

**J. W. Sir Fortescue**



*British Campaigns  
in Flanders 1690-1794*

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# **British Campaigns in Flanders 1690-1794**

**Being Extracts from "A History of the British Army"**



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# PREFACE

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This volume consists simply of extracts reprinted from my *History of the British Army*. It is published in order that the troops at the front may, if they wish it, study the experiences of their forerunners in the Low Countries in a book which is fairly portable and fairly inexpensive, though neither so cheap nor so compendious as *The British Soldiers' Guide to Northern France and Flanders*.

J. W. F.



# MAPS AND PLANS

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# VOL. I. BOOK V. CHAPTER II

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I pass now to Flanders, which is about to become for the second time the training ground of the British Army. The judicious help sent by Lewis the Fourteenth to Ireland had practically diverted the entire strength of William to that quarter for two whole campaigns; and though, as has been seen, there were English in Flanders in 1689 and 1690, the contingents which they furnished were too small and the operations too trifling to warrant description in detail. After the battle of the Boyne the case was somewhat altered, for, though a large force was still required in Ireland for Ginkell's final pacification of 1691, William was none the less at liberty to take the field in Flanders in person. Moreover, Parliament with 1690.October. great good-will had voted seventy thousand men for the ensuing year, of which fully fifty thousand were British,[1] so that England was about to put forth her strength in Europe on a scale unknown since the loss of Calais.

But first a short space must be devoted to the theatre of war, where England was to meet and break down the overweening power of France. Few studies are more difficult, even to the professed student, than that of the old campaigns in Flanders, and still fewer more hopeless of simplification to the ordinary reader. Nevertheless, however desperate the task, an effort must be made once for all to give a broad idea of the scene of innumerable great actions.

Taking his stand on the northern frontier of France and looking northward, the reader will note three great rivers



running through the country before him in, roughly speaking, three parallel semicircles, from south-east to north-west. These are, from east to west, the Moselle, which is merged in the Rhine at Coblenz, the Meuse, and the Scheldt, all three of which discharge themselves into the great delta whereof the southern key is Antwerp. But for the present let the reader narrow the field from the Meuse in the east to the sea in the west, and let him devote his attention first to the Meuse. He will see that, a little to the north of the French frontier, it picks up a large tributary from the south-west, the Sambre, which runs past Maubeuge and Charleroi and joins the Meuse at Namur. Thence the united rivers flow on past the fortified towns of Huy, Liège, and Maestricht to the sea. But let the reader's northern boundary on the Meuse for the present be Maestricht, and let him note another river which rises a little to the west of Maestricht and runs almost due west past Arschot and Mechlin to the sea at Antwerp. Let this river, the Demer, be his northern, and the Meuse from Maestricht to Namur his eastern, boundary.

Returning to the south, let him note a river rising immediately to the west of Charleroi, the Haine, which joins the Scheldt at Tournay, and let him draw a line from Tournay westward through Lille and Ypres to the sea at Dunkirk. Let this line from Dunkirk to Charleroi be carried eastward to Namur; and there is his southern boundary. His western boundary is, of course, the sea. Within this quadrilateral, Antwerp (or more strictly speaking the mouth of the Scheldt), Dunkirk, Namur, and Maestricht, lies the most famous fighting-ground of Europe.

Glancing at it on the map, the reader will see that this quadrilateral is cut by a number of rivers running parallel to each other from south to north, and flowing into the main streams of the Demer and the Scheldt. The first of these, beginning from the east, are the Great and Little Geete, which become one before they join the main stream. It is worth while to pause for a moment over this little slip of land between the Geete and the Meuse. We shall see much of Namur, Huy, Liège, and Maestricht, which command the navigation of the greater river, but we shall see still more of the Geete, and of two smaller streams, the Jaar and the Mehaigne, which rise almost in the same table-land with it. On the Lower Jaar, close to Maestricht, stands the village of Lauffeld, which shall be better known to us fifty years hence. On the Little Geete, just above its junction with its greater namesake, are the villages of Neerwinden and Landen. In the small space between the heads of the Geete and the Mehaigne lies the village of Ramillies. For this network of streams is the protection against an enemy that would threaten the navigation of the Meuse from the north and west, and the barrier of Spanish Flanders against invasion from the east; and the ground is rich with the corpses and fat with the blood of men.

