

# Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English

T.A.Shippey

The surviving body of Anglo-Saxon poetry includes a number of interesting but neglected poems which have only appeared in the volumes of the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Record*. Many of these 'poems of wisdom and learning' are not only attractive in themselves, but are important evidence for the Anglo-Saxon vision of life and art. This volume presents them with text and facing translation, and a general introduction. The twenty or so poems are divided into three groups - learning, religion, and history - and each group has a separate introduction; there are also notes on difficult passages.





POEMS OF WISDOM AND LEARNING  
IN OLD ENGLISH



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**T. A. Shippey**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- ASPR* *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, see List of References, I.
- B-T* *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, J.Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, see List of References, I.
- EETS OS* *Early English Text Society, Original Series*.
- JEGP* *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*.
- MLR* *Modern Language Review*.
- NM* *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*.
- N & Q NS* *Notes and Queries, New Series*.
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- PBA* *Proceedings of the British Academy*.
- PMLA* *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*.

## PREFACE

THE IMBALANCE OF Old English studies over the past century may be seen by a glance at the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, published in 1974. Two closely-printed columns of this are given up to studies of *The Wanderer*, almost two more to *The Seafarer*, with a good deal besides under the heading *Elegies* — perhaps a hundred and fifty entries in all. Meanwhile, the two poems that come between *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* in the Exeter Book, *Precepts* and *The Gifts of Men*, have one and two critical entries respectively, the one on *Precepts* being, incidentally, a bare half-page of textual notes printed in 1895. Modern taste and what one can guess of Anglo-Saxon taste appear to be at least divergent. It is arguable, of course, even undeniable, that *The Wanderer* is a better poem than *The Gifts of Men*, so much so as to indicate a difference of kind rather than of degree. This argument is less convincing, however, if applied to *Solomon and Saturn*, a poem of great interest in its own right. Yet though it has fared better than some (a score of items in the *Bibliography*), it still remains far from popular; one might note that there has been no English translation of it since the eccentric one of John Kemble, in 1848. At least part of the reason for the imbalance in Old English scholarship between one poem and another is simple familiarity. Poems in established Readers get more than their fair share of critical attention; those rejected by editors of student anthologies (often in essence nineteenth-century works) get far too little. The main purpose of this volume is to make it possible for some of Henry Sweet's and James Bright's 'rejects' to reach a wider audience.

This has determined the shape of much of what follows. The difficulties of translation from Old English have often been enumerated, but the one I have been most conscious of is the temptation to replace an Old English word of uncertain application by a Modern English one of the same kind — often a word which is dimly familiar, but never used in speech, or used only in unlikely circumstances. In too many glossaries and translations goblets are proffered, visions are declared, decrees are ordained, and countenances, if not fair, are flushed: the effect is not exactly one of archaism, rather of bookishness, as if the translator were unfamiliar with words' common situational contexts. I have tried to avoid this fault above all. I do not suppose that I have always succeeded, or that I have kept out of the opposite pitfalls of vulgarity and anachronism; but when proselytising it seems better to be wrong than discreet.

The texts of the poems are on facing pages to encourage checking of the translation. They have all been reconsidered from facsimiles, from the original manuscripts, or (in the case of *The Rune Poem*) from the principal edition. The availability of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, with their heavy critical apparatus, has meant that I have been able to leave out much of what they have done. The translations are footnoted only where there is major ambiguity of sense, or where suggestions have been made after the date of *A.S.P.R.* Only gaps and blurs in the manuscripts are recorded diacritically in the texts, and a few major reconstructions; for additions and emendations it is necessary to look at the lists of Textual Variants.

*A.S.P.R.* titles have been retained. To save space, I have kept footnotes out of the introduction, referring to books and articles by author and date, or author and title, with full indications in the List of References. I am only sorry that this necessity appears on occasion brusque.

My thanks are due to Dr.D.S.Brewer, who read a first draft of some of the translations and pointed out the corruption of my style; to Dr.R.I.Page, Librarian of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, who allowed me to read his college's MS 422; to the authorities of the British Museum, who let me check *Maxims II* against MS Cotton Tiberius B.i; and to my colleagues Prof.J.H.Harley and Dr.D.J.Mabberley, who explained points of botany to me tolerantly.

## INTRODUCTION

'Ic a wille leode læran', observes the poet of *Judgement Day I*, 'I mean to teach people all the time.' His confession might be thought applicable to most Anglo-Saxon poets, from the legendary Widsith (hero of his own catalogue-poem) to the historical Cynewulf (also author of a catalogue-poem), or even to the resolutely proverbial author of *Beowulf*. But the remark is more particularly true of a group of some fifteen to twenty poems\* dispersed through several of the surviving manuscripts of Old English poetry: poems which aim primarily neither at narrative nor at self-expression, but deal instead with the central concerns of human life – what it is; how it varies; how a man may hope to succeed in it, and after it. These poems have not been treated as a category, or indeed much considered at all in the modern period. They, are, however, perhaps the commonest type of poem in Old English, and their influence is strong even in the most familiar works.

A distinguishing feature of the group is the directness and ambitiousness of the poets. They do not hesitate to make the most sweeping generalisations about men, God, nations, the state of the world, even the nature of the universe. 'I shall quickly tell you,' declares the author of *The Order of the World*, 'more of the Ruler's power and success than you can grasp in mind or thought, wise though you are.' And even in poems which appear to have a much less splendid purpose, such as the occupational list which forms the bulk of *The Gifts of Men*, a moral conclusion (in that case, the need for humility and resignation) is felt to be not far away. Paradoxically, the authors' directness is made even more visible by the devices they often use to hide it. Several poems show a reluctance to address the reader or listener as one man to another, and get round this by introducing a literary persona, usually a prophet or sage or man of great experience, whose role it is to give authority to whatever the poet has to say. In most cases the fictions are trans-

\* Poems one might wish to consider as homogeneous are: in the Exeter Book, *The Wanderer*, *The Gifts of Men*, *Precepts*, *The Seafarer*, *Vainglory*, *The Fortunes of Men*, *Maxims I*, *The Order of the World*, *The Riming Poem*, *Soul and Body II*, *Deor*, *The Judgement Day I*, *Resignation*, and the fragments known as *Almsgiving* and *Homiletic Fragment II*; in the Vercelli Book, *Soul and Body I*, *Homiletic Fragment I*; in a total of five other manuscripts, *Solomon and Saturn I and II*, *The Judgement Day II*, *The Exhortation to Christian Living*, *The Rune Poem*, *Maxims II*. Most of these are around a hundred lines long; in most the poet makes a direct appeal to his audience; many contain gnomic generalisations, or use the figure of an old man instructing his disciple; minor similarities of tone or conclusion are pervasive. Naturally one could cut this suggested group down by applying further criteria, or extend it by including the various 'catalogue-poems' of Old English, or some of the pieces known as 'elegies'. I have chosen for this volume one poem, *The Descent into Hell*, which is narrative rather than admonition, though it too turns on a gnomic statement and drifts into a prophetic address.

parent. The author of *Precepts*, for example, sets his poem as a series of instructions given by father to son; but it is evident that the reader is meant to cast himself as the son, just as the poet sees himself as the father. The personae have no independent life. Rather similarly, *The Order of the World* begins by inviting the reader to enquire of a prophet, a man from far away, one who has undergone many things: but within a few sentences this sage has become identified with the poet, who has started to address the reader, indeed, with a series of sharp imperatives – ‘Learn this teaching! ... Now hear this song of praise!’

Perhaps most convincingly, it is a characteristic and recurrent editorial difficulty with these poems that one does not know when the interpolated speeches of literary personae begin and end: their exhortations are indistinguishable from those of the poets themselves. Thus, in *Homiletic Fragment I* (a very minor poem from the Vercelli Book) the poet is making the point that when one man speaks ill of another behind his back, God is a witness, if no-one else. He reinforces this by introducing an anonymous prophet to corroborate, with the words ‘*Fordan se witiga cwæð*’, ‘And so the prophet said ...’ The editor of the poem for the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* accordingly opens inverted commas, and closes them at the end of the sentence, six and a half lines later. But if the poet *has* returned to speaking in his own person, he is saying almost exactly the same thing as his nameless authority; it would be quite feasible to extend the speech several lines further, or indeed for much of the rest of the poem. In exactly the same way the author of *Vainglory* asserts ‘*Pæt se witga song*’, ‘The prophet sang this ...’, and begins a speech which runs, according to the *A.S.P.R.* editors, from lines 52-77, but according to Professor Huppé, in his edition of 1970, only from lines 52-56. It is hard to say who is right; and also, evidently, unimportant. Prophet and poet are very much the same thing.

A similar problem arises, of course, in *The Wanderer*, most familiar and most extensively-studied of all O.E. poems, but a text which nevertheless still rouses strong disagreement among critics over who is speaking when, how many voices are indeed to be distinguished, and what the purpose is of the transitions from one to another. There are almost as many opinions as there are readers, and it is notorious that in this case the *A.S.P.R.* editors, perhaps wisely, opened inverted commas to signify a speech beginning at line 8, but never thereafter closed them, thus allowing each reader to punctuate the poem his own way, at least between lines 8 and 92! Should *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Deor* (three of the most attractive short O.E. poems) be assimilated to the didactic group? Obviously the question does not admit a yes-or-no solution. They are similar, often curiously similar, to their more undistinguished counterparts in the ethical remarks which they include (the kernel of *Deor*, for instance, lines 31-34, being almost identical with the central tenet of *The Fortunes of Men*, lines 64-67). They also share the device of creating a persona to express one’s own insights. On the other hand, the personae after whom *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *Deor* are named are clearly vastly more developed than the father of *Precepts* or the prophets of *Vainglory* or *The Order of the World*. None of these latter poems contains more than a perfunctory line or two in the first person; there is in them no sense of personality or individual experience, and

no wish for it. Probably the best one can do is to suggest that all the poems mentioned could be arranged on a scale. *Deor* is less overtly didactic and more solidly in the first person than *The Wanderer*, just as *The Wanderer* contains more sense of an individual protagonist than *The Rimming Poem* or *Precepts*, and these in their turn more than others, running down to the total impersonality, without even a pretence of mediation, of *The Fortunes of Men* or the Cottonian *Maxims II*. As with the punctuation of *The Wanderer*, modern readers are free to draw boundaries wherever they please. It seems unlikely, however, that in either case Anglo-Saxon readers would have felt a need for precise discrimination. Certainly the scribe of the Exeter Book can hardly have thought so, since he wrote out consecutively ten poems beginning with *The Wanderer* and ending with *The Rimming Poem*, and in this sequence allowed *Precepts* and *The Seafarer* and *Vainglory* to jostle each other without compunction.

A limited conclusion one could draw from the existence of these poems and from the relative carelessness of their didactic strategies is that to at least some Anglo-Saxons (poets as well as readers) poetic forms were a good deal less important than the weight of meaning they were meant to carry. To modern students of literature, trained to shun overt didacticism, this is an uncongenial viewpoint. To many people nowadays, the very nature of Anglo-Saxon wisdom must also seem uncongenial, baffling, even downright irritating. The poet of *The Order of the World*, for example, after making the very ambitious declaration quoted above (that he will tell us more about God than we can understand), balks at his task, and comes out only with the flat statement – if it is a statement, for ‘sin’ is an emendation of ‘þin’, see Huppé, 1970, page 38 – ‘Is sin meaht forswiþ’, ‘His power is very great’. The promised explanation turns out to be assertion, and in a way the logical movement of the poem could be reduced to ‘God created the universe, and the universe is there to prove it’, a teleological argument more dramatic than convincing. Of course the poet is not really applying himself to logical argument; and it must be added that the whole poem has been defended in recent years with considerable fervour by modern critics (see Isaacs 1968, Huppé 1970, Lee 1972). Nevertheless the real argument against the poet is not, as some critics have said, that he preaches too much, but that he promises too much. His wisdom tells us very little more than we might have realised for ourselves, though it does so with tremendous assertiveness. In places, indeed, one might suspect that he is almost as pleased by the thought of not knowing things as by that of finding them out; he relishes the reader’s supposed enquiring ignorance at the start, and near the end reflects, in a fine passage strongly reminiscent of Scyld’s funeral in *Beowulf*, that there is no man so wise as to know the start or finish of the sun’s path:

hu geond grund færed goldtorht sunne  
in þæt wonne genip under wætra geþring,  
oþþe hwa þæs leohtes londbuende  
brucan mote, siþþan heo ofer brim hweorfed. (78-81)

[how the golden and splendid sun goes across the abyss, down beneath the tumult of waters into the gloom and darkness, or (to know) who of the men who live on

earth may enjoy the light, once it has passed across the ocean.]

Such passages justify themselves. Nevertheless it is characteristic of the poems as a group to value highly what is ‘deop, deorc, dygel, dyrne’, deep and dark and secret and hidden; a modern reader may feel in places that, as often, obscurity has been confused with profundity. Even more annoying is the poets’ habit, when all else fails, of making lists; or at the opposite extreme of mystery rather than banality, the frequent sense that one is being urged on to some conclusive understanding which has not been fully explained and which will in any case lead to no clear course of action. Anglo-Saxon wisdom, it seems, is neither knowledge nor faith nor morality, but an uneasy mixture of all these and more, a way of life rather than a possession, a balance only to be acquired (so several of the poets say or imply) by age and experience, and not by the activity of reading poems at all. One might be forgiven for feeling that though the poems were useful then, they are not so now. And yet it is a commonplace that all civilisations, our own included, overrate their own objectivity. There are tendrils of sense and beauty in all the didactic poems in Old English, and the tendrils are worth following both for critics and historians: they lead us to a better understanding of the nature of poetry for Anglo-Saxons, and perhaps to some awareness of their cultural preoccupations.

It has seemed to me that the best way to do this is to consider poems individually, while bearing in mind the evident possibility of cross-reference and mutual reinforcement.

### *Precepts, Vainglory, The Fortunes of Men*

*Precepts* lies third in the string of didactic poems in the Exeter Book, after *The Wanderer* and *The Gifts of Men* and immediately before *The Seafarer*. It has aroused little interest among critics, the common opinion being represented by Stanley Greenfield’s comment (1965) that it is an ‘uninspired admonition’ in which ‘a father ten times delivers himself of platitudinous advice about not committing crimes, not associating with evil companions, guarding against the deadly sins ... and so on.’

Without disputing this for the moment, it may first be remarked that in several places *Precepts* is a hard poem to understand. Line 4, to begin with, causes trouble: ‘Do a þætte duge, deag þin gewyrhtu.’ The two half-lines are normally taken to be related causally – always do what may ‘avail’, and then what you have done *will* ‘avail’. But this is tautological. W.J.Sedgefield (1922) accordingly emended ‘gewyrhtu’ to ‘gewyrht’ so that it no longer meant ‘deeds, actions’, translating ‘Do ever what is good, and thy deserts will be good.’ Reacting in a different way to the embarrassment, I.Gollancz had previously, in 1895, tried to associate line 4b with the next line rather than 4a: ‘Do always what is worthy; if thy works be worthy, God will ever be thy patron and support ...’ This loses, however, the feeling that line 5 ff. is intended to reinforce what precedes it, while neither translation marks the fact that ‘duge’ is subjunctive, ‘deag’ indicative. The root of the trouble may be that ‘dugan’ has a wide range of meanings, from ‘to be right’ at one extreme to ‘to be a success, to work (e.g. medicinally)’ at another. I have assumed

that the poet is playing on this, saying in effect that honesty is the best policy – if you do what is right you will be better-off – and probably thinking as he says it of the Last Judgement, when men’s ‘gewyrhtu’ will most evidently be repaid. But this intention is by no means self-evident. And the difficulty continues into the next two and a half lines, where there is doubt as to the extent of what is clearly a multiple parallelism. The translation offered here, ‘God will always be a helpful lord to you in everything that is good; the devil will be an instigator to others of what is worse,’ assumes a quadruple opposition between ‘god’ and ‘freond’, ‘þe’ and ‘þam oþrum’, ‘frea’ and ‘gewyrhta’, ‘goda gehwylces’ and ‘wyrsan’. But this is not the only possible reading. E.A.Kock assumed (1918) that the opposition was in fact between ‘frea’ and ‘feond’, arriving therefore at the translation ‘God ever is lord and help to thee in all that’s good, but to the others a foe in their inferior deeds’. I have been encouraged to reject this authoritative view by noting the unmistakable opposition between ‘godes bearn’ and ‘feondes bearn’ in the next poem, *Vainglory*, and also what seems to be an intended parallel between lines 7 and 19 of *Precepts*, ‘wyrsan gewyrhta’ and ‘wommes gewita’. ‘Gewyrhta’ and ‘gewita’ are often associated in legal contexts, meaning something like ‘accessory before, or after, the fact,’ so that it is attractive to find a reading that balances them grammatically, as Kock’s does not. The difficulties are genuine, however, and might be spun out further by considering, for instance, lines 23-4. But the important point is this: that we encounter difficulties, as modern readers, largely because of the poet’s strange but consistent obscurity at critical places.

Problems centre on his use of comparatives and oppositions. In line 7 the son is told to train himself to do ‘what is better,’ ‘þy betran,’ and in line 47 to choose ‘the better,’ ‘þæt selle’. Against this he is told that the devil is an ‘instigator of what is worse,’ ‘wyrsan gewyrhta,’ line 7, and that he himself must not ‘associate with anyone worse,’ ‘ne gewuna wyrsan,’ line 23. ‘The better’ and ‘the worse’ do not appear to be points on a scale, but total alternatives, just like ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in line 45 and again in lines 50-51. But what these alternatives mean in practice is not defined. They may be psychological states, elements within the individual to be repressed or encouraged. But if they are, we are given no guide as to how these impulses are to be recognised or graded (even though one might have thought it common confessorial experience that no man is a good judge of his own morality). Besides, there is at least a hint that the opposition is also an external and objective one: between God and the devil, good man and bad one, in the end (lines 19-20) between joy and torment. The son and the reader are both encouraged to think of their personalities as single entities, unreservedly good (line 5) or unreservedly bad (line 19), but in either case absolutely opposed to the mysterious and nameless ‘others’ (‘þam oþrum’, lines 6, 20). In this situation of commitment the father seems to think, some of the time, that it is the intellect which will preserve one from evil and help one to make the right choice; and in the first and sixth precepts at least, it is accordingly the strongly abstract nature of his advice that causes our problems.

Yet this abstraction is by no means unimpassioned. Punctuating the poem, no doubt deliberately, is a series of urgent (but vague) imperatives: ‘efn elne þis’ (8),

'Heald elne þis' (16), 'Ræfn elne þis.' (30), 'heald þe elne wið' (50). The 'ellen', the zeal with which the son is to carry out his father's advice is in curious contrast to the nebulosity of some of the maxims ('recognise what is good or evil'), and to the emotional restraint enjoined by most of the rest ('avoid anger and spite and the love of women'). Nevertheless it appears his only protection, and his father does all he can to stimulate it, in him as in us. The urgent necessity of being on the right side is supported by threats of divine punishment at lines 19, 40, 72, threats which appear more justified since we are told we will be assisted if only we make the effort (5-6, 81), and more ominously, 'gif þe deah hyge', once more 'if your mind is good enough'. There seems in fact to be a state almost of paradox within the poem. With the one hand the poet drives us on to zeal, instant action, realisation of the critical nature of our situation; with the other he indicates only that emotions are dangerous, that wisdom and the scriptures are important for survival, that our task is over as soon as we recognise the good and determine to join it. The result is a sense of frustration, as furious purpose drives on to inaction: but also, and perhaps more intentionally, of psychic danger.

A similar contradiction can be seen almost within the form of the poem itself. At several places the father's precepts are entirely familiar from other Old English poems, and must have been even more familiar to contemporary audiences. We are told five times of the danger of foolish words (lines 34, 42, 57, 79, 84), a warning repeated many times in *The Wanderer*, *The Fortunes of Men*, and elsewhere; the risks of drunkenness are an equally common motif. On five or six occasions, in the second half of the poem, this familiarity reaches the level of 'gnomic' utterance. In other words the advice is put in the form of an impersonal generalisation, based frequently on the modal verb 'sceal', 'must be'. The most certain examples in *Precepts* are lines 37-9, 54-6, 57-8, and 86-9, with 71-2 and 78-80 as further possibilities. It is striking how much the tone of these remarks differs from those of the bulk of the poem. The gnomic reflections are impersonal, cold, relying on occasion on studied understatement: the adverb 'seldan', 'seldom', in lines 54-5, clearly means 'never', just as 'oft' in line 37 really means 'always', kept down only by the caution and irony which are a normal part of the gnomic stance. But these three adverbs, together with the indeterminate 'monig' of line 71 and the understated, threatening 'swipor ... þonne him sy sylfum ryht' four lines later, are practically the only words in the poem to express moderation, normality, working by rule-of-thumb. Much more characteristic are the adverbs suggesting totality, utter dedication. 'A', 'ever', is used eight times in the poem, 'simle', 'always', six times, 'næfre', 'never', twice, 'æfre' once. Several times the words are extended, 'a þenden þu lifige, widan feore, a symle'. The words suggest again the dangers facing son and reader, the elemental oppositions which will make one slip perilous; and the consequent nervous excitement of the poet or the father. Against this the gnomic intrusions imply detached and self-sufficient brooding. The clash of emotions which one may detect supports the sense of danger aroused by the poet's mingled urgency and obscurity – an alarm sounding in the darkness and indicating one knows not what. Whatever one's opinion of the skill or usefulness of the poem, it can hardly be

denied a certain complexity of tone and of effect.

It would be possible to approach the structure of the poem in another way, by considering the mutual compatibility of some of the advice given. What is one to make, for instance, of the adjurations to love one's father and mother and teachers, and never to betray one's friends, and their potential conflict with the reminders that one has, however, higher duties to God and to the right? Perhaps one can say no more than that it is such oppositions of religious demands with social solidarity which make the 'wise man' the gloomy, solitary figure he usually is in Old English poetry; but in any case the poet here seems to be only groping his way towards a conclusion. More can be gained by considering the relationship of *Precepts* to the poem which follows it and *The Seafarer* in the Exeter Book, *Vainglory*.

This poem has been treated rather more kindly by modern critics, in particular by Professor B.F.Huppé (1970), in a full discussion which has the great merit of concentrating attention (once more) on the poem's many verbal difficulties. But even these are of a different kind from those of *Precepts*. The language of *Precepts* is bare, direct, making little use of complex sentences or of compound words other than familiar ones. *Vainglory* has, by contrast, 'twenty-one otherwise unattested words, six which occur only once outside *Vainglory*, and one that is unique in poetry, but attested in prose' (Huppé, 1970, page 8). This comparative richness of vocabulary is complemented by a vivid and detailed description of the sinner, in the centre of the poem, and a virtually total shunning of what is gnomic or impersonal. At first sight, and in many respects at last, *Vainglory* could hardly be more distinct from *Precepts* in tone and structure.

It is the more surprising that there are a string of similarities. One has already been mentioned: the fact that, just as *Precepts* opens apparently with an opposition of 'god' and 'feond', so *Vainglory* is based structurally on the opposition of 'godes agen bearn' (line 6, and again line 80) and 'feondes bearn' (line 47). It is equally true that in both cases it is the role of the poet (instructed by a prophet) or the son (instructed by his father) to tell the two apart; both poems use the same verbal element to describe the process, 'toscead simle ... on gescead witan'. Further, *Vainglory*, like *Precepts*, presents us with an immediate verbal problem caused by an unparticularised comparative — 'God's own son' is opposed to 'þone wacran ... scyldum bescyredne'. The problem may be stated like this: since we know that the 'devil's son' of line 47 is a man, we may imagine that the 'son of God' in line 7 is also a man, and that 'the weaker' therefore is human as well, as Huppé points out, op. cit., a fallen man, a sinner. On the other hand 'God's own son' could evidently mean Christ; his natural opposite would then be 'the weaker spirit', that is, Satan (who was proved weaker by his expulsion from heaven, as indeed the poet is later to say). Decision between the two alternatives is not made easier by the descriptive 'scyldum bescyredne'. 'Bescyred' is used quite frequently in the Exeter Book, and usually means 'deprived'. Thus to be 'dreamum bescyred', 'stripped of any happiness', in *The Fortunes of Men* line 55 is clearly regrettable, while to be 'scyldum bescyrede', 'set free from one's sins', is in *The Riming Poem* a necessary preliminary to going to heaven. However, if there is one thing clear about 'scyldum bescyredne'

in *Vainglory* it is that it is associated with weakness, whether human or diabolical. In this quandary Professor Huppé has suggested a slightly involved pun on 'scild' = 'shield' and 'scyld' = 'sin', translating 'unshielded through sins'. I have preferred to think that the word has undergone a semantic shift similar to modern 'deprive, deprived'. It is now normal to talk of 'a deprived person' without saying what he has been deprived of (though this use is still unrecognised by the *O.E.D.*); I assume that for the poet of *Vainglory* 'scyldum bescyredne' was similarly an abbreviated form of, perhaps, '(rices) bescyredne (for his) scyldum', c.p. the Parker Chronicle entry for 821.

This reading comes down heavily, perhaps too heavily, on a diabolic interpretation of the phrase, and may be wrong. But as with *Precepts* the point is not just that the poem is difficult or that we are failing to see what once was obvious: the vagueness is built into the poem, and is the result of heavy, dramatic, and total opposition, a view of the world which sees little difference between sinners and devils, and no resemblance at all between sinners and saints. At times the poet seems almost to be putting forward a theory of angelic or diabolic possession. Thus at the end of the poem line 80, though awkward to translate, does say that to the good and humble man God's own son (and this must surely here mean Christ) will be a welcome guest and associate, 'a guest conjoined' as Huppé renders it. What the nature of that conjunction is one can only guess, as one can only speculate on the sense of 'wilgest on wicum', 'a welcome guest wherever men live', in line 7. The devil's relationship with his partisans is as close if no clearer. After the long description of the sinner, the poet says unequivocally that he is 'a child of the devil enclosed in flesh', and the last phrase suggests it is not meant entirely as a metaphor. C.A.Regan (1970) proposed several analogues from patristic writing which would make it likely that the poet did indeed believe in a theory of imitation leading to identification. And the strength of the strange association is increased in the poem by two recurrent images (both noted by Prof. Huppé, if explained in a rather different way than they are here).

The first is the image of the hostile spear. If one ignores the mysterious 'æscstede' of line 17, there are three or perhaps four uses of this: and the peculiar thing about it is that one cannot tell, so to speak, whether the deadly shafts are coming in or going out. In the first instance (line 27) the phrase 'feondes fligepilum' inevitably calls up the clear and familiar picture of *Beowulf* 1743-7, of the devil creeping up on the unwary man and shooting him with the shafts of sin – an image of temptation very similar, as E.G.Stanley pointed out (1955) to the Anglo-Saxon theory of disease caused by elf-shot. The sinner in *Beowulf*, however, is asleep, a passive victim. In *Vainglory* he is anything but, showing remarkable noise and activity. In line 34 it is he who is the marksman, letting fly his 'premeditated shafts' (by which the poet presumably means verbal insults, attempts to make others entrap or lose control of themselves). At this stage one might wish to go back to the earlier example of 'fligepilum' and decide that these belong to the devil only in the sense that he furnished the arrows of spite for the sinner to use. But three lines later the 'inwitflan', the 'treacherous arrows', are again and this time unquestion-

ably incoming: the sinner's soul is now seen as a fort, deserted and captured. There can be no question that one is meant to put these images together, for at three-line intervals between lines 34 and 40 the poet uses the same construction in the second half-line, 'hyggegar leteð ... læteð inwitflan ... searwum læteð ... word ut faran'. But he does not discriminate between what the devil does to the sinner and what the sinner does to other men. It may be said that the whole picture of the sinner is curiously implausible. In a mere twenty-one lines (23-44) he is accused of pride; envy; boastfulness; ignorance; slanderous spite; gluttony; and deceitfulness – a combination of course not impossible, but one that is difficult to focus. It is hard to believe that the poet intended us to make any dispassionate analysis of what it actually is that sinners do wrong. Once again, he is aiming at a horrifically complete picture which will indicate the strife of eternal principles, and urge one to fight in it rather than to scrutinise one's soul. The description is in fact a propagandist 'atrocious story'; the image that pervades it is contemptuously physical. It is one of 'swelling'. The man's spirit swells ('þrinteð'), he is 'ful' and 'gefylled', near the end he is 'gebermed', or blown up with 'barm', brewers' yeast; possibly the result of all this (Huppé, op. cit., page 16) is that he belches his words out instead of speaking ('breodað he ond bælceð').

What the poet liked in this picture was maybe its implication of an enormous bubble of over-confidence waiting to be pricked – a thought congenial to many Old English poets, see Ringler, 1966, or Irving, 1968, ch.1. But he regards it from a position of unquestioning superiority. To him, the hatred of the sinner for 'se sella mon' is as natural as that of the fallen angels for 'hyra sellan', and both enmities will end in the same way, by a shattering manifestation of power.

It is easy to criticise the poet's stance. The adjuration of line 44, that if you meet a man like the sinner you are to recognise him as evil, is almost comically unnecessary, since anyone exhibiting anything like that combination of hatred and bad manners would be shunned by the least perceptive. One might further suspect the author's charity. And, like the author of *Precepts*, he fails to give us any positive, useful idea of what we are supposed to *do*. But these criticisms are irrelevant to the poem's purpose, if not to its effect. Though unlike *Precepts* in so many respects, *Vainglory* is trying to do the same thing: to arouse a sense of danger, to make one aware of the mutual exclusiveness and intolerance of good and evil, so much so that one will approach cautiously any action or decision to be taken in life. The two poems may be similar, also, in one final respect: their readiness to use for moral purposes advice and images which might once have been purely physical, materialistic, the common coin of heroic society. Thus lines 46-7 of *Precepts* are an imperative rehandling of some such maxim as lies behind the Danish coastguard's speech in *Beowulf* 287-9, while several of its other suggestions have a practical basis; 'do not get drunk in case you annoy someone' turns into 'do not get drunk because it is wrong'. In *Vainglory* one can only say that the poet is a trace equivocal in his attitude to the values of heroic society. It is an accident, one hopes without significance, that the scribe has distorted the advice to love one's enemies by writing 'freond', 'friend', for 'feond', 'enemy', in line 70, and has pro-

duced as a result a sentiment more appropriate to gnomic verse, see for instance *Maxims I C*, line 7 ff. But the description of winehall, sage, and minstrel of lines 10-23, though it begins with criticism and ends with more, seems intentionally elegiac, even frustrated, rather than wicked. It may not be a coincidence that the poet extracts himself from the scene by using, for a directly moral purpose, the only semi-gnomic remark he allows himself, the generalisation that 'minds are divided into types, for men are not all alike.'

In its very unambitiousness *The Fortunes of Men* perhaps shows us the soil from which both material and moral wisdom could spring. Unlike the two poems discussed above, it is cool and relaxed. There is no attempt to give authority to what is said by bringing in a fictional voice; indeed what is said seems so irresistibly obvious that authority is not needed. Though the poem is like *Vainglory* in being bipartite, following bad fates with good fates and pointing the contrast with the repeated phrase 'mid godes meahtum' (lines 1, 58), the opposition is not moral but simply accidental. No advice is given, except in the last two rather perfunctory lines, and the poem can hardly even be called gnomic, since on the whole it avoids generalisation for the particular; it is difficult to argue with or derive insight from the proposition that some things happen to some people.

Nevertheless it would be a mistake to think *The Fortunes of Men* without direction. It has a strong, if unsuspected, unity of tone. A recurrent note is struck by the first few lines; or rather two notes. The one is that of human concern, expressed by the striking run of verbs (several of them unfamiliar) which describe the way the father and mother look after their children: they bear them, give them form, cherish them, coax them, lead them, carry them, give them presents, look after them. Against all these stands the single verb 'bringad', also of course potentially beneficial, but in fact ominous, unloving, just as the force of 'winter' is stronger than any affection from 'wer ond wif, fæder ond modor'. Right at the start humanity is brought into opposition with, and under subjection to, time. And from then on the poet shows us not merely impersonality (which one might endure with relative calm), but an impersonality face to face with human regrets and reactions. One sees at the same time the strength of feeling between one person and another, and its total weakness when extended to the universe outside.

The most characteristic figure is therefore the mourner. In line 14 the mother mourns her child ('bimurned'), in line 20 the cripple laments his own fate ('cwanian, murnan'), in line 46 again a woman weeps ('reoted') as she sees her son burning. In each case the activity of mourning is irrepressible but (as the poet does not bother to say) useless. He offers a more macabre picture of human powerlessness in the scene of the hanged man, unable to protect himself from even the worst violations as the ravens peck out his eyes: once again the lack of feeling would be more tolerable if the poet did not suggest the instinctive reaction of shooing them away at the same time that he tells us it is impossible. In a fifth picture the poet is even sportive as he shows us a human being gripped by gravity, killing himself in a fall. For a moment there is the sense of freedom, even wish-fulfilment, as the man is in free fall, in flight, turns in the air ('bið on flihte seþeah, laceð on lyfte'). Then the

universe reasserts itself, as he lands on the tree-root. In this as in several other of the tableaux there is an element of indignity, as people, instead of dying bravely or gallantly, die in disgrace or through clumsiness, or do not die at all but survive to know their own pain and weakness. It is striking that, although the poet includes the rather conventional images of the exile (lines 27-32) and the man killed 'on meodubence' (48-50), he goes on from the latter to give us an unexpected and original side of the dangers of the mead-hall: apparently, that a man may drink himself to death, and so die with particular irony and wretchedness. The sequence of unlucky fates makes its point the more powerfully for not being directly stated; and also through a kind of internal rhetorical contrast. The poet likes to end verse-paragraphs with curt, dismissive half-lines (e.g. lines 14, 26, 42, 50, as also 76, 84); but against this he also has the habit of using 'þær' or 'þonne' clauses to extend pointedly the worst aspects of situations (e.g. lines 24, 36, 45, 52). The whole poem invites the paraphrase: 'These are the fortunes of men. There is nothing to be done about them.'

By contrast, the sequence of good fortunes in the second half of the poem (actually it is rather less) is relatively feeble. The conventional charms of heroic society are indicated – gold, harps, hawks – and the poet changes his organising principle from the deaths of men to their skills ('monna cræftas', line 94). It would be possible to see in this a suggestion that what opposes the neutrality or malevolence of time is human control, taming wild things, creating concord, giving and taking in a spirit of trust. But even if this is so the effect is not strong. The poet repeats his general conclusion both in the middle and at the end of the poem (lines 64-7, 93-6), and it is no more than that God rules human life, and that the contrasts in it therefore come from him. The poet does *not* go on to say that this is reassuring, that seen ills are unseen goods, that there will be a reward hereafter, or to offer any of the evident consolations that might be drawn. Even in generalisation his tone remains cool, factual, indicating innate difference rather than potential reconciliation.

One might say the same of other Anglo-Saxon poets, several of whom also appear to find it difficult to move from recognition of God's power to any evident confidence that all is for the best. (See *Beowulf* 1057-62 and *Deor* 31-42, and for comment on them, respectively Ringler 1966 and Shippey 1972, ch.3) But *The Fortunes of Men* presents us with a particularly teasing opposition of pain and providence, so detached as to be almost bland, and yet showing clearly that the poet is able to imagine the reality of suffering, even if he chooses not to comment on it. The impression finally left is not heartlessness, but a determination to look on the bright side of a dark situation; a second recognition of the fact that mourning does no good, whether to the poet or to the nameless mothers of doomed children. The poet's wisdom is a blend of recognition and wilful optimism.

It is impossible to say which of these poems has priority over the others, and putting them in any kind of order is necessarily subjective. One need have no special confidence even in the order of the manuscript. Nevertheless it is possible to see that, in one way, *The Fortunes of Men* (or other poems like it) lays the foundations for the comments of the others. The statement it makes is common to all

Old English didactic poems: God is powerful, and (the obverse) men are weak. Its author resists the temptation to go on with an ‘And therefore ...’ But this is where the poets of *Precepts* and *Vainglory* start, offering as they do answers, reassurances based on different blends of wisdom and morality. The sense of fear and danger which, I have suggested, is latent in both of them would however be well accounted for if both poets had in their minds some such awareness as is projected by *The Fortunes of Men*. All three poets agree that life is full of oppositions (‘wrætlic, missenlic, gedæled’): through its maze the wise man must tread warily.

### *Maxims I and II, The Rune Poem*

The poems entitled, in A.S.P.R., *Maxims I* and *Maxims II* have been described as ‘gnomic’ at least since 1826, when J.J. Conybeare used the term. According to the *O.E.D.* a ‘gnome’ is ‘a short pithy statement of a general truth; a proverb, maxim, aphorism, or apophthegm,’ but the main function of the word ‘gnomic’ is to place the Old English poems in a genre well-represented in Irish, Welsh, and Norse literature, and (perhaps most important for early users of the term) respectably familiar also from Greek. This categorisation has not been entirely fortunate, for (as P.L. Henry said, 1966) the comparative approach ‘has tended to promote the anatomy of the subject at the expense of the living organism and to deal in norms rather than in facts.’ Too many readers have felt that the word ‘gnomic’ is enough to explain the peculiarity of the poems: both their barely imaginable purpose and their undeniable charm, felt even now and indeed perhaps more strongly now than at any time since (one presumes) the tenth century.

Even the form of the poems’ sayings is less than clear. It is customary nowadays to make a distinction between ‘proverb’ and ‘maxim’ (see N. Barley, 1972), the latter being general and literal, the former particular but metaphorical. Thus the remark of *Proverbs* 30, 26, ‘The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks,’ is either a banal statement or else a proverb, meant to be taken as a metaphor for the general truth that shelter may compensate for weakness: one can imagine it being said to an ambitious person, to remind him not to get above his station. Meanwhile *Proverbs* 15, 20, ‘A wise son maketh a glad father,’ is evidently a plain maxim.

As their titles suggest, the Old English poems lean much more heavily to the latter end of the balance; yet certain doubts may be felt. The bulk of *Maxims II*, for instance, consists of statements of the form ‘x “sceal on” y,’ followed by a half-line expounding ‘x’, such as the famous ‘Draca sceal on hlæwe, fród, frætwum wlanc’, ‘A dragon must live in a barrow, old and proud of his treasures’. If these are literal they are not purposeful; they can hardly be called maxims. On the other hand, if they are proverbs, all that they convey by their many metaphors is ‘A place for everything and everything in its place’ – though one cannot imagine one Anglo-Saxon saying reprovingly to a less tidy colleague ‘Draca sceal on hlæwe ...’ Meanwhile *Maxims I*, though all of the three possibly separate poems within it are much more overtly ethical than *Maxims II*, presents further problems. ‘Feorh cynna fela fæþmeþ wide elgond monig’, the poet observes, ‘There are many islands, far and

wide, containing many species of life.' Is this a statement, a maxim, or a proverb? It is indeed literally true; but plays a part also in an argument whose kernel seems to be that people are different but can be reconciled: 'it takes all sorts to make a world.' In a similar way 'Werig sceal se wiþ winde roweþ,' 'A man who rows against the wind will be exhausted,' is a fact but contains a proverbial suggestion which we might express in terms of swimming with the tide or bowing to the wind. That suggestion can now only be speculative, but one might remark that if 'Licgende beam læsst groweþ,' 'The fallen tree grows least,' does *not* have a proverbial implication, it is virtually meaningless. By contrast, E.A.Kock (1918) felt that the much-disputed line *I B 8* meant something like 'still waters run deep.' But his deduction of a meaning from a metaphor, though attractive, has not found much acceptance. One conclusion is that proverbs in the end consist of 'statement + context', and once the context is lost the point is also. A less depressing one is that modern terminology is simply inadequate for describing ancient practice, since besides the literal-to-metaphorical range already shown the sayings vary very much as to whether they are ethical or factual (some say 'sceal', some say 'biþ'), as well as in their range from obviousness to obscurity. No-one, further, can hope to have more than an opinion on whether they were widely disseminated or invented on the spot by the poets, though this was a distinction ('Sprichwort' versus 'Denkspruch') once highly regarded.

To repeat Dr. Henry's remark, it is more important to look at facts than at norms, and in particular to state if not solve the questions of the poems' symbolic suggestions, and their lurking hints of connectivity: only these can lead us towards the problems already mentioned of the poems' purpose, and attraction.

*Maxims II* is the easiest to discuss. It comes from MS Cotton Tiberius B. i, where it is one of three items in the same handwriting: a catalogue-poem on the festivals of the Church year, the *Menologium*; *Maxims II*; and the start of the C manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The *A.S.P.R.* editors state firmly that *Maxims* 'has no relationship in subject-matter to either the *Menologium* or the *Chronicle*' (*A.S.P.R.* Vol VI, page lxi), but the most recent commentator (Bolland, 1973) sees a clear connection between all three. The first two state, as it were, what is permanent and eternal, one in terms of the rhythm of ecclesiastical commemoration, the other through 'the physical world and the social order by which man survives in it' (Bolland, *op. cit.*). These provide a firm basis for the flux of temporal events in the *Chronicle*. As Mr. Bolland further points out, this speculation is much strengthened by the first half-line of *Maxims II* appearing in small capitals: 'CYNING SCEAL RICE HEALDAN'. One could hardly look for a better brief summary of the *Chronicle's* moral. The conclusion is, therefore, that at least one Anglo-Saxon took the genre 'gnomic poem' rather seriously; and perhaps more interestingly, that he saw in it something like the abstract insights to which modern critics are drawn. It is hard only to know where to draw a line.

