

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY

When Christianity spread through the Roman empire in the first century A.D., the effect was felt even in far-off Britain. No one knows exactly when the first missionaries arrived, but by A.D. 300 the number of Christians on the island was significant. In 597 Augustine, a monk, landed in Kent, having been sent by Pope Gregory to do missionary work. King Aethelbert of Kent was married to Bertha, a Christian woman who had come to England from France. Bertha evidently had a profound influence on her husband, for when Augustine arrived Aethelbert was quite ready for conversion. He is said to have been baptized in Canterbury in a tiny church called St. Martins, supposedly built during the Roman occupation. Augustine established a monastery there and became the first of many famous Archbishops of Canterbury.

The influence of the Roman Church was felt throughout Britain. The Celtic Christians in the North, however, did not recognize the authority of the Pope. For their leadership these Christians looked west to Ireland, to the home of the learned monks who had converted them to Christianity. Representatives of the Roman and Celtic churches met in 664 at Whitby Abbey, a monastery in Yorkshire, to settle their disputes. The outcome of this conference was that Britain became a province of the Roman Church. The island was unified under one religious system and through this system was joined to the rest of Europe.

THE CHURCH AS A CULTURAL FORCE

Through the influence of the Church, the Anglo-Saxon system of justice was modified and refined. Courts of law superseded the old pagan laws of vengeance and blood feuds. The clergy and nobles began to use written contracts and agreements.

The monasteries were the centers of intellectual, literary, artistic, and social activity in Anglo-Saxon Britain. The monks cared for the poor, sick, friendless, and orphaned and provided a refuge for travelers and scholars. Monastic scholars imported books from the Continent, which were then painstakingly copied by the monks. Original works were written, mostly in scholarly Latin, but with occasional lines and later entire pieces in Old English. Schools were provided, at least occasionally, for the very young. The earliest recorded history of the English people comes from the churchmen at the monasteries. The greatest of these monks was the Venerable Bede (673-735), author of *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. As a historian Bede is regarded as the "father of English history."

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY

When Christianity spread through the Roman empire in the first century A.D., the effect was felt even in far-off Britain. No one knows exactly when the first missionaries arrived, but by A.D. 300 the number of Christians on the island was significant. In 597 Augustine, a monk, landed in Kent, having been sent by Pope Gregory to do missionary work. King Aethelbert of Kent was married to Bertha, a Christian woman who had come to England from France. Bertha evidently had a profound influence on her husband, for when Augustine arrived Aethelbert was quite ready for conversion. He is said to have been baptized in Canterbury in a tiny church called St. Martins, supposedly built during the Roman occupation. Augustine established a monastery there and became the first of many famous Archbishops of Canterbury.

The influence of the Roman Church was felt throughout Britain. The Celtic Christians in the North, however, did not recognize the authority of the Pope. For their leadership these Christians looked west to Ireland, to the home of the learned monks who had converted them to Christianity. Representatives of the Roman and Celtic churches met in 664 at Whitby Abbey, a monastery in Yorkshire, to settle their disputes. The outcome of this conference was that Britain became a province of the Roman Church. The island was unified under one religious system and through this system was joined to the rest of Europe.

THE CHURCH AS A CULTURAL FORCE

Through the influence of the Church, the Anglo-Saxon system of justice was modified and refined. Courts of law superseded the old pagan laws of vengeance and blood feuds. The clergy and nobles began to use written contracts and agreements.

The monasteries were the centers of intellectual, literary, artistic, and social activity in Anglo-Saxon Britain. The monks cared for the poor, sick, friendless, and orphaned and provided a refuge for travelers and scholars. Monastic scholars imported books from the Continent, which were then painstakingly copied by the monks. Original works were written, mostly in scholarly Latin, but with occasional lines and later entire pieces in Old English. Schools were provided, at least occasionally, for the very young. The earliest recorded history of the English people comes from the churchmen at the monasteries. The greatest of these monks was the Venerable Bede (673-735), author of *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. As a historian Bede is regarded as the "father of English history."

