

overseas commerce.¹ Previous to this foreign merchants² who visited Ireland used to exchange their goods for home produce at the numerous *oenachs* or fairs held at certain intervals all over the country. These *oenachs* continued to be celebrated during the Viking period, but it was in the seaport towns, Dublin, Limerick, Cork, Wexford, and Waterford, that the most important trade was centred. Dublin, owing to its splendid position, half way between the Continent and the Scandinavian settlements in Scotland and Iceland, and within easy distance of England, became one of the wealthiest towns in the West. One Irish chronicler gives a glowing account of the treasures carried off from there by the Irish after the battle of Gleann Máma (A.D. 1000):

“In that one place were found the greatest quantities of gold, silver, bronze, and precious stones: carbuncle-gems, buffalo horns, and beautiful goblets . . . much also of various vestures of all colours were found there likewise.”³

Dublin is frequently mentioned in the sagas and seems to have been very well known to Icelandic dealers. In *Olaf Tryggvason's Saga* (*Heimskringla*) we read that during the reign of Olaf Cuaran a merchant called Thórir Klakka, who had been on many a Viking expedition, went on a trading voyage to Dublin, “as was usual in those days.”⁴ When Olaf's son, Sihtric Silken Beard, was King of Dublin (c. 994) the Icelandic poet Gunnlaug Ormstungu sailed from England to Ireland with merchants who were bound for Dublin.⁵

¹ Cf. *Laxdaela Saga*, ch. 21.

² According to an ancient poem on the great fair of Carman (Co. Kildare) foreign merchants visited this fair and sold there “articles of gold and silver, ornaments and beautiful clothes.” For other references see Joyce: *A Social History of Ancient Ireland*, Vol. II., pp. 429-431; O'Curry: *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, III., p. 531.

³ *War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, p. 115.

⁴ *Saga Ólafs Tryggvasonar* (*Heimskringla*), ch. 51.

⁵ *Gunnlaugs Saga Ormstungu*, ch. 8.