

A REVERENT PILGRIMAGE.

PART V.

Let Ariel, or some other "airy spirit" who "does his spiriting gently," transport us to Thurso—the most northerly town in Scotland, and not far from famous John O'Groat's House. And now, fellow pilgrim, Heaven send us a fair wind and not too much of it, for we are going to embark upon that roughest of waters, the Pentland Firth, bound for yon dim blue islands, over which the Old Man of Hoy, rising thirteen hundred feet above the sea, keeps guard. Before we land in Kirkwall, the spire of St. Magnus' Cathedral attracts us; as it guides us when, in the long beautiful northern evening, we wander out to see what is to be seen. In the longest day in Orkney, the sun rises at three and sets at twenty-three minutes past nine. Think of a day of more than eighteen hours, and of a night that is never dark—for the light of morning mingles with the yet unfaded light of evening. The visitor to Melrose, following Scott's advice, seeks the old abbey by moonlight. We may wander to St. Magnus, if we will, in the softened glow of a mellow midnight that seems but a more ethereal day.

Situated as these islands are, we might expect that they would not escape the bold Norseman. And they did not. Their history, up to the time of the Norse invasion, may be stated in a few words;

to him was founded in 1137 by his nephew, Jarl Rognvald, but was not completed till three centuries later.

St. Magnus' Cathedral, built of red sandstone from the neighbouring islands, is over 234 feet long by 56 feet wide, with a transept 101 feet long by 28 feet wide. The oldest parts of the building are the centre of the cross—including the four massive pillars, 24 feet in circumference, spanned by beautifully formed arches, upon which rests the spire—and the portion of the choir nearest this. The rest of the choir, with a fine Gothic window, was added by Bishop Stewart in 1511. Part of the nave also is very old; the newest portion of it—the extreme west end—with window and porch, was built by Bishop Reid, who succeeded to the See in 1540. After the Reformation, the revenues of the Cathedral became the property of the Crown, and in course of time the building was threatened with the ruin which has overtaken so many of its kind. Partly through the liberality of a private individual, and partly by a grant from government, it was at length substantially repaired, and now a portion of it is in use as the parish church.

Within, St. Magnus suggests the Abbey Church of Dunfermline, as the latter suggests—though on a small scale, of course—magnificent Durham. The

horrible fate there? or some erring monk, or nun, like poor Constance in "Marmion"? Or was it but kept as a gentle reminder, as the "tawse" is preserved still in certain families, where, nevertheless, the rod is spared and the child spoiled? We shall never know.

With the Bishop's Palace adjoining the Cathedral, and the Castle of Earl Patrick Stewart adjoining the Palace, we feel as if we were visiting part of a ruined city. Earl Patrick's Castle, built



INTERIOR OF ST. MAGNUS' CATHEDRAL.

in the ornate castellated style of the sixteenth century, with projecting mullioned windows and cruciform shot-holes, is a stately ruin. Up a massive stair is the great banquet hall, the scene in *The Pirate* of the interview between Cleveland and Bunce. In the Bishop's Palace, which is much older than the Castle—though the circular tower, the principal portion remaining, is of the sixteenth century—King Haco died, after the Battle of Largs, in 1263. The Sagas relate how the grim old warrior prepared for death—paying his soldiers and receiving extreme unction; and how "all present bade the King farewell with a kiss." The Cathedral was then a century old. Earl Patrick, who lived nearly four hundred years after the Norse king, made no such pious ending. After a life-time of robberies, murders, treason, and almost every other imaginable crime, he was captured and sentenced to be executed; but as he was found so deplorably ignorant of religion as not to know even the Lord's prayer, the carrying out of the sentence was delayed for a short time so that he might receive instruction.

With that deplorable want of taste—and might I not say want of reverence?—which characterized Scotland for a century or two, the Castle and Palace were used as quarries for many years. Even the Cathedral began to suffer. In 1649 we find "my Lord Morton, his brother, presenting a desire in my Lord's name to the session." "That seeing his Lordship had ane purpose to erect ane tomb upon the corp of his umquhile father, in the best fashion he could have it; Therefore, understanding that there were some stones of marble in the floore of the Kirk of Kirkwall, commonly called St. Magnus, his Kirk, quhilk would be very suitable to the same tomb; Therefore, requested the favour of the session to uplift the said stones for the use aforesaid; Whereunto the session condescended, with this provision, that the places thereof be sufficiently filled up again with hewen stones." Very friendly and affable in my Lord Morton; but, really, one cannot help hoping that the "corp of his umquhile father" did not know! Fortunately for the Cathedral, no other noblemen applied; and before the palace and castle were quite demolished an accident made the destroyers pause and consider. Two men were quarrying together one day, and one of them had just drawn out a fine large stone, when (I shall not say unfortunately) he happened to let it fall on his companion's head.

In the island of Egilsay we find the ruins of a church, also dedicated to St. Magnus, on the very spot where the Saint was murdered. It consists of



KIRK WALL CATHEDRAL.

and it is more traditional than authoritative, for of early records there are none. Discovered about 385 B.C., Orkney is supposed to have been settled by the Picts, and to have received Christianity from the Culdees, the followers of St. Columba, who spread the doctrines of their religion among the several groups of islands in the North Sea as far as Iceland. In the ninth century the Norsemen conquered the Picts, and the gentle gospel of Christ gave place to the bloody rites of Odin.

Here the Icelandic Sagas take up the history, and it is such a tale as the *Nibelungen Lied*: love and hate; marriages, murders and magic; Jarls, subject to Norway, reigned, and one of them—Jarl Sigurd—embraced Christianity, with his whole people. It was one of those sudden conversions, not uncommon in that age. King Olaf Trygvasson, who had become a Christian while in England, suddenly appeared with his fleet in one of the Orkney bays, and, sending for Sigurd to come on board his vessel, gave him his choice between instant conversion and instant death. The Jarl chose conversion.

One of the Jarls, Magnus, after his assassination by his cousin, joint ruler with him, was adopted as the patron saint of Orkney. The church dedicated

walls enclose the dust of many a proud Jarl and Bishop, but time has obliterated almost every vestige of their tombs. While the repairs above referred to were in progress, a skeleton, supposed to be that of St. Magnus, was discovered in the choir, but the only connecting link between Saint and skeleton was the indentation of the skull. In 1263, King Haco, who had died in the Bishop's Palace adjoining, was buried there, preparatory to being taken to Norway, and in 1290 the young Queen Margaret, the Maid of Norway, whose untimely death wrought so much woe to Scotland. The church is full of old and strangely sculptured tombstones,

"Whose frail and crumbling frame
Preserves not e'en an airy name;
The lines by friendship's finger traced,
Now touched by Time's, are half effaced.
The few faint letters lingering still
Are all the dead man's chronicle."

A most interesting discovery was that of a cell, built in the thickness of the wall and closed by solid stone. It was about the height of a man, and hanging from the roof was a rusty chain, with a bit of barley bread attached. What a treasure trove for the romancer! Had some Ugolind met his