

**CHARLES WILLIAM
FERDINAND, DUKE OF
BRUNSWICK. AN HISTORICAL
STUDY, 1735-1806**

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Charles William Ferdinand, duke of Brunswick. *An Historical Study, 1735-1806* by Edmond Fitzmaurice

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EDMOND FITZMAURICE

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PREFACE

THE study contained in the following pages was originally published in two articles in the *Edinburgh Review* for July 1897 and January 1898. Lord Rosebery and Sir George Trevelyan having intimated to me their opinion that these articles might be of use to the historical student if they received a more permanent shape, the present volume appears in consequence.

The portrait of the Duke on the frontispiece of this volume is by McArdell, after a picture by Ziesenis of Hanover, the original of which belonged at the time of engraving to General Conway. As Ziesenis died in 1777, the portrait shows the sitter in the early part of his career. The smaller portrait represents the Duke in later life. It was engraved by Ridley and Flood, and published in the *European Magazine* for 1807 without the name of the painter.

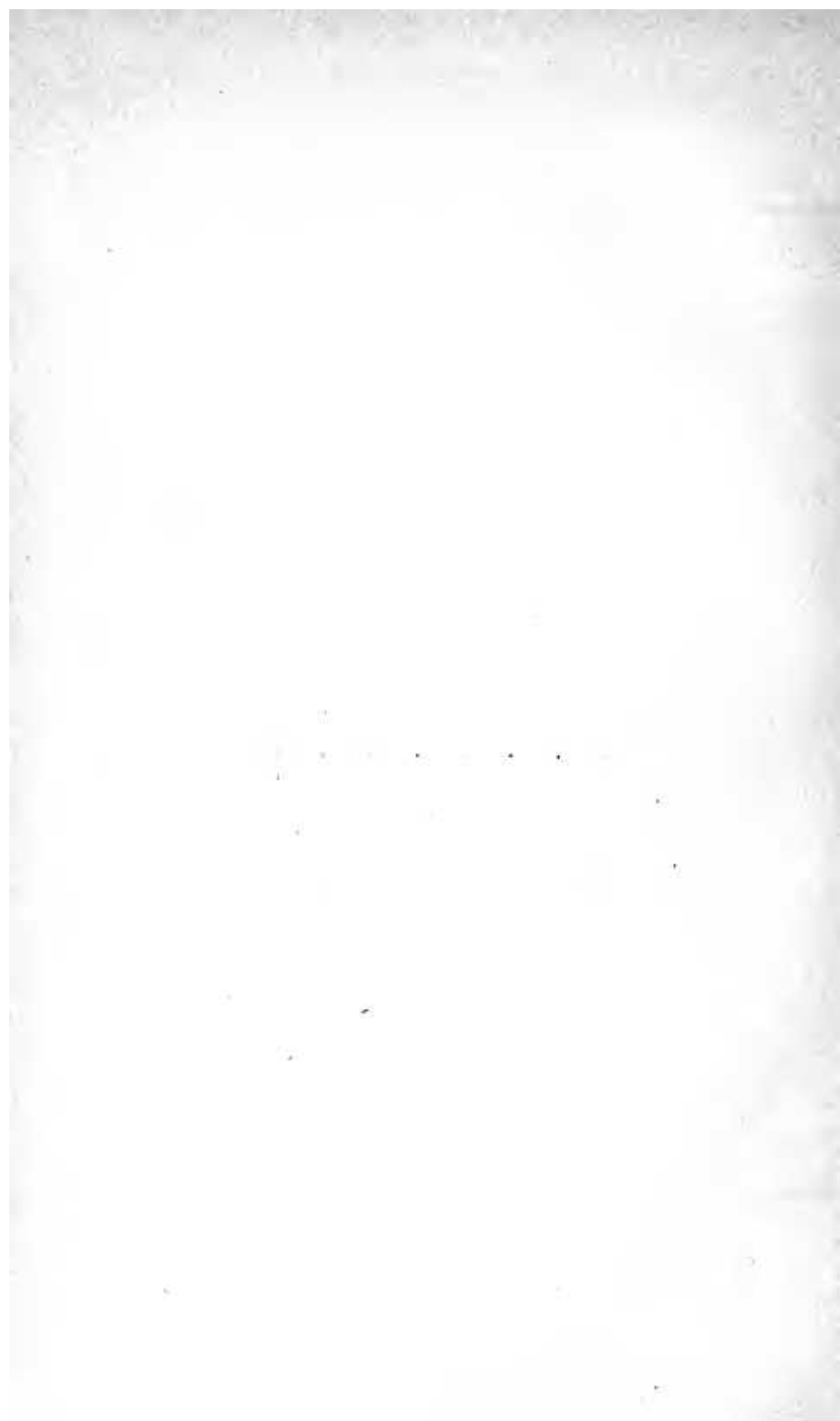
The references to the 'Memoirs of Hardenberg' are to the edition in five volumes published at

Leipzig in 1877, and those to the works of Massenbach are—except where otherwise stated—to the Memoirs published at Amsterdam in 1809.

