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Excerpt

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BOOK XIX

FRIEDRICH LIKE TO BE OVERWHELMED IN
THE SEVEN-YEARS WAR

1759—1760

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARIES TO A FOURTH CAMPAIGN

THE posting of the Five Armies this Winter,—Five of them in Germany, not counting the Russians, who have vanished to Cimmeria over the horizon, for their months of rest,—is something wonderful, and strikes the picturesque imagination. Such a Chain of Posts, for length, if for nothing else! From the centre of Bohemia eastward, Daun's Austrians are spread all round the western Silesian Border and the south-eastern Saxon; waited-on by Prussians, in more or less proximity. Next are the Reichsfolk; scattered over Thüringen and the Franconian Countries; fronting partly into Hessen and Duke Ferdinand's outskirts:—the main body of Duke Ferdinand is far to westward, in Münster Country, vigilant upon Contades, with the Rhine between. Contades and Soubise,—adjoining on the Reichsfolk are these Two French Armies: Soubise's, some 25,000, in Frankfurt-Ems Country, between the Mayn and the Lahn, with its back to the Rhine; then Contades, onward to Maes River and the Dutch Borders, with his face to the Rhine,—and Duke Ferdinand observant of him on the other side. That is the 'Cordon of Posts' or winter-quarters

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this Year. 'From the Giant Mountains and the Metal Mountains, to the Ocean;—to the mouth of Rhine,' may we not say; 'and back again to the Swiss Alps or springs of Rhine, that Upper-Rhine Country being all either French or Austrian, and a basis for Soubise?'¹ Not to speak of Ocean itself, and its winged War-Fleets, lonesomely hovering and patrolling; or of the Americas and Indies beyond!

'This is such a Chain of mutually vigilant Winter-quarters,' says Archenholtz, 'as was never drawn in Germany, or in Europe, before.' Chain of about 300,000 fighting men, poured out in that lengthy manner. Taking their winter siesta there, asleep with one eye open, till reinforced for new business of death and destruction against Spring. Pathetic surely, as well as picturesque. 'Three Campaigns there have already been,' sighs the peaceable observer: 'Three Campaigns, surely furious enough; Eleven battles in them,² a Prag, a Kolin, Leuthen, Rossbach;—must there still be others, then, to the misery of poor mankind?' thus sigh many peaceful persons. Not considering what are, and have been, the rages, the iniquities, the loud and silent deliriums, the mad blindnesses and sins of mankind; and what amount of *calcining* these may reasonably take. Not calcinable in three Campaigns at all, it would appear! Four more Campaigns are needed: then there will be innocuous ashes in quantity; and a result unexpected, and worth marking in World-History.

It is notably one of Friedrich's fond hopes,—of which he keeps-up several, as bright cloud-hangings in the haggard inner world he now has,—that Peace is just at hand; one right struggle more, and Peace must come! And on the part of Britannic George and him, repeated attempts were made,—one in the end of this Year 1759;—but one and all

¹ Archenholtz, i. 306.

² Stenzel, v. 185. This, I suppose, would be his enumeration: *Lobositz* (1756); *Prag*, *Kolin*, *Hastenbeck*, *Gross-Jägersdorf*, *Rosbach*, *Breslau*, *Leuthen* (1757); *Crefeld*, *Zorndorf*, *Hochkirch* (1758): 'eleven hitherto in all.'

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of them proved futile, and, unless for accidental reasons, need not be mentioned here. Many men, in all nations, long for Peace; but there are Three Women at the top of the world who do not; their wrath, various in quality, is great in quantity, and disasters do the reverse of appeasing it.

