

THE PRUSSIAN AMPAIGN OF 1758;

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The Prussian campaign of 1758; by Herbert Tuttle

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HERBERT TUTTLE

**THE PRUSSIAN
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THE PRUSSIAN CAMPAIGN OF 1758

BY

HERBERT TUTTLE

LATE PROFESSOR IN CORNELL UNIVERSITY

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THE PRUSSIAN CAMPAIGN OF 1758, I.¹

[THE following pages contain the last historical work of the late Herbert Tuttle, Professor of Modern European History in Cornell University. Shortly after his untimely death, Houghton, Mifflin and Co. published what was thought to be all that the deceased historian had completed of his *History of Prussia*. It seems, however, that this was not the case. When Professor Tuttle left Ithaca for the last time for Clifton Springs, in 1894, he packed up with several books the manuscript on which he had last been working, in the hope that his health would permit him to continue his labors. Mrs. Tuttle was unaware of this and entrusted to the publishers only the completed chapters that appeared in book form with a sympathetic memoir by Professor Herbert B. Adams. The chapter now presented to the readers of the AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW, and presenting an account of the campaign of 1758, extending to October, bears characteristic marks of the ripe knowledge and scholarly workmanship which made Professor Tuttle's *History of Prussia* the best authority in the English language upon the subject. Special mention should be made of the care he displayed in examining the primary sources of the period. He went to the expense of having copied for him in London much of the correspondence of the Duke of Newcastle, which is preserved in the British Museum and the importance of which has only recently been made known to students of the history of the eighteenth century. The love of truth, grasp of the period and minute care to assure correctness of detail, which distinguished all the work of the historian of Prussia, show no diminution in the last paragraphs that came from his hand. The editors of the AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW hereby express their gratitude to Mrs. Mary McArthur Tuttle for her kindness in permitting them to publish in its pages the last contribution to history made by her accomplished husband.]

H. MORSE STEPHENS.

If the year 1757 was remarkable for the tardy close, the following year was not less remarkable for the early opening of hostilities,

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so that the period of general rest was short. It was quite in the fitness of things too that the Russians, who were then the first to retire, should now be the first to begin. Apraxin's successor, General Fermor, like Apraxin himself, was not a man from whom much was expected by those who knew the scale of military reputations at the Russian capital; but his sovereign's orders were now imperative, his troops were hardened to severe weather, and in the middle of January he marched upon the capital of Preussen at the head of thirty thousand men. No opposition was made to his progress. Lehwaldt was in Pomerania; and as all available resources were needed for defending the rest of his dominions, Frederic now dropped Preussen, as he had before dropped the western provinces, out of his system of operations. The few battalions of militia fled on the approach of the enemy, and on the twenty-second of January Fermor made his triumphant entry into Königsberg. The leading magnates were notified that by the law of conquest the dominion of the province was transferred to the empress of the Russias. In harmony with this fiction the cruel policy of plunder and destruction observed by Apraxin the year before was abandoned for one of conciliation; the people were promised the maintenance of their laws and institutions; strict discipline was enforced; and Frederic refused to forgive his subjects of Preussen for the apparent ease with which they accepted the yoke of the invader. He never again set foot in the province.¹

While Fermor paused for rest after this arduous achievement the fires of war were suddenly lighted in another part of the field; the signal gun from Preussen was answered on the plains of Hanover. During the winter a change again took place in the chief command of the French army. Marshal Richelieu went back to Paris laden with spoils if not with glory;² and in his place came, in February, the Count of Clermont, a man in clerical orders, with little or no military talent, but a prince of the house of Bourbon, and a favorite at the court of Versailles. In the hour of his disgrace French satire wrote and French urchins sang in the streets that he preached like a soldier and fought like a priest.³ But among his many faults too great confidence was evidently not one. His first reports were full of complaints about the bad condition of the army, the inadequate quarters, the deficient supplies, about the hospitals crowded with sick, and the rosters glaring with falsehood;⁴ and other ac-

¹ See Preuss, II. 161, 162.

² Barbier, VII. 16, 17, gives the amount of debts which he paid from the proceeds of his campaign at 1,110,000 livres.

³ Il prêche comme un soldat

Et se bat comme un apôtre.