The next stream to westward is the Dyle, which flows past Louvain to the Demer, and gives its name, after the junction, to that river. The next in order is the Senne, which flows past Park and Hal and Brussels to the same main stream. At the head of the Senne stands the village of Steenkirk; midway between the Dyle and Senne are the forest of Soignies and the field of Waterloo.

Here the tributaries of the Demer come to an end, but the row of parallel streams is continued by the tributaries of another system, that of the Scheldt. Easternmost of these, and next in order to the Senne, is the Dender, which rises near Leuse and flows past Ath and Alost to the Scheldt at Dendermond. Next comes the Scheldt itself, with the Scarpe and the Haine, its tributaries, which it carries past Tournay and Oudenarde to Ghent, and to the sea at Antwerp. Westernmost of all, the Lys runs past St. Venant, where in Cromwell's time we saw Sir Thomas Morgan and his immortal six thousand, past Menin and Courtrai, and is merged in the Scheldt at Ghent.

The whole extent of the quadrilateral is about one hundred miles long by fifty broad, with a great waterway to the west, a second to the east, and a third, whereof the key is Ghent, roughly speaking midway between them. The earth, fruitful by nature and enriched by art, bears food for man and beast; the waterways provide transport for stores and ammunition. It was a country where men could kill each other without being starved, and hence for centuries the cockpit of Europe.

A glance at any old map of Flanders shows how thickly studded was this country with walled towns of less or greater strength, and explains why a war in Flanders should generally have been a war of sieges. Every one of these little towns, of course, had its garrison; and the manœuvres of contending forces were governed very greatly by the effort, on one side, to release these garrisons for active service in the field, and, on the other, to keep them confined within their walls for as long as possible. Hence it is obvious

that an invading army necessarily enjoyed a great advantage, since it menaced the fortresses of the enemy while its own were unthreatened. Thus ten thousand men on the Upper Lys could paralyse thrice their number in Ghent and Bruges and the adjacent towns. On the other hand, if an invading general contemplated the siege of an important town, he manœuvred to entice the garrison into the field before he laid siege in form. Still, once set down to a great siege, an army was stationary, and the bare fact was sufficient to liberate hostile garrisons all over the country; and hence arose the necessity of a second army to cover the besieging force. The skill and subtlety manifested by great generals to compass these different ends is unfortunately only to be apprehended by closer study than can be expected of any but the military student.

A second cause contributed not a little to increase the taste for a war of sieges, namely, the example of France, then the first military nation in Europe.<sup>[2]</sup> The Court of Versailles was particularly fond of a siege, since it could attend the ceremony in state and take nominal charge of the operations with much glory and little discomfort or danger. The French passion for rule and formula also found a happy outlet in the conduct of a siege, for, while there is no nation more brilliant or more original, particularly in military affairs, there is also none that is more conceited or pedantic. The craving for sieges among the French was so great that the King took pains, by the grant of extra pay and rations, to render this species of warfare popular with his soldiers.<sup>[3]</sup>

Again, it must be remembered that the object of a campaign in those days was not necessarily to seek out an enemy and beat him. There were two alternatives prescribed by the best authorities, namely, to fight at an advantage or to subsist comfortably.[4] Comfortable subsistence meant at its best subsistence at an enemy's expense. A campaign wherein an army lived on the enemy's country and destroyed all that it could not consume was eminently successful, even though not a shot was fired. To force an enemy to consume his own supplies was much, to compel him to supply his opponent was more, to take up winter-quarters in his territory was very much more. Thus to enter an enemy's borders and keep him marching backwards and forwards for weeks without giving him a chance of striking a blow, was in itself no small success, and success of a kind which galled inferior generals, such as William of Orange, to desperation and so to disaster. The tendency to these negative campaigns was heightened once more by French example. The French ministry of war interfered with its generals to an extent that was always dangerous, and eventually proved calamitous. Nominally the marshal commanding-in-chief in the field was supreme; but the intendant or head of the administrative service, though he received his orders from the marshal, was instructed by the King to forward those orders at once by special messenger to Louvois, and not to execute them without the royal authority. Great commanders such as Luxemburg had the strength from time to time to kick themselves free from this bondage, but the rest, embarrassed by the surveillance of an inferior officer,

preferred to live as long as possible in an enemy's country without risking a general action. It was left to Marlborough to advance triumphant in one magnificent campaign from the Meuse to the sea.

