

**ON THE NATURE OF
THE SCHOLAR, AND
ITS MANIFESTATIONS**

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On the nature of the scholar, and its manifestations by Johann Gottlieb Fichte

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"Fichte, the German philosopher, delivered, some forty years ago, at Jena, a highly remarkable course of lectures on this subject: 'Ueber das Wesen des Gelehrten (on the Nature of the Literary Man).' Fichte, in conformity with the transcendental Philosophy, of which he was a distinguished teacher, declares, first: That all things which we see or work with in this earth, especially we ourselves and all persons, are as a kind of vesture or sensuous appearance: that under all there lies, as the essence of them, what he call the 'Divine Idea of the World;' this is the reality which 'lies at the bottom of all appearance.' To the mass of men no such divine idea is recognisable in the world; they live, merely, says Fichte, among the superficialities, practicalities, and shows of the world, not dreaming that there is anything divine under them. But the man of letters is sent hither specially that he may discern for himself, and make manifest itself in a new dialect; and he is there for the purpose of doing that. Such is Fichte's phraseology; with which we need not quarrel. It is his way of naming what I here, by other words, am striving imperfectly to name; what there is at present no name for; the unspeakable Divine Significance, full of splendour, of wonder and terror, that lies in the being of every man, of every thing—the presence of the God, who made every man and thing.

"Fichte calls the man of letters, therefore, a prophet, or as he prefers to phrase it, a priest, continually unfolding the godlike to men: Men of letters are a perpetual priesthood, from age to age, teaching all men that a God is still present in their life; that all 'appearance,' whatsoever we see in the world, is but as a vesture of the 'Divine Idea of the World,' for 'that which lies at the bottom of appearance.' In the true literary man there is thus ever, acknowledged or not by the world, a sacredness; he is the light of the world; the world's priest;—guiding it, like a sacred pillar of fire, in its dark pilgrimage through the

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"But above all, the mysticism of Fichte might astound us. The cold, colossal, adamantine spirit, standing erect and clear, like a Cato-major among degenerate men; fit to have been the teacher of the Stoic, and to have discoursed of beauty and virtue in the groves of academe! Our reader has seen some words of Fichte; are these like words of a mystic! We state Fichte's character as it is known and admitted by men of all parties among the Germans, when we say that so robust an intellect, a soul so calm, so lofty, massive, and immovable, has not indulged in philosophical discussion since the time of Luther. We figure his motionless look, had he heard this charge of mysticism! For the man rises before us, amid contradiction and debate, like a granite mountain amid clouds and wind. Hitherto, of the best that could be commanded, has been already tried against him; but it could not avail. What was the wit of a thousand wits to him? The cry of a thousand tongues assailing that old cliff of granite; seen from the summit, these, as they winged the midway air, showed scarce so gross as beetles, and their cry was seldom even audible. Fichte's opinions may be true or false; but his character as a thinker can be slightly valued only by such as know it ill; and as a man, approved by action and suffering, in his life and in his death, he ranks with a class of men who were common only in better ages than ours."—*State of German Literature, by Thomas Carlyle.*

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