

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-42588-0 - Campaigners Grave and Gay: Studies of Four Soldiers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

L. H. Thornton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

MARSHAL MAURICE DE SAXE

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-42588-0 - Campaigners Grave and Gay: Studies of Four Soldiers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

L. H. Thornton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

AUTHORITIES

- ACTON, Lord. *Lectures on Modern History.*
- CHARTERIS, The Hon. EVAN. *William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland.*
- COLIN, J. *The Campaigns of Marshal Saxe.*
- FORTESCUE, The Hon. J. W. *A History of the British Army.*
- HAYWARD, A. *Essays.*
- HENDERSON, E. F. *A Lady of the Old Régime (Elizabeth Charlotte, duchesse d'Orléans).*
- MACLACHLAN, A. N. C. *William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland.*
- ORLÉANS, The Duchess of. *Secret Memoirs of the Court of Louis XIV.*
- POMPADOUR, Madame de. *Memoirs.*
- SAXE, M. de. *Mes Réveries.*
- SHAND, A. I. *Soldiers of Fortune in Camp and Court.*
- SKRINE, F. H. *Fontenoy, and Great Britain's share in the War of the Austrian Succession.*
- TOWNSHEND, C. V. F. *The Military Life of Field Marshal George, First Marquess Townshend.*
- TROWBRIDGE, W. R. H. *A Beau Sabreur. Maurice de Saxe, Marshal of France.*
- WILLIAMS, H. N. *Madame de Pompadour.*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-42588-0 - Campaigners Grave and Gay: Studies of Four Soldiers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

L. H. Thornton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

MARSHAL MAURICE DE SAXE

MAURICE DE SAXE was born at Dresden on October 28th, 1696. He was the natural son of the monarch who combined the Electorship of Saxony with the Crown of Poland. Maurice had only one legitimate brother and no legitimate sister. None the less he came of a somewhat numerous family, for he had no fewer than three hundred and fifty-three illegitimate brothers and sisters. His father's name was Augustus the Strong.

Mr Trowbridge has sketched for us the life and character of this most engaging of reprobates, this most prolific of kings. We see the petty Court apeing in its ruinous extravagance the splendours of Versailles. We see a galaxy of beauty, the long line of *maîtresses en titre* who succeeded one another with bewildering frequency. We see also, but less clearly, the shadowy forms of some of those many other women, and their name was legion, who temporarily attracted the fancy of the King. We see Augustus himself, full of *joie de vivre*, possessed of an irresistible charm, a strikingly handsome man, endowed with a strength which, even allowing for exaggeration, must have been prodigious. We see him, fearless, generous, kind-hearted, honest, and straightforward. Many of these traits we shall see reflected in his famous son

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-42588-0 - Campaigners Grave and Gay: Studies of Four Soldiers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

L. H. Thornton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 *Campaigners, Grave and Gay*

—the same keen zest in life, the same lavish openhandedness, the same attractive personality, the same recklessness, the same outspoken bluntness, the same abnormal physique, and (we must confess it) the same weakness for the society of gorgeous creatures.

If Maurice owed much to his father, he owed even more to his mother, a woman of outstanding ability. His mother was the Countess Aurora von Königsmarck, whose grandfather, Marshal von Königsmarck, made himself famous, or, as some might say, infamous, in the Thirty Years' War. He was indeed as thorough-paced an old ruffian as ever pillaged a town or laid waste a countryside. He died in the service of Sweden, full of years, full of honours, and, we must add, full of riches; for the old bandit knew well how to combine the rapacity of a looter with the discrimination of a connoisseur. The Marshal left three sons, of whom one died young. Of the survivors, the eldest, Conrad, was disappointing, as a Königsmarck. The true Königsmarck must needs be ever occupied in destroying something. Failing cities to sack, there remained the domestic felicity of homes to break up. Conrad cared for neither the one nor the other of these occupations. He spent a virtuous, commonplace existence, adding to the large fortune left to him by his father. The remaining son, Otho, worthily sustained the traditions of his

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-42588-0 - Campaigners Grave and Gay: Studies of Four Soldiers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

L. H. Thornton

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Maurice de Saxe*

5

House. He it was who, in the service of Venice, bombarded the Parthenon and reduced to ruins that sublime relic of a glorious past.

The good Conrad left two sons and two daughters. Of the latter, one married early and settled down to an ordinary, humdrum existence. The remainder of the family proved themselves very Königsmarcks. Charles, the eldest, was a soldier of fortune who served with much distinction against the Turks and the Moors. Wherever a desperate deed was to be done, there was Charles Königsmarck to be found to do it. Nor was it only in war that he made his mark. While in Venice he met the beautiful wife of an English peer and eloped with her. This lady presented him with a daughter under somewhat unusual circumstances. There was apparently in the Venetian service an order forbidding officers to take “animated comforts¹” into the field with them, so Charles, when campaigning in Italy, took with him his *chère amie* disguised as a page. One day, when he was out for a walk, the landlord of his billet came running after him shouting “Sir, Sir, come back quickly! Odd things are happening; your page is being confined.”

Later, on a visit to England, Charles made violent love to the greatest heiress of the day, who returned his affection and was prepared to elope

¹ This phrase was actually used in an official letter during the South African War.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-42588-0 - Campaigners Grave and Gay: Studies of Four Soldiers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

L. H. Thornton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 *Campaigners, Grave and Gay*

with and marry him. Unfortunately the lady had a husband. This was awkward—what was to be done? The husband might be murdered? And murdered he was. This admittedly extreme method of removing an obstacle to matrimony was too much even for the easy-going Court of Charles II, and Königsmarck had to flee the country. He then joined his uncle Otho, at that time commanding the Venetian army in the Morea. In this campaign Charles contracted a fever, which brought to a close the career of this truly promising Königsmarck at the early age of twenty-six.

