

H. W. MABLE



*Legends that every
Child should Know*

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Legends That Every Child Should Know

Hamilton Wright Mabie

INTRODUCTION



If we knew how the words in our language were made and what they have meant to successive generations of the men and women who have used them, we should have a new and very interesting kind of history to read. For words, like all other creations of man, were not deliberately manufactured to meet a need, as are the various parts of a bicycle or of an automobile; but grew gradually and slowly out of experiences which compelled their production. For it is one of the evidences of the brotherhood of men that, either by the pressure of necessity or of the instinct to describe to others what has happened to ourself and so make common property of personal experience, no interesting or influential or significant thing can befall a man that is not accompanied by a desire to communicate it to others.

The word legend has a very interesting history, which sheds light not only on its origin but on early habits of thought and customs. It is derived from the Latin verb *legere*, which means "to read." As legends are often passed down by word of mouth and are not reduced to writing until they have been known for centuries by great numbers of people, it seems difficult at first glance to see any connection between the Latin word and its English descendant. In Russia and other countries, where large populations live remote from cities and are practically without books and newspapers, countless stories are told by peasant mothers to their children, by reciters or semi-professional story-

tellers, which have since been put into print. For a good many hundred years, probably, the vast majority of legends were not read; they were heard.

When we understand, however, what the habits of people were in the early Christian centuries and what the early legends were about, the original meaning of the word is not only clear but throws light on the history of this fascinating form of literature. The early legends, as a rule, had to do with religious people or with places which had religious associations; they were largely concerned with the saints and were freely used in churches for the instruction of the people. In all churches selections from some book or books are used as part of the service; readings from the Old and New Testament are included in the worship of all churches in Christendom. In the earliest times not only were Lessons from the Old Testament and the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament read, but letters of bishops and selections from other writings which were regarded as profitable for religious instruction. Later stories of the saints and passages from the numerous lives which appeared were read at different services and contributed greatly to their interest. The first legends in Christian countries were incidents from the lives of the saints and were included in the selections made from various writings for public worship; these selections were called *legends*. The history of the word makes clear, therefore, the origin and early history of the class of stories which we call legends.

The use of the stories at church services led to the collection, orderly arrangement and reshaping of a great mass of material which grew rapidly because so many people were interested in these semi-religious tales. In the beginning the stories had, as a rule, some basis in fact, though it was often very slight. As time went on the element of fact grew smaller and the element of fiction larger; stories which were originally very short were expanded into long tales and became highly imaginative. In

the Thirteenth Century the *Legenda Aurea* , or Golden Legend, which became one of the most popular books of the Middle Ages, appeared. In time, as the taste for this kind of writing grew, the word legend came to include any story which, under a historical form, gave an account of an historical or imaginary person.

During the Middle Ages verse-making was very popular and very widely practised; for versification is very easy when people are in the habit of using it freely, and a verse is much more easily remembered than a line of prose. For many generations legends were versified. It must be remembered that verse and poetry are often very far apart; and poetry is as difficult to compose as verse is easy. The versified legends were very rarely poetic; they were simply narratives in verse. Occasionally men of poetic genius took hold of these old stories and gave them beautiful forms as did the German poet Hartmann von Aue in "Der Arme Heinrich." With the tremendous agitation which found expression in the Reformation, interest in legends died out, and was not renewed until the Eighteenth Century, when men and women, grown weary of artificial and mechanical forms of literature, turned again to the old stories and songs which were the creation of less self-conscious ages. With the revival of interest in ballads, folk-stories, fairy stories and myths came a revival of interest in legends. The myths were highly imaginative and poetic explanations of the world and of the life of man in it at a time when scientific knowledge and habits of thought had not come into existence. The fairy story was "a free poetic dealing with realities in accordance with the law of mental growth, ... a poetic wording of the facts of life, ... an endeavour to shape the facts of the world to meet the needs of the imagination, the cravings of the heart." The legend, dealing originally with incidents in the lives of the saints and with places made sacred by association with holy men, has, as a rule, some slight historical basis; is cast in narrative form

and told as a record of fact; and, in cases where it is entirely imaginative, deals with some popular type of character like Robin Hood or Rip Van Winkle; or with some mysterious or tragic event, as Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" are poetic renderings of part of a great mass of legends which grew up about a little group of imaginary or semi-historical characters; Longfellow's "Golden Legend" is a modern rendering of a very old mediaeval tale; Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is an example of purely imaginative prose, and Heine's "Lorelei" of a purely imaginative poetic legend.