How deliberate, for instance, is the relationship between the first and the second half-line, 'cyning sceal rice healdan' and 'ceastræ beoð feorran gesyne'? It has been suggested (by Dr. Henry, *op. cit.*) that kings and cities are related through their pre-eminence, by R. MacGregor Dawson (1962) that the one lives in the other.

As one reads on, though, it begins to look as if the ‘ceastrā’ are in fact ruins, their builders, the giants, forgotten. Does this suggest, perhaps, an implied ‘because’ between 1a and 1b? Kings must guard their kingdoms because (if they do not) the kingdoms will end in waste and ruin like the cities of Roman Britain? One might feel that just as the first line tells us about both ‘cyning’ (his duty is to ‘guard’) and ‘rice’ (it needs guarding by a ‘king’), so the first line as a whole tells us something about ‘healdan’ – it means to rule, to guard, to keep in being. Certainly something of this basic suggestiveness clings to many of the juxtapositions in gnomic poetry: it is perhaps what Lynn L. Remly means by saying (1971) that the poets have an ‘ontological obsession’. However the connection is shadowy and cannot be followed for long. The poet goes on from ruins (?) to wind, thunder, Christ, fate, winter, the seasons, to truth, to treasure, and wisdom: all powers, as one sees immediately, but powers put down without much suggestion of whether they are good or bad, and furthermore organised in no sort of hierarchy. Clearly Christ (4b) ought to be at the top, but the move from primary to superlative in 5a implies if anything the opposite; the two half-lines cannot be read comparatively (see E. G. Stanley, 1975, page 114). Against that it is very tempting to take 13b, ‘the clouds roll on,’ as a kind of comment on 13a, ‘grief is remarkably hard to shake off,’ and on what precedes it. The old man has seen many things, the grief of them will never leave him – but the universe continues its uncaring progress. So one might argue: and go on to point out that (as printed in this volume) the section 1-17a begins and ends with sayings of encouragement, prowess, the tight grip, which frame and perhaps oppose the gloomier recognition of superhuman powers in the middle, as if suggesting some latent and more inclusive precept about the way things are and the way one behaves. But if that meaning is present, it is only subliminal. The sayings *can* be read as single, detached, only immediately true.

A reading of this kind is virtually obligatory on the next ‘section’, 17b-41, where the poet seems to have gone out of his way to provide a sequence of remarks tightly connected by form, but utterly distinct in sense. Only the most speculative could find a connection between most of the twenty-four things listed. Fish and kings, perhaps, might be linked by their lavishness – they pour out rings, or spawn, indiscriminately. The bird and the salmon both move quickly. But no-one could make anything of the bear and the river, or should of the green hill, God, and the door (through his suffering on a green hill God opened the door to ...!). The poet has marked his interest here in variety by counterbalancing the all but identical ‘b’ half-lines with imaginatively dissimilar ‘a’ ones. Of the twenty-four descriptive phrases only three (29 from 28, 35 from 31, 38 from 37) repeat a syntactic and metric shape used previously in the section – something of a feat in such a restricted context. The poet also relies, in places, on connections by no more than sound. In the article already cited R. MacGregor Dawson points out that in lines 32-3 ‘treow’ (‘faith’) may proceed to ‘wudu’ (‘wood’) via the punning, unstated intermediary ‘treo’ (‘tree’). One wonders too whether the start of this section does not come from the jingly repetition ‘hilde gebidan – wilde gewunian’; while, for what it is worth, the section also ends with the echo ‘wilde gewunian – winde geblanden.’

There is no intellectual link between ‘hilde’ – ‘wilde’ – ‘winde’. They suggest only that the poet wrote what came into his mind from wayward association.

Nevertheless there is a fine element of paradox in the definition that begins the list: ‘A hawk must go on a glove, the wild thing rest there.’ The first half-line seems innocuous enough, but the two words in the second – ‘wilde’, ‘gewunian’ – are almost opposites, throwing a strong stress retrospectively on ‘sceal’, reminding us of what is unnatural about wild hawks on human wrists. The line echoes what has been said before about the virtues of control, dominance, the tight grip. And these reappear more evidently at the end of the poem. Having given us a series of pictures of the dark, lonely, and illicit (the thief, the giant, the lovers), the poet seems to return to his theme of elemental indifference (the sea, the clouds, the thoughtless cattle, the stars). Then for the first time since lines 14-15 he gives us an extended passage of ethical generalisation, making the point, perhaps latent earlier on, that the world is full of contending powers. Surely there is an effect of clinching in lines 55-6, as he observes ‘The wise man must always consider this world’s conflicts, and the criminal must hang ...’ As with ‘wea’ and ‘wolcnu’, or ‘wilde’ and ‘gewunian’, the wise man and the criminal (peacemaker and outlaw) seem natural opposites, facing each other across the boundary lines of human and inhuman, chaotic and controlled. The criminal must hang, then, *because* the wise man is aware of the strife in the world, and knows that without the tight grip of the guarder, the tamer, the executioner, human beings will be overcome. The Anglo-Saxon poet is of course not concerned with the ironies of using violence to suppress violence, but might not have found the thought uncongenial. He ends gloomily, with the repetition ‘Meotod ana wat ... drihten ana wat’, and with speculation about the fate of the soul which, if not exactly sceptical about the father’s embrace and the homes of the conquerors, at least sees them as far away and hardly affecting issues of survival in this world.

*Maxims II* is a moving poem because of the way its clear, precise images link up unexpectedly and suggestively. The modern critic’s temptation is to press that suggestiveness into certainty, to derive a structure from what may be just single things. Nigel Barley (1972) writes of ‘paradigms’ and ‘pensée sauvage’, P. B. Taylor (1969) of ‘rituals of men’ and ‘rituals of nature’. The non-general nature of so much of the poem must, however, give one pause. It is hard to see what intellectual or ethical pleasure lies behind lines 17-41, though the germ of the answer may be in Dr. Taylor’s further observation that the gnomes are ‘a text on the art of poetry’ (a recondite one, to be sure). Many of the ranks and beasts and objects listed are stock images of Old English poetry, set down here under their most useful aspects. It remains true that the gnomic poet seems to write them down not for future reference, but simply because he likes them for themselves, and because (like Treebeard the Ent in Professor Tolkien’s affectionate recreation in chapter 4 of *The Two Towers*) he likes the idea of fitness, wholeness.

One gnomic poem might be a quirk; two suggest a taste. It seems likely that we in fact have four, the differences between each of the three sections of *Maxims I* in the Exeter Book being palpable, if not conclusive. (The sections are marked off

in the manuscript by capitalising the initial words, a method used indifferently for beginning short poems or sections of long poems.) There is also a more general dissimilarity between the whole of *Maxims I* and *Maxims II*. The latter has almost as many separate subjects as it has lines, very few subordinate clauses, and sentences that extend beyond a couple of lines only at the end. *Maxims I*, by contrast, begins conversationally, contains many extended sentences, and follows trains of thought for longer. It is surprising, indeed, that the A.S.P.R. editors should have said so firmly (vol. III, pages xlvi-vii) that 'there is an almost complete lack of ordered arrangement ... The entire text gives the impression of a mass of unrelated materials ... assembled by the compiler more or less mechanically, with no attempt at selection or logical arrangement.' As Professor Dawson has shown (op. cit.) the poets' thoughts can be followed for most of the time without strain. The cast of their (or his) thoughts is moreover rather different from that of the poet of *Maxims II*.

The author of *Maxims I A* is, in a word, trustful. In several places (lines 8, 27, 39) he remarks openly on the sadness of the human condition: men grow old, die, lose their children, go blind. And, as in *Maxims II* or *The Fortunes of Men*, there is on occasion a sense of violent contrast suggesting the incommunicability of grief: the blind man and the blithe one share a line. But these potentially disturbing reflections are enclosed almost always in a frame of protecting or consoling powers, the first God, the second wisdom, powers which respectively end and begin the poem. Thus lines 27-30 seem for a moment to echo the end of the Cottonian gnomes as they remark that men must die, that there is an eternal struggle in the world (c.p. 'ymb gedal sacan middangeardes' with 'hyrcgean ymb þisse worulde gewinn'), and that the Ruler alone knows ... Then doubt if not gloom is dispersed as the poet expresses the curiously Malthusian reflections, first, that new children replace the dead, and second that since this is so death is necessary to prevent over-crowding! The same acceptance is apparent in the strong double contrast of eternal God and mortal man in lines 7-8, and in the pious hope of lines 43-4. Resignation is balanced, however, by what one might call a belief in moderate self-advancement: God helps those who help themselves. For the first things we are told that God gives men intelligence, and diversity. Wise men use the former to reconcile the latter (lines 18-21); wise men also save their souls (36); furthermore, they teach each other (start, and line 45 ff.). It is striking that after the many turns of his argument — if it can be called that — the poet in line 57 is still echoing his remark of line 18, that peoples reach peace by adjudication. If there is an eternal turmoil in the universe it is opposed by the wise man's 'þing'; one could hardly have a plainer statement of community than 'til sceal mid tilum'.

This triple contrast (of God, suffering, and wisdom) is evidently not dissimilar, in essence, to that opposition of nature and culture remarked in *Maxims II*; even the young man of line 45 seems a little like the Cottonian 'hawk on glove', a wild creature to be 'tamed' and if necessary (line 51) restrained. But the poems are otherwise distinguishable in tone and attitude. It is the more surprising that, at least to modern ears, *Maxims I A* changes tone distinctly from about line 59. Inspired perhaps by no more than the etymological connection 'gecynde — cyning', the poet moves suddenly to a much more heroic and aggressive stance. The king is

a land-grabber, not a kingdom-guarder. Power and pride lead to firm statements of social propriety. Peace and settlements give way to the gold-sharing commonly associated with war, and only abruptly linked with the favours of God. The last passage serves as a caution for those who would draw from the gnomic poems too consistent a philosophy. It also raises a final question, most conveniently illustrated from the last two poems or sections of the Exeter gnomes, *Maxims I B* and *I C*.

Little can be said of these two poems that is entirely novel. Both are more difficult textually than either of the two poems discussed already; and neither is as coherent in form as the Cotton gnomes, or in thought as *I A*. *I B* indeed begins with a series of elemental and seasonal oppositions which have proved not quite neat enough for some tastes (see K. Malone, 1943), and goes on to a string of extended pictures — the queen, the Frisian's wife, the sailor, the starving man — which lead to maxims relatively intermittently, unlike the clearly metaphorical images of *I A* — the tree and the storm. *I C*, meanwhile, though it wanders round the theme of friends and friendlessness, looks distinctly haphazard. What both poems share, at least from time to time, is a certain hard materialism. 'Nænig fira to fela gestryneð', insists *I C*, 'No man can get too much'. The ultimate importance of food is repeated several times by *I B*. Friends are important, in *I C* again, not for their companionship but because they save you trouble, or else protect you in dangerous tasks. There is a curious link between the two poems in their ideas about burial. *I C* says (lines 9-14) that a friendless man takes wolves as his companions, a counsel of despair that is almost a paradox, since wolves are elementally treacherous; so careless of relationships are they that they do not respect the dead, but feel only hunger at the sight of corpses. In between these reflections the poet slots his maxim, that one ought to fear wolves and bury the dead. What this seems to say beneath its grisly suggestion is that on one side there are friendship, rituals, the last rites, on the other only wolves and unappeasable hunger. It is odd that *I B* makes much the same opposition with its stern, definite, but wholly unexpected turn 'Mægen mon sceal mid mete fedan, morþor under eorþan befeolan': appease your hunger (but) bury the dead. A Levi-Straussian distinction-cum-parallel of man and beast, that both feel the same impulses but react to them differently? The thought could be taken further (see Gerstein 1974 and Haarder 1975). But at any rate it is clear that the poets are describing everyday reality less than a cultural ideal, and that that ideal includes, stresses, a firm grip on basic necessities — food and support.

There are more overtly materialistic passages in both poems. In lines 49-51 of *I B* good and evil are thoroughly equated with successful and useless: our own cultural ideals no longer allow such plain statements that might be right, though we are allowed to say, with a slight cynicism now obscured by semantic change, 'honesty is the best policy.' *I C* tells us to be prepared for hostility (57), to return one gift for another (17). Most striking is the low value put on the humble or unfortunate man. In line 48 of *I B* there is considerable dispute over the meaning of the second half-line 'adl gesigan' (see note 7 to the translation of that poem). Nevertheless it does appear to be an intermediary between 'The humble man has to bow down' and 'what is right will grow strong', and the poet's general point appears to be not

just that it is a law of nature that the weak and humble must give way to those stronger and wiser, but that it is an acceptable law of nature. In the last thirteen lines of *I C* the poet tells the story of Cain and Abel with sudden metric regularity, asserting that since then warfare has been endemic in the world. He stops short, however, of saying that this is regrettable or that Christ's incarnation has made a difference. Instead he states, again as a law of nature, that men must have courage just as weapons have points. The penalty for humility (or cowardice) is to get no share of the loot. Of course the poet may be regretting this fratricidal situation, just as the poet of *I B* might be harbouring some concealed irony in the word 'riht'. It seems likely, though, that both are stating the way of the world as they see it, and are on the whole untroubled by it. War and inequality, like disease and dead children, are a part of the divine will (asserted in each gnomic poem or section as in every Old English didactic poem). The wise man concentrates on accepting and enduring them rather than reproving them or wishing they would stop.

Such reflections are of course to be found in both the gnomic poems discussed earlier. *Maxims I A* remarks the misery of starvation, and the Cotton poem observes (again in a rather Malthusian way) that people fight inevitably over land, adding as if the process were an endless cycle, 'pursuing violence'. This general harshness returns us to the problems raised at the start of this section. How coherent are these poems? What do they imply? How are they attractive? What can their purpose have been?

It now seems possible to say, as indeed Professor Dawson has said before, that the poems are reasonably coherent from one line to another, even if the connections are formal or aural as well as sensible; and furthermore, as many readers have sensed, that there is a considerable coherence of implication. The poets are writing from within a firmly-held cultural ethic, which may be that of their nation or class or profession. The central tenets of this seem to be that misfortune is inevitable, but that wise men find ways of guarding against it, mitigating it, in the last resort accepting it. In this prudential process social controls are given high importance. For a modern reader the poems' charm often derives from their unfamiliar blend of the bold and the canny, the physical and the abstract, the banal and the suggestive. The question of the poems' original purpose remains. If they were intended as entertainment, one can only say that they neither amuse nor distract. If they were mnemonic poems, catalogues, then they have neither the completeness nor the ease of reference which one might hope for in such works. If they are didactic then they ought to come to firmer conclusions. It is hard to imagine them being sung in the meadhall, read in the refectory, or even set as an exercise in copying, all contexts which one might imagine for at least some Old English poems. The agreement of modern critics that the poems tell us a good deal about Anglo-Saxon England does not solve the problem, for it is evident that they tell us most about the natural and familiar assumptions of their authors, in a way that can hardly have been intended; they are 'a time-capsule' (Taylor, 1969) only to us.

The problem of purpose is indeed the most baffling one in Old English poetic studies, and can only be considered speculatively (another deterrent to scholars).

All that can be said for sure is that the gnomic poems, like the didactic poems generally, bear witness to a strong liking for setting out the fruits of experience in a direct and incontrovertible form; and that they aim at a definitive, even quasi-legal tone. Earlier scholars went on to think in terms of folk-moots and law-speakers (B. Williams, 1914, repr. 1966, pages 16-17), while a modern one has drawn a parallel, more apologetically, with ‘casual conversation ... not, perhaps, a good pattern for a poem, but ... an adequate one’ (Dawson, 1962). There are two possibilities of more literary interest: one is prompted by the reflection that modern lyrics also often hide strong ethical statements in descriptions, though conventions of individuality have changed very much; maybe, after all, these Anglo-Saxon poets wrote as a means of self-expression, in a modern fashion. But on the other hand one might note the faint suggestion of a dialogue, or a riddle-contest, at the start of *Maxims I*. When one remembers the Anglo-Saxon predilection for mystery, one might think that the gnomic poems, like riddles, were offered as sportive tests, to probe men’s capacity for uncovering moral truth. Speculation would then have been a part of the response to them from the beginning! But as with proverbs, proverbial poems consist more than most of ‘statement + context’, and the irretrievably lost context makes speculation more than usually risky.

*The Rune Poem* may contribute a little to opinions on the problem. Its function is very evident: to provide a list of rune-names in a memorable and recitable form. However the length and complexity of its definitions seems too much for perfect mnemonic efficiency, so that one would end by struggling to remember the lines rather than just the order of the runes. L. Musset (1965), while observing that ‘la valeur littéraire du texte n’est pas considérable,’ nevertheless concedes that the range of its images is ‘supérieure à celle d’une formule mnémotechnique.’ Further, the definitions are very much in the form of gnomic assertions: there is little difference between any one of them and, for example, the lines defining ‘ceastra’ or ‘hærfest’ in *Maxims II*. What these points suggest is that the poet had some slight ambition to entertain or instruct in addition to teaching prospective readers their ‘alphabet’. Can anything be made of his sequence of images by looking at their unity or their juxtapositions, as has been done with the gnomic poems?

It has to be admitted immediately that any such effort risks ridicule even before it starts because of the fantastic structures already erected on *The Rune Poem*. For there are other runic alphabet-poems extant, in Icelandic and Norwegian, all three overlap enough to hint at a common Germanic origin, and yet vary enough to suggest strongly that the Old English poem has suffered, or benefited, from a process of Christian bowdlerisation. This combination of hint, obscurity, and the occult (for runes played a part in magic) has naturally proved irresistible, so that several writers have derived strange insights from the three runic poems considered together. They have been seen as preserving the relics of early religion (for since *The Golden Bough* such concepts as ‘day’, ‘sun’, and ‘water’ are easy to link under the heading ‘fertility cult’); and Karl Schneider, for example (1959), has made a very thorough attempt to reconstruct the original sense of the rune-names, presumed in every case to be cultic, mythological, divine, or connected with farming and fertil-

ity. This involves, however, seeing the rune-name N ('nyd' or 'need' in Old English) as representing a fire-drill, of course a phallic symbol, while 'ice' is 'the primordial substance of the cosmos' or 'kosmische Urmaterie'. Against this R. I. Page (1973) has argued that the compiler of *The Rune Poem* 'seems to have been a simple and literal-minded man', and that no infra-structure in the poem need or should be sought.

After such ambitious hopes and daunting setbacks only limited points can be made. Without being exactly materialistic, the runic poet shares with the gnomic ones a concern for physical comfort; his remarks that 'feoh byþ frotur' and 'eþel byþ oferleof' could easily be paralleled, while his strong dislike of the sea ('lagu') is evidently proverbial (see note 5 to *Maxims I C*). Most of the rune-names can in fact be polarised with respect to comfort and discomfort. About half of them name evident benefits: money, speech, torches, generosity, happiness, spring, the 'peorð', the sun, the guiding star Tir, horses, men, home, day, bows. Several things are as evidently inimical: thorns, hail, need, sharp reeds, the sea, the grave. In between are a series of more neutral objects viewed, on the whole, with faint admiration: the wild ox, ice, the yew, the poplar (?), the god or hero Ing, eels (?). In a few cases both good and bad qualities are noted: oak and ash are useful but dangerous, while the poet remarks, with a mild joke, that riding is pleasant in prospect but hard when one has to do it. This may seem no more than a statistically predictable variety, but it shows at least that the poet sees his objects and abstracts very much anthropocentrically, according to how they affect people. As with the gnomic lists, there is a kind of consistency. One might go on to say that in spite of the poet's liking for beauty (his favourite adjective is 'fæger') the cast of his thoughts is gloomy. On several occasions benefits are sharply queried or qualified, most obviously with 'feoh' and 'man', where in both cases the second line of the definition begins abruptly with 'sceal þeah' – 'just the same', money has to be given away, men have to part. 'Eþel' too is queried, 'rad' turns from pleasure to difficulty, both 'gyfu' and 'wenn' remind us of the existence of people who do not enjoy them or who have nothing else. Malign agencies, however, tend to be reinforced. Most commentators agree that 'ear', the grave, has been placed deliberately at the end to give a 'dying fall', (Page, 1973, page 85), and the last word of the poem '(ge) swicab' has been used twice before. Agreements lapse, men turn from each other, only Tir the guiding star never lets you down. It is interesting that the only hostile rune which is at all qualified is that for 'nyd', necessity or misery, which is said to be a help to men 'as long as they attend to it in time', presumably, before it actually arrives. The thought has seemed obscure to many, but *The Rune Poem* is saying no more than passages of *Precepts* or *The Seafarer*: that the wise man, while in prosperity, is still aware of adversity and even courts it, so that prosperity will not lull him nor adversity take him by surprise. It would be too much to say that the poem comes to a conclusion, but it does suggest an outlook, and one by no means discordant with the wary good sense of the *Maxims*. That this should be allowed to emerge from a work that might so easily have been simply utilitarian testifies to the power of the 'wise man' or 'wise poet' persona.

## *The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn*

In view of what has been said so far, it can be no surprise to find Solomon, the pre-eminent wise man of Biblical tradition, figuring prominently in Old English literature. The degree of his prominence, however, deserves some remark. There are four Old English dialogues extant in which Solomon debates with or is interrogated by Saturn: two of them are in verse, two in prose. The shorter verse dialogue is moreover one of only three Old English poems of any length to be preserved in more than one copy, while the prose dialogue of Cotton Vitellius MS A XV (the *Beowulf* manuscript) shares many of its questions and answers with other Old and Middle English debates. One of the latter – the poem *The Proverbs of Hendyng* – is furthermore feigned to be written by one Marculf, a character mentioned in line 11 of the poem printed here; and it contains at least one proverb ('Ase fele þedes, ase fele þewes') virtually identical with lines 17-8 of the Exeter *Maxims IA*. All round, there is evidence for a tradition of proverbial literature in England at once widespread, durable, and distinctive.

So much has been evident since 1848, when John Kemble published his still valuable, if free-handed anthology *The Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn, with an Historical Introduction* (the latter phrase concealing an edition and translation of some fifteen texts from several languages). Almost equally evident, however, has been the problem which the Solomonic texts in Old English so sadly present: that of the utility of learning. For in spite of the general similarity of an interest in wisdom, the dialogues are in some respects all but totally different from the gnomic or hortatory poems considered so far. Where *Vainglory* or *Precepts*, for instance, keep to generalities and to moral stimulation, the Solomonic debates often make the mistake of offering precise information: and have as a result come to seem in places irrecoverably and simply outdated. In the prose dialogue of Cotton Vitellius, for example, Saturn asks (these questions are not in sequence) how tall Adam was; where the sun rises; and who it was that first talked to a dog. And Solomon replies, that Adam was nine foot eight; that the sun rises in the city of Jaiaca; and that it was St. Peter who pioneered inter-species communication. There is of course some interest in finding the sources of this material and evaluating its role in the cultural history of Anglo-Saxon England, and the project has been undertaken by T. D. Hill and J. E. Cross (see Cross, 1972, page 74). But as a literary text the dialogue can have no merit.

One can be only slightly less dismissive of the other prose dialogue and the shorter of the two verse dialogues (not presented in this volume), both of which centre on descriptions of the Pater Noster. They agree in regarding the prayer somehow as a living creature of enormous power (not to say gaudiness). The prose describes the transformations that the devil and the Pater Noster will undergo in some future conflict, goes on to recount that conflict, and is cut off in the midst of describing the Pater Noster's banner. The verse is more restrained in its praise, but still sees the Pater Noster as 'door of the deaf, tongue of the dumb, shield of the guilty, hall of the Creator, flood-bearer, people-saviour, hereditary guardian of the waves, stream for serpents and poor fishes' – and much besides. Indeed the bulk of the poem con-

sists of a list of the separate letters of the Pater Noster and an account of how each fights against the devil, with goads and whips and spears, tongue-stabbing, tooth-breaking, hair-pulling. R. J. Menner, in his edition of 1941, dismissed the whole sequence as ‘fantastic superstition and childish literalism’, and with this one has to agree: incredulity, it should be noted, is not caused so much by the underlying statement (that the Pater Noster keeps off the assaults of the devil) as by the repetitive extrapolations of this, with their extraordinary and meaningless exactness.

The second poem found in MS 422 of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, presents a different case. All readers have noted its comparative sobriety and the way it turns from the exact, single answers of the other Solomonic texts to much more general statements about the organisation of the universe. In particular, in several places it sounds very like the hortatory poems already discussed. To take a familiar example, in one much-admired passage (lines 186-92) Saturn asks why two twins should lead very different lives, one happy, the other wretched. Does this not mean (he seems to be saying) that there is some malignant power guiding the lives of men? Solomon replies that mothers indeed cannot be sure what will happen to their children as they grow up, concluding ‘so, when she bears a son, the mother has no control (‘geweald’) over her child’s prosperity’. Both the situation and the concluding statement resemble the start of *The Fortunes of Men*, where also we find opposed parental care and ultimate fate, with at the end the remark ‘then his mother will mourn his death. Such things are not under human control (‘monnes geweald’).’ The ‘modor – geweald’ connection may be fortuitous, but in a general way it is true that the questions which trouble Saturn (justice, the future, the fight between good and evil) are those which trouble other didactic poets in Old English, while the slightly uncertain answers given by Solomon, of faith in an ultimate power, are close to those of *Vainglory* or *Precepts*.

May *Solomon and Saturn II*, then, be removed from its manuscript context (after the two ‘Pater Noster’ dialogues) and considered instead in the relatively respectable milieu of the Exeter Book poems? That is the implication of its presence in this volume, as of what I have written about it elsewhere (Shippey, 1972, pages 62-7). But before this is assumed several points need to be noted. One is that in spite of its subject-matter *Solomon and Saturn I* cannot be entirely disregarded as a poem. For one thing it puts forward a characterisation of Saturn very close to that of the poem translated here – a sincere and well-intentioned figure, eager to gain knowledge and prepared to pay for his instruction. And on the other hand it is evident that even if *Solomon and Saturn II* rejects the ‘literalism’ of the other poem, it is not without a dash of very similar superstition. While the author of the first dialogue, for instance, recommends everyone to say the Pater Noster as he draws his sword (in order to keep off the devil who might bring ill-luck, enchanting the weapon with baleful runes or weighing down the sword-arm), the author of the second thinks that a charm is necessary for anyone who wants to pick up dropped food from the floor – see lines 224-6 and note. In short, while it is the opinion of most critics that the poems are different enough to be most likely by different authors, they nevertheless do seem to come from a similar background: a learned,

cranky, impractical one. What is especially important for the present discussion is that the second poem, like the first, poses the problem already stated of the utility of exact knowledge.

What, for example, is the point of the two descriptions near the start of the 'weallende wulf' and the 'Vasa Mortis'? This question has been overshadowed to date by the more scholarly one of the passages' sources, the subjects of two long papers by R. J. Menner (1929, 1938) as well as of sections in his 1941 edition. His conclusions were, briefly, that the two passages were ultimately based on Hebrew traditions transmitted, perhaps through Greek writers, to medieval Europe. The 'Vasa Mortis' is a blend of the demon Ashmedai (Solomon's opponent in Talmudic story) and perhaps Dagon, fish-god of the Philistines; its name may stem from misunderstanding of the phrase in *Psalms* 7, 14, translated now as 'instruments of death' but thought earlier to refer to devils, or heretics. 'Weallende wulf', meanwhile, can be explained as a kind of translation ('the raging wolf' or 'the wandering wolf') of Marculf or 'mearc-wulf' or 'march-wolf', a Germanic rewriting of the Hebrew name Markolis, an idol identified in some texts with Saturn. In other texts Saturn is identified with Bel, the Babylonian god, and in yet others Bel is confused or connected with the Biblical hunter Nimrod, friend (or possibly son) of the 'weallende wulf' himself in this poem. Menner shows that several details of both passages, notably the two hundred guards of the 'Vasa Mortis', 'weallende wulf's' connections with a desert and a dragon-fight, and Saturn's own links with the Tower of Babel (traditionally the work of Nimrod and the giants), all have analogues in the hinterland of Hebrew legend.

None of this information, however, makes it any easier for us to read the passages concerned; and it is possible to wonder whether even the best-educated Anglo-Saxon would have been any better off. There is, one should note, a parallel, even a remarkable parallel, between the 'weallende wulf' passage and the famous description of Grendel in *Beowulf* 102-114. But it is one which in the end shows more difference than similarity. Both passages are thirteen lines long; both begin with a slight slight variation on 'se mæra wæs haten ...' 'that famous one was called'; both lead from a far-off killing to its regrettable but permanent effects, and both, most strikingly, offer a myth about the creation of evil, in similar words. 'Panon untydras ealle onwocon', says *Beowulf* 111, to be echoed and amplified by *Solomon and Saturn* 42-3, 'Ðanon atercynn ærest gewurdon wide onwæcned' (From this awoke all misbegotten creatures ... From there all the races of poison-creatures were first awoken). Most importantly, the *Beowulf*-passage is marked, like the Solomonic one, by a disconcerting assumption of the reader's knowledge; we are shifted abruptly from Grendel's wasteland to the race of Cain, from Cain's exile to elves and giants. Early editors of *Beowulf* found this surprising. Some labelled the passage an 'interpolation'. But the difficulties it presented were soluble and have indeed been solved, O. F. Emerson pointing out in 1906 that the poet was referring to established legends, and that in effect the only clue one needs is to know that in medieval tradition Cain's descendants of *Genesis* 4, 16 ff, were identified with the 'daughters of men' of *Genesis* 6, 2, and these in their turn with the 'giants' of two verses later. The poet then believed that Cain's descendants were literally giants, and were the

cause of Noah's flood; his connection of them with Grendel is inspired and original but perfectly comprehensible to an audience that knew a little of Bible commentary

The same can hardly be said about 'weallende wulf'. In the first place no legend has been found that is more than analogous to the passage in question. This may be just accident; but in the second place questions spring unbidden from the description itself. Why did the battle take place? What was 'weallende wulf'? How did he die, and why was the battlefield laid waste? Are the 'atercynn' snakes and reptiles or more vaguely poisons and diseases? Should we see the 'wulf' as culture-hero or Pandora? It is remotely possible to imagine a learned source which would clear up all these problems as neatly as Emerson cleared up 'Cain's kin'. But there is at least an alternative hypothesis: that no such source ever existed outside the poet's mind, or if it did, that the poet had no interest in guiding his readers to it. The poet, then, was not alluding to accepted, if recondite knowledge (as in *Beowulf*), still less trying to transmit information (as in the Cotton Vitellius prose dialogue). He was instead laying down a veneer of precision which would both mystify and reassure his readers as to the degree of wisdom the mythical sages possessed; and he was doing it in a way which deserves literary consideration.

Such a hypothesis can of course never be proved, only disproved, e.g. by further and more successful source-study. It may encourage us, however, to look at the effect such passages produce, and to think that this effect may have been intended, rather than just the result of our ignorance. The 'weallende wulf' description, for instance, is surely capped by its last two evocative if mysterious lines (for which no hint of a learned analogue has ever been found). The preceding four sentences have introduced the hero, and set up a pattern of victory-and-defeat, mighty event and fated result; like Beowulf, the 'wulf' killed but was killed, destroyed the dragons but awoke the 'atercynn', died but left his mark on the still-fatal wasteland. Then the poet sums up with a triumphant image of heroic glory lasting beyond the grave:

Git his sveord scinað swiðe gescæned,  
and ofer ða byrgenna blicað ða hieltas.

[His brightly polished sword still shines, and its hilt gleams over the graves.]

The affirmative 'git' balances the threatening 'nu' of two lines before; the shining sword (like the shining helmet of *Beowulf* 317) emphasises power and vigilance; and the verb 'blicað' not only echoes 'scinað' but also adds a suggestion of something enormous, visible from far away – it is a verb commonly used in Old English poetry for the first glimpse of cliff or wall which tells a traveller that he is at the end of his journey (see G. Clark, 1965, esp. page 467). This suggestion of lasting fame is further deepened by the contrasting phrase 'ofter ða byrgenna'; the hero's sword shines across the graves like Hrothgar's hall, shining 'ofter landa fela', or Beowulf's barrow, towering 'brightly' above those who bring their ships from far off 'ofter floda genipu'. Such resonances are independent of any Hebrew legend or Babylonian myth from which the story may have been drawn.

One could make a similar analysis of the 'Vasa Mortis' description, centring on the peculiar effect created by the bird's allegedly animal nature, which is however

belied by its apparent intelligence and immortality – a paradox dramatised by the sequence of verbs which describe its behaviour, and which alternate between those appropriate to a caged beast ('ligedð', 'swingedð', 'gilledð') and those natural for an imprisoned man yearning to be free ('sefadð', 'singgedð', 'longað', 'ðyncedð'). But the point does not apply simply to set-pieces, dramatic though these are. Throughout the poem its author takes pains to suggest precise and exact knowledge which he (and the mythical sages) are not prepared to share. He continually uses exact numbers: there are twenty-five dragons, seven tongues with twenty points, two hundred guardsmen, four heads, four ropes for the doomed man, four varieties of temptation; the 'Vasa Mortis' thinks it ninety thousand years to Doomsday, age devours every year thirty-nine thousand dwellers on land, in sea, in air. Possibly some of these numbers are intended as literally as Adam's height in the prose dialogue; T. D. Hill has suggested (1971) that the four varieties of temptation are a Gregorian reference. But in general they make a literary point; they are a part of the sages' characterisation, on which the poet has spent time and trouble. Saturn, in particular, is firmly presented from the start as a Chaldee, a friend of the Philistines, to be linked with the enemies of God. Solomon warns him early on that the fall of Babel in the field of Shinar was a rebuke to his people's human pride, and returns to the subject some 120 lines later, to warn Saturn of his evil inheritance. The return is used to mark a minor emotional peak. But in fact the true progress in the poem is Saturn's, as has often been noted: he moves from near-equality to increasing subordination, then to the role of sincere questioner, and finally to a joyful new knowledge. There can be no doubt that this was planned, nor that the poet has gone to some lengths to show us that in his defeat we have the defeat of no mean adversary: a man filled with exact and secret knowledge.

The drift of this argument is to suggest that the author of *Solomon and Saturn II* was playing, on a larger scale, something like the trick mentioned before, that of inventing a sage or prophet to give authority to his own opinions; and the success of the trick cannot be doubted, for the poem does indeed, by its human drama and combination of detail and mystery, create an impression of profundity beyond any of the other didactic poems. The question remains, did the poet have anything of value to express in addition to his complex and demanding frame? And here there may be room for disagreement. It has often been noted that Solomon in the end has little to offer Saturn in the way of explanation or even of consolation; the wise men chorus rather than debate. One might add that in its view of the universe *Solomon and Saturn II* is at its most conventional, echoing other gnomic and didactic poems at several points besides the 'twins' passage already mentioned. Thus Solomon's remark about 'deep water' at line 47, incomprehensible though it is in context, would fit perfectly into the Exeter *Maxims*; as would his statement to the effect that 'leaves are green for a short time' (line 136). T. D. Hill once again scents a patristic reference there (1970 a), though the connection seems a natural one, c.p. *Maxims IA* 25 ff., and in any case gives a fine example of the transformation of statement to proverb by the addition of a metaphoric context. More seriously, as the poem and the debate warm up, sections are repeatedly closed by statements to

the effect that the world is a battlefield, a belief much honoured in gnomic verse, as has been seen. In lines 177-80 Solomon declares that opposites must oppose and the weaker submit (c.p. *Maxims I* B 48-9); then good and evil fortune are said to be simply ‘eald gesceaft’, like the irresistible ‘meotudgesceaft’ of *Fortunes of Men*, line 20; near the end of the poem Solomon explains the nature of human life as arising from the conflict of God and the devil, and sees this mirrored in the fight of angels over the human soul, an idea close to that of the author of *Vainglory*; while the repeated use of ‘se wyrsa’ without qualification may recall both *Vainglory* and *Precepts*. In the end, the only solid advice or hope that Solomon gives is to say that it is possible for the ‘fortunate man’ to *choose* his true lord, a statement close to *Precepts* line 47 in both its substance and its tone of menacing vagueness. All round, *Solomon and Saturn II* shares with the poems discussed earlier a firm belief in elemental oppositions, a tendency to expect the worst in this world, a confidence that it is nevertheless possible to be on the right side in the end. But some might feel that more could be expected from Solomon himself.

To this I can only reply by restating the major question for any interpretation of the set of poems presented here. What are they *for*? The advice they give is less than utilitarian, the information they offer at times no more than common knowledge, at other times recondite but useless. They are neither lyric nor elegiac, and not all of them (*Maxims, Fortunes*) even homiletic. *Solomon and Saturn II* shares this indeterminacy, but offers a clue towards explaining it. One of the poem’s most surprising elements is its repeated condemnation of *grumblers*. On several occasions, especially in the middle of the poem, Solomon cuts off Saturn’s well-meant queries about the world’s injustice with flat statements that things are as they are, and might be worse; in one of the earliest he goes so far as to rebuke Saturn implicitly for mentioning deficiencies at all:

Unlæde bið and ormod    se ðe a wile  
geomrian on gihðe:    se bið gode fracoðast.

[It is a miserable and spiritless man who keeps on being gloomy when he is in trouble. God finds him most offensive.]

‘Unlæde’ is in fact one of the poet’s favourite words in this section, being used three more times, twice in opposition to ‘eadig’, ‘blessed’ or ‘prosperous’, and carrying seemingly a mixed sense: the man who is unlucky, *or* the man who is recalcitrant in turning from Christ. A faint suggestion is perceptible that being unlucky is your own fault, and certainly complaining about it is downright wicked! This impression is reinforced by the agreement of the two sages that the purpose of books is to strengthen you in adversity, and also to cheer you up (‘amyrgað mod-sefan’, line 83). As I have suggested elsewhere (Shippey, 1972, page 63), this is perhaps the intention of the poem itself: ‘not to console (since no calamity has occurred) but to explain and reassure, cheering the mind with a promise of order.’ Solomon repeats the point some two hundred lines later, when he says (with an echo of line 28 of *The Rune Poem*) that the wise man can moderate (‘gemetigian’) each turn of fate, as long as he has wisdom and piety; while it is remarkable that the

whole attitude, by which ill-luck and perversity are confounded and both states are linked with ignorance and gloom, has been well caught by the poet of *Solomon and Saturn I* (if indeed this is the later poem, as Menner argues, 1941, pages 6, 17). There too Solomon defines the man who is 'unlæde': he does not know the Pater Noster, will be damned as a result, is 'offensive ('fracoð') ... and a stranger to the almighty Lord.' Saturn then asks to be taught the Pater Noster so that he can purify his heart from sin and 'cheer it from sorrow' ('mergan of sorge'). Though the two poets disagree a little on how one is to be cheered, they have no doubt that the gloomy man is either ill-instructed or perverse.

The question put in the last paragraph can then be answered simply, if bluntly. The poems discussed here have two functions: they make us aware of the true state of the world, which is a sad one; having done so, they encourage us not to be overwhelmed by it, either by offering religious hope or else by calling on our innate strength of mind. The two consolations are, however, not always easy to distinguish. Hence Solomon feels that the man who allows the sad state of the world to prey on him is both 'ormod', 'spiritless', and 'gode fracoðast', 'most offensive to God', and the sentiment – while hardly consistent with the first of the Beatitudes – echoes the last advice of *Precepts* as well as the refusal to mourn of the poet of *Fortunes*. The movement of the poem seems, moreover, to be on the whole from the first function, exposure, to the second, consolation. By the end the characters have been polarised from their original near-unanimity, Saturn asking repeatedly why he should not feel sad, Solomon answering him with assertions about human choice, the limitations of fate, and the activities of guardian angels. The rather unexpected climax, as has often been noted, is the defeat and delight of Saturn: 'he had never laughed before from his heart.'

The poem, then, offers partial refutation of the view that Old English poetry is inherently melancholic. As in line 59 of *The Wanderer*, one may wonder why the mind should not indeed grow dark, in view of all the sad things it knows. Nevertheless it is accepted that succumbing to grief is improper, and that the proper attitude is a well-instructed, wary balance – neither optimism nor pessimism, hope without too much expectation. The conclusions still may not seem worthy of Solomon, but are at least expressed in this poem with more sense of psychologically possible alternatives than we find elsewhere; Saturn in particular asks natural questions with a fine blend of doubt and willingness to be converted.

One is still left with several problems. It is hard to find a theory about the poem's structure, partly as a result of gaps in the manuscript, but partly from what looks like deliberate riddling. Thus the questions and answers of lines 154-215 are all, broadly speaking, on the theme of injustice, but the shift to 'water' is quite unexpected, and made the more surprising by the pseudo-familiarity of 'this'; the transitions at lines 47, 52, 77, 104, 136, 154, etc., are all equally mysterious. Meanwhile the genre of the poem is as problematic as usual, suggesting both instruction-dialogue and riddle-contest, as Menner notes. To round off with, one should note simple local difficulty of interpretation in several places. What does Saturn mean by opposing 'wyrd' and 'warnung' in line 250? How could one, logically, answer the

question in lines 298-302? In that question and the answer to it, what can ‘se dæg... dæg...dæglóngne fyrst’ mean, since at one moment we seem to be talking about the particular day of one’s death, at another about one’s entire lifetime? Maybe some of these questions can be answered positively; but enough would remain to leave the poem one of the most mysterious in the Old English corpus.

