

PREFACE.

THE present work is not in any sense a history, even on the most limited scale. It may perhaps be termed an appreciation of the century—of what it has done, and what it has left undone. The attempt has been made to give short, descriptive sketches of those great material and intellectual achievements which especially distinguish the nineteenth century from any and all of its predecessors, and to show how fundamental is the change they have effected in our life and civilization. A comparative estimate of the number and importance of these achievements leads to the conclusion that not only is our century superior to any that have gone before it, but that it may be best compared with the whole preceding historical period. It must therefore be held to constitute the beginning of a new era of human progress.

But this is only one side of the shield. Along with these marvellous Successes—perhaps in consequence of them—there have been equally striking Failures, some intellectual, but for the most part moral and social. No impartial appreciation of the century can omit a reference to them; and it is not improbable that, to the historian of the future, they will be considered to be its most striking characteristic. I have therefore given them due prominence. No doubt it will be objected that I have devoted far too much space to them—more