

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE

IN THE EPIC OF BEOWULF.

by

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INTRODUCTION.

Subject and scope of the thesis.

The subject and the subject-matter of this thesis are by no means new. The question as to the genuineness, strength, and extent of the Christian influences in the epic of Beowulf has been argued pro and con for many years; and a set of four articles on these influences has been published, amounting to more than one hundred pages of close print. (1) Yet, though there is little concerning the controversy that has not been worked over many times, something more may be said. New thought may be brought to bear upon the old material; new combinations of evidences may show Beowulf in a stronger Christian light than heretofore, to the extent of furthering the theory that this poem is Christian in spirit. Such is the object of the present thesis.

Present state of the Beowulf controversy.

The present state of the Beowulf controversy is one of quiescence. To-day the principal exponents of its two sides are William Witherle Lawrence, who holds that the poem is heathen in spirit, and his opponents, the two greatest living Beowulf scholars, Frederic Klaeber and Raymond Wilson Chambers. Lawrence's most recent work on the question, the popularly written "Beowulf and Epic Tradition", appeared in 1928; Klaeber's famous annotated edition of the Anglo-Saxon text, "Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg", came out in 1922; Chambers' monumental work, "Beowulf; an

(1) "Die Christlichen Elemente im Beowulf." Klaeber. "Anglia" 1911-1912

Introduction," re-appeared in 1932. This second and revised edition, however, does not contain anything concerning the controversy which is not in the 1921 first edition. Since 1932 no one has stirred the embers. A few critical articles on Beowulf have been published, chiefly in "Anglia" and in "English Studies," and a new paraphrastic translation of the poem into modern English, by Ayres, has very recently come out; but concerning the controversy, - nothing. (1)

a new page

CHAPTER ONE.

The Pagan Theory concerning Beowulf.

The most important critics.

The most important Beowulf critics on this side of the question, listed chronologically, are: F.A. Blackburn; Arnold Smithson; Henry Munro Chadwick; Henry Bradley; and lastly, Professor Lawrence. There are other Beowulf scholars, but they have not entered the controversial lists, and need not be mentioned.

Their arguments.

Blackburn's main contention is that the influence of the new religion on the epic of Beowulf extends no farther than the

(1) When it was requested that I report on the present state of the Beowulf controversy whether this meant temporal or actual state was not specified. The two following chapters may be considered (if so wished) as a presentation of the actual state of the controversy.

definitely Christian passages, and that these passages, besides being interpolations, are "weak, vague, and colorless."(1) He asserts that the only evidences of genuine Christian influence in the poem are found in the mere use of the words God, Lord, and equivalent expressions. When we are told in Beowulf, "God willed it not,"(706) and "Mighty God had exalted him,"(1716) substitute fate (wyrd) for God, the critic says, and it will be seen how little of Christian influence these interpolations really express.(2) In short, remove from the poem its use of definitely Christian terms and you remove its Christianity.

The next critic in point of time, Arnold Smithson, does not confine himself to an examination of the Christian passages in Beowulf. Comparing this poem with the Crist, the Andreas, and other religious works, he finds it deficient in Christianity and sufficient in paganism. "The Christian ideals of faith, love, and sacrifice are absolutely wanting," and "the pagan ideals of strength, loyalty, courage, generosity, wisdom, and acquiescence in the decrees of fate are present."(3) There is nothing of Christianity in its fundamental conception and motivation." "It is a weakly Christianized pagan poem."(4)

Henry Munro Chadwick, a critic of much greater importance than either of the two preceding critics, has thrown all his energies

(1) Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, 1897, vol.12. "The Christian Coloring in Beowulf." p.216.

(2) Ibid, pp.217-218.

(3) "The Old English Christian Epic," p.315.

(4) Ibid, p. 316.

into elaborating one piece of evidence which has since been proved untenable. This piece of evidence is the cremation of the hero of the poem. His argument is that Beowulf is a pagan poem which has been revised (though not interpolated) by a Christian minstrel, (1) for if the epic was originally composed by an adherent of the new religion "why should he lay Beowulf himself to rest with heathen obsequies, when in his dying speeches the hero has been made to express his faith and gratitude to the Almighty?" (2) But "if the poem was originally a heathen work the inconsistencies become perfectly natural." (2) Chadwick is certain that the account of the cremation of Beowulf is such as "no Christian poet could or would compose." (1) He also notes that "the customs and ceremonies described are almost without exception heathen." (3) but admits that "the reflections and the sentiments are largely Christian." (3) The theology he finds "singularly vague", and conjectures that the final shaper of the epic "had little direct knowledge of the new religion." (4)

