

English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

COLERIDGE

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BY

H. D. TRAILL

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PREFATORY NOTE.

IN a tolerably well-known passage in one of his essays De Quincey enumerates the multiform attainments and powers of Coleridge, and the corresponding varieties of demand made by them on any one who should aspire to become this many-sided man's biographer. The description is slightly touched with the humorous hyperbole characteristic of its author; but it is in substance just, and I cannot but wish that it were possible, within the limits of a preface, to set out the whole of it in excuse for the many inevitable shortcomings of this volume. Having thus made an "exhibit" of it, there would only remain to add that the difficulties with which De Quincey confronts an intending biographer of Coleridge must necessarily be multiplied many-fold by the conditions under which this work is here attempted. No complete biography of Coleridge, at least on any important scale of dimensions, is in existence; no critical appreciation of his work *as a whole*, and as correlated with the circumstances and affected by the changes of his life, has, so far as I am aware, been attempted. To perform either of these two tasks adequately, or even with any approach to adequacy, a writer should at least have the