

PAGE

was the heart of mankind as he saw it, surveying Europe in his day, and knew it in his own bosom as well. He conceived of Prometheus as mankind, of his history and fate as the destiny of man; and being full of that far sight of Prometheus which saw the victorious end — being as full of it as the wheel of Ezekiel was full of eyes — he saw, as the centre of all vision, Prometheus Unbound — the millennium of mankind. He imagined the process of that great liberation and its crowning prosperities. This is his poem. In this poem the Revolution as a moral idea reached its height; that is what makes it, from the social point of view, the race point of view, the greatest work of the last century in creative imagination — for it is the summary and centre, in the world of art, of the greatest power in that century — the power of the idea of humanity." — George Edward Woodberry's *The Torch*.

Prometheus Unbound is Shelley's greatest drama and his greatest poem, fit subject at once for the philosophizings of a Hegel or the musical genius of a Wagner. Though it is possible to question some of its structural ideas in truth of detail, the truth of its movement and aspiration is beyond question. Its political value is no doubt less than its social value, and that again less than its spiritual value. It offers no sure method for the renovation of life, but it impresses us all with the assurance and reality of renovation. Having said this, however, we must caution the student against a too docile acceptance of the dicta of those critics who can see no vitality in Shelley's social and political views. The truth would seem to be that although the poet, as a student of affairs, remained steadily faithful to the teachings of William Godwin, yet his matter of belief in this regard was far less important to him — and ought to be so to us — than the energy and enthusiasm of his belief, its spirit and its power. If he placed too little stress on the effortful co-operation of men in the working out of their long salvation, we must remember that Shelley was a Romantic poet and that his own experience had actually given him more occasion for believing in the beneficent dynamic of Nature than in that of his fellows. In *Man*, as the great member and expression of Nature, he believed; of the mental and spiritual inertia of men he was but too keenly aware. Nor is it by any means certain that Shelley's social philosophy, more particularly examined, is as inadequate as it sometimes appears. It is not to be interpreted as postulating a purely external impulse, but rather an inclusive one. Shelley's mankind, though given fluctuating place in a vast Nature-organization, is not by any means a mechanized conception. He saw and felt the importance of arousing humanity to active enterprise in