The legend is not so sharply defined as the myth and the fairy story, and it is not always possible to separate it from these old forms of stories; but it always concerns itself with one or more characters; it assumes to be historical; it is almost always old and haunts some locality like a ghost; and it has a large admixture of fiction, even where it is not wholly fictitious. Like the myth and fairy story it throws light on the mind and character of the age that produced it; it is part of the history of the unfolding of the human mind in the world; and, above all, it is interesting.

CHAPTER I



WIGWAM LEGEND OF HIAWATHA [Footnote: This story is ascribed to Abraham le Fort, an Onondaga chief, a graduate of Geneva College. The poem of Longfellow has given it general interest. Hiawatha is an example of the intellectual capacity of one of that race of whom it has been said "Take these Indians in their owne trimme and naturall disposition, and they bee reported to bee wise, lofty spirited, constant in friendship to one another: true in their promise, and more industrious than many others."—Wood's, "New England's Prospect," London, 1634.]

On the banks of Tiotó, or Cross Lake, resided an eminent man who bore the name of Hiawatha, or the Wise Man.

This name was given him, as its meaning indicates, on account of his great wisdom in council and power in war. Hiawatha was of high and mysterious origin. He had a canoe which would move without paddles, obedient to his will, and which he kept with great care and never used except when he attended the general council of the tribes. It was from Hiawatha the people learned to raise corn and beans; through his instructions they were enabled to remove obstructions from the water courses and clear their fishing grounds; and by him they were helped to get the mastery over the great monsters which overran the country. The people listened to him with ever increasing delight; and he gave them wise laws and maxims from the Great Spirit, for he had been second to him only in power previous to his taking up his dwelling with mankind.

Having selected the Onondagas for his tribe, years passed away in prosperity; the Onondagas assumed an elevated rank for their wisdom and learning, among the other tribes, and there was not one of these which did not yield its assent to their superior privilege of lighting the council-fire.

But in the midst of the high tide of their prosperity, suddenly there arose a great alarm at the invasion of a ferocious band of warriors from the North of the Great Lakes; and as these bands advanced, an indiscriminate slaughter was made of men, women, and children. Destruction fell upon all alike.

The public alarm was great; and Hiawatha advised them not to waste their efforts in a desultory manner, but to call a council of all the tribes that could be gathered together, from the East to the West; and, at the same time, he appointed a meeting to take place on an eminence on the banks of the Onondaga Lake. There, accordingly, the chief men assembled, while the occasion brought together a vast multitude of men, women, and children, who were in expectation of some marvellous deliverance.

Three days elapsed, and Hiawatha did not appear. The multitude began to fear that he was not coming, and messengers were despatched for him to Tioto, who found him depressed with a presentiment that evil would follow his attendance. These fears were overruled by the eager persuasions of the messengers; and Hiawatha, taking his daughter with him, put his wonderful canoe in its element and set out for the council. The grand assemblage that was to avert the threatened danger appeared quickly in sight, as he moved rapidly along in his magic canoe; and when the people saw him, they sent up loud shouts of welcome until the venerated man landed. A steep ascent led up the banks of the lake to the place occupied by the council; and, as he walked up, a loud whirring sound was heard above, as if caused by some rushing current of air. Instantly, the

eyes of all were directed upward to the sky, where was seen a dark spot, something like a small cloud, descending rapidly, and as it approached, enlarging in its size and increasing in velocity. Terror and alarm filled the minds of the multitude and they scattered in confusion. But as soon as he had gained the eminence, Hiawatha stood still, causing his daughter to do the same—deeming it cowardly to fly, and impossible, if it was attempted, to divert the designs of the Great Spirit. The descending object now assumed a more definite aspect; and, as it came nearer, revealed the shape of a gigantic white bird, with wide-extended and pointed wings. This bird came down with ever increasing velocity, until, with a mighty swoop, it dropped upon the girl, crushing her at once to the earth.

The fixed face of Hiawatha alone indicated his consciousness of his daughter's death; while in silence he signalled to the warriors, who had stood watching the event in speechless consternation. One after the other stepped up to the prostrate bird, which was killed by its violent fall, and selecting a feather from its snow-white plumage, decorated himself therewith. [Footnote: Since this event, say the Indians of this tribe, the plumage of the white heron has been used for their decorations on the war-path.]