THE DANISH INVASIONS AND KING ALFRED

During the late eighth and ninth centuries, Britain was invaded by the warlike Danes, or Vikings. These plundering raiders destroyed monasteries with their precious stores of manuscripts and threatened to obliterate all traces of cultural refinement. After nearly a century of violence, Alfred the Great led a successful campaign against the Danes.

The crisis of invasion temporarily abated, King Alfred sought to raise the level of culture by providing for the establishment of schools and the rebuilding of monasteries. A well educated man, he translated Latin works into English and encouraged others to do the same and to produce original works in English. During Alfred's time, English history was systematically recorded in a series of chronicles, which were the first historical records kept in English. Wise in politics and government, able in war and sensitive to the intellectual and cultural needs of his people, Alfred puts to rest any notion that the so-called "Dark Ages" were lacking "bright stars."

ANGLO-SAXON LITERATURE

Anglo-Saxon literature reflects the somber temperament of these Germanic people and the bleak environment in which they lived. Not much of the imagery of brief English summers appears in this literature; winter prevails, and spring comes slowly, if at all. The Anglo-Saxons were serious minded, and the reader finds little humor in their literature. Life was difficult, and most of the stories and poems of this period present heroic struggles in which only the strong survive.

Oral tradition was the earliest mode of literary expression. The Anglo-Saxons gathered in great "mead halls" where kings and nobles lavishly entertained friends and strangers alike, often to celebrate successful battles or expeditions. The favorite drink was mead, a potent liquor made of fermented honey and water, often with spices, fruit, and malt, which was drunk from beautifully wrought cups and bowls. The scop, a professional singer or minstrel, entertained the company with retellings of stories and poems about the exploits of tribal heroes. The king's warriors and comrades and sometimes the king himself also sang of their own adventures.

Virtually all written literature of the Anglo-Saxon period dates from Christian times. Anglo-Saxon literature, however, is far from uniformly Christian. The oral tradition, reflecting essentially pagan values, endured for many centuries. Heroic epics such as *Beowulf* eventually were synthesized and recorded by unknown Christian writers, yet they celebrate the traditional Anglo-Saxon virtues of

loyalty, courage, and strength and the heroic adventures of early Germanic warriors.

Beowulf represents the most familiar of the Anglo-Saxon poetic forms, the heroic epic. Another form, the elegiac lyric, also recalls the glories of the past. "The Seafarer" is one of the few surviving Anglo-Saxon poems of this type. Also among the remnants of Anglo-Saxon literature are riddles, a kind of folklore that exhibits a delight in sound, rhythm, and imagination.

The poems of monks such as Caedmon and Cynewulf deal with themes and subjects from the Bible and Church tradition, yet they are distinctly Germanic in their fascination with the sea and with heroic deeds. Written in Old English, these poems are similar in imagery, rhythm, and spirit to the literature derived from Anglo-Saxon oral tradition.

Prose developed much later than poetry. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, initiated in the ninth century by King Alfred, and the Old English translation of Bede's *History* are classic examples of Anglo-Saxon prose style. Much of this early prose is a somewhat dull recital of events, year by year, but it is still an invaluable source of information to the historian. Of more interest to the general reader are the writings of Aelfric, many of whose sermons and translations were commissioned by church leaders as a means of teaching Christianity and moral values to the monks. *A Colloquy* provides a unique view of ordinary Anglo-Saxon working people, unlike the aristocratic subjects of traditional Anglo-Saxon poetry.

SUTTON HOO: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL TREASURE

The Prologue to *Beowulf* describes "... jeweled helmets, Hooked swords and ... armor/Carried from the ends of the earth. . . ." These precious ornaments adorn Shild's funeral vessel, a ring-prowed fighting ship that is put out to sea with its "motionless cargo," the body of the king.

