## Beowulf and Grendel.age rating 8 plus

## From Myths and Legends from all nations byLogan Marshall.

### Long ago there ruled over the Danes a king called Hrothgar. He gained success and glory in war, so that his loyal kinsmen willingly obeyed him, and everything prospered in his land. One day it came into his mind that he would build a princely banquet-hall, where he might entertain both the young and old of his kingdom; and he had the work widely made known to many a tribe over the earth, so that they might bring rich gifts to beautify the hall. In course of time the banquet-house was built and towered aloft, high and battlemented. Then Hrothgar gave it the name of Heorot, and called his guests to the banquet, and gave them gifts of rings and other treasures; and afterwards every day the joyous sound of revelry rang loud in the hall, with the music of the harp and the clear notes of the singers. But it was not long before the pleasure of the king's men was broken, for a wicked demon began to work mischief against them. This cruel spirit was called Grendel, and he dwelt on the moors and among the fens. One night he came to Heorot when the noble guests lay at rest after the feast, and seizing thirty thanes as they slept, set off on his homeward journey, exulting in his booty. At break of day his deed was known to all men, and great was the grief among the thanes. The good King Hrothgar also sat in sorrow, suffering heavy distress for the death of his warriors. Not long afterwards Grendel again appeared, and wrought a yet worse deed of murder. After that the warriors no longer dared to sleep at Heorot, but sought out secret resting-places, leaving the great house empty.

### A long time passed. For the space of twelve winters Grendel waged a perpetual feud against Hrothgar and his people; the livelong night he roamed over the misty moors, visiting Heorot, and destroying both the tried warriors and the young men whenever he was able. Hrothgar was broken-hearted, and many were the councils held in secret to deliberate what it were best to do against these fearful terrors; but nothing availed to stop the fiend's ravages. Now the tale of Grendel's deeds went forth into many lands; and amongst those who heard of it were the Geats, whose king was Higelac. Chief of his thanes was a noble and powerful warrior named Beowulf, who resolved to go to the help of the Danes. He bade his men make ready a good sea-boat, that he might go across the wild swan's path to seek out Hrothgar and aid him; and his people encouraged him to go on that dangerous errand even though he was dear to them. So Beowulf chose fourteen of his keenest warriors, and sailed away over the waves in his well-equipped vessel, till he came within sight of the cliffs and mountains of Hrothgar's kingdom. The Danish warder, who kept guard over the coast, saw them as they were making their ship fast and carrying their bright weapons on shore. So he mounted his horse and rode to meet them, bearing in his hand his staff of office; and he questioned them closely as to whence they came and what their business was.

### Then Beowulf explained their errand, and the warder, when he had heard it, bade them pass onwards, bearing their weapons, and gave orders that their ship should be safely guarded. Soon they came within sight of the fair palace Heorot, and the warder showed them the way to Hrothgar's court, and then bade them farewell, and returned to keep watch upon the coast. Then the bold thanes marched forward to Heorot, their armor and their weapons glittering as they went. Entering the hall, they set their shields and bucklers against the walls, placed their spears upright in a sheaf together, and sat down on the benches, weary with their seafaring. Then a proud liegeman of Hrothgar's stepped forward and asked: "Whence bring ye your shields, your gray war-shirts and frowning helmets, and this sheaf of spears? Never saw I men of more valiant aspect." "We are Higelac's boon companions," answered Beowulf. "Beowulf is my name, and I desire to declare my errand to the great prince, thy lord, if he will grant us leave to approach him." So Wulfgar, another of Hrothgar's chieftains, went out to the king where he sat with the assembly of his earls and told him of the arrival of the strangers, and Hrothgar received the news with joy, for he had known Beowulf when he was a boy, and had heard of his fame as a warrior. Therefore he bade Wulfgar bring him to his presence, and soon Beowulf stood before him and cried:

