

## PREFACE

THESE essays are intended as a general description of some of the principal forms of narrative literature in the Middle Ages, and as a review of some of the more interesting works in each period. It is hardly necessary to say that the conclusion is one "in which nothing is concluded," and that whole tracts of literature have been barely touched on—the English metrical romances, the Middle High German poems, the ballads, Northern and Southern—which would require to be considered in any systematic treatment of this part of history.

Many serious difficulties have been evaded (in *Finnesburh*, more particularly), and many things have been taken for granted, too easily. My apology must be that there seemed to be certain results available for criticism, apart from the more strict and scientific procedure which is required to solve the more difficult problems of *Beowulf*, or of the old Northern or the old French poetry. It is hoped that something may be gained by a less minute and exacting consideration of the whole field, and by



an attempt to bring the more distant and dissociated parts of the subject into relation with one another, in one view.

Some of these notes have been already used, in a course of three lectures at the Royal Institution, in March 1892, on "the Progress of Romance in the Middle Ages," and in lectures given at University College and elsewhere. The plot of the Dutch romance of *Walewein* was discussed in a paper submitted to the Folk-Lore Society two years ago, and published in the journal of the Society (*Folk-Lore*, vol. v. p. 121).

I am greatly indebted to my friend Mr. Paget Toynbee for his help in reading the proofs.

I cannot put out on this venture without acknowledgment of my obligation to two scholars, who have had nothing to do with my employment of all that I have borrowed from them, the Oxford editors of the Old Northern Poetry, Dr. Gudbrand Vigfusson and Mr. York Powell. I have still to learn what Mr. York Powell thinks of these discourses. What Gudbrand Vigfusson would have thought I cannot guess, but I am glad to remember the wise good-will which he was always ready to give, with so much else from the resources of his learning and his judgment, to those who applied to him for advice.

W. P. KER.

LONDON, 4th November 1896.