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Excerpt

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## BOOK XV

SECOND SILESIAN WAR, IMPORTANT EPISODE  
IN THE GENERAL EUROPEAN ONE.

15TH AUG. 1744—25TH DEC. 1745

## CHAPTER I

## PRELIMINARY : HOW THE MOMENT ARRIVED

BATTLE being once seen to be inevitable, it was Friedrich's plan not to wait for it, but to give it. Thanks to Friedrich Wilhelm and himself, there is no Army, nor ever was any, in such continual preparation. Military people say, 'Some Countries take six months, some twelve, to get in motion for war : but in three weeks Prussia can be across the marches, and upon the throat of its enemy.' Which is an immense advantage to little Prussia among its big neighbours. 'Some Countries have a longer sword than Prussia ; but none can unsheathe it so soon' :—we hope, too, it is moderately sharp, when wielded by a deft hand.

The French, as was intimated, are in great vigour, this Year ; thoroughly provoked ; and especially since Friedrich sent his Rothenburg among them, have been doing their very utmost. Their main effort is in the Netherlands, at present ;—and indeed, as happened, continues all through this War to be. They by no means intend, or ever did, to neglect Teutschland ; yet it turns out, they have pretty much done with their fighting there. And next Year, driven or led by accidents of various kinds, they quit it altogether ; and

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turning their whole strength upon the Netherlands and Italy, chiefly on the Netherlands, leave Friedrich, much to his astonishment, with the German War hanging wholly round *his* neck, and take no charge of it farther! In which, to Friedrich's Biographers, there is this inestimable benefit, if far the reverse to Friedrich's self: That we shall soon have done with the French, then; with them and with so much else; and may, in time coming, for most part, leave their huge Sorcerer's Sabbath of a European War to dance itself out, well in the distance, not encumbering us farther, like a circumambient Bedlam, as it has hitherto done. Courage, reader! Let us give, in a glance or two, some notion of the course things took, and what moment it was when Friedrich struck-in;—whom alone, or almost alone, we hope to follow thenceforth; 'Dismal Swamp' (so gracious was Heaven to us) lying now mostly to rearward, little as we hoped it!

It was mere accident, a series of bad accidents, that led King Louis and his Ministers into gradually forsaking Friedrich. They were the farthest in the world from intending such a thing. Contrariwise, what brain-beating, diplomatic spider-weaving, practical contriving, now and afterwards, for that object; especially now! Rothenburg, Noailles, Belleisle, Cardinal Tencin, have been busy; not less the mistress Châteauroux, who admires Friedrich, being indeed a high-minded unfortunate-female, as they say; and has thrown out Amelot, not for stammering alone. They are able, almost high people, this new Châteauroux Ministry, compared with some; and already show results.

Nay, what is most important of all, France has (unconsciously, or by mere help of Noailles and luck) got a real General to her Armies: Comte de Saxe, now Maréchal de Saxe; who will shine very splendid in these Netherland operations,—counter-shone by mere Wades, D'Ahrembergs, Cumberlands,—in this and the Four following Years. Noailles had always recognised Comte de Saxe; had long striven for

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him, in Official quarters; and here gets the light of him unveiled at last, and set on a high place: loyal Noailles.

This was the Year, this 1744, when Louis xv., urged by his Châteauroux, the high-souled unfortunate-female, appeared in person at the head of his troops: 'Go, Sire, go, *mon Chou* (and I will accompany); show yourself where a King should be, at the head of your troops; be a second Louis-le-Grand!' Which he did, his Châteauroux and he; actually went to the Netherlands, with baggage-train immeasurable, including not cooks only, but play-actors with their thunder-barrels (off from Paris, May 3d), to the admiration of the Universe.<sup>1</sup> Took the command, nominal-command, first days of June; and captured in no-time Menin, Ipres, Furnes, and the Fort of Knock, and as much of the Austrian Netherlands as he liked,—that is to say, saw Noailles and Saxe do it;—walking rapidly forward from Siege to Siege, with a most thundering artillery; old Marshal Wade and consorts dismally eating their victuals, and looking-on from the distance, unable to attempt the least stroke in opposition. So that the Dutch Barrier, if anybody now cared for it, did go all flat; and the Balance of Power gets kicked out of its sacred pivot: to such purpose have the Dutch been hoisted! Terrible to think of;—had not there, from the opposite quarter, risen a surprising counterpoise; had not there been a Prince Karl, with his 70,000, pressing victoriously over the Rhine; which stayed the French in these sacrilegious procedures.

