NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER,

AND

WASHINGTON ADVERTISER.

VOL. VI. | WASHINGTON CITY, PRINTED BY SAMUEL HARRISON SMITH, PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE. | No. DCCCXIX

FIVE DOLLARS PER ANNUM. | WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1806. | *PAID IN ADVANCE.*

REVIEW
OF THE LIFE OF
FREDERICK II. or Prussia:

[CONCLUDED.]

The queen of Frederick was a most exemplary woman, entirely occupied with acts of charity, and with fulfilling the king's intentions in regard to the reception of strangers at her court, and whatever else was intrusted to her. Frederick always treated her with the greatest respect, and visited her once a year on her birth day. On these occasions he appeared in silk stockings, but staid at her drawing room only half an hour. Our author draws a comparison between the characters of Frederick & prince Henry. It contains a flattering portrait of both, and yet, from the anecdotes related, appears in regard to prince Henry in particular considerably just.

"I have been a hundred times asked which of the two princes, Frederick and Henry, possessed in my opinion the most of the qualities that constitute a great man. There is no doubt that they were both of the small number of those men who are worthy to serve as models to the rest of their species, but who, notwithstanding, obtain the fewest imitators: never, however, did two men less resemble each other. Frederick was the most robust in form, yet his life was the shortest. The physiognomy of each was strongly marked and considerably characteristick, but the whole head of the king was strikingly handsome, which nevertheless did not prevent his assuming at times extreme severity of countenance; while the prince, who was far from being handsome, had an exterior that never failed to be engaging. No eyes perhaps were ever seen more penetrating, intelligent, animated, and agreeable than those of the king, though they could so suddenly assume an expression absolutely terrifick. Those of prince Henry, on the contrary, at first sight conveyed the idea of harshness of character in the possessor, and inclined somewhat to a squint; but an intercourse with him of two minutes only was sufficient to produce a contrary opinion. The eldest brother had a ready flow of wit, a turn for repartee and epigram, and by nature prone to high spirits and sarcastic kind of humour: he was at the same time penetrating, and as it were prophetic; possessing in an eminent degree that sort of subtlety which deceives others, and is somewhat allied to cunning. The mind of prince Henry was of a more sober cast, but by no means deficient in quickness: he was habitually a reasoner, but without pedantry: severe in his judgment without unkindness; delicate without falsehood: upright and equitable without harshness or dejection. His art was the sister of prudence; which confined itself to discovering that quality in others and enabled him to escape from its effects. Every man of taste and judgment would have highly valued opportunities of approaching and listening to the king, to whom they would have given their utmost admiration; but all men of rectitude and sensibility would have wished to lived with the prince, on whom they would have bestowed their affections. The first dispensed delight in the society in which he engaged with a sort of profusion; the latter, the most delicate attentions and the most obliging courtesies. They were both more than what is called men of understanding, they were learned men; in profoundness of thinking, extent and fertility of genius, they were equal. In war and politics they have both been able actors; but what the one has done as it were by inspiration, the other has done by dint of calculation and reflection: hence it has happened that the one has performed the most atchievements, and is the most chargeable with errors; while the other, whose atchievements have also been great, has on the contrary no errors with which he could reproach himself. With respect to their faults, we may with truth ascribe to the king that of a mistrustful temper, and to the prince the contrary defect of too easy a confidence. I am not now speaking of their discretion: the king has sometimes betrayed his political opinions from passion; the prince was never guilty of imprudence but when only his personal concerns were in question, because the first was by nature irritable, and the last by nature frank. Both possessed considerable haughtiness of temper on certain occasions: the king, for example, when he suspected a person of intending disrespect towards him, and the prince when he had reason to think the disrespect had actually taken place. Considered in a military point of view, the king was brave from character, and the prince from principle; on the other hand, in matters of social intercourse, it was the latter who was kind and indulgent from character, while the former were so from principle. I am inclined to compare the king to Hannibal for subtlety, and to Conde for personal courage; and the prince to Turrenne and to Gustavus Adolphus. They shared between them, so to express myself, the characters of Alexander and Cesar."

In the intercourse of Frederick with his brother and nephews the most striking circumstance is the suspicion with which he watched them, his occasional severity, and his jealousy of their splendid qualities. All who betrayed any attachment to Henry were marked objects of the king's dislike. All the princes were shut up in garrisons with their regiments, surrounded by his spies and severely curbed in their pleasures. The eldest of his brothers, who had undergone much fatigue in his wars, having sustained some loss in an engagement with the Austrians, was so harshly used as to have a lingering and fatal disorder brought on by his grief.