Henry Bradley, though one of the outstanding critics of modern times, has, in his article on Beowulf, contributed very little to the controversy. Outside of a remark that "the Christian passages in Beowulf are poetically of no value" he has done no more than merely state the issue: that the Christian passages do not harmonize with the pagan spirit of the poem, and are interpolations. "Though there are some distinctly Christian passages, they

(1) "Cambridge History of English Literature," p.30.
 (2) "The Heroic Age", p.53.
 (3) Cambridge History of English Literature," p.29.
 (4) "The Heroic Age," p.48.

are so incongruous with the rest of the poem that they must be regarded as interpolations." (1) Ten Brink, Andrew Lang, John Clark, and other critics said as much before Bradley. Lawrence, indeed, writes of the English scholar's article, "it reflects to a considerable extent earlier opinions; it is not in line with the most advanced research." (2)

There is little that is new in the arguments of the American scholar, Lawrence. But his positions are the most recent expression of this side of the controversy, and will bear summarizing. Briefly, he maintains that although the author of Beowulf was nominally a Christian, at heart he was a pagan; (3) that "the Christianity of the poem is all on the surface" (4) and that this "veneer seems the least admirable part of the poem" (5) that "the Christianity of the characters seems imposed upon them rather than natural to them;" (4) that "the definitely Christian passages are among the poorest and weakest parts of the poem"; (4) and lastly, - unkindest cut of all, - that the poet was perhaps "not even sincere in his religious convictions, but fell into line, as he had of necessity to do." (6)

(1) "Encyclopaedia Britannica," 11th edition, vol. 3, p. 730.

(2) "Beowulf and Epic Tradition," p. 298. Bradley has been included here principally because Chambers lists him as an opponent worthy of attention. See Chambers' "Beowulf; an Introduction," p. 121ff.

(3) "Beowulf and Epic Tradition," pp. 281-282.

(4) Ibid, p. 9. Yet he speaks of "the courtly, refined, and Christian spirit of Beowulf," p. 258. See also p. 284.

(5) Ibid, p. 15.

(6) Ibid, p. 282.

The Christian passages in Beowulf not interpolations.

Before summarizing the various views of the aforementioned critics into one consistent argument worthy of being controverted at the present day, it will be necessary to eliminate the interpolation theory. In late years this supposition has been not only out-moded, but shattered. Chambers has argued most effectively against it, (1) and Lawrence himself, concurring with the critical conclusions of modern scholars, rejects the view that Beowulf has been Christianized by a pious interpolator. "Careful research has shown that the Christian elements are in all probability not interpolated, but an integral part of the epic." (2) "The older idea, that the Christian elements in Beowulf are interpolations in an originally heathen poem is now generally abandoned. Careful study has shown no difference in style, metre, or dialect, such as would be likely to arise in the inserted sections." (3) In short, the Christian passages "are not mere interpolations, but an integral part of the work of the final poet." (4)

The pagan theory brought up to date.

In the past the pagan theory concerning Beowulf was that the poem was composed by a pagan: now it consists of the assumption that the poem is pagan in spirit. Summarizing the

(1) "Beowulf; an Introduction," pp. 121ff, 322ff, 390.

(2) "Beowulf and Epic Tradition," p. 258.

(3) Ibid, p. 282.

(4) Article on Beowulf in Encyclopaedia Americana, 1928, vol. 3 p. 534.

theory in its present day form we obtain the following abstract: that the Beowulf poet, though nominally a Christian, was at heart a pagan; that the influence of the new religion in the epic is superficial; that this influence extends little farther than the definitely religious passages; that the Christian ideals of faith, love, and sacrifice are wanting, and that the pagan ideals are present; briefly: that the poet, although of the new religion, has not toned down the pagan elements in his epic sufficiently to justify the ~~work's~~ being labelled Christian.

works

CHAPTER TWO.

The Christian Theory concerning Beowulf.

The most important critics.

On this side of the question there are four critics of weight who have not stepped into the controversial lists. These are,- Knut Stjerna, W.J. Sedgefield, G. Sarrazin, and A.S. Cook; there are two who have entered deeply into the question: Alois Brandl and Raymond Wilson Chambers; and there is one who has almost exhausted the subject: Frederic Klaeber. Chambers and Klaeber are ~~both~~ the most recent and most important exponents of the Christian theory.

Their arguments.

Stjerna, though not troubling himself about the

controversy, has supplied some useful material which no doubt has troubled the holders of the pagan theory. Studying the account of the cremation of Beowulf, Stjerna has proven that it is not pagan at all, but an inaccurate, almost bungling description of what the poet imagined a heathen funeral ceremony would be like.(1) As will be shown, Chambers has turned this evidence to good account.

