BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

FREDERICK THE GREAT AT MEISSEN.

The great battle of Torgau had been fought, and the Prussian army, after so many combats and such a bloody victory, was contemplating with lively satisfaction the going into winter quarters, which, it hoped, this time would be in Saxony. The Prussian headquarters were, for the time being, in Meissen, and in the palace there, for a short resting-spell, dwelt the king, who for many years had only experienced the troubles and dangers of his position; the king who had often struggled with hunger and care, daily privation and mortal danger, and who one day, wearied out by sleeping night after night on the cold ground, commissioned his adjutant to provide a bundle of straw for the comfort of his royal person. The king had for a long time spared Saxony. He was sorry for this beautiful, afflicted land. But Saxony was finally to be treated as an enemy's country, as she would not appreciate Frederick's noble forbearance and clemency, and had allied herself to his enemies with fanatical zeal. And now her devastated fields, her paralyzed factories, her impoverished towns and deserted villages, testified to her distress and the calamities of war. But at this time quiet and tranquillity reigned in the hostile camps. On both sides they were too tired to be able to carry on a fresh conflict, and the strength

of both parties being exhausted, they were obliged to allow each other time for rest. Besides, the winter had set in early with unusual severity, and, to all appearances, put an end to the campaign of 1760.

The only contest now was for winter quarters; and it had been, therefore, after the victory of Torgau, the king's first endeavor to cut off the retreat of the Austrians to Dresden, or at least to drive them out of this town. But, as the king wrote to Countess Camas, "They laughed at us from the top of the hills—I withdrew immediately, and, like a little boy, have stuck myself down in pure disgust in one of the accursed Saxon villages. I assure you I lead a perfect dog's life, such as no one else, except Don Quixote, has ever led."

In the mean while Frederick had left this "accursed Saxon village" (Neustadt) and had gone to Meissen, and his "dog's life" had given place to ease and comfort. He had, therefore, for some quiet weeks laid aside the sword, and the gentleman had become again the royal poet and *savant*, who divided his time between music and poetry, between serious studies and writing to his friends, to whom he sent letters, in which his great and elevated manner of thinking, his soul above prejudice, were displayed in all their beauty and power.

The king was alone in his study. He had just finished a letter to the Marquis d'Argens, calling upon him to give some news of his gallery at Sans-Souci, and to inform him of its progress. The king laid down his pen, and leaned back in his chair for a moment. His usually sharp, bright eye had now a soft, gentle expression, and a light smile played around his thin, nobly-formed lips. He has forgotten for the time the care and bustle of

war, and fancied himself in his beloved paradise, his Sans-Souci, where it was allowed the hero to be a poet, and where he could for some genial hours put aside his dignity, and, instead of the enthroned ruler, be the cheerful sage, the smiling son of the Muses.

The king, pleased by these memories of happy days, rose and seized his flute, which, by his express orders, always lay on his writing-table. He put it to his lips, and began an *adagio*, in the execution of which he was acknowledged to be one of the first *virtuosos* of his day, and the sounds, as they poured forth, rose plaintively, and floated around him in bewitching melody. No one could listen to this beautifully-executed, deeply-felt music of the royal performer, without being impressed in his inmost soul, and feeling his heart swell with powerful emotions. Outside, in the antechamber, were standing the stern generals, the heroic warriors, Zeithen, and the brave Schwerin, and General von Saldern, and their scarred, austere features assumed a soft, touching expression, as they leaned against the wall and listened in breathless silence to the performance of the king. But suddenly the playing ceased.

To these brave warriors, unaccustomed to music, the execution had seemed superb; but the king was not satisfied with it. He, who had in his memory the royal *artiste* of Sans-Souci, exacted of the king, driven about by the hardships and necessities of war, that he should have lost nothing of the fulness of tone or the power and energy of execution. It worried him that the notes no longer flowed so clearly; it vexed him to hear a sharp, whistling sound, that seemed to accompany the melody as with a painful sigh. He threw the flute aside, and stepped to a looking-glass, which he took up with evident unwillingness.

