

## PREFACE

The Red Book contains a large number of verses. A few are included in the narrative of the *Downfall of the Lord of the Rings*, or in the attached stories and chronicles; many more are found on loose leaves, while some are written carelessly in margins and blank spaces. Of the last sort most are nonsense, now often unintelligible even when legible, or half-remembered fragments. From these marginalia are drawn Nos. 4, II, 13; though a better example of their general character would be the scribble, on the page recording Bilbo's *When winter first begins to bite*'.

*The wind so whirled a weathercock  
He could not hold his tail up;  
The frost so nipped a **throstlecock**  
He could not snap a snail up.  
'My case is hard' the throstle cried,  
And 'All is vane' the cock replied;  
And so they set their wail up.*

The present selection is taken from the older pieces, mainly concerned with legends and jests of the Shire at the end of the Third Age, that appear to have been made by **Hobbits**, especially by Bilbo and his friends, or their immediate **descendants**. Their authorship is, however, seldom indicated. Those outside the narratives are in various hands, and were probably written down from oral tradition.

In the Red Book it is said that No. 5 was made by Bilbo, and No. 7 by Sam **Gamgee**. No. 8 is marked **SG**, and the ascription may be accepted. No. 12 is also marked **SG**, though at most Sam can only have touched up an older piece of the comic **bestiary** lore of which **Hobbits** appear to have been fond. In *The Lord of the Rings* Sam stated that No. 10 was traditional in the Shire.

No. 3 is an example of another kind which seems to have amused Hobbits: a rhyme or story which returns to its own beginning, and so may be recited until the hearers revolt. Several specimens are found in the Red Book, but the others are simple and crude. No. 3 is much the longest and most elaborate. It was evidently made by Bilbo. This is indicated by its obvious relationship to the long poem recited by Bilbo, as his own composition, in the house of **Elrond**. In origin a 'nonsense rhyme', it is in the **Rivendell** version found transformed and applied, somewhat incongruously, to

the High-elvish and **Numenorean** legends of **Earendil**. Probably because Bilbo invented its metrical devices and was proud of them. They do not appear in other pieces in the Red Book. The older form, here given, must belong to the early days after Bilbo's return from his journey. Though the influence of Elvish traditions is seen, they are not seriously treated, and the names used (*Derrilyn, Thellamie, Belmarie, Aerie*) are mere inventions in the Elvish style, and are not in fact Elvish at all.

The influence of the events at the end of the Third Age, and the widening of the horizons of the Shire by contact with **Rivendell** and **Gondor**, is to be seen in other pieces. No. 6, though here placed next to Bilbo's **Man-in-the-Moon** rhyme, and the last item. No. 16, must be derived ultimately from Gondor. They are evidently based on the traditions of Men, living in shorelands and familiar with rivers running into the Sea. No. 6 actually mentions *Belfalas* (the windy bay of **Bel**), and the Sea-ward Tower, *Tirith Aear*, or **Dol Amroth**. No. 16 mentions the Seven Rivers' that flowed into the Sea in the South Kingdom, and uses the **Gondorian** name, of High-elvish form, *Firiel*, mortal woman. 2 In the **Langstrand** and **Dol Amroth** there were many traditions of the ancient Elvish dwellings, and of the haven at the mouth of the **Morthond** from which 'westward ships' had sailed as far back as

1 *Lefnui, Morthond-Kiril-Ringlo, Gilrain-Sernui, and Anduin*.

2 The name was borne by a princess of Gondor, through whom **Aragorn** claimed descent from the Southern line. It was also the name of a daughter of **Elanor**, daughter of Sam, but her name, if connected with the rhyme, must be derived from it; it could not have arisen in **Westmarch**.

the fall of **Eregion** in the Second Age. These two pieces, therefore, are only re-handlings of Southern matter, though this may have reached Bilbo by way of **Rivendell**. No. 14 also depends on the lore of Rivendell, Elvish and **Numenorean**, concerning the heroic days at the end of the First Age; it seems to contain echoes of the Numenorean tale of Turin and **Mim** the Dwarf.

Nos. 1 and 2 evidently come from the Buckland. They show more knowledge of that country, and of the Dingle, the wooded valley of the **Withywindle**, than any **Hobbits** west of the **Marish** were likely to possess. They also show that the **Bucklanders** knew **Bombadil**,<sup>2</sup> though, no doubt they had as little understanding of his powers as the **Shirefolk** had of **Gandalf's**: both

were regarded as benevolent persons, mysterious maybe and unpredictable but nonetheless comic. No. 1 is the earlier piece, and is made up of various **hobbit-versions** of legends concerning **Bombadil**. No. 2 uses similar traditions, though

1 *Grindwall* was a small **hythe** on the north bank of the **Withywindle**; it was outside the Hay, and was so well watched and protected by a *grind* or fence extended into the water. *Breredon* (Briar Hill) was a little village on rising ground behind the hythe, in the narrow tongue between the end of the High Hay and the **Brandywine**. At the *Mithe*, the outflow of the **Shirebourn**, was a landing-stage, from which a lane ran to **Deephallow** and so on to the Causeway road that went through **Rushey** and Stock.

Indeed they probably gave him this name (it is **Bucklandish** in form) to add to his many older ones.

Tom's raillery is here turned in jest upon his friends, who treat it with amusement (tinged with fear); but it was probably composed much later and after the visit of **Frodo** and his companions to the house of **Bombadil**.

The verses, of **hobbit** origin, here presented have generally two features in common. They are fond of strange words, and of rhyming and metrical tricks — in their simplicity **Hobbits** evidently regarded such things as virtues or graces, though they were no doubt mere imitations of Elvish practices. They are also at least on the surface, **lighthearted** or frivolous, though sometimes one may uneasily suspect that more is meant than meets the ear. No. 15, certainly of hobbit origin, is an exception. It is the latest piece and belongs to the Fourth Age; but it is included here, because a hand has scrawled at its head *Frodos Dreme*. That is remarkable, and though the piece is most unlikely to have been written by **Frodo** himself, the title shows that it was associated with the dark and despairing dreams which visited him in March and October during his last three years. But there were certainly other traditions concerning Hobbits that were taken by the 'wandering-madness', and if they ever returned, were afterwards queer and uncommunicable. The thought of the Sea was ever-present in the background of hobbit imagination; but fear of it and distrust of all Elvish lore, was the prevailing mood in the Shire at the end of the Third Age, and that mood was certainly not entirely dispelled by the events and changes with which that Age ended.