Sedgefield's point of view is gathered from one remark: "As a pious Christian our poet reveres God, but his loathing of the devil and the devil's minions has all the bitterness of a recent convert."(2)

That Sarrazin and Cook belong on this side of the controversy we learn from their conjectures as to the author of Beowulf. The former thinks it probable that the epic is a translation from the Danish by the Christian poet Cynewulf.(3) The latter believes that the poem was composed in the learned and pious court of Aldfrith.(4)

Brandl's work on Anglo-Saxon literature has not yet been translated into English, though it fully deserves to be. This erudite critic's main contention is that the epic of Beowulf is "pervaded throughout" by a strongly Christian influence, and that this influence is especially noticeable in the character of Beowulf, the hero of the poem: "Wer die unheidnischen Elemente

(1) Essay on funeral obsequies, in "Essays on Questions connected with the Old English Poem of Beowulf." pp.197-239.

(2) "Beowulf." Introduction to the text, p.9.

(3) "Beowulf-Studien" pp.68-108.

(4) "The Possible Begetter of the O.E. Beowulf and Widsith."

aus dem Beowulfepos vollständig entfernen will, muss es umdichten."(1) "Bis in den Kern des Beowulfcharakters geht der Einschlag christlich anmutender Gesittung. Beowulf denkt niemals an einen Angriffskrieg um Beute zu machen, wie etwa die übermütige Hygelac; er ist nur die Erlöser seines Volkes von menschlichen und teuflischen Feinden; er ist bescheiden und gottesfürchtig, schützt die Waisen, und dankt es schliesslich dem Himmel, in einer an dem Heiland gemahnen den Weise, dass er die Seinen um den Preis des eigenen Lebens mit Schätzen beglücken konnte."(2)

Chambers' chief argument is that incongruities may be expected in a poem written in England in the eighth century. The age was one of inconsistencies. Christianity did not at once drive out the older faith and ideas. For a time the old and the new existed side by side. "As the new religion swept northward many queer situations were created."(3) Theodoric the great, Charles the great, Alfred the great, and Saint Olaf were "tough fighting chieftains as well as saintly churchmen."(4) These illustrious Christians loved the old heathen songs. Charles the great and Alfred the great went even to the trouble of collecting them, and Saint Olaf on the last day of his life had one of the wildest sung to him. Now, concludes Chambers, there is no reason why we should expect a poem written in such times to be free from similar incongruities.(5)

(1) "Geschichte der altenglischen Literatur," p.63.

(2) Ibid, p.62.

(3) "Beowulf; an Introduction," p. 121.

(4) Ibid, p. 122.

(5) Ibid, pp.121-125.

The two remaining arguments of Chambers are worth mentioning: regarding the so-called interpolations he shows that the syntax of these passages is the same as that of the rest of the poem, (1) and he argues that if they had been put in by a pious ecclesiastic deliberately setting out to turn a pagan into a Christian poem they would be more dogmatic than they are; (2) he reasons upon Sarrazin's evidence that the author who described the funeral obsequies of Beowulf was "a late poet, drawing upon tradition." (3) Chambers is convinced of the pervasive Christian influence in the poem, ^{of} the essential piety of the characters, and of the sincerity of the unknown author's religious convictions: "Do not the characters of Hrothgar, Beowulf, Hygd, Wealtheow, show a Christian influence...which is anything but superficial?" (4) "The Beowulf does not seem to me the work of a man whose adherence to Christianity is merely nominal." (4)

Klaeber's contribution to the controversy is an enormous accumulation of evidence. (5) This evidence is presented in connection with the men and monsters of the poem, thus showing the concrete Christian influence which has been

(1) "Beowulf; an Introduction," pp. 98-104, 121ff, 322ff, 390.

(2) Ibid, pp. 125-126.

(3) Ibid, p. 124. See also Cook, who says, "This part has been likely elaborated under Homeric influence." p. 339 of "The Possible Begetter of the Old English Beowulf and Widsith."

(4) Ibid, p. 126.

(5) "Die christlichen Elemente im Beowulf." *Anglia* 1911-1912, vol. 35, pp. 111-136, 249-270, 453-482; vol. 36, pp. 169-199. Much of this evidence has been reproduced in Klaeber's introduction to the text: "Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg." As Lawrence says, it contains "an extraordinary amount of concise information." ("Beowulf and Epic Tradition," p. 296.)

