# THE NORTHMEN in BRITAIN

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*"There is no man so high-hearted over earth, nor so good in gifts, nor so keen in youth, nor so brave in deeds, nor so loyal to his lord, that he may not have always sad yearning towards the sea-faring, for what the Lord will give him there.*

*"His heart is not for the harp, nor receiving of rings, nor delight in a wife, nor the joy of the world, nor about anything else but the rolling of the waves. And he hath ever longing who wisheth for the Sea."*

"The Seafarer"
(Old English Poem).


*Fr.* *The Coming of the Northmen*

# THE NORTHMEN IN BRITAIN

*BY*

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'THE POEM-BOOK OF THE GAEL' 'CUCHULAIN, THE HOUND OF ULSTER'
'PAGAN IRELAND' 'EARLY CHRISTIAN IRELAND'
ETC.

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# Foreword

TWO great streams of Northern immigration met on the shores of Britain during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. The Norsemen from the deep fiords of Western Norway, fishing and raiding along the coasts, pushed out their adventurous boats into the Atlantic, and in the dawn of Northern history we find them already settled in the Orkney and Shetland Isles, whence they raided and settled southward to Caithness, Fife, and Northumbria on the east, and to the Hebrides, Galloway, and Man on the western coast. Fresh impetus was given to this outward movement by the changes of policy introduced by Harald Fairhair, first king of Norway (872-933). Through him a nobler type of emigrant succeeded the casual wanderer, and great lords and kings' sons came over to consolidate the settlements begun by humbler agencies. Iceland was at the same time peopled by a similar stock. The Dane, contemporaneously with the Norseman, came by a different route. Though he seems to have been the first to invade Northumbria (if Ragnar and his sons were really Danes), his movement was chiefly round the southern shores of England, passing over by way of the Danish and Netherland coast up the English Channel, and round to the west. Both streams met in Ireland, where a sharp and lengthened contest was fought out between the two nations, and where both

took deep root, building cities and absorbing much of the commerce of the country.

The viking was at first simply a bold adventurer, but a mixture of trading and raiding became a settled practice with large numbers of Norsemen, who, when work at home was slack and the harvest was sown or reaped, filled up the time by pirate inroads on their own or neighbouring lands. Hardy sailors and fearless fighters they were; and life would have seemed too tame had it meant a continuous course of peaceful farming or fishing. New possessions and new conquests were the salt of life. "Biorn went sometimes on viking but sometimes on trading voyages," we read of a man of position in Egil's Saga, and the same might be said of hundreds of his fellows.

It was out of these viking raids that the Dano-Norse Kingdoms of Dublin and Northumbria grew, the Dukedom of Normandy, and the Earldom of Orkney and the Isles.

The Danish descents seem to have been more directly for the purpose of conquest than those of the Norse, and they ended by establishing on the throne of England a brief dynasty of Danish kings in the eleventh century, remarkable only from the vigour of Canute's reign.

The intimate connexion all through this period between Scandinavia, Iceland, and Britain can only be realized by reading the Northern Sagas side by side with the chronicles of Great Britain and Ireland, and it is from Norse sources chiefly that I propose to tell the story.

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I desire to thank Mrs Muriel Press and Mr W. C. Green for kind permission to make use of portions of their translations of Laxdæla and Egil's Sagas; also Mr W. G. Collingwood for his consent to my adoption in my map of some of his boundaries from a map published in his *Scandinavian Britain* (S.P.C.K.); and to the Secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge for giving his sanction to this.

# The Northmen in Britain

## THE AGE OF THE VIKINGS

## Chapter I

### The First Coming of the Northmen

THE first actual descent of the Northmen is chronicled in England under the year 787, and in Ireland, upon which country they commenced their descents about the same time, under the year 795; but it is likely, not only that they had visited and raided the coasts before this, but had actually made some settlements in both countries. The Ynglinga Saga tells us that Ivar Vidfadme or "Widefathom" had taken possession of a fifth part of England, *i.e.* Northumbria, before Harald Fairhair ruled in Norway, or Gorm the Old in Denmark; that is to say, before the history of either of these two countries begins. Ivar Vidfadme is evidently Ivar the Boneless, son of Ragnar Lodbrog, who conquered Northumbria before the reign of Harald Fairhair. There are traces of them even earlier, for a year after the first coming of the Northmen to Northumbria mentioned in the English annals we find that they called a synod at a place named Fingall, or "Fair Foreigners," the name always applied to

the Norse in our Irish and sometimes in our English chronicles. Now a place would not have been so named unless Norse people had for some time been settled there, and we may take it for granted that Norse settlers had made their home in Northumbria at some earlier period. We find, too, at quite an early time, that Norse and Irish had mingled and intermarried in Ireland, forming a distinct race called the Gall-Gael, or "Foreigners and Irish," who had their own fleets and armies; and it is said that on account of their close family connexion many of the Christian Irish forsook their religion and relapsed into the paganism of the Norse who lived amongst them. We shall find, as we go on in the history, that generally the contrary was the case, and that contact with Christianity in these islands caused many Norse chiefs and princes to adopt our faith; indeed, it was largely through Irish and English influence that Iceland and Norway became Christian. Though we may not always approve of the way in which this was brought about, the fact itself is interesting.

The first settlers in Iceland were Irish hermits, who took with them Christian books, bells, and croziers, and the first Christian church built on the island was dedicated to St Columba, the Irish founder of the Scottish monastery of Iona, through whom Christianity was brought to Scotland.

Yet there is no doubt that the coming of the Northmen was looked upon with dread by the English, and there is a tone of terror in the first entry in the chronicles of their arrival upon the coast. This entry is so important that we will give it in the words of one of the old historians: "Whilst the pious King Bertric [King of Wessex] was reigning over the western

parts of the English, and the innocent people spread through the plains were enjoying themselves in tranquillity and yoking their oxen to the ploughs, suddenly there arrived on the coast a fleet of Danes, not large, but of three ships only: this was their first arrival. When this became known, the King's officer, who was already stopping in the town of Dorchester, leaped on his horse and galloped forwards with a few men to the port, thinking that they were merchants rather than enemies, and commanding them in an authoritative tone, ordered them to go to the royal city; but he was slain on the spot by them, and all who were with him."[1]

This rude beginning was only a forecast of what was to follow. We hear of occasional viking bands arriving at various places on the coast from Kent to Northumbria, and ravaging wherever they appeared. At first they seem to have wandered round the coast without thought of remaining anywhere, but about sixty years after their first appearance (in 851), we find them settling on the warmer and more fertile lands of England during the winter, though they were off again when the summer came, foraging and destroying. This became a regular habit with these visitors, and led gradually to permanent settlements, especially in Northumbria. The intruders became known as "the army," and the appearance of "the army" in any district filled the inhabitants with terror. Our first definite story of the Northmen in England is connected with the appearance of "the army" in Yorkshire A.D. 867. We learn from the English chronicles that violent internal discord was troubling Northumbria at this time. The king of the Northumbrians was Osbert,

[1] Ethelwerd's Chronicle, A.D. 786 (*recté* 787).

but the people had risen up and expelled him, we know not for what reason,[1] and had placed on the throne a man named Ælla, "not of royal blood," who seems to have been the leader of the people.

Just at this moment, when the country was most divided, the dreaded pagan army advanced over the mouth of the Humber from the south-east into Yorkshire. In this emergency all classes united for the common defence, and we find Osbert, the dethroned king, nobly marching side by side with his rival to meet the Northmen. Hearing that a great army was approaching, the Northmen shut themselves up within the walls of York, and attempted to defend themselves behind them. The Northumbrians succeeded in making a breach in the walls and entering the town ; but, inspired by fear and necessity, the pagans made a fierce sally, cutting down their foes on all sides, inside and outside the walls alike. The city was set on fire, those who escaped making peace with the enemy. From that time onward the Northmen were seldom absent from Northumbria. York became one of their chief headquarters, and the constant succession of Norse ships along the coast gradually brought a considerable influx of Norse inhabitants to that part of England. It became, in fact, a viking kingdom, under the sons of Ragnar Lodbrog, whose story we have now to tell. This was in the time of the first Ethelred, when Alfred the Great was about twenty years of age. Ethelred was too much occupied in warring with the pagans in the South of England to be able to give any aid to the Northumbrians.

[1] Saxo's Danish annals speak of Hame, the father of Ælla, as King of Northumbria (see p. 18), but he is unknown to the English Chronicles.

# Chapter II

## The Saga of Ragnar Lodbrog, or "Hairy-breeks"

ACCORDING to the Danish and Norse accounts, the leader of the armies of the Northmen on the occasion we have just referred to was the famous Ragnar Lodbrog, one of the earliest and most terrible of the Northern vikings. The story of Ragnar stands just on the borderland between mythology and history, and it is difficult to tell how much of it is true, but in some of its main outlines it accords with the rather scanty information we get at this time from the English annals. An old tradition relates how Ragnar got his title of Lodbrog, or "Hairy-breeks."

It is said that the King of the Swedes, who was fond of hunting in the woods, brought home some snakes and gave them to his daughter to rear. Of these curious pets she took such good care that they multiplied until the whole countryside was tormented with them. Then the King, repenting his foolish act, proclaimed that whosoever should destroy the vipers should have his daughter as his reward. Many warriors, attracted by the adventure, made an attempt to rid the country of the snakes, but without much success. Ragnar also determined to try to win the princess. He caused a dress to be made of woolly material and stuffed with hair to protect him, and put on thick hairy thigh-pieces that the snakes

could not bite. Then he plunged his whole body, clad in this covering, into freezing water, so that it froze on him, and became hard and impenetrable. Thus attired, he approached the door of the palace alone, his sword tied to his side and his spear lashed in his hand. As he went forward an enormous snake glided up in front, and others, equally large, attacked him in the rear. The King and his courtiers, who were looking on, fled to a safe shelter, watching the struggle from afar like affrighted little girls. But Ragnar, trusting to the hardness of his frozen dress, attacked the vipers boldly, and drove them back, killing many of them with his spear.

Then the King came forward and looked closely at the dress which had withstood the venom of the serpents. He saw that it was rough and hairy, and he laughed loudly at the shaggy breeches, which gave Ragnar an uncouth appearance. He called him in jest Lodbrog (Lod-brokr), or "Hairy-breeks," and the nickname stuck to him all his life. Having laid aside his shaggy raiment and put on his kingly attire, Ragnar received the maiden as the reward of his victory. He had several sons, of whom the youngest, Ivar, was well known in after years in Britain and Ireland, and left a race of rulers there.

Meanwhile the ill-disposed people of his own kingdom, which seems to have included the districts we now know as Zealand or Jutland, one of those small divisions into which the Northern countries were at that time broken up,[1] during the absence of Ragnar stirred up the inhabitants to depose him and set up one Harald as king. Ragnar, hearing of this, and having few men at his command, sent envoys to Norway to ask for assistance.

[1] This is the account of Saxo; the Norse accounts differ from him as to the district over which Ragnar ruled.


*Ladgerda* 16

They gathered a small host together, of weak and strong, young and old, whomsoever they could get, and had a hard fight with the rebels. It is said that Ivar, though he was hardly seven years of age, fought splendidly, and seemed a man in courage though only a boy in years. Siward, or Sigurd Snake-eye, Ragnar's eldest son, received a terrible wound, which it is said that Woden, the father of the gods of the North, came himself to cure. The battle would have gone against Ragnar but for the courage of a noble woman named Ladgerda, who, "like an Amazon possessed of the courage of a man," came to the hero's assistance with a hundred and twenty ships and herself fought in front of the host with her loose hair flying about her shoulders. All marvelled at her matchless deeds, for she had the spirit of a warrior in a slender frame, and when the soldiers began to waver she made a sally, taking the enemy unawares on the rear, so that Harald was routed with a great slaughter of his men. This was by no means the only occasion in the history of these times that we hear of women-warriors; both in the North and in Ireland women often went into battle, sometimes forming whole female battalions. The women of the North were brave, pure, and spirited, though often fierce and bitter. They took their part in many ways beside their husbands and sons.

About this time Thora, Ragnar's wife, died suddenly of an illness, which caused infinite sorrow to her husband, who dearly loved his spouse. He thought to assuage his grief by setting himself some heavy task, which would occupy his mind and energies. After arranging for the administration of justice at home, and training for war all the young men, feeble or strong, who came to him, he determined to cross over to Britain, since

he had heard of the dissensions that were going on, and the weakness of the country. This was before the time of Ælla, when, as the Danish annals tell us, his father, Hame, "a most noble youth," was reigning in Northumbria. This king, Ragnar attacked and killed, and then, leaving his young and favourite son to rule the Danish settlers of Northumbria, he went north to Scotland, conquered parts of Pictland, or the North of Scotland, and of the Western Isles, where he made two others of his sons, Siward Snake-eye and Radbard, governors.

Having thus formed for himself a kingdom in the British Isles, and left his sons to rule over it, Ragnar departed for a time, and the next few years were spent in repressing insurrections in his own kingdom of Jutland, and in a long series of viking raids in Sweden, Saxony, Germany, and France. His own sons were continually making insurrections against him. Ivar only, who seems to have been recalled and made governor of Jutland, took no part in his brothers' quarrels, but remained throughout faithful to his father, by whom he was held in the highest honour and affection. Another son, Ubba, of whom we hear in the English chronicles, alternately rebelled against his father and was received into favour by him. Then, again, Ragnar turned his thoughts to the West, and, descending on the Orkneys, ravaged there, planting some of those viking settlements of which we hear at the opening of Scottish history as being established on the coasts and islands. But two of his sons were slain, and Ragnar returned home in grief, shutting himself up in his house and bemoaning their loss, and that of a wife whom he had recently married. He was soon awakened from his sorrow by the news that Ivar, whom he had left in

Northumbria, had been expelled from the country, and had arrived in Denmark, his own people having made him fly when Ælla was set up as king.[1] Ragnar immediately roused himself from his dejection, gave orders for the assembling of his fleet, and sailed down on Northumbria, disembarking near York. He took Ivar with him to guide his forces, as he was now well acquainted with the country. Here, as we learn from the English chronicles, the battle of York was fought, lasting three days, and costing much blood to the English, but comparatively little to the Danes. The only real difference between the Danish and English accounts is that the Northern story says that Ælla was not killed, but had to fly for a time to Ireland, and it is probable that this is true. Ragnar also extended his arms to Ireland, after a year in Northumbria, besieged Dublin, and slew its king, Maelbride (or Melbrik, as the Norse called him), and then, filling his ships with the wealth of the city, which was very rich, he sailed to the Hellespont, winning victories everywhere, and gaining for himself the title of the first of the great viking kings.

But it was fated to Ragnar that he was to die in the country he had conquered, and when he returned to Northumbria from his foreign expeditions he was taken prisoner by Ælla, and cast into a pit, where serpents were let loose upon him and devoured him. No word of complaint came from the lips of the courageous old man while he was suffering these tortures; instead, he recounted in fine verse the triumphs of his life and the dangers of his career. This poem we still possess. Only

[1] The Northern chronicles here throw much light on the internal affairs of Northumbria, which are only briefly dealt with in the English chronicles. But the general outline of events fits well into the English account.

when the serpents were gnawing at his heart he was heard to exclaim: "If the little pigs knew the punishment of the old boar, surely they would break into the sty and loose him from his woe." These words were related to Ælla, who thought from them that some of Ragnar's sons, whom he called the "little pigs," must still be alive; and he bade the executioners stop the torture and bring Ragnar out of the pit. But when they ran to do so they found that Ragnar was dead; his face scarred by pain, but steadfast as in life. Death had taken him out of the hand of the king.

In Ragnar Lodbrog's death-song he recites in succession his triumphs and gallant deeds, his wars and battles, in England, Scotland, Mona, the Isle of Man, Ireland, and abroad. Each stanza begins, "We hewed with our swords!" Here are the final verses, as the serpents, winding around him, came ever nearer to his heart.

### Ragnar Lodbrog's Death-song

We hewed with our swords!

Life proves that we must dree our weird. Few can escape the binding bonds of fate. Little dreamed I that e'er my days by Ælla would be ended! what time I filled the blood-hawks with his slain, what time I led my ships into his havens, what time we gorged the beasts of prey along the Scottish bays.

We hewed with our swords!

There is a never-failing consolation for my spirit; the board of Balder's sire [Woden] stands open to the brave! Soon from the crooked skull-boughs[1] in the splendid house of Woden we shall quaff the amber mead! Death blanches not the brave man's face. I'll not approach the courts of Vitris[2] with the faltering voice of fear!

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[1] *i.e.* the horns from which the ale was quaffed, made from the branching or curved antlers of reindeer or ox.

[2] *i.e.* "the Wanderer," another name for Woden.

We hewed with our swords!

Soon would the sons of Aslaug[1] come armed with their flaming brands to wake revenge, did they but know of our mischance; even that a swarm of vipers, big with venom, sting my aged body. I sought a noble mother for my children, one who might impart adventurous hearts to our posterity.

We hewed with our swords!

Now is my life nigh done. Grim are the terrors of the adder; serpents nestle within my heart's recesses.

Yet it is the cordial of my soul that Woden's wand[2] shall soon stick fast in Ælla! My sons will swell with vengeance at their parent's doom; those generous youths will fling away the sweets of peace and come to avenge my loss.

We hewed with our swords!

Full fifty times have I, the harbinger of war, fought bloody fights; no king, methought, should ever pass me by. It was the pastime of my boyish days to tinge my spear with blood! The immortal Anses[3] will call me to their company; no dread shall e'er disgrace my death.

I willingly depart!

See, the bright maids sent from the hall of Woden, Lord of Hosts, invite me home! There, happy on my high raised seat among the Anses, I'll quaff the mellow ale. The moments of my life are fled, but laughing will I die!

---

[1] *i.e.* his sons, the children of Aslaug, his second wife.

[2] *i.e.* the sword of Woden. The prophecy was shortly afterwards fulfilled, for Lodbrog's sons returned to Northumbria, dethroned Ælla, and put him to a cruel death.

[3] *i.e.* the High Gods, who dwelt in Valhalla, or the home of the immortals.

# Chapter III

## The Call for Help

IT seemed, toward the close of the ninth century, that England would gradually pass into the power of the Danes and cease to be an independent country. They had established themselves not only in Northumbria, but in East Anglia and parts of Mercia. We have to think of England at this period not as one united kingdom, but as a number of separate principalities, ruled by different kings. The most powerful of these principalities was Mercia, which occupied the whole central district of England, from Lincolnshire in the north to Oxford and Buckingham in the south, and west to the borders of Wales. It was governed by a king named Burhred, who found great difficulty in holding his own against incursions from the Welsh on the one hand and from the Danes of Northumbria on the other.[1]

In the south the kingdom of Wessex was coming into prominence. During the reigns of Alfred and his brother, Edward the Elder, Wessex not only held back the Danes from their tide of progress, but gave its kings to the larger part of England. The kingdom of Wessex extended from Sussex in the east to Devon in the west, and included our present counties of Hants,

[1] The great province of Northumbria extended from the Humber to the Firth of Forth.

Dorset, Somerset, Berks, and Wilts. It was from this small district that the saviour of England was to come, who, by his courage, perseverance, and wisdom, broke the power of the Danes and kept them back from the conquest of the whole country, which at one time seemed so probable. This saviour of England was Alfred the Great.

We know the history of Alfred intimately, for it was written for us during the King's lifetime by his teacher and friend, Asser, who tells us that he came to Alfred "out of the furthest coasts of western Britain." He was Bishop of St David's, in South Wales.

The account of his coming at Alfred's request to give him instruction and to act as his reader must be told in his own interesting words. He tells us that at the command of the King, who had sent in many directions, even as far as Gaul, for men of sound knowledge to give him and his sons and people instruction, he had come from his western home through many intervening provinces, and arrived at last in Sussex, the country of the Saxons.

Here for the first time he saw Alfred, in the royal "vill" in which he dwelt, and was received with kindness by the King, who eagerly entered into conversation with him, and begged him to devote himself to his service and become his friend. Indeed, so anxious was he to secure Asser's services, that he urged him then and there to resign his duties in Wales and promise never to leave him again. He offered him in return more than all he had left behind if he would stay with him. Asser nobly replied that he could not suddenly give up those who were dependent on his ministrations and permanently leave the country in which he had been bred and where his duties lay; upon which the

King replied: "If you cannot accede to this, at least let me have part of your service; stay with me here for six months and spend the other six months in the West with your own people." To this Asser, seeing the King so desirous of his services, replied that he would return to his own country and try to make the arrangement which Alfred desired; and from this time there grew up a lifelong friendship between these two interesting men, one learned, simple, and conscientious, the other eager for learning, and bent upon applying all his wisdom for the benefit of the people over whom he ruled.

From the life of Alfred, written by his master, we might imagine that the chief part of the monarch's time was devoted to learning and study. "Night and day," Asser tells us, "whenever he had leisure, he commanded men of learning to read to him;" so that he became familiar with books which he was himself unable to read. He loved poetry, and caused it to be introduced into the teaching of the young. He with great labour (for his own education had been sadly neglected) translated Latin works on history and religion, so that his people might read them. He kept what he called a "Manual" or "Handbook," because he had it at hand day and night, in which he wrote any passage they came upon in their reading which especially struck his mind. Asser tells us in a charming way how he began this custom. He says that they were sitting together in the King's chamber, talking, as usual, of all kinds of subjects, when it happened that the master read to him a quotation out of a certain book. "He listened to it attentively, with both his ears, and thoughtfully drew out of his bosom a book wherein were written the daily psalms and prayers which he had read in his

youth, and he asked me to write the quotation in that book. But I could not find any empty space in that book wherein to write the quotation, for it was already full of various matters. Upon his urging me to make haste and write it at once, I said to him : ' Would you wish me to write the quotation on a separate sheet ? For it is possible that we may find one or more other extracts which will please you ; and if this should happen, we shall be glad that we have kept them apart.'

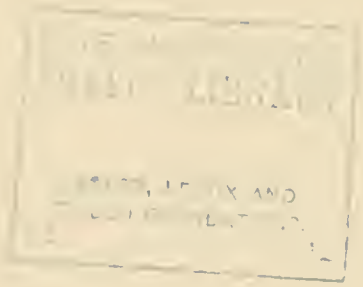
" ' Your plan is good,' he said ; and I gladly made haste to get ready a fresh sheet, in the beginning of which I wrote what he bade me. And on the same day, as I had anticipated, I wrote therein no less than three other quotations which pleased him, so that the sheet soon became full. He continued to collect these words of the great writers, until his book became almost as large as a psalter, and he found, as he told me, no small consolation therein."

But, studious as was naturally the mind of Alfred, only a small portion of his life, and that chiefly when he became aged, could be given to learning. His career lay in paths of turmoil and war, and his earlier days were spent in camps and among the practical affairs of a small but important kingdom. Already as a child of eight or ten he had heard of battles and rumours of war all around him. He heard of " the heathen men," as the Danes were called, making advances in the Isle of Wight, at Canterbury and London, and creeping up the Thames into new quarters in Kent and Surrey. There his father, King Ethelwulf, and his elder brothers had met and defeated them with great slaughter at Aclea, or Ockley, " the Oak-plain," and they returned home to Wessex with the news of a complete victory. It was probably to keep his favourite child out of the

way of warfare and danger that Ethelwulf sent him twice to Rome ; the seeond time he himself accompanied him thither, and they returned to find that one of Alfred's elder brothers, Ethelbald, had made a conspiraey against his own father, had seized the kingdom, and would have prevented Ethelwulf from returning had he been able. But the warm love of his people, who gathered round him, delighted at his return, prevented this project from being carried into effect, and the old man, desiring only peaee in his family, divided the kingdom between his two eldest sons ; but on the death of Ethelbald, soon after, Ethelbert joined the two divisions together, ineluding Kent, Surrey, and Sussex in the same kingdom with Wessex. When Alfred was eighteen years of age this brother also died, and for five years more a third brother, Ethelred, sat on the throne of Wessex.

It was at this time, when Alfred was growing up to manhood, that the troubles in Northumbria of which we have already given an aecount took place. The reign of Ælla, and his horrible death at the hands of Lodbrog's sons, was followed by the advanee of the pagan army into Mercia, and it was here that Alfred came for the first time faee to face with the enemy against whom mueh of his life was to be spent in conflict. Burhred, King of the Mereians, sent to Ethelred and Alfred to beg their assistance against the pagan army. They immediately responded by marching to Nottingham with a large host, all eager to fight the Danes ; but the pagans, shut up safely within the walls of the eastle, deelined to fight, and in the end a peace was patched up between the Danes and the Mercians, and the two Wessex princes returned home without a battle. It was not long, however, before the army was needed


*Alfred at Ashdune*



again; for, three years later, in the year 871, when Alfred was twenty-three years of age, "the army of the Danes of hateful memory," as Asser calls it, entered Wessex itself, coming up from East Anglia, where they had wintered. After attacking the then royal city of Reading, on the Thames, they entrenched themselves on the right of the town. Ethelred was not able to come up with them at so short notice, but the Earl of Berkshire, gathering a large army, attacked them in the rear at Englefield Green, and defeated them, many of them taking to flight. Four days afterwards the two princes of Wessex, Ethelred and Alfred, came up, and soon cut to pieces the Danes that were defending the city outside; but those Danes who had shut themselves in the city sallied out of the gates, and after a long and hot encounter the army of Wessex fled, the brave Earl of Berkshire being among the slain.

Roused by this disaster, the armies of Wessex, in shame and indignation, collected their whole strength, and within four days they were ready again to give battle to the Danes at Ashdune (Aston), "the Hill of the Ash," in the same county. They found the Danes drawn up in two divisions, occupying high ground; while the army of Wessex was forced to attack from below. Both parties began to throw up defences, and the Danes were pressing forward to the attack; but Alfred, who was waiting for the signal to begin the battle, found that his elder brother, Ethelred, was nowhere to be seen. He sent to inquire where he was, and learned that he was hearing mass in his tent, nor would he allow the service to be interrupted or leave his prayers till all was finished. It had been arranged that Alfred with his troops should attack the smaller bodies of the Danes, while Ethelred, who was to lead the centre, took the general command;

but the enemy were pushing forward with such eagerness that Alfred, having waited as long as he dared for his brother, was forced at length to give the signal for a general advance. He bravely led the whole army forward in a close phalanx, without waiting for the King's arrival, and a furious battle took place, concentrating chiefly around a stunted thorn-tree, standing alone, which, Asser tells us, he had seen with his own eyes on the spot where the battle was fought. A great defeat was inflicted on the Danes; one of their kings and five of their earls were killed, and the plain of Ashdune was covered with the dead bodies of the slain. The whole of that night the pagans fled, closely followed by the victorious men of Wessex, until weariness and the darkness of the night brought the conflict to an end.

# Chapter IV

## Alfred the Great

(BORN 849; REIGNED 871–901)

IT was in the midst of incessant warfare that Alfred ascended the throne of Wessex. Ethelred, his brother, died a few months after the battle of Ashdune, and in the same year, that in which Alfred came to the throne, no less than nine general battles were fought between Wessex and the Danes. Both armies were exhausted, and a peace was patched up between them, the Danish army withdrawing to the east and north, and leaving Wessex for a short time in peace. But they drove King Burhred out of Mercia, and overseas to Rome, where he soon afterwards died. He was buried in the church belonging to an English school which had been founded in the city by the Saxon pilgrims and students who had taken refuge in Rome from the troubles in England.

It would seem that Alfred's chief troubles during the years following were caused by the fierce sons of Ragnar Lodbrog, brothers of Ivar the Boneless of Northumbria. These three brothers, Halfdene, Ivar, and Ubba, overran the whole country, appearing with great rapidity at different points, so that, as one historian says, they were no sooner pushed from one district than they reappeared in another. Alfred tried by every means to disperse the Danish army. He made them

swear over holy relics to depart, but their promise was hardly given before it was broken again; he raised a fleet after their own pattern and attacked them at sea; and he laid siege to Exeter, where they had entrenched themselves, cutting off their provisions and means of retreat. It was like fighting a swarm of flies; however many were killed, more came overseas to take their place. "For nine successive years," writes William of Malmesbury, "he was battling with his enemies, sometimes deceived by false treatics, and sometimes wreaking his vengeance on the deceivers, till he was at last reduced to such extreme distress that scarcely three counties, that is to say, Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Somerset, stood fast by their allegiance." He was compelled to retreat to the Isle of Athelney, where, supporting himself by fishing and forage, he, with a few faithful followers, led an unquiet life amid the marshes, awaiting the time when a better fortune should enable them to recover the lost kingdom. One hard-won treasure they had with them in their island fortress. This was the famous Raven Banner, the war-flag which the three sisters of Ivar and Ubba, Lodbrog's daughters, had woven in one day for their brothers. It was believed by them that in every battle which they undertook the banner would spread like a flying raven if they were to gain the victory; but if they were fated to be defeated it would hang down motionless. This flag was taken from the brothers in Devon at the battle in which Ubba was slain, and much booty with it. No doubt it was cherished as an omen of future victory by the followers of the unfortunate Alfred in their retreat.

But Alfred was not idle. Slowly but surely he gathered around him a devoted band, and his public reappearance

in Wiltshire some months afterwards, in the spring or summer of 878, was the signal for the joyous return to him of a great body of his subjects. With a large army he struck camp, meeting the foe at Eddington or Ethandun, and there defeated the pagans in so decisive a battle that after fourteen days of misery, "driven by famine, cold, fear, and last of all by despair, they prayed for peace, promising to give the King as many hostages as he desired, but asking for none in return." "Never before," writes Asser, "had they concluded such an ignominious treaty with any enemy," and the king, taking pity on them, received such hostages as they chose to give, and what was more important, a promise from them that they would leave the kingdom immediately. Such promises had been given by the Danes before, and had not been kept. But the Danish chief or prince with whom Alfred was now dealing was of a different type from the sons of Ragnar. He was a man of high position and character; not a viking in the usual sense, for he had been born in England, where his father had settled and been baptized, and Alfred knew that in Gorm, or Guthrum, he had a foe whom he could both respect for his courage and depend on for his fidelity.

This Gorm is called in the Northern chronicles, "Gorm the Englishman," on account of his birth and long sojourn in this country. Though a prince of Denmark, he had spent a great part of his life in England, and he had held the Danes together, and been their leader in many of their victories against Alfred. It was during his absence from England, when he had been forced to go back to Denmark to bring things into order in his own kingdom, that the English had gathered courage, under Alfred's leadership, to revolt against him. His absence was short, but he was unable

on his return to recover his former power, and the result was the great defeat of the Danes of which we have just spoken. It had been one of Alfred's stipulations that Gorm, or Guthrum (as he was called in England), should become a Christian; this he consented to do, the more inclined, perhaps, because his father had been baptized before him; accordingly, three weeks after the battle, King Gorm, with about thirty of his most distinguished followers, repaired to Alfred at a place near Athelney, where he was baptized, Alfred himself acting as his godfather. After his baptism, he remained for twelve days with the King at the royal seat of Wedmore; and Alfred gave him and his followers many gifts, and they parted as old friends. His baptismal name was Athelstan. For a time he seems to have remained in East Anglia, and settled that country; but soon afterwards he returned to his own kingdom, where the attachment of his people seems to have been all the greater on account of his ill-luck in England. Though he irretrievably lost his hold on this country, he remained firmly seated on the throne of Denmark. He was the ancestor of Canute the Great, joint King of Denmark and of England, who regained all, and more than all, that his great-grandfather had lost in this country, for Canute ruled, not over a portion of England, but over an undivided kingdom. Gorm died in 890.

The latter part of Alfred's reign was devoted to the affairs of his country. He gave his people good laws; dividing the kingdom into divisions called "hundreds" and "tythings," which exercised a sort of internal jurisdiction over their own affairs. He rebuilt London, and over the whole of his kingdom he caused houses to be built, good and dignified beyond any that had hitherto been known in the land. He encouraged

industries of all kinds, and had the artificers taught new and better methods of work in metals and gold. He encouraged religion and learning, inviting good and learned men from abroad or wherever he could hear of them, and richly rewarding their efforts. He devoted much time to prayer; but his wise and sane mind prevented him from becoming a bigot, as his activity in practical affairs prevented him from becoming a mere pedant. One of his most lasting works was the establishment of England's first navy, to guard her shores against the attacks of foreigners. All these great reforms were carried out amid much personal suffering, for from his youth he had been afflicted with an internal complaint, beyond the surgical knowledge of his day to cure, and he was in constant pain of a kind so excruciating that Asser tells us the dread of its return tortured his mind even when his body was in comparative rest. There is in English history no character which combines so many great qualities as that of Alfred. Within and without he found his kingdom in peril and misery, crushed down, ignorant and without religion; he left it a flourishing and peaceful country, united and at rest. When his son, Edward the Elder, succeeded him on the throne, not only Wessex but the whole North of England, with the Scots, took him "for father and lord"; that is, they accepted him, for the first time in history, as king of a united England. This great change was the outcome of the many years of patient building up of his country which Alfred had brought about through wise rule. He was open-handed and liberal to all, dividing his revenue into two parts, one half of which he kept for his own necessities and the uses of the kingdom and for building noble edifices; the other for the poor, the encouragement of learning,

and the support and foundation of monasteries. He took a keen interest in a school for the young nobles which he founded and endowed, determining that others should not, in their desire for learning, meet with the same difficulties that he had himself experienced. In his childhood it had not been thought necessary that even princes and men of rank should be taught to read; and the story is familiar to all that he was enticed to a longing for knowledge by the promise of his stepmother Judith, daughter of the King of the Franks, who had been educated abroad, that she would give a book of Saxon poetry which she had shown to him and his brother to whichever of them could first learn to read it and repeat the poetry by heart. Alfred seems to have learned Latin from Asser, for he translated several famous books into Saxon, so that his people might attain a knowledge of their contents without the labour through which he himself had gone. When we consider that he was also, as William of Malmesbury tells us, "present in every action against the enemy even up to the end of his life, ever daunting the invaders, and inspiring his subjects with the signal display of his courage," we may well admire the indomitable energy of this man. In his old age he caused candles to be made with twenty-four divisions, to keep him aware of the lapse of time and help him to allot it to special duties. One of his attendants was always at hand to warn him how his candle was burning, and to remind him of the special duty he was accustomed to perform at any particular hour of the day or night.

The latter years of Alfred were comparatively free from incursions by the Danes or Norsemen; this was the period during which the attention of the Norse was attracted in other directions. The conquests of

Rollo or Rolf the Ganger or "the Walker" in the North of France were attracting a large body of the more turbulent spirits to those shores which in after-times they were to call Normandy, or the land of the Northmen. After Gorm the Englishman's submission to Alfred many of the Danes from England seem to have joined these fresh bands of marauders, advancing up the Seine to Paris, and devastating the country as far as the Meuse, the Scheldt, and the Marne on the east and Brittany on the west. In time to come, under Rollo's descendant, William the Conqueror, these people were once more to pour down upon English shores and reconquer the land that their forefathers had lost through Alfred's bravery and statesmanship. Rollo overran Normandy for the first time in the year 876,[1] and William the Conqueror landed at Pevensey in 1066, nearly two hundred years later. William's genealogy was as follows:—He was son of Robert the Magnificent, second son of Richard the Good, son of Richard the Fearless, son of William Longsword, son of Rollo or Rolf the Walker—six generations. The direct connexion between the Anglo-Norman houses was through Emma, daughter of Richard the Fearless, who married first Ethelred the Unready, King of England, and afterwards his enemy and successor, Canute the Great. It was on account of this connexion that William the Conqueror laid claim to the Crown of England.

[1] The English Chronicle, dating his rule in Normandy from this, his first expedition thither, gives him a reign of fifty years; he actually reigned from 911–927 A.D. (see p. 110).

# Chapter V

## Harald Fairhair, First King of Norway, and the Settlements in the Orkneys

THERE were yet other directions toward which the Norse viking-hosts had already turned their eyes. Not far out from the coasts of Norway lay the Orkney and Shetland Islands, and beyond them again the Faröe Isles rose bleak and treeless from the waters of the northern sea. The shallow boats of the Norsemen, though they dreaded the open waters of the Atlantic, were yet able, in favourable weather, to push their way from one set of islands to another, and from the earliest times of which we know anything about them they had already made some settlements on these rocky shores. To the Norseman, accustomed to a hardy life and brought up to wring a scanty livelihood almost out of the barren cliff itself, even the Orkney and Shetland Isles had attractions. Those who have seen the tiny steadings of the Norwegian farmer to-day, perched up on what appears from below to be a perfectly inaccessible cliff, with only a few feet of soil on which to raise his scanty crop, solitary all the year round save for the occasional visit of a coasting steamer, will the less wonder that the islands on the Scottish coast proved attractive to his viking forefathers. Often, in crossing that stormy sea, the adventurous crew found a

watery grave, or encountered such tempests that the viking boat was almost knocked to pieces; but on the whole these hardy seamen passed and repassed over the North Sea with a frequency that surprises us, especially when we remember that their single-sailed boats were open, covered in only at the stem or stern,[1] and rowed with oars. We hear of these settlers on our coasts before Norwegian history can be said to have begun; and from early times, also, they carried on a trade with Ireland; we hear of a merchant in the Icelandic "Book of the Settlements" named Hrafn, who was known as the "Limerick trader," because he carried on a flourishing business with that town, which later grew into importance under the sons of Ivar, who settled there and built the chief part of the city.