### "Hail to thee, Hrothgar! I have heard the tale of Grendel, and my people, who know my strength and prowess, have counseled me to seek thee out. For I have wrought great deeds in the past, and now I shall do battle against this monster. Men say that so thick is his tawny hide that no weapon can injure him. I therefore disdain to carry sword or shield into the combat, but will fight with the strength of my arm only, and either I will conquer the fiend or he will bear away my dead body to the moor. Send to Higelac, if I fall in the fight, my beautiful breastplate. I have no fear of death, for Destiny must ever be obeyed." Then Hrothgar told Beowulf of the great sorrow caused to him by Grendel's terrible deeds, and of the failure of all the attempts that had been made by the warriors to overcome him; and afterwards he bade him sit down with his followers to partake of a meal. So a bench was cleared for the Geats, and a thane waited upon them, and all the noble warriors gathered together, and a great feast was held once more in Heorot with song and revelry. Waltheow, Hrothgar's queen, came forth also, and handed the wine-cup to each of the thanes, pledging the king in joyful mood and thanking Beowulf for his offer of help. At last all the company arose to go to rest; and Hrothgar entrusted the guardianship of Heorot to Beowulf with cheering words, and so bade him good night. Then all left the hall, save only a watch appointed by Hrothgar, and Beowulf himself with his followers, who laid themselves down to rest.

### No long time passed before Grendel came prowling from his home on the moors under the misty slopes. Full of his evil purpose, he burst with fury into the hall and strode forward raging, a hideous, fiery light gleaming from his eyes. In the hall lay the warriors asleep, and Grendel laughed in his heart as he gazed at them, thinking to feast upon them all. Quickly he seized a sleeping warrior and devoured him; then, stepping forward, he reached out his hand towards Beowulf as he lay at rest. But the hero was ready for him, and seized his arm in a deadly grip such as Grendel had never felt before. Terror arose in the monster's heart, and his mind was bent on flight; but he could not get away. Then Beowulf stood upright and grappled with him firmly, and the two rocked to and fro in the struggle, knocking over benches and shaking the hall with the violence of their fight. Suddenly a new and terrible cry arose, the cry of Grendel in fear and pain, for never once did Beowulf relax his hold upon him. Then many of Beowulf's earls drew their swords and rushed to aid their master; but no blade could pierce him and nothing but Beowulf's mighty strength could prevail. At last the monster's arm was torn off at the shoulder, and sick unto death, he fled to the fens, there to end his joyless life. Then Beowulf rejoiced at his night's work, wherein he had freed Heorot forever from the fiend's ravages.

### Now on the morrow the warriors flocked to the hall; and when they heard what had taken place, they went out and followed Grendel's tracks to a mere upon the moors, into which he had plunged and given up his life. Then, sure of his death, they returned rejoicing to Heorot, talking of Beowulf's glorious deed; and there they found the king and queen and a great company of people awaiting them. And now there was great rejoicing and happiness. Fair and gracious were the thanks that Hrothgar gave to Beowulf, and great was the feast prepared in Heorot. Cloths embroidered with gold were hung along the walls and the hall was decked in every possible way. When all were seated at the feast, Hrothgar bade the attendants bring forth his gifts to Beowulf as a reward of victory. He gave him an embroidered banner, a helmet and breastplate, and a valuable sword, all adorned with gold and richly ornamented. Also he gave orders to the servants to bring into the court eight horses, on one of which was a curiously adorned and very precious saddle, which the king was wont to use himself when he rode to practice the sword-game. These also he gave to Beowulf, thus like a true man requiting his valiant deeds with horses and other precious gifts. He bestowed treasures also on each of Beowulf's followers and gave orders that a price should be paid in gold for the man whom the wicked Grendel had slain.

### After this there arose within the hall the din of voices and the sound of song; the instruments also were brought out and Hrothgar's minstrel sang a ballad for the delight of the warriors. Waltheow too came forth, bearing in her train presents for Beowulf--a cup, two armlets, raiment and rings, and the largest and richest collar that could be found in all the world. Now when evening came Hrothgar departed to his rest, and the warriors cleared the hall and lay down to sleep once more, with their shields and armor beside them as was their custom. But Beowulf was not with them, for another resting-place had been assigned to him that night, for all thought that there was now no longer any danger to be feared. But in this they were mistaken, as they soon learnt to their cost. For no sooner were they all asleep than Grendel's mother, a monstrous witch who dwelt at the bottom of a cold mere, came to Heorot to avenge her son and burst into the hall. The thanes started up in terror, hastily grasping their swords; but she seized upon Asher, the most beloved of Hrothgar's warriors, who still lay sleeping, and bore him off with her to the fens, carrying also with her Grendel's arm, which lay at one end of the hall. Then there arose an uproar and the sound of mourning in Heorot. In fierce and gloomy mood Hrothgar summoned Beowulf and told him the ghastly tale, begging him, if he dared, to go forth to seek out the monster and destroy it.

