

traces between 1870 and the present day of what, in default of a better word, we must call a reaction, France might with good reason be called a decadent nation. But not only were such traces visible, they were dominant in the most important realms of human activity; and there is no exaggeration in saying that the characteristic of contemporary French thought is its strong reactionary tendency.

It is remarkable that two of the writers whom I pointed out above as representing the speculative recklessness of the Second Empire actually refuted their own theories. These two writers are no others than Taine and Renan, and it is useless to dwell on the importance of a change in such influential authors. I do not mean that Taine gave up his philosophy or Renan his criticism: a man seldom remodels his intellectual equipment after he is forty; but both Taine and Renan adopted after the war a completely different attitude towards life from that which they had shown before. Their conviction was that, being philosophers, their sole business was to philosophize, and that the consequences of their philosophy did not matter; if the conclusion of their speculations was that patriotism was a remnant of barbarism, let those who heard of that conclusion act as their conscience dictated. The double catastrophe of the defeat and the Commune staggered this security: the author of *L'Intelligence* and the author of *L'Avenir de la Science* had it brought home to them that, in spite of their long years of intellectual aloofness, they belonged to a community of men and not of pure spirits, and for the first time the civic instinct was awakened in them. The results are well known. Taine devoted the rest of his life to the eleven volumes of his *Origines de la France*