

the Austrian kings, he intended to dictate terms to the prostrate monarchy.

The queen had effectually checked his progress, new levies were crowding to her aid, and it was in vain for Frederic, with his diminished and exhausted regiments, to undertake an assault upon the ramparts of Vienna. Again he proposed terms of peace. He demanded all of upper as well as lower Silesia, and the county of Glatz, containing nearly seven hundred square miles, and a population of a little over sixty thousand. Maria Theresa, crowded by her other enemies, was exceedingly anxious to detach a foe so powerful and active, and she accordingly assented to the hard terms. This new treaty was signed at Breslau, on the 11th of June, and was soon ratified by both sovereigns. The Elector of Saxony was also included in this treaty and retired from the contest.

The withdrawal of these forces seemed to turn the tide of battle in favor of the Austrians. The troops from Hungary fought with the most romantic devotion. A band of Croats in the night swam across a river, with their sabers in their mouths, and climbing on each other's shoulders, scaled the walls of the fortress of Piseck, and made the garrison prisoners of war. The Austrians, dispersing the allied French and Bavarians in many successful skirmishes, advanced to the walls of Prague. With seventy thousand men, the Duke of Lorraine commenced the siege of this capital, so renowned in the melancholy annals of war. The sympathies of Europe began to turn in favor of Maria Theresa. It became a general impression, that the preservation of the Austrian monarchy was essential to hold France in check, which colossal power seemed to threaten the liberties of Europe. The cabinet of England was especially animated by this sentiment, and a change in the ministry being effected, the court of St. James sent assurances to Vienna of their readiness to support the queen with the whole power of the British empire. Large supplies of men and money were immediately voted

Sixteen thousand men were landed in Flanders to cooperate with the Austrian troops. Holland, instigated by the example of England, granted Maria Theresa a subsidy of eight hundred and forty thousand florins. The new Queen of Russia, also, Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, adopted measures highly favorable to Austria.

In Italy affairs took a singular turn in favor of the Austrian queen. The King of Sardinia, ever ready to embark his troops in any enterprise which gave him promise of booty, alarmed by the grasping ambition of France and Spain, who were ever seizing the lion's share in all plunder, seeing that he could not hope for much advantage in his alliance with them, proposed to the queen that if she would cede to him certain of the Milanese provinces, he would march his troops into her camp. This was a great gain for Maria Theresa. The Sardinian troops guarding the passes of the Alps, shut out the French, during the whole campaign, from entering Italy. At the same time the Sardinian king, with another portion of his army, aided by the Austrian troops, overran the whole duchy of Modena, and drove out the Spaniards. The English fleet in the Mediterranean cooperated in this important measure. By the threat of a bombardment they compelled the King of Naples to withdraw from the French and Spanish alliance. Thus Austria again planted her foot in Italy. This extraordinary and unanticipated success created the utmost joy and exultation in Vienna. The despondency of the French court was correspondingly great. A few months had totally changed the aspect of affairs. The allied troops were rapidly melting away, with none to fill up the dwindling ranks. The proud army which had swept over Germany, defying all opposition, was now cooped up within the walls of Prague, beleaguered by a foe whom victory had rendered sanguine. The new emperor, claiming the crown of Austria, had lost his own territory of Bavaria; and the capital of Bohemia, where he had so recently been en-

throned, was hourly in peril of falling into the hands of his foes.

Under these circumstances the hopes of the Duke of Bavaria sank rapidly into despair. The hour of disaster revealed a meanness of spirit which prosperity had not developed. He sued for peace, writing a dishonorable and cringing letter, in which he protested that he was not to blame for the war, but that the whole guilt rested upon the French court, which had inveigled him to present his claim and commence hostilities. Maria Theresa made no other reply to this humiliating epistle than to publish it, and give it a wide circulation throughout Europe. Cardinal Fleury, the French minister of state, indignant at this breach of confidence, sent to the cabinet of Vienna a remonstrance and a counter statement. This paper also the queen gave to the public.