*Prince Karl gets across the Rhine (20th June—2d July 1744)*

Prince Karl, some weeks ago, at Heilbronn, joined his Rhine Army, which had gathered thither from the Austrian side, through Baiern, and from the Hither-Austrian or Swabian Winter-quarters; with full intent to be across the Rhine, and home upon Elsass and the Compensation Countries, this Summer, under what difficulties soever. Karl, or as some

<sup>1</sup> Adelung, iv. 113; Barbier, ii. 391, 394; Dulaure, *Hist. de Paris*; etc.

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whispered, old Marshal Traun, who is nominally second in command, do make a glorious campaign of it, this Year;—and lift the Cause of Liberty, at one time, to the highest pitch it ever reached. Here, in brief terms, is Prince Karl's Operation on the Rhine, much admired by military men :

'Stockstadt, June 20th, 1744. Some thirty and odd miles north of Mannheim, the Rhine, before turning westward at Mainz, makes one other of its many Islands (of which there are hundreds since the leap at Schaffhausen). one other, and I think the biggest of them all; perhaps two miles by five; which the Germans call *Kuhkopf* (Cow-head), from the shape it has,—a narrow semi-ellipse; River there splitting in two, one split (the western) going straight, the other bending luxuriantly round: so that the *hind*-head or straight end of the Island lies towards France, and the round end, or *cow-lips* (so to speak) towards native Teutschland, and the woody Hills of the Berg-Strasse thereabouts.\* Stockstadt, chief little Town looking over into this Cowhead Island, lies under the *chin*: understand only farther that the German branch carries more than two-thirds of the River; that on the Island itself there is no town, or post of defence; and that Stockstadt is the place for getting over. Coigny and the French, some 40,000, are guarding the River hereabouts, with lines, with batteries, cordons, the best they can; Seckendorf, with 20,000 more ("Imperial" Old-Bavarian Troops, revived, recruited by French pay), is in his garrison of Philipsburg, ready to help when needed:—not moulting now, at Wemdingen, in that dismal manner; new-feathered now into 'Kaiser's Army'; waiting in his Philipsburg to guard the River there. 'Coigny's French have ramparts, ditches, not quite unfurnished, on their own shore, opposite this Cowhead Island (*Isle de Héron*, as they call it); looking over to the hind-head, namely: but they have nothing considerable there; and in the Island itself, nothing whatever. "If now Stockstadt were suddenly snatched by us," thinks Karl;—"if a few pontoons were nimbly swung in?"

'June 20th,—Coigny's people all shooting *feu-de-joie*, for that never enough to be celebrated Capture of Menin and the Dutch Barrier a fortnight ago,—this is managed to be done. The active General Bärenklau, active Brigadier Daun under him, pushes rapidly across into *Kuhkopf*; rapidly throws up entrenchments, ramparts, mounts cannon, digs himself in,—greatly to Coigny's astonishment; whose people hereabouts, and in all their lines and posts, are busy shooting *feu-de-joie* for those immortal Dutch victories, at the moment, and never dreaming

\* See Map (Two First Silesian Wars), at end of vol. iv.

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of such a thing. Fresh force floods-in, Prince Karl himself arrives next day, in support of Bärenklau; Coigny (head-quarters at Speyer, forty miles south) need not attempt dislodging him; but must stand upon his guard, and prepare for worse. Which he does with diligence; shifting northward into those Stockstadt-Mainz parts; calling Seckendorf across the River, and otherwise doing his best,—for about ten days more, when worse, and almost worse, did verily befall him.