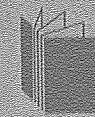
When British archaeologists uncovered an ancient burial mound at Sutton Hoo in 1939, they found such a ship dating from the mid-seventh century A.D., about a century before *Beowulf* was first recorded. The ship measures eighty-six feet long and fourteen feet in the beam. Some six feet longer than any of the later Viking ships yet discovered, it is a large, open, seagoing vessel propelled by thirty-eight oarsmen and steered by a large paddle over the stern.

The burial mound includes objects of the highest quality: magnificent shields, helmets, buckles, and drinking horns, exquisitely decorated purses inlaid with jewels, and many varieties of gold and silver coins. These ornamental "grave goods" might represent things that the dead king would need in his future life, or they might symbolize the nobility of his social position while he lived. The treasures unearthed at Sutton Hoo are the most valuable antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon period ever dug from British soil.

Reading a Time Line. The time line below is divided into one-hundred-year intervals up to the year A.D. 1000. Dates are indicated by triangles and vertical lines. The time line is further divided into two halves: great literary achievements are listed in the top half, and major historical events are listed in the lower half. In this way, literary and historical events are easy to see in relation to one another. Look on the time line to find when *Beowulf* was composed. What major historical events happened in the same century? How soon after Alfred became King of Britain did the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* begin to be written?

TIME LINE

Literature



400

500

600

700

800

900

1000

• Caedmon composes hymn telling glory of creation

• Christian poet composes *Beowulf*

• Bede completes *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in Latin

• Poet Cynewulf writes Old English poems

• Bede's *History* is translated into Old English

• Alfred the Great (849-899) translates Pope Gregory's *History of the World* and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*

• *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* begin to be recorded

• The *Exeter Book*, containing "The Seafarer," copied

History



• German barbarians sack Rome, ending Roman rule in Britain

• Germanic tribes begin conquest of Britain

• St. Augustine arrives in Britain as first Christian missionary

• Muhammad organizes commonwealth of Islam

• Muhammad dies

• Britain becomes province of Roman Church after Synod of Whitby

• Moslems conquer Spain

• Danes first invade Britain, beginning century of raids

• Pope crowns Charlemagne Emperor of the West in Rome

• Vikings invade Britain

• Alfred defeats Danes, ending century of violence

• Alfred becomes King of Britain

• Norsemen under Leif Ericson land in North America

The Development of the English Language

OLD ENGLISH

English is the only truly global language, the mother tongue of more than three hundred million people and the native language of countries that cover one-fifth of the globe. Although Mandarin, the main language of China, is spoken by more people, English is in many ways the dominant medium of communication of the twentieth century. It is the language of international airline pilots, the most frequently studied second language, and the leading language of trade and diplomacy. The vocabulary of English is truly international, for it has incorporated extensive borrowings from other languages.

The Indo-European Base for English

About three-thousand languages are in use today, some spoken by millions of people, others spoken only by a few thousand. English can be traced back to Indo-European, the most prevalent prehistoric language. The name Indo-European suggests the geographic range of this language family, which eventually spread east to India and throughout Europe. Scholars theorize that the Indo-Europeans spoke a single language throughout the New Stone Age but that migrations broke up the unity by the time of the Bronze Age, about 3000 B.C. The distinct languages that evolved gradually from Indo-European included Latin, Greek, and the Germanic languages of Northern Europe.

The Germanic Roots of English

The original inhabitants of Britain spoke a Celtic language, which was a derivative of

Indo-European. Between the first and fourth centuries, during Roman rule of the island, the common people spoke Celtic, while the imperial ruling class spoke Latin. When the Roman legions withdrew in the fifth century, Germanic tribes from the continent invaded, bringing a new language, which supplanted the language of the Celts. Domination by these Germanic tribes was complete, and very few Celtic words were absorbed into the language of the conquerors. The tribes, called Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, spoke a Germanic dialect derived from Indo-European; this dialect became the basis for English. The most powerful tribe, the Angles, gave its name to the language, "Angleish," or English.