But now a new affliction fell upon Hiawatha; for, on removing the carcass of the bird, not a trace could be discovered of his daughter. Her body had vanished from the earth. Shades of anguish contracted the dark face of Hiawatha. He stood apart in voiceless grief. No word was spoken. His people waited in silence, until at length arousing himself, he turned to them and walked in calm dignity to the head of the council.

The first day he listened with attentive gravity to the plans of the different speakers; on the next day he arose and said: "My friends and brothers; you are members of many tribes, and have come from a great distance. We have come

to promote the common interest, and our mutual safety. How shall it be accomplished? To oppose these Northern hordes in tribes singly, while we are at variance often with each other, is impossible. By uniting in a common band of brotherhood we may hope to succeed. Let this be done, and we shall drive the enemy from our land. Listen to me by tribes. You, the Mohawks, who are sitting under the shadow of the great tree, whose branches spread wide around, and whose roots sink deep into the earth, shall be the first nation, because you are warlike and mighty. You, the Oneidas, who recline your bodies against the everlasting stone that cannot be moved, shall be the second nation, because you always give wise counsel. You, the Onondagas, who have your habitation at the foot of the great hills, and are overshadowed by their crags, shall be the third nation, because you are greatly gifted in speech. You, the Senecas, whose dwelling is in the dark forest, and whose home is all over the land, shall be the fourth nation, because of your superior cunning in hunting. And you, the Cayugas, the people who live in the open country and possess much wisdom, shall be the fifth nation, because you understand better the art of raising corn and beans, and making lodges. Unite, ye five nations, and have one common interest, and no foe shall disturb and subdue you. You, the people who are the feeble bushes, and you who are a fishing people, may place yourselves under our protection, and we will defend you. And you of the South and West may do the same, and we will protect you. We earnestly desire the alliance and friendship of you all. Brothers, if we unite in this great bond, the Great Spirit will smile upon us, and we shall be free, prosperous, and happy; but if we remain as we are, we shall be subject to his frown. We shall be enslaved, ruined, perhaps annihilated. We may perish under the war-storm, and our names be no longer remembered by good men, nor be repeated in the dance and song. Brothers, those are the

words of Hiawatha. I have spoken. I am done." [Footnote: Canassatego, a renowned chief of the Confederacy, in his remarkable piece of advice to the Colonial Commissioners of Lancaster in July, 1744, seems to imply that there was an error in this plan of Hiawatha, as it did not admit all nations into their Confederacy with equal rights.]

The next day his plan of union was considered and adopted by the council, after which Hiawatha again addressed the people with wise words of counsel, and at the close of this speech bade them farewell; for he conceived that his mission to the Iroquois was accomplished, and he might announce his withdrawal to the skies. He then went down to the shore, and assumed his seat in his mystical canoe. Sweet music was heard in the air as he seated himself; and while the wondering multitude stood gazing at their beloved chief, he was silently wafted from sight, and they saw him no more. He passed to the Isle of the Blessed, inhabited by Owayneo [Footnote: A name for their Great Spirit in the dialect of the Iroquois.] and his manitos.

And they said, "Farewell forever!"

Said, "Farewell, O Hiawatha!"

And the forests, dark and lonely,

Moved through all their depths of darkness ^

Sighed, "Farewell, O Hiawatha!"

And the waves upon the margin,

Rising, rippling on the pebbles,

Sobbed, "Farewell, O Hiawatha!"

And the heron, the shuh-shu-gah,

From her haunts among the fen-lands,

Screamed, "Farewell, O Hiawatha!"

Thus departed Hiawatha,

Hiawatha the Beloved,

In the glory of the sunset,

In the purple mists of evening,

To the regions of the home-wind,

Of the northwest wind, Keewaydin,

To the Islands of the Blessed,
To the kingdom of Ponemah,
To the land of the Hereafter.

[Footnote: "The Song of Hiawatha," by H. W. Longfellow.]

CHAPTER II



BEOWULF

Old King Hrothgar built for himself a great palace, covered with gold, with benches all round outside, and a terrace leading up to it. It was bigger than any hall men had ever heard of, and there Hrothgar sat on his throne to share with men the good things God had given him. A band of brave knights gathered round him, all living together in peace and joy.

