

## CHAPTER V.

## SHIPBUILDING AND SEAFARING.

THE almost complete absence of any allusion to Irish ships<sup>1</sup> during the eighth and ninth centuries shows that at this time the Irish had no warships to drive back the powerful naval forces of the Vikings. Meeting with no opposition on sea the invaders were able to anchor their fleets in the large harbours, and afterwards to occupy certain important positions along the coasts. In this connection it is interesting to note that the Irish word *longphort* (a 'shipstead'; later, 'a camp') is used for the first time in the *Annals of Ulster* with reference to the Norse encampments at Dublin and Linn-Duachail (840); hence it has been concluded that the early Norse *long-phorts* were not exactly fortified camps, but 'ships drawn up and protected on the landside, probably by a stockaded earthwork.'<sup>2</sup>

The Annalists tell how, when the Vikings were expelled from Dublin in 902, they fled across the sea to England, leaving large numbers of their ships behind them. It was probably the capture of these vessels that impressed upon the Irish the advantages of this new method of warfare, for they now began to build ships and to prepare to meet

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<sup>1</sup> Only one reference is to be found in the Annals. See *Annals of the Four Masters*, A.D. 728.

<sup>2</sup> Eoin MacNeill: "The Norse Kingdom of the Hebrides" (*Scottish Review*, Vol. XXXIX., pp. 254-276).