



KING ARTHUR AND HIS KNIGHTS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

ON the decline of the Roman power, about five centuries after Christ, the countries of Northern Europe were left almost destitute of a national government. Numerous chiefs, more or less powerful, held local sway, as far as each could enforce his dominion, and occasionally those chiefs would unite for a common object; but, in ordinary times, they were much more likely to be found in hostility to one another.

“For when the Roman left us, and their law
Relax’d its hold upon us, and the ways
Were fill’d with rapine, here and there a deed
Of prowess done redress’d a random wrong.”

—GUINEVERE.

In such a state of things, the rights of the humbler classes of society were at the mercy of every assailant; and it is plain that, without some check upon the lawless power of the chiefs, society