

PREFACE

As we, living in more tranquil days, recede from the eighteenth century we recede also from the historical judgments passed upon its leading events by the critics of the nineteenth. We overlook, as from an eminence, the rugged plain traversed by our race, and reflect wonderingly on the ignorance of fundamental conditions and natural tendencies which brought disaster to that eighteenth century army. They mistook hillocks for mountains, in tiny creeks they greeted mighty rivers, and abandoning humanity's broad high-road, lost themselves in the thickets of controversy, moral, social, political; of insane altruism, of ethical delirium. They sought Utopia, and lo, were enmeshed in a jungle. What touching trust humanity reposed in those deluded and self-appointed forerunners, of intellectual vision so distorted, whose counsels led to anarchy and death! Rousseau, Priestley, Paine, Stanhope, Marat, Jefferson, Fox! what scouts for this poor blind Samson of the eighteenth century as it went blundering on to meet its doom so sardonic and withal so merited at Marengo.

We feel—perhaps it is but the self-flattery of youth—we feel ourselves wise to-day. From the vantage ground of the twentieth century we believe