

Dream of the Rood

+ *The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14* +

Author Unknown

What I wish to say of the best of dreams,
what came to me in the middle of the night
after the speech-bearers lie biding their rest!

It seemed to me that I saw the greatest tree
brought into the sky, bewound in light,
the brightest of beams. That beacon was entirely
garnished with gold. Gemstones
prominent and proud at the corners of the earth—
five more as well blazoned across the span of its shoulders.
Every angel of the Lord warded it there,
a brilliant sight of a universe to come.
Surely it was no longer the gallows of vile crime
in that place—yet there they kept close watch,
holy spirits for all humanity across the earth,
and every part of this widely famous creation.

Surpassing was this victory-tree, and me splattered with sins—
struck through with fault. I saw this tree of glory,
well-worthied in its dressing, shining in delights,
geared with gold. Gemstones had
nobly endowed the Sovereign's tree.
Nevertheless I could perceive through all that gold
a wretched and ancient struggle, where it first started
to sweat blood on its right side. I was entirely perturbed with sorrows—
I was fearful for that lovely sight.
Then I saw that streaking beacon warp its hue, its hangings —
at times it was steamy with bloody wet, stained with coursing gore,
at other times it was glistening with treasure.

Yet I, lying there for a long while,
beheld sorrow-chary the tree of the Savior
until I heard that it was speaking.
Then the best of wood said in words:

“It happened long ago—I remember it still—
I was hewn down at the holt’s end
stirred from my stock. Strong foes seized me there,
worked in me an awful spectacle, ordered me to heave up their criminals.
Those warriors bore me on their shoulders
until they set me down upon a mountain.
Enemies enough fastened me there.
I saw then the Lord of Mankind
hasten with much courage, willing to mount up upon me.

“There I dared not go beyond the Lord’s word
to bow or burst apart—then I saw the corners of the earth
tremor—I could have felled all those foemen,
nevertheless I stood fast.

“The young warrior stripped himself then—that was God Almighty—
strong and firm of purpose—he climbed up onto the high gallows,
magnificent in the sight of many. Then he wished to redeem mankind.
I quaked when the warrior embraced me—
yet I dared not bow to the ground, collapse
to earthly regions, but I had to stand there firm.
The rood was reared. I heaved the mighty king,
the Lord of Heaven—I dared not topple or reel.

“They skewered me with dark nails, wounds easily seen upon me,
treacherous strokes yawning open. I dared injure none of them.
They shamed us both together. I was besplattered with blood,
sluicing out from the man’s side, after launching forth his soul.

“Many vicious deeds have I endured on that hill—
I saw the God of Hosts racked in agony.
Darkness had covered over with clouds
the corpse of the Sovereign, shadows oppressed

the brightest splendor, black under breakers.
All of creation wept, mourning the king's fall—
Christ was upon the cross.

“However people came hurrying from afar
there to that noble man. I witnessed it all.
I was sorely pained with sorrows—yet I sank down
to the hands of those men, humble-minded with much courage.
They took up there Almighty God, lifting up him up
from that ponderous torment. Those war-men left me
to stand, dripping with blood—I was entirely wounded with arrows.
They laid down the limb-weary there, standing at the head of his corpse,
beholding there the Lord of Heaven, and he rested there awhile,
exhausted after those mighty tortures.

“Then they wrought him an earthen hall,
the warriors within sight of his killer. They carved it from the brightest stone,
setting therein the Wielder of Victories. Then they began to sing a mournful song,
miserable in the eventide, after they wished to venture forth,
weary, from the famous Prince. He rested there with a meager host.

“However, weeping there, we lingered a good while in that place,
after the voices of war-men had departed.
The corpse cooled, the fair hall of the spirit.
Then someone felled us both, entirely to the earth.
That was a terrifying event! Someone buried us in a deep pit.
Nevertheless, allies, thanes of the Lord, found me there
and wrapped me up in gold and in silver.

“Now you could hear, my dear man,
that I have outlasted the deeds of the baleful,
of painful sorrows. Now the time has come
that men across the earth, broad and wide,
and all this famous creation worthy me,
praying to this beacon. On me the Child of God
suffered awhile. Therefore I triumphant
now tower under the heavens, able to heal
any one of them, those who stand in terror of me.

Long ago I was made into the hardest of torments,
most hateful to men, until I made roomy
the righteous way of life for them,
for those bearing speech. Listen—
the Lord of Glory honored me then
over all forested trees, the Warden of Heaven's Realm!
Likewise Almighty God exalted his own mother,
Mary herself, before all humanity,
over all the kindred of women.

“Now I bid you, my dear man,
to speak of this vision to all men
unwrap it wordfully, that it is the Tree of Glory,
that the Almighty God suffered upon
for the sake of the manifold sins of mankind,
and the ancient deeds of Adam.
Death he tasted there, yet the Lord arose
amid his mighty power, as a help to men.
Then he mounted up into heaven. Hither he will come again,
into this middle-earth, seeking mankind
on the Day of Doom, the Lord himself,
Almighty God, and his angels with him,
wishing to judge them then—he that holds the right to judge
every one of them—upon their deserts
as they have earned previously here in this life.

“Nor can any remain unafraid there
before that word that the Wielder will speak.
He will ask before the multitude where that man may be,
who wished to taste in the Lord's name
the bitterness of death, as he did before on the Cross.
Yet they will fear him then, and few will think
what they should begin to say unto Christ.
There will be no need to be afraid there at that moment
for those who already bear in their breast the best of signs,
yet every soul ought to seek through the Rood
the holy realm from the ways of earth—

those who intend to dwell with their Sovereign.”

I prayed to that tree with a blissful heart,
great courage, where I was alone,
with a meager host. My heart's close was
eager for the forth-way, suffering many
moments of longing. Now my hope for life
is that I am allowed to seek that victorious tree,
more often lonely than all other men,
to worthy it well. The desire to do so
is strong in my heart, and my guardian
is righteous in the Rood. I am not wealthy
with many friends on this earth,
yet they departed from here from the joys of the world,
seeking the King of Glory—now they live
in heaven with the High-Father, dwelling in magnificence,
and I hope for myself upon each and every day
for that moment when the Rood of the Lord,
that I espied here upon the earth,
shall ferry me from this loaned life
and bring me then where there is great bliss,
joys in heaven, where there are the people of the Lord,
seated at the feast, where there is everlasting happiness
and seat me where I will be allowed afterwards
to dwell in glory, brooking joys well amid the sainted.
May the Lord be my friend, who suffered before
here on earth, on the gallows-tree for the sins of man.

He redeemed us and gave us life,
a heavenly home. Hope was renewed
with buds and with bliss for those suffered the burning.
The Son was victory-fast upon his journey,
powerful and able, when he came with his multitudes,
the army of souls, into the realm of God,
the Almighty Ruler, as a bliss for the angels
and all of the holy, those who dwelt in glory
before in heaven, when their Sovereign came back,

Almighty God, to where his homeland was.