Old English in Perspective

The language spoken in England from the beginning of the Germanic invasions in 449 until the Norman Conquest in 1066 is commonly called Old English. It is distinguished from Middle English, which was used from about 1066 until about 1485, and Modern English, which has developed since. These divisions are approximate signposts, for language evolves as constantly as a river flows. Old English is entirely different from Modern English and cannot be understood without considerable study, but similarities are discernible. For example, in Modern English, Mark 12:1 reads, "A certain man planted a vineyard," and in Old English, "Sum monn him plantode wingeard."

The Germanic Heritage

Old English was a remarkably pure Germanic tongue in the early centuries. For the

most part the Anglo-Saxons stubbornly resisted a foreign word when a term existed in their own language, and they formed new words by compounding rather than by borrowing. Old English was also strongly Germanic in grammar. As in modern German words had inflectional endings. Word order was flexible, for the ending of a word, rather than its placement in a sentence, described its grammatical relation to other words. The following literal translation of the Lord's Prayer demonstrates the Germanic traits of Old English:

Fæder ure, þū þe eart on heofonum, si þīn nama gahalgod.
(Father our, thou that art on heavens, be thy name hallowed.)
Tōbecume þīn rice.
(Become thy rich.)
Gewurpe ðīn willa on eorðan swā swā on heofonum.
(Worth thy will on earth so so on heavens.)

The Scandinavian Influence

When the Danes invaded the country in the eighth and ninth centuries the purity of Old English came under assault. Because the Scandinavian tribes were related to the Anglo-Saxons ethnically and linguistically, no fundamental change occurred. However, many new words from the Old Norse language of the Danes, such as *egg*, *dirt*, *sky*, *wrong*, *low*, *take*, *window*, and *get*, were assimilated, along with crucial pronouns such as *they*, *their*, and *them*. While the Scandinavian influence was extensive, contributing not only key nouns, verbs, and pronouns but also phrases, word orders, and irregular verb forms, eventually the newcomers were absorbed into the Anglo-Saxon culture.

The Latin Influence

A more significant contribution to English was made by Latin, the language reintroduced

