



Old Celtic Romances

P. W. Joyce

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Among the Celtic people of Ireland and the north-west of Scotland, story-telling has always been a favourite amusement. In the olden time, they had professional story-tellers, variously designated according to rank—ollaves, shanachies, filès, bards, etc.—whose duty it was to know by heart a number of old tales, poems, and historical pieces, and to recite them at festive gatherings, for the entertainment of the chiefs and their guests. These story-tellers were always well received at the houses of princes and chiefs, and treated with much consideration; and on occasions when they acquitted themselves well, so as to draw down the applause of the audience, they were often rewarded with costly presents.

To meet the demand for this sort of entertainment, ingenious "men of learning," taking legends or historical events as themes, composed stories from time to time; of which those that struck the popular fancy were caught up and remembered, and handed down from one generation of story-tellers to another. In course of time, a body of romantic literature grew up, consisting chiefly of prose tales, which were classified, according to subject, into Battles, Voyages, Tragedies, Military Expeditions, Cattle-Raids, Courtships, Pursuits, Adventures, Visions, etc.

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