

ROBERT-HERMANN TENBROCK  
A HISTORY  
OF GERMANY

Translated from the German  
by  
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*Chapter Eleven*

THE RISE OF GERMAN DUALISM

*The Struggle Between Austria and Prussia for Silesia*

The youth of the Prussian Crown Prince, Frederick II, was decisively influenced by the antagonism existing between him and his father, Frederick William I. This did not develop simply out of the natural tension arising between a strongly willed father and a son very early conscious of his own individuality. It was far more the expression of the clash of two ages, whose incompatibility was all the more emphasised in the peculiar intellectual atmosphere of Brandenburg-Prussia. On his accession to the throne, his father had made a clean sweep of everything that, from the intellectual and cultural point of view, might have suggested contact between Brandenburg and the great world of European Baroque. The universities in Prussia lost their good name; the Prussian Academy founded by Leibniz languished; the intellectual life in the royal palaces was hardly distinguishable from that in the home of a Pomeranian country squire.

Frederick William I had made little use of his imposing military might for purposes of military conquest, although the army and the military were his prime concern as king. The acquisition of Hither Pomerania as far as the River Peene with the islands of Usedom and Wollin he owed mainly to favourable political circumstances. Although Austria did not keep the promise given to Brandenburg in connection with the regulation of the female succession by the Pragmatic Sanction, Frederick William did not take advantage of the critical situation which had arisen for the Habsburgs with the loss of Belgrade during the unsuccessful Turkish War of 1737—1739. If one seeks the reasons for such a passive attitude on the part of an absolute monarch, one will probably find them, among other things, in Frederick William's deep religious convictions. These and the views based on them about the duties of a sovereign were what Frederick William wanted to hand on to his son as his most important contribution to the crown prince's upbringing.

However, the influence of Sophia Dorothea of Hanover, the mother of the young crown prince, was stronger than his own. For her son she was the refined vehicle of the intellectual riches of the West and of the Enlightenment. She encouraged him in his leanings towards music and in his approving admiration of the sensuous Baroque. Thus Frederick's early inclinations were towards exact philosophic thought and artistic endeavours in the French tongue and in music. His interests did not extend to politics, economics, and soldiering. He regarded himself as so little suited to become the ruler of the Brandenburg state that in 1730 he determined to flee to England, in order to escape the rigorous discipline of his father's upbringing. The attempt at flight failed. Frederick was cast into prison together with his most faithful friend, and his father summoned a court martial at Köpenick. His friend was condemned to death and beheaded before Frederick's eyes. The crown prince was set to work in the state administration at Küstrin.

Frederick carried out his father's orders by conforming to what had been imposed upon him. But beneath the external world of obedience to duty and service of the state he created an inner world entirely of his own. From the youth who had presumed to be able to mould his life according to his own will developed the man who learnt to master his fellow men by concealing his own thoughts. The sacrifice which he seemed to make for his father in renouncing his own desires released him from all attachments. He despised men because they were not in a position to master themselves and instead blindly followed their instincts. At this stage of his intellectual development, Frederick, who developed into a fine administrative official and a good soldier, and who reconciled himself to a loveless marriage concluded in obedience to his father with Princess Elizabeth Christian of Brunswick-Bevern, came into contact with Voltaire, the most outstanding representative of the French Enlightenment. Since 1736 the crown prince had been living on his Rheinsberg estate, which he had converted into a refuge of peace and study. The friendship, at first epistolary and later personal, with the French cynic and philosopher he so admired strengthened him in his belief in reason as the final arbiter of all thought and conduct. This view was entirely in keeping with his theory that a ruler must also regard himself as bound in his conduct by an objective norm of law. War as a political expedient and the absolute prince's mania for new conquests are equally to be rejected. A prince should regard the safeguarding and maintenance of peace as the state's greatest good, and the exercise of the virtue of philanthropy as his chief concern. In 1738 Frederick consigned these views to writing in his polemical work

the "Anti-Macchiavel". At the same time he also defended the viewpoint that the sovereign should subordinate himself to the interests of the state in all things, for after all he is nothing but "the first servant of the state".

