

A HISTORY
OF
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE



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LITERATURE

(1660-1780)

BY

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PREFACE

TO call a sketch of English authorship between 1660 and 1780 a history of Eighteenth Century Literature is, on the face of it, to be guilty of a misnomer. Eighteenth Century Literature should include everything between the death of Dryden and the birth of Sir Henry Taylor, and nothing else. At the same time, no other name has occurred to us by which, without confusion or affectation, those literary developments might be concisely described which came to their climax in the early part of the eighteenth century, and seem to be related to what we are in the habit of considering the characteristic features of that age in social, intellectual, and artistic matters. To call this the Augustan period would be to narrow it most unduly; to call it the classical period would be to introduce a series of ideas incongruous as well as inexact. No newly discovered nickname would please all readers at this time of day, and we must be content with a title so patently imperfect as that which we have chosen. The dates on the title-page may at least guard the writer against any misconception of the purpose which he set before himself to fulfil.