

A GENTLE KNIGHT OF OLD BRANDENBURG—BY CHARLES MAJOR

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

ONE of the important steps in the designs of the Emperor of Austria in the 1730's to absorb Brandenburg and Prussia, then ruled by King Frederick William, was to arrange a marriage between Princess Wilhelmina, daughter of the latter, and Adolph, Margrave of Schwedt. Adolph was generally looked upon as a half-witted drunken fool, but beneath his maudlin exterior lay concealed a large kind heart and astonishing perspicacity. Adolph loved Wilhelmina, and, as his mother, from purely unselfish reasons, was anxious to have the match consummated, he was easily persuaded to journey to Berlin in obedience to the summons of Grumkow, who was Prime Minister of King Frederick William, but really the Emperor of Austria's tool and spy at the Berlin court.

At the same time Frederick Henry (known as Fritz Henry), hereditary Prince of Bayreuth, secretly left home to escape an

expected offer of marriage to one of the daughters of August the Stark, King of Poland and Elector of Saxony, the patron of Bayreuth. He and his father were agreed that almost any fate would be better than an alliance with August's corrupt court. He traveled under the name of Captain Henry Churchill of England.

He was captured by emissaries of King Frederick William, who were seeking recruits for the famous Grenadier Regiment, and taken to Berlin. As soon as he saw Princess Wilhelmina, Henry astonished the King by expressing his willingness to serve in the regiment, and, after proving his ability, was given command of a company. The King hated his son Frederick (afterward Frederick the Great), as well as Wilhelmina, and commanded the Crown Prince to make a companion of Henry, in the hope that the Prince might "learn something."



Henry Sprang Like a Cat to the Harpsichord and Took Fritz's Seat.

CHAPTER V.

Little Prince Fritz

WHEN the Crown Prince and Henry entered the Prince's apartments, Fritz gave our friend no word of welcome. The little fellow changed his rough military coat for a silk dressing gown, took a book from a shelf, seated himself in a window, and began to read. Henry took his stand by another window overlooking the palace gardens, and for a time was divided between pity for the Crown Prince and an inclination to be angry.

Little Fritz seemed to be such a forlorn young Prince, stranded on the stormy reef of his father's unnatural hatred, that Henry's anger soon gave way to sympathy. Presently two pages of the court entered the room and began a conversation with the Crown Prince. They talked at first in undertones; but once in awhile Fritz Henry caught the King's name linked with the words "damned Old Stumpy," "old brute," "old tyrant."

The Crown Prince addressed one of the pages as Keith and the other as Katt, though which was Katt and which was Keith, Henry did not know, since the Crown Prince did not honor his guest by presenting either of the young men. Soon the conversation became louder and grew excited in tone, and after a few minutes the Crown Prince and the pages seemed to care nothing for Henry's presence, and spoke aloud regardless of what he might hear.

"Stumpy says they must go," said one of the young men. "The harpsichord, violin, and flute all must go, and a bonfire will be made of them on the parade ground. Kate Sonnfeld told me that Stumpy swears he will beat you with his stick in public, and will imprison you in the dungeons of Spandau Castle on bread and water for a month, if

he catches you playing on either the harpsichord, flute, or violin."

"I'll play when I choose!" said the Crown Prince, showing great spirit in the absence of his father.

"Ah, but you must not!" pleaded one of the pages. "Your father seems to be insane on the subject of your music. He does not object to music in others, and it must be the pleasure it gives you that hurts him."

"But I will play! I'll play now!" said the Prince, who, in a small way, had his father's stubbornness without his force.

"But your father may come upon us," insisted Katt. "You know he is always slipping around and surprising you at unexpected moments. Judging from the violence of his recent outburst, I should not be surprised if he would try to kill you with his own hand, should he come suddenly into the room and find you playing. I believe the King's hatred of you and Mina has driven him mad."

"I'll play, anyway," said the Crown Prince. "I wish he would come in and kill me!"

