



# JUDITH, PHOENIX

AND OTHER ANGLO-SAXON POEMS

*TRANSLATED*

*FROM THE GREIN-WÜLKER TEXT*

BY

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## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE NOTES.

A.-S. = Anglo-Saxon.

B. = Baskervill's *Andreas*.

Br. = Stopford Brooke's *Early English Literature*.

Bri. = Bright's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*.

BT. = Bosworth-Toller *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*.

C. = Cook's *Judith* and *Anglo-Saxon Reader*.

Ett. = Ettmüller's *Scopas*.

Gar. = Garnett's translations of *Judith*, *Maldon*, and *Brunnanburh*.

Gr. = Grein's *Bibliothek*, *Dichtungen*, and *Sprachschatz*.

G.-W. = Grein-Wülker *Bibliothek*.

W. = Wülker's Notes in the G.-W. *Bibliothek*.

## THE PHŒNIX.

[This beautiful allegory is generally regarded as one of the finest products of the Anglo-Saxon poetical genius. It is less known to the cultivated, non-technical student than several other poems of our early literature; and one aim of the present volume is to supply this deficiency, and put this noble poem before that kind audience who have listened patiently to our earlier experiments in the Old English field.]

As to the high literary merits of the *Phœnix*, there is no dissenting voice. Sweet says that it has "all of Cynewulf's grace and harmony of thought and language." Brooke and ten Brink speak of it in terms of high praise; and Professor J. W. Bright, who has studied the poem in all its phases, says: "In grace and simplicity of style, in the elaboration and clearness of figure, in lyric beauty, and in richness of description, this poem must be classed with the best productions of Anglo-Saxon times."

As to the authorship, there is more diversity of opinion. Brooke and ten Brink attribute it to Cynewulf [A.D. 725 (?)—c. 800 (?)]. Sweet thinks that there is "little doubt" that he wrote it. Professor J. W. Bright, on the other hand, says that "it is almost certainly not to be attributed to Cynewulf." Gaebler, a German scholar, after an exhaustive study of its vocabulary, phraseology and grammatical structure, assigned it to him; while a detailed and laborious study of its metres led two other scholars, Cremer and Mather, to a contrary conclusion. More recently, Professor Edward Fulton, an American scholar, after weighing carefully and sifting the arguments of the three last named, and studying the poem on the side of style, decides against its Cynewulfian authorship.

It is quite generally thought that the poem belongs to the Northumbrian cycle, and to the "school" of Cynewulf.

Most scholars think that the Anglo-Saxon poet took his subject from the Latin poem *Carmen de Phœnice*, attributed to Firmianus Lactantius, who was tutor to Crispus, son of the Emperor Constantine the Great, and whom Jerome speaks of as a poet. (This Latin poem can be found in Bright's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, pp. 189-193.) Our poet, however, if he used this poem, expanded, embellished, glorified it. The poem of Lactantius has 380 lines; his, 677. Lactantius tells us of the fabled bird of the east that rose from its ashes; the old English poet, starting with this fabled bird and its delightful land, tells

us of the Christian who, refined and purified by fiery trials, rises from his ashes to a new life here and a life of immortal joys in the world to come, and also of the Divine Phoenix, who soars high through the heavens followed by throngs of blissful and triumphant spirits of just men made perfect.

Our poet may never have read or even heard of the poem attributed to Lactantius. The Phoenix legend, or saga, is almost as old as the human race. A fabled bird, under various names, was familiar in ancient Egyptian hymns and incantations as the symbol of the sun. Herodotus made it well known to the Greek imagination. Pliny, Tacitus, and others tell us that it was no stranger to the Romans. St. Ambrose and Bede show us how the great bird captured the imagination of the early church, and was regarded as a symbol of the Sun of Righteousness, who arose with healing in his wings.<sup>1</sup> Certainly no subject could more readily have inspired a pious poet of any era of English literature.

The complete Anglo-Saxon text is readily accessible in Bright's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, and less so in the Grein-Wülker *Bibliothek*, Vol. III, pp. 95-116. One of the choicest passages is given in Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*.

Translations are not accessible; a few fine passages are rendered with grace and beauty in Brooke's *Hist. of Early Eng. Lit.* (See index).]

The poet describes the Happy Land where the Phoenix lives.

In legend and lay, I have learned that eastward  
 Far away hence is the fairest of countries  
 Known to the races. That region of midearth  
 'Neath the arch of the ether not ever is reached of  
 Folk-leaders many, but is far Sundered  
 From ill-doers' evil by All-Father's power.  
 'Tis a beauteous expanse, resplendent with pleasures,  
 'Mid odors fragrantest that earth ever breatheth :  
 Peerless is the island, the Creator noble,  
 10 Most mighty, lofty, who that land established.  
 There ever and aye eminent melodies  
 Await the redeemed, heaven's gate open.  
 'Tis a delightful land, there living-green forests  
 Stretch far under heaven. There nor rain nor snow,  
 Nor breath of the frost, nor blast of the fire,  
 Nor fall of the hail, nor bite of the rime,  
 Nor the sun's heat weary, nor ceaseless chill,

<sup>1</sup> Is the prophet Malachi (iv : 2) referring to the promised Messiah under the figure of the fabled bird of the east?

Nor warm weather, nor winter's shower,  
 May anywise injure, but ever the place is  
 20 Blessèd, perfect : that noble land  
 Bloometh and blossometh. Nor boulders nor mountains  
 Do steep stand there ; no stone-cliffs precipitous  
 Tower aloft, as here so oft,  
 Nor dales nor vales, nor darksome caverns,  
 Nor mounds nor hills, nor slopeth<sup>1</sup> there ever  
 Aught of ruggedness : but the excellent plain  
 Blossometh under heaven, blooming joyous :  
 30 As wise men of old in their books have told,  
 From research have written, that region glorious,  
 That beauteous land, is a twelve-fathom higher  
 Than the loftiest heights that lift their heads up  
 High heavenward here 'neath the welkin.  
 Placid the plain is, the pleasant forest,  
 The bright grove, gleameth : glorious blossoms,  
 Fruits, never fall there ; but, foliage-clad,  
 As God-Father bade, the trees stand ever.  
 Winter and summer, the wood ever is  
 Laden with blossoms : the leaves never  
 Fall to the earth there, no fire shall injure them  
 40 Forever and ever, till the end of the world shall  
 Come in the ages. As the ocean's might,  
 The tumbling currents, once covered the earth o'er,  
 O'er the round world rolled, wrapping and folding it  
 In their big embraces, when this beauteous plain,  
 This spacious expanse, spared by the waters,  
 Stood firm 'gainst the flood of the far-dashing billows,  
 Blessèd, unmarred, through the mercy of Heaven :  
 So it bideth blooming till the blaze cometh  
 Of the day of the Lord, when graves shall open  
 And the dark caverns of heroes their dead shall surrender. ]

The Flood did  
 not injure this  
 and.

