HENRY BULWER

HISTORICAL CHARACTERS

Henry Bulwer

Historical Characters

Bulwer H.

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Содержание

Henry Lytton Earle Bulwer
Historical Characters / Mackintosh, Talleyrand, Canning, Corbett, Peel

TO LORD LYTTON

My dear Edward,

The idea of this work, which I dedicate to you in testimony of the affection and friendship which have always united us, was conceived many years ago. I wished to give some general idea of modern history, from the period of the French Revolution of 1789 down to our own times, in a series of personal sketches. In these sketches I was disposed to select types of particular characters, thinking that in this way it is easier to paint with force and clearness both an individual and an epoch. The outlines of Talleyrand, Cobbett, and others, were then imperfectly traced; and Canning and Mackintosh have been little altered.

The manuscript, however, was laid aside amidst the labours of an active professional career, and only thought of since complete leisure created the wish for some employment. It was then that I resumed my task.

I need not say that the portraits I give here are but a few of those I commenced, but the constant change of residence, rendered necessary by the state of health in which I left Constantinople, interfered with the completion of my design, and added to the defects which, under any circumstances, would have been found in the following pages.

Ever yours affectionately,
H. L. Bulwer.

13, Rue Royale, Paris,
Oct 10, 1867.

PREFACE TO THIS NEW EDITION

The sale which this work has had in its original form has induced my publisher to recommend a cheaper and more popular one; and I myself gladly seize the opportunity of correcting some of the errors in print and expression which, though gradually diminished in preceding editions, left even the last edition imperfect. An author with ordinary modesty must always be conscious of many defects in his own work. I am so in mine. Still I venture to say that the portraits I have drawn have, upon the whole, been thought truthful and impartial; and though I have been often reminded of the difficulty which Sir Walter Raleigh, when writing the History of the World, experienced in ascertaining the real particulars of a tumult that took place under his windows – almost every anecdote one hears on the best authority being certain to find contradiction in some of its particulars – I have not refrained from quoting those anecdotes which came to me from good authority or the general report of the period; since a story which brings into relief the reputed character of the person it is applied to, and which, to use the Italian proverb, ought to be true if it is not so, is far from being indifferent to history.

In conclusion, I cannot but express my thanks, not only to public, but to private and previously unknown critics, whose remarks have always received a willing and grateful attention, and to whose suggestions I am greatly indebted.

Nov. 6, 1869.

TALLEYRAND, THE POLITIC MAN

Part I
FROM THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE REVOLUTION TO THE EXPOSITION OF THE STATE OF THE NATION

Different types of men. – M. de Talleyrand, the politic man. – Character of the eighteenth century, which had formed him. – Birth, personal description, entry into church. – Causes of revolution. – States-General. – Talleyrand's influence over clergy; over the decision as to the instructions of members, and the drawing up of the rights of man. – Courage in times of danger. – Financial knowledge. – Propositions relative to church property. – Discredit with the Court party. – Popularity with the Assembly. – Charged to draw up its manifesto to the nation. – Project about uniformity of weights and measures.

I

There are many men in all times who employ themselves actively in public affairs; but very few amongst these deserve the title of "Men of action."

The rare individuals who justly claim this designation, and whose existence exercises so important an influence over the age in which they appear, must possess, in no ordinary degree, intelligence, energy, and judgment; but these qualities are found blended in different degrees in the different classes or types of men who, as soldiers, sovereigns, or statesmen, command the destiny of their times.

They in whom superior intelligence, energy, and judgment are equally united, mount with firm and rapid pace the loftiest steeps of ambition, and establish themselves permanently on the heights to which they have safely ascended. Such men usually pursue some fixed plan or predominant idea with stern caution and indomitable perseverance, adapting their means to their end, but always keeping their end clearly in view, and never, in the pursuit of it, overstepping that line by which difficulties are separated from impossibilities. Cardinal de Richelieu in France, and William III. in England, are types of this heroic race.

On the other hand, they in whom the judgment, however great, is not sufficient to curb the energy and govern the intellect which over-stimulates their nature, blaze out, meteor-like, in history, but rather excite temporary admiration than leave behind them permanent results. Their exploits far surpass those of other men, and assume for a moment an almost supernatural appearance: but, as their rise is usually sudden and prodigious, their ruin is also frequently abrupt and total. Carried on by a force over which they gradually lose all control, from one act of audacity to another more daring, their genius sails before the wind, like a vessel with overcrowded canvas, and perishes at last in some violent and sudden squall. Charles XII. of Sweden was an example of this kind in the last century, and Napoleon Bonaparte, if we regard him merely as a conqueror, a more striking one in our own days.

Thirdly, there are men whose energy though constant is never violent, and whose intellect, rather subtle than bold, is attracted by the useful, and careless of the sublime. Shrewd and wary, these men rather take advantage of circumstances than make them. To turn an obstacle, to foresee an event, to seize an opportunity, is their peculiar talent. They are without passions, but self-interest and sagacity combined give them a force like that of passion. The success they obtain is procured

by efforts no greater than those of other candidates for public honours, who with an appearance of equal talent vainly struggle after fortune; but all their exertions are made at the most fitting moment, and in the happiest manner.

A nice tact and a far-sighted judgment are the predominant qualities of these "*politic*" persons. They think rarely of what is right in the abstract: they do usually what is best at the moment. They never play the greatest part amongst their contemporaries: they almost always play a great one; and, without arriving at those extraordinary positions to which a more adventurous race aspires, generally retain considerable importance, even during the most changeful circumstances, and most commonly preserve in retirement or disgrace much of the consideration they acquired in power. During the intriguing and agitated years which preceded the fall of the Stuarts, there was seen in England a remarkable statesman of the character I have just been describing; and a comparison might not inappropriately be drawn between the plausible and trimming Halifax and the adroit and accomplished personage whose name is inscribed on these pages.

But although these two renowned advocates of expediency had many qualities in common – the temper, the wit, the knowledge, the acuteness which distinguished the one equally distinguishing the other – nevertheless the Englishman, although a more dexterous debater in public assemblies, had not in action the calm courage, nor in council the prompt decision, for which the Frenchman was remarkable; neither is his name stamped on the annals of his country in such indelible characters, nor connected with such great and marvellous events.

And yet, notwithstanding the vastness of the stage on which M. de Talleyrand acted, and the importance of the parts which for more than half a century he played, I venture to doubt whether his character has ever been fairly given, or is at this moment justly appreciated; nor is this altogether surprising. In a life so long, brilliant, and varied, we must expect to find a diversity of impressions succeeding and effacing each other; and not a few who admired the captivating companion, and reverenced the skilful minister of foreign affairs, were ignorant that the celebrated wit and sagacious diplomatist had exhibited an exquisite taste in letters, and a profound knowledge in legislation and finance. Moreover, though it may appear singular, it will be found true, that it is precisely those public men who are the most tolerant to adverse opinions, and the least prone to personal enmities, who oftentimes gather round their own reputation, at least during a time, the darkest obloquy and the most terrible reproaches. The reason for this is simple: such men are themselves neither subject to any predominant affection, nor devoted to any favourite theory. Calm and impartial, they are lenient and forgiving. On the other hand, men who love things passionately, or venerate things deeply, despise those who forsake – and detest those who oppose – the objects of their adoration or respect. Thus, the royalist, ready to lay down his life for his legitimate sovereign; the republican, bent upon glorious imitations of old Rome and Greece; the soldier, devoted to the chief who had led him from victory to victory, could not but speak with bitterness and indignation of one who commenced the Revolution against Louis XVI., aided in the overthrow of the French Republic, and dictated the proscription of the great captain whose armies had marched for a while triumphant over Europe.

The most ardent and violent of the men of M. de Talleyrand's time were consequently the most ardent and violent condemners of his conduct; and he who turns over the various works in which that conduct is spoken of by insignificant critics,[1] will be tempted to coincide with the remark of the great wit of the eighteenth century: "*C'est un terrible avantage de n'avoir rien fait; mais il ne faut pas en abuser.*"[2]

How far such writers were justified will be seen more or less in the following pages, which are written with no intention to paint a character deserving of eulogy or inviting to imitation, but simply

[1] Many of those works confound dates and names, and make the most absurd, as well as the most malignant, accusations; but here and there they relate facts which authentic documents have since confirmed, as well as anecdotes which I have heard contemporaries repeat, and of which I shall therefore take advantage.

[2] "It is a terrible advantage to have done nothing; but one must not abuse it."

with the view of illustrating a remarkable class of men by a very remarkable man, who happened to live at a period which will never cease to occupy and interest posterity.

II

Charles Maurice Talleyrand de Périgord was born February 2, 1754.[3] The House of Périgord was one of the noblest in France, and in the earliest ages of the French monarchy possessed sovereign power. The principality of Chalais, the only one which existed, I believe, in the time of Louis XIV. (for the other personages called princes at the French court took their titles as princes of the Roman States or the German Empire, and ranked after French dukes), is said to have been eight centuries in this family. Talleyrand, a name usually attached to that of Périgord, and anciently written *Tailleran*, is supposed to have been a sort of *sobriquet*, or nickname, and derived from the words, "*tailler les rangs*" (cut through the ranks). It was borne by Helie V., one of the sovereign counts of Périgord, who lived in 1118; and from this prince (Helie V.) descended two branches of the Talleyrand-Périgords; the one was extinct before the time of Louis XVI., the other, being the younger branch, was then represented by a Comte de Périgord, Captain of the Guards, and Governor of the States of Languedoc. A brother of this Comte de Périgord was the father of Charles Maurice Talleyrand de Périgord (the subject of this memoir), whose mother, Eléonore de Damas, daughter of the Marquis de Damas, was also of a highly noble family, and a lady alike remarkable for her beauty and her virtue.[4]

III

The seal which marks our destiny has usually been stamped on our childhood; and most men, as they look back to their early youth, can remember the accident, the book, the conversation, which gave that shape to their character which events have subsequently developed.

M. de Talleyrand was in infancy an exile from his home; the fortune of his parents did not correspond with their rank: his father,[5] a soldier, was always at the court or the camp; his mother held a situation in the household at Versailles. To both a child was an incumbrance, and Maurice immediately at his birth was put out to nurse (as was indeed at that time frequently the custom) in the country, where, either by chance or neglect, he met with a fall which occasioned lameness. This infirmity, when the almost forgotten child at the age of twelve or thirteen was brought up to Paris for the purpose of receiving rather a tardy education, had become incurable; and by a *conseil de famille*, it was decided that the younger brother, the Comte d'Archambaud – subsequently known as one of the handsomest and most elegant of the courtiers of Louis XVI., and whom I can remember under the title of Duc de Périgord – (a title given by Louis XVIII.), should be considered the elder brother, and enter the army, whilst the elder son should be pronounced the younger son, and devoted to the clerical profession, into which the Périgords knew they had sufficient influence to procure his admission, notwithstanding the infirmity which, under ordinary circumstances, would have been a reason for excluding him from the service of the church. From this moment the boy – hitherto lively, idle, and reckless – became taciturn, studious, and calculating. His early propensities remained, for nature admits of no radical change; but they were coloured by disappointment, or combated by ambition. We see traces of gaiety in the companion who, though rarely smiling himself, could always

[3] There seems to be some difficulty in ascertaining the date of M. de Talleyrand's birth with exactitude. I have been told, on apparently the best authority, that he was born on the 7th of March, on the 1st of September, and on the 2nd of February. This last is the date I have selected, having reason upon the whole to believe it the correct one. With respect to the year there is no dispute.

[4] The Countess de Talleyrand lived to 1809; and was very proud of the talents of her son, but regretting, it is said, the use he had made of them.

[5] This gentleman had been *menin* to the Dauphin, son of Louis XV. He subsequently commanded a regiment in the Seven Years' War, and rose to be lieutenant-general in the King's armies. He bore an excellent character, but was never considered to have any ability.

elicit a laugh from others; we see traces of indolence in the statesman who, though always occupied, never did more than the necessity of the case exacted; we see traces of recklessness in the gambler and politician who, after a shrewd glance at the chances, was often disposed to risk his fortune, or his career, on a speculation for money or power: but the mind had been darkened and the heart hardened; and the youth who might easily and carelessly have accepted a prosperous fate, was ushered into the world with a determination to wrestle with an adverse one.

Nor did any paternal advice or maternal care regulate or soften the dispositions which were thus being formed. From the nurse in the country, the lame young Périgord – for Périgord was the name which at this time he bore – was transplanted to the "Collége d'Harcourt," since called that of St. Louis. He entered it more ignorant, perhaps, than any boy of his years; but he soon gained its first prizes, and became one of its most distinguished scholars.

At the "Séminaire de St. Sulpice," to which he was removed in 1770, his talent for disputation attracted attention, and even some of his compositions were long remembered and quoted by contemporaries. Whilst at the Sorbonne, where he subsequently completed his studies, this scion of one of the most illustrious French houses was often pointed out as a remarkably clever, silent, and profligate young man: who made no secret of his dislike to the profession that had been chosen for him, but was certain to arrive at its highest honours.

With such prospects and such dispositions, M. de Talleyrand entered, in 1773, the Gallican Church.

IV

At this time we have to fancy the young ecclesiastic – a gentleman about twenty years of age, very smart in his clerical attire, and with a countenance which, without being handsome, was singularly attractive from the triple expression of softness, impudence, and wit. If we are to credit the chronicles of that day, his first advance in his profession was owing to one of those *bon mots* by which so many of the subsequent steps of his varied career were distinguished.

There were assembled at Madame Dubarry's a number of young gentlemen, rather free in their conversation and prodigal in their boasts: no beauty had been veiled to their desires, no virtue had been able to resist their attacks. The subject of this memoir alone said nothing. "And what makes you so sad and silent?" asked the hostess. "*Hélas! madame, je faisais une réflexion bien triste.*" "*Et laquelle?*" "*Ah, madame, que Paris est une ville dans laquelle il est bien plus aisé d'avoir des femmes que des abbayes.*"

The saying, so goes the story, was considered charming, and being reported to Louis XV., was rewarded by that monarch with the benefice desired. The Abbé de Périgord's career, thus commenced, did not long linger. Within a few years after entering the church, aided by his birth and abilities, he obtained (in 1780) the distinguished position of "Agent-General" of the French clergy – this title designating an important personage who administered the ecclesiastical revenues, which were then immense, under the control of regular assemblies.

It is a curious trait in the manners of these times that, whilst holding this high post as a priest, the Abbé de Périgord fitted out a vessel as a privateer; and, it being his intention to plunder the English, received from the French government the cannon he required for so pious a purpose.[6]

I am unable to say what success attended M. de Talleyrand's naval enterprise; but when, in 1785, he had to give an account of his clerical administration, the very clear and statesmanlike manner in which he did so, raised him, in the opinion of the public, from the position of a clever man, into that of an able one. Nor was this all. The peculiar nature of the first public duties which he thus exercised,

[6] This singular fact is mentioned by M. Mignet in a short and able memoir, which after M. de Talleyrand's death he read to the French Academy.

directed his mind towards those questions which the increasing deficit in the French treasury, and the acknowledged necessity of supplying it, made the fashion: for every one at that time in Paris – ladies, philosophers, wits, and men of fashion – talked finance. Few, however, troubled themselves with acquiring any real insight into so dry a subject. But M. de Talleyrand, although constitutionally averse to hard or continued study, supplied this defect by always seeking and living with men who were the best informed on those subjects with which he wished to become acquainted. In this manner his own information became essentially practical, and the knowledge he obtained of details (furnishing him with a variety of facts, which he always knew how to quote opportunely), attracted the attention and patronage of M. de Calonne, then at the head of the French government, and who, being himself as much addicted to pleasure as to affairs, was not sorry to sanction the doctrine that a man of the world might also be a man of business.

Still, though thus early marked out as a person who, after the example of his great ecclesiastical predecessors, might rise to the highest dignities in the Church and State, the Abbé de Périgord showed an almost ostentatious disregard for the duties and decorum of the profession which he had been forced to embrace. Indeed, he seemed to make in this sort of conduct a kind of protest against the decree by which his birthright had been set aside, and almost to glory in the publication of profane epigrams and amorous adventures which amused the world but scandalised the Church. Thus, each year, which increased his reputation for ability, added to the stories by which public rumour exaggerated his immorality; and in 1788, when the bishopric of Autun, to which he had for some time been looking forward, became vacant, Louis XVI. was unwilling to confer the dignity of prelate on so irregular an ecclesiastic. For four months the appointment was not filled up. But the Abbé de Périgord's father lay at that time on his death-bed: he was visited by the kind-hearted Louis in this condition, and he begged the monarch, as the last request of a dying and faithful servant, to grant the bishopric in question to his son. The King could not withstand such a prayer at such a moment, and the Abbé de Périgord was consecrated Bishop of Autun on the 17th of January, 1789 – four months before the assembling of the States-General.

V

The period which had elapsed between the time at which M. de Talleyrand had entered the Church, and that at which he attained the episcopal dignity, is, perhaps, the most interesting in modern civilization. At no epoch did society ever present so bright and polished a surface as it did in the French capital during these fourteen or fifteen years. The still great fortunes of the *grand seigneur*, the profuse expenditure of the financier, the splendour of a court embellished by that love for the arts and for letters which the Medici had imported from Italy, and which Louis XIV. had made a part of his royal magnificence, all contributed to surround life with a taste in luxury which has never been surpassed. Rich manufactures of silk, exquisite chiseling in bronze, china equally beautiful in form and decoration, and paintings somewhat effeminate, but graceful, and which still give celebrity to the names of Watteau, Boucher, and Greuze, mark the elegant refinement that presided over those days.

Nothing, however, in those courtly times had been carried to such perfection as the art of living, and the habits of social intercourse. People did not then shut up their houses from their friends if they were poor, nor merely open them in order to give gorgeous and pompous entertainments if they were rich. Persons who suited and sympathised, assembled in small circles, which permitted the access of new members cautiously, but received all who had once been admitted without preference or distinction.

In these circles, the courtier, though confident of the fixed superiority of his birth, paid homage to the accident of genius in the man of letters; and the literary man, however proud of his works, or conscious of his talents, rendered the customary tribute of respect to high rank and station.

Thus poets and princes, ministers of state, and members of learned academies – men of wit, and men of the world – met on a footing of apparent equality, and real familiarity, on a stage where Beauty, ambitious of universal admiration, cultivated her mind as much as her person, and established one presiding theory – "that all had to make themselves agreeable."

The evening parties of Madame de Brignole, and of Madame du Deffand, the little suppers of Madame Geoffrin, the dinners of Baron Holbach and Helvetius, the musical receptions of the Abbé Morelet, and the breakfasts of Madame Necker, were only specimens of the sort of assemblies which existed amongst different classes, and throughout every street and corner of Paris and Versailles.

Here, all orders mingled with suitable deference towards each other. But beneath this brilliant show of actual gaiety and apparent unity there lay brooding a spirit of dissatisfaction and expectation, which a variety of peculiar circumstances tended, at that time, to exaggerate in France, but which is in fact the usual characteristic of every intellectual community, when neither over-enervated by luxury and peace, nor over-wearied by war and civil commotion. Its natural consequence was a desire for change, which diffused its influence over all things – great and small. Léonard revolutionized the head-dress of the French lady: Diderot and Beaumarchais, the principles of the French stage: Turgot and Necker, the political economy and financial system of the French state: and just at this moment, when the imagination was on the stretch for novelty, as if Providence designed for some mysterious end to encourage the aspiring genius of the epoch, the balloon of Montgolfier took its flight from the Tuileries, and the most romantic dreams were surpassed by a reality.

It was not, however, a mere discontent with the present, a mere hope in the future, a mere passion after things new, however violent that passion might be, which constituted the peril, nor, indeed, the peculiarity of the hour.

In other seasons of this kind, the wishes and views of men have frequently taken some fixed form – have had some fixed tendency – and in this way their progress has been regulated, and their result, even from a distance, foreseen.

But at the period to which I am referring, there was no general conception or aim which cast a decisive shadow over coming events, and promised any specific future in exchange for the present, evidently passing away.

There still lived, though on the verge of the tomb, an individual to whom this distinguishing misfortune of the eighteenth century was in no small degree attributable. The keen sagacity of Voltaire, his piercing raillery, his brilliant and epigrammatic eloquence, had ridiculed and destroyed all faith in old abuses, but had never attempted to give even a sketch of what was to come in their room. "*Magis habuit quod fugeret quam quod sequeretur.*" The effect of his genius, therefore, had been to create around him a sort of luminous mist, produced by the blending of curiosity and doubt; an atmosphere favourable to scepticism, favourable to credulity; and, above all things, generative of enthusiasts and empirics. St. Germain the alchymist, Cagliostro the conjurer, Condorcet the publicist, Marat the politician, were the successive produce of this marvellous and singular epoch. And thus it was, – amidst a general possession of privileges, and a general equality of customs and ideas – amidst a great generosity of sentiment, and an almost entire absence of principle in a society unequalled in its charms, unbounded in its hopes, and altogether ignorant of its destiny, – that the flower of M. de Talleyrand's manhood was passed.

VI

I have dwelt at some length upon the characteristics —

"Of those gay times of elegance and ease,
When Pleasure learnt so gracefully to please:
When wits and courtiers held the same resorts,

The courtiers wits, and all wits fit for courts:
When woman, perfect in her siren art,
Subdued the mind, and trifled with the heart;
When Wisdom's lights in fanes fantastic shone,
And Taste had principles, and Virtue none:
When schools disdained the morals understood,
And sceptics boasted of some better good:
When all was Fairyland which met the view,
No truth untheorized, and no theory true."

I have dwelt, I say, at some length upon the characteristics of those times; because it is never to be forgotten that the personage I have to speak of was their child. To the latest hour of his existence he fondly cherished their memory; to them he owed many of those graces which his friends still delight to recall: to them, most of those faults which his enemies have so frequently portrayed.

The great test of his understanding was that he totally escaped all their grosser delusions. Of this I am able to give a striking proof. It has been said that M. de Talleyrand was raised to the episcopal dignity in January, 1789, four months previous to the assembling of the States-General. To that great Assembly he was immediately named by the *baillage* of his own diocese; and perhaps there is hardly to be found on record a more remarkable example of human sagacity and foresight than in the new bishop's address to the body which had chosen him its representative.

In this address, which I have now before me, he separates all the reforms which were practicable and expedient, from all the schemes which were visionary and dangerous – the one and the other being at that time confused and jumbled together in the half-frenzied brains of his countrymen: he omits none of those advantages in government, legislation, finance – for he embraces all these – which fifty years have gradually given to France: he mentions none of those projects of which time, experience, and reason have shown the absurdity and futility.

A charter giving to all equal rights: a great code embodying and simplifying all existing and necessary laws: a due provision for prompt justice: the abolition of arbitrary arrest: the mitigation of the laws between debtor and creditor: the institution of trial by jury: the liberty of the press, and the inviolability of private correspondence: the destruction of those interior imposts which cut up France into provinces, and of those restrictions by which all but members of guilds were excluded from particular trades: the introduction of order into the finances under a well-regulated system of public accounts: the suppression of all feudal privileges: and the organization of a well-considered general plan of taxation: such were the changes which the Bishop of Autun suggested in the year 1789. He said nothing of the perfectibility of the human race: of a total reorganization of society under a new system of capital and labour: he did not promise an eternal peace, nor preach a general fraternity amongst all races and creeds. The ameliorations he proposed were plain and simple; they affiliated with ideas already received, and could be grafted on the roots of a society already existing. They have stood the test of eighty years – now advanced by fortunate events, now retarded by adverse ones – some of them have been disdained by demagogues, others denounced by despots; – they have passed through the ordeal of successive revolutions; and they furnish at this instant the foundations on which all wise and enlightened Frenchmen desire to establish the condition of government and society in their great and noble country. Let us do honour to an intelligence that could trace these limits for a rising generation; to a discretion that resisted the temptation to stray beyond them!

VII

About the time of the assembling of the States-General, there appeared a work which it is now curious to refer to – it was by the pen of Laclos – entitled *Galerie des États-Généraux*. This work

gave a sketch under assumed names of the principal personages likely to figure in the States-General. Amongst a variety of portraits, are to be found those of General Lafayette and the Bishop of Autun; the first under the name of Philarète, the second under that of Amène; and, assuredly, the author startles us by his nice perception of the character and by his prophetic sagacity as to the career of these two men. It is well, however, to remember that Laclos frequented the Palais Royal, which the moral and punctilious soldier of Washington scrupulously avoided. The criticism I give, therefore, is not an impartial one. For, if General Lafayette was neither a hero nor a statesman, he was, take him all in all, one of the most eminent personages of his time, and occupied, at two or three periods, one of the most prominent positions in his country.

"Philarète," says M. Laclos, "having found it easy to become a hero, fancies it will be as easy to become a statesman. The misfortune of Philarète is that he has great pretensions and ordinary conceptions. He has persuaded himself that he was the author of the revolution in America; he is arranging himself so as to become one of the principal actors in a revolution in France.

"He mistakes notoriety for glory, an event for a success, a sword for a monument, a compliment for immortality. He does not like the court, because he is not at his ease in it; nor the world, because there he is confounded with the many; nor women, because they injure the reputation of a man, while they do not add to his position. But he is fond of clubs, because he there picks up the ideas of others; of strangers, because they only examine a foreigner superficially; of mediocrity, because it listens and admires.

"Philarète will be faithful to whatever party he adopts, without being able to assign, even to himself, any good reasons for being so. He has no very accurate ideas of constitutional authority, but the word 'liberty' has a charm for him, because it rouses an ambition which he scarcely knows what to do with. Such is Philarète. He merits attention, because, after all, he is better than most of his rivals. That the world has been more favourable to him than he deserves, is owing to the fact that he has done a great deal in it, considering the poverty of his ability; and people have been grateful to him, rather on account of what he seemed desirous to be, than on account of what he was. Besides, his exterior is modest, and only a few know that the heart of the man is not mirrored on the surface.

"He will never be much more than we see him, for he has little genius, little nerve, little voice, little art, and is greedy of small successes."

Such was the portrait which was drawn of Lafayette; we now come to that of M. de Talleyrand.

"Amène has charming manners, which embellish virtue. His first title to success is a sound understanding. Judging men with indulgence, events with calmness, he has in all things that moderation which is the characteristic of true philosophy.

"There is a degree of perfection which the intelligence can comprehend rather than realise, and which there is, undoubtedly, a certain degree of greatness in endeavouring to attain; but such brilliant efforts, though they give momentary fame to those who make them, are never of any real utility. Common sense disdains glitter and noise, and, measuring the bounds of human capacity, has not the wild hope of extending them beyond what experience has proved their just limit.

"Amène has no idea of making a great reputation in a day: such reputations, made too quickly, soon begin to decline, and are followed by envy, disappointment, and sorrow. But Amène will *arrive at everything*, because he will always profit by those occasions which present themselves to such as do not attempt to ravish Fortune. Each step will be marked by the development of some talent, and thus he will at last acquire that general high opinion which summons a statesman to every great post that is vacant. Envy, which will always deny something to a person generally praised, will reply to what we have said, that Amène has not that force and energy of character which is necessary to break through the obstacles that impede the course of a public man. It is true he will *yield to circumstances*, to reason, and will deem that he can make *sacrifices to peace without descending from principle*; but firmness and constancy may exist without violent ardour, or vapid enthusiasm.

