

The Wanderer

translated by Charles W. Kennedy

Oft to the **w**anderer, **w**eary of exile,
Cometh God's **p**ity, **c**ompassionate love,
Though **w**oefully toiling on **w**intry seas
With **ch**urning oar in the **i**cy wave,
5 **H**omeless and **h**elpless he **f**led from **f**ate.
Thus saith the wanderer **m**indful of **m**isery,
Grievous **d**isasters, and **d**eath of kin:

alliteration
regular rhythm
caesura (space)

"Oft when the day broke. Oft at the dawning,
Lonely and wretched I wailed my woe.
10 No man is living, no comrade left
To whom I dare fully unlock my heart.
I have learned truly the mark of a man
Is keeping his counsel and locking his lips,
Let him think what he will For, woe of heart
15 Withstandeth not fate: a failing spirit
Earneth no help. Men eager for honor
Bury their sorrow deep in the breast.
"So have I also, often in wretchedness
Fettered my feelings, far from my kin,
20 Homeless and hapless, since days of old,
When the dark earth covered my dear lord's face,
And I sailed away with sorrowful heart,
Over wintry seas, seeking a **gold-friend**,
If far or near lived one to sustain me
25 With gift in the mead-hall and comfort for grief.
"Who bears it, knows what a bitter companion,
Shoulder to shoulder, sorrow can be,
When friends are no more. His fortune is exile,
No gifts of fine gold; a heart that is frozen,
30 Earth's pleasantness dead. And he dreams of the **hall-men**,
The dealing of treasure, the days of his youth,
When his lord bade welcome to wassail and feast.
But gone is the gladness, and never again
Shall come the loved counsel of comrade and king.
35 "Even in slumber his sorrow assaileth,
And, dreaming he claspeth his dear lord again,
Head on knee, hand on knee, loyally laying,
Pledging his liege as in days long past.
Then from his slumber he starts lonely-hearted,
40 Beholding gray stretches of tossing sea.
Sea-birds bathing, with wings outspread,
While hailstorms darken, and driving snow.
Bitterer then is the bane of his wretchedness,
The longing for loved one: his grief is renewed.
45 The forms of his kinsmen take shape in the silence:
In rapture he greets them: in gladness he scans
Old comrades remembered. But they melt into air
With no word of greeting to gladden his heart.
Then again surges his sorrow upon him;
50 And grimly he spurs his weary **spirit-chest**
Once more to the toil of the tossing sea.
"No wonder therefore, in all the world,
If shadow darkens upon my soul

kenning

When I reflect on the fates of men—
55 How one by one proud warriors vanish
From the halls that knew them, and day by day
All this earth ages and droops unto death.
No man may know wisdom till many a winter
Has been his portion. A wise man is patient,
60 No swift to anger, nor hasty of speech,
Neither too weak, nor too reckless, in war,
Neither fearful nor fervent, nor too wishful of wealth.
Nor too eager in vow— ere he know the event.
A brave man must bide when he speaketh his boast
65 Until he know surely the goal of his spirit.
"A wise man will ponder how dread is that doom
When all this world's wealth shall be scattered and waste
As now, over all, through the regions of earth,
Walls stand rime-covered and swept by the winds.
70 The battlements crumble, the wine-halls decay;
Joyless and silent the heroes are sleeping
Where the proud host fell by the wall they defended.
Some battle launched on their long, last journey;
One a bird bore o'er the billowing sea:
75 One the gray wolf slew; one a grieving earl
Sadly gave to the grave's embrace.
The Warden of men hath wasted this world
Till the sound of music and revel is stilled,
And these giant-built structures stand empty of life.
80 "He who shall muse on these moldering ruins,
And deeply ponder the darkling life,
Must brood on old legends of battle and bloodshed,
And heavy the mood that troubles his heart:
'Where now is the warrior? Where is the war horse?
85 Bestowal of treasure, and sharing of feast?
Alas! The bright ale-cup, the armor-clad warrior,
The king in his splendor— those days are long sped
In the night of the past, as if they never had been!
And now remains only, for warriors' memorial,
90 A wall wondrous high with serpent shapes carved.
Storms of ash-spears have smitten the earls,
Carnage of weapon, and conquering fate.
"Storms now batter these ramparts of stone;
Blowing snow and the blast of winter
95 Enfold the earth; night-shadows fall
Darkly lowering, from the north driving
Raging hail in wrath upon men.
Wretchedness fills the realm of earth.
And fate's decrees transform the world.
100 Here wealth *is fleeting*, friends *are fleeting*,
Man *is fleeting*, kinsman *is fleeting*.
All the foundation of earth shall fail!"

Thus spoke the sage in solitude pondering.
Good man is he who guardeth his faith.
105 He must never too quickly unburden his breast
Of its sorrow, but eagerly strive for amends;
And happy the man who seeketh for mercy
From the father in heavens, our fortress and strength.