

THE BATTLE OF THE EASTERN FIELD



J. R. R. TOLKIEN



BELOW is reproduced in full the poem 'The Battle of the Eastern Field' written by J. R. R. Tolkien in 1911. This poem first appeared in the 'King Edward School Chronicle' Volume XXVI no. 186 March 1911; and we thank the trustees and governors of King Edward VI Grammar School and the executors of the late Professor's estate for permission to reprint this poem. As by way of explanation of some points of the poem, it starts with a short introductory paragraph from the then editor of the magazine. Stating that the poem was found in the waste paper basket in the common room, and that it was in a poor state, he has added pieces of his own. This may seem confusing, and you may wonder if that was so, then how can it be said Tolkien wrote the poem. I think, though, that if you bear in mind that this type of poem, romantically saved from death in the bin, and restored to posterity, was all the rage at this particular time, and that it is also possible that Tolkien himself had a hand at editing this particular magazine, as it is known that Tolkien wrote the editorials for the same magazine in June and July of that year. I now reproduce the poem in full:

K. J. Young - Mallorn Editor

(On Friday March 31st I came across this curious fragment in the waste paper basket, in the prefects' room. Much of it was so blotted that I could not decipher it. I now publish it with emendations of my own. G. A. B.)

I

Ho, rattles sound your warnote!
Ho, trumpets loudly bray!
The clans will strive and gory writhe
Upon the field today.
Today the walls and blackboards
Are hung with flaunting script,
From Atlas on the staircase
To Bogey's darkling crypt.
Each knight is robed in scarlet,
Or clad in olive green;
A gallant crest upon each breast
Is proudly heaving seen.
While flows our Yellow River,
While stands the great Pavil,
That Thursday in the Lenten Term
Shall be a beanfeast still.

II

Thus spake the Green-clad Chieftain
To the foe in Scarlet dight,
"Shall no one wrest the silver grail
"Nor dare another fight!"
And the doughty foeman answered -
"Ay, the goblet shall be won,
"And on a famous field of war
"Great deeds of prowess done!"
So hard by Brum's great river
They bade the hosts to meet,
Array'd upon the Eastern Field
For victory or defeat.

III

Now greily dawns that fatal day
Upon the Eastern Field,
That Thursday in the Lenten Term
With honour ever sealed.
* * * * (!!! G. A. B.)

((The dots are meant to represent ink blots, and the comment in brackets is from the magazine's editor.))

Nor without secret trouble
Does the bravest mark his foes,
For girt by many a vassal bold
Each mighty leader shows.
Around the Green-clad Chieftain
Stands many a haughty Lord,

From Edgbastonia's ancient homes,
 From Mosli's emerald sward;
 Towers Ericillus of the sands;
 Glowers Falco of the Bridge.
 But noblest stands that Chiefest Lord
 From the Fountain's lofty ridge.
 Among the blood-red ranks were seen
 Midst many an honour'd name
 Great Sekhet and those brethren
 The Corcii of fame.

IV

Now straight the shrill call sounded
 That heralds in the fray,
 And loud was heard the clamour
 Of the watchers far away.
 * * * * * (bother !!! G.A.B.)

Swiftly rushed out that Chiefest Lord,
 And fiercely onward sped,
 His corslet girt about his waist,
 His close helm on his head.
 Now round in thickest throng there pressed
 These warriors red and green,
 And many a dashing charge was made,
 And many a brave deed seen.
 Full oft a speeding foeman
 Was hurtled to the ground,
 While forward and now backward,
 Did the ball of fortune bound:
 Till Sekhet mark'd the slaughter,
 And toss'd his flaxen crest
 And towards the Green-clad Chieftain
 Through the carnage pressed;
 Who fiercely flung by Sekhet,
 Lay low upon the ground,
 Till a thick wall of liegemen
 Encompassed him around.
 His clients from the battle
 Bare him some little space,
 And gently rubbed his wounded knee,
 And scanned his pallid face.

* * * * *
 (The rest of this touching scene and most of the
 remainder of the battle are blotted out. I hadn't
 time to put in any of my own. G.A.B.)

XIII

* * * * *
 ...meanwhile in the centre

Great deeds of arms were wrought,
 Where Cupid ran on cunning foot,
 And where the Hill-Lord fought.
 But Cupid lo! outrunning
 The fleetest of the hosts,
 Sped to where beyond the press,
 He spied the Great Twin Posts;
 He crossed the line ... (he scored a try? G. A. B.)
 And ... then ...
 * * * * fly
 (Bother these blots G. A. B.)

XX

Then tenfold from the watchers
 The shouts and din arose,
 Like the roar of the raucous signal
 When the dinner-hour bull blows. (!!! G. A. B.)
 Now backward and now forward,
 Rocked furious the fray,
 When sudden came the last shrill call
 Which marked the close of play.

(G. A. B. This is unworthy of the poet; I emend to -
 "When sudden from the midmost host
 The clarion called for peace."
 Ed. It wasn't a clarion and "peace" does NOT rhyme
 with "fray".)

XXI

Then cried the King Mensura,
 "Ho, henchmen lade the board,
 "With tankards and with viands rare
 "From out thy toothsome hoard;
 "For never, I ween, shall warriors,
 "Who have fought a noble fight,
 "All thirsty and a hungering,
 "Depart without a bite.
 "So let the war-worn clansmen
 "Of banner green or red,
 "Sip my steaming cup of peace,
 "And friendly break my bread."
 So at Mensura's bidding,
 Was straight a feast array'd
 And thither limped the men of war,
 And thirst and hunger stay'd
 When so, they put forth from them
 The lust of meat and drink, (!!! Homer)
 Though ne'er from food or foemen,
 Did any ever shrink,

Before them many a King and Lord
Held speech, and many a cheer
Was raised for all those men of heart,
To whom brave war is dear.

* * * * *

The Ed. won't let me put any more in. Most of them then
went home to bed. G. A. B.



The former King Edward's School,
New Street, Birmingham.