

CHAPTER VII.

THE VIKINGS AND THE CELTIC CHURCH.

BEYOND a few meagre allusions the Irish Annals throw no light on the progress of Christianity among the "foreigners" in Ireland during the ninth century. Fortunately, however, the Icelandic Sagas and the *Landnámabók* have preserved some interesting details concerning a small number of the Norse settlers in Iceland, who had previously come under the influence of Christianity in Ireland and in the Western Islands of Scotland. As far as we can gather from these sources the new faith seems at first to have made but little headway; heathenism retained a strong hold on the majority of the Norse people, and there can be little doubt that this form of religion was extensively practised in Ireland during the Viking age. Evidence of this is to be found in *The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, which describes how Authr, wife of Turgéis, sat on the high altar of the church in Clonmacnois, and gave audiences as a prophetess.¹ In this instance the high altar would seem to have corresponded to the *seithr hjallr* or platform which it was customary to erect in Icelandic houses when a *völva* or prophetess was called in to foretell the future.² Some writers³ also point

¹ *War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, p. 13.

Cf. also *Three Fragments of Annals*, p. 146: "In a battle fought between the Irish and the Norsemen the latter were driven to a small place surrounded by a wall. The druid Hona went up on the wall, and with his mouth open began to pray to the gods and to exercise his magic; he ordered the people to worship the gods. . . ."

² Cf. *Thorfinnsaga Karlsefnis*, ch. 3; *Vatnsdæla Saga*, ch. 10; *Tháttur af Nornagesti*, ch. 11; *Hvólfs Saga. Kraka*, ch. 3; etc.

³ e.g., C. Haliday: *The Scandinavian Kingdom of Dublin*, p. 12 ff. Margaret Stokes, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-98.