

26.  
Rousseau.

the French mind than of that of any other nation, it was for the time being thrown into the background and superseded by the thoroughly unscientific and unmethodical denunciations of Rousseau. The latter gained his great influence on French, Swiss, and German thought mainly through two works, 'The Social Contract,' and his educational treatise, 'Emile.' The former was the gospel of many of the leaders in the excesses of the French Revolution, the latter, as I stated above, inspired Swiss and German educationalists. Both dealt with great social problems.

Rousseau looked upon the existing organisations of society and the fabric of the State as mechanical contrivances, deliberately formed by contract or convention. He looked upon them not as the natural outcome of the social instincts of human beings, but as an inevitable contrivance through which a much better state of things, the state of nature, has been artificially modelled and controlled. Instead, however, of setting patiently to work trying to improve the existing machine of society, the treatise lays much more stress upon the desirable return to nature which, nevertheless, is admitted to be impossible. So far as any attempt is made towards construction, the treatise is full of contradictions and inconsistencies, accompanied by historical allusions frequently incorrect or misapplied; nevertheless it preached successfully the gospel of Fraternity and of the sovereignty of the People, a doctrine which was not new, which had been promulgated by Locke in this country, and had entered into the democratic spirit of the small republic of Geneva, Rousseau's native place.