Frederick had been constrained to take part in the business of government. Charles VI of the house of Habsburg had sheltered Maria Theresa, his eldest daughter and heiress to the Austrian dominions, from all political employment. She heard of the great political events as they were seen through the eyes of her tutor and instructress, or of her mother, who was of the same house of Brunswick-Bevern as Frederick's wife. Maria Theresa's world was that of a sincere and convinced Catholicism whose laws and regulations were binding on both prince and subject. The Enlightenment had no part in the intellectual formation of the young princess. All the greater, however, was the influence on her of Italian literature and music, to which she abandoned herself with characteristically feminine open-mindedness. The choice of her husband, Francis Duke of Lorraine, who in the Polish War of Succession (1733—1735) had had to cede his duchy of Lorraine to Louis XV's father-in-law, Stanislaus Leszcynski, in exchange for Tuscany, was fully in keeping with her own inclinations. She had been his play-fellow as a child and was strongly attached to him. According to her father's will, her marriage, too, was not intended to give her a political view of the world, but to provide the monarchy with a son who would protect Austria from the rule of a woman. Nevertheless Charles VI had obtained the recognition by all the great powers of the female succession in Austria, if at some sacrifice. When, however, he died in 1740, shortly after the accession of Frederick II in Brandenburg-Prussia, he left his lands to a woman who ascended the throne as queen over a great empire with nothing but her natural, feminine, open-minded approach to her tasks, a quick mind, and a big motherly heart to guide her.

After the death of Charles VI the German electors, led by Brandenburg-Prussia, chose the Elector of Bavaria as emperor, a choice which France had been assiduously advocating. Frederick II then demanded from Maria Theresa the whole of Silesia in return for an undertaking to defend the rest of the Habsburg possessions against all eventual enemies. Maria Theresa rejected this offer, whereupon Frederick gave the command for his troops to invade Silesia, while he continued the negotiations. The Prussian victory at Mollwitz (1741) led to the Peace of Breslau (1742), in which Silesia and the County of Glatz were

ceded to Frederick II. Two years later, East Friesland also came to Prussia as a consequence of an earlier treaty.

At the same time Maria Theresa had to fight for recognition of her accession against a powerful coalition with France at its head. Her most embittered opponent, the Holy Roman Emperor Elect and Elector of Bavaria, was driven from his electorate. However, he was able to secure his coronation to the imperial dignity as Charles VII at Frankfurt in 1742. After the conquest of Bavaria, the French were thrown back beyond the Rhine. England, Austria's ally, defeated the French at Dettingen. It almost looked as though Austria would be successful in reconquering Alsace and Lorraine, the hereditary territory of Maria Theresa's consort. Moreover, a great number of the princes of the empire, impressed by the Austrian victories, had deserted the elected emperor. At this moment favourable for Austria, Frederick II joined the French coalition (1744) and invaded Bohemia from Silesia. He was not able to maintain his position there, but won a decisive victory over the Austrians at the Battle of Hohenfriedberg (1755). The Peace of Dresden was signed in the same year. This confirmed Frederick in his possession of Silesia, but also recognised Francis of Lorraine as emperor. Subsequent to this peace treaty, Frederick was greeted by his countrymen as he marched into Berlin with the title "the Great". Brandenburg-Prussia thus took its place as one of the five great powers in Europe alongside England, France, Austria, and Russia. It must also be remembered, however, that this same Dresden peace treaty was also the foundation of the enduring quarrel between Prussia and Austria.

Charles, Holy Roman Emperor and Elector of Bavaria, died in 1745. Not only had Austrian arms proved their superiority over the forces of Bavaria and France; Charles's death also brought Maria Theresa's husband, Francis I (1745—1765), recognition as emperor. The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) confirmed Maria Theresa in her Habsburg possessions against the Bavarian and French claims.

Frederick II devoted the next ten years of his reign to the internal administration of his territories, especially to the incorporation of Silesia into his state, which he was able to carry out with comparative ease because of his policy of strict toleration towards both Protestants and Catholics. During this interlude he also built his mansion of Sanssouci near Potsdam.

Maria Theresa found it difficult to reconcile herself to the loss of Silesia since every cession of a German territory represented a great danger to her empire, which united more foreign than German peoples under the Austrian crown. For this reason she geared her policy to a

renewal of armed conflict with Prussia. The world political situation, which was determined at the time by the struggle between France and England for the colonies in North America and India, was opportune for both the great German powers. At the beginning of 1756 Frederick succeeded in winning England over to his side. Prussia undertook to protect Hanover, which was linked in a personal union with the English crown; England held out prospects of subsidies. After the Anglo-Prussian agreements had become known, France, which felt that its Prussian allies had played false, was successfully persuaded into an alliance with Austria—a sensational alteration in the "Concert of Powers". Russia, which hoped for territorial aggrandizement in the west as a result of the conflict between the two great German powers, likewise joined Austria. Tsarina Elizabeth, a personal enemy of Frederick the Great, was promised the former land of the Teutonic Knights, Prussia, in the event of an Austrian victory.

