

# 1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, Volume 28 — William I. of Württemberg



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**WILLIAM I.** [FRIEDRICH KARL] (1781–1864), king of Württemberg, son of Frederick, afterwards King Frederick I. of Württemberg, was born at Lüben in Silesia on the 27th of September 1781. In his early days he was debarred from public life owing to a quarrel with his father, whose time-serving deference to Napoleon was distasteful to him. In 1814-1815 he suddenly rose into prominence through the Wars of Liberation against France, in which he commanded an army corps with no little credit to himself. On his accession to the throne of Württemberg in 1816 he realized the expectations formed of him as a liberal-minded ruler by promulgating a constitution (1819), under which serfdom and obsolete class privileges were swept away, and by issuing ordinances which greatly assisted the financial and industrial development and the educational progress of his country. In 1848 he sought to disarm the revolutionary movement by a series of further liberal reforms which removed the restrictions more recently imposed at Metternich's instance by the Germanic diet. But his relations with the legislature, which had from time to time become strained owing to the bureaucratic spirit which he kept alive in the administration, were definitely broken off in consequence of a prolonged conflict on questions of Germanic policy. He cut the knot by repudiating the enactments of 1848–1849 and by summoning a packed parliament (1851), which re-enforced the code of 1819.

The same difficulties which beset William as a constitutional reformer impeded him as a champion of Germanic union. Intent above all on preserving the rights of the Middle Germanic states against encroachments by Austria and Prussia he lapsed into a policy of mere obstruction. The protests which he made in 1820–1823 against Metternich's policy of making the minor German states subservient to Austria met with less success than they perhaps deserved. In 1849–1850 he made a firm stand against the proposals for a Germanic union propounded in the National Parliament at Frankfort, for fear lest the exaltation of Prussia should eclipse the lesser principalities. Though forced to accede to the proffering of the imperial crown to the king of Prussia, he joined heartily in Prince Schwarzenberg's schemes for undoing the work of the National Parliament, and by means of the *coup d'état* described above forced his country into a policy of alliance with Austria against Prussia. Nevertheless his devotion to the cause of Germanic union is proved by the eagerness with which he helped the formation of the Zollverein (1828–1830), and in spite of his conflicts with his chambers he achieved unusual popularity among his subjects. He died on the 25th of June 1864, and was succeeded by his son Charles.

See Nick, Wilhelm I., *König von Württemberg, und seine Regierung* (Stuttgart, 1864); P. Stalin, "König Wilhelm I. von Württemberg," *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Geschichte*, 1885, pp. 353-367, 417-434.



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