The French people, as is natural, are weary of a War which yields them mere losses and disgraces; 'War carried on for Austrian whims, which likewise seem to be impracticable!' think they. And their Bernis himself, Minister of Foreign Affairs, who began this sad French-Austrian Adventure, has already been remonstrating with Kaunitz, and grumbling anxiously, 'Could not the Swedes, or somebody, be got to mediate? Such a War is too ruinous!' Hearing which, the Pompadour is shocked at the favourite creature of her hands; hastens to dismiss him ('Be Cardinal, then, you ingrate of a Bernis; disappear under that Red Hat!')—and appoints, in his stead, one Choiseul (known hitherto as *Stainville*, Comte de Stainville, French Excellency at Vienna, but now made Duke on this promotion), Duc de Choiseul;¹ who is a Lorrainer, or Semi-Austrian, by very birth; and probably much fitter for the place. A swift, impetuous kind of man, this Choiseul, who is still rather young than otherwise; plenty of proud spirit in him, of shifts, talent of the reckless sort; who proved very notable in France for the next twenty years.

French trade being ruined withal, money is running dreadfully low: but they appoint a new Controller-General; a M. de Silhouette, who is thought to have an extraordinary creative genius in Finance. Had he but a Fortunatus-Purse, how lucky were it! With Fortunatus Silhouette as purse-holder, with a fiery young Choiseul on this hand, and a fiery old Belleisle on that, Pompadour meditates great things this Year,—Invasions of England; stronger German Armies; better German Plans, and slashings home upon Hanover itself, or the vital point;—and flatters herself, and her poor

¹ Minister of Foreign Affairs, '11th November 1758' (Barbier, iv. 294).

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Louis, that there is on the anvil, for 1759, such a French Campaign as will perhaps astonish Pitt and another insolent King. Very fixed, fell and feminine is the Pompadour's humour in this matter. Nor is the Czarina's less so; but more, if possible; unappeasable except by death. Imperial Maria Theresa has masculine reasons withal; great hopes, too, of late. Of the War's ending till flat impossibility stop it, there is no likelihood.

To Pitt this Campaign 1759, in spite of bad omens at the outset, proved altogether splendid: but greatly the reverse on Friedrich's side; to whom it was the most disastrous and unfortunate he had yet made, or did ever make. Pitt at his zenith in public reputation; Friedrich never so low before, nothing seemingly but extinction near ahead, when this Year ended. The truth is, apart from his specific pieces of ill-luck, there had now begun for Friedrich a new rule of procedure, which much altered his appearance in the world. Thrice over had he tried by the aggressive or invasive method; thrice over made a plunge at the enemy's heart, hoping so to disarm or lame him: but that, with resources spent to such a degree, is what he cannot do a fourth time; he is too weak henceforth to think of that.

Prussia has always its King, and his unrivalled talent; but that is pretty much the only fixed item. Prussia *versus* France, Austria, Russia, Sweden and the German Reich, what is it as a field of supplies for war! Except its King, these are failing, year by year; and at a rate fatally *swift* in comparison. Friedrich cannot now do Leuthens, Rossbachs; far-shining feats of victory, which astonish all the world. His fine Prussian veterans have mostly perished; and have been replaced by new levies and recruits; who are inferior both in discipline and native quality;—though they have still, people say, a noteworthy taste of the old Prussian sort in them; and do, in fact, fight well to the last. But 'it is observable,' says Retzow somewhere, and indeed it

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follows from the nature of the case, 'that while the Prussian Army presents always its best kind of soldiers at the beginning of a war, Austria, such are its resources in population, always improves in that particular, and its best troops appear in the last campaigns.' In a word, Friedrich stands on the defensive henceforth; disputing his ground inch by inch: and is reduced, more and more, to battle obscurely with a hydra-coil of enemies and impediments; and to do heroisms which make no noise in the Gazettes. And, alas, which cannot figure in History either,—what is more a sorrow to me here!