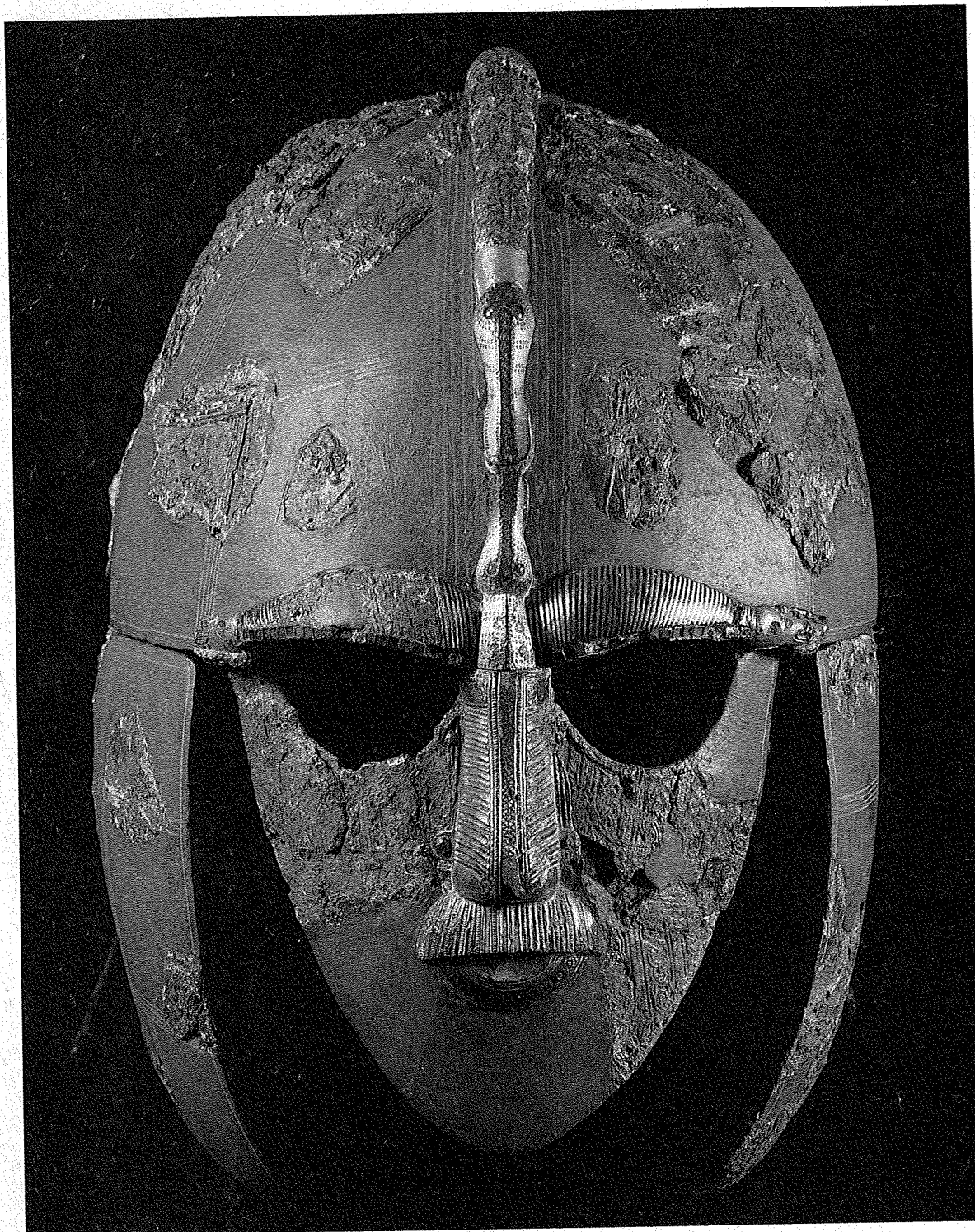
by the missionaries who began to arrive in Britain in 597. After the spread of Christianity, the Latin language of the church played a large part in the legal and intellectual life of the time. Scribes who learned Latin used the Latin alphabet to preserve the literature of the Old English vernacular. Earlier the runic alphabet with its mysterious symbols had been used.

Borrowings from Latin were on a massive scale and included religious words, such as *altar*, *martyr*, *mass*, *priest*, and *angel*, as well as words for education, such as *school*, *grammar*, and *science*. Latin words also were adopted for new items coming into use, as with *sock*, *cap*, and *mat*, as well as for many foods, including *radish*, *beet*, and *pear*.

The Enduring Heritage of Old English

The development of Old English over six centuries was overshadowed by the drastic change that occurred after the Norman Conquest in 1066, when Old English was altered fundamentally and forever. Essentially, though, Old English has not died out, for it still lives at the very heart of the English language, as surely as earlier generations endure in their descendants. Despite changes in pronunciation, Old English words are part of everyday speech. Most of the common, brief words in contemporary English derive directly from Old English, for example, *a*, *the*, *to*, *from*, *out*, *at*, *eye*, *nose*, *cat*, *eat*, *play*, *go*, *house*, *man*, and *woman*. Words related to natural elements and cycles often are rooted in Old English: *morning*, *night*, *rain*, *sun*, *moon*, *year*, *sleep*, *life*, and *death*.

It would be virtually impossible to speak or write in English without using words from Old English. For modern day speakers of English, language establishes their kinship with Beowulf and Hrothgar, with all the peasants, princes, bards, and scribes who lived and spoke and wrote a millenium and more ago.