In 1755 an Austrian secret conference of state had decided on a war with Prussia to take place the following year, because Austria was convinced that Frederick would take up the offensive again. In 1756 the Prussian king, alarmed by Russian and Austrian mobilisation, sent an ultimatum to Austria demanding an assurance that he "would not be attacked either this year or the next". This assurance was not forthcoming. He believed that he could only escape the impending doom by entering on a preventive war. Thus, in 1756, without a declaration of war, he invaded Saxony, which belonged to the opposing coalition. Thereupon Frederick was placed under the ban of the empire and an army was raised to meet him. Sweden joined Austria in order to win back the mouth of the Oder. France and England stood by their treaty obligations. England sent Frederick subsidies and troops, and in America fought against France and her colonies. A world war had begun. For seven long years it was to devastate Silesia and the adjacent territories.

Frederick with the aid of his powerful army of 150,000 men succeeded in occupying Saxony very rapidly. The burdens which he imposed on this land were heavy. During the first three years of hostilities Frederick emerged victor from nearly all the larger engagements. Certainly he had at times to abandon Prussia to the Russians, but he was able to defend Silesia against the Austrians and the French. The Battle of Rossbach especially, where his numerically inferior army carried the day against a larger force of French, Austrian, and imperial troops, made a great impression on the Germans in other parts of the empire. As Goethe put it, most Germans were "Frederick-minded" ("fritzisch gesinnt") at this time. They began to regard Frederick as a national hero who was fighting

not against the Austrians but against the enemies of the German people. Frederick took very skilful propaganda advantage of this mood. It gave rise in later Prussian historiography to the myth of Frederick the Great as the pioneer of German unity.

From 1759 onwards, however, the manifold numerical advantage of the Russian, French and Austrian allies made itself felt. Frederick suffered his greatest defeat at the Battle of Kunersdorf. Dresden was lost; Austrian and Russian troops occupied Berlin. England, having achieved her war aims in North America, concluded a separate peace with France in 1762 and withdrew from the alliance. Canada and the Mississippi region were ceded to England. Brandenburg-Prussia was faced with economic ruin. At this critical moment for Frederick, Tsarina Elizabeth of Russia died. She was succeeded by Peter of Holstein-Gottorp, an admirer of Frederick, who promptly discontinued the war with Prussia. A year later a peace was also signed with Austria at Hubertusburg. Prussia kept Silesia.

The Seven Years War had shown Frederick conclusively that he could not obtain any extension of his territory by a war of aggression conducted against the great powers of his day. This explains why he renounced all thought of annexation during this almost hopeless struggle, and came to regard the maintenance of the territorial status quo ante bellum as his war objective. After the Peace of Hubertusburg he drew closer to Russia. In 1764 he negotiated a treaty of mutual assistance with Russia for a period of 25 years. Russia was given a free hand in Poland, where anarchic conditions prevailed. Prussia was now able to devote its energies undisturbed to the reconstruction of its territories, since it no longer had any need to fear Austria. Catherine II of Russia had her former favourite, Stanislaus Poniatowski, crowned King of the Poles, and he ascended the throne as Stanislaus II Augustus. Repeated Russian interference in the internal affairs of Poland led Turkey to declare war on Russia in 1768 as a means of strengthening the hand of the Polish opposition to Stanislaus and to Catherine II. However, the Turks were no match for the Russian land and sea forces. As a result Moldavia and Walachia were occupied by Russia. This considerable Russian expansion in the Balkans occasioned Maria Theresa to form an alliance with Turkey in 1771. A war in which Prussia—this time alongside Russia—would once again have to fight against Austria seemed unavoidable. At this juncture, however, Catherine II proposed a partition of Poland among the great powers of eastern Europe. Frederick declared himself in agreement and obtained, through the intercession of Joseph II, his great admirer and heir to the Austrian throne,

the agreement of Maria Theresa as well. Prussia was granted West Prussia, Russia the territory east of the Dvina and the Dnieper, and Austria Galicia. The core of Poland survived unscathed.

The first partition of Poland represents a masterpiece of well-contrived spoliation of a territory and was entirely in keeping with the policy which Louis XIV had employed against the Netherlands and Germany. It was also, however, the expression of a policy of power and conquest which was assured of success because of the weakness of its opponent. Whereas the large land-owning Polish nobility, the real cause of Polish weakness, was easily assimilated, the burgher and peasant class, encouraged by a decidedly nationalistic Catholicism, refused to cooperate, especially with Russia and Prussia. In spite of this, both Austria and Prussia carried out the incorporation of the Polish territories into their states without any attempt at Germanisation. The settlement of German peasants in West Prussia had economic, not nationalistic objectives. As in all the other Prussian territories, this policy aimed at raising the economic prosperity of the country, and in this the Polish population also had a share. Thus the preponderantly Polish regions kept their Polish character in regard to language, religion, and culture.