But there came a wicked monster, Grendel, out of the moors. He stole across the fens in the thick darkness, and touched the great iron bars of the door of the hall, which immediately sprang open. Then, with his eyes shooting out flame, he spied the knights sleeping after battle. With his steel finger nails the hideous fiend seized thirty of them in their sleep. He gave yells of joy, and sped as quick as lightning across the moors, to reach his home with his prey. When the knights awoke, they raised a great cry of sorrow, whilst the aged King himself sat speechless with grief. None could do battle with the monster, he was too strong, too horrible for any one to conquer. For twelve long years Grendel warred against Hrothgar; like a dark shadow of death he prowled round about the hall, and lay in wait for his men on the misty moors. One thing he could not touch, and that was the King's sacred throne.

Now there lived in a far-off land a youngster called Beowulf, who had the strength of thirty men. He heard of the wicked deeds of Grendel, and the sorrow of the good

King Hrothgar. So he had made ready a strong ship, and with fourteen friends set sail to visit Hrothgar, as he was in need of help. The good ship flew over the swelling ocean like a bird, till in due time the voyagers saw shining white cliffs before them. Then they knew their journey was at an end; they made fast their ship, grasped their weapons, and thanked God that they had had an easy voyage.

Now the coastguard spied them from a tower. He set off to the shore, riding on horseback, and brandishing a huge lance.

"Who are you," he cried, "bearing arms and openly landing here? I am bound to know from whence you come before you make a step forward. Listen to my plain words, and hasten to answer me." Beowulf made answer that they came as friends, to rid Hrothgar of his wicked enemy Grendel, and at that the coastguard led them on to guide them to the King's palace. Downhill they ran together, with a rushing sound of voices and armed tread, until they saw the hall shining like gold against the sky. The guard bade them go straight to it, then, wheeling round on his horse, he said, "It is time for me to go. May the Father of All keep you in safety. For myself, I must guard the coast."

The street was paved with stone, and Beowulf's men marched along, following it to the hall, their armour shining in the sun and clanging as they went. They reached the terrace, where they set down their broad shields. Then they seated themselves on the bench, while they stacked their spears together and made themselves known to the herald. Hrothgar speedily bade them welcome. They entered the great hall with measured tread, Beowulf leading the way. His armour shone like a golden net-work, and his look was high and noble, as he said, "Hail, O King! To fight against Grendel single-handed have I come. Grant me this, that I may have this task alone, I and my little band of men. I know that the terrible monster despises weapons, and therefore I shall bear neither sword, nor

shield, nor buckler. Hand to hand I will fight the foe, and death shall come to whomsoever God wills. If death overtakes me, then will the monster carry away my body to the swamps, so care not for my body, but send my armour to my King. My fate is in God's hands."

Hrothgar loved the youth for his noble words, and bade him and his men sit down to the table and merrily share the feast, if they had a mind to do so. As they feasted, a minstrel sang with a clear voice. The Queen, in cloth of gold, moved down the hall and handed the jewelled cup of mead to the King and all the warriors, old and young. At the right moment, with gracious words, she brought it to Beowulf. Full of pride and high purpose, the youth drank from the splendid cup, and vowed that he would conquer the enemy or die.

When the sun sank in the west, all the guests arose. The King bade Beowulf guard the house, and watch for the foe. "Have courage," he said, "be watchful, resolve on success. Not a wish of yours shall be left unfulfilled, if you perform this mighty deed."

Then Beowulf lay down to rest in the hall, putting off from him his coat of mail, helmet, and sword.

Through the dim night Grendel came stealing. All slept in the darkness, all but one! The door sprang open at the first touch that the monster gave it. He trod quickly over the paved floor of the hall; his eyes gleamed as he saw a troop of kinsmen lying together asleep. He laughed as he reckoned on sucking the life of each one before day broke. He seized a sleeping warrior, and in a trice had crunched his bones. Then he stretched out his hand to seize Beowulf on his bed. Quickly did Beowulf grip his arm; he stood up full length and grappled with him with all his might, till his fingers cracked as though they would burst. Never had Grendel felt such a grip; he had a mind to go, but could not. He roared, and the hall resounded with his yells, as up and down he raged, with Beowulf holding him in a fast

embrace. The benches were overturned, the timbers of the hall cracked, the beautiful hall was all but wrecked. Beowulf's men had seized their weapons and thought to hack Grendel on every side, but no blade could touch him. Still Beowulf held him by the arm; his shoulder cracked, and he fled, wounded to death, leaving hand, arm, and shoulder in Beowulf's grasp. Over the moors, into the darkness, he sped as best he might, and to Beowulf was the victory.