RECONSTRUCTED HELMET WITH GOLD ORNAMENT. Sutton Hoo.
Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

from *Beowulf* Translated by *Burton Raffel*

The epic *Beowulf* probably was first recorded in the eighth century by English monks. The heroic deeds recalled in the epic, however, supposedly took place during the third or fourth century in the area that is now northern Germany, Denmark, and southern Sweden. The heroes of *Beowulf* are Geats and Danes, tribes that shared a common Germanic heritage and a common heroic tradition with the Anglo-Saxon conquerors of Britain. Through the Anglo-Saxons, *Beowulf*, a distinctly Germanic hero, became the great epic hero of the English people.

Prologue

Hear me! We've heard of Danish heroes,
Ancient kings and the glory they cut
For themselves, swinging mighty swords!
How Shild¹ made slaves of soldiers from every
Land, crowds of captives he'd beaten 5
Into terror; he'd traveled to Denmark alone,
An abandoned child, but changed his own fate,
Lived to be rich and much honored. He ruled
Lands on all sides: wherever the sea
Would take them his soldiers sailed, returned 10
With tribute and obedience. There was a brave
King! And he gave them more than his glory,
Conceived a son for the Danes, a new leader
Allowed them by the grace of God. They had lived,
Before his coming, kingless and miserable; 15
Now the Lord of all life, Ruler
Of glory, blessed them with a prince, Beo,²
Whose power and fame soon spread through the world.
Shild's strong son was the glory of Denmark;
His father's warriors were wound round his heart 20
With golden rings, bound to their prince
By his father's treasure. So young men build
The future, wisely open-handed in peace,
Protected in war; so warriors earn
Their fame, and wealth is shaped with a sword. 25

1. Shild (Scyld): a Danish king who had arrived in Denmark as a child alone in a ship loaded with treasures.
2. Beo (Bā' ō): grandfather of the Danish King, Hrothgar.

When his time was come the old king died,
Still strong but called to the Lord's hands.
His comrades carried him down to the shore,
Bore him as their leader had asked, their lord
And companion, while words could move on his tongue. 30
Shild's reign had been long; he'd ruled them well.
There in the harbor was a ring-prowed fighting
Ship, its timbers icy, waiting,
And there they brought the beloved body
Of their ring-giving lord, and laid him near 35
The mast. Next to that noble corpse
They heaped up treasures, jeweled helmets,
Hooked swords and coats of mail, armor
Carried from the ends of the earth: no ship
Had ever sailed so brightly fitted, 40
No king sent forth more deeply mourned.
Forced to set him adrift, floating
As far as the tide might run, they refused
To give him less from their hoards of gold
Than those who'd shipped him away, an orphan 45
And a beggar, to cross the waves alone.
High up over his head they flew
His shining banner, then sadly let
The water pull at the ship, watched it
Slowly sliding to where neither rulers 50
Nor heroes nor anyone can say whose hands
Opened to take that motionless cargo.

Then Beo was king in that Danish castle,
Shild's son ruling as long as his father
And as loved, a famous lord of men. 55
And he in turn gave his people a son,
The great Healfdane,³ a fierce fighter
Who led the Danes to the end of his long
Life and left them four children,
Three princes to guide them in battle, Hergar 60
And Hrothgar and Halga the Good, and one daughter,
Yrs, who was given to Onela, king
Of the Swedes, and became his wife and their queen.

Then Hrothgar, taking the throne, led 65
The Danes to such glory that comrades and kinsmen
Swore by his sword, and young men swelled
His armies, and he thought of greatness and resolved
To build a hall that would hold his mighty
Band and reach higher toward Heaven than anything

3. Healfdane (hǣ' alf den ə): half Dane. Apparently Hrothgar's mother was a foreigner.

That had ever been known to the sons of men. 70
And in that hall he'd divide the spoils
Of their victories, to old and young what they'd earned
In battle, but leaving the common pastures
Untouched, and taking no lives. The work 75
Was ordered, the timbers tied and shaped
By the hosts that Hrothgar ruled. It was quickly
Ready, that most beautiful of dwellings, built
As he'd wanted, and then he whose word was obeyed
All over the earth named it Herot.⁴ 80
His boast come true he commanded a banquet,
Opened out his treasure-full hands.
That towering place, gabled and huge,
Stood waiting for time to pass, for war
To begin, for flames to leap as high 85
As the feud that would light them, and for Herot to burn.

