

Editorial

Schiller's birthday

Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller was born 235 years ago on the tenth of November of 1759 in the small town of Marbach, which is beautifully situated on the banks of the Neckar River, to a poor family in one of the poorer towns of the district of Germany called Württemberg. The quick-witted lad was later accepted at the Military Academy, where most of the other young cadets were noblemen. He was given free schooling, a uniform, and his keep, and destined to a career as a military doctor. But he wanted to be a poet, and so, one night he fled Württemberg seeking the freedom to compose poetry, and went into exile.

Friedrich Schiller became a friend of Goethe, and taught universal history at the University in Jena. He was the chief inspiration of the Weimar Classic.

The themes of Schiller's theatrical works, for which he created a new dramatic theory synthesizing classical Greek tragedy and Shakespeare's works, resonated with those which inspired the American independence struggle during his early manhood. Into one early drama, *Kabale und Liebe*, he wove the story of the doomed love of two "beautiful souls," the commoner Luise Miller and the aristocrat's son Rudolf, into the contemporary tragedy of Hessian subjects shipped off to fight as mercenaries for the English crown against American patriots.

His most famous lyric poem, "An die Freude," (the "Ode to Joy"), celebrated not only the brotherhood of humanity under the loving embrace of the Eternal Father, but also the founding father of the United States, Benjamin Franklin, whose discoveries in electricity won him the applause of Europe as a "new Prometheus" who brought the "celestial spark" to man. Many eminent composers, including the young Schiller-enthusiast Franz Schubert, set the Ode to Joy to music. But it was Ludwig van Beethoven, whose life overlapped Schiller's, who worked for three decades to shape an adequate setting for the "schöne Götterfunken" (beautiful divine spark); when he achieved it in the unheard-of choral finale to his Ninth Symphony in 1823, all the other settings were forgotten.

Schiller never traveled beyond the borders of then-fragmented Germany, yet he vividly portrayed the liberator of Switzerland, William Tell, the queen of Scotland Mary Stuart, and St. Joan of France, each in their native settings. He wrote a *History of the Thirty Years' War*, which had so indelibly imprinted the history and soil of Germany; and he created, around the issues and personalities of the 16th and 17th centuries before and during that war, his unforgettable dramas *Don Carlos* and the *Wallenstein* trilogy.

Throughout the 1800s, Schiller, who died at the peak of his powers in 1804, continued to inspire with his joy, his belief in the artist's God-given mission to transform the world, his will to depict historical truth in all of its subtlety and complexity. In the 1830s, a cantata by the German composer Andreas Romberg on Schiller's lyric *The Power of Song*, was published in Boston in English translation, as a fitting piece for the amateur choral societies which then abounded in the United States. In the 1840s, the great musicians Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn wrote settings of Schiller's lyrics for the annual Nov. 10 birthday celebrations. In 1859, the Schiller Centennial was celebrated with the greatest pomp all over the world, and especially in the United States. Danish storyteller Hans Christian Andersen contributed an essay to that year's "Schiller Album."

But Schiller's fame in the United States fell victim to the "special relationship," the false notion of a unique kinship to the British Empire which was artificially promoted to subvert American foreign policy and poison its culture starting about a century ago. Until 1984, but for the sometimes disparaging liner notes in recordings of the Beethoven Ninth, or *William Tell*, Schiller's name was little remembered in America. That was when Helga Zepp-LaRouche founded the Schiller Institute, and the German "poet of freedom" became the patron-image of so many struggles for internal and external freedom worldwide. Happy 235th Birthday, Friedrich Schiller! Happy Tenth Birthday, Schiller Institute!