But during the latter years of Alfred's reign and for many years after his death a great impetus was given to the settlements in the North of Scotland by the coming to the throne of Norway of the first king who reigned over the whole country, Harald Fairhair. He established a new form of rule which was very unpopular among his great lords and landowners, and the consequence of this was that a large number of his most powerful earls or "jarls" left the country with their families and possessions and betook themselves to Iceland, the Orkneys and Hebrides, and to Ireland. They did not go as marauders, as those who went before them had done, but they went to settle, and establish new homes for themselves where they would be free from what they considered to be Harald Fairhair's oppressive laws. Before his time each of these jarls had been his own master, ruling his own district as an

[1] In hot weather a tent was erected over the boat.

independent lord, but paying a loose allegiance to the prince who chanced at the time to prove the most powerful. From time to time some more ambitious prince arose, who tried to subdue to his authority the men of consequence in his own part of the country, but hitherto it had not come into the mind of any one of them to try to make himself king over the whole land.

The idea of great kingdoms was not then a common one. In England up to this time no king had reigned over the whole country; there had been separate rulers for East Anglia, Wessex, Northumbria, etc., sometimes as many as seven kings reigning at the same time in different parts of the country, in what was called the "Heptarchy." It was only when the need of a powerful and capable ruler was felt, and there chanced to be a man fitted to meet this need, as in Alfred's time and that of his son, Edward the Elder, that the kingdoms drew together under one sovereign. But even then it was not supposed that things would remain permanently like this; under a weaker prince they might at any moment split up again into separate dynasties. In Ireland this system remained in force far longer, for centuries indeed, the country being broken up into independent and usually warring chiefdoms. Abroad, none of the Northern nations had united themselves into great kingdoms up to the time of Harald Fairhair, but about this date a desire began to show itself to consolidate the separate lordships under single dynasties, partly because it chanced that men of more than usual power and ambition happened to be found in them, and partly for protection from neighbouring States; in the case of Harald himself, his pride also led him to desire to take a place in the world as important

as that of the neighbouring kings. In Sweden King Eirik and in Denmark King Gorm the Old were establishing themselves on the thrones of united kingdoms. The effort of Harald to accomplish the same task in Norway was so important in its effects, not only on the future history of his own country, but on that of portions of our own, that it is worth while to tell it more in detail.

Harald was son of Halfdan the Black, with whose reign authentic Norwegian history begins. Halfdan ruled over a good part of the country, which he had gained by conquest, and he was married to Ragnhild, a wise and intelligent woman, and a great dreamer of dreams. It is said that in one of her dreams she foretold the future greatness of her son Harald Fairhair. She thought she was in her herb-garden, her shift fastened with a thorn; she drew out the thorn with her hand and held it steadily while it began to grow downward, until it finally rooted itself firmly in the earth. The other end of it shot upward and became a great tree, blood-red about the root, but at the top branching white as snow. It spread until all Norway was covered by its branches. The dream came true when Harald, who was born soon afterwards, subdued all Norway to himself.

Harald grew up strong and remarkably handsome, very expert in all feats, and of good understanding. It did not enter his head to extend his dominions until some time after his father's death, for he was only ten years old at that time, and his youth was troubled by dissensions among his nobles, who each wanted to possess himself of the conquests made by Halfdan the Black; but Harald subdued them to himself as far south as the river Raum. Then he set his affections

on a girl of good position named Gyda, and sent messengers to ask her to be his wife. But she was a proud and ambitious girl, and declared that she would not marry any man, even though he were styled a king, who had no greater kingdom than a few districts. "It is wonderful to me that while in Sweden King Eirik has made himself master of the whole country and in Denmark Gorm the Old did the same, no prince in Norway has made the entire kingdom subject to himself. And tell Harald," she added, "that when he has made himself sole King of Norway, then he may come and claim my hand; for only then will I go to him as his lawful wife." The messengers, when they heard this haughty answer, were for inflicting some punishment upon her, or carrying her off by force; but they thought better of it and returned to Harald first, to learn what he would say. But the King looked at the matter in another light. "The girl," he said, "has not spoken so much amiss as that she should be punished for it, but on the contrary I think she has said well, for she has put into my mind what it is wonderful that I never before thought of. And now I solemnly vow, and I take God, who rules over all things, to witness, that never will I clip or comb my hair until I have subdued Norway, with scat,[1] dues, and dominions to myself; or if I succeed not, I will die in the attempt."

The messengers, hearing this, thanked the King, saying that "it was royal work to fulfil royal words."

After this, Harald set about raising an army and

[1] Scat was a land-tax paid to the king in money, malt, meal, or flesh-meat, and was adjudged to each king on his succession by the "Thing," or assembly of lawgivers.

ravaging the country, so that the people were forced to sue for peace or to submit to him ; and he marched from place to place, fighting with all who resisted him, and adding one conquest after another to his crown ; but many of the chiefs of Norway preferred death to subjection, and it is stated of one king named Herlaug that when he heard that Harald was coming he ordered a great quantity of meat and drink to be brought and placed in a burial-mound that he had erected for himself, and he went alive into the mound and ordered it to be covered up and closed. A mound answering to this description has been opened not far north of Trondhjem, near where King Herlaug lived, and in it were found two skeletons, one in a sitting posture, while in a second chamber were bones of animals. It is believed that this was Herlaug's mound where he and a slave were entombed ; it had been built for himself and his brother King Hrollaug, to be their tombs when they were dead, but it became the sepulchre of the living. As for Hrollaug, he determined to submit to Harald, and he erected a throne on the summit of a height on which he was wont to sit as king, and ordered soft beds to be placed below on the benches on which the earls were accustomed to sit when there was a royal council. Then he threw himself down from the king's seat into the seat of the earls, in token that he would resign his sovereignty to Harald and accept an earldom under him ; and he entered the service of Harald and gave his kingdom up to him, and Harald bound a shield to his neck and placed a sword in his belt and accepted his service ; for it was his plan, when any chief submitted to him, to leave him his dominions, but to reduce him to the position of a jarl, holding his rights from himself and owning fealty to him.

In many ways the lords were richer and better off than before, not only because they had less cause to fight among themselves, being all Harald's men, but because they were made collectors of the land dues and fines for the King, and out of all dues collected the earl received a third part for himself; and these dues had been so much increased by Harald that the earls had greater revenues than before; only each earl was bound to raise and support sixty men-at-arms for the King's service, while the chief men under them had also to bring into the field their quota of armed men. Thus Harald endeavoured to establish a feudal system in Norway similar to that introduced into England by William the Conqueror, and in time the whole country was subdued outwardly to his service, and Harald won his bride. But although he cut off or subdued his opponents and there was outward peace, a fierce discontent smouldered in the minds of many of the nobles who hitherto had been independent lords, and they would not brook the authority of Harald, but fled oversea, or joined the viking cruisers, so that the seas swarmed with their vessels and every land was infested with their raids. It was at this time that Iceland and the Faröe Islands were colonized by people driven out of Norway, and others went to Shetland and the Orkneys and Hebrides and joined their countrymen there; others settled in Ireland, and others, again, lived a roving life, marauding on the coasts of their own country in the summer, and in other lands in the winter season; so that Norway itself was not free from their raids. King Harald fitted out a fleet and searched all the islands and wild rocks along the coast to clear them of the vikings. This he did during three summers, and wherever he came the vikings took to flight, steering


*Harald Fairhair*

out into the open sea; but no sooner was the King gone home again than they gathered as thickly as before, devastating up into the heart of Norway to the north; until Harald grew tired of this sort of work, and one summer he sailed out into the western ocean, following them to Shetland and the Orkneys, and slaying every viking who could not save himself by flight. Then he pushed his way southward along the Hebrides, which were called the Sudreys[1] then, and slew many vikings who had been great lords in their time at home in Norway; and he pursued them down to the Isle of Man; but the news of his coming had gone before him and he found all the inhabitants fled and the island left entirely bare of people and property. So he turned north again, himself plundering far and wide in Scotland, and leaving little behind him but the hungry wolves gathering on the desolate sea-shore. He returned to the Orkneys, and offered the earldom of those islands to Ragnvald, one of his companions, the Lord of More, who had lost a son in the war; but Ragnvald preferred to return with Harald to Norway, so he handed the earldom of Orkney and the Isles over to his brother Sigurd. King Harald agreed to this and confirmed Sigurd in the earldom before he departed for Norway.

When King Harald had returned home again, and was feasting one day in the house of Ragnvald, Earl of More, he went to a bath and had his hair combed and dressed in fulfilment of his vow. For ten years his hair had been uncut, so that the people called him Lufa or "Shockhead"; but when he came in with his

[1] The bishop of the islands is still styled Bishop of Sodor (*i.e.* the Sudreys) and Man. Up to the fifteenth century these bishops had to go to Trondhjem in Norway for consecration.

hair shining and combed after the bath, Ragnvald called him Harfager, or "Fair Hair," and all agreed that it was a fitting name for him, and it clung to him thenceforward, so that he is known as Harald Harfager to this day.

# Chapter VI

## The Northmen in Ireland

THERE is yet another direction to which we must turn our attention, if we would understand the grip that the Northmen at this time had taken on the British Islands, and the general trend of Norse and Danish history outside their own country. Their conquests and influence in Ireland were even more widespread and equally lasting with those in England. We find them from the beginning of the ninth century (from about A.D. 800 onward) making investigations all round the coast of Ireland, and pushing their way up the rivers in different directions. The Norse, many of whom probably reached Ireland by way of the Western Isles and Scotland, consolidated their conquests in the north under a leader named Turgesius (perhaps a Latinized form of Thorgils), who ruled from the then capital of Ireland and the ecclesiastical city of St Patrick, Armagh. Thorgils was a fierce pagan, and he established himself as high-priest of Thor, the Northman's god of thunder, in the sacred church of St Patrick, desecrating it with heathen practices; while he placed his wife Ota as priestess in another of the sacred spots of Ireland, the ancient city of Clonmacnois, on the Shannon, with its seven churches and its high crosses, from the chief church of which she gave forth her oracles.

Soon after this there arrived in Ireland another chief, named Olaf the White, who chose Dublin, then a small town on the river Liffey, as his capital, building there a fortress, and establishing a "Thing-mote," or place of meeting and lawgiving, such as he was accustomed to at home. From this date the importance of Armagh waned, and Dublin became not only the Norse capital of Ireland and an important city, but also the centre from which many Norse and Danish kings ruled over Dublin and Northumbria at once. We shall see when we come to the time of Athelstan, and the story of Olaf Cuaran, or Olaf o' the Sandal, who claimed kingship over both Ireland and Northumbria, how close was the connexion between the two.

The Danes, who succeeded the Norwegians, first came to Ireland in the year 847, probably crossing over from England. They had heard much of the successes of the Northmen or Norwegians in Ireland, and they came over to dispute their conquests with them and try to take from them the fruit of their victories. They did not at first think of warring with the Irish themselves, but only with their old foes, the Norsemen, whom they were ready to fight wherever they could find them; but as time went on we find them fighting sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other, mixing themselves up in the private quarrels of the Irish chiefs and kings, often for their own advantage. On the other hand, the Irish chiefs were often ready enough to take advantage of their presence in the country to get their help in fighting with their neighbours.

The Kings of Dublin in the later time were Danish princes, who passed on to other parts of Ireland, building forts in places which had good harbours and could easily be fortified, such as Limerick and Waterford,

which were for long Danish towns, ruled by Danish chiefs, most of them of the family of Ivar of Northumbria. Though their hold on their settlements was at all times precarious, and they met with many reverses, and several decisive defeats from the Irish, the Danes gradually succeeded in building up their Irish and Northumbrian kingdom. The official title of these rulers was "King of the Northmen of all Ireland and Northumbria."

The story we have now to tell is connected with a prince who probably was not a Dane, but a Norseman, or a "Fair-foreigner," as the Irish called them, to distinguish them from the Danes, or "Dark-foreigners." This was Olaf the White, who came to Ireland in 853. In the course of a warring life he succeeded in making himself King of the Norse in Dublin. He seems to have been of royal descent, and he was married to Aud, or Unn, daughter of Ketill Flatnose, a mighty and high-born lord in Norway. Aud is her usual name, but in the Laxdæla Saga, where we get most of her history, she is named Unn the Deep-minded or Unn the Very-wealthy. All this great family left their native shores after King Harald Fairhair came to the throne, and they settled in different places, Ketill himself in the Orkney Isles, where some of his sons accompanied him; but his son Biorn the Eastman and Helgi, another son, said they would go to Iceland and settle there. Sailing up the west coast, they entered a firth which they called Broadfirth. They went on shore with a few men, and found a narrow strip of land between the foreshore and the hills, where Biorn thought he would find a place of habitation. He had brought with him the pillars of his temple from his home in Norway, as many of the Icelandic settlers did, and he flung them over-

board, as was the custom with voyagers, to see where they would come ashore. When they were washed up in a little creek he said that this must be the place where he should build his house; and he took for himself all the land between Staff River and Lava Firth, and dwelt there. Ever after it was called after him Biorn Haven.

But Ketill and most of his family went to Scotland, except Unn the Deep-minded, his daughter, who was with her husband, Olaf the White, in Dublin, though after Olaf's death she joined her father's family in the Hebrides and Orkneys, her son, Thorstein the Red, harrying far and wide through Scotland. He was always victorious, and he and Earl Sigurd subdued Caithness, Sutherland, and Ross between them, so that they ruled over all the north of Scotland.[1] Troubles arose out of this, for the Scots' earl did not care to give up his lands to foreigners, and in the end Thorstein the Red was murdered treacherously in Caithness.

When his mother, Unn the Deep-minded, heard this, she thought there would be no more safety for her in Scotland; so she had a ship built secretly in a wood, and she put great wealth into it, and provisions; and she set off with all her kinsfolk that were left alive; for her father had died before that. Many men of worth went with her; and men deem that scarce any other, let alone a woman, got so much wealth and such a following out of a state of constant war as she had done; from this it will be seen how remarkable a woman she was. She steered her ship for the Faröe Islands, and stayed there for a time, and in every place at which she stopped she married off one of her granddaughters,

[1] See chap. xv., "Wild Tales from the Orkneys," p. 108.

children of her son, Thorstein the Red, so that his descendants are found still in Scotland and the Faröes. But in the end she made it known to her shipmates that she intended to go on to Iceland. So they set sail again, and came to the south of Iceland, to Pumice-course, and there their good ship went on the rocks, and was broken to splinters, but all the sea-farers and goods were saved.

All that winter she spent with Biorn, her brother, at Broadfirth, and was entertained in the best manner, as no money was spared, and there was no lack of means ; for he knew his sister's large-mindedness. But in the spring she set sail round the island to find lands of her own ; she threw her high-seat temple pillars into the sea, and they came to shore at the head of a creek, so Unn thought it was well seen that this was the place where she should stay. So she built her house there, and it was afterwards called Hvamm, and there she lived till her old age.

When Unn began to grow stiff and weary in her age she wished that the last and youngest of Thorstein the Red's children, Olaf Feilan, would marry and settle down. She loved him above all men, for he was tall and strong and goodly to look at, and she wished to settle on him all her property at Hvamm before she died. She called him to her, and said : " It is greatly on my mind, grandson, that you should settle down and marry." Olaf spoke gently to the old woman, and said he would lean on her advice and think the matter over.

Unn said : " It is on my mind that your wedding-feast should be held at the close of this summer, for that is the easiest time to get in all the provision that is needed. It seems to me a near guess that our friends

will come in great numbers, and I have made up my mind that this is the last wedding-feast that shall be set out by me."

Olaf said that he would choose a wife who would neither rob her of her wealth nor endeavour to rule over her; and that autumn Olaf chose as his wife Alfdis, and brought her to his home. Unn exerted herself greatly about this wedding-feast, inviting to it all their friends and kinsfolk, and men of high degree from distant parts. Though a crowd of guests were present at the feast, yet not nearly so many could come as Unn asked, for the Iceland firths were wide apart and the journeys difficult.

Old age had fallen fast on Unn since the summer, so that she did not get up till midday, and went early to bed. She would allow no one to come to disturb her by asking advice after she had gone to sleep at night; but what made her most angry was being asked how she was in health. On the day before the wedding, Unn slept somewhat late; yet she was on foot when the guests came, and went to meet them, and greeted her friends with great courtesy, and thanked them for their affection in coming so far to see her. After that she went into the hall, and the great company with her, and when all were seated in the hall every one was much struck by the lordliness of the feast.

In the midst of the banquet Unn stood up and said aloud: "Biorn and Helgi, my brothers, and all my other kinsmen and friends, I call as witnesses to this, that this dwelling, with all that belongs to it, I give into the hands of my grandson, Olaf, to own and to manage."

Immediately after that Unn said she was tired and would return to the room where she was accustomed

to sleep, but bade everyone amuse himself as was most to his mind, and ordered ale to be drawn out for the common people. Unn was both tall and portly, and as she walked with a quick step out of the hall, in spite of her age, all present remarked how stately the old lady was yet. They feasted that evening joyously, till it was time to go to bed. But in the morning Olaf went to see his grandmother in her sleeping-chamber, and there he found Unn sitting up against her pillow, dead.

When he went into the hall to tell these tidings, those present spoke of the dignity of Unn, even to the day of her death. They drank together the wedding-feast of Olaf and funeral honours to Unn, and on the last day of the feast they carried Unn to the burial-mound that they had raised for her. They laid her in a viking-ship within the cairn, as they were wont to bury great chiefs ; and they laid beside her much treasure, and closed the cairn, and went their ways.

One of the kinsmen was Hoskuld, father of Olaf the Peacock, whose story will be told later on.

# Chapter VII

## The Expansion of England

WHILE Harald Fairhair was occupied in settling the Hebrides and Orkneys with inhabitants from Norway, and Rollo and his successors were possessing themselves of the larger part of the North of France, England and Ireland were enjoying a period of comparative repose. The twenty-three years of Edward the Elder's reign were devoted largely to building up the great kingdom which his father, Alfred, had founded, but not consolidated; he brought Mercia more immediately into his power, and subdued East Anglia and the counties bordering on the kingdom of Wessex; before his death Northumbria, both English and Danish, had invited him to reign over them, and he was acknowledged lord also of Strathclyde Britain, then an independent princedom, and of the greater part of Scotland. In all his designs Edward was supported by the powerful help of his sister, Ethelfled, "the Lady of the Mercians," as her people called her, a woman great of soul, beloved by her subjects, dreaded by her enemies, who not only assisted her brother with advice and arms, but helped him in carrying out his useful projects of building and strengthening the cities in his dominions, a matter which had also occupied the attention of their father. This woman had inherited the high spirit of Alfred; she was the

widow of Ethelred, Prince of Mercia, and she ruled her country with vigour after her husband's death, building strong fortresses at Stafford, Tamworth, Warwick, and other places; she bravely defended herself at Derby, of which she got possession after a severe fight in which four of her thanes were slain. The following year she became possessed of the fortress of Leicester, and the greater part of the army submitted to her; the Danes of York also pledged themselves to obey her. This was her last great success, for in 922 the Lady of Mercia died at Tamworth, after eight years of successful rule of her people. She was buried amid the grief of Mercia at Gloucester, at the monastery of St Peter's, which she and her husband had erected, on the spot where the cathedral now stands.

The most severe attack of the Danes in Edward the Elder's reign was made by two Norse or Danish earls who came over from the new settlements in Normandy and endeavoured to sail up the Severn, devastating in their old manner on every hand. They were met by the men of Hereford and Gloucester, who drove them into an enclosed place, Edward lining the whole length of the Severn on the south of the river up to the Avon, so that they could not anywhere find a place to land. Twice they were beaten in fight, and only those got away who could swim out to their ships. They then took refuge on a sandy island in the river, and many of them died there of hunger, the rest taking ship and going on to Wales or Ireland. One of the great lords of the Northern army, well known in the history of his own country, Thorkill the Tall, of whom we shall hear again, submitted to Edward, with the other Norse leaders of Central England, in or about Bedford and Northampton. Two years afterwards we read that Thorkill the Tall,

"with the aid and peace of King Edward," went over to France, together with such men as he could induce to follow him.

Great changes had been brought about in England during the reigns of Edward and his father. Everywhere large towns were springing up, overshadowed by the strong fortresses built for their protection, many of which remain to the present day. Commerce and education everywhere increased, and there was no longer any chance of young nobles and princes growing up without a knowledge of books. Edward's large family all received a liberal education, in order that "they might govern the state, not like rusties, but like philosophers"; and his daughters also, as old William of Malmesbury tells us, "in childhood gave their whole attention to literature," afterwards giving their time to spinning and sewing, that they might pass their young days usefully and happily.

This was a change of great importance. The ruler who succeeded Edward, his son, the great and noble-minded Athelstan, was a man of superior culture, and the daughters of Edward and Athelstan sought their husbands among the reigning princes of Europe. England was no longer a mere group of petty states, always at war with each other, or endeavouring to preserve their existence against foreign pirates; it was a kingdom recognized in the world, and its friendship was anxiously sought by foreign princes.

Another thing which we should remark is that it was at this time that the Norse first came into close contact with England. Hitherto her enemies had been Danes, and the kingdom of Northumbria seems to have been a Danish kingdom. But Thorkill the Tall, King Hakon, the foster-son of Athelstan, King Olaf Trygveson, who

all came into England at this period, were Norsemen; and henceforth, until the return of the Danish kings under Sweyn and Canute the Great and their successors, it is principally with the history of the Kings of Norway that we shall have to deal, in so far as these kings were connected with the history of England.

Hitherto the connexion between Great Britain and Norway had been confined to the settlements of the Norse in the Western Isles and in Northern Scotland; but the partial retirement of the Danes from the South of England, and the importance to which the country had recently grown, brought her into closer relationship with the North of Europe generally, and with Norway in particular. This we shall see as our history proceeds.

# Chapter VIII

## King Athelstan the Great

(925–940)

ENGLAND was fortunate in having three great kings in suecession at this critieal period, all alike bent upon strengthening and advaneing the prosperity of the kingdom.

Athelstan, who eame to the throne on the death of his father Edward, had been a favourite grandson of Alfred, and people said that he resembled his grandfather in many ways. When he was only a little fellow, Alfred, delighted with his beauty and graeeful manners, had affeetionately embraeed him, and prayed for the happiness of his future reign, should he ever eome to the erown of England. He had presented him at an early age with a scarlet cloak, a belt studded with brilliants, and a Saxon sword with a golden seabbard, thus, as was eustomary among many nations at this time, calling him even in boyhood to prepare himself for war and admitting him into the eompany of the King's own pages. Alfred then plaeed him with his daughter Ethelfled, the " Lady of Mereia," to be brought up in a fitting way for the future eare of the kingdom. The young prinee could not have had a better instruetress. Ethelfled's liberal spirit, high eourage, and good understanding were passed on to her pupil. William

of Malmesbury, who had a great admiration for this prince and gives us an excellent account of his reign, tells us that there was a strong persuasion among the English that one more just and learned never governed the kingdom; all his acts go to show that this praise was well deserved. He was of a good height and slight in person, with fair hair that seemed to shine with golden threads. Beloved by his subjects, he was feared and respected by his enemies. He obliged the warlike tribes of Wales and Cumberland to pay him tribute, "a thing that no king before him had even dared to think of," and he forced them to keep within limits west of the Wye, as he forced the Cornish Britons to retire to the western side of the Tamar, fortifying Exeter as a post of strength against them. Not long after his consecration at Kingston-on-Thames, in 925, amid the happy plaudits of the nation, Athelstan received from abroad many marks of the esteem in which he was held by foreign princes. Among others, Harald Fairhair sent him as a gift a ship with a golden prow and a purple sail, furnished with a close fence of gilded shields. This splendid present was received by Athelstan in state at York, and the envoys who presented the gift were richly rewarded by him, and sent home with every mark of respect and friendliness.

There are two events in Athelstan's reign that are of great importance to us in connexion with Norse history in these islands, the first being his wars in Northumbria, the second his accepting Hakon, Harald Fairhair's son, as his foster-child, and bringing him up in England under his own charge and tuition. We will deal with these two events in separate chapters.

It was part of Athelstan's fixed policy, when coming to the throne, to bring into subjection to himself those

outlying portions of England which up to that time had stood aloof as determined enemies to the central power and as absolutely independent kingdoms. Nothing would induce the Welsh or Cornishmen to yield, and we have seen that Athelstan was reduced to penning them up, as far as he could, into their own districts, beyond rivers which he endeavoured to make the borders of their respective countries. But in the north he had yet a harder task in his endeavour to reduce the Danish kingdom of Northumbria to submission.

At this time the kingdom of Northumbria was ruled by two of the fiercest and most renowned of all the Danish chiefs who at different times made England their home. The names of these chiefs were Sitric Gale, or "The One-eyed," and his son and successor, Olaf Cuaran, or "Olaf o' the Sandal," both men of wild and romantic careers. Some think that the old romance of "Havelok the Dane" really describes the history of Olaf Cuaran, but this I myself do not think to be likely, although Havelok also is called Cuaran in the story. But the name in his legend seems to mean a "kitchen-boy," because he was at one time so poor and needy that he was forced to act as messenger to an earl's cook, whereas Olaf's title is an Irish word, meaning "a sandal." We do not know exactly why he was so named.

It would seem that at the beginning of his reign, Athelstan endeavoured by a friendly alliance to bring Northumbria back to English rule. It was a favourite and wise plan of his to make alliances by marriage with foreign princes, and it shows in what esteem he was held that men of power and position were ready to unite themselves with his family. One of his sisters he married to the Emperor Otto, the restorer of the

Roman Empire, and another he offered in marriage to Sitric Gale, after a friendly meeting arranged by the two kings at Tamworth on the 3rd of February in the year in which Athelstan came to the throne (925). With Sitric Athelstan made a close and, as he hoped, a lasting covenant; but alas! Sitric died hardly more than a year afterwards, and on his death Athelstan, evidently in consequence of the arrangement made between them, claimed the throne of Northumbria, where he seems to have been peacefully received by the inhabitants. He spent this year in the north in active endeavours to quell the last disaffected portions in the realm. There is no doubt that at this time Athelstan designed to unite the whole of Britain under his own sway. He at first drove Howel, King of Wales, and then Constantine, King of the Scots, from their kingdoms; but not long after, if we are to believe his admirer William of Malmesbury, moved with commiseration, he restored them to their original state, saying that "it was more glorious to make than to be a king." However, he obliged both these princes to accept their crowns as underlords to himself, thus establishing a suzerainty over them.

But his plans did not suit the turbulent Danish princes. Godfrey, brother to Sitric, was at the time of Sitric's death reigning as King of Dublin, but on hearing of Athelstan's succession to the sovereignty of Northumbria he came over hastily and claimed the kingdom. He was, however, a man hated both in Northumbria and in Ireland, and Athelstan was strong enough to drive him out and send him back to Dublin with his Danes in the year 927.

But a more formidable foe than Godfrey was in the field. This was Olaf o' the Sandal (called Anlaf in the

English Chronicle), son of Sitric Gale, who seems to have been in Northumbria at the time, but who was expelled with his uncle Godfrey, and went back with the Danes to Dublin. Godfrey died soon after, as the Irish annals tell us, "of a grievous disease," and for ten years Olaf nursed his wrath against Athelstan and awaited his opportunity to revenge himself upon him. He went to Athelstan's enemy, the Scottish King, Constantine, and entered into a treaty with him, marrying his daughter; and Constantine never ceased to urge him on to war with the King of England, promising to support him in every way. Olaf remained long in Scotland, and was so much mixed up with Scottish affairs, that some Scandinavian historians call him "King of the Scots."

It was in the year 937 that their preparations were at length completed, and one of the most formidable combinations ever formed against England came to a head. The battle of Brunanburh, or Brumby, fought in this year, is chronicled in the Irish and Norse annals, and the Saga of Egil Skalligrimson gives us a detailed account both of the battle itself and of the Norsemen who took part in it. The English Chronicle breaks out into a wild, spirited poem when describing this battle, and we are told by one English annalist that many years afterwards people spoke of the greatness of this fight.

The battle was probably fought not far from the Humber, though the exact spot is not now known. From the north marched down the Scottish King and his son, of whom the latter fell in the fight, Olaf o' the Sandal taking charge of a fleet of 115 ships, with which he sailed into the Humber. From Dublin the whole force of the Danish host in Ireland set sail to join and

support their fellow-countrymen from Scotland, Strathclyde, and Northumbria. This formidable host met the forces of Athelstan and his brother, Edmund, and was completely overthrown. Five kings lay dead on the field, and five of Olaf's earls. King Olaf[1] himself escaped to his ships and back to Ireland, with the shattered remnant of his magnificent army, there to become a source of trouble and terror in days yet to come. The poem in the English Chronicle thus describes his flight :—

"There was made flee
by need constrained
the Northmen's chief[2]
with his little band
to the ship's prow.
The bark drove afloat,
the king departed
on the fallow flood,
his life preserved.
. . . .
The Northmen departed
in their nailed barks ;
on roaring ocean
o'er the deep water
Dublin to seek,
back to Ireland,
shamed in mind."

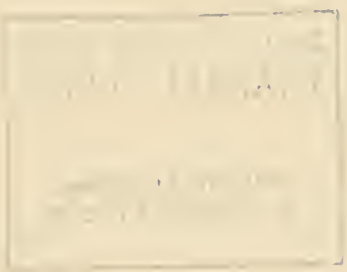
William of Malmesbury tells us a romantic story of Olaf Cuaran on the night before the battle. It may very well be true ; it accords with all we know of his adventurous character. The chronicler relates that on hearing of the arrival of the Danes and Scots in the North Athelstan purposely feigned a retreat. Olaf, who was still quite young and absolutely fearless,

[1] Probably Olaf, son of Godfrey, King of Dublin.
[2] *i.e.* Olaf Cuaran.

wishing to discover the exact strength of Athelstan's forces and how they were disposed, assumed the character of a spy. Laying aside the emblems of royalty, he dressed as a minstrel, and taking a harp in his hand, he proceeded to the King's tent. Singing before the entrance, and touching the strings of his harp in harmonious cadence, he was readily admitted, and he entertained the King and his companions for some time with his musical performance. All the time he was present he was carefully observing all that was said and done around him. When the feast was over, and the King's chiefs gathered round for a conference about the war, he was ordered to depart. The King sent him a piece of money as the reward of his song; but one of those present, who was watching him closely (for he had once served under Olaf, though now he was gone over to the side of Athelstan), observed that the minstrel flung the coin on the ground and crushed it into the earth with his foot, disdaining to take it with him. When Olaf was well away this person communicated what he had seen to the King, telling him that he suspected that the minstrel was none other than the leader of his foes. "Why, then, if you thought this," said Athelstan angrily, "did you not warn us in time to capture the Dane?"

"Once," said the man, "O King, I served in the army of Olaf, and I took to him the same oath of fidelity that I afterwards swore to yourself. Had I broken my oath to him and betrayed him to you, you might rightly have thought that I would another time act in the same way toward yourself. But now I pray you, O King, to remove your tent to another place, and to endeavour to delay the battle till your other troops come up."


*Olaf Cuaran*



The King approved of this, and removed his tent to another part of the field. Well it was that he did so, for that night, while Athelstan was still awaiting the remainder of his army, Olaf and his host fell upon him in the darkness of the night, the chief himself making straight for Athelstan's tent, and slaying in mistake for him a certain bishop who had joined the army on the night before and, ignorant of what had passed, had pitched his tent on the spot from which the King's tent had been removed.

Olaf, coming thus suddenly in the darkness of the night, found the whole army unprepared and deeply sleeping. Athelstan, who was resting after the labours of the day, hearing the tumult, sprang up and rushed into the darkness to arouse and prepare his people, but in his haste his sword fell by chance from its sheath, nor could he find it again in the gloom and confusion ; but it is said that, when placing his hand on the scabbard, he found in it another sword, which he thought must have come there by miracle, and which he kept ever after in remembrance of that night. It is probable that in the hurry of dressing he had laid his hand on a weapon belonging to one of the chiefs who fought on his side.

Thus in the darkness of night and in wild confusion began the battle which, in spite of all, was to end victoriously for Athelstan and disastrously for his enemies. The Northern story of the fight, which we are now about to tell, occurs in the Saga of Egil, son of one Skalligrim, an old man who had betaken himself to Iceland with most of his family, from the rule of Harald Fairhair, and who stoutly opposed him on every occasion.

Skalligrim had two strong, warlike sons, Thorolf and Egil. They found the life in Iceland wearisome, for they

preferred the turmoil of war ; so they left old Skalligrim, their father, to his seal-fishing and whale-hunting and his shipbuilding and smith-work, for he was a man with many trades, and able and crafty, and careful in saving his money, and went off to fight in Norway and in England. Before the battle of Brunanburh they had offered their services to Athelstan, for the Norse were ever ready to war against the Danes, and they were in the fight of Brunanburh on his side, each of them commanding a troop of Norwegian soldiers, and did much, as the Saga will show, to help in winning the battle for the English.

Here is the story from Egil Skalligrimson's Saga.

# Chapter IX

## The Battle of Brunanburh

THE account of the battle of Brunanburh in Egil's Saga begins by describing the strong combination made against Athelstan by the princes of the north of England with the Scots and Welsh and the Irish Danes, of whom we have already spoken. They thought to take advantage of Athelstan's youth and inexperience, for he was at this time only thirty years old. Olaf o' the Sandal is here called Olaf the Red, which may have been the title by which he was known in Norway. He marched into Northumbria, "advancing the shield of war." Athelstan, having laid claim to Northumbria, set over it two earls, Alfgeir and Gudrek, to defend it against the Irish and Scots, and they mustered all their forces and marched against Olaf. But they were powerless against his great army, and Earl Gudrek fell, while Alfgeir fled with the most part of his followers behind him. When Alfgeir reported his defeat to Athelstan he became alarmed, and summoned his army together; he sent messengers in every direction to gather fresh forces, and among those who heard that he wanted men and came to his assistance were the brothers Thorolf and Egil, who were coasting about the shores of Flanders. Athelstan received them gladly, for he saw that they were trained fighting-men and brought a good following; but he wished them to

be "prime-signed," in order that the Norse of his own army might fight on good terms with them.

It was a custom in those days, when pagan men traded with Christian countries, or when they took arms for them, that they should allow themselves to be signed with the cross, which was called "prime-signing," for then they could hold intercourse with Christians and pagans alike, though they did not thereby give up their pagan faith, and usually returned to their own worship when they went home to Norway or Iceland. Egil and Thorolf consented to this, for England was at that time a Christian country. They entered the King's army, and three hundred men-at-arms with them.

But the victory of Olaf had so strengthened his cause that Athelstan heard tidings from every quarter that his earls and subjects were falling away from him and joining Olaf. Even the two princes of the Welsh or Britons who had sworn allegiance to Athelstan, and who had the right to march to battle before the royal standard, passed over with their troops to the army of his foe. When the King received this bad news he summoned a conference of his captains and counsellors, and put before them point by point what he had been told. They advised that Athelstan should go back to the south of England, levy all the troops that he could get together and march with them to the north; for they felt that only the personal influence of the King could save his kingdom against such a combination as that which Olaf had gathered together. While he was gone south the King appointed Thorolf and Egil chiefs over his mercenary troops, and gave them the general direction of his army. They were commanded to send a message to Olaf, giving him tidings that Athelstan would offer battle to him on Vin-heath in

the north, and that he intended to "enhazel" the battle-field there; he appointed a week from that time for the conflict, and whoever should win the battle would rule England as his reward.

When a battlefield was "enhazelled" it was considered a shameful act to harry in the country until the battle was over. Olaf accepted the challenge, and brought his army to a town north of Vin-heath and quartered the troops there, awaiting the date of the battle, while collecting provisions for his men in the open country round. But he sent forward a detachment of his army to encamp beside Vin-heath, and there they found the ground already marked out and "enhazelled" for the battle. It was a large level plain, whereon a great host could manœuvre without difficulty. A river flowed at one side, and on the outskirts on the other hand was an extensive wood, and between the wood and the river the tents of Athelstan were pitched. All round the space hazel-poles were set up, to mark the ground where the battle was to be; this was called "enhazelling the field." Only a few of the King's men had arrived, but their leaders wished them to pass for a great host, to deceive King Olaf. They planted the tents in front very high, so that it could not be seen over them whether they stood many or few in depth; in the tents behind one out of every three was full of soldiers, so that the men had a difficulty in entering, and had to stand round the doors; but in every third tent there were only one or two men, and in the remaining third none at all. Yet when Olaf's soldiers came near them they managed things so that Athelstan's men seemed to be swarming before the tents, and they gave out that the tents were over-full, so that they had not nearly room enough. Olaf's troops, who were pitched

outside the hazel-poles, imagined that a great host must be there, and they feared the return of the King himself with the succours he was collecting in the South. Meanwhile, through every part of his dominions Athelstan sent out the war-arrow, summoning to battle. From place to place his messengers sped, passing the arrow from hand to hand, for it was the law that the war-arrow might never stop once it was gone out, nor be dropped by the way. From day to day men flocked to the standard from all quarters, and at last it was given out that Athelstan was coming or had come to the town that lay south of the heath. But when the appointed time had expired and Olaf was busking him for battle and setting his army in array, purposing to attack, envoys came to him from the leaders of Athelstan's host, saying: "King Athelstan is ready for battle, and hath a mighty host. But he sends to King Olaf these words, for he desires not to cause such carnage as seems likely; he is willing to come to terms with King Olaf, and offers him his friendship, with a gift as his ally of one shilling of silver from every plough through all his realm, if Olaf will return quietly to Scotland." Now this was all a ruse, for in fact Athelstan had not yet arrived, and his captains were only seeking more time, so that the battle might not be begun by Olaf until the King and his fresh troops were come.

