

Classical and Romantic Cultural Styles: Prince Clemens von Metternich and King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia (June 1840)

Abstract

Classical and Romantic styles collide in this exchange of letters between [Prince Clemens von Metternich](#) and King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia. The influence of classicism is evident in Metternich's letter, which he wrote to Friedrich Wilhelm on June 11, 1840, just days after the death of the latter's father, Friedrich Wilhelm III. As the new Prussian king notes in his reply, Metternich's style combined rational thinking with the sympathy demanded by the occasion. Despite the personal nature of the letter, the Austrian chancellor wrote in the manner of an official state representative, using elaborate, dignified formulations. In contrast, Friedrich Wilhelm's reply of June 27, 1840, reveals his own devotion to Romanticism. His style is much more emotional and less ornate but appeals strongly to Metternich's sympathy and sorrow.

Source

I. Metternich to King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia, Vienna, June 11, 1840

Providence has now called Your Majesty to the high burden of the throne to which Your Highness was born! You will be equal to the task; you have already won universal trust, and you will also know how to justify it. It is not Your Majesty that I congratulate on the assumption of the throne; it is your realm that deserves this felicitation.

If governing is a task that is difficult to accomplish at any time, it is all the truer in times like ours. Your Majesty knows what I mean by governing, and I entertain the sure conviction that the views and feelings of your mind and your heart are in complete harmony with those of mine.

Your Highness knows the faithful reverence that I showed to the king who has now become immortal; he never doubted me, just as I always relied on him. The task of my ministry for more than thirty years was to bind Austria and Prussia intimately together as the true center of the salvation of our world. My sense tells me that I accomplished this task to the best of my ability. Now this legacy, too, shall pass to Your Majesty, and I know what you thought about its importance years ago. May Your Highness accept the assurance that this knowledge gives me a strength that I honor for all it is worth.

May Your Majesty graciously deign to permit me to remain henceforth towards Your Highness on a footing on which the immortal monarch allowed me to express my views freely! Austria and Prussia have been called to be the sustaining powers with respect to both Europe and Germany. They must get along, for that it is the only way in which great dangers can be mitigated. As long as the heart is healthy, there is hope for life, and in Europe these two realms assume the place of the heart.

May Your Highness deign graciously to accept this outpouring in a moment of heavy burden, and to permit the tribute of deep reverence with which I remain Your Majesty's humbly obedient

Prince Metternich

II. King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia to Metternich, Sanssouci, June 21, 1840

Your letter, dearest prince, in its ancient brevity of expression and gravity of content, is a lovely monument to the most beloved and revered man we mourn! Oh, whoever joined your warm heart with your cool head! That is the surest way always to be right and to govern correctly. I feel only too clearly that I lack this union, for I am not able to recover from the blow that has crushed us, and my situation seems to me like a dream from which I dearly long to awaken.

To take the place of a prince such as this king is a task whose enormous difficulty those outside the country are barely able to fathom.

How profoundly moving and exalted is the way in which the hand of God guided the dearly departed through life, his love of working inconspicuously for the good—and, on the other side, the sad or glorious fortunes through which God led him, his humble striving to give honor to Him alone, in times good or bad, and, by contrast, the glorification of his years in power through divine guidance: all this is known at home and abroad, and perhaps it will be handed down to posterity here and there on marble tablets. But the impression of these fortunes of his forty-three years on the throne, with the most terrible upheavals at the beginning and the longest and most blessed peace in history at the end—the impression that this natural government, devoid of the clatter of the craft, made on the people, on all estates, on good and evil, no one knows it who has not grown up under this regime and drawn his life force from it! Pity me, then, dear good prince, I deserve it.

Not that I do not recognize that some things still need to be done, accomplished, completed; not that I lack the drive, especially the drive to work, in partnership with Austria's imperial power, at elevating and glorifying our worthy German fatherland, and thus to achieve, in the heart of Europe, a vigorous union and unity, against which ill wind and foul weather (from wherever it may come) will rage powerlessly—but what I will always lack is what he was assured of in advance: the jubilant cheers from his peoples, who trusted that the monarch rich in experience and years would not undertake anything that was not thought through coolly and maturely. Admit it, my dear prince, I am right!

Well then, I place everything in God's hands. You, my esteemed prince, do not belong to Austria alone. The son of the king of Prussia believes that he has a claim to you, and so I will happily look upon and treat you as my counselor and friend until you indicate to me that this is not what you intended.

Farewell, my dearest prince, and thank you for your lovely letter to me, for your friendship to my unforgettable father—for the friendship of which you have already given me no small number of proofs; I am very much counting on it. Perhaps God will bless you as he blessed him: for the salvation of Germany and Europe.

With true friendship and the most respectful trust, dear prince, your devoted Friedrich Wilhelm.

Source: Clemens Wentzel Lothar von Metternich, *Aus Metternich's nachgelassenen Papiere*, edited by Richard von Metternich-Winneburg. Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1880-84, vol. 6, pp. 441-42, 445-46.

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