
TELL ME MORE: COUNT TALLARD, THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR

By *Graham Christian*

Among the many foreign figures who danced their way across the Assembly Room floors of England, few are more striking than Camille d'Hostun de la Baume, the duc de Tallard (1651-1728), who, without ever ceasing to be an advocate for France, both in the royal circles of England and the battlefields of the Continent, made a profound and favorable impression on the social scene of the country of his sometime adversaries, resulting in the creation of at least two dances.

Tallard began his career as a dedicated soldier, serving under Louis XIV's most distinguished generals in the Netherlands and Alsace, and rising to the rank of *maréchal de camp* by the age of 26. After the conclusion of the Nine Years' War (1688-1697), Tallard was sent to the Court of St. James as France's ambassador, where his understanding of Continental politics made him an invaluable asset. In 1701, however, Tallard's friend and master Louis XIV acknowledged the deposed James II of England's eldest son by his second marriage, James Stuart, as the rightful heir to the English throne. In reaction, King William II, who had gone to some trouble to secure the English crown for a Protestant succession and exclude James' Catholic children, expelled the French ambassador from London.

Tallard's days in England, however, were not at an end. Upon his return to France, his services were once more required in the ongoing, spasmodic struggles for hegemony that preoccupied much of Europe through this period, this time in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714). Tallard enjoyed some impressive victories early on, seizing the towns of Breisach and Landau in 1703, but he found his nadir at the Battle of Blenheim on the 13th of August in 1704, the scene of one of the greatest triumphs of England's brilliant general John Churchill, afterwards the Duke of Marlborough. Tallard, at the head of the joint Franco-Bavarian forces, was simply surprised and outmanoeuvred by Churchill and Prince Eugene of Savoy; something like 27,000 French soldiers died, and Tallard himself was captured and taken to Churchill, who said, "I am very sorry

that such a cruel misfortune should have fallen upon a soldier for whom I have the highest regard."

Tallard was sent to England as a prisoner, where he was given the lease of Newdigate House in Nottingham. Almost at once, he made an appearance in English poetry; Joseph Addison (1672-1719) featured him prominently in the laudation he wrote for Churchill in late 1704, "The Campaign":

*Unfortunate Tallard! Oh who can name
The Pangs of Rage, of Sorrow, and of Shame,
That with mixt Tumult in thy Bosom swell'd!
When first thou saw'st thy Bravest Troops repell'd,
Thine Only Son pierc'd with a Deadly Wound,
Choak'd in his Blood, and gasping on the Ground,
Thy self in Bondage by the Victor kept...
An English Muse is touch'd with gen'rous Woe,
And in th' unhappy Man forgets the Foe.*

This must have come as a surprise to Tallard's son Marie-Joseph, who in fact lived until 1754.

Tallard's captivity seems not to have been too onerous. After a delay of a few months in London, he and a few other French officers and their retinue started toward Nottingham, having all their food prepared by their own chefs (the locals remarked on the "excellent Soop"). Once he had settled in the modern and tasteful Newdigate House, he almost at once received the gift of a hundred bottles of wine and books to read from the Vice-Chancellor, Thomas Coke, and began a busy social career of visits to the local aristocracy. He had the grounds made over into a small ornamental garden in the French style, which was so well thought of that a detailed account of it appeared in *The Retir'd Gardener* in 1706. He was said, on somewhat doubtful authority, to have introduced the cultivation of celery to England, to have written a guide for the local bakers on the making of French rolls and fancy breads, and to have encouraged local boys in boxing and wrestling matches, with cash rewards to the victors. Remarkably enough, he was a composer, too, writing at least one elegant suite for the lute, but it is not possible to say with conviction that he wrote the tune for the dance bearing his name.

After a change of the English government in 1711, Tallard was sent home where, with reputation unbruised, he rose to a dukedom, the French peerage, and the presidency of the Academy of Sciences, dying in 1728. Daniel Defoe saw the



ABOVE: Camille d'Hostun, duc de Tallard. Anonymous 18th century engraving.

garden in the early 1720s, which he admired, but admitted it “does not gain by English keeping,” going on to remark wryly, “Tis said likewise that this gallant Gentleman left behind him here some living Memorandums of his great Affection and Esteem for the English Ladies.”

“The French Embasseder” first appeared in the 11th edition of Playford’s *Dancing Master* in 1701, and continued in that publication to the end of the series in 1728; pulled into Walsh’s publications in 1718, it continued to be reprinted by that firm until 1755. The tune was not new; it had appeared in the Walsh firm’s *Harpsichord Master* in 1697, and was almost certainly the work of John Eccles. Thomas Bray made effective use of it as “The Parson’s Cap” in his 1699 collection, and it was used for an entirely new dance, sharing the Playford title, by Marjorie Heffer and William Porter in the 1932 publication *Maggot Pie*. “Count Tallard” first appeared in the 13th edition of *The Dancing Master* in 1706, and likewise went on into the 1720s, also appearing in Walsh collections from 1718 until 1755.

One final glimpse of the charismatic count must suffice, from an anonymous long poem published in 1705, not long after the start of Tallard’s cozy imprisonment. The narrator, having heard some unflattering remarks about the count from a little crowd gathered around Newdigate to get a glimpse of him (“I’d not give a Custard to see him again / Zooks, our Squire’s a handsomer Man, I’ll maintain”), decides to evaluate the man for himself, and ends admiringly:

*That Honour shou’d polish the Heroe so fine,
His Lustre shou’d ev’n in Adversity shine;
Which only has power mean Souls to enslave,
Being scorn’d and disdain’d by the Gen’rous and Brave...
Be thy Fate, then, brave Tallard, a Captive to be,
Thy Greatness of Soul does declare thou art free.*

Charles Bolton interpreted “The French Embasseder” in the first book of his *Retreads* series, and Ken Sheffield presented his version of Count Tallard in the fifth of his *From Two Barns* series; both can be consulted on the CDSS website.

(200)

The French Embasseder. Longways for as many as will.

The 1. cu. cross over and turn below the 2. cu. Then cross over below the third cu. and turn. The 1. man turns the 3. wo. and the 1. wo. the 2. man, then turn your Partner with your left hand, then lead through the 2. cu. and call up and turn. Figure throrow the 2. cu. and turn your Partner.

[82]

Count Tallard, Longways for as many as will.

Note: Each Strain is to be play'd twice over.

The 1. Man cast off behind the 2. Man into the Wo. place, the 2. Wo. casting up at the same time on the outside of the 1. Wo. into the 1. Man's place; the 1. Wo. cast round her own Partner into the 2. Man's place, and the 2. Man cast up round his own Partner into the 1. Wo. place. Then the 1. cu. half Figure, and the 2. cu. half Figure. Then hands half round, and Right and Left half round; then lead through the 3. cu. and cast up and lead through the 2. cu. and cast off.

TOP: “The French Embasseder,” *The Dancing Master* (11th edition; 1701) BOTTOM: “Count Tallard,” *The Dancing Master* (17th edition; 1721)