Olaf and his captains were divided as to accepting these terms; some were against postponing the fight, and others said that if Athelstan had offered so much at first he would offer yet more if they held out for higher terms; others, again, thought the gift so great that they would do well to be satisfied with it and return home at once. When they heard that there was division among Olaf's counsellors, the messengers

were well pleased, and they sent word that if Olaf would give more time they would return to King Athelstan and try if he would raise his terms for peace. They asked for three days' further truce, and Olaf granted this.

At the end of the third day the envoys returned, saying that the King was so well pleased to have quiet in the realm that he would give, over and above the terms already offered, a shilling to every freeborn man in Olaf's forces, a gold mark to every captain of the guard, and five gold marks to every earl. Again the offer was laid before the forces, and again opinions were divided, some saying the offer should be taken and some that it should be refused. Finally King Olaf said he would accept these terms, if Athelstan would add to them that Olaf should have undisputed authority over the kingdom of Northumbria, with the dues and tributes thereof, and be permitted to settle down there in peace. Then he would disband his army.

Again the envoys demanded a three days' truce that they might bear the message to the King, and get his reply; when this was granted, the messengers returned to the camp. Now during this delay Athelstan had arrived close to the enhazelled ground with all his host, and had taken up his quarters south of the field, in the nearest town. His captains laid the whole matter of their treaties with Olaf before the King, and said that they had made those treaties in order to delay the battle until he returned.

Athelstan's answer was sharp and short. "Return to King Olaf," said he, "and tell him that the leave we give him is to return at once to Scotland with all his forces; but before he goes he must restore to us all the property he has wrongfully taken in this land.

Further, be it understood that Olaf becomes our vassal, and holds Scotland henceforth under us, as under-king. If this is carried out, then we will make terms of peace, that neither shall harry in the other's country. Go back and give him our terms."

The same evening the envoys appeared again before King Olaf, arriving at midnight in his camp. The King had to be waked from his sleep in order to hear the message from King Athelstan. Straightway he sent for his captains and counsellors, to place the matter before them. They discovered, too, that Athelstan had come north that very day, and that the former messages had not been sent by himself but by his captains.

Then out spake Earl Adils, who had gone over from Athelstan's side to the side of the Scottish King: "Now, methinks, O King, that my words have come true, and that ye have been tricked by these English. While we have been seated here awaiting the answer of the envoys they have been busy assembling a host. My counsel is that we two brothers ride forward this very night with our troop, and dash upon them unawares before they draw up their line of battle, so we may put a part of them to flight before their King be come up with them, and so dishearten the others; and you with the rest of the army can move forward in the morning." The King thought this good advice, and the council broke up.

In the earliest grey of the dawn the leaders of Athelstan's host were warned that the sentries saw men approaching. The war-blast was blown immediately, and word was sent out that the soldiers were to arm with all speed and fall into rank. Earl Alfgeir commanded one division, and the standard was borne

before him, surrounded by a " shield-burgh " of soldiers with linked shields to protect it. The second division, which was not so large, was commanded by Thorolf and Egil. Thus was Thorolf armed. He had a red war-shield on his arm, for the shields in time of peace were white, but in time of war they were red. His shield was ample and stout, and he had a massive helmet on his head. He was girded with the sword he called " Long," a weapon large and good. In his hand he had a halberd, with a feather-shaped blade two ells in length, ending in a four-edged spike ; the blade was broad above, the socket both long and thick. The shaft stood just high enough for the hand to grasp the socket, and was remarkably thick. The socket fitted with an iron prong on the shaft, which was also wound round with iron. Such weapons were called mail-piercers.

Egil was armed in the same way as Thorolf. He was girded with the right good sword which he called the " Adder." Neither of the captains wore coats of mail. All the Norwegians who were present were gathered round their standard, and were armed with mail at every point ; they drew up their force near the wood, while Alfgeir's moved along the river on their right.

When the captains of Olaf's party saw that their advance was observed, they halted and drew up their force in two divisions, one under Earl Adils, which was opposed to Earl Alfgeir, the other under Earl Hring, which stood opposite to Thorolf and Egil. The battle began at once, and both parties charged with spirit. The men of Earl Adils pressed on with such force that Alfgeir gave ground, and then the men pressed twice as boldly. In the end Alfgeir's division was broken and he himself fled south, past the town

in which Athelstan lay. "I deem," he said to his followers, "the greeting we should get from the King would be a cool one. We got sharp words enough after our defeat by Olaf in Northumbria, and he will not think the better of us now, when we are in flight again before him. Let us keep clear of the town."

So he rode night and day till he came to the coast, and there he found a ship which took him over to France, and he never returned to England. The captains who had fought with him thought him no loss, for he was something of a coward, and his own opinion of himself was ever better than that other men had of him, and they had not approved when the King had forgiven him his first flight and set him again as captain in his army.

Now when Adils turned back from pursuing Alfgeir and his men, he came to where Thorolf was making his stand against Earl Hring's detachment, and joined his forces to theirs. When Thorolf saw that the enemy had received reinforcements he said to Egil: "Let us move over to the wood, so that we may have it at our backs, that we be not attacked on all sides at once." They did so, drawing up under cover of the trees. A furious onset was made upon them there, and furiously they repelled it; so that though the odds of numbers were great, more of Adils' men fell than of Egil's.

Then his "berserking fury"[1] came upon Thorolf, and he became so furious that he bit the iron rim of his shield for rage; then he flung his shield on his back, and, grasping his halberd in both hands, he bounded forward, cutting and thrusting on every

[1] A sort of fury of war which attacked the Northmen when engaged in battle, and made them half-mad with ferocity.


*Thorolf slays Earl Hring at Brunanburh*

side. He shouted like a wild animal, and men sprang away from him, so terrified were they; but he cleaved his path to Earl Hring's standard, slaying many on his way, for nothing could stop him. He slew the man who bore the earl's standard and hewed down the standard-pole. Then he lunged at the breast of the earl with his halberd, driving it right through his body, so that it came out at his shoulders; and he raised the halberd with the earl empaled upon its end over his head, and planted the butt-end in the ground. There, in sight of friends and foes, the earl breathed out his life, expiring in agony. Then, drawing his sword, Thorolf charged at the head of his men, scattering the Scots and Welsh in all directions.

Thorolf and Egil pursued the flying foe till nightfall; and Earl Adils, seeing his brother fall, took shelter in the wood with his company; he lowered his standard that none might recognize his men from others. The night was falling when Athelstan on the one side and Olaf on the other came up with the fighting contingent; but as it was too dark to give battle, both armies encamped for the night; and it was told to Olaf that both his earls Hring and Adils were fallen, for no one knew what had become of Adils and his men.

At break of day King Athelstan called a conference, and he thanked Thorolf and Egil for their brave fight on the day before, and placed Egil as leader of his own division in the van with the foremost men in the host around him. "Thorolf," he said, "shall be opposed to the Scots, who ever fight in loose order; they dash forward here and there with bravery, and prove dangerous if men are not wary, but they are unsteady in the fight if boldly faced." Egil liked not to be separated from his brother, and said that he thought

ill-luck would come of it, and that in time to come he often would rue the separation, but Thorolf said: "Leave it with the King to place us as he likes best; we will serve him wherever he desires us to be."

After this they formed up in the divisions as the King ruled, Egil's division occupying the plain toward the river, and Thorolf's the higher ground beside the wood. Olaf also ranged his troops in two divisions, his own standard being opposite the van of Athelstan's army, and his second division, the Scots, commanded by their own chiefs, opposite to Thorolf. Each had a large army; there was no great difference on the score of numbers.

Soon the forces closed and the battle waxed fierce. Thorolf thought to turn the Scottish flank by pressing between them and the wood and attacking them from behind. He pushed on with such energy that few of his followers were able to keep up with him; and just when he was least on his guard, and all his mind was fixed upon the army on his right, Earl Adils, who all the night had lain concealed among the trees, leaped out upon him with his troop, and thrust at him so suddenly that he fell, pierced by the points of many halberds. The standard-bearer, seeing the earl fall, retreated with the banner among those that came on behind.

From his position at the other side of the fighting-field Egil heard the shout given by the Scots when Thorolf fell, and saw the banner in retreat. Leaving the fierce combat in which he was engaged with Olaf's troops, he hewed his way across the plain until he came amidst the flying Norsemen. Rallying them with his shouts, he turned them back and fell with them upon the enemy. Not long was it ere Earl Adils met

his death at Egil's hand, and then his followers wavered ; one after another they turned to fly before the fearful onslaught, each following his fellow ; and Egil, pursuing them, swept round behind and attacked the troops of Olaf's first division from the back. Thus, caught between two dangers, the force recoiled, and havoc overtook them. King Olaf was wounded, and the greater part of his troops were destroyed. Thus King Athelstan gained a great victory.

When Egil returned from pursuing the flying foe he found the dead body of his brother Thorolf. He caused a grave to be dug, and laid Thorolf therein with all his weapons and raiment. Before he parted from him, Egil clasped on either wrist a golden bracelet, and then they piled earth and stones upon his grave.

Then Egil sought the King's tent, where he and his followers were feasting after the battle, with much noise and merriment. When the King saw Egil enter the hall he caused the high seat opposite to himself to be cleared for him ; Egil sat him down there, and cast his shield on the ground at his feet. He had his helm on his head and laid his sword across his knees ; now and again he half drew it, then clashed it back into the sheath. He sat bolt upright, but as taking no notice of anything, and with his head bent forward. The King observed him, but said nothing. He thought the tall, rough warrior before him was angry. Egil was well made, but big-shouldered beyond other men, and with wolf-grey hair. Like his father he was partly bald, swarthy and black-eyed. His face was broad and his features large and hard, and just now he looked grim to deal with. He had a curious trick, when he was angry, of drawing one eyebrow down

toward his cheek, and the other upwards toward the roots of his hair, twitching them up and down, which gave him a ferocious appearance. The horn was borne to him, but he would not drink. King Athelstan sat facing him, his sword too laid across his knees. At last he drew his sword from the sheath, and took from his arm a ring of gold, noble and good. He placed the ring on the sword's point, stood up and reached it over the fire to Egil. At that Egil rose up and walked across the floor, striking his own sword within the ring and drawing it to him. Then both went back to their places, and Egil drew the massive ring on his arm, and his face cleared somewhat, and his eyebrows returned to their natural place. He laid down his sword and helmet and drank off at one draught the horn of wine they brought him. Then he sang a stave to the King :—

"Mailed Monarch, lord of battles,
The shining circlet passeth,
His own right arm forsaking,
To hawk-hung wrist of mine ;
The red gold gleameth gladly
Upon my arm brand-wielding,
About war-falcon's feeder [1]
Its twisted folds entwine."

After they had supped, the King sent for two chests of silver that he had by him in the tent, and handed them to Egil, saying, "These, O Egil, I give thee to take to thy father in Iceland, in satisfaction for his son Thorolf, slain in my service ; and to thee, in satisfaction for thy brother. If thou wilt abide with me I will give thee such honour and dignities as thou

[1] *i.e.* the dead bodies of the warriors whom his arm had slain fed the falcons, or carrion-birds.

mayest thyself name." Then Egil grew more cheerful, and he thanked the King, and said he would stay with him that winter, but that in the spring he must hie him home to Iceland, to tell the tidings to his father. He must go also to Norway, to see to the family of Thorolf and how they fared. So he stayed that winter with the King, and gat much honour from him, and in the spring he took a large warship, and on board of it a hundred men, and put out to sea. He and King Athelstan parted with great friendship, and the King begged Egil to return as soon as might be. And this Egil promised that he would do.

# Chapter X

## Two Great Kings trick each other

IT was, as we saw, part of Athelstan's policy of consolidation to ally his family with foreign princes. After marrying one sister to Sitric Gale, King of the Danes of Northumbria, and another sister to Otto, who became Emperor of the West in 962, his next thought was how he could mingle his country to his country's advantage with the affairs of Norway, which under Harald Fairhair was growing into a powerful kingdom. An opportunity soon occurred, and Athelstan was not slow to make use of it.

King Harald Fairhair, who was then an old man of seventy years of age, had a son born in 919. The mother was a woman of good family named Thora, and at the time when the child was born she was on her way to meet King Harald in a ship belonging to the great Earl Sigurd, one of Harald's wisest counsellors; but before they could reach the place where the King was staying the boy was born at a cove where the ship had put into harbour for the night, up among the rocks, not far from the ship's gangway.

It was the custom in the old Norse religion of Odin or Woden to pour water over a child after birth and give it a name, something after the manner of Christian baptism; when the child was of high birth some

person of distinction was chosen to do this, for it was a matter of importance and a solemn ceremony. We hear of Harald himself, and of Olaf Trygveson, Magnus, and other kings, being thus baptized, and now Earl Sigurd "poured water" over the new-born babe, and called him Hakon, after the name of his own father.[1] The boy grew sturdy and strong, handsome, and very like his father, King Harald, and the King kept him close to himself, the mother and child being both in the King's house as long as he was an infant.

Shortly after Hakon was born Athelstan had sent messengers to King Harald to present him with a sword, gold-handled, in a sheath of gold and silver, set thickly with precious jewels. Harald was much pleased with this, thinking that it was a mark of respect to himself, but Athelstan had another intention. When the ambassadors presented the sword to the King, they handed him the sword-hilt; but on the King taking it into his hands, they exclaimed: "Now thou hast taken the sword by the hilt, according to our King's desire, and as thou hast accepted his sword, thou art become his subject and owe him sword-service." Harald was very angry at Athelstan's attempt to entrap him in this way, for he would be subject to no man. But he remembered that it was his rule, whenever he was very angry about anything, to keep himself quiet and let his passion abate, and

[1] Unnecessary doubt has been thrown upon this practice of pagan baptism, but the instances are too numerous to be set aside. Baptism is a widespread custom among different races. In pagan Ireland also there are instances recorded of a sort of child-naming, combined with christening, by pouring water over the child. Baptism was not invented by Christianity; it was adopted from the Jewish faith into the new religion.

when he became cool to consider the matter calmly. He did this now, and consulted his friends, who advised him to let the ambassadors go safely away in the first place and afterwards consider what he would do to avenge the insult put upon him. So Harald consented to this, and the messengers went back to England in safety.

But Harald did not forget what had happened. The next summer he fitted out a ship for England, and gave the command of it to Hauk Haabrok, a great warrior and very dear to the King. Into his hands he gave his son Hakon. Now it was considered in those days that a man who fostered another man's son was lower in authority and consideration than the father of the child, and it was Harald's intention to make Athelstan take his son Hakon as foster-son, and thus pay him back in his own coin. The ship proceeded to England, and they found the King in London, where feasts and entertainments were going forward. Hauk and the child and thirty followers obtained leave to come into the hall where the King was seated at the feast. Hauk had told his men how they should behave. He said they should march into the hall and stand in a line at the table, at equal distance from each other, each man having his sword at his side, but fastened beneath his cloak, so that it could not be seen. They were to go out in the same order as they had come in. This they carried out, and Hauk went up to the King and saluted him in Harald's name, and Athelstan bade him welcome. Then Hauk, who was leading Hakon by the hand, took the child in his arms and placed him on the King's knee. Athelstan looked at the boy, and asked the meaning of this. "It means," said Hauk,

"that King Harald sends thee his child to foster." The King was in great anger, and seized a sword that lay beside him, and drew it, as though he would slay the child.

"Thou hast borne him on thy knee," said Hauk, "and thou mayest murder him if thou wilt; but I warn thee there are other sons of Harald behind who will not let his death go unavenged."

Then without another word Hauk marched out of the hall, his men following him in order; they went straight down to the ship and put out to sea, for all was ready for their departure, and back they went to King Harald. Harald was highly pleased when they told him what they had done, for it made Athelstan, in the opinion of many people, subject to him; but in truth neither was subject to the other, or less than the other, for each was supreme in his own kingdom till his dying day.

When Athelstan began to talk to the boy, and found him a brave, manly child, well brought up and open in his ways, he took a liking to him, and had him baptized with Christian baptism, and brought up in the Christian faith and in good habits, and made him skilful in all sorts of exercises; and the end of it was that he loved Hakon above all his own relatives; and Hakon was beloved of all men. King Athelstan gave the lad a gold-hilted sword, with the best of blades. It was called "Quern-biter," because to try it Hakon cut through a quern or mill-stone to the centre. Never came better blade into Norway, and Hakon kept it to the end, and it was with that sword he was fighting on the day when he got the wound that brought him to his death.

# Chapter XI

## King Hakon the Good

WHEN he was fifteen years old news came to Hakon in England that his father Harald Fairhair had died. He had resigned his crown three years before his death, for he had become feeble and heavy and unable to travel through the country or carry out the duties of a king. So he had parted the kingdom between his sons and lived in retirement on one of his great farms. He was eighty-three years of age when he died, and he was buried under a mound in Kormsund with a gravestone thirteen and a half feet high over his grave. The stone and the mound are still to be seen at Gar, in the parish of Kormsund.

No sooner was Harald dead than dissensions broke out between his sons, and they went to war with each other, each one desiring to be sole king, as their father had been. The chief of these sons was King Eric Bloodaxe, whose after-history is much mixed up with that of England. He fought his brothers, and two of them fell in battle; but the country was disturbed because of these quarrels. Eric was a stout and fortunate man of war, but bad-minded, gruff, unfriendly, and morose. Gunhild, his wife, was a most beautiful woman, clever and lively; but she had a false and cruel disposition. They had

many children, who played their part in English history.

Hakon heard of all that was going on in Norway, and he thought that the time had come when he should return to his own country. King Athelstan gave him all he needed for his journey, men, and a choice of good ships fitted out most excellently. In harvest-time he came to Norway, and heard that King Eric was at Viken, and that two of his brothers had been slain by him. Hakon went to his old friend and fosterer, Sigurd, Earl of Lade, who was counted the ablest man in Norway. Greatly did Sigurd rejoice to see Hakon again, grown a handsome, stalwart man, as his father had been before him; and they made a league thereupon mutually to help each other. But Hakon had not much need of help, for when they called together a "Thing," or parliament of the people of that district, and Hakon stood up and proposed himself as their king, the people said to each other, "It is Harald Fairhair come again, but grown young"; and it was not long before they acclaimed him king with one consent. Hakon promised to restore their right to own the land on which they lived (called "udal-right"), which his father had taken from them when he made them his vassals; and this speech met with such joyful applause that the whole assembly cried aloud that they would take him as their king. So it came about that at fifteen Hakon became king, and the news flew from mouth to mouth through the whole land, like fire in dry grass; and from every district came messages and tokens from the people that they would become his subjects. Hakon received the messengers thankfully, and went through all the land, holding a "Thing" in each district, and

everywhere they acclaimed him; for the more they hated King Eric the more they were ready to replace him by taking King Hakon. They called him Hakon the Good.

At last, seeing that he could not withstand his brother, King Eric got a fleet together and sailed out to the Orkneys, and then south to England, plundering as he went. Athelstan sent messengers to him, saying that as King Harald Fairhair, his father, had been his friend, he would act kindly toward his son, and he offered to make him King of Northumbria if he would defend it against other vikings and Danes and keep it quiet; for Northumbria was by that time almost wholly peopled by Northmen, and the names of many towns and villages were Danish or Norse, and are so to this day. Eric gladly accepted this offer, allowing himself to be baptized, with his wife and children and his followers, and settled down at York; and this continued till Athelstan's death.

# Chapter XII

## King Hakon forces his People to become Christians

IT seemed that all would have gone well in Norway with King Hakon the Good after King Eric Bloodaxe left the country, but that he had it in his mind to make the people Christians whether they would or no. Hitherto they had sacrificed to Odin, or Woden, who gives his name to our Wednesday—*i.e.* Woden's Day; and they had other gods and goddesses, such as Thor, the God of Thunder, from whom we get the name Thursday, or Thor's Day, and Freya, a goddess, who gives her name to our Friday. They had many special festivals, but the chief of all was Yule, in mid-winter, when the Yule log was brought in from the forests and burned with great rejoicings, and cattle and horses were slaughtered in sacrifice, and their blood sprinkled on the altars and temple walls, and on the people besides. A large fire was kindled in the middle of the temple floor, on which the flesh was roasted, and full goblets were handed across the fire, after being blessed by the chiefs. Odin's goblet was first emptied for victory and power to the king, and afterwards Freya's goblet for peace and a good season, and after that the "remembrance-goblet" was emptied to the memory of departed friends. It was a time of great joy and

festivity. In Scotland and other places the night of mid-winter is still called Hogmanay night, that is, the Norse "Höggn-nott," or slaughter night, from the hogging or hewing down of the cattle for sacrifice, and many Hogmanay songs are still sung in this country.

The first thing King Hakon did was to order that the festival of Yule should begin at the same time as Christmas did in Christian lands, as is the case at this day; and this displeased the people, for they did not like to change the day on which they and their forefathers had held their feast. Then Hakon sent for a bishop and priests from England to instruct the people in Christianity. Hitherto there had been no priests in Norway, but every man was priest in his own house; and the chief man of each place conducted the sacrifices for his neighbours. The people were against giving up their own religion and adopting a religion which they did not understand and which was foreign to them; but because they loved their King they at first made no outery, but deferred consideration of the matter to the meeting of the chief "Thing," [1] which they called the "Froste Thing," where men from every part of the country would be present. When the "Froste Thing" met, both they and the King made speeches, and Earl Sigurd begged the King not to press the matter, as it was plain the people were against it; and at first he seemed to consent to this. But the next harvest, which was the time of the summer sacrifice, the nobles watched the King closely to see what he would do. Earl Sigurd,

[1] The "Thing" was a convention or parliament of the people assembled to make laws or come to decisions on important matters. There were both local and general "Things." The place where the "Thing" was held was called the "Thing-mote."

who was a staunch pagan, made the feast, and the King came to it. When the Odin goblet was filled, Earl Sigurd blessed it in Odin's name, and drank to the King, and then he handed the goblet to the King to drink. The King took the goblet in his hand, and made the sign of the cross over it before he put it to his lips. "What is the King doing?" said a lord who stood near him. "He is making the sign of Thor's hammer [1] over the cup, as each of you would do," said Earl Sigurd, thinking to shield the King. For the moment this satisfied the people, but next day when the sacrifices were offered, and horse-flesh was eaten, as was always done at a solemn feast, Hakon utterly refused to join in the heathen festival, nor would he touch even the gravy of the dish.

Great discontent was aroused at this, both the King and the people being very ill-pleased with each other, and on the next occasion it threatened to develop into war. From time to time Earl Sigurd came between the King and the people and kept them at peace, but neither loved the other as before.

The latter years of Hakon's reign were disturbed by the return of Eric Bloodaxe's sons, and their attempts to take the crown. For years they had been marauding on the coasts, but Hakon had driven them off; and he had conquered them in the great sea-fight of Augvaldsness, after which they went south to Denmark, and rested there. King Hakon put all his sea-coast subjects under tribute that they should raise and sustain in each district a certain number of ships to defend the coast, and that they should erect beacons on every hill and headland, which were

[1] The hammer of Thor was somewhat like a Greek cross.

to be lighted when the fleet of Erie's sons appeared, so that by the lighting of the beacons the whole country could speedily be warned of the coming of the enemy. But when Erie's sons actually came at last with an overwhelming host, provided for them by the King of Denmark, the beacons were not lighted, because they came by an unexpected route, where they were not looked for. The beacons also had so often been lighted by the country-people whenever they saw a ship-of-war or viking boat cruising about on the coast, thinking that it brought Erie's sons, that King Hakon had become angry at the waste of trouble and money without any purpose, and had heavily punished those who gave the false alarm. Thus it happened that when Erie's sons' host really came in sight no one was ready, and they had sailed far north before anyone was aware of their presence. The people were afraid to give warning to the King, because of his anger if they gave a false alarm. So they watched the great fleet making its way northward and turning in toward the island where the King lay, and none of them dared go to inform him of its coming. The King was supping in the house of one of his *bondes* named Eyvind, when at length one of the country-people took courage to come to the house and beg that Eyvind would come outside at once, for it was very needful. Eyvind went up a little height, and there he saw the great armed fleet that lay in the fiord. With all haste he entered the house, and, placing himself before the King, he cried: "Short is the hour for action, but long the hour for feasting." "What now is forward, Eyvind?" said the King, for he saw that something of import was in the air. Then Eyvind cried:


*The dying King Hakon carried to his Ship* 88

"Up, King! the avengers are at hand!
Eric's bold sons approach the land!
They come well armed to seek the fight.
O mighty King, thy wrath be light
On him who calls thee from thy rest
To put thee to the battle-test.
Gird on thy armour; take thy stand
Here where thy foes are come to land.
Quernbiter now shall bite again
And drive the intruder o'er the main!"

Then said the King: "Thou art too brave a fellow, Eyvind, to bring us a false alarm of war." He ordered the tables to be removed, and went out to look at the ships; and the King asked his men what resolution they would take, to give battle there and then, or to sail away northwards and escape. They gave their voice for war, for they knew that this was what the King would choose, and made them ready speedily. A great battle was fought that day, but in the end Eyvind was killed and the King received an arrow through his shoulder, and though he fought on, his blood ebbed out until he had no strength left, and he had to be carried to his ship. They sailed on awhile toward King Hakon's house at Alrekstad, but when he came as far as Hakon's Hill he was nearly lifeless; so they put in to shore, and he died there by the shoreside, at the little hill beside which he had been born. They buried his body in a mighty mound, in which they laid him in full armour and in his kingly robes; that mound is to be seen not far from Bergen at this day. So great was the sorrow at his death that he was lamented alike by his friends and his enemies; for they said that never again would Norway see such a king. For all he was a Christian,

they spake over his grave wishing him a good reception in Valhalla, the home of Odin and the gods. It was in the year 960 that the battle of Stord and the death of King Hakon took place. The men who had fallen in his army were buried in mounds along the sea-shore, each great man among them laid in his armour, and one of the enemy's ships turned bottom up over him, and the whole covered in with earth and stones. These were called " ship-burial " mounds, and many of them have been found in Norway.

After Hakon's fall the sons of Eric Bloodaxe ruled over Norway.

# Chapter XIII

## The Saga of Olaf Trygveson

ONE of the greatest Kings of Norway was named Olaf Trygveson (*i.e.* the son of Trygve), who became King of Norway in 995. He had an adventurous career, part of it being connected with the British Isles, where he spent ten years in hiding in his youth, only returning to his native country when his people called on him to take the crown.

His father, Trygve, had been treacherously put to death shortly before he was born, and his mother had fled away with a few faithful followers, and had taken refuge in a lonely island in a lake; here Olaf was born in 963, and baptized with heathen baptism, and called after his grandfather, a son of Harald Fairhair.

During all that summer Astrid, his mother, stayed secretly in the island; but when the days grew shorter, and the nights colder, she was obliged to leave the damp island and take refuge on the mainland, in the house of her father, reaching it by weary night-marches, for they feared to be seen if they travelled by day. But soon news reached them that their enemies were searching for them, and they dared not stay longer, but clothed themselves in mean clothing and went on again, meeting with many rebuffs, until at last

they got out of the kingdom, and were protected for three years by Hakon the Old, King of Sweden. Now Astrid had a brother in Russia in the service of the Russian King, and she thought that Olaf would be safer if she went thither with him; so they set sail in a ship provided by Hakon the Old, but again ill-luck overtook them, for they were captured by pirates in the Baltic, and the little lad was separated from his mother, and sold as a slave into Russia. But there a better fortune came to him, for he fell in with his cousin, his mother's nephew, who bought him from his master, and took him to the King's palace, and commended him to the care of the Queen. There Olaf grew up, and men favoured him, for he was stout and strong, and a handsome man, and accomplished in manly exercises. But he dared not go back to his own country, so he took ship and sailed to England, and ravaged wide around the borders. He sailed right round Britain, and down to the coast of France, laying the land waste with fire and sword wherever he came. After that he came to the Scilly Isles, and lay there, for he was weary after his four years' cruise. This was in 988. He did not wish it to be known who he was, so he called himself Ole instead of Olaf, and gave out that he was a Russian. One day he heard that a clever fortune-teller was in the place, and he sent one of his company to him, pretending that this man was himself. But the fortune-teller knew at once that this was not so, and he said: "Thou art not the King, but I advise thee to be faithful to thy king." And no more at all would he say to him than that. Then Olaf went to him himself, and asked what luck he would have if he should attempt to regain his kingdom. The hermit replied that he would become a

renowned king, and that he ought to adopt the Christian religion and suffer himself to be baptized; and he told him many things regarding his future. That autumn a summons was sent through the country for a great Thing-mote, or meeting of the Danes in the South of England; and Olaf went to the Thing in disguise, wearing his bad-weather clothes and a coarse cloak, and keeping apart with his people from the rest. There was also at the Thing a lady called Gyda, who was sister of Olaf Cuaran, or Olaf o' the Sandal, Danish King of Dublin. She had been married to a great English earl, and after his death she ruled all his property. She had in her territory a strong, rough champion, named Alfvine, who wooed her in marriage, but she did not favour his suit, saying she would only marry again as she pleased. She said he should have his answer at the Thing, so he came in his best, sure that the Lady Gyda would soon be his wife. But Gyda went all round the company, looking in each man's face, to see whom she would choose; but she chose none until she came where Olaf stood. She looked him straight in the face, and in spite of his common clothing she thought the face good and handsome. So she said to him: "Who are you, and what do you here?" "My name is Ole," he replied; "but I am a stranger here." "In spite of that," she said; "wilt thou have me for thy wife, if I ask thee?" "I do not think I would say no to that," he answered; "but tell me of what country you are, for I am, as I said, a stranger here."

"I am called Gyda," said she; "and I am sister of the Danish King of Ireland. But I was married to an earl in this country. Since his death many

have asked for my hand, but I did not choose to marry any of them." Then Olaf saw that she was a young and very handsome woman, and he liked her well, and they talked a long while together, and after that they were betrothed. Alfvine was furious when he heard this, and he challenged Olaf to fight, but Olaf and his followers struck down Alfvine and his men, and he ordered Alfvine to leave the country and never return again. Then he and Gyda were wedded, and they lived sometimes in England and sometimes in Ireland.

It was in Ireland that Olaf got his wolf-hound, Vige. The Irish dogs were famous all over the world for their great size and intelligence; they were large, smooth hounds, and the constant companions of men. One day Olaf and his men were sailing along the east coast of Ireland, when, growing short of provisions, they made a foray inland, his men driving down a herd of cattle to the water's edge. One of their owners, a peasant, came up and begged Olaf to give him back his own cows, which he said were all the property he possessed. Olaf, looking at the large herd of kine on the strand, told him laughingly that he might take back his own cows, if he could distinguish them in the herd. "But be quick about it," he added, "for we cannot delay our march for you."

He thought that out of such a number of cattle it would be impossible to tell which were owned by any single person. But the man called his hound and bade him go amongst the hundreds of beasts and bring out his own. In a few minutes the dog had gathered into one group exactly the number of cows that the peasant said he owned, all of them marked with the same mark. Olaf was so surprised at the

sagacity of the dog that he asked the peasant if he would sell him to him. "Nay," said the peasant, "but as you have given me back my cattle, I will gladly give him to you: his name is Vige, and he will, I hope, be as good a dog to you as he is to me." Olaf thanked the man, and gave him a gold ring in return, and promised him his protection. From that time forth Olaf went nowhere without his dog Vige; he was the most sagacious of dogs, and remained with Olaf till the day of his death. Once when Olaf was fighting in Norway, and driving his enemies before him, Thorer, their leader, ran so fast that he could not come up with him. His dog Vige was beside him, and he said, "Vige! Vige! catch the deer!" In an instant Vige came up with Thorer, who turned and struck at him with his sword, giving him a great wound; but Olaf's spear passed through Thorer at the same instant and he fell dead. But Vige was carried wounded to the ships. Long afterwards, when Olaf disappeared after the battle of Svold, Vige was, as usual, on his master's ship, the *Long Serpent.* One of the chiefs went to him, and said: "Now we have no master, Vige!" whereupon the dog began to howl, and would not be comforted. When the *Long Serpent* came near to land he sprang on shore, and ran to a burial-mound which he thought was Olaf's grave and stretched himself upon it, refusing to take food. Great tears fell from his eyes, and there he died, in grief for the loss of his master.

Now it began to be whispered about in Norway that to the westward, over the Northern Sea, was a man called Ole, whom some people thought to be a king. At that time a powerful earl, named Hakon,

ruled in Norway, and the land prospered under him, but he himself was a man of unruly passions, and his people, especially the great lords, hated him for his exactions and cruelties, and were ready enough to turn against him. Earl Hakon became alarmed lest this Ole, of whom men spoke, should turn out to belong to Norway, and should some day dispute the sovereignty of the kingdom with him. He recalled that he had heard that King Trygve had had a son, who had gone east to Russia, having been brought up there by King Valdemar, and he had his suspicions that this Ole might prove to be Trygve's son. So he called a friend of his, called Thorer Klakka, who went often on viking expeditions, and sometimes also on merchant voyages, and who was well known everywhere, and he bade him make a trading voyage to Dublin, as many were in the habit of doing, and there to inquire carefully who Ole was. If it should prove that he was indeed Olaf Trygveson, he was to persuade him to come to Norway, and by some means to ensnare him into the earl's power. So Thorer sailed west to Ireland, and found that Olaf was in Dublin with his wife's father, Olaf o' the Sandal ; then he went to do business with Olaf, and, being a clever, plausible man, they became acquainted. Thus gradually he learned from Olaf who he was, and that he had some thoughts of going back to try to recover his kingdom ; for his heart turned often toward his native land. Thorer encouraged him in every way, praising him highly and telling him that Earl Hakon was disliked and that it would be easy for one of Harald Fairhair's race to win the country to his side. As he talked thus Olaf began more and more to wish to return. But Thorer's words were spoken deceit-

fully, for he intended, if he could persuade Olaf to return to Norway, to give Hakon warning, so that Olaf would at once be taken prisoner and put to death. In the end Olaf decided to go, and they set out by way of the Orkneys, with five ships; he sailed straight out to sea eastward and gained the coast of Norway, travelling in such haste that no one was well aware that he was coming. As they came close to land tidings reached them that Hakon was near, and that his *bondes* or farmers and great men were all in disaccord with him. Thorer Klakka had not thought of this, for when he left Norway the people were at peace with Hakon; now he saw that things might turn out in a very different way from what he expected. At that very moment Earl Hakon was flying from his lords, who were determined to kill him, and it did not comfort him to hear that Olaf Trygveson was come overseas and was anchored in the fiord. He fled away with only one servant, named Kark, and took refuge with a woman whom he knew, named Thorer, begging her to conceal him from his pursuers. She did not know where she could hide him to prevent his being discovered, for it was well known by all that she was a friend of his. "They will hunt for you here, both inside my house and out," she said. "I have only one safe place, where they would never expect to find you, and that is in the pig-sty; but it is not a pleasant place for a man like you." "Well," said the earl, "the first thing we need is our life; let it be made ready for us."

So the slave dug a hole beneath the sty, and laid wood over the place where he had dug out the earth, and then the earl and Kark went into the hole, and Thorer covered it with earth and dung and drove

in the swine round the great stone that was in the centre of the sty.

When Olaf sailed with his five ships into the fiord all the *bondes* gathered joyfully to him, and readily agreed to make him King of Norway. They set forth at once to seek Earl Hakon, in order to put him to death; and it so chanced that they went straight to the house where Hakon lay, and searched inside and out, but they could not find him. Hakon, from under the sty, could hear them searching, and could dimly see their forms moving about, and he was full of fear, for he was not a very brave man. Then, close by the great stone, Olaf held a council, and he stood upon the stone and made a speech to them, promising a great reward to the man who should find and kill the earl. All this was heard by Hakon and by Kark, his man.

"Why art thou so pale at one moment, and again as black as death?" said the earl to Kark. "Is it thy intention to win that reward by betraying me?"

"By no means whatever," said Kark.

"We were born on the same night," said the earl, "and I think there will not be much more difference between the time of our deaths."

King Olaf went away that evening. When night came the earl kept himself awake, for he was afraid of Kark; but Kark slept a disturbed sleep. The earl at last woke him and asked him what he was dreaming about.

"I dreamed I was at Lade, and Olaf Trygveson was laying a gold ring round my neck."

"It will be a red and not a gold ring that Olaf will put about thy neck if ever he catches thee," said the earl; "take you care of that. It is only from me

that you will enjoy good, so beware that you betray me not."

From that time each of them kept himself awake, watching the other, until toward daybreak the earl's head fell forward, and he dropped asleep, for the air was close and he was weary. But his sleep was so unquiet that he suddenly screamed out loudly, and drew himself together, as if to spring up. On this Kark, dreadfully alarmed, drew a large knife out of his belt and struck at the earl, and in a moment he fell dead, with his head severed from his body. Then in the early morning Kark got out of the hole with Hakon's head and ran with it to Olaf, telling what had befallen them. But Olaf had him taken out and beheaded. Soon after that Olaf was elected King of Norway at a general Thing, as his great-grandfather, Harald Fairhair, had been. This was in the year 995.

