

PREFATORY NOTE.

THE materials for a biography of Sterne are by no means abundant. Of the earlier years of his life the only existing record is that preserved in the brief autobiographical memoir which, a few months before his death, he composed, in the usual quaint *staccato* style of his familiar correspondence, for the benefit of his daughter. Of his childhood; of his school-days; of his life at Cambridge, and in his Yorkshire vicarage; of his whole history, in fact, up to the age of forty-six, we know nothing more than he has there jotted down. He attained that age in the year 1759; and at this date begins that series of his *Letters*, from which, for those who have the patience to sort them out of the chronological confusion in which his daughter and editress involved them, there is, no doubt, a good deal to be learnt. These letters, however, which extend down to 1768, the year of the writer's death, contain pretty nearly all the contemporary material that we have to depend on. Freely as Sterne mixed in the best literary society, there is singularly little to be gathered about him, even in the way of chance allusion and anecdote, from the memoirs and *ana* of his time. Of the many friends who would have been competent to write his biography while the facts were yet fresh, but one, John Wilkes, ever entertained—if he did seriously entertain—the idea of performing this pious work; and he, in spite of the entreaties of Sterne's widow