Next, a glance must be thrown at the contending parties. The defenders of the Spanish Netherlands, for they cannot be called the assailants of France, were confederate allies from a number of independent states—England, Holland, Spain, the Empire, sundry states of Germany, and Denmark, all somewhat selfish, few very efficient, and none, except the first, very punctual. From such a heterogeneous collection swift, secret, and united action was not to be expected. King William held the command-in-chief, and, from his position as the soul of the alliance, was undoubtedly the fittest for the post. But though he had carefully studied the art of war, and though his phlegmatic temperament found its only genuine pleasure in the excitement of the battlefield, he was not a great general. He could form good plans, and up to a certain point could execute them, but up to a certain point only. It should seem that his physical weakness debarred him from steady and sustained effort. He was strangely incapable of conducting a campaign with equal ability throughout; he would manoeuvre admirably for weeks, and forfeit all the advantage that he had gained by the carelessness of a single day. In a general action, of which he was fonder than most commanders of his time, he never shone except in virtue of conspicuous personal bravery. He lacked tactical instinct, and above all he lacked patience; in a word, to use a modern phrase, he was a very clever amateur.

France, on the other hand, possessed the finest and strongest army in Europe,—well equipped, well trained, well organised, and inured to work by countless campaigns. She had a single man in supreme control of affairs, King Lewis the Fourteenth; a great war-minister, Louvois; one really great general, Luxemburg; and one with flashes of genius, Boufflers. Moreover, she possessed a line of posts in Spanish Flanders extending from Dunkirk to the Meuse. On the Lys she had Aire and Menin; on the Scarpe, Douay; on the Upper Scheldt, Cambray, Bouchain, Valenciennes, and Condé; on the Sambre, Maubeuge; between Sambre and Meuse, Philippeville and Marienburg; and on the Meuse, Dinant. Further, in the one space where the frontier was not covered by a friendly river, between the sea and the Scheldt, the French had constructed fortified lines from the sea to Menin and from thence to the Scheldt at Espierre. Thus with their frontier covered, with a place of arms on every river, with secrecy and with unity of purpose, the French enjoyed the approximate certainty of being able to take the field in every campaign before the Allies could be collected to oppose them.

The campaign of 1691 happily typifies *1691*. the relative positions of the combatants in almost every respect. The French concentrated ten thousand men on the Lys. This was sufficient to paralyse all the garrisons of the Allies on and about the river. They posted another corps on the Moselle, which threatened the territory of Cleves. Now Cleves was the property of the Elector of Brandenburg, and it was not to be expected that he should allow his contingent of troops to join King William

at the general rendezvous at Brussels, and suffer the French to play havoc among his possessions. Thus the Prussian contingent likewise was paralysed. So while William was still ordering his troops to concentrate at Brussels, Boufflers, who had been making preparations all the winter, suddenly marched up from Maubeuge and, before William was aware that he was in motion, had besieged Mons. The fortress presently surrendered after a feeble resistance, and the line of the Allies' frontier between the Scheldt and Sambre was broken. William moved down from Brussels across the Sambre in the hope of recovering the lost town, outmanœuvred Luxemburg, who was opposed to him, and for three days held the recapture of Mons in the hollow of his hand. He wasted those three days in an aimless halt; Luxemburg recovered himself by an extraordinary march; and William, finding that there was no alternative before him but to retire to Brussels and remain inactive, handed over the command to an incompetent officer and returned to England. Luxemburg then closed the campaign by a brilliant action of cavalry, which scattered the horse of the Allies to the four winds. As no British troops except the Life Guards were present, and as they at any rate did not disgrace themselves, it is unnecessary to say more of the combat of Leuse. It had, however, one remarkable effect: it increased William's dread of the French cavalry, already morbidly strong, to such a pitch as to lead him subsequently to a disastrous military blunder.