It was very seldom that the king held it worth his while to consult the mirror about his personal appearance, and when he did so, it was usually to inquire for some failing or evidence of frailty which restricted him in the freedom of his being. And while he thus looked at himself, his features assumed a sad expression, and his eyebrows became contracted.

What was it, which thus put out of humor the brave hero, the victory-crowned king?

He became aware that his second front tooth had broken off. The gap thus caused was the natural explanation of the want of clearness in his playing. He threw the mirror angrily aside, and with a frown on his brow paced rapidly up and down the room two or three times.

But gradually another expression succeeded, and a sarcastic smile played around his mouth. Again he stepped to the writing-table, on which lay several unfinished letters. Looking for the one he had commenced to the Countess Camas, he said to himself: "The good countess inquires after my personal appearance. Well, now that I am in the humor, I will draw my protrait for her."

Again he took up the hand-glass and regarded himself long and attentively; but this time not with vexation or ill-humor, but with the cheerful smile and dignified calm of a philosopher. He then applied himself to his writing: "You ask how I look, dear mother. The disorder of war has made me so old, that you would hardly recognize me. My hair is quite gray on the right side of my head; my teeth break off and fall out; my face is as full of wrinkles as the furbelow of a woman's frock; my back as bent as that of a monk of La Trappe. Only my heart is unchanged; and, as long as I have breath,

will preserve feelings of esteem and the most tender friendship toward you, good mamma." *

As the king read over this description of his appearance once more, he broke into a loud, merry laugh. He then pushed the letter aside, and took up another piece of paper, and a drawing-pencil.

Silence prevailed now in the cabinet of the king. Outside was heard the monotonous tread of the sentinel, sometimes the sound of a trumpet, the neighing of a horse, or the order of some officer. The king paid no attention to all this. His ear was so accustomed to these noises, that it seemed like perfect silence to him. He was so buried in his work, that even the unwonted tumult which now arose was unperceived by him; nor did he notice that a carriage drove into the palace-yard, its post-horn sounding loud and merrily. The generals and courtiers, who were in the antechamber, noticed it all the more, because any thing was welcome to them which broke in upon the prevailing quiet; for so accustomed were they to the varied business of war, that any thing which departed from it was insupportably tedious. They drew to the window and looked with pleasure on the dusty, dirty travelling carriage, which, with its four panting post-horses, had drawn up at the entrance to the palace, and out of which descended a tall, manly figure, who went in at the palace door.

The gentlemen in the antechamber amused themselves guessing who the stranger who had just arrived could be; and they had all arrived at the unanimous conclusion that it must be the Marquis d'Argens, as the door opened, and the stranger entered. He asked for the adjutant on duty, and, as the latter was pointed out to

* "Lettres inédites, ou Correspondance de Frédéric II.," &c., p. 120.

him, he stepped toward him with an air of quiet dignity.

"I pray you announce me immediately to his majesty. Have the kindness to say to him, that I have not come hither on my private affairs, but as a delegate from the city of Berlin, with full powers from the Council and citizens, to request the honor of an audience with the king, and that I am obliged to return as speedily as possible to the capital."

"Your name, sir?"

"I am the merchant, John Gotzkowsky."

The serious and proud features of the aristocratic adjutant immediately relaxed, and assumed a more polite and obliging expression.

"Ah! Gotzkowsky, the rich and magnanimous merchant of Berlin—the special *protégé* of the king. I will announce you immediately to his majesty." And the adjutant hurried through the halls and entered the boudoir of the king.

In the mean while, the generals drew near Gotzkowsky, who related to them all about the siege of Berlin, and the cruel and relentless conduct of the enemy; pressing him with questions, whether on his journey thither he had encountered or come into the vicinity of any portion of the enemy.

"You will find the king very much out of humor," said General von Saldern; "he has not left his study to-day, and doubtless he is occupied with very serious plans."

"Perhaps even with the plan of a battle," said another of the gentlemen, "for it is said that Lacy has advanced his army, and even that Landon has left Dresden. A battle is therefore imminent, and the king is evidently drawing up his plan."

At this moment the door of the study was opened,

and the adjutant motioned to Gotzkowsky to enter. As the latter was traversing the hall, the generals cast an eager glance through the open door, anxious to see the countenance of the king, and find out from its expression whether this intolerable armistice was to be interrupted by the violent clash of arms.

