

cutters, for they were small.

"I wonder what this means?" said the King, as they drew into the anchorage. "I had no tidings of visitors, when we left the city yesterday, and it is strange that the town is all alight!"

So before the ships had come to anchor, Olaf and Sigurd leaped into a small boat and were rowed ashore. Their ships had been seen entering, for great fires were lit on either side of the harbor, making everything plain to the sight, and a crowd of men met them as they landed.

"What is all this excitement about?" demanded the King, looking around in wonder.

A confused talking answered him. "Here, one at a time!" shouted Olaf, and one of the men stepped to his side.

"We have been driven from home, my lord King, and we come from the north. There two chiefs, Raud the Strong and Thori Hart, have revolted against the White Christ, have gathered a fleet, and are sailing against you. They are preparing to restore the temples of Thor and Odin and to burn the churches you have built; we, who are Christians, have barely escaped with our lives, fleeing in our small boats. The heathen will enter the Firth in a few days, unless you meet them first!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE WRESTLING MATCH.

OLAF at once went to the great hall, and there the fugitives came before him and told their story. The two Northern chieftains had taken advantage of the unexampled spell of warm weather to raise a fleet and sail down the coast, thinking to come upon the King just as he had come upon Jarl Hakon.

Olaf quickly consulted with Sigurd, the Bishop, and his other leaders, and their

opinion was that not a minute was to be lost. If the King embarked that night and sailed out of the Firth, he would reach the entrance by morning, and could wait for the heathen fleet there.

The King agreed to this plan, and at once sent word to his men to return on board the ships. The Thrandheim chiefs now proved their loyalty by refusing to return to their homes.

"No, King," said they, "you have dealt with us fairly and honorably, and we are sensible of it. We and our men will be of use if it comes to a battle, and the enemy may lose heart when they see us, for evidently they count on our forces joining them. So set up our standards on your ships, and we will gladly accompany you."

At this decision the King was overjoyed, for with these men were several hundred warriors in all, who had gathered at the Moeri Assembly. So a few hours later Olaf and Sigurd left Nidaros again, with a dozen ships, while more would follow as soon as they had been taken off their winter dry-docks.

The ships rowed down the Firth all night, while Olaf and Sigurd rested. The day had been a terribly hard one on both, and they were glad to get what sleep they could before meeting the advancing foes.

The week of warm weather seemed a wonderful thing to all the men, and not a few ascribed it to the favor of heaven upon Olaf. It was only barely past Yuletide, and although no one expected the warm weather to last, few of the oldest men could remember a winter when Thrandheim Firth had remained open, or had opened before April.

By morning they were outside the cape of Agdaness, where the traitor Thorkel had been executed. The King ordered the ships to be hove to here, in order to wait for the six other ships which were following from Nidaros. All day long they waited, seeing nothing of the rebels. Two or three small