Then, in the morning, many a warrior came from far and near. Riding in troops, they tracked the monster's path, where he had fled stricken to death. In a dismal pool he had yielded up his life.

Racing their horses over the green turf, they reached again the paved street. The golden roof of the palace glittered in the sunlight. The King stood on the terrace and gave thanks to God. "I have had much woe," he said, "but this lad, through God's might, has done the deed that we, with all our wisdom, could not do. Now I will heartily love you, Beowulf, as if you were my son. You shall want for nothing in this world, and your fame shall live forever."

The palace was cleansed, the walls hung anew with cloth of gold, the whole place was made fair and straight, for only the roof had been left altogether unhurt after the fight.

A merry feast was held. The King brought forth out of his treasures a banner, helmet, and mail coat. These he gave to Beowulf; but more wonderful than all was a famous sword handed down to him through the ages. Then eight horses with golden cheekplates were brought within the court; one of them was saddled with King Hrothgar's own saddle, decorated with silver. Hrothgar gave all to Beowulf, bidding him enjoy them well. To each of Beowulf's men he gave rich gifts. The minstrels sang; the Queen, beautiful and gracious, bore the cup to the King and Beowulf. To Beowulf she, too, gave gifts: mantle and bracelets and collar of gold.

"Use these gifts," she said, "and prosper well! As far as the sea rolls your name shall be known."

Great was the joy of all till evening came. Then the hall was cleared of benches and strewn with beds. Beowulf, like the King, had his own bower this night to sleep in. The nobles lay down in the hall, at their heads they set their shields and placed ready their helmets and their mail coats. Each slept, ready in an instant to do battle for his lord.

So they sank to rest, little dreaming what deep sorrow was to fall on them.

Hrothgar's men sank to rest, but death was to be the portion of one. Grendel the monster was dead, but Grendel's mother still lived. Furious at the death of her son, she crept to the great hall, and made her way in, clutched an earl, the King's dearest friend, and crushed him in his sleep. Great was the uproar, though the terror was less than when Grendel came. The knights leapt up, sword in hand; the witch hurried to escape, she wanted to get out with her life.

The aged King felt bitter grief when he heard that his dearest friend was slain. He sent for Beowulf, who, like the King, had had his own sleeping bower that night. The youth stood before Hrothgar and hoped that all was well.

"Do not ask if things go well," said the sorrowing King, "we have fresh grief this morning. My dearest friend and noblest knight is slain. Grendel you yourself destroyed through the strength given you by God, but another monster has come to avenge his death. I have heard the country folk say that there were two huge fiends to be seen stalking over the moors, one like a woman, as near as they could make out, the other had the form of a man, but was huger far. It was he they called Grendel. These two haunt a fearful spot, a land of untrodden bogs and windy cliffs. A waterfall plunges into the blackness below, and twisted trees with gnarled roots overhang it. An unearthly fire is seen gleaming there night after night. None can tell the

depth of the stream. Even a stag, hunted to death, will face his foes on the bank rather than plunge into those waters. It is a fearful spot. You are our only help, dare you enter this horrible haunt?"

Quick was Beowulf's answer: "Sorrow not, O King! Rouse yourself quickly, and let us track the monster. Each of us must look for death, and he who has the chance should do mighty deeds before it comes. I promise you Grendel's kin shall not escape me, if she hide in the depths of the earth or of the ocean."

The King sprang up gladly, and Beowulf and his friends set out. They passed stony banks and narrow gullies, the haunts of goblins.

Suddenly they saw a clump of gloomy trees, overhanging a dreary pool. A shudder ran through them, for the pool was blood-red.

All sat down by the edge of the pool, while the horn sounded a cheerful blast. In the water were monstrous sea-snakes, and on jutting points of land were dragons and strange beasts: they tumbled away, full of rage, at the sound of the horn.

One of Beowulf's men took aim at a monster with his arrow, and pierced him through, so that he swam no more.