I desire to acknowledge the valuable assistance which I have received from Mr. W. C. Cartwright on several historical points, and from Mr. Sidney Colvin in regard to the above-mentioned portraits.

E. F.

January 30, 1901.



CHARLES WILLIAM FERDINAND,
DUKE OF BRUNSWICK

THE numerous works recently published on the history of the French Revolution and Empire have again directed attention to the career of Charles William Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick. In their pages his name constantly occurs, but with an ill-defined sphere and an enigmatic action which in many respects have hitherto baffled explanation. The Duke held a distinguished place in all the transactions, both of war and peace, in the period between 1758 and 1806; and this place is seen to be of even greater interest and importance in proportion as the events of the time are more closely examined. But the reader is often conscious of being in the face of many apparent paradoxes and contradictions in connection with the life of the Duke, and of a frequent difficulty in finding satisfactory evidence to account for the unquestioned position so long occupied by him both in the camp and the Cabinet and in public estimation; and at

last takes revenge by calling the strategy of the Duke sinister and his character incomprehensible.¹

The nephew and favourite pupil of Frederic the Great, the military career of the Duke is chiefly associated with the disasters of Valmy and Auerstädt. In the aged commander whose hesitations are the object of the wrath of more serious critics than the boasters of the Potsdam parade-grounds, the reader hardly recognises the brilliant chief who shared with his uncle Ferdinand the glories of Crevelt and Minden, and dashed across Germany to the rescue of Frederic himself after Künersdorf. Like his royal uncle a sympathiser with reforming ideas—one of the princely forerunners, in fact, of the French Revolution—he is, nevertheless, for ever identified with the manifesto of the allied sovereigns against the Revolution: the manifesto which, rightly or wrongly, has the credit of having been the immediate cause of the downfall of the French monarchy at the hands of the exasperated Republicans. Early in 1792 he is the object of an invitation, as will be related further on, from the advanced wing of the constitutional party in France to take the command of all her forces, with almost a certainty of having to lead them in a war against Austria; and later in the year he is offered, and accepts, the command of the allied army which invades France in order to put down

¹ Lord Rosebery, *Life of Pitt*, 130, 158.

the Revolution. At one moment he is acclaimed as the greatest general in Europe ; at another he is denounced as the cause of all the misfortunes of his country. His life is the record of abrupt transitions. One half consists of great and continuous good fortune ; the other, of terrible and ruinous failure. Born in 1735 his sun rises in youthful splendour amid the most brilliant glories of the Seven Years' War ; it disappears in the gloom of disaster and defeat in 1806. Just before his death Kalckreuth declared him to be responsible for every coming misfortune ; yet Rückert made his death the subject of one of those lyrics which aroused Germany against the conqueror, and Byron included him in the splendid tribute which immortalised his son, who fell at Quatre Bras.

By birth the Duke was allied to the Royal House of England, and his own military fortunes were originally connected with the disasters which befell another member of the Hanoverian family. In the war of the Austrian Succession the continental army of England and her allies was commanded by the Duke of Cumberland, who combined a leonine personal courage with a total ignorance of the art of war, made doubly dangerous by the defective vision which, on one occasion, caused him to be almost captured by some hostile cavalry mistaken by him for one of his own brigades. At

the battle of Dettingen a series of lucky accidents, and a want of skill then unusual in the French commanders, alone converted into a British victory a situation which, judged from a purely military standpoint, ought to have ended in the capture of the Duke, of his royal father, and of the Secretary of State, at a moment when such a disaster might have had fatal effects not only on the fortune of the campaign, but also on the struggle for the crown with the Pretender. At Fontenoy the British arms sustained a defeat which dimmed the lustre of Blenheim and Ramillies. At home, the officers whom the Duke favoured as his chosen lieutenants proved themselves at Prestonpans and Falkirk to be unable even to cope with an almost savage and totally undisciplined foe; and the facile glories of Culloden, where victory at length smiled on the ducal standard, were soon wiped out by renewed disasters abroad. When the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle terminated the war of the Austrian Succession, men were at least grateful that peace had presumably terminated the active military career of the son of George II. Unfortunately, when war again commenced in 1756, he was once more entrusted, through paternal and royal affection, with the command of the army which in 1757 was sent to defend the Electorate of Hanover and to co-operate with Frederic the Great by a diversion in Western