

2. SECULAR LYRIC AND ELEGY

THE WANDERER

Many a lonely man at last comes to honor;
Merits God's mercy, though much he endured
On wintry seas, with woe in his heart,
Dragging his oar through drenching-cold brine,
20 Homeless and houseless and hunted by Wyrd.

These are the words of a wayfaring wanderer,
This is his song of the sorrow of life,
Slaughter of foemen, felling of kinsmen:

Oft in the dark, alone before dawning,
25 All to myself my sorrow I tell.

No friend have I here, to whom I may open (11)
My heart's deep secret, my hidden spring of woe.
Well do I know 'tis the way of the high-born,
Fast in his heart to fetter his feelings,
5 Lock his unhappiness in the hold of his mind.
Spirit that sorrows withstandeth not destiny,
Heart that complaineth plucketh no help.
A haughty hero will hide his suffering,
Manfully master misery's pang.
10 Thus stricken with sorrow, stript of my heritage,
Far from kinsmen and country and friends,
Grimly I grappled my grief to my bosom,
Since long time ago, my giver of bounty
Was laid in the earth, and left me to roam
15 Watery wastes, with winter in my heart.
Forsaken I sought a shielder and protector;
Far and near I found none to greet the wanderer,
No master to make him welcome in his wine-hall;
None to cheer the cheerless, or the friendless to be-
friend.

20 He who has lost all his loved companions
Knoweth how bitter a bedfellow is sorrow.
Loneliness his lot, not lordly gold,
Heart-chilling frost, not harvest of plenty.
Oft he remembers the mirth of the mead-hall,
25 Yearns for the days of his youth, when his dear lord
Filled him with abundance. Faded are those joys!
He shall know them no more; no more shall he listen
To the voice of his lord, his leader and counsellor.
Sometimes sleep and sorrow together
30 Gently enfold the joyless wanderer:

Bright are his dreams, he embraces his lord again,
Kisses his liege, and lays on his knee (42)
Head and hands as in happy days,
When he thanked for a boon his bountiful giver.

- 5 Wakes with a start the wanderer homeless;
Nought he beholds but the heaving surges,
Seagulls dipping and spreading their wings.
Scurries of snow and the scudding hail.
Then his heart is all the heavier,
10 Sore after sweet dreams sorrow reviveth.
Fain would he hold the forms of his kinsmen,
Longingly leans to them, lovingly greets them;
Slowly their faces swim into distance;
No familiar greeting comes from the fleeting
15 Companies of kinsmen. Care ever shadows
The way of the traveller, whose track is on the waters,
Whose path is on the billows of the boundless deep.

- Behold I know not how I may keep
My heart from sinking, heavy with sorrow,
20 When all life's destiny deeply I ponder,—
Men that are suddenly snatched in their prime,
High-souled heroes; so the whole of this earth
Day by day droopeth and sinketh to decay. . . (63)
How dread is the doom of the last desolation, (73)
25 When all the wealth of the world shall be waste,
He that is wise may learn, if he looks
Abroad o'er this land, where lonely and ruinous,
Wind-swept walls, waste are standing;
Tottering towers, crusted with frost,
30 Crumbling wine-halls, bare to the sky.
Dead is their revelry, dust are the revellers!

Some they have fallen on far fields of battle, (81)
Some have gone down in ships on the sea;
Some were the prey of the prowling gray-wolf,
Some by their loved ones were laid in the earth.
5 The Lord of the living hath levelled their mansions,
Silenced the sound of the singing and laughter.
Empty and bare are all their habitations,
Wondrous works of the giants of old.

He that considers this scene of desolation,
10 And this dark life deeply doth ponder,—
Battle and bloodshed, burning and slaughter,
It bringeth to mind, and mournfully he asks:
Where is the warrior, where is the war-horse?
Where is the giver of bounty, where are the boon-
companions,
15 The "dream and the gleam" that gladdened the hall?
Alas the bright ale-cup, alas the brave warrior!
Alas the pride of princes! Their prime is no more;
Sunk under night's shadow, as though it never had
been!

Where lusty warriors thronged, this lone wall towers,
20 Weird with dragon-shapes, wondrously carven;
Storm of ash-spears hath stricken the heroes,
Blood-thirsty weapons, Wyrd the supreme.
Wintry blasts now buffet these battlements;
Dreary snow-storms drift up the earth,
25 The terror of winter when wild and wan
Down from the north, with the darkness drives
The ruinous scourge of the ruthless hail.

All this life is labor and sorrow,
Doom of destiny darkens o'er earth.