"Amène has against him his pleasing countenance and seductive manner. I know people whom these advantages displease, and who are also prejudiced against a man who happens to unite the useful chance of birth with the essential qualities of the mind.

"But what are we really to expect from Amène in the States-General? Nothing, if he is inspired with the spirit of class; much, if he acts after his own conceptions, and remembers that a national assembly only contains citizens."

VIII

Few who read the above sketch will deny to the author of the "*Liaisons Dangereuses*" the merit of discernment. Indeed, to describe M. de Talleyrand at this time seems to have been more appropriate to the pen of the novelist than to that of the historian. Let us picture to ourselves a man of about thirty-five, and appearing somewhat older: his countenance of a long oval; his eyes blue, with an expression at once deep and variable; his lips usually impressed with a smile, which was that of mockery, but not of ill-nature; his nose slightly turned up, but delicate, and remarkable for a constant play in the clearly chiseled nostrils. "He dressed," says one of his many biographers, "like a coxcomb, he thought like a deist, he preached like a saint." At once active and irregular, he found time for everything: the church, the court, the opera. In bed one day from indolence or debauch, up the whole of the following night to prepare a memoir or a speech. Gentle with the humble, haughty with the high; not very exact in paying his debts, but very scrupulous with respect to giving and breaking promises to pay them.

A droll story is related with respect to this last peculiarity. The new Bishop had ordered and received a very handsome carriage, becoming his recent ecclesiastical elevation. He had not, however, settled the coachmaker's "small account." After long waiting and frequent letters, the civil but impatient tradesman determined upon presenting himself every day at the Bishop of Autun's door, at the same time as his equipage.

For several days, M. de Talleyrand saw, without recognising, a well-dressed individual, with his hat in his hand, and bowing very low as he mounted the steps of his coach. "*Et qui êtes vous, mon ami?*" he said at last. "*Je suis votre carrossier, Monseigneur.*" "*Ah! vous êtes mon carrossier; et que voulez-vous, mon carrossier?*" "*Je veux être payé, Monseigneur*," said the coachmaker, humbly. "*Ah! vous êtes mon carrossier, et vous voulez être payé; vous serez payé, mon carrossier.*" "*Et quand, Monseigneur?*"[7] "Hum!" murmured the Bishop, looking at his coachmaker very attentively, and at the same time settling himself in his new carriage: "*Vous êtes bien curieux!*" Such was the Talleyrand of 1789, embodying in himself the ability and the frivolity, the ideas and the habits of a large portion of his class. At once the associate of the Abbé Sieyès, and of Mademoiselle Guimard: a profligate fine gentleman, a deep and wary thinker; and, above all things, the delight and ornament of that gay and graceful society, which, crowned with flowers, was about to be the first victim to its own philosophy. As yet, however, the sky, though troubled, gave no evidence of storm; and never, perhaps, did a great assembly meet with less gloomy anticipations than that which in the pomp and gallantry of feudal show, swept, on the 1st of May, through the royal city of Versailles.

Still, there was even at that moment visible the sign and symbol of the approaching crisis; for dark behind the waving plumes and violet robes of the great dignitaries of Church and State, moved on the black mass, in sable cloak and garb, of the Commons, or tiers-état, the body which had, *as*

[7] "And who are you, my friend?" "I am your coachmaker, my lord." "Ah! you are my coachmaker; and what do you want, my coachmaker?" "I want to be paid, my lord." "Ah! you are my coachmaker, and you want to be paid; you shall be paid, my coachmaker." "And when, my lord?" "You are very inquisitive!"

yet, been nothing, but which had just been told by one of its most illustrious members,[8] that it *ought to be everything*.

The history of the mighty revolution which at this moment was commencing, is still so stirring amongst us, – the breath of the tempest which then struck down tower and temple, is still so frequently fancied to be rustling about our own dwellings, – that when the mind even now wanders back, around and about this time, it is always with a certain interest and curiosity, and we pause once again to muse, even though we have often before meditated, upon that memorable event which opened a new chapter in the history of the world. And the more we reflect, the more does it seem surprising that in so civilised an age, and under so well-meaning a sovereign, an august throne and a great society should have been wholly swept away; nor does it appear less astonishing that a monarch with arbitrary sway, that a magistracy with extraordinary privileges, each wishing to retain their authority, should have voluntarily invoked another power, long slumbering in an almost forgotten constitution, and which, when roused into activity, was so immediately omnipotent over parliament and king.

IX

The outline of Louis XVI.'s reign is easily, though I do not remember where it is briefly, and clearly traced. At its commencement, the influence of new opinions was confined to the library and drawing-room. The modern notions of constitutional liberty and political economy prevalent amongst men of letters, and fashionable amongst men of the world, had not been professed by men in power, and were consequently disdained by that large class which wishes in all countries to pass for the practical portion of the community. At this time, an old minister, himself a courtier, and jealous lest other courtiers should acquire that influence over his master which he possessed, introduced into affairs a set of persons hitherto unknown at court, the most eminent of whom were Turgot, Malesherbes, and Necker; and no sooner had these three eminent reformers obtained a serious political position, than their views acquired a political consideration which had not before belonged to them, and the idea that some great and general reform was shortly to take place entered seriously into the public mind. Each of these ministers would have wished to make the reforms that were most necessary with the aid of the royal authority; and, had they been able to do so, it is probable that they would have preserved the heart and strength of the old monarchy, which was yet only superficially decayed. But the moderate changes which they desired to introduce with the assent of all parties, were opposed by all parties, in spite of – or, perhaps, on account of – their very moderation: for losers are rarely satisfied because their losses are small, and winners are never contented but when their gains are great.

In the meantime, Maurepas, who would have supported the policy of his colleagues, if it had brought him popularity, was by no means disposed to do so when it gave him trouble. Thus, Malesherbes, Turgot, and Necker were successively forced to resign their offices, without having done anything to establish their own policy, but much to render any other discreditable and difficult.

The publication of the famous "*Compte Rendu*," or balance-sheet of state expenses and receipts, more especially, rendered it impossible to continue to govern as heretofore. And now Maurepas died, and a youthful queen inherited the influence of an old favourite. M. de Calonne, a plausible, clever, but superficial gentleman, was the first minister of any importance chosen by the influence of Marie-Antoinette's friends. He saw that the expenses and receipts of the government must bear some proportion to each other. He trembled at suddenly reducing old charges; new taxes were the only alternative; and yet it was almost impossible to get such taxes from the lower and middle classes, if the clergy and nobility, who conjointly possessed about two-thirds of the soil, were exempted from all contributions to the public wants. The minister, nevertheless, shrunk from despoiling

[8] Sieyès, in a celebrated pamphlet published at this period.

the privileged classes of their immunities, without some authorization from themselves. He called together, therefore, the considerable personages, or "notables," as they were styled, of the realm, and solicited their sanction to new measures and new imposts, some of the former of which would limit their authority, and some of the latter affect their purses.

The "notables" were divided into two factions: the one of which was opposed to M. de Calonne, the other to the changes which he wished to introduce. These two parties united and became irresistible. Amongst their ranks was a personage of great ambition and small capacity – Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse. This man was the most violent of M. de Calonne's opponents. The court turned round suddenly and chose him as M. de Calonne's successor. This measure, at first, was successful, for conflicting opinions end by creating personal antipathies, and the "notables," in a moment of exultation over the defeated minister, granted everything with facility to the minister who had supplanted him. A new embarrassment, however, now arose. The notables were, after all, only an advising body: they could say what they deemed right to be done, but they could not do it. This was the business of the sovereign; but his edicts, in order to acquire regularly the force of law, had to be registered by the Parliament of Paris; and it is easy to understand how such a power of registration became, under particular circumstances, the power of refusal. The influence of that great magisterial corporation, called the "Parliament of Paris," had, indeed, acquired, since it had been found necessary to set aside Louis XIV.'s will by the sanction of its authority, a more clear and positive character than at former periods. This judicial court, or legislative assembly, had thus become a constituent part of the State, and had also become – as all political assemblies, however composed, which have not others for their rivals, will become – the representative of popular opinion. It had seen, with a certain degree of jealousy, the convocation, however temporarily, of another chamber (for such the assembly of notables might be called), and was, moreover, as belonging to the aristocracy, not very well disposed to the surrender of aristocratical privileges. It refused, therefore, to register the new taxes proposed to it: thus thwarting the consent of the notables, avoiding, for a time, the imposts with which its own class was threatened, and acquiring, nevertheless, some increase of popularity with the people who are usually disposed to resist all taxation, and were pleased with the invectives against the extravagance of the court, with which the resistance of the parliament was accompanied.

The government cajoled and threatened the parliament, recalled it, again quarrelled with it, attempted to suppress it – and failed.

Disturbances broke out, famine appeared at hand, a bankruptcy was imminent; there was no constituted authority with sufficient power or sufficient confidence in itself to act decisively. People looked out for some new authority: they found it in an antique form. "The States-General!" (that is, an assembly chosen from the different classes, which, in critical periods of the French nation had been heretofore summoned) became the unanimous cry. The court, which wanted money and could not get it, expected to find more sympathy in a body drawn from all the orders of the State than from a special and privileged body which represented but one order.

The parliament, on the other hand, imagined that, having acquired the reputation of defending the nation's rights, it would have its powers maintained and extended by any collection of men representing the nation. This is why both parliament and court came by common accord to one conclusion.

The great bulk of the nobility, though divided in their previous discussions, here, also, at last agreed: one portion because it participated in the views of the court, and the other because it participated in those of the parliament.

In the meantime, the unfortunate Archbishop, who had tried every plan for filling the coffers of the court without the aid of the great council now called together, was dismissed as soon as that council was definitively summoned: and, according to the almost invariable policy of restoring to power the statesman who has increased his popularity by losing office, M. Necker was again placed at the head of the finances and presented to the public as the most influential organ of the crown.

X

It will be apparent, from what I have said, that the court expected to find in the States-General an ally against the parliament, whilst the parliament expected to find in the States-General an ally against the court. Both were deceived.

The nobility, or notables, the government, and the parliament, had all hitherto been impotent, because they had all felt that there was another power around them and about them, by which their actions were controlled, but with which, as it had no visible representation, they had no means of dealing.

That power was “public opinion.” In the Commons of France, in the Deputies from the most numerous, thoughtful, and stirring classes of the community, a spirit – hitherto impalpable and invisible – found at once a corporate existence.

Monsieur d’Espremenil, and those parliamentary patricians who a year before were in almost open rebellion against the sovereign, at last saw that they had a more potent enemy to cope with, and rallied suddenly round the throne. Its royal possessor stood at that moment in a position which no doubt was perilous, but which, nevertheless, I believe, a moderate degree of sagacity and firmness might have made secure. The majority of the aristocracy of all grades, from a feudal sentiment of honour, was with the King. The middle classes also had still for the monarch and his rank considerable respect; and were desirous to find out and sanction some just and reasonable compromise between the institutions that were disappearing, and the ideas that had come into vogue. It was necessary to calm the apprehensions of those who had anything to lose, to fix the views of those who thought they had something to gain, and to come at once to a settlement with the various classes – here agitated by fear, there by expectation. But however evident the necessity of this policy, it was not adopted. Suspicions that should have been dissipated were excited; notions that should have been rendered definite were further disturbed; all efforts at arrangement were postponed; and thus the revolution rushed onwards, its tide swelling, and its rapidity being increased by the blunders of those who had the greatest interest and desire to arrest it. The fortune of M. de Talleyrand was embarked upon that great stream, of which few could trace the source, and none foresaw the direction.

XI

I have just said that none foresaw the direction in which the great events now commencing were likely to run. That direction was mainly to be influenced by the conduct and character of the sovereign, but it was also, in some degree, to be affected by the conduct and character of the statesman to whom the destinies of France were for the moment confided.

M. Necker belonged to a class of men not uncommon in our own time. His abilities, though good, were not of the first order; his mind had been directed to one particular branch of business; and, as is common with persons who have no great genius and one specialty, he took the whole of government to be that part which he best understood. Accordingly, what he now looked to, and that exclusively, was balancing the receipts and expenditure of the State. To do this, it was necessary to tax the nobility and clergy; and the class through whose aid he could best hope to achieve such a task was the middle-class, or “tiers-état.” For this reason, when it had been decided to convoke the States-General, and it became necessary to fix the proportionate numbers by which each of the three orders (viz. the nobility, clergy, middle-class, or “tiers-état,”) which composed the States-General, was to be represented, M. Necker determined that the sole order of the “tiers-état” should have as many representatives as the two other orders conjointly; thinking in this way to give the middle-class a greater authority, and to counterbalance the want of rank in its individual members, by their aggregate superiority in numbers.

But when M. Necker went thus far he should have gone farther, and defined in what manner the three orders should vote, and what power they should separately exercise. This precaution, however, he did not take; and therefore, as soon as the States-General assembled, there instantly arose the question as to whether the three orders were to prove the validity of their elections together as members of one assembly, or separately as members of three distinct assemblies. This question, in point of fact, determined whether the three orders were to sit and vote together, or whether each order was to sit and vote apart; and after M. Necker's first regulation it was clear that, in one case, the order of the Commons would predominate over all opposition; and that, in the other, it would be subordinate to the two rival orders. A struggle then naturally commenced.

XII

The members of the "tiers-état," who, as the largest of the three bodies forming the States-General, had been left in possession of the chamber where all the orders had been first collected to meet the sovereign – an accident much in their favour – invited the members of the two other orders to join them there. The clergy hesitated; the nobles refused. Days and weeks passed away, and the minister, seeing his original error, would willingly have remedied it by now proposing that which he might originally have fixed, namely, that the three orders should vote together on questions of finance, and separately on all other questions. This idea was brought forward late; but, even thus late, it might have prevailed if the court had been earnest in its favour. The King, however, and those who immediately influenced him, had begun to think that a deficit was less troublesome than the means adopted to get rid of it; and fancying that the States-General, if left to themselves, might ere long dissolve amidst the dissensions which were discrediting them, were desirous that these dissensions should continue. Nor would this policy have failed in its object if negotiation had been much further prolonged.

But it is at great moments like these that a great man suddenly steps forth, and whilst the crowd is discussing what is best to be done, does it. Such a man was the Comte de Mirabeau; and on the 15th of June, this marvellous personage, whose audacity was often prudence, having instigated the Abbé Sieyès (whose authority was at that time great with the Assembly) to bring the subject under discussion, called on the tiers-état, still doubting and deliberating, to constitute themselves at once, and without further waiting for the nobility, "The Representatives of the French people." They did so in reality, though not in words, declaring themselves duly elected, and taking as their title "The National Assembly." The government thought to stop their proceedings by simply shutting up the chamber where they had hitherto met, but so paltry a device was insufficient to arrest the resolutions of men whose minds were now prepared for important events. Encouraging each other, the Commons rushed unhesitatingly to a tennis-court, and in that spot, singularly destined to witness so solemn a ceremony, swore, with but one dissentient voice, to stand by each other till France had a constitution. After such an oath, the alternative was clearly between the old monarchy, with all its abuses, and a new constitution, whatever its dangers. On this ground, two orders in the State stood hostilely confronted. But another order remained, whose conduct at such a juncture was all-decisive. That order was the clergy, – which, still respected if not venerated, – wealthy, connected by various links with each portion of society, and especially looked up to by that great and sluggish mass of quiet men who always stand long wavering between extremes – had been endeavouring to effect some compromise between the privileged classes and their opponents, but had as yet taken no prominent part with either. The moment was come at which it could no longer hesitate.

XIII

M. de Talleyrand, though but a new dignitary in the church, was already one of its most influential members. He had been excluded by a prejudice of the nobility from the situation to which his birth had entitled him amongst them. He had long resolved to obtain another position at least as elevated through his own exertions. His views, as we have seen, at the time of his election, were liberal, though moderate, whilst he was sufficiently acquainted with the character of Louis XVI. to know that that monarch would never sincerely yield, nor ever sturdily resist, any concession demanded with persistency. Partly, therefore, from a conviction that he was doing what was best for the public, and partly, also, from the persuasion that he was doing what was best for himself, he separated boldly from the rest of his family (who were amongst the most devoted to the Comte d'Artois and Marie-Antoinette), and laboured with unwearied energy to enlist the body he belonged to on the popular side.

To succeed in this object he had the talents and advantages most essential. His natural courtesy flattered the curates; his various acquirements captivated his more learned brethren; his high birth gave him the ear of the great ecclesiastical dignitaries; and, finally, a majority of his order, instigated by his exertions and address, joined the Third Estate, on the 22nd of June, in the Church of Saint-Louis.

From that moment the question hitherto doubtful was determined; for at no time have the clergy and the commons stood side by side without being victorious. It was in vain, therefore, that even so early as the day following, the descendant of Louis XIV., in all the pomp of royalty, and in the presence of the three orders – whom he had for that day summoned to assemble – denounced the conduct which the tiers-état had pursued, annulled their decisions, and threatened them with his sovereign displeasure.

The tiers-état resisted; the King repented – retracted, – and showing that he had no will, lost all authority. Thus, on the 27th of June, the States-General, henceforth designated by the title which had been already assumed by the Commons (the National Assembly), held their deliberations together, and the three orders were confounded.

XIV

But one step now remained in order to legalise the revolution in progress. Each deputy had received a sort of mandate or instruction from those who named him at the moment of his election. Such instructions or mandates, which had been given at a time when people could hardly anticipate the state of things which had since arisen, limited, or seemed to limit, the action of a deputy to particular points which had especially attracted the attention of his constituents.

The conservative party contended that these mandates were imperative, the liberal party that they were not. According to the first supposition, the States-General could do no more than redress a few grievances; according to the other, they could create a perfectly new system of government.

The Bishop of Autun, in the first speech he delivered in the National Assembly – a speech which produced considerable effect – argued in favour of his own liberty and that of his colleagues, and his views were naturally enough adopted by a body which, feeling its own force, had to determine its own power. Hence, on the record of two great decisions – the one solving the States-General into the "National Assembly;" the other extending and fixing that Assembly's authority – decisions which, whatever their other results, were at least fatal to the power and influence of the class to which he belonged by birth, but from which he had, in spite of himself, been severed in childhood – was indelibly inscribed the name of the once despised and still disinherited cripple of the princely house of Périgord.

XV

There was nothing henceforth to impede the labours of the National Assembly, and it commenced those labours with earnestness and zeal, if not with discretion. One of its first acts was to choose by ballot a committee of eight members, charged to draw up the project of a constitution, which was subsequently to be submitted to the Assembly. The Bishop of Autun was immediately placed upon this select and important committee. It had for its task to render practical the political speculations of the eighteenth century. Things, however, had commenced too violently for them to proceed thus peaceably; and as the success of the popular party had been hitherto obtained by braving the crown, it was to be expected that the crown would seize the first opportunity that presented itself for boldly recovering its authority. A well-timed effort of this kind might have been successful. But neither Louis XVI., nor any of the counsellors in whom he confided, possessed that instinct in political affairs which is the soul of action, inspiring men with the resolve to do the right thing at the right moment. It has often been found easy to crush a revolution at its commencement, for the most ardent of its supporters at such a time act feebly, and doubt about the policy they are pursuing. It has often been found possible to arrest a revolution at that subsequent stage of its progress when the moderate are shocked by some excess, or the sanguine checked by some disappointment; but a revolution is invincible at that crisis, when its progress, begun with boldness, has neither been checked by misfortune, nor disgraced by violence.

Nevertheless, it was just at such a crisis that the unfortunate Louis XVI., guided in a great degree by the fatal influence of his brother, after having gradually surrounded Versailles and the capital with troops, suddenly banished M. Necker (July 10th), whose disgrace was instantly considered the defeat of those who advised the King to renovate his authority by concessions, and the triumph of those who counselled him to recover and re-establish it by force. But the measures which were to follow this act were still in suspense, when a formidable insurrection broke out at Paris. A portion of the soldiery sided with the people. The Bastille was taken, and its commandant put to death, the populace got possession of arms, the prevôt or mayor of the city was assassinated, whilst the army which had been so ostentatiously collected in the Champ de Mars and at St. Denis was left an inactive witness of the insurrection which its array had provoked. The results were those which usually follow the strong acts of weak men: Louis XVI. submitted; M. Necker was recalled; the Comte d'Artois emigrated.

It was M. de Talleyrand's fortune not merely at all times to quit a falling party at the commencement of its decline, but to stand firm by a rising party at the moment of its struggle for success. This was seen during the contest we have just been describing. Throughout that contest the Bishop of Autun was amongst the most determined for maintaining the rights of the nation against the designs of the court. His decision and courage added not a little to the reputation which had been already gained by his ability. We find his name, therefore, first in the list of a small number of eminent men,[9] whom the Assembly, when surrounded by hostile preparations for restoring the despotism which had been abolished, charged, in a bold but not imprudent spirit of defiance, with the task of at once completing and establishing the constitution which had been promised, and which it had become evident there was no intention to accord. The labour of these statesmen, however, was not easy, even after their cause was triumphant, for political victories often leave the conquerors – in the excess of their own passions, and the exaggeration of their own principles – worse enemies than those whom they have vanquished. Such was the case now.

[9] Evêque d'Autun, archévêque de Bordeaux, Lally, Clermont-Tonnerre, Mounier, Sieyès, &c., &c.

XVI

In the exultation of the moment all moderate notions were laid aside, and succeeded by a blind excitement in favour of the most sweeping changes. Nor was this excitement the mere desire of vulgar and selfish interest stirring the minds of those who hoped to better their own condition: nobler and loftier emotions lit up the breasts of men who had only sacrifices to make with a generous enthusiasm. "Nos âmes," says the elder Ségur, "étaient alors enivrées d'une douce philanthropie, qui nous portait à chercher avec passion les moyens d'être utiles à l'humanité, et de rendre le sort des hommes plus heureux."[10] On the 4th of August, "a day memorable with one party," observes M. Mignet, "as the St. Bartholomew of property, and with the other as the St. Bartholomew of abuses," – personal service, feudal obligations, pecuniary immunities, trade corporations, seignorial privileges, and courts of law, – all municipal and provincial rights, – the whole system of judicature, – based on the purchase and sale of judicial charges, and which, singular to state, had, however absurd in theory, hitherto produced in practice learned, able, and independent magistrates, – in short, almost all the institutions and peculiarities which constituted the framework of government and society throughout France, were unhesitatingly swept away, at the instigation and demand of the first magistrates and nobles of the land, who did not sufficiently consider that they who destroy at once all existing laws (whatever those laws may be), destroy at the same time all established habits of thought; – that is, all customs of obedience, all spontaneous feelings of respect and affection, without which a form of government is merely an idea on paper.

In after times, M. de Talleyrand, when speaking of this period, said, in one of his characteristic phrases, "*La Révolution a désossé la France.*" But it is easier to be a witty critic of by-gone history, than a cool and impartial actor in passing events; and at the time to which I am alluding the Bishop of Autun was, undoubtedly, amongst the foremost in destroying the traditions which constitute a community, and proclaiming the theories which captivate a mob. The wholesale abolition of institutions, which must have had something worth preserving or they would never have produced a great and polished society honourably anxious to reform its own defects, was sanctioned by his vote; and the "rights of man," the acknowledgment of which did so little to secure the property or life of the citizen, were proclaimed in the words that he suggested.

It is difficult to conceive how so cool and sagacious a statesman could have imagined that an old society was to be well governed by entirely new laws, or that practical liberty could be founded on a declaration of abstract principles. A sane mind, however, does not always escape an epidemic folly; any more than a sound body escapes an epidemic disease. Moreover, in times when to censure unnecessary changes is to pass for being the patron, and often in reality to be the supporter, of inveterate abuses, no one carries out, or can hope to carry out, precisely his own ideas. Men act in masses: the onward pressure of one party is regulated by the opposing resistance of another: to pursue a policy, it may be expedient for those who do not feel, to feign, a passion; and a wise man may excuse his participation in an absurd enthusiasm by observing it was the only means to vanquish still more absurd prejudices.

Still, if M. de Talleyrand was at this moment an exaggerated reformer, he at least did not exhibit one frequent characteristic of exaggerated reformers, by being so wholly occupied in establishing some delusive scheme of future perfection, as to despise the present absolute necessities. He saw from the first that, if the new organization of the State was really to be effected, it could only be so by re-establishing confidence in its resources, and that a national bankruptcy would be a social dissolution. When, therefore, M. Necker (on the 25th of August) presented to the Assembly a memoir on the

[10] "Our souls were then intoxicated by a gentle philanthropy, which induced us to seek passionately the means of being useful to humanity, and of rendering the condition of man more happy."

situation of the finances, asking for a loan of eighty millions of francs, the Bishop of Autun supported this loan without hesitation; demonstrating the importance of sustaining the public credit; and shortly afterwards (in September), when the loan thus granted was found insufficient to satisfy the obligations of the State, he again aided the minister in obtaining from the Assembly a tax of twenty-five per cent. on the income of every individual throughout France. A greater national sacrifice has rarely been made in a moment of national distress, and has never been made for a more honourable object. It is impossible, indeed, not to feel an interest in the exertions of men animated, amidst all their errors, by so noble a spirit, and not to regret that with aspirations so elevated, and abilities so distinguished, they should have failed so deplorably in their efforts to unite liberty with order – vigour with moderation.

But Providence seems to have prescribed as an almost universal rule that everything which is to have a long duration must be of slow growth. Nor is this all: we must expect that, in times of revolution, contending parties will constantly be hurried into collisions contrary to their reason, and fatal to their interests, but inevitably suggested by their anger or suspicions. Hence the wisest intentions are at the mercy of the most foolish incidents. Such an incident now occurred.

A military festival at Versailles, which the royal family imprudently attended, and in which it perhaps idly delighted to excite a profitless enthusiasm amongst its guards and adherents, alarmed the multitude at Paris, already irritated by an increasing scarcity of food, and dreading an appeal to the army on the part of the sovereign, as the sovereign dreaded an appeal to the people on the part of the popular leaders. The men of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and the women of the market-place, either impelled by their own pressing wants and indefinite fears, or guided (as it was then – I believe falsely – reported) by the secret influence of the Duc d'Orléans, were soon seen pouring from the dark corners of the capital, and covering the broad and stately road which leads to the long-venerated palace, where, since the time of the "Great Monarch," his descendants had held their court. In the midst of an accidental tumult, this lawless rabble entered the royal residence, massacreing its defenders.

The King was rescued from actual violence, though not from insult, and escorted with a sort of decorum to the Tuileries, which he henceforth inhabited, nominally as the supreme magistrate of the State, but in reality as a prisoner. The National Assembly followed him to Paris.

XVII

The events of which I have been speaking took place on the 5th and 6th of October; and were, to the advocates of constitutional monarchy, what the previous insurrection, in July, had been to the advocates of absolute power. Moderate men began to fear that it was no longer possible to ally the dignity and independence of the crown with the rights and liberties of the people: and MM. Mounier and Lally-Tollendal, considered the leaders of that party which from the first had declared the desire to establish in France a mixed constitutional government, similar to that which prevailed in England – disheartened and disgusted – quitted the Assembly. Hitherto, M. de Talleyrand had appeared disposed to act with these statesmen, but he did not now imitate their conduct: on the contrary, it was precisely at the moment when they separated themselves from the Revolution, that he brought forward a motion which connected him irrevocably with it.