Of the great offices at court many were left wholly unoccupied during the reign of Frederick, and others were filled by persons intrusted with nothing, and indeed some of them incapable of executing any trust. Of this we have a curious instance presented to us:

"There was a chamberlain in the court of the queen mother, named M. de Morien, who was a man of so circumscribed an understanding as to be constantly held up to ridicule in the sphere to which he belonged: even after his death some traits were circulated of him that appeared almost incredible—such as his being unable to recollect whether at the siege of such a place he was the besieged or the besieger, and whether it was himself or his brother who was killed in such a campaign. To this M. Morien it was that the marquis d'Argens lent the same volume seven times over; and who being asked afterwards how he liked the work, replied, "I think it, sir, an admirable production—but if I might speak my opinion freely, the author sometimes repeats the same things."—The English ambassador requested him to present to the queen mother the Earl of Essex, then on his travels, and added that it was not the Earl of Essex who had been beheaded under queen Elizabeth: accordingly M. de Morien, at the usual hour of presentations, said to the queen, "Madame, I have the honor to present to your majesty the Earl of Essex, a native of England and a traveller: for the rest, the English ambassador has assured me that he is not the same Earl of Essex who was beheaded under queen Elizabeth!"

In the connection of Frederick with his court, there is nothing more conspicuous than his love of solitude, of being master of his own time, and of avoiding all ceremonials as much as possible. He was fond of the stage, and particularly the opera: and kept some capital performers at a high salary, paid by himself. His equipage was very little conspicuous—his stud belonged to the riding school. On the occasion of the archduke Paul coming to Berlin to marry a princess of his family, Frederick seemed for once anxious to make a magnificent display, and for this purpose ordered all the old state carriages of his grandfather, which had been out of repair for fifty years, to be new gilded to improve the spectacle, which they certainly did—occasioning much mirth by their grotesque appearance.

In his transactions with his court and people we continually meet with some abuse, some want of human feeling, to which he was led by the uncontrolled power in his hands. The inhabitants of Berlin had made splendid preparations for receiving him at their gates in triumph after the seven years war, had raised a triumphal arch, &c. Frederick, however, hearing of these preparations, changed his route, entered *incognito* at a different gate, and thus subjected the inhabitants to a mortification which they did not forget for many years afterwards. A very loyal and innocent man, the bishop of Breslaw, had been calumniated to the king, and in consequence had his revenues confiscated, and was even obliged to seek for safety in exile. Frederick was afterwards fully convinced of the bishop's innocence; but as a remission of the sentence must have been attended with a restoration of the confiscated revenues, the unfortunate man was allowed to die in exile and poverty. A paper maker from France was allured to Prussia by the magnificent promises of the king. These promises were, however, found to be hollow: and the paper maker having rejected, as infamous, a proposal to share the fruits he derived from the royal favor with some of the inferior members of the administration, was ruined by their arts, and condemned to waste out his days in a dungeon, where he derived even the necessaries of life from a poor creditor who had been involved in his ruin.

We have now to take a short view of the most important part of the work, that which relates to Frederick's civil and military government. The Frederician code has been much extolled, and its regulations, if properly executed, might be productive of much happiness to a people. But where it is in the power of an individual, according to his own caprice, to alter, modify, and suspend the execution of the laws, it is in vain to look for the regular distribution of justice from a good code of laws. The code of Justinian, contained the collected wisdom of ages, but did this compilation of the dictates of justice prevent the Roman people from being plundered and abused by their tyrants and the satellites of tyranny? The laws of the Frederician code were good, but Frederick could, without the fear of punishment, suspend the execution of these laws, or cause the decision to proceed in direct opposition to the dictates of the code. The king, in Prussia, is at once, the sole legislator, and the supreme executioner of justice.

It must, however, be acknowledged that Frederick, when not swayed by caprice or misapprehension, was more inclined to mercy than rigor, especially in regard to private crimes. Few of our readers will blame the following exertion of his power, although not according to the strict rules of justice.

"A story that has been often cited is of the Catholic soldier in garrison in that one of the towns of Silesia, in which there was a chapel celebrated for the extraordinary devotion paid in it to the Virgin. Her statue which adorned the altar was ornamented with the gifts of her votaries, many of which consisted of the most valuable jewels. This soldier when he was not under arms, passed whole days in one of the corners of this chapel, edifying his spectators by his self-collectedness, his earnestness, and his devotion. By degrees, people were accustomed to seeing him, and would have thought it a sort of crime to watch his motions; so that finding himself at length for the most part without witness, he robbed the statue of every thing valuable about it. When the theft was discovered, every one was suspected; not even the pious soldier escaped. He was examined, and one of the most costly of the stones was found in his possession.

