

THE JORSALAFARERS.

EARL ROGNVALD busked him that summer to leave the Orkneys, and he was rather late boun; for they had a long while to wait for Eindrid, as his ship did not come from Norway which he had let be made there the winter before. But when they were boun, they held on their course away from the Orkneys in fifteen big ships.

“They sailed away from the Orkneys and south to Scotland, and so on to England, and as they sailed by Northumberland, off Humbermouth, Armod sang a song,—

‘The sea was high off Humbermouth
When our ships were beating out,
Bends the mast and sinks the land
’Neath our lee off Vesla-sand;
Wave with veil of foam that rises
Drives not in the eyes of him
Who now sits at home; the stripling
From the meeting rideth dry.’

“They sailed thence south round England and to France. Nothing is said of their voyage before that they came to that seaburg which is named Nerbon

There these tidings had happened, that the earl who before had ruled the town was dead. His name was Germanus; he left behind him a daughter young and fair, whose name was Ermingerd. She kept watch and ward over her father's inheritance, with the counsel of the most noble men of her kinsfolk. They gave that counsel to the queen that she should bid the earl to a worthy feast, and said that by that she would be famous if she welcomed heartily such men of rank who had come so far to see her, and who would bear her fame still further. The queen bade them see to that. And when this counsel had been agreed on by them, men were sent to the earl, and he was told that the queen bade him to a feast with as many of his men as he chose to bring with him. The earl took this bidding with thanks; he chose out all his best men for this journey with him. And when they came to the feast, there was the best cheer, and nothing was spared which could do the earl more honour than he had ever met before.

“One day it happened as the earl sat at the feast that the queen came into the hall and many women with her; she held a beaker of gold in her hand. She was dressed in the best clothes, had her hair loose as maidens wont to have, and had put a golden band round her brow. She poured the wine into the earl's cup, but her maidens danced before them. The earl took her hand and the beaker too and set her on his knee, and they talked much that day.

“The earl stayed there very long in the best of cheer. The townsmen pressed the earl to settle down there, and spoke out loudly about how they would give him the lady to wife. The earl said he would fare on that

voyage which he had purposed, but said that he would come thither as he fared back, and then they could carry out their plan or not as they pleased. After that the earl busked him away thence with his fellow voyagers. And as they sailed west of Thrasness they had a good wind; then they sat and drank and were very merry.

“They fared till they came to Galicialand in the winter before Yule, and meant to sit there Yule over. They dealt with the landsmen, and begged them to set them a market to buy food; for the land was barren and bad for food, and the landsmen thought it hard to feed that host of men. Now these tidings had happened there, that in that land sat a chief who was a stranger, in a castle, and he had laid on the landsmen very heavy burdens. He harried them on the spot if they did not agree at once to all that he asked, and he offered them the greatest tyranny and oppression. And when the earl spoke to the landsmen about bringing him food to buy, they made him that offer, that they would set them up a market thenceforth on till Lent, but they must rid them in some way or other of the men in the castle; but Earl Rognvald was to bear the brunt in return for the right of having all the goods that were gotten from them.

“The earl laid this bare before his men, and sought counsel from them as to which choice he should take; but most of them were eager to fall on the castlemen, and thought it bid fair for spoil. And so Earl Rognvald and his host went into that agreement with the landsmen. But when it drew near to Yule, Earl Rognvald called his men to a talk, and said,—

“‘Now have we sat here awhile, and yet we have

had nothing to do with the castlemen, but the landmen are getting rather slack in their dealings with us. Methinks they think that what we promised them will have no fulfilment; but still that is not manly not to turn our hands to what we have promised. Now, kinsman Erling, will I take counsel from you in what way we shall win the castle, for I know that ye are here some of you the greatest men for good counsel; but still I will beg all those men who are here that each will throw in what he thinks is likeliest to be worth trying.'

"Erling answered the earl's speech: 'I will not be silent at your bidding. But I am not a man for counsel, and it would be better rather to call on those men for that who have seen more, and are more wont to such exploits, as is Eindrid the Young. But here it will be as the saying goes, "You must shoot at a bird before you get him." And so we will try to give some counsel, whatever comes of it. We shall to-day, if it seems to you not bad counsel or to the other shipmasters, go all of us to the wood, and bear each of us three shoulder-bundles of fagots on our backs under the castle; for it seems to me as though the lime will not be trusty if a great fire is brought to it. We shall let this go on for the three next days and see what turn things take.'

"They did as Erling bade; and when that toil was over, it was come right on to Yule. The bishop would not let them make their onslaught while the Yule high feast stood over them.

