PREFATORY NOTE

The collection of Essays contained in this volume was made by Mr. Arnold himself, and they are, therefore, in the opinion of a critic, at once competent and severe, worthy to be collected and preserved. Severe is perhaps hardly an epithet ever properly applicable to Mr. Arnold; but his judgment was as serene and unbiased in regard to his own compositions as in regard to those of any author whom from time to time he criticized. But it was further characteristic of him to be content to say one thing at one time; and he has been accused, not perhaps entirely without reason, of repeating the same thing in the same words, sometimes almost to the weariness of the reader. This habit, however, had at least the effect of fixing in the mind the phrases,
and therefore the thoughts or ideas which the phrases conveyed, and with which for the moment he was concerned. But in order to gather the mind of Mr. Arnold on the whole of any subject, literary, political, or religious, it is often necessary to read more than one paper, because in each paper he frequently deals with one aspect of a subject only, which requires, for sound and complete judgment, to be supplemented or completed by another. It is especially necessary to bear this in mind in reading what has become his last utterance on Shelley. In Shelley’s case he is known to have intended to write something more; not, indeed, to alter or to qualify what he said, but to say something else which he thought also true, and which needed saying.

This is not the place to attempt a character of Mr. Arnold, even as a critic or an essayist. A preface would expand into a volume if it attempted to indicate even the materials for thought on such subjects, handled by Mr. Arnold, as Poetry, Gray, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth (to name no
others), which are the subjects of some of the Essays here collected. This is the last volume he ever put together, and it contains some of his ripest, best, most interesting writing.

Perhaps it is well to add that these few words are contributed at the request of others. Inane munus indeed, but all that a friend can do!

C.