

The catastrophe of 1870, which showed to the French that the United States of Europe was a rather premature conception, and demonstrated that courage, self-denial, and the virtues without which a nation must go to ruin are inconsistent with materialism, ought to have brought about a revulsion of feeling and of thought. It did produce this result in a few eminent individuals; and until 1876 the country at large, owing to its Government, appeared to have gone back to sound principles. But after 1876 the outlook changed rapidly. The masses began to forget the formidable lesson they had received a few years before, and the newly elected representatives of the country were very different from their predecessors. Where the difference lay was not very difficult to see. Most of these men had been students in Paris during the Second Empire, and their intellectual background was generally that which I have described above. Their philosophers were Taine or Haeckel, their theologian was Renan; the novels they had read were those of George Sand, the plays they had applauded were those of Dumas; they had believed in the United States of Europe, and imagined that the establishment of the French Republic was a first step towards the pacification of the world. The consequence was that the advanced doctrines which, in 1865, were confined to books, were found ten years after to underlie the Government of the country and to be paramount in the formation of the public spirit.

An objection must rise in the mind of the English reader: is it possible that literature, which after all is only the solace of idle hours, should have so much influence on the trend of public affairs? and is it not a fact that numberless French people were to be found,