Had affairs worn a different aspect, it is probable that he would not have compromised himself so decidedly in favour of a scheme which was certain to encounter a determined and violent opposition: still it is but just to observe that his conduct in this instance was in perfect conformity with the course he had previously pursued, and the sentiments he had previously expressed, both with respect to the exigencies of the State and the property of the Church. I have shown, indeed, the interest he had manifested in maintaining the public credit, first by supporting a loan of eighty millions of francs, and secondly by voting a property tax of twenty-five per cent. But the one had proved merely a temporary relief, and the other had not given an adequate return; for, as the whole administration of the country had been disorganized, so the collection of taxes was precarious and

difficult. Some new resource had to be sought for. There was but one left. The clergy had already resigned their tithes, which at first had only been declared purchasable, and had also given up their plate. When M. de Juisné, Archbishop of Paris, made the two first donations in the name of his brethren, he had been seconded by the Bishop of Autun; and it was the Bishop of Autun who now proposed (on the 10th of October) that all that remained to the clergy – their land – should, on certain conditions, be placed at the disposal of the nation.

XVIII

M. Pozzo di Borgo, a man in no wise inferior to M. de Talleyrand, though somewhat jealous of him, once said to me, "Cet homme s'est fait grand en se rangeant toujours parmi les petits, et en aidant ceux qui avaient le plus besoin de lui."[11]

The propensity which M. Pozzo di Borgo somewhat bitterly but not inaccurately described, and which perhaps was in a certain degree the consequence of that nice perception of his own interests which guided the person whom I designate as "politic" through life almost like an instinct, was especially visible in the present instance. No one can doubt that, at the moment when every other institution was overturned in France, a great change in the condition of the French church, against which the spirit of the eighteenth century had been particularly directed, was an event not to be avoided. Alone amidst the general prodigality, this corporation by its peculiar condition had been able to preserve all its wealth, whilst it had lost almost all its power.

The feeble and the rich in times of commotion are the natural prey of the strong and the needy; and, therefore, directly the nation commenced a revolution to avoid a bankruptcy, the ecclesiastical property was pretty sure, a little sooner or a little later, to be appropriated to the public exigencies. Such an appropriation, nevertheless, was not without difficulties; and what the laity most wanted was a churchman of position and consideration who would sanction a plan for surrendering the property of the church. The opinions expressed by a man of so high a rank amongst the nobility and the clergy as the Bishop of Autun, were therefore of considerable importance, and likely to give him – those opinions being popular – an important position, which was almost certain (M. Necker's influence being already undermined) to lead – should a new ministry be formed on the liberal side – to office. Mirabeau, in fact, in a note written in October, which proposes a new ministerial combination, leaves M. Necker as the nominal head of the government "in order to discredit him," proposes himself as a member of the royal council without a department, and gives the post of minister of finance to the Bishop of Autun, saying, "His motion on the clergy has won him that place."[12]

The argument with which the Bishop introduced the motion here alluded to has been so often repeated since the period to which I am referring, and has so influenced the condition of the clergy throughout a great portion of Europe, that it cannot be read without interest. "The State," said M. de Talleyrand, "has been for a long time struggling with the most urgent wants. This is known to all of us. Some adequate means must be found to supply those wants. All ordinary sources are exhausted. The people are ground down. The slightest additional impost would be justly insupportable to them. Such a thing is not to be thought of. Extraordinary means for supplying the necessities of the State have been resorted to: but these were destined to the extraordinary wants of this year. Extraordinary resources of some kind are now wanted for the future; without them, order cannot be established. There is one such resource, immense and decisive: and which, in my opinion (or otherwise I should reject it), can be made compatible with the strictest respect for property. I mean the landed estate of the church.

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[11] "This man has made himself great by placing himself always by the side of the little, and aiding those who most needed him."

[12] "La motion du clergé lui a conquis cette place." —*Correspondance de Mirabeau et le Comte de la Marck.*

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"Already a great operation with regard to this estate is inevitable, in order to provide suitably for those whom the relinquishment of tithes has left destitute.

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"I think it unnecessary to discuss at length the question of church property. What appears to me certain is, that the clergy is not a proprietor like other proprietors, inasmuch as that the property which it enjoys (and of which it cannot dispose) was given to it – not for its own benefit, but for the performance of duties which are to benefit the community. What appears to me also certain is, that the nation, exercising an almost unlimited power over all the bodies within its bosom, possesses – not the right to destroy the whole body of the clergy, because that body is required for the service of religion – but the right to destroy any particular aggregations of such body whenever they are either prejudicial or simply useless; and if the State possesses this right over the existence of prejudicial or useless aggregations of the clergy, it evidently possesses a similar right over the property of such aggregations.

"It appears to me also clear that as the nation is bound to see that the purpose for which foundations or endowments were made is fulfilled, and that those who endowed the church meant that the clergy should perform certain functions: so, if there be any benefices where such functions are not performed, the nation has a right to suppress those benefices, and to grant the funds, therefrom derived, to any members of the clergy who can employ them according to the object with which they were given.

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"But although it is just to destroy aggregations of the clergy which are either prejudicial or useless, and to confiscate their property – although it is just to suppress benefices which are no longer useful for the object for which such benefices were endowed – is it just to confiscate or reduce the revenue of those dignitaries and members of the church, who are now actually living and performing the services which belong to their sacred calling?

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"For my own part, I confess the arguments employed to support the contrary opinion appear to me to admit of several answers. I shall submit one very simple answer to the Assembly.

"However the possession of a property may be guaranteed and made inviolable by law, it is evident that the law cannot change the nature of such property in guaranteeing it.

"Thus, in a question of ecclesiastical property, it can only assure to each titulary the enjoyment of the actual donation of the founder. But every one is aware that, according to the titles of church property, as well as according to the various laws of the church, which explain the spirit and meaning of these titles, the only part of church property to which the ecclesiastic has any individual right is that necessary for his honest subsistence: the remainder has to be applied to the relief of the poor, or to the maintenance of places of worship. If then the nation assures to the holder of a benefice, whatever that benefice may be, his necessary subsistence, it does not violate his individual property; and if at the same time that it takes possession of that portion of his revenue which is not required for his subsistence, it assumes the other obligations attached to the benefice in question, such as

the maintenance of hospitals, the performance of works of charity, the repairing of churches, the expenses of public education, &c.; and, above all, if it does this in a moment of general distress, I cannot but believe that the intentions of the donors will be fully carried out, and that justice will still be maintained.

"I think, then, that the nation in a period of general distress may appropriate the property of those religious establishments which it deems it necessary to suppress, by securing to their dependants their necessary subsistence; that it may also profit by all benefices to which no duties are attached, and assure to itself the reversion of all such benefices as may hereafter fall into that condition; and lastly, that it may reduce all extravagant salaries now enjoyed by the clergy if it take to itself all the obligations – apart from the decent maintenance of the clergy – which originally attached to church property according to the founder's bequest. Such are the principles according to which the State may, in my opinion, legitimately appropriate the whole of the ecclesiastical property, on assuring to the clergy therefrom what would be sufficient for their decent support."

XIX

Thus M. de Talleyrand contended: —

1st. That the members of the clergy were not like other proprietors, inasmuch as they held their property not for their own enjoyment but for the performance of certain duties, and that it was only intended that they should have out of the proceeds of that property a decent subsistence, the residue being destined for the support of the poor and the maintenance of religious edifices.

2nd. That the State could alter the distribution of church property, or rather the payment of the clergy, and also totally suppress such ecclesiastical institutions as it deemed injurious or not requisite; as well as such useless benefices as were then vacant, or might become vacant; and, as a matter of course, employ the revenue which was thereto attached, in the manner which might seem best adapted to the general advantage.

3rd. That in a moment of great and national distress it might altogether take possession of the whole property held by the clergy, and appropriate the same to public purposes; if at the same time it took upon itself those charges with which the clergy were intrusted, and also provided for the clergy themselves a fixed and adequate support. He did not, however, propose, as some may have idly imagined, and have unjustly stated, to reduce his order to a state of indigence; on the contrary, presuming the revenue of the church property, including the tithes (which he would still have had collected as national revenue), to be about a hundred and fifty millions of francs, he advised the government to make a yearly grant of no less than a hundred millions – never to be reduced below eighty-five millions – for the support of the clergy, no member of it receiving less than twelve hundred francs, to which was added a dwelling; and when we consider that the tithes having been surrendered, the ecclesiastical revenue was at that time reduced to seventy-five millions, the rent of the land; and when we consider also that the ecclesiastical budget, including the payment of all religions, has never, since that period, amounted to the sum which M. de Talleyrand was disposed to allow, I think it must be acknowledged that the proposals I have been describing, looking at all the difficulties of the times, were not to be despised, and that the French clergy would have acted more prudently if they had at once accepted them, although it must be confessed that any bargain made in changeful times between a power which is sinking in the State and a power which is rising, is rarely kept faithfully by the latter.

But the clergy, at all events, and the high clergy especially, would not accept this bargain. They complained not so much of the insufficiency of the provision which was to be made for them, as of the grievance of having an income as proprietors changed into a salary as functionaries. They contended, in short, that they were proprietors like other proprietors, and that the Bishop of Autun had misstated their case and justified their robbery.

In this state of things – whatever the real nature of the title under which the church held its possessions – whatever the imprudence of the clergy themselves in resisting the compromise that was proposed to them as an equivalent for the surrender of those possessions – it was impossible forcibly to confiscate a property which a great corporation had held indisputedly for ages and which it declared itself unwilling to resign, without weakening the respect for property in general, and weakening also, by the questions and discussions to which such a measure was certain to give rise, the respect for religion: thus enfeebling and undermining – at a moment when (amidst the falling ruins of an old government and society) it was most essential to strengthen and preserve – those foundations on which every society that pretends to be civilized, and every government that intends to be honest, has to establish its existence.

"The wise," says a great reformer, "should be cautious about making great changes when the foolish are clamorous for dangerous innovations." But although the maxim may be a good one, I suspect that it is more likely to be professed by the speculative philosopher than followed by the ambitious statesman.

There are, in fact, moments in the history of nations when certain events are, by the multiplied force of converging circumstances, inevitably foredoomed; and in such moments, whilst the ignorant man is obstinate, the proud man firm, the religious man resigned, the "*politic* man" accommodates himself to fate, and only attempts to mix up as much good as he can with the evil which has to be accepted.

It is easy to conceive, therefore, that when M. de Talleyrand proposed the appropriation of the church property by the State, he did so because he saw that at all events it would be appropriated; because he thought that he might as well obtain the popularity which was to be got by the proposition; and likewise because he could thus bargain for such conditions as, if they had been frankly accepted by one party and fairly carried out by the other, would have secured an honourable existence to the clergy and an immense relief to the State. I say an immense relief to the State, since, according to the calculations which the Bishop of Autun submitted to the Assembly – and these seem to have been made with consideration – had the immense property, valued at two milliards of francs, been properly sold, and the proceeds properly applied, these, by paying off money borrowed at enormous interest and life annuities which were granted at an extravagant loss, might with tolerable economy have converted a deficit of some millions of francs into a surplus of about the same amount.

But it happened at this time, as it not unfrequently happens when passion and prudence unite in some great enterprise, the part which passion counselled was consummated completely and at once; the part which prudence suggested was transformed and spoilt in the execution. To this subject I shall by-and-by have to return.

XX

The motion of M. de Talleyrand with respect to the property of the church was carried on the 2nd of November, 1789, after some stormy debates; and the party he had defeated now classed him amongst its bitterest opponents. But, on the 4th of December, he gained more than a party triumph by the singular lucidity with which, on the question of establishing a bank at Paris and restoring order generally to the French finances, he explained the principles of banking and public credit, which the public at that time enveloped in the mystery with which ignorance surrounds those subjects which are detailed in figures, and involve such vast interests as the resources and necessities of a nation.

The admirable talent which M. de Talleyrand displayed on this occasion consisted in rendering clear what appeared obscure, and simple what seemed abstract. After showing that a bank could only exist with benefit to itself and to others by its credit – and that this credit could not be the effect of a paper money with a forced currency, on which some persons were disposed to form one, inasmuch as that a currency which was forced was nothing more or less than an exhibition of the insolvency

of the institution which it was intended to protect – he turned to the general condition and credit of the State, and said: "The time, gentlemen, is gone by for complicated fiscal plans, learnedly and artfully combined, which are merely invented to delay by temporary resources the crisis which is inevitably arriving. All the contrivances of wit and cunning are exhausted. For the future, honesty must replace genius. Side by side with the evidence of our calamities must be placed the evidence of their remedy. All must be reduced to the simplicity of an account-book – drawn up by good sense, kept by good faith."

This speech obtained for its author general encomiums: it was praised in the boudoir of the fine lady, for the elegance of its style; in the country house of the banker, for the soundness of its views; even the Faubourg St. Germain acknowledged that M. de Talleyrand, though a *scélérat* (a rascal), was a statesman, and that in those iniquitous times a *scélérat*, a man of quality, and a statesman, might be useful to his country. Such universal popularity did not last long. In the following month (January 31, 1790), the liberal bishop declared himself in favour of conferring upon a Jew the rights of a French citizen. This opinion – considered by many as a double outrage against the distinctions hitherto maintained between castes and between creeds – admitted of no pardon from a large portion of that society which M. de Talleyrand had formerly frequented; and I have read, in some tale of the time, that the Marquis de Travanet, a famous player of "tric-trac," used subsequently to say, in making what is called "*la case du diable*," "*je fais la case de l'évêque d'Autun*."

A man's reputation, however, when parties run high, is not unfrequently made by his opponents; and the name of M. de Talleyrand now rose in the country and the Assembly just in proportion as it sank in the circles of the court and amongst the extreme partisans of priestly intolerance and royal prerogative.

Few persons had, in fact, rendered such important services to the cause which he had espoused. To his endeavours, as we have seen, it was mainly owing that the clergy joined the commons in the church of St. Louis, and thus constituted the States-General. Shortly afterwards, by contending against the imperative nature of those orders which the members of the States-General had received from their constituents, he had aided in no small degree in releasing the National Assembly from the instructions which would otherwise have fettered its progress. Elected a member of the committee, appointed to prepare the new constitution which was to be given to France, his labours had been amongst the most valuable of that body, and the future rights of Frenchmen had been proclaimed in the words which he had suggested as most appropriate. Evincing on all questions of finance that knowledge of principles which produces clearness of statement, he had ably assisted M. Necker in the measures by which that statesman had sought to reassure public credit and raise the revenue; and, finally, he had delivered up the wealth and power of his own order, as a sacrifice (such, at least, was his pretension) to the public weal.

The part which he had taken in the proceedings of the Assembly was, indeed, so considerable, that it was thought that no one could be better qualified to explain and defend its conduct. With such an explanation or defence he was charged; and he executed his task in a sort of memoir or manifesto to the French nation. This manifesto was read in the National Assembly on the 10th of February, 1790, and subsequently published and circulated throughout France. It has long since been forgotten amongst the many papers of a similar kind which have marked and justified the successive changes that France has for the last eighty years undergone.

But the skill and address of its composition was the subject of universal praise at the time of its appearance, and it still remains a remarkable exhibition of the ideas, and a skilful and able attempt to vindicate the actions, of an epoch which is yet awaiting the final judgment of posterity.

XXI

The memoir or manifesto, to which I have been alluding, announced the abolition of privileges, the reform of the church, the institution of a representative chamber and a citizen guard; and promised a new system of taxation, and a general plan of education. It was read, as I have said, on the 10th of February, in the National Assembly, and on the 16th of the same month its author was named president of that assembly[13] by a majority of three hundred and seventy-five votes to one hundred and twenty-five, although the Abbé Sieyès – no mean rival – was his competitor.

This honour received additional solidity from a most able report in favour of the uniformity of weights and measures, which M. de Talleyrand made to the Assembly on the 30th April, 1790: a report which, carrying out the idea that Turgot had been anxious to establish, and furnishing a method for destroying the inconvenient distinctions which separated province from province, laid the foundation for that uniform system which now prevails throughout the French dominions. Nor would M. de Talleyrand have applied this project merely to France; he at the same time suggested that commissions from the Academy of Sciences in Paris and the Royal Society in London should be appointed to fix on some natural unity for measure and weight, which should be alike applicable to England and France. "*Chacune des deux nations*," he added, "*formerait sur cette mesure ses étalons, qu'elle conserverait avec le plus grand soin, de telle sorte que si, au bout de plusieurs siècles, on s'apercevait, de quelque variation dans l'année sidérale, les étalons pussent servir à l'évaluer, et par là à lier ce point important du système du monde à une grande époque – celle de l'Assemblée Nationale. Peut-être même est-il permis de voir dans ce concours de deux nations interrogeant ensemble la nature, pour en obtenir un résultat important, le principe d'une union politique, operée par l'entremise des sciences.*"[14]

It is impossible not to sympathise with a conception at once so elevated and so practical as that which is here expressed; and rejoice at thus finding an example of what Bacon – himself no less a statesman than a philosopher – claims as the attribute of men of science and letters, viz.: that when they do give themselves up to public affairs, they carry thereunto a spirit more lofty and comprehensive than that which animates the mere politician.

The greater part of the work which the Assembly had proposed to itself, was now terminated. The old monarchy and aristocracy were destroyed; the new powers of the crown and the people were defined; the new divisions of the country into departments, districts, and communes, were marked out; the new organisation of the tribunals of justice was decreed. No one entirely approved of the constitution thus to be created, but there was an almost universal satisfaction at its being so nearly completed.

[13] The presidency was only for fifteen days; but the consideration in which this dignity was held may be estimated by the fact that Mirabeau, notwithstanding his utmost efforts, was unable to obtain it until the subsequent year.

[14] "Each of the two nations should by this means form its standards, which it ought to preserve with the greatest care, so that if, at the end of several centuries, any variation in the sidereal year should be perceived, the standards might serve to ascertain its extent, and in this way to connect this important point in the system of the universe with a mighty epoch, such as that of the National Assembly. Perhaps, even we may be permitted to foresee in this co-operation of two nations, together interrogating nature to obtain from her an important solution, the principle of a political union brought about by the intervention of the sciences."

Part II
FROM THE FESTIVAL OF THE 14TH OF JULY TO THE CLOSE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Blesses the standard of France at festival of the 14th of July. – Increasing financial distress. – M. de Talleyrand's views. – Civil constitution of the clergy. – M. de Talleyrand's conduct. – Refuses archbishopric of Paris. – Letter to editors of Chronicle. – Mirabeau's death. – Sketch of his career, and relations with M. de Talleyrand, who attends his death-bed. – Probabilities as to his having initiated M. de Talleyrand into plots of court. – Leaves M. de Talleyrand his intended speech on the law of succession, which regulated the present state of the law in France, and which M. de Talleyrand read in the National Assembly. – M. de Talleyrand suspended from his episcopal functions, and quits the Church. – The King's flight. – Conduct and views of M. de Talleyrand. – Wishes to aid the King. – Foolish conduct of court party. – Fatal decree of National Assembly, forbidding the re-election of its members. – M. de Talleyrand's project of education. – Assembly closes the 13th of September, 1791. – M. de Talleyrand goes to England, January 1792.

I

We are arrived at the festival of the 14th of July, held to celebrate the destruction of the Bastille, and to do honour to the new government which had risen on its ruins: let us pause for a moment on that day of joy!

An immense and magnificent amphitheatre is erected on the Champ de Mars: there the hereditary sovereign of France, and the temporary president of an elected assembly – the joint symbols of two ideas and of two epochs – are seated on two equal thrones, resplendent with the arms which the nation has taken from its ancient kings; and there is the infant prince, on whom an exulting people look kindly as the inheritor of his father's engagements, and who is to perpetuate the race of Saint Louis: and there is that queen, "decorating and cheering the sphere she moves in, glittering like the morning star, full of life, and splendour, and joy;" and there that royal maiden, beauteous with the charms of the palace, blessed with the virtues of the cloister – a princess, a saint – destined to be a martyr! And there is the vain but honest Lafayette, leaning on his citizen sword: and there the terrible Mirabeau – his long hair streaming to the wind: and there that well-known and still memorable Assembly, prematurely proud of its vaunted work, which, alas! like the spectacle we are assisting at, is to be the mere pageant of a day. And, behold, in yonder balcony, the most graceful and splendid court in Europe, for such even at that time was still the court of France; and lo! in the open space, yon confederated bands, bearing their respective banners, and representing every portion of that great family which at this moment is rejoicing over the triumph it has achieved. On a sudden the sky – the light of which mingles so well with the joy of men, but which had hitherto been dark and sullen – on a sudden the sky clears up, and the sun blends his pomp with that of this noble ceremony! And now, robed in his pontifical garments, and standing on an altar thronged by three hundred priests, in long white robes and tricoloured girdles, the Bishop of Autun blesses the great standard, the oriflamme of France, no longer the ensign of war, but the sign and token of peace between the past and the future – between the old recollections and the new aspirations of the French people.

Who, that had been present that day in Paris, could have believed that those who wept tenderly with the children of Bearne, at the foot of the statue of Henry IV., would so soon laugh horribly

round the scaffold of his descendant? that the gay multitude, wandering in the Champs Elysées, amidst garlands of light, and breathing sounds of gentle happiness and affection, would so soon be the ferocious mob, massacreing in the prisons, murdering in the public streets, dancing round the guillotine dripping with innocent blood? that the monarch, the court, the deputies, every popular and princely image of this august pageant, the very forms of the religion with which it was consecrated, would in two or three brief years be scoffingly cast away: and that even the high priest of that gorgeous solemnity, no longer attached to his sacred calling, would be wandering a miserable exile on foreign shores, banished as a traitor to the liberty for which he had sacrificed the prejudices of his caste, the predilections of his family, the honours and wealth of his profession?

II

From the 14th of July, 1789, to the 14th of July, 1790, the scenes which were comprehended in this, which may be called the first act in the great drama then agitating France, were upon the whole such as rather to excite the hopes than the fears of mankind; but from the latter period the aspect of things greatly changed, and almost each day became marked by some disappointment as to the success of a favourite scheme, or the fortune of a popular statesman.

On the 4th of September, 1790, M. Necker left almost unnoticed, and altogether unregretted, that Paris to which but a year before he had returned amidst unanimous acclamation. About the same time, Mirabeau began to be suspected; and the shouts of "Vive Lafayette!" were not unfrequently changed into "à bas Lafayette!"[15] by the ever fickle multitude. At this period also it became apparent that the sale of the church property, which, properly managed, might have restored order to the finances, was likely, on the contrary, to render the national bankruptcy more complete.

In order to give a just idea of the conduct of M. de Talleyrand, it is necessary that I should explain rapidly how this calamity occurred. The Assembly, desiring to secure the irrevocability of its decrees by disposing as soon as possible of the vast estate which it had declared was to be sold, and desiring also to increase its financial resources without delay, looked out for some means by which this double end could be accomplished. After two or three projects, for a moment taken up and then abandoned, the idea finally adopted was that of issuing State notes, representing a certain value of national property, and giving them a forced currency, so that they would have an immediate value independent of that which they acquired as the representatives of property.

These notes or bonds, in short, thus became money; and they had this advantage over ordinary paper money, that they represented something which had a positive value; and as the first issue of four hundred millions of francs took place at a time when some substitute was really required for the coin which every one, from alarm and want of confidence, had then begun to hoard, its effects were rather beneficial than the reverse. The Assembly instantly thought it had an inexhaustible fund at its disposal; consequently a new issue of eight hundred million bonds followed shortly after the first issue of four hundred millions, as a matter of course; and it became evident that this mode of meeting the current wants of the State was to be adopted to a greater and greater extent, thereby increasing the currency in a manner not in any way called for by the increased wealth or business of the community, and altering the value of money in all the transactions of life. M. de Talleyrand at once foresaw the evils to which this system would naturally lead; and saying, "*Je serais inconsolable si de la rigueur de nos décrets sur le clergé il ne résultait pas le salut de la chose publique*,"[16] demonstrated, with a singular clearness and sagacity, that the course on which the Assembly had entered must inevitably cause the

[15] "La popularité de M. de Lafayette qui s'était élevée si haut commençait à décliner de ce jour là (14 July): un mois plus tard, les cris 'à bas Lafayette!' avaient succédé aux cris de 'Vive Lafayette!'" – (*Comte de la Marck.*)

[16] "I should be inconsolable if the severity of our decrees as to the clergy should not produce as its result the salvation of the State." – See *Appendix*.

total disappearance of bullion, an enormous rise in provisions, a daily depreciation of State paper and of land (such State paper representing land), a rapid variation of exchanges, an impossibility of all regular commerce.

But men in desperate times disregard ultimate results. The Assembly wanted funds at the moment: forced assignats created those funds; and when Mirabeau shrewdly observed that to multiply assignats was, at all events, to multiply the opponents to reaction, since no man who had an assignat could wish the property on which its value depended to be restored to its former possessors, this political argument settled the financial one.

III

The great characteristic of modern legislation is the principle of representation by election. It by no means follows, however, that because it has been an invaluable discovery to make a portion of government depend upon a particular principle, that every portion of a government should be deduced from that principle. On the contrary, the mobility given to a government by any system that introduces into it the popular passions and variations of opinion, requires some counteracting element of fixity and stability to give permanence to its duration, and steadiness to its action. But the National Assembly – like those invalids who, having found a remedy for their disease, fancy that if a little of such remedy does some good, a great deal must do much more – made the whole of their institutions, with one exception, depend upon the same basis; and as their chamber was elective, their municipalities elective – so their judges were to be elective, and their clergy and bishops elective also.

Here commenced the first serious schism in the nation, for that which had hitherto existed had been between the nation and the court. I have said that the clergy, and more especially the higher clergy, had not willingly abandoned the property which they had been accustomed to consider theirs. This loss, however, furnished them with but a worldly cause of feud; it neither affected their consciences, nor the consciences of their flocks. But the new regulations, whatever their intrinsic merits, entirely changed the existing condition of the Roman church, and struck at the root of its discipline. These regulations, consequently, were denounced by the Pope, and could not be solemnly accepted by the more zealous of the priesthood.

In such circumstances it would have been far wiser to have left the spiritual condition of the clergy untouched. To oblige all ecclesiastics either to give up their benefices, or to swear to uphold the "Civil Constitution of the Clergy" (such being the title given to the new system), was to provoke many who might otherwise have been silent to declare hostility to the Revolution; and at the same time gave to the Revolution itself that persecuting bias by which it was finally disgraced and ruined. Such a measure, besides, divided the clergy into two classes – one of which excited the veneration of the people by its sacrifices, and the indignation of the government by its complaints: the other satisfied the government by its obedience, but lost the respect of the people by its servility. A Catholic clergy disowned by the Pope was useless to those professing the Catholic religion; no clergy at all was wanted for those who professed no religion whatsoever. The course which M. de Talleyrand observed in this business was wary and cautious up to the moment at which it was bold and decided.

The Assembly had determined upon the "Civil Constitution of the Clergy," prior to the 14th of July. The King, however, had requested a delay, with the intention of referring to Rome, and the law did not finally pass the Legislature till the 27th of November.