What cannot be denied, once again, is the poem’s emotional drive, deliberately evoked, and present even in the most pedantic passages. There is naturally something charming and challenging in the suggestion of a dead philosophy to be rediscovered for the modern period, and most of our present-day enquiries must centre on the question of what the dialogue means. But it seems likely that *Solomon and Saturn II* would have been a powerful poem in its own day, without the adventitious aid of quaintness. From its opening upon the contending champions of middle-earth, the poem is instinct with a sense of violent oppositions, partly between the contestants, with their quick, positive questions and affirmations, but much more from the natural and supernatural powers they continually evoke. Their thought-world is full of hopes, longings, disappointments: the Philistines expect to be robbed by violence, their captive howls and rings his chains with frustration, the guardian angel goes off weeping, Saturn’s ancestors thought to fight against God but were crushed – like the sinners of whom Solomon observes, contemptuously, ‘and they expect, the fools, that almighty God ... will listen to them for ever!’ Meanwhile the poison-creatures try to force their entry, ‘wyrd’ and ‘warning’ fight each other, the water of the world never rests by day or night, fate surges and torments us and breeds violence. Even the forces of nature are destructive. Age beats down buildings, smashes trees, gnaws iron and men; snow shrivels plants and breaks gates; even light can break and burn hall-timbers. Elemental conflicts are noted and even approved by Solomon: ‘the clutch of fire and the chill of frost cannot live in the same place, nor can snow and sun bear to live together, but one of them will have to weaken and give in, the one which has less power.’ In this conflict silent forces are not the least destructive: age, rust, falling leaves, temptation. The idea of bondage is continually present, from ‘Vasa Mortis’ in its cage to the chains of ‘yldo’, the doomed man’s ropes, the plants tied by cold, the devil fettered underground. The myth which is Solomon’s final explanation is that of the war in heaven; the poem reverberates with the fall of Babel in the past, with misery and contest in the present. In the future one may expect to hear the din of doomsday (lines 95, 148, 159) when the water will drown all land. The lines overflow with powerful, even exaggerated verbs – ‘gilleð, beateð, abreoteð, friteð, oferwiged, abiteð, slideð, bærneð, feohteð, sticad,’ and many more. To these the occasional plain, gnomic statements (‘sleep is most like death ... leaves are green for a short time ... fate is hard to alter’) form a by no means relieving contrast.

*Solomon and Saturn II* was probably *not* a ‘disturbing’ poem in its own time in the sense that we now use that phrase: that is, a poem which made men reconsider their basic beliefs. If, however, what it implies *was* generally believed, then it is easy to see what fuelled the desire for order and consolation which it ultimately satisfies! We may not admire the answers of Solomon, but we should respond to his and his creator’s sternly agonised predicament.

## *Soul and Body I*

*Solomon and Saturn II* introduces us to a situation exemplified by several Old English poems. Its basic concept is hardly likely to be original, and there are many partial, or possible, sources or analogues. Nevertheless, there is no text from which it definitely descends; many of its details are unparalleled; and in any case it is both older and better than almost all of its non-Old English analogues. All these statements are true, in particular, of *The Soul's Address to the Body*, a poem (like *Solomon and Saturn I*) found in two Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, the Vercelli Book – from which it is edited here – and, in a shorter version, the Exeter Book.

Its provenance has given rise to prolonged and on occasion ill-tempered debate. In 1880 Gustav Kleinert put forward the argument that, since the Old English versions of the 'Soul and Body' theme were older than those others then known in French, Latin, Spanish, Russian, etc., the whole concept must have been an Anglo-Saxon invention. He was followed much later by J. B. Leishman (1966), who remarked that the genre 'seems to have originated in England during the Middle Ages,' is a 'uniquely medieval English topic.' Leishman did not know of the two Old English poems and five Old English homilies that contain 'soul and body' passages (not to mention Riddle 43), but was affected both by the numerous seventeenth century English poems on the subject, and by the probable English origin of some of the best-known Latin pieces. In 1966 his statements passed unchallenged. In 1880, however, ten years after Sedan, with Franco-German animosity at one of its recurrent peaks, Kleinert's thesis was felt as an unwarranted piece of German (or Germanic) appropriation, a slur on French (or Latin) originality. In a bitter review the same year Gaston Paris pointed out that a version of the Old French *Vie de Saint Alexis* contained a 'soul and body' section similar to the Old English poem but (presumably) not deriving from it: the true source of both must then be some 'légende latine ancienne.' As it happens, there is at least a possibility (see C. Storey, 1968) that the *Vie de Saint Alexis* was itself of English, or at least Anglo-Norman origin. But Paris's argument is no doubt ultimately correct, and has in the main held the field.

Where, then, is the 'légende latine ancienne'? The likeliest possibility (one of several proposed by B. P. Kurtz, 1929) is sermon no.69 of a collection known as the *Sermones ad fratres in eremo*, edited in volume 40 of the *Patrologia Latina* (Migne, 1861), and there attributed without conviction to St. Augustine. This sermon tells the 'exemplum horribile ... cujusdam defuncti in Aegypto', the 'dreadful story of someone who died in Egypt', a heading which conveys well the sermon's tone of naive superstition. Without explaining who saw the vision, or where the story comes from, the author tells us simply that there was once a rich sinner, who died. But his soul was reluctant to leave the gate of the body ('ostium corporis'), for it could see the devils waiting outside to snatch it, and muttering among themselves: 'Quomodo tardatur? Cur fit hoc? Quare fecit tot moras? Festinemus ...' 'How is it so slow? Why does it do that? Why does it delay so much? Let's get a move on ...' The devils are afraid that St. Michael will come to the rescue with his posse of angels; but one of them reassures the others. 'Nostra est ...' 'he is ours. I know his deeds, I have always been with him, day and night.' When it hears this, the soul breaks out in a cry

of self-pity and anger against its own body, lamenting that it ever came ‘in isto pessimo carcere carnis’, ‘in this worst of dungeons, of the flesh’. It offers a series of oppositions between body and soul: ‘You fed yourself on dainty food, I was hungry for our salvation. You drank strong-tasting wine, I was thirsty for the fountain of life ... you were fat and I was thin, you were ruddy and I was pale, you were cheerful and I was sad. You laughed, I wept,’ and so on. Then it curses the body, saying it is dust, rottenness, food for worms. It will rest in earth for a while, and then will be led with the soul to hell, to endure joint torments for ever. The body gives up the ghost, the devils seize it, crying out to each other to strike their tridents in its eyes, mouth, heart, hands, feet, for all have sinned. So, ‘animam ... membratim punientes’, ‘punishing the soul in each of its limbs,’ they take it away, show it the light to which it might have gone had it been righteous, and hurl it into the jaws of a devil-dragon, where with its like it will wait for Judgement Day.

The story is at least a spirited one, and it resembles the Old English poem in several respects. The run of oppositions in the soul’s speech to the body is echoed by lines 39-41 of the poem, and lines 142-4 later, while the idea of being punished ‘membratim’ is found in lines 99-100 (though there it will take place on Judgement Day, not at the moment of death). Furthermore, although the whole collection of the *Sermones ad fratres* is now attributed (J. P. Bonnès, 1945-6) to a 13th century Belgian forger, there is no doubt that the collection is made up of older material, and that something like it was in circulation long before. Sermon no.58, for instance, is the source for a Blickling homily (J. E. Cross, 1957); no.66 for at least three Old English homilies (*ibid.*); while no.69, whatever its relationship with the poem, is found actually translated in no.29 of Napier’s collection of Old English homilies attributed to Wulfstan (1883). Evidently material like that of the *Sermones ad fratres* was appreciated and even popular in early England. Sermon 69 could, then, have been known to the poet, possibly in some slightly different form; in 1891 Th. Batiouchkof published an expanded version of the sermon (though without realising that that is what it is) which he found in a Roman manuscript of the 11th or 12th century, and which resembles the poem in having a ‘good soul’ as well as a ‘bad soul’ passage. At least this shows that the sermon was popular enough to rehandle.

A further point is that the poet shares the sermonist’s eschatology. Both believe in double-judgement: at death the soul goes immediately to heaven or hell (line 7, ‘swa wite swa wuldor’), while the body rots in the ground. At Doomsday, though, the two will be joined again, and after that the body will share in the joys or tortures of the soul. ‘The pair of us will be together from then on,’ says the soul at the end of its diatribe in the poem, ‘we will have to undergo whatever miseries you destined us to here before’: this agrees closely with the prophecy in the sermon, ‘et postea tecum in infernum deduceris, tormenta sicut et ego passurum aeterna.’ The theory was once a respectable one, held for instance by Caesarius of Arles, the 6th century bishop who seems to have had considerable influence on Old English literature. But it causes several problems. It makes Judgement Day something of a formality. It eliminates any possibility of either Limbo or Purgatory (ideas already almost

explicitly formulated in Bede's account of Dryhthelm's vision in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, v 12). Perhaps most important, it suggests that ecclesiastical intercession for the dead is of no help. The Early Middle English poem on the soul and the body, to be found in the Worcester Fragments (ed. J. Hall, 1920), lays great stress on the use of masses for the dead; the soul says reproachfully to the body:

noldest þu lokien lufe      wiþ ilærede men,  
ȝiuen ham of þine gode      þet heo þe fore beden.  
Heo mihten mid salmsonge      þine sunne acwenchen,  
mid hare messe      þine misdeden fore biddan ...  
þo þu were ifreod      to faren into heouene.

But in the Old English poem nothing of this is heard except that in line 78 the soul says that the body would have done better to give its money to the Lord – presumably, as alms during its lifetime, not for funerary masses in its will. Both sermon and poem, then take up an extreme if consistent eschatological opinion, and one which is not shared by *all* Anglo-Saxon writers (see M. McC. Gatch, 1965). This fact may point again to their connection. It also indicates one of the difficulties in their evaluation.

For it has to be said that the *Sermones ad fratres*, at least, are regarded by modern theologians with disgust and contempt. The *Patrologia* quotes Bellarmine as saying that their style is so 'tasteless, unsuitable, and impure' ('inepta, impropria, lutulenta') 'that it is amazing that such sermons could ever have been accredited to St. Augustine by any sensible man.' Another commentator in Migne's preface picks out sermon 69 for special dispraise. And the only recent theologian to remark on the collection (J. P. Bonnès, 1945-6) does so only to clear his own subject from the false and damaging imputation of having written them: the best he can say of the collection is that 'elle mériterait surtout d'être oubliée.' As far as theology goes, the Old English poem might come in for similar strictures; and indeed for even more. For one of the most obvious ways in which the poem differs from the sermon is that the latter is concerned with the moment of death, the 'exitus animae'; the former, however, has the soul returning to the body at some indeterminate period after death, every seventh night (line 10). Th. Batiouchkof suggested in his lengthy study of 1891 that the source for this idea might be the *Visio Pauli* or *Apocalypse of Paul* (ed. and trans. M. R. James, 1893, 1924), a fourth century work which puts forward *inter alia* the merciful theory that all damned souls receive a holiday: Easter Day in the original version, but in later accounts every weekend from noon on Saturday to dawn on Monday, 'efre forð to domes dei', as an Early Middle English sermon puts it (ed. R. Morris, 1867, pages 41-7). It is at least plausible that the soul returning to its body from torments, in the Old English poem, is meant to be taking its holiday in an appropriate form. The *Visio Pauli*, however, was a disreputable work to many. St. Augustine laughed at it in his treatise *On John* (so M. R. James believes, 1924); the severely orthodox Ælfric condemned it as a 'false narrative' (see B. Thorpe, 1846, Vol. II, page 332). But its popularity remained undisturbed till the time of Dante, for there are Middle English versions of it, while it

was a source for two of the Blickling homilies and, some have thought, for *Beowulf*. Still, it points again to a certain crudity in the poet's learning, while (as Batiouchkof remarked) the idea that the *good* soul should return to its body from heaven, just to match the bad soul's return from hell, is unparalleled and possibly slightly licentious.

There is a last point at which the poet seems to be out of line with the best opinions. It is, as one can see from the article on *Ame* in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, a heresy to believe that the soul is the prisoner of the body. St. Augustine says (*City of God* xiv, 3, trans. H. Bettenson, 1972) 'the cause of sin arises in the soul, not in the flesh,' and repeats the argument elsewhere. The point is a fundamental one, both to theology and to the history of *debates* (rather than diatribes) between body and soul. English readers will remember that Marvell's *Dialogue between the Soul and Body* gives the body the last word:

What but a Soul could have the wit  
To build me up for sin so fit?  
So Architects do square and hew  
Green Trees that in the Forest grew.

But this is an argument almost entirely ignored by the Anglo-Saxon poet. He begins by suggesting that the soul is a passive sufferer for whatever the body has cared to do (lines 6-8); he goes on to say repeatedly (or to have the soul say) that the soul is heavenly, sent from God, while the body is nothing but earth. The soul takes all good to itself, while accusing the body continually of 'lustgryrum' and 'fyrenlustas', 'terrible and sinful pleasures'; twice it says (lines 70 and 102) that it will have to endure the fate 'to which *you* destined me here ... *you* destined us to here before.' The good soul (141) agrees. Beneath all the accusations there is a strong feeling that the poet dwells on the details of corruption and coffin-worms just because he thinks the body (once soulless) is automatically evil — its rottenness after death is a true image of its real nature. Most revealingly, in lines 44-5 the soul accuses the body of forgetting that it 'had been conceived violently by flesh and by sinful pleasures.' This assertion, so tempting to ascetics, that sexuality is in itself evil, trembles on the edge of heresy; and most commentators have preferred to assume, often silently, that the scribe has made a mistake, and to substitute 'gestyred', 'disturbed', for 'gestryned', 'conceived'. They may be right; but one might still feel that the copyist was misled by the tone of the poem as well as by the cast of his own thoughts. Other Anglo-Saxon writers coped with the situation without these slips. The homilists who treat the body and soul theme, for instance, are all (with the revealing exception of the man translating *ad fratres* no.69) careful to indicate the soul's joint culpability. 'Woe is me!' says the soul at Doomsday in Assman's homily no.14 (1889), 'because I allowed all the evil that you did.' It is echoed by the two homilists edited by R. Willard in 1935: 'Woe is me, because I loved forbidden things *with you* ... you did much evil *with me*.' Most firmly, the man who wrote the fourth homily of the Vercelli Book — the manuscript in which we find the poem — allowed 'his' soul to present an extremely long and abusive account of the body, but then closed it (page 102 of Förster's edition, 1932) with the sentence of Christ

the king: 'Gang þu, sawl, in þæt forlorene hus. Da gyt ætsomne syngodon, gyt eac ætsomne swelten.' 'Since you both sinned together, you also perish together.' This point is never seen by or put to the sinful soul in the poem. The most that it says (and even this is not present in the Vercelli version of the poem, see note 6) is that at Judgement Day it will feel humiliation and punishment – not guilt.

Theologically, the poem is not first-rate. Of course it is doubtful how much the poet was interested in theology. All that one can discover of his sources suggests that he used them arbitrarily, picking out details of the soul's speech from a sermon, adding to it a common idea about the soul's release from torment, but not troubling to make this clear, and emerging in any case with a situation found in no learned work at all: the soul returning to its body after death, as if unable to stay away. But it is this situation which immediately creates in the poem its running contrast of action and stillness, outcry and silence, desire and frustration. From the start we are given an impression of futility, unchangeability. 'Lang bið syððan', says the poet in an understatement for eternity, 'After that, there will be a *long* time ...'; he repeats 'lānge' at line 11 to suggest the soul's continuing connection with the body, but again contrasts the world and eternity in lines 25-6 – 'in the world before you little thought how *long* it will be here like this.' The body's silence exemplifies this changeless and unmoving state. But against it we have the repeated, compulsive activity and outcry of the soul: it *has* to come every seven nights, 'geohðum hremig,' 'crying out in its misery,' even though its complaints can have no purpose. At several moments the poet sets up fine oppositions of anger and futility. At the end of its peroration at line 102 the soul reaches a peak of anxiety and despair only to be sent remorselessly away, unanswered – for to its question, 'What are we going to *do*?' there is no answer. 'Fyrnað þus þæt flæschord ...' 'So it scolds its cage of flesh, but then has to travel away, to visit the abyss of hell, not the joys of heaven, troubled by what has been done. The dust lies where it was, it cannot offer any answer to its sad soul ...' The tragedy lies in this realisation when it is too late, this grief that does no good, this body that cannot speak. And the poet uses similar movements elsewhere, running on, in lines 57-64, from his list of things that will do no good to the stripped bones that must lie waiting and the soul that must, by contrast, often reluctantly return. Two lines later the soul repeats that although the body is 'dumb ond deaf' it must nevertheless seek it out compulsively ('swaþeah nede gesecan'). The body's stasis confronts the soul's neurotic activity. It gives a fine (and of course purposeful) sense of the frustration that comes after death – hence the activity that ought to precede it.

Frustration, moreover, seems an essential part of the soul's experience. It describes how it was tormented during life by spiritual hunger and thirst and imprisonment, so that 'very often it seemed to me that it was going to be thirty thousand years till the day you died.' If this is hardly fair (for if the soul suffered so passively during life, it hardly ought to be blamed after death!), it nevertheless adds point and motivation to the soul's bitter railings. The soul, indeed, seems to have a humanly inconsistent character. It hates the body (see lines 17-25), is happy to see it disintegrate, and looks forward to Doomsday when the body will join it in suffering. But of course the body cannot suffer without the soul, and so the tone changes

from relish – ‘What are you going to say to the Lord *there*?’ – to despair: ‘What are we going to *do*?’ The poet could hardly have brought in more variation, or more emotional depth, short of making his poem into a dialogue. And behind this presentation of the soul lies a further obvious, but unasked, question. *Why* does the soul return so often? Is it a punishment, carried out ‘minum unwillum’, ‘against my own will’? Is it caused by regret for what might have been? Does the soul come vindictively, to enjoy the sight of the worm-eaten, helpless body? Is it drawn by some unseverable connection, like Milton’s ‘thick and gloomy shadows damp / Oft seen in charnel vaults and sepulchres / Lingering, and sitting by a new-made grave / As loth to leave the body which it loved’? Probably the poet had no single explanation in mind. But the question adds a mystery to the poem not found in the simple self-pity of souls in Latin sermons. It is a suggestive picture, also, to have the ghost fleeing ‘at cockcrow’ when the holy men raise their song of praise to the living God. The soul becomes ‘a guilty thing Upon a fearful summons’, shunning light and fearing holy songs like Grendel, or like a troll in a fairy-story. In its flight we see, not folk-belief fusing with Christianity, but Christian folk-belief being created. The soul is a predecessor for the revenants of Usher’s Well:

The cock doth craw, the day doth daw,  
The channerin worm doth chide;  
Gin we be mist out o our place,  
A sair pain we maun bide.

As with other Old English poems, a certain complexity of tone underlies a simple surface. The poet’s voice, too, has a role in this. To the soul’s anger and fear he opposes a cool, almost gnomic objectivity. The sinful soul’s speech is framed by the extremely withdrawn and unpressing remarks ‘Certainly it is necessary for every man to consider for himself the journey his soul will have to make ... This can be a reminder for everyone, for every man of sense.’ Something much more powerful than that has been conveyed by the soul’s fate; the poet merely invites wise men to see the situation for themselves, as he does by introducing the saved soul with the violently understated comparatives ‘hyhtlicre’, ‘eadiglicre’. It is of course the poet who introduces the ‘mould-worm’ motif, in lines 108-25, and some have found this tasteless; ‘in the sensationalism of the “Address” there is calculated hatred, degenerate realism, and an ignoble fear’ (Kurtz, 1929). But the poet has at least superficially a simply explanatory reason for bringing in the theme of corruption, for in line 106 he remarks that the body gives no answer to the soul, and adds as if in explanation some ten lines later that this is because the tongue has been devoured; there is no way for the body to debate with its accuser. A similar ‘hard-headedness’ has been noted by Professor Cross (1957) in Anglo-Saxon sepulchral homilies. And while we may feel that the poet is there only rationalising what he intended to say all along, we should not mistake the tone even of the most morbid passages. The emotion they express is neither nausea nor fear; it is a sober and unlamenting grief, an awareness that things are as they are (and so must be faced). Gifer the worm has the same function as the eye-pecking raven of *The Fortunes of Men*, to provide an image of human weakness and indignity. The poet was, no doubt, disturbed by

fleshly corruption — he repeats the phrase ‘wyrmum to wiste’ three times, and shows a trace of worry as to why even the good must undergo this experience. ‘Ac þæt wolde god’, ‘but God so wished it’. With that he withdraws from the puzzle.

Coming to an evaluation of *Soul and Body I* is no easier now than in the time of Kleinert and Paris, a century ago. Nationalistic disputes over which country should take the ‘credit’ for developing a theme have stopped, but have been replaced by a sharp interest in orthodoxy versus heresy, which may also have its root in modern conditions. Probably participants in this argument tend to take the Anglo-Saxon poet’s doctrinal interests too seriously. B. P. Kurtz (1929), noting the poem’s dualistic structure and connecting it with the interest in corruption, suggested that the poet might have been under some Catharist or Manichaean influence. This is inherently unlikely. But on the other hand Father Smetana’s ‘second thoughts’ on the poem (1967), with their determined attempt to ‘exonerate’ the poet ‘from any taint of heterodoxy’, do not face squarely either the crux of ‘gestryned’, or the problems implicit in the souls’ weekly returns, or the sinful soul’s failure to accept responsibility; Mary H. Ferguson’s equally determined assertion that the poem is orthodox and Augustinian (1970) ignores both its learned analogues (very much non-Augustinian), and its genuine eschatological oddities, while concentrating attention on its (of course equally genuine) commonplaces. Much the most helpful remark offered is that of R. W. Ackermann (1962), to the effect that the tendency to *simplify* theology is always present in popular preaching. The ‘Body and Soul’ theme is useful because it represents what we all feel: that on the one hand we have impulses or instincts, on the other, conscience, a sense of duty. To say that the one is ‘the Body’ and the other ‘the Soul’ is a satisfying and morally useful metaphor, and the doctrinal dangers of identifying the flesh as intrinsically evil are too far-off to worry many people. The Old English poem is then in the same tradition as the Middle English ‘Desputisoun bitwen þe Bodi and þe Soule’ (the object of Ackermann’s research), of popular Christian stimulus; and this tradition has continued in all probability to the present day. Long ago (1893), M. R. James noted rather wryly the discrepancies between popular and scholarly taste, and suggested that the historical value of many minor works — like the *Visio Pauli*, the *Book of Enoch*, or the *Acta Andreae*, all probably or certainly known to Anglo-Saxon poets — was in general underrated:

The apocryphal books stand in the relation of by-paths — not always clear or pleasant — to the broad and well-trodden high-roads of orthodox patristic literature. If a future historian wants to realise vividly what were the beliefs of many large classes of ordinary Christians in our time, he will derive great help, I doubt not, from the ‘Sunday Stories’ of the last thirty years: and not less information can be gathered from the apocryphal books as to the popular beliefs of average Christians in far earlier times.

*Soul and Body I*, then, is a valuable document for the history of ideas. As a poem, it is more individual (if not exactly original) than has been realised, at least in comparison with other poems *on the same theme*. For in spite of its wholly different subject it fits quite well into the thought-structure of the gnomic and didac-

tic poems discussed earlier. The poet addresses himself firmly to the wise, ‘mod-snotra gehwam’. He is convinced that good and evil are total opposites, without intermediate states, being on the whole more stimulated by the side of evil and danger. He believes in the value of realising this total opposition *before* decisions are taken, and even more firmly in the uselessness of realisation and repentance afterwards. He makes the sinner in fact into a kind of anti-hero, one who understands too late when the time of effort really was, and so passes at one stride from fleshly complacency to spiritual despair. Most relevant, perhaps, is the fact that from the Christian message the poet has chosen to convey only one thing: that the world is a dangerous and deceitful place where men need to have their wits about them, where second thoughts are wisest. At line 95 the poet reflects that not even Christ’s blood is free: everything has to be paid for, sin by sin and limb by limb. In this savage place the poet’s thought and self-control much outweigh the sinful soul’s emotional lamentings.

### *The Descent into Hell*

There is a natural connection between death, Hell, and Doomsday – the subjects of *The Descent into Hell* and the poems which flank it in this volume. They are three of the four Last Things of popular belief (the fourth is heaven); they are the three most useful to preachers in a utilitarian way, for pointing out the need, rather than the desire, to behave properly. And there are more intimate doctrinal connections. The *Soul and Body* poet, as has been said, clearly believes in a ‘particular judgement’ of each soul immediately after death, a decision to be confirmed by the ‘general judgement’ of Doomsday. His ‘evil’ soul looks forward to that time with fear, first for the shame which it and the body must endure, and second because of the reunification with the body which will then take place, when, in the opinion of many, both would become liable to a different and more physical kind of torment. But in Old English homilies such as Vercelli IV (ed. Förster, 1932), the diatribe of soul against body in fact takes place on Judgement Day rather than generally after death; and the poet of *Judgement Day I* makes passing references to the resurrection of the body and the junction of body and soul. Poets and homilists share a clear picture of the future, ignoring or avoiding notions of purgatory, limbo, or the sleep of the soul between death and Doomsday.

Nevertheless, the tensions which gave rise to those beliefs were already present in Anglo-Saxon England (see Gatch, 1965), as indeed they had been in Latin Christianity since early times (see Kelly, 1958, chapter 17). A further and extremely ancient adaptation to such tensions is the story of Christ’s Harrowing of Hell. Different accounts of this are given in Jean Monnier, *La Descente aux Enfers*, and J. A. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell*; and it has become something of a disputed issue between Protestant and Catholic Churches. But it may be said simply that there were evident feelings, first, that those who were not Christians could not be saved, and second, that it was nevertheless hardly fair that the righteous men of pre-Christian times, Moses and Job and John the Baptist and the rest, should be left in hell till Judgement Day. Limbo was one compromise: another, the story that between his

crucifixion and his resurrection Christ ‘descended into Hell’ (the fifth article of the Apostles’ Creed, though its date is unknown) and rescued from it the souls of the patriarchs and prophets. This remained an immensely popular legend for centuries, still told for example in *Piers Plowman* and the Middle English cycles of mystery plays; while the early if apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, which gave an account of the Harrowing as revealed by two of the rescued souls, was translated into most European languages, including Old English (see Hulme, 1898, and Swanton, 1975). Its story of the overthrow of Hell paralleled Christ’s defeat of physical death and prefigured the greater enlargement of Doomsday. The Harrowing thus became a cornerstone of medieval eschatology and atonement theory. It perhaps accounts in part for the belief of the author of Blickling homily no. 7 (held in defiance of *Matthew* 24, 36) that Doomsday will come at Easter; and was obviously to that homilist a much more interesting event than the Resurrection. The Harrowing is alluded to in Old English poetry many times.

Christ’s Descent into Hell remained, however, a difficult subject, especially for unskilled or unlearned authors. In chapter 12 of *The English Mystery Plays* Rosemary Woolf shows how the medieval playwrights struggled to present simply such important but abstract theses as: that Christ did not rescue sinful souls from Hell as well as the righteous; that only Christ’s soul descended to Hell, while his body lay in the sepulchre; that, since the fathers were not suffering physical torments (‘poena sensus’) but only the sorrow of loss (‘poena damni’), Christ’s appearance itself relieved them, allowing him to spend two days in Hell with them, up till Easter Sunday, without increasing their discomforts; and so on. All these points, and many others, were considered by Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica* III, 52.2, translated by the English Dominican Fathers in 1926; while the second at least was noted by the author of Blickling homily 7. But perhaps the first striking thing about the Old English poem of *The Descent into Hell* is that its author seems quite uninterested in any such matters.

To begin with, the structure of his poem implies that the Harrowing took place, not immediately after Christ’s death, but on Easter Sunday, after the Resurrection. At the start the two women are approaching the sepulchre expecting to find Christ’s body; instead they find the tomb open, surrounded by angels. Simultaneously – or so it is described – Christ’s body comes to life, the earth quakes, and the patriarchs in Hell laugh (‘hlogen helwaran’) with relief and triumph. Their laugh seems to be prolonged in the joy of John the Baptist, who spoke with laughter (‘hlyhhende spræc’) to his fellows. He describes the oncoming of Christ; the walls of Hell fall down; and Christ comes in, to be surrounded by the patriarchs. Then again John (if it is John) speaks to him in thanks, the speech occupying the rest of the poem. Resurrection and Harrowing then appear to take place in *that* order, though this reverses the order of the Creed (‘he descended into Hell; the third day he rose again from the dead’), and also leaves unclear whether it is Christ’s soul or his reanimated body which carries out the rescue. Other points stated in the mystery plays, and the Middle English *Harrowing of Hell*, and the *Gospel of Nicodemus* itself, such as the difference between Christ’s divinity and his humanity, or the justice with which the Devil’s rights were abrogated – all these find no place.

It is probably a result of this attitude that, like *Solomon and Saturn II* and *Soul and Body I*, *The Descent into Hell* appears to be effectively sourceless. Both the A.S.P.R. editors (1936) and Stanley Greenfield (1965) agree that the *Gospel of Nicodemus* must ‘ultimately’ have provided the poet’s knowledge, but though John the Baptist does speak in that, what he says is nothing like the speech in the poem, and in any case he is there only the third speaker out of five in a chorus of voices preceding the dialogue of Hell and Satan, and the arrival of Christ. It may be noted that the canonical gospels themselves are treated with little less freedom. In his opening account the poet makes clear that there are two women going to the sepulchre (line 11), a detail found only in Matthew, like the earthquake that accompanies the rolling away of the stone. But Matthew also makes clear that there is only one angel (there are two in Luke and John), while the Old English poem introduces a whole company of them. Once again the poet is more interested in effect than in accuracy; and the effect he aims at is prominent enough to make it even less likely that he was following faithfully some source which (as in too many other instances) happens to have been lost. It is one of a triumphant and universal simultaneity.

The poem opens with two oddly symmetrical, and suspenseful, eight-line units. Each consists of six and a half lines expressing grief, dismay, the certainty of defeat felt by Mary Magdalene and the disciples on Easter morning; then a line and a half coda expressing (still in obscure terms) the poet’s awareness that their feelings were misplaced. Both passages are cut into short, detached, half-explanatory units, and in them finite verbs are curiously dominant, opening clauses seven times in the sixteen lines. The Maries *began* to get ready; (because) everyone *knew* that Christ’s body was in the tomb; they *meant* to lament him. Mary *came* in the dawn, she *told* her companion to come with her, the two mourners *looked* for the body in the tomb – where, once again, they *knew* the Jews had laid him and where they *expected* him to remain. The verbs of knowledge and assumption alternate loosely with verbs describing the action the women take as a result. But this firm and in human terms inevitable progress is twice disrupted by the poet’s awareness that in this case human terms are inadequate. ‘The place where he lay had grown cold,’ he says, ‘his passing had been hard.’ Then this half-imitation of the mourners’ thoughts is dropped with the gleeful chiasmus of lines 7b-8, ‘But the men they met at the tomb were brave and cheerful.’ ‘Hæleð’ is an odd word, here, to use of the angels who declare the resurrection, but it seems likely that again the poet is trying to imitate in his language the women’s overpowering surprise. As in three of the four gospels they do not realise immediately who or what the strangers at the sepulchre are; it is enough of a surprise that they should find them ‘bliðe’, ‘cheerful’, in the surroundings of gloom and despair. Having suggested once the discrepancy between human beliefs and divine event, the poet repeats the process, saying again that the women went to the sepulchre (‘eordærn’) where they knew (‘wiston’) the body was laid. The verbal repetition emphasises their mistake; and the poet emphasises it again with his second interruption, that ‘certainly the women knew (“wiston”) something else about it, when they turned back again!’

What that something was, and who the ‘hæleð’ were, has been left teasingly uncertain; the poem’s audience has been invited to put aside its knowledge, to share once again the ignorance, or rather the false knowledge, of the Maries, which was once the true and certain knowledge of the human race. But in the third paragraph we are told that it was a troop of angels which came ‘on uhtan’ (line 17 repeats lines 1 and 9), and that the ‘eordærn’ (line 19 repeats lines 3 and 12) was open. The ‘æþelinges lic’ (lines 3 and 19 again) was alive. Or rather, it came alive. For just as he has juxtaposed gloom and gladness on earth in his first two paragraphs, in this one the poet puts together three events which appear to be simultaneous – the resurrection, the earthquake (as the stone was rolled away), the laughter of those in hell. ‘Helwaran’, like ‘hæleð’, is for a moment ambiguous. It could mean the devils, laughing perhaps in error, like Grendel looking at the sleeping warriors he thought would be his victims. But the repetition three lines later once more clears matters up; it is John, Christ’s kinsman, who represents the inhabitants of hell, and so they can be ‘helwaran’ no more. At the start of the next speech they are ‘burgwaran’, those who live in the city (sc. of God).

There should be no doubt that the poet knew what he was doing, though the suddenness and obscurity of his language have (as so often with Old English poetry) led to alternative readings, especially of lines 7-8. But in this first twenty lines or so he shows a consistent enthusiasm for the spectacle of human ignorance marching confidently to a rendezvous with superior power: not because he finds ignorance comic, like the author of *Judith* – though lines 15-16 come close to this – but because he delights in the idea of power, of a single event altering, in ever-widening circles, the belief of the Maries, the stability of the earth, the state of affairs in hell, the course of history. John’s speeches afterwards show that he foresaw the event, had good reason to, was indeed waiting for it. But to have his reasons included or hinted at too early would diminish the shock of the resurrection, and spoil the poet’s half-entry into what one might see as the last moments of the pre-Christian era. The artistic motive is enough to explain the poem’s oddly abrupt start (we do not learn that it is about a ‘descent into hell’ till line 23), and its curious chronology. Of course there is something appropriate in making Christ’s defeat of death equivalent to his Harrowing of Hell, and the poet may have had some source for his belief; the crux of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* is the moment when Christ in Hell ‘trample(s) upon death,’ and see also Woolf, 1972, page 272 and note, and Hill, 1972, page 387 and note. Nevertheless, in stating matters as he does the poet is going against the natural interpretation of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, not to mention the common gloss put on *Matthew* 12, 40, ‘so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’ If his chronology were extended into an argument, it would create problems for the ‘devil’s rights’ theory of the atonement, and in the end oppose the position eventually taken up by the Catholic Church (for which see *Descente aux Enfers* in the *Dictionnaire de la Théologie Catholique*).

But the poet, as has been said, is not interested in arguments. His approach to the Descent is shaped by a conception of heroic irony, and the Harrowing itself is described in heroic, even anthropomorphic terms. John the Baptist’s first speech

shows us a Saviour almost ‘honour bound’ to harrow Hell – in order to rescue his ‘mæg’, his kinsman, whom he had sent on the ‘sið’ or exploit of death with a firm promise of rescue after six months, ‘ymb siex monað’. All these statements – only the first has Scriptural authority – humanise Christ’s action; he behaves like Hygelac at Ravenswood, rescuing his supporters. The destruction of hell-gates itself is very much stripped down to action. There is no debate between Hell and Satan, or between Christ and Satan, indeed Satan does not appear; the other main interest of most accounts of the Harrowing, the retelling of Old Testament prophecies of Christ, is reduced to the vestigial list of lines 44-9. The poet’s only aim is to suggest power, the power which destroys locks and barriers without a touch (39-40), which admits no difference between intention (34) and result (40). His favourite epithet for Christ is ‘sigebearn’, ‘victorious son’, which he repeats at lines 32, 43, and 50. Between lines 50 and 55 he also repeats the device used in the first two paragraphs, of juxtaposing gloom with cheerfulness, ‘god’ with ‘geomor’ and ‘helle’ with ‘hædre’. But with the illumination of hell gates (long ‘beþeahte mid þystre’ as Christ’s body was for a while ‘eordærne biþeaht’), the change seems to have been accomplished from ‘wop’ to ‘wynn’, from the sad expedition of the Maries to the glad one of Christ.

So far *The Descent into Hell* has been a narrative poem, rather far removed from the hortatory ones so far discussed. But at line 56, as all agree, the tone changes to something variously described as ‘lyrical’ or ‘liturgical’; and some familiar problems recur. The first is that, as often before, it is hard to know who is speaking. The long speech that forms the body of the poem is attributed in line 56 to the ‘burgwarena ord’, the ‘first’ or ‘best’ of the citizens. The A.S.P.R. editors note that ‘the older commentators ... made the natural assumption that the speaker of ll. 59-137 is John the Baptist’ – a natural assumption indeed, since John is named at line 50, is still the ‘he’ of line 53 and the ‘þeƿn’ of line 55, and so presumably the ‘ord’ of 56. Line 57 is moreover virtually identical with line 25, and in both the speaker is Christ’s ‘mæg’ (see *Luke* 1, 36, which suggests that John the Baptist was Christ’s cousin). But at the end of this speech the ‘burgwarena ord’ appeals to Christ to asperse all the citizens ‘as you and John, in the Jordan, nobly inspired all this middle-earth with baptism.’ ‘Git Iohannis’, ‘you and John’, suggests that the speaker is not John. The A.S.P.R. editors argue accordingly that ‘burgwarena ord’ must mean ‘the *first* of the citizens’, not ‘the *best*’, and so refer literally to Adam. The troublesome line 132, ‘we two bathed in the stream together’, which also seems to identify John (see *Matthew* 3, 6 and 3, 16) is reinterpreted to fit Adam by means of an apocryphal story. But this theory too is hardly satisfactory. For one thing, the ‘first of the citizens’ (sc. of God) would, according to Augustine, *City of God* xv, sections 1 and 18, be not Adam but either Seth or Abel; for another, we still want a reason for the poet’s not naming a new character. It is not surprising that an emendation to the awkward ‘git Iohannis’ was soon suggested (Crotty, 1939) – but rejected most recently by R. Trask (1971). Dr. Trask, however, was no more convinced by the Adam theory, and went on to stop a further escape-route by declaring that the idea of giving the offensive lines to the poet is ‘facile’.

Dr. Trask is certainly right, in a sense. The imperative ‘oferwurpe’ clearly goes back fifteen lines to the uncompleted appeal of line 118: simply to close inverted commas after line 132 (‘wit ... baþodon’) but before 135-6 (‘git ... onbryrdon’) would be at best hopeful. Yet the instances of *Vainglory* and *Homiletic Fragment I* need once more to be remembered. There the speeches spill over and become anonymous, not because (as we would put it) the poet’s ‘persona’ has taken over from the prophet’s, but because the two ‘personae’ are felt to be in substantial agreement: there is no need to distinguish them. An element of this appears to be present in the whole of this long speech; the poet’s aim is, once more, to show the widening circles round his central action.

It is often not clear, for instance, who ‘we’ are in the speech. At the start the ‘burgwarena ord’ is speaking, evidently, for himself and his fellow patriarchs, those who have had to wait in bondage (‘bidan sceoldon’) till Christ wished to seek them (‘secan woldest’). At lines 80 and 86 this body seems to be narrowed down (as Dr. Trask says, op. cit.) to the ‘long-term’ residents in hell, since those lines indicate that at the time of Annunciation and Nativity ‘we’ were already in hell and waiting for salvation – as John the Baptist, for instance, was not. But that would be too literal a view. Immediately preceding both these pictures of the waiting in bondage, the poet says that Gabriel, or Mary, ‘brought the child to us in Bethlehem’. Who, here, is ‘us’? If it means the patriarchs, then ‘brought’ can only be understood in a very loose sense; if ‘brought’ is understood more naturally, ‘we’ must include the whole human race, all those offered the chance of salvation. In a sense this larger body also waits timelessly for the Advent, whether this is seen as an event in the Christian year or as a moment in the soul’s progress. Lines 95-8 add to the sense of timelessness. When the speaker says ‘we betrayed ourselves through our own greedy spirits’ he might, indeed, be Adam referring to the Fall; but the Fall is inherited, and so are impulses to evil. It is striking that at line 98 the speaker uses the present tense, ‘sculon’ not ‘sceoldon’. Not only do we ‘carry the sins in our hearts to the hands of the killer,’ we also ‘have [now] to ask for peace from our own enemies.’ Has the Harrowing, then, not taken place? For after this the patriarchs would need no longer to supplicate the devils. But the speaker by now is surely a man expressing general truths about the situation of men who are at any time without the operation of grace. The ‘burgwarena ord’ is, in short, ‘speaking as a member of the Christian community’ as well as for the patriarchs (Hill, 1972). And when he says (lines 71-4) that Christ visited him and gave him sword, helmet, and armour, he may be continuing the heroic imagery of lines 27 ff., but he is also echoing (as Dr. Trask has further pointed out) *Ephesians 6, 13-17*, by which the Christian is invested with the ‘breastplate of righteousness’ (‘lorica’ = ‘byrne’), the ‘helmet of salvation’, the ‘sword of the Spirit’.

The ‘burgwaran’, then, are a larger body than the patriarchs; the Harrowing did more than merely save the latter; the speaker represents more than a delimited body at a particular time. Most modern commentators would agree so far; and all this helps to explain the poet’s lack of interest in naming the man who presents his final speech, and his final wandering from a fairly clear indication of John the Baptist in

line 132 to an appeal (133-7) that seems in essence personal. Like the author of *Vainglory*, the poet of *The Descent* adds his own voice to that of his imagined prophet – a movement confusing to a modern reader, but also a token of the action's intended universality.