Beowulf was making ready for the fight. He covered his body with armour lest the fiend should clutch him. On his head was a white helmet, decorated with figures of boars worked in silver. No weapon could hurt it. His sword was a wonderful treasure, with an edge of iron; it had never failed any one who had needed it in battle.

"Be like a father to my men, if I perish," said Beowulf to Hrothgar, "and send the rich gifts you have given me to my King. He will see that I had good fortune while life lasted. Either I will win fame, or death shall take me."

He dashed away, plunging headlong into the pool. It took nearly the whole day before he reached the bottom, and while he was still on his way the water-witch met him. For a

hundred years she had lived in those depths. She made a grab at him, and caught him in her talons, but his coat of mail saved him from her loathsome fingers. Still she clutched him tight, and bore him in her arms to the bottom of the lake; he had no power to use his weapons, though he had courage enough. Water-beasts swam after him and battered him with their tusks.

Then he saw that he was in a vast hall, where there was no water, but a strange, unearthly glow of firelight. At once the fight began, but the sword would not bite—it failed its master in his need; for the first time its fame broke down. Away Beowulf threw it in anger, trusting to the strength of his hands. He cared nothing for his own life, for he thought but of honour.

He seized the witch by the shoulder and swayed her so that she sank on the pavement. Quickly she recovered, and closed in on him; he staggered and fell, worn out. She sat on him, and drew her knife to take his life, but his good mail coat turned the point. He stood up again, and then truly God helped him, for he saw among the armour on the wall an old sword of huge size, the handiwork of giants. He seized it, and smote with all his might, so that the witch gave up her life.

His heart was full of gladness, and light, calm and beautiful as that of the sun, filled the hall. He scanned the vast chamber, and saw Grendel lying there dead. He cut off his head as a trophy for King Hrothgar, whose men the fiend had killed and devoured.

Now those men who were seated on the banks of the pool watching with Hrothgar saw that the water was tinged with blood. Then the old men spoke together of the brave Beowulf, saying they feared they would never see him again. The day was waning fast, so they and the King went homeward. Beowulf's men stayed on, sick at heart, gazing at the pool. They longed, but did not expect, to see their lord and master.

Under the depths, Beowulf was making his way to them. The magic sword melted in his hand, like snow in sunshine; only the hilt remained, so venomous was the fiend that had been slain therewith. He brought nothing more with him than the hilt and Grendel's head. Up he rose through the waters where the furious sea-beasts before had chased him. Now not one was to be seen; the depths were purified when the witch lost her life. So he came to land, bravely swimming, bearing his spoils. His men saw him, they thanked God, and ran to free him of his armour. They rejoiced to get sight of him, sound and whole.

Now they marched gladly through the highways to the town. It took four of them to carry Grendel's head. On they went, all fourteen, their captain glorious in their midst. They entered the great hall, startling the King and Queen, as they sat at meat, with the fearful sight of Grendel's head.

Beowulf handed the magic hilt to Hrothgar, who saw that it was the work of giants of old. He spake to Beowulf, while all held their peace, praised him for his courage, said that he would love him as his son, and bade him be a help to mankind, remembering not to glory in his own strength, for he held it from God, and death without more ado might subdue it altogether. "Many, many treasures," he said, "must pass from me to you to-morrow, but now rest and feast."

Gladly Beowulf sat down to the banquet, and well he liked the thought of the rest.

When day dawned, he bade the King farewell with noble words, promising to help him in time of need. Hrothgar with tears and embraces let him go, giving him fresh gifts of hoarded jewels. He wept, for he loved Beowulf well, and knew he would never see him any more.

The coastguard saw the gallant warriors coming, bade them welcome, and led them to their ship. The wind whistled in the sails, and a pleasant humming sound was

heard as the good ship sped on her way. So Beowulf returned home, having done mighty deeds and gained great honour.

In due time Beowulf himself became King, and well he governed the land for fifty years. Then trouble came.

A slave, fleeing from his master, stumbled by an evil chance into the den of a dragon. There he saw a dazzling hoard of gold, guarded by the dragon for three hundred winters. The treasure tempted him, and he carried off a tankard of gold to give to his master, to make peace with him.