Friedrich, say all judges of soldiership and human character who have studied Friedrich sufficiently, 'is greater than ever,' in these four Years now coming.¹ And this, I have found more and more to be a true thing; verifiable and demonstrable in time and place,—though, unluckily for us, hardly in this time or this place at all! A thing which cannot, by any method, be made manifest to the general reader; who delights in shining summary feats, and is impatient of tedious preliminaries and investigations,—especially of *maps*, which are the indispensablest requisite of all. A thing, in short, that belongs peculiarly to soldier-students; who can undergo the dull preliminaries, most dull but most inexorably needed; and can follow out, with watchful intelligence, and with a patience not to be wearied, the multifarious topographies, details of movements and manœuvrings year after year, on such a Theatre of War. What is to be done with it here! If we could, by significant strokes, indicate, under features true so far as they went, the great wide fireflood that was raging round the world; if we could, carefully omitting very many things, omit of the things intelligible and decipherable that concern Friedrich himself, nothing that had meaning: *if* indeed—! But it is idle preluding. Forward again, brave reader, under such conditions as there are!

Friedrich's Winter in Breslau was of secluded, silent,

¹ Berenhorst, in *Kriegskunst*; Retzow; etc.

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sombre character, this time; nothing of stir in it but from work only: in marked contrast with the last, and its kindly visitors and gaieties. A Friedrich given-up to his manifold businesses, to his silent sorrows. 'I have passed my winter like a Carthusian monk,' he writes to D'Argens: 'I dine alone; I spend my life in reading and writing; and I do not sup. When one is sad, it becomes at last too burdensome to hide one's grief continually; and it is better to give way to it by oneself, than to carry one's gloom into society. Nothing solaces me but the vigorous application required in steady and continuous labour. This distraction does force one to put away painful ideas, while it lasts: but, alas, no sooner is the work done, than these fatal companions present themselves again, as if livelier than ever. Mupertuis was right: the sum of evil does certainly surpass that of good:—but to me it is all one; I have almost nothing more to lose; and my few remaining days, what matters it much of what complexion they be?'¹

The loss of his Wilhelmina, had there been no other grief, has darkened all his life to Friedrich. Readers are not prepared for the details of grief we could give, and the settled gloom of mind they indicate. A loss irreparable and immeasurable; the light of life, the one loved heart that loved him, gone. His passionate appeals to Voltaire to celebrate for him in verse his lost treasure, and at least make her virtues immortal, are perhaps known to readers:² alas, this is a very feeble kind of immortality, and Friedrich too well feels it such. All Winter he dwells internally on the sad matter, though soon falling silent on it to others.

The War is ever more dark and dismal to him; a wearing, harassing, nearly disgusting task; on which, however, depends

¹ 'Breslau, 1st March 1759,' To D'Argens (*Œuvres de Frédéric*, xix. 56).

² *Ode sur la mort de S. A. S. Madame la Princesse de Bareith* (in *Œuvres de Voltaire*, xviii. 79-86): see Friedrich's Letter to him (6th November 1758); with Voltaire's *Verses* in Answer (next month); Friedrich's new Letter (Breslau, 23d January 1759), demanding something more,—followed by the *Ode* just cited (*Ib.* lxxii. 402; lxxviii. 82, 92; or *Œuvres de Frédéric*, xxiii. 20-24; etc.).

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life or death. This Year, he 'expects to have 300,000 enemies upon him'; and 'is, with his utmost effort, getting-up 150,000 to set against them.' Of business, in its many kinds, there can be no lack! In the intervals he also wrote considerably: one of his Pieces is a *Sermon on The last Judgment*; handed to Reader De Catt, one evening:—to De Catt's surprise, and to ours; the Voiceless in a dark Friedrich trying to give itself some voice in this way!¹ Another Piece, altogether practical, and done with excellent insight, brevity, modesty, is *On Tactics*; ²—properly it might be called, 'Serious very Private Thoughts,' thrown on paper, and communicated only to two or three, 'On the new kind of Tactics necessary with those Austrians and their Allies,' who are in such overwhelming strength. 'To whose continual sluggishness, and strange want of concert, to whose incoherency of movements, languor of execution, and other enormous faults, we have owed, with some excuse for our own faults, our escaping of destruction hitherto,'—but had better *not* trust that way any longer! Fouquet is one of the highly select, to whom he communicates this Piece; adding along with it, in Fouquet's case, an affectionate little Note, and, in spite of poverty, some Newyear's Gift, as usual,—the 'Widow's Mite' (300*l.*, we find); 'receive it with the same heart with which it was set apart for you; a small help, which you may well have need of, in these calamitous times.'³ Fouquet much admires the new Tactical Suggestions;—seems to think, however, that the certainly practicable one is, in particular, the last, That of 'improving our Artillery to some equality with theirs.' For which, as may appear, the King has already been taking thought, in more ways than one.