"He was immediately brought to trial, and the false devotee was found guilty of robbery and sacrilege, notwithstanding his persisting to declare that the kind and holy virgin, touched with his zeal, had miraculously made him a present of the diamond. The sentence was laid before the king to be signed previous to its execution. Frederick assembled the most celebrated Catholic theologians of Silesia to pronounce upon the following question: "Is it possible, according to the doctrine of the Catholic christians, that the Virgin should miraculously have given away what had been made a present to herself." The theologians, though they laid great stress upon the improbability of such a miracle, in reality so little agreeable to the spirit of the church, could not, however, prevail on themselves, considering the question in a general point of view, to withhold their affirmative: on this, Frederick annulled the sentence; but added, that as he had no power to forbid the Virgin from giving away what belonged to her, he should forbid his soldiers, on pain of death, to receive any thing she might in future offer them."

The humorous dilemma of this question seems to have been Frederick's chief motive for lenity towards the soldier; and indeed in the various instances of his lenity recorded by M. Thiebault, we find the culprit almost always saved by some *bon mot* either of himself or of some other person. To exercise the virtue of mercy, chiefly, on such occasions, cannot much excite our esteem, unless it be considered as meritorious in a king to be accessible to the charms of wit; and we account it as a just distribution of things that the man of wit should be spared and only the dunces be hanged.

Another anecdote shows what is every moment to be dreaded when the power of a king is above the laws. A miller, having instituted a suit against a count N. for depriving his mill of water, and having been cast, presented a petition to the king craving justice. The king commanded his chancellor to have the cause tried again, which was done; and the same verdict returned. A second petition was presented; a third trial took place by the order of Frederick, and the same judgment again awarded. On the miller presenting a third petition, the king commissioned some of his secret agents to examine the facts on the spot and report them to him. Their representation agreed with that of the miller: the mill had actually been stopt from want of water, and this want of water was owing to the drains cut by count N. The king was no longer able to command his rage: he sent for the chancellor and the other three judges, reversed their sentence, and in their presence wrote another, condemning count N. to restore the water to the mill, to pay all the costs of both suits, and also such damages as would reimburse the miller for the losses he had sustained. After doing this, he sent Baron de Furst, the chancellor to the Devil, declaring he no longer stood in need of his services, and the three judges to the dungeons of Spandaw, kicking them with indignation out of the room. Six months after this outrage, Frederick discovered that he had been misled by a misapprehension of the facts; that the mill had indeed been stopt for the want of water, and in consequence of the cutting of the drains; but that the drains had been cut below the mill, and consequently, although the volume of the stream even above the mill was by this means diminished, yet count N. was in no degree to blame, since by the established maxims of jurisprudence every one is allowed to employ a stream running through his own grounds to the best advantage, unless he diverts it from those who are to use it after him. But although Frederick recognized his error, it was against the plan of his arbitrary government to make public reparation for the public wrongs he had committed. Without mentioning the affair to any one, he gave private orders to remit the fine of count N. he restored the three judges first to their liberty, and afterwards to their places, without however a word of apology for the affront offered to them. The chancellor, whose restoration would have looked like a public avowal of his error, was suffered to remain in disgrace. What rendered this attack on the ministers of justice more flagitious was, that none of them was present in the courts where the suit of the miller was tried, and that the chancellor, in particular, knew nothing of the circumstances. It is to be observed that the miller rented his mill from the king.

The system of civil administration might have done very well had proper checks been provided against the abuse of each department; but here, as in other despotic governments, the king himself was the only efficient check, and those who could deceive him might persist in the most flagrant abuses of their authority. He indeed used every precaution not to be deceived. He employed spies in every quarter, and attended incessantly to their reports. But then his spies were themselves as liable to be corrupted as others, and hence he was perpetually deceived. The laws were both tardily and partially executed, even the letters addressed to himself were opened at the post-offices, or suppressed by his secretaries, and the frauds practised in collecting the revenues and in every other department were innumerable. Such is the feebleness and inefficiency of an arbitrary executive government, where no one but the monarch seems interested that affairs should be properly conducted, and where the rest have no other motive but fear to perform their duty. The instances of meanness and peculation recorded even of his prime ministers are disgraceful to a degree scarcely credible. The pitiful salaries which he allowed the officers of government, both high and low, were indeed a sufficient cause to render even their dread of his power insufficient to deter them from their practises, "They are all knaves in matters that relate to my interest," said he of his revenue officers; "I have studied them thoroughly, and I pronounce they would cheat me at the very altar." "Sire," replied his chief financier, "how can they do otherwise than cheat you? What you pay them will barely provide them with shoes and stockings?"

The measures adopted for promoting the internal prosperity of the country were dictated by that absurd system of political economy, whose object it is to force different sorts of industry by artificial methods. Frederick anxiously watched over the balance of trade, and endeavored by every means in his power to increase his exports, and reduce his imports. He built houses, and held out various encouragements to those who were desirous to engage in agriculture, manufactures or commerce. He took the sale of coffee, the chief article of importation, into his own hands, and by raising the price endeavored to diminish the consumption. He took the most rigorous measures to promote the sale of home manufactures; on one occasion, for example, he compelled all the Jews who married in his dominions to take a certain quantity of his home-made porcelain, in the confidence that they would hence be induced to use their utmost endeavors to bring it into general use. In short Frederick, with the plenitude of arbitrary power, endeavored to carry into effect the means recommended by the mercantile system for promoting the internal prosperity. It is needless to add that his success was as bad as the means he employed were absurd.

