

DANIEL DEFOE

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Daniel Defoe by William Minto

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WILLIAM MINTO

DANIEL DEFOE

ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

Pocket Edition

DANIEL DEFOE



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BY

WILLIAM MINTO

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P R E F A C E.

THERE are three considerable biographies of Defoe—the first, by George Chalmers, published in 1786; the second by Walter Wilson, published in 1830; the third, by William Loe, published in 1869. All three are thorough and painstaking works, justified by independent research and discovery. The labour of research in the case of an author supposed to have written some two hundred and fifty separate books and pamphlets, very few of them under his own name, is naturally enormous; and when it is done, the results are open to endless dispute. Probably two men could not be found who would read through the vast mass of contemporary anonymous and pseudonymous print, and agree upon a complete list of Defoe's writings. Fortunately, however, for those who wish to get a clear idea of his life and character, the identification is not pure guess-work on internal evidence. He put his own name or initials to some of his productions, and treated the authorship of

others as open secrets. Enough is ascertained as his, to provide us with the means for a complete understanding of his opinions and his conduct. It is Defoe's misfortune that his biographers on the large scale have occupied themselves too much with subordinate details, and have been misled from a true appreciation of his main lines of thought and action by religious, political, and hero-worshipping bias. For the following sketch, taking Mr. Lee's elaborate work as my chronological guide, I have read such of Defoe's undoubted writings as are accessible in the Library of the British Museum—there is no complete collection, I believe, in existence—and endeavoured to connect them and him with the history of the time.

W. M.

January 1879.

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