Finance is naturally a heavy part of Friedrich's Problem;

¹ *Œuvres de Frédéric*, xv. 1-10 (see Preuss's *Preface* there; Formey, *Souvenirs*, i. 37; etc. etc.).

² *Réflexions sur la Tactique*: in *Œuvres de Frédéric*, xxviii. 153-166.

³ 'Breslau, 23d December 1758'; with Fouquet's Answer, 2d January 1759: in *Œuvres de Frédéric*, xx. 114-117.

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the part which looks especially impossible, from our point of vision! In Friedrich's Country, the War Budget does not differ from the Peace one. Neither is any borrowing possible; that sublime Art, of rolling-over on you know not whom the expenditure, needful or needless, of your heavy-laden self, had not yet,—though England is busy at it,—been invented among Nations. Once, or perhaps twice, from the *Stände* of some willing Province, Friedrich negotiated some small Loan; which was punctually repaid when Peace came, and was always gratefully remembered. But these are as nothing, in face of such expenses; and the thought how he did contrive on the Finance side, is and was not a little wonderful. An ingenious Predecessor, whom I sometimes quote, has expressed himself in these words:

‘Such modicum of Subsidy’ (he is speaking of the English Subsidy in 1758), ‘how useful will it prove in a Country bred everywhere to Spartan thrift, accustomed to regard waste as sin, and which will lay-out no penny except to purpose! I guess the Prussian Exchequer is, by this time, much on the ebb; idle precious metals tending everywhere towards the melting-pot. At what precise date the Friedrich-Wilhelm balustrades, and enormous silver furnitures, were first gone into, Dryasdust has not informed me: but we know they all went; as they well might. To me nothing is so wonderful as Friedrich's Budget during this War. One day it will be carefully investigated, elucidated and made conceivable and certain to mankind: but that as yet is far from being the case. We walk about in it with astonishment; almost, were it possible, with incredulity. Expenditure on this side, work done on that: human nature, especially British human nature, refuses to conceive it. Never in this world, before or since, was the like. The Friedrich miracles in War are great; but those in Finance are almost greater. Let Dryasdust bethink him; and gird his flabby loins to this Enterprise; which is very behoveful in these Californian times!’—

The general Secret of Prussian Thrift, I do fear, is lost

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from the world. And how an Army of about 200,000, in field and garrison, could be kept on foot, and in some ability to front combined Europe, on about Three Million Sterling annually ('25 million *thalers*'=3,150,000*l.*, that is the steady War-Budget of those years), remains to us inconceivable enough;—mournfully miraculous, as it were; and growing ever more so in the Nugget-generations that now run. Meanwhile, here are what hints I could find, on the Origins of that modest Sum, which also are a wonder:¹

'The Hoarded Prussian Moneys, or "*Treasures*"' (two of them, *Kleine Schatz*, *Grosse Schatz*, which are rigidly saved in Peace years, for incidence of War), 'being nearly run-out, there had come the English Subsidy: this, with Saxony, and the Home revenues and remnants of *Schatz*, had sufficed for 1758; but will no longer suffice. Next to Saxony, the English Subsidy (670,000*l.* due the second time this year) was always Friedrich's principal resource: and in the latter years of the War, I observe, it was nearly twice the amount of what all his Prussian Countries together, in their ravaged and worn-out state, could yield him. In and after 1759, besides Home Income, which is gradually diminishing, and English Subsidy, which is a steady quantity, Friedrich's sources of revenue are mainly Two:

'*First*, there is that of wringing money from your Enemies, from those that have deserved ill of you,—such of them as you can come at. Enemies, open or secret, even Ill-wishers, we are not particular, provided only they lie within arm's-length. Under this head fall principally three Countries (and their three poor Populations, in lieu of their Governments): Saxony, Mecklenburg (or the main part of it, *Mecklenburg-Schwerin*), and Anhalt; from these three there is a continual forced supply of money and furnishings. Their demerits to Friedrich differ much in intensity; nor is his wringing of them,—which in the cases of Mecklenburg and Saxony increases year by year to the nearly intolerable pitch,—quite in the simple ratio of their demerits; but in a compound ratio of that and of his indignation and of his wants.

'Saxony, as Prime Author of this War, was from the first laid-hold of, collared tightly: "Pay the shot, then, what you can" (in the end it was almost what you cannot)! As to Mecklenburg-Schwerin, the grudge against Prussia was of very old standing, some generations now; and the present Duke, not a very wise Sovereign more than his Ancestors, had always been ill with Friedrich; willing to spite and hurt

¹ Preuss, ii. 388-392; Stenzel, v. 137-141.

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him when possible : in Reichs Diet he, of all German Princes, was the first that voted for Friedrich's being put to Ban of the Reich,—he ; and his poor People know since whether that was a wise step ! The little Anhalt Princes, too, all the Anhalts, Dessau, Bernburg, Cöthen, Zerbst' (perhaps the latter partially excepted, for a certain Russian Lady's sake), 'had voted, or at least had ambiguously half-voted, in favour of the Ban, and done other unfriendly things ; and had now to pay dear for their bits of enmities. Poor souls, they had but One Vote among them all Four ;—and they only half gave it, tremulously pulling it back again. I should guess it was their terrors mainly, and over-readiness to reckon Friedrich a sinking ship ; and to leap from the deck of him,—with a spurn which he took for insolent ! The Anhalt-Dessauers particularly, who were once of his very Army, half Prussians for generations back, he reckoned to have used him scandalously ill.

'This Year the requisition on the Four Anhalts,—which they submit to patiently, as people who have leapt into the wrong ship,—is, in precise tale : of money, 330,000 thalers (about 50,000*l.*) ; recruits, 2,200 ; horses, 1800. In Saxony, besides the fixed Taxes, strict confiscation of Meissen Potteries and every Royalty, there were exacted heavy "Contributions," more and more heavy, from the few opulent Towns, chiefly from Leipzig ; which were wrung-out, latterly, under great severities,—“chief merchants of Leipzig all clapt in prison, kept on bread-and-water till they yielded,”—*as* great severities as would suffice, but *not* greater ; which also was noted. Unfortunate chief merchants of Leipzig,—with Brühl and Polish Majesty little likely to indemnify them ! Unfortunate Country altogether. An intelligent Saxon, who is vouched-for as impartial, bears witness as follows : “And this I know, that the oppressions and plunderings of the Austrians and Reichsfolk, in Saxony, turned all hearts away from them ; and it was publicly said, We had rather bear the steady burden of the Prussians than such help as these our pretended Deliverers bring.”¹ Whereby, on the whole, the poor Country got its back broken, and could never look-up in the world since. Resource *First* was abundantly severe.

'Resource *Second* is strangest of all ;—and has given rise to criticism enough ! It is no other than that of issuing base money ; mixing your gold and silver coin with copper,—this, one grieves to say, is the Second and extreme resource. “A rude method,—would we had a better,—of suspending Cash-payments, and paying by bank-notes instead !” thinks Friedrich, I suppose. From his Prussian Mints, from his Saxon' (which are his for the present), 'and from the little Anhalt-Bernburg Mint' (of which he expressly purchased the sad privilege,—for *we* are not a Coiner, we are a King reduced to suspend Cash-payments, for the time being), 'Friedrich poured-out over all Germany, in all manner of

¹ Stenzel (citing from *Kriegskanzlei*, which I have not) v. 137 *n.*