

**FAME'S TWILIGHT;
STUDIES OF NINE
MEN OF LETTERS**

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Fame's twilight; studies of nine men of letters by K. N. Colvile

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K. N. COLVILE

**FAME'S TWILIGHT;
STUDIES OF NINE
MEN OF LETTERS**

W. H. Allen

FAME'S TWILIGHT

STUDIES OF NINE MEN
OF LETTERS

BY

By the Author of 'The Life of Philip'
K. N. COLVILE,

SOMETIME SCHOLAR OF CHRIST CHURCH,
OXFORD.



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FOREWORD.

THE revaluation, from time to time, of our lesser classics is one of the most necessary critical tasks, and the studies contained in this book are the outcome of an intimate acquaintance with the works named herein extending over a good many years. It is to such a re-examination of the manner and content of certain bodies of literary work, whose authors looked giants to their own contemporaries, that I have applied myself in the ensuing pages.

In this I do not think I have disobeyed Arnold's precepts—not to be led astray by historical considerations but to apply to everything the touchstone of the absolutely highest and best. Fashions in literature pass and reputations with them, but the reputations not always deservedly. Many writers are admired in their lifetime for the wrong reason, but the disproving of their early admirers' claims should not debar them from having the same chance as the slower start-

ers of a fame based on more solid grounds. Again, subsequent unanimity as to the pre-eminence of a supremely great artist should not preclude the recognition of a certain though lesser degree of genius in his defeated rival. Nor where an art has fallen almost into disuse should we forget its greatest practitioners in the past. Occasionally, too, a fashion revives, and it is interesting and salutary to note the prototypes of its contemporary exponents, their brief glory, their long oblivion.

A poet friend once came upon me reading a poet of the day before yesterday and reproved me for spending so much time on outworn specimens of the art he himself practised. I replied that his shade would very likely be gratified to find that my grandson inherited my tastes in this respect. He then picked up my book and remarked with surprise that in several chance met phrases this despised writer had anticipated passages of his own.

What really matters is that we shall not, from enthusiasm for our own rediscoveries or sheer reaction from popular neglect, fall into the error of disproportionate praise. Every age has its own points of contact not only with

the acknowledged classics but with those who may be deemed just to have failed to attain that rank. Indeed, he is a bold man who ventures to say where exactly the line is to be drawn between the two classes. In one of his essays Arnold names among the really great English poets, less than a score all told, Campbell and Moore. Contemporary opinion would not with anything approaching unanimity place these two higher than the subjects of some of my essays. And as none of the writers named herein has been judged worthy of inclusion in the series of 'English Men of Letters,' they may with propriety be classed as *Proxime Accessit*.