

THE FOUNDING OF ST. MAGNUS CATHEDRAL.



AFTER the death of Hakon, the slayer of Earl Magnus, the earldom was divided between his two sons, Harald the Smooth-talker, and Paul the Speechless. There were many bitter quarrels between the brothers, until the death of the former left Paul as sole ruler. That happened in this wise.

When they had been reconciled after one of their quarrels, Harald invited Paul to a feast in his house at Orphir. On the morning before the feast, Earl Harald found his mother and his aunt working at a very beautiful shirt, which, they said, was a present for his brother Paul.

“Why should such a splendid garment be given to Paul and not to me?” asked the earl, taking it up in his hand to look at it. Then before the women could prevent him, he threw off the light cloak he was wearing and put on the gorgeous shirt. No sooner had it touched his skin than he was seized with violent pains, and with a sickness of which he died a few days later. The shirt had been poisoned in

order to cause Earl Paul's death, but it was Earl Harald who fell a victim to his mother's cunning and treacherous design.

Earl Paul did not long reign in peace. A new claimant soon appeared for part of the lands. This was Kali, the son of Kol and of Gunhild, the sister of the murdered St. Magnus, who had been brought up at the court of King Harald of Norway. He was a man of noble appearance, bold and skilful in war, and a born leader of men. He was in addition a noted skald or poet, and many of the songs which he made have come down to us in the Sagas.

He now changed his name to Rognvald, which had been a popular name in the isles since the days of Rognvald, Brusi's son, and he is known in history as Rognvald Kali, or Rognvald the Second.

Having the promise of help from Harald, the Norwegian king, Rognvald sent a message to Earl Paul, demanding that share of the islands which Earl Magnus had held. Earl Paul, who was a good ruler, and had many friends among the Orkneymen, replied that he would guard his inheritance while God gave him life. Rognvald then gathered ships and set sail for Shetland, but his fleet was destroyed in Yell Sound by the ships of Earl Paul, and he had to escape to Norway in a merchant vessel.

Earl Paul thereupon placed beacons on some of the highest hills in the islands, in order that he might have warning of any attempt by Rognvald to make a descent by way of Shetland, and the most important of these beacons was on the Fair Isle.

When Rognvald, angry and disappointed, arrived in Norway, he took counsel with his father Kol and

with an old man named Uni, who was reckoned a very wise man; and as he had many friends among the men of Shetland, it was decided to make a new attempt in the spring. By the aid of King Harald and of his friends a new fleet was then got ready.

When the ships were assembled, Rognvald stood up on the deck of his war-dragon to address his men. "Earl Paul and the Orkneyingers," he said, "have taken my inheritance, and refuse to give it up. My grandfather, the holy Earl Magnus, was treacherously slain by Paul's father Hakon, and instead of giving compensation for the wicked deed, Earl Paul would wrong me still more in the matter of my inheritance. However, if it be the will of God, I intend to fare to the Orkneys, and there win what is mine by right, or die with honour."

All the men cheered this speech, and when they were silent Kol rose to speak. He advised his son not to trust in his own strength for success. "I advise thee, Rognvald," he said, "to make a vow that if St. Magnus secures to thee thine inheritance, thou wilt build and dedicate to him in Kirkwall a minster of such size and splendour that it shall be the wonder and the glory of all the North."

Rognvald thought this the best of advice. Rising once more, he vowed to build in Kirkwall a splendid cathedral in honour of St. Magnus, and to remove thither with all reverence the remains of the sainted earl. No sooner had this solemn vow been taken than the wind became fair for sailing. The fleet at once put to sea, and reached Shetland in a few days.

Now Rognvald's real difficulties began. How could he take Earl Paul by surprise, as he wished to do,

with the beacon on the Fair Isle ready to give the alarm as soon as his ships came in sight? The wisdom of Kol and of Uni came to his aid. The former had a plan to cause the beacon to be lit on a false alarm, and the latter to prevent its being lit when it was needed.

Kol set sail from Shetland towards evening with a fleet of small boats. When they came in sight of the Fair Isle, they hoisted their sails half way up the masts, and with the oars the men kept back the boats so as to make them sail very slowly. At the same time they gradually hoisted their sails higher and higher, so that to those in charge of the beacon it might seem that a fleet was rapidly approaching. When it was dark the boats returned to the land.

The trick was successful. The Fair Isle beacon flared up to the sky, those on North Ronaldsay and on Westray followed, and soon every hilltop in the islands showed its warning light. The Orkney men took their weapons and hurried to Kirkwall, where Earl Paul had appointed them to gather in such a case, and all was ready to meet the enemy; but no enemy appeared. Those who had charge of the beacons came with the news of a fleet approaching; and after long waiting other men were sent to look for its coming, but they looked in vain. Quarrels soon began to arise as to who was to blame for the false alarm, for the men were angry at having been taken from their farm work to no purpose; so the earl had to make peace among them, and set other men to build up the beacons again and to watch them.