In the mean time, Gotzkowsky entered the chamber of the king, and the door closed after him. He was now alone in the presence of the monarch, who was still sitting at his writing-table, making rapid strokes with his drawing-pencil on the paper before him.

"He is writing," said Gotzkowsky to himself, "and is perhaps in the act of drawing out the plan of the battle which the generals out there are awaiting with such joyous impatience. Yes, he is writing, and perhaps each stroke of the pen may cost the lives of hundreds of human beings." And he did not venture by a single word or a loud breath to draw attention to his presence. On his entrance, the king had cast on him one of his sharp, penetrating glances, before whose commanding power many a general and many a brave man had quailed, and had then bent his head again over the paper.

Absolute silence prevailed for a while. Suddenly the king interrupted it, and motioned to Gotzkowsky with his hand to draw near. "Just look and see whether that pleases you," said he, in a friendly tone. "You are known as a connoisseur in art, and you have proved to me that you understand painting. Look at that, and tell me whether you like it."

What was it that the king had drawn on the paper? Was it really, as his brave generals wished, the plan of a battle soon to be fought, was it a philosophical treatise, or one of those witty and piquant epistles to which the king treated his friends? None of all these.

"A nosegay!" cried Gotzkowsky, as with unconcealed astonishment he looked now on the paper, now on the king. "Your majesty is drawing a bouquet of flowers, and out there the gentlemen have just told me in confidence that you were busied with a plan of battle, and that the Austrians were approaching."

"Nonsense!" said the king, shrugging his shoulders, "that rough set out there are always anxious for war, and to be cutting and slashing at each other. Don't you listen to them, but rather tell me how you like this drawing. Don't you think these roses mixed with lilies look well? But I see you wish to know what it is intended for. Well, it is for a set of porcelain which I wish to have painted for the Marquis d'Argens." And, as he met Gotzkowsky's looks, he continued with a friendly smile: "Yes, you see, you are rich; you can make others presents. But the king of Prussia is a poor man; he has only his coat, his sword, and his porcelain. And this last even," continued he, with a slight frown, "I am obliged to get from Meissen."

"That your majesty need not do in future. Please God, your majesty shall make your porcelain in your own dominions!"

"Will you guarantee that? Will you undertake it?" asked the king, kindly.

"I will."

"And look ye, you are just the man to carry out what you wish. I am well satisfied with you. You have justified the confidence I placed in you when I was crown prince. You have redeemed the vow you made me then."

"I swore to your majesty that I would be faithful to the fatherland with life and property," cried Gotzkowsky, with noble ardor.

"And you have kept your word. It is not difficult in easy and prosperous times to find people to serve the state. Those are good citizens who serve her when she is in difficulty and danger.* You are a good citizen." And handing Gotzkowsky an open letter which lay on the writing-table, he said: "Read, it is a letter from the Marquis d'Argens. Read it aloud, I would like to hear it again."

And Gotzkowsky read with a trembling voice, and cheeks reddened with noble modesty, the following passage from a letter of the marquis, which the king pointed out to him with his finger: "Gotzkowsky is, indeed, an excellent man and a worthy citizen. I wish you had many such as he. The greatest gift which fortune can make a state is a citizen full of zeal for the welfare of his country and his prince. And in this respect I must say, to the credit of Berlin, that in these trying times I have met many of her citizens, Gotzkowsky the foremost among them, whose virtues, the old historians of Rome, had they lived at the present day, would have immortalized!" †

"Are you satisfied?" asked the king, as Gotzkowsky, having finished, handed him the paper. "Oh, I see you are a modest man, and blush like a young girl. But tell me, now, what brings you here? What does the city of Berlin wish?"

"Her rights, your majesty," said Gotzkowsky, seriously.

"And who is troubling her rights?"

"Your majesty."

The king frowned, and cast an angry glance on the bold jester.

* The king's own words.

† "Correspondance entre Fred. et M. d'Argens," vi., p. 228.

Gotzkowsky continued, calmly: "Your majesty is depriving us of our good rights, in so far as you wish to prevent us from being honest people, and keeping our word sacred."