Grendel

A powerful monster, living down
In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient
As day after day the music rang
Loud in that hall, the harp's rejoicing 5
Call and the poet's clear songs, sung
Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling
The Almighty making the earth, shaping
These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,
Then proudly setting the sun and moon 10
To glow across the land and light it;
The corners of the earth were made lovely with trees
And leaves, made quick with life, with each
Of the nations who now move on its face. And then
As now warriors sang of their pleasure: 15
So Hrothgar's men lived happy in his hall
Till the monster stirred, that demon, that fiend,
Grendel, who haunted the moors,¹ the wild
Marshes, and made his home in a hell
Not hell but earth. He was spawned in that slime, 20
Conceived by a pair of those monsters born

4. Herot (hǣ' ə rot).

1. moors: wasteland.

Of Cain,² murderous creatures banished
 By God, punished forever for the crime
 Of Abel's death. The Almighty drove
 Those demons out, and their exile was bitter,
 Shut away from men; they split
 Into a thousand forms of evil—spirits
 And fiends, goblins, monsters, giants,
 A brood forever opposing the Lord's
 Will, and again and again defeated. . . .
 When darkness had dropped, Grendel
 Went up to Herot, wondering what the warriors
 Would do in that hall when their drinking was done.
 He found them sprawled in sleep, suspecting
 Nothing, their dreams undisturbed. The monster's
 Thoughts were as quick as his greed or his claws:
 He slipped through the door and there in the silence
 Snatched up thirty men, smashed them
 Unknowing in their beds and ran out with their bodies,
 The blood dripping behind him, back
 To his lair, delighted with his night's slaughter.
 At daybreak, with the sun's first light, they saw
 How well he had worked, and in that gray morning
 Broke their long feast with tears and laments
 For the dead. Hrothgar, their lord, sat joyless
 In Herot, a mighty prince mourning
 The fate of his lost friends and companions,
 Knowing by its tracks that some demon had torn
 His followers apart. He wept, fearing
 The beginning might not be the end. And that night
 Grendel came again, so set
 On murder that no crime could ever be enough,
 No savage assault quench his lust
 For evil. Then each warrior tried
 To escape him, searched for rest in different
 Beds, as far from Herot as they could find,
 Seeing how Grendel hunted when they slept.
 Distance was safety; the only survivors
 Were those who fled him. Hate had triumphed.
 So Grendel ruled, fought with the righteous,
 One against many, and won; so Herot
 Stood empty, and stayed deserted for years,
 Twelve winters of grief for Hrothgar, king
 Of the Danes, sorrow heaped at his door

2. **Cain:** son of Adam and Eve. According to the Bible story (Genesis 4), he killed his brother Abel and was cursed by God.

By hell-forged hands. His misery leaped
 The seas, was told and sung in all
 Men's ears: how Grendel's hatred began,
 How the monster relished his savage war
 On the Danes, keeping the bloody feud
 Alive, seeking no peace, offering
 No truce, accepting no settlement, no price
 In gold or land, and paying the living
 For one crime only with another. No one
 Waited for reparation from his plundering claws:
 That shadow of death hunted in the darkness,
 Stalked Hrothgar's warriors, old
 And young, lying in waiting, hidden
 In mist, invisibly following them from the edge
 Of the marsh, always there, unseen.
 So mankind's enemy continued his crimes,
 Killing as often as he could, coming
 Alone, bloodthirsty and horrible. Though he lived
 In Herot, when the night hid him, he never
 Dared to touch king Hrothgar's glorious
 Throne, protected by God—God,
 Whose love Grendel could not know. But Hrothgar's
 Heart was bent. The best and most noble
 Of his council debated remedies, sat
 In secret sessions, talking of terror
 And wondering what the bravest of warriors could do.
 And sometimes they sacrificed to the old stone gods,
 Made heathen vows, hoping for Hell's
 Support, the Devil's guidance in driving
 Their affliction off. That was their way,
 And the heathen's only hope, Hell
 Always in their hearts, knowing neither God
 Nor His passing as He walks through our world, the Lord
 Of Heaven and earth; their ears could not hear
 His praise nor know His glory. Let them
 Beware, those who are thrust into danger,
 Clutched at by trouble, yet can carry no solace
 In their hearts, cannot hope to be better! Hail
 To those who will rise to God, drop off
 Their dead bodies and seek our Father's peace! . . .