<sup>1</sup> BT. = *Nor does aught unsmooth rest there.*—Gr. = *noch erhebt sich da unsüßes irgend.*—Br. = *lean, incline, slope*; we follow him.—Lactantius has *nec tumulus crescit.*

- 50 In that land of bliss, no foe harasseth,  
Nor tears nor trouble, no token of sorrow,  
Age, penury, nor death the narrow,  
Nor the loss of life, nor the loathed foe's coming,  
Sin, dissension, sore tribulation,  
No wrestling with want, of riches no lack there,  
Nor sorrow, nor sleep,<sup>1</sup> nor sickness grievous,  
Nor the winter's storm, nor the wind's raging,  
Bleak under heaven, and the biting frost  
Not any one striketh with icicles freezing.
- 60 There hail and hoarfrost from heaven fall not,  
Nor windy cloud, there no water falleth,  
Lashed by the air : but living streams,  
Fairest of fountains, freely gush there,  
Laving earth's bosom with billows of loveliness,  
Winsome waters from the wood's-heart flowing,  
Which sea-cold bubble from the bosom of earth as  
The moons move on, compass anon  
The whole wood grandly : 'tis the Lord's behest that  
This land of glory the beautiful waters
- 70 Shall twelve times traverse. The trees bend there  
With fruits fairest : there fade not ever  
Holy under heaven the holt's ornaments,  
Fallow blossoms fall not to earthward,  
The wood's garniture : but wondrously there  
On the boughs ever the branches are laden,  
Oft and anon new fruit blossometh,  
On the grass-plain green, glorious in verdure,
- 80 Stands the fairest of groves decked joyously

<sup>1</sup> That the A.-S. poet is inspired partly by the last two chapters of the book of *Revelation*, the reader need not be told; but it may be mentioned that the poets have apparently *inferred* that there is to be no sleep in heaven, since there is no night and no sin. — For an interesting discussion of the passage before us (l. 56), see articles by Professors J. M. Hart and A. S. Cook, *Modern Language Notes*, May and November, 1899. — Lactantius does not mention 'sleep,' but "sleepless cares."

By the might of the Wielder. The wood is nowise  
 Shorn of its beauty, where the blessèd fragrance  
 Is diffused o'er that joy-land ; that ne'er shall be changed  
 Forever and ever, till All-Knowing God  
 Who erstwhile created shall that old-work demolish.

## II.

The guardian of  
 the wood.

The ward of that wood is a wondrous-beautiful,  
 Fleet-wingèd bird Phœnix entitled.  
 There the feathery hermit hath his lone dwelling,  
 Brave bideth<sup>1</sup> there : in that blessèd place  
 Death shall ne'er injure him while the earth standeth.  
 90 He must watch and ward the world-candle's<sup>2</sup> journey  
 And go forth greeting God's bright lantern,<sup>2</sup>  
 The glittering jewel,<sup>2</sup> gladly watching  
 When the noblest of stars<sup>2</sup> climbeth the heavens  
 From the east shining sheen o'er the waters,  
 The All-Father's old-work<sup>2</sup> in ornaments gleaming,  
 God's bright token.<sup>2</sup> The stars are hidden,  
 Gone 'neath the ocean off to the westward,  
 Bedimmed in the dawn, and the dark night lurid  
 Fleëth the firmament : then, the Phœnix bird,  
 Mighty of motion, marketh the ocean,  
 100 Exultant of wing, watcheth the mountain-stream,  
 Eagerly looketh aloft when there cometh  
 Up from the east o'er the ocean gliding  
 The Lord's bright lantern lavishing lustre.  
 So the noble bird remains at the fountain,  
 Brilliant in beauty, bides at the water,  
 Where twelve times the glorious one bathes in the current,  
 Ere God's bright beacon glides o'er the earth-ways,

The great bird  
 watches the sun.

<sup>1</sup> Some high authorities treat *drohta* (l. 88) as a substantive; others, as a verb. We follow the latter.

<sup>2</sup> The A.-S. poet draws freely upon his stock of epithets for the sun.

The torch of the ether, and as oft quaffeth he  
 110 Ocean-cold draughts from those excellent fountains  
 When he dips in those waters. His wave-sportings done,  
 To a tall tree-top he betaketh him proudly  
 Where most easily eastward he is able to watch  
 The sun's journey when the taper of heaven  
 O'er the boiling billows brilliantly glimmereth,  
 Luminous with lustre. Lands are embellished,  
 The world made beauteous, when the bright gem of  
 glory  
 O'er the ocean's paths, through earth and her regions,  
 Grandest of stars, the ground illumines.  
 120 As<sup>1</sup> soon as the sun o'er the salt-streams riseth,  
 High overtow'rth them, the tawny-winged bird  
 Glorious leaves the tree of the forest,  
 Through the firmament flieth on fleet wing upward,  
 Chanteth and singeth as he soars heavenward.  
 The bird's demeanor<sup>2</sup> is so comely and pleasing,  
 His spirit inspired, then, sparkling with joyance ;  
 More wondrously raiseth he the tones of his music,  
 His glorious voice, than the children of men  
 E'er heard under heaven, since high-ruling God,  
 130 Wielder of Glory, the world founded,  
 The earth and the heavens. The sound of his voice is  
 Sweeter, more beautiful than song ever uttered,  
 Winsomer far than any of melodies ;  
 Nor trumpets nor horns can equal that music,  
 Nor the harp's harmony, nor heroes' voices  
 Any on earth, nor organ's melody,

Such music is  
never heard  
among men.