### Full of courage, Beowulf answered with cheerful words, promising that Grendel's mother should not escape him; and soon he was riding forth fully equipped on his quest, accompanied by Hrothgar and many a good warrior. They were able to follow the witch's tracks right through the forest glades and across the gloomy moor, till they came to a spot where some mountain trees bent over a hoar rock, beneath which lay a dreary and troubled lake; and there beside the water's edge lay the head of Asher, and they knew that the witch must be at the bottom of the water. Full of grief, the warriors sat down, while Beowulf arrayed himself in his cunningly fashioned coat of mail and his richly ornamented helmet. Then he turned to Hrothgar and spoke a last word to him. "If the fight go against me, great chieftain, be thou a guardian to my thanes, my kinsmen and my trusty comrades; and send thou to Higelac those treasures that thou gavest me, that he may know thy kindness to me. Now will I earn glory for myself, or death shall take me away." So saying, he plunged into the gloomy lake, at the bottom of which was Grendel's mother. Very soon she perceived his approach, and rushing forth, grappled with him and dragged him down to her den, where many horrible sea-beasts joined in the fight against him. This den was so fashioned that the water could not enter it, and it was lit by the light of a fire that shone brightly in the midst of it.

### And now Beowulf drew his sword and thrust at his terrible foe; but the weapon could not injure her, and he was forced to fling it away and trust in the powerful grip of his arms as he had done with Grendel. Seizing the witch, he shook her till she sank down on the ground; but she quickly rose again and requited him with a terrible hand-clutch, which caused Beowulf to stagger and then fall. Throwing herself upon him, she seized a dagger to strike him; but he wrenched himself free and once more stood upright. Then he suddenly perceived an ancient sword hanging upon the wall of the den, and seized it as a last resource. Fierce and savage, but well-nigh hopeless, he struck the monster heavily upon the neck with it. Then, to his joy, the blade pierced right through her body and she sank down dying. [Illustration: BEOWULF FACE TO FACE WITH THE FIRE-BREATHING DRAGON] At that moment the flames of the fire leapt up, throwing a brilliant light over the den; and there against the wall Beowulf beheld the dead body of Grendel lying on a couch. With one swinging blow of the powerful sword he struck off his head as a trophy to carry to Hrothgar. But now a strange thing happened, for the blade of the sword began to melt away even as ice melts, and soon nothing was left of it save the hilt. Carrying this and Grendel's head, Beowulf now left the den and swam upwards to the surface of the lake. There the thanes met him with great rejoicings, and some quickly helped him to undo his armor, while others prepared to carry the great head of Grendel back to Heorot. It took four men to carry it, and ghastly, though wonderful, was the sight of it.

### And now once more the warriors assembled in Heorot, and Beowulf recounted to Hrothgar the full tale of his adventure and presented to him the hilt of the wonderful sword. Again the king thanked him from the depth of his heart for his valiant deeds; and as before a fair feast was prepared and the warriors made merry till night came and they repaired to rest, certain this time of their safety. Now on the morrow Beowulf and his nobles made ready to depart to their own land; and when they were fully equipped they went to bid farewell to Hrothgar. Then Beowulf spoke, saying: "Now are we voyagers eager to return to our lord Higelac. We have been right well and heartily entertained, O king, and if there is aught further that I can ever do for thee, then I shall be ready for thy service. If ever I hear that thy neighbors are again persecuting thee, I will bring a thousand thanes to thy aid; and I know that Higelac will uphold me in this." "Dear are thy words to me, O Beowulf," Hrothgar made answer, "and great is thy wisdom. If Fate should take away the life of Higelac, the Geats could have no better king than thou; and hereafter there shall never more be feuds between the Danes and the Geats, for thou by thy great deeds hast made a lasting bond of friendship between them." Then Hrothgar gave more gifts to Beowulf and bade him seek his beloved people and afterwards come back again to visit him, for so dearly had he grown to love him that he longed to see him again.

### So the two embraced and bade each other farewell with great affection, and then at last Beowulf went down to where his ship rode at anchor and sailed away with his followers to his own country, taking with him the many gifts that Hrothgar had made to him. And coming to Higelac's court, he told him of his adventures, and having shown him the treasure, gave it all up to him, so loyal and true was he. But Higelac in return gave Beowulf a goodly sword and seven thousand pieces of gold and a manor-house, also a princely seat for him to dwell in. There Beowulf lived in peace, and not for many years was he called to fresh adventures.

