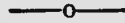


Stepping into the open space between the two armies, Olaf and Raud threw off their helmets and armor, and took hold of each other.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE CROSS AND THE HAMMER.

SIGURD'S heart sank as he saw the mighty muscles and powerful limbs of the pagan; but he glanced at Olaf, and while the latter's muscles were not so big, he knew that there was terrible strength in them.

At first the opponents tried out each other carefully; then, gradually warming up, Raud made terrific attempts to throw Olaf, but the latter resisted every endeavor, seemingly without effort. Now was seen the difference in the two men's lives, for while Raud speedily lost his wind, became flushed and tired, King Olaf looked as fresh as when he began the conflict, owing to his temperate life.

As the viking weakened, Olaf suddenly seized him by the thigh in an unguarded moment, and with a movement of his hands flung the man over his head. Amid a shout from his men, and a groan of dismay from those of Raud, the latter struck the ground, Olaf leaping to his side.

As the fallen man struggled up, the King seized his hand and aided him. "You have won fairly, Olaf," gasped Raud, looking with wondering eyes on his antagonist, "and my life is yours."

"Nay," said the King, kindly, handing the viking his garments, "I seek no man's blood, Raud. All I ask is that you serve me faithfully, and you shall have the same lands that you held from Hakon."

Messengers were at once despatched overland to Nidaros, to tell of the outcome of the conflict; then, after Raud, Thori and

his men had been baptized, for they accepted the condition willingly, Olaf embarked his men again and they returned south.

The Firth was of course closed again, so the ships were drawn ashore for the winter, and the chiefs of the bonders left the King for their homes, while he pushed on across the snow-clad hills with his own men. At Ladi they crossed the ice to Nidaros, and were received with much joy.

At Eastertide the marriage of King Olaf and Gudrun, the daughter of Ironbeard, was solemnized by Bishop Sigurd; and at the same time Sigurd Fairhair and Astrid were married. The wedding was a surprise to no one, as the whole court knew the story of their adventures, and had long since agreed that sooner or later the two would be wedded.

Easter of this year came late in April, and the Firth had been open for some time. As the procession left the church and wended through the streets of Nidaros to the great hall, a wonderful ship was seen entering the harbor. The prow ended in a dragon's head, the stern in the coils and tail of a dragon; both prow and stern were gilded, shining bravely in the morning sun. The hoisted sail represented a dragon's wings, and the glistening oar blades the beast's legs.

A cry of amazement went up from all, but the King turned, with a smile at Sigurd.

"This ship I have had built in secret, and it is my wedding gift to my faithful Jarl, Sigurd Fairhair. It is not fitting that a Jarl of mine should be landless, so I also bestow on him the earldom of the Agdirs, and command that he take his wedding journey thither in this his new ship!"

Four years later King Olaf Triggveson, with a few of his ships, was entrapped by the treacherous Jarl Sigvald among the islands of Svold Sound, while the main part of his fleet was out at sea.