The campaign of 1691 was therefore decidedly unfavourable to the Allies, but there was ground for hope that all might be set right in 1692. The Treasurer, Godolphin,



was nervously apprehensive that Parliament might be unwilling to vote money for an English army in Flanders; but the Commons cheerfully granted a total of sixty-six thousand men, British and foreign; which, after deduction of garrisons for the safety of the British Isles, left forty thousand free to cross the German Ocean.

Of these, twenty-three thousand were *1692*. British, the most important force that England had sent to the Continent since the days of King Henry the Eighth. The organisation was remarkably like that of the New Model. William was, of course, Commander-in-Chief, and under him were a general of horse and a general of foot, with a due allowance of lieutenant-generals, major-generals, and brigadiers. There is, however, no sign of an officer in command of artillery or engineers, nor any of a commissary in charge of the transport.<sup>[5]</sup> The one strangely conspicuous functionary is the Secretary-at-War, who in this and the following campaigns for the last time accompanied the Commander-in-Chief on active service. But the most significant feature in the list of the staff is the omission of the name of Marlborough. Originally included among the generals for Flanders, he had been struck off the roll, and dismissed from all public employment, in disgrace, before the opening of the campaign. Though this dismissal did not want justification, it was perhaps of all William's blunders the greatest.

As usual, the French were beforehand with the Allies in opening the campaign. They had already broken the line of the defending fortresses by the capture of Mons; they now designed to make the breach still wider. All through the

winter a vast siege-train was collecting on the Scheldt and Meuse, with Vauban, first of living engineers, in charge of it. May. In May all was ready. Marshal Joyeuse, with one corps, was on the Moselle, as in the previous year, to hold the Brandenburgers in check. Boufflers, with eighteen thousand men, lay on the right bank of the Meuse, near Dinant; Luxemburg, with one hundred and fifteen thousand more, stood in rear of the river Haine. On the 20th of May, King Lewis in person May10/20.

May13/23.

May16/26. reviewed the grand army; on the 23rd it marched for Namur; and on the 26th it had wound itself round two sides of the town, while Boufflers, moving up from Dinant, completed the circuit on the third side. Thus Namur was completely invested; unless William could save it, the line of the Sambre and one of the most important fortresses on the Meuse were lost to the Allies.

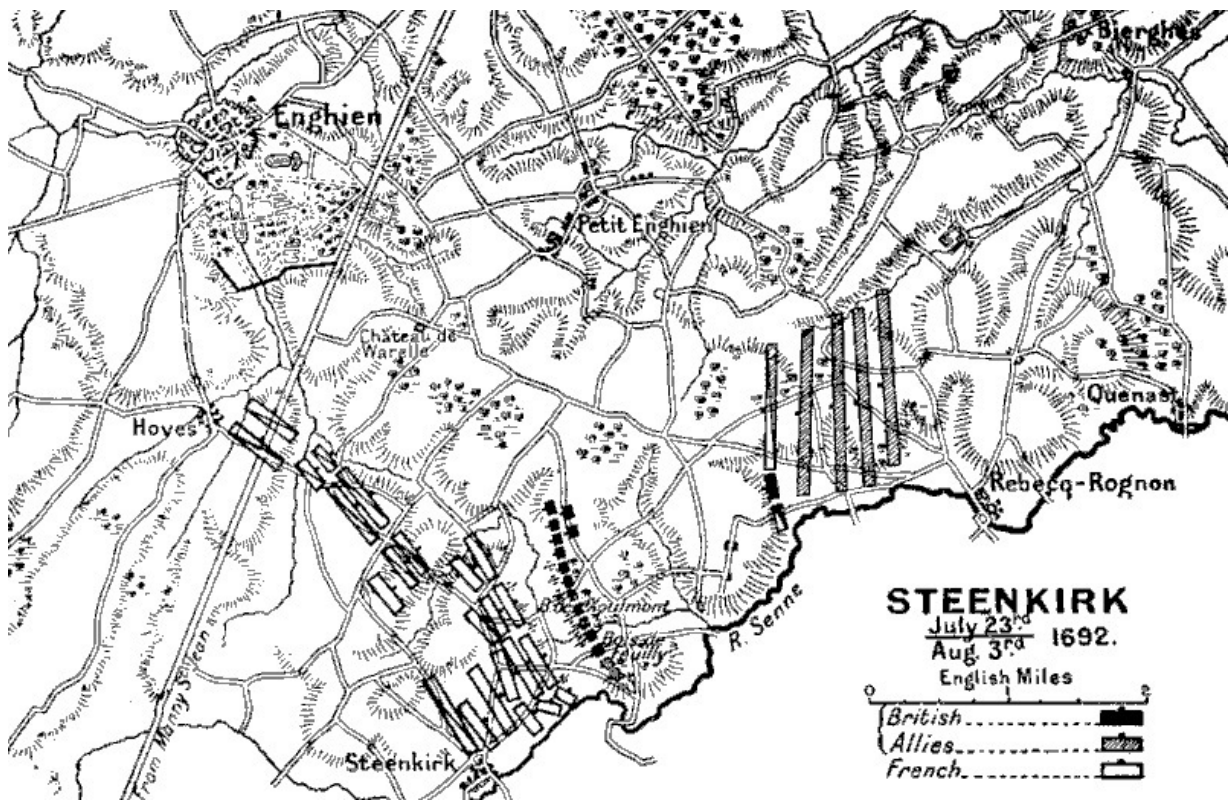
William, to do him justice, had strained every nerve to spur his indolent allies to be first in the field. The contingents, awaked by the sudden stroke at Namur, came in fast to Brussels; but it was too late. The French had destroyed all forage and supplies on the direct route to Namur, and William's only way to the city lay across the Mehaigne. Behind the Mehaigne lay Luxemburg, the ablest of the French generals. The best of luck was essential to William's success, and instead of the best came the worst. Heavy rain swelled the narrow stream into a broad flood, and the building of bridges became impossible. There was beautiful fencing, skilful feint, and more skilful parry, between the two generals, but William could not get