# Chapter XIV

## King Olaf's Dragon-ships

IT does not concern us here to follow the story of Olaf Trygveson point by point. Much of his history is taken up with attempts to force Christianity upon his people, as King Hakon had done. Having learned the doctrines of Christianity in England and been baptized there, he was determined that all his people should follow his example and be baptized also. But the chief doctrine of Christianity, the love of all men as brothers and the forgiveness of foes, he had not learned; and when he proclaimed abroad that "all Norway should be Christian or die" he was far from the spirit of the Christian life. His persecutions of his people stain an otherwise great and humane reign; and he was not content with forcing his religion on Norway, but sent a priest of much the same temper as his own to convert Iceland to Christianity by similar means, stirring up strife and bringing misery upon a nation that heretofore had been prosperous and peaceable. For though it may have been well for these countries to forsake their old religion and embrace Christianity, it was an evil thing to force it upon the people in such a way.

Otherwise the reign of Olaf was a happy one; he was loved by his friends and feared by his foes. But, as was usual when things went well, enemies began

to gather about him, and a coalition was formed between the Danish King Sweyn Fork-beard, and the Swedish King, who was his brother-in-law, to fight Olaf, and drive him out of his kingdom. It was Sweyn's wife, Sigrid the Haughty, who urged him on to this. She had once been betrothed to Olaf, but the betrothal had come to an end because Olaf insisted that she should be baptized before he married her. When he spake thus to her she had replied: "It is for you to choose whatever religion suits you best; but as for me, I will not part from my own faith, which was the faith of my forefathers before me." Olaf was enraged at that, and he struck her face with his glove in his passion, and rose up saying, "Why should I care to marry thee, an aged woman and a heathen?" and with that he left her. Sigrid the Haughty had never forgiven the insult put on her by Olaf, and when she was married to Sweyn she thought her time was come to be revenged; so she stirred him up to make war on Olaf.

Olaf was very fond of having fine war-vessels built for him, of greater size and height than any that had been built hitherto. He had a fleet of over seventy vessels, all good craft, to meet King Sweyn, but chief of these were his own three ships, the *Crane*, the *Long Serpent*, and the *Short Serpent*. These were the finest vessels that had been planned in Norway, and were known all over the world. The lighter craft sailed first, and got out to sea, Olaf with his great ships following more slowly behind. Along with him was Earl Sigvalde, whom he thought to be his friend, but who was secretly in the pay of King Sweyn; he had induced Olaf to postpone sailing on one pretence or another, until he heard that Sweyn had collected his whole

army and fleet together, and was lying under the island of Svold, in the Baltic, awaiting Olaf Trygveson. The Swedish King, together with Earl Eirik were, with all their forces, watching anxiously for the coming of Olaf's fleet. The weather was fine, with clear sunshine, and they went upon the island to see the vessels coming in from the open sea, sailing close together. They saw among them one large and shining ship. The two kings said: "That is a large and very beautiful vessel; that will be the *Long Serpent*." But Earl Eirik replied: "That is not the *Long Serpent*; the vessel in which Olaf sails is greater still than that."

Soon they saw another vessel following, much larger than the first, but no figure-head on her prow. "That," said King Sweyn, "must be Olaf's ship, but it is evident that he is afraid of us, for he has taken the dragon off his prow, that we may not recognize his ship."

Eirik said again: "That is not yet the King's ship, for his ship has striped sails. It must be Erling Skialgson's ship. Let it pass on, that it may be separated from Olaf's fleet."

Next came up Earl Sigvalde the traitor's ships, which were in league with the enemy; they turned in and moored themselves under the island, for they did not intend to fight for Olaf. After that came three ships moving swiftly along under full sail, all of great size, but one larger than the rest. "Get your arms in your hands," said King Sweyn, "man the boats, for this must be Olaf's *Long Serpent*." "Wait a little," said Eirik again; "many other great vessels have they besides the dragon ship." Then all Sweyn's followers began to grumble, thinking that


*King Olaf's "Long Serpent"*

Eirik made excuses to prevent them from going to war, for he had been Olaf's vassal at one time, and they were doubtful of his fidelity. But as they complained, Eirik pointed with his finger out to sea. And there upon the horizon they saw four splendid ships bearing proudly along, the one in the centre having a large dragon-head, richly gilt. Then Sweyn stood up and said: "That dragon shall bear me high to-night, for I shall be its steersman." And they all cried: "The *Long Serpent* is indeed a wonderful ship, and the man who built it must be great of mind." But in his excitement Eirik forgot where he was, and he cried aloud so that the King himself heard him: "If there were no other vessels with King Olaf but only this one, King Sweyn would never with the Danish forces alone be able to take it from him."

Then all the sailors and men-at-arms rushed to their ships and took down the coverings or tents that sheltered them on board, and got them ready for fighting. Earl Eirik's vessel, which he used on his viking expeditions, was a large ship with an iron comb or spiked top on both sides to protect it, and it was iron-plated right down to the gunwale.

When King Olaf sailed into the Sound, with the *Short Serpent* and the *Crane* attending on him, the other boats were lying by under the island, following in the wake of the traitor, Earl Sigvalde, with their sails reefed, and drifting with the tide. On the other side of the Sound were the fleet of the enemy, trimmed and in full battle array, rowing out into the Sound; the fleets of Sweden and Denmark united together. When some of Olaf's men saw this, they begged him to sail at full speed out of the Sound into the open sea again, and not risk battle with so great a force.

But the King, standing on his quarter-deck, in view of all his host, exclaimed: "Strike the sails. No man shall ever learn of me to fly before the enemy. Never yet have I fled from battle, nor ever will. Let God dispose as He thinks best, but flight I never shall attempt."

Then he ordered his war-horns to be sounded and the ships to close up to each other, and lash themselves together, side by side, under the island, as the Norse were wont to do in battle; thus no ship could forsake the others, but all fought side by side to the end. The King's ship lay in the middle of the line, with the *Crane* on one side and the *Little Serpent* on the other, all fastened together at the head; but the dragon ship was so long that it stood out behind the others; and when the King saw this he called out to his men to lay his *Long Serpent*, the dragon ship, more in advance, so that its stern should lie even with the other ships behind.

"We shall have hot work of it here on the forecastle, if the King's ship stands out beyond the rest," said Ulf the Red.

"I did not think I had a forecastle man who would grow red with dread," said the King, punning on Ulf's name.

"I hope you will defend the quarter-deck as well as I defend the forecastle," replied Ulf, who was vexed at Olaf's sneer.

There was a bow in the King's hands, and he fixed an arrow on the string to take aim at Ulf.

"Shoot the other way, King," said Ulf, "where it is needed more; maybe you will need my arm to-day."

King Olaf stood on the quarter-deck, high above all. He had a gilt shield and a helmet inlaid with

gold; over his armour he wore a short red cloak, so that it was easy to distinguish him from other men. He asked one who stood by him: "Who is the leader of the force right opposite to us?"

"King Sweyn, with the Danish fighting-men," was the reply.

The King replied: "We have no fear of those soft Danes, for there is no bravery in them. Who are the troops on the right of the Danes?"

"King Olaf the Swede, with his troops," was the answer.

"It were better for these Swedes to be sitting at home killing pagan sacrifices, than venturing so near the weapons of the *Long Serpent*," said the King. "But who owns the large ships on the larboard side?"

"Earl Eirik Hakonson," said they.

"Ah," said the King, "it is from that quarter we may expect the sharpest conflict, for his men are Norsemen like ourselves."

The battle of Svold was fought in September, in the year 1000, and it was one of the hardest sea-conflicts ever known in the North.

King Sweyn laid his ship against the *Long Serpent*, and on either side of him the King of Sweden and Earl Eirik attacked the *Little Serpent* and the *Crane*. The forecastle men on Olaf's ships threw out grappling-irons and chains to make fast King Sweyn's ship, and they fought so hotly there that the King had to escape to another ship, and Olaf's men boarded the vessel and cleared the decks. King Olaf the Swede fared no better, for when he took Sweyn's place he found the battle so hot that he too had to get away out of range.

But it was a different story with Earl Eirik, as Olaf

had said. In the forehold of his ship he had had a parapet of shields set up to protect his men; and as fast as one man fell another would come up to take his place, and there he fought desperately with every kind of weapon. So many spears and arrows were cast into the *Long Serpent* that the shields could scarce receive them, for on all sides the vessel was surrounded by the enemy. Then King Olaf's men grew so mad with rage that they ran on board the enemies' ships, to get at the people with stroke of sword at close quarters, but many of them missed their footing and went overboard, and sank in the sea with the weight of their weapons. The King himself stood in the gangway shooting all day, sometimes with his bow, but more often casting two spears at once. Once, when he stooped down and stretched out his right hand, the men beside him saw that blood was running down under his steel glove, though he had told no one that he was wounded.

Einar Tambaskelfer, one of the sharpest of bow-men, stood by the mast, and aimed an arrow at Earl Eirik. The arrow hit the tiller end just above the earl's head with such force that it sank into the wood up to the shaft. The earl looked that way, and asked if they knew who made that shot, but just as he was speaking another arrow flew between his hand and his side, and fixed itself into the stuffing of his stool, so that the barb stood far out on the other side. "Shoot that tall man standing by the mast for me," said the earl to one who stood beside him. The man shot, and the arrow hit the middle of Einar's bow just as he was drawing it, and the bow split into two parts

"What is that," cried King Olaf, "that broke with such a noise?"

"Norway, King, from thy hands," said Einar.

Not long after this the fight became so fierce that it seemed as though none of Olaf's men would be left alive. Twice Earl Eirik boarded the *Long Serpent*, and twice he was driven off again, but so many of the fighting-men fell that in many places the ships' sides were quite bare of defenders. At length Earl Eirik with his men boarded her again, and filled the ship from stem to stern with his own host, so that Olaf saw that all was lost. Then Olaf and his marshal sprang together overboard; but the earl's men had laid boats around the dragon ship, to kill all who fell overboard. They tried to seize Olaf alive to bring him to Earl Eirik; but King Olaf threw his shield over his head and sank beneath the waters.

Many tales were told of the King, for none would believe that he was dead. Some said that he had cast off his coat of mail beneath the water and had swum, diving under the long ships, and so had escaped; only one thing is certain, that he never came back to Norway or to his kingdom again. The poet Halfred speaks thus about him:—

"Does Olaf live? or is he dead?
Hath he the hungry ravens fed?
I scarcely know what I should say,
For many tell the tale each way.
This I can say, nor fear to lie,
That he was wounded grievously—
So wounded in this bloody strife,
He scarce could come away with life.'

# Chapter XV

## Wild Tales from the Orkneys

THE wildest of all the vikings were those who settled in the Orkney Isles and carried on their raids from there. After Ragnvald had given up his possessions in the Isles to Earl Sigurd, the earl made himself a mighty chief; he joined with Thorstein the Red, son of Olaf the White of Dublin and Unn the Deep-minded, and together they harried and won, as we have seen, all Caithness, and Moray and Ross,[1] so that they united the northern part of Scotland to the Orkney and Shetland Isles. The Scottish earl of those lands was ill-pleased at this, and he arranged that he and Sigurd should meet and discuss their differences and the limits of both their lands. Melbrigd the Toothy was the name of the Scots' earl, because his teeth protruded from his jaws; and they arranged to meet at a certain place, each with forty men. But Sigurd suspected treachery, and he caused eighty of his men to mount on forty horses. As they rode to the place of meeting Melbrigd said: "I shrewdly suspect that Sigurd hath cheated us; I think I see two men's feet at each side of the horses; thus, they are twice as many as we. Let us, however, do our best, and see that each man of us can answer for a man of them before we die." So they marshalled

[1] Chap. vi., page 48.

themselves to fight, and when Sigurd saw this he ordered one half of his men to dismount and attack from behind, while the other half set on them in front. They had a good tussle after that, and Earl Melbrigd fell with all his men, and Sigurd's men cut off their heads and fastened them to their horses' cruppers, and set off home boasting of their victory. The bleeding heads dangled behind them; and as he rode, Earl Sigurd, intending to kick his horse with his foot to urge him on, scratched his leg against a tooth of Melbrigd which stuck out from his head, and the wound became so swollen and painful that in the end he died of it. Sigurd the Mighty is buried in a "howe," or burial-mound, on the banks of the Oikel, in Sutherlandshire.

When Earl Ragnvald heard that his possessions in Orkney were again without a lord, and that Sigurd his brother was dead, he sent one of his sons, Hallad, to take his place; but vikings went prowling all over those lands, plundering the headlands and committing depredations on the coast. The yeomen brought their complaints to Hallad, but he did not do much to right them; he soon grew tired of the whole business, resigned his earldom, and went back to Norway to take up his own property. When his father heard of this, he was by no means well pleased. All men mocked at Hallad, and Ragnvald said his sons were very unlike their ancestors. His eldest son, Rolf, was away in Normandy, plundering and conquering. He was a mighty viking, and he was so stout that no horse could carry him, and whithersoever he went he must walk on foot; hence he was called Rolf Ganger, or Rolf the Walker. He was the conqueror of Normandy, and from him the Dukes of Normandy and Kings of

England were descended. King Harald drove him out of Norway because he had one summer made a cattle foray on the coast of Viken, and plundered there. King Harald happened to be in the neighbourhood, and he heard of it, and it put him into the greatest fury; for he had forbidden, under heavy penalties, that anyone should plunder within the bounds of his territories. Rolf's mother, Hild, interceded for him, but it was of no avail. She made these lines :—

"Think'st thou, King Harald, in thine anger,
To drive away my brave Rolf Ganger,
Like a mad wolf, from out the land?
Why, Harald, raise thy mighty hand?

Bethink thee, Monarch, it is ill
With such a wolf at wolf to play,
Who driven to wild woods away,
May make the King's best deer his prey!"

What she had predicted came to pass, for Ganger-Rolf went west over the sea to the Hebrides, and thence to the west coast of France, which the Norsemen called Valland, where he conquered and subdued to himself a great earldom, which he peopled with Northmen, from which it was called Normandy. He was ancestor of William the Conqueror, King of England, and ruled in Normandy from 911 to 927.

Earl Ragnvald had three other sons living at home with him, and after Hallad's return from Orkney he called them to him and asked which of them would like to go to the islands; for he heard that two

Danish vikings were settling down on his lands and taking possession of them. Thorir said that he would go if his father wished. But Ragnvald replied that he thought he had need of him at home, and that his property and power would be greatest there where he was.

Then the second, Hrollaug, said: "Father, would you like me to go?" The earl said: "I think your way lies toward Iceland; there you will increase your race, and become a famous man; but the earldom is not for you."

Then Einar, the youngest, came forward; he was a tall, ugly man, with only one eye, yet very keen-sighted, and no favourite with his father. What he said was: "Would you wish me to go to the islands? One thing I will promise you that I know will please you; it is that I will never come back. Little honour do I enjoy at home, and it is hardly likely that my success will be less anywhere else than it is here."

Earl Ragnvald said: "Never knew I any man less likely for a chief than yourself, for your mother's people come of thralls; but it is true enough that the sooner you go and the longer you stay the better pleased I shall be. I will fit out for you a ship of twenty benches,[1] fully manned, and I will get for you from King Harald the title of Earl of Orkney in my place."

So this was settled, and Einar sailed west to Shetland and gathered the people round him, for they were glad to get rid of the vikings. They slew them both in a battle in the Orkneys, and Einar took possession

[1] Twenty benches probably meant forty rowers, besides other fighting men. Two rowers at least would sit to each bench.

of their lands. He was the first man who found out how to cut turf for fuel, for firing was scarce on those islands and there was little wood; but after that men used peat; and they called him Torf-Einar, or Turf-Einar, on account of that.

The chief difficulty that Torf-Einar had was from King Harald Fairhair's sons, who were now grown to be men. They were overbearing and turbulent, for they thought their father ought to have given his lands to them and not to his earls, and they set themselves to revenge their wrongs (as they thought them) on the King's friends. They came down suddenly on Earl Ragnvald and surrounded his house and burnt him in it and sixty with him. The King was so angry at this that one of them, Halfdan Long-legs, had to fly before his wrath, and he rushed on shipboard and sailed west, appearing suddenly in the Orkneys. When it became known that a son of King Harald was come, the liegemen were full of fear, and Earl Einar fled to Scotland to gather forces to resist him. But later in the year, about harvest-time, he came back and fought Halfdan, and gained the victory over him. Halfdan slipped overboard in the dusk of eventide and swam to land, and a few followers after him, and they concealed themselves in the rocks and cliffs of the islands. Next morning, as soon as it was light, Einar's men went to search the islands for runaway vikings, and each man who was found was slain where he stood. Then Torf-Einar began to search himself, and he saw something moving in the island of Ronaldsay, very far off, for he was more keen-sighted than most men. He said: "What is that I see on the hillside in Ronaldsay? Is it a man or is it a bird? Sometimes it raises itself up and sometimes it lays itself

down. We will go over there." There they found Halfdan Long-legs, and they cut a spread-eagle on his back, and killed him there, and gave him to Odin as an offering for their victory; and Einar sang a song of triumph over him, and raised a cairn over him, and left him there.[1]

But when this news reached Norway it was taken very ill by Halfdan's brothers and King Harald, and the King himself ordered out a levy, and proceeded westward to Orkney. When he heard that Harald was coming, Torf-Einar fled to Caithness, but in the end the quarrel was made up between them, on condition that the isles should pay the King sixty marks of gold. The people were so poor that they could not meet the fine, but Einar undertook the whole payment himself, on condition that they should make over to him their allodial holdings, or freeholds. They had no choice but to submit to this, and from that time till the time of Earl Sigurd the Stout the earls possessed the properties; but Sigurd restored most of them to their original owners.[2]

Then King Harald went home to Norway, and Earl Einar ruled the Orkneys till his death.

It was a bad time for the Orkneys during the stay of Eric Bloodaxe and his sons in England. He ruled from York, which had been the capital of Northumbria ever since the half-mythical days of Ragnar Lodbrok. Every summer Eric and his band of followers from Norway, bold and reckless men like himself, went on a cruise, plundering in the Hebrides and Orkneys, and

[1] This cruel method of putting a foe to death was also practised on Ælla of Northumbria; it was probably, as here, a sacrifice to Odin.

[2] There are still a few *udal,* or allodial properties, in Orkney.

as far as Ireland or Iceland. Wherever they appeared the people fled before them. In the Orkneys they committed great excesses and were much dreaded. This was in the time of Thorfin Skull-splitter, Torf-Einar's son, and of Earl Hlodver, his son, the father of Earl Sigurd the Stout, who fell at the battle of Clontarf. Sigurd's mother was Eithne, or Audna, an Irish princess, daughter of Karval, King of Dublin (872-887). It was she who worked the raven-banner that was carried before the earl at Clontarf, which brought its bearers ill-luck.[1] She was a very wise and courageous woman, and people thought she was a witch on account of her knowledge.

Earl Sigurd the Stout was a powerful man and a great warrior. While he was Earl of Orkney, Olaf Trygveson made a raid upon the Orkney Isles on his way to recover his kingdom of Norway. The earl had gathered his forces for a war expedition, and was lying in a harbour near the Pentland Firth, for the weather was too stormy to cross the channel. As it happened, Olaf, or, as he was then called, Ole (for he was still in hiding), ran into the same harbour for shelter. When he heard that Sigurd the Stout was lying there he had him called, and addressed him thus: "You know, Earl Sigurd, that the country over which you rule was the possession of Harald Fairhair, who conquered the Orkneys and Shetland (then called Hjaltland), and placed earls over them. Now these countries I claim as my right and inheritance. You have now come into my power, and you have to choose between two alternatives. One is that you, with all your subjects, embrace the Christian faith, be baptized, and become my men; in which case you shall have

[1] See pp. 152-3.

honour from me, and retain your earldom as my subject. The other is that you shall be slain on the spot, and after your death I will send fire and sword through the Orkneys, burning homesteads and men. Choose now which you will do."

Though Sigurd saw well what a position he was in and that he was in Olaf Trygveson's power, he replied at once: "I will tell you, King Olaf, that I have absolutely resolved I will not, and dare not, renounce the faith which my kinsmen and forefathers had before me, because I am not wiser than they; moreover, I know not that the faith you preach is better than that which we have had and held all our lives. This is my reply."

When the King saw the determination of the earl he caught hold of his young son, who was with his father, and who had been brought up in the islands. The King carried the boy to the forepart of the ship, and, drawing his sword, said: "Now I will show you, Earl Sigurd, that I will spare no one who will not listen to my words. Unless you and your men will serve my God, I shall with this sword kill your son this instant. I shall not leave these islands until you and your son and your people have been baptized and I have completely fulfilled my mission." In the plight in which the earl found himself, he saw that he must do as the King desired; so he and his people were baptized, and he became the earl of King Olaf, and gave him his son in hostage. The boy's name was Whelp, or Hound, but Olaf had him baptized by the name of Hlodver, and took him to Norway with him; the boy lived but a short time, however, and after his death Earl Sigurd paid no more homage to King Olaf. It was fourteen years after the death of

Olaf that the earl went to Ireland, and was slain at the battle of Clontarf in Dublin.

Note.—Olaf Trygveson reigned in Norway from 995-1000; Sigurd the Stout ruled in the Orkneys (according to Munch) from 980-1014. The Icelandic annals say that he was earl for sixty-two years, which would put his accession back to 952.

# Chapter XVI

## Murtough of the Leather Cloaks

IRELAND as well as Norway and the Orkneys had her saga-tales of the events of the viking period. About the middle of the tenth century two princes, one in the north of Ireland and one in the south, are noted for their wars against the Norse. Both had strange and romantic careers, and of both we have full details told by their own poets or chroniclers. These two contemporary princes were Murtough of the Leather Cloaks, in Ulster, and Callaghan of Cashel, in Munster. The career of the former concerns us most.

Murtough was a prince of the O'Neills, and he ruled his clans from an immense fortress called Aileach, in North Londonderry, whose walls, with secret passages in their thicknesses, remain to the present day to testify to the massive strength of the old fortifications. He was son of a brave king of Ireland, Niall Glundubh or "Black-knee," who had fallen in fight with the Danes of Dublin after a short but vigorous reign, spent in warring against his country's foes. Murtough had been brought up in the tradition of resistance to the common enemy, and well did he answer to the call of duty. No doubt he was determined to avenge his father's fall. Again and again he gathered together the clans over whom he ruled and endeavoured to push

back the invader. His career is a brilliant succession of victories. We first hear of him in full chase of Godfrey and the Dublin Danes during one of their raids on Armagh. Murtough stole up behind, coming on their track at fall of night, and only a few of the enemy escaped in the glimmering twilight, because they could not be seen by the Irish. Four years afterwards he dealt them another severe blow on Carlingford Lough, in the middle of winter, which seems to have been Murtough's favourite time for warfare, and here eight hundred were killed, and the remainder besieged for a week, so that they had to send to Dublin for assistance. King Godfrey came to their aid, and raised the siege; but these defeats seem to have discouraged the foreigners, for soon after this Godfrey left Dublin to claim the throne of Northumbria, left vacant by the retirement of Sitric Gale, and Murtough took advantage of his absence to make a descent on Dublin with Donagh, the King of Ireland, raiding south to Kildare.

A misfortune overtook Murtough soon after his return home. The Northern foreigners laid siege to his fortress, and succeeded in taking him prisoner, and carrying him off to their ships. The prince was ransomed by his people, and took his revenge by penetrating with his fleet to the Hebrides, and carrying off much booty from their Norse inhabitants. This successful foreign expedition so much increased his fame that we find him soon afterwards making a warlike circuit of the entire country, and taking hostages of all the provincial kings of Ireland. It was this circuit through Ireland that gained him his title of "Murtough of the Leather Cloaks," from the warm cloaks of rough hide or leather which he and his attendants wore to protect them


*Murtough on his Journey with the King of Munster in Fetters* 118

from the cold. The famous journey was performed in the depth of the winter of 942, after his return from "Insi-Gall," or the Isles of the Foreigners, as the Hebrides were frequently called. He summoned all the clans over whom he ruled, and chose out of them a bodyguard of a thousand picked men, with whom he proceeded eastward into Antrim, then south to Dublin, thence into Leinster and Munster, and homeward through Connaught to Ulster again. Leinster and Munster threatened to oppose him, but the sight of his thousand chosen warriors seems to have deterred them. Murtough took with him his clan bard, who has written in verse which still exists an account of their journey. Their leather cloaks they used for wraps by day and for tents by night. Snow often lay deep on the ground on which they had to sleep, but they would "dance to music on the plain, keeping time to the heavy shaking of their cloaks." Murtough returned home with an imposing array of princes as his hostages, for none dare refuse to acknowledge his supremacy. Sitric, a Danish lord of Dublin, was delivered to him by the Northmen; a prince of Leinster followed, and a young son of Tadhg of the Towers, King of Connaught, who alone went unfettered, while all the others were in chains. But his most audacious stroke was the demand that Callaghan, King of Cashel, in Munster, should be delivered to him fettered. Such an unheard-of demand was not easily acquiesced in; but Murtough would accept no other hostage, and at length, apparently at the King's own request, he was delivered into the hands of the proud prince of the North. This fettering of a King of Munster caused a sensation at the time and was the burthen of many poems.

After his triumphal entry into his palace with his princely hostages, rejoicings and feastings went on for the space of five months, the hostages taking part in all the festivities and being royally entertained. The Queen herself waited on them and saw to all their wants. Before their arrival messengers had been sent forward to tell the Queen to send out her maidens to cut fresh rushes for the floor and to bring in kine and oxen for the feast. The Queen on her own behalf, to show her joy, supplied them all with food, and her banquets "banished the hungry look from the army."

When the season of rejoicing was past Murtough led the captive princes out of his castle, and lest he should seem to be assuming glory and rights not properly his own, he sent them under escort to the High-King of Ireland, begging him, in courtly language, to receive them in token of his submission and respect. His message runs thus: "Receive, O Donagh, these noble princes, for there is none in Erin so greatly exalted as thyself."

But Donagh, King of Ireland, would not accept so great a token of submission at Murtough's hands. He replied: "Now thou art a greater prince than I, O King! Thy hand it was that took these princes captive; in all Ireland is there none thine equal." So the captives were sent back, and apparently set free, with the blessing of the King of Ireland.

Only one year afterwards, in 943, Murtough again met the angry Northmen at the ford of Ardee, on the River Boyne, and fell by the sword of Blacaire, son of Godfrey, lord of the Foreigners. There is something romantic and unusual in every act of this Northern prince of the O'Neills, and we feel inclined to echo

the despairing words of the old chronicler who records his death : "Since Murtough does not live the country of the Gael is for ever oppressed."

It would seem to have been a daughter of this brave Murtough whose story we find in the Icelandic Laxdæla Saga, and who in these troublous times was carried away by the Norse out of her own country and sold as a slave in Northern Europe, eventually being purchased by an Icelander and carried away to Iceland. Her story is so interesting in itself and throws so much light on the conditions of the time that we will now tell it at length. If it was really Murtough of the Leather Cloaks who was father to this poor enslaved princess, torn from her home in Ireland and carried far overseas, never to return, we cease to wonder at the persistent hatred with which Murtough pursued the foes at whose hand he had received so great injuries as the death of his father and the loss of his daughter. In this case he was the grandfather of the famous Icelandic chief, Olaf Pa, or Olaf the Peacock.

# Chapter XVII

## The Story of Olaf the Peacock

(From Laxdæla Saga)

SLAVERY was commonly practised in the days of which we are writing, and slaves taken in war were often carried from the British Isles to Iceland or Norway. There are many accounts of slaves with Irish or Scottish names in the Icelandic "Book of the Settlements"; they appear often to have given great trouble to their foreign masters. But it is less common to find a lady of high rank, an Irish princess, carried off from her people and sold as a slave in open market. The lady was named Melkorka, and her story is found in Laxdæla Saga, from which Saga we have already taken our account of the life and death of Unn the Deep-minded.[1] Parts of this Saga are closely connected with Irish affairs.

There was in the tenth century in Iceland a young man whose name was Hoskuld. He was of good position and held in much esteem both in Norway and at his own home in Iceland. He was appointed one of the bodyguard of King Hakon, and he stayed each year, turn and turn about, at Hakon's Court in Norway and at his own home in Iceland, which he called Hoskuld-stead. He was married to a handsome, proud, and

[1] Chap. vi. p. 47.

extremely clever woman, named Jorunn, who, the saga says, "was wise and well up in things, and of manifold knowledge, though rather high-tempered at most times." Hoskuld and she loved each other well, though in their daily ways they made no show of their love. Hoskuld, with his wife's money joined to his own, became a great chieftain, for Jorunn was daughter of the wealthiest land-owner in all that part of the country, and his house and family stood in great honour and renown.

Now there came a time when the King, attended by his followers, went eastward at the beginning of summer, to a meeting at which matters of international policy were discussed and settled between Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. From all lands men came to attend the meeting, and Hoskuld, who at that time was staying with his kinsfolk in Norway, went along with the rest. There was a great fair going on in the town, with eating and drinking and games and every sort of entertainment, and crowds passed to and fro along the streets. Hoskuld met many of his kinsfolk who were come from Denmark, and one day, as they went out to disport themselves, he marked a stately tent far away from the other booths, with a man in costly raiment and wearing a Russian hat on his head presiding at the door of the tent. Hoskuld asked his name. He said his name was Gilli;[1] "but most men call me Gilli the Russian," he added, "and maybe you know me by that name." Hoskuld said he knew him well, for he was esteemed the richest man of all the guild of merchants. "Perhaps," he said, "you

[1] The name Gilli is evidently either Scotch or Irish, which explains the fact that he had an Irish girl among his slaves. He either was an inhabitant of these countries pretending to be a Russian merchant, or he was a Russian who had lived in Scotland.

have things to sell which we might wish to buy." Gilli asked what sort of things he might be looking for, and Hoskuld said he was needing a bondswoman, if he had one to sell. "There," said the man, "I see that you mean to give me trouble by asking for things you don't expect me to have in stock; but after all perhaps I can satisfy you."

Then Hoskuld noticed that right across the back of the booth there was a curtain drawn; when the man drew the curtain, Hoskuld saw that there were twelve women seated behind it in a line across the booth. Gilli said that Hoskuld might examine the women if he chose. Then Hoskuld looked carefully at them, and he saw one woman seated on the outskirts of the tent, a little apart from the rest, very poor and ill-clad, but, so far as he could judge, fair to look upon. Then he asked: "What is the price of this woman if I should wish to buy her?" "Three silver pieces must be weighed out to me for that woman," Gilli replied. "It seems to me," said Hoskuld, "that you charge highly for this woman, for that is the price of three." "Choose any of the other women," said Gilli, "and you shall have them at the price of one silver mark; but this bondswoman I value more highly than the other eleven." "I must see," said Hoskuld, "how much silver I have in the purse in my belt; take you the scales while I search my purse and see what I have to spend."

Then Gilli said: "As you seem to wish to have this woman, Hoskuld, I will deal frankly with you in the matter. There is a great drawback to her which I wish to let you know about before the bargain is struck between us." Hoskuld was surprised, and he asked what it was. "The woman," said Gilli, "is dumb. I have tried in every way to persuade her to talk, but

not a word have I ever got out of her, and sure I am that she knows not how to speak." "Bring out the scales, nevertheless," said Hoskuld, "and weigh my purse, that we may see how much silver is in it." Then the silver was poured out, and it came to just three marks. "Now," said Hoskuld, "our bargain is concluded, for the marks are yours, and I will have the woman. I take it that you have behaved honestly in this affair, and have had no wish to deceive me therein." When he brought her home, Hoskuld said to her: "The clothes Gilli the Rich gave you do not appear to be very grand, though it is true that it was more of a business for him to dress twelve women than for me to dress one." With that he opened a chest and took out some fine women's clothes and gave them to her; and when she was dressed every one was surprised to see how fair and noble she looked in her handsome array. She was still quite young, for she had been taken prisoner of war and carried away to Europe when she was only fifteen winters old, and it was remarked by all that she was of high birth and breeding, and that, in spite of her want of speech, she was no fool.

When Hoskuld brought his slave home to Iceland, Jorunn, his wife, asked the name of the girl whom he had brought with him. "You will think I am mocking you," said Hoskuld, "when I tell you that I do not know her name." "In that you must be deceiving me," said Jorunn; "for it is impossible that you have been all this time with this girl without inquiring even her name." So Hoskuld told her the truth, that the girl was deaf and dumb, and he prayed that she might be kindly treated, more especially on that account. Jorunn said she had no mind to ill-use her, least of all if she was dumb. But nevertheless she treated

the poor girl with disdain, and made a waiting-maid of her, and one day it is told that while Melkorka (for that was the woman's name) was aiding her mistress to undress, Jorunn seized the stockings that were lying on the floor and smote her about the head. Melkorka got angry at this, and Hoskuld had to come in and part them. He soon saw that the mistress and maid could not live happily together, therefore he prepared to send Melkorka away to a dwelling he had bought for her up in Salmon-river-dale, on the waste land south of the Salmon River. And all the time the desolate girl, either from pride and despair or because she could speak no language but her native tongue, kept up the illusion that she was deaf and dumb. Neither kind nor unkind treatment could force her to open her lips.

There came a time when Melkorka had a son, a very beautiful boy, who at two years old could run about and talk like boys of four. And Hoskuld often visited the two, for he was proud of the boy, and he named him Olaf. Early one morning, as Hoskuld had gone out to look about his manor, the weather being fine, and the sun but little risen in the sky and shining brightly, it happened that he heard some voices of people talking; so he went down to where a little brook ran past the home-field slope, and he saw two people there whom he recognized as the boy Olaf and his mother; then he discovered for the first time that she was not speechless, for she was talking a great deal to her son.

It was in Irish that she was talking. Then Hoskuld went to her and asked her name, and said it was useless to try and hide it any longer. They sat down together on the edge of the field, and she told him of her birth

and history, that her name was Melkorka, and that she was daughter of a king in Ireland. Hoskuld said that she had kept silence far too long about such an illustrious descent. From that time forward Jorunn grew more bitter against the girl, but Hoskuld sheltered her, and brought her everything she needed. And Olaf grew up into a noble youth, superior to other men, both on account of his beauty and courtesy. Among the things his mother taught him was a perfect knowledge of her native tongue, which was destined to stand him in good stead in later days.

At the age of seven years Olaf was taken in fosterage by a wealthy childless man, named Thord, who bound himself to leave Olaf all his money. At twelve years the lad already began to ride to the annual Thing meeting, though men from other countrysides considered it a great errand to go; and they wondered at the splendid way he was made. So handsome and distinguished was he even then, and so particular about his war-gear and raiment, that Hoskuld playfully nicknamed him "the Peacock," and this name stuck to him, so that he is known in Icelandic story as Olaf Pa, or the Peacock. When Olaf was a man of eighteen winters Melkorka told him that she had all along set her mind upon his going to Ireland, to find out her relatives there. "Here," said she, "you are but the son of a slave-woman, but my father is Myrkjartan [Murtough], king amongst the Irish, and it would be easy for you to betake you on board the ship that is now in harbour at Bord-Eye and sail in her to Ireland." Melkorka even determined, partly to gain money for her son's journey and partly to spite Hoskuld, whom she had never forgiven for having bought her as a slave, to marry a man who had long wished to wed her, but

for whom she had no affection. He gladly provided all that Olaf required for his voyage in return for Melkorka's hand, and Olaf made him ready to go. Before he left, Melkorka gave him a great gold finger-ring, saying, "This gift my father gave me for a teething-gift, and I know he will recognize it when he sees it." She also put into his hands a knife and a belt, and bade him give them to her old foster-nurse. "I am sure," she said, "they will not doubt these tokens." And still further Melkorka spake: "I have fitted you out for home as best I know how, and taught you to speak Irish, so that it will make no difference to you where you come ashore in Ireland." After that they parted.

There arose a fair wind when Olaf got on board, and they sailed straightway out to sea. On the way they visited Norway, and so well did King Harald think of Olaf that he would fain have had him stay there at his Court, but after a while he set forth the object of his journey, and the King would not delay him, but gave him a ship well fitted out, and bade him come again to him on his return. They met unfavourable weather through the summer, with plentiful fogs and little wind, and what there was contrary, and they drifted wide of their mark, until on those on board fell sea-bewilderment, so that they sailed for days and nights, none of them knowing whither they were steering. One night the watchman leapt up and bade them all awake, for he said there was land in sight, and so close that they came near to striking upon it. The steersman was for clearing away from the land if they could; but Olaf said: "That is no good way out of our plight, for I see reefs astern. Let down the sail at once, until daylight comes, and then

we can discover what land it is." Then they cast anchor, and they touched bottom at once. During the night all on board disputed as to what land they could have come to; but when daylight arose they recognized that it was a desolate part of the Irish coast, far from any town; and Orn the steersman said: "I think the place we have arrived at is not good; it is far from any harbour or market-town where we should be received in peace; here we are left high and dry, like sticklebacks, and according to the Irish law it is likely they will claim our merchandise as a lawful prize, seeing that we are near the shore; for they consider as flotsam ships that are farther from the ebb of the tide than ours." But Olaf advised them to tow out their boat to a deeper pool in the sea that he had noticed during the ebb tide, and then no harm would happen to them. Hardly had they done so than all the people of the neighbourhood came crowding down to the shore, for the news spread of the drifting in of a Norwegian vessel close to the land. Two of the Irish pushed out in a boat and demanded who they were, and bade them, according to the law of the country, to give up their goods. But Olaf's knowledge of Irish stood him in good stead, for he answered them in their own tongue that such laws held good only for those who had no interpreter with them, and that they were not come to plunder, but as peaceful men. The Irish, not satisfied with this, raised a great war-cry, and waded out to try to drag the ship in-shore, the water being no deeper for most of the way than up to their arm-pits, or to the belts of those who were tallest. But just where the ship was anchored the pool was so deep that they could not get a footing. Olaf bade his crew fetch out their weapons and range

themselves in battle-line from stem to stern, their shields hung upon the bulwarks, and overlapping all along the ship's sides, and a spear-point thrust out below each shield.