<sup>1</sup> Commenting on the passage ll. 120-144 in our text, Br. says, "I wonder that there are still folk who think that there is no poetry in early England."

<sup>2</sup> We have followed BT. and Gr., though the context, by expatiating upon the tones of the bird, might justify us in translating 'cries'; i.e., 'The cries of the bird are so beautiful,' etc. Moreover, Lactantius dwells with great emphasis upon the "song," "voice," etc.

Nor bagpipe's notes,<sup>1</sup> nor swan's feathers,<sup>2</sup>  
 Nor any harmony that Heaven created  
 For men's merriment in this mournful existence !  
 140 So sings he and chants with joys blissful,  
 Till the sun southward sinks 'neath the welkin :  
 He listeneth in silence, his head bowing, then,  
 Wise, firm-mooded, and his fleet pinions  
 Thrice fluttereth : the Phoenix is silent.  
 Twelve times ever, the hours marketh he  
 Of day and of night. So the bird is the forest's  
 Dweller and denizen deemed, that he enjoyeth  
 The place at his pleasure, its plenty, riches,  
 150 Its life and delights, the land's ornaments,  
 Till the guard of the grove hath gone through a thousand<sup>3</sup>  
 Of this world's winters. 'Neath the weight of age, then,  
 The dusky-feathered one droops for a season,  
 Old, aged one : the excellent bird, then,  
 Flieth away, the green earth leaveth,  
 The fields blossoming, to find him a spacious  
 Kingdom of earth where not any of men have  
 Home and fatherland. There, high over bird-kind,  
 Mighty, illustrious, dominion he wieldeth,  
 160 'Mid that folk preëminent, and awhile along with them  
 The waste places wardeth.<sup>4</sup> Then, west goeth he,  
 Mighty of motion, with many years burdened,

In this secluded spot, he stays long as king of birds.

<sup>1</sup> Our translation follows quite closely the G.-W. text; but this passage (136 (b)–137 (a)) is rendered differently by some scholars; e.g., *organ's tone, song's melody; nor organ's tone, nor harmonious lay; nor the organ tone, nor the singing of the sackbut*, etc., etc.

<sup>2</sup> The swan's singing his death-song is familiar; but the singing of the feathers is unusual. For valuable note, see Bright's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, p. 228.

<sup>3</sup> Bri. and some others say *thousands*; but Lact. has *mille*. Also cf. l. 364, below.

<sup>4</sup> Gr. construed **him** (l. 160) as sing., and **weardað** (l. 161), as plu., and translated: *a while with him they inhabit the waste places*. **Weardað**, however, is a sing., and its subj. is **he** (l. 158).

On fleet wing flying, the feathery tribe  
 Through the noble one : each of them fain  
 Would be liegeman and thane to the illustrious atheling,  
 Till he himself seeketh the Syrians' land  
 With the greatest of retinues. Thither the pure one  
 Hies him hurriedly, and holds in the shade,  
 In the grove inhabits, a gloomy, desolate  
 170 Place that is hidden from heroes a-many,  
 Where in a lofty tree, he lives in the forest,  
 A firm-rooted tree 'neath the dome of the heavens,  
 Which folk on the earth Phœnix entitle  
 From the name of the bird. The renowned Glory-King,  
 Creator of Earthmen, I ever have heard,  
 Hath that tree granted that it and it only  
 Of all trees on earth upward a-towering  
 Bloometh most beauteously : nor blight nor blast  
 180 May anywise harm it, but, ever protected,  
 It abideth uninjured while the earth lasteth.

God blesses this  
tree for the bird's  
sake.

## III.

Then, the wind lulleth, the weather is calm,  
 The pure gem of heaven holy shineth,  
 The clouds disperse, the expanse of waters  
 Do stand still there, the storms utterly  
 Soothed under heaven, from the south shineth  
 The weather-torch warm, for world-folk beameth :  
 Then, the bird in the boughs his building beginneth,  
 His nest fashioning ; he must needs speedily  
 190 Old age quicken by ardor of spirit,  
 His youth renew. From near and from far, then,  
 He gathereth and gleaneth the goodliest of winsome  
 Plants and wood-blooms up in his dwelling-place,  
 Each excellent [odor] from herbs fragrant,  
 From sweet things on earth that the Sovereign of Glory,  
 The Creator of all things, on earth fashioned

The Phœnix now  
gathers the  
choicest plants  
and herbs, and  
builds a nest.

For the honor of earth-folk. Up to that tree, then,  
 200 He early beareth the excellent treasures ;  
 The wild bird 'gins, then, to build in the desert  
 In a tall tree's boughs a biding-place lovely,  
 An abode beautiful, and abideth therein,  
 Far aloft liveth, in the leafy shade  
 Batheth and steepeth his body and plumage  
 On all sides fully with odors holy,  
 And the noblest blooms and blossoms of earth.  
 He sitteth there anxious and eager for the journey,  
 When, in the summer season, the sun at its hottest  
 210 O'er the shade shineth, sheen gem of heaven,  
 Fulfils its destiny<sup>1</sup> and the world surveyeth :  
 His home grows hot through the heat of the sun, then,  
 The herbs warm up, the excellent dwelling  
 Breathes and exhaleth the sweetest of odors,  
 And the bird with its nest through the fire's clutches  
 Burns in the blaze : the bale-fire is kindled ;  
 Then, the blaze embraces the abode of the sad one,  
 Is cruelly busy,<sup>2</sup> the yellow flame  
 Eats it, and the Phœnix ancient of days  
 In the fire burneth. Then, the blaze swalloweth  
 220 His frail body, his life departeth,  
 The doomed one's spirit, when the death-fire burneth  
 His flesh and his bones. There shall come again, nathless,  
 In the lapse of the years new life to the Phœnix.  
 Again thereafter, the ashes begin to  
 Gather together, when the great fire is over,  
 A ball fashioning, when fully consumed in  
 The flame's grapple the greatest of nests is,  
 The brave one's abode : his body cooleth,  
 His bone-house is broken, and the blaze subsideth.  
 230 From the pyre's ashes, thereafter appeareth

The nest and the  
 bird are con-  
 sumed in the  
 flame.