brought to bear upon them. Some evidence, also, is presented to show the Christian feeling of the poet. The characters of Hrothgar and Beowulf, says Klaeber, show strong Christian influence. The Danish king thanks and blesses God on every imaginable occasion. As for the Geatish hero, "We need not hesitate to recognize features of the Christian savior in the destroyer of hellish fiends, the warrior brave and gentle, blameless in thought and deed!"(1) This resemblance is further strengthened when we hear Hrothgar praise the mother of Beowulf, saying that the Lord was gracious to her in her child-bearing, (Beowulf, 942-946) and when we note that the disloyalty of the ten cowardly followers of the hero is not unlike the defection of the disciples of Jesus. (2) The monsters, - Grendel, his dam, and the fire-drake, though heathen in origin, have undergone a transformation. "The first two bear unmistakable signs of Christian influence," and "even the fire-drake is not free from the suspicion of similar influence, especially as the dragon was, in ecclesiastical tradition, the recognized symbol of the arch-fiend." (3) The description of the fiend Grendel shows strong religious coloring. He is more than a cruel monster: he is an impersonation of evil, "even an incarnation of the Christian devil." He is called by the following epithets of Satan: feond mancynnes, Godes andsaca, feond on helle, helle haefta, and we are told that he bore God's anger, Godes yrre baer. The blood of Cain runs in his vile veins. (107ff) The mother of Grendel has also been closely associated in the mind of the poet with sin, evil, and Cain. (1258ff) The author of

(1) Introduction to "Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg," p. 11.

(2) (note, to, 11.2596) (3) Ibid, 11.

Beowulf sees these evil monsters from the point of view of an adherent of the new religion. He even feels about them as a Christian would; he loathes them: yet he pities them. Note the pity expressed in the following lines:

"won-saelig wer weardode hwile." (105)

"Com tha to recede rinc sithian
dreamum bedealed." (720-721)

"oother earm-sceapen," (1351)

and also in lines 973, 975 and 1546. (1)

Summary of the Christian theory.

Substantially, the Christian theory is this: that though many elements in the poem "bear testimony to an ancient background of pagan conceptions and ideals" (2) "the main story has been thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Christianity;" (3) that "the Christian elements are almost without exception so deeply ingrained in the very fabric of the poem that they cannot be explained away as the work of a reviser or later interpolator;" (3) and that the influence of the new religion, which is anything but superficial, may be found even in the most pagan parts of the epic; in short, - that this influence is pervasive, and that we "cannot remove from Beowulf those elements which are not heathen without rewriting the whole poem." (4)

(1) "Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg." Introduction, p.L. Similarly Brandl: "Der Dichter ist so sanftmütig, dass er selbst den Menschenfresser Grendel bedauert." (Geschichte der altenglischen Literatur, p.62) Gosse says: "Nothing is more remarkable than the vein of pity blended with abhorrence in the description of the ogres, which indicates a finer spirit of humanity than Homer was able to attain when he drew the Cyclop." (English Literature, vol.1, p.14.) (2) Ibid, p.XLIX. (3) Ibid, p.L. (4) Translation of "Wer die unheidnischen..." etc on pp.8-9 of this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE.

Some Important Evidences
of Christian Influence
in Beowulf.

As there are no sources of Beowulf extant, (1) we can judge the extent of the Christian influence which it has undergone only internally. Hence, let us divide the poem into three parts, studying it under the following headings: (A). Christian Material; (B). Historical Material; (C). Pagan Material.

(A) The Christian material.

In discussing the definitely Christian passages in the poem it will be impossible to say anything that has not been said many times before unless a new tack is taken. This has been done in the form of a reply to some already-quoted criticisms, which are, namely: (1) that the Christian influence in Beowulf is merely verbal; and (2) that "the Christian ideals of faith, love, and sacrifice are absolutely wanting in Beowulf." (2)

(1) The Christian influence not merely verbal.

Substitute the word fate (wyrd) for the term God

(1) Lawrence's "Beowulf and Epic Tradition," p.17.
(2) See note 3, p.3 of this thesis.

and for synonyms of God, asseverates Blackburn, and the Christianity vanishes from the poem.(1) We grant that in some cases this is true: de-Christianization or neutralization occurs when some of the religious passages in Beowulf are tampered with in this way.(2) But in many cases this is decidedly not true. The following exemplary passages bear the suggested alteration badly:

- (a) "Him tha Scyld gewat to gescaep hwile
fela-hror feran on frean waere." (26-27)
- "Then at the fated hour Scyld, very brave,
passed hence into the protection of fate." (3)
- (b) "Wel bith thaem the mot
aefter death-daege drihten secean
and to faeder faethmum freotho wilnian." (186-188)
- "Well is it for him who may after the day of death
seek fate, and crave shelter in its embrace."
- (c) "God thancedon
thaes the him yth-lade eathe wurdon." (227-228)
- "They thanked fate that the sea voyage had been
easy for them."
- (d) "Faeder alwalda
mid ar-stafum eowic gehealde
sitha gesunde." (316-318)
- "Fate guard you by his grace safe in your
venture."
- (e) "Thaer gelyfan sceal
dryhtnes dome se the hine death nimeth." (440-441)
- "There he whom death takes must needs trust to
the judging of fate."

