

The next thing to note in the matter is this: that in this barbaric time none of the *heroes* are barbaric. They are only heroes if they are anti-barbaric. Men real or mythical, or more probably both, became omnipresent like gods among the people, and forced themselves into the faintest memory and the shortest record, exactly in proportion as they had mastered the heathen madness of the time and preserved the Christian rationality that had come from Rome. Arthur has his name because he killed the heathen; the heathen who killed him have no names at all. Englishmen who know nothing of English history, but less than nothing of Irish history, have heard somehow or other of Brian Boru, though they spell it Baroo and seem to be under the impression that it is a joke. It is a joke the subtlety of which they would never have been able to enjoy, if King Brian had not broken the heathen in Ireland at the great Battle of Clontarf. The ordinary English reader would never have heard of Olaf of Norway if he had not "preached the Gospel with his sword"; or of the Cid if he had not fought against the Crescent. And though Alfred the Great seems to have deserved his title even as a personality, he was not so great as the work he had to do.

But the paradox remains that Arthur is more real than Alfred. For the age is the age of legends. Towards these legends most men