

## CHAPTER I.

## THE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT IN FRANCE.

It will be generally admitted that the scientific spirit is a prominent feature of the thought of our century as compared with other ages. Some may indeed be inclined to look upon science as the main characteristic of this age. The century may thus be called with some propriety the scientific century, as the last was called the philosophical century, or as the sixteenth was termed the century of the Reformation and the fifteenth the century of the Renaissance. It is therefore natural that we should begin our study of the thought of the age with an examination of this side of modern culture.

1.  
Our century  
the scientific  
century.

It is not necessary to *define* what I mean by science.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The use of the word science and its adjective scientific has varied considerably in the English language. We must wait for Dr Murray's great work to give us a history of the word. I venture to assert that it acquired its present definite meaning about the time of the formation of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (1831). The two other great organisations which profes-

sedly started for the culture of what we now call science—*viz.*, the Royal Society for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge, and the Royal Institution—did not use the word officially in their charter or title, although it is used frequently in the documents and correspondence connected with the foundation of the younger, and occasionally in those referring to the older Society. The Royal So-