"That chief's name was Godfrey who dwelt in the castle; he was a wise man, and somewhat stricken in years. He was a good clerk, and had fared far and

wide, and knew many tongues. He was a grasping man and a very unfair man. He called together his men when he saw Rognvald's undertakings, and said to them,—

“‘This scheme seems to me clever and harmful to us which the Northmen have taken in hand. It will befall us thus if fire is borne against us, that the stone wall round the castle will be untrustworthy. But the Northmen are strong and brave; we shall have to look for a sharp fight from them if they get a chance. I will now take counsel with you what shall be done in this strait which has befallen us.’ But his men all bade him see to that for them. Then he began to speak, and said, ‘My first counsel is that ye shall bind a cord round me and let me slide down from the castle wall to-night. I shall have on bad clothes, and fare into the camp of the Northmen, and know what I can find out.’

“This counsel was taken as he had laid it down. And when Godfrey came to Earl Rognvald he said he was an old beggar carle, and spoke in Spanish; they understood that tongue best. He fared about among all the booths and begged for food. He found out that there was great envy and splitting into parties amongst the Northmen. Eindrid was the head of one side, but the earl of the other. Godfrey came to Eindrid and got to talk with him, and brought that before him that the chief who held the castle had sent him thither. ‘He will have fellowship with thee, and he hopes that thou wilt give him peace if the castle be won. He would rather that thou shouldst have his treasures, if thou wilt do so much in return for them, than those

who would rather see him a dead man.' Of such things they talked and much besides. But the earl was kept in the dark; all this went on by stealth at first. And when Godfrey had stayed a while with the earl's men, then he turned back to his men. But this was why they did not flit what they owned out of the castle, because they did not know whether the storm would take place at all; besides they could not trust the landfolk.

"It was the tenth day of Yule that Earl Rognvald rose up. The weather was good. Then he bade his men put on their arms, and let the host be called up to the castle with the trumpet. Then they drew the wood towards it, and piled a bale round about the wall. The earl drew up his men for the onslaught where each of them should go. The earl goes against it from the south with the Orkneyingers, Erling and Aslag from the west, John and Gudorm from the east, Eindrid the Young from the north with his followers. And when they were boun for the storm they cast fire into the bale.

"Now they began to press on fast both with fire and weapons. Then they shot hard into the work for they could not reach them by any other attack. The castlemen stood loosely here and there on the wall, for they had to guard themselves against the shots. They poured out too burning pitch and brimstone, and the earl's men took little harm by that. Now it turned out as Erling had guessed, that the castle wall crumbled before the fire when the lime would not stand it, and there were great breaches in it.

"Sigmund Angle was the name of a man in the earl's bodyguard; he was Sweyn Asliefson's step-

son. He pressed on faster than any man to the castle, and ever went on before the earl; he was then scarcely grown up. And when the storm had lasted awhile, then all men fled from the castle wall. The wind was on from the south, and the reek of the smoke lay towards Eindrid and his men. And when the fire began to spread very fast, then the earl made them bring water and cool the rubble that was burned. And then there was a lull in the assault.

“After that the earl made ready to storm, and Sigmund Angle with him. There was then but a little struggle, and they got into the castle. There many men were slain, but those who would take life gave themselves up to the earl’s power. There they took much goods, but they did not find the chief, and scarcely any precious things. Then there was forthwith much talk how Godfrey could have got away; and then at once they had the greatest doubt of Eindrid the Young, that he must have passed him away somehow, and that he (Godfrey) must have gone away under the smoke to the wood.

“After that Earl Rognvald and his host stayed there a short time in Galicialand, and held on west off Spain. They harried wide in that part of Spain which belonged to the heathen, and got there much goods. After that they sailed west off Spain, and got there a great storm, and lay three days at anchor, so that they shipped very much water, and it lay near that they had lost their ships. After that they hoisted their sails and beat out to Njorfa Sound [the Strait of Gibraltar] with a very cross wind. They sailed through Njorfa Sound, and then the weather

began to get better. And then, as they bore out of the sound, Eindrid the Young parted company from the earl with six ships. He sailed over the sea to Marseilles, but Rognvald and his ships lay behind at the sound; and men talked much about it, how Eindrid had now himself given proof whether or not he had helped Godfrey away.

“Nothing is told of the voyage of the earl and his men before they came south off Sarkland, and lay in the neighbourhood of Sardinia, and knew not what land they were near. The weather had turned out in this wise, that a great calm set in and mists and smooth seas—though the nights were light—and they saw scarcely at all from their ships, and so they made little way. One morning it happened that the mist lifted. Men stood up and looked about them. Then the earl asked if men saw anything new. They said they saw nought but two islets, little and steep, and when they looked for the islets the second time, then one of the islets was gone. They told this to the earl. He began to say, ‘That can have been no islets. That must be ships which men have out here in this part of the world, which they call dromonds; those are ships big as holms to look on. But there, where the other dromond lay, a breeze must have come down on the sea, and they must have sailed away; but these must be wayfaring men, either chapmen or faring in some other way on their business.’