Then Olaf, clad in gold-inlaid helmet and coat of mail, his barbed spear in his hand and his gold-hilted sword at his side, walked forward to the prow; before him was his red shield, chased with a lion all in gold. So threatening did things look that fear shot through the hearts of the Irish, and they thought that it would not be so easy a matter to master the booty as they had imagined. They changed their minds, and now thought that it was but the herald of one of those warlike incursions of which they had had such frequent and terrible experience. They turned back, and sent with all haste to the King, who happened to be but a short way off, feasting in the neighbourhood. This King, who rode down speedily with a large company of followers, looking a party of the bravest, proved to be Murtough, or Myrkjartan, Olaf's grandfather. He was a valiant-looking prince, and the two companies, Icelanders and Irish, must have made a brave sight as they stood opposite to each other, one on the ship and the other on the shore, divided only by a narrow strip of shallow water. The shipmates of Olaf grew hushed when they saw so large a body of fighting-men, for they deemed that here were great odds to deal with. But Olaf put them in heart, saying, "Our affairs are in a good way; for the shouts of the Irish are not against us, but in greeting to Murtough, their king." Then they rode so near the ship that each could hear what the other said. The King asked who was master of the ship, and whence they had put to sea, and whose men they were. Then

he asked searchingly about Olaf's kindred, for he found that this man was of haughty bearing, and would not answer any further than the King asked. Olaf answered: "Let it be known to you that we ran our ship afloat from the coast of Norway, and that these men with me are of high birth and of the bodyguard of King Harald, lord of Norway. As for my own race, I have, sire, to tell you this, that my father lives in Iceland, and is named Hoskuld, a man of good birth; but as for my mother's kindred, I think it likely that they are better known to you than to myself. For my mother is Melkorka, and it has been told me of a truth that she is your daughter, O King. And it is this that has driven me forth on this long journey, to know the truth of the matter, and to me it is of great import what answer you have to make to me." At that the King grew silent, and hesitated long, consulting with his counsellors; for though it was clearly seen that Olaf was a high-born man, and that he spoke the best of Irish, the King doubted whether his story could be true. But he stood up, and offered peace and friendship to those that were in the ship. "But as to what you tell me, Olaf, we will talk further of that." After this they pushed forth their gangways to the shore, and Olaf and his company went on land; and the Irish marvelled to see such warrior-looking men. Olaf greeted the King, taking off his helmet and bowing before him, and the King welcomed him gladly. They fell then to talking, and Olaf pleaded his case in a long and frank speech, and when he had done he took from his finger the ring that his mother had given him at parting, and held it out toward the King, saying: "This ring, King, you gave to Melkorka as a teething-gift." The King took the ring

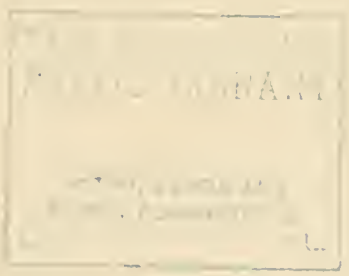
and looked at it, and his face grew red, and then he said: "True enough are the tokens, and none the less notable to me is it that you have so many features of your mother's family, so that by those alone you might easily be recognized, and because of these things I will, in sooth, Olaf, acknowledge your kinship before all these men, and ask you to my Court with all your following; but the honour of you all will depend on what worth as a man I find you to be when I try you further." Then the King commanded that riding-horses should be given to them, and they left some of the crew to guard the ship, while they rode on together to Dublin.

Men thought it great tidings that the King should be journeying to Dublin with the son of his daughter, who had been carried off in war when she was only fifteen winters old. But most startled of all at the news was the foster-mother of Melkorka, who was bed-ridden, both from heavy sickness and because of her great age; yet without even a staff to support her she arose from her bed and walked to meet Olaf.

The King said to Olaf: "Here is come Melkorka's foster-mother, and she will wish to hear all you can tell her about your mother's life." Olaf took the old woman in his arms and set her on his knee and told her all the news; he put into her hands the knife and the belt that Melkorka had sent, so that the aged woman recognized the gifts, and wept for joy. "It is easy to see," she said, "that Melkorka's son is one of high mettle, and no wonder, seeing what stock he comes of." And with joy the old dame seemed to grow strong and well, and was in good spirits all the winter.

The King was seldom at rest, for at all times the


*Olaf took the Old Woman in his Arms*



land was raided by vikings and war-bands. But Olaf joined with him in driving off the invaders, and those who came thought that his was indeed a grim company to deal with. The King loved him better than his own sons, and at a solemn gathering of the wise men of his realm he publicly prayed him to remain with him, offering him the kingdom in succession when his own day was done, and setting him before his people as his grandson and Melkorka's son. Olaf thanked him in fair and graceful words, but he refused the offer, for he said he had no real claim to the kingdom, as the King had sons, nor did he wish to stir up strife between them. "It is better," he said, "to gain swift honour than lasting shame." He added that he desired to go back to Norway, where vessels could pass peaceably from land to land, and that his mother would have little delight in her life if he went not back to her. So the King said that he must do as he thought best, and the assembly was broken up. Olaf bade a loving farewell to the King, who came with him to the ship and saw him on board, and gave him a spear chased in gold, and a gold-hilted sword, and much money besides. Olaf begged that he might take her old foster-mother to Melkorka; but the King thought her too aged for travelling, and he did not let her go. So they parted the most loving friends, and Olaf sailed out to sea. After a winter spent with King Harald in Norway the King gave Olaf a ship, and he sailed with a fair wind to Iceland, and brought his vessel into Ramfirth, where Hoskuld and his kinsmen greeted him warmly. It spread abroad through all the land that he was grandson of Murtough, King of Ireland, and he became very renowned on that account and because of his journey.

Melkorka came soon to greet her son, and Olaf met her with great joy. She asked about many things in Ireland, of her father first and then of her other relatives; and then she asked if her foster-mother were still alive, and Olaf told her everything. But she said it was strange that he had not brought the old woman back with him, that she might have seen her once more. When Olaf told her that he had wished to bring her, but that they would not allow her to go, "That may be so," she said; but it was plain to be seen that she took this much to heart.

Olaf became a famous man both in Iceland and in Norway, and very wealthy, and he made a good match with Thorgerd, daughter of Egil, and prospered. He called his eldest son Kjartan, after Myrkjartan, his mother's father, the King of Ireland.

# Chapter XVIII

## The Battle of Clontarf

WE now come to a battle that is famous alike in Norse and in Irish story. It was the final effort made by the Norsemen to assert their supremacy over Ireland, and the last of several disastrous defeats which they encountered at the hands of the Irish. Both the story-tellers of the North and the historians and bards of Ireland wrote long accounts of it, so that we know the details of the battle of Clontarf perhaps better than we know those of any other ancient battle fought in the British Isles. Except the battle of Brunanburh, no other fight in these islands excited half so much attention at this period. On the Norse side forces were gathered from the Orkneys, the Isle of Man, and the Scottish coast to support the Norse of Dublin ; on the other were the united forces of Munster and Connaught, supported by Danish auxiliaries, and led by the aged King of Munster, Brian Boru, or "Brian of the Tributes." Brian had risen from being an outlawed prince of part of Munster, in the south of Ireland, to the position of High-King of the whole country. When he was a boy the foreigners had become so powerful in the south of Ireland that the Irish princes despaired of either driving them out of the country or defeating them in battle. They had adopted the weaker policy

of paying the intruders a heavy tribute, in order to keep them quiet; and when Brian's father, Kennedy, died, and Brian's elder brother, Mahon, came to the throne, he carried on the same policy. But Brian utterly refused to make any truce with the Northmen, or to pay them any tribute whatsoever; and when he saw that Mahon was determined at all costs to keep peace he left the royal palace of Kincora, on the Shannon, and he and a band of the most hardy and independent of the young chiefs of the neighbourhood betook themselves to the forests and wild parts of North Munster, whence they issued forth by day or night to attack and harass the Northmen. Many of them they cut off and killed, but on the other hand a number of Brian's followers were slain, and they were all reduced to great straits, from lack of food and shelter. For, like Alfred the Great in similar circumstances, they had to live in huts or caves or wherever they could get refuge; and often they could get no food but roots and wild herbs, so that their strength was reduced, and in the wet weather they became in wretched plight. Brian's brother, Mahon, hearing of this, sent for him, and tried to induce him to give up his roving life and return to Kincora; but Brian, in no wise daunted by all that he had gone through, reproached Mahon for having made a dishonourable truce with the foreigners, which neither their father nor any of their ancestors would have approved. When Mahon excused himself, saying that he did not care to lead his clan to certain death, as Brian had led the young chiefs, his brother replied that it was their heritage to die, and the heritage of all the clan, and whatever they might do they could not escape death; but that it was not natural or customary to

them to submit to insult or contempt at the hands of their enemies. And he so wrought upon Mahon that he determined to adopt his brother's advice, and they called an assembly of the tribe, who with one heart gave their voice for war. From that time forward Mahon and Brian grew stronger and stronger. They gained a great victory over the foreigners at Limerick, plundered their goods and sacked the fort; after that they set fire to the town and reduced it to ashes, and they banished Ivar, Prince of Limerick, to Wales. The soldiers of the Norsemen, who were billeted on the people, and did them grievous wrong, were driven out, and Mahon reigned as undisputed king.

But treachery arose among his own followers, for some of them were envious of his success, and Donovan and Molloy, two of his chiefs, betrayed him in Donovan's own house, being instigated to the foul act by Ivar of Limerick, who wished to be revenged on Mahon. The prince was suddenly surrounded while he was at a peaceful meeting with the clergy of the province. He bore on his breast the Gospel of St Fin-Barre, to protect him, but when he saw the naked sword lifted to strike he plucked it out of his tunic and flung it over the heads of those that stood nearest him, so that his blood might not stain it. The Gospel fell into the hands of a priest who stood at some distance, with Molloy beside him. Not knowing that it was Molloy who had planned the murder of Mahon, nor understanding what was passing, the priest turned to Molloy and asked him what he should do with the book. "Cure yonder man with it if he should come to thee," laughed the traitor, and with that he leaped on his horse and fled from

the place. When the cleric perceived what was done and that Mahon had been slain, he fervently cursed the deed, and prophesied that evil would befall Molloy. Looking at the book he saw that it was sprinkled with Mahon's blood; he gave it to Colum, who was the abbot, and they wept at the sight of the blood on its pages, and at the death of the King.

After that the sovereignty fell to Brian, and the beginning of his reign was one vigorous, long-continued struggle to rid his country from the hosts of the invaders. He made untiring war on them, driving them out of his territories, until he seated himself firmly on the throne of Munster. Then he began to aspire further, and he thought that he would attempt the High-Kingship of Ireland, and would endeavour to drive the Northmen not only from the south, but from the whole country. He marched north into Leinster, for the men of Leinster, with the Norsemen of Dublin, revolted from Brian, and they met at the Glen of the Gap, in County Wicklow, at the pass beside the ancient palace of the Kings of Leinster.

A great battle was fought between them, and Brian was completely victorious; he marched on straight to Dublin, and took the Danish fort of Dublin, and plundered it, gathering the spoil of gold and silver ornaments and precious stones, goblets and buffalo horns, wondrous garments of silk, and feather beds, with steeds and slaves, into one place, and dividing it among the clansmen. From Great Christmas to Little Christmas Brian rested his army there (*i.e.* from Christmas to Epiphany), and from that time forth no Irishman or Irishwoman needed any longer to set hands to menial labour, for things were changed, and the foreigners became their slaves and did the

kneading and grinding and washing for the households of the conquerors. Up to this time the foreigners had enslaved the Irish. Then Brian ravaged Leinster, and he caught Melmora, the King, hidden in a yew tree, where Morrogh, Brian's young son, saw him concealed among the branches, and pulled him down. He returned to Munster, having made peace with Melmora; and Sitric Silken-beard,[1] the Norse King of Dublin, submitted to him, and Brian gave him his daughter in marriage. For fifteen years there was peace and prosperity in the country, and Brian sent abroad to purchase books, and to find teachers and professors in place of those whom the Norsemen had destroyed; he rebuilt churches, and encouraged learning, and made bridges and causeways, and high-roads all through the country; and he strengthened the fortresses, and ruled well and generously. He made a royal progress through the land, taking hostages from all the chiefs in token of their subjection to him. But all the time the Northmen were planning to avenge themselves upon him, by an expedition the like of which had not been made before into Ireland; and the King of Ireland, Melaughlan, whom Brian had dethroned, joined with them against him.

A great fire may arise from a little spark, and the light which set Ireland and the North ablaze was kindled by the angry words of a jealous woman.

Gormliath (or Kormlod, as she is called in Northern saga) was the fiercest and most dreaded woman of her time. She is said in the saga to have been "the

[1] Sitric Silken-beard was son of Olaf Cuaran, or Olaf o' the Sandal, and his wife Gormliath, or Kormlod.

fairest of women, and best gifted in everything that was not in her own power, but it was the talk of men that she did everything ill over which she had any power "—that is, she had the best gifts of nature, but out of her own will she did nothing but what was bad. Already she had been married to two husbands, to the last Danish King of Dublin, Olaf o' the Sandal, by whom her son was Sitric Silken-beard, the reigning king when Brian conquered the fort of Dublin. But even Olaf had found Gormliath too wicked a woman, and he had sent her away, after which she married the King of Ireland, Melaughlan, whom Brian dethroned. After his downfall she seems to have gone with Brian to Kincora, and been married to him, though her former husband was still alive. So wicked a woman was little comfort to any husband, and it was not long before we find her parted from Brian also and taking part against him in every way in her power. But at the time of our story she was living with Brian at Kincora, though her acts show that she had little love for him. She was a Leinster princess, and sister of that King of Leinster whom Brian's son had caught hiding in the yew tree. Brian had made peace with him, and he had consented to pay tribute to Brian as his over-lord. One day he set forth to conduct a tribute of pine trees for ship-masts to Brian, but at a boggy part of the road ascending a mountain a dispute broke out between the drivers of the wagons, and to prevent the masts falling the King himself sprang from his horse and put out his hand to support the mast that was in front. In doing so one of the buttons of his silken tunic broke off. The tunic had been a gift to him from Brian, and had on it a rich border of gold and buttons of silver When he

arrived at the palace Melmora took off his tunic, and took it to his sister Gormliath, asking her to sew on the silver button. But the Queen angrily threw the garment into the fire, reproaching him bitterly for taking gifts from Brian or giving tribute to him, and in every way stirring him up against her husband.

The next morning fresh cause of quarrel arose out of a game of chess which Morrogh, son of Brian, was playing with Conang, his nephew. Melmora was standing by, teaching Conang the game, and he advised a move which lost the game to Morrogh. At that angry words arose between them, and Morrogh said: "It was thou that gavest advice to the foreigners at the battle of the Gap when they were defeated." "I will give them advice again, and they shall not be defeated," was Melmora's retort. "Take care that thou have the yew tree ready, then, in which to hide thyself and them," was Morrogh's reply. At this the King of Leinster grew furious, and the next morning, without asking permission or taking leave of anyone, he left the palace, and started to return to Leinster. He was mounting his horse on the east side of the wooden bridge of Killaloe, when a messenger overtook him, sent hastily by Brian to beg of him to return; he gave the King's message, telling him that Brian desired to part from him peaceably and to give him gifts of gold and vestments. The only reply that Melmora made was to strike at the officer with his horse-switch, so that he was carried back dying to Kincora.

When this was related to Brian some of those who stood round him called on him to pursue Melmora and force him to submit. But Brian said that he would not pursue one who had been a guest

under his roof, but that at the door of his own palace in Leinster he would demand satisfaction from him.

Hardly had Melmora returned to his own palace than he set himself with all his power to raise up enemies to Brian. He said that he had received insult, not only to himself, but to the province, in the house of Brian, and he incited the princes of the province to turn against the King of Munster. They declared for war, and began to assemble a great host. Moreover, Melmora sent messengers to stir up the princes of the north, so that on both sides, from Ulster and from Leinster, war was declared against Brian. The rebels effected an alliance with the foreigners of Dublin, who busied themselves in gathering the most formidable host that ever reached the shores of Ireland. And on his side also Brian bent all his efforts to gather together an army so great that it could not be overcome, and he plundered far and wide to get provisions for his host and to weaken the enemy. In the spring he was ready to set out for Dublin with his army, and when Sitric Silken-beard, Norse King of Dublin, saw that, he sent messengers to the Orkneys and to the Isle of Man to stir up the Northmen there to come to his assistance and to the assistance of the King of Leinster. It was Gormliath who egged him on. After Melmora left Kincora she returned to Dublin and she employed all her wit to set her son Sitric against her husband, Brian. "So grim had she got against him that she would gladly have had him dead," says the saga. But Sitric and all the viking chiefs knew the goodness of Brian's heart, "that he was the best-natured of all kings, and that he would thrice forgive all outlaws the same offence before he

would have them judged by the law; and from that it was clear to them what a king he must have been." But Gormliath would take no denial, and in the end she got her way, and King Sitric set sail for the Orkneys.

# Chapter XIX

## Yule in the Orkneys, 1014

WE will now turn to the Orkneys and see what was happening there. It is Yule or Christmas, and at Earl Sigurd the Stout's Court a splendid feast is in progress. The long hall is filled with guests, seated between double rows of pillars, and on the hearth in the centre of the hall the Yule-log is blazing. King Sitric Silken-beard, but newly arrived from Ireland, is placed in the high seat in the centre of the tables, with Earl Sigurd and Earl Gille on either hand. The guests are ranged round the hall in the order of their rank, and behind the earls, on the raised daïs, the minstrels are placed. Just at the moment a man named Gunnar, Lambi's son, is relating to the assembled company the terrible story of the burning of Nial and his family in Iceland, which had only just taken place.[1]

Gunnar himself had had a hand in the dastardly deed, and to save himself he was giving a garbled version of the tale. Every now and again he lied outright. Now it so happened that while he was talking two other Icelanders, close friends of the house of Nial, came up to the door, and they stood outside and listened, arrested by the false story which Gunnar was relating to the earl. They had lately landed from Iceland, and the truth was well known to them.

[1] For the story of the burning of Nial, see chap. xx. pp. 157–175.

One of the two was Kari, who had escaped from the burning, and he could not stand this, and with swift vengeance, and a wild snatch of song upon his lips, he rushed into the hall, his drawn sword in his hand. In a moment the head of Gunnar was severed from his body, and it spun off on the board before the King and earls, who were befouled with the spouting blood. The earl exclaimed in his anger, "Seize Kari and kill him"; but never a man moved to put forth his hand. "Kari hath done only what it was right to do," they all exclaimed, and they made a way for Kari, so that he walked out, without hue or cry after him. "This is a bold fellow," cried King Sitric, "who dealt his stroke so stoutly and never thought of it twice!" And in spite of his anger Earl Sigurd was forced to exclaim: "There is no man like Kari for dash and daring!"

Then King Sitric Silken-beard bestirred himself to egg on the earl to go to war with him against King Brian, but at first the earl refused, for all his host were against it, and liked not to go to war with so good a king. In the end, however, Sitric promised him his mother Gormliath's hand and the kingdom of Ireland if they slew Brian, and then Sigurd gave him his word to go. It was settled between them that the earl should bring his host to Dublin by Palm Sunday, and on this Sitric fared back to Ireland, and told Gormliath what luck he had had. She showed herself well pleased, but she said that they must gather a greater force still. Sitric asked where this was to be found, and she said that she had heard tidings that two viking fleets were lying off the Isle of Man, thirty ships in each fleet, with two captains of such hardihood that nothing could withstand them. "The name of one,"

said she, "is Ospae, and the other's name is Brodir. Haste thee to find them, and spare nothing to get them into thy quarrel, whatever price they ask." So Sitric set forth again, but the price that Brodir asked was the kingdom of Ireland and the hand of the fair Gormliath. Sitric was much perplexed, but in the end he promised, for he thought that if they gained the victory Earl Sigurd and the vikings could fight it out between them, and if they were conquered no harm was done. So he ended by promising all that they wished, only he stipulated that they should keep the matter so secret that it would never come to Earl Sigurd's ears. They too were to arrive in Dublin before Palm Sunday, and Sitric left well satisfied, and fared home to tell his mother.

But hardly had he gone than a fierce quarrel broke out between the brothers. It would seem that the conference had been between Sitric and Brodir only, and that Ospae had not been informed of the pact until after Sitric had left. Then he roundly said that he would not go. Nothing would induce him to fight against so good a king as Brian. Rather would he become a Christian and join his forces to those of the Irish King. Ospae, though he was a heathen, is said to have been the wisest of all men; but Brodir bears an ugly character. He had been a Christian, and had been consecrated a deacon, but he had thrown off his faith "and become God's dastard," as the saga says, "and now worshipped pagan fiends and was of all men most skilled in sorcery." He wore a magic coat of mail, on which no steel would bite. He was tall and strong and his hair was black. He wore his locks so long that he tucked them into his belt. Fearful dreams beset him from night to night. A great

din passed over his ship, causing all to spring up and hastily put on their clothes. A shower of blood poured over them, so that, although they covered themselves with their shields, many were scalded, and on every ship one man died. They were so disturbed at night that they had to sleep during the day. The second night swords leapt out of their sheaths, and swords and axes flew about in the air and fought of themselves, wounding many. They had to shelter themselves, but the weapons pressed so hard that out of every ship one man died. The third night ravens flew at them, with claws and beaks hard as of iron, and again in every ship a man died. The next morning Brodir pushed off in his boat to seek Ospac to tell him what he had seen, and ask him the meaning of the portents. Ospac feared to tell his brother what these things boded, and though Brodir promised that no harm should follow, he put off telling him until nightfall, for he knew that Brodir never slew a man by night. Then he said: "Whereas blood rained on you, many men's blood shall be shed, yours and others; but when ye heard a great din, then ye must have been shown the crack of doom, and ye shall all die speedily. When weapons fought against you, they must forbode a battle; but when ravens overpowered you, that marks the evil spirit in whom ye put your faith, and who will drag you all down to the pains of hell." Brodir was so wroth that he could answer never a word, but he moored his vessels across the sound that night, so that he could bear down and slay Ospac's men next morning. But Ospac saw through the plan, and while Brodir's men were sleeping he slipped away quietly in the darkness, having cut the cables of Brodir's line, and

he sailed round the south of Ireland, and so up the Shannon to Kincora. Here he told all that he knew to King Brian, giving him warning; and he was baptized at Kincora, and became Brian's ally, joining his forces with those of the King.

All being prepared, King Brian marched on Dublin, setting fire on his way to all the country round, so that the Norsemen when they arrived saw the land as one sheet of flame. The battle was fought on the north side of the River Liffey, where the land falls low toward the sea at Clontarf, up to the wooded country on the heights behind which Phœnix Park now extends. Here, with the wood behind them called Tomar's Wood, were the lines of the Irish forces, facing the bay where the Norsemen brought in their ships. On the south side of the river was the fort of the Norsemen, where Dublin Castle now stands, and from its walls King Sitric and his mother Gormliath watched the fight. Besides these two, another spectator followed the course of the battle. This was Sitric's wife, who was Brian's daughter, married to the chief of her country's foes. Though she stood by her husband's side, her heart was with the men of Munster, and with her father and brothers who led their hosts. In the beginning of the day it seemed to the men of Dublin who were watching from the battlements that the swords of the enemy were mowing down Brian's troops, even as the ripe corn in a field might fall if two or three battalions were reaping it at once. "Well do the Norsemen reap the field," said Sitric. "It will be at the end of the day, that we shall see if that be so," said the wife of Sitric, Brian's daughter.

All day long, from sunrise till evening, the battle

was fought. At full tide in the morning the foreigners beached their boats, but when the tide returned at night, they were being everywhere routed before the Irish, who rushed down upon them from the upland, pushing them farther and farther backward toward the sea. Then, as they turned to fly, hoping to regain their vessels, they saw that the rising tide had lifted the boats from their resting-places and carried them out to sea, so that they were there caught between their enemies on the land and the sea behind, with no place of safety to turn to. An awful rout was made of them, and the sounds of their shouting and war-whoops and cries of despair were heard by the watchers of the fort. Then Brian's daughter turned to her husband. "It appears to me," she said, "that, like gad-flies in the heat, or like a herd of cows seeking the water, the foreigners return to the sea, their natural inheritance. I wonder are they cattle, driven by the heat? But if they are they tarry not to be milked." The answer of her husband was a brutal blow upon the mouth. Close to the weir of Clontarf, where the River Tolka seeks the sea, Turlough, the young grandson of Brian, pursued a Norseman across the stream. But the rising tide flung him against the weir, and he was caught on a post, and so was drowned, with his hand grasping the hair of the Norseman who fell under him.

The day on which the battle was fought was Good Friday, 1014. King Brian himself was too aged to go into battle; besides, it was against his will to fight on a fast-day; so his bodyguard made a fastness round him with their linked shields upon a little height, and from the time of the beginning of the combat he knelt upon a cushion, with his psalter open before

him, and began to read the psalms and to pray aloud. There was with him a young lad, an attendant, who watched the course of the fighting from the height, and from time to time he told his master what was going forward. After the King had said fifty psalms and prayed awhile he asked his attendant how the battle went.

"Intermingled together and closely fighting are the battalions, each of them within the grasp of the other," said the boy; "and not louder would be the sound of blows of wood-cutters on Tomar's Wood if seven battalions together were cutting it down, than are the resounding blows that fall from the swords on both sides upon bones and skulls." The King said: "Do you see the standard of Morrogh, my son?" "It is standing," said the lad, "and the banners of Munster close about it; but many heads are falling round it, the heads of our own clan and the heads of foreigners also." "That is good news," said the King. Then the lad readjusted the cushion under Brian, and the King prayed again and sang another fifty psalms; and all the time the fighting was going on below. "What is the condition of the battalions," Brian asked again, "and where is Morrogh's standard?" The lad said that there was not a man on earth who could distinguish friend from foe, so covered were they all with gore and wounds; but as for the standard of Munster it was still standing, but it had passed away to the westward. Then the King said: "The men of Ireland will do well so long as that standard stands."

So the lad adjusted the cushion again and the King prayed and sang fifty psalms more; and now the evening was drawing on. Brian asked the attendant

again, in what condition the forces were. The lad replied: "It seems to me as though Tomar's Wood were all on fire, and that all the young shoots and undergrowth had been cut away, leaving only the great oaks standing; so are the armies on either side; for their men are fallen thick, and only the leaders and gallant heroes remain alive. For they are ground about like the grindings of a mill turning the wrong way. Yet it seems to me that the foreigners are defeated, though the standard of Morrogh is fallen." "Alas! alas! for that news," said Brian. "The honour and valour of Erin fell when that standard fell, and the honour of Erin is now fallen indeed; and what avails it to me to obtain the sovereignty of the world if Morrogh and the chiefs of Munster are slain?" "If thou wouldst take my advice," said the lad, "thou wouldst mount thy horse and take refuge in the camp, where every one who escapes alive out of this battle will rally round us; for it seems to me that the foreigners are afraid of retreating to the sea, and we know not at any moment who may find us here." "Indeed, my boy," said Brian, "flight becomes us not; and well I know that I shall not leave this place alive. For Evill, the fairy maid who guards our clan, appeared to me last night and told me that I should be killed this day. Wherefore take my steed and escape, and arrange for my seemly burial, and for my gifts to the Church, for I will remain where I am until my fate overtakes me."

While he was saying these words a party of the Northmen approached with Brodir at their head. "There are people coming toward us up the hill," said the boy, "and all our bodyguard are fled." "What like are they?" inquired the King. "A blue, stark-

naked people they seem to me," was the reply. "Alas!" said Brian, "they must be foreigners in armour; for the Northmen fight not like our people in their tunics, but with blue armour on their bodies; and no good will come to us if it is they indeed." Then the old man arose and pushed aside the cushion and unsheathed his sword. But Brodir marked him not, and would have passed, had not one of his followers, who had been in Brian's service, recognized the King. "The King," he cried, "this is the King!" "No, no," said Brodir, "this old man is a priest." "By no means so," replied the man; "this is the great king, Brian." Then Brodir turned, and swung his gleaming battle-axe above his head, and smote the King; but ere he did so Brian had made a stroke at him, and wounded him in the knee, so that they fell together; but Brian, the King, was dead. The lad Teigue had thrown his arm across the King to shield him, but the arm was taken off at the stump with the same blow that slew the King. Then Brodir stood up and with a loud voice exclaimed: "Now may man tell his fellow-man that Brodir hath felled King Brian." But not long was his triumph: for Ospac his brother and some of the Munstermen came up, and they took Brodir alive, and put him to a cruel death there upon the spot.

Two incidents must still be told. The first concerns the raven banner that Earl Sigurd carried to the fight. It was made in raven-shape, and when the wind blew out the folds it was as though a raven spread its wings for flight.[1] The banner, which was wrought with fine needlework of marvellous skill,

[1] The same description is given of the banner of the sons of Lodbrog, taken by Alfred the Great.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had been made for Sigurd by his mother, a princess of Irish birth, whose father was Karval, Prince of Dublin. So clever was she that she had a reputation for witchcraft, for men thought her knowledge was greater than that of a woman. She was a person of spirit and mettle; for once when her young son, Sigurd, asked her advice as to whether he should go out to fight with a Scotch earl, whose followers were seven times greater in number than his own, she scornfully bade him go. "Had I known that thou hadst a desire to live for ever," she had said, "I should have kept thee safely rolled up in my wool-bag. Fate rules life, but not where a man stands at the helm; and better it is to die with honour than to live with shame. Take thou this banner which I have made for thee with all my cunning; I ween it will bring victory to those before whom it is borne, but death to him who carries it." This was true; wherever the raven banner went victory followed after it, and men were slain before it, but he who was standard-bearer always met his death. Thus the banner came to have an evil fame, and it was not easy to find a man to carry it into battle.

In the battle of Clontarf the banner was borne aloft before the earl, but one of the bearers after another had fallen. Then Earl Sigurd called on Thorstein, son of Hall o' the Side, to bear the flag, and Thorstein was about to lift it when a man called out: "Do not bear the banner; for all those who do so come by their death. Through it three of my sons have been slain." "Hrafn the Red," called out the earl, "bear thou the banner." "Bear thine own crow thyself," answered Hrafn. Then the earl said: "'Tis fittest that the beggar should bear his own

bag, indeed"; and with that he took down the banner from its staff, and hid it under his cloak. Only a short time after that, the earl fell, pierced through by a spear.

The other incident also concerns Thorstein, the brave young Icelander who had accompanied Sigurd to Ireland. He was only twenty years of age, and as fearless as he was brave. When flight broke out through all the host of the foreigners, Thorstein, with a few others, took their stand by the side of Tomar's Wood, refusing to fly. At last, seeing that hope was past, all turned to follow with the rout save Thorstein only. He stood still to tie his shoe-string. An Irish leader, coming up at the moment, asked him why he had not run with the others. "Because I am an Icelander," said Thorstein, "and were I to run ever so fast I could not get home to-night." The Irish leader was so struck by the young warrior's coolness and courage that he set him at liberty. Thorstein remained for some time in the household of the Irish King, when all his fellows returned home, and he was well beloved in Ireland.

All through the North flew the tidings of Brian's battle, and the Norsemen felt that it was one of the most severe checks sustained by them in Western Europe. On the evening of the battle a strange portent happened in Caithness. A Norseman was walking out late at night alone. He saw before him a bower, which he had never seen before, and twelve women riding, two and two, toward it. They passed into the bower and disappeared from sight. Curious to know what had become of the women, he went up to the bower, and looked in through a narrow slit that served for a window. Horrible was the sight

he saw. The women were seated in the bower, weaving at a loom. But when he looked he saw that skulls of men served as the weights, and that the web and weft were the entrails of dead men. The loom was made of spears, and swords were the shuttles, and as the weird women wove, blood dripped from the loom upon the floor. They sang this song as the shuttles sped, softly as though they keened the slain :—

### The "Darradar-Liod, or "Lay of the Darts."

"See! warp is stretched
For warrior's fall,
Lo! weft in loom
'Tis wet with blood;
Now fight foreboding,
'Neath friends' swift fingers,
Our grey woof waxeth
With war's alarms;
Blood-red the warp,
Corpse-blue the weft.

The woof is y-woven
With entrails of men,
The warp is hard-weighted
With heads of the slain;
Spears blood-besprinkled
For spindles we use,
Sharp steel-edged the loom
Arrow-headed our reels,
With swords for our shuttles
This war-woof we work:
So weave we, weird sisters,
Our war-winning woof.

Now War-winner walketh
To weave in her turn,
Now Sword-swinger steppeth,
Now Swift-stroke, now Storm;

When the shuttle is speeding
How spear-heads shall flash !
Shields crash, and helm-biter
On bucklers bite hard !
Now mount we our horses,
Now bare we our brands,
Now haste we, swift-riding,
Far, far from these lands.

Then they plucked down the woof and tore it asunder, but each held fast to what she had in her hand. And the watcher knew that these were the Valkyrie women, who weave the threads of life and of death. He fled from the place, terrified, and spread the tidings of the slaughter ; but the Valkyrie maidens mounted their steeds and rode, six to the north and six to the south ; and the bower disappeared and was no more seen.

# Chapter XX

## The Story of the Burning

(Nial's Saga)

WHAT was the Story of the Burning that Gunnar was telling to Earl Sigurd, and for his share in which he lost his head by Kari's stroke ?

Of all the sagas of Iceland the most famous and the best known is the saga of Njal, or, as it is sometimes called, the Story of the Burning. Njal or Nial is an Irish name, and there may have been some Irish mixture in his descent, though this is not proved from his genealogy. He was well known to be the wisest and best of Icelanders, and he was so learned a lawyer that all men desired his advice when any case came before the Court of Laws. He was clear in his judgments, and on that account it was believed that he could see into the future; people said that he had the "second-sight" and could foretell what would happen. Kind and generous too he was and always ready to help a friend in need. His wife was Bergthora, a brave, high-spirited woman, and they had three daughters and three sons; the names of the sons were Skarphedinn, Grim, and Helgi. They had, moreover, a foster-son, Hoskuld, whom Nial loved better than his own sons. Nial's sons and

Hoskuld were never apart, and what the one thought or did the other did likewise.

The desire of travel came upon Nial's sons when they were men, and Grim and Helgi fared abroad, and were away five winters, part in Orkney and part in Norway (989-994). They were well received in Orkney by Earl Sigurd the Stout, for he found them to be bold and trustworthy men, and he took them into his bodyguard, and gave Helgi a gold ring and mantle and Grim a shield and sword. It was in the Western Isles that they met Kari, Solmund's son, who gave them help and brought them to the earl, and was ever their friend; and together they fought for Earl Sigurd against the Scots in Caithness, and against Godred, King of the Isle of Man, and everywhere they were successful and got renown. When their time of sea-roving was past they busked them for Iceland, and Kari with them; and Kari was there that winter with Nial, and asked his daughter Helga to wife, and when they were married they were much with Nial, for he was now an old man, and he liked to have his children about him.

This was the more needful, for now when he was seventy winters old troubles began to fall upon Nial and his sons. Evil men envied their prosperity, and hated Nial the more that all spake honourably of him and praised the valour and uprightness of his sons. These men of bad feeling went about to separate the old man from his friends and stir up suspicion against him, and it was thought likely that for all he was aged, and the justest of counsellors and a friend whom no backbiting could shake even when his friendship was sorely tried, his own prophecy of himself would come true, and that his end would

be far from that which anyone could guess. But things went quietly for a time, because it was hard to bring a cause of complaint against Nial. At last they thought that they had found a handle to turn against him when he erected a new Court of Law in the island, which he called the Fifth Court; to this appeals might be made when for any reason a decision on a case was not come to at one of the Quarter Courts then established in Iceland. For there were many suits pleaded in the Quarter Court that were so entangled that no way could be seen out of them, and many said that they lost time in pleading their suits when no decision was come to, and that they preferred to seek their rights "with point and edge" of sword, and to fight it out; so that there was danger of anarchy in the country. But Nial's plan was to refer these disputed cases to a higher court for its decision. But though all agreed that this was a wise plan, many of the judges in the old Quarter Courts were annoyed that their authority was lowered and the supreme jurisdiction given to the new court, in which were to be placed only the wisest and best men; and what angered them still more was that one of these new judges was Hoskuld, Nial's foster-son. In the time of paganism there were no clergy such as we have to-day, but the chief of each large clan or family was its priest, and there was only a fixed number of priests in each district, men who were regarded as the head-men or chiefs of that Quarter. So long as the old faith remained in the land it was the head of the family who offered the sacrifices for his own people. Hoskuld was made a judge in the new court, and he got the priesthood with it; he was called the Priest

of Whiteness. His judgments were so just that many men refused to plead in the other courts and went to have their suits pleaded before Hoskuld's court. Out of this jealousies arose, and above all two enemies of Nial, Valgard the Guileful and his son Mord, were angry because their court was left empty, while Hoskuld's was full. One night Valgard was sitting over the fire when his son Mord came in. Valgard looked up at him and said: "If I were a younger man I should not be sitting here very busy doing nothing while the court of Hoskuld is crowded with suitors; and now I regret that I gave up my priesthood to thee; I see thou wilt take no action to support it; but I, if I were young, would work things so that I would drag them all down to death, Nial and all his sons together."

