

The Dream of the Rood

translated by

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Lo! I will tell the fairest of dreams, that came to me at midnight when mortal men abode in sleep. It seemed to me that I beheld a beauteous tree uplifted in the air, enwreathed with light, brightest of beams. All that beacon was enwrought with gold. Four jewels lay upon the earth, and five were at the crossing of the arms. All the winsome angels of the Lord gazed upon it through the firmament. Nor was that the cross indeed of any evil-doer, but holy spirits looked upon it, men on earth, and all the bright creation. Wondrous was that victor-tree, and I was stained with sin and wounded with my wickedness. I beheld the cross of glory shining in splendour, graced with hangings and adorned with gold. Worthily had jewels covered over all that forest tree.

Yet through the gold might I perceive the olden woe of wretched souls, when on the right side it began to bleed. In my sorrow I was greatly troubled, smitten of fear, before that winsome vision. I saw that beacon swiftly change in hangings and in hue; whiles was it all bedewed with moisture, with flowing blood befouled; and whiles adorned with treasure. Natheless, lying there a weary while, I gazed upon the Saviour's cross with rueful heart, till that I heard how it addressed me; that fairest of all trees began to speak:

"Many years have gone—yet still I have it in remembrance—since I was felled upon a forest's edge and wakened from my slumbers. Strange foes seized hold upon me and wrought me to a pageant and bade me lift aloft their wretched men. Men bore me on their shoulders, till that they set me on a hill; enough of foes, forsooth, fastened me there. Then I beheld the Lord of men hasting with mighty, steadfast heart, for He would fain ascend upon me. Yet might I not bow down nor break, against the word of God, what time I saw the compass of the earth tremble and shake. All those foes might I lay low; yet firm I stood.

“The Hero young—He was Almighty God—did off His raiment, steadfast, stout of heart With valour, in the sight of many men, He mounted up upon the lofty gallows, when He would fain redeem mankind. I trembled when the Hero clasped me. Yet dared I not incline unto the ground, nor fall upon the face of earth, but I must needs stand firm. As a cross was I lifted up; I bore aloft the righteous King, the Lord of heaven; I dared not bow me down.

“They pierced me through with darksome nails; on me the scars are manifest, the open, woeful wounds. Yet dared I not work harm to any one of them. They mocked us both together. All bedewed with blood was I, gushing from the Hero’s side, when He had yielded up His spirit. Many a dire affliction I bode upon that mount; beheld the Lord of hosts stretched out grievously. Darkness had compassed about with clouds the body of the wielding God, that lustrous radiance. Wan under heaven shadows went forth. And all creation wept, wailing the slaughter of its King. Christ was on the cross.

“Yet souls hasted from afar unto the Prince; I beheld it all. Sorely was I smit with sorrow, yet in lowliness, with enduring heart, I yielded to the hands of men. Then they took Almighty God and lifted Him from off His woeful torment; those war-wolves left me standing, overspread with blood; all wounded was I with their darts. There they laid Him down, weary of limb, and at His body’s head they stood and gazed upon the Lord of heaven. And for a little time He rested there, feeble after His great strife. These men began, in the sight of His slayers, to dig a sepulchre; out of the gleaming rock they carved it. And there they laid the God of victory. In the even-tide with woeful hearts they sang a dirge. Full soon must they depart again, soul-weary, from their mighty Prince. So with a little band He rested there.

“Yet weeping unto God we kept our station for a time. Then the Hero ... ascended up. Cold was His earthly frame, the winsome dwelling of the soul. And men began to hew us down unto the earth. That was a fearsome fate. In a deep trench they covered us; but there the friends and thanes of God found me. ... With silver and with gold they decked me. Now mayest thou know, beloved man, what deeds of evil I have suffered, what grievous woes. Now bliss is come, so that men revere me far and wide throughout the earth, and all the great Creation prayeth to

this beacon. On me the Son of God suffered a little time; wherefore in glory now I tower up beneath the sky; and I may bring healing unto every one of those that have regard for me.

“Of old was I the bitterest of tortures, loathsome to men, ere that I opened unto mortal men true way of life. Lo! the Prince of glory, the Warden of the heavenly realm, hath shewed me honour over all the forest trees, even as also to His mother, Mary, Almighty God shewed honour over all the race of women. And now, beloved man, I bid thee reveal this vision unto men, in speech proclaim it that it is the tree of glory, whereon Almighty God suffered for the many sins of man, the olden deeds of Adam.

“He drank the cup of death, yet in His mighty power the Lord arose, a succour unto men. He ascended into heaven, and hither in the day of judgment shall the Lord Himself, Almighty God, and all His angels, haste to earth to seek out man. Then He who hath the power of judgment will give His doom to every man, according as aforetime in this fleeting life on earth he doth deserve it. Nor may any there be unafraid for the word which the wielding God shall utter. Before that host he shall demand where is the man, who for his Lord’s sake would drink of bitter death, as He did on the cross aforetime. Then shall they be smitten of terror, and few shall know what answer they may give to Christ. Yet then no man need be afraid, who in this life beareth in his breast that best of beacons; but through the cross every soul shall seek the heavenly kingdom from the paths of earth, whoso thinketh to dwell with God.”

Then where I bode alone with a small band I prayed unto the cross, with blithesome heart, enduring courage. My soul was yearning for its journey hence. Too many a weary hour have I abode. Now have I hope of life, that I may seek that victor-tree, revere it well more oft than all men. Wherefore I have exceeding joy in heart, and my hope of succour is set upon the rood. In the world I have not many mighty friends, but they have journeyed hence, out of the pleasures of this worldly life, and sought the King of glory. Now they dwell in heaven above with the High Father, there abide in glory. And day by day I wait until the cross of God, which here on earth I saw, in the time of this fleeting life, may lead and guide me where is exceeding joy, rapture in heaven. There God’s

folk are set forever; there is abiding bliss. May He establish me where I may dwell in glory, and with all holy souls have joy of blessedness. May the Lord be my friend, who here on earth suffered for the sins of men upon that cross. He ransomed us and gave us life, a home in heaven. Hope was renewed, with blessedness and bliss, for those who then endured the fires of hell. Triumphant was the Son upon that journey, mighty with speed of fortune, when with a multitude, a host of spirits, He, ruling alone, Almighty, came unto the kingdom of God, to the joy of angels and all holy souls, who dwelt in heaven in glory then, when their Lord, the mighty God, came where was His home-land.