



Volume 2. From Absolutism to Napoleon, 1648-1815

Christian Daniel Friedrich Schubart, Article from *Deutsche Chronik* (May 20, 1776)

Christian Daniel Friedrich Schubart (1739-91) was a pugnacious and turbulent poet and journalist who favored the Enlightenment project for its democratic implications. He published his *Deutsche Chronik* in Augsburg from 1774 until 1778, at which point he was imprisoned, ostensibly for anti-clericalism. In the following piece, Schubart expressed his scorn for those German publicists who tolerated German absolutism, and he signaled his admiration for the American rebels. He pointed out that Natural Rights philosophy and sectarian Protestant sensibilities came together in the rebels' ideological temperament.

I do not hold it against newspaper writers if they now turn their eyes away from Europe and fix them on America. After all, what material for entertainment does Europe offer us? The great ones lock themselves in the ministry, as though in a pandemonium, and no one knows what they deliberate inside. That is why our new reports from the European courts are usually so cool and insipid that one can hardly bear listening. – Among all the crawling creatures of the earth, the newspaper writer is the most sycophantic. How he gazes admiringly with childlike wonderment at the pomp of the great! How he grabs with pedantic awe, as Magister Sebaldu Nothanker once did, the corner of a shriveled lord steward's dressing robe and kisses it humbly! How he stands, with hat under his arm, crooked and bowed, in the entry hall and croaks his "Bless you!" at sneezing princes and courtiers! How every feast at court is more important to him than the feast of devotion dedicated to the Lord by a pious people! – All our writings have the stamp of our slavish century, and the newspapers most of all. Under these circumstances, could one do anything better than slip away from our degenerate hemisphere and see what is going on in the other half? There one still finds people who feel that their destiny is not slavery, who with noble impatience shake the yoke of a power-hungry ministry from their necks, and who will soon show these tormentors of the people that one can live without them. The free people of America have not yet brought forth an eminent great man – their Hancocks and Adamses are of normal stature; but soon a few of their nation will awaken like giants and show the British what an enraged humanity is capable of. Without provocation and cause, the soul of man, with all its capability, strikes me like a drum around which ropes have been wound; the greater the cause, the more of these ropes are unwound, the greater man is! – O, you great ones of the earth, if only you would let man be what he *can* be and show your power only where he might otherwise go astray.

The colonists have now arrived at the point where they would not hear of a reunification with England. [. . .]

The character of the colonists has something very unique about it, a kind of Pietistic heroism, as though Herrnhut and Sparta were merging into one. The songs with which they fortify themselves are all so mystical-heroic, so Zinzendorfean-Tyrtaean that they have no equal in tone and composition. In short, if the colonists achieve their final goal, they will create a state that will be very peculiar in nature, and I am delighted if for once something *new* happens under the sun.

Source: *Deutsche Chronik* [*German Chronicle*], May 20, 1776, pp. 321-25.

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