

Here had gathered his enemies—the King of Sweden, King Svein, of Denmark, who had turned against Olaf, and the heathen men of Norway, who had chosen rather to leave the land than to accept the Cross. One by one the King's ships were taken, although he made such a defense as Norway had never seen, and at one time it seemed as though he would win, even against such odds. Then Jarl Eirik, the son of Jarl Hakon, tore the dragon-prows from his ships, and rowed to the attack under the sign of the Cross.

As the last of King Olaf's men fell on his forecastle, the King threw aside his shield and sprang overboard. He was famous as a swimmer through all the lands of the north, and now he dived deeply, swimming under the keels of his enemies' ships, so that it seemed to them that he had drowned.

Coming up outside the ring of vessels, the King swam swiftly to a fishing boat that lay in by the islands, and was pulled aboard by Sigurd and his wife Astrid, who had come too late to warn Olaf of the plot to betray him. That night, with his wounds bound, the King sat in the stern of the boat, which sailed swiftly south.

Sigurd urged Olaf to go north, offering to take him to his fleet, which could return and meet the invaders, but the King refused.

"No, my friends, I cannot do this. Toward the end of the fight Jarl Eirik hoisted the Cross, and I believe he made a vow that he and his men would renounce the old gods forever if he conquered me. Therefore, it seems to me that by the will of God, Norway has become Christian at last, and also I am not without fear that God has been displeased with my rule."

"Then shall we go to England with you? You have many great friends there, and King Ethelred, who is almost driven from his kingdom by the Danes, would gladly give you a share of his realm," said Astrid. Again the King shook his head.

"No," he replied, "let me be as dead to the realm of Norway, for I will never trouble it again. I will go to Rome, and after that to Jerusalem. There the Crusaders rule the Holy Land, and I will join them and devote the rest of my life to serving against the Moslem. I believe that God used me as an instrument for giving his Word to Norway, and now that this is accomplished, it were best to give peace to this troubled realm."

Seeing that it was useless to urge Olaf further, Sigurd sadly gave up, and two days later they arrived in his earldom of Agdir. Here the King remained for two weeks, then, fearing that his presence would bring trouble on his old friends, decided that he would at once start on his pilgrimage.

"Make your peace with the conquerors, Sigurd," he said. "They will be glad to retain you in your possessions here."

With this he selected a score of men and a small ship of Sigurd's, and departed from Norway forever. As he and Sigurd and Astrid stood together on the fore-castle, just as the anchor was raised, the King said sadly:

"My friends, it is for the best, believe me, and now peace will come to the land. The faith of Christ has been established, and although men may return at times to the old gods, I think that it will not be for long. Now take this sword of mine, even as you took one long ago in Ireland, and wear it in memory of me; I will never use a weapon again, save in defense of the Holy Land."

Embracing the King with tears, Sigurd and Astrid left the ship; and an hour later it was a white speck far on the horizon.

"Come, Astrid," said Sigurd. "we will never see Olaf again; yet he will always be remembered as the first King of Norway to overthrow the Hammer of Thor, and to plant in its stead the Cross of Christ!"

THE END.