“After that the earl lets them call to him the bishop and all the shipmasters; then he began to say: ‘I call you together for this, lord bishop and Erling, my kinsman: see ye any scheme or chance of ours that we may win victory in some way over those who

are on the dromond.' The bishop answers: 'Hard, I guess, will it be for you to run your long-ships under the dromond, for ye will have no better way of boarding than by grappling the bulwarks with a broad-axe; but they will have brimstone and boiling pitch to throw under your feet and over your heads. Ye may see, earl, so wise as you are, that it is the greatest rashness to lay one's self and one's men in such risk.'

"Then Erling began to speak: 'Lord bishop,' he says, 'likely it is that ye are best able to see this, that there will be little hope of victory in rowing against them. But somehow it seems to me that though we try to run under the dromond, so methinks it will be that the greatest weight of weapons will fall beyond our ships, if we hug her close, broadside to broadside. But if it be not so, then we can put off from them quickly, for they will not chase us in the dromond.'

"The earl began to say: 'That is spoken like a man and quite to my mind. I will now make that clear to the shipmasters and all the crews, that each man shall busk him in his room, and arm himself as he best can. After that we will row up to them. But if they are Christian chapmen, then it will be in our power to make peace with them; but if they are heathen, as I feel sure they are, then Almighty God will yield us that mercy that we shall win the victory over them. But of the war spoil which we get there, we shall give the fiftieth penny to poor men.' After that, men got out their arms and heightened the bulwarks of their ships, and made themselves ready according to the means which they

had at hand. The earl settles where each of his ships should run in. Then they made an onslaught on her by rowing, and pulled up to her as briskly as they could.

“But when those who were aboard the dromond saw that ships were rowing up to them, they took silken stuffs and costly goods and hung them out on the bulwarks, and then made great shoutings and hailings; and it seemed to the earl’s men as though they dared the Northmen to come on against them. Earl Rognvald laid his ship aft alongside the dromond on the starboard, but Erling, too, aft on the larboard. John and Aslak, they laid their ships forward each on his own board, but the others amidships on both boards; and all the ships hugged her close, broadside to broadside. And when they came under the dromond, her sides were so high out of the water that they could not reach up with their weapons. But the foe poured down blazing brimstone and flaming pitch over them. And it was as Erling guessed it would be, that the greatest weight of weapons fell out beyond the ships, and they had no need to shield themselves on that side which was next to the dromond, but those who were on the other side held their shields over their heads and sheltered themselves in that way.

“And when they made no way with their onslaught, the bishop shoved his ship off and two others, and they picked out and sent thither their bowmen, and they lay within shot, and shot thence at the dromond, and then that onslaught was the hardest that was made. Then those on board the dromond got under cover, but thought little about what those were doing

who had laid their ships under the dromond. Earl Rognvald called out then to his men, that they should take their axes and hew asunder the broadside of the dromond in the parts where she was least ironbound. But when the men in the other ships saw what the earl's men were about, they also took the like counsel.

“Now, where Erling and his men had laid their ship a great anchor hung on the dromond, and the fluke was hung by the crook over the bulwark, but the stock pointed down to Erling's ship. Audun the Red was the name of Erling's bowman; he was lifted up on the anchor-stock. But after that he hauled up to him more men, so that they stood as thick as ever they could on the stock, and thence hewed at the sides as they best could, and that hewing was by far the highest up. And when they had hewn such large doors that they could go into the dromond, they made ready to board, and the earl and his men got into the lower hold, but Erling and his men into the upper. And when both their bands had come up on the ship there was a fight both great and hard. On board the dromond were Saracens, what we call Mahomet's unbelievers. There were many black-amoores, and they made the hardest struggle. Erling got there a great wound on his neck near his shoulders as he sprang up into the dromond. That healed so ill that he bore his head on one side ever after. That was why he was called Wryneck.

“And when they met Earl Rognvald and Erling, the Saracens gave way before them to the forepart of the ship, but the earl's men then boarded her one after another. Then they were more numerous, and

they pressed the enemy hard. They saw that on board the dromond was one man who was both taller and fairer than the others; the Northmen held it to be the truth that that man must be their chief. Earl Rognvald said that they should not turn their weapons against him, if they could take him in any other way. Then they hemmed him in and bore him down with their shields, and so he was taken and afterwards carried to the bishop's ship, and few men with him. They slew there much folk, and got much goods and many costly things. When they had ended the greatest part of their toil, they sat down and rested themselves.

