

**YALE STUDIES IN
ENGLAND. XXI THE
ELENE OF CYNEWULF**

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YALE STUDIES IN ENGLISH

ALBERT S. COOK, EDITOR

XXI

THE
ELENE OF CYNEWULF

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH PROSE

BY

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PREFACE

This translation was made from the edition of the *Elene* issued by Charles W. Kent in 1889 (Ginn & Co., Boston). His text is 'that of Zupitza's second edition, carefully compared with Wülker's edition and Zupitza's third edition, in which the results of Napier's collation are contained.'

The aim of this translation is to give an accurate and readable modern English prose rendering of the Old English poetry. The translation of Richard Francis Weymouth, entitled *A Literal Translation of Cynewulf's Elene*, has been at hand, but I owe it practically nothing in this work. While I trust that my rendering has not departed so far from the text that it will be valueless to the student, yet at places it will be found that I have to some extent expanded or contracted the literal translation in the hope of benefiting the modern English version.

My thanks are due to Dr. Robert K. Root and Dr. Chauncey B. Tinker of Yale University, and to Dr. Charles H. Whitman of Lehigh University, for examining part of the work in manuscript, and to Dr. Albert S. Cook of Yale University for a careful reading of the proof.

LUCIUS HUDSON HOLT.

NEW HAVEN,
January 1, 1904.

ELENE

I. THE EMPEROR CONSTANTINE.

There had passed in the turn of years, as men mark the tale of time, two hundred and thirty and three winters over the world since the Lord God, the Glory of kings and Light of the faithful, was born on earth in human guise; and it was the sixth 5 year of the reign of Constantine since he was raised in the realm of the Romans to lead their army, a prince of battles. He was a bulwark to his people, 10 valiant with the shield, and gracious to his heroes; and the prince's realm waxed great beneath the heavens. He was a just king, a war-lord of men. God strengthened him with majesty and might till 15 he became a joy to many men throughout the world, an avenger for his people when he raised aloft his spear against their foes.

2. THE WAR WITH THE BARBARIANS.

And battle was brought on him, the tumult of strife. The people of the Huns and famous Goths 20 gathered a host together; and the Franks and Hugas marched forth, men fierce in fight and ripe for war. The spears and woven mail-coats glittered, as with shouts and clash of shields they lifted up on high the standard of battle. Openly 25 the fighters gathered all together, and the throng marched forth. The wolf in the wood howled his

war-song, and hid not his secret hopes of carnage;
30 and at the rear of the foe the dewy-feathered eagle
shrieked his note on high.

A mighty host hastened to war through the cities,
gleaned from all the men the Hunnish king could
summon from the near-lying towns. A vast army
35 sallied forth—bands of picked horsemen strength-
ened the force of the foot-soldiers—until within a
foreign land upon the bank of the Danube these
stout-souled brandishers of the spear pitched their
camp near the water's flow, amid the tumult of the
40 army. They longed to overrun the realm of the
Romans, and lay it waste with their hordes.

Then were the dwellers in the cities aware of the
Huns' coming. And the emperor straightway bade
summon with the greatest speed by dispatch of the
arrow his heroes to war against the foes; bade lead
45 out to battle the warriors beneath the heavens.
Their hearts inspired by victory, the Roman heroes
were soon girt with weapons for the fight, though
they had a lesser host for battle than circled about
50 the proud king of the Huns. Then the shields
rang, the wood of war clashed; the king with the
host, his army, marched forth to strife, and over
their heads the raven wailed, dark, and thirsting for
the slaughter. The army was moving—trumpeters
leaped, heralds shouted commands, and horses
55 stamped the earth. Hastily the multitude enranked
itself for strife.