Now came Uni's turn. He sailed to the Fair Isle with three companions, and pretended to be an enemy

of Rognvald, saying many hard things against him and his men. His three companions went out every day to fish, but Uni himself stayed on shore. He gradually made friends with the people of the isle, and especially with those who had charge of the beacon. At last he offered to watch it for them, saying that he had nothing else to do, and his offer was accepted. Uni then poured water on the beacon, and kept it in such a state of dampness that it should be impossible to light it when it was needed.

Thus by the time that Rognvald was to set out from Shetland, Uni had everything prepared. As soon as his ships were seen from the Fair Isle, the men who had charge of the beacon tried to light it, but in vain. There was no time to warn Earl Paul, and Rognvald landed in Westray without any alarm being given. The bishop now interfered between the rivals, and a truce was agreed to in order that terms of peace might be arranged.

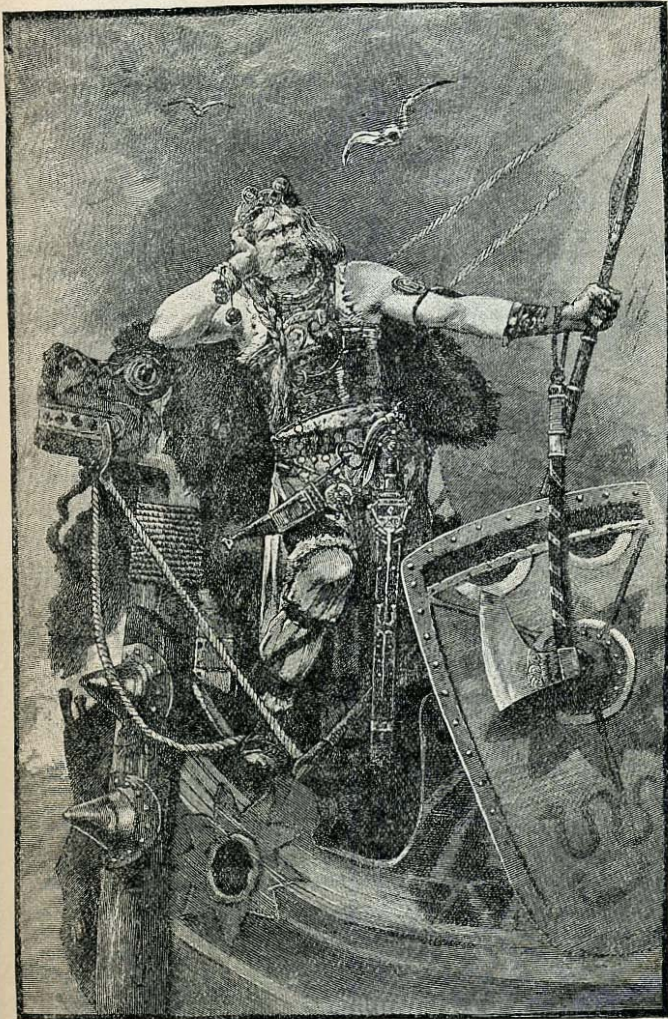
And now things took a strange and unexpected turn, so that Rognvald won the islands without any fighting. While Earl Paul was on a visit to his friend Sigurd of Westness, in Rousay, he went out before breakfast one morning and mysteriously disappeared. Sigurd sought him everywhere in vain. At last they discovered that he had been seized and carried off to Scotland by Sweyn Asleifson, and he never returned. Earl Paul's men gradually came over to Earl Rognvald, and he became ruler over the whole earldom.

Earl Rognvald now set about fulfilling his vow and raising a great cathedral in Kirkwall in honour of St. Magnus. In 1137 the work was begun under

the superintendence of Kol, but many a long year was to pass ere it should be finished. As the work went on it soon became very costly to the earl. In his difficulty he once more went to his father Kol for advice. Kol said that Rognvald should declare himself the heir of all landholders who died, and that their sons should have to redeem their lands from him. A Thing was called, and this law was passed; but the freemen also had the choice given them of buying their lands outright, so that the earl might not inherit them in the future. Most of the landholders took that plan, and now there was once more plenty of money for the cathedral.

When the work was so far advanced that part of the cathedral could be roofed in, the remains of St. Magnus, which had already been removed from Christ Church in Birsay, were laid to rest in the new minster. Many great men have been laid in the same place since then. Earl Rognvald himself was buried there, and there too the remains of King Hakon rested for a time before their removal to Bergen.

While on a visit to Norway, Earl Rognvald made the acquaintance of a Crusader who had returned from the Holy Land, and he determined that he also would become a "Jorsalafarer," or pilgrim to Jerusalem. The story of this strange voyage, in company with the Bishop of Orkney and many of his countrymen—half Vikings, half Crusaders—is well told in the "Saga of Earl Rognvald," and in our next chapter we give part of the narrative.



On the "Viking Path."