<sup>1</sup> This peculiar phrase is literally taken from the A.-S., and is so rendered by Bri., Gr., BT.

<sup>2</sup> Grein says, *Das Feuer ist im Zuge*; we follow BT., and Bri. glossary.

The image of an apple<sup>1</sup> issuing marvellous,  
 Whence a worm<sup>1</sup> waxeth wondrously beautiful,  
 As if forth from an egg it had sprung into being,  
 From a shell, beauteous; in the shade groweth it,  
 Till at first it resembleth a fair young bird,  
 The chick of an eagle; then, on liveth it  
 Longer in life-joys, till it is like in form to  
 The old eagle, and thereafter anon is  
 Furbished with feathers as at first it had been,  
 240 Brilliantly blooming: then, the bird (?)<sup>2</sup> waxeth  
 Youthful again, [is from sins parted,  
 Like as<sup>3</sup> one beareth the fruits of the earth  
 Homeward at harvest, health-giving nourishment,  
 For life's sustenance, at the time of the reaping,  
 Ere winter approacheth, lest the pouring rain-storms  
 On the earth injure them; thereafter, plenty,  
 Board-joys they find there, when frost and snow  
 With might overmastering mantle earth's bosom  
 250 In the garments of winter; from those fruits afterward  
 Must earth-folk's riches be reaped, harvested  
 By the sprouting of grain, which springeth from pure  
 Seed erstwhile sown, when the sun's radiance,  
 The symbol of life, in the spring season

The regeneration  
 of the bird begins.

The stages of its  
 growth.

<sup>1</sup> This is only one of the numerous forms that this legend assumed during its long course through Egyptian, Roman, and mediæval periods. — Lact. has *seminis instar*.

<sup>2</sup> *Bræd* (l. 240) is not understood. We follow Gr.'s translation, and the conjecture of Bri., J. R. C. Hall, and others.

<sup>3</sup> We here enter upon an unusually long, labored simile; so long, indeed, that the poet can hardly maintain his equilibrium. Several eminent textual critics have tried to patch up this passage; but the results are not yet entirely satisfactory. We have kept close to the G.-W. text, but found Bri.'s punctuation more helpful than W.'s — The *Beowulf* poet, whoever he is, seems to break down in the middle of a simile about as long as this. Cf. Hall's *Trans. of B.*, pp. 82-83, note. — The *Phoenix* poet is clearing the way to tell us that the bird is the symbol of the new life in the Christian soul; but first he must exhibit him as "the symbol of the sun."

The regeneration of the Phoenix is compared to the growth of the grain, which "is not quickened except it die."

Folk-wealth awaketh, so that the fruits of the land,  
 The earth's ornaments, by their own germination  
 Are brought forth thereafter : so the old bird waxeth  
 Young after years, his youth reneweth  
 With flesh again furnished. No food taketh he,  
 260 Naught to eat on earth, save only a portion  
 Of honey-dew<sup>1</sup> tasteth he, which at midnight often  
 On the blossoms falleth : thus the fearless bird  
 His life feedeth till his former dwelling-place,  
 His own home, again, thereafter seeketh he.

## IV.

Then, proud of his plumage, with plants surrounded  
 The bird is now grown, his life renewed is,  
 Young, full of gifts, in the ground seeks he  
 His agile body which the blaze had erst eaten,  
 The leavings of fire collecteth together,  
 270 With skill gathereth the bones that had crumbled  
 In the fire's fury, and fetcheth together  
 Early thereafter ashes and bones,  
 The pyre's remnants, and with plants surroundeth  
 The spoils of the slaughter<sup>2</sup> splendidly garnished.  
 He is ready to look for his own land again, then,  
 The leavings of fire with his feet seizeth,  
 With his claws clutcheth, and his country one more  
 His sun-bright seats, seeks joyfully  
 His happy home. Wholly renewed, then,  
 280 Are his life and his plumage, as at first he had them,  
 When God all-glorious in the beginning placed him

Phoenix is himself again.

<sup>1</sup> This has sometimes been rendered as *mildew*; but, as that would not bring up pleasant associations, we adopt the conjectures of J. R. C. Hall, Bri., and others. The Latin has *ambrosios caelesti nectare rores*, which the A.-S. poet puts into one word. Probably 'nectar' is the word we need.

<sup>2</sup> *Wæl-reaf* (l. 273). BT. says '*exuvias suas*,' Gr. *Leichenraub*. J. R. C. Hall and Bri. say *spoil of the slain*.

In that noble region. His bones there, then,  
 Which the fire's fervor in flame on the barrow  
 Had eaten, brings he and the ashes together :  
 Then, the bones and the embers all on that island  
 The brave one burieth. Back to life cometh  
 The sun's symbol,<sup>1</sup> when the sheen heaven-torch,  
 The gladdest of gems, from the east shineth  
 290 Up o'er the ocean, orb preëminent.  
 Phoenix is in front fair to look upon,  
 His bosom embellished with a blending of colors :  
 On the back of his head, green and crimson <sup>2</sup>  
 Blend together in beauty and harmony.  
 The tail of the bird is beautifully mingled,  
 Brown and purple, with plashes of brightness  
 Beauteously embellished. The bird's wings are  
 White at the tips, his neck green both  
 Above and beneath, and his neb glisteneth  
 300 Like glass or gem, his beak fair to look on  
 Within and without. His eyeball (?)<sup>3</sup> is strong,  
 In form and in shape a stone resembling,  
 A glittering jewel, when in golden vessel  
 By the craft of the smiths 'tis set cunningly.

The bird is de-  
 scribed in detail.

