

He was held to be a seer and a prophet, as well as a bard, as indeed true poets are in all ages. The compositions of the British and Celtic bards were either hymns or chants of devotion—like the Psalms of David—or celebrated the great deeds of the heroes, who were first in and last out of the battle. They aroused the patriotic enthusiasm of the living by glowing recitals of the achievements of the dead. But never having been committed to writing, their ballads and songs, or epic poems, if they produced any, have either perished altogether, or only exist in fragments, such as James Macpherson discovered among the peasantry in remote districts of the Highlands of Scotland, and gave to the world as the poems of Ossian, the greatest bard of the Celtic nations. The Danish skalds and Saxon gleemen, who succeeded to the British bards, drew from their predecessors many materials for popular song. The adventures of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table, the loves of Guinever and Sir Lancelot du Lake, the pranks of the boy with that wonderful mantle described in Percy's "Reliques," the merriment of King Cole, and the enchantments of Merlin—all traditions of the Celtic period—were embalmed in Celtic and afterwards in Saxon song, and found as much favour among the newer people who took possession of the British Isles as the legends of the Mohicans, the Cherokees, or the Creek Indians, when enshrined in the classic pages of Cooper or Longfellow, find among the English and Americans of the present day. King Arthur, his court, his queen, his Round Table, and his knights were for a thousand years the great themes of the minstrels in England and Wales, and have not yet lost their hold over the imagination of the people. King Arthur and King Cole are cited in nursery rhymes, and

the earliest songs of children; though Mr. Chappell, in his excellent work on English music, is heterodox enough to suggest that the King Cole of song is not the King Cole of history, but a mere public-house king or good fellow of the seventeenth century. Of the same period as King Arthur, though a generation or two later, were King Lud and King Lear, mere names and shadows of names, except for poetry, that has made them immortal. The King Arthur of history is less than a dream. The King Arthur of song is a living reality. The Lear that reigned in Britain has left no record on which the historian can build; but the Lear of the poet, the foolish, fond old man, sightless, and not in his perfect mind, stands out in Shakespeare's history, hallowed in the light of poetry, a man whom we know more intimately than we do many persons whom we met yesterday and talked to in the streets.

During the Saxon and early Norman period the minstrels played an important part in social life. They were the welcome guests of all ranks and classes, from the monarch's palace and the baron's hall to the tavern of the town and the cottage of the peasant.

'Twas merry in the hall
When beards wagged all;

when the minstrels set the beard in motion by singing their last new ballads of romance or adventure. The minstrels united in their persons, not only the functions of the song-maker and musician, but those of the newspaper editor and reporter of the present day. Although they sang songs of the olden time, they did not confine themselves to the past, but detailed the freshest news from the court or the camp, or put into verse the circumstances of the last horrible murder or desperate love-tragedy.

Of these minstrels, as of the bards