The struggle during this period was between the Sovereign and the Pope on the one side, and the philosophers and the church reformers – for both took a part in the matter – on the other.

It was disagreeable for a bishop, still looking to ecclesiastical preferment, to venture to quarrel with one party in the dispute, and equally disagreeable for a statesman aspiring to popular authority to separate himself from the other. The result of the contest, also, was for a while uncertain; and as there was no absolute necessity for the Bishop of Autun to express any opinion upon its merits, he

was silent. But when the Assembly had pronounced its final decree, and that decree had received the formal though reluctant assent of the King, the case was different. A law had been regularly passed, and the question was, not whether it was a good law, but whether, being a law, it was to be obeyed. A battle had been fought, and the question was, not whether the victors were in the right, but whether it was better to join with those who had conquered, or with those who had been conquered.

In such a condition of things M. de Talleyrand rarely hesitated. He took his side with the law against the church, and with those who were daily becoming more powerful, against those who were daily becoming more feeble; and having once taken a step of this kind, it was never his custom to do so timidly.

He at once took the required oath, which all his episcopal brethren – with the notorious and not very creditable exceptions of the Bishops of Babylon and Lydia, whose titles were purely honorary – refused to take. He also justified this course in a letter to the clergy of his own department, and ultimately undertook to consecrate the new bishops who were elected to supply the place of those whom the Assembly had deprived of their dioceses.

We shall presently see the results of this conduct. But it may be as well at once to state, that although M. de Talleyrand accepted for himself those new regulations for his church which the State, in spite of the head of his church, had established, and took an oath to obey them without unwillingness, and although he even maintained that the State, considering the clergy as public functionaries enjoying a salary in return for the performance of public duties, might deprive any members of the clergy of such salary if they would not submit to the laws of the government which paid and employed them; he nevertheless contended, boldly and consistently and at all times, that all ecclesiastics thus dispossessed would have a right to the pension which, at the time of confiscating the church property, had been granted to any ecclesiastic whom the suppression of religious establishments or of useless benefices left without income or employment; a principle at first accepted as just, but soon condemned as inexpedient; for there is no compromise between parties when one is conscientiously disposed to resist what it deems an act of injustice, and the other resolutely determined to crush what it deems a selfish opposition.

IV

Amidst the various vacancies which were occasioned by the refusal of the high dignitaries of the church to take the oath which the Constitution now exacted from them, was that of the archbishopric of Paris; and as it was known that M. de Talleyrand could be elected for this post if he so desired it, the public imagined that he intended to take advantage of his popularity and obtain what, up to that period, had been so honourable and important a position. In consequence of this belief a portion of the press extolled his virtues; whilst another painted and, as usual in such cases, exaggerated his vices.

M. de Talleyrand was, up to the last hour of his life, almost indifferent to praise, but singularly enough (considering his long and varied career), exquisitely sensitive to censure; and his susceptibility on this occasion so far got the better of his caution, as to induce him to write and publish a letter in the *Moniteur*, of Paris, February 8th, 1791.

Letter of M. de Talleyrand to the editors of the "Chronicle," respecting his candidature for the diocese of Paris

"Gentlemen,

"I have just read in your paper that you have been good enough to name me as a candidate for the archbishopric of Paris. I cannot but feel myself highly flattered by this nomination: some of the electors have in fact given me to understand that

they would be happy to see me occupy the post to which you have alluded, and I, therefore, consider that I ought to publish my reply. No, gentlemen, I shall not accept the honour of which my fellow-citizens are so obliging as to think me worthy.

"Since the existence of the National Assembly, I may have appeared indifferent to the innumerable calumnies in which different parties have indulged themselves at my expense. Never have I made, nor ever shall I make, to my calumniators the sacrifice of one single opinion or one single action which seems to me beneficial to the commonwealth: but I can and will make the sacrifice of my personal advantage, and on this occasion alone my enemies will have influenced my conduct. I will not give them the power to say that a secret motive caused me to take the oath I have recently sworn. I will not allow them the opportunity of weakening the good which I have endeavoured to effect.

"That publicity which I give to the determination I now announce, I gave to my wishes when I stated how much I should be flattered at becoming one of the administrators of the department of Paris. In a free state, the people of which have repossessed themselves of the right of election —*i. e.* the true exercise of their sovereignty – I deem that to declare openly the post to which we aspire, is to invite our fellow-citizens to examine our claims before deciding upon them, and to deprive our pretensions of all possibility of benefiting by intrigue. We present ourselves in this way to the observations of the impartial, and give even the prejudiced and the hostile the opportunity to do their worst.

"I beg then to assure those who, dreading what they term my ambition, never cease their slanders against my reputation, that I will never disguise the object to which I have the ambition to pretend.

"Owing, I presume, to the false alarm caused by my supposed pretensions to the see of Paris, stories have been circulated of my having lately won in gambling houses the sum of sixty or seventy thousand francs. Now that all fear of seeing me elevated to the dignity in question is at an end, I shall doubtless be believed in what I am about to say. The truth is, that, in the course of two months, I gained the sum of about thirty thousand francs, not at gambling houses, but in private society, or at the chess-club, which has always been regarded, from the nature of its institution, as a private house.

"I here state the facts without attempting to justify them. The passion for play has spread to a troublesome extent. I never had a taste for it, and reproach myself the more for not having resisted its allurements. I blame myself as a private individual, and still more as a legislator who believes that the virtues of liberty are as severe as her principles: that a regenerated people ought to regain all the austerity of morality, and that the National Assembly ought to be directed towards this vice as one prejudicial to society, inasmuch as it contributes towards that inequality of fortune which the laws should endeavour to prevent by every means which do not interfere with the eternal basis of social justice, viz., the respect for property.

"You see I condemn myself. I feel a pleasure in confessing it; for since the reign of truth has arrived, in renouncing the impossible honour of being faultless, the most noble manner we can adopt of repairing our errors is to have the courage to acknowledge them.

"Talleyrand A. E. d'Autun."

From this document we learn that the Bishop of Autun, notwithstanding his labours in the Assembly, was still a gay frequenter of the world: to be found pretty frequently at the chess-club, as well as in private society; and, though he lamented over the fact, a winner at such places of thirty

thousand francs within two months. We also learn that he abandoned at this moment the idea of professional advancement, in order to maintain unimpeached the motives of his political conduct; and we may divine that he looked for the future rather to civil than to ecclesiastical preferment.

The most striking portion of this document, however, is the tone and style – I may almost say the cant – which prevails towards its conclusion. But every epoch has its pretensions: and that of the period which intervened between May, 1789, and August, 1792, was to decorate the easy life of a dissolute man of fashion with the pure language of a saint, or the stern precepts of a philosopher. "*Le dire*," says old Montaigne, "*est autre chose que le faire: il faut considérer le prêche à part, et le prêcheur à part*."[17]

V

And now, or but a little after this time, might have been seen an agitated crowd, weeping, questioning, and rushing towards a house in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin. It was in the first days of April, and in that house – receiving through the open windows the balmy air which for a moment refreshed his burning forehead, and welcoming yet more gratefully the anxious voice of the inquiring multitude – lay the dying Mirabeau, about to carry into the tomb all the remaining wisdom and moderation of the people; and, as he himself sadly and proudly added, all the remaining fragments of that monarchy which he had shown the power to pull down and had flattered himself he might have the power to reconstruct. By his death-bed stood the Bishop of Autun. It was a curious combination of circumstances which thus brought together these two personages, whose characters were essentially different, but whose position was in some respects the same. The one was eloquent, passionate, overbearing, imprudent; the other cool, urbane, logical, and cautious. But both were of illustrious families, endowed with great abilities, ejected from their legitimate place in society. Both also were liberal in their politics, and this from vengeance and ambition, as well as from principle and opinion. Aristocrats allied with a democratic faction; monarchists in desperate conflict with those by whom monarchy was most held in reverence; they had engaged in a battle for moderation with extreme auxiliaries and extreme opponents. Mirabeau, the fifth child, but who became, by a brother's death, the eldest son of the Marquis de Mirabeau (a rich proprietor of a noble house in Provence), had been, when very young, married to a wealthy heiress, and intended for the profession of arms. Nevertheless, quitting his profession, separated from his wife, constantly involved in scrapes – now for money, now for love – he had led a bachelor's life of intrigue, indigence, and adventure, up to the age of forty, alternately the victim of his own wild nature and of the unwise and absurd severity of his father, whose two pursuits in life were persecuting his family and publishing pamphlets for the benefit of mankind. Thus, frequently in confinement – always in difficulties (the first and last means of correction with the old marquis being to procure a "*lettre de cachet*," and to stop his son's allowance), the Comte de Mirabeau had supported himself almost entirely by his talents, which could apply themselves to letters, though action was their proper sphere.

During a short interval in his various calamities – an interval which he had passed at Paris in a desperate effort to better his condition – he had become acquainted with M. de Talleyrand, who, struck by his abilities and affected by his misfortunes, recommended him to M. de Calonne, at whose suggestion he was sent by M. de Vergennes, then minister of foreign affairs, on a sort of secret mission into Germany, just prior to the Great Frederick's death. From this mission he returned when France was being agitated by the convocation of the "notables," speedily succeeded by that of the States-General. He saw at a glance that an era was now approaching, suited to his eminent talents, and in which his haughty but flexible character was likely to force or insinuate its way: his whole soul,

[17] "Saying is quite a different thing from doing: the preaching and the preacher must be considered apart."

therefore, was bent upon being one of that assembly, which he from the first predicted would soon command the destinies of his country.

Certain expenses were necessary to obtain this object, and, as usual, Mirabeau had not a farthing. The means which he adopted for procuring the money he required were the least creditable he could have devised. He published a work called "The Secret History of the Court of Berlin," a work full of scandal, public and private, and betraying the mission with which he had recently been intrusted.[18]

The government was naturally indignant; a prosecution was instituted against him before the Parliament of Paris; M. de Montmorin, and others, by whom he had previously been patronised, told him plainly they wished to drop his acquaintance.

Through all these disgraceful difficulties Mirabeau scrambled. He denied that the work was published by his authority.

Rejected from their sittings by the nobility of Provence, who decreed that, having no fiefs of his own, and being merely invested with his father's voice, he had no right to sit among the nobles, he became the successful candidate of the tiers-état for Aix; and at the meeting of the States-General stood before the ministry which had accused, and the aristocracy which had repudiated him, a daring and formidable enemy.

But, though made a desperate man by circumstances, he was not so either by inclination or by ideas.

His views for France were limited to the procuring it a representative government; and his views for himself were those which frequently lead ambitious men under such a government to adopt opposition as a road to power. "*Tribun par calcul*," as was justly said of him by a contemporary,[19] "*aristocrat par goût*." He aimed at obtaining for his country a constitution, and being minister of the crown under that constitution.

M. de Talleyrand had the same wish, and probably the same ambition. These two statesmen, therefore, would naturally, at the meeting of the States-General, have acted together as two private friends who thought the same on public matters. But the publication of "The Secret History of the Court of Berlin," offensive to the minister who had employed Mirabeau, could not be otherwise than painful and disagreeable to M. de Talleyrand, at whose intercession Mirabeau had been employed, and to whom, indeed, Mirabeau's correspondence had been principally addressed. This circumstance had, therefore, produced a cessation of all private intimacy between these two personages who were about to exercise so great an influence over approaching events. It is difficult, however, for two men to act a prominent part on the same side for any length of time in a popular assembly, and this at a great national crisis, without relapsing into an old acquaintance, or forming a new one. To what extent the old relations between Mirabeau and M. de Talleyrand were thus renewed, it is difficult to say, but that on the 21st of October, 1789, they already talked together with some degree of intimacy is evident from a letter of Mirabeau to the Comte de la Marck, in which letter Mirabeau states that he had been told the history of a secret political intrigue by the Bishop of Autun.[20]

About this time, too, it is now known that Mirabeau projected a ministry to which I have already alluded, and in which he and M. de Talleyrand were to be united. Had this ministry been formed, it is very possible that the history of France during the next sixty years would have been different.

But the most fatal measure adopted by the Assembly was that (November 9, 1789) which prevented any of its members from being minister during its continuance, and from entering the service of the crown for two years after its dissolution. The consequences of this resolution, aimed

[18] A defence has been set up for Mirabeau, viz., that the work, though written by him, was published without his knowledge by a bookseller's wife, his mistress. But besides the utter improbability of this story, there is the fact that Mirabeau remained until his death on the best terms with the person who would thus have betrayed a most sacred trust and merited his bitterest contempt and indignation.

[19] See *Les Considérations sur la Révolution*, by Madame de Staël.

[20] See *Appendix*.

at those who, like Mirabeau and Talleyrand, were hoping to erect a constitutional government, and to have the direction of it, were incalculable. The persons at that time who had most influence in the Assembly were men with moderate opinions, great talents, and great ambition. Had such men been placed as the head of affairs they might have controlled them and established a government at once popular and safe. But this new regulation prevented those who were powerful as representatives of the people from using their influence in supporting the executive power of the crown. It drove them, moreover, if their passions were violent and their positions desperate, to seek for power by means hostile to the constitution which annihilated their hopes.

It had this effect upon Mirabeau; and his sentiments becoming known to the court, a sort of alliance established itself between them in the spring of 1790; – an alliance entered into too late (since most of the great questions on which Mirabeau's influence might have been useful were already decided) and most absurdly carried on; for whilst the King opened to Mirabeau his purse, he shut from him his confidence, and at first, and for a long time, exacted that the compact he had entered into with the great orator for the defence of his throne should be kept altogether secret, even from his own ministers.[21]

Mirabeau was to advise the King in secret, to help him indirectly in public; but he was not to have the King's countenance, and he was to be thwarted and opposed by the King's friends.

The error which both parties to this arrangement committed was the result of the feeble and irresolute character of the one, who never did anything wholly and sincerely, and of the over-bold and over-confident character of the other, who never doubted that whatever he attempted must succeed, and who now easily persuaded himself that having vanquished the difficulty of opening a communication with the court, he should promptly vanquish that of governing it. Indeed, the desire of Mirabeau to serve the crown being sincere, and his ability to do so evident, he (not unnaturally perhaps) felt convinced that his sincerity would be trusted, and his talents given fair play.

But it is clear that the King thought of buying off a dangerous enemy, and not of gaining a determined ally. Thus he went on supplying Mirabeau's wants, receiving Mirabeau's reports, attending little to Mirabeau's counsels, until matters got so bad that even the irresolution of Louis XVI. was vanquished (this was about the end of 1790), and then, for the first time, was seriously entertained a plan which the daring orator had long ago advised, but which the King had never, up to that period, rejected nor yet sanctioned.

This plan consisted in withdrawing the King from Paris; surrounding him with troops still faithful, and by the aid of a new assembly, for which public opinion was to be prepared, reforming the constitution – now on the point of being completed – a constitution which, while it pretended to be monarchical, not only prevented the monarch from practically exercising any power without the express permission of a popular assembly, but established, as its fundamental theory, that the King was merely the executor of that assembly's sovereign authority: an addition which, at first sight, may seem of small importance, but which, as it was calculated daily to influence the spirit of men's actions, could not but have an immense effect on the daily working of their institutions. Nor was this all. Nations, like individuals, have, so to speak, two wills: that of the moment – the result of passion, caprice, and impulse; and that of leisure and deliberation – the result of foresight, prudence, and reason. All free governments possessing any solidity (whatever their appellation) have, for this reason, contained a power of some kind calculated to represent the maturer judgment of the people and to check the spontaneous, violent, and changeful ebullitions of popular excitement. Even this barrier, however, was not here interposed between a chamber which was to have all the influence in the State, and a chief magistrate who was to have none.

[21] When M. Mercy, the Austrian ambassador, and for a long time the intermediate agent between the court and Mirabeau, left Paris, M. de Montmorin, the minister of foreign affairs, was, without the knowledge of his colleagues, admitted into the secret of the court's engagements, and authorised to correspond with Mirabeau concerning their execution.

The constitution about to be passed was, in short, an impracticable one, and no person saw this more clearly than Mirabeau; but, whilst ready and desirous to destroy it, he by no means lent himself to the ideas, though he was somewhat subjugated by the charms of Marie-Antoinette.

"Je serai ce que j'ai été toujours," he says in a letter to the King, 15th December, 1790, "défenseur du pouvoir monarchique réglé par les lois; apôtre de la liberté garantie par le pouvoir monarchique."[22]

Thus he undertook the difficult and almost impossible enterprise of rescuing liberty at the same time from a monarch in the hands of courtiers enthusiastic for absolute power, and from a mob under the influence of clubs, which intended to trample constitutional monarchy under the feet of a democratical despotism.

I have narrated what had undoubtedly been Mirabeau's projects; for we have to consider what were probably his thoughts when, in acute suffering but with an unclouded mind and a clear prescience of his approaching dissolution, he summoned his former friend, with whom, it is said, he was never till that instant completely reconciled, to the couch from which he was no more to rise.

Must we not suppose that Mirabeau in this, his last conversation with M. de Talleyrand, spoke of the schemes which then filled his mind? And does it not seem probable that he at that hour conceived the Bishop of Autun to be the person best fitted to fill the difficult position which he himself was about to leave vacant, and amidst the various intrigues and combinations of which it required so much skill to steer?

For this supposition there are many plausible reasons. M. de Talleyrand, like Mirabeau, was an aristocrat by birth, a liberal by circumstances and opinion; he was also one of the members of the Assembly, who possessed the greatest authority over that portion of it which Mirabeau himself influenced; and likewise one of a very small number of members upon whom M. de Montmorin, the minister with whom Louis XVI. at last consented that Mirabeau should confidentially communicate, had told Mirabeau he most relied. Lastly, he was acquainted with all the classes and almost all the individuals then seeking to disturb, or hoping to compose, the disordered elements of society. He knew the court, the clergy, the Orleanists. He had been one of the founders of the Jacobins; he was a member of its moderate rival, the Feuillans; and although, undoubtedly, he wanted the fire and eloquence necessary to command in great assemblies, he was pre-eminent in the tact and address which enable a man to manage those by whom such assemblies are led.

In short, though Mirabeau left no Mirabeau behind him, M. de Talleyrand was, perhaps, the person best qualified to supply his loss, and the one whom Mirabeau himself was most likely to have pointed out for a successor. I have no clue, however, beyond conjecture, to guide me on this subject, unless the public trust which Mirabeau confided to M. de Talleyrand in his last hours may be cited as a testimony of his other and more secret intentions. What this trust was, we may learn from the statement of M. de Talleyrand himself, who, on the following day, amidst a silence and a sorrow which pervaded all parties (for a man of superior genius, whatever his faults, rarely dies unlamented), ascending the tribune of the National Assembly, said in a voice which appeared unfeignedly affected:

"I went yesterday to the house of M. de Mirabeau. An immense crowd filled that mansion, to which I carried a sentiment more sorrowful than the public grief. The spectacle of woe before me filled the imagination with the image of death; it was everywhere but in the mind of him whom the most imminent danger menaced. He had asked to see me. It is needless to relate the emotion which many things he said caused me. But M. de Mirabeau was at that time above all things the man of the public; and in this respect we may regard as a precious relic the last words which could be saved from that mighty prey, on which death was about to seize. Concentrating all his interest on the labours that still remain to this Assembly, he remembered that the law of succession was the order of the

[22] "I shall be what I have always been, the defender of the monarchical power, regulated by the laws; the apostle of liberty, guaranteed by the monarchical power."

day, and lamented he could not assist at the discussion of the question, regretting death, because it deprived him of the power of performing a public duty. But, as his opinion was committed to writing, he confided the manuscript to me, in order that I might in his name communicate it to you. I am going to execute this duty. The author of the manuscript is now no more; and so intimately were his wishes and thoughts connected with the public weal, that you may imagine yourselves catching his last breath, as you listen to the sentiments which I am about to read to you."

Such were the words with which M. de Talleyrand prefaced the memorable discourse which, in establishing the principles on which the law of inheritance has since rested in France, laid the foundations of a new French society, on a basis which no circumstance that can now happen seems likely to alter.

"There is as much difference," said Mirabeau, "between what a man does during his life, and what he does after his death, as between death and life. What is a testament? It is the expression of the will of a man who has no longer any will respecting property which is no longer his property; it is the action of a man no longer accountable for his actions to mankind; it is an absurdity, and an absurdity ought not to have the force of law."

Such is the argument set forth in this celebrated and singular speech. Ingenious rather than profound, it does not seem, as we turn to it coolly now, worthy of the reputation it attained, nor of the effect which it has undoubtedly produced. But, read in M. de Talleyrand's deep voice, and read as the last thoughts upon testamentary dispositions of a man who was making his own will when he composed it, and who since then was with his luminous intellect and marvellous eloquence about to be consigned to the obscure silence of the grave, it could hardly fail to make a deep impression. It was, moreover, the mantle of the departed prophet; and the world, whether wrong or right in the supposition, fancied that it saw in this political legacy the intention to designate a political successor.

VI

Thus, M. de Talleyrand, already, as we have seen, a member of the department of Paris, was immediately chosen to fill the place in the directorship of that department, an appointment which Mirabeau's death left vacant.

In this municipal council, considerable influence still existed; nor did it want various means for exercising that influence over the middle classes of the capital; so that a man of resolution and tact could have made it one of the most useful instruments for restoring the royal authority and consolidating it on new foundations.

It seems not unlikely, indeed, that M. de Talleyrand had the design of making it popular as the organ of good advice to the King, and of making the King popular by engaging him to listen to this advice, since we find that it drew up an address to him on the 18th April (about a fortnight after Mirabeau's death), urging him to put aside from his councils those whom the nation distrusted, and to confide frankly in the men who were yet popular: whilst there is reason to believe, as I shall by-and-by have occasion to show, that M. de Talleyrand entered about this time into secret negotiations with the King, or, at least, offered him, through M. de Laporte, his best assistance.

But Louis XVI. was more likely to trust a bold and passionate man like Mirabeau, whom, notwithstanding his birth, he looked upon – considering the situation in which the Revolution had found him – as an adventurer who had been almost naturally his opponent, until he had purchased his support, rather than a man like M. de Talleyrand; a philosopher, a wit, who might be said to have been bred a courtier; and, on the other hand, M. de Talleyrand himself was too cautious to commit himself boldly and entirely to the daring and doubtful schemes which Mirabeau had prepared, until he saw a tolerable chance of their being successful.

Other circumstances, moreover, occurred at this time, which could not but have an unfavourable influence as to the establishment of any serious concert between the scrupulous and mistrustful monarch, and the chess-playing, constitutional bishop.

VII

When M. de Talleyrand rejected the archbishopric of Paris, it was clear that he expected nothing further from the church; and he no doubt from that moment conceived the idea of freeing himself from its trammels on the first decent opportunity: nor did he long wait for this opportunity, for, on the 26th of April, one day after his consecration of the Curé Expelles, the newly-elected Bishop of Finisterre, arrived a brief thus announced in the *Moniteur* of the 1st of May, 1791:

"*Le bref du Pape est arrivé jeudi dernier. De Talleyrand-Périgord, ancien évêque d'Autun, y est suspendu de toutes fonctions et excommunié, après quarante jours s'il ne revient pas a résipiscence.*"[23]

The moment had now come for that decisive measure which the unwilling ecclesiastic had for some time contemplated; for he had too much tact to think of continuing his clerical office under the interdiction of the head of his church, and was by no means prepared to abandon his political career, and to reconcile himself with Rome, on the condition of separating himself from wealth and ambition. But one alternative remained – that of abandoning the profession into which he had been forced to enter. This he did at once, and without hesitation; appearing in the world henceforth (though sometimes styled in public documents the Abbé de Périgord, or the ancien évêque d'Autun) under the plain designation of M. de Talleyrand, a designation which I have already frequently applied to him, and by which, though he was destined to be raised to far higher titles, he has by universal consent descended to posterity. The act was a bold one; but, like most bold acts in difficult circumstances, it was not (I speak of it as a matter of worldly calculation) an imprudent one: for it released an indifferent priest from a position which he could only fill with decency by a constant hypocrisy, for which he was too indolent; and it delivered up an able statesman to a career for which, by the nature of his talents, he was peculiarly fitted. Neither was M. de Talleyrand's withdrawal from the church so remarkable a fact at that moment as it would have been at any other; for France, and even Europe, were then overrun by French ex-ecclesiastics of all grades, who were prohibited from assuming their rank and unable to fulfil their duties, and who, in many cases, were obliged to conceal their real calling under that from which they earned a daily subsistence.

Nevertheless, the Bishop of Autun's particular case excited and merited attention. It had been as an organ and representative of the French church, that this prelate had contributed in no slight degree to alienate its property and change its constitution; and now, his brethren in the French clergy being what he had made them, he voluntarily threw their habit from his shoulders and renounced all participation in their fate.

It might, it is true, be urged that none had lost more by the destruction of the ancient church and its institutions than himself, that he had originally become a priest against his inclinations, and that he was compelled to decide either against his convictions as a citizen or against his obligations as a churchman. Still, this desertion from his order by one who had been so conspicuous a member of it, was undoubtedly a scandal, and though the world usually pardons those whom it has an interest to forgive, and though M. de Talleyrand, if he erred, had the consolation of living to see his errors forgiven or overlooked by many very rigid Catholics, who enjoyed his society, by many very pious princes, who wanted his services, and even by the Pope himself, when his holiness was in a situation to fear his enmity and require his goodwill – he himself never felt entirely at his ease as to his early profession, and was so sensitive on the subject that the surest way to offend him was to allude to it.

[23] "The brief of the Pope arrived last Thursday. De Talleyrand-Périgord, the late Bishop of Autun, is suspended from all functions and excommunicated, if after forty days he has not repented."

I was told by a lady, long intimate with M. de Talleyrand, that even the mention of the word “lawn” annoyed him.

As to Louis XVI., although making perpetual compromises with his conscience, he was of all persons the one most likely to be shocked by a bishop thus coolly converting himself into a layman; whilst it must be added that M. de Talleyrand was of all persons the one least likely to respect Louis XVI.’s scruples.

We may, therefore, reasonably suppose that whatever relations were indirectly kept up between them at this time, such relations were neither intimate nor cordial, but rather those which men not unfrequently maintain with persons whom they neither like nor trust, but are ready to serve under or be served by, should circumstances arrive to render a closer connection mutually advantageous.

The King, however, had become more and more puzzled by the opposing advice of his various and never-trusted counsellors, and more and more dissatisfied with the prospect of having shortly to assent to a constitution which, in reality, he looked upon as an abdication. It was not surprising, therefore, that, on the morning of the 21st of June, it was discovered that he had, with his family, quitted Paris; and it was shortly afterwards ascertained that the fugitives had directed their course towards the north of France and the camp of M. de Bouillé.

It will be remembered that, to withdraw from the capital to the camp of this officer, in whose judgment, ability, and fidelity Louis XVI. most relied, was part of Mirabeau’s old scheme.

But this was not all: the King, in a paper which he left behind him, stated that it was his intention to retire to some portion of his “kingdom where he could freely exercise his judgment, and there to make such changes in the proposed constitution” (it was on the point of being terminated) “as were necessary to maintain the sanctity of religion, to strengthen the royal authority, and to consolidate a system of true liberty.” A declaration of this kind (though the words I have cited were rather ambiguous) was also comprised in the scheme of Mirabeau.