"Oh, now I understand you," said the king, laughing. "You are speaking of the Russian war-tax. Berlin shall not pay it."

"Berlin will pay it, in order that your majesty may retain her in your gracious favor; in order that the great Frederick may not have to blush for his faithless and dishonest town, which would not then deserve to be the residence of a king. How! would your majesty trust the men who refused to redeem their openly-pledged word? who look upon sworn contracts as a mouse-trap, to be escaped from as soon as the opportunity offers, and when the dangerous cat is no longer sitting at the door? Berlin will pay—that our sons may not have to blush for their fathers; that posterity may not say that Berlin had stamped herself with the brand of dishonor. We have pledged our word, and we must keep it."

"You must not, for I do not wish you to do so," cried Frederick, with anger-flashing eyes. "I will institute reprisals. The imperial court has refused the payment of the Bamberg and Wurzburg bonds."

"And your majesty considers that proceeding highly dishonest and unjust," interrupted Gotzkowsky; "and while you wish to punish the empire for its breach of faith, you punish doubly the town of Berlin by depriving her of the last thing that remained to her in her day of need and misfortune—her honorable name. You cannot be in earnest, sire? Punish, if you choose, the imperial judge, but do not make Berlin the dishonored Jack Ketch to carry out your sentence."

"But are you so anxious to get rid of your money? What is the amount that you still owe?"

"A million and a half, sire."

The king stepped back and looked at Gotzkowsky with astonishment. "And the people of Berlin insist upon paying it?"

"Yes, because their word is pledged."

The king shook his head thoughtfully. "Hark ye," said he, "you seem to me to be a dangerous agitator, who wishes to turn my peaceful citizens of Berlin into true children of Haman. Some weeks ago, after the unfortunate fight of Kunnersdorf, when I sent an express courier to Berlin and ordered the Town Council to advise the rich and well-to-do to retire from the city with their portable property, my recommendation was not followed: you yourself excited the Council to disobedience. In your self-willed obstinacy you had the impudent assurance to make your way through a country infested by the enemy; and if my colonel, Von Prittwitz, had not found you in those woods, and brought you to me in the village, your obstinate head would have adorned the lance of some Cossack or other. And what did you come for but to assure me that the well-to-do citizens of Berlin would prefer staying at home, and did not wish to run away? Yes, truly you are a queer diplomatist, and rush headlong into danger and trouble only to assure your king that his citizens will not obey him!"

The king had spoken with apparent displeasure, but around his lips there played a slight smile, and his large blue eyes were directed toward Gotzkowsky with an expression of indescribable kindness.

"In this case they do not wish to obey your majesty, because they wish to remain worthy of the name of your majesty's citizens and subjects."

The king paced up and down several times, with folded arms, and then stopped before Gotzkowsky, looking steadily in his eyes. "Now tell me, how did you manage to make the Berliners so obstinate and so lavish of their means?"

Gotzkowsky smiled. "Please your majesty, the Berliners prize their honor above their life."

The king shook his head impatiently. "You may tell that to some one else. Tell *me*, how did you bring my Berliners up to that? But the truth—mind, you tell me the truth."

"Well, then, your majesty shall know the truth," said Gotzkowsky, after a pause.

"Yes, yes, the truth," cried the king, nodding his head violently. "I wish to know how you inspired the citizens of Berlin with such bold assurance."

"The truth is, sire, that this was only the courage of cowardice, and that the prudent magistracy and merchants were perfectly delighted with your majesty's orders not to pay these bonds, and that I gave myself an immense amount of trouble in vain to remind them of their pledged word and their compromised honor."

"Oh! I know it," said the king. "My good Berliners love money as well as any other of the good-for-nothing children of men. Proceed!"

"Well, when I found them deaf to the voice of honor, I let them hear the words of cowardly prudence. I painted to them the horrors awaiting them if the enemy perchance should return as conquerors, and what a fearful revenge they would take on the perjured city. I reminded them that the enemy would immediately attack all our property in Courland, Dantzic, and Livonia, and that at the Russian headquarters they had threatened

me that they would publish us in all the open commercial marts as issuers of false bonds."

"You were then in the Russian camp?"