"I do not see," said Mord, "how that is to be done."

"My plan is," said Valgard the Guileful, "that you should make great friendship with Nial's own sons. Ask them to thy house and give them gifts when they leave, and win their trust and goodwill, so that they shall come to have confidence in thee as much as they have in one another. For awhile say nothing that shall arouse suspicion of thy friendship, but when once they are won over, begin little by little to sow discord between them and Hoskuld, and keep on tale-bearing to each of the other, so that they will be set by the ears, and will end by killing Hoskuld, and then it is likely that they themselves will fall in the blood-feud that will arise from his death, and so we shall get rid of all of them, and thou mayest seize the chieftainship when they are all dead and gone."

"It will not be easy to do this," answered Mord, "for Hoskuld is so much beloved that no one will

believe any ill of him. M
his foster-brothers, are so
that they are always in
support each other in ev
what can be done, for Nia
to me, father, than they ar

From that time forward
house, and he struck up a
hedinn, and said he would
Skarphedinn took it all
he had never sought for a
and he encouraged Mord
ward, so that often they
but Nial disliked his co
man, and often he was rath

This was while Grim
But when they came hom
to give a great feast in
had been long away. Th
called together a crowded
away he gave them hands
gold to Skarphedinn, and a

They went home well
gifts to Nial. But all he
full dearly for those gifts l

From that time Mord be
sons that Hoskuld was no
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grew (and Mord had ever
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and he came less often to
met they scarcely spoke to

Moreover, he and Nial's sons,
warm in friendship together
each other's company and
very way. Still, I will see
l and his sons are no dearer
e to thee."

l Mord was much at Nial's
great friendship with Skarp-
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's sons. At first they paid
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a new one when they met),
veen the sons and Hoskuld,
their house, and when they
gether.

But Hoskuld knew not what to think, for he loved his foster-brothers well, and he found it hard to believe that they had the designs on him that Mord made out. One day, when Mord had brought him a new story that Skarphedinn carried an axe under his belt, intending to take an opportunity to kill him, Hoskuld broke out angrily: "I tell you this, Mord, right out, that whatever ill-tales you tell me of Nial's sons, you will never get me to credit them; but supposing such things were true, and it became a question between us whether I must slay them or they me, I tell thee that far rather would I be slain by them than work the least harm to them. A bad man thou art, with these tales of thine."

Mord bit his lip, and knew not what to answer, but soon after that he went to Nial's house and fell a-talking to Kari and Skarphedinn in a low voice, telling them all sorts of evil of Hoskuld, worse than before, and egging them on to kill him that very evening. He said that if they did not kill Hoskuld he would kill him himself for their honour. So he got his way with them, and bound them to meet him that night with their weapons and ride down to Hoskuld's house at Ossaby.

That night Skarphedinn did not lie down to rest, nor his brothers, nor Kari.

Then Bergthora, Nial's wife, said to her husband: "What are our sons talking about out of doors?"

"In the old days when their counsels were good," said Nial, "seldom was I left out of them, but now they make their plans alone, and tell me nothing of them."

That night when it was dark the sons of Nial and Kari arose and rode to Ossaby, their weapons in their

hands. They stopped under the fence that encircled Hoskuld's house, hidden from sight. The weather was good and the sun just risen.

Now it happened that about that time Hoskuld, the Priest of Whiteness, awoke, and put on his clothes and flung about his shoulders a new crimson cloak embroidered to the waist, which Flosi, his wife's uncle, had given him. He took his corn-sieve and walked along the fence, sowing the corn as he went; but in his left hand he carried his sword.

Skarphedinn and the others sprang up as he came near, and made a rush at him, but Hoskuld, seeing them, tried to turn away. It is not said that he defended himself with his sword from Skarphedinn.

Then Skarphedinn ran up, crying out: "Do not try to turn on thy heel, Whiteness Priest," and with that he hewed at him, smiting him on the head with such a blow that he fell on his knees.

"God help me, and forgive you," said Hoskuld, as one after the other they thrust him through.

Then Mord slipped off as fast as he could, and gave out through the country that Nial's sons had slain their foster-brother, Hoskuld, but nothing was said about his own part in the matter.

The day was not far gone when he gathered men together to go down with him to Ossaby, to bear witness of the deed, and he showed them the wounds, and said that this wound was dealt by Skarphedinn, the next by Helgi or Grim, the next by Kari, and so on; but there was one wound that he said he knew not who dealt it, for that wound was made by himself. He it was who set on foot the law against the sons of Nial

But the sons of Nial rode home, and Kari with them, and they told Nial the tidings. "Sorrowful are these tidings, and ill to hear," said Nial, "and this grief touches me very nearly. Methinks I would have given two of my own sons to have had my foster-son alive."

"We will excuse thy words," said Skarphedinn, "seeing that thou art an old man, and it was to be expected that this loss would touch thee closely."

"It is true that I am weak and aged," said Nial; "but my age will not prevent what is to follow."

"What is to follow?" said Skarphedinn.

"My death by violence," he said, "and the death with me of my wife, and of all you my sons."

They stood silent at that, for the old man's prophecies had seldom failed, and they felt that this one would come to pass.

Then Kari said: "Am I in the one case with you all?"

"Thy good fortune will bring thee safe out of it," said Nial; "but they will spare no pains to have thee in the same case with us."

This one thing touched Nial so nearly that he could never speak of it without shedding tears.

As the time of the suit about Hoskuld's death drew on, all men wondered how it would go with Nial's sons. Those who knew Hoskuld contended that he had been slain for less than no cause; and this was true; yet others saw clearly that if men of such worth as Nial and his sons were slain, whose family were always held in the greatest respect, the blood-feud and the hue and cry would stir the whole country, and those who slew them would be hated by all. But Mord would not let the matter rest, but was ever

urging the relatives of Hoskuld on his wife's side to take up the suit against Nial's sons. So the suit went forward, some taking Nial's part and some the part of his enemies; but few men stood to aid Nial in the suit.

Nial was often found sitting with his chin on the top of his staff, gazing out from the door of the booth, and his hair looked greyer than its wont. "Things draw on to an end," he would say; "and what must be, must be."

# Chapter XXI

## Things draw on to an End

BUT Nial's enemies were loth to wait for his clearing at law, and they planned to bring about his death and the death of his sons. A man Flosi was at the head of these conspirators, and he it was who gathered together the party of men who had agreed to kill Nial.

They all met together in Flosi's house, Grani, Gunnar's son, and Gunnar, Lambi's son, and others with them.

Now about that time strange portents were seen at Bergthors-knoll, Nial's home, and from that Nial and Bergthora his wife guessed that the end was near; but Skarphedinn laughed their fears to scorn.

A Christian man went out one night of the Lord's day, nine weeks before the winter season, and he heard a crash, and the earth rocked beneath his feet. Then he looked to the west, and he saw a ring of fire moving toward him, and within the ring a man riding on a grey horse. He had a flaming firebrand in his hand, and he rode hard; he and the flaming ring passed the watcher by and went down towards Bergthors-knoll. Then he hurled the firebrand into Nial's house, and a blaze of fire leapt up and poured over the house and across the fells. And it seemed that the man rode his horse into the flames and was no more seen. Then the man who watched


*The Vision of the Man on the Grey Horse* 166

knew that the rider on the grey horse was Odin, who ever comes before great tidings. He fell into a swoon and lay senseless a long time.

Not long after this an old wizened woman who lived in Nial's service went out into the yard behind the house with a cudgel in her hand. Nial's sons called her the Old Dotard, because she would go about the house babbling to herself, leaning on her crutch; but for all that she was wise in many things and foresighted, and some things that she prophesied came to pass. She was ever murmuring about a stack of vetches that was piled up in the yard, that they should bring it indoors, or move it farther away, and to soothe her they promised they would do so; but the days went on, and something always hindered it. This day she took her cudgel and began beating the vetch-stack with all her might, wishing that it might never thrive, wretch that it was!

Skarphedinn stood watching her, holding his sides with laughter. He asked her why she beat the vetch-stack; what harm it had done to her.

"It has not harmed me, but it will harm my master," she said; "for when they need firing for the fire that will burn my master, it is to the vetch-stack they will come, and they will light the house with it; take it away, therefore, and cast it into the water, or burn it up as fast as you can."

Skarphedinn thought it a pity to waste the vetch, so he said: "If it is our doom to die by fire, something else will be found to light the fire with even though the stack be not here. No man can escape his fate." The whole summer the old woman was muttering about the vetch-stack, but time went on and nothing was done.

One evening, as usual, Bergthora prepared the supper, and she spoke to those about her and said: "Let everyone choose what he would like best to eat to-night, and I will prepare it for him, for it is in my mind that this is the last meal that I shall prepare for you."

They asked her what she meant by that, and then she told them that she had heard tidings that a large party was riding toward the house, with Flosi at its head, and she thought it likely that this night would be their last. Nial said that they would sup and that then they would prepare themselves. When they sat down Nial sat at the head of the board, but he ate nothing, and they saw that he seemed to be in a trance. At last he spoke and said: "Methinks I see blazing walls all round this room, and the gable is falling above our heads, and all the board is drenched with blood. It is strange that you can bring yourselves to eat such bloody food!"

Then all that sat there rose, with terror on their faces, and they began to cry out and say that they must save themselves before their enemies came upon them. But Skarphedinn spoke up cheerfully, and bade them behave like men. "We more than all others should bear ourselves well when evil comes upon us, for that is only what will be looked for from us," he said.

So they cleared the board, and Nial bade no man go to sleep, but to prepare themselves for what might befall. Then they went outside the door and waited. Counting Kari and the serving-men, they made near thirty gathered in the yard and about the house.

As it was getting dark they heard footsteps approaching, for the men with Flosi had tethered their

horses in a dell not far from the house, and had waited there till sundown. Nial said to his sons: "A great body of men seems to be approaching, but they have made a halt beyond the house. I think they are more in number than ourselves, and that it would be better for us to go inside the house and fight them from there; the house is strong, and they will be slow to come to close quarters."

Skarphedinn did not think well of that. "These men," he said, "are come out for no fair fight; they are come to do a foul and evil deed, and they will not turn back till we all are dead, for they will fear our revenge. It is likely that they will burn us out, dastards that they are, and I for one have no liking to be stifled indoors like a fox run to earth."

"In the old days," said Nial, "when ye were young, it was ever my counsel that ye sought, and your plans went well; but now I am old ye will have your own way."

"We had better do what our father wills," said Helgi; "whether his counsel be good or bad, it were best for us to follow it."

"I am not sure of that," said Skarphedinn, "for the old man is doting. But if it humours my father to have us all burnt indoors with him, I am as ready for it as any of you, for I am not afraid of my death."

With that they all went indoors, and Flosi, who was watching what they would do, turned to his comrades and smiled. "The wise sons of Nial have all gone mad to-night," he said, "since they have shut themselves up in the house; we will take care that not one of them comes out alive again."

Then they took courage and went up close to the house, and Flosi set men on every side to watch that

no one escaped by any secret way. But he and his own men went round to the front, where Skarphedinn stood in the doorway. One of the men, seeing Skarphedinn there, ran at him with his spear to thrust him through. But Skarphedinn hewed off the spear head with his axe, and then with one stroke of his weapon laid the man dead.

"Little chance had that one with thee, Skarphedinn," said Kari; "thou art the bravest of us all."

"I am not so sure of that," said Skarphedinn, but he drew up his lips and smiled.

Then Grim and Kari and Helgi began throwing out spears, and wounded many of those that stood round, while their enemies could do nothing against them in return. Flosi's men, too, were unwilling to fight, and when they saw the old man and Bergthora standing before them, and the brave sons of Nial, and Kari, whom all men praised, their courage oozed away, for these all were held in great respect from one end of the land to the other. It seemed to them a shameful thing to attack them in their own house. Grani, Gunnar's son, and Gunnar, Lambi's son, moreover, who most had egged them on, now hung back, and were more willing that others should go into danger than they themselves; they seemed ready on the slightest chance to slink away, for they were cowards.

Flosi saw that if they were to carry out their plan they must try some other means, for never would they overcome Nial's sons with sword and battle-axe, nor could they get at them within the house.

So then he made them all fetch wood and fuel and pile it before the doors. When Skarphedinn saw what they were about he cried out: "What, lads! are ye

lighting a fire to warm yourselves, or have ye taken to cooking ? "

" We are making a cooking-fire, indeed," answered Grani, Gunnar's son, " and we will take care that the meat was never better done."

" Yet you are the man whose father I avenged," said Skarphedinn. " Such repayment as this was to be looked for from a man like thee."

But the fire made little way, for as fast as they lit it the women threw whey or water, clean and dirty, upon it, and extinguished it. But one of the men said to Flosi : " I saw a vetch-stack standing outside in the yard behind the house, dry and inflammable, and if we can stuff it lighted into the loft above the hall it will set the roof ablaze."

They brought down the vetch, and stuffed it under the roof, and set fire to it, and in a moment the roof was ablaze over the heads of Nial and his sons. And Flosi continued to pile the wood before the doors, so that none could get out. The women inside began to weep and to scream with fear, but Nial sustained them all, saying that it was but a passing storm, and that it was long before they were like to have another such. Then he went to the door, and called out to Flosi, asking him whether he would be content to take an atonement for his sons.

Flosi replied that he would take none. " Here I remain," said he, " until all of them are dead ; but the women and children and slaves may go out." Then Nial returned into the house, and bade the women go out, and all to whom leave was given.

" Never thought I to part from Helgi in such a way as this," said Thorhalla, Helgi's wife ; " but if I go out I will stir up my kindred to avenge this deed."

"Go, and good go with thee," said Nial; "for thou art a brave woman." But all grieved most that Helgi should die, for he was much beloved; and one of the women threw a woman's cloak over him, and tied a kerchief round his head, and against his will they made him go out between them.

Nial's daughters and Skarphedinn's wife and the other women went out too.

Flosi was watching them as they passed, and he said: "That is a mighty woman and broad across the shoulders that walks in the middle of the others; take hold of her and see who she is."

When Helgi heard that he flung off his cloak and drew his sword, but Flosi hewed at him, and took off his head at a stroke.

Now the fire was mounting the walls, and Flosi's heart smote him at last that an old man like Nial should burn in his own house, who had been so brave and noble a man. He went up to the door and called to Nial, saying, "I offer thee and thy wife leave to go out, Master Nial, for it is unfit that thou shouldst burn to death indoors."

"I will not come out," said Nial, "for I am an old man, and the time is past when I could have avenged the death of my sons, and I have no wish to live in shame after them."

"Come thou out, housewife," called Flosi to Bergthora; "for I would not for anything in the world have thee burn indoors."

"I was given away to Nial when I was young," she answered, "and I pledged my word to him then that we twain should share the same fate together. But thou, child," she said to Thord, Kari's son, who had stayed yet beside her, for he had the undaunted

*"Come thou out, housewife," called Flosi to Bergthora* 172

heart of his father in him, "I would that thou shouldst go out while there is time; I cannot brook to see a lad like thee burned."

"Thou hast promised me, grandmother, that so long as I desired to be with thee, thou never wouldst send me away; and I think it now much better to die with thee and Nial than to live without thee after thy death."

So they turned back into the house. "What shall we do now?" Bergthora said to Nial.

"We will go to our bed," said Nial, "and lay us down; I have long been eager for rest."

Then they laid themselves down on their bed, and the boy lay between them, with his arm round the old woman's neck.

"Put over us that hide," said Nial to his steward, "and mark where we lie, for I mean not to stir an inch hence however the smoke or fire torment me. Here in this spot you will find our bones, if you come afterwards to look for them."

The steward spread the hide over the bed, and then he went out with the others. Then Nial and Bergthora signed themselves and the boy with the cross, and confided their souls into God's hand, and that was the last word that they were heard to utter.

Skarphedinn saw how his father laid him down, and laid himself out, and he said this: "Our father goes early to bed to-night, and that is meet, for he is an old man."

Then for a time Skarphedinn and Kari and Grim stood side by side, catching the brands as they fell and throwing them out at their enemies; and Flosi's men hurled spears from without, but they caught them and sent them back again. But in the end

Flosi bade his men cease throwing their spears, and sit down till the fire had done its work.

One man only escaped from the burning, and that was Kari, who leaped out on a fallen cross-beam, Skarphedinn helping him. "Leap thou first," said Kari, "and I will leap after you, and we will get away in the smoke together." But Skarphedinn refused, and would not go until Kari had got safe away, for he had run along under the smoke, his hair and his cloak blazing; and he ran till he came to a stream, and threw himself into it, and so put out the flames; and he rested in a hollow, and got away after that.

But when Skarphedinn leaped to follow him the cross-beam gave way in the middle where it had been burnt, and he was thrown backward into the house; and with a great crash the end of the roof fell above him so that he was shut in between the gable and the roof and could not stir a step.

All night the fire burned fitfully, sometimes blazing up and sometimes burning low, and those outside watched it till dawn. And they said that all in the house must have been burned long ago. Then Flosi told them to get on their horses and ride away, and they were glad to do that. But as they rode from the place they heard, or thought they heard, a song rising from far down in the fire beneath them, and they shuddered and looked each in the other's face for fear.

"That song is Skarphedinn's, dead or alive," they said.

Some of them were for turning back to look for him, but Flosi forbade them, and urged them to ride away as quickly as they could, for there was no man he feared so much as Skarphedinn.

But when, many days afterwards, they sought

among the embers, they found Skarphedinn's body upright against the gable-wall, but his legs burned off him at the knees. He had driven his axe into the gable-wall so fast that they had much ado to get it out.

Nial and Bergthora lay beneath the hide dead, but unburned by the fire, and a great heap of ashes above them; also of the boy only one finger had been consumed.

This is the Story of the Burning, and of the death of Nial.


BRITISH ISLES
in the time of the Northmen.
Norse Settlements
The Danelaw
Orkneyjar
(The Orkneys)
Hrossey
Ragnvaldsey
Hjaltland
(Shetland)
Hrossey
Breidi Fjordr
(Moray Firth)
Skye
Innse Gall
SKOTLAND
Largs
NORTHUMBRIA
Galloway
ULADH
Ard Macha
(Armagh)
Cranford
Lough
CONNACHT
Mann
DEIRA
Skardaborg
(Scarborough)
Humber
MIDHE
Clonmacnois
Lambay I
Howth
Ath Cliath
or Dyflin
Grimsby
Chester
Lincoln
The Five Boroughs
Derby
Nottingham
Stamford
LAIGHIN
TUATH MUMA
Luimneach
(Limerick)
Leicester
EAST ANGLIA
Waterford
DEAS MUMA
Corca Mor
Watling Street
ESSEX
Gloucester
Lundenaborg
(London)
Wednore
Athelney
Winchester
KENT
SUSSEX
WESSEX
Dofra
(Dover)
MILES
0 10 20 40 60 80 100

# THE DANISH KINGDOM OF ENGLAND
## (1013-1042)

*We continue, in the following chapters, to use the Sagas of the Norse Kings as supplementary to the accounts in the English Chronicles. That they are not always accurately informed in regard to the actual course of events in England is not surprising when we consider that reports were not regularly transmitted by authorized means, as in our own days, but were carried from country to country by chance travellers or poets who recorded only what they had themselves seen or heard. Yet to ignore the Norse accounts is to limit ourselves to one side of the picture only, and only to half understand the causes and motives of what was going on in Britain. Detached from their Danish history, Sweyn and Canute were mere foreign adventurers whose power in England lacks explanation.*

*From the social side, the brilliant and spirited accounts in the Sagas of the Kings of Norway are absolutely invaluable; and even as regards actual occurrences we are inclined to rely upon them to a greater extent than Freeman allowed himself to do. They bear the impress of truth.*

# Chapter XXII

## The Reign of Sweyn Forkbeard

DENMARK became consolidated into a kingdom at a slightly earlier period than Norway, and there was constant strife between the two young nations. The first king of all Denmark was named Gorm the Old (b. 830), but it is rather with the reigns of his grandson, Sweyn Forkbeard, and his great grandson, Canute the Great, that we have to do, for it was in their time that England was conquered by Denmark, and became for the space of twenty-nine years, from Sweyn to Hardacanute (1013-1042), a portion of the Danish dominions. This is an important incident in the history of both countries, and we must now see what the sagas have to tell us about these events.

During the reign of Hakon the Good and the early years of Olaf Trygveson in Norway, the King of Denmark was Harald Blue-tooth, son of Gorm the Old, who reigned from 935 to 985, during the reigns of Athelstan the Great and Edmund in England, and of the weak and insignificant kings, Edwy, Edgar, and Ethelred the Unready, who succeeded them.

It was during the reign of Ethelred that for the first time there was raised a regular tax in England, called the Danegeld, or Dane-gold, paid by the English to the terrible Danes in order to purchase peace from

them. But the effect of the tax was just the opposite to that which the English desired; instead of keeping the Danes out of the country, it brought them over in greater numbers, in the hope of getting more money out of the English. Both the south and east coast were at their mercy, and wherever they appeared the English troops fled at their approach; unled and unmarshalled, they could make no stand against their foes. In the year 994 Olaf Trygveson (reigned 995-1000) and Sweyn Forkbeard united their armies and made a descent upon London with ninety-four ships, as we read in the English Chronicle. They were driven away from London with great loss and damage, but they went burning and slaying all round the coast. They went into winter quarters at Southampton, where sixteen thousand pounds in money was paid to them to induce them to desist from their ravaging. But in the same year, at an invitation from the English king, Olaf paid a visit of state to Ethelred, and pledged himself that he would no more take arms against the English, which promise he loyally fulfilled. His thoughts were, indeed, turning toward his own kingdom of Norway. But Sweyn made no such promise. Sweyn Forkbeard, called in his own country Svein Tjuguskeg, who reigned over Denmark from 985 to 1014, was son to Harald, Gorm's son. The year before his father's death he had come to him and asked him to divide the kingdom with himself; but Harald would not hear of this. Then Sweyn flew to arms, and though he was overpowered by numbers and obliged to fly, Harald Blue-tooth received a wound which ended in his death; and Sweyn was chosen King of Denmark. He was the father of Canute, or Knut, the Great.

On his succession he had given a splendid banquet, to which he invited all the chiefs of his dominions, and the bravest of his army and allies, and of the vikings who had assisted him; on the first day of the feast, before he seated himself on the throne of his father Harald, he had poured out a bowl to his father's memory, and made a solemn vow that before three winters were past he would go over to England and either kill King Ethelred the Unready or chase him out of the country.

But a good time passed before Sweyn was able fully to carry out his threat. In the meantime he was occupied with wars in Norway, where King Olaf Trygveson had come to the throne. The first thing he did was to marry Sigrid the Haughty, whom Olaf had once intended to marry, but with whom he had quarrelled because she would not be baptized, and who had never forgiven Olaf for striking her in the face with his glove. Now she saw a chance of revenge, and she continually urged King Sweyn to give battle to Olaf. In the end he consented to do this, and he sent messengers to his kinsman the King of Sweden, and to Earl Eirik of Norway, and together they made the formidable coalition which met Olaf Trygveson at the great sea-fight of Svold in A.D. 1000, where Olaf disappeared, as we have already related.

We must inquire what causes so much incensed Sweyn against England that he determined above all other things to go to that country and avenge himself there. The thirty-seven years of Ethelred's reign had been miserable for English and Danes alike. An old historian says that his life was "cruel in the beginning, wretched in the middle, and disgraceful in the end." Just at a time when a strong leader was most needed this idle and frivolous King gave

himself up to indolence and every kind of wickedness. Instead of organizing his armies he shut himself up in London, careless of what became of his kingdom and people so long as he himself was safe. He was cruel to his wife, Emma, daughter of Duke Richard of Normandy, a lady of high rank, and cowardly before his enemies. Indeed, his only idea of freeing the country from war was by paying large sums of money to the Danes to keep them quiet. At one time he paid them twenty-four thousand pounds to go away, at others sixteen and thirty thousand; but the only result of his gifts was to bring them back in greater numbers. The English people were in a pitiable condition, forced to raise these large sums to pay their enemies, who at the same time were pillaging and robbing them all over the country.

Then the King, who was too cowardly to fight, bethought him of another means to get rid of his enemies. On St Brice's Day, 1002, he sent forth a secret order that all the Danes in the kingdom should be massacred in that single night. In many cases the Danes had become friends of the English people among whom they lived, or had married English wives and were living peaceably among the inhabitants; but on that terrible night each Englishman was forced by his miserable King to rise up and massacre in cold blood the Danish people who lived with him, even wives being compelled to betray their husbands and friends to put to death their friends. Among those who fell on that fearful night was a beautiful sister of Sweyn's, who had married an English nobleman and embraced Christianity; she was living in England, and her presence there was looked upon as a pledge that Sweyn would not attack the kingdom. She was

beheaded by command of one of the King's worthless favourites, whom he afterwards raised to a high position and made governor of the Mercians. First he murdered her husband before her face, and her young son was pierced through with four spears, and finally she herself was beheaded by the furious Edric. She bore herself with fortitude and dignity, and people said that in death she was as beautiful as in life, for even her cheeks did not lose their colour.

Sweyn knew England well, for he had several times raided there in his youth, and he was probably kept fully informed of all that was going on by the Danish chief of the East Angles of Norfolk and Suffolk, who is well known both in Scandinavian and in English history. His name was Thorkill the Tall, and he was a great viking, and called himself king, even when he had no lands to rule over. He was one of the noblest born of the Danish men, and King Olaf the Saint of Norway was not ashamed to enter into partnership with him. In 1009 he sailed over to England with a vast army, and landed at Sandwich, taking Canterbury and overrunning all the south-east of England. Ethelred was so terrified by this fresh incursion that he called the whole nation out against the invaders; but in spite of this they marched about wherever they pleased, taking Canterbury and settling down upon East Anglia, from which point Thorkill the Tall ravaged the country. "Oft," says the old chronicler, "they fought against London city, but there they ever met with ill fare;" but it was the only place of which this could be said.

When Thorkill had firmly seated himself in England he invited Sweyn to come over, telling him that the King was feeble, the people weak, and the commanders jealous of each other; and Sweyn, who was only

awaiting his opportunity, got together his fleet, and landed at Sandwich in 1013. Before the year was out all England north of the Thames was in his power, and paid him tribute and delivered hostages. Turning south, he compelled Oxford and Winchester to submit, and committing his fleet and hostages to the charge of his son, Canute, he turned against London, the only city still holding out against him. Shut up within their walls, the Londoners awaited the onslaught of the Danes; inside were King Ethelred and Thorkill, who had deserted Sweyn and gone over to the King's side. The Danes came on with headlong fury, not even waiting to cross the bridge, but flinging themselves into the river in their haste to get over; but at the firmly closed gates of the city they received a sudden check. The citizens made wonderful exertions, and forced back the Danes from their walls; many of them were carried away by the stream and drowned; and Sweyn was forced to retreat with the shattered remnants of his army to Bath, where the western lords, or thanes, submitted to him.

But the brave resistance of London and the faithfulness of the city made no impression on the wretched Ethelred, whose only thought was how he might escape from his kingdom, even though his going left the citizens without the semblance of a leader and open to the worst assaults of their enemies. But the King knew not which way to turn; he had alienated his friends and was despised by his foes. He fled first to the Isle of Wight, reaching the Solent by secret journeys, and thence he bethought him that he would pass over to Normandy, where his wife Emma's brother, Richard the Good, was Duke. He remembered very well, however, that he had treated his wife cruelly,

and he doubted whether Richard would be willing to receive him. But taking refuge now behind her whom he had formerly abused, he first sent Emma, with their children Edward and Alfred, to Normandy, hoping that if they were kindly received he himself might follow at Christmas. It was then the month of August, and they set forth on a calm sea, with the Bishop of Durham and Abbot of Peterborough to escort them, while Ethelred anxiously awaited the message they would send. It was not long before he learned the welcome news that Richard had received his sister with great affection, and that he invited the King also to condescend to become his guest. Delighted with this message, Ethelred lost no time in following his family to Normandy.

In the meantime Sweyn made himself master of the whole centre and north of England, and was acknowledged as "full king." Even London, fearing worse evils, submitted; and Thorkill forced the inhabitants to support his army at Greenwich, while Sweyn required other parts of the country to raise provisions for his host.[1]

But an end was soon made of Sweyn's ambitions, for shortly after Christmas, early in the year 1014, he suddenly died—people said through the vengeance of St Edmund the Martyr. The Danish army elected Canute, son of Sweyn, who was then in England, king in place of his father.

[1] Freeman ("Norman Conquest," Vol. I., p. 342), considers that Thorkill acted throughout independently of Sweyn, and aimed at setting up a princedom of his own. He explains in this way Thorkill's sudden alliance with Ethelred against Sweyn in 1013. Thorkill remained faithful to the English king until his flight, and later gave his adherence to Canute, who first enriched and afterwards banished him (see pp. 193-4).

# Chapter XXIII

## The Battle of London Bridge

"London Bridge is broken down"

WHEN it became known that Sweyn was dead, it was agreed at a meeting of the Angles to send for Ethelred out of Normandy; for the people thought it would be wiser to have their own lord, if only he could conduct himself better, rather than another foreigner for their king; so they sent messengers to invite him to return. Ethelred was, however, as little trustful of his own subjects as he was of the Danes; and he first sent over his young son Edward to sound the English and see if they were really inclined to obey him. Edward found them full of friendship, and they swore to support their own princes, while every Danish king they declared to be a foreigner and outlaw from England for ever. When he heard this, Ethelred, flattered by the joyful greetings of his subjects, set to work to gather together an army against Canute, people flocking to him from every quarter. Among those who brought vessels to support him was Olaf the Thick, afterwards King Olaf of Norway. He came to the throne a year afterwards. On the death of King Olaf Trygveson at the battle of Svold, Norway had been divided up, and was ruled by Earl Eirik and King Sweyn. Olaf the Thick was a handsome man, and bold

in his character and acts. It is told of him that he liked not his step-father's ways, because his step-father, with whom he was brought up, was a careful householder, who attended to his farm and servant-men, and did not disdain to superintend the work in the fields or in the smithy himself. Of this the young Olaf was disdainful, and one day, when his step-father had sent him out to saddle his horse for him, he saddled a large he-goat instead. When his step-father went to the door and saw what Olaf had done, he looked at the lad and said: "It is easy to see that I shall get little obedience from thee. It is plain that we are of different dispositions, and that thou art a prouder man than I am." Olaf said nothing, but went his way laughing

Olaf was only twelve years old when he got his first war-ship and set out a-foraying in Sweden and Denmark. He met there Thorkill the Tall, who was come over from England to raise more troops, and entered into alliance with him, and together they sailed to England, just before the death of Sweyn.

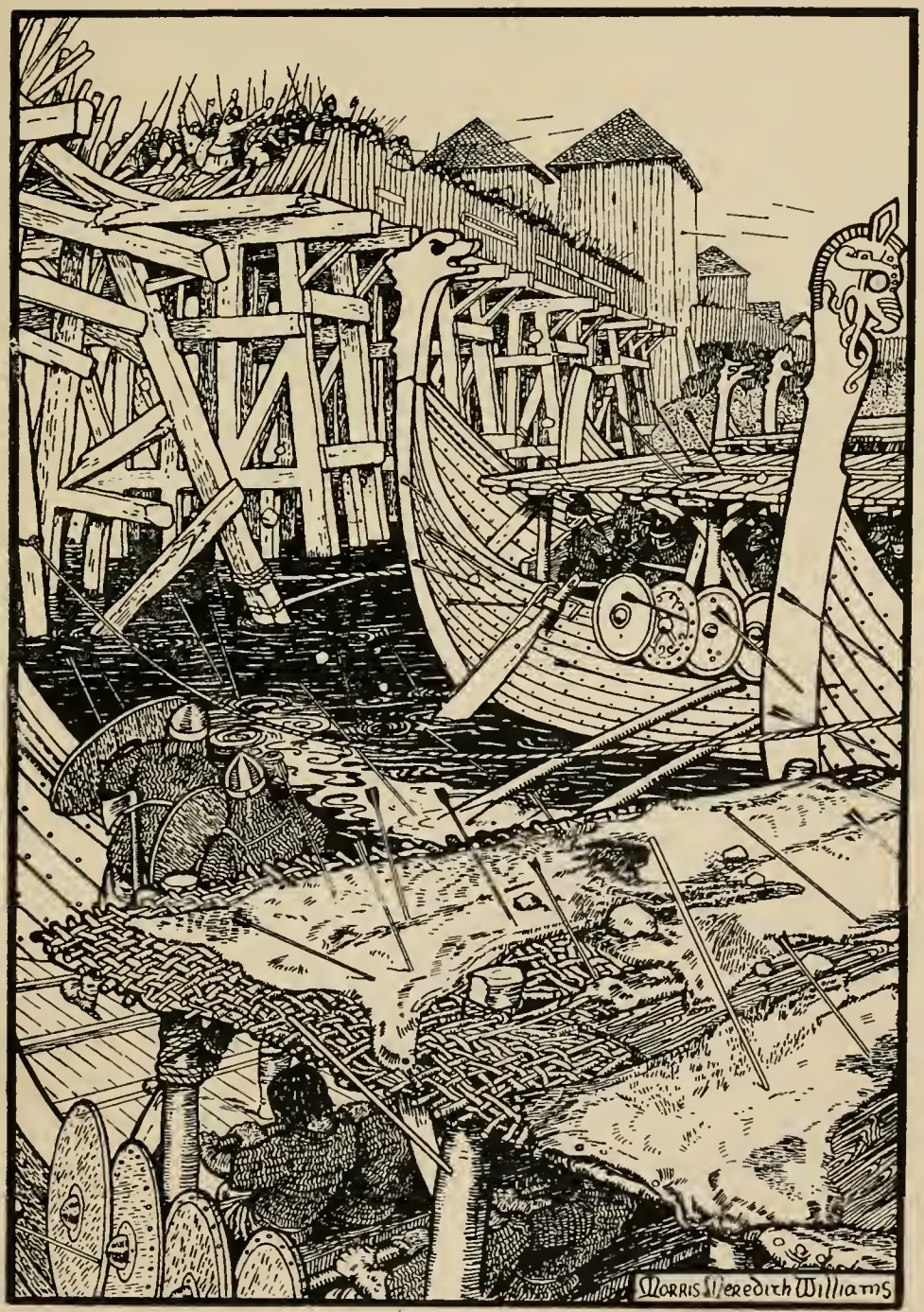
Olaf seems to have been sailing in the English Channel when Sweyn died, for as soon as he heard that Ethelred wanted troops to aid him in recovering his kingdom he joined himself to him, hoping, no doubt, to reap some advantage from the war, and to inflict a defeat on the Danes, whose kingdom it was always the desire of the Norsemen to add to the crown of Norway.[1]

Together he and Ethelred set sail, steering direct for London, which had always been faithful to its king; but they found the Danish force strongly ensconced behind deep ditches and a high bulwark of stone, timber, and turf in their castle opposite

[1] See note at end of this chapter.

Southwark, which the Danes called Sudvirke or, Southern Town, a great place of trade. King Ethelred sailed up the Thames, and ordered a general assault, but the Danes defended themselves bravely, and Ethelred could make nothing of it.

Between the Danish castle, which afterwards was known as the Tower of London, and Southwark, was old London Bridge, which was broad enough for two wagons to pass each other on it. The Danes had strongly fortified it with barricades and towers, and wooded parapets along the sides, breast-high, and behind this the soldiers, who thickly covered the bridge, stood shooting down upon Ethelred's fleet of boats beneath them. King Ethelred was very anxious to get possession of the bridge, but it was not clear how this was to be done. Then Olaf the Thick said he would attempt to bring his fleet up alongside the bridge, if the others would do the same. This was his plan. He first ordered his men to land and pull down some old wooden houses that were near the river, and with the wood he made great platforms tied together with hazel withes, so strong that stones would not penetrate them. These he placed over his ships on high pillars so that they stretched out on each side of the boats, and it was possible for his men to fight freely beneath them. The English ships did not take any precautions, but rowed up as they were to the bridge; but so smart a shower of weapons and great stones was shot down upon them that they were forced to retreat, many of them badly damaged and their men wounded; for neither helmet nor shield could hold out against such a storm of missiles. But Olaf's vessels rowed up quite safely beneath the bridge, where they were sheltered from the enemy above;

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and when they came under the bridge they tied their cables firmly round the wooden piles upon which the bridge was built, and then rowed off as hard as they could go down-stream, the force of the river and of their oars alike pulling at the piles until they were loosened at the bottom, and dragged out of their place. Now as the bridge was crowded with armed troops, and heavy heaps of stones and weapons were collected upon it, when the piles beneath were loosened it gave way with a great crash, and most of those who were on it fell into the water, the others flying to either side, some to the castle and some into Southwark for safety. Then Olaf's troops landed on the Southwark side, and stormed and took the place; and when the people in the castle opposite saw that the bridge and the city of Southwark were in the hands of the enemy, to save more bloodshed they surrendered, for they saw that they could no longer hinder the passage of the fleet up and down the river Thames. So Ethelred became their king; and Olaf remained with him until the King died, commanding all his forces and fighting many battles, of which one was at Canterbury, where the castle was burned and many people killed. Olaf fought also a great battle in East Anglia or Essex, and came off victorious; indeed, he was so successful wherever he went that the saga says that Ethelred entrusted him with the whole land defence of England, and he sailed round the country with his ships of war! But the "Thing-men" or bodies of men-at-arms, who were trained soldiers and cared for little but fighting, still kept the field, and the Danes held many of the castles. When Ethelred died Olaf stood out to sea, and went harrying in Normandy.

