

they only denied—in contradiction to the spirit of the time—the right of human groups, conscious of a collective personality, to dispose of themselves and to choose their allegiance. This right, which could have no meaning while national sentiment was weak and vacillating and the desires of subjects inarticulate, had gradually imposed itself—rather by the force of experience than with the authority of a doctrine—upon the respect of Christendom. It had, even in modern times, been more than once subordinated to diplomatic convenience, overborne by ambitious rulers or misguided nations; but never without protest. Far oftener, during the nineteenth century, it had been successfully asserted—against Napoleon, against the Turk, against the Austrian—with the applause of Europe. Only a few years earlier, the cession of Savoy and Nice to France had been submitted to a popular vote.¹ In the case of Alsace-Lorraine, the consent of the population was dispensed with. But before their nationality was taken from them, the free institutions under which they had lived happily allowed their protest to be heard. The solemn declaration of all their Deputies, elected by a last act of citizenship, under the invader's eye, to the Assembly at Bordeaux, records the historic refusal of a million and a half of French citizens to become German subjects.

Failing the consent of their new compatriots, the victors were willing to justify the annexation upon other grounds. Of its military object German statesmen made no secret.² But their apologists were not content

¹ April 22, 1860. There were 135,449 voters on the register: 130,839 voted; 130,533 approved the cession.

² The new frontier corresponded pretty nearly with that traced in anticipation of victory by the Prussian general staff ('the map with