‘No attempt was made on Bärenklau; nor, beyond the alarming of the Coigny-Seckendorf people, did anything occur in Cowhead Island,—unless it were the finis of an ugly bully and ruffian, who has more than once afflicted us: which may be worth one word. Colonel Mentzel’ (copperfaced Colonel, originally Playactor, ‘Spy in Persia,’ and I know not what) ‘had been at the seizure of Kuhkopf; a prominent man. Whom, on the fifth day after (“June 25th”), Prince Karl overwhelmed with joy, by handing him a Patent of Generality: “Just received from Court, my Friend, on account of your merits old and late.”—“Aha,” said Bärenklau, congratulating warmly: “Dine with me, then, Herr General Mentzel, this very day. The Prince himself is to be there, Highness of Hessen-Darmstadt, and who not; all are impatient to drink your health!” Mentzel had a glorious dinner; still more glorious drink,—Prince Karl and the others, it is said, egging him into much wild bluster and gasconade, to season their much wine. Eminent swill of drinking, with the loud coarse talk supposable, on the part of Mentzel and consorts did go on, in this manner, all afternoon: in the evening, drunk Mentzel came out for air; went strutting and staggering about; emerging finally on the platform of some rampart, face of him huge and red as that of the foggiest rising Moon;—and stood, looking over into the Lorraine Country; belching-out a storm of oaths, as to his taking it, as to his doing this and that; and was even flourishing his sword by way of accompaniment; when, lo, whistling slightly through the summer air, a rifle-ball from some sentry on the French side (writers say it was a French drummer, grown impatient, and snatching a sentry’s piece) took the brain of him, or the belly of him; and he rushed-down at once, a totally collapsed monster, and mere heap of dead ruin, never to trouble mankind more.’<sup>1</sup> For which my readers and I are rather thankful. Voltaire, and perhaps other memorable persons, sometimes mention this brute (miraculous to the Plebs and Gazetteers); otherwise eternal oblivion were the best we could do with him. Trenck also, readers will be glad to understand, ends in jail and bedlam by and by.

‘Prince Karl had not the least intention of crossing by this Cowhead Island. Nevertheless he set about two other Bridges in the neighbour-

<sup>1</sup> *Guerre de Bohème*, iii. 165.

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hood, nearer Mainz (few miles below that City); kept manœuvring his Force, in huge half-moon, round that quarter, and mysteriously up and down; alarming Coigny wholly into the Mainz region. For the space of ten days; and then, stealing-off to Schröck, a little Rhine Village above Philipsburg, many miles away from Coigny and his vigilances, he—

‘Night of 30th June—1st July, Suddenly shot Pandour Trenck, followed by Nadasti and 6,000, across at Schröck; who scattered Seckendorf’s poor outposts thereabouts to the winds; “built a bridge before morning, and next day another.” Next day Prince Karl in person appeared; and on the 3d of July, had his whole Army with its luggages across; and had seized the Lines of Lauterburg and Weissenburg (celebrated northern defence of Elsass),—much to Coigny’s amazement; and remained inexpugnable there, with Elsass open to him, and to Coigny shut for the present!<sup>1</sup> Coigny made bitter wail, accusation, blame of Seckendorf, blame of men and of things; even tried some fighting, Seckendorf too doing feats to recover those Lines of Weissenburg: but could not do it. And, in fact, blazing to and fro in that excited rather than luminous condition, could not do anything; except retire into the strong posts of the background; and send express on express, swifter than the wind if you can, to a victorious King overturning the Dutch Barrier: “Help, your Majesty, or we are lost; and France is—what shall I say!”’

‘Admirable feat of Strategy! What a General, this Prince Karl!’ exclaimed mankind,—Cause-of-Liberty mankind with special enthusiasm; and took to writing *Lives* of Prince Karl,<sup>2</sup> as well as tar-burning and *te-deum*-ing on an extensive scale. For it had sent the Cause of Liberty bounding up again to the top of things, this of crossing the Rhine, in such fashion. And, in effect, the Cause of Liberty, and Prince Karl himself, had risen hereby to their acme or culminating point in World-History; not to continue long at such height, little as they dreamt of that, among their tar-burnings. The feat itself,—contrived by Nadasti, people say, and executed (what was the real difficulty) by Traun,—brought

<sup>1</sup> Adelung, iv. 139-141.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, *The Life of his Highness Prince Charles of etc., with etc. etc.* (London 1746); one of the most distracted Blotches ever published under the name of Book;—awakening thoughts of a public dimness very considerable indeed, to which this could offer itself as lamp!