The same carelessness of detail explains the almost equally sudden reference, in line 133, to 'the water'. What water? There is no suggestion in any account of the Harrowing that Christ needed to baptise the rescued souls before leading them out (indeed Aquinas distinguished the effect of the Harrowing from that of baptism in *Summa Theologica* III 52.7). And though the Jordan has been mentioned a couple of times previously, it has not been in any way that prepares us for this odd climax. One may – perhaps – deduce what the poet was thinking of by looking at the symmetrical patterns of lines 99-102 and 103-6. There the speaker appeals first to Jerusalem, then to the Jordan, as he does again at the end of his string of appeals in lines 128-32. Both the references to Jerusalem present it as something far off, not to be visited by all living men, to be returned to by Christ only in the future. By contrast, the Jordan could be bathed in by Christ and John, and enjoyed by all on earth; it can (if one accepts the emendation, in line 105, of 'nales' to 'mostes', see note 9) flow over everyone. These last two remarks make it clear that the Jordan is not being considered literally; its availability to all suggests rather the waters of baptism, while in the same way Jerusalem is not only the historical city, but (as in Bernard of Cluny's famous hymn) represents the future state of the righteous. What the poet means, presumably, is that after the Advent, the Resurrection, the Harrowing, the means of salvation are available to all: though for us, as for the poet and his audience, if not for the rescued patriarchs, salvation has not yet come. In his final appeal for mercy, then, John the Baptist, the 'burgwarena ord', speaks more for us than for himself; behind the actual, once-and-for-all event of the Harrowing the poet is describing also the future salvation of Christians, even 'the operation of redemptive grace within the individual soul' (see R. B. Burlin, *The Old English Advent*, page 77).

Yet when all allowance has been made for the modes of 'typological understanding', *The Descent into Hell* remains a confusing and perhaps a clumsy poem (though the opposite view is stoutly maintained by both T. D. Hill and R. M. Trask in the articles already cited). Its originality, however, is not denied, nor (if this is compatible with clumsiness) its self-assurance. The poet offers no preliminary to his abrupt opening; never explains the purpose of this opening when it turns out to be tangential; makes no apology for his rehandlings of and omissions from the well-known Nicodemean story. His non-identification of the major speaker is only the last in a series of confident trespasses on the reader's good nature. They make one wonder how far any Anglo-Saxon reader or listener would be able to follow the twists of the poem's structure, or how far the poet would want him to. Possibly the poet's intentions would be fulfilled if his auditors grasped, first, the overwhelming sense of surprise and reversal associated with the Resurrection on Easter morning, second, the contrasting confidence of John and the waiting patriarchs, third, the way that a Christian ought to reconcile these opposing feelings by becoming confident in a sal-

vation which would be, for him as for the Maries, predictable but as yet unheralded by miraculous events. The poet lets John generalise his experience at one point in what is almost a gnomic statement (lines 62-8): that when enemies tie up the friendless and persecuted exile, he can always regain his courage by thinking of his lord's favour. This remark is true even in a secular sense; in using it the poet repeats his image of the Saviour honour-bound to his kinsmen and followers. It is true of the patriarchs' experience, and obviously meant to be true as well of the doubtful and despairing soul at any time. The generalising nature of the statement allows it to come over with special force, as does the conclusion that John draws from it: 'we all believe in you alone'. Darkness turning to light, and doubt to belief, these may be said to be the central themes of the poem – just as the line quoted above is, appropriately if accidentally, even by arithmetic the central line.

### *The Judgement Day I*

*The Descent into Hell* might seem a particularly unlikely poem in which to find gnomic or prophetic elements, since the event itself is intrinsically a happy one, and one furthermore unaffected by the exercise of human wisdom. The poet's aesthetic subordination of Christ to the 'wise man' figure of John is the more surprising. But it is in *Judgement Day I* that the Anglo-Saxon poets' preoccupation with prudential wisdom reaches its zenith.

The poem precedes *The Descent into Hell*, in the Exeter Book, by some four pages. It has seemed undistinguished to most critics. For one thing – unlike the other two main poetic treatments of the Doomsday theme in Old English – it has, once more, no known source, apparently owing 'little to anything but popular tradition based on the Bible' (Whitbread, 1967). Its lack of learning is complemented by a general absence of precise description, replaced by a moral earnestness now uncongenial and often described, with a certain depreciation, as 'homiletic'. Worst of all, the poem appears shapeless. Stanley Greenfield (1965) remarks on its repetitive nature, L. Whitbread (op. cit.) on the fact that it 'has no well-defined structural plan.'

Yet the repetitiveness may disclose, if not a structure, at least a bias, and Whitney Bolton has given a further lead by his acute comment (prefixed to his edition of the poem in an anthology, 1965) that it shows, like the Exeter *Maxims*, a 'notional' order, whereby thoughts are loosely associated. In fact, at least by comparison with the gnomic verse, *Judgement Day I* seems almost well-shaped, though its interests are not those of the Latin works imitated by *Christ III* or *Judgement Day II*. It should be noted, to begin with, that in spite of its title (which is of course a modern one) rather less than half the poem is about the Day of Judgement itself. The poet directs us to that event in the first few lines, arriving eventually at the theme of the devouring fire which will then consume the world. He remains on that subject for some eight lines (5-13a), opposing five words or phrases for fire ('lige', 'fyr', 'byrnende lig', 'gleda', 'reþra bronda') to four for the world ('lond', 'foldan sceatas', 'beorhte gesceafte', 'eal þes ginna grund'); but mention of this latter draws him away in mid-sentence. 'All this wide world,' he says, 'will be full of coals and

cruel firebrands – this world ruled now by hard-hearted men, who hoard ostentatiously and provide their lord with ridicule – until ...’ And from describing Doomsday in the future he has come to describing sinners in the present. When ‘fire’ returns in line 18 it is not the purgatorial fire of Judgement but the penal fire of Hell, a quite separate thing which the poet continues to describe for eight lines (18-26). At the end of that he remarks on the sinners’ lack of foresight (repeated again in lines 71 and 77), incidentally opposes the dark side of creation (‘mircan gesceafte’) to the bright one he had seen incinerated earlier, and goes on to make a further contrast between the Hell which stands eternally for sinners and the Heaven standing ready for the pure. Only then does Doomsday return, with what is almost a repeat of the poem’s first line (‘Sceal se dæg weorðan ... Ðæt gelimpan sceal’), as if the theme needed to be reopened from scratch.

There is then quite a long section (34b-63) which does indeed concentrate on the title-subject. Its fluidity is still, however, very marked. The exposure of men’s deeds is the poet’s first thought, but he drifts away from it to the coming of the flood after the fire, the disappearance of the stars, the abolition of earthly glory, and then again the coming of firebrands to the ‘beorhte gesceafte’ – when, he repeats, the deeds of all men will be exposed. The section consists of a long verbal loop. It would be hard to construct any chronology of events from it, though some Anglo-Saxons at least were familiar with the fifteen signs of Doomsday as enumerated and ordered (allegedly) by St. Jerome. (See Cook, 1900, pages 179, 200). But this poet either does not know or does not care that there ought to be thirteen other stages between the flood of his line 1 and the general death of his line 2; while the fire which has cooled in line 37 is back again eighteen lines later.

Enough has been quoted already, though, to show that the poet does not write like this from mere incurable vagueness. Like the poet of *The Descent*, he is more interested in events as they appear to human minds than as they actually take place; and the theme on which he concentrates with praiseworthy insistence is the contrast between the future state and the present one. In a sense, the first four lines of the poem state exactly what he is going to say and to keep saying: that on the one hand Doomsday will have to happen (‘gelimpan sceal’) and everyone will have to die; on the other, that anyone who wants to (‘se þe wile’) can think about this truth. There is even a certain wryness about the contrast between the modes of the two statements, the one implying necessity, universality (‘sceal’, ‘bið’, ‘anra gehwylcum’), the other option, possibility, a frequency which is less than total (‘mæg’, ‘wile’, ‘oft’). Both statements are of a gnomic cast, similar in implication though different in form: what the poet means is that even if a man does *not* want to reflect on this truth, it will happen just the same – though then his failure to appreciate gnomic understatement will have serious consequences.

It is this swivelling from an obvious future to an uncomprehending present that dictates both the poet’s sentence structure and his often-criticised paragraphing. He runs through variations of the trick at least a dozen times, trying always to startle by some abrupt change of focus, some violent connection between the reader and the subject. In line 13, as has been said, he opposes the world in flames in the future to the world ruled, in the present, by proud men, proud men who will them-

selves go to the flames ... Nearly forty lines later, what looks like becoming again a dull and ‘homiletic’ passage is jerked back to immediacy by the conjunction ‘ærþon’; gain God’s love in this world *before* the fire comes in the next. Repeatedly we are told that what will preoccupy people in the future is the past; then it will be made known who has lived well (62-3), then everyone will be rewarded for what he did before (41-2), then God will reward the righteous man because he has been so sad (85-7). The sentences quoted repeat and vary each other. Lines 85-7 are an expansion of the four preceding lines, which say essentially the same thing, except that the subordinate relative clause is there in the present tense (‘þam þe ... geþen-ceþ’) rather than the past (‘þæs þe he ... wearð’), and contains the adverb ‘nu’, making the point that the past judged at Doomsday is our present. Lines 77-80 return to the proud and ruling sinners of line 14, whose joy in the present is innocent of the future, ‘æfter þisse worulde’. But this last phrase echoes ‘in þisse worulde’ of line 50, ‘on þisum life’ of line 53; the understated remark on their ignorance (so popular with Old English poets) is a variation of the ‘ne con he ... ne con he’ of lines 26 and 71. As critics have realised, there is no point in trying to sort out a progressive movement in this whirl of repetitions and oppositions; what they have not been prepared to admit is that the poet is not aiming at an orderly description of a single event safely distanced in the future. The poem gains its compulsion – if that is not too strong a term – from its succession of jabbing reminders that now is the time when matters are decided, that though what happens then will be of great interest and majesty, it will all be, for human beings, too late.

The poet’s tricks are by no means exhausted by what has been described before. It is worth glancing through the poem, for instance, for sentences turning on conjunctions of time, ‘síþan’ (10, 21, 53, 64), ‘óþæt’ (16), ‘ærþon’ (50), ‘þonne’ (70, 104). It seems also that he enjoys distinguishing between the brief present of men and the eternal present of God, repeating, between lines 24 and 34, that hell is (always) there for the man who is (now) often committing slander; that the slanderer is unaware of hell’s eternal presence; but that heaven, meanwhile, stands ready for those who ‘þisne cwide willað ondrædan þus deopne’ – for the people (including us) who are actually reading the poem. But this determined assault on the reader perhaps crystallises current critical objections to the poem – objections familiar enough from earlier discussions. The poet, we see, insists that his work is profound (‘þus deopne’). And yet he has not a great deal to say that is intellectually convincing: just that the day will come, something that one either believes already or (more probably nowadays) does not – in which case argument is wasted. In either case the poet seems to be awarding himself too much authority, as indeed the poets of *Precepts* and *Vainglory* had done before him. Yet all these affronts to modern dignity are well-intentioned, not to say utterly sincere. Here as elsewhere, the poet assumes that his audience is already in substantial agreement with him, for reasons not to be expressed in vernacular verse. Far from persuading them, his job is to make them ‘prove knowledge upon their pulses,’ to help them over the gap between ‘witan’ (know by intellect) and ‘cunnan’ (know by experience). They must be made aware of the crucial nature of everyday existence. In their different ways the poets of *Soul and Body*, *Descent into Hell*, and *Judgement Day I* all grapple with the same

problem: not just recounting history or prophesying the future, but showing what difference such events ought to make, not just stirring the imagination but stirring it to action. It is of course unlikely that they can now have the effect they would have wished for, and their methods may seem gruesome, or confused, or ‘homiletic’. But this is a fault of intention, not of execution. There may be some truth in one’s feeling that by the end the poet of *Judgement Day I* has lost patience, putting the weight on the reader’s wisdom rather than his own: ‘Now repeat what this says ... it will have to happen that way to everybody ... the man who thinks the right way now will have happiness in heaven.’ But alternatively one might reflect that it is in the nature of wisdom to be of no value till it is understood. So, for the reader’s voice to be heard at the end of the poem is the best guarantee that it has worked; and it is this which the poet so directly solicits. The ‘ic’ of the poem’s final section means *you*.

### *Conclusion*

The danger of putting poems into groups is that their individuality and that of their authors is diminished: a grave danger, but one that students of literature are now carefully trained to avoid. The risks of considering poems in isolation perhaps need more indication at the moment. A common one is that it becomes difficult to estimate a poet’s originality. Naturally, one may over-estimate this simply by not knowing that other people have said the same thing; this is why *Maxims* or *The Durham Proverbs* should be more useful to critics of *The Wanderer*. But it is also quite possible to under-estimate a poet’s capacity for original thought by treating him in isolation, since one can always assume that a single poem has had an exact source, now lost. This is more difficult to believe when one finds a succession of poems in similar case; and even more so when several poems show a relationship to particular sources which is a good deal less than slavish, and may even appear high-handed.

One conclusion, then, that might be drawn from reading these ten poems (and others) together is that the problems they set are not all soluble by finding a cultural background for them. It is relatively easy, for instance, to link some of their sayings with Bible quotations. T. D. Hill has argued once again (1970b) that *Maxims I A* 35-6 derives from *Proverbs* 11, 30, that *Maxims II* 51-8 is linked with *Ecclesiasticus* 33, 15, and further, that these links are a key to the poets’ total intentions. More parallels could be found: *Ecclesiasticus* 21, 20 is virtually identical with *Precepts* 54-5, much of chapter 19 recalls passages in *Vainglory* and *The Fortunes of Men*, while 12, 9 of the same book seems a more cynical variant of Durham Proverb number 3. Other passages in this volume recall bits of *The Benedictine Rule* (see Schroer, 1885, for the Old English version, McCann, 1952, for a Latin / English one). But to arrive at a fair estimate of the Old English poems one needs to remark, first, how small the overlap is between poems and ‘sources’: the poems say nothing of that dominant theme in *Proverbs* (see Heaton, 1968), the way a scribe may ‘serve great men with ease’; and conversely, the books of the Bible and Apocrypha often contradict the cherished Anglo-Saxon theory of the inaccessibility of wisdom –

'Whoso seeketh her early shall have no great travail', says Solomon, *Wisdom* 6, 14. Secondly, it is salutary to observe the many resemblances between these poems and proverb-collections well outside the Anglo-Saxon cultural area. It was once the fashion to juxtapose *Maxims* and the Old Norse *Havamal*; but one finds nearly as much by reading the *Maxims of Ptahhotpe* (Egyptian, c. 2350 B.C., see Simpson 1973), or indeed the collections of anthropologists from Nigeria or New Guinea. Single similarities are not enough. It is important to consider the total stance of individual poems, as a bare minimum.

But the obverse of this consideration of hortatory poems with respect to their analogues must be consideration of them with regard to each other; and then their originality is a good deal less marked, as has often been noted above. This is no reason, though, to deprecate the poets. The elements they share may be difficult to define, but are closely bound up with the stance of the maker of gnomic sayings: he must be authoritative without certainty, show urgency without personal commitment, combine reserve and anxiety. The stance itself offers great scope for variability, and, like all social poses, is defined by discrimination. Indeed, it is only over a period that the reader comes to recognise it and presumably (at one time) to imitate it. Analogues to it are easily found in the behaviour of characters in epic poems, and even, much later, in family sagas, a circumstance which makes it hard to resist the feeling that the 'wise man's' suspicious and slightly cynical posture arises directly from the experience of chronic uncertainty which is a Heroic Age (an Age prolonged for Anglo-Saxons, of course, up to the time of King Alfred if not King Ethelred). Nevertheless recent attempts to counteract the 'Christian' side of Old English poetry with a 'heroic' side (Cherniss, 1972) have been unsubtle, stressing 'fortitudo' very much at the expense of 'sapientia'. Professor Hill (1970b, above) is certainly right in the last resort in putting stress on the Anglo-Saxon poets' interest in 'God's providential order', a theme to which they refer all but unanimously; it needs to be added only that if their poetic orbit is affected by the gravity of that force (with its reflections on death, Hell, Doomsday and the like), it is defined also by the inertia of their gnomic posture, with its insistence that (however well one copes, and even though all may come right in the end), the interim will nevertheless be filled with blindness, mourning, happenstance, bondage, wolves, and ravens.

## PRECEPTS

- Ðus frod fæder      freobearn lærde,  
 modsnottor mon,      maga cystum eald,  
 wordum wisfæstum,      þæt he wel þunge:  
 'Do a þætte duge,      deag þin gewyrhtu.  
 God þe biþ symle      goda gehwylces  
 frea ond fultum,      feond þam oþrum  
 wyrsan gewyrhta.      Wene þec þy betran,  
 efn elne þis      a þenden þu lifge.
- Fæder ond modor      freo þu mid heortan,  
 maga gehwylcne,      gif him sy meotud on lufan.      10  
 Wes þu þinum yldrum      arfæst symle,  
 fægerwyrde,      ond þe in ferðe læt  
 þine lareowas      leofe in mode,  
 þa þec geornast      to gode trymmen.'
- Fæder eft his sunu      frod gegrette  
 oþre siþe: 'Heald elne þis!      15  
 Ne freme firene,      ne næfre freonde þinum,  
 mæge man ne geþafa,      þy læs þec meotud oncumne,  
 þæt þu sy wommes gewita.      He þe mid wite gieldeð,  
 swylce þam oþrum      mid eadwelan.'      20
- Ðriddan syþe      þoncsnottor guma  
 breostgehygdum      his bearne lærde:  
 'Ne gewuna wyrsan,      widan feore,  
 ængum eahta,      ac þu þe anne genim  
 to gesprecan symle      spella ond lara  
 rædhycgende,      sy ymb rice swa hit mæge.'      25
- Feorþan siðe      fæder eft lærde  
 modlefne magan,      þæt he gemunde þis:  
 'Ne aswig sundorwine,      ac a symle geheald  
 ryhtum gerisnum.      Ræfn elne þis,  
 þæt þu næfre fæcne weorðe      freonde þinum.'      30
- Fiftan siþe      fæder eft ongon  
 breostgeþoncum      his bearne lærnan:  
 'Druncen beorg þe      ond dollic word,  
 man on mode      ond in muþe lyge,  
 yrre ond æfeste,      ond idese lufan.      35  
 Fordon sceal æwiscmod      oft siþian,  
 se þe gewiteð      in wifes lufan,  
 fremdre meowlan.      Pær bið a firena wen,  
 laðlicre scome,      long nið wið god,  
 geotende gielp.      Wes þu a giedda wis,  
 wær wið willan,      worda hyrde.'

## PRECEPTS

This is how the father – a man of experience<sup>1</sup> with an intelligent mind, a man who had grown old in good qualities – this is how he taught his noble son, giving him sensible advice, so that he would get on well:

‘Always do what would be right, and what you have done will bring you profit. God will always be a helpful lord to you in everything that is good; the devil will be an instigator to others of what is worse.<sup>2</sup> Train yourself to do what is better, and always practise this with fortitude as long as you live.

Love your father and mother in your heart, and each one of your family, if they love God. Always be respectful to your elders, speak to them politely, and think kindly thoughts of your teachers in your mind, of those who are most anxious to encourage you in virtue.’

The experienced father then addressed his son once again:

‘Observe this strictly! Do no wrong, and never condone sin in your friend or relation, in case the Ruler should accuse you of being an accessory to sin. He will give you punishment for that, just as he will reward others with happiness.’

A third time this wise and thoughtful man instructed his child from the meditations of his heart:

‘Don’t ever, in all your life, associate with anyone worse, not for any consideration, but always choose as an adviser for yourself someone who is resourceful in precepts and examples, whatever his status happens to be.’<sup>3</sup>

Again a fourth time the father instructed the son dear to his heart, that he should remember this:

‘Do not let your chosen friend down, but always observe what is right and proper. Keep this rule strictly, that you should never be deceitful to your friend.’

Again a fifth time the father began to teach his child with the thoughts of his heart:

‘Avoid drunkenness and foolish words, sin in the heart and lies in the mouth, anger and spite and the love of women. For the man who falls to loving a woman, a girl he does not know, will often have to go away ashamed. One can always expect to find sin there, hateful disgrace, long enmity against God, and overflowing arrogance. Always be wise in what you say, watchful against your desires; guard your words.’

- Siextan siþe swæs eft ongon  
 þurh bliðne geþoht his bearn læran:  
 'Ongiet georne hwæt sy god oþþe yfel,  
 ond toscead simle scearpe mode  
 in sefan þinum, ond þe a þæt selle geceos.  
 A þe bið gedæled; gif þe deah hyge,  
 wunað wisdom in, ond þu wast geare  
 ondgit yfles, heald þe elne wið,  
 feorma þu symle in þinum ferðe god.' 45
- Seofeþan siþe his sunu lærde  
 fæder, frød guma, sægde fela geongum:  
 'Seldan snottor guma sorgleas blissað,  
 swylce dol seldon drymed sorgful  
 ymb his forðgesceaft, nefne he fæhþe wite.  
 Wærwyrde sceal wisfæst hæle  
 breostum hycgan, nales breahtme hlud.' 50
- Eahtöpan siþe eald fæder ongon  
 his mago monian mildum wordum:  
 'Leorna lare lærgedefe,  
 wene þec in wisdom, weoruda scyppend  
 hafa þe to hyhte, haligra gemynd,  
 ond a soð to syge, þonne þu secge hwæt.' 60
- Nigeþan siþe nægde se gomola,  
 eald uðwita sægde eaforan worn:  
 'Nis nu fela folca þætte fyrngewritu  
 healdan wille, ac him hyge brosnað,  
 ellen colad, idlað þeodscype;  
 ne habbað wiht for þæt, þeah hi wom don  
 ofer meotudes bibod. Monig sceal ongielde  
 sawelsusles. Ac læt þinne sefan healdan  
 forð fyrngewritu ond frean domas,  
 þa þe her on mægðe gehwære men forlætaþ  
 swiþor asigan, þonne him sy sylfum ryht.' 70
- Teoþan siþe tornsorgna ful,  
 eald eft ongon eaforan læran:  
 'Snyttra bruceþ þe fore sawle lufan  
 warnað him wommas worda ond dæda  
 on sefan symle, ond soþ fremeð;  
 bið him geofona gehwylc gode geyced,  
 meahtum spedig, þonne he mon flyhð. 80
- Yrre ne læt þe æfre gewealdan,  
 heah in hreþre, heoroworda grund  
 wylme bismitan, ac him warnað þæt  
 on geheortum hyge. Hæle sceal wisfæst  
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Again a sixth time the good man began to instruct his child with kindly intentions:

'Be quick to recognise what is good or evil; and always distinguish between them in your mind with sharp intelligence; and always choose the better for yourself. The distinction will always be there for you;<sup>4</sup> if your mind is good enough, and there is wisdom in it, and you have a ready knowledge and perception of evil, then keep yourself resolutely away from it, and always foster what is good in your heart.'<sup>5</sup>

A seventh time the father taught his son, the man of experience told the young one many things:

'A wise man seldom enjoys himself without worrying; just as a fool rarely mixes enjoyment with concern about his future,<sup>6</sup> unless he knows he has an enemy. A sensible man must be careful with his words, and think things over in his heart, not be loud and noisy.'

An eighth time the old father began to advise his son with kind words:

'Learn what you are taught in a way that shows you apt for instruction, train yourself in wisdom. Put your trust in the Lord of hosts and the memory of the saints, and always have truth as your aim, whenever you say anything.'<sup>7</sup>

A ninth time the old man spoke, the aged philosopher said many things to his son:

'There are not many nations now prepared to observe the ancient scriptures, instead their thoughts are corrupt, their zeal grows cold, their discipline becomes hollow.<sup>8</sup> They do not care about it at all, even if they do wrong against the Ruler's command. Many will have to pay for it with torture of the soul. But let your mind continue to observe the ancient scriptures and the Lord's judgements, which people here allow to decline in every province, much more than would be for their own good.'<sup>9</sup>

A tenth time, full of cares and anxieties, the old man again began to teach his son:

'That man is making good use of his wisdom who always guards himself mentally against sins of word and deed, and advances the truth, for the love of his soul. Each of his talents will be increased by God; when he flees from sin, he will be rich in strength.'

Do not let anger ever master you, rising high in your heart, nor let deep and cutting words disgrace you with a sudden upsurge; the wise man guards his thoughts resolutely against that. A man must be sensible and moderate, wise in mind, shrewd

ond gemetlice,    modes snottor,  
gleaw in gehygdu<sup>m</sup>,    georn wisdomes,  
swa he wið ælda mæg    eades hleotan.  
Ne beo þu no to tælende,    ne to tweospræce,  
ne þe on mode læt    men to fracoþe,  
ac beo leofwende,    leoht on gehygdu<sup>m</sup>  
ber breostcofan.    Swa þu, min bearn, gemyne  
frode fæder lare,    ond þec a wið firenum geheald.'

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in thoughts, eager for wisdom, so he can have his share of happiness with other people. Do not be too slanderous, nor too much of a flatterer,<sup>10</sup> do not think too contemptibly of people in your mind; rather be well-liked, and keep your spirit up with cheerful thoughts. In this way, my son, remember your father's wise advice, and always keep yourself from sin.'

## VAINGLORY

Hwæt, me frod wita on fyrndagum  
 sægde, snottor ar, sundorwundra fela!  
 Wordhord onwreah witgan larum  
 beorn boca gleaw, bodan ærcwide,  
 þæt ic soðlice siþþan meahte  
 ongitan bi þam gealdre godes agen bearn,  
 wilgest on wicum, ond þone wacran swa some,  
 scyldum bescyredne, on gescead witan.

Pæt mæg æghwylc mon eaþe geþencan,  
 se þe hine ne læteð on þas lenan tid  
 amyrran his gemyndum modes gælsan,  
 ond on his dægrime druncen to rice,  
 þonne monige beoð mæþelhegendra,  
 wlonce wigsniþas winburgum in.  
 Sittap æt symble, soðgied wrecað,  
 wordum wrixað, witan fundiaþ  
 hwylc æscstede inne in ræcede  
 mid werum wunige, þonne win hweteð  
 beornes breastefan; brahtem stigeð,  
 cirm on corþre, cwide scralletaþ  
 missenlice. Swa beoþ modsefan  
 dalum gedæled, sindon dryhtguman  
 ungelice.

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Sum on oferhygdo  
 þrymme þringeð, þrinteð him in innan  
 ungemedemad mod; sindan to monige þæt.

Bið þæt æfþonca eal gefyllde  
 feondes fligepilum, facensearwum;  
 breodað he ond bælceð, boð his sylfes  
 swiþor micle þonne se sella mon,  
 þenceð þæt his wise welhwam þince  
 eal unforcuþ. Biþ þæs oþer swice,  
 þonne he þæs facnes fintan sceawað.

Wrenceþ he ond blenceþ, worn geþenceþ  
 hinderhoca, hygegar leteð,  
 scurum sceoteþ. He þa scylde ne wat  
 fæhþe gefremede, feoþ his betran  
 eorl fore æfstum, læteð inwitflan  
 brecan þone burgweal, þe him bebead meotud  
 þæt he þæt wigsteal wergan sceolde.

Siteþ symbolwlonc, searwum læteð  
 wine gewæged word ut faran,  
 þræfte þringan þrymme gebyrmed,

## VAINGLORY

Listen, long ago I was told many extraordinary and astonishing things by someone both learned and experienced, a wise man with a message. Through the prophet's teaching this man, expert with books, brought to light a treasure of words, spoken in the past by a preacher, so that as a result of his solemn song I could afterwards recognise properly God's own son, a welcome guest wherever men live; and in the same way discern that weaker spirit, who was deprived of authority for his offences.<sup>1</sup> This can easily be grasped by anybody who does not allow spiritual wantonness, during this brief existence, to pervert his intellect; and, during his lifetime, does not allow drunkenness to get control of him, when there are many men holding a meeting, proud war-makers in the wine-halls.<sup>2</sup> They sit at the feast, composing true songs, exchanging words; they try hard to find out what battlefield may remain among men inside the hall,<sup>3</sup> when wine makes a man's heart excited. Noise increases, the hubbub of the company, and voices ring out competing with each other. In the same way minds are divided into types, for men are not all alike.

One sort presses on violently in his pride, an immoderate spirit swells within him; of these there are too many. He is filled by the devil's flying arrows of envy, by deceitful temptations. He bawls and shouts,<sup>4</sup> boasts about himself far more than does the better man, thinks that his behaviour must seem absolutely irreproachable to everybody. But there will be another outcome of it all, when he sees the result of his offence! He tricks and cheats, he thinks of many barbed devices, he lets fly with premeditated shafts, he snipes continuously. He does not realise the guilt he has brought into being by his enmity; and, out of spite, he hates his superior, allowing treacherous arrows to break through the castle-wall, the fortress his Ruler had commanded him to defend. Sitting proudly at the feast, overcome by wine, he lets his words stream out maliciously, pushing for a quarrel, swollen with violence, inflamed

æfestum onæled, oferhygda ful,  
niþum, nearowrencum. Nu þu cunnan meaht:  
gif þu þyslicne þegn gemittest 45  
wunian in wicum, wite þe be þissum  
feawum forðspellum þæt þæt biþ feondes bearn  
flæsce bifongen, hafað fræte lif,  
grundfusne gæst gode orfeormne,  
wuldorcyninge. Pæt se witga song, 50  
gearowyrdig guma, ond þæt gyd awræc:  
‘Se þe hine sylfne in þa sliþnan tid  
þurh oferhygda up ahlæneð,  
ahefeð heahmodne, se sceal hean wesan  
æfter neosiþum niþer gebigid, 55  
wunian witum fæst, wyrmum beþrungen.  
Pæt wæs geara iu in godes rice  
þætte mid englum oferhygd astag,  
widmære gewin; wroht ahofan,  
heardne heresiþ, heofon widledan, 60  
forsawan hyra sellan, þa hi to swice þohton  
ond þrymcyning þeodenstoles  
ricne beryfan, swa hit ryht ne wæs,  
ond þonne gesettan on hyra sylfra dom  
wuldres wynlond. Pæt him wige forstod 65  
fæder frumsceafta; wearð him seo feohte to grim.’

Donne bið þam oþrum ungelice,  
se þe her on eorþan eaðmod leofað,  
ond wiþ gesibbra gehwone simle healdeð  
freode on folce ond his feond lufað, 70  
þeah þe he him abyrgnesse oft gefremede  
willum in þisse worulde. Se mot wuldres dream  
in haligra hyht heonan astigan  
on engla eard. Ne biþ þam oþrum swa,  
se þe on ofermedium eargum dædum 75  
leofaþ in leahtrum, ne beoð þa lean gelic  
mid wuldorcyning. Wite þe be þissum:  
gif þu eaðmodne eorl gemete,  
þegn on þeode, þam bið simle  
gæst gegæderad godes agen bearn 80  
wilsum in worlde, gif me se witega ne leag.

Forþon we sculon a hygende hælo rædes  
gemunan in mode mæla gehwylcum  
þone selestan sigora waldend. Amen.

by spite and hostility and tricks to cause trouble, full of pride. Now you can be sure: if you meet a man of this kind living among other people, know from these few plain statements that that is a child of the devil enclosed in flesh, that he lives his life perversely, has a soul destined for Hell and worthless to God, the king of glory. The prophet sang this, a man of ready speech, he made this song:<sup>5</sup>

'Whoever sets himself up through pride in his time of cruelty, and raises himself up arrogantly, will have to be humbled miserably after his death-journey, brought down to live fixed in torments, surrounded by thronging worms. It was long ago in the kingdom of God that arrogance arose among the angels, a famous struggle; they instigated the quarrel, started a violent attack; they polluted Heaven and despised their superior, when they meant, as was not right, to turn traitor and deprive the noble and mighty king of his lordly throne, and then live in the happy land of glory, on their own terms. The father of creation denied them that by force: the fight turned out too fierce for them.'<sup>6</sup>

But there is a different fate for the other man, who lives humbly here on earth, and always keeps on friendly terms with every member of his family and with people generally, and who loves his enemy, even though he has often been deliberately provoked by him in this world. The humble man can rise from here to happiness and glory, the hope of the saints, the land of the angels. It will not be so for the other one, who lives among his sins, proud of disgraceful deeds. Their rewards will not be the same from the king of glory.

Recognise from these words: if you happen to meet a humble person, a man among the people, God's own son will always be his close associate – a guest to be wished for in this world<sup>7</sup> – if the prophet did not deceive me.

So we must always and on every occasion, considering what is necessary for salvation, remember in our hearts that greatest ruler of victories. Amen.

## THE FORTUNES OF MEN

Ful oft þæt gegongeð, mid godes meahatum,  
 þætte wer ond wif in woruld cennad  
 bearn mid gebyrdum ond mid bleom gyrwað,  
 tennaþ ond tætaþ, oþþæt seo tid cymed,  
 gegæð gearrimum, þæt þa geongan leomu,  
 liffæstan leoþu, geloden weorþað.

5

Fergað swa ond feþað fæder ond modor,  
 giefað ond gierwað. God ana wat  
 hwæt him weaxendum winter bringað.

10

Sumum þæt gegongeð on geoguðfeore  
 þæt se endestæf earfeðmæcgum  
 weallic weorþeð. Sceal hine wulf etan,  
 har hæðstapa; hinsiþ þonne  
 modor bimurneð. Ne bið swyld monnes geweald.

15

Sumne sceal hungor ahiþan, sumne sceal hreoh fordrifan,  
 sumne sceal gar agetan, sumne guð abreotan.

Sum sceal leomena leas lifes neotan,  
 folmum ætfeohtan, sum on feðe lef,  
 seonobenum seoc, sar cwanian,  
 murnan meotudgescaft mode gebysgad.

20

Sum sceal on holte of hean beame  
 fiþerleas feallan; bið on flihte seþeah,  
 laceð on lyfte, oþþæt lengre ne bið  
 westem wudubeames. Ponne he on wyrtruman  
 sigeð sworcenferð, sawle bireafod,  
 fealleþ on foldan; feorð biþ on siþe.

25

Sum sceal on feþe on feorwegas  
 nyde gongan ond his nest beran,  
 tredan uriglast elþeodigra,  
 frecne foldan; ah he feormendra  
 lyt lifgendra, lað biþ æghwær  
 fore his wonsceaftum wineieas hæle.

30

Sum sceal on geapum galgan ridan,  
 seomian æt swylte, oþþæt sawlhord,  
 bancofa blodig, abrocen weorþeð.  
 Pær him hrefn nimeþ heafodsyne,  
 sliteð salwigpad sawelleasne;  
 noþer he þy facne mæg folmum biwergan,  
 laþum lyftsceaþan, biþ his lif scæcen,  
 ond he feleleas, feores orwena,  
 blac on beame bideð wyrde,  
 bewegen wælmiste. Bið him werig noma.

35

Sumne on bæle sceal brond aswencan,

40

## THE FORTUNES OF MEN

It happens very often, through God's power, that a man and woman have children, bringing them into the world through birth and clothing them in fleshly form,<sup>1</sup> coaxing and cherishing, until with the passing of many years the time comes that the young limbs, the members they gave life to, have grown to maturity. In this way the father and mother carry their children and lead them,<sup>2</sup> give them things and provide for them. Only God knows what winters will bring them as they grow up.<sup>3</sup>

It happens to some unlucky men that the end of their lives comes unhappily in youth. One of them the wolf, the grey heath-prowler, will eat; then his mother will mourn his death. Such things are not under human control.

Hunger will destroy one, a storm will drive another to death; the spear will kill one off, battle beat down the next. Another will have to live his life without light, groping about with his hands; or, too weak to walk, ill from aches in the joints, will grumble about the pain, complain in depression about his fate. One, in the woods, will fall from a high tree; he has no wings, but flies nevertheless, twists and turns in the air, till he no longer hangs on the tree like fruit. Then he falls to the ground, crashes down to the roots with despair in his heart; his soul is snatched away, his life leaves him.

Another man will be forced to travel far-off ways on foot, carrying his food, will have to tread the dangerous earth of foreigners along wet tracks; he has few people alive to look after him, is disliked in all places because of his misfortunes, a friendless man. Another will have to ride the broad gallows, at his death he hangs until his body, the casket of blood and bones that locks up his soul, has rotted to pieces. Then the raven takes the eyes from his head, the black-feathered creature pecks at the dead man; nor can he defend himself from that outrage with his hands, beat off the hated attacker from the air. His spirit has gone, without hope of life he hangs insensible and pallid on the tree; surrounded by a deadly miasma he endures his destiny. His name is cursed.

Flames will torment another in a fire, the dangerous blaze consumes the doomed

fretan frecne lig	fægne monnan.	
Pær him lifgedal	lungre weorðeð,	45
read reþe gled;	reotedð meowle,	
seo hyre bearne gesihð	brondas þeccan.	
Sumum meces ecg	on meodubence	
yrrum eallowosan	ealdor oþþringed,	
were winsadum;	bið ær his worda to hræd.	50
Sum sceal on beore	þurh byreles hond	
meodugal mæcga.	Ponne he gemet ne con	
gemearcian his muþe	mode sine,	
ac sceal ful earmlice	ealdre linnan,	
dreogan dryhtenbealo	dreamum biscyred,	55
ond hine to sylfcwale	secgas nemnað,	
mænað mid muþe	meodugales gedrinc.	
Sum sceal on geoguþe	mid godes meahatum	
his earfoðsiþ	ealne forspilden,	
ond on yldo eft	eadig weorþan,	60
wunian wyndagum	ond welan þicgan,	
maþmas ond meoduful	mægburge on,	
þæs þe ænig fira mæge	ford gehealdan.	
Swa missenlice	meahtig dryhten	
geond eorþan sceat	eallum dæleð,	65
scyreþ ond scrifed	ond gesceapo healdeð:	
sumum eadwelan,	sumum earfeþa dæl,	
sumum geogoþe glæd,	sumum guþe blæd,	
gewealdenne wigplegan,	sumum wyrp oþþe scyte,	
torhtlicne tiir,	sumum tæfle cræft,	70
bleobordes gebregd.	Sume boceras	
weorþað wisfæste.	Sumum wundorgife	
þurh goldsmiþe	gearwad weorþeð;	
ful oft he gehyrdeð	ond gehyrsteð wel,	
brytencyninges beorn,	ond he him brad syleð	75
lond to leane.	He hit on lust þiged.	
Sum sceal on heape	hæleþum cweman,	
blissian æt beore	bencsittendum;	
þær biþ drincendra	dream se micla.	
Sum sceal mid hearpan	æt his hlafordes	80
fotum sittan,	feoh þicgan,	
ond a snellice	snere wræstan,	
lætan scralltan	sceacol, se þe hleapeð,	
nægl neomegende.	Biþ him neod micel.	
Sum sceal wildne fugel	wloncne atemian	85
heafoc on honda,	oþþæt seo heoroswealwe	
wynsum weorþeð;	deþ he wyrplas on,	

man. There he parts with life quickly, the cruel coals burn red. The woman weeps, who sees the flames enveloping her son.<sup>4</sup> The edge of the sword drives out life from another on the mead-bench, from the angry ale-swiller, the man full of wine. He has been too free with his words. Another turns into a man excited by mead and the beer the servant brings. Then he knows no moderation, cannot set a limit to his mouth by will-power,<sup>5</sup> but will have to lose his life most wretchedly, endure the pain of losing his lord,<sup>6</sup> be stripped of any happiness. And men say he killed himself, openly put the blame on what the alcoholic drank.

Another, through the power of God, will in his youth obliterate all his harsh experience, and then be fortunate in old age, living happy days and enjoying prosperity, riches and the mead-cup in the home of his family, as much as any man may be able to keep on having these.

In this way the mighty Lord shares things out in different ways to everyone across the world's expanse. He allocates, he decrees, he maintains the nature of things: riches to one, hardship to another; to one pleasure in youth, to another fame in battle, mastery of the game of war; one is good at throwing or shooting, gains glory and splendour, another has skill at games, knows the tricks of the chequer-board.<sup>7</sup> Some become wise scholars. For some marvellous gifts are prepared by the goldsmith. Often the powerful king's servant hardens metal and puts fine decoration on it, for which the king gives him broad lands as a reward. He accepts it happily.

Another, in a crowd, will please warriors, entertain them as they sit with their beer on benches; there is great pleasure there for the men as they drink. Another will sit at his lord's feet with a harp, and be given money; he always plucks the harp strings with bravura, lets the leaping plectrum cry out, the nail ring in harmony.<sup>8</sup> He shows great verve.

Another will tame the wild, proud bird, the hawk in his hands, until the taloned-swallow becomes obedient. He puts varvels on it, feeds the strong-winged bird while

fedeþ swa on feterum      fiþrum dealne,  
lepeþ lyftswiftne      lytlum gieflum,  
oþþæt se wælisca      wædum ond dædum  
his ætgiefan      eaðmod weorþed  
ond to hagostealdes      honda gelæred.