The Prince seated himself at the harpsichord and began to play a selection from Handel's "Rinaldo." He had been playing perhaps five minutes, beautifully, sadly, tenderly, when a heavy footfall and the thump, thump, thump of a rattan cane were heard just outside the door of the room. The footfall and the cane were too familiar and too terrifying to every member of the court of Berlin not to be known when heard. The ominous sounds brought terror to the Crown Prince and his friends. One of the young men quickly drew the Prince away from the harpsichord, crying,

"The King, the King! For God's sake, Fritz—"

BUT it was too late. The footfall, the cane, and the ominous, angry growl were just outside the door. Henry turned toward the Crown Prince, and saw the pale young face distorted with fear. Fritz had just

risen from the harpsichord; but everyone in the room knew that he had risen too late, for the offensive notes certainly had fallen upon the ears of irate Prussian Majesty, and the royal fury could be heard with appalling distinctness. The knob of the door had just begun to turn.

The Prince was standing by the bench before the harpsichord, and a frightful scene was imminent. Henry sprang with the quickness of a cat to the harpsichord, took the seat Fritz had vacated, and, much to the Crown Prince's surprise, caught up the theme of Handel's beautiful melody just where the Crown Prince had left off twenty seconds before. At the same instant the door opened and in walked the furious old man.

When the King entered, Fritz Henry apparently was so interested in his music that he seemed not to be aware of his Majesty's presence, and continued playing as if no one had come into the room. When the King saw that it was his new Captain playing, his cane, which he had lifted on high, came gradually and softly to the floor, and the old man stood listening to the rare, sweet strains so beautifully rendered by our friend.

"Pardon me," said the Prince, laying his hand on Fritz Henry's shoulder. "Music is offensive to his Majesty, and I fear you do not know he is in the room."

Henry sprang to his feet, gave a stiff, military salute, and said, "I beg your Majesty's pardon. I did not know you had entered the room, nor did I know that you objected to music. I should not have dared accuse your Majesty of the crime of hating music."

"I don't hate it. Go on! Go on!" said the King, much to everyone's astonishment. "I'm not so great an idiot as to object to music if it is of the right kind and doesn't rob a young man of his senses. I like your music. If my worthless son would play that sort of music as you play it, I should not object; but his miserable French dances drive me mad. They are not for men; they are for French courtesans."

Fritz Henry had conquered this stubborn King, and had accomplished the extraordinary feat within half a day by using the King's own methods, temporized, softened, and sweetened to suit the occasion. Henry was careful always to make the King feel that nothing he did was exactly right; but he administered his corrective doses in such sugar coated, diminutive pills that the King felt the curative effect only and did not realize that he was being drugged.

"Go on! Play, play! Why do you stop?" said the King, evidently indignant that anyone should accuse him of disliking good music, though he had many times declared, in stormy outbursts, his hatred of it.

Henry played, and hard, half-mad Prussian Majesty listened, standing defiantly in the middle of the room, and refusing to sit in the presence of his despised son. After Henry had played for ten or fifteen minutes, he rose, and the King walked deliberately away, leaving our astonished friends staring at one another in open-eyed wonder.

AFTER he had left the room, Henry walked back to the window where he had been standing. The Crown Prince cast several glances in his direction and went over to him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, speaking English, "and I want you to do me the great honor of giving me your hand."

"I'll gladly give you my hand," answered Henry; "but I have nothing to pardon in your Highness."

"You have, indeed," insisted the Crown Prince. "I have, without the slightest cause, treated you discourteously; but my apology shall not be in words. From this hour my effort will be to make amends by what I do, and my conduct shall prove the warmth of my friendship, if you can find it in your heart to overlook what I have done, and will grant me the favor of your kind regard. These are my friends. This is Lieutenant Katt, and this is Lieutenant Keith. Each, you see, is over six feet tall, and you may judge from that fact that they are in my regiment, the Grenadiers."

Henry acknowledged the introduction, and the Crown Prince continued:

"There is one other person whom I wish you to know,—my sister. I have but three friends in the world,—Katt, Keith, and Mina. Before I present you to my sister, I want to tell her of the mistake I