<sup>1</sup> The clause **Bið . . . segn** [287(b)-288(a)] has long perplexed editors and translators. The MS. has **þegn**, retained by Grundtvig and Gr. If **bið him edniwe** be rendered *is himself again*, then the whole clause = *the thane of the sun is himself again* (when his lord, the sun, appears, etc.). Cf. l. 165, where the birds wished to be his thanes and servants; now he is the sun's thane. This exegesis enables us to keep close to the MS. Thorpe and Ett., however, suggest '**segn**,' which W. and Bri. adopt. Now, Tacitus and others speak of the Phoenix as "the symbol of the sun," and **þære sunnan segn** would exactly represent that epithet. Adopting this, the clause would read, "*The symbol of the sun is himself again*," etc., etc. Gr. in his *Dichtungen*, gave a very free translation.

<sup>2</sup> **Wurma** (l. 294) is variously glossed *purple, crimson, scarlet, purplish red*. Color words are very vague in A.-S.

<sup>3</sup> It is not certain whether the whole ball of the eye or merely the pupil is meant. Gr.'s translation and lexicon differ; the latter takes the A.-S. word as an abstract noun = *nature-of-the-eye, power-of-sight*.

His neck encircling, like the sun's halo,  
 Is the brightest of rings woven of feathers.  
 Beauteous his belly is, bright and gleaming,  
 Marvellous sheen. The shield, above, on the  
 Back of the Phoenix is joined with ornaments.  
 310 The legs of the bird are with scales covered,  
 His fallow feet. The Phoenix is wholly  
 Lovely to look on, likest the peacock  
 Blooming in bliss, as the books tell us.  
 The bird is not slow, sluggish of motion,  
 Inert, indolent, like others of bird-kind  
 Which on dull, numb wing move through the air :  
 But he is quick and swift-going, exceeding agile,  
 Beauteous and winsome, marked with glory :  
 Eternal is the Prince who happiness giveth him !  
 320 Early thereafter, he his old haunts seeketh,  
 From this land flieth, to that fair place hieth.  
 As the bird soareth, is seen, then, of earthmen,  
 Of folk not a few, far through middle-earth,  
 They assemble themselves from southward and northward,  
 From eastward and westward, eagerly thronging,  
 Come from far and near in numberless multitudes,  
 Where the Creator's gift they do all see, now,  
 In the bird clearly, as the King of Victories  
 In the beginning gave him a goodlier nature,  
 330 More excellent ornaments, than others of bird-kind.  
 Then, men o'er the earth marvel and wonder  
 At his beauty and form, and their books<sup>1</sup> tell us,  
 On tablets of marble mark with their hands, too,  
 When the day and the hour to earth folk showeth  
 The swift-flier's ornaments. Myriads of birds, then,  
 From far and near flock in multitudes,  
 From all sides moving, in the air raise

Multitudes  
throng to see the  
great bird.

His coming is  
made a matter of  
record.

<sup>1</sup> Some read *gewritum* (l. 332) = *in books tell us*. We follow our text, based upon the MS.; the meaning is the same in both cases. The Egyptians, Romans, and others wrote no little of this wonderful bird.

Their pæan of praise, with puissant voices  
Laud the great hero, and wheeling in midair  
340 Encompass the holy one : in the midst, Phœnix  
Is surrounded by throngs. Races look on, now,  
Bewildered wonder how the willing retinue  
The wild bird worship, in wide multitudes  
Proclaim him lustily, and as king honor  
The liegelord beloved, lead joyfully  
The atheling homeward, till the eminent hermit  
Swift-wingèd fleeth, till the throng of rejoicing ones  
No longer can follow him, when the pride of multitudes  
From this earth soareth, his own land seeking.

V.

350 So the blessèd Phœnix, his death-hour over,  
His dear old home once again seeketh,  
That land of delight ; lorn of mood, then,  
Back from the brave one do the birds turn them  
To their land once more, when the mighty atheling  
Young is at home. High God only  
Knoweth his nature,<sup>1</sup> omnipotent Ruler,  
Whether woman or man : this wot not any  
Of all men of earth but the Creator only,  
In how marvellous a manner he made this creature,  
360 How great the decree that gave him his being !  
There the blessèd bird may in bliss enjoy his  
Home and the currents that course through the forests,  
On that beauteous plain the bird may remain  
A thousand of winters : then, his life's end cometh ;  
The pile covers him through the blaze of the fire :  
Yet, wakened marvellously, he cometh to life  
Once more wondrously. So, when, wan and drooping,  
He death dreadeth not, its dire agony,

God alone  
knoweth the  
mystery of his  
birth.

<sup>1</sup> Some render 'sex,' but we follow Bri.

He does not fear  
death, knowing  
that he shall rise  
again.

370 Who knoweth ever that renewal of life shall  
The flame's fury follow assuredly,  
Life after death, when in bird-form he riseth  
Early thereafter from his ashes springing,  
Reneweth his youth 'neath the shelter of heaven.  
He is son and sire to himself, and is heir  
Forever thereafter to his old inheritance.  
The mighty Maker of Man granted him  
To live so wondrously his life again over,  
380 Covered with feathers, though the fire had swallowed him.<sup>1</sup>

## VI.

The Christian,  
also, shall rise  
from his ashes.

So each saint seeketh, after sore tribulation,  
Life everlasting 'mid the Lord God's chosen,  
Through the darkness of death,<sup>2</sup> that, his days here over,  
He the gracious gifts of God may enjoy in  
Rapture unending, and forever and ever,  
As a meed of his labors, live in glory.  
This bird's nature may well be likened to  
The elect servants of the dear Lord Jesus  
390 Here under heaven, how, through the help of the Father,  
They keep in this world their joy unfading  
In these days of danger, and undying glory  
In the celestial land lay up forever. —  
The Almighty, we have heard, by his marvellous power  
Made man and woman, and placed them in earth's  
Choicest region, which the children of men  
Paradise call, where no pleasure failed them  
While they minded to keep the command of the Eternal,

The poet tells of  
the fall of man.

<sup>1</sup> From this point the poet draws on his imagination and Christian symbolism.

<sup>2</sup> The A.-S. is *dark death*. On line 52, above, the phrase *the narrow death* is used. The great poet-laureate's words in *The Two Voices* may be paraphrased: No sound man that breathes with Anglo-Saxon breath hath ever truly longed for death.

