

If the ideas of Kant may be said to have presided at the birth of modern Prussia under Frederick, those of his great follower, Fichte, may be said to have been the inspiring influence of its re-birth after the humiliation that Napoleon inflicted upon her. Fichte's teaching on the Divine Idea is probably still most familiar to this country through Carlyle's essay on the 'State of German Literature'.¹ We are here concerned with its political application. At the nadir of his country's fortunes, in the winter of 1807-8, Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* were a summons from the heights. What, he asked, in times of storm is the spirit that can be put at the helm? 'Not', he answers, 'the spirit of quiet civic loyalty to the constitution and the laws. No; but the consuming flame of the higher patriotism which conceives of the Nation as the embodiment of the Eternal, for which the high-minded man devotes himself with joy; the low-minded man, who only exists for the sake of the other, must be made to devote himself.' The addresses were an appeal from the power of force to the power of the spirit:

Strive not to conquer with bodily weapons, but stand before your opponents firm and erect in the dignity of the spirit. Yours is the greater destiny to found an empire of mind and of reason, to destroy the dominion of rude physical powers as the ruler of the world. . . . Yes, there are in every nation minds who can never believe that the great promises to the human race of a kingdom of Law, of Reason, and of Truth are idle and vain delusions and who consequently cherish the conviction that the present iron-handed time is but a progression towards a better State. These, and with them the whole later races

¹ *Miscellaneous Essays*, vol. i.