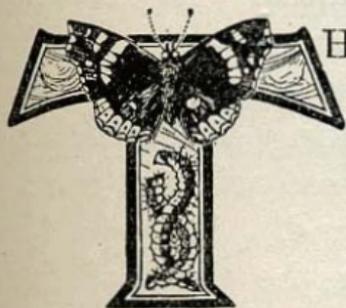


## THE ANNEXATION TO SCOTLAND.



THE history of Orkney during the two centuries which intervened between the battle of Largs and the annexation to Scotland contains little of interest. The earldom was held by Scottish families, first the Strathernes, and then the St. Clairs. The sympathies of the earls were with the Scots, the people were mainly Norse, and as a natural consequence quarrels frequently arose between the earls and their subjects. Another source of trouble was the fact that the earls generally held possessions in Scotland, and were thus subjects of Scotland as well as of Norway. The islands were neglected by both countries, being of little importance to Norway as governed by foreigners, and of little interest to Scotland as owned by a foreign country.

Several of the earls took a prominent part in the affairs of Scotland, and were men of mark and highly esteemed by the Scottish sovereigns. Thus Magnus, the last of the Angus line, was one of the eight Scottish noblemen who, in 1320, subscribed the famous letter to the Pope asserting the independence of Scotland; and Henry, the second of the St. Clairs,

was entrusted by King Robert the Third with the task of conveying the young Prince James to a safe asylum in France, when that prince was made prisoner by the English.

In the history of Orkney itself the only man of note among the Scottish earls was Henry, the first of the St. Clairs, the builder of Kirkwall Castle. Henry became earl in 1379. Under his rule Orkney and Shetland were once more united. He is the only one of the Scottish earls who can be at all compared with the old Norse jarls of Orkney. In everything except name he was king of his island dominions, ruling them as he pleased without much thought of either Norway or Scotland.

It was in the time of William, the third of the St. Clair earls, that the transference of Orkney and Shetland to Scotland took place. The circumstances which led to this important event must now be related.

After the battle of Largs a treaty of peace between Norway and Scotland had been signed at Perth in 1266, Norway resigning the Hebrides in return for an immediate payment by Scotland of four thousand marks, and in addition a tribute of one hundred marks to be paid annually in St. Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall. For every failure to pay this tribute—known in history as the Annual of Norway—Scotland was liable to a penalty of ten thousand marks. This treaty was afterwards confirmed by Hakon the Fifth and Robert the Bruce at Inverness in 1312.

In 1397 Norway, Sweden, and Denmark were united under one sovereign. When, in 1448, Christian the First became king of the united realms, payment

by Scotland of the Annual of Norway had been neglected for some forty years. According to the Treaty of Perth, Scotland was therefore liable to a penalty of over four hundred thousand marks. Christian's exchequer was empty; here was an opportunity of replenishing it. About 1460 Christian made a threatening demand for payment of the whole sum due.

The sum demanded was so large that it would have been no easy matter for Scotland to pay it, however willing she might be. Christian had concluded an alliance with France, and France had always been the firm friend of Scotland. When a rupture between Denmark and Scotland seemed inevitable, the French king employed all his influence to secure a compromise. He suggested that a marriage should be arranged between Prince James of Scotland, afterwards James the Third, and Margaret, Christian's daughter, trusting that the negotiations in connection with the marriage would lead to the friendly settlement of the matters in dispute.

Prolonged negotiations took place between the two countries. Scotland at first demanded the remission of the Annual of Norway with arrears, the cession of Orkney and Shetland, and a dowry of a hundred thousand crowns. To these terms Christian refused to listen. The death of James the Second at the siege of Roxburgh Castle suspended negotiations for a time. Some years after the accession of James the Third they were resumed. The final result was the Marriage Treaty of 1468, which brought about the transference of Orkney and Shetland to Scotland.