Wealth is fleeting, friends are fleeting,
Man is fleeting, maid is fleeting,
All this earth's foundations utterly shall pass. (110)

The Wanderer

Oft to the Wanderer, weary of exile,
Cometh God's pity, compassionate love,
Though woefully toiling on wintry seas
With churning oar in the icy wave,
Homeless and helpless he fled from Fate.
Thus saith the Wanderer mindful of misery,
Grievous disasters, and death of kin:

“Oft when the day broke, oft at the dawning,
Lonely and wretched I wailed my woe.
No man is living, no comrade left,
To whom I dare fully unlock my heart.
I have learned truly the mark of a man
Is keeping his counsel and locking his lips,
Let him think what he will! For, woe of heart
Withstandeth not Fate; a failing spirit
Earneth no help. Men eager for honor
Bury their sorrow deep in the breast.

“So have I also, often in wretchedness
Fettered my feelings, far from my kin,
Homeless and hapless, since days of old,
When the dark earth covered my dear lord's face,
And I sailed away with sorrowful heart,
Over wintry seas, seeking a gold-lord,
If far or near lived one to befriend me
With gift in the mead-hall and comfort for grief.

“Who bears it, knows what a bitter companion,
Shoulder to shoulder, sorrow can be,
When friends are no more. His fortune is exile,
Not gifts of fine gold; a heart that is frozen,
Earth's winsomeness dead. | And he dreams of the hall-men,
The dealing of treasure, the days of his youth,
When his lord bade welcome to wassail and feast.

But gone is that gladness, and never again
Shall come the loved counsel of comrade and king.

“Even in slumber his sorrow assaileth,
And, dreaming he claspeth his dear lord again,
Head on knee, hand on knee, loyally laying,
Pledging his liege as in days long past.
Then from his slumber he starts lonely-hearted,
Beholding gray stretches of tossing sea,
Sea-birds bathing, with wings outspread,
While hailstorms darken, and driving snow.
Bitterer then is the bane of his wretchedness,
The longing for loved one: his grief is renewed.
The forms of his kinsmen take shape in the silence;
In rapture he greets them; in gladness he scans
Old comrades remembered. But they melt into air
With no word of greeting to gladden his heart.
Then again surges his sorrow upon him;
And grimly he spurs his weary soul
Once more to the toil of the tossing sea.

“No wonder therefore, in all the world,
If a shadow darkens upon my spirit
When I reflect on the fates of men—
How one by one proud warriors vanish
From the halls that knew them, and day by day
All this earth ages and droops unto death.
No man may know wisdom till many a winter
Has been his portion. A wise man is patient,
Not swift to anger, nor hasty of speech,
Neither too weak, nor too reckless, in war,
Neither fearful nor fain, nor too wishful of wealth,
Nor too eager in vow— ere he know the event.
A brave man must bide when he speaketh his boast
Until he know surely the goal of his spirit.

“A wise man will ponder how dread is that doom
When all this world's wealth shall be scattered and waste

As now, over all, through the regions of earth,
Walls stand rime-covered and swept by the winds.
The battlements crumble, the wine-halls decay;
Joyless and silent the heroes are sleeping
Where the proud host fell by the wall they defended.
Some battle launched on their long, last journey;
One a bird bore o'er the billowing sea;
One the gray wolf slew; one a grieving eorl
Sadly gave to the grave's embrace.
The Warden of men hath wasted this world
Till the sound of music and revel is stilled,
And these giant-built structures stand empty of life.

"He who shall muse on these mouldering ruins,
And deeply ponder this darkling life,
Must brood on old legends of battle and bloodshed,
And heavy the mood that troubles his heart:
'Where now is the warrior? Where is the war horse?
Bestowal of treasure, and sharing of feast?
Alas! the bright ale-cup, the byrny-clad warrior,
The prince in his splendor —those days are long sped
In the night of the past, as if they never had been !'
And now remains only, for warriors' memorial,
A wall wondrous high with serpent shapes carved.
Storms of ash-spears have smitten the eorls,
Carnage of weapon, and conquering Fate.

"Storms now batter these ramparts of stone;
Blowing snow and the blast of winter
Enfold the earth; night-shadows fall
Darkly lowering, from the north driving
Raging hail in wrath upon men.
Wretchedness fills the realm of earth,
And Fate's decrees transform the world.
Here wealth is fleeting, friends are fleeting,
Man is fleeting, 'maid is fleeting;
All the foundation of earth shall fail!"

Thus spake the sage in solitude pondering.
Good man is he who guardeth his faith.
He must never too quickly unburden his breast
Of its sorrow, but eagerly strive for redress;
And happy the man who seeketh for mercy
From his heavenly Father, our Fortress and Strength.