(1) See note 1 to p.3 of this thesis.

(2) This might even be expected. The poet does not always use the terms pertaining to the Christian Deity in such a sense as makes substitution of fate an impossibility.

(3) The appended translations, (minus fate) are from the modern English rendering of Beowulf in "Everyman's Library."

- (f) "Leoht eastan com,
beoht beacen godes." (568-569)
"Light came from the east, bright beacon of fate."
- (g) "Thisse ansyne al-wealdan thanc
lungre gelimpe...a mag god wyrcean
wunder aefter wunder, wuldres hyrde." (928-931)
- (h) "For this sight thanks be straightway rendered
to fate.....ever may fate, the glorious protector, perform
wonder after wonder."
- (h) "Thær stid "Thaer abidan sceal
maga mane fah miclan domes,
hu him scir metod scrifan wille." (977-979)
"There the creature stained with sin must await
the great doom; what judgment bright fate will award him."
- (i) "Swa he hyra ma wolde,
nefne him witig god wyrd forstode
and thaes mannes mod: metod eallum weold
gumena cynnes, swa he nu git deth." (1055-1058)
"So he was minded to do with more of them, if
wise fate and the man's courage had not turned aside such a
fate from them. Fate ruled over all mankind as it still does!"
- (j) "Hwaethre he gemunde maegenes strenge,
gin-faeste gife, the him god sealde,
and him to anwaldan are gelyfde,
frofre and fultum: thy he thone feond ofecwom,
gehnaegde helle gast." (1270-1274)
"Yet he remembered the power of his strength,
the precious gift which fate had given him, and he trusted
for support, for succor and help, to fate which rules over
all. By that he overcame the fiend, laid low the spirit of
hell."
- (k) "godes andsaca,
morthres scyldig," (1682-1683)
"the foe of fate, guilty of murder,"
- (l) "Thaet waes fremde theod
ecean dryhtne, him thaes ende-lean
thurh waeteres wylm waldend sealde." (1691-1693)

"That race was estranged from the eternal fate.
It gave them final requital for that in the surge of the water."

- (m) "Swa maeg unfaege eathe gedigan
wean and wraec-sith, se the waldendes
hylde gehealdeth." (2291-2293)

"Thus may a man, not destined to fall, who relies
on the protection of fate, easily survive sorrow and exile."

- (n) "Wende se wisa, thaet he wealdende,
ofer ealde riht, ecean dryhtne
bitre gebolge." (2329-2331)

"The wise man thought that, breaking established
law, he had bitterly angered eternal fate."

- (o) "Fortham me witan ne thearf waldend fira
morthor-bealo maga, thonne min sceaceth
lic of lice." (2741-2743)

"Wherefore fate has no cause to blame me for the
slaughter of kinsmen, when my life passes out from my body."(1)

(2) The Christian ideals of faith, love, and sacrifice.(2)

We do not have to read far in Beowulf before we
observe that Hrothgar has a deep faith in God and in his
deliverer's God-given strength, for in lines 381-384 the
old king thankfully exclaims:

"Hine halig god
for ar-stafum us onsende,
to West-Denum, thaes ic wen haebbe,
with Grendles gryre."

and in lines 478-479 we see that he has a perfect trust in
the might of the Creator:

"God eathe maeg
thone dol sceathan daeda getwaefan."

- (1) Further passages evidencing genuine Christian influence are:
lines 92ff, 168ff, 180ff, 381ff, 625ff, 670ff, 685ff, 786, 811,
939ff, 1397ff, 1550ff, 1606ff, 1626, 1655ff, 1724, 1778ff, 1841, 2469ff.
(2) See p.3 of this thesis, Smithson's arguments.

Again: Beowulf, laying himself down on the bed at night in the monster-haunted hall, says with great confidence:

"Witig god
on swa hwaethere hond halig dryhten
maertho deme, swa him gemet thince." (685-687)

The trusting faith of the author himself comes into prominence in the following seven lines:

"Ac him dryhten forgeaf
wig spedu gewiofu, Wedera leodum
frofor and fultum, that h̅æ feond heora
thurh anes craeft, ealle ofercomon
selfes mihtum. Soth is gecythed
thaet mihtig god manna-cynnes
weold wide ferhth." (696-702)

Hrothgar believes no more than Beowulf that the wonderful victory over the evil creature is due to earthly might alone. After rendering due thanks to God, the glorious protector, the old king breaks out:

"In scealc hafath
thurh drihtnes miht daede gefremede
the we ealle ær ne meahton
snyttrum besyrwan." (939-942)

These are strong examples of sincere and devout Christian faith.