Now, M. de Montmorin, the minister of foreign affairs – with one of whose passports the King had actually made his escape as a servant of a Madame de Korff – had been initiated, as we know, into Mirabeau’s secrets, and M. de Talleyrand was one of M. de Montmorin’s friends, and had been, as we have recently seen, by Mirabeau’s bedside during his last hours. Hence it might be inferred, notwithstanding the causes which prevented any real sympathy or cordial understanding between the King and the ex-Bishop of Autun, that the latter was privy to the flight of the former, and prepared to take part in the plans of which that flight was to be the commencement.

Rumours, indeed, to this effect, concerning both M. de Montmorin and M. de Talleyrand, were for a moment circulated in Paris.

But M. de Montmorin proved to the satisfaction of the Assembly that he was innocent of all participation in the King’s evasion; and the reports respecting M. de Talleyrand never went further than to one or two of those journals which at that time disgraced the liberty of the press by their total indifference as to whether they published truth or falsehood.

It is also to be remarked that M. de Lafayette, whom on that subject one must accept as a good authority, expressly charges the King with having left M. de Montmorin and his most intimate friends ignorant of his intentions.

“Il était ignoré,” says M. de Lafayette, “de ses ministres, des royalistes de l’Assemblée, tous laissés exposés à un grand peril. Telle était la situation non seulement des gardes nationaux de service, de leurs officiers, mais des amis les plus dévoués du roi, du duc de Brissac, commandant des cent-suisses, et de M. de Montmorin qui avait très-innocemment donné un passeport sous le nom de la baronne de Korff.”[24]

[24] “The ministers, the royalists of the Assembly, were all left in ignorance of the King’s intentions, and exposed to great peril. Such was the situation, not only of the National Guards and their officers, but also of the most devoted of the King’s friends, the Duc de Brissac, commander of the Swiss Guards, and M. de Montmorin, who had unwittingly given a passport in the name of the Baroness de Korff.”

It is difficult to account for the inconsistency in Louis XVI.'s conduct, except by referring to the inconsistency of his character: I am, however, disposed to surmise that, after Mirabeau's death, he considered it would be impossible to unite a considerable portion of the Assembly and the army in one common plan; and that he then began carrying on at the same time two plans: the one relative to the policy he should pursue in the event of his stay in the capital, which he probably conducted through M. de Montmorin, who was intimate with the leading members of the constitutional party in the Assembly; the other relative to his flight, which he only entrusted to the general whose camp he was about to seek, and to those private friends and adherents who took little part in public affairs. It is further to be presumed that, according to his constant incertitude and indolence, never long or firmly fixed on any one project, he was scared by apprehensions of the mob at the moment when most disposed to remain quietly in his palace, and alarmed at the risk and trouble of moving when actually pressing the preparations for his journey.

In this manner we may best reconcile his writing to M. de Bouillé, to expect him at Montmedy within a week of his declaring to the sovereigns of Europe (23rd April) that he was satisfied with his condition at Paris: in this manner, likewise, we may explain his solemnly assuring the general of the National Guard that he would not quit the Tuileries, only two or three days before he actually did so.[25]

He rarely did what he intended to do; and belied himself more frequently from change of intentions, than from intentional insincerity.

VIII

At all events, it seems probable (returning to the fact with which we are in the present instance most concerned) that Louis XVI.'s departure took place without M. de Talleyrand's active assistance, but I do not think it probable that it was altogether without his knowledge.

The ex-Bishop had such a varied and extensive acquaintance that he was pretty certain to know what he wished to know; and it was according to his usual practice to contrive that he should not be compromised if the King's projects failed, and yet that he should be in a situation to show that the King was indebted to him if those projects succeeded. It is useless to speculate on what might have occurred had the unfortunate monarch reached his destination; for travelling in a carriage peculiarly heavy and peculiarly conspicuous at the rate of three miles an hour, walking up the hills, putting his head out of the windows at the post-houses, Louis XVI. arrived at the place where he was to have met his escort twenty hours later than the appointed time, and was finally stopped at the bridge of Varennes by a few resolute men, and reconducted leisurely to the capital, amidst the insults of the provinces and the silence of Paris.

The important question then arose, What was to be done respecting him?

Was he to be deposed in favour of a republic? All contemporary writers agree that, at this moment, the idea of a republic was only in a few visionary minds. Was he to be deposed in favour of a new monarch, which, considering the emigration of his brothers and the infancy of his child, could only be in favour of a new dynasty? or, was he to be reinstated in the position he had quitted?

IX

The views and conduct of M. de Talleyrand are at this crisis interesting. We have been told by contemporaries, that he and Sieyès were of opinion that there was a better chance of making the Revolution successful with a limited monarchy under a new chief, elected by the nation, than under

[25] "Ce prince (Louis XVI.) dont on ne peut trop déplorer le manque de bonne foi dans cette occasion, lui donna les assurances si positives, si solennelles, qu'il crut pouvoir répondre *sur sa tête* que le roi ne partirait pas." —*Mémoires de Lafayette.*

the old one, who claimed his throne in virtue of hereditary right; and we can easily understand their reasoning.

A king who had succeeded to a throne from which his ancestors had been accustomed for centuries to dictate absolutely to their people, could hardly be sincerely satisfied with possessing on sufferance a remnant of his ancestors' former authority; nor could a people be ever wholly without suspicion of a prince who had to forget the ideas with which he had received the sceptre before he could respect those which restricted the use of it.

Louis XVI., moreover, had attempted to escape from his palace, as a prisoner escaping from his gaol, and as a prisoner thus escaping he had been caught and brought back to his place of confinement.

It was difficult to make anything of a sovereign in this condition save a puppet, to be for a while the tool, and ere long the victim, of contending parties.

Now, M. de Talleyrand had always a leaning to the Orleans branch of the House of Bourbon: neither did he think so ill of the notorious personage who was then the representative of the Orleans family, as the contemporaries from whose report posterity has traced his portrait.

Of this prince he once said, in his own pithy manner, "Le duc d'Orléans est le vase dans lequel on a jeté toutes les ordures de la Révolution;"[26] and this was not untrue.

Philippe d'Orléans, indeed, who has figured in history under the nickname or *sobriquet* of "Egalité," was neither fitted for the part of a great sovereign in turbulent times nor for that of a quiet and obscure citizen at any more tranquil period. Nevertheless, he was not so bad a man as he has been represented; for both Legitimists and Republicans have been obliged to blacken his character in order to excuse their conduct to him.

His character has, furthermore, been mystified and exaggerated, as we have looked at it by the lurid glare of that unnatural vote which brings the later period of his life always prominently and horribly before us. Still, in reality, he was rather a weak man, led into villainous deeds by want of principle, than a man of a strong and villainous nature, who did not scruple at crimes when they seemed likely to advance his ambition. His only one strong passion was a desire to be talked about.

It is possible that the King, by skilful management, might have turned this ruling wish of his most powerful subject to the profit of his monarchy: for the young Duc de Chartres was at one time anxious to shine as an aspirant to military fame. The government, however, denied his request to be employed as became his rank; and when, despite of this denial, he engaged in a naval combat as a volunteer, the court unjustly and impoliticly spread reports against his courage. To risk his life in a balloon, to run riot in every extravagance of debauch, to profess the opinions of a republican though the first prince of the blood royal, were demonstrations of the same disposition which might have made him a gallant soldier, a furious bigot, a zealous royalist, and even a very tolerable constitutional monarch.

As to the various stories of his incessant schemes and complicated manœuvres for exciting the populace, debauching the soldiery, and seizing the crown, they are, in my opinion, no more worthy of credit than the tales which at the same period were equally circulated of Louis XVI.'s drunkenness, and Marie-Antoinette's debaucheries. Belonging to those whom Tacitus has described as "men loving idleness – though hating quiet," seeking popularity more than power, and with a character easily modelled by circumstances, I am by no means certain, that if M. de Talleyrand did think of bestowing on him what was afterwards called a "citizen crown," (it must be remembered that he had not then been lowered and disgraced by the follies or crimes into which he was subsequently led), the plan was not the best which could have been adopted. But there was one great and insurmountable obstacle to this design.

General Lafayette commanded the National Guard of Paris, and although his popularity was already on the wane, he was still – Mirabeau being dead – the most powerful citizen that had been

[26] "The Duc d'Orléans is the vase into which people have thrown all the filth of the Revolution."

raised up by the Revolution. He did not want to run new risks, nor to acquire greater power, nor to have a monarch with more popularity or more authority than the runaway king.

Courageous rather than audacious, more avid of popularity than of power, a chivalric knight-errant, an amiable enthusiast, rather than a great captain, or a practical politician, the part which suited him was that of parading himself before the people as the guardian of the constitution, and before the sovereign as the idol of the nation. To this part he wished to confine himself; and the monarch under whom he could play it most easily was Louis XVI. Nor was this all.

Ambitious men may agree as to sharing the attributes of office; vain men will not agree as to sharing the pleasure of applause: and it is said that Lafayette never forgot that there was another bust, that of the Duc d'Orléans, carried about the streets of Paris together with his own, on the memorable day which saw the destruction of the Bastille. To any idea, therefore, of the Duc d'Orléans as King of France, he was decidedly opposed.

X

Thus, after making just that sort of effort in favour of the younger branch of the Bourbons which left him free to support the elder one, if such effort proved abortive, M. de Talleyrand finally declared for Louis XVI., as the only person who could be monarch, if a monarchy could be preserved; and was also for giving this prince such a position as he might honourably accept, with functions that he might really fulfil.

The King himself, it must be added, was now in a better disposition than he had hitherto been for frankly accepting the conditions of the new existence proposed to him.

A hero, or rather a saint, when it was required of his fortitude to meet danger or to undergo suffering, his nature was one of those which shrink from exertion, and prefer endurance to a struggle for either victory or escape.

It was with difficulty that he had been so far roused into action as to attempt his recent expedition; he had been disgusted with its trouble, more than awed by its peril. Death itself seemed preferable to another such effort.

He had seen, likewise, from the feeling of the provinces, and even from the infidelity of the troops, who, sent to escort him, might have attempted his rescue; but who, when told to cry, "*Vive le Roi!*" cried, "*Vive la Nation!*" that, even if he had reached M. de Bouillé's camp, it would have been difficult for that general, notwithstanding his firmness of character and military ability, to have placed the sovereign of France in any position within the French territory from which he might have dictated to, or even treated with, the French people. To quit Paris, therefore, a second time was evidently to quit France and to unite himself with, and to be subordinate to, that party of *émigrés* which had always preferred his younger brother, whose presumption had become insulting to his authority and offensive to Marie-Antoinette's pride.

On the other hand, many persons of note in the Assembly who had hitherto employed their talents and their popularity towards the weakening of the monarchical power, were at this juncture disposed to strengthen it.

Amongst the commissioners sent to conduct Louis XVI. from Varennes to Paris, was Barnave, an eloquent young lawyer, who, from a desire to distinguish himself in a glorious rivalry with Mirabeau, had adopted that party in the Assembly which, whilst declaring itself against a republic, contended in all discussions, and especially in the famous discussion on the *veto*, for abridging and in fact annihilating the royal authority. Struck by the misfortunes of Marie-Antoinette, – beauty never appearing so attractive to a generous heart as in the hour of distress, – and convinced, perhaps, by his own personal observations that Louis XVI. had in many respects been grossly calumniated, Barnave had at last adopted the views which had previously been formed by his great rival, whose ashes then slept in the Pantheon.

The two Lameths also, officers of noble birth, possessing some talent and more spirit, perceiving that by the course they had hitherto pursued they had raised up at each step more formidable rivals amongst the lower classes of society than any they would otherwise have had to encounter amongst the leaders of the nobility or the favourites of the court, were now as anxious to restrain the democracy which they hated, as Barnave was to assist the queen whom he loved; whilst many of all ranks, conscientiously in favour of liberty, but as justly alarmed at anarchy, beginning to consider it more important to curb the license of the mob and the clubs than that of the King and the government, were for rallying round the tottering throne and trying to give it a tolerable foundation of security.

XI

For these reasons, then, there was a combination of interests, desires, and abilities, in favour of establishing Louis XVI. at the head of such a constitution, as, if not the best possible, would have been the best possible at that time; and, every other rational project seeming out of the question, M. de Talleyrand entered, as I have said, into this one, although with less faith in its practicability than some of his coadjutors.

There were, however, at this moment circumstances which favoured it. An assemblage, collected together by the influence and exhortations of the most violent of the Jacobins for the purpose of signing a petition to the Assembly against the continuance of the monarchy, having given a sufficient pretext by its tumultuous character and excesses to justify the act, was dispersed by Lafayette at the head of the National Guard, and with the authority of Bailly, mayor of Paris; – that is, with the force and authority of the whole mass of the *bourgeoisie*, or middle class.

The Republicans were daunted. A revision of the constitution, moreover, was required; for the desultory and inconsistent manner in which many of the measures of the Assembly had been voted, rendered it necessary to distinguish between those which were temporary in their character and those that were to remain fundamental laws of the State. This revision offered the opportunity of introducing changes of importance into the constitution itself, and amongst these a second chamber or senate.

To this addition even Lafayette consented; although his opinion was that such second chamber should be elective, as in the United States (his constant model), and not hereditary as in England, which another section of public men – anxious to maintain an aristocracy as well as a monarchy – desired.

The moderate party, still powerful in the departments, in Paris, and in the National Guard, as well as in the army, had not, nevertheless, by itself a majority in the Assembly; and a mere majority could not have undertaken so great a plan as that contemplated. With the aid of the Royalists, however, the execution of this plan was easy. But the Royalists, consisting of two hundred and ninety members, with the Abbé Maury at their head (Cazales, the other leader of the Royalist party, at this time emigrated), retaining their seats in the Assembly, declined to take any part in its proceedings; – and in this manner the only hope of safety for the King was destroyed by the very persons who arrogated to themselves the title of “the King’s friends;” nor was this course, though foolish and unpatriotic, altogether unnatural.

What a party can least bear is the triumph of its opponents: the consolidation of a constitutional government was the triumph of that party, which from the beginning of the Revolution had advocated such a government and declared it possible. The triumph of the opposite party, on the contrary, was, that there should be an absolute monarchy, or no monarchy; a government of “*lettres de cachet*,” or no government. This party had to prove that to diminish the sovereign’s power was to conduct him to the scaffold; that to give the people freedom was to overthrow society. Thus, if they did not hope for

the worst, they would do nothing to secure the best that was practicable. It is conjunctures like these which confound the calculations of those who fancy that men will act according to their interests.

Left to themselves, the Constitutionalists had not sufficient power to give battle to the democrats in the Assembly and the clubs out of it. They voted the King a body-guard and a privy purse – measures better calculated to excite the envy than to curb the license of the populace; and then, betrayed by the same wish to show their disinterestedness, which had made them parties, in November, 1789, to the stupid declaration that no member of the National Assembly should be the King's minister, they committed the still greater folly of declaring that no member of the National Assembly should sit in the next legislature, nor hold any office under the Crown during its continuance; a decree decapitating France, and delivering an untried constitution into the hands of inexperienced legislators.

This decree left the future too obscure for any man of calmness and judgment to flatter himself that there was more than a faint probability of fixing its destinies for some years to come; but whatever these destinies might be, the reputation of the statesman whose views formed the mind of a rising generation, would survive the errors and passions of a past one.

It was with this thought before him that M. de Talleyrand, just previous to the dissolution of the National Assembly, or, as it is sometimes called, *l'Assemblée constituante*, brought under its notice a vast project of education, then too late to be decided upon, but which, printed and recommended to the attention of the coming legislature, and having at one extremity the communal school and at the other the Institute, exists with but slight alterations at this very day.

The Assembly now separated (on the 13th of September) amidst that usual exhibition of fireworks and fêtes which mark the history of the animated and variable people, who, never contented and never despairing, exhibit the same joy when they crown their heroes or break their idols.

Such was the end of that great Assembly which passed away rapidly from the face of affairs at the moment, but which left its foot-print on the world for generations that have not yet effaced it.

In this Assembly, M. de Talleyrand was the most conspicuous figure after Mirabeau, as he was hereafter in the Empire the most conspicuous personage after Napoleon; and I have dwelt more on this portion of his career than I may do upon others, because it is the one least known, and for which he has been least appreciated.

The reputation, however, which he obtained and justly earned in those violent and turbulent times, was not of a violent or turbulent character. A member of the two famous clubs of the day (Jacobins and Feuillans), he frequented them occasionally, not to take part in their debates, but to be acquainted with and influence those who did. In the National Assembly he had always sided with the most moderate who could hope for power, and who did not abjure the Revolution.

Necker, Mounier, Mirabeau, had successively his support so long as they took an active part in public affairs. In the same manner he acted, when they disappeared, with Barnave and the two Lameths; and even with Lafayette, though he and that personage disliked and despised each other. No personal feeling altered his course; it was never marked by personal prejudices, nor can I say that it was ever illumined by extraordinary eloquence. His influence arose from his proposing great and reasonable measures at appropriate times, in singularly clear and elegant language; and this from the height of a great social position. He did not pretend to be guided by sentiment or emotion; neither hatred, nor devotion, nor apprehension, ever seemed to affect his conduct. He avowed that he wished for a constitutional monarchy, and was willing to do all he could to obtain one. But he never said he would sacrifice himself to this idea if it proved impossible to make it successful.

Many have attacked his honour because, being a noble and a churchman, he sided against the two orders he belonged to; but in reality he rather wished to make ancient things live amongst new ideas than to sweep ancient things away. Others have denied his sagacity in promoting a revolution which drove him from affluence and power into poverty and exile. But, in spite of what has been said to the contrary, I by no means believe that the end of the Revolution of 1789 was the natural

consequence of its commencement. The more we examine the history of that period, the more we are struck by the incessant and unaccountable follies of those who wished to arrest it. There was no want of occasions when the most ordinary courage and good sense on the part of the King and his friends would have given the one all the power it was advisable he should exercise, and preserved the other in as influential a position as was compatible with the abolition of intolerable abuses. No man can calculate with accuracy on all the faults that may be committed by his opponents. It is probable that M. de Talleyrand did not calculate on the utter subversion of the society he undertook to reform; but it appears that at each crisis he foresaw the dangers that were approaching, and counselled the measures most likely to prevent their marring his country's prospects and his own fortunes.

At the actual moment, he perceived that the new legislature would be a new world, which could neither have the same notions, nor belong to the same society, nor be subject to the same influences, as the last; and that the wisest thing to do was to withdraw himself from the Paris horizon until the clouds that obscured it had, in some direction or other, passed away.

In England, he was sufficiently near not to be forgotten, and sufficiently distant not to be compromised. England, moreover, was the natural field of observation at that moment for a French statesman. To England, therefore, he went, accompanied by M. de Biron, and arrived in London on the 25th of January, 1792.

Part III
FROM CLOSE OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO CONSULATE

M. de Talleyrand in London. – Manner and appearance. – Witticisms. – Visit to England. – Lord Grenville refuses to discuss business with him. – Goes to Paris; returns with letter from King. – State of affairs in France prevents success of any mission in England. – Arrives in Paris just prior to the 10th of August. – Escapes and returns to England, the 16th of September, 1792. – Writes to Lord Grenville, declaring he has no mission. – Sent away the 28th of January, 1794. – Goes to America. – Waits until the death of Robespierre. – Gets then permission to return to France. – Chénier declares that he was employed by Provisional Government in 1792, when he had told Lord Grenville he was not. – Successful reception. – Description of Directory and of society at that time. – Chosen Secretary of Institute, and read two remarkable memoirs to it. – Named Minister of Foreign Affairs. – Sides with Barras and Executive against the Assemblies. – Negotiations at Lille broken off. – Address to diplomatic agents. – Peace of Campo Formio. – Bonaparte goes to Egypt. – Democrats triumph in the Directory. – M. de Talleyrand quits office, and publishes an answer to accusations made against him. – Paris tired with the Directory. – Bonaparte returns from Egypt. – Talleyrand unites with Sieyès to overturn the Government, and place power in Bonaparte's hands.

I

When M. de Talleyrand made his first appearance in our country, many persons in it still continued favourable to the French Revolution, and viewed with esteem those who had rather sought to destroy crying abuses than to put fantastical theories into practice. Thus, although naturally preceded by the calumnies which were certain to be circulated about a man who had played so remarkable a part on so eventful a scene as that which he had just quitted, the ex-Bishop of Autun was, on the whole, well received by a large portion of our aristocracy, and became particularly intimate at Lansdowne House. The father of the late marquis mentioned to me that he remembered him dining there frequently, and being particularly silent and particularly pale. A contemporary, indeed, describes M. de Talleyrand at this time as aiming to impose on the world by an air of extreme reserve: —

"His manner was cold, he spoke little, his countenance, which in early youth had been distinguished for its grace and delicacy, had become somewhat puffed and rounded, and to a certain degree effeminate, being in singular contrast with a deep and serious voice which no one expected to accompany such a physiognomy. Rather avoiding than making advances, neither indiscreet, nor gay, nor familiar, but sententious, formal, and scrutinizing, – the English hardly knew what to make of a Frenchman who so little represented the national character.

"But this exterior was a mask, which he threw off in the circles in which he was at his ease, talking in these freely, taking the greatest pains to please, and being remarkable for the choice of his expressions and a certain epigrammatic wit, which had a singular charm for those who were accustomed to his society. His was the saying cited by Chamfort, *à propos* of Rulhières,[27] who – on observing that he did not know why he was called ill-natured, for in all his life he had never done

[27] M. de Rulhières, l'ancien secrétaire du baron de Breteuil à St. Pétersbourg, le confident du maréchal de Richelieu, le poëte de la duchesse d'Egmont, narrateur fort redouté de Catherine II., &c. &c.

but one ill-natured action – was replied to by M. de Talleyrand's drily observing, '*Et quand finira-t-elle?*' – 'when will it end?'

"One evening, playing at long whist, the conversation turned on an old lady who had married her footman; some people expressed their surprise, when M. de Talleyrand, counting his points, drawled out in a slow voice, '*At nine, one does not count honours*.'

"Another time," says the person from whom I am quoting, "we were speaking of the infamy of a colleague, when I burst out by exclaiming, 'That man is capable of assassinating any one!' '*Assassinating, no!*' said M. de Talleyrand, coolly; '*poisoning, yes!*'

"His manner of narrating was full of grace; he was a model of good taste in conversation. Indolent, voluptuous, born for wealth and grandeur, he accustomed himself in exile to a life simple and full of privations, sharing with his friends the produce of his magnificent library, which he sold very ill, the spirit of party preventing many from becoming purchasers."

This description, from Dumont (pp. 361, 362), is interesting as a personal sketch at one of the most critical periods of M. de Talleyrand's life; that is, at the commencement of his career as a diplomatist; for the voyage to England which he was now making, first suggested to Louis XVI. by M. de Montmorin, and subsequently realized by the minister who succeeded him, was (though this could not be officially avowed on account of the self-denying ordinance of the National Assembly) of an official character; a fact suspected if not known at the time. Lord Gower, indeed (our ambassador at Paris), speaks of it in January as a *mission* of peace. Lord Grenville, in a communication to Lord Gower, in February, says M. de Talleyrand had brought him a letter from M. Delessart, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, and in March again he thus writes:[28]

"I have seen Monsieur de Talleyrand twice since his arrival on the business of his *mission* to this country.

"The first time he explained to me very much at large the disposition of the French government and nation to enter into the closest connection with Great Britain, and proposed that this should be done by a mutual guarantee, or in such other manner as the government of this country should propose. Having stated this, he earnestly requested that he might not receive any answer at the time, but that he might see me again for that purpose. I told him that, in compliance with his request, I would see him again for the object he wished, though I thought it fair to apprise him that, in all probability, my answer would be confined to the absolute impossibility of entering into any kind of discussion or negotiation on points of so delicate a nature with a person having no official authority to treat upon them. When I did see him again I repeated this to him, telling him it was the only answer I could give to any proposal that he might make to me, although I had no difficulty in saying to him individually, as I had to every Frenchman with whom I had conversed on the present state of France, that it was very far from being the disposition of H. M. Government to foment or prolong any disturbances there with a view of any profit to be derived from them to this country."

The coyness of Lord Grenville to enter into political discussions at this moment with M. de Talleyrand might arise in some degree from the position of the French ministry, for though M. de Talleyrand had brought a letter, as has been said, from M. Delessart, who belonged to the more moderate section of the French ministry, his intimate friend in it was the Comte de Narbonne; named, just previous to M. de Talleyrand's departure, minister of war, and who, being the youngest and most ardent member of the government, was all for an immediate war with Austria, as the only means of saving France from the internal agitation that was preying on her, and the only means of definitively separating the King from the French *émigrés* and the court of Vienna, whose counsels rendered it impossible to count on his conduct.

M. de Talleyrand shared these ideas. Narbonne's colleagues, however, soon began to think the young soldier's views, to which they had at one time half assented, were too adventurous; and M.

[28] March 9. Lord Grenville to Lord Gower.

de Talleyrand's position becoming more and more difficult, was, after Lord Grenville's conversation in March, untenable. He returned, therefore, to Paris, and on arriving at its gates, learnt that M. de Narbonne was out of office.

But the moderate Constitutionalists who thought of governing without M. de Narbonne had not been employed till their party had lost its influence, and were unable to stem the opposition to which the removal of their popular colleague had given a new impulse. They soon, therefore, gave way to the celebrated Gironde, a band which, though rigid in its own principles of conduct, was not indisposed to profit by the assistance of able men less scrupulous; and General Dumouriez, a clever and bold adventurer, became minister of foreign affairs. He had precisely the same views as Narbonne with respect to a war with Austria, and thought that it was of the utmost importance to make sure of the neutrality of England.

M. de Talleyrand had, as we learn from Lord Gower, the address to speak satisfactorily of the sentiments of the British Government after returning from his late expedition, and to attribute whatever was unfriendly in its language to the irregularity of the character he had appeared in. He was again chosen, then, as the French negotiator; and though, as in the former instance, he could not be named ambassador, everything that the law permitted was done to give weight to his character; – Louis XVI. giving him a letter to George III. expressive of his confidence in the bearer. In the meantime, M. de Chauvelin, a gentleman of fashion, professing popular principles, but who would never have been placed in so important a post had not M. de Talleyrand been his counsellor, was named minister plenipotentiary.

M. Dumouriez announces this double appointment to Lord Grenville on the 21st of April, that is, the day after the declaration of war with Austria, saying —

"That M. de Talleyrand, in his recent voyage to London, had stated to Lord Grenville the desire of the French government to contract the most intimate relations with Great Britain. That it was particularly desirable at that moment, when France was on the eve of a war that she had not been able to avoid, to assure herself of the friendship of that government which could most aid in bringing about a peace; that for this object M. de Chauvelin had been named minister plenipotentiary, a gentleman chosen on account of the knowledge which his Majesty had of his person, sentiments, and talents; and that to him had been adjoined, in consequence of the extreme importance of the negotiation, M. de Talleyrand (whose abilities were well known to Lord Grenville), and M. de Roveray,[29] formerly *procureur-général* in Geneva – a gentleman known in Switzerland as well as in France; and the King hoped that the efforts of three persons, understanding the situation of France, and enjoying great confidence with the French people, would not be without result."

