

young minds out of the state of depression and degradation into which Germany had been plunged through all the disintegrating agencies which had been at work for two centuries alike in politics, society, thought, and literature, but out of which also a new world of faith and hope was then springing up. And the success of Fichte's endeavour became evident by the fact that the closing years of the eighteenth century witnessed under his influence at Jena, that reform of German student life with its ideal of academic freedom which has become such an important power for good all through the nineteenth century and a characteristic trait in German culture.

In addition to this deeper personal and moral influence which Fichte exerted, his doctrine acquired popular notoriety through its bearings on the religious question, which were pushed into the foreground through the polemics and controversies¹ in which Fichte was entangled during that period, and which ended in his removal from Jena. With his departure the moral rigorism, the severity peculiar to Kant's and—though to a smaller extent—to his own² ethical views, gave way, at Jena,

¹ This was the notorious *Atheismus-Streit*.

² Kant had, especially in his later writings, included the doctrine of a radical evil propensity in human nature—a doctrine which we have seen was repellent to Schiller, though he did not feel able to disprove it. With Fichte this propensity acquires a different meaning; he liberates himself from the inherited theological view which has been pointed out as still lurking in Kant's ethical system. Fichte, though a stern and uncompromising

character, was, after all, much more a man of general culture, and had moved in very different circles and come under the influence of many interests which stirred that age but which did not touch Kant. Probably even greater than the influence of the poetical surroundings in Jena and Weimar was that of Jacobi and Spinoza. It was Spinozism which formed the intellectual bond, if such existed at all, between him and Goethe, and gave to the whole of his speculation a direction quite different from that