Marshal Belleisle was in command of the French and Bavarian troops, which were besieged in Prague. The force rapidly gathering around him was such as to render retreat impossible. The city was unprepared for a siege, and famine soon began to stare the citizens and garrison in the face. The marshal, reduced to the last extremity, offered to evacuate the city and march out of Bohemia, if he could be permitted to retire unmolested, with arms, artillery and baggage. The Duke of Lorraine, to avoid a battle which would be rendered sanguinary through despair, was ready and even anxious to assent to these terms. His leading generals were of the same opinion, as they wished to avoid a needless effusion of blood.

The offered terms of capitulation were sent to Maria Theresa. She rejected them with disdain. She displayed a revengeful spirit, natural, perhaps, under the circumstances, but which reflects but little honor upon her character.

"I will not," she replied, in the presence of the whole court; "I will not grant any capitulation to the French army. I will listen to no terms, to no proposition from Car-

dinal Fleury. I am astonished that he should come to me now with proposals for peace; *he* who endeavored to excite all the princes of Germany to crush me. I have acted with too much condescension to the court of France. Compelled by the necessities of my situation I debased my royal dignity by writing to the cardinal in terms which would have softened the most obdurate rock. He insolently rejected my entreaties; and the only answer I obtained was that his most Christian majesty had contracted engagements which he could not violate. I can prove, by documents now in my possession, that the French endeavored to excite sedition even in the heart of my dominions; that they attempted to overturn the fundamental laws of the empire, and to set all Germany in a flame. I will transmit these proofs to posterity as a warning to the empire."

The ambition of Maria Theresa was now greatly roused. She resolved to retain the whole of Bavaria which she had taken from the elector. The duchy of Lorraine, which had been wrested from her husband, was immediately to be invaded and restored to the empire. The dominions which had been torn from her father in Italy were to be reannexed to the Austrian crown, and Alsace upon the Rhine was to be reclaimed. Thus, far from being now satisfied with the possessions she had inherited from her father, her whole soul was roused, in these hours of triumph, to conquer vast accessions for her domains. She dreamed only of conquest, and in her elation parceled out the dominions of France and Bavaria as liberally and as unscrupulously as they had divided among themselves the domain of the house of Austria.

The French, alarmed, made a great effort to relieve Prague. An army, which on its march was increased to sixty thousand men, was sent six hundred miles to cross rivers, to penetrate defiles of mountains crowded with hostile troops, that they might rescue Prague and its garrison from the besiegers. With consummate skill and energy this criti-

cal movement was directed by General Mallebois. The garrison of the city were in a state of great distress. The trenches were open and the siege was pushed with great vigilance. All within the walls of the beleaguered city were reduced to extreme suffering. Horse flesh was considered a delicacy which was reserved for the sick. The French made sally after sally to spike the guns which were battering down the walls. As Mallebois, with his powerful reinforcement, drew near, their courage rose. The Duke of Lorraine became increasingly anxious to secure the capitulation before the arrival of the army of relief, and proposed a conference to decide upon terms, which should be transmitted for approval to the courts of Vienna and of Paris. But the imperious Austrian queen, as soon as she heard of this movement, quite regardless of the feelings of her husband, whom she censured as severely as she would any corporal in the army, issued orders prohibiting, peremptorily, any such conference.

"I will not suffer," she said "any council to be held in the army. From Vienna alone are orders to be received. I disavow and forbid all such proceedings, *let the blame fall where it may.*"

She knew full well that it was her husband who had proposed this plan; and he knew, and all Austria knew, that it was the Duke of Lorraine who was thus severely and publicly reprimanded. But the husband of Maria Theresa was often reminded that he was but the subject of the queen. So peremptory a mandate admitted of no compromise. The Austrians plied their batteries with new vigor, the wan and skeleton soldiers fought perseveringly at their embrasures; and the battalions of Mallebois, by forced marches, pressed on through the mountains of Bohemia, to the eventful arena. A division of the Austrian army was dispatched to the passes of Satz and Caden, which it would be necessary for the French to thread, in approaching Prague. The troops of

