



INTRODUCTION.

BIOGRAPHY, taken in its widest sense, is generally a very entertaining and instructive species of history. Most countries have produced it. Its first composers were the minstrels. The exploits of the chiefs were the subject of their song. They were most extravagant in the praise of their heroes—exalting them to demigods ; they represented them as achieving what was far beyond the reach of human ability. This was the fabulous age of biography, when nothing was too marvellous for credulity. Plutarch, who flourished in the second century, was the first to give to biography the place it now occupies among the departments of literature.

During the dark ages, in the hands of the monks, it lost its former rank, and was enlisted in the service of a gross and vile superstition. The subjects were Popish saints, whose only title to notoriety was their cunning, hypocrisy, and intrigue. But the truest, purest, most beautiful and influential biographies are those which have been given to the world by the true Church of Christ. No branch of Christian literature has been more acceptable to the