The main provisions of the Marriage Treaty were these:—(1.) That the Princess Margaret's dowry should amount to fifty thousand florins; ten thousand to be paid within the year, and the islands of Orkney to be pledged for the remaining forty thousand.—Only two thousand florins were paid, Shetland being pledged in the following year for the remaining eight thousand. (2.) That the rights of Christian as King of Norway should be exercised in the islands by the Scottish king until the forty thousand florins were paid. (3.) That the islanders should enjoy their own customs and laws while under Scottish rule.

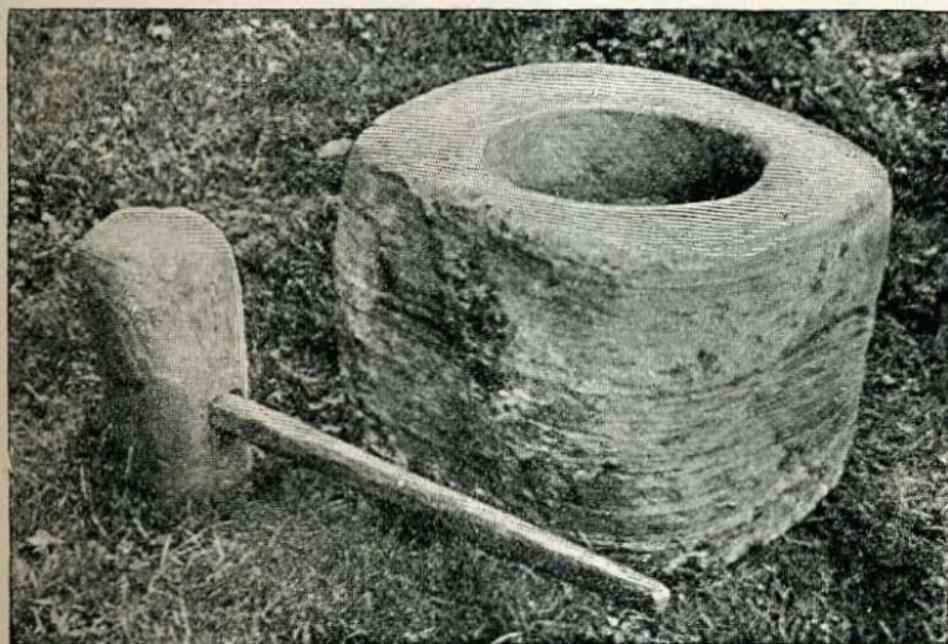
Christian would not consent to the permanent cession of the islands to Scotland under any conditions. In fact nothing but the direst financial straits can account for his even pledging them. But he had just finished a costly war in Sweden, his exchequer was empty, and the Scottish marriage seemed to him very desirable.

On this Marriage Treaty of 1468, and on the agreement afterwards made with Earl William, Scotland bases her claim to the islands of Orkney and Shetland. It is certain that Christian intended to redeem the islands, and even as late as 1668 the plenipotentiaries of Europe assembled at Breda declared that Denmark—it ought to be Norway—still retained the right to redeem them.

Scottish influence in Orkney had been increasing for many years previous to the annexation. The needy dependants of the various Scottish noblemen who held the earldom found the islands a happy hunting-ground for their avarice or for their need. There was thus a strong party in Orkney in favour

of the annexation to Scotland. But the large majority of the inhabitants could not but regard the change of masters with dismay. Scotland was an alien power, and had usually been a hostile one. Her laws and institutions had little in common with those of the northern earldom. Besides this, her tenure being only temporary, she had no inducement to promote the welfare of the islands, but on the contrary her obvious interest was to make as much profit as possible from her opportunity.

From 1468 onwards, till long after the termination of Scottish and the beginning of British rule, the lot of the islanders was far from enviable. The transformation of the leading Norse earldom into a minor Scottish county was the work of those years. The process by which this was accomplished was a long-continued series of injuries and oppressions, the story of which forms too long a tale to be fully told here.



*Knocking Stone and Mell.*