May 26./June 5. under Luxemburg's guard. On the 5th of June, after a discreditably short defence, Namur fell, almost before William's eyes, into the hands of the French.

Then Luxemburg thought it time to draw the enemy away from the vicinity of the captured city; so recrossing the Sambre, and keeping Boufflers always between himself and that river, he marched for the Senne as if to threaten Brussels. William followed, as in duty bound; and French and Allies pursued a parallel course to the Senne, William on the north and July 23./Aug. 2. Luxemburg on the south. The 2nd of August found both armies across the Senne, William at Hal, facing west with the river in his rear, and Luxemburg some five miles south of him with his right at Steenkirk, and his centre between Hoves and Enghien, while Boufflers lay at Manny St. Jean, seven miles in his rear.

The terrible state of the roads owing to heavy rain had induced Luxemburg to leave most of his artillery at Mons; and, as he had designed merely to tempt the Allies away from Namur, the principal object left to him was to take up a strong position wherein his worn and harassed army could watch the enemy without fear of attack. Such a position he thought that he had found at Steenkirk.<sup>[6]</sup> The country at this point is more broken and rugged than is usual in Belgium. The camp lay on high ground, with its right resting on the river Sennette and its fight front covered by a ravine, which gradually fades away northward into a high plateau of about a mile in extent. Beyond the ravine was a network of wooded defiles, through which Luxemburg seems to have hoped that no enemy could fall upon him in force unawares. It so happened, however, that one of his most useful spies

was detected, in his true character, in William's camp at Hal; and this was an opportunity not to be lost. A pistol was held to the spy's head, and he was ordered to write a letter to Luxemburg, announcing that large bodies of the enemy would be in motion next morning, but that nothing more serious was contemplated than a foraging expedition. This done, William laid his plans to surprise his enemy on the morrow.



*Stanford's Geogl. Estabt., London.*

Steenkirk, July 24<sup>th</sup> /Aug 3<sup>rd</sup> 1692.

The Old Style date on the map is incorrect.