This letter was dated, as we have said, on the 21st April, but the embassy did not reach its destination till the month of May: M. de Chauvelin having been at first displeased with the adjunction of M. de Talleyrand, and not indisposed to prolong his dissatisfaction, had not the minister, fatigued with quarrels about trifles at so critical a moment, terminated them by saying, "M. de Talleyrand s'amuse, M. de Chauvelin fronde, M. de Roveray marchande:[30] if these gentlemen are not off by to-morrow night they will be superseded."

The story (told by Dumont) is worth notice, as showing the careless indolence which the *ci-devant* bishop often affected in the affairs which he had most at heart – an indolence which he afterwards justified by the well-known maxim, "Point de zèle, Monsieur!"[31]

[29] He acted as secretary to the mission.

[30] M. de Talleyrand amuses himself, M. de Chauvelin grumbles, and M. de Roveray bargains.

[31] No zeal, sir.

II

It was not for want of zeal, however, that this second mission, notwithstanding the King's letter, was even more unsuccessful than the first; but for another very good reason: viz., that whatever MM. de Chauvelin or Talleyrand might say and do in London, the turn which affairs were taking more and more decidedly at Paris was such as could not but destroy the credit of any agent of the French government.

The Legislative Assembly had been especially framed to place power in the hands of the middle classes, and was intended to be alike hostile to the nobles and the mob.

But the middle class, the most weighty auxiliary that a government can have, is rarely found capable of directing a government. Vergniaud and Roland, who were on this occasion its organs, lost week by week their prestige; the rabble, which forced the palace on the 20th of June, began day by day to be more convinced of its power. What authority remained to the representative of a sovereign whose habitation was not secure and whose person was insulted?

Amidst such events the Revolution lost in England most of its early patrons. Fox, Sheridan, and a few of their particular clique, formed the sole associates of the French embassy; and Dumont, whom I again quote as a trustworthy witness, describes a scene at Ranelagh which testifies the general unpopularity in England of every Frenchman having an official position.

"At our arrival we perceived a buzzing sound of voices saying, 'Here comes the French embassy!' Regards, evincing curiosity but not amity, were directed at once towards our battalion, for we were eight or ten, and we soon ascertained that we should not want space for our promenade, every one retreated to the right and left at our approach, as if they were afraid that there was contagion in our very atmosphere."

M. de Talleyrand, seeing that all attempt to negotiate under such circumstances was vain, returned to Paris just previous to the 10th August, and was there when the wavering and unfortunate Louis XVI. lost his crown by a combination between the Girondins and the Jacobins: the first wishing to have the appearance of a victory, the latter aiming at the reality. M. de Talleyrand had been the object of attack when the united Republicans were mustering their forces for the combat, and he felt himself by no means secure after their triumph. The popular movement had now in truth swept over all the ideas and all the individuals it had commenced with; its next excesses were likely to be still more terrible than the last, and the wary diplomatist thought that the best thing he could do was to get back to England as soon as possible.

III

He got his passport from Danton, then in the provisional government, and whom he knew as an early partisan of the Duc d'Orléans; and he used, when last in London, to tell a story as to the manner in which he obtained it by a timely smile at a joke, which the jocular and truculent tribune had just passed on another petitioner. But I shall have presently to allude further to this passport. The bearer of it but just escaped in time.

Among the papers found in the famous iron cupboard, discovered at the Tuileries, was the following letter from M. de Laporte, the intendant of the King's household, to whom I have already alluded as having communicated the wishes of the King as to M. de Talleyrand's first mission, and dated the 22nd of April, 1791:

> "Sire,
>
> "J'adresse à Votre Majesté une lettre écrite avant-hier, et que je n'ai reçue qu'hier après-midi; elle est de l'évêque d'Autun qui paraît désirer servir Votre

Majesté. Il m'a fait dire qu'elle pouvait faire l'essai de son zèle, et de son crédit, et lui désigner les points où elle désirait l'employer."[32]

The original communication, however, here alluded to, was not discovered: and M. de Talleyrand himself boldly denied that it had ever been written. It is possible that he knew it was destroyed (it is said that he purchased it from Danton), but at all events, various concomitant circumstances seemed to prove that he had been more in the interest and confidence of the Court than he could now safely avow; and the Convention issuing and maintaining a decree of accusation against him, he was unable to return to France on the 8th April, 1793, which he ought to have done in order not to be comprised in the general list of *émigrés*, and was thus forced to remain in England.

The first thing he had done on arriving there was to address the following letter to Lord Grenville: —

"18th September, Kensington Square.[33]

"My Lord,

"I have the honour of informing you that I arrived in England two days ago. The relations which I had the advantage of having with you, during my stay in London, make this a duty to me.

"I should reproach myself for not promptly performing it, and for not offering my first homage to the minister whose mind has shown itself on a level with the great events of the present times, and who has always manifested views so pure, and a love of liberty so enlightened.

"On my first voyages, the King had intrusted me with a mission to which I attached the greatest value. I wished to hasten the moment of the prosperity of France, and consequently connect her, if possible, with England.

"I hardly, indeed, dared to hope for such a blessing in our circumstances, but I could not resolve not to make exertions for attaining it.

"The assurance you vouchsafed to give us of the neutrality of your government at the epoch of the war, appeared to me most auspicious.

"Since that moment, everything has cruelly changed amongst us; and although nothing can ever unrivet my heart or my wishes from France, and though I live in the hope of returning thither as soon as the laws shall have resumed their reign, I must tell you, my Lord, and I am desirous that you should know, that I have at this time

[32] "Sire, – I address to your Majesty a letter written the day before yesterday, and which I only received yesterday after mid-day. It is from the Bishop of Autun, who seems desirous to serve your Majesty. He had it conveyed to me that the King might make a trial of his zeal and influence, and indicate to him the points on which he could be employed."

[33] "18 septembre, Kensington Square."My Lord,"J'ai l'honneur de vous informer que je suis arrivé en Angleterre il y a deux jours. Les rapports que j'ai eu l'avantage d'avoir avec vous pendant mon séjour à Londres m'en font un devoir."Je me reprocherais de ne pas m'en acquitter promptement et de ne pas offrir mes premiers hommages au ministre dont l'esprit m'a paru au niveau des grands événements de cette époque, et qui a toujours manifesté des vues si pures, et un amour éclairé de la vraie liberté."A mes premiers voyages j'étais chargé par le roi d'une mission à laquelle j'attachais le plus grand prix. Je voulais hâter le moment de la prospérité de la France, et par conséquent l'attacher, s'il était possible, à l'Angleterre."J'osais à peine, il est vrai, espérer tant de bonheur dans nos circonstances, mais je ne pouvais me résoudre à ne pas faire des efforts pour y parvenir."L'assurance que vos daignâtes nous donner de la neutralité de votre gouvernement à l'époque de la guerre me parut un présage très-heureux."Depuis ce moment tout est cruellement changé parmi nous, et quoique rien ne puisse jamais détacher mon cœur ni mes vœux de la France, et que mon espoir soit d'y retourner aussitôt que les lois y auront repris leur empire, je dois vous dire, mylord, et je tiens beaucoup à ce que vous sachiez que je n'ai absolument aucune espèce de mission en Angleterre, que j'y suis venu uniquement pour y chercher la paix et pour y jouir de la liberté au milieu de ses véritables amis."Si pourtant mylord Grenville désirait connaître ce que c'est que la France en ce moment, quels sont les différents partis qui l'agitent, et quel est le nouveau pouvoir exécutif provisoire, et enfin ce qu'il est permis de conjecturer des terribles et épouvantables événements dont j'ai été presque le témoin oculaire, je serais charmé de le lui apprendre et de trouver cette occasion de lui renouveler l'assurance des sentiments de respect avec lesquels je suis, mylord, votre très-humble, et très-obéissant serviteur,"Talleyrand-Périgord."

> *absolutely no kind of mission in England*, that I have come here solely for the purpose of seeking repose, and the enjoyment of liberty in the midst of its true friends.
>
> "If, however, my Lord Grenville should wish to know what France is at this moment, what are the different parties that disturb her, and what is the new provisional executive power, and lastly, what is permitted to conjecture of the terrible and frightful events of which I have almost been an eye-witness, I shall be happy to give such information, and to avail myself of the occasion to renew the expression of the respectful sentiments with which I am, my Lord, your most humble and obedient servant,
> *"Talleyrand-Périgord."*

There is no trace of Lord Grenville's having taken any notice of this communication.

Nothing, however, was done for some time to disturb the fugitive's residence amongst us.

M. de Chauvelin was sent away by the British government after the execution of Louis XVI. on the 24th of January, 1793, and it was not till the 28th of January, 1794 that M. de Talleyrand received an order, under the powers conferred by the Alien Bill, to quit England. He wrote a letter, dated 30th, to Lord Grenville, in which he begs to be allowed to justify himself from any false accusation, declares that if his thoughts have been often turned to France, it has only been to deplore its disasters, repeats that he has no correspondence with the French government, represents the calamitous condition he should be reduced to if driven from our shores, and finally appeals to the British minister's humanity as well as justice.

IV

M. DE TALLEYRAND'S DECLARATION.[34]

"My respect for the King's Council, and my confidence in its justice, induce me to lay before it a personal declaration more detailed than that which, as a stranger, I am bound to lay before a magistrate.

"I came to London towards the end of January, 1792, intrusted by the French government with a mission to the government of England. The object of this mission, at a moment when all Europe seemed to declare itself against France, was to induce the government of England not to renounce the sentiments of friendship and good neighbourhood of which it had given constant proofs towards France during the course of the Revolution. The King, especially, whose most ardent wishes were the preservation of a peace which seemed to him as useful to Europe in general as to France particularly, attached great value to the neutrality, and to the friendship of England, and he had ordered M. de Montmorin, who retained his confidence, and M. de Laporte, to acquaint me with his wishes on this subject. I was, moreover, instructed by the King's ministers to make to the government of England proposals referring to the commercial interests of both nations. The constitution had not allowed the King, while honouring me with his commands, to invest me with a public capacity. This want of an official title was held by my Lord Grenville to be an obstacle to any political conference. I demanded, in consequence, my recall, and I returned to France. A minister plenipotentiary was sent some time after; the King commanded me to assist in the negotiations, and informed his Britannic Majesty of this by a private letter. I remained attached to the duty the King had imposed upon me until the epoch of the 10th of August, 1792. At that time I was in Paris, where I had been called by the minister of foreign affairs. After having been for more than a month without being able to obtain a passport, and having remained exposed during all this time, both as an administrator of the department of Paris,

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[34] "*Déclaration de Monsieur de Talleyrand.*"Mon respect pour le conseil du roi, et ma confiance en sa justice m'engagent à lui présenter une déclaration personnelle plus détaillée que celle que je vois comme étranger présenter au magistrat."Je suis venu à Londres vers la fin de janvier 1792, chargé par le gouvernement français d'une mission auprès du gouvernement d'Angleterre. Cette mission avait pour objet, dans un moment où toute l'Europe paraissait se déclarer contre la France, d'engager le gouvernement d'Angleterre de ne point renoncer aux sentiments d'amitié et de bon voisinage qu'il avait montré constamment en faveur de la France pendant le cours de la Révolution. Le roi surtout, dont le vœux le plus ardent était le maintien d'une paix qui lui paraissait aussi utile à l'Europe en général qu'à la France en particulier, le roi attachait un grand prix à la neutralité et à l'amitié de l'Angleterre, et il avait chargé Monsieur de Montmorin qui conservait sa confiance, et Monsieur de Laporte, de me témoigner son désir à ce sujet. J'étais chargé de plus par les ministres du roi de faire au gouvernement d'Angleterre des propositions relatives à l'intérêt commercial des deux nations. La constitution n'avait pas permis au roi en me chargeant de ses ordres, de me revêtir d'un caractère public. Ce défaut de titre officiel me fut opposé par mylord Grenville comme un obstacle à toute conférence politique. Je demandai en conséquence mon rappel à Monsieur de Laporte, et je retournai en France. Un ministre plénipotentiaire fut envoyé quelque temps après; le roi me chargea d'en seconder les travaux, et en fit part à S. M. Britannique par une lettre particulière. Je suis resté attaché au devoir que le roi m'avait imposé jusqu'à l'époque du 10 août, 1792. J'étais alors à Paris où j'avais été appelé par le ministre des affaires étrangères. Après avoir été plus d'un mois sans pouvoir obtenir de passeport et être resté exposé pendant tout ce temps, et comme administrateur du département de Paris, et comme membre de l'Assemblée Constituante à tous les dangers qui peuvent menacer la vie et la liberté, j'ai pu enfin sortir de Paris vers le milieu de septembre, et je suis venu en Angleterre jouir de la paix et de la sûreté personnelle à l'abri d'une constitution protectrice de la liberté et de la propriété. J'y existe, comme je l'ai toujours été, étranger à toutes les discussions et à tous les intérêts de parti; et n'ayant pas plus à redouter devant les hommes justes la publicité d'une seule de mes opinions politiques que la connaissance d'une seule de mes actions. Outre les motifs de sûreté et de liberté qui m'ont ramené en Angleterre, il est une autre raison, très-légitime sans doute, c'est la suite de quelques affaires personnelles et la vente prochaine d'une bibliothèque assez considérable que j'avais à Paris, et que j'ai transportée à Londres."Je dois ajouter que devenu en quelque sorte étranger à la France, où je n'ai conservé d'autres rapports que ceux de mes affaires personnelles, et d'une ancienne amitié je ne puis me rapprocher de ma patrie que par les vœux ardents que je fais pour le rétablissement de sa liberté et de son bonheur."J'ai cru que dans des circonstances où la malveillance pouvait se servir de quelques préventions pour les faire tourner au profit d'inimitiés dues aux premières époques de notre Révolution, c'était remplir les vues du conseil du roi que de lui offrir dans une déclaration précise un exposé des motifs de mon séjour en Angleterre, et un garant assuré et irrévocable de mon respect pour la constitution et pour les lois."Talleyrand."1er janvier, 1793."

and as a member of the Constituent Assembly, to all the dangers which can threaten life and liberty, I was at length able to leave the French capital about the middle of September, and I have reached England to enjoy peace and personal safety under the shelter of a constitution protecting liberty and property. There I have been living, as I always have done, a stranger to all discussions and all interests of party, and having nothing to fear before just men from the publicity of any of my political opinions, or from the knowledge of any of my actions. Besides the motives of safety and liberty which brought me back to England, there existed another reason, doubtless a very legitimate one, which was some personal business, and the early sale of a rather considerable library which I possessed in Paris, and which I had brought over to London.

"I must add, that having become in some measure a stranger to France, where I have maintained no other relations than those connected with my personal affairs, and an ancient friendship, I cannot approach my own country save by those ardent wishes which I form for the revival of its liberty and of its happiness.

"I thought that in circumstances where ill-will may avail itself of various prejudices in order to turn them to the profit of those enmities due to the first periods of our revolution, it was carrying out the views of the King's Council, to offer it a precise exposition of the motives for my stay in England, and an assured and irrevocable guarantee of my respect for its constitution and its laws.

"Talleyrand.
"January 1, 1793."

V

Nothing can be more clear and precise than this declaration, but it was ineffectual, and its writer now sailed for the United States, carrying with him letters of recommendation from different members of the Opposition, and, amongst others, from the Marquis of Lansdowne, with whose intimacy, as I have said, he had been especially honoured. Washington replied:

"30th August, 1794.

"My Lord,

"I had the pleasure to receive the introduction from your Lordship delivered to me by M. de Talleyrand-Périgord. I regret very much that considerations of a political nature, and which you will easily understand, have not permitted me as yet to testify all the esteem I entertain for his personal character and your recommendation.

"I hear that the general reception he has met with is such as to console him, as far as the state of our society will permit, for what he abandoned on quitting Europe. Time will naturally be favourable to him wherever he may be, and one must believe that it will elevate a man of his talents and merit above the transitory disadvantages which result from differences as to politics in revolutionary times.

"Washington."

VI

It will be seen from the foregoing communication that M. de Talleyrand was spoken of with some respect, and that his reception in the United States had been rather flattering than otherwise. But the French name generally had lost its popularity; for Lafayette was an exile in the prisons of Olmütz, and the bloodthirsty violence of the Convention and the intrigues of its agents were in nowise congenial with American feelings. The moment, however, was one of considerable excitement; the

able men who had hitherto formed round their venerable president a united government were splitting up into opposing parties; the treaty with England was under dispute; and M. de Talleyrand, intimate with Jefferson, was active, it is said, in adding to the prevailing agitation, and endeavouring to thwart the policy of the government which had lately banished him from its shores. His endeavours, however, were unsuccessful; and becoming heartily wearied with his new place of exile, he employed what capital he had been able to save from his varied career in fitting out a ship, in which, accompanied by M. de Beaumetz, like himself a former member of the National Assembly, he was about to sail for the East Indies.

But during the years that had elapsed since his quitting Paris, events which had been rushing on with a demoniacal rapidity through almost every horror and every crime (each phase in this terrible history being marked by the murder of one set of assassins and the momentary rule of another), had arrived at a new crisis.

The Gironde, whom I left trembling and triumphant on the 10th of August, had been soon after strangled in the giant grasp of Danton. Danton, too indolent and self-confident to be a match for his more cool and ambitious coadjutor, had bent his lofty head beneath the guillotine, to which he had delivered so many victims; and, finally, Robespierre himself had just perished by the hands of men whom fear had rendered bold, and experience brought in some degree to reason, inasmuch as that they at last felt the necessity of re-establishing some of those laws by which alone society can be preserved.

M. de Talleyrand on learning these occurrences determined on abandoning his commercial enterprises and striving once more for power and fortune amidst the shifting scenes of public affairs.

And here, as often, Fortune favoured him; for the vessel in which he was about to embark, sailing with his friend, was never afterwards seen or heard of. All his efforts were now bent on returning to his native country, where he had many active in his behalf. Amongst the most influential of these was a remarkable woman, of whose talents we have but a faint idea from her works, which – though bearing witness to an ardent imagination and a powerful intellect – hardly give evidence of that natural and startling eloquence which sparkled in her conversation. The daughter of Necker, of whom I speak, just awakening from the horrors of a nightmare that had absorbed almost every sentiment but fear, was at this period the centre of a circle, in which figured the most captivating women and the ablest men, rushing with a kind of wild joy back to those charms of society which of late years had been banished from all places, except perhaps the prisons, wherein alone, during what has been emphatically called the "Reign of Terror," any records of the national gaiety seem to have been preserved.

Amongst the intimates at Madame de Staël's house was the surviving Chénier (Joseph-Marie), who on the 18th of Fructidor addressed the Convention, after the return of M. de Montesquieu had just been allowed, in the following characteristic terms:

"I have a similar permission to demand for one of the most distinguished members of the Constituent Assembly – M. de Talleyrand-Périgord, the famous Bishop of Autun. Our different ministers of Paris bear witness to his services. I have in my hands a *memoir of which the duplicate exists in the papers of Danton*; the date of this memoir is 25th of November, 1792, and it proves that M. de Talleyrand was actually occupied in the affairs of the Republic when he was proscribed by it. Thus, persecuted by Marat and Robespierre, he was also banished by Pitt from England; but the place of exile that he chose was the country of Franklin, where, in contemplating the imposing spectacle of a free people, he might await the time when France should have judges and not murderers; a Republic, and not anarchy called laws!"

How are we to reconcile this declaration with M. de Talleyrand's solemn protestations to Lord Grenville?

How could M. de Talleyrand have been writing memoirs to Danton and yet have come over to England, "solely for the purpose of seeking repose?"

That the passport to which we have drawn attention bore out M. Chénier's affirmation *allant à Londres par nos ordres*– "going to London by our orders" – is certain, for M. de Talleyrand afterwards confirmed this fact in a pamphlet which we shall have by-and-by to notice. But of the memoir we can learn nothing further.

The friends of M. de Talleyrand say that probably it never existed, or that, if it did, it could only be a paper of no importance, and not such a one as the English government would have objected to. They add that the form given to the passport was the only one Danton could have ventured to give without danger from the provisional council; that the English government must have been acquainted with it; and that M. de Talleyrand merely availed himself of it, and pretended that it placed him in the position of a French agent, when this was necessary to procure his return to France or to defend himself against the charge of emigration.

I must leave it to his autobiography to clear up whatever is obscure in this transaction; but at present it seems to justify the French lady, who, when the conversation once turned on the agreeable qualities of the Abbé de Périgord, acknowledged it would be difficult to refuse him her favours, but that it would be impossible to give him her confidence.

VII

At all events, Chénier's pleading was successful. The permission to return was granted; and, accordingly, M. de Talleyrand retraversed the Atlantic, and, having been driven on the English coast by stress of weather, arrived in the month of July, 1795, at Hamburg, then the place of refuge for almost all *émigrés*, especially Orleanists, as well as of Irish malcontents: Madame de Genlis, Madame de Flahaut, Lord Edward FitzGerald, &c.

The condition of Europe may be briefly described at this time by saying that the French arms had been generally successful. Belgium was taken; the expedition under the Duke of York beaten and repulsed; Holland had become an allied and submissive Republic; on most of the towns of the Rhine floated the tricolour flag; Spain had sued for and obtained peace; Prussia was neutral. The expedition to Quiberon had been a complete failure; and although the French generals, Pichegru and Jourdan, began to experience some reverses, the Directory was powerful enough, both abroad and at home, to justify the support of prudent adherents.

M. de Talleyrand consequently saw no objection to serving it. But before appearing at Paris, he judged it well to stay a short time at Berlin, which, being then the central point of observation, would make his arrival in France more interesting.

After this brief preparation, he appeared in the French capital, and found his name one of the most popular in the drawing-rooms (he never had the popularity of the streets), in that capricious city. The ladies formerly in fashion spoke of his wit and address from memory; those of more recent vogue, from curiosity; the great mass of the Convention were well disposed to have a "*grand seigneur*" in their suite; the "*grands seigneurs*" who still remained in France, to have one of their own body in power; all the political leaders recognised his ability, and were anxious to know to what particular section he would attach himself. Even among the "*savants*" he had a party; for he had been named, though absent, member of the Institute, which had recently been formed on the basis that he had laid down for it. Above all things, he was well known as a liberal, and undefiled by the bloody orgies of freedom. Under such circumstances, he again appeared on the stage of pleasure and affairs.

VIII

The first movement of all parties after the death of Robespierre had been, as I have said, against the continuance of the murderous system connected with his name; but it was difficult to combine into any one government or policy the various parties that were triumphant; that is, the

violent Democrats, who had risen against their chief; – the more moderate Republicans, who had been rather spectators than actors during the domination of the Convention; – and the Constitutionalists of the National and Legislative Assemblies. The reaction once begun, extended by degrees, until it provoked conflicts between extremes; and it was only after a series of struggles, now against the Jacobins and now against the disguised Royalists, that a sort of middle party formed the Constitution of year III., which was founded on the principle of universal tolerance; assuring, however, to the Conventionalists a supremacy, by exacting that two-thirds of the new assemblies should be chosen from amongst them. These new assemblies were of two kinds, both elected: the one called "the ancients," a sort of senate, which had the power of refusing laws; the second, the Five Hundred, which had the power of initiating laws. The executive was entrusted to a Directory, which, in order to guard against a despot, consisted of five members: Carnot, with whose republican severity M. de Talleyrand had little sympathy; Laréveillère-Lepaux, whose religious reveries he had turned into ridicule by christening the "Théophilantropes" (a sect of deists whom Laréveillère patronised) *Les filoux en troupe*; Letourneur, an engineer officer, who had little or no influence; Rewbell, a lawyer, and a man of character and ability, not ill-disposed to him; and Barras.

This last man, at the time I am speaking of the most powerful member of the Directory, was the sort of person who frequently rises to a greater height in civil commotions than any apparent merit seems to warrant. Clever, without great ability; intriguing, without great address; bold and resolute on any critical occasions, but incapable of any sustained energy; of gentle birth, though not of any great historical family, – he had acquired his influence by two or three acts of courage and decision; and was forgiven the crime of being a noble, in consideration of the virtue of being a regicide. Having been chosen by his colleagues, as the man best acquainted with and accustomed to the world, to represent the government with society, – he sustained this position by easy manners and a sort of court with which he contrived to surround himself; a court containing all the fragments of the old society that were yet to be found mingled with affairs.

In the south of Europe, and in the East, many such adventurers have risen to great fortunes and retained them. In the north, and (strange to say) especially among the changing and brilliant people of France, more solid qualities, and a more stern and equable character, seem essentially necessary for command. Richelieu, Mazarin, Louis XI., Louis XIV., even Robespierre, differing in everything else, were all remarkable for a kind of resolute, every-day energy, for a spirit of order and system which the voluptuary of the Luxembourg wanted. His drawing-room, however, was a theatre where the accomplished gentleman of former times was still able to shine, and his prejudices, though he affected democratic principles in order to shield himself from the charge of being born an aristocrat, were all in favour of the ex-noble. To Barras, therefore, M. de Talleyrand attached himself.

IX

The society of Paris was never more "*piquante*," if I may borrow an expression from the language of the country of which I am speaking, than at this moment. Nobody was rich. Pomp and ceremony were banished; few private houses were open: a great desire for amusement existed; there were no pretensions to rank, for who would have ventured to boast of his birth? There was no drawing into sets or *cliques*, for such would still have been considered as conspiracies. People lived together in public fêtes, in public gardens, at theatres, at subscription-balls, like those of Marbeuf, where the grocer's wife and the monseigneur's danced in the same quadrille; each being simply qualified by the title of "*citoyenne*." The only real distinction was that of manners. An active, artful, popular man of the world, amidst such a confused assemblage of all orders, bent on being amused, had full play for his social and political qualities. But this was not all; with the taste for gaiety had also returned the taste for letters. Here, again, M. de Talleyrand found means to excite attention. I have said that, during his absence from France he had been elected a member of the National Institute, which owed its origin,

as I have noticed, to the propositions he had laid before the National Assembly just previous to its dissolution. He had also been chosen its secretary; and it was in this capacity that he now addressed to the moral and scientific class, to which he belonged, two memoirs: the one on the commercial relations between England and the United States, and the other on colonies generally. There are few writings of this kind that contain so many just ideas in so small a compass. In the first, the author gives a general description of the state of American society, the calm character, the various and peculiar habits, the Saxon laws, and religious feelings of that rising community. He then shows, what was at that time little understood, that the mother country had gained more than she had lost by the separation; and that the wants of Americans connected them with English interests, while their language, education, history, and laws, gave them feelings, which, if properly cultivated, would be – English.

The memoir on colonisation, however, is even superior to the preceding one; it is in this memoir on colonisation that M. de Talleyrand points out – for he even then perceived what has since been gradually taking place – the impossibility of long continuing slave labour or of maintaining those colonies which required it. He foresaw that such colonies existed in the face of sentiments which must, whether rightly or wrongly, in a few years sweep them away. He looked out for other settlements to supply their place; and Egypt and the African coast are the spots to which, with a singular prescience, he directed the attention of his country; whose inhabitants he describes, from their sense of fatigue, from their desire of excitement, and in many instances, from their disappointment and discontent, to be peculiarly in want of new regions of rest, of enterprise, and of change.

