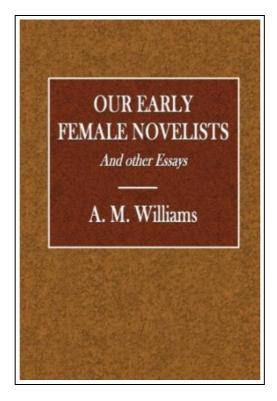
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OUR EARLY FEMALE NOVELISTS: AND OTHER ESSAYS (PAPERBACK)



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Print on Demand *****. From the beginning of the first essay. IN the history of English story-telling an altogether notable place is occupied by Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. They are remarkable not only as masterpieces of narrative, but as containing both description of incidents and delineation of manners; not only as triumphs of literary expression, but as giving artistic form both to the romance of chivalry and to the tale of common life. Wholly wonderful it is that at so early a period such directness of movement and perfection of style, such vividness of portraiture and realism of incident, are found in verse, while centuries pass before similar excellences are found in prose. It is, indeed, peculiarly interesting to contrast Chaucer's practice with the subsequent course of English fiction. He sets his wits against the absurdities of the popular metrical romance, and jingles gaily along in the Rime of Sir Thopas till Harry Bailey, whose eres aken with the drasty speche, pulls him up with an impatient na moore of this for Goddes dignitee/ but the merry ridicule glanced harmlessly from the garrulous tellers of long-winded stories, who continued to delight many generations of auditors; the seventeenth century loved such romances as Boyle's Parthenissa, and patient readers traced to the abrupt close its devious wandering in the regions of interminable talk and episode. When Chaucer abandoned his burlesque and took up the heavy tale of Melibeus, he inflicted on his audience a sample of that allegorical didacticism which long clung like a burr to the skirts of prose fiction; throughout mediaeval times the allegory followed hard after the story-teller and compelled him to moralize. In view, however, of the early course...

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