An hour before daybreak the advanced *July 24./Aug. 3.* guard of William's army fell silently into its ranks, together with a strong force of pioneers to clear the

way for a march through the woods. This force consisted of the First Guards, the Royal Scots, the Twenty-first, Fitzpatrick's regiment of Fusiliers, and two Danish regiments of great reputation, the whole under the command of the Duke of Würtemberg. Presently they moved away, and, as the sun rose, the whole army followed them in two columns, without sound of drum or trumpet, towards Steenkirk. French patrols scouring the country in the direction of Tubise saw the two long lines of scarlet and white and blue wind away into the woods, and reported what they had witnessed at headquarters; but Luxemburg, sickly of constitution, and, in spite of his occasional energy, indolent of temperament, rejoiced to think that, as his spy had told him, it was no more than a foraging party. Another patrol presently sent in another message that a large force of cavalry was advancing towards the Sennette. Once more Luxemburg lulled himself into security with the same comfort.

Meanwhile the allied army was trailing through narrow defiles and cramped close ground, till at last it emerged from the stifling woods into an open space. Here it halted, as the straitness of the ground demanded, in dense, heavy masses. But the advanced guard moved on steadily till it reached the woods over against Steenkirk, where Würtemberg disposed it for the coming attack. On his left the Bois de Feuilly covered a spur of the same plateau as that occupied by the French right, and there he stationed the English Guards and the two battalions of Danes. To the right of these, but separated from them by a ravine, he placed the three remaining British battalions in the Bois de Zoulmont. His guns he posted, some between the two

woods, and the remainder on the right of his division. These dispositions complete, the advanced party awaited orders to open the attack.

It was now eleven o'clock. Luxemburg had left his bed and had ridden out to a commanding height on his extreme right, when a third letter was brought to him that the Allies were certainly advancing in force. He read it, and looking to his front, saw the red coats of the Guards moving through the wood before him, while beyond them he caught a glimpse of the dense masses of the main body. Instantly he saw the danger, and divined that William's attack was designed against his right. His own camp was formed, according to rule, with the cavalry on the wings; and there was nothing in position to check the Allies but a single brigade of infantry, famous under the name of Bourbonnois, which was quartered in advance of the cavalry's camp on his extreme right. Moreover, nothing was ready, not a horse was bridled, not a man standing to his arms. He despatched a messenger to summon Boufflers to his aid, and in a few minutes was flying through the camp with his staff, energetic but perfectly self-possessed, to set his force in order of battle. The two battalions of Bourbonnois fell in hastily before their camp, with a battery of six guns before them. The dragoons of the right wing dismounted and hastened to seal up the space between Bourbonnois and the Sennette. The horse of the right was collected, and some of it sent off in hot speed to the left to bring the infantry up behind them on their horses' croups. All along the line the alarm was given, drums were beating, men snatching hastily at their arms and falling into their ranks ready to file

away to the right. Such was the haste, that there was no time to think of regimental precedence, a very serious matter in the French army, and each successive brigade hurried into the place where it was most needed, as it happened to come up.

Meanwhile Würtemberg's batteries had opened fire, and a cunning officer of the Royal Scots was laying his guns with admirable precision. French batteries hastened into position to reply to them with as deadly an aim, and for an hour and a half the rival guns thundered against each other unceasingly. All this time the French battalions kept massing themselves thicker and thicker on Luxemburg's right, and the front line was working with desperate haste, felling trees, making breastworks, and lining the hedges and copses while yet they might. But still Würtemberg's division remained unsupported, and the precious minutes flew fast. William, or his staff for him, had made a serious blunder. Intent though he was on fighting a battle with his infantry only, he had put all the cavalry of one wing of his army before them on the march, so that there was no room for the infantry to pass. Fortunately six battalions had been intermixed with the squadrons of this wing, and these were now with some difficulty disentangled and sent forward. Cutts's, Mackay's, Lauder's, and the Twenty-sixth formed up on Würtemberg's right, with the Sixth and Twenty-fifth in support; and at last, at half-past twelve, Würtemberg gave the order to attack.

His little force shook itself up and pressed forward with eagerness. The Guards and Danes on the extreme left, being on the same ridge with the enemy, were the first that

came into action. Pushing on under a terrible fire at point-blank range from the French batteries, they fell upon Bourbonnois and the dragoons, beat them back, captured their guns, and turned them against the enemy. On their right the Royal Scots, Twenty-first, and Fitzpatrick's plunged down into the ravine into closer and more difficult ground, past copses and hedges and thickets, until a single thick fence alone divided them from the enemy. Through this they fired at each other furiously for a time, till the Scots burst through the fence with their Colonel at their head, and swept the French before them. Still further to the right, the remaining regiments came also into action; muzzle met muzzle among the branches, and the slaughter was terrible. Young Angus, still not yet of age, dropped dead at the head of the Cameronians, and the veteran Mackay found the death which he had missed at Killiecrankie. He had before the attack sent word to General Count Solmes, that the contemplated assault could lead only to waste of life; and he had been answered with the order to advance. "God's will be done," he said calmly, and he was among the first that fell.