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Prince Karl very great renown, this Year; and is praised by Friedrich himself, now and afterwards, as masterly, as Julius Cæsar's method, and the proper way of crossing rivers (when executable) in face of an enemy. And indeed Prince Karl, owing to Traun or not, is highly respectable in the way of Generalship at present; and did in these Five Months, from June onward, really considerable things. At his very acme of Life, as well as of Generalship; which alas, soon changed, poor man; never to culminate again. He had got, at the beginning of the Year, the high Maria Theresa's one Sister, Archduchess Maria Anna, to Wife;<sup>1</sup> the crown of long mutual attachment; she safe now at Brussels, diligent Co-Regent, and in a promising family-way; he here walking-on victorious:—need any man be happier? No man can be supremely happy long; and this General's strategic felicity and his domestic were fatally cut-down almost together. The Cause of Liberty, too, now at the top of its orbit, was—But let us stick by our Excerpting:

'Dunkirk, 19th July 1744' (Princess Ulrique's Wedding, just two days ago). 'King Louis, on hearing of the Job's-news from Elsass, instantly suspended his Conquests in Flanders; detached Noailles, detached this one and that, double-quick, Division after Division (leaving Saxe, with 45,000, to his own resources, and the fatuities of Marshal Wade); and, 19th July, himself hastens off from Dunkirk (leaving much of the luggage, but not the Châteauroux behind him), to save his Country, poor soul. But could not, in the least, save it; the reverse rather. August 4th, he got to Metz, Belleisle's strong Town, about 100 miles from the actual scene; his detached reinforcements, say 50,000 men or so, hanging out ahead like flame-clouds, but uncertain how to act;—Noailles being always cunctatious in time of crisis, and poor Louis himself nothing of a Cloud-Compeller;—and then,

'Metz, August 8th, The Most Christian King fell ill; dangerously, dreadfully, just like to die. Which entirely paralysed Noailles and Company, or reduced them to mere hysterics, and excitement of the unluminous kind. And filled France in general, Paris in particular,

<sup>1</sup> Age then twenty-five gone: 'born 14th September 1718; married to Prince Karl 7th January 1744; died, of childbirth, 16th December same year' (Hormayr, *Österreichischer Plutarch*, iv. erstes Bändchen, 54).

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with terror, lamentation, prayers of forty-hours; and such a paroxysm of hero-worship as was never seen for such an object before.<sup>1</sup>

For the Cause of Liberty here, we consider, was the culminating moment; Elsass, Lorraine and the Three Bishoprics lying in their quasi-moribund condition; Austrian claims of Compensation ceasing to be visions of the heated brain, and gaining some footing on the Earth as facts. Prince Karl is here actually in Elsass, master of the strong passes; elate in heart, he and his; France, again, as if fallen paralytic, into temporary distraction; offering for resistance nothing hitherto but that universal wailing of mankind, Hero-worship of a thrice-lamentable nature, and the Prayers of Forty-Hours! Most Christian Majesty, now *in extremis*, centre of the basest hubbub that ever was, is dismissing Châteauroux. Noailles, Coigny and Company hang well back upon the Hill regions, and strong posts which are not yet menaced; or fly vaguely, more or less distractedly, hither and thither; not in the least like fighting Karl, much less like beating him. Karl has Germany free at his back (nay, it is a German population round him here); neither haversack nor cartridge-box like to fail: before him are only a Noailles and consorts, flying vaguely about;—and there is in Karl, or under the same cloak with him at present, a talent of manœuvring men, which even Friedrich finds masterly. If old Marshal Wade, at the other end of the line, should chance to awaken and press home on Saxe, and his remnant of French, with right vigour? In fact, there was not, that I can see, for centuries past, not even at the Siege of Lille in Marlborough's time, a more imminent peril for France.