Some years after the Polish partition effected in union with Austria, hostilities between the two great German powers nearly broke out anew. In 1778 the Bavarian Wittelsbachs became extinct. Whereupon the Emperor Joseph II raised claims to Bavaria. These Frederick opposed and sent troops to invade Bohemia. As a consequence of Russian mediation between Prussia and Austria there was no general engagement of troops. Bavaria ceded the Inn Quarter to Austria. The Rhenish Palatinate and Bavaria were united.

When in 1785 Joseph again tried to prevail upon the future heir of Bavaria to exchange his inheritance for Belgium (the Austrian Netherlands), Frederick countered by founding the "German League of Princes" with the object of preventing any alteration in the territorial structure of the empire. Joseph II yielded before this threat from the north. Thus the union of Bavaria with Austria, which would doubtless have set German history on a completely different course, was not achieved.

Frederick's conception of the duty of the absolute ruler to expand the territory of his state had been the guiding-star of his foreign policy, and, despite forbidding reverses, had brought him success which the rest of the world admiringly acknowledged. By his brilliant achievements in the field, Frederick had raised Prussia to the status of a European power and maintained this with enduring results. It was a matter of

complete indifference to him that in so doing he also gave the death-blow to the empire, which, in spite of its loose-knit structure, still regarded Austria as its natural head. It was precisely the spokesmen of German unity under Prussian leadership who, during the struggle to reshape and reform the German empire in the 19th century, usurped Frederick's name for their cause. They could do this because of Frederick's fame as a general and because of his domestic policy.

#### *Absolutism and the Enlightenment*

The 18th century took its course in the shadow of the Enlightenment. It was the Age of Reason. Although the absolutist form of government was considered the only effective and progressive one by nearly all continental powers, individual monarchs nevertheless still tried to face the issue involved in the new ideas which rejected the absolutist state, and to turn them to such good account for their own programme of government as was possible without endangering the unlimited power of the ruler. In this respect Frederick the Great became an important pioneer and model, not only for his own state but also for Austria—especially for his admirer Joseph II—and a number of other German territories.

Frederick the Great created the Prussian constitutional state. All his subjects, without distinction of class or confession, were equal in the eyes of the law, even if the king occasionally intervened in the administration of justice in the interest of the state. The judges were irremovable and adequately salaried. Of great significance for court cases were the *Codex Fridericianus* and a general legal procedure. The *Allgemeines Preussisches Landrecht*, the first modern legal code in German, was prepared by Frederick's orders, but appeared only after his death. It was the first royal codification of law since the code of the Roman Emperor Justinian. Its real creator was Suarez. This Prussian legal code made the law independent of the person of the ruler and placed the ruler, too, under the law in the same way as the subject. Legal proceedings were rid of antiquated methods of arriving at the truth (such as torture). This uniform code of law for all parts of Brandenburg-Prussia has, since 1793, proved a strong cementing factor in Prussian state consciousness. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, Frederick proclaimed toleration for all varieties of religious opinion. In this way he made the relation of the citizen to the state independent of religious beliefs. However, a number of restrictions remained in force in particular

cases. Thus, for example, Catholics were barred from taking higher office in the state; the Jews formed a nation apart within the state and were placed under a humiliating set of special laws.

Frederick's measures against any mixing of the estates preserved the strict division of society into nobility, burghers, and peasantry. The purchase of a noble's property by burghers and peasants was forbidden. In this way, in spite of the king's enlightened attitude in legal and religious matters, the system conceding an unalterably privileged position to the nobility in Prussia was preserved.

Thus the nobility remained the ruling class; for from their ranks Prussian officials and officers were exclusively drawn; the peasants were subjected to them. The burghers of the city continued to be without political rights and indifferent towards political life. The peasantry was, indeed, protected by royal decrees against acts of violence and expropriation. But in law, except on the crownlands and in the western regions of Prussia, the peasants were only chattels, mere appurtenances of landed property.

Frederick the Great viewed the state purely mechanically and rationally. For him it was something supra-personal and sublime, to which both ruler and ruled had to subordinate themselves by their service. The position of the individual was determined by the value of the service he rendered to the state. This in turn was essentially dependent on the class into which he had been born. As long as the state, embodied in the king, his army, and his officials, ruled the subject with absolute power and was far removed from the individual, enlightened absolutism could mitigate hardships but not remove them. Frederick the Great regarded himself as a member of the state which he like all others had to serve indefatigably.