90

Swa wrætlice      weoroda nergend  
geond middangeard      monna cræftas  
sceop ond scyrede,      ond gesceapo ferede  
æghwylcum on eorþan      eormencynnes.  
Forþon him nu ealles þonc      æghwa secge,  
þæs þe he fore his miltsum      monnum scrifeð.

95

it is tied, weakens the swift creature by giving it small morsels, until the gerkalcon is humbled by its dress and by what its provider does, is taught to return to the hands of the warrior.

In this wonderful way the Lord of hosts and Saviour created and allocated skills of men throughout the world, sent everyone on earth of human race his own nature. So let everyone thank him now for everything that he has decreed for men through his mercy.

# MAXIMS I

## A

Frige mec frodum wordum. Ne læt þinne ferð onhælne,  
degol þæt þu deopost cunne. Nelle ic þe min dyrne gesecgan,  
gif þu me þinne hygecræft hylest ond þine heortan geþohtas.  
Gleawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan.

God sceal mon ærest hergan,  
fægre, fæder userne, forþon þe he us æt frymþe geteode  
lif ond lænne willan. He usic wile þara leana gemonian.

Meotud sceal in wuldre. Mon sceal on eorþan,  
geong ealdian. God us ece biþ.

Ne wendað hine wyrda, ne hine wiht dreceþ  
adl ne yldo, ælmihtigne.

Ne gomelað he in gæste, ac he is gen swa he wæs,  
þeoden geþyldig.

He us geþonc syleð,  
missenlicu mod, monge reorde.  
Feorh cynna fela fæþmeþ wide  
eglond monig. Eardas rume  
meotud arærde for moncynne,  
ælmihtig god, efenfela bega  
þeoda ond þeawa.

Ping sceal gehegan  
frod wiþ fronde. Biþ hyra ferð gelic.  
Hi a sacē semaþ, sibbe gelærað,  
þa ær wonsælge awegen habbað.  
Ræd sceal mid snyttro, ryht mid wisum,  
til sceal mid tilum.

Tu beoð gemæccan.  
Sceal wif ond wer in woruld cennan  
bearn mid gebyrdum. Beam sceal on eorðan  
leafum liþan, leomu gnornian.  
Fus sceal feran, fæge sweltan,  
ond dogra gehwam ymb gedal sacan  
middangeardes. Meotud ana wat  
hwær se cwealm cymeþ, þe heonan of cyþþe gewiteþ.  
Umbor yced, þa æradl nimeð;  
þy weorþeð on foldan swa fela fira cynnes.  
Ne sy þæs magutimbræs gemet ofer eorþan,  
gif hi ne wanige se þas woruld teode.

Dol biþ se þe his dryhten nat, to þæs oft cymed dead unþinged;  
snotre men sawlum beorgað, healdað hyra soð mid ryhte.

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## MAXIMS I

### A

Question me with wise words. But do not let your opinion remain hidden, or what you know most profoundly stay obscure. I will not tell you my secret knowledge if you hide the strength of your mind from me, and the thoughts of your heart. Men of perception ought to exchange their sayings.

God is to be praised first, rightly praised as our father, because in the beginning he granted us our life and our transitory pleasure. He will ask us to repay him for those things. The Ruler's place is in heaven. Man's is on the earth, passing from youth to age. God is eternal to us. Events do not change him, nor does sickness or age trouble the almighty in any way. He does not grow old in heart, but is still as he was, the patient Lord.

He gives us understanding, our various temperaments, our many languages. There are many islands, far and wide, containing many species of life. The Ruler, almighty God, established these broad lands for the human race, with just as many customs as there are peoples.

Wise men must hold meetings together. Their minds are similar. They always settle disputes and advise for peace, which unfortunate men have previously disturbed. Good advice goes with wisdom, justice with wise men, good men keep together.

Two people are mates. A man and a woman will bring a child into the world through birth.<sup>1</sup> On the earth a tree must lose its leaves — its branches are sad. A man who is ready must go, doomed men must die, struggling every day over their departure from the world. Only the Ruler knows where plague comes to, when it goes away from our country. He sends more children, when premature sickness takes them.<sup>2</sup> That is why there are so many of the human race in the world. There would be no limit to the number of children on earth, if he who established this world were not to make them fewer.

A man who does not know his Lord is a fool; death often comes unexpectedly to him. Wise men look after their souls, they uphold their integrity with justice. A man

Eadig bið se þe in his eþle geþihð,    earm se him his frynd geswicað.  
Nefre sceal se him his nest aspringeð,    nyde sceal þrage gebunden.  
Bliþe sceal bealoleas heorte.

Blind sceal his eagna þolian.

Oftigen biþ him torhtre gesihþe,    ne magon hi ne tunglu bewitian,  
swegltorht, sunnan ne monan.    Pæt him biþ sar in his mode,  
onge þonne he hit ana wat,    ne wened þæt him þæs edhwyrft cyme.  
Waldend him þæt wite teode,    se him mæg wyrpe syllan,  
hælo of heofodgimme,    gif he wat heortan clæne.

40

Lef mon læces behofað.    Læran sceal mon geongne monnan,  
trymman ond tyhtan    þæt he teala cunne,  
oþþæt hine mon atemedne hæbbe;  
sylle him wist ond wædo,    oþþæt hine mon on gewitte alæde.  
Ne sceal hine mon cildgeongne forcweþan,    ær he hine acyþan mote;    50  
þy sceal on þeode geþeon,    þæt he wese þristhycgende.  
Styran sceal man strongum mode.    Storm oft holm gebringeb,  
geofen in grimmum sælum.    Onginnað grome fundian  
fealwe on feorran to londe,    hwæþer he fæste stonde.  
Weallas him wiþre healdað,    him biþ wind gemæne.

45

Swa biþ sæ smilte,  
þonne hy wind ne weced,    55  
swa beoþ þeoda geþwære,    þonne hy geþingad habbað.  
Gesittað him on gesundum þingum    ond þonne mid gesiþum healdaþ  
cene men gecynde rice.

50

Cyning biþ anwealdes georn;  
lað se þe londes monað,    leof se þe mare beodeð.    60  
Prym sceal mid wlenco,    þriste mid cenum,  
sceolon bu recene    beadwe fremman.  
Eorl sceal on eos bōge,    eorod sceal getrumē ridan,  
fæste feþa stondan.    Fæmne æt hyre bordan geriseð;  
widgongel wif    word gespringeð,    65  
oft hy mon wommum bilihð;  
hæleð hy hospe mænað,    oft hyre hleor abreoþeð.  
Sceomiande man sceal in sceade hweorfan,    scir in leohte geriseð.  
Hond sceal heofod inwyrkan,    hord in streonum bidan,  
gifstol gegierwed stondan,    hwonne hine guman gedælen.    70  
Gifre biþ se þam golde onfehð,    guma þæs on heahsetle geneah.  
Lean sceal, gif we leogan nellað,    þam þe us þas lisse geteode.

60

65

70

Forst sceal freosan,    fyr wudu meltan,  
eorþe growan,    is brycgian,  
wæter helm wegan,    wundrum lucan

who gets on well in his own home is fortunate, a man whose friends let him down is wretched. A man whose food runs out can never do well,<sup>3</sup> for a time he will have to be bound by necessity. An innocent heart is happy.

A blind man must do without his eyes. He is deprived of clear sight, his eyes cannot perceive the stars, bright in the sky, nor the sun and moon. This is painful to him in his mind, distressing when he knows this one thing alone,<sup>4</sup> and does not expect any change in it will come to him. The Ruler fixed this torment for him, and can give him recovery, a cure for the jewel in his head, if he knows the man's heart is pure.

A sick man needs a doctor. A young man is to be taught, to be encouraged and prompted to know things well, until you have made him manageable;<sup>5</sup> give him food and clothes, until he is led to be sensible. He is not to be abused while he is still a boy, before he has had a chance to prove himself; in this way it will be achieved among people that he becomes firm and confident. A strong mind is to be checked.<sup>6</sup> Often a storm drives the sea and ocean into a furious state. From far-off the angry grey waves begin to hurry to the land, to see whether it will stand firm.<sup>7</sup> The cliffs hold them back, they both feel the wind. As the sea is calm when the wind does not stir it, so peoples are peaceful when they have come to terms. They settle down in safety and then brave men with their comrades can hold the kingdom that is properly theirs.

A king is eager for sovereignty; he hates anyone who claims land, loves anyone who offers him more. Power goes with pride, bold men with brave ones; both must be quick to make war. A nobleman goes on the arched back of a war-horse, a troop of cavalry must ride in a body, the foot-soldier must stand fast. It is fitting for a woman to be at her embroidery; a woman who walks about everywhere causes talk, people often defame and blacken her character; men speak of her with contempt, often she is unable to show her face.<sup>8</sup> A man who is ashamed must walk in the shadows, bright things ought to be in the light. The hand must rest on the head,<sup>9</sup> the treasure wait where it is laid, the gift-throne stand prepared, until men share out the hoard. The one who receives the gold is avid, the man on the high seat has enough of it. If we do not want to speak false, we will have to repay the one who granted us these favours.

## B

Frost will freeze, fire burn up wood, earth bear growth, ice form bridges – the water wears a covering – strangely locking up the shoots in the earth. Only God

eorþan ciþas. An sceal inbindan  
forstes fetre felameahtig god.

5

Winter sceal geweorpan, weder eft cuman,  
sumor swegle hat. Sund unstile,  
deop deada wæg dyrne bið lengest.  
Holen sceal inæled, yrfe gedæled  
deades monnes. Dom biþ selast.

10

Cyning sceal mid ceape cwene gebicgan,  
bunum ond beagum. Bu sceolon ærest  
geofum god wesan. Guð sceal in eorle,  
wig geweaxan, ond wif geþeon,  
leof mid hyre leodum, leohtmod wesan,  
rune healdan, rumheort beon  
mearum ond maþnum, meodorædenne  
for gesiðmægen symle æghwær  
eodor æþelinga ærest gegretan,  
forman fulle to frean hond  
ricene geræcan, ond him ræd witan  
boldagendum bæm ætsomne.

15

Scip sceal genægled, scyld gebunden,  
leoht linden bord. Leof wilcuma  
Frysian wife, þonne flota stondeð.

20

Biþ his ceol cumen ond hyre ceorl to ham,  
agen ætgeofa, ond heo hine in laðaþ,  
wæsced his warig hrægl ond him syleþ wæde niwe,  
liþ him on londe þæs his lufu bædeð.

Wif sceal wiþ wer wære gehealdan.

30

Oft hi mon wommum behlið.

Fela bið fæsthydgra, fela bið fyrwetgeornra,  
freoð hy fremde monnan, þonne se oþer feor gewiteþ.  
Lida biþ longe on siþe, a mon sceal seþeah leofes wenan,  
gebidan þæs he gebædan ne mæg. Hwonne him eft gebyre weorðe,  
ham cymeð, gif he hal leofað, nefne him holm gestyreð,  
mere hafað mundum mægðegsan wyn.

35

Ceapeadig mon cyningwic þonne  
leodon cypeþ, þonne liþan cymeð,  
wuda ond wætres nyttæð, þonne him biþ wic alyfed,  
mete bygeþ, gif he maran þearf, ærþon he to meþe weorþe.

40

Seoc se biþ þe to seldan ieteð. Peah hine mon on sunnan læde,  
ne mæg he be þy wedre wesan; þeah hit sy wearm on sumera,  
ofercumen biþ he, ær he acwele, gif he nat hwa hine cwicne fede.

with his many powers shall unfasten the fetters of the frost. The winter will leave, and fine weather return again, summer warmed by the sun. The restless ocean, the deep path of the dead, will be hidden for longest.<sup>1</sup> Holly must be burnt,<sup>2</sup> a dead man's legacy shared. Fame is best.

A king shall pay bride-price for a queen, with rings and goblets. Both must first of all be free with gifts. The nobleman must have fighting-spirit, his courage must grow, and his wife be a success, liked by her people;<sup>3</sup> she must be cheerful, keep secrets, be generous with horses and precious things; at mead-drinking she must at all times and places approach the protector of princes first, in front of the companions, quickly pass the first cup to her lord's hand, and know what advice to give him as joint master and mistress of the house together.

A ship is riveted, a shield, the bright linden wood, is lashed with hides. The Frisian's wife is glad to see the arrival she has wished for, when his ship is drawn up. His boat has come and her husband is at home, her own breadwinner. She calls him in, washes his dirty clothes and gives him fresh ones, gives him on the land what his love demands. A woman must keep faith with a man. People often defame and blacken their characters; many are faithful, many are curious, they love strangers when the husband goes far away. A seaman is away for a long time, but still one must always look for the one you love to return, wait for what cannot be hurried. When he gets an opportunity again,<sup>4</sup> he will come home, if he is alive and safe, unless the sea prevents him, the ocean has his ship, the raider's joy,<sup>5</sup> in its grasp. The rich merchant then buys his men quarters from the king, when he comes sailing in, makes use of wood and water, once he is allotted quarters, buys food, if he needs more provisions, before he becomes too faint.<sup>6</sup>

A man who does not eat often enough grows sick. Although he may be led into the sun, he cannot live on weather; although it may be warm and summery, he will be a beaten man before he dies, if he does not know someone to feed him and keep

Mægen mon sceal mid mete fedan,      morþor under eorþan befeolan,  
hinder under hrusan,      þe hit forhelan þenceð.  
Ne biþ þæt gedefe deaþ,      þonne hit gedyrned weorþeð.

45

Hean sceal gehnigan,      hald gesigan,  
ryht rogian.      Ræd biþ nyttost,  
yfel unnyttost;      þæt unlæd nimeð.  
God bið genge,      ond wiþ god lenge.  
Hyge sceal gehealden,      hond gewealden,  
seo sceal in eagan,      snyttoo in breostum;  
þær bið þæs monnes      modgeþoncas.  
Muþa gehwylc mete þearf,      mæl sceolon tidum gongan.  
Gold geriseþ      on guman sweorde,  
sellic sigesceorp,      sinc on cwene,  
god scop gumum,      garniþ werum,  
wig towiþre      wicfreoþa healdan.  
Scyld sceal cempan,      sceast reafere,  
sceal bryde beag,      bec leornere,  
husl halgum men,      hæþnum synne.  
Woden worhte weos,      wuldor alwalda,  
rume roderas.      Pæt is rice god,  
sylf soðcynning,      sawla nergend,  
se us eal forgeaf      þæt we on lifgaþ,  
ond eft æt þam ende      eallum wealdeð  
monna cynne.      Pæt is meotud sylfa.

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C

Ræd sceal mon secgan,      rune writan,  
leoþ gesingan,      lofes gearnian,  
dom areccan,      dæges onettan.  
Til mon tiles      ond tomes meares,  
cuþes ond gecostes      ond calcrondes.  
Nænig fira      to fela gestryneð.

5

Wel mon sceal wine healdan      on wega gehwylcum;  
oft mon fereð feor bi tune,      þær him wat freond unwiotodne.  
Wineleas wonsælig mon      genimeð him wulfa to geferan,  
felafæcne deor.      Ful oft hine se gefera sliteð.  
Gryre sceal for greggum,      græf deadum men.  
Hungre heofeð,      nales þæt heafe bewindeð,  
ne huru wæl wepeð      wulf se græga,  
morþorcwealm mæcga,      ac hit a mare wille.

10

Wræd sceal wunde,      wracu heardum men,  
boga sceal stræle,      sceal bam gelic  
mon to gemæccan.      Maþþum oþres weordð,

15

him alive. Strength is to be kept up with food, murder put underground, down beneath the earth, by the man who means to hide it. That is not a decent sort of death, when it is kept secret.

The humble man has to bow down, what is on a slope has to fall, what is right will grow strong.<sup>7</sup> Good advice is the most useful thing, evil the least; it is a wretched man who chooses that. Good is never out of place, it is close to God. The mind must be restrained, the hand directed, the eye must have a pupil, the heart wisdom. That is where the thoughts of men are. Every mouth needs food, meals must take place on time. It is right for gold to be on a man's sword, and for a woman to wear precious things, fine clothes to be admired and give prestige; it is right for men to have a good poet and for warriors to fight with spears, defending the peace of their homes against war. A shield is for the warrior, a spearhaft for the raider, a ring for the bride and books for the student, the Eucharist for the holy man and sins for the heathen one. Woden made idols, but the Almighty made heaven, the broad skies. That is the God of power, the true king himself, the saviour of souls, he gave us all that we live on and again at the end will rule all the human race. That is the Ruler himself.

## C

Good advice should be said out loud, a secret written down, a song sung; fame is to be earned,<sup>1</sup> a judgement pronounced; a man should be busy in the daytime. A good man will keep in mind a good, well-broken horse, familiar, well-tried, and round-hoofed. No man can get too much. A man must be careful to keep a friend on every road; you often go a long way round a town, where you know you will not find a friend. The unhappy man who has no friends takes wolves as his companions, most treacherous beasts. Very often his companion tears him. One should fear the grey beast, give a dead man a grave. But the grey wolf laments its hunger, will by no means circle the grave with a dirge, certainly will not weep for the death and for men being violently killed; it always wants more.

A wound must have a bandage, an unyielding man must have revenge; arrow must have bow, a man must accompany both together. One precious thing is worth

gold mon sceal gifan. Mæg god syllan  
eadgum æhte ond eft niman.

Sele sceal stondan, sylf ealdian. 20  
Licgende beam læsest groweð.  
Treo sceolon brædan ond treow weaxan,  
sio geond bilwitra breost ariseð.  
Wærleas mon ond wonhydig,  
ætrenmod ond ungetreow, 25  
þæs ne gymeð god.  
Fela sceop meotud þæs þe fyrn gewearð,  
het siþan swa forð wesan.  
Wæra gehwylcum wislicu word gerisað,  
gleomen gied ond guman snyttro. 30

Swa monige beoþ men ofer eorþan, swa beoþ modgeþoncas;  
ælc him hafað sundorsefan.

Longað þonne þy læs þe him con leoþa worn,  
oþþe mid hondum con hearpan gretan; 35  
hafaþ him his gliwes giefe, þe him god sealde.  
Earm biþ se þe sceal ana lifgan,  
wineleas wunian hafaþ him wyrd geteod.  
Betre him wäre þæt he broþor ahte, begen hi anes monnes,  
eorles eaforan wærar, gif hi sceoldan eofor onginnan  
oþþe forbegan beran; biþ þæt sliþhende deor. 40

A scyle þa rincas gerædan lædan  
ond him ætsomne swefan.  
Næfre hy mon tomælde  
ær hy dead todæle.

Hy twegen sceolon tæfle ymbsittan, þenden him hyra torn toglide, 45  
forgietan þara geocran gesceafta, habban him gomen on borde.  
Idle hond æmetlan geneah  
tæfles monnes, þonne teoselum weorpeð.  
Seldan in sidum ceole, nefne he under segle yrne,

Welig sceal se wiþ winde roweþ. Ful oft mon wearnum tihð  
eargne, þæt he elne forleose; drugað his ar on borde. 50  
Lot sceal mid lyswe, list mid gedefum;  
þy weorþeð se stan forstolen.  
Oft hy wordum toworpāð  
ær hy bacum tobreden. 55  
Geara is hwær aræd.

Wearð fæhþo fyra cynne, siþan furþum swealg  
eorðe Abeles blode. Næs þæt andæge nið,

another, gold is to be given away. God can give possessions to the fortunate and take them back again. A hall must stand, and itself grow old. The fallen tree grows least.<sup>2</sup> Trees must grow broader, and the faith increase; it springs up everywhere in the hearts of simple people. A faithless and reckless man, bitter and false-hearted – God does not take care of him. The Ruler created many things that happened long ago, ordered them to be like that from then on. Wise words are fitting for everybody, a song for the minstrel, and prudence for a man.

There are as many opinions as there are men on earth; everyone has a mind of his own.<sup>3</sup> The man who knows many songs, or who can play the harp with his hands then has fewer vain longings; he has his gift for music, which God gave him. The man who has to live by himself is miserable, fate has dictated that he should live without friends. It would be better for him to have a brother, for them both to be the sons of one man, one nobleman, if they were to have to attack a boar, or overpower a bear; that is an animal with cruel paws. The warriors should always carry their equipment with them, and all sleep in a body. Let no-one separate them by slanders<sup>4</sup> before death parts them. Two men shall sit over the games-board till their troubles slip from them, forgetting the sad things that happen, enjoying themselves at the table. Idle hands are good enough for the man with nothing to do, the gambler, when he is throwing dice. Rarely in a broad ship, unless it is running under sail . . . . .<sup>5</sup> A man who rows against the wind will be exhausted. Very often the man who has no spirit is accused on all sides of losing his strength; his oar dries on the ship's side. Cheating goes with foul play, skill with what is fair; that is how a piece gets taken.<sup>6</sup> They often hurl words at each other before they turn their backs. A resolute man is always ready.

A state of violence came into being for the race of men, from the moment when the earth swallowed the blood of Abel. That was no one-day disturbance; from the

of þam wrohtdropan wide gesprungon  
micel mon ældum, monegum þeodum  
bealoblonden niþ. Slog his broðor swæsne  
Cain, þone cwealm serede. Cuþ wæs wide siþhan  
þæt ece nið ældum scod. Swa aþolware  
drugon wæpna gewin wide geond eorþan,  
ahogodon ond ahyrdon heoro sliþendne.

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Gearo sceal guðbord, gar on sceafte,  
ecg on sweorde ond ord spere,  
hyge heardum men. Helm sceal cenum,  
ond a þæs heanan hyge hord ungnost.

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blood-drops of that crime there sprang far and wide great wickedness for men, inextricable hatred and evil for many peoples. It was Cain who killed his own brother and plotted the murder.<sup>7</sup> It was known everywhere after that that an eternal hatred was afflicting men. So the inhabitants of earth<sup>8</sup> endured the clash of weapons widely through the world, inventing and tempering wounding swords.

The war-shield must be ready, the shaft must have a spear, the sword an edge and the spear a point, the unyielding man must have spirit. The brave man must have a helmet, the man of poor spirit will always have least treasure.

## MAXIMS II

Cyning sceal rice healdan. Ceastra beoð feorran gesyne,  
orðanc enta geweorc, þa þe on þysse eorðan syndon,  
wrætic weallstana geweorc. Wind byð on lyfte swiftust,  
þunar byð þragum hludast. Prymmas syndan Cristes myccle.

Wyrd byð swiðost, winter byð cealdost,  
lenceten hrimigost, he byð lengest ceald,  
sumor sunwlitegost, swegel byð hatost,  
hærfest hreðeadegeost, hæleðum bringeð  
geres wæstmas, þa þe him god sendeð.

Soð bið swicolost, sinc byð deorost,  
gold gumena gehwam, and gomol snoterost,  
fyrngearum frod, se þe ær feala gebideð.

Wea bið wundrum clibbor. Wolcnu scriðað.

Geongne æþeling sceolan gode gesiðas  
byldan to beadewe and to beahgife.

Ellen sceal on eorle, ecg sceal wið hellme  
hilde gebidan.

Hafuc sceal on glofe  
wilde gewunian. Wulf sceal on bearowe,  
earm anhaga. Eofor sceal on holte,  
toðmægenes trum. Til sceal on eðle  
domes wyrcean. Daroð sceal on handa,  
gar golde fah. Gim sceal on hringe  
standan steep and geap. Stream sceal on yðum  
mencgan mereflode. Mæst sceal on ceole,

segelgyrd seomian. Sweord sceal on bearme,  
drihtlic isern. Draca sceal on hlæwe,  
frod, frætwum wlanc. Fisc sceal on wætere  
cynren cennan. Cyning sceal on healle  
beagas dælan. Bera sceal on hæðe,

eald and egesfull. Ea ofdune sceal  
flodgræg feran. Fyrd sceal ætsomne,  
tirfæstra getrum. Treow sceal on eorle,  
wisdom on were. Wudu sceal on foldan  
blædum blowan. Beorh sceal on eorþan  
grene standan. God sceal on heofenum,

dæda demend. Duru sceal on healle,  
rum recedes muð. Rand sceal on scylde,  
fæst fingra gebeorh. Fugel uppe sceal  
lacan on lyfte. Leax sceal on wæle  
mid sceote scriðan. Scur sceal of heofenum,  
winde geblanden, in þas woruld cuman.

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## MAXIMS II

A king is to guard his kingdom. Cities can be seen from far away, the skilful work of giants, which remain in this world, the splendid stone-walled forts. Wind in the sky is swiftest, thunder at times is loudest. Christ's powers are great. Fate is strongest, winter is coldest, spring frostiest and cold for longest, summer with its sunshine most beautiful; the sun is hottest, harvest-time most prosperous, it brings men the year's crops, which God sends them. Truth is most deceptive.<sup>1</sup> Treasure is most valuable, as gold is for every man, and an old man knows most things, a man made wise by distant years, who has experienced a great deal before. Grief is remarkably hard to shake off.<sup>2</sup> The clouds roll on. A young prince ought to be encouraged in war and in generosity by good companions. A warrior must have courage, a sword has to experience its battle against the helmet.

A hawk must go on a glove, the wild thing stay there. The wolf must be in the forest, wretched and solitary, the boar in the wood with his strong, fixed tusks. A good man must gain honour in his own country. The javelin goes in the hand, the spear that glitters with gold. On a ring a jewel should stand large and prominent. A river must mix in the waves with the sea's current. A ship must have a mast, a standing spar for sails. The splendid iron sword must lie in the lap. A dragon must live in a barrow, old and proud of his treasures. A fish must spawn its kind in the water. In the hall a king must share out rings. A bear must live on the heath, old and terrifying. A river must run downhill in a grey torrent. The army must keep together, a band of men set on glory. A warrior must show loyalty, a man must have wisdom. On the earth a wood must bear blossoms and fruit. On the land a hill must stand out green. God's place is in heaven, he is the judge of deeds. A hall must have a door, the building's broad mouth. A shield must have a boss, a firm finger-guard. A bird must play, up in the air. In a deep pool the salmon must glide with the trout. Stirred by the wind the shower shall come down to this world from the sky.

Peof sceal gangan þystrum wederum.  
Pyrs sceal on fenne gewunian,  
ana innan lande. Ides sceal dyrne cræfte,  
fæmne hire freond gescean, gif heo nelle on folce geþeon  
þæt hi man beagum gebicge. Brim sceal sealte weallan,  
lyfthelm and laguflod ymb ealra landa gehwylc,  
flowan firgenstreamas. Feoh sceal on eorðan  
tydran and tyman. Tungol sceal on heofonum  
beorhte scinan, swa him bebead meotud. 45  
God sceal wið yfele, geogoð sceal wið yldo,  
lif sceal wið deaþe, leoht sceal wið þystrum,  
fyrd wið fyrde, feond wið oðrum,  
lað wið laþe ymb land sacan,  
synne stælan. A sceal snotor hycean  
ymb þysse worulde gewinn, wearh hangian,  
fægere ongildan þæt he ær facen dyde  
manna cynne. Meotud ana wat  
hwyder seo sawul sceal syððan hweorfan,  
and ealle þa gastas þe for gode hweorfað 50  
æfter deaddæge, domes bidað  
on fæder fæðme. Is seo forðgesceaft  
digol and dyrne; drihten ana wat,  
nergende fæder. Næni eft cymeð  
hider under hrofas, þe þæt her for soð  
mannum secge hwylc sy meotodes gesceaft,  
sigefolca gesetu, þær he sylfa wunað. 55  
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A thief walks in gloomy weather, a monster must live in the fen, alone in his land. A girl or a woman must seek out her lover with secret art, if she does not want to bring it about among her people that a bride-price is paid for her with rings. The salt sea must surge, and mighty currents flow around every land, of ocean-tide and covering cloud. On the earth cattle must breed and multiply. In the sky the star must shine brightly, as the Ruler commanded it. Good must be against evil, youth against age, life against death, light against darkness, army against army, one enemy against another, foe must fight against foe for land, pursuing violence.<sup>3</sup> The wise man must always consider this world's conflicts, and the criminal must hang, fairly expiating the crime he had committed against the human race. Only the Ruler knows where the soul must turn to then, as with all the spirits who go before God after the day of their deaths, and wait for judgement in their father's embrace. One's future fate is dark and hidden. Only the Lord knows, the father who saves us. No man comes back again under our roofs to tell men here for sure what the Ruler is really like, or to describe the homes of the conquerors, where he lives himself.

## THE RUNE POEM

F	ꝝ	'Feoh' byþ frofur fira gehwylcum; sceal ðeah manna gehwylc miclun hyt dælan gif he wile for drihtne domes hleotan.	
U	ᚦ	'Ur' byþ anmod and oferhyrned, felafrcene deor, feohteþ mid hornum, mære morstapa; þæt is modig wuht.	5
TH	Þ	'Ðorn' byþ ðearle scearp; ðegna gehwylcum anfeng ys yfyl, ungemetun reþe manna gehwylcun ðe him mid resteð.	
O	ꝝ	'Os' byþ ordfruma ælcre spræce, wisdomes wraþu and witena frofur, and eorla gehwam eadnys and tohiht.	10
R	ᚱ	'Rad' byþ on recyde rinca gehwylcum sefte, and swiþhwæt ðam ðe sitteþ on ufan meare mægenheardum ofer milpaþas.	15
C	ᚤ	'Cen' byþ cwicera gehwam cuþ on fyre, blac and beorhtlic, byrneþ oftust ðær hi æþelingas inne restaþ.	
G	>X	'Gyfu' gumena byþ gleng and herenys, wraþu and wyrþscype, and wræcna gehwam ar and ætwist ðe byþ oþra leas.	20
W	ƿ	'Wenne' bruceþ ðe can weana lyt, sares and sorge, and him sylfa hæfþ blæd and blysse and eac byrga geniht.	
H	ᚾ	'Hægl' byþ hwitust corna; hwyrt hit of heofones lyfte, wealcaþ hit windes scuras, weorþeþ hit to wætere syððan.	25
N	ᛗ	'Nyd' byþ nearu on breostan, weorþeþ hi ðeah oft niþa bearnum to helpe and to hæle gehwæþre, gif hi his hlystaþ æror.	
I	ᛁ	'Is' byþ oferceald, ungemetum slidor, glisnaþ glæshluttur, gimmum gelicust, flor forste geworuht, fæger ansyne.	30
J	ᛄ	'Ger' byþ gumena hiht, ðon god læteþ, halig heofones cyning, hrusan syllan beorhte bleda beornum and ðearfum.	
EO	ᛇ	'Eoh' byþ utan unsmeþe treow, heard, hrusan fæst, hyrde fyres, wyrtrumun underwreþyd, wyn on eþle.	35

## THE RUNE POEM \*

Money is a comfort to every man; just the same, everyone ought to give it away freely, if they want to receive approval when they face the Lord.

The wild ox is fearless, and has enormous horns; it is a very fierce animal, it fights with its horns, a famous roamer of the moors; that is a brave creature.

The thorn is very sharp; it hurts anyone who grasps it, is extremely cruel to anybody who lies on them.

The mouth is the originator of every speech,<sup>1</sup> the mainstay of wisdom, a comfort to all wise men, hope and happiness for every person.

In the hall, riding is easy to every warrior, but it is very energetic for the man who sits on a powerful horse along miles of road.<sup>2</sup>

When it is alight,<sup>3</sup> a torch is obvious to everyone alive, it is clear and bright, it usually burns inside where princes sit resting.

Generosity is a thing for men to take pride in and be praised for, it brings them help and credit; it is the property and substance<sup>4</sup> of all homeless people who have nothing else.

Happiness is enjoyed<sup>5</sup> by the man who has felt few troubles, little pain or grief, and who has prosperity and joy of his own, as well as the plenty you find in cities.

Hail is the whitest grain; it comes down from high in the sky, the wind hurls it in showers, then it turns to water.

Need lies heavy on the heart, but still it often turns out to be both help and salvation for the children of men, as long as they attend to it in time.

Ice is extremely cold and much too slippery. It glistens, clear as glass, just like jewels, is a floor made by the frost, beautiful to look at.

The spring<sup>6</sup> is what men look forward to, when God, the holy king of heaven, lets the earth give its shining fruits to noblemen and to the needy.

The yew is a tree with a rough exterior, a hard wood that keeps the fire; firmly fixed in the ground, supported by its roots, it is a good thing to have by your home.<sup>7</sup>

\*Since the original MS of *The Rune Poem* was burnt by accident in 1731, all later editions of the poem are based on the version printed by George Hickes in his *Linguarum Vett. Septentrionalium Thesaurus*, I, 135. It is likely that Hickes worked eclectically, including material from different sources. His normal layout was: (a) Roman letter (b) runic letter (c) rune-name (d) verse-stanza, printed consecutively as prose; and probably only (b) and (d) come from the *Rune Poem* MS, though (c) is of course an integral part of the poem and must have been supplied, at least silently, by any reader. I have kept to Hickes's plan, but have not recorded his many divagations from it; he did not always supply a Roman letter, sometimes gave two or three runic ones, and added several marginal scribbles.

P M	'Peord' byþ symble plega and hlehter wlancum on middum, ðar wigan sittaþ on beorsele, bliþe ætsomne.	40
X Y	'Eolhx' secg eard hæfþ oftust on fenne, waxed on wature, wundaþ grimme, blode brened beorna gehwylcne ðe him ænigne onfeng gedeð.	
S N	'Sigel' semannum symble biþ on hihte, ðonn hi hine feriaþ ofer fisces beþ, oþ hi brimhengest bringeþ to lande.	45
T ↑	'Tir' biþ tacna sum, healdeð trywa wel wiþ æþelingas, a biþ on færylde, ofer nihta genipu næfre swiceþ.	
B B	'Beorc' byþ bleda leas, bereþ efne swaðeah tanas butan tudder; biþ on telgum wlitig, heah on helme hrysted fægere, geloden leafum, lyfte getenge.	50
E M	'Eh' byþ for eorlum æþelinga wyn, hors hofum wlanc, ðær him hæleþ ymbe, welege on wicgum, wrixaþ spræce, and biþ unstyllum æfre frofur.	55
M M	'Man' byþ on myrgþe his magan leof; sceal þeah anra gehwylc oðrum swican, fordam dryhten wyle dome sine þæt earme flæsc eorþan betæcan.	60
L ↑	'Lagu' byþ leodum langsum geþuht, gif hi sculun neþun on nacan tealtum, and hi sæyþa swyþe bregaþ, and se brimhengest bridles ne gymed.	65
NG X	'Ing' wæs ærest mid Eastdenum gesewen secgun, oþ he siððan eft ofer wæg gewat, wæn æfter ran; ðus heardingas ðone hæle nemdun.	70
OE X	'Eþel' byþ oferleof æghwylcum men, gif he mot ðær rihtes and gerysena on brucan on bolde, bleadum oftast.	
D H	'Dæg' byþ drihtnes sond, deore mannum, mære metodes leoht, myrgþ and tohiht eadgum and earmum, eallum brice.	75

The dice-box (?) is always a source of laughter and amusement among proud men, where warriors sit cheerfully together in the beer-hall.<sup>8</sup>

The sedge's habitat<sup>9</sup> is most often in the fen; it grows in the water, inflicts serious wounds, reddens with blood every man who makes any grasp at it.

The sun is always looked forward to by seamen, when they are travelling away across the fishes' bath, until their sea-stallion brings them to the land.

Tir is a constellation,<sup>10</sup> it keeps faith well with princes, it always runs its course above the fogs of night, it never fails.

The poplar<sup>11</sup> has no fruit, but just the same it puts out suckers without fertile seed; its boughs are beautiful, its high crown is finely bedecked with a heavy growth of leaves, close to the sky.

A horse is a delight to princes in front of their nobles, one that steps proudly while rich men on horseback exchange talk about it; it is always a comfort to the restless.

In happy times a man's near relative will be fond of him; nevertheless each of them will have to turn from the other, since the Lord means, by his sentence, to commit the wretched body to the earth.

The sea looks never-ending to men, if they should venture out on a cranky boat, and the sea-waves are very frightening to them, and the sea-stallion does not answer to its bridle.

Ing was first seen by men among the East-Danes, till later he went away again over the sea, and his wagon rolled after him; that is what the man was called by those warriors.<sup>12</sup>

To every man his home is very dear, as long as he can enjoy his rights and proper station there, in his own house, for the most part prosperously.

Day is the Lord's messenger, it is precious to men, the Ruler's glorious light, it brings hope and happiness to the rich and poor, it serves them all.

- A ⚜ 'Ac' byþ on eorþan elda bearnum  
flæsces fodor, fereþ gelome  
ofer ganotes bæþ; garsceg fandaþ  
hwæþer ac hæbbe æþele treowe. 80
- Æ ⚝ 'Æsc' biþ oferheah, eldum dyre,  
stiþ on staþule, stede rihte hylt,  
ðeah him feohtan on firas monige.
- Y ⚛ 'Yr' byþ æþelinga and eorla gehwæs  
wyn and wyrþmynd, byþ on wicge fæger,  
fæstlic on færelde, fyrdgeatewa sum. 85
- IO \* 'Ior' byþ eafix, and ðeah a bruceþ  
fodres on foldan, hafaþ fægerne eard,  
wætre beworpen, ðær he wynnum leofaþ.
- EA ⚞ 'Ear' byþ egle eorla gehwylcun,  
ðonn fæstlice flæsc onginneþ,  
hraw, colian, hrusan ceasan  
blac to gebeddan; bleda gedreosaþ,  
wynna gewitaþ, wera geswicaþ. 90

The oak leaves fodder on the ground to make flesh for the children of men, and often travels across the gannet's bath; the ocean tests whether the oak will keep faith nobly.

The ash is a very tall tree, and valuable to men; it has a strong trunk, and stays in its proper place even though many men attack it.

A bow is a delight to every prince and noble, it is valued highly; it looks fine on a horse, its flight can be relied on, it is part of one's equipment for war.<sup>13</sup>

The eel<sup>14</sup> is a river-fish, and yet it always takes food on land; it has a fine home surrounded by water, where it lives happily.

The grave is a horror to every man, when the body begins to grow cold inexorably, the pale corpse chooses to lie with the earth; good times come to an end, no pleasures are left, all agreements are over.

## THE SECOND DIALOGUE OF SOLOMON AND SATURN

Hwæt, ic flitan gefrægn on fyndagum  
 modgleawe men, middangeardes ræswan,  
 gewesan ymbe hira wisdom. Wyrs deð se ðe liehð  
 oððe ðæs soðes ansæced.

5

Saloman was bremra,  
 ðeah ðe S(atu)rnus sumra hæfde,  
 bald breosttoga, boca c(æ)g(a,  
 le)ornenga locan; land eall geondhwearf,  
 Indea mer(c, Ea)st-Corsias,  
 Persea rice, Palestinion,  
 Niniuen ceastre and Norð-Predan,  
 Meda maððumselas, Marculfes eard,  
 Saulus rice, swa he suð ligeð  
 ymbe Geallboe and ymb Gedor norð,  
 Filistina flet, fæsten Creca,  
 wudu Egipta, wæter Mathean,  
 cludas Coreffes, Caldea rice,  
 Creca cræftas, cynn Arabia,  
 lare Libia, lond Syria,  
 Bitðinia, Buðanasan,  
 Pamphilia, Pores gemære,  
 Macedonia, Mesopotamie,  
 Cappadocia, Cristes eðel,  
 Hieryhco, Galilea, Hierusa(lem) ...

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[a page of the manuscript, some 25-30 lines, has been erased]

(Solomon) ‘... oððe ic ðe s(a)d(ie), oððe ic swigie,  
 nytties hycgge, ðeah ic no spr(e)c(e).  
 Wat ic ðonne, gif ðu gewitest on Wendelsæ  
 ofer Coforflod cyððe seccan,  
 ðæt ðu wille gilpan ðæt ðu hæbbe g(um)ena bearn  
 forcumen and forcyððed. Wat ic ðæt wæron Caldeas  
 guðe ðæs gielpne and ðæs goldwlonce,  
 mærða ðæs modige, ðæt to ðam moning gelomp  
 suð ymbe Sanere feld. Sæge me from ðam lande  
 ðær nænig fyra ne mæg fotum gestæppan.’

Saturnus cuæð: ‘Se mæra was haten mereliðende  
 weallende wulf, (wer)ðeodum cuð  
 Filistina, freond Nebrondes.  
 He on ðam felda ofslog fif and twentig  
 dracena on dægred, and hine ða deað offeoll.  
 Fordan ða foldan ne mæg fira ænig,

## THE SECOND DIALOGUE OF SOLOMON AND SATURN

Listen, I have heard of an argument held long ago by intelligent men, by leaders of this world debating about their wisdom. He does worse who lies, or contradicts the truth.

Solomon was more famous, though Saturn could marshal his thoughts boldly<sup>1</sup> and had the keys of some books in which learning was locked. He travelled about over all countries<sup>2</sup>: the borderland of India; the Cassaei of the east; the Persian kingdom and Palestine; the city of Nineveh; the Parthians of the north; the Medes' treasure-halls and the land of Marculf; the kingdom of Saul, as far as it lies between Gilboa in the south and Gadara in the north; the halls of the Philistines, the fortresses of the Greeks, the wood of the Egyptians, the waters of Midian, the cliffs of Horeb, the Chaldean kingdom, the arts of the Greeks, the tribes of Arabia, the learning of Libya and the Syrian land; Bythinia, Bashan, Pamphilia; the borders of Porus; Macedonia, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, and Christ's homeland, Jericho and Galilee and Jerusalem ...

