

THE EVOLUTION OF THOUGHT IN MODERN FRANCE

THE object of the following pages is to account for the present state of public opinion and of national feeling in France by tracing them to their historic causes.

A war is one of the greatest trials that a nation can undergo : it taxes all its energies and possibilities and reveals its moral condition exactly as a great sentimental or intellectual crisis reveals the latent power or the unsuspected weakness of individuals. Under difficult circumstances of this kind a man not only acts but speaks in a manner which, whether to his credit or to his disgrace, proclaims the principles or the fallacies on which he has lived so far.

It is unquestionable that France has borne the brunt of the declaration of war, of the trying first weeks which followed, and of the slow months which elapsed after the battle of the Marne, in a manner which even her enemies must have admired, and which they probably did not expect. If you refer to the Yellow Paper (*Livre Jaune*) published in December 1914 by the French Government, you will find that the Germans had long cherished the idea that France was a decaying nation.

Were there traces of a similar notion, more or less conscious and reasoned, outside of Germany? It is impossible to deny it. Everybody must have met people who were surprised, even if they were delighted, to see France giving evidence of complete self-possession and following without effort the guidance of her best leaders.