

adopt by instinct a sane attitude; and, of the two, credulity is certainly much more sane than incredulity. It does not much matter whether most of the stories are true; and (as in such cases as Bacon and Shakespeare) to realise that the question does not matter is the first step towards answering it correctly. But before the reader dismisses anything like an attempt to tell the earlier history of the country by its legends, he will do well to keep two principles in mind, both of them tending to correct the crude and very thoughtless scepticism which has made this part of the story so sterile. The nineteenth-century historians went on the curious principle of dismissing all people of whom tales are told, and concentrating upon people of whom nothing is told. Thus, Arthur is made utterly impersonal because all legends are lies, but somebody of the type of Hengist is made quite an important personality, merely because nobody thought him important enough to lie about. Now this is to reverse all common sense. A great many witty sayings are attributed to Talleyrand which were really said by somebody else. But they would not be so attributed if Talleyrand had been a fool, still less if he had been a fable. That fictitious stories are told about a person is, nine times out of ten, extremely good evidence that there was somebody to tell them about. Indeed some allow that marvellous things were done,