[this gap, the first of several in the poem, is caused by the erasure of a page of the manuscript. The 25-30 lines lost presumably included the challenge, and the terms of the contest. When the manuscript resumes, Solomon is speaking, apparently protecting himself against any possible failure: he will answer Saturn's questions if he can, but will not feel defeated even if he cannot.]

- (Solomon) ‘... I will either satisfy you, or else keep quiet, and think of something useful even if I do not speak. I know, then, that if you go away across the river Chebor to the Mediterranean, to look for your home, you mean to boast that you have overcome and shamed the sons of men. And I know that the Chaldeans were so boastful of their skill in war, so proud of their wealth, so arrogant in their glories, that they were sent a warning, in the south at the field of Shinar.<sup>3</sup> Tell me about the country which cannot be trodden by any man's foot.’
- Saturn said: ‘That famous sea-voyager<sup>4</sup> was called “the raging wolf”, a friend of Nimrod, known to the tribes of the Philistines.<sup>5</sup> At daybreak on that field he killed twenty-five dragons, and then death destroyed him. As a result no man can search out that land, that

- 40
- ðone mercstede, mon gesecan,  
fugol gefleogan, ne ðon ma foldan n(ea)t.  
Danon atercynn ærest gewurdon  
wide onwæcned, ða ðe nu weallende  
ðurh attres oroð ingang rymað.
- 45
- Git his sword scinað swiðe gescæned,  
and ofer ða byrgenna blicað ða hieltas.'
- Salomon cwað: 'Dol bið se ðe gæð on deop wæter,  
se ðe sund nasað ne gesegled scip,  
ne fugles flyht, ne he mid fotum ne mæg  
grund geræcan. Huru se godes cunnad  
full dyslice, dryhtnes meahta.'
- 50
- Saturnus cuæð: 'Ac hwæt is se dumba, se ðe on sumre dene resteð?  
Swiðe snyttrað, hafað seofon tungan,  
hafað tungena gehwylc twentig orda,  
hafað orda gehwylc engles snytro,  
ðara ðe wile anra hwylc uppe bringan,  
ðæt ðu ðære gyldnan gesiehst Hierusalem  
weallas blican and hiera winrod lixan,  
soðfæstra segn. Saga hwæt ic mæne.'
- 55
- Salomon cuæð: 'Bec sindon breme, bodiað geneahhe  
weotodne willan ðam ðe wiht hygeð.  
Gestrangað hie and gestaðeliað staðolfæstne gedoht,  
amyrgað modsefan manna gehwylces  
of ðreamedlan disses lifes.'
- 60
- Saturnus cwæð: 'Bald bið se ðe onbyregeð boca cræftes,  
symle bið ðe wisra ðe hira geweald hafað.'
- 65
- Salomon cuæð: 'Sige hie onsendað soðfæstra gehwam,  
hælo hyðe, ðam ðe hie lufað.'
- Saturnus cwæð: 'An wise is on woroldrice,  
ymb ða me fyrwet bræc fiftig wintra  
dæges and niehtes ðurh deop gesceaft,  
geomrende gast; deð nu gena swa,  
ærðon me geunne ece dryhten  
ðæt me geseme snoterra monn.'
- 70
- Salomon cwæð: 'Soð is ðæt ðu sagast; seme ic ðe recene  
ymb ða wrætlican wiht. Wilt ðu ðæt ic ðe secgge?  
An fugel siteð on Filistina
- 75

desert place, nor any bird fly to it, no more than any beast of the earth can go on it. From there the races of poison-creatures<sup>6</sup> were first awoken, and spread widely, all those which now force their way in in swarms, through their poisonous breath. His brightly polished sword still shines, and its hilt gleams over the graves.'

Solomon said:

'He is a fool who embarks on deep water if he cannot swim, has no ship with sails, cannot fly like a bird, nor reach the bottom with his feet. Such a man is certainly tempting God very foolishly, and the powers of the Lord.'

Saturn said:

'But what is the dumb creature that lies in a valley? It is extremely wise, it has seven tongues; each tongue has twenty tips; each tip has the wisdom of an angel. Each one of these will raise you up till you can see the walls of the golden Jerusalem gleaming, and their joyful Cross shining, the banner of the righteous. Say what I mean.'

Solomon said:

'It is books which are glorious, they often declare the pre-ordained purpose to anyone who thinks about it at all. They strengthen the steadfast intention and make it firm, they cheer the heart of every man to rise from the pains which afflict one's mind in this life.'<sup>7</sup>

Saturn said:

'The man who has a taste of what books can do will be bold; anyone who knows how to use them will always be the wiser for it.'

Solomon said:

'They send victory to each of the righteous, and the benefit of salvation to all those who love them.'

Saturn said:

'There is one matter in this world about which curiosity has disturbed me day and night for fifty years, through the mysterious course of nature,<sup>8</sup> so that my spirit has been sad; it is still the same now, until the eternal Lord should grant me satisfaction from a wiser man.'

Solomon said:

'What you say is true. I will quickly satisfy you about that wonderful creature.<sup>9</sup> Do you want me to tell you? A bird sits at the

middelgemærum; munt is hine ymbutan,  
geap gylden weall. Georne hine healdað  
witan Filistina, wenað – ðæs ðe naht is –  
ðæt hiene him scyle ælðeod on genæman  
wæpna ecggum. Hie ðæs wäre cunnon.  
Healdeð hine niehta gehwylce norðan and suðan  
on twa healfa tu hund wearda.  
Se fugel hafað feower heafdu  
medumra manna, and he is on middan hwælen;  
geowes he hafað fiðeru and griffus fet.  
Ligeð lonnum fæst, locað unhiere,  
swiðe swingeð and his searo hringeð,  
gilleð geomorlice and his gyrn sefað,  
wylleð hine on ðam wite, wunað unlustum,  
singgeð syllice; seldom æfre  
his leoma licggað. Longað hine hearde,  
ðynceð him ðæt sie ðria ðritig ðusend wintra  
ær he domdæges dynn gehyre.  
Nyste hine on ðære foldan fira ænig  
eordan cynnes, ærðon ic hine ana onfand  
and hine ða gebendan het ofer brad wæter,  
ðæt hine se modega heht Melotes bearne,  
Filistina fruma, fæste gebindan,  
lonnum belucan wið leodgryre.  
Done fugel hatað feorbuende,  
Filistina fruman, Vasa Mortis.'

Saturnus cwæð: 'Ac hwæt is ðæt wundor ðe geond ðas worold færed,  
styrnenga gæð, staðolas beateð,  
aweceð wopdropan, winneð oft hider?  
Ne mæg hit steorra ne stan ne se steapa gimm,  
wæter ne wildeor wihte beswican,  
ac him on hand gæð heardes and hnesces,  
micles and mætes; him to mose sceall  
gegangan geara gehwelce grundbuendra,  
lyftfleogendra, laguswemmendra,  
ðria ðreoteno ðusendgerimes.'

Salomon cuæð: 'Yldo beoð on eorðan æghwæs cræftig;  
mid hiðendre hildewræsne,  
rumre racenteage, ræced wide,  
langre linan, lisseð eall ðæt heo wile.  
Beam heo abreoteð and bebriceð telgum,  
astyreð standendne stefn on siðe,  
afilleð hine on foldan; friteð æfter ðam

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centre of the Philistines' boundaries; there is a mountain round about it, a vaulted golden wall. The wise men of the Philistines take care of it assiduously, for they believe – which is not true – that a foreign nation<sup>10</sup> is to take it away from them by the edge of the sword. They know how to guard against that. Every night two hundred sentries guard it on both sides from north and south. The bird has four heads of normal human size, and is like a whale in the middle; it has the feathers of a vulture and the feet of a griffin. It lies firmly chained, gives fierce looks, flaps its wings strongly and jangles its metal rings; it cries out sorrowfully and laments its misfortune, wallows in pain and lives unhappily, singing a strange song; its limbs hardly ever lie still. It feels great yearning, for it seems to the bird that it will be ninety thousand years before it can hear the crack of Doomsday. No man in the world, of any race on earth, knew about it before I alone discovered it; and across the broad sea I ordered it to be bound, so that the brave son of Melot, leader of the Philistines, had it firmly bound, locked up in chains to prevent terror to his people. The leaders of the Philistines, who live far off, call the bird the *Vasa Mortis*.<sup>11</sup>

Saturn said:

'But what is that strange thing that travels through this world, goes on inexorably, beats at foundations, causes tears of sorrow, and often comes here? Neither star nor stone nor eye-catching jewel, neither water nor wild beast can deceive it at all, but into its hand go hard and soft, small and great. Every year there must go to feed it three times thirteen thousand of all that live on ground or fly in the air or swim in the sea.'

Solomon said:

'Old age has power over everything on earth. She reaches far and wide with her ravaging slave-chain, her fetters are broad, her rope is long, she subdues everything that she wants to. She smashes trees and breaks their branches, in her progress she uproots the standing trunk and fells it to the ground. After that she eats the

wildne fugol. Heo oferwigeð wulf,  
hio oferbideð stanas, heo oferstigeð style,  
hio abiteð iren mid ome, deð usic swa.'

Saturnus cwæð: 'Ac forhwon fealleð se snaw, foldan behydeð,  
bewrihð wyrta cið, wæstmas getigeð,  
geðyð hie and geðreatað, ðæt hie ðrage beoð  
cealde geclungne? Full oft he gecostað eac  
wildeora worn, wætum he oferbricgeð,  
gebryceð burga geat, baldlice fereð,  
reafað ...'

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[a leaf of the manuscript, probably some 55 lines, is missing]

(Solomon) '... swiðor micle donne se swipra nið  
se hine gelædeð on ða laðan wic  
mid ða fræcnan feonde to willan.'

Saturnus cwæð: 'Nieht bið wedera ðiestrost, ned bið wyrda heardost,  
sorg bið swarost byrðen, slæp bið deaðe gelicost.'

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Salomon cwæð: 'Lytle hwile leaf beoð grene;  
donne hie eft fealewiað, feallað on eorðan  
and forweorniað, weordāð to duste.  
Swa donne gefeallað ða ðe fyrena ær  
lange læstað, lifiað him in mane,  
hydað heahgestreon, healdað georne  
on fæstenne feondum to willan;  
and wenað wanhogan ðæt hie wille wuldorcining,  
ælmihtig god, ece gehiran!'

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Saturnus cwæð: 'Sona bið gesiene, siððan flowan mot  
yð ofer eall lond. Ne wile heo awa ðæs  
siðes geswican, sioððan hire se sæl cymeð,  
ðæt heo domes dæges dyn gehiere.'

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Salomon cwæð: 'Wa bið donne ðissum modgum monnum,  
ðam ðe her nu mid mane lengest  
lifiað on ðisse lænan gesceafte!  
Ieo ðæt ðine leode gecyðdon.  
Wunnon hie wið dryhtnes miehtum;  
forðan hie ðæt worc ne gedegdon.  
Ne sceall ic ðe hwæðre, broðor, abelgan;  
ðu eart swiðe bittres cynnes,  
eorre eormenstrynde. Ne beyrn ðu in ða inwitgecyndo!'

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Saturnus cwæð: 'Saga ðu me, Salomon cyning, sunu Dauides,  
hwæt beoð ða feowere fægæs rapas?'

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wild bird. She fights better than a wolf, she waits longer than a stone, she proves stronger than steel, she bites iron with rust; she does the same to us.’<sup>12</sup>

Saturn said:

‘But why does the snow fall and cover the ground, hiding the shoots of the plants, restraining all growing things, crushing and repressing them, so that for a time they are withered with cold? Very often it puts many of the wild animals to the test as well, it makes bridges over the water, breaks castle-gates, goes on boldly, robs ...’

[the leaf missing here must have contained Solomon’s answer to the question above, and a good deal else. When the manuscript resumes, Solomon is either asking the name of another mighty force, or else asserting that in despite of such forces, God’s power is greater.]

(Solomon)

‘... much stronger than the cunning malice which will lead him to that hateful place with the terrible ones,<sup>13</sup> to the devil’s delight.’

Saturn said:

‘Night is darkest weather, necessity hardest of fates, sorrow is the heaviest burden, sleep most like death.’

Solomon said:

‘Leaves are green for a short time. Then they turn brown again and fall to the ground, rot away and turn into dust. In the same way, then, fall those who have for a long while been committing their crimes, who live evil lives, hiding their treasures, keeping them carefully in safety to the devils’ delight; and they expect, the fools, that almighty God, the King of glory, will listen to them for ever.’<sup>14</sup>

Saturn said:

‘It will soon be apparent, once the sea is allowed to flow over all the land. It will never stop its advance, once the time comes for it to hear the crack of Doomsday.’

Solomon said:

‘Woe then to these proud men who now live evil lives here for so long, in this transitory state of creation! Your people showed us that long ago. They fought against the powers of the Lord; so they did not end their work successfully. But I shall not make you angry, brother; you are of a most bitter race, a fierce and mighty stock. Do not fall in with those evil instincts!’

Saturn said:

‘Tell me, King Solomon, son of David, what will be the four ropes of the doomed man?’

- Salomon cuæð: ‘Gewurdene wyrda,  
ðæt beoð ða feowere fæges rapas.’
- Saturnus cwæð: ‘Ac hwa demeð ðonne dryhtne Criste  
on domes dæge, ðonne he demeð eallum gesceaftum?’
- Salomon cwæð: ‘Hwa dear ðonne dryhtne deman, ðe us of duste geworhte, 160  
nergend of niehtes wunde?  
Ac sæge me hwæt næren ðe wærон.’
- Saturnus cwæð: ‘Ac forhwon ne mot seo sunne side gesceaft  
scire geondscinan? Forhwam besceadeð heo  
muntas and moras and monige ec  
weste stowa? Hu geweorðeð ðæt?’ 165
- Salomon cuæð: ‘Ac forhwam næron eorð(we)lan ealle gedæled  
leodum gelice? Sum to lyt hafað,  
godes grædig. Hine god seteð  
ðurh geearnunga eadgum to ræste.’
- Saturnus cwæð: ‘Ac forhwan beoð ða gesiðas somod ætgædre,  
wop and hleahtor? Full oft hie weorðgeornra  
sælda toslitað. Hu gesæleð ðæt?’ 170
- Salomon cuæð: ‘Unlæde bið and ormod se ðe a wile  
geomrian on gihðe. Se bið gode fracoðast.’
- Saturnus cwæð: ‘Forhwon ne moton we ðonne ealle mid onmedlan  
gegnum gangan in godes rice?’ 175
- Salomon cwæð: ‘Ne mæg fyres feng ne forstes cile,  
snaw ne sunne somod eardian,  
aldor geæfnan, ac hira sceal anra gehwylc  
onlutan and onliðigan ðe hafað læsse mægn.’ 180
- Saturnus cwæð: ‘Ac forhwon ðonne leofað se wyrsa leng?  
Se wyrsa ne wat in woroldrice  
on his mægwinum maran are.’
- Salomon cwæð: ‘Ne mæg mon forildan ænige hwile  
ðone deoran sið, ac he hine adreogan sceall.’ 185
- Saturnus cwæð: ‘Ac hu gegangeð ðæt? Gode oððe yfle,  
ðonne hie beoð ðurh ane idese acende,  
twegen getwinnas, ne bið hira tir gelic.  
Oðer bið unlæde on eordan, oðer bið eadig swiðe,  
leoftæle mid leoda dugudum; oðer leofað lytle hwile,  
swiceð on ðisse sidan gesceaft, 190  
and ðonne eft mid sorgum gewiteð.  
Fricge ic ðec, hlaford Salomon,  
hwæðres bið hira folgoð betra?’

- Solomon said: ‘Events which have happened: those will be the four ropes of the doomed man.’
- Saturn said: ‘But who then will judge Christ the Lord on Doomsday, when he judges all created things?’
- Solomon said: ‘Who will dare then to judge the Lord who made us out of dust, the Saviour who made us from the womb of night. But tell me what things were that were not.’<sup>15</sup>
- Saturn said: ‘But why cannot the sun shine brightly over all broad creation? Why does it leave in shadow moors and mountains and many other desert places? How does that come about?’
- Solomon said: ‘But why weren’t all the goods of the earth shared out equally to men? One man, in his eagerness for good, will own too little. Because of his merits God will place him at rest with the blessed.’
- Saturn said: ‘But why are those companions kept together, tears and laughter? Very often they destroy the happiness of worthy and well-intentioned people. How does that happen?’
- Solomon said: ‘It is a miserable and spiritless man who keeps on being gloomy when he is in trouble. God finds him most offensive.’<sup>16</sup>
- Saturn said: ‘Why then cannot we all go forward into God’s kingdom, with splendour?’
- Solomon said: ‘The clutch of fire and the chill of frost cannot live in the same place, nor can snow and sun bear to live together, but one of them will have to weaken and give in, the one which has less power.’
- Saturn said: ‘But why then do worse men live longer? In the kingdom of the world the worse man does not get greater respect from his friends and family.’
- Solomon said: ‘No man can put off his painful journey for a moment, but will have to endure it.’
- Saturn said: ‘But how does this come about? Whether they are good or evil, when two twins are born of one woman, their success will not be the same. One is miserable in the world, the other very lucky, he is popular wherever noblemen gather together; the first one lives a short time, then leaves this broad universe, goes unhappily away from it again. I ask you, lord Solomon, of the two of them, which has the better position?’

- Salomon cuæð: 'Modor ne rædeð, ðonne heo magan cenneð,  
 hu him weorðe geond worold widsið sceapen.  
 Oft heo to bealwe bearne afedeð,  
 seolfræ to sorge, siððan dreoged  
 his earfoðu, orlegstunde. 195
- Heo ðæs afran sceall oft and gelome  
 grimme gretan, ðonne he geong færeð,  
 hafað wilde mod, werige heortan,  
 sefan sorgfullne, slideð geneahhe,  
 werig, wilna leas, wuldres bedæled.  
 Hwilum higegeomor healle weardað,  
 leofað leodum feor; locað geneahhe  
 fram ðam unlædan ænga hlaford. 200
- Forðan nah seo modor geweald, ðonne heo magan cenneð,  
 bearnes blædes, ac sceall on gebyrð faran  
 an æfter anum: ðæt is eald gesceaft.' 205
- Saturnus cwæð: 'Ac forhwan nele monn him on giogode georne gewyrcan  
 deores dryhtscipes and dædfruman,  
 wadan on wisdom, winnan æfter snytro?' 210
- Salomon cwæð: 'Hwæt, him mæg eadig eorl eaðe geceosan  
 on his modsefan mildne hlaford,  
 anne æðeling. Ne mæg don unlæde swa.'
- Saturnus cwæð: 'Ac forhwam winneð ðis wæter geond woroldrice,  
 dreoged deop gesceaft? Ne mot on dæg restan,  
 neahtes neðyð, neodcræfte tyð,  
 cristnað and clænsað cwicra manigo,  
 wuldre gewlitigað. Ic wihte ne cann  
 forhwan se stream ne mot stillan neahtes ...' 220
- [a second leaf of the manuscript, again some 55 lines, is missing]
- (Solomon) '... his lifes fæðme. Simle hit bið his lareowum hyrsum.  
 Full oft hit eac ðæs deofles dugoð gehnægeð,  
 ðær weotena bið worn gesamnod.  
 Donne snotrum men snæd oððglideð,  
 ða he be leohte gesihð, luteð æfter,  
 gesegnað and gesyfleð and him sylf friteð. 225  
 Swilc bið seo an snæd æghwylcum men  
 selre micle, gif heo gesegnod bið,  
 to ðycganne, gif he hit gedencan cann,  
 donne him sie seofon daga symbolgereordu. 230  
 Leoht hafað heow and had haliges gastes,  
 Cristes gecyndo; hit ðæt gecyðeð full oft.  
 Gif hit unwitan ænige hwile

Solomon said: ‘When she bears a son, a mother has no control over how his long journey through the world may have been destined. She will often bring up her child to disaster, and to her own sorrow, when she has to bear his hardships and his fatal hour. Time and again she will have to weep bitterly for her son, when he is going round as a young man, with a wild spirit, a wicked heart, and a sad mind. Often he goes astray, he is wretched, has nothing as he wants it, is stripped of honour. Sometimes, depressed, he keeps to his house, lives far away from other people; his only lord often turns his face away from this miserable man. So, when she bears a son, the mother has no control over her child’s prosperity, but one thing must follow another in order: that is the old way of the world.’

Saturn said: ‘But why will a man not be eager in his youth to gain himself a valuable lord and a champion, to pursue wisdom, to struggle for sagacity?’

Solomon said: ‘Well, a fortunate man can easily choose a kind lord for himself in his mind, a single prince. The unfortunate man cannot do the same.’

Saturn said: ‘But why is this water in turmoil all over the world, why does it suffer a mysterious destiny? It cannot rest by day, it goes on by night, runs strongly and eagerly (?).<sup>17</sup> It christens and purifies many who are alive, makes them beautiful and glorious. I have not the least idea why the stream is not allowed to be still by night ...’

[the leaf missing here is especially unfortunate in view of the puzzling character of the previous speech. When the manuscript resumes Solomon is speaking on the properties of fire in response to Saturn on water. It seems likely that the baptismal suggestions of the latter have led to the Pentecostal ones of the former.]

(Solomon) ‘... to the extent of his life. It is always obedient to its teachers.<sup>18</sup> Very often, too, it overthrows the devil’s forces, where there are many wise men assembled.

When a piece of food slips away from one of them, he sees this in the light, bends down for it, blesses it and gives it a relish, and eats it himself. In the same way the one particular piece of bread is much better for anyone to receive, if it is blessed and he can remember how to do it, than seven days of banquets would be for him.

Light has the colour and form of the Holy Ghost, the nature of Christ: very often it proves that. If ignorant men keep it for

healdað butan hæstum, hit ðurh hrof wædeð,  
bryceð and bærneð boldgetimbru,  
seomað steep and geap, stigeð on lenge,  
clymmed on gecyndo, cunnað hwænne mote  
fyr on his frumsceaft on fæder geardas,  
eft to his eðle, ðanon hit æror cuom.

235

Hit bið eallenga eorle to gesihðe,  
ðam ðe gedælan can dryhtnes ðecelan,  
fordon nis nænegu gecynd cuicligende,  
ne fugel ne fisc ne foldan stan,  
ne wæteres wylm ne wudutelga,  
ne munt ne mor ne ðes middangeard,  
ðæt he forð ne sie fyrenes cynnes.'

240

245

Saturnus cwæð: 'Full oft ic frode menn fyrn gehyrde  
secgan and swerian ymb sume wisan:  
hwæðer wære twegra butan tweon strengra,  
wyrd ðe warnung; donne hie winnað oft  
mid hira ðreamedlan, hwæðerne aðreoteð ær.  
Ic to soðon wat — sægdon me geara  
Filistina witan, donne we on geflitum sæton,  
bocum tobræddon and on bearm legdon,  
meðelcwidas mengdon, moniges fengon —  
ðæt nære nænig manna middangeardes  
ðæt meahte ðara twega tuion aspyrian.'

250

255

Salomon cwæð: 'Wyrd bið wended hearde, wealleð swiðe geneahhe;  
heo wop weceð, heo wean hladeð,  
heo gast scyðeð, heo ger byreð,  
and hwæðre him mæg wisefa wyrda gehwylce  
gemetigian, gif he bið modes gleaw  
and to his freondum wile fultum secan,  
ðehhwæðre godcundes gæstes brucan.'

260

Saturnus cwæð: 'Ac hwæt witeð us wyrd seo swiðe,  
eallra fyrena fruma, fæhðo modor,  
weana wyrtwela, wopes heafod,  
frumscylda gehwæs fæder and modor,  
deaðes dohtor? Ac tohwan drohtað heo mid us?  
Hwæt, hie wile lifigende late aðreotan,  
ðæt heo ðurh fyrena gefliti fæhðo ne tydre.'

265

270

Salomon cwæð: 'Nolde gæd geador in godes rice  
eadiges engles and ðæs ofermodan.  
Oðer his dryhtne hierde,  
oðer him ongan wyrcan ðurh dierne cræftas

any time without locking it up, it gets away through the roof, it breaks through the housebeams and burns them, it hangs there, high and wide, rises up in length, climbs according to its nature, it probes to see when the fire may be allowed to return to its beginning, in the courts of the Father, and go back to the country from which it came before. It is entirely visible to anyone who knows how to share in the torch of the Lord, because there is no living species, bird or fish or stone from the earth, stream of water or tree-branch, mountain or moor or this middle world, that is not still of the race of fire.'

Saturn said:

'Very often in the past I have heard men of experience talking and making assertions about a certain matter, about which of two things would be indubitably the stronger, fated events or foresight: when they fight each other, as they often do, each with its own way of paining men's minds, which will be exhausted first. I know this is true – the Philistine counsellors told me in the past, when we sat disputing, opening books and putting them in our laps, exchanging speeches and taking up many matters – they told me that there is no man in this universe who would be able to explain one's doubts about these two.'

Solomon said:

'Fate is hard to alter, it surges up very often; it causes tears, it piles up sorrows, it injures the spirit, it carries the years along. And nevertheless an intelligent man can moderate all the things that fate causes, as long as he is clear in his mind and is prepared to seek help from his friends, and moreover enjoy the Holy Spirit.'

Saturn said:

'But why does this mighty thing "fate" torment us, this beginning of all sins, mother of enmity, root of sorrows and source of tears, father and mother of every ancient wickedness,<sup>19</sup> daughter of death? Why is it a part of our life? I am sure, while it lives it will be slow to tire of giving birth to violence through evil disputes.'

Solomon said:

'In God's kingdom they did not wish for fellowship between the blessed angel and the proud one. The one obeyed his Lord; the other began through secret arts to make himself a banner and

segn and side byrnan, cwað ðæt he mid his gesiðum wolde 275  
hiðan eall heofona rice

and him donne on healfum sittan,  
tydran him mid ðy teoðan dæle,  
oððæt he his (to)r(ne)s geuðe  
ende ðurh insceafte. Da wearð se æðel(a) ðeoden  
gedrefed ðurh ðæs deofles gehygdo;  
forlet hine ða ofdune gehreosan,  
afielde hine ða under foldan sceatas,  
heht hine ðær fæste gebindan.

280

Dæt sindon ða usic feohtad on:  
fordon is witena gehwam wopes eaca.

Da ðæt eadig onfand engla dryhten,  
ðæt heo leng mid hine lare ne namon,  
aweorp hine ða of ðam wuldre and wide todraf,  
and him bebead bearn heofonwara  
ðæt hie ec scoldon a ðenden hie lifdon  
wunian in wylme, wop ðrowian,  
heaf under hefonum, and him helle gescop,  
wælcealde wic wintre beðeahte,  
wæter in sende and wyrmeardas,  
atol deor monig irenum hornum,  
blodige earnas and blace nædran,  
ðurst and hungor and ðearle gewin,  
egna egesan, unrotnesse;  
and æghwylc him ðissa earfed a ece stondeð  
butan edwende(n) a ðenden hie lifigað.'

285

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295

Saturnus cwað: 'Is donne on ðissem foldan fira ænig  
eordan cynnes, ðara ðe a man age,  
ðe deað abæde ær se dæg cyme  
ðæt sie his calencwide clæne arunnen  
and hine mon annunga ut abanne?'

300

Salomon cwað: 'Æghwylc(um men) engel onsendeð  
dryhten heofona, donne (dæg cym)eð;  
se sceall behealdan hu his hyge (cunne)  
grædig growan in godes willan,  
murnan metodes ðrym, mid ðy ðe hit dæg bið.  
Donne hine ymbegangað gastas twegen:  
oðer bið golde glædra, oðer bið grundum sweartra;  
oðer cymed (of heahðrymme heofona rices,  
oðer cymed of steame) ðære stylenan helle;  
oðer hine læred ðæt he lufan healde,

305

310

broad armour, saying that with his companions he meant to lay waste all the heavenly kingdom, and then establish himself in his own part; he meant to breed with his tenth of the angels, until, through this internal propagation, he could give his spite(?) an end.<sup>20</sup> Then the noble king was angered by the devil's intention; then he let him fall down, hurled him down beneath the surface of the earth, ordered him to be firmly bound there. These are what fight against us;<sup>21</sup> that is why every wise man feels his sorrow increase.

When the blessed Lord of angels realised that they would not take instruction from him any more, he threw him down from glory and drove him far away, and committed the children of heaven to his keeping,<sup>22</sup> so that they should forever while they lived inhabit the surge of flame, suffer misery and lamentation beneath the heavens; and he made hell for them, a place of deadly cold shrouded in winter; he sent into it water and pits for snakes, many dreadful beasts with iron horns, bloody eagles and black adders, hunger and thirst and fierce fighting, sad and terrible things to see. And each of these hardships remains eternally for them, without any change, for ever while they live.'

Saturn said:

'Is there then in this world any man of earthly race, any one of those who have committed sin, whom death can claim before the day comes when his calendar has entirely (?) run out and he is necessarily called away?'<sup>23</sup>

Solomon said:

'The Lord of heaven sends an angel to each man as soon as day breaks;<sup>24</sup> as long as the day lasts he is to watch how the man's mind manages to develop in eagerness for God's purposes, how it is perturbed over the Ruler's power. Then two spirits surround him: one is brighter than gold, the other blacker than the abyss; the one comes from the height and majesty of the heavenly kingdom, the other from the smoke (?) of hell, hard as steel;<sup>25</sup> the one teaches him to keep God's love and mercy, and to obey the

metodes miltse, and his mæga ræd,  
 oðer hine tyhteð and on tæso læreð,  
 yweð him and ypped earmra manna  
 misgemynda, and ðurh ðæt his mod hweteð,  
 lædeð hine and læceð and hine geond land spaneð,  
 oððæt his ege bið æfðancum full,  
 ðurh earmra scyld yrre geworden.  
 Swa ðonne feohteð se feond on feower gecynd,  
 oððæt he gewendeð on ða wyrsan hand  
 deofles dædum dæglongne fyrst,  
 and ðæs willan wyrcoð ðe hine on woh spaneð.  
 Gewiteð ðonne wepende on weg faran  
 engel to his earde and ðæt eall sagað:  
 “Ne meahte ic of ðære heortan heardne aðringan  
 stylenne stan; sticað him tomiddes ...”’  
315  
320  
325

[There is then an indeterminate, but probably short gap between this point and what is thought to be the end of the poem, see note 27.]

(Solomon) ‘... swice, ær he soð wite,  
 ðæt ða sienfullan saula sticien  
 mid hettendum helle tomiddes.  
 Hateð ðonne heahcining helle betynan,  
 fyres fulle, and ða feondas mid.’  
330  
  
 Hæfde ða se snotra sunu Dauides  
 forcumen and forcyðed Caldea eorl.  
 Hwæðre wæs on sælum se ðe of siðe cwom  
 feorran gefered; næfre ær his ferhð ahlog.  
335

good advice of his relatives, the other tempts him and guides him to ruin, shows him the evil thoughts of unhappy men and makes them clear, and in this way puts suggestions in his mind, leads him and doctors him and entices him astray, until his eyes are full of malice, have been turned to spite through the fault of those in misery. In this way, then, the devil fights with four methods,<sup>26</sup> until, because of what the devil has done the whole day long, the man turns to the bad and does the will of the creature who entices him to evil. Then the angel goes away weeping on the journey to his home, and says all this: "I could not dislodge the stone, hard as steel, from his heart, it is fixed inside him ...".

[the manuscript ends at this point. However it is likely that a fragment written earlier in the manuscript is the true end of this poem. In it Solomon is referring again to Judgement Day, in terms that echo the angel's speech.]

(Solomon)     '... weaken, before he knows the truth – that the sinful souls are fixed with their tormentors inside Hell. Then the high king will order Hell to be shut up, full of fire, and the devils with it.'

Then the wise son of David had overcome the Chaldean noble and put him to shame. Yet he who had come on that journey, brought from afar, was still glad; he had never laughed before from his heart.<sup>27</sup>

## SOUL AND BODY I

Huru ðæs behofað      hæleða æghwylc  
 þæt he his sawle sið      sylfa geþence,  
 hu þæt bið deoplic      þonne se dead cymed,  
 asyndred þa sybbe      þeær samod wæron,  
 lic ond sawle.      Lang bið syððan  
 þæt se gast nimeð      æt gode sylfum  
 swa wite swa wuldor,      swa him on worulde ær  
 efne þæt eordfæt      ær geworhte.

5

Scéal se gast cuman,      geohðum hremig,  
 symble ymbe seofon niht      sawle findan  
 þone lichoman      þe hie ær lange wæg,  
 þeo hund wintra,      butan ær þeodcyning,  
 ælmihtig god,      ende worulde  
 wyrcan wille,      weoruda dryhten.

10

Cleopað þonne swa cearyl      cealdan reorde,  
 spreced grimlice      se gast to þam duste:  
 'Hwæt, druh ðu dreorega,      to hwan drehtest ðu me!  
 Eordan fulnes      eal forwissnad,  
 lames gelicnes,      lyt ðu gemundest  
 to hwan þinre sawle þing      siðþan wurde,  
 syððan of lichoman      læded wäre.  
 Hwæt wite ðu me, weriga?      Hwæt, ðu huru, wyrma gyfl,  
 lyt geþohtest,      þa ðu lustgryrum eallum  
 ful geeodest,      hu ðu on eordan scealt  
 wyrnum to wiste.      Hwæt, ðu on worulde ær  
 lyt geþohtest      hu þis is þus lang hider.  
 Hwæt, þe la engel      ufan of roderum  
 sawle onsende      þurh his sylfes hand,  
 meotod ælmihtig      of his mægenþrymme,  
 ond þe gebohte      blode þy halgan,  
 ond þu me mid þy heardan      hungre gebunde,  
 ond gehæftnedest      helle witum.

20

25

30

35

40

Eardode ic þe on innan,      ne meahte ic ðe of cuman,  
 flæsce befangen,      ond me fyrenlustas  
 þine geþrungon,      þæt me þuhte ful oft  
 þæt hit wäre þritig      þusend wintra  
 to þinum deaddæge.      A ic uncres gedales onbad  
 earfodlice.      Nis nu huru se ende to god!  
 Wære þu þe wiste wlanc      ond wines sæd,  
 þrymful þunedest,      ond ic ofþyrsted wæs  
 godes lichoman,      gastes drynces.  
 Fordan þu ne hogodes      her on life,  
 syððan ic ðe on worulde      wunian sceolde,

## SOUL AND BODY I

Certainly it is necessary for every man to consider for himself the journey his soul will have to make, how terrible it will be when death comes, and separates the kinsmen who once were joined: the soul and the body. After that, there will be a long time in which the soul receives from God himself either torment or glory, depending on exactly what its earthly enclosure has earned for it earlier on, in the world.

The spirit will come, crying out in its misery, every seventh night<sup>1</sup> the soul will find the body that it had worn for so long, it will keep coming for three hundred years, unless almighty God, the king of nations and lord of hosts, means before then to put an end to the world.

Then it calls out sadly with a cold voice, the soul speaks harshly to the dust: 'So, you bloodstained clod,<sup>2</sup> what did you torment me for? Earthly filth, all shrivelled up, effigy of clay, little did you remember what the state of your soul would come to, once it had been taken out of the body. What can you blame me for, damned thing?<sup>3</sup> So, food for worms, you certainly didn't think much, while you were following all your terrible pleasures, about how you will have to be a banquet for the worms, in the earth. See, in the world before you little thought how long it will be here, like this. And look, it was the angel who sent you your soul, by his own hand from heaven above, it was the almighty Ruler in his majesty,<sup>4</sup> and he paid the price for you with his holy blood – and you bound me with a fierce hunger, made me a slave in the torments of hell.'

I lived inside you, I could not get out of you, I was enclosed in flesh, and your sinful pleasures oppressed me, so that very often it seemed to me that it was going to be thirty thousand years till the day you died. I waited all the time, with difficulty, for our separation. Certainly the end of it is not so good now! You were puffed up with your feasting and full of wine, you raved in your power; and I was thirsty for God's body, the soul's drink. So you never considered, here in this life, never since I had to live in you in the world, that you had been conceived violently

þæt ðu wære þurh flæsc      ond þurh fyrenlustas  
strange gestryned,      ond gestaðolod þurh me,  
ond ic wæs gast on ðe      fram gode sended.  
Næfre ðu me wið swa heardum      helle witum  
ne generedest      þurh þinra nieda lust.

45

Scealt ðu minra gescenta      sceame þrowian  
on ðam myclan dæge      þonne eall manna cynn  
se ancenneda      ealle gesamnað.  
Ne eart ðu þon leofra      nænigum lifigendra  
men to gemæccan,      ne meder ne fæder,  
ne nænigum gesybban      þonne se swearta hrefen,  
syððan ic ana of ðe      ut siðode  
þurh þæs sylfes hand      þe ic ær onsended wæs.  
Ne magon þe nu heanon adon      hyrsta þa readan,  
ne gold ne seolfor      ne þinra goda nan,  
ne þinre bryde beag,      ne þin boldwela,  
ne nan þara goda      þe ðu iu ahtest.      55  
Ac her sceolon onbidan      ban bereafod,  
besliten synum;      ond þe þin sawl sceal  
minum unwillum      oft gesecan,  
wemman þe mid wordum,      swa ðu worhtest to me.

60

Eart ðu nu dumb ond deaf,      ne synt þine dreamas awiht.

65

Sceal ic ðe nihtes swaþeah      nede gesecan,  
synnum gesargod,      ond eft sona fram þe  
hweorfan on hancred,      þonne halige men  
lifiendum gode      lofsang doð,  
secan þa hamas      þe ðu me her scrife,      70  
ond þa arleasan      eardungstowe.

Ond þe sculon her moldwyrmas      manige ceowan,  
slitan sarlice      swearte wihta,  
gifre ond grædige.      Ne synt þine æhta awihte,

75

þe ðu her on moldan      mannum eowdest.

Fordan þe wære selre      swiðe mycle  
þonne þe wær on ealle      eorðan speda,  
butan þu hie gedælte      dryhtne sylfum,  
þær ðu wurde æt frymðe fugel      oððe fisc on sæ,      80  
oððe on eorðan neat      ætes tilode,  
feldgangende      feoh butan snyttro,  
oððe on westenne      wildra deora  
þæt wyrreste      þær swa god wolde,  
ge þeah ðu wære      wyrma cynna  
þæt grimmeste      þær swa god wolde –  
þonne ðu æfre on moldan      man gewurde,  
oððe æfre fulwihte      onfon sceolde.

85

by flesh and by sinful pleasures,<sup>5</sup> but that you were upheld by me — and I was the spirit sent into you by God. You never saved me from these cruel torments of hell, because of the pleasure of your desires.

You will have to suffer shame at my humiliation<sup>6</sup> on that great day when the only-begotten summons all the human race. You are no more popular as a companion to any living man, to your mother or your father or any of your relatives, than the black raven is, not since I went away out of you, alone, by the hand of him by whom I had been sent. Your red ornaments cannot get you out of here now, nor gold nor silver nor any of your goods, not your wife's ring nor your rich house nor any of the goods that you once possessed. But here your stripped bones will have to wait, their sinews torn off; and your soul will often have to seek you out — against my own will — and say foul things to you, just as you did them to me.

Now you are deaf and dumb, your pleasures are nothing. Just the same I must needs visit you at night, pained by sins, but quickly turn away from you again, at cockcrow, when the holy men sing lauds to the living God, so that I can seek the home to which you destined me here, the place where people live in disgrace. And here many mould-worms will chew at you, the black creatures will tear painfully at you, avid and greedy. Your possessions, which here on earth you could show off to men, mean nothing. So it would have been a great deal better for you than all the wealth of the world would have been (unless you had donated it to the Lord himself), if you had been from the beginning a bird, or a fish in the sea, or if you had been an ox and foraged for your food on the ground, like cattle that wander mindlessly in the fields; or that you had been, if God had wished it so, the worst of the wild beasts in the wilderness, even though you had been the fiercest of all the species of snakes, if God had wished it so:<sup>7</sup> it would have been better for you than that you had ever become a man on earth, or that you had ever had to receive baptism.

Ponne ðu for unc bæm andwyrдан scealt  
on ðam miclan dæge þonne mannum beoð  
wunda onwrigene, þa ðe on worulde ær  
fyrenfulle men fyrn geworhton,  
ðonne wyle dryhten sylf dæda gehyran  
hæleða gehwylces, heofona scippend,  
æt ealra manna gehwæs muðes reorde  
wunde widerlean. Ac hwæt wylt ðu þær  
on þam domdæge dryhtne secgan? 90

Ponne ne bið nan na to þæs lytel lið on lime aweaxen  
þæt ðu ne scyle for anra gehwylcum onsundrum  
riht agildan, þonne reðe bið  
dryhten æt þam dome. Ac hwæt do wyt unc? 100

Sculon wit þonne eft ætsomne siððan brucan  
swylcra yrmða swa ðu unc her ær scrife.'