"The art of putting the right men in the right places" (the phrase is not, I may observe *en passant*, of to-day's invention), he observes profoundly, "is perhaps the first in the science of government; but," he adds, "the art of finding a satisfactory position for the discontented is the most difficult.

"To present distant scenes to their imaginations, views agreeable to their thoughts and desires, is," he says, "I think, one of the solutions of this social problem."[35]

In three weeks after the reading of this memoir, M. de Talleyrand accepted the office of minister of foreign affairs.

X

The immediate cause of his being named to replace Charles Delacroix in this post, used to be thus related by himself: – "I had gone to dine at a friend's on the banks of the Seine, with Madame de Staël, Barras, and a small party which frequently met. A young friend of Barras, who was with us, went out to bathe before dinner, and was drowned. The director, tenderly attached to him, was in the greatest affliction. I consoled him (I was used to that sort of thing in early life), and accompanied him in his carriage back to Paris. The ministry of foreign affairs immediately after this became vacant; Barras knew I wanted it, and through his interest I procured it."

But this was not the sole cause of his selection. The state of affairs was at this time critical; the reaction, produced by the horrors of the democrats, became stronger and stronger under a government of indulgence.

In proportion as the ordinary relations of society recommenced, the feeling against those who had disturbed and for a time destroyed them, became more and more bitter. At last the hatred of the Robespierreans verged towards an inclination for the Royalists; and Pichegru, the president of the Assembly of the Five Hundred, and a general at that time in great repute, was already in correspondence with Louis XVIII.

[35] "L'art de mettre des hommes à leur place est le premier de la science du gouvernement; mais celui de trouver la place des mécontents est à coup sûr le plus difficile; et présenter à leur imagination des lointains, des perspectives où puissent se prendre leurs pensées et leurs désirs, est, je crois, une des solutions de cette difficulté sociale."

The Directory itself was divided. Carnot, an impracticable man of genius and a violent Republican, sided with the opposition from personal dislike to his colleagues and from a belief that any new convulsion would end by the triumph of his own principles. He carried with him Barthélemy, the successor to Letourneur, who had lost his place in the Directory by the ballot, which was periodically to eliminate it. Rewbell and Laréveillère-Lepaux ranged themselves with Barras, who, satisfied with his position, and having to keep it against the two extreme parties, was glad to get into the ministry, as attached to him, a man of well-known ability and resolution.

Besides, the negotiation with Great Britain at Lille, which not unnaturally followed the defeat of all her continental allies, suggested the appointment of a more distinguished diplomatist than M. Delacroix, who presided at that time over the department to which M. de Talleyrand was appointed.

The new minister soon justified the choice that had been made of him. His eye took in at once the situation in which Barras found himself, – a situation that singularly resembled one in our own times. The majority of the executive was on one side, and the majority of the legislative bodies on the other.

The question was agitated by the Assembly as to whether it should not take the first step, and, without regard for the constitution, obtain possession by any means of the executive power. General Pichegru hesitated, as did General Changarnier after him.

Talleyrand advised Barras not to hesitate. He did not; and, taking the command of the troops in virtue of his office, seized the chief men amongst his opponents, to whatever party they belonged. Carnot, Barthélemy, and Pichegru were amongst the number, and, though Carnot escaped by flight, M. de Talleyrand equally got rid of an enemy, and the ardent Republicans lost a leader.

XI

The worst effect of this *coup-d'état* was the interruption of the negotiations at Lille, and of the arrangements which Monsieur Maret was on the point of concluding, which Talleyrand had himself favoured, but which were impossible to a government that had now to seek popularity as a protection to usurpation.

The idea of peace with England being thus abandoned, M. de Talleyrand addressed a circular to his agents, which, considering the time at which it was written and the position which its writer held at that moment, is a model of tact and ability.

He describes England as the sole enemy of France. He dates her power and prestige from the times of Cromwell and the spirit and energy which liberty inspires. He bases the power and prestige which France ought then to hold on that same liberty, and invokes the victories which she had just gained. He describes in a way that suited his purpose the manner in which Great Britain had acquired her influence, and accuses her of having abused it.

He shows to his agents the immense importance of an intelligent diplomacy. He warns them against shocking the habits and ideas of the nations to which they are sent; he tells them to be active without being agitators. He instils into them the conviction of the greatness of France and the necessity of making that greatness acknowledged and sympathised with.

He counsels them to avoid little tricks, and to evince that confidence in the strength and continuance of the Republic, which would inspire such confidence in others.

He points out how all the misfortunes and changes in the government of France had been brought about by the feeble and apathetic position which she had held abroad during the reign of the later princes of the House of Bourbon; and, finally, he assures them of his support, and adds that he appreciates highly the services which their talents may render to their country.

It is in this manner that great ministers form able agents.

In the meantime the treaty of Campo Formio had established peace in Italy and Germany on conditions advantageous to France, though, by the cession of Venice to Austria, she abdicated the cause for which she had hitherto pretended to fight.

Bonaparte, to whom this peace was due, now visited Paris, and saw much of M. de Talleyrand, who courted him with assiduity, as if foreseeing his approaching destiny. But the time for a closer alliance was not yet arrived: Napoleon, indeed, was not himself prepared for the serious meditation of the design which he subsequently executed. Vague ideas of conquest and greatness floated before his eyes, and the gigantic empires that courage and genius have frequently founded in the East, were probably more familiar with his thoughts than any tyranny to be established in his own country (May, 1798). He set out for Egypt, then, where he thought of realising his splendid dreams, and where the Directory, following a traditional policy not yet abandoned, thought of striking a desperate blow against the ancient enemy and rival with whom alone she had now to maintain a conflict. With him seemed to depart the fortunes of his country. A new European coalition broke out with the murder of the French plenipotentiaries at Rastadt, and divisions of all kinds manifested themselves in France. The victories of the allies on the Upper Rhine and in Italy increased these divisions, and added to the strength of the democratic party, to which the overthrow of Pichegru and his associates had already – contrary to the intention of Barras, who, as I have said, had wished to maintain a middle course – given an increased influence. The loss of Rewbell, whose energy the Democrats dreaded, and whose seat in the Directory became legitimately vacant, gave strength to their desires, the more especially as Sieyès, who replaced Rewbell, entered the executive with his usual mania of propounding some new constitution.

M. de Talleyrand, attacked as a noble and an *émigré*, resigned his department, and published a defence of his conduct, which is remarkable, and of which I venture to give, in an abbreviated and free translation, some of the most salient points: —

"… I am accused of creating the league of kings against our Republic! I! If I have been known for one thing more than another, it has been for my constant desire for an honourable peace; the great result that will alone give solidity to our institutions! So it is I, then, who seek to augment our enemies, exasperate our friends, break our treaties, indispose neutrals, and menace other states with principles they do not wish to accept – and who make this accusation? They who are always stirring up discord, invoking the horrors of war; they, whose aim it is to produce revolutions throughout the world, who address to every power by turn the most injurious, absurd, and impolitic reproaches; who employ the press to circulate the assertion that monarchies and republics are natural enemies; and who left to me the task of calming the governments whom they kept in a state of constant disquietude and alarm.

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"It is true that Austria, after the treaty of Campo Formio, though that treaty was favourable to her, began new combinations and alliances against us – and that England and Russia engaged her in their designs. If I had been ignorant of their intrigues or hostile preparations, if I had not informed the government of them, then, indeed, I might justly be accused. But, not only do I defy any one to show that I ever neglected my duty for a single day, it so happens that five months before the entry of the Russians into Italy, *I procured a copy of the combined plans of Russia and Austria*, and delivered them to General Joubert, who has frequently declared that they were of the utmost utility in his operations.

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"But I am a Constitutionalist of 1791 (a title I glory in), and, consequently, I offer no guarantee to the Republic.

"If it were not true that a patriot of 1789, who has not hesitated to take his oath to the Republic, and frequently repeated it, has no favour to expect from a French government that is not republican; – it is certain either that the Republic will establish itself, or that it will perish in a general confusion, or that it will be again submitted to a royalty furious and revengeful. From the Confusionists and the Royalists it appears to me that I have little to expect. Is this no guarantee?

"But – I am an *émigré*! an *émigré*! When the first republican authority – the National Convention – declared with unanimity, at the period of its greatest independence and its greatest force, that my name should be effaced from the list of *émigrés*, I was sent to London on the 7th of September, 1792, by the executive government. My passport, delivered to me by the provisional council, is signed by its six members, Lebrun, Servan, Danton, Clavière, Roland, Monge. It was in these terms:

"'Laissez passer Ch. Maurice Talleyrand, allant à Londres *par nos ordres*.'

[M. de Talleyrand here repeats what was said by Chénier.]

"Thus I was authorised to quit France, and to remain out of it until the orders I received were revoked, which they never were. But not wishing to prolong my absence, I asked, the instant that the Convention recovered the liberty which had been for a time suppressed, to return to my native land, or to be judged if I had committed any offence that merited exile. My request was granted. I left France then by orders which I received from the confidence of the French government. I re-entered it directly it was possible for me to do so with the consent of the French government. What trace is there here of emigration?

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"Well, then, it was I 'who made Malmesbury, who had been sent about his business by Charles Delacroix, return – not, it is true, to Paris, but – to Lille, the centre of our military Boulevards.'

"What is the truth? On the 13th Prairial, year V., Lord Grenville proposed to enter into negotiation; on the 16th the proposal was accepted; on the 25th Charles Delacroix sent passports to England, and fixed on Lille as the place of negotiation.

"On the 29th Lord Grenville accepts Lille as the place of negotiation, and announces the choice of Lord Malmesbury as the English negotiator. On the 2nd Messidor, the Directory sanctions this arrangement. On the 28th the conferences commence at Lille, and it was not till the 28th I was named minister.

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"I am attacked for all the acts of the ex-Directors. My accusers know that, if my opinion differed from theirs, I should not have charged them with errors when they were in place, and still less should I do so now, when they are stripped of power, and that all I desire to remember is their kindness and confidence.

"It is for this reason that in my report to the legislative body I only glanced rapidly over the fact that all that was to be decided relative to Italy and Switzerland, during my ministry, was decided without my knowledge and concurrence. I could have added that, to the changes operated in the Cisalpine Republic, I was entirely a stranger; that, when the citizen Rivaud was sent to that Republic as ambassador, I was asked for letters of credence in blank, and that I only learnt of his mission after it had been in activity. But my enemies do not pause here.

"Ignorance and hatred seem to dispute as to which should accumulate the most falsehoods and absurdities against my reputation.

"I am reproached for not having invaded Hanover: but if I had advocated carrying the war into that country in spite of the neutral line which protects it, how much more just and more violent would have been the attacks on me for having violated that neutrality, and thereby roused Prussia against us!

"Then it is said I should have assailed Portugal! And if I had done so and been opposed by Spain, and thus lost an alliance so useful to us, what reproaches should I not have encountered!

"But I did not sufficiently encourage letters of marque against England. Five hundred and forty-five privateers fell into the hands of the English, from the commencement of the war till the year VI. of the Republic. The number of prisoners in England amounts to thirty-five thousand; these cost fifteen millions to support on an enemy's territory, and it is principally owing to letters of marque that we owe this result.

"I will say no more; but surely I have said enough to inspire the most discouraging reflections as to that moral disorganization – as to that aberration of mind – as to that overthrow of all reasonable ideas – as to that want of good faith, of the love of truth, of justice, of esteem for oneself and others – which are the distinguishing characteristics of those publications which it is difficult to leave unanswered, and humiliating to reply to."[36]

We find, from the above, that the ex-minister did not scruple to make his defence an attack, and to treat with sarcasm and disdain the party by which he had been ejected; but at the same time that he denounces the follies of the over-zealous Republicans, he declares himself unequivocally for a republic: and justifying what he had done, ridiculing what he had been condemned for not doing, he throws with some address the blame of much that had been done against his opinion on those Directors still in power.

What he says as to the negotiations at Lille shows sufficiently the difficulties, after the 18th of Fructidor, of any peace with England; and a passage that I have quoted, and to which I had previously alluded, bears out what had been said by Chénier as to the famous passport.

In these "Eclaircissements," however, the ex-minister aimed more at putting himself in a good position for future events, than at referring to past ones.

He would hardly, indeed, have fixed his signature to so bold a publication if his enemies had been firm in their places: but already the Directory was tottering to its fall.

XII

The great evil of any constitution, formed for a particular time and not the result of continual adaptation to the wants of various epochs, is that it is altogether of one character and is almost immediately out of date. The constitution of the Directory, framed after a period of great popular violence and individual despotism, was framed upon the principle of so nicely checking every action in the State, that there should be no honest means for any individual gaining great power or distinction. But when the influence of individuals in a government is over-zealously kept down, the influence of government collapses, and becomes unequal to restrain the agitation of a society more ardent and ambitious than itself.

Thus, during four years, the Constitution of the year III. was preserved in name by a series of actual infringements of it. Now, the Directory checked the councils by transporting the opposition; now, the opposition put down the Directory by compelling an unpopular director to resign his office; and now again, the absence of all laws against the license of the press was compensated for by declaring hostile journalists enemies of the State, and punishing a clever article as an insurrection.

Nor was this all: where civil ability can create no great career a civilian can excite no great enthusiasm. The persons in civil employment had their prestige limited by the same contrivances that limited their power; the nation was fatigued with talkers, for talking had no result: a general alone could strike its imagination, for a general alone was in the situation to do anything remarkable. Each party saw this. The patriots or democrats, represented in the Directory by Laréveillère and Gohier (who had become a Director instead of Treillard); Barras, of no particular opinion, who might be

[36] (XII.) Eclaircissements donnés par le citoyen Talleyrand à ses concitoyens.

said to represent those generally who were intriguing for place; and Sieyès, the most capable of the executive, at the head of a moderate section, still for maintaining the Republic and establishing order, though under some new form. Sieyès had with him a majority in the Council of Ancients, a powerful minority in the Council of the Five Hundred, and some of the most eminent and capable men in France, amongst whom was M. de Talleyrand.

He sought then a General like the rest, but the choice was not so easy to make. Hoche was no more; Joubert had just perished; Moreau was irresolute; Massena, though crowned by the victory of Zurich, too much of the mere soldier; Augereau, a Jacobin; Bernadotte, unreliable. At this moment (on the 9th October, 1799), Bonaparte landed from Egypt. He broke the quarantine laws, he had deserted his army, but the country felt that he was wanted; and through his progress to Paris, as well as on his arrival there, he was hailed by acclamations.

His object at this time, if he had any distinct one, was the Directory, for which, however, he wanted a dispensation as to age. But he found that the majority of the Directory would not hear of this dispensation. Something else was to be tried, and that something else could only be combined with Barras or Sieyès. Now Barras, Bonaparte hated: for Barras had been his protector, without having been his friend. In regard to Sieyès, M. Thiers has said, not untruly, that two superior Frenchmen, until they have had the opportunity of flattering one another, are natural enemies. Moreover, Bonaparte and Sieyès had met at Gohier's without exchanging a syllable, and had separated, disliking each other more than ever. M. de Talleyrand undertook to reconcile these two men, whose rivalry had to be conquered by their interests, – and he succeeded. But, with Sieyès, a total subversion of the existing state of things was a matter of course, because the only ambition he ever fostered was that of inventing institutions, which he did with a rare intelligence as to the combination of ideas, forgetting that societies have something in them besides ideas.

A revolution therefore was decided upon; it was to be brought about by the Ancients, of whom Sieyès was sure, and who were to declare that the chambers were in danger at Paris, and should be assembled at St. Cloud; the safety of these assemblies was then to be confided to the guardianship of Bonaparte; and the dissolution of the Directory by the resignation of a majority of its members was to follow. After this, it was supposed that the majority of the Five Hundred, overawed by a large military force, opposed by the other branch of the Legislature, and having no government to support it, would, in some way or other, be overcome. The first two measures accordingly were taken on the 18th Brumaire, but the third remained. Sieyès and Ducos, who acted together and who resigned, were balanced by Gohier and Moulins, who would not give in their resignation; while Barras had the casting vote; and it was M. de Talleyrand again, who, in conjunction with Admiral Bruix, was charged with the task of coaxing this *once* important man into accepting insignificance and retreat. In this task he succeeded, and the vanquished director, conquered as much, perhaps, by his own indolence, as by his politic friend's arguments, stepped out of the bath, reposing in which his two visitors had found him, into the carriage which bore him from the Luxembourg, and thus the Directory being no longer in existence, a charge of grenadiers in the Orangery of St. Cloud settled the affair on the day following.

XIII

In glancing over the narrative of these events, we shall see that, if a similar result could have been otherwise arrived at (which is doubtful), it certainly could not have been arrived at in the same peaceful and easy way, but for the assistance of M. de Talleyrand. The legal part of the recent change was effected by Sieyès, whom he had united with Bonaparte; and accomplished through Barras, whose abdication he also procured. The time for rewarding these services was come, and when Napoleon became first consul, M. de Talleyrand was made minister of foreign affairs.

In following him through the period which intervened between the 10th of August, 1792, and the 18th Brumaire, we find him a fugitive to England under doubtful auspices, an exile in America

dabbling in politics, projecting commercial adventures, and, above all, waiting on events which proved fortunate to him.

Having quitted France as the partisan of a constitutional monarchy, he returns to it when the feverish passions and opinions which had so long convulsed it were settled down under a republic – too strong to be overturned by Royalists – too weak to promise a long existence.

He takes office under the government which he finds, a government that, compared with its immediate predecessors, offered in a remarkable manner the security of property and life.

He sides, amidst the conflicts which still continue, with those who are for a middle course, between bringing back the Bourbons with all their prejudices, or re-establishing the Robespierreans with all their horrors. In these political struggles he exhibits moderation and resolution: in the department which he fills, he shows tact and capacity. His two memoirs, read before the Institute, are remarkable for the elegance of their style and the comprehensiveness of their views.[37] Defending himself against the two parties who assailed him – the one for being too much, the other for being too little, of a republican – he uses language which is at once bold, dignified, and moderate, and the only question that can arise is as to whether it was sincere.

Finally, he throws a government – which is at once feeble, profligate, divided, and conscious of its own incapacity, – into the hands of a man of great genius, by whom he expected to be rewarded, and who, upon the whole, seemed the one most capable of steadying the course, promoting the prosperity, and elevating the destiny of his country.

[37] See *Appendix*.

Part IV
FIRST CONSULATE

Talleyrand supports the extension of the First Consul's power, based on a principle of toleration and oblivion of the past. – Napoleon attempts peace with England; fails. – Battle of Marengo. – Treaty of Lunéville and peace of Amiens. – Society at Paris during the peace. – Rupture. – M. de Talleyrand supports Consulate for life, Legion of Honour, and Concordat. – Gets permission from the Pope to wear the secular costume and to administer civil affairs. – Marries. – Execution of Duc d'Enghien. – New coalition. – Battle of Austerlitz. – Treaty of Presburg. – Fox comes into power; attempts a peace unsuccessfully. – Prussia declares against France, and is vanquished at Jena. – Peace of Tilsit. – M. de Talleyrand resigns Ministry of Foreign Affairs. – Differences about policy in Spain. – Talleyrand and Fouché now at the head of a quiet opposition. – Russian campaign; idea of employing M. de Talleyrand. – Napoleon's defeats commence. – Offers M. de Talleyrand the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the battle of Leipsic, but on unacceptable conditions. – In the continued series of disasters that ensue, Talleyrand always advises peace. – Tries to persuade Marie-Louise not to quit Paris. – Doubtful then between a regency with her and the Bourbons. – When, however, her departure suspends the constituted authority, and the Emperor of Russia takes up his residence at the Hôtel Talleyrand, and asks M. de Talleyrand what government should be established, he says that of the Bourbons. – Efforts to obtain a Constitution with the Restoration. – Napoleon arrives at Fontainebleau. – Negotiates, but finally abandons the French throne, and accepts the island of Elba, under the title of Emperor, as a retreat.

I

One of M. de Talleyrand's striking phrases (a phrase I have already quoted) was that the great Revolution "*avait désossé la France*" – "had disboned France!" There had ceased, in fact, to be any great principles in that country, holding affairs together, and keeping them in form and order. He said, then, "What principles cannot do, a man must. When society cannot create a government, a government must create society." It was with this idea that he was willing to centre in Napoleon all the power which that wonderful man's commanding genius required. But he wanted, in return, two things: one, that he should himself profit by the power he aided in establishing; the other, that that power should be exercised, on the whole, for the benefit of the French nation. Relying, for the moment, on the fulfilment of these conditions, he delivered himself up to a dictatorship which should quietly and gradually absorb all the used-up opinions and institutions.

Sieyès, who, with a more profound, had a less sagacious intellect, imagined that after he, a man of letters, had handed over the State to a daring, unscrupulous man of the world, he could govern that man. But M. de Talleyrand rather despised and underrated Sieyès, whom he looked on as a tailor who was always making coats that never fitted – a skilful combiner of theories, but without any tact as to their application; and when some one, *à propos* of the new constitution, which Sieyès had undertaken to frame, said, "Après tout ce Sieyès a un esprit *bien profond*," he replied, "Profond! Hem! Vous voulez dire peut-être *creux*."[38]

[38] "After all that Sieyès has a very profound intellect." "Profound! Hem! You mean perhaps —*hollow*."

Bonaparte's conduct justified this witticism; for when the first project of the constitution alluded to was presented to him, he treated it with ridicule, in the well-known phrase: "A man must have little honour or intellect who would consent to be a pig, put up in a stye to fatten on so many millions a year."

The hero of the 18th Brumaire was not, in truth, a man who would accept the robes without the reality of power; and having taken out of the plan proposed for his acceptance what suited his views, and discarded the rest, he endowed himself with as much authority as he thought would be tolerated; for though France was wearied with perpetual changes and convulsions, she was not at that time prepared to end them by a new sovereignty.

One of the causes, indeed, which facilitated Napoleon's early steps towards the great object of his ambition, was the general incredulity as to the possibility of his attaining it.

M. de Talleyrand himself did not, in all probability, imagine that he was making a military empire, when he was aiming at concentrating authority in the hands of the chief of the Republic; but he thought that the first care was to steady a community which had so long lost its balance; and on one occasion, shortly after the formation of the new government, and when the part which the first consul was to play was not yet altogether decided, he is said by a contemporary[39] to have held, at a private interview with the first consul, the following language:[40]—

"Citizen consul, you have entrusted to me the ministry of foreign affairs, and I will justify your confidence; but I think I must declare to you that henceforth I will communicate with you alone. This is no vain presumption on my part. I say that, in the interest of France – in order that it may be well governed – in order that there may be unity of action in its conduct – you must be the first consul; and the first consul must have in his hands all the political part of the government; *i. e.*, the ministry of the interior and of the police, for internal affairs; and my ministry for foreign; and also the two great ministries of execution, the war and the marine. It would be proper that these five departments should communicate with you alone. The administrations of justice and finance are, no doubt, connected with the policy of the State by many ties, but these ties are less inseparable from that policy than the departments I have mentioned. If you will allow me to say so, then, general, I would add that it would be convenient to give to the second consul, a very clever jurisconsult, the department of justice; and to the third consul, also very able as a financier, the direction of the finances. These matters will occupy and amuse them. And you, general, having at your disposal all the mainsprings of government, will be able to give it that fitting direction for arriving at the noble aim which you have in view – the regeneration of France."

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[39] Bourrienne.

[40] "Quand Roger Ducos et Sieyès portaient le titre de consuls, les trois membres de la commission consulaire étaient égaux, si non de fait, du moins en droit. Cambacérès et Lebrun les ayant remplacés, M. de Talleyrand, appelé dans le même moment à succéder à M. Reinhard au ministère des relations extérieures, fut reçu en audience particulière dans le cabinet du premier consul.'"Citoyen Consul,' lui dit-il, 'vous m'avez confié le ministère des relations extérieures, et je justifierai votre confiance; mais je dois vous déclarer dès à présent que je ne veux travailler qu'avec vous. Il n'y a point là de vaine fierté de ma part; je vous parle seulement dans l'intérêt de la France. Pour qu'elle soit bien gouvernée, pour qu'il y ait unité d'action, il faut que vous soyez le premier consul, et que le premier consul ait dans sa main tout ce qui tient directement à la politique, c'est-à-dire les ministères de l'intérieur et de la police, pour les affaires du dehors; ensuite les deux grands moyens d'exécution, la guerre et la marine. Il serait donc de toute convenance que les ministres de ces cinq départements travaillassent avec vous seul. L'administration de la justice et le bon ordre dans les finances tiennent sans doute à la politique par une foule de liens: mais ces liens sont moins sacrés. Si vous me permettez de le dire, général, j'ajouterai qu'il conviendrait de donner au deuxième consul, très-habile jurisconsulte, la haute main sur la justice, et au troisième consul, également bien versé dans la connaissance des lois financières, la haute main sur les finances. Cela les occupera, les amusera; et vous, général, ayant à votre disposition les parties vitales du gouvernement, vous arriverez au noble but que vous vous proposez – la régénération de la France.'"'Qui ne reconnaît là le premier germe de l'archichancellerie et de l'architrésorerie de l'empire?" Bourrienne, *Mémoires*, vol. iii., pp. 324, 325.

II

The minister of foreign affairs, in advising a willing listener thus to take possession of all important affairs, merely echoed, it must be allowed, a general sentiment; for all the different parties then in presence saw the new dictator through glasses coloured by their own particular illusions. The Royalists imagined that General Bonaparte would turn out a General Monk; the moderate Republicans, a General Washington! M. de Talleyrand knew that Bonaparte was neither a Monk nor a Washington; and that he would neither hand over the power he had acquired to the exiled dynasty, nor lay it down at the feet of the French people. He was aware, on the contrary, that he would keep it as long as he could keep it; and he wished him to keep it with a system which should have at its head the men of the Revolution, without excluding men of the ancient *régime* who would accept the principles that the Revolution had founded. This was precisely, at that moment, the view of Napoleon himself; and the appointment of Fouché, a regicide, as minister of police, and the permission for the Royalist *émigrés* and the proscribed priests to return to France, gave the exact expression of the policy that was thenceforth to be pursued.

But none knew better than the first consul that it was necessary, having gained power by war, to show that he wished to consolidate it by peace. He addressed, therefore, his famous letter to George III.,[41] on the effect of which he counted little, and his minister of foreign affairs less. But it was always something in the eyes of his nation to have evinced his own inclination for an interval of repose, and to have placed himself on a level with kings when he spoke to them as the popular chief of the French people.

The refusal of England to treat was the signal of a new coalition, and the renewal of a general war; at the commencement of which Bonaparte, by a stroke of genius, defeated the Austrians in Italy when they were marching as they conceived without opposition into France.

But although the hopes of the cabinet of Vienna were struck down at the battle of Marengo, it did not yet submit to despair, even when the Emperor Paul, flattered by the attentions of the first consul (who had returned him his prisoners newly clothed), had withdrawn from the coalition. The policy of France, under these circumstances, was to create divisions amongst the remaining allies (Austria and England) by opening negotiations with each. This was tried by M. de Talleyrand with the cabinet of Vienna, through the means of the Comte St. Julien, who (sent to settle some particulars relative to the convention which took place after the Italian war) actually signed a treaty which his government disowned; and with that of St. James, through the means of an agent employed in the exchange of prisoners, but whose attempts as a negotiator also failed. The success of Moreau, in Germany, however, at last obtained the treaty of Lunéville; and shortly afterwards M. Otto concluded in London the preliminaries of a similar treaty, which was received with equal joy by the French and English nations.

