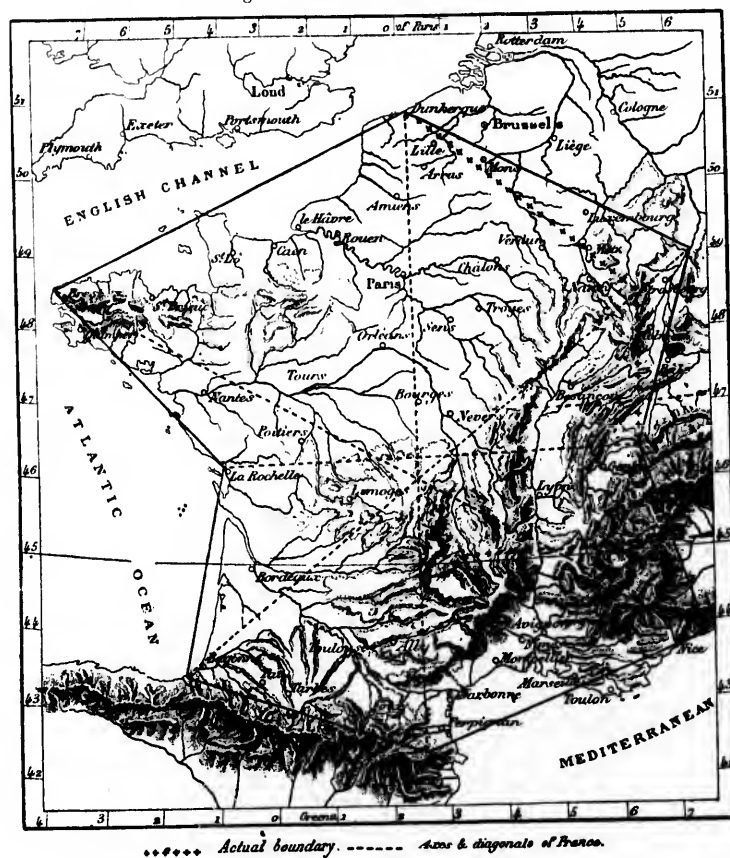


the inhabitants of France are indebted for the eminent position they hold to the climate, the soil, and the geographical features of the country which they inhabit, and a faithful description of these will be our task in the following pages.

It has often been said that France enjoys exceptional advantages from its position between the Mediterranean and the open ocean. This position has made it the intermediary between the old countries of the Mediterranean and Northern

Fig. 1.—THE CONTOUR OF FRANCE.



Europe. Nowhere else in Europe is communication between the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic equally facile. The plains of Poland and Russia may offer fewer obstacles to intercommunication, but the Baltic and the Black Sea, which they unite, are remote inland seas. In Central Europe the Alps are an obstacle to the exchange of ideas and merchandise between the North Sea and the Adriatic, but in France great natural highways join the Atlantic and Mediterranean ports and river basins. Mountainous Europe may be said to terminate at