

Maldon

SAMPLER

Also by Michael Smith (\* indicates a Shearsman publication)

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Michael Smith

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*A Version*

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Thereby one might know  
that the youth was unwilling  
to waver in combat  
when weapons he wielded.

He also desired Ealdric  
to attend to his leader,  
his lord, in the battle;  
then forward began to bear  
spear to the conflict:  
and he was of hale heart  
while he could bear with his hands  
his buckler and broad-blade.  
His pledge to his prince to fight  
he upheld as he promised.

Then Byrhtnoth began  
to exhort his soldiers;  
he rode and he heartened,  
showed to his warriors  
the way they must stand  
and hold to their stances;  
he bade them grip their shields  
correctly and strongly,  
and be unafraid.

When these he'd well heartened  
then he dismounted  
where those of his men,  
his dearest, most loyal retainers,  
the troop of his household,  
he knew to be stationed.

There stood then on shore  
and shouted out stoutly  
the Vikings' envoy;  
voiced in words  
full of menace  
the message of the seafarers  
addressed to the earl  
where he stood on the bank:

'To you the bold seamen  
have sent me,  
commanded me tell you  
to render up tribute  
in return for protection;  
and for you it is better  
to buy off with tribute  
this onslaught of spears  
than take part with us  
in a battle so bitter.  
There's no need either  
for mutual slaughter  
if you have riches enough  
and give up your gold  
in trade for a truce.  
If you who are strongest  
decide to disband  
and pay to the seamen  
the gold they determine  
as tribute for peace,  
we shall take to our ships  
with the coins you have yielded,  
set forth on the sea  
and keep peace with you.'

Byrhtnoth then spoke;  
                                he grasped his buckler,  
brandished his trim spear of ash;  
  angry and resolute,  
made answer  
                                as follows:  
‘Listen, seaman,  
                                to what this folk tell you.  
For tribute they’ll give you  
                                lances and spears  
tipped with poison,  
                                and ancient swords.  
Such war-gear to you  
                                will be useless in battle.  
Viking seaman,  
                                announce back again,  
report to your people  
                                a message more hateful,  
that here stands dauntless  
                                an earl with his troops  
prepared to defend  
                                this land that is theirs,  
Aethelred’s homeland,  
                                my prince,  
its people and places.  
                                The heathen shall fall  
prostrate in battle.  
                                To me it’s too shameful  
that you with our tribute  
                                depart on your ships  
untested by battle,  
                                having journeyed  
thus hither  
                                far in our homeland.