King Olaf always took his poet Sigvat, who was

called his skald, with him wherever he went. Sigvat sang the praises of his battles, and it is partly from his songs that the history of the time is known. After the battle of London Bridge he sang a song, a form of which is still common among us, and which children sing in their singing-games, "London bridge is broken down."

Here is a verse of Sigvat's song, which he made in the year 1014, and which is still known to-day, though few people remember when it was made, or why:

"London Bridge is broken down—
Gold is won, and bright renown.
Shields resounding,
War-horns sounding,
Hild is shouting in the din!
Arrows singing,
Mail-coats ringing—
Odin makes our Olaf win!"[1]

[1] Freeman will not accept any part of this story of Olaf's intervention in English affairs, because it is not found in any of the English Chronicles. It, however, reads like the record of an actual attack upon the Danish forces in London, although the time and circumstances may have become confused in the mind of the Northern Chronicler. Sigvat's poem tends to confirm its general accuracy.

# Chapter XXIV

## Canute the Great

### (1017–1035)

CANUTE, or Knut, the son of Sweyn, was in England when his father died. The Danes immediately elected him king, and he lay at Lindsey with his fleet when Ethelred returned to claim the kingdom. Canute was one of the greatest kings who ever ruled in England. Though he began his reign with an exhibition of ruthless cruelty by mutilating the high-born young nobles whom Sweyn had placed in his charge, cutting off their ears and noses, and afterwards boasting of his act, which made the English fear that they had in him a cruel master, as time went on his mind seems to have widened out into channels of broad and humane government. Even the English in the end agreed in styling him Canute the Great, a title they had heretofore given only to their own Alfred and Athelstan, the most constant enemies of the Danes. Canute's ambitions were immense; he dreamed of no less a kingdom than the whole North of Europe, from England and Scotland on the west to Sweden on the East. Denmark and Norway he intended to weld into one country, over which he was to reign from England; for it was his intention no longer to rule England as a foreign conqueror, but to identify himself with the

country to which he had come and to be in every way an Englishman. He determined that the country over which he ruled should retain its own laws, and that the Church should be fostered and all ancient dues discharged and rights respected. In the fifteenth year of his reign he expressed his ideas of government in a letter which he wrote to his people from Rome. It is worth while to listen to what he says. "I call to witness and command my counsellors, to whom I have entrusted the counsels of the kingdom," he writes, "that they by no means, either through fear of myself or favour to any powerful person, suffer, henceforth, any injustice, or cause such to be done, in all my kingdom. . . . I command all sheriffs or governors thoughout my whole kingdom not to commit injustice towards any man, rich or poor, but to allow all, noble and ignoble, alike to enjoy impartial law, from which they are never to deviate, either in hope of royal favour or for the sake of amassing money for myself; for I have no need to accumulate money by unjust exaction. . . . You yourselves know that I have never spared, nor will I spare, either myself or my labours for the needful service of my whole people. . . . I have vowed to God Himself, henceforth to reform my life in all things, and justly and piously to govern the kingdoms and the peoples subject to me, and to maintain equal justice in all things."

These are the words of a high-minded man and a good sovereign; and our English annals tell us that they were not mere words, but were borne out by all Canute's acts.

Yet at the beginning of his reign there was little sign that the King would rise above the level of his father Sweyn's mode of life. His mutilation of the young hostages was only one example of this. When

he began to reign he divided the kingdom into four parts, retaining Wessex, and placing Mercia, East Anglia, and Northumbria each under a separate chief. Two of these chiefs, Eirik and Thorkill the Tall, are well known in Norse history. Earl Eirik, or Eric, as he is called in the English chronicles, had been, as we have read, fighting on the side of the Danish King, Sweyn, against his own sovereign, Olaf Trygveson, at the battle of Svold.[1] He was son of Earl Hakon, the most powerful lord in Norway and the ruler of Norway before Olaf came to the throne[2]; after his fall and Olaf's succession Earl Eirik and his brother, with many valiant men who were of their family, had left the country and gone over to Denmark. Eirik entered Sweyn Fork-beard's service and married his daughter in 996; he spent his time in cruising and harrying, until he joined Sweyn in his wars against Olaf; and after Olaf's disappearance at the battle of Svold Earl Eirik became owner of his war-vessel the *Long Serpent*, and of great booty besides. He and Sweyn and the Swedish King divided Norway between them, and Eirik got a large share and the title of earl, and he allowed himself to be baptized.

Earl Eirik had ruled peacefully over Norway for twelve years when a message came to him out of England from King Canute, who was his brother-in-law, that he should go to him in England and help him to subdue the kingdom. Eirik would not sleep upon the message of the King, but that very day he got his ships together and sailed out of Norway, leaving his son, another Hakon, who was but seventeen years of age, to rule in his stead. He met Canute in England, and was with him when he took the castle of London, and he himself

[1] pp. 102-107. [2] pp. 95-99.

had a battle in the same place, a little farther up the Thames. He remained in England for a year, fighting on Canute's behalf at one place and another; and on the division of the kingdom by Canute he was made ruler of Northumbria.

But no sooner had Canute bestowed these possessions on his followers than he seems to have regretted it and desired to get them back into his own keeping. There is no doubt that there was growing up in his mind a design of ruling over a united England from Northumbria to the English Channel. In later days he attempted to add Scotland also to his dominions.

Determined, then, to extend his personal rule over the whole country, he began by causing Edric, Lord of Mercia, to be put to death. Edric was a man of evil life, and both Danes and English were glad to be rid of him. According to one account, he had brought about the death of the brave Edmund Ironside, Ethelred's son, who had all this time been the great antagonist of Canute, and who had engaged him in a series of battles after the death of Sweyn, and in the end divided the kingdom with him. It seems not impossible that Canute himself had connived at the murder of Edmund, for Edric was then Canute's friend; however this may have been, it now served Canute's purpose to accuse Edric of compassing Edmund's death and to punish him for it. Next, Eirik was driven out of England at the end of the winter, and Canute added Northumbria to his own dominions.[1] There now only remained Thorkill the Tall to dispose of, who had long reigned over the East Angles, and had proved himself a great warrior. On the first opportunity Canute outlawed him and drove him out of

[1] The Norwegian chronicles say that Eirik died in England.

the land; but no better fortune awaited him in Denmark. Fearing that so mighty a warrior, in order to revenge himself on King Canute, would excite rebellions and war in their country, some of the Danish chiefs met Thorkill at the shore and put him to death before he could step on land (1021).[1] Thus Canute became sole King of England and Denmark.

His next step was to banish Ethelred's son Edwy out of England, and to marry his step-mother, Ethelred's widow, who, strange as it may appear to us, consented to wed with the enemy of her husband and family. The marriage was a politic one for Canute, for it brought to his allegiance many of the English who had hitherto looked upon him as a foreign conqueror and foe; and when in course of time Emma bore him a son and daughter they began to look upon the son as the rightful heir to the English crown. His father named him Hardacanute. Canute had also a son by a former wife, whose name was Harald, who immediately succeeded his father.

The sons of Ethelred the Unready who had fled to Rouen to their uncle, Richard, Duke of Normandy, did not at once give up hopes of regaining the kingdom. Northern story says that Olaf of Norway was again cruising in those waters when the sons of Ethelred arrived.[2] He was not at all unwilling to enter into a compact to help them, if in return he were rewarded for it;

[1] This is the Norse account. The English Chronicle, which is likely to be correct in this matter, says that Canute was reconciled to Earl Thorkill in 1023, and that he committed Denmark and his son Hardacanute to his keeping, he himself taking Thorkill's son back with him to England.

[2] Emma's two sons by Ethelred were Alfred (see pp. 211-212) and Edward the Confessor; she also had a daughter. Ethelred had several sons by a former wife, of whom Edmund Ironside is the most famous.

and they came to an agreement that, if they succeeded, Olaf should have Northumbria as his portion. This was before St Olaf had gained his kingdom of Norway from young Earl Hakon. They sent Olaf's foster-father, a man called Hrane, into England to sound the people and to collect money and arms for the expedition. Hrane was all winter in England, and several of the thanes joined him and promised their aid; for they would have been glad again to have a native king. But others had become so accustomed to the Danish rulers that they were not inclined to revolt and bring about fresh war and bloodshed in the country. So in the spring, when Olaf the Thick and the sons of Ethelred set out and landed in England, though at first they won a victory and took a castle, King Canute came down with such a powerful host that they saw they could not stand before it, and they turned back and sought safety in Rouen again.

King Olaf did not return with them, for he bethought him that it was time to seek his own dominions. He sailed first to the North of England to see the country of the Northumbrians that had been promised to him. There he left his long-ships in a harbour, and took with him only two heavy seafaring vessels with 260 picked men in them, armed and stout. They set sail then, but in the North Sea they encountered a tremendous storm, and if they had not had "the king's luck" with them all would have been lost. But they made the shore in the very middle of Norway, at a place called Saela. The King said it was a good omen that they landed at this place, for Saell means "Lucky," and he thought luck would be with them. As they were landing the King slipped on a wet piece of clay, and nearly fell, but he supported himself with the

other foot. "Alas! if the King falls!" exclaimed Olaf. "Nay," cried Hrane, "the King falls not, but sets his foot fast in the soil." The King laughed at that, and said: "If God will, it may be so." [1]

It was not long before they captured Earl Hakon, Eirik's son, who was ruling the country, by drawing a cable across the Sound between their two ships as he was sailing by; for he thought they were two merchant vessels, and had no suspicion that they were Olaf's boats. As he passed they drew up the cable tight beneath his vessel, so that it was lifted half out of the water and could not pass, and the earl was taken prisoner and brought before Olaf. This Earl Hakon, son of Earl Eirik, was still only a youth as he stood before King Olaf. Olaf said he would give him his life if he swore to give up the kingdom to him and leave the country and never take up arms against him; and this he promised to do, and swore an oath upon it. He turned his ships toward England, and entered King Canute's service; and Canute received him well, and placed him at his Court, and there he dwelt a long time.

[1] The same story is told of the landing of William the Conqueror at Pevensey; it is probably repeated from this incident in the life of Olaf.

# Chapter XXV

## Canute lays Claim to Norway

FOR the first nine or ten years of his reign, Canute remained in England, only occasionally going over to Denmark to see that all was going on well there. He spent this time in bringing back the English nation to obedience to their own laws, the old laws of Edgar, for the first time insisting that, as parts of the same nation, Dane and Englishman were alike before the law and that no difference should be made between them. He repaired throughout England the churches and monasteries that had been injured or destroyed by the wars of his father and himself, and at all places where he had fought he erected churches in which prayers should be offered for those who had been slain. A very splendid monastery was built by him at the town since called Bury St Edmunds, in Suffolk, at the place where lay the remains of Edmund, slain by the Danes in 870, who was called King Edmund the Martyr; parts of this monastery, at one time the richest in England, remain to this day. It was little dreamed by Canute that at this monastery the nobles of England would in aftertimes meet to consider how they might wring their country's liberties from an English king. It was at Bury St Edmunds that Magna Charta was drawn up and signed by the barons in

1214.[1] Besides these benefactions, his queen, Emma, suggested to him that he should bestow rich alms on Winchester, the old capital of the English, where was one of the finest cathedrals. Here he gave so largely that the quantity of precious stones and valuable metals dazzled the eyes of strangers. Emma seems to have thought that if her husband gave his money in alms he would be the less likely to go on foreign expeditions; but all the time Canute was planning immense undertakings to extend his power in the North of Europe. He grew tired of the peace that was so grateful to his subjects; but on this occasion, instead of bringing fresh incursions of foreigners into England, he designed to add Sweden and Norway by English arms to his possessions in England and Denmark. He thought the time a good one for his design, for the fame of his splendour and good government had spread far and wide, and even from Norway a great number of powerful men had gathered to him, leaving their country on various pretended errands. To every one Canute gave magnificent presents, and the pomp and splendour of his Court and the multitude of his adherents impressed all who came. Peace was so well established in his realm that no man dared break it; even toward each other the people kept faith and good friendship. King Olaf, or, as it is better to call him, St Olaf, though he did not get that name till after his death, was not altogether loved in Norway, though the country had submitted to him with joy at the first. The people found his rule harsh, and many of them would have

[1] Magna Charta was then taken south by the barons to meet the King at Staines; it was signed by King John on an island in the Thames called Runnymede, on the 15th of June 1215.

been willing enough to put the young Earl Hakon back in his place, or even Canute himself. This came to Canute's ears, and he instantly equipped ambassadors in the most splendid way, and sent them in the spring of 1025 with his letters and seal to Norway. Olaf was ill at ease when he heard it, for he knew that it was with no friendly purpose to him that the envoys were sent. For a long time he refused to see them, and when they came before him and presented their letters he was even more ill-pleased. Canute's message was that he considered all Norway as his property, and that if Olaf desired still to retain his crown he must submit to him, become his vassal, and receive back his kingdom as a fief from him, paying him "scat" or dues.

At this Olaf answered furiously to the messengers: "I have heard," he said, "in old stories that Gorm the Old, first king of Denmark, ruled but over a few people, and in Denmark alone, but the kings who succeeded him thought that too little. Now it is come so far that King Canute, who rules over England and Denmark, and the most part of Scotland as well, claims also my paternal heritage, and then perhaps will promise some moderation after that. Does he wish to rule over all the countries of the North? Will he eat up all the kail in England? He may do so if he likes, and make a desert of the country, before I kneel to him, or pay him any kind of service. And now ye may tell him these my words: I will defend Norway with sword and battle-axe as long as life is given me, and I will pay scat and tribute to no man for my kingdom."

The messengers were by no means pleased to take this message back to King Canute. When they told

him the reply of Olaf and that he would by no means come and pay scat to him, or lay his head between his knees in sign of subjection, Canute replied: "King Olaf the Thick guesses wrong if he thinks I shall eat up all the kail in England. I will soon let him see that there is something else under my ribs than kail; and cold kail it shall prove for him."

Soon after that, in 1026, Canute went over to Denmark to see what Olaf was about, and to try to detach the King of Sweden from Olaf's side; but this he failed to do, for the King of Sweden feared that Canute, if he were successful against Olaf, would turn next against him and swallow him up also; so as soon as Canute had returned to England the King of the Swedes and the King of Norway made a meeting together, and swore to support each other against Canute, both of them meanwhile collecting what forces they could and agreeing to lie in wait for the King of England. By the winter of 1027 Olaf had got a good fleet together, and for himself he had built a very large ship with a bison's head gilded all over standing out from the bow. He called his vessel the *Bison*. He sailed eastward with a mighty force, keeping close to land, and everywhere inquiring whether anything had been seen of Canute, but all he could hear was that he was fitting out a levy in England, and getting together a great fleet, over which Earl Hakon was second in command. Many of Olaf's people got tired of waiting when they heard that Canute had not yet come, and returned home, but the best of his warriors remained with him, and with these he sailed south to Denmark, giving out that he intended to conquer the country. Here the King of the Swedes met him with his army, and together they made fearful ravages in the land, treating

the people with great severity, and dragging them bound and wounded to the ships. Many of the people, feeling themselves unable to withstand the united force of the two kings, agreed to submit to them ; but the others were wasted with fire and sword. It was joyful tidings for them when they heard that Canute and his fleet had really sailed and were on their way to their help.

Sigvat the skald, who was sometimes with Olaf in Norway and sometimes with Canute in England, made this ballad about the sailing of Canute the Great :

"'Canute is on the sea
The news is told,
And the Norsemen bold
Repeat it with great glee.
It runs from mouth to mouth—
'On a lucky day
We came away
From Throndhjem to the south.'

Canute is on the land ;
Side by side
His long-ships ride
Along the yellow strand.
Where waves wash the green banks,
Mast to mast,
All bound fast,
His great fleet lies in ranks."

Sigvat was a great skald, but though he was sometimes in Canute's service he still loved Olaf the best. On one occasion he and another skald, named Berse, were at Canute's Court together, and the King gave a gold ring to Sigvat, but to Berse (whose name means a "bear-cub") he gave two gold rings, much larger

and weightier than Sigvat's, besides an inlaid sword. Sigvat made this song about it :

"When we came o'er the wave, you cub, when we came o'er the wave,
To me one ring, to thee two rings, the mighty Canute gave ;
One mark to me,
Four marks to thee,
A sword, too, fine and brave.
Now God knows well,
And skalds can tell,
What justice here would crave."

When Sigvat came back to Norway and presented himself before Olaf, who some time before had made him his marshal, the King was about to sit down to table. Sigvat saluted him, but Olaf only looked at him, and said not a word. Then Sigvat and those who were standing by saw that Olaf knew well that Sigvat had been in England and had been received by King Canute. As the old proverb says, "Many are the ears of a king." The King said to Sigvat the skald : "I do not know if thou art my marshal or if thou hast become one of Canute's followers." Then Sigvat answered the King in verse, telling him that Canute had invited him to stay with him, but that he preferred to be at home with Olaf. After that King Olaf gave Sigvat the same seat close to himself that he had had before, and the skald was in as high favour as ever with the King.

Things went on for some time in this way, Canute passing backward and forward between England and Denmark, and ever gathering more ships for the final struggle with Olaf and the Swedish King. He himself had a dragon ship, said to have had sixty banks of rowers, and the head gilt all over. Earl Hakon had another dragon ship of forty banks, with

a gilt figure-head. The sails of both were in stripes of blue, red, and green, and the vessels were painted from above the water-line, and all that belonged to their equipment was most splendid. They had a vast number of men sailing in the ships. On the other side the Kings of Norway and Sweden set out also, but as soon as it was noised that Canute the Old was on the seas no one thought of going into the service of these two kings. When the Kings heard that Canute was coming against them they held a council as to what they should do. They were then lying with their fleet in the Helga River, in the south of Sweden, and Canute was coming straight upon them with a war-force one-half greater than that of both of them put together. King Olaf, who was very skilful in making plans, went with his people up the country into the forest. The river flowed out of a lake in the forest, and he set his men to cut down trees and dam up the lake where the river emerged with logs and turf, at the same time turning all the surrounding streams into the lake, so that it rose very high. All along the river-bed they laid large logs of timber. Then they waited till they got tidings from the Swedish King (who had moved his fleet into concealment round the cliffs not far from the mouth of the river) that King Canute's ships were close at hand. Canute arrived with his fleet toward the close of day, and seeing the harbour empty, he went into it with as many ships as he could, the larger vessels lying outside in the open water. In the morning, when it was light, a great part of his men went on shore, some to amuse themselves, some to converse with sailors from the other ships. They observed nothing until the water of the river began to rise, and then came rushing down

in a flood, carrying huge trees in its course, which drove in among the ships, damaging all they struck. Olaf had broken up his dam and let loose the whole body of water from the lake. In a few moments the whole of the low country was under water, and the men on shore were all swept away and drowned. Those on board cut their cables, and were swept out before the stream and scattered here and there. The great dragon ship which Canute was in was borne forward by the flood, and because of her size she was unwieldy, and they could not prevent her from driving in amongst the Norwegian and Swedish ships, whose crews immediately tried to board her, but her height was so great and she was so well defended that she was not easy to attack. Seeing that Canute's ships were gradually collecting again, and finding that little more was to be gained by an uneven fight, King Olaf stood off and out to sea, and, observing that Canute did not follow, sailed away eastward toward Sweden. Many of the Swedish crew were so home-sick that they made for home, until the Swedish King had few followers left, and Olaf was much perplexed what to do. Finally he determined to send his ships eastward to the care of the King of Sweden, and he himself with the bulk of his army set out to march on foot across Sweden and so back to Norway, carrying their goods as best they might on pack-horses. Some of the men were old and did not like this plan. One of them, Harek of Throtta, who was aged and heavy, and who had been on shipboard all his life, said to the King that it was evident he could not go, nor had he any desire to leave his ship with other men. The King replied: "Come with us, Harek, and we will carry thee when thou art tired of walking." But Harek waited until

the King's party had set off, and then he slipped down to his own ship, took down its flag and mast and sail, and covered all the upper part of the vessel with some grey canvas, and put only two or three men sitting fore and aft where they could be seen, while the others sat down low in the vessel. In this way he made it appear that it was only a merchant ship, and not a war-vessel, and so it slipped past Canute's fleet without attack. As soon as they were well beyond Canute's fleet they sprang up, hoisted the sails and flag and tore off the coverings, and then Canute's men saw that they had let a war-ship escape them. Some of them thought it might even have been Olaf himself, but Canute said he was too prudent to sail with a single ship through the Danish fleet, and that more likely it was Harek's ship, or some one like him. Then his men suspected that he had come to a friendly understanding with Harek to let him pass safely, and it became known that they were on good terms after that. Harek went his way, and never stopped till he came safe home to his own house in Halogaland. As he was sailing he sang this ditty :

"The widows of Lund may smile through their tears,
The Danish girls may raise their jeers,
They may laugh or smile,
But outside their isle
Old Harek still to his North land steers."

It was the policy of Canute to induce men to leave King Olaf the Saint by the promise of advancement and by bestowing on them splendid gifts. He drew such large revenues from England and Denmark that he was able to make these presents without difficulty, and thus great numbers of the nobles were drawn

away from Olaf and secretly joined Canute. This made Olaf suspicious even of his best friends, and sometimes his suspicions proved to be true. There is a story of one Thorer, of whom the King thought highly, and who had entertained him to a magnificent feast, who had, in spite of all, taken gifts from Canute. One day the King was speaking of this Thorer to his follower Dag, and he praised him much; but Dag made short replies. Olaf asked him why he did not answer; and Dag replied: "If the King must needs know, I find Thorer too greedy of money." "Is he a thief, or a robber?" asked the King. "I think that he is neither," said Dag. "What then is the matter with him?" asked Olaf. "To win money he is a traitor to his sovereign," said Dag; "he has taken money from King Canute the Great to betray thee." "What proof hast thou of this?" demanded the King. Dag replied: "He has upon his right arm, above his elbow, a thick gold ring, which Canute gave him, but which he lets no man see." Olaf was very wroth at that, and the next time Thorer passed him, in seeing that the wants of his guests were attended to, the King held out his hand to him, and when he had placed his hand in the King's, the King felt it toward the elbow. Thorer said: "Take care, for I have a boil on my elbow." The King said: "Let me see the boil. Do you not know that I am a physician?" Then Thorer saw that it was no use to conceal the ring, and he took it off and laid it on the table. Olaf asked if he had received that ring from King Canute, and Thorer could not deny it. Then the King was so wroth that he would listen to no one, but ordered Thorer to be killed on the spot. That act of Olaf's made him very unpopular in the uplands.

Meanwhile Olaf heard that Canute the Great was advancing with a mighty host which was growing greater every day. Men were flocking to him, and Olaf could not tell on whom to depend. His ships, too, which he had left behind in Sweden, could not get out past Canute's fleet to come to his assistance; they had to wait until Canute had gone north to Norway, and then the best of them managed to steer round the Sound and join Olaf, and the rest were burned. King Canute made a march with his host through Norway, holding a "Thing" in each place he came to, and proclaiming Earl Hakon his governor-in-chief, and his son Hardacanute King of Denmark. The great landowners, or *bondes*, gave him hostages in token of their fidelity, and the skalds combined to sing his praises and celebrate his journeys in song. So that without striking a blow Norway gradually fell from the hands of Olaf into the hands of Canute.

The next winter Earl Hakon followed Canute to England, but he was lost in a storm on his way back; he had gone over to celebrate his marriage to Gunhild, a niece of King Canute. He had been so much beloved in Norway that Olaf had seen that it was impossible to stand before him, for the King's followers lost no opportunity of falling away from him and placing themselves under the rule of Earl Hakon. The people considered that Olaf had been too severe in his rule, although they had to confess that he was just; but when he tried to abolish all plundering and marauding, and punished all who disobeyed with death, the chiefs turned against him, though this was a good law, and one much needed to preserve peace and prosperity in the countries.

Olaf thought it wiser to withdraw for a time, and

he went east to Russia, where he was well received, and there he remained until he heard of Earl Hakon's death. Then he returned and gathered his forces together, and they met their foes at the famous battle of Stiklestad, on 29 July, 1030, on the day of the great eclipse, fighting in the dark for the most part of the day; there Olaf fell, at the age of thirty-five years, with three wounds which Thorstein and Thorer Hund and Kalf gave him; and the greater portion of his forces fell around him. After he was gone and his severities were forgotten the people canonized him as a saint, and he who during his life-time was called Olaf the Thick was called St Olaf thenceforth.

King Canute never went again to Norway; he occupied the latter years of his reign by quiet and good government in England, the country he had made his home. He was a man who had dreamed a great dream, the union in one vast sovereignty of Northern Europe, justly and peaceably ruled, and in part his dream came true; but as soon as his strong hand was withdrawn his empire fell to pieces of itself. His sons, Harald and Hardacanute (Harthacnut), in England and Denmark, and Sweyn, in Norway, had none of the great qualities of their father, and his kingdom parted asunder in their hands. The popular idea of Canute's invincible power took shape in a story, well known to every one, that he one day caused his kingly seat to be placed on the sea-shore and commanded the waves to come no farther. When the water, in spite of his command, came up frothing round his feet he pointed to it, bidding his flattering followers mark that though they had protested there was nothing that he could not do, the waves and winds were beyond

his authority; and he bade them refrain from such flatteries, and from giving to him praise which was due to the Creator of the universe alone.

Canute died at Shaftesbury, and was buried at Winchester, in 1035.

# Chapter XXVI

## Hardacanute

WE need not give much attention to the reign of Harald, the son and successor of Canute. Though he reigned for over four years, there is no good act told of him. The unfortunate son of Ethelred, Alfred the Ætheling, came over to England about this time to try to recover his kingdom, but he was seized by Earl Godwin, his eyes put out, and most of his companions killed or mutilated. The young prince was sent to Ely, where he lingered for a time, living a miserable existence on insufficient food, and finally died, being buried in Ely Cathedral. Harald's next act was to drive Emma, the late King's wife, out of the kingdom. Emma was not his own mother; the chronicles show that he and Sweyn were Canute's sons by another wife. For some time Queen Emma was protected by Earl Godwin, who was rapidly rising into power, and whose own son, another Harald (spelled in English Harold), was soon to reign over the kingdom; but as soon as the Danish King saw himself safely seated on the throne he drove her out upon the sea, without any kind of mercy, in stormy weather. This was the second time this woman with a strange history was forced to take refuge abroad. She went at first back to Normandy, where she had taken refuge as

Ethelred's wife, but being ill-received there, she passed on to Bruges, where the Earl of Flanders[1] welcomed her kindly. It is difficult to imagine the feelings of this queen, allied as she was to the house of the English kings by her marriage with Ethelred, and to the Danish kings, their worst enemies, by her marriage with Canute: when her son Alfred the Ætheling came to England, hoping to see his mother, she was not permitted to see him, even had she wished it, or able to prevent the evil deeds of his enemies. She remained in Flanders until her other son, Edward the Confessor, came to the throne, when she returned to Winchester. She is said to have been inordinately fond of money and jewels, and to have accumulated great hoards of wealth. She was sincerely attached to Canute, but would do nothing for her elder sons, the children of Ethelred; when Edward the Confessor came to the throne he complained greatly of this, and took from her all her possessions, saying that she had never aided him with money when he was in need. She died dishonoured at Winchester in 1052.

When Harald died at Oxford in 1040, the English, "thinking that they did well," as the Chronicle says, sent at once for Hardacanute to come from Denmark and occupy the throne of his father Canute and his half-brother Harald. They hoped little from Ethelred's sons, but much from this son of the great Canute, whom they had rarely seen, for most of his life had been passed in Denmark. He, too, was the son of Emma, and seemed destined to unite the two races

[1] Baldwin, Earl of Flanders in the ninth century, had married a daughter of Alfred the Great, hence the connexion with England. The same earl was, by another wife, the ancestor of Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror.

of Danes and English into one nation. Their hopes in him were disappointed, as we shall see. But first we must retrace our steps a little and tell the history of this prince. When Canute returned from his visit to Denmark in 1026 he had left his young son, then only nine years of age, to replace him there. He placed him under the charge of a very distinguished man, Earl Ulf,[1] who had married Canute's sister and became the father of Svein, or Sweyn, who afterwards was King of Denmark. Earl Ulf was left to act as regent of Denmark during Hardacanute's childhood; but Queen Emma, the lad's mother, was ambitious that her son should actually reign, boy though he was. She persuaded Ulf to have him proclaimed an independent king, without the knowledge of his father, Canute. She secretly got hold of the King's seal and sent it off to Denmark, writing a forged letter, which was supposed to be from King Canute himself, and which she signed with his name, commanding Ulf to have Hardacanute crowned King of Denmark. The earl called together an assembly of the nobles and declared that Canute had commanded him to have Hardacanute crowned king; he produced in proof of this Canute's seal and the forged letter written by Queen Emma. In consequence of this the nobles consented to take the boy for their king. Just at this moment the news arrived that King Olaf was coming from Norway with a great fleet, and was to be joined by the King of Sweden, as we have related.[2] Ulf and the nobles gathered their troops together and went to Jutland, but they saw that the army coming against them was far too great for them to meet alone so they were forced to send for help to King Canute,

[1] The English chronicles say of Thorkill the Tall. [2] p. 201-3.

fearful as they were as to how he would regard their doings.

When Canute came with his army to Limfiord, where they were awaiting him, they sent to beg Queen Emma to find out whether he were annoyed or not. When Emma told the King, and promised that Hardacanute would pay any fine he might demand if he should consider that the boy had done wrong, Canute replied that he was sure that Hardacanute had not acted on his own responsibility. "It has turned out exactly as might have been expected," he said. "He, a mere child without understanding, is in a hurry to have a crown on his head; but when an enemy appeared the country would easily have been conquered unless I had come to his aid. If he wants me to forgive him, let him come to me at once and lay down this mock title of king that he has taken, and I will see what is to be done."

The Queen sent this message to her son, and begged him not to delay his coming. "For," she said, "it is plain that you have no force to stand against your father." Indeed, this was very true, for as soon as the army and people of Denmark heard that King Canute the Old was in the land they all streamed away from Hardacanute to him with one consent; so that Earl Ulf and his party saw that either they must make their peace with Canute at once or fly the country. All pressed Hardacanute to go to his father and try to make terms, and this advice he followed. When they met he fell at his father's feet, and laid the kingly seal on his knee. Canute took Hardacanute by the hand, and placed him beside him in a seat no lower than he had occupied before. Then Ulf took courage and sent his son Sweyn, Canute's nephew, a boy of


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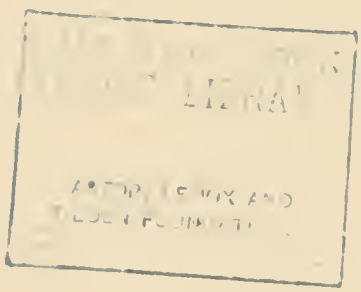

the same age as Hardacanute, to plead for him, and to offer himself as hostage for his future loyalty. King Canute bade him tell his father to assemble his men and ships and come to him, and then they would talk of reconciliation. This the earl did, and together they met the Kings of Norway and Sweden at the battle of Helga River, where, as we saw, many of their ships were swept away by Olaf's dam.

But Canute had never forgiven Earl Ulf for his treachery to him; and while they were lying in wait for the enemy's fleet in the Sound it happened that Earl Ulf invited him to a banquet to try to make peace between them. The earl was a most agreeable host, and endeavoured in every way to entertain and amuse the King, but Canute remained silent and sullen, and his face was stern. At last the earl proposed that they should play a game of chess, and a chess-board was set out for them. When they had played awhile the King made a false move, at which Earl Ulf took the King's knight; but the King put the piece back on the board and told the earl to make another move. At this the earl grew angry, for he was hasty of temper, stiff, and in nothing yielding; he threw over the chess-board, stood up, and went away. The King said: "Runnest thou away, Ulf the coward?" The earl turned at the door and said: "If thou hadst come to battle at Helga River thou wouldst have run farther than I run now if I had not come to thy help. Thou didst not call me Ulf the coward when the Swedes were beating thee like a dog," and with that he went out and retired to bed. The King also retired, but not to forget the words of Ulf. Early in the morning, while he was dressing, he was overcome by his anger, and said to his footboy: "Go to Earl Ulf and kill

him." The youth was afraid to disobey, but after a while he came back to the King. "Did you kill Earl Ulf?" said the King. "I did not kill him," said the youth, "for he was gone to church." At that the King called Ivar, his chamberlain, and said to him: "Go thou and kill the earl, wherever he is." Ivar went to the church, and up to the choir, and thrust his sword through the earl, who died on the spot. He came back to the King, with his bloody sword in his hand. "Hast thou killed the earl?" said Canute. "I have killed him," said he. "Thou hast done well," said the King.

After the murder was committed the monks ordered the doors of the church to be closed and locked. But the King sent a message that they were to be opened and high Mass sung. Then Canute gave a great gift of property to the church, and rode down to his ships, and lay there till harvest with a very large army.

When men fell away from King Olaf and joined Canute, as we have related before, so that Norway fell under his sway, Canute determined to return to England. He had Earl Hakon proclaimed Governor of Norway, and his son Hardacanute he led to the high seat at his side, gave him the title of king, and with it the dominion of Denmark. He himself took hostages from all the great lords for their fidelity, and returned to England.

When Earl Hakon died, Canute's elder son, Sweyn, succeeded him in Norway, but shortly after St Olaf's fall at the battle of Stiklestad his son Magnus had been accepted as King of Norway by the people, and Sweyn saw that he could not stand before him; so he retired to Denmark, where his brother Hardacanute

received him with kindness and gave him a share in the government of Denmark. There is little good to be said of Hardacanute except this one thing, that he was kind to his brothers and sisters, and even to his half-brother, Edward the Confessor, who succeeded him on the throne of England; for, after Hardacanute became King of England, the gentle Edward, wearied with wandering and exile from his native country, came to England, and was most lovingly welcomed by Hardacanute, and allowed to live in peace, so that he was more happy than his brother Alfred, or indeed than any other of his family. In other ways Hardacanute was a man with little to recommend him, wild, undisciplined, and childish. The English had cause to regret that they had chosen him to succeed the great Canute and his feeble son Harald.

Hardacanute came almost as a stranger to England when Harald died in 1040. He had not been in the country since his babyhood, and he was unknown to the English, as they were to him. His first act showed his savage disposition. He caused the dead body of Harald, his half-brother, to be dug up and the head cut off and thrown into the Thames; but it was dragged up soon after in a fisherman's net, and the Danes buried it in their cemetery in London. His next act was to impose an intolerable tribute on the country in order to pay the shipmen in his fleet a heavy sum of money. This aroused so much opposition that two of his collectors were murdered in Worcester, upon which he sent his Danish commanders to ravage and burn the whole country and carry off the property of the citizens. It was not long, therefore, before all that had been gained of good friendship and understanding between the

Danes and English by the wise rule of Canute was lost again and they hated each other as much as before. Nor was there any regret when, two years after his arrival in this country, the people learned that Hardacanute had fallen down in a fit while he was drinking at Lambeth, and that he had died without recovering his speech.

Instantly their thoughts turned to the race of their English kings, and before Hardacanute was buried beside his father at Winchester they had already chosen Edward as their king. He was crowned at Winchester, on the first day of Easter (1043), amid the rejoicings of the people, and with much pomp. Thus came to an end the union of Denmark and England, and with it the mighty sovereignty of which Canute dreamed, and which his own force of character had brought about. Norway and Denmark reverted to their own line of kings, and Edward and his successors sought no more to re-establish the great consolidation of nations over which Canute ruled.

But the power of the Danes in this country, though crippled and broken, did not immediately come to an end: they played a large part in English history for another twenty-four years, when the conquest of England by the Normans brought to our shores another branch of the great Northern family of nations and bound them to us for ever. William the Conqueror was descended from Rolf the Ganger, or Walker, the viking chief who had called the land he conquered in the North of France Normandy, or "the Northman's Land," in memory of the country from which he had come. The Dukes of Normandy were never part or parcel of the French people amongst whom they made their home in the North of France, but they speedily

felt themselves at home amongst the English and Danish population in England, for the same blood flowed in the veins of Saxon, Dane, and Norman. All alike traced their origin to the free countries of the North.

During the intervening space of which we have now to speak the Kings of Denmark and Norway more than once revived their claim on England; but the time for such a union had gone by, and the English people no longer desired to become a portion of the Danish realm: they felt themselves strong and independent enough to stand alone.

The first case of which we speak was a claim made by King Magnus the Good, son of St Olaf. No sooner was he seated firmly on the throne of Norway and become ruler of Denmark than he began to think of laying claim to England, as his predecessors had done. He sent ambassadors to King Edward the Confessor, with his seal and the following letter: "Ye must have heard of the agreement that I and Hardacanute made, that whichever of the two survived the other should have all the land that the other possessed. Now it hath so turned out, as you have doubtless heard, that I have taken the Danish dominions after Hardacanute. But before he died he had England as well as Denmark; therefore I consider that, in consequence of our agreement, I own England also. Therefore I will that thou now deliver me my kingdom; and if not I will seek to take it by force of arms; and let him rule it to whom fate gives the victory."