But the king was fear-smitten, awed with terror,
as he looked upon the hostile host, the army of the
Huns and Goths, that upon the river's bank at the
60 boundary of the Roman realm was massing its
strength, an uncounted multitude. The king of the

Romans suffered bitter grief of soul, and hoped not for his kingdom because of his small host; he had too few warriors, trusty thanes, to encounter the overnight of brave men in battle. 65

3. THE DREAM.

The army encamped near at hand beside the river, nobles about their prince, for the space of a single night after they first beheld the course of their foes. Then unto the emperor himself in his sleep, as he slumbered among his retinue, was disclosed the marvel of a dream, shown unto him with soul uplifted in the hope of victory. Him thought there appeared before him in the form of a man a certain warrior, radiant, resplendent, brilliant, more glorious than he ever beheld 'neath the heavens, before or since. Then, dight with his boar-crested helmet, he started up from slumber, and straightway the messenger, a bright herald of glory, spake unto him and called him by his name, while the veil of night parted asunder: 'O Constantine, the King of angels, Wielder of fates and Lord of hosts, hath commanded to offer thee a covenant. Fear thou not, though foreign peoples threaten thee with terror and bitter strife. Look to heaven, unto the Lord of glory. There shalt thou find aid and the token of victory.' 85

He was soon ready at the holy one's behest; he opened wide the secret places of his heart; he gazed on high, as the messenger, faithful weaver of peace, had bidden him. Over the roof of clouds he saw the beauteous tree of glory, gleaming with treasure and decked with gold—and the gems shone 90

brightly. The shining tree was inscribed with letters of brilliance and light: 'By this sign thou shalt overcome the foe in the dread peril; by this thou shalt stay the hated host.'

- 95 Then the light vanished, ascended up on high, and together with it the messenger, unto the throng of the pure ones. And the king, the leader of men, was the blither and the freer from grief in his heart by reason of that fair vision.

4. THE BATTLE.

Then Constantine, bulwark of heroes and giver
100 of gifts, battle-prince of armies and glorious king,
bade fashion with greatest haste a token like unto
that sign he had seen, which had been disclosed
before him in the heavens, the cross of Christ.
105 And at dawn, with the first gleam of day, he bade
rouse the warriors and make ready for the stress of
fight, lift up the emblem of battle, take the holy
tree before them, and bear the sign of God into
the press of their foes.

110 The trumpets rang loud at the army's front.
The raven rejoiced at the move; the dewy-feathered
eagle scanned the march, the strife of battle-heated
men; and the wolf, fellow of the forest, raised his
song. Rife was the dread terror of battle.

Then there was the clash of shields and the shock
115 of men, the bitter hand-to-hand struggle and the
slaughter of hosts, when once they had passed within
an arrow's flight. On the fated folk dire enemies
hurled a shower of darts, and with might of arm
sent their spears, biting battle-adders, over the yel-
120 low shields into the midst of their foes. But with

courage undaunted the other host advanced; from time to time they surged forward, broke the rampart of shields, thrust their swords between, and sternly kept their way.

Then was the standard, the token, raised before the armies, and they chanted the victors' song. Over the field of battle gleamed spears and helmets of gold. The pagan host was conquered; in merciless strife they fell. As the king of the Romans, dauntless in battle, bade raise that holy tree, the peoples of the Huns straight fled away, and their warriors were scattered far and wide. Some 130 perished in the fight, some saved themselves hardly on the march, some, with life half-ebbed, fled to fastnesses and nursed their strength behind barren rocks, some seized the land near the Danube, and 135 some were finally drowned in the river's current. Then was the army of valiant heroes rejoiced, and from break of day until eve they followed hard upon the foreign foe, while the spears flew, biting 140 battle-adders. The horde of hated shield-bearers was lessened; but few of the army of Huns returned thence home again.

Then was manifest from that day's deed that the King Almighty gave unto Constantine victory, 145 glorious honor, and a realm beneath the heavens, through his holy rood. And he, renowned in battle, a bulwark of armies, returned thence home again when the war was decided, exulting in his spoil. Famed in the fight, a defense for heroes, the 150 king came with a throng of thanes to visit his cities and stud his shield with jewels.