

**MEDIEVAL STORY AND THE
BEGINNINGS OF THE
SOCIAL IDEALS OF
ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649136124

Medieval story and the beginnings of the social ideals of English-speaking people by William Witherle Lawrence

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WILLIAM WITHERLE LAWRENCE

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Columbia University Lectures

MEDIEVAL STORY

THE HEWITT LECTURES

1911

COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY PRESS
SALES AGENTS

NEW YORK:

LEMCKE & BUCHNER

30-32 WEST 57TH STREET

LONDON:

HENRY FROWDE

AMEN CORNER, E.C.

TORONTO:

HENRY FROWDE

25 RICHMOND ST., W.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LECTURES

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IDEALS OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE

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New York

THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

1911

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Set up and electrotyped. Published September, 1911.

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ABSTRACTS

Norwood Press

J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

988

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TO
BRANDER MATTHEWS
INTERPRETER OF THE LITERATURE AND LIFE
OF MODERN TIMES

242366

PREFACE

IN accordance with the terms of the Hewitt Foundation, the following lectures, delivered during the months of February and March, 1911, at Cooper Union in New York City, are herewith issued in book form.

It seems desirable to remind the reader who is unfamiliar with the conditions under which the Hewitt Lectures are given that they are designed, in part at least, for a less academic audience than that usually in attendance upon lectures given under the auspices of Columbia University. In the present instance, no acquaintance with medieval literature, nor, indeed, any interest in it on the part of the audience could be taken for granted. The course was therefore designed primarily to reveal the charm of this literature, and its significance for modern times. With this end in view, such narrative poetry was selected for analysis as would best illustrate a single theme, — the development of social ideals in the history of the English people. The successive lectures were, however, mainly devoted to discussing this early poetry as literature, in the belief that an understanding of its subject-matter, its origins, and its spirit would best lead to a comprehension of its significance as an index of social progress. It should perhaps be stated that while the general outline of each lecture was strictly adhered to in actual delivery before the audience, the manuscript was not closely followed, much of the speaking being extemporaneous.