

The same thing is true in the case of great men and women. We play "Shakespeare" as representing a great poet, but we do not all read Shakespeare. "Newton" stands for science in the speech and writing of many who have never heard of the "Principia" and have not the faintest idea as to the subjects of which it treats. "Machiavelli" represents craft in politics in the minds of those who do not know to within a thousand years when he lived, or to within a thousand miles where he lived. In the same way even such famous names as Hannibal, Cesar, Charlemagne, Alfred, Voltaire, are names only to most of those who use them. That this ignorance should exist is, of course, inevitable. No man can have the whole biographical dictionary at his fingers' ends. But the want of knowledge exists to a far greater extent than it ought to do or need do, because modern readers have, to a great extent, given up any reference to originals, and have abandoned standard works for the delights of literary snippets and summaries.

It is when we come to the history of our own country that we find out how much is lost by this practice. It is of great importance that an Englishman should know something of the great men of his race—should understand what they did, why they did it, and to what extent Britain is indebted to them for what they suffered and what they achieved. It will be a misfortune if the day ever comes when the names of great Englishmen become counters merely. It is with the object of postponing this day—of enabling readers, young and old, to redeem the counters which have hitherto represented nothing of real value to them—that this book is written. In its pages are to be found brief and very simple biographies of some of the greatest Englishmen—men who in their day, each in his different manner, contributed to make Britain great, good, glorious, and free. All are not equally noble, all are not equally deserving of our admiration; but they have left behind them "footprints in the sands of time." They have all done something which we, their successors in bearing the burden of Empire, may admire, and which, in our degree, we may emulate and imitate.