

Without another word the King walked up to the large idol, and raising his heavy staff, struck it. The idol toppled over, fell to the stone floor, and broke in two parts. At the same instant Sigurd and his men rushed at the other images and swept them from their pedestals.

A loud cry of horror arose from the bonders, and Ironbeard, seizing a spear, poised it, in the act of hurling it at the King. As he did so, one of Olaf's men, who was outside, pierced him with an arrow, and he fell at the temple threshold.

The bonders drew back, in terror, and the King turned angrily.

"Who fired that arrow?" he shouted. The man who had done so stepped to the door.

"It was I, King Olaf, and I did it to save your life. Ironbeard had poised a spear at you—see, it is even now in his hand!"

Olaf looked at the fallen leader, and saw that the man spoke truly. "Order the Assembly called," he said to Sigurd. "Bid them have no fear."

When the people had taken their places again, Olaf came out of the temple and addressed them from the steps:

"Friends and bonders, I did not come here to shed blood, and I am bitterly grieved that Ironbeard drew his fate on himself. As I told you a little time ago, I will compel no man to leave his faith; I have discovered the wickedness of that course. But a few days ago your other chiefs, some of whom stand at my side, accepted from my hands the Cross of Christ, and now I offer it to you also.

"You have seen how your gods have fallen and broken. Where is their power, think you? The true God has protected me, has brought me to this kingdom and given it into my hand without a struggle, and whether you will it or not, his faith will prevail in Norway before many more years have passed."

The King paused, and one of the bonders arose to reply.

"Oh, King, your words to-day have fallen pleasantly on our ears, and we easily perceive that you have truth and justice in your heart. We see, too, that the gods are dead, and that they have no power before the Cross of the White Christ. But, King Olaf, the slaying of Ironbeard was an evil deed, whether you intended it or not, and before we say more on this subject we would like to know whether you will punish his murderer."

The bonder sat down amid a faint murmur of applause, and the Assembly fixed their eyes on Olaf. For a moment the King sat in silence, and it was evident that he was struggling with himself; then his face cleared.

"My people, I will not punish the man, for he saved my life. Wait! I am not through. Are there any relatives of Ironbeard present?"

Two men stood up. "We are distant relatives of his, oh, King, but he has left no others to mourn him save a single daughter."

King Olaf took off his helm. "My people, this is a lawful Assembly, able to give judgment and to punish criminals, with power to inflict penalty for offenses. I appoint you two bonders judges, and I take upon my own head the blood of Ironbeard. Whatever you shall think right, I will agree to, in compensation for his death. Whether you demand my life, or my exile, or a seat in money, these will I give, and you shall fear no punishment from my men."

At these words a silence fell on the host, and Sigurd gazed at Olaf in love and admiration. Truly, old Bishop Sigurd had not spoken in vain! A murmur of appreciation of Olaf's generous offer passed from mouth to mouth, and presently the two relatives of Ironbeard, after conferring together, stood up.

"King Olaf, by these words of yours you have indeed shamed us, who came to this Assembly with arms, and with war in our