"A fortnight ago, sire. The Council of Berlin requested me to undertake this journey to complete the transactions left unfinished by the rapid retreat of General von Tottleben."

"And did you finish them?"

"I was obliged to give General Tottleben a written agreement that I would return in four weeks to the Russian camp to carry out the transactions in the name of these merchants."

"I have been told that the Russian general would not accept the bonds for the war-tax unless you indorsed them. Is that true, too?"

"It is true."

"And what did you do?"

"I indorsed them."

The king's eye lighted up with friendship and kindness. "D'Argens is right," said he. "Cornelius Nepos and Livy would have mentioned you in their writings." And he paced up and down the room in deep thought.

A long pause ensued. Finally, Gotzkowsky was bold enough to break it. "And the tax, your majesty, may we pay it?"

The king stopped in front of him. "The tax shall be paid," said he curtly; but, as Gotzkowsky was about to break out in loud expressions of gratitude, the king waved him off with his hand. "That is," said he, "I myself will pay it, if it cannot be otherwise. Go back into the Russian camp, as you have promised. Endeavor to get some abatement of the amount, or some other profitable terms; but if you do not succeed, well, I will

have to pay this million and a half for Berlin. But in return you must grant me a favor."

"What, sire? Whatever it may be," cried Gotzkowsky, ardently, "I am ready to perform any service for your majesty, even to the sacrifice of my life."

The king smiled. "Oh, no! not quite so bad as that, although the service I ask of you is more difficult to most men than dying—I mean *keeping silence.*" And as he laid his hand affectionately on Gotzkowsky's shoulder, he continued: "Betray to no one what I have said to you, and only at the very last moment, if it is absolutely necessary, take the Council into your confidence."

"How, sire?" said Gotzkowsky, painfully. "You wish to deprive your Berlin citizens of the gratification of expressing to you their gratitude, their infinite affection. Berlin may not even know how kind, how gracious your majesty has been to her!"

"I don't like the jingling of words, nor the throwing of wreaths. The very people who throw laurel-wreaths would be only too glad if the laurels were hard enough to break our heads. You pay the contribution, that is to say, you advance it, and I'll return it to you.* That's all, and now don't say another word about it." At the same time, as if fearful that Gotzkowsky might yet venture to act contrary to his wishes, he continued more rapidly: "Now tell me a little about Berlin, and above all things about our gallery at Sans-Souci. How does it fare?"

"It is finished, sire, and the people flock to see it."

"I only, like a fugitive or a Don Quixote, am driven about," said the king to himself, "and cannot even enter

* "Life of a Patriotic Merchant," pp. 85–254. "The king paid the contribution in fact so quietly, one hardly knew when, where, or how."—*Preuss's History of Frederick.*

my own house, and they call that royal happiness!" Turning to Gotzkowsky, he remarked aloud: "Have you seen the gallery since the enemy took up his quarters in it?"

"Yes, sire! Prince Esterhazy was this noble enemy. He protected Sans-Souci like something sacred. When he left he only took one single small picture with him, as a souvenir."

The king gave a friendly nod. "I know it," said he, "and that is the only pleasure I have had for a long time. Once more I will see my Titians and Correggios, my Rubenses and Vandycks, which you bought for me. Now tell me about Charlottenburg. But mind, give me the truth. I have noticed that no one will speak out about it, nobody will tell the truth. They are afraid of my anger. But you are a brave man, you are not even afraid of the Cossacks. You will have the courage to let your king know the facts. How is it with Charlottenburg? The Saxons have quartered there—what did they do?"

And now Gotzkowsky, often interrupted by the violent and angry exclamations of the king, told of the barbarous and cruel vandalism committed by the Saxons at Charlottenburg, their unbridled destructiveness and unsparing barbarity.

"And the Polignac collection?" asked the king, breathlessly.

"Almost entirely destroyed."

The king started up from his easy-chair, his eyes flashing with rage. He was no longer the philosopher of Sans-Souci, no longer the poet; he was now the warrior panting for battle and bloody vengeance. "Tell me, tell me! I wish to know all," said the king, laboring out each word, and taking long strides up and down.

