

**WILLIAM TELL. A  
DRAMA, IN  
FIVE ACTS**

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William Tell. A Drama, in Five Acts by Friedrich Schiller

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**FRIEDRICH SCHILLER**

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WILHELM TELL.

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# WILHELM TELL

A DRAMA

IN FIVE ACTS

BY

FRIEDRICH SCHILLER

TRANSLATED INTO

ENGLISH BLANK VERSE

BY

TARKÁRI.



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SCHILLER'S  
WILHELM TELL.

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THE subject of Schiller's drama of "Wilhelm Tell" is the struggle of the Swiss Forest States, Schwytz, Uri, and Unterwalden, lying around the lake of Lucerne, at the north base of Mt. Saint Gothard, for the maintenance of their independence against the powerful house of Hapsburg.

The "Free Men of Schwytz" are first mentioned in history as having sent envoys to the Court of the German Emperor, Henry V. (1106-25), to protest against the encroachments of the Abbot of Einsiedeln, who pretended a right to certain hill pastures, which they or their ancestors had from time immemorial used as summer grazings for their cattle. The Abbot, on his side, produced a charter of Henry II., granting to one of his predecessors all the "waste" within scope of the monastery. The envoys maintained that the said abbot had carefully concealed from the Emperor the fact of their presence there; and that, even were it otherwise, he (the Emperor) could not give away what had never belonged to him; that they were, and always had been, free men, and had voluntarily put themselves under the protection of the Empire; that as free men they had

always supplied their contingent to the imperial armies when summoned by the *heerban* (or imperial summons); that in return they expected to be protected against the encroachments of powerful neighbours, and that as such mutual assistance was the only bond between the Empire and themselves, if it were broken on one side they did not think it should be maintained on the other. "If the Empire could do without them, they could do without the Empire." When the Emperor, in the face of their protest, confirmed the Abbot's claim, they refused to submit, and were consequently excommunicated. No way daunted, they offered a choice of two courses to their priests, viz., either to perform the religious services as heretofore, or to leave their country. As many of the latter were sons of the peasantry, they did not require much persuasion to remain. When afterwards threatened by the Emperor with outlawry, they replied by forming among themselves "an eternal league and covenant," and renounced allegiance to the Empire, till justice should be done to them. Nothing farther is heard of this dispute, and from such scanty notices of them as are found in history, they seem on the whole to have stood well with the various emperors, and generally to have had their privileges confirmed in each new reign down to the time of Albert I. (1298-1308).

From the times of Charlemagne there had existed in Germany numerous communities of free peasants, governing themselves according to old customs and native law, and recognising no other connection with

the elected Emperor than receiving a High Judge for the judgment of capital crimes, and sending their contingent of men-at-arms on the summoning of the "Heerban" for an imperial war. The issuing of the Heerban required the consent of the Diet of the Empire, and to this "Diet" all the free communities, as *immediate* subjects of the Empire, had the right to send their deputies.

But, by the time of Henry V. (1106-25), the free peasant communities formerly existing in the plains and open parts of Germany had disappeared, having been absorbed by the adjacent great lords (dukes, electors, counts, bishops, &c.), vassals of the empire; and *mediatised*, *i.e.*, they had ceased to be *immediately* connected with the Empire, and belonged to it only *mediately* through the *medium* of these powerful and immediate vassals. They were, in fact, vassals of vassals, and had no longer a voice in the governing Diet.

Now this was the condition to which the Emperor, Albert I., wished to reduce the free men of the Forest States, and what, of all things, they most dreaded. And therefore, in answer to the intimation of his wish, they replied that they had always been contented with their condition and their connection with the Empire, and had no desire to change it. They wanted nothing but an imperial steward to administer justice in peace, and lead their contingent in war. The Emperor thereupon sent them two instead of one. These were Herman Gessler of Brunek, and Berengar of Landenberg, both