400 The word of the Holy One, in their new delight.  
 There the old-foe's envy injured them bitterly,  
 The arch-fiend's enmity, who offered the tree's  
 Fruit for food to them, that foolishly both of them  
 Ate of the apple, angering God,  
 Forbidden things tasted. There bitter grief to them  
 Came from that eating, to their offspring proved it,  
 To their sons and daughters, a sorrowful banquet :<sup>1</sup>  
 Their busy<sup>2</sup> teeth were bitterly punished  
 For their guilt grievously ; they had God's anger,  
 Bitter agony ; anguish suffered

410 Their offspring afterward for eating that morsel  
 'Gainst God's command. So, mournful in spirit,  
 Their delightsome home they must leave, abandon,  
 Through the serpent's hatred, when in days ago  
 He our grandparents beguiled artfully,  
 With treachery foul, so that far away thenceward  
 They sought a sojourn in that sorrowful death-vale,  
 Dismaler dwellings. The dear life of rapture  
 Was hidden in darkness, and the holy places  
 Were shut fast in their faces, through the foeman's cunning

420 Many weary winters, till the Wielder of Glory,<sup>3</sup>  
 The Joy of Mankind,<sup>3</sup> by his coming hither  
 Again opened them, Comfort of the Weary<sup>3</sup>  
 And the Only Hope,<sup>3</sup> to all his holy ones.

Like a faithful  
 homilist, he tells  
 of the Only Hope  
 for sinful men.

VII.

And most like this, as men of learning  
 In words do tell us and writings inform us, ✓

<sup>1</sup> **Symbel** (l. 406) was rendered as an adv. by Gr. in his translation. BT., Br., and others treat it as a noun = *banquet*.

<sup>2</sup> **Idge** (l. 407) is not understood. We follow BT. — For a helpful note, see Bri., p. 228.

<sup>3</sup> These parallelisms are a regular feature of A.-S. poetry, though we do not often have as many as four together. Of course these refer to Christ.

As this agèd bird  
leaves his home,  
and goes to an-  
other land to find  
new life,

Is this bird's journey, when agèd he leaveth  
His own land and country and old is waxen,  
Departeth sorrowful oppressed with winters,  
Where the grove's shelter lofty he findeth,  
430 And therein buildeth, of herbs and branches  
Noblest that are known, a new place of dwelling,  
A nest in the grove : he greatly desireth  
That young once more he again may receive through  
The fire's burning life after death,  
May renew his youth and his old haunts visit,  
His sun-bright seats set out to look for,  
When his fire-bath is finished. So our first parents,  
Our elders of old, gave up, abandoned  
The land of delight, and left behind them  
440 Their dwelling of glory, went a long journey  
Into hostile ones' hands, where hateful ones often,  
Accursèd creatures, cruelly harassed them.  
There were many, nathless, who with holy practices  
Heeded under heaven the behests of the Father,  
With glorious deeds, so that God smiled on them,  
Great King of Heaven, with gracious approval.  
The high tree is this that the holy saints now  
Have their pure homes in, where hateful ones nowise  
Are able with poison to injure his people,  
450 With token of treachery, in that time of great peril,  
Where by deeds illustrious the Lord's good warrior  
His nest fashioneth 'gainst every oppression,  
When alms giveth he to the poor and the needy,  
To all wretched ones, and for aid on the Lord God,  
On the Father calleth, forth hasteneth,  
Atones the offences of this fleeting existence,  
Its deeds of darkness, and the dear law of God  
Holds firm in his bosom, his prayers seeketh<sup>1</sup>  
With pure, clean thoughts, and his knees oft bendeth

so our first  
parents had to  
leave theirs in  
Paradise, and  
seek a home  
among enemies.

The faithful  
Christian is  
building his nest  
in a high tree.

<sup>1</sup> We follow BT. and Bri. — Gr. has almost the same translation: (*er*) *Zum Gebet sich wendet.*

- 460 Noble to earth, all ill deeds fleëth,  
 All foul offences, for the fear of the Lord God,  
 Strives eagerly to do the most of  
 Good deeds and gracious : God shieldeth him  
 In all of his ways, Wielder of Victories,  
 Lord God of Hosts. These are the herbs, then,  
 The blooms of the plants, which the blessèd Phœnix  
 From far and wide doth fetch under heaven,  
 Brings to his bidding-place, where he buildeth his nest soon  
 All fast and firm 'gainst foemen's oppressions.
- 470 So the heroes of heaven his behests follow  
 With mood and with might in their mortal dwellings,  
 Fame-deeds perform : the Father almighty will  
 Assuredly give them blessèd requital.  
 From these herbs, dwellings shall hereafter be built them  
 In the city of glory, their good works rewarding,  
 Seeing they held to his holy commandments,  
 And love the dear Lord with unlagging ardor  
 By day and by night, fervent in spirit,  
 With faith luminous the Belovèd One choosing
- 480 'Bove the wealth of this world : they ween not of happiness  
 By long living this life so fleeting.  
 Thus, the blessèd man doth bliss eternal,  
 A home in the heavens, with the High-King eminent  
 Earn valiantly, till the end cometh of  
 His measure of days, when death off-taketh  
 Each one from life-joys, eager-toothed warrior  
 Armed with his weapons,<sup>1</sup> and to earth's embraces  
 Speedily pusheth the perishing bodies  
 From their souls sundered, where, 'neath the sod mouldering,
- 490 They shall long remain till the last fire cometh.  
 To the Great Meeting<sup>2</sup> shall many be led, then,

His good deeds  
 are the pleasant  
 herbs with which  
 he encompasseth  
 himself.

<sup>1</sup> Literally, *The warrior greedy for slaughter (and) armed with weapons.*  
 This is thoroughly characteristic.

<sup>2</sup> The gathering of the nations at the Day of Judgment is conceived as a  
 great **Gemot**, summoned by the Great King.

The Day of Judgment.