Beowulf, in his courteous reply to the Danish king, says simply, in a casual reference to the slain Grendel:

"Thaer abidan sceal
maga mane fah miclan domes
hu him scir metod scrifan wille." (977-979)

And very good Christian reasons are given why Beowulf was victorious, in his fight with Grendel's mother. (1)

(1) See quotation j. on p.15 of this thesis. Quotation m. on p. 16 expresses a similar thought.

Nor are the other Christian ideals wanting. Love and self-sacrifice appear to be markedly present, especially in the character of the hero of the poem. Beowulf is a type of the loftiest morality, (1) and a universal love for God and man seems to shine in all his conduct and actions, from his first helping of Breca(540ff) to his last stand against the terrible fire-drake.(2538ff) His love for God is evidenced in his trusting faith,(2) and his love for mankind appears in his kindness and courteousness to all, (even to the "jeering but not ungenerous" Unferth) and in his desire to help others.(3) When the robbed dragon begins its ravages the hero's first thought is that by breaking established law he has angered the Lord.(2329) Almost his last thought, when he is stricken to death, and in pain, is anxiously to beg Wiglaf to attend to the needs of the people.(2801ff) And he thanks God that he has been able to sell his old life for a treasure which they may use.(2794ff) No wonder the people say of him after his death:

"Cwaedon thaet he waere woruld cyninga
 manna mildust and mon thwaerost,
 leodum lithost and lof-geornost." (3181-3183)

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- (1) The only fault we note in him is a pardonable pride,(675ff) a pride against which-Hrothgar counsels him- even the most favored of the Lord need to guard.
- (2) Lawrence himself speaks of this. He notes the hero's "consciousness of virtue" and his "faith in the True God."
 "Beowulf and Epic Tradition," p.131.
- (3) Although a sort of mercenary adventurer, it is this desire of Beowulf to help others(his father's friend, his royal master's boyish son, and lastly, his people) that motivates him, not a love for treasures which moth and rust corrupt. These, indeed, he gives away freely.(1900ff,2163ff) See also Brandl on p.9 of this thesis.

As for the Christian ideal of sacrifice, it may be said that the very theme of the Beowulf epic is virtually, "Greater love hath no man than this: that he lay down his life for his friends." Beowulf ventures out alone against the dragon for the sake of his people. He dies that they may live. The poem even preaches self-sacrifice and devotion. Thus:

"Swa sceal man don."(1172)

"Swa sceal man don."(1534)

"Swa sceal maeg don.(2166)

"Swylc sceolde secg wesan
thegn aet thearfe." (2708)

Surely sacrifice is stressed, and strongly.

It may be questioned how far the qualities of faith, love, and sacrifice are ideals in the poem, but at least they are ideals. Faith is of things not seen, and the same may be said of love and sacrifice,- at least as these qualities occur in thesepicunder consideration. Besides, they are so obviously present in the poem that they possess the strength of ideals. Hrothgar thanks and blesses God "on every imaginable occasion;" Beowulf conquers the evil monsters because of his faith in God;(1) he loves his people so well that he gives his life for them;(2) and this is the supreme sacrifice, spoken of in Scripture.

(1) See quotation j. p.15 of this thesis.

(2) If he had not loved them so well the people would not have loved him as they did. See lines 3181-3183 on p.18 of this thesis.

(B) The historical material.

The historical and quasi-historical material of Beowulf may be considered briefly. It is of little value in this study. Critics on both sides of the controversy leave it untouched. It is all but free from Christian influence, (1) and is therefore of no help to the one set of critics; and as no serious proclivity for things heathen may be observed in it, it is of no help to the other set of critics. Let us then leave this material alone, merely bearing in mind that although it does not show a Christian spirit, neither does it betray a heathen spirit. (2)

(C) The pagan material.

It is well known that there are many decidedly pagan elements in Beowulf. (3) Therefore two things have been attempted in this section: 1. a justification of the presence of these elements in the poem; and 2. a proof that they have undergone strong Christian influence.

1. Justification of pagan elements.

One critic asseverates that the "pagan ideals of strength, loyalty, courage, generosity, wisdom, and acquiescence in the decrees of fate are present" (4)

(1) Klaeber's "Beowulf and the fight at Finnsburg," Introduction, p.1

(2) Lawrence says, "There is in Beowulf a sobriety of temper which is quite its own. The point of view of the poet is, in general, as impartial as that of a modern historian."
"Beowulf and Epic Tradition," p.24.

(3) Klaeber's Introduction, pp. XLVIII-XLIX.

