Gan they then on the mountain the greatest of pyres
The warriors to kindle: the wood-smoke arose
From the burning pile black, the crackling flame
Mingled with mourning (the wind-roar was still), 10
Until it had broken the house of bone,
Hot in the breast. Sad in their minds
With sorrow they mourned their dear lord's death;
Also a sad song uttered the spouse,
Pained in her breast, grieved in her heart, 15
Mournful she frequently fettered her mind,
So that for her husband's most grievous blows
She wept, the grim fate of his bloody death,
. . . terror of fire
. . . heaven swallowed the smoke. 20
Wrought they there then the folk of the Weders
A mound on the steep, which high was and broad,
For the sea-goers to see from afar,
And they built up within ten days,
The warlike one's beacon; the brightest of flames 25
They girt with a wall, as it most worthily
Very wise men might there devise.
They in the mound placed rings and bright jewels,
All such precious things as before in the hoard
Brave-minded men had taken away. 30
They let the earth hold the treasure of earls,
Gold in the ground, where it still lives
As useless to men as it before was.
Then 'round the mound the battle-brave rode,

Children of nobles (they were twelve in all),
 Their sorrow would tell, grieve for their king,
 Their mourning utter, and about the man speak;
 His earlship they praised, and his noble deeds
 5 They extolled to the courtiers, as it is right
 That one his dear lord in word should praise,
 With soul him love, when he shall forth
 From his own body be severed by death.
 So then lamented the folk of the Geats
 10 The fall of their lord, the hearth-companions,
 Said that he was a mighty king,
 Mildest to men and most tender-hearted,
 To his folk most kind and fondest of praise.

THE SEAFARER¹

PART I

I can sing of myself a true song, of my voyages telling,
 15 How oft through laborious days, through the wearisome
 hours
 I have suffered; have borne tribulations; explored in my ship,
 Mid the terrible rolling of waves, habitations of sorrow.
 Benumbed by the cold, oft the comfortless night-watch hath
 held me
 At the prow of my craft as it tossed about under the cliffs.
 20 My feet were imprisoned with frost, were fettered with ice-
 chains,
 Yet hotly were wailing the querulous sighs round my heart;
 And hunger within me, sea-wearied, made havoc of courage.
 This he, whose lot happily chances on land, doth not know;
 Nor how I on the ice-cold sea passed the winter in exile,
 25 In wretchedness, robbed of my kinsmen, with icicles hung.
 The hail flew in showers about me; and there I heard only

¹ Reprinted from Cook and Tinker, *Translations from Old English Poetry*, Ginn and Company, publishers.

The roar of the sea, ice-cold waves, and the song of the swan;
For pastime the gannets'¹ cry served me; the kittiwakes'²
chatter

For laughter of men; and for mead-drink² the call of the
sea mews.¹

When storms on the rocky cliffs beat, then the terns, icy-
feathered,

Made answer; full oft the sea-eagle forebodingly screamed, 5
The eagle with pinions wave-wet. There none of my kinsmen
Might gladden my desolate soul; of this little he knows
Who possesses the pleasures of life, who has felt in the city
Some hardship, some trifling adversity, proud and wine-
flushed.

How weary I oft had to tarry upon the sea-way! 10
The shadows of night became darker, it snowed from the
north;

The world was enchained by the frost; hail fell upon earth;
'Twas the coldest of grain. Yet the thoughts of my heart
now are throbbing

To test the high streams, the salt waves in tumultuous play.
Desire in my heart ever urges my spirit to wander 15
To seek out the home of the stranger in lands afar off.

There is no one that dwells upon earth, so exalted in mind,
So large in his bounty, nor yet of such vigorous youth,
Nor so daring in deeds, nor to whom his liege lord is so kind,
But that he has always a longing, a sea-faring passion 20
For what the Lord God shall bestow, be it honor or death.
No heart for the harp has he, nor for acceptance of treasure,
No pleasure has he in a wife, no delight in the world,
Nor in aught save the roll of the billows; but always a
longing,

A yearning uneasiness, hastens him on to the sea. 25

The woodlands are captured by blossoms, the hamlets
grow fair,

¹Sea birds. The last two are gulls.

²a fermented drink made from honey.