The dragon had been sleeping, now he awoke, and sniffed the scent of an enemy along the rock. He hunted diligently over the ground; he wanted to find the man who had done the mischief in his sleep. In his rage he swung around the treasure mound, dashing into it now and again to seek the jewelled tankard. He found it hard to wait until evening came, when he meant to avenge with fire the loss of his treasure.

Presently the sun sank, and the dragon had his will. He set forth, burning all the cheerful homes of men: his rage was felt far and wide. Before dawn he shot back again to his dark home, trusting in his mound and in his craft to defend himself.

Now Beowulf heard that his own home had been burnt to the ground. It was a great grief to him, almost making him break out in a rage against Providence. His breast heaved with anger.

He meant to rid his country of the plague, and to fight the dragon single handed. He would have thought it shame to seek him with a large band, he who, as a lad, had killed Grendel and his kin. As he armed for the fray, many thoughts filled his mind; he remembered the days of his youth and manhood. "I fought many wars in my youth," he said, "and now that I am aged, and the keeper of my people, I will yet again seek the enemy and do famously."

He bade his men await him on the mountain-side. They were to see which of the two would come alive out of the tussle.

There the aged King beheld where a rocky archway stood, with a stream of fire gushing from it; no one could stand there and not be scorched. He gave a great shout, and the dragon answered with a hot breath of flame. Beowulf, with drawn sword, stood well up to his shield, when the burning dragon, curved like an arch, came headlong upon him. The shield saved him but little; he swung up the sword to smite the horrible monster, but its edge did not bite. Sparks flew around him on every side; he saw that the end of his days had come.

His men crept away to the woods to save their lives. One, and one only,

Wiglaf by name, sped through the smoke and flame to help his lord.

"My Lord Beowulf!" he cried, "with all your might defend life, I will support you to the utmost."

The dragon came on in fury; in a trice the flames consumed Wiglaf's shield, but, nothing daunted, he stepped under the shelter of Beowulf's, as his own fell in ashes about him. The King remembered his strength of old, and he smote with his sword with such force that it stuck in the monster's head, while splinters flew all around. His hand was so strong that, as men used to say, he broke any sword in using it, and was none the worse for it.

Now, for the third time, the dragon rushed upon him, and seized him by the neck with his poisonous fangs. Wiglaf, with no thought for himself, rushed forward, though he was scorched with the flames, and smote the dragon lower down than Beowulf had done. With such effect the sword entered the dragon's body that from that moment the fire began to cease.

The King, recovering his senses, drew his knife and ended the monster's life. So these two together destroyed the enemy of the people. To Beowulf that was the greatest moment of his life, when he saw his work completed.

The wound that the dragon had given him began to burn and swell, for the poison had entered it. He knew that the tale of his days was told. As he rested on a stone by the mound, he pondered thoughtfully, looking on the cunning work of the dwarfs of old, the stone arches on their rocky pillars. Wiglaf, with tender care, unloosed his helmet and brought him water, Beowulf discoursing the while: "Now I would gladly have given my armour to my son, had God granted me one. I have ruled this people fifty years, and no King has dared attack them. I have held my own with justice, and no friend has lost his life through me. Though I am sick with deadly wounds, I have comfort in this. Now go quickly, beloved Wiglaf, show me the ancient wealth that I have won for my people, the gold and brilliant gems, that I may then contentedly give up my life."

Quickly did Wiglaf enter the mound at the bidding of his master. On every side he saw gold and jewels and choice vases, helmets and bracelets, and over head, a marvellous banner, all golden, gleaming with light, so that he could scan the surface of the floor and see the curious treasured hoards. He filled his lap full of golden cups and platters, and also took the brilliant banner.

He hastened to return with his spoils, wondering, with pain, if he should find his King still alive. He bore his treasures to him, laid them on the ground, and again sprinkled him with water. "I thank God," said the dying King, "that I have been permitted to win this treasure for my people; now they will have all that they need. But I cannot be any longer here. Bid my men make a lofty mound on the headland overlooking the sea, and there place my ashes. In time to come men shall call it Beowulf's Barrow, it shall tower aloft to guide sailors over the stormy seas."

The brave King took from his neck his golden collar, took his helmet and his coronet, and gave them to his true knight, Wiglaf. "Fate has swept all my kinsmen away," said he, "and now I must follow them."

That was his last word, as his soul departed from his bosom, to join the company of the just.

Of all Kings in the world, he was, said his men, the gentlest to his knights and the most desirous of honour.