(4) See Smithson's argument on p.3 of this thesis.

in the Beowulf epic. It is true that the "pagan" ideals are in evidence. There is no reason why they should not be so. The ideals of courage, wisdom, loyalty and the rest are not exclusively pagan. They are positive qualities and a Christian should possess them. We are enjoined to be perfect even as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect. This Father is generally conceded to be wise, generous, and mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. Therefore we should expect to find these qualities in a Christian poem.(1)

There are other elements in Beowulf, however, which are exclusively heathen, such as the vowing of sacrifices at idol fanes, the observing of omens, and the burning of the dead.(2) Yet it is not surprising that a Christian secular poet should use this material, or even show an artistic fondness for it. A poet of the new religion may work on heathen material and infuse a genuinely Christian spirit into it. Take for example Milton. It is well known that he was a great classical scholar and used many heathen elements in his Paradise Lost.(3) May, search in the Lusiad of Camoens and there will be found Christian and pagan deities jostling each other; and yet it is not likely that anyone has ever impeached the unity of authorship of that work, or called into question the genuineness of its author's Christian sentiments.

(1) "Acquiescence in the decrees of fate" will be discussed a few pages farther on in this thesis.

(2) See note 3 on preceding page of this thesis.

(3) And in his other poems as well. e.g. Comus is son of Circe by Bacchus. Sabrina is a water-nymph. Yet critics agree to call "Comus" a Christian philosophical poem. (Regarding the Christianity of Milton: it may not be broad or tolerant, but it is almost certainly genuine, and Christian as opposed to pagan.)

Marie Corelli, an ardent, militant Christian, in one of her novels describes a Viking funeral ceremony(1) with more evident relish than the author of Beowulf shows when he describes pagan rites and ceremonies. When such late Christian writers show a fondness for heathen matter surely it argues that an early poet who lives when heathendom was passing might incorporate pre-Christian elements in his poetry and yet remain a true believer in the new religion.

Not only is the Beowulf poet vested with a poet's privilege of fusing whatever he will to his own desires, but he possesses this privilege the more because he is a secular poet. Some of the critics on the pagan side of the controversy do not seem to take this into account. For instance Smithson makes a comparative study of Beowulf and the Christian religious epics, and decides that the former is deficient in Christianity; and Chadwick asserts that the account of the cremation of the hero of the poem is such "as no Christian poet could or would compose." (2) Perhaps no Christian religious poet "could or would compose" such an account, if the ceremony were really heathen, but a Christian secular poet is not so restricted. His eye glances from heaven to earth, and "il prend son bien ou il le trouve." The author of Beowulf tells a tale of adventure, and where should he get his material but in the heathen songs and lays which Alfred and Saint Olaf

(1) "Thelma," chapter XXXII. And she obviously loves her Viking character

(2) See note 1 on p.4 of this thesis.

loved so well. Now, to take materials from pagan sources does not prove a writer pagan at heart. He might be a very sincere and devout Christian, just as Alfred and Saint Olaf were. Thus it might perhaps be said that for a secular epic of adventure, Beowulf viewed even superficially shows strong evidences of Christian influence. One thing seems certain: that the unknown poet's use of heathen elements for artistic purposes does not militate against the depth and sincerity of his religious convictions.

2. Christian influence on pagan elements.

The most important elements in Beowulf which are definitely pagan in source are no doubt the following:

- (1) The evil monsters.
- (2) Fate.
- (3) The curse.

The first has been shown by Klaeber to have undergone manifest (1) Christian influence. The second, also, has been discussed by him, though something more may be said. The third has undergone, according to Lawrence, very little Christian influence, and juts out boldly from the poem, stark in its paganism. Let us, then, look into (2) and (3).

Fate in Beowulf is conceived of as a mindless monster, an inexorable blind power, indifferent dispenser of good and ill. (e.g. 455, 477, 572, 2574) God, as passages already quoted show (2) is a protecting and beneficent Power, Intelligent and Almighty. It is true, that, as Klaeber says "the

(1) See p.11 of this thesis.
 (2) See pp.14-17 of this thesis.

functions of God and wyrd seem quite parallel,"(1) but this is so only because fate exercises a power which is proper to God. The Creator always possesses the power of fate, but fate never the power of the Creator. Material law may always be substituted for the term wyrd, but never for God except when He exercises but that part of His power which is common to Himself and fate. Fate is said to rule the world; but if a man has trust in God he is no longer under the law of fate,(2) "upon such the law hath no power." Once, indeed, God is said to control fate: "Witig god wyrd forstode."(2) The attitude of the Beowulf poet toward this conception seems strongly Christian.(3)

The "curse" motive, also, has been palpably Christianized. In its original heathen source it must have run something like this:(4) A treasure is buried, and a protecting spell laid on it. For centuries it rests undisturbed. Then, by chance, it is plundered, the curse takes effect, and a dragon which has been guarding the gold begins to ravage the country. The king of the land himself falls a victim to the curse, and is slain by the dragon. Such is the story the Christian "scop" transmutes. God can lift the curse and grant to whom he will to open the hoard.