But as Gotzkowsky gave him a more detailed account, and related the sacrilegious barbarity which did not spare even the sacred art-treasures, the king's brow became more darkened, and for a moment a burning flush of anger shot across his pale cheek. At one time he raised his arm threateningly, as if he would bring down the thunderbolts of heaven upon such wickedness and ruthlessness.

As Gotzkowsky finished, the king said, curtly and vehemently, "Good, very good!" and traversing the room with hasty steps, he threw open the door which led into the antechamber, and called out, "Saldern!"

Immediately General von Saldern appeared at the open door. The king commanded him to enter and shut the door; then, addressing him in a short, decisive tone: "Go to-morrow, quietly, with a detachment of infantry and cavalry, to Hubertsburg, take possession of the castle, and have all the valuable furniture carefully inventoried and packed up. I will have none of it. The money obtained from its ransom will be turned over to the Lazaretto, and I will not forget you."

There was a pause. General von Saldern remained at the door motionless, in stiff military attitude.

The king looked at him with astonishment. "Well! did you hear?"

"Yes, your majesty, I heard. But, may it please your majesty, this is against my honor and my oath."

The king compelled himself to be composed, for he loved General Saldern as a brave and noble officer. You would be right," said he, "if I did not use this desperate means to a good object. But let me tell you, the head of the great lord does not feel it if you tear out the hair of his subjects. You must hit, then, where it hurts him; and that I intend to do. The Elector of Saxony shall

find out how it feels when one's most cherished possession is destroyed. We will teach him to be humane, and behave himself. Go, therefore, to Hubertsburg, and do as I told you."

General von Saldern turned pale, and his countenance was expressive of deep suffering, as he answered gravely and firmly: "Your majesty may send me right off to attack the enemy and his batteries, and I will obey with my whole heart; but against my honor, my oath, and my duty, I cannot, dare not act."

The king stamped with his foot, and his eye flashed with threatening anger.

"You must obey, as is your duty; you are bound to obey no other voice than that of your king who commands you," said he with a voice of thunder.

General Saldern answered, calmly: "But, sire, I must obey the voice of my honor! Your majesty can easily transfer this commission to another."

The king turned from him with an involuntary frown, and, walking up and down hastily, he stopped near Saldern, and laid his hand gently on his shoulder. "Look ye, Saldern, obey—go to Hubertsburg."

"I cannot, sire!"

"You do not desire to enrich yourself?" said the king, as he turned away. "Do you wish your discharge? I have no use for soldiers who do not consider obedience their first duty."

"I herewith ask for my discharge, sire!"

"You have it—go!" *

Without saying a word, General von Saldern made a military obeisance, and left the room.

* This interview is historical and literal. General von Saldern left the army, but after the peace entered it again, with high honor and distinction.—Kustre, "Traits of Saldern," p. 39.

"You go too!" said the king to Gotzkowsky, who had been a silent, involuntary spectator of this scene—"go and tell my adjutant to send Quintus Icilius to me."

In a few minutes Major Quintus Icilius entered. "Go to Hubertsburg with a detachment of infantry and cavalry, and clear out the castle."

Major Quintus Icilius took good heed not to contradict the king. He had already, in the antechamber, heard of General von Saldern's fate, and he was not indisposed to execute the king's commission.

"Only a hundred thousand dollars you hand over to the Lazaretto, the rest you can keep for yourself."

"As you command, sire! Shall I proceed at once?"

The king cast a look of disgust on him. "Are you in such a hurry to be rich?" said he. "Go—I will appoint the time and the hour more particularly." *

When the king was alone again, he paced up and down the room in deep thought. At one time he stopped at the window, and his bright blue eyes were turned mournfully toward heaven. "Poor fools that we are!" said he, with a sigh. "We have only a moment to live, and we make this moment as bitter as possible to each other. We take pleasure in destroying the master-pieces of industry and art, at the same time we are erecting an accursed monument to our own devastation and our cruelty." †

* Not till May, 1761, was the king's order carried into execution by Major Q. Icilius, in a most barbarous manner. The king was apparently satisfied; but when Q. Icilius in 1764 applied for repayment of moneys spent in executing the royal command, the king indorsed on the application—"My officers steal like crows. They get nothing."

† His own words.