Still the British, in spite of all losses, pressed furiously on; and famous French regiments, spoiled children of victory, wavered and gave way before them. Bourbonnois, unable to face the Guards and Danes, doubled its left battalion in rear of its right; Chartres, which stood next to them, also gave way and doubled itself in rear of its neighbour Orléans. A wide gap was thus torn in the first French line, but not a regiment of the second line would step into it. The colonel of the brigade in rear of it ordered, entreated, implored his



men to come forward, but they would not follow him into that terrible fire. Suddenly the wild voice ceased, and the gesticulating figure fell in a heap to the ground: the colonel had been shot dead, and the gap was still unfilled.

The first French line was broken; the second and third were dismayed and paralysed: a little more and the British would carry the French camp. Luxemburg perceived that this was a moment when only his best troops could save him. In the fourth line stood the flower of his infantry, the seven battalions of French and Swiss Guards. These were now ordered forward to the gap; the princes of the blood placed themselves at their head, and without firing a shot they charged down the slope upon the British and Danes. The English Guards, thinned to half their numbers, faced the huge columns of the Swiss and stood up to them undaunted, till by sheer weight they were slowly rolled back. On their right the Royal Scots also were forced back, fighting desperately from hedge to hedge and contesting every inch of ground. Once, the French made a dash through a fence and carried off one of their colours. The Colonel, Sir Robert Douglas, instantly turned back alone through the fence, recaptured the colour, and was returning with it when he was struck by a bullet. He flung the flag over to his men and fell to the ground dead.

Slowly the twelve battalions retired, still fighting furiously at every step. So fierce had been their onslaught that five lines of infantry backed by two more of cavalry<sup>[7]</sup> had hardly sufficed to stop them, and with but a little support they might have won the day. But that support was not forthcoming. Message after message had been sent to the

Dutch general, Count Solmes, for reinforcements, but there came not a man. The main body, as has been told, was all clubbed together a mile and a half from the scene of action, with the infantry in the rear; and Solmes, with almost criminal folly, instead of endeavouring to extricate the foot, had ordered forward the horse. William rectified the error as soon as he could; but the correction led to further delay and to the increased confusion which is the inevitable result of contradictory orders. The English infantry in rear, mad with impatience to rescue their comrades, ran forward in disorder, probably with loud curses on the Dutchman who had kept them back so long; and some time was lost before they could be re-formed. Discipline was evidently a little at fault. Solmes lost both his head and his temper. "Damn the English," he growled; "if they are so fond of fighting, let them have a bellyful"; and he sent forward not a man. Fortunately junior officers took matters into their own hands; and it was time, for Boufflers had now arrived on the field to throw additional weight into the French scale. The English Horse-grenadiers, the Fourth Dragoons, and a regiment of Dutch dragoons rode forward and, dismounting, covered the retreat of the Guards and Danes by a brilliant counter-attack. The Buffs and Tenth advanced farther to the right, and holding their fire till within point-blank range, poured in a volley which gave time for the rest of Würtemberg's division to withdraw. A demonstration against the French left made a further diversion, and the shattered fragments of the attacking force, grimed with sweat and smoke, fell back to the open ground in rear of the woods, repulsed but unbeaten, and furious with rage.

William, it is said, could not repress a cry of anguish when he saw them; but there was no time for emotion. Some Dutch and Danish infantry was sent forward to check further advance of the enemy, and preparations were made for immediate retreat. Once again the hardest of the work was entrusted to the British; and when the columns were formed, the grenadiers of the British regiments brought up the rear, halting and turning about continually, until failing light put an end to what was at worst but a half-hearted pursuit. The retreat was conducted with admirable order; but it was not until the chill, dead hour that precedes the dawn that the Allies regained their camp, worn out with the fatigue of the past four-and-twenty hours.

