

**THE OVERTHROW OF THE
FRENCH ARMY, ITS
PRELUDE AND ITS CAUSE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649483204

The Overthrow of the French Army, Its Prelude and Its Cause by Anonymous

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ANONYMOUS

**THE OVERTHROW OF THE
FRENCH ARMY, ITS
PRELUDE AND ITS CAUSE**

THE
OVERTHROW
OF
THE FRENCH ARMY:

ITS PRELUDE AND ITS CAUSE.

In Essay.



LONDON:

WILLIAM RIDGWAY, 169 PICCADILLY. W.

1871.

237. f. 85.

THE
OVERTHROW OF THE FRENCH ARMY;
ITS PRELUDE, AND ITS CAUSE.

An Essay.

THE month of July, 1870, opened upon a profound calm pervading the surface of European politics. There was not a ripple on the water—not a cloud in the sky.

Even the two great nations, whose rival claims to predominance had long constituted a source of disquiet, seemed likely to rest content with asserting them, and to prefer a divided throne to the risk of contesting its sole sovereignty.

France had been engaged during the preceding year in a series of constitutional changes, which had just been ratified by a national vote; and her Government, gratified by the 'peaceful Sadowa' it had won, which had silenced for a time its political opponents, had announced a programme of internal progress and reform.

Prussia had also attained her object of solidifying the other German States upon herself. The Southern Confederation was knit to the Northern by the closest military as well as commercial ties,

and the unification of Germany (outside Austria) was virtually an accomplished fact.

Their animosity had lasted during four years, without either giving a tangible cause for quarrel. If France had threatened, she had never attempted to carry her threats into execution. If Prussia had been provoking, her provocations had never taken the form of material injury. Neither had really interfered with the other : and thus there was good ground for hope that the quarrel was dying out ; that the rivals would respect each other's strength, and tacitly acknowledge their rivalry without bringing it to an issue.

But this was not to be. A storm was already brewing, which was destined to sweep over Europe with hurricane-like force and rapidity, before men had hardly had time to notice its appearance above the horizon.

On the 3rd July, a telegram from the French Ambassador at Madrid acquainted the Minister for Foreign Affairs at Paris with the startling fact that the Spanish Government had offered the vacant throne of Spain to Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, an obscure and distant member of the Prussian royal house ; that the Prince had accepted the offer ; and that his acceptance had already received the sanction of the Prussian King.

The negotiations consequent on this announcement only took 12 days to run their course, and

ended on the 15th July with a declaration of war by France against Prussia. Three weeks of military preparation then sufficed for the commencement of hostilities; and, in a short month afterwards, on the 2nd of September, the Imperial French army had ceased to exist, the Second Empire had vanished with it, and France herself was struggling in the death-agony!

Beyond this point the present Essay does not go.

Up to the 2nd of September the war was merely a regular campaign between the French and German armies, terminating in the whole of the former becoming virtually prisoners by the surrender of Sedan and the isolation of Metz; and is therefore mainly of interest to the professional student, although the dramatic overthrow of French and Napoleonic power cannot fail to be universally attractive.

In its details this period is chiefly remarkable for the contrast which it presents between perfect organization and perfect disorganization, for the completeness of the triumph, and for the fearful danger shewn to be incurred by making generalship subserve political need. The belief that it teaches any fresh lessons in the art of war is erroneous. What is new always appears more wonderful than what is old. Superior skill, numbers and energy, won as they have always won, and very much in the same way: French and Germans

fought as they have always fought: the carnage was not greater than with the old weapons: and the actual fighting only went to re-prove the truth that peculiarities in drill and armament very slightly affect the fate of battles. The numbers were too large to allow much exercise of tactics; while, as regards strategy, although that of Von Moltke was faultless, it was not fairly tested. The French movements had no other tendency than to get their armies surrounded by irresistible numbers, and the Germans had only to conform. It was like the fly selecting the most eligible spot for the spider to weave his web around him.

After the 2nd of September, however, the war, although far from being at an end, assumed an entirely new phase. It was no longer a case of army *versus* army, but of the patriotism of France rallying round Paris, and striving to make head against the disciplined hosts of Germany. The interest therefore attaching to this second period of the war, which lasted till its termination, is of a widely different character from that of the first.

The problems of the attack and defence of a city of two millions of inhabitants were then presented for solution: The merits of the Prussian military system were developed to the utmost: The revolution in the science of fortification necessitated by modern artillery was shewn: The behaviour of the German in unaccustomed victory, and of the Frenchman in unaccustomed defeat was exem-

plified : The effect of a high state of civilization upon abating the horrors of war was seen : and, perhaps most important of all, the capability of an unarmed people to resist a great armed invasion was fully tested.

The two periods have therefore little in common beyond their mutual relationship, and it is the former—the most popularly interesting, although the least instructive—that will now alone be dealt with. Not that so slight a work as the present aims at entering deeply into even this restricted portion of so great a subject. It is merely what it pretends to be, viz. an Essay: which will attempt a sketch; first, of the origin of the war which resulted in the overthrow of the French army; then, of the course of the campaign which wrought that overthrow; and, lastly, of the causes to which the overthrow was due.

I.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WAR.

The fundamental requisite towards forming an impartial estimate of the causes which led to the late war, is to realize the pre-existing relations between France and Prussia; to recognize the fact that, since the wonderful accession of European power and military reputation gained by the latter in the Bohemian campaign of 1866, the nominal peace between the two countries had been only

nominal, and that the attitude in which they stood towards each other was really that of an armed truce.

Going back then to this chronic state of feud as the primary source of evil, it cannot be gainsayed that it was due to an unjustifiable feeling of jealousy on the part of the French, and it therefore follows that the primary responsibility for the war rests with France.

But then this is surely not saying very much, considering how the connecting links between cause and effect in human affairs are so complicated, that every event can be traced back to some primary source which has had practically nothing to do with bringing it about. And national feeling is a mere senseless force—at one moment stirred to its depths by the veriest trifle, at another unmoved by the most astounding phenomena—which is capable of being controlled, directed, roused, or dissipated, at will by the individuals who rule their fellows. The impulses of the popular mind therefore are no more responsible for the uses or misuses to which they are put, than the spring which merely supplies the river-water is responsible for the manner in which that water is employed during the hundreds of miles of its course.

Even as regards the feeling itself—although it was culpable, it was also natural. What nation, on finding a long enjoyed supremacy challenged, would not experience the same? Has England,