That part of Frederick's political measures which has excited most attention is his military government, and this is precisely the part in which we find the spirit of his despotic administration most remarkably displayed. By a law framed by William, the father of Frederick, all the lower orders of the Prussians, were, with a few exceptions, doomed to be soldiers for life. The despair excited by this dreadful decree, when it was first promulgated, led to the most fatal consequences. Those who could emigrated, and those who remained behind very commonly disabled themselves for service by cutting off one or more fingers of the right hand. By degrees this despair was succeeded by same acquiescence, and at present the Prussians see the recruiting officers enter their district, and order away the most promising of their sons to the army, with only unresisting grief. The Prussian armies are composed of natives thus dragged together, and of foreigners, chiefly French deserters, who have been procured by a bounty, and who only wait a fresh opportunity to desert. Such were the men whom Frederick found it necessary to keep in awe by the most unrelenting severity. He was certainly in the right when he judged that men of this description, to whom he held out no rewards, no means of bettering their condition, could only be restrained from deserting by the most fearful apprehensions. But why he should have increased their desire to desert by allowing his officers to abuse them in the brutal manner they did, would seem astonishing, if fear were not the engine to which a despotic prince is accustomed. The attempts which have been made by misguided men to introduce his abominable policy in other countries would lead us to suppose they were ignorant of the success of his measures. Can any thing be more revolting than the following account of the consequences by an eye witness.

"The dreadful severity I now speak of, at the time of my living at Berlin, rendered a great number of soldiers absolutely desperate. A fatal and horrible maxim was established among them; they said to each other, that the best thing they could do was to die, but to prevent their afterwards going to hell for committing suicide, they would murder some child, who by that means they sent to Paradise, whither they should then go of necessity themselves, for the purpose of confessing the murder and surrendering their persons, and thus procure themselves the opportunity of asking pardon of God previous to being condemned to punishment.

"I knew of a great number of the soldiery who had adopted this monstrous doctrine. Frederick conceived against it the most just abhorrence and alarm; and, to counteract it, gave strict order that no priest or pastor should be allowed to approach a homicide of this description, whose crimes, he observed, was more in the spirit of the devil than of religion. The remedy at first produced but little effect: it was not, however, quite useless; the soldiers could not think without utter repugnance, of dying without spiritual assistance, and feared this privation would more infallibly than any other means bring upon them the pains of damnation."

A remedy truly worthy of a tyrant whose severity made it requisite! But let us mark the issue of such measures:

"The regiment of the guards, before the seven years' war, was commanded by a man of so severe a temper that the soldiers swore among themselves to aim their first cartridges at him whenever they should be called out to face the enemy. War was soon after declared—the general having learned the resolution of the soldiers, was under considerable apprehension: on the first occasion of his marching he halted so unseasonably that M. de Mullendorff, who was then a captain in the corps, ventured to animadvert on his proceeding, but without producing the desired effect. Shortly after, M. de Mullendorff perceiving the prince d'Anhalt at some distance, hastened toward him, and conjured him to save the honor of the regiment by giving such orders as would produce a prompt obedience. The prince accordingly gave orders for attacking the enemy without delay, and on the first discharge of musketry the general fell to the ground pierced with fifty bullets."

Our author mentions several other instances of the most desperate attempts being made by the soldiers to rise upon their officers, and effect their escape. Nothing indeed can exceed their misery, and death seems to be courted as a desirable end to their sufferings. The following is an account of the police by which any attempt to escape from their miseries is repressed:

"What renders desertion in Prussia, in time of peace nearly impossible is, the order established respecting soldiers. Any officer who sees several soldiers standing together, may and ought to separate them by blows with his cane, especially if they are Frenchmen. Every captain, from whose company a soldier deserts, is put under confinement for a limited time. Every garrisoned town is surrounded by fortifications, by walls, or at least by palisades: this inclosure has within it a periphery that resembles a road or place for walking; here the sentinels are so stationed as for one to see and hear the other throughout. If a deserter has passed between two of these sentinels, and the fact is proved, the two sentinels undergo a flogging; in addition, the muster-roll is called over three times in the course of every evening. If there be but one who does not answer to his name, the strictest search is immediately made, and if he is not found in the course of an hour, the cannon for alarm is discharged: this is a cannon of large dimensions placed on a high piece of ground, and is heard in all the adjacent villages. This signal assembles the country people, who take up arms and keep guard at every outlet. A reward of forty livres is paid to any village that lays hold of a deserter; and, on the other hand, the village through which a deserter is proved