## Beowulf and the fire dragon.

### After his return to the land of the Geats, Beowulf served Higelac faithfully till the day of the king's death, which befell in an expedition that he made to Friesland. Beowulf was with him on that disastrous journey, and only with difficulty did he escape with his life. But when he returned as a poor solitary fugitive to his people, Hygd, Higelac's wife, offered him the kingdom and the king's treasures, for she feared that her young son Heardred was not strong enough to hold the throne of his fathers against invading foes. Beowulf, however, would not accept the kingdom, but rather chose to uphold Heardred among the people, giving him friendly counsel and serving him faithfully and honorably. But before very long Heardred was killed in battle, and then at last Beowulf consented to become king of the Geats. For fifty years he ruled well and wisely and his people prospered. But at last trouble came in the ravages of a terrible dragon, and once more Beowulf was called forth to a terrific combat. For three hundred years this dragon had kept watch over a hoard of treasure on a mountain by the seashore in the country of the Geats. The treasure had been hidden in a cave under the mountain by a band of sea-robbers; and when the last of them was dead the dragon took possession of the cave and of the treasure and kept fierce watch over them. But one day a poor man came to the spot while the dragon was fast asleep and carried off part of the treasure to his master. When the dragon awoke he soon discovered the man's footprints, and on examining the cave he found that part of the gold and splendid jewels had disappeared. In wrathful and savage mood he sought all round the mountain for the robber, but could find no one.

### So when evening came he went forth eager for revenge, and throwing out flashes of fire in every direction, he began to set fire to all the land. Beowulf's own princely manor-house was burnt down and terrible destruction was wrought on every hand, till day broke and the fire-dragon returned to his den. Great was Beowulf's grief at this dire misfortune, and eager was his desire for vengeance. He scorned to seek the foe with a great host behind him, nor did he dread the combat in any way, for he called to mind his many feats of war, and especially his fight with Grendel. So he quickly had fashioned a mighty battle-shield, made entirely of iron, for he knew that the wooden one that he was wont to use would be burnt up by the flames of the fire-dragon. Then he chose out eleven of his earls, and together they set out for the mountain, led thither by the man who had stolen the treasure. When they came to the mouth of the cave Beowulf bade farewell to his companions, for he was resolved to fight single-handed against the foe. "Many a fight have I fought in my youth," he said, "and now once more will I, the guardian of my people, seek the combat. I would not bear any sword or other weapon against the dragon if I thought that I could grapple with him as I did with the monster Grendel. But I fear that I shall not be able to approach so close to this foe, for he will send forth hot, raging fire and venomous breath. Yet am I resolute in mood, fearless and resolved not to yield one foot's-breadth to the monster.

### "Tarry ye here on the hill, my warriors, and watch which of us two will survive the deadly combat, for this is no enterprise for you. I only can attempt it, because such great strength has been given to me. Therefore I will do battle alone and will either slay the dragon and win the treasure for my people or fall in the fight, as destiny shall appoint." When he had spoken thus Beowulf strode forward to the fight, armed with his iron shield, his sword and his dagger. A stone arch spanned the mouth of the cave, and on one side a boiling stream, hot as though with raging fires, rushed forth. Undaunted by it, Beowulf uttered a shout to summon the dragon to the fight. Immediately a burning breath from the monster came out of the rock, the earth rumbled and then the dragon rushed forth to meet his fate. Standing with his huge shield held well before him, Beowulf received the attack and struck from beneath his shield at the monster's side. But his blade failed him and turned aside, and the blow but served to enrage the dragon, so that he darted forth such blasting rays of deadly fire that Beowulf was well nigh overwhelmed and the fight went hard with him. Now his eleven chosen comrades could see the combat from where they stood; and one of them, Beowulf's kinsman Wiglaf, was moved to great sorrow at the sight of his lord's distress. At last he could bear it no longer, but grasped his wooden shield and his sword and cried to the other thanes:

### "Remember how we promised our lord in the banquet-hall, when he gave us our helmets and swords and battle-gear, that we would one day repay him for his gifts. Now is the day come that our liege lord has need of the strength of good warriors. We must go help him, even though he thought to accomplish this mighty work alone, for we can never return to our homes if we have not slain the enemy and saved our king's life. Rather than live when he is dead, I will perish with him in this deadly fire." Then he rushed through the noisome smoke to his lord's side, crying: "Dear Beowulf, take courage. Remember thy boast that thy valor shall never fail thee in thy lifetime, and defend thyself now with all thy might, and I will help thee." But the other warriors were afraid to follow him, so that Beowulf and Wiglaf stood alone to face the dragon. As soon as the monster advanced upon them, Wiglaf's wooden shield was burnt away by the flames, so that he was forced to take refuge behind Beowulf's iron shield; and this time when Beowulf struck with his sword, it was shivered to pieces. Then the dragon flung himself upon him and caught him up in his arms, crushing him till he lay senseless and covered with wounds. But now Wiglaf showed his valor and strength, and smote the monster with such mighty blows that at last the fire coming forth from him began to abate somewhat. Then Beowulf came once more to his senses, and drawing his deadly knife, struck with it from beneath; and at last the force of the blows from the two noble kinsmen felled the fierce fire-dragon and he sank down dead beside them.

### But Beowulf's wounds were very great, and he knew that the joys of life were ended for him and that death was very near. So while Wiglaf with wonderful tenderness unfastened his helmet for him and refreshed him with water, he spoke, saying: "Though I am sick with mortal wounds, there is yet some comfort remaining for me. For I have governed my people for fifty winters and kept them safe from invading foes; yet have not sought out quarrels nor led my kinsmen to dire slaughter when there was no need. Therefore the Ruler of all men will not blame me when my life departs from my body. "And now go thou quickly, dear Wiglaf, to spy out the treasure within the cave, so that I may see what wealth I have won for my people before I die." So Wiglaf went into the cave and there he saw many precious jewels, old vessels, helmets, gold armlets and other treasures, which excelled in beauty and number any that mankind has ever known. Moreover, high above the treasure flapped a marvelous gilded standard, from which came a ray of light which lit up all the cave. Then Wiglaf seized as much as he could carry of the precious spoils, and taking the standard also, hastened back to his lord, dreading lest he should find him already dead. Beowulf was very near his life's end, but when Wiglaf had again revived him with water, he had strength to speak once more. "Glad am I," he said, "that I have been able before my death to gain so much for my people. But now I may no longer abide here. Bid the gallant warriors burn my body on the headland here which juts into the sea, and afterwards raise a huge mound on the same spot, that the sailors who drive their vessels over the misty floods may call it Beowulf's Mound."

### Then the dauntless prince undid the golden collar from his neck and gave it to Wiglaf with his helmet and coat of mail, saying: "Thou art the last of all our race, for Fate has swept away all my kindred save thee to their doom, and now I also must join them," and with these words the aged king fell back dead. Now as Wiglaf sat by his lord, grieving sorely at his death, the other ten thanes who had shown themselves to be faithless and cowardly approached with shame to his side. Then Wiglaf turned to them, crying bitterly: "Truly our liege lord flung away utterly in vain the battle-gear that he gave ye. Little could he boast of his comrades when the hour of need came. I myself was able to give him some succor in the fight, but ye should have stood by him also to defend him. But now the giving of treasure shall cease for ye and ye will be shamed and will lose your land-right when the nobles learn of your inglorious deed. Death is better for every earl than ignominious life." After this Wiglaf summoned the other earls and told them of all that had happened and of the mound that Beowulf wished them to build. Then they gathered together at the mouth of the cave and gazed with tears upon their lifeless lord and looked with awe upon the huge dragon as it lay stiff in death beside its conqueror. Afterwards, led by Wiglaf, seven chosen earls entered the cave and brought forth all the treasure, while others busied themselves in preparing the funeral pyre.

### When all was ready and the huge pile of wood had been hung with helmets, war-shields and bright coats of mail, as befitted the funeral pyre of a noble warrior, the earls brought their beloved lord's body to the spot and laid it on the wood. Then they kindled the fire and stood by mourning and uttering sorrowful chants, while the smoke rose up and the fire roared and the body was consumed away. Afterwards they built a mound on the hill, making it high and broad so that it could be seen from very far away. Ten days they spent in building it; and because they desired to pay the highest of honors to Beowulf, they buried in it the whole of the treasure that the dragon had guarded, for no price was too heavy to pay as a token of their love for their lord. So the treasure even now remains in the earth, as useless as it was before. When at last the mound was completed, the noble warriors gathered together and rode around it, lamenting their king and singing the praise of his valor and mighty deeds. Thus mourned the people of the Geats for the fall of Beowulf, who of all kings in the world was the mildest and kindest, the most gracious to his people, and the most eager to win their praise.