Fyrnað þus þæt flæschord, sceall þonne feran onweg,  
secan hellegrund, nallæs heofondreamas,  
dædum gedrefed. Ligeð dust þær hit wæs,  
ne mæg him ondsware ænige gehatan  
geomrum gaste, geoce oððe frofre. 105

Bið þæt heafod tohliden, handa toliðode,  
geaglas toginene, goman toslitene,  
sina beoð asocene, swyra becowen,  
fingras tohrorene. 110

Rib reafiað reðe wyrmas,  
beoð hira tungan totogenne on tyn healfa  
hungregum to frofre. Forþan hie ne magon huxlicum  
wordum wrixlian wið þone werian gast. 115

Gifer hatte se wyrm, þe þa eaglas beoð  
nædle scearpran, se genyddé to  
ærest eallra on þam eorðscræfe,  
þær he þa tungan totyhð ond þa teð þurhsmyhð,  
ond þa eagan þurheted ufan on þæt heafod, 120  
ond to ætwelan oðrum gerymed,  
wyrmum to wiste, þonne þæt werie  
lic acolod bið þæt he lange ær  
werede mid wædum. Bið þonne wyrma gifel,  
æt on eorþan. Pæt mæg æghwylcum  
men to gemynde, modsnutra gehwam. 125

Donne bið hyhtlicre þæt sio halige sawl  
færed to ðam flæsse, frofre bewunden;  
bið þæt ærende eadiglicre  
fundon on ferhðe. Mid gefean seceð  
lustum þæt lamfæt þæt hie ær lange wæg. 130

When you have to answer for us both, on that great day when God's wounds are revealed to men, the wounds that sinful people inflicted long ago in the world, then the Lord himself will want to hear of the actions of every man, the creator of heaven will want to hear from the voice of every single person's mouth about the repayment he has got for his wounds. But what are you going to say to the Lord, there on Doomsday? Then there will be no joint that grows in any of your limbs so small that you will not have to pay the proper price for each one separately,<sup>8</sup> when the Lord is strict at the judgement. But what are we going to do? The pair of us will be together from then on, we will have to undergo whatever miseries you destined us to here before.'

So it scolds its cage of flesh, but then has to travel away, to visit the abyss of hell, not the joys of heaven, troubled by what has been done. The dust lies where it was, it cannot offer any answer to its sad soul, any help or comfort. Its head is split, its hands disjointed, its jaws agape, its gums torn, its fingers have dropped off. The cruel worms plunder their ribs, their tongues are dragged away in ten directions to give comfort to the hungry ones. That is why they cannot bandy scornful words with the damned soul.

'Avid' is the name of the worm whose jaws are sharper than needles, in the grave he was the first of all to make it happen,<sup>9</sup> there he drags off the tongue and bores through the teeth, and eats away the eyes in the head from on top, he clears a way to the good food for the others, for the worms' banquet, once the damned body has grown cold, that the man for so long used to cover and clothe. Then it is worms' meat, carrion in the ground. This can be a reminder to every man, to everyone of sense.

There is much more to look forward to when the holy soul goes to its body, exuding comfort; your mind will find its errand much more fortunate. It seeks out the clay enclosure it had worn for so long, with pleasure and happiness. Then the souls

Ponne þa gastas gode word sprecað,  
snottre, sigefæste, ond þus soðlice  
þone lichoman lustum gretaþ:  
‘Wine leofesta, þeah ðe wyrmas gyt  
gifre gretaþ, nu is þin gast cumen,  
fægere gefrætewod of mines fæder rice,  
earum bewunden. Eala min dryhten,  
þær ic þe moste mid me lædan  
þæt wyt englas ealle gesawon,  
heofona wuldor, swylc swa ðu me ær her scrife! 135

Fæstest ðu on foldan, ond gefyldest me  
godes lichoman, gastes drynces.  
Wære ðu on wædle, sealdest me wilna geniht.  
Forðan ðu ne þearft sceamian, þonne sceadene beoþ  
þa synfullan ond þa soðfæstan 140

on þam mæran dæge, þæs ðu me geafe,  
ne ðe hreowan þearf her on life  
ealles swa mycles swa ðu me sealdest  
on gemotstede manna ond engla. 145

Bygdest ðu þe for hæleðum ond ahofe me  
on ecne dream.  
Forþan me a langaþ, leofost manna,  
on minum hige hearde, þæs þe ic þe on þyssum hynðum wat,  
wyrnum to wiste, ac þæt wolde god 150

þæt þu æfre þus laðlic legerbed cure.  
Wolde ic þe donne secgan þæt ðu ne sorgode,  
fordan wyt bioð gegæderode æt godes dome.  
Moton wyt þonne ætsomne syþan brucan  
(swylcra arna, swa ðu unc her ær scrife,) 155

ond unc on hefonum heahþungene beon.  
Ne þurfon wyt beon cearie æt cyme dryhtnes,  
ne þære andswire yfele habban,  
sorge in reðre, ac wyt sylfe magon  
æt ðam dome þær dædum agilpan, 160

hwylce earnunga uncre wæron.  
Wat ic þæt þu wære on woruldrice  
geþungen þrymlice þysses ...’  
165

say good words, words of wisdom and triumph, they greet the body truthfully and pleasurabley, like this:

'My dearest friend, although the worms are still attacking you avidly, your spirit has now come from my father's kingdom, dressed in splendour, wrapped in grace. Oh, my lord, if only I could take you away with me, so that we could see all the angels and the glory of heaven, just as you destined me to here, before! You went hungry on earth, and so you filled me with God's body, the soul's drink. You lived in poverty, and gave me plenty of what I desired. So you will have no need to be ashamed of what you gave me, on that famous day when the sinful are separated from the righteous; nor, at the place where men and angels meet, will you have any need to regret all that you gave me here during life, however much it was. You humbled yourself before men, and raised me to eternal happiness. So, dearest of men, it always grieves me bitterly in my mind to know that you are in this humiliation, a banquet for the worms; but God so wished it, that you should always choose your deathbed in this ugly way. Then I would like to tell you not to be sad, for we shall both be re-united at God's judgement. After that the pair of us will be able to enjoy together whatever honours you destined us to here before (?),<sup>10</sup> and be of high distinction in heaven. We will have no need to be worried at the Lord's coming, or have anxiety and mental distress over our answer, but there at the judgement we will be able in person to speak with pride of our deeds, and of what the two of us have deserved. I know that in the kingdom of the world you were mighty and distinguished in this ...'<sup>11</sup>

## THE DESCENT INTO HELL

Ongunnon him on uhtan æþelcunde mægð  
gierwan to geonge; wiston gumena gemot  
æþelinges lic eorðærne biþeaht.

5

Woldan werigu wif wope bimænan  
æþelinges dead ane hwile,  
reone bereotan. Ræst wæs acolad,  
heard wæs hinsið. Hæleð væron modge,  
þe hy æt þam beorge bliðe fundon.

Cwom seo murnende Maria on dægred,  
heht hy oþre mid eorles dohtar,  
sohton sarigu tu sigebearn godes,  
ænne in þæt eorðærn, þær hi ær wiston  
þæt hine gehyddan hæleð Iudea.  
Wendan þæt he on þam beorge bidan sceolde,  
ana in þære easterniht. Huru þæs oþer þing  
wiston þa wifmenn, þa hy onweg cyrdon.

10

Ac þær cwom on uhtan an engla þreat,  
behæfde heapa wyn hælendes burg.  
Open wæs þæt eorðærn, æþelinges lic  
onfeng feores gast. Folde beofode,  
hlogen helwaran, hagosteald onwoc  
modig from moldan, mægenþrym aras  
sigefæst ond snottor. Sægde Iohannis,  
hæleð helwarum, hlyhhende spræc  
modig to þære mengo ymb his mæges sið:  
'Hæfde me gehaten hælend user,  
þa he me on þisne sið sendan wolde,  
þæt he me gesoh(te ymb si)ex monað,  
ealles folces fruma. Nu (is se fyrst) sceacen.  
Wene ic ful swiþe ond witod(lice  
þæt us) to dæge dryhten wille  
(sylfa) gesecan, sigebearn godes.'

20

Fysde hine þa to fore frea moncynnes,  
wolde heofona helm helle weallas  
forbrecan ond forbygan, þære burge þrym  
onginnan reafian, reþust ealra cyninga.  
Ne rohte he to þære hilde helmberendra,  
ne he byrnwigend to þam burggeatum  
lædan ne wolde, ac þa locu feollan,  
clustor of þam ceastrum. Cyning in oþrad,  
ealles folces fruma, forð onette  
weoruda wuldorgiefa. Wræccan þrungon  
hwylc hyra þæt sygebearn geseon moste —

25

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35

40

## THE DESCENT INTO HELL

Before it was day the women of noble birth began to get themselves ready to go; the men who were assembled knew that the prince's body was shut in the sepulchre. The tired women meant to lament the prince's death with dirges for a while, to mourn in sadness.<sup>1</sup> The place where he lay had grown cold, his passing had been hard. But the men they met at the tomb were brave and cheerful.<sup>2</sup>

Mary, the mourner, came at dawn, she told another nobleman's daughter to go with her, the two sad women looked for God's victorious son, alone in the sepulchre, where they knew that the men of the Jews had hidden him before. They expected that he would remain in the tomb, alone over Easter Night. Certainly the women knew something else about it, when they turned back again.

But a host of angels came there at daybreak, the best of companies surrounded the Saviour's citadel. The sepulchre was open, the prince's body received the breath of life. The earth quaked, hell's inhabitants laughed, the young warrior awoke, came proudly from the earth, the majesty rose up in wisdom and in victory. John said this to hell's inhabitants, laughing, he spoke with pride to the crowd of them about his kinsman's exploit:

"When he wanted to send me on this journey, our Saviour had promised me that he would come to find me at the end of six months,<sup>3</sup> as the leader of all people. Now the time is up, I expect strongly and with certainty that today the Lord will come to find us himself,<sup>4</sup> the victorious son of God."

Then the Lord of mankind went rapidly on his way, heaven's protector meant to break down and slight the walls of hell, the fiercest of all kings set out to plunder the power of that city. He did not worry in the battle about men wearing helmets, nor did he mean to lead men in armour against the city's gates, but the locks and bolts fell from the fortifications. The king rode in, the leader of all people, he hastened forward to give the hosts salvation. The outcasts pressed forward, to see which of them could catch sight of the victorious Son – Adam and Abraham, Isaac

Adam ond Abraham, Isac ond Iacob,  
monig modig eorl, Moyses ond Dauid,  
Esaias ond Sacharias,  
heahfædra fela, swylce eac hæleþa gemot,  
witgena weorod, wifmonna þreat,  
fela fæmnenā, folces unrim.

45

Geseah þa Iohannis sigebearn godes  
mid þy cyneþrymme cuman to helle.  
Ongeat þa geomormod godes sylfes sið,  
geseah he helle duru hædre scinan,  
þa þe longe ær bilocen wæron,  
beþeahte mid þystre. Se þegn wæs on wynne.

50

A bead þa bealdlice burgwarena ord,  
modig fore þære mengo ond to his mæge spræc,  
ond þa wilcuman wordum grette:

55

Þe þæs þonc sie, þeoden user,  
þæt þu us (sar)ige secan woldest,  
nu we on þissum bendum bidan (sceoldon.)  
Ponne mon gebinded broþorleansne →  
wræccan, (wonspedgan) – he bið wide fah –  
ne bið he no þæs nearwe undir niðloc(an  
oððe) þæs bitre gebunden under bealuclommum,  
þæt he þy yð ne mæge ellen habban,  
þonne he his hlafordes hyldo gelyfeð,  
þæt hine of þam bendum bicgan wille.

60

Swa we ealle to þe an gelyfað,  
dryhten min se dyra. Ic adreag fela,  
síþjan þu end to me in síþadest,  
þa þu me gesealdest sweord ond byrnan,  
helm ond heorosceorp – a ic þæt heold nu giet –  
ond þu me gecyðdest, cyneþrymma wyn,  
þæt þu mundbora minum wäre.

65

Eala Gabrihel, hu þu eart gleaw ond scearp,  
milde ond gemyndig ond monþwære,  
wis on þinum gewitte ond on þinum worde snottor.  
Pæt þu gecyðdest þa þu þone cnyht to us  
brohtest in Bethlem. Bidan we þæs longe,  
setan on sorgum, sibbe oflyste,  
wynnum ond wenum hwonne we word godes  
þurh his sylfes muð secgan hyrde.

75

Eala Maria, hu þu us modigne  
cyning acendest, þa þu þæt cild to us  
brohtest in Bethlem. We þæs beofiende  
under helledorum hearde sceoldon

80

85

and Jacob, many patriarchs, and a crowd of men with them, a host of prophets, a multitude of women, many girls, innumerable people.

Then John saw the victorious son of God coming into hell with royalty and power; then in his sadness he realised the exploit that God himself had carried out, he saw hell's gates shining brightly, which for so long before had been locked and smothered in darkness. God's servant was delighted. Then the champion of those who lived in that stronghold<sup>5</sup> called out boldly, he spoke with pride to his kinsman, in front of all the multitude, and greeted their welcome visitor with these words: 'May you be thanked, our Lord, for wishing to look for us, we who have been sad since we have had to wait in this bondage. When they tie up the brotherless outcast, the man with no resources (?) — he is proscribed everywhere — he can never be so tightly shut up under hostile bars,<sup>6</sup> or fastened so cruelly in evil chains, that he cannot take heart the easier if he believes in his lord's good grace, and that he will ransom him out of his bondage. In that way, my dear Lord, we all believe in you alone.<sup>7</sup> I have endured a great deal since the time before when you travelled to me, when you gave me my sword and armour, helmet and battledress — I have kept them always till now — and you revealed to me that you would be a protector of what was mine, the greatest and most powerful of kings.'

O Gabriel, how keen and perceptive you are, how kind and thoughtful and humane, how wise in your spirit and reasonable in your words. You showed that when you brought the boy to us in Bethlehem. We had waited for him a long time, had sat sorrowfully yearning for peace, wishing and hoping for the time when we would hear the words of God spoken by his own mouth.

O Mary, how proud a king you bore for us, when you brought the child to us in Bethlehem. We had had to wait trembling in bondage for him, it had been hard for

bidan in bendum.	Bona weordes gefeah,	
wærон ure ealdfind	ealle on wynnum,	90
þonne hy gehyrdon	hu we hreowen(de	
mænd)on murnende	mægburg usse	
oþþæt (þu on siþe,)	sigidryhten god,	
bimengdes(t moldgrundas,	modi)gust ealra cyninga.	
(. . . . . . .)	nu us mon modge þe	
ageaf from usse geogoðe.	We þurh gifre mod	95
beswican us sylfe.	We þa synne forþon	
berað in urum breostum	to bonan honda,	
sculon eac to ussum feondum	freoþo wilnian.	
Eala Hierusalem	in Iudeum,	
hu þu in þære stowe	stille gewunadest.	100
Ne mostan þe geondferan	foldbuende	
ealle lifgende	þa þe lof singað.	
Eala Iordane	in Iudeum,	
hu þu in þære stowe	stille gewunadest.	
Mostes þu geondflowan	foldbuende;	105
mostan hy þynes wætres	wynnum brucan.	
Nu ic þe halsie,	hælend user,	
deope in gedyrftum	– þu eart dryhten Crist –	
þæt þu us gemiltsie,	monna scyppend.	
Pu fore monna lufan	þinre modor bosm	110
sylfa gesohtes,	sigidryhten god,	
nales fore þinre þearfe,	þeoda waldend,	
ac for þam miltsum	þe þu moncynne	
oft ætywdest,	þonne him wæs are þarf.	
Pu meaht ymbfon	eal folca gesetu,	115
swylce þu meaht geriman,	rice dryhten,	
sæs sondgrotu,	selast ealra cyninga.	
Swylce ic þe halsige,	hælend user,	
fore (þ)inum cildhade,	cyninga selast,	
ond fore þære wunde,	weoruda dr(yhten,	120
ond fo)r þinum æriste,	æþelinga wyn,	
ond fore þinre me(der,	þære bið Ma)rian nama,	
þa ealle hellwara	hergað ond lof(iað	
ond fore þam eng)lum	þe þe ymbstondað,	
þa þu þe lete sittan	(on þa swiþran) hond,	125
þa þu us on þisne wræcsið,	weoroda dryhten,	
þurh þines sylfes geweald	secan woldest,	
ond fore Hierusalem	in Iudeum –	
sceal seo burg nu þa	bidan efne swaþeah,	
þeoden leofa,	þines eftcymes –	130
ond for Iordane	in Iudeum –	

us beneath the gates of hell. Our killer took delight in what he had done, our ancient enemies were all exultant when they heard how we spoke with regret and penitence of our nation, until in your expedition (?), Lord God of victory, you plumbèd the depths of the earth (?), the bravest king of all. . . .<sup>8</sup> now we have, with pride, been given you from our own younger generation. We betrayed ourselves through our own greedy spirits. Because of that we carry the sins in our hearts to the hands of the killer himself, we have besides to ask for peace from our own enemies.

O Jerusalem of the Jews, how you have remained unshaken in your place. Not all the people who live across the earth and sing your praises have been allowed to travel through you.

O Jordan of the Jews, how you have remained unshaken in your place. You could flow over all the people on earth; they would all be free to take water from you happily.<sup>9</sup>

Now I implore you, our Saviour, from the depths of destruction – you are Christ the lord – that you should have mercy on us, as the creator of men. It was for the love of men that you yourself descended to your mother's breast, Lord God of victory, not because you needed to, Ruler of nations, but because of the kindness you often showed to mankind, when they were in need of favour. You can comprehend the homes of all the races, just as you can reckon up, Lord of power and best of all kings, the grains of sand in the sea. And so I implore you, our Saviour: by your childhood (best of kings); and by your wounding (Lord of hosts); and by your mother, whose name was Mary, whom all the inhabitants of hell praise and honour; and by the angels who surround you, whom you allowed to sit at your right hand,<sup>10</sup> when (Lord of hosts) you wished to come to find us on this expedition away from your home, by your own power; and by Jerusalem of the Jews (nevertheless, dear Lord, the city will have to wait now for your return); and by Jordan of the Jews

wit unc in þære burnan baþodan ætgædre  
oferwurpe þu mid þy wætre, weoruda dryhten,  
bliþe mode ealle burgwaran,  
swylce git Iohannis in Iordane  
mid þy fullwihte fægre onbryrdon  
ealne þisne middangeard, sie þas symle meotude þonc.'

135

(the two of us bathed in its stream together): — Lord of hosts, scatter its water cheerfully over all those who live in this city, just as you and John, in the Jordan, nobly inspired all this middle-earth with baptism, for which may God always be thanked.'

# THE JUDGEMENT DAY I

Ðæt gelimpan sceal, þætte lagu floweð,  
flod ofer foldan: feores bið æt ende  
anra gehwylcum. Oft mæg se þe wile  
in his sylfes sefan soð geþencan.

Hafað him geþinged hider þeoden user  
on þam mæstan dæge, mægencyninga hyhst;  
wile þonne forbærnan brego moncynnes  
lond mid lige. Nis þæt lytulu spræc  
to geheganne! Hat bið onæled  
siþþan fyr nimeð foldan sceatas,  
byrnende lig beorhte gesceafte.

5

Bið eal þes ginna grund gleda gefylléd,  
reþra bronda, swa nu rixiað  
gromhydge guman, gylpe strynað,  
hyra hlaforde gehlæges tilgað —  
oþþæt hy beswicado synna weardas,  
þæt hi mid þy heape helle secað,  
fleogað mid þam feondum. Him biþ fyr ongean,  
droflic wite, þær næfre dæg scineð  
leohte of lyfte, ac a bilocen stondeð,  
siþþan þæs gastes gryre agiefen weorþeð.

10

Ufan hit is enge, ond hit is innan hat;  
nis þæt betlic bold, ac þær is brogna hyhst,  
ne noht hyhtlic ham, ac þær is helle grund,  
sarlic siðfæt þam þe sibbe ful oft  
tomældeð mid his muþe. Ne con he þa mircan gesceaft,

15

hu hi butan ende ece stondeð  
þam þe þær for his synnum onsægd weorþeð,  
ond þonne a to ealdre orleg dreogeð.

20

Hwa is þonne þæs ferðgleaw, oþþe þæs fela cunne,  
þæt æfre mæge heofona heahþu gereccan,  
swa georne þone godes dæl, swa he gearo stondeð  
clænum heortum, þam þe þisne cwide willað  
ondrædan þus deopne? Sceal se dæg weorþan  
þæt we forð berað firena gehwylce,  
þeawas ond geþohtas; þæt bið þearlic gemot,

25

heardlic heremægen.

30

Hat biþ acolod.

Ne biþ þonne on þisse worulde nymþe wætres sweg,  
(floweð ofer foldan) fisces eþel.

Ne biþ her ban ne blod, ac sceal bearna gehwylc  
mid lice ond mid sawle leanes fricgan  
ealles þæs þe we on eorþan ær geworhton

35

40

## THE JUDGEMENT DAY I

It is going to happen: the sea will rise in flood over the world, life will be over for every single person. Anyone who wants to can often ponder this truth in his own mind.

Our Lord has fixed the time when he will come here, on that greatest day, as highest king of power; then the ruler of mankind will burn the land with fire. That will not be a small convocation to hold!<sup>1</sup> A blaze will be kindled, once fire has seized the earth's surface, the burning flame has taken the bright creation. All this wide world will be full of coals and cruel firebrands – this world ruled now by hard-hearted men who hoard ostentatiously and provide their Lord with ridicule – until those who should keep watch against their sins betray them, so that they have to go down to hell with the crowd, fly off with the devils. They are for the fire, torment in obscurity, where day never shines brightly in the sky, but it stays shut up for ever, once the soul's dreadful sentence is pronounced.<sup>2</sup> It is cramped above, and hot inside; that is no splendid mansion, but the greatest of terrors there, no home to be looked forward to, but down there the abyss of hell, a miserable journey for the man who so often disturbs the peace with his words. He has no knowledge of the dark side of creation, how it stands ready eternally and endlessly for the man who is thrown down there for his sins, and then endures his fate for ever. Who then has a mind wise enough, or possesses so much knowledge that he can ever describe the height of heaven, or the amount of good things in it as thoroughly as they are,<sup>3</sup> standing ready for all pure souls, for all those who are prepared to feel fear at this utterance in its profundity? The day shall come when we bring forward each of our sins, our thoughts and our behaviour. That will be a stern assembly, a fierce army to face.

The heat will have grown cold. Then there will be nothing in this world except the noise of the water, the home of the fish will flow over the world (?).<sup>4</sup> Here there will be neither bone nor blood, but every child ever born will have to ask what is the reward for his soul and his body of everything we have ever done on earth,

godes oþþe yfles. Ne mæg nænig gryre mare  
geweorþan æfter worulde, ond se bið wide cuð.  
Ne tytaþ her tungul, ac biþ tyr scæcen,  
eorþan blædas. Forþon ic a wille  
leode læran þæt hi lof godes  
hergan on heahþu, hyhtum to wuldre  
lifgen on geleafan, ond a lufan dryhtnes  
wyrcan in þisse worulde, ær þon se wlonica dæg  
bodige þurh byman brynehatne leg,  
egsan oferþrym.

45

Ne bið nænges eorles tir  
leng on þissum life, siþþan leohtes weard  
ofer ealne foldan fæþm fyr onsendeð.  
Lixeð lyftes mægen, leg onetteð,  
blæc byrnende, blodgyte weorþeð  
mongum gemeldad, mægencyninges þrea;  
beofað eall beorhte gesceaft, brondas lacað  
on þam deopan dæge, dyneð upheofon.  
Ponne weras ond wif woruld alætað,  
eorþan yrmþu, seoð þonne on ece gewyrht.  
Ponne bið gecyþed hwa in clænnisse  
lif alifde; him bið lean gearo.

55

Hyht wæs a in heofenum, siþþan user hælend wæs,  
middangeardes meotud, þurh þa mæstan gesceaft  
on ful blacne beam bunden fæste  
cearian clomme; Crist ealle wat  
gode dæde. No þæs gilpan þearf  
synfull sawel, þæt hyre sie swegl ongean,  
þonne he gehyrweð ful oft halge lare,  
brigdeð on bysmer. Ne con he þæs brogan dæl,  
yfles ondgiet, ær hit hine on fealleð.  
He þæt þonne onfindeð, þonne se fær cymeb,  
geond middangeard monegum gecyþeð,  
þæt he bið on þæt wynstre weorud wyrs gescaden  
þonne he on þa swiþran hond swican mote,  
leahtra alysed. Lyt þæt geþenceð  
se þe him wines glæd wilna bruceð,  
siteð him symbelgal, siþ ne bemurneð  
hu him æfter þisse worulde weordan mote.

60

Wile þonne forgieldan gæsta dryhten  
willum æfter þære wyrde, wuldres ealdor,  
þam þe his synna nu sare geþenceþ,  
modbysgunge micle dreogeð;  
him þæt þonne geleanað lifes waldend,

70

75

80

85

good or bad. No greater terror can ever take place in the world — and this will be known by many! The stars will not be visible to us here any more, but earthly prosperity and distinction will have gone. So I mean to teach people all the time that they should praise the glory of God on high, and live their lives faithfully, hoping for heaven, and should always gain the Lord's love by their actions in this world, before that day of splendour announces with trumpets the burning heat of the fire, the overpowering terror.

No nobleman can keep his distinction in this life any longer, not once the guardian of light has sent fire across the entire face of the world. His army blazes in the sky,<sup>5</sup> the flame sweeps on, bright and burning, it is announced to many that they must shed their blood, as punishment from the king of power; all the bright creation quakes, the firebrands will leap on that vital day, heaven above will ring. When men and women leave the world and earth's miseries behind, they will see then what they have earned in eternity. Then it will be shown who have lived their lives in purity; their reward will be waiting. There has always been a hope of having that in heaven, ever since our Saviour, the Ruler of the world, was fastened tightly on the dark tree with a painful clamp; for Christ knows of all good deeds. But the sinful soul will have no cause to take pride in being bound for heaven, since it so often despises holy instruction, brings it into contempt. He is not aware of the terror he will be allotted, he has no perception of evil, till the moment it strikes him. Then he realises it, when the calamity is on him, announcing to many a man throughout the world that in the division he will be put with the crowd on the left-hand side, worse for him than if he were allowed to turn to the right, set free from his sins. The man who can enjoy what he wants, who can be cheerful over his wine and sit feasting licentiously, without worrying about his last journey, he thinks little about how things may turn out for him once this world is over.

Then after that event the Lord of souls, the Prince of glory, will give everything that he wants to the man who now meditates in misery upon his sins, enduring great anxiety in his mind; the Ruler of life and Guardian of heaven will then repay

heofona hyrde, æfter heonansiþe,  
godum dædum, þas þe he swa geomor wearð,  
sarig fore his synnum. Ne sceal se to sæne beon,  
ne þissa larna to læt, se þe him wile lifgan mid gode,  
brucan þas boldes þe us beorht fæder  
gearwað togeanes, gæsta ealdor. 90

Pæt is sigedryhten þe þone sele frætweð,  
timbreð torhtlice. To sculon clæne,  
womma lease, swa se waldend cwæð,  
ealra cyninga cyning. Forþon cwicra gehwylc, 95  
deophydigra, dryhtne hyreð,  
þara þe wile heofona heahþu gestigan.

Hwæþre þæt gegongeð, þeah þe hit sy greote beþeaht,  
lic mid lame, þæt hit sceal life onfon,  
feores æfter foldan. Folic biþ gebonnen, 100  
Adames bearn ealle to spræce;  
beoð þonne gegædrad gæst ond bansele,  
gesomnad to þam siþe. Soþ þæt wile cyðan,  
þonne we us gemittað on þam mæstan dæge,  
rincas æt þære rode, secgað þonne ryhta fela, 105  
eal swylce under heofonum gewearð hates ond cealdes,  
godes oþþe yfles. Georne gehyreð  
heofoncyninga hyrst hæleþa dæde.

Næfre mon þas hlude horn aþyted  
ne byman ablaweþ, þæt ne sy seo beorhte stefn 110  
ofer ealne middangeard monnum hludre,  
waldendes word. Wongas beofiað  
for þam ærende þæt he to us eallum wat.

Oncweþ nu þisne cwide: cuþ sceal geweorþan  
þæt ic gewægan ne mæg wyrd under heofonum,  
ac hit þus gelimpan sceal leoda gehwylcum, 115  
ofer eall beorht gesetu byrnende lig.  
Siþpan æfter þam lige líf bið gestaþelad;  
welan ah in wuldre se nu wel þenceð.

him beneficently , after he has left this world, for having been so melancholy, so sorry for his sins. The man who wants to live with God must not be too slow, nor too apathetic about the things I am teaching here, if he wants to live in the mansion which our Father in glory is preparing for us, the Prince of souls. It is the Lord of victory who will decorate that hall, who will build it with splendour. The pure will go to it, those who are free of vice, as the Ruler has said, King of all kings. So everyone alive must listen to the Lord, if he thinks deeply, if he wants to rise to heaven in the heights.

Yet it will happen, that although the body is covered with earth and clay, it will receive life, will draw breath after lying in the ground. The people will be summoned, all Adam's children called to convocation; then souls and their bony houses will be brought together, united for their journeys. That will make the truth known, when on that greatest day we men assemble beneath the cross; then many truths will be told, everything that has happened beneath the sky, whether hot or cold, good or evil. The highest King of heaven listens attentively to what men have done. Never has horn been sounded or trumpet blown so loud that his clear voice will not be louder to men across the whole world, the Ruler's words. The continents will shake at the message he has in mind for us all.

Now repeat what this says:<sup>6</sup> it will become obvious that I cannot prevent that event beneath the sky, but it will have to happen like this to everybody, with burning fire over all the bright homes of men. Then, after the fire, life will be made permanent; the man who thinks the right way now will have happiness in heaven.



## NOTES

### *Precepts*

<sup>1</sup> ‘Frod’ is normally translated as either ‘old’ or ‘wise’, but it is often unclear, in context, which area of meaning is primarily indicated. In line 53 of this poem, for instance, ‘frod’ is opposed to ‘geong’ (and so suggests age), while in line 94 it modifies ‘lare’, and so must mean ‘wise’. As is well-known, lines 64-5 of *The Wanderer* insist that years are the only source of wisdom.

<sup>2</sup> See the introduction for discussion of the problems of the preceding lines, and for some alternative translations.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph presents several difficulties. The editors of the poem for the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (Krapp and Dobbie, 1936) believe that lines 23-24a should be construed ‘ne eahta’ (imperative) ‘ængum’ (dative sing.) ‘gewuna wyrsa’ (genitive plural), ‘Regard not any of worse practices’, i.e. ‘Take no notice of anyone who has bad habits’. But it is not likely that ‘ne’ can govern ‘eahta’, six words later, c.p. lines 17, 29, 83; while ‘gewuna wyrsa’ is less likely as a genitive plural if one has already rejected that interpretation of ‘wyrsan gewyrhta’ in line 7, for which see the introduction. Bosworth-Toller translate (1921, under ‘eaht’) ‘don’t make a companion of an inferior on any consideration’. This is a smoother rendering than mine, but gives ‘wyrsan’ a suggestion of class-consciousness which now seems anachronistic and is also denied, in my opinion, by line 26b.

In line 25b, ‘spell’ and ‘lar’ are both words with a wide range of meaning, the first ranging from ‘fable’ to ‘homily’, the second covering any form of transmitted knowledge. I suspect, though, that the poet has in mind someone very like himself, offering something very like this poem.

<sup>4</sup> Gollancz translates (1895) ‘it shall aye be allotted thee’, ‘it’ being ‘þæt selle’, ‘the better thing’. He is supported by B-T (1921), see ‘gedælan’ VI (5). This view seems over-optimistic in context, and unrelated to what precedes and follows. I have preferred to continue the poet’s stress on separation, assuming that ‘gedælan’ keeps its basic meaning of ‘to divide’, and that the (unexpressed) subject of ‘bid’ is also the (vague) object of ‘ongiet, toscead’.

<sup>5</sup> There is an accent over ‘god’ in the MS, as with the same word in line 45. ‘God’ cannot, then, here mean ‘God’.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Drymed’ is from ‘dryman’, ‘to rejoice’. It is, of course, hard to imagine how even a wise man could often rejoice sorrowfully: the poet is relying heavily on the antithesis ‘sorgleas (blissað)’/(drymed) sorgful’.

<sup>7</sup> Once again, one should note here an element of deliberate balance: ‘hafa scyp-pend þe to hyhte, ond (hafa) soð (þe) to syge’. It is only this that gives any lead for

translating the otherwise unrecorded ‘syge’, perhaps connected with ‘seo’ (f.), ‘the pupil (or apple) of the eye’. The *ASPR* editors suggest that ‘syge’ = ‘sige’, ‘success, victory’, translating ‘have ever truth for thy victory when thou sayest aught’.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Peodscipe’ is a word with a strong monastic flavour, ‘a disciplinary regulation’ or ‘regular custom’ — a form of community life bound by strict rules. The least one can say of English monasteries during the 9th and early 10th centuries is that laxness was endemic, up to the Benedictine reform of 940 and after. The author might be a member of a reformed house after that date, objecting to the continuance of poor discipline in other places. In that case the ‘fyrngewritu’ might conceivably be the Benedictine Rule.

<sup>9</sup> The alliterative stress on ‘sylfum’ is difficult to preserve here if one translates ‘ryht’ as ‘right’. As elsewhere in these texts, the concept of morality (right or wrong) overlaps with that of expediency (harm or benefit).

<sup>10</sup> ‘Tweospræce’ could mean ‘slanderous’ once again, rather than ‘flattering’. Obviously both vices involve being ‘double-tonged’, saying one thing to people’s faces and another behind their backs. Gnomic wisdom commonly involves a rejection of opposites, however, as in line 68 of *The Wanderer* or no. 23 of *The Durham Proverbs* (Arngart, 1956), ‘Ne sceal man to ær forht ne to ær fægen’, ‘a man must not be frightened too easily or pleased too soon’, i.e. be neither pessimist nor optimist.

### *Vainglory*

<sup>1</sup> See the introduction for comment on this phrase, and for alternative translations.

<sup>2</sup> In his edition of the poem in *The Web of Words* (1970), B. F. Huppé argues that ‘wigsmiþas’ must mean ‘idol-makers, idolaters’, from ‘wih’, ‘an idol’, rather than ‘wig’, ‘war’. The words are, however, usually easy to distinguish.

<sup>3</sup> There seem to be two possible senses here. Either, as Huppé suggests, op. cit. pages 14-15, these men (idolaters and sinners) are deliberately looking for a pretext for fighting, hence a ‘field of strife’; or else they are searching their memories for events that have endured, perhaps to provide themes for the poetry they are apparently composing and exchanging.

<sup>4</sup> These words are not found elsewhere. The meanings suggested are those of Bosworth-Toller (1898), but the second word could also be connected with ‘bælc’, ‘pride, high stomach’, and so mean ‘he boasts’; or else with ‘bealcettan’, ‘to belch’, as Huppé suggests, and as is discussed in the introduction.

<sup>5</sup> Neither the prophet nor the speech is identifiable, though Huppé (op. cit. page 20) suggests *Psalms* 36 verse 12, ‘There are the workers of iniquity fallen: they are cast down, and shall not be able to rise.’

<sup>6</sup> The *ASPR*, and earlier editors, close inverted commas after ‘wuldorcyning’ in line 77, obviously thinking that if the prophet ‘did not deceive’ the poet about the humble man (line 81), then he must also have furnished the description of him. There is, however, no point in the MS after ‘wuldorcyning’, as there is after line 66 and also after line 56, where Huppé closes the speech. It seems to me also that there is a simple structural parallel between the poet’s description of the sinner, lines 26-44, ending with the exhortation ‘wite þe be þisum’ (46); and his description of the good man, lines 67-74, leading to exactly the same exhortation (77). The ‘Fall of the Angels’ passage acts as a reinforcing digression, most easily given separately to the ‘prophet’. But, as has been said in the introduction, the most evident conclusion is that the voices of poet and prophet are hardly to be distinguished.

<sup>7</sup> Lines 80-81 echo line 47 and line 6, though not with perfect consistency. At the start the poet said he knew how to recognise God’s son and, apparently, the devil; then he tells us how to distinguish good and bad people. In the middle of the poem the sinner is the devil’s child incarnate; but at the end the saint is rather less closely linked to Christ. The word ‘gegæderad’ has caused difficulty, B-T translating (1898) ‘God’s child will be a guest *associated* with him’, Huppé preferring ‘a guest *conjoined*’.

### *The Fortunes of Men*

<sup>1</sup> ‘Bleoh’ normally means ‘colour’, as in line 71, ‘bleobord’; hence R. K. Gordon’s translation (1954) ‘deck him with many-coloured garments’. But in some cases it certainly means ‘shape’ or ‘form’, see Bosworth-Toller (1921) II, and this seems better suited to the chiasmus of ‘cennað … mid gebyrdum’ / ‘mid bleom gyrað’. See also C. J. E. Ball and A. Cameron (1973).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Feþað’ is found once elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon, while ‘tennap’ and ‘tætaþ’ above have no parallels. ‘Lead’ is the suggestion of B-T (1898), while ‘coax’ and ‘cherish’ are variations on their ‘encourage’ and ‘amuse’, c.p. Mackie (1934) ‘cheer and cherish’, Gordon (1954) ‘train and caress’.

<sup>3</sup> Both Mackie and Gordon read ‘a child’ for ‘children’, and make all subsequent references singular. This may be more appropriate, and one cannot tell from ‘bearn’ or ‘him weaxendum’ whether one child or several is meant; ‘gebyrdum’, however, must be plural.

<sup>4</sup> The emendation from ‘brondas þencan’ to ‘brond aswencan’ (line 43) was suggested by O. T. Williams, and has since been generally accepted. Some doubt must remain, because of the similarity to ‘brondas þeccan’ four lines later. Besides, the idea of torment is slightly contradicted by the assurance that the death is quick;

while the presence of a woman watching and weeping suggests the cremation of a dead body (as in *Beowulf* 1119-24) rather than a live person being burnt and suffering pain.

<sup>5</sup> This translation assumes that ‘con’ takes a double object, the noun ‘gemet’ and the verb ‘gemearcian’, as suggested by S. J. Crawford, *MLR* 19 (1924), page 105.

<sup>6</sup> B-T (1898) translate ‘dryhtenbealo’ as ‘profound misery, extreme evil’, and are generally followed. The other use of the word in Anglo-Saxon poetry, however, in the messenger’s speech of *Guthlac* 1349, shows quite clearly that the word is like ‘winegeomor’ in *Beowulf* 2239 and ‘seledreorig’ in *The Wanderer* 25 (as edited by T. P. Dunning and A. J. Bliss (1969), q.v.): in each case the sadness of the second element, ‘bealu’, ‘geomor’, ‘dreorig’, is caused by having lost the first, ‘dryhten’ or ‘wine’ or ‘sele’. It is interesting to see that drunkenness could be a cause for dismissal, even in Anglo-Saxon times.

<sup>7</sup> It is not clear what kinds of dice or board games are indicated here; but see R. I. Page (1970), 162-4, and H. Murray (1941).

<sup>8</sup> Both ‘neomegende’ and ‘sceacol’ are the result of emendation, from MS ‘neome cende’ and ‘gearo’. There are, however, few other possibilities, see *ASPR* III, page 304.

### *Maxims I A*

<sup>1</sup> The preceding line and a half are virtually identical with lines 2-3a of *The Fortunes of Men*, and more loosely similar to lines 193 ff. of *Solomon and Saturn II*. In both the other poems the idea of childbirth leads to gloomy reflections; and it is this which prompts the translation of ‘liþan’ in the next line as ‘to lose’, (Bosworth-Toller (1898) ‘to suffer loss’). ‘Liþan’ is not found in this sense elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> This line has been much disputed. Could ‘umbor’ be subject rather than object of ‘yced’? Is ‘æradi’ a compound, or two separate words? Is ‘þa’ a conjunction of time or a pronoun, acc. pl. object of ‘nimeð’? Permutations of these possibilities have given rise to several variant translations with the same general sense, e.g. ‘a baby adds, when early sickness takes’ (E. A. Kock, 1922), or ‘He increases children, whom early sickness takes’ (R. K. Gordon, 1954). The latter hardly fits the idea of multiplication stated in the next three lines.

<sup>3</sup> The translation assumes that ‘eadig’ is understood once more, from the last line. Kock (1918) suggested that one should read ‘nearo’ for ‘næfre’, ‘in straits a man will be whose food runs short’.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Onge’ is another word not found elsewhere. B-T (1921) take it to be a variation of ‘ange, ænge’, ‘anxiously, painfully’. The movement of the passage from incurable

spiritual anguish to resigned and near-complacent objectivity is similar to the much-disputed reflection in *Deor* 28-34.

<sup>5</sup> In two articles in *Notes and Queries* (1971-2) A. J. Bliss has discussed the problems of short and hypermetric lines in O. E. poetry, with particular reference to gnomic verse. One of his conclusions is that editors should be more aware of the possibility 'that short lines occurring in the manuscript may have been intended as such by the poet', and so be slower to print aberrant patterns as if they were normal half-line pairs. With this in mind, I have rearranged five lines taken to be hypermetric in *ASPR* as regular lines followed by a short line: i.e. IA 46-7, 65-6, IB 30-1, IC 27-8, II 42-3. All have four stresses in the regular line and continued alliteration in the short one. The fact that both (or all four) gnomic poems exhibit this line-pattern may suggest that verse of this kind was once formally as well as thematically distinctive.