"nefne god sylfa

(1) Klaeber's Introduction, p. XLIX.

(2) See quotations i. and j. on pp. 15-16 of this thesis.

(3) This attitude toward fate is maintained, likewise, in the "Andreas," a religious poem powerful in its Christianity. "Anglo-Saxon Poetry," Everyman Edition, p. 211.

(4) Lawrence's "Beowulf and Epic Tradition," pp. 215-216.

sigora soth-cyning, sealde tham the he wolde
 (he is manna gehyld) hord openian,
 efne swa hwylcum manna, swa him gemet thuhte!"(3054-3057)

Those who have given heed in the past to the grace of the
 Lord may touch the gold with impunity, despite the spell:

Naes he gold-hwaet gearwor haefde
 agendes est aer gesceawod." (3074-3075)

Lawrence objects that the Christianity is weak here
 because Beowulf does fall a victim to the curse, when he
 "ought to have been saved by the Christian God, who is
 superior to the incantations of dead heathen, and who
 careth for his own, but Beowulf was not saved in the
 traditional story, so there was nothing for it but to allow
 the curse and the spells to work, after all, and the
 dragon to kill him off."(1) But, no: the heathen curse has
 undergone a Christian transformation, and is interpreted to
 mean, not merely destruction to whoever takes possession of
 the hoard,(2) as it was originally in the pagan source, but
 Hell-Torments after death:

"thaet se secg waere synnum scildig,
 hergum geheatherod, hell-bendum faest,
 wommum gewitnad, se thone ^{wong}strade." (3071-3073)

These Beowulf escapes, for it is said plainly that his soul
 passed from his breast to seek the glory of the saints:

"him of hrethre gewat
 sawol secean soth-faestra dom." (2819-2820)

Therefore he is not a victim of the curse, and he is "saved"

(1) Lawrence's "Beowulf and Epict Tradition," p.217.

(2) "se thone wong strade". Literally, "whoever should stride
 the place." Perhaps this means "plunders" or perhaps it
 means "disturb."

by the Christian God.(1) And why? Because his mind was stayed on the Lord.(3074-3075)

CHAPTER FOUR.

Summary and Conclusion.

At the outset of this thesis it was stated that an attempt would be made to further the Christian theory concerning Beowulf. This attempt has been in the nature of a presentation of evidence, not in itself new, but shown, (it is hoped) in a new light. A summary of the main points presented will help us to decide whether anything contributory has been accomplished for the advancement of the Beowulf controversy. As the following points are not all original, those which have been made by the quoted critics have been bracketed:

1. (The definitely religious passages are not due to the pen of an interpolator: therefore the Beowulf poet is a Christian.)
2. (Incongruities may be expected in a poem written in early Christian times.) (2)
3. (The principal characters of the poem, Beowulf and Hrothgar, show strong evidences of Christian influence.)
4. This influence is not verbal, but genuine.
5. The Christian ideals of faith, love, and sacrifice are in evidence.

(1) Although his life is not saved, there is nothing very hopeless or fateful in the fact that Beowulf dies gloriously in a great exploit at the age of about 80, after having ruled his people well for 50 years, and after having lived a noble, heroic life to the full.

(2) It seems that the poem stands as it does because its author gave more thought to some of the strongly heathen elements than to the inconsistencies he might be led into by so doing. e.g. He has taken care to make Hrothgar thank or praise God in every

6. "Pagan" ideals, also, are in evidence; but there seems to be no reason why positive qualities which are not essentially heathen should not be present in a Christian poem. Rather, one should expect them.

7. Definitely pagan elements may be noted; but a Christian poet has a right to use them, especially if he is writing a secular tale of adventure.

8. The heathen conception of fate has undergone Christian modification. (1)

9. (The monsters -especially the first two- have submitted to very strong Christian influence.)

10. The curse theme, together with 8 and 9, the most positively pagan elements in the poem, has been transmuted into something far more Christian than heathen.

11. (The cremation of Beowulf is a description of what a Christian poet thought a pagan ceremony would be like.)

Such has been the evidence presented to further the Christian theory, to advance the reasonable contention that "the great merit of Beowulf is that it shows us a picture of a period in which the virtues of the heathen 'heroic age' were tempered by the gentleness of the new belief; and age warlike, yet Christian; devout, yet tolerant." (2)

"

one of his speeches: but he has neglected to remove from his poem the statement that the Danish king and his court are heathen, and knew not the Lord God. (178-183)

(1) It might be discussed whether fate is so utterly heathen as many people imagine.

(2) Chambers' "Beowulf; an Introduction," p.128.

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