When King Edward read the letter and heard this demand he replied: "It is well known to all of you that King Ethelred, my father, rightfully ruled this kingdom, both according to the old and new law of

inheritance. So long as I had no kingly title I served those above me, in all respects as those do who have no claim to the kingdom. Now I have received the kingly title and am consecrated king. If King Magnus come here with an army, I will gather no army against him; but he shall only get the opportunity of taking England when he first hath taken my life. Tell him these words of mine." [1]

The ambassadors went back to King Magnus and gave him this message.

King Magnus reflected a while, and answered thus: "I think it wisest, and that it will succeed best, to let King Edward have his kingdom in peace, so far as I am concerned, and that I keep the kingdoms that God hath put into my hands." This was the last time that a King of Denmark laid formal claim to the throne of England.

[1] See the whole of Edward's speech in Snorre, "Saga of Magnus the Good," Laing's translation, 1889, vol. iii. p. 344-5.

# Chapter XXVII

## Edward the Confessor

### (1042-1066)

WE need not linger over the reign of Edward the Confessor, the weak and womanish king who came to the throne of England on the death of Hardacanute; in fact, the country can hardly be said to have been governed by Edward, for he placed himself almost entirely in the hands of Earl Godwin, who now with rapid strides advanced to be the first man in the kingdom and the real ruler of England. Edward was more fitted to be a monk than a king. The mournful circumstances of his life had no doubt helped to make him timid and retiring, and he seems to have inherited the weak character of his father, Ethelred the Unready. Yet he was beloved by his people, who regarded him as a saint and admired his devotion to the Church and to religion. He was simple and abstemious in his dress and habits, sparing in imposing taxes, and kind to the poor; it is said that he never uttered a word of reproach to the humblest person. Moreover, though the sons of Godwin stirred up strife at home, the King made no foreign wars, and the nation was thankful for peace. The only person toward whom he seems to have acted harshly was his mother, Emma, whom, as we have said, he deprived of all her wealth and lands, because

she had never assisted him when he was in distress. Edward must have been nearly forty years of age when he came to England from Normandy, just before Hardacanute's death; all these years he had passed in exile. It is a matter of wonder, when we consider the miserable fate that overtook his brother Alfred on venturing to England, that Edward came at all; but he was received with kindness, and lived quietly till the death of his half-brother. When he heard that Hardacanute had died he was lost in uncertainty whether to fly the kingdom or what to do. His weak mind was unable to form any plan, and in his perplexity he betook himself to Earl Godwin, throwing himself at his feet and praying him to assist him in escaping back to Normandy. At first Godwin was perplexed what course to take, but he no doubt reflected on the power which the King's weakness would throw into his own hands, and he determined on a bold course. Raising the King up, he reminded him that it was better to live worthily in a position of power than to die ingloriously in exile; that he was the son of a King of England, and the kingdom was his by right. If he thought fit to rely on him, whose authority was already so great in the country, he was sure that the nation would follow his lead. He proposed that Edward should marry his daughter, and thus cement the friendship with himself; and Edward, who was ready to promise anything to secure Earl Godwin's help, fell at once into his plans. Then, calling an assembly of the people, Godwin addressed them so fluently and cleverly that, partly by persuasion and partly by their willing consent, Edward was chosen king, and soon after crowned at Winchester on Easter Day (1043), all those

who opposed his election being driven out of the kingdom.

In spite of Edward's marriage with Editha, the saintly, learned, and beautiful daughter of Godwin, he soon fell out with the earl and his sons. The historians of the time find it difficult to say who was to blame in this, and where they fail we are not likely to succeed.

Whether Godwin was sincerely attached to the cause of Edward or not, it is likely that his great power made the King jealous; his sons, too, especially one of them named Sweyn, were wild and lawless, and constantly stirred up strife in the country. In the end Godwin and his sons were outlawed by the King and retired, the earl and Sweyn and Tosti to Flanders, and Harold to Ireland, where they lay all the winter. Edward was so incensed with the whole family that he even sent away his wife, stripping her of all her possessions, and handing her over to his sister. There were threats of an invasion by Magnus, King of Norway, and the whole country was disturbed; so much so that Edward occupied himself in gathering together his fleet; and in spite of inexperience and feebleness he himself took charge of the fleet at Sandwich, watching for the return of Godwin. But after all Godwin came back to England long before they were aware of it, and went secretly from place to place, making friends with the sailors and boatmen all along the coast from Kent to the Isle of Wight, so that he and Harold, his son, enticed to their side quite a large army, with which they began an advance on London.

King Edward, hearing this, sent for more men, but they came very late, and the fleet of Godwin sailed up the Thames to Southwark, waiting for the flood-

tide to come up. There they found the King's men awaiting them, and they sailed along by the south shore under the bridge, their land forces gathered on one side and the King's on the other. But a fog that arose obscured the armies from each other, and a great unwillingness was in the hearts of both to fight against their own race, for nearly all on both sides were Englishmen. They felt that if they began fighting each other, there would be no one to defend the land from their common enemies ; thus, happily, a truce was made between them, and a general council called. There Godwin spoke so well and eloquently that the King received him and his sons back into full favour, restoring to him his earldom and possessions. The Normans who had established themselves in Edward's friendship during the absence of Godwin, and who had helped to inflame the King against him, were now in their turn driven from the country, or escaped across the sea themselves. The Queen was recalled, and Godwin and Harold settled down on their property ; Sweyn, after many acts of piracy on the coast, and after committing more than one murder, had gone on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but fell a victim to the Saracens and never returned. The King had made Tosti Earl of Northumbria, but he was so turbulent and harsh that the Northumbrians rose up and drove him out. Harold, his brother, on hearing what had happened, went north with an army to his assistance, but the Northumbrians, most of whom were Norsemen and men of great spirit, declared that they could not put up with Tosti's cruelties, and they persuaded Harold to get the King to appoint a prince named Morcar in his stead. Tosti, enraged against every one, went with his wife and children to Bruges, in Flanders,

where he remained till the death of Edward. Shortly after this Godwin died suddenly, while sitting with his son Harold at a feast with the King, and Harold succeeded to the earldom.

The short remainder of Edward's reign was spent in planning for the succession. He sent to the King of Hungary to ask him to send back to England Edward the Ætheling, son of Edmund Ironside, who had taken refuge in his country. Doubtless the English people would have welcomed him as king; but he was, like so many of his family, a man feeble in mind and body, and he died soon after landing in England and was buried at St Paul's.

Some historians say, and William the Conqueror afterwards declared, that Edward then sent Harold over to him in Normandy to offer the crown to the duke; but we shall never know whether this is true or not. All we know is that Harold was in Normandy about this time, cast upon the Norman coasts by a storm, and that, as the price of his return to England, William forced him to swear above holy relics an oath that he would support the claim of the duke to the Crown of England.

After a reign of twenty-four years Edward laid down the crown that he had worn so uneasily, dying on the eve of Twelfth Day, immediately after the consecration at Westminster of the glorious edifice that he had built to receive his tomb.[1] His last act, the remission of the hated Danegeld, now happily no longer needed, was one of the most welcome measures of his long reign. His people thought that in the mild King they had lost a saint, and they called him, as we call him still, Edward the Confessor.

[1] Westminster Abbey was consecrated on the 28th of December 1065.

# Chapter XXVIII

## King Harold, Godwin's Son, and the Battle of Stamford Bridge

(1066)

THE king who succeeded Edward was in every way unlike him. The fair hair and beard and blue eyes of Edward, described by our chroniclers, his long, feminine fingers, his florid complexion and thin form, belonged to quite a different type from the strong, able man who succeeded him. Harold had, in fact, been the real ruler of the kingdom since his father died; and he seems to have inherited much of his father's genius for administration. He, like all his family, was strongly opposed to the Norman influence which was creeping into England, and he was looked upon by the people as the guardian of their liberties and the representative Englishman of his day. There was no dispute or hesitation about his accession to the throne: had all his race been royal he could not more quietly have succeeded to the crown. His troubles arose, not from the English people, but from his own family. The English chronicles say that he was the eldest son of Godwin, but there seems some probability that the Norse sagas are right in making him a younger son, who had been the favourite with his own father and also with the King, and that it was Tosti's anger at this preference

that made him, as the eldest son, take up arms against Harold. They tell us that when Edward was dying Harold bent down over the King, and then, straightening himself, he turned to those who were standing by, saying, "I take you to witness that the King has now made over to me the realm of England." When the news reached Tosti, who was, we remember, in exile in Flanders, he at once set out for Denmark and Norway, to persuade their kings to help him to recover his own possessions in England. To Sweyn, King of Denmark, he offered his help to win the country for him and make him King of England, as Canute, his uncle, had been, if he would dethrone Harold and restore to him, Tosti, his possessions in Northumbria. But Sweyn, who was in perpetual warfare with Norway, would not be induced to take another expedition on his hands.

"I," he replied, "am so much smaller a man than Canute the Great that I can hardly defend my own dominions against the Northmen. My uncle Canute got the Danish throne by inheritance: he took England by slash and blow. Norway he took without a blow at all. But it suits me much better to do what I can with the little ability I have than to try to imitate King Canute's lucky hits." Tosti was angry at this, and replied: "The result of my errand is not what I expected of a gallant man like thee when a relative came to ask thy help in time of need. It may be that I shall seek help where it might be less likely to be got, and that I may come across a chief less afraid than thou art, King, to undertake a great enterprise." The King and the earl parted, not the best of friends.

Then Tosti went on to the new King of Norway, Harald

Sigurdson, called "Hardrada," and talked him over to his cause, and at last he promised to go and attack England, Tosti having persuaded him that he could easily conquer England and add it to the dominions of Norway. Harald Hardrada sent out the split arrow, the sign of a war levy, through Norway, while Earl Tosti sailed to Flanders to collect the men who had accompanied him or had gathered to join his forces. There King Harald Hardrada joined him with a large fleet of nearly 300 vessels, besides provision-ships and smaller craft. Before leaving Nidaros, Harald had visited St Olaf's shrine, opened it, and taken out a piece of the Saint's hair; then he locked the shrine, and threw the keys into the sea, since which time it has never been opened again.

But it was with bad omens and many forebodings that Harald went on this expedition. A man in his army dreamed that he saw a huge witch-woman riding in front of the host on the back of a wolf, and she was feeding the wolf with the bodies of men, and blood was dripping from its jaws. Another dreamed that all over the fleet he saw a raven of death sitting on every ship's stern, waiting to devour the slain. And the King himself dreamed that King Olaf met him and prophesied his death. These visions made the whole host gloomy and fearful. The King took his wife and two daughters and one of his sons with him to England, but he caused his son Magnus to be proclaimed king over Norway in case he did not return again.

Harold, Godwin's son, was hardly seated on the throne when he heard that his brother Tosti was come to the South of England and was gathering great multitudes of men in the Isle of Wight. Harold had

been collecting an army, fearing an invasion by William of Normandy, for he knew well enough that William would never forgive him for having broken his oath to him, or for forgetting his promise to come back from England to marry his young daughter, to whom he had been betrothed in Normandy. He immediately prepared to lead his army south toward the place where he heard that Tosti was; but the earl took ship again and slipped away north to his own old earldom of Northumbria, where, in spite of his cruelties during his rule, he hoped to find some men to help him. Harald Hardrada had crossed over with his fleet to Orkney, where the Earls of Orkney, Paul and Erlend, joined him with a great force; and there he left his wife and daughters, taking his son Olaf with him, and sailing south to meet Tosti in Northumbria. When Tosti arrived he found the Norwegian King already plundering the country, and subduing the people all along the coast. At Scarborough, which lies beneath a high cliff, the King had fought his way inland, and on mounting the hill behind the town he had caused a great pile of brushwood to be made and set on fire; then his men with pitchforks threw the burning wood down upon the town, so that one house after another caught the flame, and the people surrendered. Then he passed on to the Humber, where Tosti joined him, and together they sailed up the river, awaiting the coming of Earl Morcar, whom Harold, Godwin's son, had made earl when Tosti fled abroad, and who was advancing from York with a large army.

The King of Norway drew up his men near Fulford, south-east of York. They stood with one end of their line toward the River Ouse, and the other ran along

a ditch on the land side. A deep morass, full of water, lay beside them. The earl's army came down along the ditch, advancing bravely, for at first it seemed that the Northmen at the end of the ditch would give ground before them. But King Harald Hardrada heard that the enemy were approaching; he ordered his war-charge to be sounded, and with his banner, the Land-ravager, borne before him, he urged on his men. Very vigorous was the charge, and the earl's army broke before it; they turned and fled, some up and some down the river, while many leaped into the ditch. So thick lay the bodies that it is said the Norsemen could go dry-foot over the morass, walking on the slain. The song called "Harald Hardrada's Stave" says about this:

"Earl Morcar's men
Lay in the fen,
By sword down-hewn,
So thickly strewn
That Norsemen say
They paved a way
Across the fen
For brave Norsemen."

Earl Morcar is said by the Northern chronicles to have been slain, and the rest of his men shut themselves up in York.

Is was at this moment that King Harold of England heard what was happening in the North. With incredible quickness he turned his army northward, marching night and day the long journey to York. On the 25th of September, 1066, that fateful year for England, the two armies met at Stamford Bridge, or Stanforda Bryggiur, as the Norsemen called it.

The Norsemen were far from expecting his appearance; only the night before, York had surrendered into the hands of the Norwegian King, and it had been promised that on the Monday morning a general "Thing" would be held in the castle to receive the King of Norway's officers and to accept his laws. The King had gone to his ships in a merry mood and was feasting with his men. It was at this very moment that Harold of England arrived with his great army from the South. On his appearance at York, the city had instantly opened its gates to him, amid the joy and good-will of all the people in the castle. So closely did Harold's army beset the town that no news was allowed to pass out to let the Norwegian King know what was happening inside. This was on Sunday night.

On Monday morning the King of Norway called a levy, and ordered that two out of every three men should follow him on shore, the remaining third to stay and guard the ships with his son Olaf, and the Earls of Orkney, Paul and Erlend. The weather was uncommonly hot, and the sun blazing. The men therefore laid aside their armour, and went on shore only with their shields, helmets, and weapons. They were very merry, for all had given way before them. They were on their way to the "Thing" at York, and they knew nothing about the arrival of Harold's troops. As they came near the castle they saw a cloud of dust rising before them, as from horses' feet, and shining shields and bright armour seemed to be visible through the dust. The King halted his people, and calling Earl Tosti he asked him what this could be. He said it seemed like a hostile army, but on the other hand it might be some of his relatives come to make

peace with them. The King commanded a halt to discover what army it was; and as it drew nearer it seemed to increase in size, and the shining arms were to the sight like glancing ice.

The King said that there could be no doubt that this was a hostile army, and he asked what counsel they should take in this strait. Tosti advised that they should turn about to their ships and either take refuge there or at least get their armour and weapons. But the King was not of that opinion. He was for making ready for fight there and then. He placed three of his swiftest lads on horses and sent them to gather the rest of their people, and he ordered his banner, the Land-ravager, to be set up, and arranged his army in a long, shallow, curved line, with himself and his banner and choice followers in the centre. And he said that the Englishmen should have a hard fray of it before they gave themselves up for lost.

The vast English army, both of cavalry and infantry, was not far off. Harald, King of Norway, rode once round his troops, to see that all were in position. As he came near the front, on his black horse, the horse stumbled and the King fell off. He sprang up in haste, crying out: "A fall is lucky for a traveller." The English Harold saw his namesake fall. He turned to the Northmen who were with him and said: "Do you know the stout man who fell from his horse, with the blue kirtle and the beautiful helmet?" "That is the King himself," said they. "A great man," quoth Harold, "and of stately appearance; but I think his luck has left him."

Then twenty horsemen, in full armour, with their horses also clothed in armour, rode forward with King

Harold at their head to speak to his brother, Earl Tosti. The brothers had been long separated, and neither of them at first recognized the other. Harold rode up to Tosti and asked: "Is Earl Tosti in this army?" "It is not to be denied that ye will find him here," said the earl. Then Harold, feigning to be a herald, said: "Thy brother, King Harold of England, sends thee salutation, and offers thee the whole of Northumbria; and if this is not enough, he will give thee a third of the kingdom, if thou wilt submit to him."

The earl said: "This is something different from the scorn and enmity he showed us last winter. But if I accept his offer what will he give the King of Norway for his trouble?"

"He has also spoken of this," replied the horseman. "This will he give him: seven feet of English ground to lie in, or as much more as he may need if he be taller than other men."

"If that is so," said Tosti, "go back and tell Harold to prepare for battle; for never shall it be said that Tosti failed the King of Norway when he came to England to fight for him. Rather we will resolve to die with honour if we may not gain England by a victory."

When the horsemen rode back King Harald Hardrada said to the earl: "Who was that man who spoke so well?" "That," said Tosti, "was King Harold Godwinson, the King of England." "Had we only known that," said the King angrily, "never would Harold have returned alive to tell the tale."

But the earl said: "Although I knew my brother, I would not betray him or be his murderer when he

came to offer me peace; but that he was bold to come thus so near us and ran a great risk, that is true, as you say."

"He was but a little man," said Harald, "yet I saw that he sat firmly in his stirrups."

On this the fight began; and so long as the Northmen kept their ground the English could do nothing against them, and kept riding round their close ranks, seeking a weak spot. At length the Norse grew tired of this, and broke their line, thinking to drive back the English in flight; but from that time all went against them, and they fell in multitudes under the English spears and arrows. King Harald Hardrada became wild with rage, and burst forth from his men, fighting and hewing down with both hands, so that no one could stand before him; but at length he was hit in the windpipe with an arrow, and he fell, for that was his death-wound. When they saw that the King was dead the whole army paused awhile, and Harold again sent forward offers of peace; but the Norsemen said they would rather fall one across the other than accept quarter from the English. It is told in the English chronicles that the hardest fight was on the bridge, where one single Norseman stood at the entrance to the way to cover the flight of the Norse to their vessels, cutting down all who ventured their feet upon the structure. So many had he killed that at last the English feared to attempt to pass, and all stood back, for the bridge was piled with dead. They offered him peace, but scornfully he rejected it, and called on them to advance, deriding them as cowards because they were afraid of one single man. At length an iron javelin, thrown from afar, transfixed the brave warrior, and on his death the English passed

the bridge and pursued the flying Norsemen. Many of the enemy fell through pure weariness, dying without a wound, and darkness came on before the slaughter was ended. Tosti was among the slain, but King Harold protected Olaf, the young son of Harald Hardrada, and sent him and the Earls of Orkney safely home, when they had sworn allegiance to him. This prince was known as Olaf Kyrre, or "the Quiet," in Norway, where he reigned from 1068 to 1093. It is said that Harold would allow no spoil to his soldiers; and on account of this many of them were discontented, and stole away from him.

Hardly was the battle of Stamford Bridge concluded than the news was brought to Harold that William had landed at Pevensey, and was overwhelming the South of England with his vast army. Seventeen days later the battle of Senlac, or Hastings, as it is usually called, was fought and won, Harold falling at set of sun, pierced by an arrow in the eye.

Thus came to an end at one time the English dynasty and the rule of Danish kings. No future King of Norway or Denmark laid claim to the Crown of England as part of his rightful heritage; but the Norman kings who reigned in England were themselves part of the same stock, and the fresh blood they brought was still Northman's blood, come round by way of Normandy.

The body of King Harald Hardrada was a year later transported from England to Nidaros,[1] and was there buried in a church that he had built. From the time when, at fifteen years of age, he had fought with his

[1] Nidaros, the old capital of Norway, was afterwards Throndhjem, or Drontheim.

brother, St Olaf, at the battle of Stiklestad until his death, he had ever been a bold and lucky warrior; but his luck turned at Stamford Bridge.[1] He was of great height—four Danish ells, or nearly eight feet. It was on this account that Harold offered him seven feet of English ground to be buried in, "or more if he needed it."

[1] Freeman considers that some of the details of the battle of Stamford Bridge, as given in the Norse story, belong rightly to the battle of Hastings.

# Chapter XXIX

## King Magnus Barelegs falls in Ireland

HARALD HARDRADA was not the last King of Norway to visit these countries. Long after this the Norwegian kings tried at times to assert their rights over the Orkneys and other parts of Scotland, and came over to enforce their claim. King Magnus, who reigned after the death of Olaf Kyrre (1094-1103), made several descents upon Britain and Ireland; he stayed so long, and grew so fond of the latter country, that he adopted the kilt, and was called in consequence by his own people "Magnus Barelegs." He seized the Earls of the Orkneys, the brothers Paul and Erlend, and sent them east to Norway as prisoners, and placed a son of his own over the Orkneys. Then he went south to the Hebrides (Sudreyar) and conquered the whole of the Western Isles, and seized the King's son. After that he sailed to Wales, and fought the two Hughs, Hugh the Stout, Earl of Chester, and Hugh the Bold, Earl of Salop, in the battle of Anglesea Sound. He had with him there the son of Earl Erland, afterwards Magnus "the Saint," Earl of Orkney, who sat down on the fore-deck with his psalter open before him and would not take arms. The King asked him why he had not armed. He said he had no quarrel with anyone there, and would not fight. Then the King said angrily: "If you dare

not fight, go down below, and do not lie among other people's feet, for I do not believe it is from religious motives that you refuse to fight for us."

But the lad sat on quietly, taking no shelter, and singing during the battle, but getting no hurt, though many of the King's men were sorely wounded. When Hugh the Bold was killed the others fled, and left the victory with King Magnus. He never forgave Magnus, the earl's son, for refusing to fight at Anglesea Sound, and he made him his serving-man; but one night the youth slipped away, and after concealing himself in the woods he made his way to the Court of the Scottish King, and did not return to the Orkneys until King Magnus was dead.

The King remained all the winter in the Hebrides, though many of his followers deserted and went home to Norway. The King of Scots offered him all the islands lying west of Scotland between which and the mainland he could pass with his rudder shipped. Then Magnus landed in Cantyre, and had his boat dragged across the neck of the mainland, himself holding the helm; thus he got Cantyre for himself as well as the islands. He sent thence to Ireland for a wife for his son, and married him to a daughter of Murtough, or Myrkiartan, King of Connaught, though his son was only nine winters old and she only five. Such early marriages were not uncommon in old times.

When Magnus returned home after this viking cruise, his people were astonished to see their King going about in a kilt, with bare legs and over-cloak, like a Scotsman or Irishman; most of his followers being dressed in the same way as the King. He was taller than most men, and could everywhere be seen towering above his followers. His people had many names

for him. Magnus the Tall some called him, others Fighting Magnus; but his usual name was Magnus Barelegs, or Barefoot. He always said that he cared not when or how he died, so long as he lived with glory; his motto was: "Kings should live for glory rather than for grey hairs." We shall see that he did indeed fall in youth, though rather ingloriously; but that was through no fault of his own.

When he had been nine years in Norway he began to long for the free life of the West. In 1102 he equipped a great fleet to go out of the country, and all the most powerful men in Norway accompanied him. He spent the winter with the King of Connaught, whose daughter had married his son, and they went on fighting raids together, conquering Dublin and a great part of its neighbourhood. Toward the spring both kings went on an expedition into Ulster, raiding and conquering in every direction; and after that Murtough returned home to Connaught, bidding Magnus good-bye, for he thought it was time to go back to his own country. Magnus sent some of his men to defend the property they had won about Dublin, and he himself sailed northward, and lay out to sea with his whole fleet ready to sail. Unfortunately, on inquiry, they found that they were short of provisions, and had not nearly enough for the voyage. Magnus sent a message to Murtough, asking him without delay to send a herd of cattle to him, and telling him that he would wait for them till St. Bartholomew's Day. But on the eve of that day the cattle had not arrived, and Magnus, impatient to be off, said he would go on shore himself and see if the cattle were coming, or if he could find other herds for food.

The weather was calm, the sun shone, and the road

lay through marsh and moss, with tracks cut through them and brushwood at the side of the tracks.

They pushed on till they got to a height whence they could see over all the surrounding country. They noticed in the distance dust rising up from the road as though under the feet of many men advancing toward them. Some said it was the Irish army, others that it was their own men returning with the cattle. They halted awhile, and one of Magnus's earls said: "What, sire, would you have us do? The men think that we are advancing imprudently, for it is known that the Irish are treacherous. Advise us what we should do."

The King commanded them to draw up in line, lest there should be treachery, he and Eyvind, his earl, going on first in front of the troop.

The King had a helmet on his head, and a red shield inlaid with a gilded lion, and his sharp sword, Segbit, in his hand. He wore a little short cloak over his shoulder above his coat of mail, embroidered before and behind with a lion in yellow silk, and all men said they had never seen one handsomer or more active than he. Eyvind had also a red cloak like the King.

As the dust-cloud came nearer they saw that it was their own men driving the cattle. The Irish king had been faithful to his friends and had sent the kine. Thereupon they all turned to go back to the ships; but the passage was so miry that they could go but slowly and in single file over the boggy places. As they were making their way thus, suddenly from every side up started the Irish and set upon them. Every mound or bushy point seemed to hold an enemy. Fighting began instantly, but in the order in which


*King Magnus in the Marsh at Dunpatrick*

they were going, divided into various bands and marching singly on a raised passage of ground, they were a good mark for the Irish, and they kept dropping one by one along the route.

Eyvind said to the King: "This retreat is going to be unfortunate for our people; what counsel shall we give them?"

"Blow the war-horn," said Magnus, "and bid them form themselves as well as they can into a body with their shields linked closely together, and so retreat backward under cover of their shields; as soon as we get on to firm ground out of this treacherous morass we shall clear ourselves fast enough."

This was done, but though the Irish fell in crowds under their arrows and spears, two seemed to appear out of the marsh for every one who dropped. At one very difficult and swampy piece of ground where there were few places on which they could stand or pass the Norsemen fell in great numbers. The King called one of his lords and bade him take his men out across a ditch to some points of higher ground and shoot from there, while he and the main body got across the bog. But as soon as ever these Northmen found themselves safe at the other side of the ditch, thinking that they had had enough of it, they made off as fast as they could to the ships, leaving their comrades in the lurch.

"Alas that ever I made thee a great man!" said the King when he saw this; "thou art deserting thy friends and thy King like a coward!"

At the same moment King Magnus was wounded severely by a spear, which passed through both his legs above the knees. Laying hold on the spear-shaft between his legs, the King broke it in two, crying out:

"This is how we break spear-shafts, my lads. On with you all! Nothing hurts me."

But it was not long afterward that, as he stumbled along on his wounded legs, an Irishman came up behind and struck him in the neck with an Irish axe, and that was his death-wound. He fell, and those around him fled. But his man, Vidkun Jonson, smote down the Irishman who had killed his master, and escaped, carrying with him the royal banner, and the King's sword, Segbit. But he was thrice wounded as he ran. He was the last man who got to the ships alive. Many great people fell with Magnus, but more of the Irish died than of the Norse. Those who got to the ships sailed away at once, and took refuge in the Orkney Islands. Magnus was thirty years old when he fell at Downpatrick, in Ulster. He was beloved by his people, and there was quiet at home in Norway in his days. But the *bondes* thought him harsh, and they were oppressed by the heavy levies he had to raise for his war-expeditions. He was buried in Ireland. He was so fond of that country that in the last song he made, when his followers were trying to persuade him to leave Ireland and return to his capital of Nidaros (now Drontheim) in Norway, he sang:

> "Why should we think of faring homeward?
> I shall not go back in the autumn to the ladies of Nidaros.
> Youth makes me love the Irish girl better than myself!"

But his son, Sigurd Magnusson, called the Jewry-farer, on account of his visit to Jerusalem, although he had married in Ireland, did not think as his father. As soon as he heard of his sire's death he set off immediately to claim the crown, leaving his Irish wife behind, and he took with him his whole fleet,

and never went back again to the West. It is said that he ever held Vidkun Jonson in the most affectionate regard, because he would not fly until he had saved the banner and killed the man who gave Magnus his mortal wound.

The fame of King Magnus never quite died out of Ireland. In old poems he appears warring at the head of a band of men for the conquest of Ireland, and in the "Ballad of King Magnus Barefoot" he is pictured as a being of gigantic proportions and a mighty warrior. Many legends and fairy-tales have Magnus for their hero.

# Chapter XXX

## The Last of the Vikings

THOUGH the viking period is generally spoken of as ending about A.D. 1100, it went on, as a matter of fact, long after that. The last of the great vikings—that is, of those whose entire life was spent in marauding expeditions—was Sweyn of Orkney, called Sweyn, Asleif's son, from his mother's name, because his father had been burnt in his house when he was entertaining a party at Yule. He was a wise man, and far-seeing in many things, but so dreaded that when it was heard that he was in any part of the islands all the inhabitants would hide their movable property under the ground or cover it with heaps of loose stones. When he was an old man he used to keep eighty men in his house at his sole expense; and his drinking-hall was the largest in the Orkneys. His plan of life was this: In the spring he would stay at home and sow the most part of his property with seed, doing a great share of the work himself; and while the seed was springing up he would be off marauding in the Hebrides or in Ireland, returning home after midsummer. This he called his spring viking. Then he stayed at home awhile to reap his crops and get in the harvest, and as soon as this was finished he would be away again up to the middle of winter, when it became too cold. Then he would

return again till spring. This he called his autumn viking.

The most famous of his viking raids was that called the "Broad-cloth Voyage," or in Norse "Skrud-viking." Sweyn had been plundering with five rowing vessels, all of good size, in the Southern Hebrides, and thence he went south to the Isle of Man, but he had obtained very little booty, for the people had got wind of his coming and had concealed their goods. So he went across to Ireland, plundering on the north coast, and making his way down to Dublin. At the entrance to Dublin Bay they came across two English merchant ships going to Dublin with a cargo of English cloth and other merchandise. Sweyn made for the vessels and offered to fight them. Being merchantmen, they made little resistance, and Sweyn's party took from them every penny's-worth that was in the vessels, leaving the Englishmen only with the clothes they stood up in and enough provisions to give them a chance of getting home alive. They got away as quickly as they could, while Sweyn and his men set sail for the Sudreyar, or Hebrides, and landed there to divide their booty. As a piece of bravado, they sewed the cloth they had taken over their sails, so that they looked as if they were all made of the finest cloth, and so home to the Orkneys; and because of this the cruise was known as the "Broad-cloth Cruise."

It was on one of his expeditions against Dublin that Sweyn met his fate. This was when he was an old man. Not long before, Earl Harald, who had been feasting with him after his return from the "Broad-cloth Cruise," on the English mead and the wine captured from the vessels, said to him: "I wish now,

Sweyn, that you would leave off your marauding expeditions. Your plundering has been successful a long while, but it might take a turn the other way; and it is good to drive home with a whole wain. Men who live by unfair means often perish by them in the end." Sweyn answered the earl with a smile: "Excellent advice, my lord, and spoken like a friend. A bit of good counsel from you is worth the having. But I have heard it said that you have some little matters on your own account to answer for, not unlike those of which you complain to me." "No doubt," said the earl, "I have my own share to answer for; I but spoke as it came into my head."

Sweyn answered: "I take your advice as it is offered to me, and, indeed, I begin to feel that I am growing old. Long fighting and hardships are beginning to tell upon me, and I had made up my mind to go only upon one expedition more. I will make my autumn viking as usual, and I hope it will go as well as my spring viking, and after that my warfaring shall be over."

"It is difficult to know, friend," said the earl, "whether death or lasting fame will overtake you first," and there their conversation ended.

Shortly after this Sweyn prepared to go on his autumn viking cruise with seven warships. They found little booty in the Sudreyar, and went on to Ireland, getting again as far south as Dublin, and entering the town before the inhabitants were aware of their presence. His attack was so sudden that he took the rulers captive, and gathered a great deal of plunder, and the upshot of the matter was that the fort surrendered to Sweyn and promised him a heavy ransom, and

that he might quarter his men on the town, and take hostages.

That night the chief men of the town had a meeting to consider the difficulties in which they were placed. They thought it grievous hardship that they should have to surrender their town to the Orkneymen, especially to him whom they knew to be the most exacting man in the whole West; and they agreed that they would cheat Sweyn if they could. Sweyn and his men were gone down to their ships for the night, but in the morning they were to come into the town to receive the hostages. The inhabitants resolved to dig deep trenches inside the city gates, and in other places between the houses in the streets through which Sweyn and his followers must pass, and armed men were concealed in the houses. They placed planks over the pits, which would fall in as soon as men stepped upon them, and strewed straw over the planks, so that they might not be observed. All that night they worked and in the morning they were ready.

With the morning's dawn Sweyn's men rose and armed themselves, to march into the town; and the Dublin men lined either side of the way from the city gate to the trenches. Not being on their guard, Sweyn and his men fell into them, and the Dublin people ran, some to the gates to close them, and some to the pits to kill the men who had fallen there. It was difficult to offer any defence, and Sweyn perished miserably with all who accompanied him. This is the end of Sweyn's history, and after him few men gave themselves up to marauding, as was the custom in the old days. Sweyn would often raid a village and burn six or more homesteads in a morning, so that the inhabitants fled wherever he came. An Icelander

named Eric, who went about with Sweyn and plundered with him, used to sing this ditty when they went out together :

> " Half a dozen homesteads burning,
> Half a dozen households plundered ;
> This was Sweyn's work of a morning—
> Wild his work, his vengeance cruel ;
> Every man who wanted fuel
> Warmed him with his flaming homestead."

Sweyn died between 1160-1165.

# Chronology

| A.D. | |
|---|---|
| 787 | First appearance of the Norse in Northumbria |
| 795 | First plunderings of the Norse in Ireland |
| „ | Irish monks in Iceland |
| 822 | Halfdan the Black, King of Norway (*d.* 860) |
| 832 | The Norse appear in Kent |
| 847 | First coming of the Danes to Ireland |
| 853 | Olaf the White, King of the Norse in Dublin |
| 867 | Ælla King of Northumbria |
| 871 | Alfred the Great, King of England (*d.* 901) |
| 872 | Harald Fairhair, King of Norway (*d.* 933) |
| 875 | The Danes are subdued by Alfred, and Guthrum is baptized |
| 878 | Harald Fairhair raids in the Orkneys and makes Ragnvald earl. During Harald's reign Iceland is peopled from Norway |
| 890 | Rolf Ganger, son of Ragnvald, Earl of More and Orkney, plunders in Normandy |
| 900 | Torf-Einar in Orkney. Harald Fairhair's second expedition to the West |
| 901 | Edward the Elder, King of England (*d.* 925) |
| 902 | The foreigners are expelled from Dublin |
| 917 | Niall Glundubh (Black-knee), King of Ireland, slain at battle of Kilmashog |
| 924 | Edward the Elder is chosen as "Father and Lord" by the Scots, Northumbria, and Strathclyde |
| 925 | Athelstan succeeds (*d.* 940) |
| 933 | Eric Bloodaxe, King of Norway |
| 934 | Hakon the Good returns to Norway and is crowned king |
| 935 | Eric Bloodaxe leaves Norway and gets a kingdom in England |
| 937 | Battle of Brunanburh |
| 939 | Murtough of the Leather Cloaks makes a warlike circuit in Ireland |

| A.D. | |
|---|---|
| 941 | Olaf Cuaran (of the Sandal) chosen King of Northumbria |
| 942 | The Danes desert Dublin and flee across sea |
| 944 | Olaf Cuaran expelled from Northumbria |
| 949 | Olaf Cuaran returns ; expelled a second time in 952 |
| 960 | Battle of Stord, and death of King Hakon the Good |
| 963 | Olaf Trygveson born in exile. Norway ruled by the sons of Eric Bloodaxe |
| 979 | Ethelred the Unready, King of England |
| 985 | Olaf Trygveson raids in the West and England. Sweyn Fork-beard becomes King of Denmark. |
| 988 | He marries Gyda, a sister of Olaf Cuaran. He is baptized in the Scilly Isles |
| 993 | Bambrough stormed |
| 994 | Olaf Trygveson and Sweyn Fork-beard are driven back from London. Olaf promises never again to fight with England |
| 995 | Earl Hakon slain ; Olaf Trygveson becomes king of Norway |
| 1000 | He dies at battle of Svold |
| 1002 | Massacre of the Danes on St Brice's Day |
| 1004 | Sweyn Fork-beard burns Norwich |
| 1009-10 | England ravaged by the Danes |
| 1010 | Siege of London and battle of Hringmara Heath |
| 1013 | Sweyn Fork-beard, King of England (*d.* 1014) |
| 1014 | Battle of Clontarf in Dublin. Ethelred II. goes to Normandy |
| 1015 | Reign of St Olaf in Norway (*d.* 1030) |
| 1016 | Death of Ethelred II. Reign of Edmund Ironside. Battle of Assandun and division of England between Edmund and Canute. |
| 1017 | Canute sole King of England |
| 1028 | Canute subjugates Norway |
| 1030 | Battle of Stiklestad and death of St Olaf |
| „ | Sweyn, Canute's son, King of Norway (*d.* 1035) |
| 1035 | Magnus the Good, King of Norway (*d.* 1047) |
| 1037 | Harald, Canute's son, King of England |
| 1040 | Hardacanute, King of England (*d.* 1042) |
| 1043 | Edward the Confessor, King of England |
| 1065 | Harold, Godwin's son, consecrated king |
| 1066 | Battle of Stamford Bridge |
| „ | Battle of Hastings |

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