The action was set down at the time as the severest ever fought by infantry, and the losses on both sides were very heavy. The Allies lost about three thousand killed and the same number wounded, besides thirteen hundred prisoners, nearly all of whom were wounded. Ten guns were abandoned, the horses being too weary to draw them; the English battalions lost two colours, and the foreign three or four more. The British, having borne the brunt of the action, suffered most heavily of all, the Guards, Cutts's, and the Sixth being terribly punished. The total French loss was about equal to that of the Allies, but the list of the officers that fell tells a more significant tale. On the side of the Allies four hundred and fifty officers were killed and wounded, no fewer than seventy lieutenants in the ten battalions of Churchill's British brigade being killed outright. The French on their side lost no fewer than six hundred and twenty officers killed and wounded, a noble testimony to their self-

sacrifice, but sad evidence of their difficulty in making their men stand. In truth, with proper management William must have won a brilliant victory; but he was a general by book and not by instinct. Würtemberg's advanced guard could almost have done the work by itself but for the mistake of a long preliminary cannonade; his attack could have been supported earlier but for the pedantry that gave the horse precedence of the foot in the march to the field; the foot could have pierced the French position in a dozen different columns but for the pedantry which caused it to be first deployed. Finally, William's knowledge of the ground was imperfect, and Solmes, his general of foot, was incompetent. The plan was admirably designed and abominably executed. Nevertheless, British troops have never fought a finer action than Steenkirk. Luxemburg thought himself lucky to have escaped destruction; his troops were much shaken; and he crossed the Scheldt and marched away to his winter-quarters as quietly as possible. So ended the campaign of 1692.

# VOL. I. BOOK V. CHAPTER III

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In November the English Parliament *1692.Nov.* met, heartened indeed by the naval victory of La Hogue, but not a little grieved over the failure of Steenkirk. Again, the financial aspect was extremely discouraging; and Sir Stephen Fox announced that there was not another day's subsistence for the Army in the treasury. The prevailing discontent found vent in furious denunciations of Count Solmes, and a cry that English soldiers ought to be commanded by English officers. The debate waxed hot. The hardest of hard words were used about the Dutch generals, and a vast deal of nonsense was talked about military matters. There were, however, a great number of officers in the House of Commons, many of whom had been present at the action. With much modesty and good sense they refused to join in the outcry against the Dutch, and contrived so to compose matters that the House committed itself to no very foolish resolution. The votes for the Army were passed; and no difficulty was made over the preparations for the next campaign. Finally, two new regiments of cavalry were raised—Lord Macclesfield's Horse, which was disbanded twenty years later; and Conyngham's Irish Dragoons, which still abides with us as the Eighth, King's Royal Irish, Hussars.

Meanwhile the French military system *1693.* had suffered an irreparable loss in Louvois's death, the source of woes unnumbered to France

in the years that were soon to come. Nevertheless, the traditions of his rule were strong, and the French once more were first in the field, with, as usual, a vast siege-train massed on the Meuse and on the Scheldt. But a late spring and incessant rain delayed the opening of the campaign till the beginning of May, when Luxemburg assembled seventy thousand men in rear of the Haine by Mons, and Boufflers forty-eight thousand more on the Scheldt at Tournay. The French king was with the troops in person; and the original design was, as usual, to carry on a war of sieges on the Meuse, Boufflers reducing the fortresses while Luxemburg shielded him with a covering army. Lewis, however, finding that the towns which he had intended to invest were likely to make an inconveniently stubborn defence, presently returned home, and after detaching thirty thousand men to the war in Germany, left Luxemburg to do as he would. It had been better for William if the Grand Monarch had remained in Flanders.

The English king, on his side, assembled sixty thousand men at Brussels as soon as the French began to move, and led them with desperate haste to the Senne, where he took up an impregnable position at Park. Luxemburg marched up to a position over against him, and then came one of those deadlocks which were so common in the old campaigns. The two armies stood looking at each other for a whole month, neither venturing to move, neither daring to attack, both ill-supplied, both discontented, and as a natural consequence both losing scores, hundreds, and even thousands of men through desertion.