It should be noted further (a) that Mr. Bliss would consider that several other lines might be reorganised, such as IA 4, 36, 59, 68 etc. (b) that I have further adopted his lineation of IC 24-5. Though irregular, these are not more so than, e.g., IC 30a, IA 23a, IB 30a, and others. For full discussion, see the articles mentioned above, as also Bliss (1967) pp. 95-7, Pope (1966) pp. 150-2.

<sup>6</sup> This half-line is repeated almost exactly in *The Seafarer* 109a. There is a long-standing dispute as to whether it means 'a strong mind is to be checked' or 'a man shall rule with a strong mind' (Gordon, 1954). Here the reflection seems intended as a counterbalance to the lenience of 45b.

<sup>7</sup> 'Fundian' means 'to hurry', but it is noted by B-T (1921) that the verb is often confused with 'fandian', 'to try, test'.

<sup>8</sup> In this passage the three verbs 'gespringeð', 'bilihð', 'abreopeð', have all caused difficulty. B-T (1921) would prefer 'word' rather than 'wif' as the subject of 'gespringeð', 'rumour reaches a rambling woman'. Line 66 recurs almost identically as IB 31, but 'bilihð' is there 'behlið'; accordingly translators have not been sure whether the verb intended is 'behligan', 'to defame', 'belean', 'to charge with', or even 'beleogan', 'to belie', not found in the modern sense in O. E., but recorded from M. E. 'Abreopeð', finally, has become involved in the semantic tangle surrounding words like 'face' or 'cheek', B-T (1898) 'a man often unsettles her cheek', (1921) 'her good looks are lost'. The first translation is prim, the second punitive. I have assumed that the poet is trying to stress the dangers of gossip, and that he does not think such accusations are normally true.

<sup>9</sup> 'Inwyrcan' is not listed by B-T, nor is the line discussed by the *ASPR* editors. Probably the poet is moving from the idea of virtue walking openly (68b) to that of virtue being rewarded (69-71). In that case 69a may refer to some such ceremony as that of *The Wanderer* 41-4, where the retainer kneels in front of his seated lord to accept a gift.

*Maxims I B*

<sup>1</sup> It is possible to take ‘sund unstille’ with the preceding line and a half, as does C. W. Kennedy (1960): winter leaves, summer comes, the sun gets hotter, the sea thaws and becomes ‘unstille’. One is then free to treat line 8 on its own, taking ‘wæg’ to mean ‘cup’ and translating ‘the deep cup of the dead is secret for longest’. Carleton Brown (1940) refines on this interpretation, emending ‘deada’ to ‘deaða’ and making other changes. The assumption that ‘weder’, ‘sumor’, and ‘sund’ are all subjects of ‘cuman’ is, however, unattractive, whereas ‘wæg’ as a parallel of ‘sund’ would be very like ‘bord’ as the obvious variation of ‘scyld’ fourteen lines later. With a long vowel ‘wæg’ would mean ‘wave’; Kock suggested (1918) that the whole line meant something like ‘still waters run deep’.

<sup>2</sup> It makes little difference whether ‘inæled’ is a past participle, ‘burnt, kindled’, or a prepositional phrase, ‘in æled’, ‘on the pyre’. For the custom of burning holly after Christmas, see E. K. Chambers (1903), I 251. K. Malone proposed (1943) that ‘holen’ should be taken to mean ‘chief’, as in *The Wanderer* line 31, ‘leofra geholena’, ‘dear protectors’.

<sup>3</sup> It would be possible here to keep the MS reading ‘lof’, ‘and his wife achieve praise from her people’. But the scribe cannot be relied on too strongly; he has made a similar but opposite error, more obviously, in line 2 of *I C*.

<sup>4</sup> It is tempting here to take ‘hwonne’ as being (like ‘þæs’) dependent on ‘gebidan’, introducing an adverbial clause, ‘... wait for what cannot be hurried, until a favourable time comes round for him’. Line 70 in *I A* appears to be of this type, and similar cases are discussed by Bruce Mitchell (1971), pp. 71-2. However, for what it is worth, the scribe has placed a point between ‘mæg’ and ‘hwonne’, indicating that he at least felt there was a break in sense.

<sup>5</sup> Kock (1918) explained this phrase as a multiple kenning. The raider is the terror (‘egesa’) of tribes (‘mægða’); his ship is his delight (‘wyn’); ‘mægðesan wyn’ reduces by two stages to ‘ship’. A previous interpretation was to take the phrase as a separate unit with ‘mægð’ meaning ‘girl’ and ‘egesa’ as ‘owner’: ‘a maid is the delight of her owner’ (Gordon, 1954). But this is both abrupt and unusually churlish in implication.

<sup>6</sup> This passage has caused difficulty to all commentators. Mackie (1934) took both ‘ceapeadig’ and ‘cyningwic’ to be two separate words, and ‘cypeþ’ to mean ‘sells’: ‘A wealthy man will sell property (‘ceap’) and the king a dwelling (‘wic’) to a man (‘leodon’), when he comes ...’ This is too complex to be attractive. P. D. Howarth (*MLR* 11 (1916), page 89) rescued both words from fracture, but took ‘cyning’ as a loose intensive: ‘The prosperous merchant then buys a stately dwelling for his people, when he comes sailing home’. There have been other interpretations. In

making my translation I have assumed (a) that the ‘wic’ of line 40 is the same as that of line 38 (b) that from its connection with provisioning it is something temporary (c) that ‘ceapian’ means, as usual, ‘to buy’. The incident related under year 787 in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and amplified by Æthelweard, suggests that traders were supposed to go to a ‘cyninges tun’; no doubt they had to pay the king the equivalent of harbour fees before being allowed to camp, trade, or revictual.

<sup>7</sup> The MS reading, ‘adl gesigan’, does not alliterate; and though it makes sense of a sort – ‘disease shall languish’ (Mackie, op. cit.) – this is both untrue and unusually optimistic, compare *IA* 29 ff. The only emendation suggested is that of Kock (1918), who explained ‘adl’ as a mistake for ‘hadl’, a metathesis of ‘hald’ or ‘heald’. He translated ‘a humble man will bow, a prone one fall’. This makes a neat progression from ‘gehnigan’ to ‘gesigan’, but is hard to visualise. ‘Heald’ in any case usually has some indication of direction, ‘heald ofdune’, ‘turned down’, ‘heald wiþ’, ‘turned towards’. The only clue to the interpretation of ‘rogian’, meanwhile, is Grein’s analogy (1912) with Gothic ‘ragin’.

### Maxims I C

<sup>1</sup> See note 3 to *I B*. Once again one could make sense of the MS reading ‘leofes gearnian’, ‘desire a friend’ (Mackie, op. cit.). But ‘lof’ leads on more easily to ‘dom’, and offers a more normal translation for ‘gearnian’.

<sup>2</sup> The point of this line is not clear. It recalls *Ecclesiastes* 11, 3, ‘in quocumque loco ceciderit (lignum) ibi erit’, ‘in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be’. This verse was thought to prove that the state of the soul is immutable after death, see Gregory’s *Moralia in Job* 8 xv.

<sup>3</sup> To preserve alliteration in this line B. C. Williams (1914) printed it as ‘ælc him hafað sundor / sefan longað’, ‘each has his own heart’s longing’ (Gordon, 1954). But this solution leaves the next line headless both in sense and metre.

<sup>4</sup> The MS reading here, ‘mon to mon to mædle’, is clearly hopeless. The solution I have adopted was first suggested by Kock (1918) and accepted by the *ASPR* editors. ‘Tomældan’ is found only once elsewhere, but that is in a context close to this in line 26 of the Exeter Book poem *Judgement Day I*.

<sup>5</sup> Various attempts have been made to make sense of this passage as it stands. The *ASPR* editors, and several of their predecessors, emended ‘sceal se’ in line 51 to ‘scealc’, making a sentence from ‘seldan’ to ‘roweþ’; but when a ship is running under sail is exactly the time when one would *not* row against the wind. Mackie tried instead to make a unit of lines 47-9: ‘The idle hands of a man shall have leisure enough at a board when he throws the dice, but seldom in a broad ship, unless it is

running under sail'. This achieves sense at the expense of a violent shift of meaning at 'seldan'. It is easier if more negative to assume that a line has been lost – a line that clearly would have said something like: 'Rarely in a broad ship, unless it is running under sail, does a man get a chance to relax'. Maxims describing the hardships of seafaring underlie several lines of O. E. verse, e.g. *Andreas* 313-4, *Christ* 855-7, besides passages in *The Seafarer* and *The Rune Poem*.

<sup>6</sup> 'Stan' is normally translated 'jewel', though why this should be the only thing stolen is quite unclear. 'Stein' is, however, the normal Middle High German word for a piece in chess or draughts or 'tables' (see H. J. R. Murray, 1941), and O. E. 'tæfelstan' is recorded also. If this is what 'stan' means here, then the poet has returned to the topic of board-games which has occupied him intermittently since line 45; he is defining sportsmanship (to an audience in sore need of the concept, to judge from the next three lines).

<sup>7</sup> It is possible to make sense of MS 'nerede', as the *ASPR* editors suggest: Cain killed his own brother, Cain 'whom the death of Abel preserved'. But preserved from what? By this stage the scribe is clearly in some difficulty.

<sup>8</sup> 'Aþolware' (MS 'aþolwarum') is a word not found elsewhere. Mackie emends to 'eþelware'.

## Maxims II

<sup>1</sup> Most editors emend firmly to 'switolost' or 'swutolost', 'Truth is most evident' (Hamer, 1970). The MS reading is, however, clear, and this scribe makes few errors. There may be some support for 'swicolost' in *The Durham Proverbs* (Arngart, 1956), which frequently recall lines of gnomic verse. No. 21 says 'Soþ hit sylf acyþed', 'Truth declares itself'; but no. 19 more cautiously and cynically affirms, 'Ne deah eall soþ asæd ne eall sar ætwiten', 'It doesn't do to tell all the truth, nor to complain of every injury'.

<sup>2</sup> This, too, is often emended to the banal 'Weax bið wundrum clibbor', 'Wax is remarkably sticky', as in *ASPR*. A feeling for the triteness of consolation can, however, be deduced from other O. E. poems, e.g. *Deor* 11-12, *The Wanderer* 29-30.

<sup>3</sup> 'Stælan' can mean 'to accuse'; the enemies accuse each other of atrocities? It can mean ('fæhðe stælan') 'to declare war'; the enemies open hostilities? In *Beowulf* 2485 it seems to mean 'to avenge'; the enemies alternately attack each other? If there is any connection between these senses, it is perhaps 'to prosecute a case, against someone, or for something, if necessary to the point of open war'.

*The Rune Poem*

<sup>1</sup> This stanza is one which has been thought to be bowdlerised. O. E. ‘os’ descends from a word meaning ‘heathen god’, though it is not certain that all Anglo-Saxons would realise that. The first line of the stanza might fit as a definition of Woden / Othinn, creator of men and god of poetry; but the rest would not. Dickins suggested (1915) that the Latin word for ‘mouth’ had been introduced at some stage as a replacement.

<sup>2</sup> Other explanations have been offered which would make ‘rad’ into a pun of some kind, see *ASPR VI*, page 154.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Cuþ on fyre’ is usually translated ‘known by its flame’, (Dickins, 1915, Page 1972). But the M. E. ‘afire’ clearly descends from the (otherwise unrecorded) O. E. ‘on fyre’; it must have been a common phrase in colloquial contexts.

<sup>4</sup> There is an ironic tinge about ‘ar and ætwist’, a very elevated phrase. ‘Ar’ can mean ‘an estate, (immovable) property’, ‘ætwist’ means ‘presence, existence’. The poet seems to be saying, jokingly, something like ‘Charity is the poor man’s wealth’.

<sup>5</sup> Hickes gives the rune name as ‘wen’, and starts the stanza proper with ‘ne’. Some early translators took it as meaning ‘He knows not hope who ... etc’.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Gear’ is occasionally used in O. E. to suggest ‘the new year, the start of the year’, as in *Beowulf* 1134, and see B-T (1921) IIIa, IIIb. Dickins, op. cit., translates ‘summer’, and there is also at least a suggestion of harvest-time.

<sup>7</sup> For the custom of planting yews by houses to form wind-breaks, see G. Grigson (1975), page 29.

<sup>8</sup> There is no indication anywhere of what ‘peorð’ means. ‘Dice-box’ is the suggestion of K. Schneider (1956), and at least fits the context. Other guesses include chessman, harpstring, dance, apple-tree, and nothing, besides mutually exclusive obscenities.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Eolxsecg’ is glossed in several places as ‘papiluus’; but this does not help to identify the species of rush or reed intended. A good candidate is *Cladium mariscus*, the ‘sedge’ or ‘Norfolk reed’, once a dominant species in the English Fenlands, and used till recently for thatching. It is described by V. M. Conway in the *Journal of Ecology* 30 (1942), 211-6.

<sup>10</sup> For this sense of ‘tacn’, see B-T (1898) Id. Tir is the name of the heathen O. E. god of war (though there is no sign that the poet realised this); the planet Mars would therefore be an appropriate identification mythically, but not navigationally.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Beorc’ means ‘birch’; but the description that follows, as was pointed out by Dickins, op. cit., is clearly of a tree that reproduces vegetatively, which birches do not. The confusion is not likely to be just the result of poor observation, since

Anglo-Saxon ‘woodmanship’ – as opposed to modern ‘forestry’ – depended heavily on suckering and coppicing, see O. Rackham (1975), pp.24-5. But what would an Anglo-Saxon have called a poplar? Of the six modern British species, only one is known to be native, and that has an Anglo-Saxon name, ‘æsp’ or aspen. The rest have been called poplars or poplars since, perhaps, the tenth century; but before then, though they might have been introduced and even hybridised, they may not have been common enough to be assigned a name. The description fits the grey poplar, *Populus canescens*, still usually found in male populations only and reproducing by suckers. Dickins noted that several glosses equate ‘birce’ with ‘populus’.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Heardingas’ may have been a proper noun, a tribe associated with the hero Ing (whose myth however remains obscure). Attempts to reconstruct names and situations have been made by J. Grimm, trans. Stallybrass (1880) I 345-9, and by G. Dumézil (1953).

<sup>13</sup> ‘Yr’ means ‘bow’ in the Icelandic rune poem, ed. Dickins, op. cit.; both rune and definition may have been borrowed from O. N.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Ior’ is another unknown word, and ‘eel’ (normally O. E. ‘æl’) is a guess from context. The only other creature at all amphibious that looks like a fish is a newt. R. W. V. Elliott (1955) argues that the word is really ‘ear’, as in the next and last rune, but with the alternative meaning of ‘sea’.

### *The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn*

<sup>1</sup> ‘Breosttoga’ is glossed by ‘chieftain’ in R.J. Menner’s edition (1941), and translated accordingly as ‘Führer’ by F. Wild (1964). It is an unusual compound, however, paralleled only by ‘folctoga, heretoga’; B-T (1898) translate ‘breast-leader’, which is accurate if hard to understand. The word, like ‘ræswan’, seems chosen to show that, though the disputants are eminent men, they are not so in a simply military way.

<sup>2</sup> The countries in the following list are identified for the most part by Menner (1941). The ASPR editor suggests that the list was intended ‘to do no more than suggest Saturn’s wide academic experience’.

<sup>3</sup> Solomon refers to the episode of the Tower of Babel, *Genesis* 11, 1-9.

<sup>4</sup> The manuscript reading ‘sæliðende’ does not alliterate. ‘Mereliðende’ was proposed by Grein (1858) and generally accepted.

<sup>5</sup> The following passage is studied exhaustively by Menner (1938). In his edition of 1941 he suggests further that line 36 ought to read ‘Filistina fruma, freond [or fæder] Nebrondes’. The ‘wulf’ would then be ‘a leader of the Philistines, the friend (or father) of Nimrod’.

<sup>6</sup> Menner in his edition follows B-T (1898) in translating ‘atercynn’ as ‘kinds of poison’, citing such parallels as ‘deorcyn’, ‘fugelcyn’, etc. One might note also, however, such words as ‘feorhcyn’, ‘eordcyn’, not ‘kinds of life, kinds of earth’, but ‘kinds of living creatures, kinds of creatures on the earth’.

<sup>7</sup> Here and in line 251 ‘ðreamedlan’ is emended by Menner to ‘ðreaniedlan’, ‘compelling force’ or ‘inevitable misfortune’. E. V. K. Dobbie does not follow suit in *ASPR*, but agrees that the existence of ‘ðreamedla’ is ‘at least uncertain’. It is found three times in Old English poetry, however, to ‘ðreaniedla’s’ once; and T. J. Gardner (1969) has suggested a new etymology for it and the translation ‘mental oppression’. This is an attractive suggestion here, if less so at line 251; Gardner’s parallels with ‘ofermedia’ on the one hand and ‘modþrea’ on the other are convincing.

<sup>8</sup> The translation here of ‘gesceaft’ (a difficult word which occurs six times in the poem) is prompted by Menner’s remarks on page 63 of his edition.

<sup>9</sup> The following passage has also been discussed in detail by Menner (1929).

<sup>10</sup> The manuscript here reads ‘eall ðeod’, ‘the whole people’, but as Menner says (1941), the emendation to ‘ælðeod’ suggested by A. R. von Vincenti (1904) is ‘very tempting’.

<sup>11</sup> The phrase means ‘the vessel of death’ (Wild, op. cit., ‘Gefäß des Todes’) or ‘the instruments of death’, as it is translated in the Authorised Version, *Psalms* 7, 13 (14 in the Vulgate). Menner (1929) has discussed the phrase’s history in Bible criticism, and its association with demonology.

<sup>12</sup> As written in the manuscript and printed here, lines 121-2 are alliteratively irregular. In his edition Menner re-arranges line 121 to obviate this, and suggests a more far-reaching re-arrangement in his notes. His first proposal, however, has Old Age outfighting the wild bird as well as the wolf, which is bathetic; and his second detaches ‘wulf’ from ‘oferwigeð’, ‘stanas’ from ‘oferbideð’, etc., even though the verbs and their objects are evidently paired.

<sup>13</sup> Menner follows F. Holthausen’s suggestion (1901), and in his edition adds ‘fyrd’ after ‘fræcnan’, ‘with the terrible army’.

<sup>14</sup> T. D. Hill (1970a) finds analogues to this passage in patristic literature.

<sup>15</sup> This neat emendation of the manuscript’s ‘nærende wæron’ was made by Menner (1941).

<sup>16</sup> An evident literary analogue to this remark is Theseus’s speech in lines 3041-6 of Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*; though critical opinion as to the value of *that* is also divided.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Neod’ is not in the manuscript, leaving the half-line without alliteration. It was suggested by E. A. Kock (1918); Menner prefers Holthausen’s ‘nearocræfte’ (1916), ‘proceeds with oppressive power’.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Hit’ presumably refers to ‘leoht’, ‘light’. To make sense of the passage that follows one needs to remember the superstition that dropped food, like spilt salt, belongs to the devil (see Menner’s edition, pages 137-8). But there is still an awkward transition from the dropped crumb (line 224) to the Host (line 227), two things connected only by being blessed.

<sup>19</sup> B-T (1898) translates ‘frumscyld’ firmly as ‘original sin’; Menner more cautiously suggests, ‘chief sin’, though this is not supported by other ‘frum’- compounds.

<sup>20</sup> The manuscript is here badly stained. J. C. Pope read line 277b as ‘oððæt he his tornes ne cuðe’, an attractive opinion adopted by Menner; the devil meant to breed his forces ‘until he should know no end of his spite (?) through internal generation’. But though R. I. Page (1965) confirmed several of Pope’s readings under ultra-violet light, he reported that ‘ne cuðe’ appears in fact to be ‘geuðe’, while the word in front of it is visible only as ..r.s.. It seems likely, then, that ‘tornes’ is wrong; but there is no other word that fits perfectly. It is tempting to assume that the gap contained some unrecorded word for ‘kingdom’, that ‘he’ means God and ‘ende’ a ‘region’ or ‘province’, as in B-T (1921) I (2) (b). The devil meant to breed ‘until, as a result of this internal generation, God granted (them) a province of his kingdom’.

<sup>21</sup> Menner follows Holthausen (1910) in adding ‘da feondas’ after ‘sindon’, to give a regular line: ‘these are the enemies who fight against us’. See, however, note 5 to *Maxims I*.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Bearn heofonwara’ could be the subject of ‘bebead’, if one is prepared to accept it as a slightly improper description of Christ, ‘the son of those who live in heaven’, (Wild, op. cit., ‘der himmlische Sohn’). Christ, then, ‘commanded them (the devils) to inhabit forever the surge of flame ...’

<sup>23</sup> The manuscript reading of line 299, ‘ðara ðe man man age’, neither alliterates nor makes sense. The version here is prompted by the note in *ASPR*; Menner has a more complicated emendation. ‘Dead’ is more comprehensible as the subject of ‘abæde’ than as the object (as in Menner and Wild); see Mitchell (1971), page 73. ‘Clæne’ is not in the manuscript, but supplied by Holthausen (1901).

<sup>24</sup> R. I. Page (1965) confirms several readings in this difficult passage, but rejects Pope’s ‘styred’ in line 304, and his ‘wille’ in line 305.

<sup>25</sup> The manuscript reads ‘cymed ofer ðære stylenan helle’ for lines 310-11, losing alliteration and balance. The presumed gap was filled by Grein (1858).

<sup>26</sup> T. D. Hill (1971) again sees a precise patristic reference.

<sup>27</sup> These last nine lines precede the rest of the poem in the manuscript and *ASPR*. It was, however, suggested by von Vincenti (1904), and generally agreed, that they did in fact constitute the end of the poem, misplaced by some accident. The reasons for thinking this are, briefly: the note of finality in the passage; the phrase

‘forcumen and forcyðed’, which links ironically with line 29; the words ‘sticien ... tomiddes’ which echo line 327, again ironically; and the way in which Saturn’s final pleasure in being beaten harmonises with his own earlier humility (line 73) and Solomon’s magnanimity (line 152).

### *Soul and Body*

<sup>1</sup> See the introduction for discussion of this belief.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Druh’ is a word not found elsewhere. Both Grein (1912) and Bosworth-Toller (1898) suggest ‘dust’ as a translation.

<sup>3</sup> If ‘Hwæt’ is an interjection here, as in the next verse and elsewhere, rather than an interrogative pronoun, object of ‘wite’, one might take this sentence as another rhetorical question aimed at the body’s silence: ‘What, are you blaming me, damned thing?’

<sup>4</sup> Christ is called ‘halig encgel’ or ‘engla beorhtast’ elsewhere in O. E. poetry (see *ASPR* Vol. II p. 126). But it is likely that this passage has been confused by a copyist; the version of the poem in the Exeter Book has ‘þe þurh engel’: ‘and the almighty Ruler sent you your soul by an angel ... by his own hand’.

<sup>5</sup> This is a repellent and ascetic sentiment. A more charitable translation is R. K. Gordon’s ‘thou didst not think that thou wert sorely *troubled* by flesh and sinful lusts’ (1954), following Grein’s ‘du durchs Fleisch ... mächtig warst *bewegt*’ (1859). But both these translators have adopted the Exeter Book reading of ‘ges-tyred’ for ‘gestryned’: this indeed makes good sense, but the Vercelli reading is not inconsistent with the poet’s attitudes.

<sup>6</sup> Here I have, myself inconsistently, felt obliged to adopt the Exeter Book reading, ‘gescenta’, for the Vercelli one, ‘gesynta’, ‘safety, success, prosperity’. The former is not recorded elsewhere, but must derive from ‘gescendan’, ‘to put to shame’. The *ASPR* editors insist that ‘gesynta’ ‘must be allowed to stand’, translating ‘shalt thou on the great day of my prosperity suffer in shame’. But the soul never elsewhere thinks that its fate will be different from that of its body, indeed it repeatedly says the opposite. The dot over the ‘y’ in the Vercelli MS may indicate some early awareness of an error.

<sup>7</sup> Here the scribe has lost track of the rhythm. As he writes the poem (see Textual Variants) neither 82b nor 84b scan, and 83 does not alliterate properly. A slightly different arrangement of the words in the Exeter Book version produces three more regular lines corresponding to 82-5 here, but without the clumsy repetition of ‘þær swa god wolde’.

<sup>8</sup> In two articles in *Notes and Queries* (1968 and 1969) T. D. Hill has suggested analogues for this thought rather closer than the obvious one mentioned in the introduction.

<sup>9</sup> The Exeter Book has ‘se geneþeo to’, ‘he is the first of all to set to’, possibly a better reading. It should be mentioned that in spite of this, and notes 4 to 7 above, the version of the poem in the Exeter Book is by no means always superior; it loses the sense on several occasions.

<sup>10</sup> There is no break between lines 159 and 161 in the MS, but ‘brucan’ is rarely if ever used intransitively to mean ‘to enjoy oneself’, as some have assumed. The line inserted was suggested by Grein in 1857; it makes 159-60 an echo of 101-2, one of several similar repetitions in the poem. Lines appear to have been dropped from O. E. poems quite frequently. The Vercelli version has up to seven lines not in Exeter (out of 126); Exeter has three not in Vercelli.

<sup>11</sup> It is a pity that the poem breaks off here, with the loss of a page, for the soul appears to be about to say something of the body’s social status: unless ‘geþungen þrymlice’ refers not to rank but to moral progress, ‘you had advanced with great zeal’, in which case ‘on woruldrice’ would mean no more than ‘when you were alive’.

### *The Descent into Hell*

<sup>1</sup> ‘Reon’ is a word not found elsewhere, and A. Campbell’s 1972 Supplement to Bosworth-Toller deletes it. The *ASPR* editors substitute the more common adjective ‘reonge’, ‘the sad ones meant to mourn’.

<sup>2</sup> See the introduction for comment on this surprising change of tone. It seems certain (from line 14 below) that the ‘beorg’ is Christ’s tomb; and it is then very hard to retain the MS reading ‘bliðne’ in line 8, unless one assumes perhaps that the ‘hæleð’ are Christ’s disciples, who regain courage once (‘þa’) the Maries (‘hy’) have met the angel, the ‘cheerful messenger’ (‘bliðne’), at the tomb, as in *Matt.* 28, 1-8.

<sup>3</sup> The traditional date of the Decollation of John is August the 29th, rather more than six, though slightly less than seven months before the traditional date of the Crucifixion, Mar. 25th. *Luke* 1, 26 and 36 both suggest that Christ was six months younger than his cousin John.

<sup>4</sup> Full accounts of the damage to the MS of this poem are given by R. W. Chambers and R. Flower, in ch. VI of their facsimile edition (with M. Förster) of the Exeter Book (1933); as also by W. S. Mackie in his edition of 1934. The notes here and brackets in the text do not attempt to indicate all the letters that have been damaged, but only those about which there may be reasonable doubt.

In line 25 there is no gap after ‘mæges’, nor any damage, but ‘sið’ is at the bottom of the next line of the MS; the copyist may have been confused. In line 28

the ‘t’ of ‘gesohte’ and ‘si’ of ‘siex’ are both damaged, but marked as visible by Chambers and Flower, and agreed by all editors. In line 29 Chambers and Flower think the letter after ‘Nu’ is ‘s’ or ‘f’, but Mackie thinks it is the top of an ‘i’. ‘Nu is se fyrst’ is the best order metrically, and is generally accepted. The suggestion adopted for lines 30-31 is that of F. Holthausen, *Anglia Beiblatt* 46 (1935), page 10; Mackie suggests ‘witod telle’, ‘I consider it certain’. In line 32, ‘sylfa’, suggested by Grein (1857), provides a long downstroke in the right place for the MS (fourth letter), and is all but certain.

<sup>5</sup> See the introduction for remarks on this disputed phrase.

<sup>6</sup> Between ‘þu’ and ‘ige’ in line 60 there is room for about six letters. Mackie reads ‘us þus sarige’, but in this poem the scribe three times (lines 94, 96, 126) writes ‘usic’ and then deletes ‘ic’. If he had done this here as well there would only be room for ‘us sarige’. The ‘i’ in ‘sarige’ is fairly clear, and the letter before it could be ‘r’. In line 61 ‘sceoldon’ was suggested by Holthausen, loc. cit., and is very probable; but there has been no agreement over what follows. Line 62 is usually emended more drastically than it has been here. In line 63 Chambers and Flower think that ‘the word following “wræccan” shows fragments of descenders in the first, fourth, and fifth letters’; if this is so, and the word alliterates on ‘w’, as it should, there are few possibilities besides ‘wonspedgan’ of the right length. Grein’s ‘wergan’ is too short. In lines 64 and 65 the ‘an’ of ‘niðlocan’ is very likely, but the word following might be ‘to’, as Mackie suggests, rather than ‘oððe’, as the *ASPR* editors propose.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Swa’ could be correlative, as Mackie has it, op. cit.: ‘as we all believe that Thou wilt’. This gives a long though not a confused sentence.

<sup>8</sup> In lines 90-91 ‘hreowende’ and ‘mændon’ have been accepted since Grein’s edition of 1857, but after that there is little agreement. The top of ‘t’ and probably ‘þ’ in ‘oþþæt þu’ are visible, and ‘þu’ is in any case necessary somewhere to introduce ‘bi-mengest’. As the *ASPR* editors remark, ‘þu us sohtest’ makes good sense in line 92, but is probably too long, especially if ‘us’ was written first as ‘usic’; ‘þu sylfa’ is too short. Reconstructing line 93 is made harder by the fact that ‘bimengan’ occurs nowhere else. My suggestions lean heavily on *Beowulf* 1449 and *Christ* 145-6; but ‘moldgrundas’ is not recorded as a compound in Anglo-Saxon. ‘Modigust’, however, is the only likely superlative that alliterates.

The whole interpretation of lines 92-4, it should be noted, is made even more questionable by doubt as to who ‘þu’ is – Christ, or Mary? The latter is more probable in context, but ‘modigust’ in line 93 is presumably nominative, and not applicable to Mary. Nevertheless a reconstruction of lines 92-5 with reference to her would not be impossible.

<sup>9</sup> See the introduction for discussion of the preceding eight lines. The scribe seems to have taken 103-6 as parallel with 99-102; but ‘mostan’ in 106 is antithetical to

‘Ne mostan’ in 101. It is this which prompts the replacement of the ungrammatical ‘nales’ of line 105 in the MS by ‘mostes’ as suggested by Grein (1857) and accepted by Mackie (1934). The past tense of all three uses of ‘mostes’, ‘mostan’ remains troublesome to translate; see B. Mitchell (1971), page 114, for a note on the verb.

<sup>10</sup> The monotony of this passage makes reconstruction relatively easy. In line 119 the first letter of ‘þinum’ is missing, but certain. ‘Weoruda dr(yhten)’ is a set phrase, while ‘ond for’ is predictable; the last letter is partly visible. Most of ‘Marian’ can be seen in line 122, which makes Mackie’s suggestion (adopted here) very probable; other proposals discussed in *ASPR III*, page 359, involve emending ‘nama’ unnecessarily. Something like the ‘e’ and ‘g’ of ‘englum’ can be seen in line 124, confirming Cramer’s reconstruction of 1897. Only line 125 is difficult; for though Grein’s suggestion of ‘on þa swiþran hond’ fits the four descenders still visible in the MS, it also leaves a slight gap. There seems to be nothing appropriate, however, that one could insert.

### *The Judgement Day I*

<sup>1</sup> In a paragraph of introduction to this poem W. F. Bolton (1965) suggests that the preceding sentence is meant to ‘draw the poet — and his audience — into the abstract scheme’, implying that the ‘spræc’ is the first seven lines of the poem, and that what has been said in them ‘is no small assertion to make’. This is a feasible and attractive translation, but ‘spræc’ in line 101 is definitely the conclave to which all souls are summoned.

<sup>2</sup> Bosworth-Toller (1921) suggest ‘after terror has become the portion of the spirit’, but I assume that ‘gryre’ here means ‘what causes terror’, not ‘the state of being terrified’.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Godes dæl’ could mean three things: (1) with short vowel in the first word, ‘the share allotted by God’; (2) with long vowel, ‘the share allotted to the good man’; (3) with abstract sense, the share of good fortune, the quantity of good things standing ready for the righteous in heaven. I have chosen the latter translation largely because of the analogy with ‘þæs brogan dæl’ in line 71.

<sup>4</sup> There is no gap in the MS, but ‘fisces eþel’ is not an acceptable variation of ‘wætres’, even if there were no break in the alliteration. In 1857 Grein suggested ‘and frecne grimmed’, ‘and the home of the fish rages furiously’. This is a good line, close in phrasing and context to *Riddles 2, 5*, ‘hwælmere hlimmed, hlude grimmed’. My own more unimaginative proposal assumes repetition from lines 1-2, in the same way as line 37 echoes line 9.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Lyftes mægen’ might mean ‘the power of the sky’ in some more general sense than I have translated it.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Oncweþan’ means ‘to reply’; B-T (1921) suggest tentatively that the phrase here means ‘make (this) response’. I think that the poet wants his readers to say what follows to themselves; ‘ic’ in the next line refers to us as well as to him. He is telling us the moral of his poem in the most direct way possible, concerned as always lest we should read it but not believe it, not act on it. Mackie (1934) translates similarly.



## TEXTUAL VARIANTS

The relevant volumes of the *ASPR* should be consulted for full details of emendations and their proposers; acknowledgement is given here only to the most important reconstructions, and to suggestions made after the date of *ASPR*. Word-divisions in manuscripts are not recorded, except when they may affect translation. The reading in the text is given first, MS reading second.

### *Precepts* (Exeter Book, Vol. III *ASPR*)

2. mon *not in MS.* 23. wyrsan; wyrsa. 31. weorðe; weorð. 53. geongum; geogum. 73. forð fyrngewritu; fyrrn forð gewritu. 94. fæder lare; fæderlare.

### *Vainglory* (Exeter Book, Vol. III *ASPR*)

3. onwreach; onwearh. 8. witan; witon. 10. ne *not in MS.* 12. druncen; drucen. 13. mæþelhegendra; mæþel hergendra. 24. þringed; þringe. 36. feoþ; feoh. 39. sceolde; scealde. 60. widledan; widlædan. 70. feond; freond. 82. a hycgende; ahycgende.

### *The Fortunes of Men* (Exeter Book, Vol. III *ASPR*)

21. beame; beane. 43. Sumne; Sum. 43. brond aswencan; brondas þencan. 44. lig; lif. 63. forð; forh. 83. sceacol; gearo. 84. neomegende; neome cende. 93. weoroda nergend; weorodanes god.

### *Maxims I* (Exeter Book, Vol. III *ASPR*)

*IA* 38. nyde; nyd. 40. hi ne; hine. 63. eorod; worod.

*IB* 15. leof; lof. 19. æþelinga; æþelinge. 32. fyrwetgeornra; fyrwet geonra. 40. alyfed; alyfeð. 48. hald; adl.

*IC* 2. lofes; leofes. 15. wunde; wunden. 39. eorles; eorle. 40. forbegan; begen. This emendation is based on a suggestion by D. Whitelock, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 31 (1949), page 91. 43. mon tomælde; mon to mon to mædle. 47. Idle hond æmetlan geneah; idle hond æmet lange neah. 50. no gap in MS. 62. broðor; bro. 63. serede; nerede. 64. aþolware; aþolwarum.

### *Maxims II* (MS Cotton Tiberius B.i, Vol. VI *ASPR*)

19. earm; earn. 24. mencgan; mecgan. 40. of; on.

### *The Rune Poem* (G. Hickes, *Thesaurus ...*, 1705, Vol. VI *ASPR*)

8. anfeng ys; anfen-gys. 23. sorge; forge. 26. scuras; scura. 31. geworuht; ge worulit. 37. wyn; wynan. 39. on middum *not in Hickes*, supplied by Dickins (1915). 41. secg eard; seccard. 53. heah; þeah. 56. hæleþ ymbe; hæleþe ymb. 59. ‘Man’; Hickes has runic letter followed by ‘an’. 60. oðrum;

odrum. 66. gymeð; gym. 68. eft; est. 72. rihtes; rihter. 73. bolde; blode.  
 86. fyrdgeatewa; fyrd geacewa. 87. 'Ior'; Hickes has 'io' written above 'iar'.  
 87. eafix; ea fixa. 88. foldan; faldan. 90. 'Ear'; by the runic letter Hickes has  
 written, besides 'ear', 'tir' and 'car'.

*The Second Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* (MS 422, Corpus Christi College Cambridge, Vol. VI *ASPR*)

NB: (M) = R. J. Menner's edition (1941), (P) = R. I. Page's article (1965)

2. ræswan; ræswum. 5. S(atu)rnus: so (M); (P) Sa(t)urnus. 5. sumra; sumru (P)  
 6. c(æ)g(a): so (M). 7. (le)ornenga: so (M). 8. mer(c): (M) mer(e); (P) mer(c).  
 8. (Ea)st: so (M). 15 Mathean; mathea, (M) Mathean. 16. cludas; claudas,  
 (M) cludas. 19. Bitðinia; pitðinia, (M) Bitðinia. 20. Pamphilia; pam hphilia,  
 (M) Pamphilia. 22. eðel *not in MS*. 23. Hierusalem; hierusa *at end of page*.  
 24. oððe ic ðe s(a)d(ie): so (P). 25. spr(e)c(e): so (M). 28. g(um)ena: so (M),  
 (P) g(u)mena. 31. ðæt; ðær. 34. mereliðende; sæliðende, see note 4.  
 35. (wer)ðeodum; (M) w(e)rðeodum, (P) þ.nðeodum (?). 36. see note 5.  
 37. fif and twentig; xxv. 38. deað; of deað. 41. n(ea)t; so (P). 54. twentig;  
 xx. 70. fiftig; l. 77. Filistina; filitina. 81. ælðeod; eall ðeod, see note 10.  
 85. feower; iiii. 94. ðritig; xxx. 98. gebendan; gebeindan. 103. fruman;  
 fruma. 103. Vasa Mortis; uasa mortis. 110. and *not in MS*. 116. ræced;  
 receð, perhaps with cedilla under e. 119. standendne; stan dene. 127. he; hie.  
 133. see note 13. 149. Wa; swa. 161. næren ðe; nærende, see note 15.  
 166. eorð(we)lan: so (M), (P) suggests more letters missing. 166. gedæled; gode  
 led. 180. mægn; mæggn. 184. forildan; for ildo. 205. ænga; ængan,  
 (M) ænga. 208. gesceaft; ge seafst. 217. neodcræfte; neod *not in MS*, see note  
 17. 240. eorle; eorl, (M) eorle. 249. streンgra; strenra. 260. scyðeð; scyð,  
 (M) scyðeð. 274. dierne; diere. 277, see note 21. 278. æðel(a): so (M),  
 (P) æðelr(a). (P) confirms ðeoden, (M) (ð)eoden. 297. edwende(n); *ASPR*,  
 (M) edwende. There is a blur between edwende and aðenden. 299. a man age;  
 man man age, see note 23. 300. ðe *not in MS*. 301. clæne *not in MS*, see note  
 23. 303. Æghwylc(um men): so (M). 304-5. (P) confirms heofona, ðonne,  
 grædig, all queried by (M), but rejects other suggestions, see note 24. 310-11. see  
 note 25.

*Soul and Body I* (Vercelli Book, Vol. II *ASPR*)

2. sið; sið sið. 22a. ðu; ðuðu. 24. geeodest; geodest. 36. wäre; wær.  
 36. þritig; xxx. 38. god; goð. 40. ic *not in MS*, supplied from Exeter Book.  
 47. wið; mid. 48. nieda; meda. Exeter neoda. 49. gescenta; gesynta. Exeter  
 gescenta, see note 6. 51. ancenneda; acenneda. Exeter ancenda. 57. magon;  
 mæg. Exeter magon. 57. þa; þy. Exeter þa. 59. boldwela; gold wela.  
 63. unwillum; unwillu. 82. wildra deora; wild deora. Exeter wildra deora, see  
 note 7. 84. wyrma cynna; wyrmcynna. See note 7. 105. Ligeð; liget.  
 117. to; to me. Exeter to, see note 9. 119. þær; þæt. 123. he *not in MS*, sup-

plied from Exeter. 125. *æt not in MS*, supplied from Exeter. 132. sprecað;  
sprecat. 135. þeah ðe; ah ðæ. 160. *not in MS*, see note 10.

*The Descent into Hell* (Exeter Book, Vol. III *ASPR*)

8. bliðe; bliðne. 25. sið *not in MS*. 28-32. for damaged letters, see note 4.  
42. weoruda; weorud. 60-65. for damaged letters, see note 6. 62. mon gebinde  
gebinded; monige bindeð. 79. gecyðdest; ge cyddest. 87. helleedorum; helle  
doru. 90-94. for damaged letters, see note 8. 105. Mostes; nales, see note 9.  
108. gedyrftum; gedyrstum. 119-25. for damaged letters, see note 10. 128. fo  
128. fore *not in MS*. 129. swaþeah; swa þean.

*The Judgement Day I* (Exeter Book, Vol. III *ASPR*)

9. onæled; onhæled. 23. bold; blod. 30. ferðgleaw; forð gleaw. 39. see  
note 4. 42. geworhtan; geweorhtan, e possibly underdotted for deletion.  
64. hælend; hæ lendes. 70. ful; fol. 74. monegum; mongegum. 75. gescad-  
en; gesceaden, e again underdotted. 95. gehwylc; gewylc. 103. cyþan; cyþam.  
108. hæleþa; hæle la.

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