

ORIGINAL PREFACE.

THE amount of appropriate material, and of acquaintance with the mediæval geography of some parts of Asia, which was acquired during the compilation of a work of kindred character for the Hakluyt Society,* could hardly fail to suggest as a fresh labour in the same field the preparation of a new English edition of Marco Polo. Indeed one kindly critic (in the *Examiner*) laid it upon the writer as a duty to undertake that task.

Though at least one respectable English edition has appeared since Marsden's,† the latter has continued to be the standard edition, and maintains not only its reputation but its market value. It is indeed the work of a sagacious, learned, and right-minded man, which can never be spoken of otherwise than with respect. But since Marsden published his quarto (1818) vast stores of new knowledge have become available in elucidation both of the contents of Marco Polo's book and of its literary history. The works of writers such as Klaproth, Abel Rémusat, D'Avezac, Reinaud, Quatremère, Julien, I. J. Schmidt, Gildemeister, Ritter, Hammer-Purgstall, Erdmann, D'Ohsson, Defrémery, Elliot, Erskine, and many more, which throw light directly or incidentally on Marco Polo, have, for the most part, appeared since then. Nor, as regards the literary history of the book, were any just views possible at a time when what may be called the *Fontal* MSS. (in French) were unpublished and unexamined.

Besides the works which have thus occasionally or inci-

* *Cathay and The Way Thither, being a Collection of Minor Medieval Notices of China.* London, 1866. The necessities of the case have required the repetition in the present work of the substance of some notes already printed (but hardly published) in the other.

† Viz. Mr. Hugh Murray's. I mean no disrespect to Mr. T. Wright's edition, but it is, and professes to be, scarcely other than a reproduction of Marsden's, with abridgment of his notes.