⁴ Clermont to Paulmy, 18 February 1758, printed by Stühr, ii. Beilage, pp. 423-426.

counts confirm his description in all its sombre details. In the rival army the interval had been used for reform and preparation, so that by the middle of February Prince Ferdinand had over thirty thousand men, including fifteen squadrons of Prussian cavalry sent by Lehwaldt from Pomerania, ready for service in the field. Prince Henry undertook to make a diversion from the side of Halberstadt. Thus prepared, Ferdinand's plan was to force the enemy out of their positions along the Weser, to give battle if they showed fight, and to drive them if possible across the Rhine. The attempt succeeded perhaps even beyond his own expectation. By a wise strategy, a bold demeanor, prompt movements, and an unflagging energy Ferdinand forced the enemy out of their positions in Brunswick and Hanover; frustrated all their attempts, which were indeed feeble enough, to make a stand; carried one after another the strategic towns where they had left garrisons on their original invasion; and thus steadily rolled back their line toward the Rhine itself, behind which they retired, near Wesel, in the first days of April. The greater part of Soubise's corps was also swept along by the current, and crossed the same river in the vicinity of Düsseldorf. Even East Friesland was evacuated by the French, so great was the panic.

These repeated disasters of France in the field had a momentous and far-reaching effect upon her relations with Russia. It is hard indeed to define these relations during the first part of the Seven Years' War in the terms of modern diplomacy. Though the two powers were nominally enlisted on the same side, they were not allies and scarcely even friends; for after ten years of alienation some constraint of course remained, no direct treaty bound them together, and the Polish question even held them apart. Hence the two courts of Vienna and Versailles looked on the Russian participation with different eyes. The empress-queen welcomed it with an open heart and few reserves; agreed to the cessions of territory demanded in return; and seemed to acquiesce in the policy of Elizabeth at Warsaw. But what Austria welcomed as a positive good France barely tolerated as a necessary evil. Louis himself and his ministers watched the progress of the Russian arms therefore with mixed feelings of delight and doubt: delight, because it weakened Frederic of Prussia, the common foe; doubt, because it increased at the cost of France the influence of Russia in Poland. But French statesmen were not agreed upon the extent to which their attitude toward Russia ought to be affected by their policy at Warsaw. Bernis and Stainville, the chief representatives of the official diplomacy, agreed in making the Russian alliance first in the order of

importance. Count Broglie and those who were admitted to the secret correspondence insisted, on the other hand, that a complete reconciliation with Russia would be suicidal; that a jealous distrust should mark all relations with that court; and that the ancient maxims of French statecraft, which aimed to support Poland and Turkey as barriers against Muscovite ambition, should be maintained in all their integrity. Between these two extremes Louis himself wavered, inclining now toward one side, now toward the other. Before Rossbach he gave some support to Broglie, looked with alarm upon the presence of the Russian army in Poland, and even procured from Brühl and Elizabeth the dismissal of Poniatowski, whose influence over Catherine was held to be full of danger. If the French had won at Rossbach, they would doubtless have assumed a still bolder tone. But the defeat shattered the prestige of their arms, and when Leuthen followed, the need of active aid from Russia became so urgent that the double policy was for a time suspended. By the assent of Louis the lover of Catherine was restored to her arms, a private correspondence was begun between the two monarchs and Count Broglie left Poland in disgust. For a time Louis seemed to acquiesce in the sway of Russian influence at Warsaw; and in spite of occasional attempts afterwards, that of France was never fully regained. On these events certain French writers base a bold yet mournful generalization. It is possible, they suggest, to take the humiliating defeat at Rossbach as the starting-point in that series of blunders and crimes which led to the extinction of Poland, the gradual dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, and the rise of Russia on the ruins of both.¹ Next in the sad procession came the retreat of Richelieu from the Elbe, and now Clermont had added a fresh disgrace by his wild flight across the Rhine.

At this time, however, the relations of both France and Austria with the court of St. Petersburg were put on a better footing, and Frederic's enemies were filled with new hopes, by the overthrow of Bestuschef. The papers of Apraxin revealed, so it was reported, the chancellor's connection with treasonable plots;² and on the twenty-fifth of February, 1758, he was placed under arrest in his own house. A special tribunal found him guilty of the charge and recommended the penalty of death, which, however, Elizabeth commuted to a species of exile. He was stripped of all his titles and honors, banished to his estates in the country, and ordered to remain there during the pleasure of the empress. His office was

¹ See, e. g., Broglie, *Secret du Roi*, I. 292.

² See Esterhazy's reports printed by Schaefer, II. 544 seq., and that of the English ambassador in Raumer, II. 456.

turned over to the vice-chancellor, Woronzof, a less able and ambitious man, but more agreeable to the courts of Vienna and Versailles.