“Men spoke of these tidings which had happened there. Then each spoke of what he thought he had seen; and men talked about who had been the first to board the dromond, and could not agree about it. Then some said that it was foolish that they should not all have one story about these great things; and the end of it was that they agreed that Earl Rognvald should settle the dispute, and afterwards they should all back what he said.

“When they had stripped the dromond they put fire into her and burnt her. And when that tall man whom they had made captive saw that, he was much stirred, and changed colour, and could not hold himself still. But though they tried to make him speak, he never said a word and made no manner of sign, nor did he pay any heed to them whether they promised him good or ill. But when the dromond began to blaze, they saw as though blazing molten ore ran down into the sea. That moved the captive man much. They were quite sure then that they had

looked for goods carelessly, and now the metal had melted in the heat of the fire, whether it had been gold or silver.

“Earl Rognvald and his men sailed thence south under Sarkland, and lay under a seaburg, and made a seven nights’ truce with the townsmen, and had dealings with them, and sold them the men whom they had taken. No man would buy the tall man. And after that the earl gave him leave to go away and four men with him. He came down the next morning with a train of men and told them that he was a prince of Sarkland, and had sailed thence with the dromond and all the goods that were aboard her. He said, too, he thought that worst of all that they burnt the dromond, and made such waste of that great wealth that it was of no use to any one. ‘But now I have great power over your affairs. Now you shall have the greatest good from me for having spared my life and treated me with such honour as ye could; but I would be very willing that we saw each other never again. And so now live safe and sound and well.’ After that he rode up the country, but Earl Rognvald sailed thence south to Crete, and they lay there in very foul weather.

“The earl and his men lay under Crete till they got a fair wind for Jewry-land, and came to Acreburg early on a Friday morning, and landed then with such great pomp and state as was seldom seen there. The earl and his men stayed in Acreburg a while. There sickness came into their ranks, and many famous men breathed their last. There Thorbjorn the Swarthy, a liegeman, breathed his last.

“Earl Rognvald and his men then fared from

Acreburg, and sought all the holiest places in the land of Jewry. They all fared to Jordan and bathed there. Earl Rognvald and Sigmund Angle swam across the river and went up on the bank there, and thither where was a thicket of brushwood, and there they twisted great knots. After that they fared back to Jerusalem.

“Earl Rognvald and his men fared that summer from the land of Jewry, and meant to go north to Micklegarth [Constantinople], and came about autumn to that town which is called Imbolar. They stayed there a very long time in the town. They had that watchword in the town, if men met one another walking where it was throng and narrow, and the one thought it needful that the other who met him should yield him the path, then he says thus, ‘Out of the way; out of the way.’ One evening as the earl and his men were coming out of the town, and Erling Wryneck went out along the wharf to his ship, some of the townsmen met him and called out, ‘Out of the way; out of the way.’ Erling was very drunk, and made as though he heard them not, and when they ran against one another, Erling fell off the wharf and down into the mud which was below; and his men ran down to pick him up, and had to strip off every stitch of his clothes and wash him. Next morning when he and the earl met, and he was told what had happened, he smiled at it.

After that they fared away thence. And nothing is told of their voyage before they come north to Engilsness [Cape St. Angelo]. There they lay some nights and waited for a wind which would seem fair to them to sail north along the sea to Micklegarth.

They took great pains then with their sailing, and so sailed with great pomp, just as they had heard that Sigurd Jewry-farer had done.

“When Earl Rognvald and his men came to Micklegarth they had a hearty welcome from the emperor and the Varangians. Menelaus was then emperor over Micklegarth, whom we call Manuel. He gave the earl much goods, and offered them bounty-money if they would stay there. They stayed there awhile that winter in very good cheer. There was Eindrid the Young, and he had very great honour from the emperor. He had little to do with Earl Rognvald and his men, and rather tried to set other men against them.

“Earl Rognvald set out on his voyage home that winter from Micklegarth, and fared first west to Bulgarieland, to Dyrrachburg. Thence he sailed west across the sea to Poule. There Earl Rognvald and Bishop William and Erling, and all the nobler men of their band, landed from their ships, and got them horses and rode thence first to Rome, and so homewards on the way from Rome until they come to Denmark, and thence they fared north to Norway. There men were glad to see them, and this voyage was most famous, and they who had gone on it were thought to be men of much more worth after than before.”

*From the “Orkneyinga Saga,” translated by Sir G. W. Dasent, D.C.L.
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A Great Viking.
(From the picture by H. W. Koekkoek.)