Mallebois, when they arrived at these defiles, were so exhausted by their long and forced marches, that they were incapable of forcing their way against the opposition they encountered in the passes of the mountains. After a severe struggle, Mallebois was compelled to relinquish the design of relieving Prague, and storms of snow beginning to incumber his path, he retired across the Danube, and throwing up an intrenched camp, established himself in winter quarters. The Austrian division, thus successful, returned to Prague, and the blockade was resumed. There seemed to be now no hope for the French, and their unconditional surrender was hourly expected. Affairs were in this state, when Europe was astounded by the report that the French general, Belleisle, with a force of eleven thousand foot and three thousand horse, had effected his escape from the battered walls of the city and was in successful retreat.

It was the depth of winter. The ground was covered with snow, and freezing blasts swept the fields. The besiegers were compelled to retreat to the protection of their huts. Taking advantage of a cold and stormy night, Belleisle formed his whole force into a single column, and, leaving behind him his sick and wounded, and every unnecessary incumbrance, marched noiselessly but rapidly from one of the gates of the city. He took with him but thirty cannon and provisions for twelve days. It was a heroic but an awful retreat. The army, already exhausted and emaciated by famine, toiled on over morasses, through forests, over mountains, facing frost and wind and snow, and occasionally fighting their way against their foes, until on the twelfth day they reached Egra on the frontiers of Bavaria, about one hundred and twenty miles east from Prague.

Their sufferings were fearful. They had nothing to eat but frozen bread, and at night they sought repose, tentless, and upon the drifted snow. The whole distance was strewn with the bodies of the dead. Each morning mounds of frozen

corpses indicated the places of the night's bivouac. Twelve hundred perished during this dreadful march. Of those who survived, many, at Egra, were obliged to undergo the amputation of their frozen limbs. General Belleisle himself, during the whole retreat, was suffering from such a severe attack of rheumatism, that he was unable either to walk or ride. His mind, however, was full of vigor and his energies unabated. Carried in a sedan chair he reconnoitred the way, pointed out the roads, visited every part of the extended line of march, encouraged the fainting troops, and superintended all the minutest details of the retreat. "Notwithstanding the losses of his army," it is recorded, "he had the satisfaction of preserving the flower of the French forces, of saving every cannon which bore the arms of his master, and of not leaving the smallest trophy to grace the triumph of the enemy."

In the citadel of Prague, Belleisle had left six thousand troops, to prevent the eager pursuit of the Austrians. The Prince Sobcuitz, now in command of the besieging force, mortified and irritated by the escape, sent a summons to the garrison demanding its immediate and unconditional surrender. Chevert, the gallant commander, replied to the officer who brought the summons,—

"Tell the prince that if he will not grant me the honors of war, I will set fire to the four corners of Prague, and bury myself under its ruins."

The destruction of Prague, with all its treasures of architecture and art, was too serious a calamity to be hazarded. Chevert was permitted to retire with the honors of war, and with his division he soon rejoined the army at Egra. Maria Theresa was exceedingly chagrined by the escape of the French, and in the seclusion of her palace she gave vent to the bitterness of her anguish. In public, however, she assumed an attitude of triumph and great exultation in view of the recovery of Prague. She celebrated the event by magnificent entertainments. In imitation of the Olympic games, she

established chariot races, in which ladies alone were the competitors, and even condescended herself, with her sister, to enter the lists.

All Bohemia, excepting Egra, was now reclaimed. Early in the spring Maria Theresa visited Prague, where, on the 12th of May, 1743, with great splendor she was crowned Queen of Bohemia. General Belleisle, leaving a small garrison at Egra, with the remnant of his force crossed the Rhine and returned to France. He had entered Germany a few months before, a conqueror at the head of forty thousand men. He retired a fugitive with eight thousand men in his train, ragged, emaciated and mutilated.