

he planted in the snow over the ruins of the idols.

Then, seeing the bonders gathering fast, he stepped out and addressed them:

"Friends, we are here by command of the King, and you have to-day seen how powerless your gods are before the true God. As you know, your chiefs are now in Nidaros; when they return they will be Christian men, no longer heathen."

With this Sigurd and his men, laden with the spoil of the temple, returned to Nidaros. At the harbor mouth a man met them, for it was noontime.

"Hasten, Jarl! The Assembly has just been called!" he cried to Sigurd. "King Olaf posted me here to bid you hasten to the hall."

Sigurd hurried on to the palace, bidding his men wait in the outer rooms till he blew his horn. Then he made his way to the hall, entering it just as the Assembly was opened by the King.

"Chiefs and bonders," said Olaf, looking sternly around on the two score great leaders who sat below his high-seat, "I do not forget that you chose me to be your King, and gave me this realm of Norway; but some two weeks ago I called a General Assembly of the people, and there you and others refused to hear me preach the gospel of Christ, and only by promising to attend the winter sacrifice did I escape injury at your hands.

"Now you and all men know that I have in many places shamed the false gods, burnt their images and temples, and in their stead have erected the Cross of the true God. But I am conscious of the oath which I swore to you at that Assembly, and therefore I propose to sacrifice to your gods the greatest and highest sacrifice that man may offer, namely, human life."

A little murmur of joy ran around the hall as Olaf paused. On great occasions the Norsemen used to offer as the most acceptable sacrifice a number of slaves or

criminals, condemned to death. At the next words of Olaf, the joyous murmur ceased.

"I do not believe that thralls or malefactors should be offered to the gods; instead, they should delight in the blood of noble men, great chiefs, powerful bonders. Since you have refused to release me from my oath, I propose to sacrifice this sort of men, for we must do our best to appease the gods, that they may favor us. Am I right?"

As the King paused again, a doubtful murmur of assent rose up, and the men, not quite sure of Olaf's meaning, fixed their eyes on the King, who stood, handsome and erect, by his throne.

"Therefore," he continued, "I will offer to your gods the greatest sacrifice that Norway has ever known. You must be eager to receive from them the reward of your service and past offerings, and for the purpose of this offering I shall select you, Orm Lugg, you, Asbiorn of Orness, you, Stirkar of Gimsa, you, Kar of Gryting, and I will sacrifice you upon the high altar of Thor at Thrandeim. And after this, I shall select six others, the highest and worthiest men of this district from among you, and they shall be sacrificed likewise, that the gods may send us fruitful seasons and peace."

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CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW THE CHIEFS WERE BAPTIZED.

FOR a moment the chiefs stared at the King, incredulous and amazed. Then, as they caught the meaning of his ironic speech, the four men he had named leaped to their feet, and an angry roar went up from all. Olaf's uplifted hand stilled the murmur.

"Wait! You do not seem so eager for the companionship of your gods: can it be that you doubt their power to save you?"