Of the race of mortals : the Father of Angels,  
 Very-King of Victories, shall convene an assembly,<sup>1</sup>  
 Lord God of Hosts, shall judge in righteousness.  
 All men of earth out from the grave, then,  
 Shall come once more, as the King almighty,  
 The Angel-Prince, summons them o'er sea and o'er land,  
 Saviour of men, at the sound of the trumpet :

500 Then, death the dark is done for the blessèd  
 By the might of the Lord God : the noble ones come  
 In multitudes pressing, when this present world,  
 Sinful and guilty, is consumed in shame,  
 Eaten in flame. Each one waxeth, now,  
 Frantic with fear, when the fire swalloweth  
 His fleeting possessions, the flame ravenously  
 Devours earth's riches, the embossed gold-work  
 Eagerly graspeth, greedily swallows  
 All the land's ornaments. At that open hour, then,

510 This bird's token,<sup>2</sup> beautiful and joyous,  
 Is plain to the eyes of all humanity,  
 When the might of the Lord all things restoreth,  
 From burial-barrows the bones gathereth,  
 The body and members and the guest of the fire<sup>3</sup>  
 At Christ's footstool : the King gloriously  
 From his high seat in heaven on his holy ones shineth,<sup>4</sup>  
 Grand Glory-Gem. Good for the man who  
 At that sorrowful season is received of the Father !

<sup>1</sup> See footnote 2, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> This means: *The symbolical character of the bird . . . is manifest to all men, etc.* **Tacen** (l. 510) is a popular word in the homiletic literature, and is used in this poem frequently.

<sup>3</sup> We follow the G.-W. text, and the translations of Thorpe and Gollancz. Other readings are: (1) *life's guest*; (2) *life's spirit*; (3) *the flame's spirit*.

<sup>4</sup> This idea is repeated in ll. 590-591, below.

## VIII.

There the bodies of saints from sins set free, then,  
 Speed joyfully, spirits return to  
 520 Their caskets of clay, when climbeth the fire  
 High to the heavens. Hot is for many  
 That fearful fire, when, affrighted, trembling,  
 Each soul of earthmen reënters its body,  
 Both of saint and of sinner, ascendeth the tomb  
 To the Judge's doom. The fire rageth  
 Burneth wickedness. There the blest redeemed ones,  
 Their agonies over, shine out in their good works,  
 In their own actions : such the excellent plants,  
 The herbs a-winsome, that the wild bird Phoenix  
 530 On every side encircles his nest with,  
 So that quickly ablaze it burneth, flameth  
 'Neath the sun suddenly and himself therewith,  
 And, the flame-burning over, he receiveth his life back  
 Anew and afresh, then. In robes of flesh, then,  
 Are all men reclad, most comely, youthful,  
 Who of their own will here bring it to pass that  
 The great Glory-King granteth them mercy  
 At the solemn assembly. Then, sanctified spirits,  
 540 The souls of the saints, sing in unison,  
 Lift up their voices, elect, holy ones,  
 In choruses chant the King's praises,  
 Go up to glory gleaming in beauty, and  
 With good deeds fragrant. Refined from dross, then,  
 Are the souls of men, made sweet and pure<sup>1</sup>  
 Through the purging of fire. — Let no one believe,<sup>2</sup> now,  
 Of all men on earth that *I* am fashioning  
 With words that are lying this lay of the Phoenix,

The Resurrec-  
 tion.

Blessèd are the  
 dead that die in  
 the Lord.

<sup>1</sup> Other readings are: *brightly adorned*; *glänzend geklärt*. Ours is a free translation, but rests upon high authority. — The poet believes in purgatory, and refers to it naturally.

<sup>2</sup> The poet here strikes a personal, subjective strain.

[I am not uttering poetical rhapsodies, but am following Job, an inspired singer.]

Am writing rhapsodies ! you may read the prophecy,  
 550 The songs <sup>1</sup> of Job ! Stirred in his bosom,  
 Inspired by the Spirit, spake he out boldly,  
 Adorned with honor, he uttered this word :  
 “ In the deeps of my bosom, I disdain not the thought  
 That I shall choose in my nest my death-bed, and thenceward,  
 Mood-weary man mournful depart on  
 My long journey from past deeds unhappy,  
 Covered with clay, to the clasp of the earth, and,  
 My death-day done, through the dear Lord’s goodness,  
 Like the great bird Phoenix, shall find once more  
 On rising again renewal of life-joys,  
 560 Bliss with the Lord, where the belovèd throng do  
 Praise the dear Father. I can never attain to  
 The limit of life through the long ages  
 Of brightness, blissfulness : though my body must moulder  
 In the grave’s gloom-vaults for glee unto worms,  
 Yet the Lord God of Hosts, after the horrible death-hour,  
 Shall my soul deliver and awake it to glory.  
 A firm hope and faith ne’er fails in my bosom,  
 Of perpetual joy in the Prince of the Angels.” <sup>2</sup>  
 570 Thus sang a seer in cycles of old,  
 Spake sagaciously, God’s messenger,  
 Of his rising again unto life eternal,  
 That we, in this era, might well conceive the  
 Glorious token that the great bird Phoenix  
 Through his burning brings us : the bones’ fragments,  
 The ashes and embers all he collecteth,  
 When the fire is finished, in his feet, thereafter,  
 The bird bringeth them to the abode of the Lord God,  
 Out tow’rd the sun, where he afterward liveth  
 580 Years numberless, renewed in form and

As the noble bird gathers up his ashes and bones, and seeks the presence and society of his god, the sun,

<sup>1</sup> *Utterances, prophecies*, some render. We follow BT.

<sup>2</sup> The poet paraphrases Job xxix. 18 and xix. 25, 26, 27, except that, in the former passage, he reads “Phoenix” where the K. J. Bible has “sand.” See Bri., p. 228.

Wholly young again, where 'mong all that people  
 Not any can ever with ills threaten him.  
 So, now, after death, by the dear Lord's power,  
 Souls with their bodies journey together,  
 Like the blessèd bird beauteously decked with  
 Excellent odors, in eminent rapture,  
 Where the faithful sun flashes in beauty  
 O'er hosts of the happy in the heavenly city.

so, after the resurrection, the souls of the just, purified as by fire, seek the presence and fellowship of God.

IX.