So the living sorrow of Healfdane's son
 Simmered, bitter and fresh, and no wisdom
 Or strength could break it: that agony hung
 On king and people alike, harsh
 And unending, violent and cruel, and evil.

In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac's³
 Follower and the strongest of the Geats—greater 110
 And stronger than anyone anywhere in this world—
 Heard how Grendel filled nights with horror
 And quickly commanded a boat fitted out,
 Proclaiming that he'd go to that famous king,
 Would sail across the sea to Hrothgar, 115
 Now when help was needed. None
 Of the wise ones regretted his going, much
 As he was loved by the Geats: the omens were good,
 And they urged the adventure on. So Beowulf
 Chose the mightiest men he could find, 120
 The bravest and best of the Geats, fourteen
 In all, and led them down to their boat;
 He knew the sea, would point the prow
 Straight to that distant Danish shore.

Beowulf

Reaching the rock-steep cliffs of the Danish shore, Beowulf and his men are escorted to Herot, where Beowulf greets the great lord of the Danes.

"Hail, Hrothgar!
 Higlac is my cousin and my king; the days
 Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's
 Name has echoed in our land: sailors
 Have brought us stories of Herot, the best 5
 Of all mead-halls,¹ deserted and useless when the moon
 Hangs in skies the sun had lit,
 Light and life fleeing together.
 My people have said, the wisest, most knowing
 And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes' 10
 Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,
 Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,
 Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove
 Five great giants into chains, chased

3. **Higlac** (hīg' ə lāk): king of the Geats (gā' ats). The Geats were a Scandinavian tribe living on a Danish island and in Sweden.

1. **mead-hall**: The metaphor reflects the idea that the chief purpose of a hall such as Herot was as a place for men to feast in.

All of that race from the earth. I swam 15
 In the blackness of night, hunting monsters
 Out of the ocean, and killing them one
 By one; death was my errand and the fate
 They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called
 Together, and I've come. Grant me, then, 20
 Lord and protector of this noble place,
 A single request! I have come so far,
 Oh shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend,
 That this one favor you should not refuse me—
 That I, alone and with the help of my men, 25
 May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard,
 Too, that the monster's scorn of men
 Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.
 Nor will I. My lord Higlac
 Might think less of me if I let my sword 30
 Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid
 Behind some broad linden shield:² my hands
 Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life
 Against the monster. God must decide
 Who will be given to death's cold grip. 35
 Grendel's plan, I think, will be
 What it has been before, to invade this hall
 And gorge his belly with our bodies. If he can,
 If he can. And I think, if my time will have come,
 There'll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare 40
 For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody
 Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones
 And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls
 Of his den. No, I expect no Danes
 Will fret about sewing our shrouds, if he wins. 45
 And if death does take me, send the hammered
 Mail of my armor to Higlac, return
 The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he
 From Wayland. Fate will unwind as it must!" . . .

Then Hrothgar's men gave places to the Geats, 50
 Yielded benches to the brave visitors
 And led them to the feast. The keeper of the mead
 Came carrying out the carved flasks,
 And poured that bright sweetness. A poet
 Sang, from time to time, in a clear 55
 Pure voice. Danes and visiting Geats
 Celebrated as one, drank and rejoiced. . . .

2. **linden shield**: Linden is the wood of a lime tree.