While most of Anglo-Saxon poetry is serious or even elegiac, the ninety-five verse riddles found in the *Exeter Book* display their interest in cleverness with words. Thus the ancient custom of riddling was a popular entertainment among Anglo-Saxons. Pretend you are an Anglo-Saxon and guess the answers.

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I am the scalp of myself, skinned by my foeman: robbed of my strength, he steeped & soaked me, dipped me in water, whipped me out again, set me in the sun. I soon lost there the hairs I had had. The hard edge of a keen-ground knife cuts me now, fingers fold me, and a fowl’s pride drives its treasure trail across me, bounds again over the brown rim, sucks the wood-dye, steps again on me, makes his black marks. A man then hides me between stout shield-boards stretched with hide, fits me with gold. There glows on me the jewelsmith’s handiwork held with wires. Let these royal enrichments and this red dye and splendid settings spread the glory of the Protector of peoples—and not plague the fool. If the sons of men will make use of me they shall....

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The womb of the wold, wet and cold, bore me at first, brought me forth. I know in my mind my making was not through skill with fells or fleeces of wool; there was no winding of wefts, there is no woof in me, no thread thrumming under the thrash of strokes, no whirring shuttle steered through me, no weaver’s reed rapped my sides. The worms that braid the brodered silk with Weird cunning did not weave me; yet anywhere over the earth’s breadth men will attest me a trustworthy garment.
I am lonely, hacked with steel, wounded by weapons; the toil of battle has wearied me, swords have worn me out. Often have I seen war, the rage of battle; nor do I hope for rest from strife before I die. Hammered swords have struck me; hard and sharp of edge, the wrought swords have bitten me; and even more deadly feud I shall endure. I can never find a leech to heal my wounds with herbs, but only more mortal blows and deeper wounds each day and night.

Wounded I am, and weary with fighting; gashed by the iron, gored by the point of it, sick of battle-work, battered and scarred. Many a fearful fight have I seen, when Hope there was none, or help in the thick of it, ere I was down and fordone in the fray. Offspring of hammers, hardest of battle-blades, smithed in forges, fell on me savagely, doomed to bear the brunt and the shock of it, fierce encounter of clashing foes. Leech cannot heal my hurts with his simples, salves for my sores have I sought in vain. Blade-cuts dolorous, deep in the side of me, daily and nightly redouble my wounds.

I war with the wind, with the waves I wrestle; I must battle with both when the bottom I seek, my strange habitation by surges o'er-roofed. I am strong in the strife, while still I remain; as soon as I stir, they are stronger than I. They wrench and they wrest, till I run from my foes; what was put in my keeping they carry away. If my back be not broken, I baffle them still; the rocks are my helpers, when hard I am pressed; grimly I grip them. Guess what I’m called.

I wear gray, woven over with bright and gleaming gems. I bring the stupid to folly’s paths, fool the ignorant with sin, urge all useless roads and ruin the rest. I can’t explain their madness, for I push them to error and pick their brains, yet they praise me more for each seduction. Their dullness will be sorrow, when they lead their souls on high, unless they learn to walk wisely, and without my help.

- **scourger**: one who scourges or flogs
- **hacked**: cut rudely, roughly, or irregularly
- **wrought**: shaped by hammering or beating
- **leech**: a leech was a doctor, so called because he used leeches to draw blood in the belief that sickness was caused by impurities in the blood.
- **dolorous**: causing pain or sorrow

My beak is below, I burrow and nose under the ground. I go as I’m guided by my master the farmer, old foe of the forest; bent and bowed, at my back he walks, forward pushing me over the field; sows on my path where I’ve passed along. I came from the wood, a wagon carried me; I was fitted with skill, I am full of wonders. As grubbing I go, there’s green on one side, but black on the other my path is seen. A curious prong pierces my back; beneath me in front, another grows down and forward pointing is fixed to my head.