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Anvendt udgave: Grundtvigs værker

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This poem, though published abroad fifteen years ago, where it has excited considerable attention, seems almost unknown to the English literary world. And yet it is the earliest known attempt, in any vernacular dialect of modern Europe, to produce an epic poem; and far from being a dull and tedious imitation of some Greek or Latin examples,—like most modern epics,—is an original Gothic performance; and if there be in me any spark of poetic feeling, I have no hesitation in affirming, that any poet, of any age, might have been proud to produce such a work, while the country which gave him birth might well be proud of him in return. I know there are tastes, called classical, which will turn away in disgust when they are told that this poem consists of two fabulous adventures, not very artificially connected, except by the person of the hero,—and that these episodes, which relate to historical traditions of the North, are rather unskilfully inserted. But I think such classical scholars as have a squeamish repugnance to all Gothic productions, should remember that, when they settle themselves down in the little circle of the ancient world, they have banished themselves from the modern, and, consequently, have made their opinions on such a subject of very little importance. Hence, without calling that artificial which is rude, or that masterly which is childish, whether of ancient or modern date, I will merely observe that Beowulf, the Gothic hero of the poem, combats, in the prime of his life, with Grendel and his mother, two goblins, who are the foes of Hrothgar, King of Denmark; and in his old age fights with Steorc-heart, the fiery dragon, which, during a thousand years, has brooded on unprofitable gold; and in this encounter, though victorious loses his life. Now, it is evident that such a tale may be told in a very absurd manner, but it is equally clear that it may also be embodied in a very lofty and interesting strain; and for my own part I have no desire for the converse of any man who would not be delighted with the simple yet animated dialogue, the beautiful descriptions, and the noble sentiments which abound in Beowulf. When I also remember how distinctly and vividly the characters of the principal personages are drawn and supported,—of Beowulf, the hero,—of Wiglaf, his youthful and enthusiastic friend,—of Hrothgar, the royal bard and philosopher,—I cannot but feel regret that time has not spared us the name of this early Gothic Homer, and my wonder is lessened that a master-spirit like Shakspeare could arise in the country where the very children of her poetry should have attempted and achieved such master-strokes of genius.