The remaining son, Philip, forsook the profession of arms for the life of a courtier. Strikingly handsome and well provided with funds, he wandered from Court to Court until he made his way to Hanover. Here he found a state of affairs existing which appealed to his romantic nature. The Electress Sophia Dorothea of Zell, a woman of great beauty, was treated with brutality and neglect by her husband, the Elector, who was to ascend the British throne as George I, a monarch who neither valued good looks in his wife nor expected them in his mistresses. Without delay Philip set to work to console the Electress for the treatment she was receiving at the hands of her spouse. How far the matter had gone we do not know; but this we do know, that Philip's affection was reciprocated, and that the affair came to the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-42588-0 - Campaigners Grave and Gay: Studies of Four Soldiers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

L. H. Thornton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Maurice de Saxe 7

ears of the Elector. What exactly happened then is shrouded in mystery. But after July 1st, 1694, Philip von Königsmarck was never seen again and all trace of him disappeared, while the unhappy Electress was sent away to the lonely castle of Ahlden, where she terminated her miserable existence thirty-two years later.

There now remains the Countess Aurora. Possessed of great personal charm and ability of a high order, she presented herself at the Court of Augustus at Dresden to solicit his assistance in the search which she was making for her brother Philip. The inflammable Augustus succumbed at once to so attractive a suppliant. The Countess Aurora succumbed also, and in due course little Maurice de Saxe made his appearance, taking his name from the Castle of Moritzberg, "where," said Augustus, with that delicacy which was so marked a feature of his character, "I obtained the victory over his mother."

It will readily be believed that to make provision for so numerous an offspring caused Augustus considerable difficulty. The problem, indeed, brought his Finance Minister, Flemming, to the verge of distraction. The number of those who appealed for financial assistance to Augustus as the author of their being was constantly increasing, and it was impossible for the harassed Flemming to foresee from year to year what the demands under this

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-42588-0 - Campaigners Grave and Gay: Studies of Four Soldiers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

L. H. Thornton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 *Campaigners, Grave and Gay*

heading would be. At last, making the King's advancing years and growing infirmities an excuse for arriving at finality in the matter, Flemming drew up a list of those whose royal parentage could be fully substantiated. This list contained three hundred and fifty-four names, by the recognition of which, in Flemming's opinion, the claim of Augustus to be considered the father of his people would be sufficiently established.

Augustus was particularly devoted to little Saxe, and he was most anxious to make an ample provision for him. With this end in view he endeavoured to obtain the appointment of the Countess Aurora as Abbess of Quedlinburg, a foundation of great wealth. The income of the Abbey would, the fond father thought, be of immense assistance to Maurice. There were some, however, who thought that the character of the Countess fell short in some respects of that usually associated with an Abbess. Unfortunately, too, the influence of those who took this view was sufficiently strong to prevent the election of the Countess Aurora. So the fair penitent—or rather impenitent, for the leopard had not changed its spots—never attained at Quedlinburg a higher position than that of Canoness, a rank which carried with it no opportunity for manipulating the revenues of the Abbey.

Saxe's education presented some little difficulty, for he displayed a rooted aversion from acquiring

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-42588-0 - Campaigners Grave and Gay: Studies of Four Soldiers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

L. H. Thornton

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Maurice de Saxe* 9

any knowledge whatever of any subject not connected with the art of war. To be a soldier was his sole ambition, and he read with eagerness any book that was given to him bearing on the military profession. To his antipathy to any other form of learning he fortunately made one exception, for he took very kindly to learning the French language, which he came to speak very well. Write it, however, he never could, and to the end of his days, though he made his great career in the French army, his efforts to write the language remained quite grotesque.

When he was twelve years of age he was already so strong and so abnormally developed that his father decided to send him to the headquarters of Marlborough and Prince Eugène, to gain some experience of actual war under those famous commanders. The boy was placed in the charge of an old veteran, General Schulenberg, to whom Augustus gave strict orders that Maurice, young as he was, was to march in the ranks, to carry a musket, and to do his duty on guard, etc. This was a somewhat drastic programme for a boy of twelve, and we gather that, once out of Augustus' sight, the kindly Schulenberg modified the routine a good deal.

On their way to the front, Schulenberg and Maurice stopped at Hanover, where they dined with the Elector. It must have been a curious meal, for both the Elector and Maurice knew of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-42588-0 - Campaigners Grave and Gay: Studies of Four Soldiers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

L. H. Thornton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 *Campaigners, Grave and Gay*

the disappearance of Philip von Königsmarck fourteen years before, and although Maurice could only guess at his uncle's fate, he knew that his host must be well aware of what that fate had been. At the Court of Hanover at this moment the reigning mistress was General Schulenberg's sister, that unpleasing woman, afterwards to be created Duchess of Kendal, who, together with a bevy of other scraggy sirens, accompanied King George I to England, where, as Lord Acton has told us, they offended one part of the public by their morals and the remainder by their ugliness.

Having arrived at the front, Maurice de Saxe was engaged at the siege of Tournay. Here he appears to have been in the thick of the fighting, for he is said to have had seven men killed and twelve wounded by his side, his horse shot under him, and a bullet through his hat. At the siege of Mons this child of twelve had an affair with an enormous French dragoon, whom he exterminated by emptying the contents of a huge horse-pistol into his assailant's stomach. At thirteen he was present at the battle of Malplaquet. Knowing what a fire-eater his charge was and foreseeing how bloody the fighting was likely to prove, General Schulenberg took care to keep Maurice well in rear, out of harm's way. This did not suit the boy at all, and at the end of the day he lost no chance of telling everyone that he had been where the