The fall of Bestuschef was undoubtedly connected with the retreat of Apraxin after the battle of Gross-Jägersdorf, but just where the point of connection lay is still an unsolved problem. It is true that a well-defined theory, which modern historians have generally accepted, makes the marshal's singular movement the result of positive orders from the chancellor,¹ who needed the army for the support of a daring scheme that he had formed. The empress was ill, mortally ill it was supposed. Bestuschef's scheme was to anticipate her death by a *coup d'état*, which should exclude the Grand Duke Peter from the throne, and proclaim the young prince who was Catherine's son, if not her husband's, as emperor, with Catherine herself as regent during his minority. When Peter learned of this plot to rob him of his expected heritage he sought the Austrian ambassador, who advised him to appeal to Elizabeth. The result was the arrest and condemnation of the chancellor; and soon afterwards Catherine herself, seeing that the game was lost, threw herself at the feet of the empress, made a full confession and was restored to favor, while the unlucky Bestuschef went into exile. But the general theory thus outlined had many minor shades or varieties, and is not yet supported by evidence which a historian can regard as conclusive. Masslowski absolutely rejects that very essential part of it which concerns the retreat of Apraxin. The statement generally made at the time and embodied in the reports of the foreign envoys,² that Apraxin's papers betrayed the minister, is also perhaps subject to some qualification. The reports of Esterhazy seem to show that the worst documents were found among Bestuschef's own papers after his arrest, not among those of the marshal;³ and the Saxon secretary of legation at St. Petersburg asserts that he saw the mysterious writings, and that they were revealed by the chancellor himself before his arrest, and that while they suggested a secret and irregular connection with Peter and Catherine, they also showed that he used his influence with them, and their influence with Apraxin, to animate not to paralyze the campaign in Prussen.⁴ But Prasse's testimony is that of a man

¹ Esterhazy in his report 25 April 1758, printed by Schaefer, II., i. Beilage, p. 545, is positive on this point. Schaefer gives other extracts from the reports of the Austrian ambassador.

² By the English ambassador, for example, 14 March 1758. Raumer, II. 456.

³ Schaefer, *ubi supra*.

⁴ This is confirmed by Bilbassof, *Geschichte Katharinas II.*, German translation by Pezold, I. 415 seq., who brings out the conclusive fact that Elizabeth's sudden illness occurred *after* Apraxin's council of war had advised a retreat and orders had been issued accordingly.

who still believed in Bestuschef, and in his bewilderment he suggests that the whole intrigue was a trap set for him by the French and Austrian ambassadors.¹ This also was a favorite theory in the gossip of the time. But a French writer of weight states positively that L'Hôpital, though instructed often in a sense unfriendly to the grand chancellor, became convinced of his good faith and contributed nothing to his overthrow; and Arneth renders a similar verdict of acquittal for Esterhazy, in which he has the support of Kaunitz himself.² What then was the secret of the powerful minister's fall? In view of the contradictory rumors and statements it is perhaps safest to answer that in all probability it was not any single act, or the discovery of any specific treason; it is rather to be sought in the tardy revolt of the empress against the authority of a man who had been guilty of many suspicious measures, who was notoriously corrupt and whose fall the allied courts earnestly desired. She had meditated his dismissal at the time of the treaty of Westminster between Prussia and England. The retreat of Apraxin, of which France and Austria bitterly complained, strengthened her suspicions; and the written evidence of Bestuschef's intrigues with the "young court" completed her aversion, and nerved her to act.³

Frederic himself received the news from St. Petersburg with calmness or even indifference. Experience had taught him that the chancellor was a frail reed on which to lean, and he was now more than ever convinced that the sword would have to decide.⁴ Notwithstanding the terrible losses of the year, he hoped to begin the next campaign with not less than two hundred thousand men, including sixty thousand garrison troops, part of whom could, however, render some service in the field.⁵ The cantonal system of inland levies was enforced with the utmost rigor, and all material which this left untouched was reaped as an aftermath by the provincial militia organizations. Recruiting in the free cities of the Empire and in foreign countries was still kept up, though naturally

¹ Hermann, *Gesch. Russlands*, V. 216 seq.

² Vandal, *Louis XV. et Élisabeth de Russie*, p. 322; Arneth, V. 286. But cf. L'Hôpital to Bernis, 30 November 1757, where the French ambassador reports on the authority of Esterhazy himself very direct and earnest appeals made by him (Esterhazy) to the empress to dismiss Bestuschef. *Recueil des Instructions, Russie*, II. 70.

³ On Elizabeth's threats and promises respecting Bestuschef see Esterhazy, 20 January 1758, *apud* Arneth, V. 284, 285, and L'Hôpital, 29 January 1758, *apud* Vandal, p. 321 n.

⁴ Frederic to Prince Henry, 13 March 1758. To Sir Robert Keith, the new English minister to St. Petersburg, who visited Breslau on his way to his post, Frederic cynically insisted that money was the only effective agent in Russia. *Pol. Cor.*, XVI. 230. Cf. Keith's report 30 March 1758, *apud* Mahon, *Hist. of Eng.*, V., App., p. xxii.

⁵ Schaefer, II. i. 62.