Frederick replaced the bureaucratic government of the General Directory with government through a cabinet. The privy councillors elaborated the cabinet orders for the king, although it was the latter who had the final word. The ministers had to approach the cabinet in writing. Each minister of the General Directory administered a particular province with the result that not one of them had an overall view of the administration of the entire state. The individual provinces had to submit their budgets, which were then synthesised by the king in the state budget. Thus he alone had knowledge of the financial position of the state as a whole.

Frederick the Great, through his personal interest, made the Potsdam of his day a Prussian cultural centre where the culture and intellectual spirit of France were especially cultivated. The blossoming of a German

culture he treated either with disregard or with disdain. Science and education he greatly promoted. The architectural works he inspired breathe, in spite of their graceful form, the spirit of Prussian temperance and austerity.

Frederick the Great, indisputably an outstanding king, was offset in his day by an empress of no less importance, Maria Theresa. Yet they were in their natures entirely different. This arose from their contrasting conceptions of the role of a sovereign. Frederick the Great saw his role as fulfilled in his service of the supra-personal "State"; Maria Theresa, on the other hand, discerned a divinely appointed mission in her care of the subjects entrusted to her. As a woman of deep Christian convictions, who always remained an exemplary wife and mother, she attempted, wherever she judged it feasible, to place her conscience above necessities of state. After the death of her husband, the Emperor Francis I, she ruled her Austrian possessions jointly with her son, Joseph II. As sole ruler she had carried through a policy of closer centralisation in her lands. The dispensation of justice was separated from the administration. The State Chancellery (ministry of external affairs) was established in addition to the Court Chancellery (ministry of internal affairs). However, when her son became co-regent, the reforms were precipitated; Maria Theresa often found herself in opposition to him.

Joseph was a fervent admirer of Frederick the Great. His character had been formed more by the spirit of the Enlightenment than by the Christian beliefs of his mother. His ecclesiastical, educational and cultural policy has gone down into history as "Josephinism". He adopted a very harsh line towards the Catholic Church. All contemplative orders were abolished. In addition he interfered in the Church's internal life of worship: processions and confraternities were forbidden; divine service and the number of feast days regulated; the candles at mass restricted for reasons of economy. For a time he even contemplated separating the Austrian Church from Rome.

During his reign Protestants received equality of civil rights and admission to public offices. The Jews were granted some amelioration of their legal position. They were allowed to enter the universities and to practise crafts, to start factories, to bear German surnames, and to dispense with their distinctive clothing.

A patent of marriage issued in 1783 declared marriage a civil contract even if, for the time being, the ecclesiastical ceremony still remained compulsory. In contrast, divorce and remarriage were permitted to non-Catholics.

In 1781 a secret resolution was passed provisionally lifting the death penalty. Some years later, the "Josephina", a new, humane code of law, was issued in which torture and capital punishment were officially abolished.

In order to better the lot of the peasants under the Habsburgs, Joseph became the first German sovereign to suppress serfdom in his dominions (1781). The peasants were granted the unrestricted right of marriage, of free movement, of free choice of employment, and of freedom to sell their property. By arrangement with their landlord they were to commute corvees and dues in kind, and become tenants.

Because Joseph imposed these innovations forcibly upon his people he drove them to revolution, especially by his ecclesiastical policy. He was forced to revoke many of his reforms because of the resistance of the nobility, the clergy, and the broad masses of the people. However, the patent of tolerance for Protestants and Jews, the abolition in principle of personal serfdom, and the "Josephina" remained in force. The emperor intended that all trace of national and provincial independence should disappear from the Habsburg states. The same prescripts were intended to apply on the Turkish border as in the Austrian Netherlands. For these reasons German was introduced as the official language in Bohemia and Hungary together with the German administrative system. Against this restrictive regimentation the peoples of the Austrian empire rose up in revolt. The emperor was forced to admit failure, above all in Hungary and the Austrian Netherlands.

It cannot be denied that "enlightened" absolutism realised many of the hopes which the philosophic thought of the Enlightenment places in the state and its rulers. In this way it succeeded in mitigating antagonisms which, especially in France, embittered relations between the estates and warped the attitude of the middle class and peasantry towards the state. But it was not capable of placing the state on a new footing; for this not only was equality of all before the law a prerequisite, but also the severance of the ties holding the estates together and keeping them in existence. Certainly Frederick the Great's conviction was that such a radical reform would have destroyed the internal stability of his state, and Joseph II was to learn by experience how many of his reforms met with the embittered resistance of the people. Notwithstanding, the Enlightenment exercised a decisive influence on German intellectual life and prepared the way for Germany's rebirth as a land of culture during the age of Goethe. This in its turn was the necessary preparation for Germany's rise and political unification during the 19th century.