

CHAPTER IV

THE NORTHMEN

BEFORE the beginning of the ninth century little is heard of that branch of the Teutonic family which had at an unknown date settled in the peninsulas of Scandinavia and Jutland. They were known as seafarers from the time of Tacitus, but except for occasional piratical raids, such as that of Hygelac, the uncle of the Beowulf immortalised in the great Teutonic epic, they remained in the isolation of their sea-girt homes, untouched by Roman influence and Christian missions. Up to the ninth century they seem to have lived as scattered tribes with no central government. But about that time leaders arose who welded together the tribes of different districts and formed the kingdoms of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Perhaps these political changes directed the energy of the discontented and more independent spirits to the sea, but whatever was the cause, a great outburst of naval enterprise began about that time, which took the varying forms of discovery, colonisation and piratical raids. The attacks of the Danes on England were only one part of a great movement, and France, the Low Countries and Germany, suffered as much as did our own country from the attacks of these marauders. The name "Danes" is often applied indiscriminately to all the marauders, but "Northmen" is a better term, as the Danes were only one race among