*Friedrich decides to intervene*

King Friedrich, on hearing of these Rhenish emergencies and of King Louis's heroic advance to the rescue, perceived that for himself too the moment was come; and hastened to

<sup>1</sup> Espagnac, ii. 12; Adelung, iv. 180; *Fastes de Louis XV.*, ii. 423; etc. etc.



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inform heroic Louis, That though the terms of their Bargain were not yet completed, Sweden, Russia and other points being still in a pendent condition, he, Friedrich,—with an eye to success of their Joint Adventure, and to the indispensability of joint action, energy, and the top of one's speed now or never,—would, by the middle of this same August, be on the field with 100,000 men. 'An invasion of Bohemia, will not that astonish Prince Karl; and bring him to his Rhine-Bridges again? Over which, if your Most Christian Majesty be active, he will not get, except in a half or wholly ruined state. Follow him close; send the rest of your force to threaten Hanover; sit well on the skirts of Prince Karl. Him as he hurries homeward, ruined or half-ruined, him, or whatever Austrian will fight, I do my best to beat. We may have Bohemia, and a beaten Austria, this very Autumn: see,—and, in one Campaign, there is Peace ready for us!' This is Friedrich's scheme of action; success certain, thinks he, if only there be energy, activity, on your side, as there shall be on mine;—and has sent Count Schmettau, filled with fiery speed and determination, to keep the French full of the like, and concert mutual operations.

'Magnanimous!' exclaim Noailles and the paralysed French Gentlemen (King Louis, I think, now past speech, for Schmettau only came August 9th): 'Most sublime behaviour, on his Prussian Majesty's part!' own they. And truly it is a fine manful indifference (by no means so common as it should be) to all interests, to all considerations, but that of a Joint-Enterprise one has engaged in. And truly, furthermore, it was immediate salvation to the paralysed French Gentlemen, in that alarming crisis; though they did not much recognise it afterwards as such; and indeed were conspicuously forgetful of all parts of it, when their own danger was over.

Maria Theresa's feelings may be conceived; George II.'s feelings; and what the Cause of Liberty in general felt, and furiously said and complained, when,—suddenly as a *Deus ex*

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*machiná*, or Supernal Genie in the Minor Theatres,—Friedrich stepped in. Precisely in this supreme crisis, 7th August 1744, Friedrich's Minister, Graf von Dohna, at Vienna, has given notice of the Frankfurt Union, and solemn Engagement entered into: 'Obliged in honour and conscience; will and must now step forth to right an injured Kaiser; cannot stand these high procedures against an Imperial Majesty chosen by all the Princes of the Reich, this unheard-of protest that the Kaiser is no Kaiser, as if all Germany were but Austria and the Queen of Hungary's. Prussian Majesty has not the least quarrel of his own with the Queen of Hungary, stands true, and will stand, by the Treaty of Berlin and Breslau;—only, with certain other German Princes, has done what all German Princes and peoples not Austrian are bound to do, on behalf of their down-trodden Kaiser, formed a Union of Frankfurt; and will, with armed hand if indispensable, endeavour to see right done in that matter.'<sup>1</sup>

This is the astonishing fact for the Cause of Liberty; and no clamour and execration will avail anything. This man is prompt, too; does not linger in getting out his sword, when he has talked of it. Prince Karl's Operation is likely to be marred amazingly. If this swift King (comparable to the old Serpent for devices) were to burst-forth from his Silesian strengths; tread sharply on the *tail* of Prince Karl's Operation, and bring back the formidably-fanged head of *it* out of Alsace, five hundred miles all at once,—there would be a business!

We will now quit the Rhine Operations, which indeed are not now of moment; Friedrich being suddenly the key of events again. I add only, what readers are vaguely aware of, that King Louis did not die; that he lay at death's door for precisely one week (8th-15th August), symptoms mending on the 15th. In the interim,—Grand-Almoner Fitz-James (Uncle of our Conte di Spinelli) insisting that a certain

<sup>1</sup> In *Adelung*, iv. 155-6, the Declaration itself (Audience, '7th August 1744'; Dohna off homeward 'on the second day after').