

Literary Department.

The Arthurian Legend.

(Read before the Gaelic Society.)

The Arthurian legends, a series of romantic traditions relating to a semi-mythical British hero, whose real position and exploits it is now somewhat difficult to determine, exercised an extraordinary influence on the literature of Mediaeval Europe. "It is certainly not a little remarkable," says a writer on the subject, "that a British prince, whose name was beneath the notice of contemporary history, and the earliest records of whom are meager and indefinite, should have had the fortune in later ages to become more illustrious in romance than Charlemagne himself. Perhaps the true explanation of the phenomenon, may be that the Norman trouveres who first began to make the story famous in the west, took all the more willingly to a hero whom tradition represented as the implacable foe of the English race, and whose victories were grateful to the descendants of the warriors that conquered at Hastings."

The real Arthur appears to have flourished in the sixth century, a leader of the Cambrian or Strathclyde Britons, according to some historians, of those of South Wales, according to others. These differences of opinion as to locality would seem to indicate that the exploits of various chieftains in widely separated quarters of the island became in course of time associated with a single personality, though they also lend color and strength to the fact recorded by Nennius that Arthur was the leader of the British clans in war, chosen as such by their kings and as such by them obeyed. It must be remembered that by the withdrawal of the Roman garrisons Britain was practically isolated from the rest of the world; so that it is quite possible that within the borders of his own island, Arthur really played a part not unlike that assigned him by the imaginations of other times and countries. It is at least certain that he was the mainspring of the South British resistance to the Saxon invasion of Wessex in 493; that he stayed their advance for a time by the victory