590 There, high through the heavens, the holy Saviour  
 Brightly beameth o'er blessèd spirits,  
 Beautiful birds in bliss exulting  
 Restored gloriously gladly follow him  
 In that land of light, elect spirits,  
 Forever and ever, where with evil and treachery  
 No false and impious foeman can harm them :  
 But they live there for aye in light apparelled,  
 Like the great bird Phœnix 'neath God's protection,  
 Grandly in glory. The good work of each of them  
 Brightly beameth in the blissful home  
 600 In the everlasting Lord's belovèd presence,  
 In peace alway, like the light of the sun where  
 The glittering garland,<sup>1</sup> from glistening jewels  
 Wondrously woven, is worn on the head of  
 Each of the happy ones. Their heads shine, then,  
 Covered with glory ; the crown of the Lord  
 Excellent adorns each of the faithful  
 With lustre in the life where the long rapture  
 Endless and perennial not e'er diminisheth,  
 But they in beauty abide abundant in glory,  
 610 With the Father of Angels in ornaments fair.  
 They shall know in that land naught sorrowful,

After the Judgment, Christ flies through the air followed by rejoicing spirits.

The good deeds of the righteous shine brightly forever.

The Joys of the Blest.

<sup>1</sup> *Crown* would be more conventional; but, for the sake of alliteration, we follow BT.

Nor harm nor want nor days of contention,  
 Nor hunger the hot nor horrible thirst,  
 Nor age nor penury : the excellent King to them  
 All good things giveth, where the great throng of spirits  
 Laud their Saviour and the heavenly King's  
 Greatness glorify, to God singing praises.  
 The peaceful throng, 'round the throne of the Father  
 Holy in heaven wake harmonies mighty,  
 Clear-sounding choruses ; in common with angels,  
 620 The blissful ones blithely bless the excellent  
 Wielder of Worlds, with one voice crying :  
 " Peace to thee, true God, and perfect wisdom,  
 And thanks be to thee enthronèd in glory  
 For every new gift and all of thy bounty,  
 Immense, measureless is thy might and thy power,  
 High and holy ! The heaven of heavens,  
 Father almighty, is filled beauteously,  
 Splendor of splendors, with thy spacious glory  
 Up 'mid the angels and on earth together !  
 630 Protect us, thou Author of all things ! thou art almighty Father  
 God in the highest, Guardian of Heaven !"  
 Thus say the righteous ransomed from sin in  
 The city of glory, sing of his majesty ;  
 The host of the happy in heaven e'er raise  
 The Emperor's<sup>1</sup> praise : " Endless worship  
 Is his only forever ; he not e'er had beginning,  
 Commencement of might ! though, 'mong men in the earth  
 here,  
 In the form of a child he was born and nurtured,  
 640 As man on this midearth, yet his mighty power  
 High o'er the heavens holy continued,  
 Undiminished his majesty ! though mortal agony,  
 Torment and torture, on the tree of shame

<sup>1</sup> The poet conceives of God as the divine Cæsar, or Kaiser. — In reading, we must project ourselves back into this early period when these words were not hackneyed by centuries of use, but were still filled with *august* meaning.

He was doomed to endure, he the third day following  
The fall of his body<sup>1</sup> rose from the dead again  
Through the help of the Father. So Phoenix betokeneth,  
Young in the world, the God-Son's power,  
When up from his ashes uninjured in form he  
650 Leaps into life again. So our Lord and Saviour  
Through the fall of his body afforded us help,  
Life everlasting, as the lofty bird his  
Wings filleth full of fragrant, winsome  
Herbs of the forest, when eager for flying,  
Earth-fruits delicious." Such are the words, then,  
The songs of the saints (as sacred books<sup>2</sup> tell us)  
Whose holy spirits aspire unto heaven,  
In the joy of all joys, to the gentle World-Father,  
Where to God for a gift the goodly fragrance  
Of words and of works<sup>3</sup> they willingly offer,  
660 To the great Creator, in the glorious creation,  
The life of light. Laud him forever,  
World without end, give him honor and glory,  
Majesty, dominion, in the mighty, celestial  
Kingdom of heaven! He is rightly Sov'ran  
Of the whole of the earth and all of the heavens,  
Encircled with glory in the city of beauty.  
The Creator of Light hath to us granted  
To earn on the earth here his unending raptures,  
By good deeds to gain glory in heaven,  
670 Where we men are permitted the mightiest kingdoms  
To seek and to hold, on seats alofty  
Live in the delights of life and of peace,  
To hold the homes of happy blessedness,  
Have pleasures perpetual, see the peaceful, merciful

Even in heaven  
the noble bird is  
glorified as a type  
of the risen  
Christ.

The poet himself  
praises God.

<sup>1</sup> We follow BT.

<sup>2</sup> Such men as Bede, St. Ambrose, and other allegorical writers of the church.

<sup>3</sup> See Bible concordance under "savour," especially "sweet-smelling savour." Also cf. "the odor of sanctity."

Lord of Victories, look on him alway  
 And his songs of praise unceasingly raise,  
 Blessèd 'mid angels. Alleluia!

[The last eleven lines of the poem are part Latin and part Anglo-Saxon, which we have tried to represent below by leaving the Latin. Stopford Brooke suggests that possibly Cynewulf may have chosen to end the poem in this "fantastic way," instead of signing with runes as in some others.<sup>1</sup>]

Hath allowed us graciously *lucis auctor*,  
 In this mortal life *mereri*<sup>2</sup>  
 By deeds of goodness *gaudia in celo*,  
 Where we men are permitted *maxima regna*  
 To seek and possess, *sedibus altis*  
 To live in the delights *lucis et pacis*,  
 Earn the abodes *almæ*<sup>3</sup> *letitiæ*,  
 Have abundant blessings, *blandem et mitem*,  
 Victory-Lord see *sine fine*,  
 And laud him loudly *laude perenne*,  
 Happy with angels. *Alleluia*.

<sup>1</sup> With all deference to this eminent scholar, I do not see the remotest connection between this way of ending a poem and Cynewulf's runic insertions, unless it should turn out that he has hidden his signature somehow, à *la Donnelly*, in the Latin.

<sup>2</sup> Some read *merueri*; one emendator, *meruisse*; another, *merere*.

<sup>3</sup> Some read *alma*.