The skill with which these affairs were conducted was generally acknowledged; but M. de Talleyrand had nevertheless to undergo the mortification of seeing Joseph Bonaparte named the negotiator with Lord Cornwallis instead of himself. He accepted, however, this arrangement with a good grace, for he had this great advantage over most men, – his vanity submitted itself easily to his interest or his ambition; and seeing the impolicy of a rivalry with the first consul's eldest brother, he saw also that, having already obtained the signature of the preliminaries of a treaty, he should have with the public all the merits of that treaty if it took place, and Joseph Bonaparte all the blame, if any failure in the further negotiations occurred.

In the meantime, the seas were opened at once to France, and the English government, having made this immediate concession, was almost bound to give way in any subsequent discussions; for

[41] See *Napoleon's Letter to King George III. before Marengo.*

to have yielded what France most desired in order to obtain peace, and then not to have obtained it, would have been ridiculous. Thus, a definitive treaty was shortly afterwards signed at Amiens, and Paris re-opened its gates to the excited curiosity of the English traveller.

III

During this period M. de Talleyrand's house became necessarily one of the great resorts of foreign visitors. He lived in the Hôtel Galifet, then the official residence of the minister of foreign affairs, a large hotel in the Rue St. Dominique (Faubourg St. Germain), which had been built by a rich colonist of St. Domingo, who gave no other order to his architect than to erect an hotel with ninety-nine columns – a monument of the skill of the builder, and of the singularity of the proprietor – which yet remains.

The principal *habitués* of the ministry were M. de Montrond, Duc de Laval, M. de Saint-Foix, General Duroc, Colonel Beauharnais, afterwards Prince Eugène, Fox, Erskine, &c., &c.

Some few yet remember the easy nonchalance with which, reclining on his sofa by the side of the fire, the minister of foreign affairs welcomed those whom he wished to make at home, the extreme and formal civility which marked his reception of his colleagues and the senators with whom he was not intimate, and the careless and pleasing familiarity that he used towards the favourite officers of the first consul, and the ladies and diplomatists to whom he was partial.

The enmity which for the last few years had been so violent between the French and English people was beginning to subside amidst their intercourse; but, unhappily for them and for the world, the peace, or rather truce, which they had concluded could only be maintained by acknowledging a galling inferiority to the French ruler, who, it was evident, regarded our retirement from the contest we had long waged without dishonour as a means for relieving St. Domingo, confirming his dominion over Italy, and invading Switzerland, circumstances which rendered it justifiable for England to retain Malta, even though she had foolishly and inconsiderately engaged to resign it.

I need hardly observe that the conduct of Napoleon throughout the whole of this affair was overbearing; but that of his minister of foreign affairs was the reverse; and I should add that that minister had the credit of having obtained, just as Lord Whitworth was departing, the first consul's permission to propose an arrangement which would have left us Malta for such a compensation as, under all the circumstances, might perhaps have been accepted. But this compromise being haughtily rejected, war somewhat abruptly recommenced.

The respite, however, thus secured, had served Napoleon's purposes, and enabled him, by the popularity it brought, to lay the first stones of the Empire, – in the Legion of Honour, out of which grew the nobility of the Empire; – in the consulship for life, which was a step towards the hereditary rank he soon assumed; and in the Concordat, which preluded his coronation by the Pope.

It is not to be presumed that these great innovations on the principles which had so long been dominant took place without a struggle. All the ardent republicans combated them as a matter of course, designating the tyrant who proposed them as a second Cæsar, who evoked the patriotism of a second Brutus. But a more serious party also attacked them in the legislative bodies, nor was it without an illegal act of authority that this party was vanquished.

The measures in question were not in fact popular, and the Concordat at one time seemed not unlikely to provoke an insurrection in the army.

M. de Talleyrand, nevertheless, supported these measures warmly; and, with the aid of Cambacérès, softened and conciliated many of their opponents.

"We have," he constantly repeated, "to consolidate a government and reorganize a society. Governments are only consolidated by a continued policy, and it is not only necessary that this policy should be continued, – people should have the conviction that it will be so.

"I look upon the consulship for life as the only means of inspiring this conviction."

So again, he said, with respect to the Legion of Honour and the Concordat, "In reorganizing any human society, you must give it those elements which you find in every human society.

"Where did you ever see one flourish without honours or religion? The present age has created a great many new things, but it has not created a new mankind; and if you mean to legislate practically for men, you must treat men as what they always have been and always are."

For the Concordat he had a peculiar reason to plead; no one gained so much by it: for he now legitimately entered into civil life on the authority of his spiritual master, and by a brief which I here cite: —

> "*To our very dear son, Charles Maurice Talleyrand.*[42]
>
> "We were touched with joy at learning your ardent desire to be reconciled with us and the Catholic Church: loosening then on your account the bowels of our fatherly charity, we discharge you by the plenitude of our power from the effect of all excommunications. We impose on you, as the consequence of your reconciliation with us and the Church, the distribution of alms, more especially for the poor of the church of Autun, which you formerly governed: we grant you, moreover, the liberty to wear the secular costume and to administer all civil affairs, whether in the office you now fill, or in others to which your government may call you."
>
> This brief was taken by M. de Talleyrand as a permission to become a layman, and even to take a wife. The lady he married, born in the East Indies, divorced from a M. Grand, and mentioned, in connection with a scandalous story, in the life of Sir Philip Francis, was as remarkable for being a beauty as for not being a wit. Every one has heard the story (whether true or invented) of her asking Sir George Robinson after his man "Friday." But M. de Talleyrand vindicated his choice, saying, "A clever wife often compromises her husband; a stupid one only compromises herself."

IV

It was shortly after the renewal of hostilities that the event occurred which has given rise to the most controversy concerning Napoleon, and to the bitterest attacks upon M. de Talleyrand. I speak of the execution of the Duc d'Enghien. Many details attending this transaction are still in dispute; but the broad outline of it is as follows: —

The pure Republicans (as they were then called) had, on the one hand, at this period become desperate; on the other hand, the latitude that had for a time been allowed to the Royalists, had given that party courage. The renewal of an European war increased this courage. The power and prestige of the marvellous person at the head of the consular government had made both parties consider that nothing was possible to them as long as he lived.

A variety of attempts had consequently been made against his life. The popular belief – that of Bonaparte himself – was that these attempts proceeded mainly from the *émigrés*, aided by the money of England, a belief which the foolish correspondence of the British minister at Munich, Mr. Drake, with a pretended *émigré*– in fact, however, an agent of the French government (Mahée), – might unfortunately have encouraged.

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[42] "*A notre Très-cher Fils, Charles Maurice Talleyrand.*"Nous avons été touché de joie quand nous avons appris l'ardent désir que vous avez de vous réconcilier avec nous et avec l'Eglise catholique. Dilatant donc à votre égard les entrailles de notre charité paternelle, nous vous dégageons par la plénitude de notre puissance du lien de toutes les excommunications. Nous vous imposons par suite de votre reconciliation avec nous et avec l'Eglise, des distributions d'aumônes pour le soulagement surtout des pauvres de l'église d'Autun que vous avez gouvernée. Nous vous accordons le pouvoir de porter l'habit séculier, et de gérer toutes les affaires civiles, soit qu'il vous plaise de demeurer dans la charge que vous exercez maintenant, soit que vous passiez à d'autres auxquelles votre gouvernement pourrait vous appeler."

George Cadoudal, the daring leader of the Chouans, who had already been implicated in plots of this kind, was known to be in Paris and engaged in some new enterprise, with which Pichegru, certainly – Moreau, apparently – was connected. But in the reports of the police it was also stated that the conspirators awaited the arrival at Paris of a prince of the house of Bourbon.

The Duc d'Enghien, then residing at Ettenheim, in the Duchy of Baden, seemed the most likely of the Bourbon princes to be the one alluded to: and spies were sent to watch his movements.

The reports of such agents are rarely correct in the really important particulars. But they were particularly unfortunate in this instance, for they mistook, owing to the German pronunciation, a Marquis de Thumery, staying with the Bourbon Prince, for Dumouriez: and the presence of that general on the Rhenan frontier, and with a Condé, strongly corroborated all other suspicions.

A council was summoned, composed of the three consuls, – Bonaparte, Cambacérès, Lebrun, – the minister of justice and police, Régnier, – and Talleyrand, minister of foreign affairs.[43]

At this council (10th March 1804) it was discussed whether it would not be advisable to seize the Duc d'Enghien, though out of France, and bring him to Paris; and the result was the immediate expedition of a small force, under Colonel Caulaincourt, which seized the prince on the Baden territory (15th March); M. de Talleyrand, in a letter to the Grand Duke, explaining and justifying the outrage. Having been kept two days at Strasburg, the royal victim was sent from that city, on the 18th, in a post chariot, arrived on the 20th at the gates of Paris at eleven in the morning; was kept there till four in the afternoon; was then conducted by the boulevards to Vincennes, which he reached at nine o'clock in the evening; and was shot at six o'clock on the following morning, having been condemned by a military commission – composed of a general of brigade (General Hullin), six colonels, and two captains – according to a decree of the governor of Paris (Murat) of that day (20th March), which decree (dictated by Napoleon) ordered the unfortunate captive to be tried on the charge of having borne arms against the Republic: of having been and being in the pay of England, and of having been engaged in plots, conducted by the English in and out of France, against the French government. The concluding order was, that, if found guilty, he should be at once executed.

The whole of this proceeding is atrocious. A prince of the dethroned family is arrested in a neutral state, without a shadow of legality;[44] he is brought to Paris and tried for his life on accusations which, considering his birth and position, no generous enemy could have considered crimes; he is found guilty without a witness being called, without a proof of the charges against him being adduced, and without a person to defend him being allowed.[45]

This trial takes place at midnight, in a dungeon; and the prisoner is shot, before the break of day, in a ditch!

It is natural enough that all persons connected with such a transaction should have endeavoured to escape from its ignominy. General Hullin has charged Savary (afterwards Duc de Rovigo), who, as commander of the gendarmerie, was present at the execution, with having hurried the trial, and prevented an appeal to Napoleon, which the condemned prince demanded. The Duc de Rovigo denies with much plausibility these particulars, and indeed, all concern in the affair beyond his mere presence, and the strict fulfilment of the orders he had received; and accuses M. de Talleyrand – against whom it must be observed he had on other accounts a special grudge – of having led to the prince's seizure by a report read at the Council on the 10th March; of having intercepted a letter

[43] Fouché, not then in office, was also consulted.

[44] It is even remarked, that a few days previous, the Duc Dalberg had been informed that there was no jealousy of the *émigrés* at that place. – See *M. de Rovigo*, vol. ii., and *Letter of the Duc Dalberg to M. de Talleyrand*, 13th November, 1823.

[45] There were two "*procès-verbaux*," or accounts taken of this trial. The one published in the *Moniteur*, which cites the laws in virtue of which the prince was condemned, and the pieces that were brought forward in proof of the accusation. This is evidently an afterthought: there was not time to write it at the spot and on the scene. The other cites nothing but the decree of the 29th Ventôse, and the answers of the prince, after a deliberation on which he is ordered to immediate execution; this is genuine. The laws by which he is condemned are left in blank.

written to the first consul by the illustrious captive at Strasburg, and of having hastened and provoked the execution, of which he offers no other proof than that he met Talleyrand, at five o'clock, coming out of Murat's, who was then, as I have said, governor of Paris, and who had just given orders for the formation of the military commission. It must be observed also, that, for the report of what passed in the council, M. de Rovigo only quotes a conversation which he had some years afterwards with Cambacérès, who was anxious to prove that he himself had opposed the violation of the German territory.

As to the supposed letter written by the Duc d'Enghien, the persons about the Duc declared that he never wrote a letter at Strasburg; and in the prince's diary, which speaks of a letter to the Princesse de Rohan, there is no mention of a letter to the first consul. With respect to another letter, written, the Duc de Rovigo seems to suppose, by M. Massias, French minister at Baden, there is no trace of it in the French archives; whilst the mere fact of M. de Talleyrand having been at Murat's proves nothing (if it be true that he was there) beyond the visit. Indeed, as Murat himself blamed the execution, and did what he could to avert it (see Thiers' *Consulate and Empire*, vol. v. p. 4), there is some probability that, if M. de Talleyrand sought Murat, it was with a view of seeing what could be done to save the prince, and not with the view of destroying him. On the other hand, Bourrienne, who had opportunities of knowing the truth, asserts that M. de Talleyrand, so far from favouring this murder, warned the Duc d'Enghien, through the Princesse de Rohan, of the danger in which he stood.

The Duc Dalberg, minister of Baden at Paris in 1804, also speaks of M. de Talleyrand as opposed to all that was done in this affair.[46]

Louis XVIII., to whom M. de Talleyrand wrote when the Duc de Rovigo's statement appeared, ordered that personage to appear no more at his court. Fouché declared the act to be entirely that of the first consul; and lastly, Napoleon himself always maintained that the act was his own, and justified it.

For myself, after weighing all the evidence that has come before me (none of it, I must admit, quite conclusive), my persuasion is that the first consul had determined either to put the prince in his power to death, or to humiliate him by a pardon granted at his request; and it seems to me not improbable that he hesitated, though rather disposed, perhaps, to punish than to spare, till all was over.

For this supposition there is the declaration of his brother Joseph, who says that a pardon had been promised to Josephine; of Madame de Rémusat, who, playing at chess that evening with Napoleon, states that he was muttering all the night to himself lines from the great French poets in favour of clemency; and, lastly, there is an order given to M. Real, minister of police, who was charged to see the Duc d'Enghien, and to report to Bonaparte the result of the interview, which evidently implied that no execution was intended till the minister's report had reached the terrible disposer of life or death, who might then finally take his resolve.

But the opportunity of coming to a decision, after receiving the report of the minister of police, never occurred. By one of those unforeseen accidents which sometimes frustrate intentions, M. Real, to whose house the written instructions I have been speaking of were carried by Savary himself, had gone to bed with the injunction not to be disturbed, and did not wake till the prince was no more: – so that Napoleon had not the chance of clemency, which he undoubtedly expected, presented to him. At all events, whatever may have been the intentions of this extraordinary man, whose policy was generally guided by calculations in which human life was considered of small importance, I believe, as far as regards the person I am principally occupied with: first, that M. de Talleyrand did read at the Council on the 10th of March a memoir containing the information that had reached his office, and which he was naturally obliged to report; secondly, that when M. de Cambacérès spoke against the

[46] "Bonaparte seul, mal informé par ce que la police avait de plus vil, et n'écoutant que sa fureur, se porta à cet excès sans consulter. Il fit enlever le prince avec l'intention de le tuer. Il est connu que sous votre ministère vous n'avez cessé de modérer les passions de Bonaparte." —*Letter of Duc Dalberg*, May 13, 1823.

original arrest, M. de Talleyrand remained silent, which may be accounted for either by a wish not to compromise himself, or, as persons well acquainted with Napoleon have assured me, by a knowledge that this was the best way to give efficacy to M. de Cambacérès' arguments; thirdly, that when M. de Talleyrand wrote to the Grand Duke of Baden, excusing the intended violation of his territory, he did endeavour to convey such a warning to the Duc d'Enghien as would prevent his being captured; finally, that when the Duc was brought up to Vincennes he gave no advice (which he thought would be useless) to Bonaparte, but approved of the efforts made by Josephine and Joseph, who were the best mediators in the prince's behalf, and that, being also aware of the instructions sent to M. Real, he did not think the execution probable.

As to taking an active part in this tragedy, such conduct would not be in harmony with his character; nor have the accusations, to which his position not unnaturally exposed him, been supported by any trustworthy testimony. To have lent himself, however, even in appearance, to so dark a deed, and to have remained an instrument in Napoleon's hands after its committal, evinces a far stronger sense of the benefits attached to office, than of the obloquy attached to injustice.

This, it is said, he did not deny; and, when a friend advised him to resign, is reported to have replied: "If Bonaparte has been guilty, as you say, of a crime, that is no reason why I should be guilty of a folly."

The execution of the Duc d'Enghien took place during the night of the 20th March. On the 7th of April, Pichegru, who had been arrested, was found strangled in his room, as some thought, by the police – as the government declared, by his own hands; George Cadoudal, who had also been captured, suffered on the scaffold; and Moreau, after being brought before a tribunal which condemned him to two years' imprisonment, had this absurd sentence commuted into exile. Bonaparte having thus struck terror into the partisans of the ancient dynasty, and having rid himself of his most powerful military rival, placed on his head, amidst the servile approbation of the Legislature and the apparent acquiescence of the nation, a crown which was solemnly consecrated by Pius VII. (2nd December, 1804).

V

The assumption of the imperial title was an epoch in the struggle which had for some time been going on between the two statesmen who contributed the most, first, to raise the power of Napoleon, and finally to overthrow it. Talleyrand and Fouché are these two statesmen; and they may be taken as the representatives of the classes whose adhesion marked Bonaparte's force, and whose defection marked his decline. The one, a great nobleman, an enlightened member of the Constituent Assembly, a liberal, such as the fashion, the theories, and the abuses of the old *régime* had created him. The other a plebeian and conventionalist of the mountain, a democrat and regicide by circumstances, position, and the fury of the time. From the 18th Brumaire they both attached themselves to the first consul's fortunes. Cool, unprejudiced, without hatred, without partialities, each, notwithstanding, had the feelings of his *caste*; and, in moderating the passion and influencing the views of Napoleon, the one never forgot that he was born in the aristocracy, the other that he was the offspring of the people.

Fouché, then, was for employing the republican forms, and entrusting authority exclusively to what may be called new men. Talleyrand was rather for returning to the fashions of a monarchy, ridiculed, to use his own expression, the "*parvenus*" who had never walked on a "parquet,"[47] and endeavoured to introduce into the employment of the State the aspirants whose principles were liberal, but whose names were ancient and historical.

The Empire which was the natural consequence of the tendency which Talleyrand had favoured and Fouché opposed, nevertheless united and wanted these two politicians; for while it sanctioned

[47] The houses of the upper classes had oaken floors, called *parquets*: the houses of the lower classes had brick floors.

the advantages and titles of the old nobility, it established on a firm and equal basis a new nobility, and brought both to a central point, under the rule of a man of genius.

Fouché, once the Empire decided upon, renounced all further attempts to limit Napoleon's will, and only sought to regain his favour.

Talleyrand, conceiving that all the hopes of the enlightened men of his youth who had sought to obtain a constitutional monarchy were at that moment visionary, abandoned them for a new order of things, which, while it pressed upon the energy and intellect of the individual Frenchman, gave a concentrated expression to the energy and intellect of the French nation, and made it ready to accept a glorious tyranny without enthusiasm, but without dissatisfaction. Nor was the French nation wholly wrong.

A great deluge had swept just recently over all that previous centuries had established; society was still on a narrow and shaking plank which required widening, strengthening, but, above all, fixing over the still turbulent and agitated waters. Everything of ancient manners, of those habits of thought, without which no community of men can march long or steadily together, was gone. No received notions on essential subjects anywhere existed; and a nation which has no such notions cannot have that sort of public morality which is, to the position and respectability of a state, what private morality is to the respectability and position of an individual. The first essential to a community is order, for under order received notions establish themselves. Order combined with liberty is the highest degree of order. But order without liberty is preferable to disorder and license. Now, Napoleon's internal government, with all its faults, was the personification of order, as that of the convention had been of disorder; and what was the consequence? a spirit of freedom grew up amidst the despotism of the latter, as a submission to tyranny had been engendered under the wild violence of the former. The phrase, that Bonaparte "*refaisait le lit des Bourbons*,"[48] was a criticism on his own policy, but it might be an eulogium on that of his followers.

VI

In the meantime a change of forms and titles at Paris was the sign of a similar change throughout Europe. Republics became kingdoms: the Emperor's family, sovereigns: his marshals and favourites, princes and grand dignitaries of the Empire. Those who had shared the conqueror's fortunes had a share allotted to them in his conquests, and for a moment the theory of the nineteenth century brought back the realities of the middle ages. Yet, and notwithstanding these signs and tokens of ambition, had it not been for the rupture with England and the cruel deed at Vincennes, Napoleon's new dignity, that gave a splendid decoration to his new power and an apparent close to his adventurous career, would probably have induced the continent, without absolutely prostrating itself at his feet, to have acknowledged and submitted to his superiority. But the fortitude with which England had braved his menaces, and the act which had sullied his renown, produced a new coalition, and led to a treaty between England and Russia and Austria, the one signed on 11th of April, and the other the 9th of August, 1805. So formidable a combination served to disturb Bonaparte from the project of an invasion, with which he was then threatening our shores. But his star, though somewhat clouded, was still in the ascendant. The battle of Austerlitz sanctioned the title of Imperator, as the battle of Marengo had done that of Consul.

M. Mignet has given us a curious instance, extracted from the French archives, of the comprehensive views of the minister of foreign affairs at this period.[49] Immediately after the victory of Ulm, M. de Talleyrand wrote to Napoleon in something like these terms:

[48] "Was re-making the bed of the Bourbons."

[49] See *Mémoires sur Talleyrand*, read in the Academy by M. Mignet, May 11, 1839.

"While your Majesty is gaining the victories which will lead to a glorious peace, I am considering how that peace can best be established. There are four great States in Europe – France, Russia, England, and Austria. England and France, from their juxtaposition, their spirit, and consequent rivality, may be considered natural enemies; that is to say, no great war will take place in Europe without these powers coming into collision. In such case, Russia cannot cordially be with France as long as she retains her projects over the Ottoman empire, which it would be madness in us to encourage. Austria, on the other hand, is sure to side with England as long as her frontiers join ours, and her natural objects of ambition are the same. A great policy, therefore, would be to deprive Russia of her Turkish dreams, and Austria of the possessions neighbouring to those states which we protect, and which, in fact, are ours. I would take from Austria, then, Suabia, in Southern Germany, the Tyrol, adjoining Switzerland; and I would make Venice an independent Republic, and thus a barrier to both parties in Italy. To this plan, however, Austria herself must consent with satisfaction, or it cannot be permanent; and I would obtain that consent by giving her, in exchange for what we take, Wallachia, Moldavia, Bessarabia, and the northern portion of Bulgaria. By this plan, your Majesty will remark, the Germans are for ever shut out of Italy, Austria made the rival of Russia and guardian of the Ottoman empire, and the Russians excluded from Europe, and thus directed upon the kingdoms of Central Asia, where they will naturally come into conflict with the rulers of Hindostan."

"This project," says M. Mignet, "being conceived at a time when nothing was impossible, might, after the battle of Austerlitz, have been accomplished, and would doubtless have given another destiny to Europe, and established the grandeur of France on solid foundations."

Napoleon, however, was not inclined to adopt so great a plan on the suggestion of another; nor, indeed, is it impossible but that the secret instinct of his peculiar genius, which was for war, opposed itself to a permanent system of tranquillity. He advanced, then, in the false policy which ultimately proved his ruin; neither gaining the affection nor utterly destroying the power of the vanquished: and the cabinet of Vienna, subdued in Italy, humbled, by the confederation of the Rhine and the elevation of the secondary states, in Germany, but with its power not annihilated, and its goodwill not conciliated, signed the treaty of Presburg. This treaty, which severed the relations between the Russian and Austrian empires, and a change which now took place in the British councils, afforded another chance of giving to the new empire a peaceful and durable existence.

VII

Mr. Fox had succeeded to Mr. Pitt, and Mr. Fox was an advocate of peace and an admirer of the warrior who guided the destinies of France. He was also a personal friend of M. de Talleyrand. The Emperor Alexander shared in some degree Mr. Fox's admiration. The hopes which he had founded on an alliance with Austria were now, moreover, at an end, and no one at that time relied on the shuffling, grasping, and timid policy of Prussia. Both the Russian and English cabinets were willing then to treat. M. d'Oubril was sent to Paris by the cabinet of St. Petersburg, and negotiations begun through Lord Yarmouth, the late Marquis of Hertford (then a "*détenu*"[50]), between the cabinets of St. James and the Tuileries.

M. de Talleyrand, in these double negotiations, succeeded in getting the Russian negotiator to sign a separate treaty, which, however, the Russian government disavowed; and acquired such an influence over Lord Yarmouth, that the English government deemed it necessary to replace him by Lord Lauderdale, who was empowered to negotiate for the two allied governments. It is but just to observe that M. de Talleyrand, though thwarted by a variety of intrigues, laboured with the utmost assiduity in favour of a peaceful termination of this negotiation; for he already saw, and at this time almost alone saw, that without peace all was yet a problem, and that, to use the words of

[50] The term applied to persons detained in France at the rupture of the peace of Amiens.

a contemporary, "a succession of battles was a series of figures, of which the first might be 'A,' and the last 'zero.'"[51]

The position of Malta and Sicily, both at this time in our hands, the natural reluctance that we felt at resigning them without solid guarantees for European tranquillity; and the impossibility of getting such guarantees from the pride and ambition of an aspirant to universal empire, were nevertheless difficulties too great for diplomacy to overcome; and when Prussia, which had lost the golden opportunity of fighting France with Austria by her side, had become so involved by secret engagements with Russia and by public engagements with France – and so restless in the dishonourable and dangerous position in which she found herself, as to be determined on the desperate experiment of escaping from her diplomacy by her arms, another great European struggle commenced.

Throughout the new campaigns to which this new coalition led – campaigns beginning with the victory of Jena and closing with the peace of Tilsit – M. de Talleyrand accompanied his imperial master; and though he could hardly be said to exercise a predominant influence over those events, which a more violent character and a more military genius decided, his calmness and good sense (qualities rarely, if ever, abdicated by him) produced a moderating effect upon the imperious warrior, that tended generally to consolidate his successes. The sort of cool way in which he brought to ground many of this extraordinary man's flights, testing them by their practical results, is well enough displayed in a reply which he made to Savary, who, after the battle of Friedland, said, "If peace is not signed in a fortnight, Napoleon will cross the Niemen."

"Et à quoi bon," replied M. de Talleyrand, "passer le Niemen?"[52] "Why pass the Niemen?"

The Niemen, then, partly owing to M. de Talleyrand's counsels, was for this once not passed; and, at last, France, pretending to sacrifice Turkey, and Russia abandoning England, the two combatants signed a treaty, which anticipated that the domination of Europe was for the future to be shared between them.

VIII

At this period M. de Talleyrand, who had been more struck in the recent war by the temerity than by the triumph of the conqueror, thought that Napoleon's military and his own diplomatic career should cease. Fortune, indeed, had carried both the one and the other to the highest point, which, according to their separate characters and the circumstances of the times, they were likely to attain. To Napoleon's marvellous successes seemed now to belong a supernatural prestige, which the slightest misfortune was capable of destroying, and which a new victory could hardly augment. So also the reputation of M. de Talleyrand was at its height, and many were disposed to consider him as great a master in the science of politics as his sovereign was in that of war. He had acquired, moreover, immense wealth, as it is said, by extorted gifts from the Powers with which he had been treating, and more especially from the small princes of Germany, whom in the general division of their territory he could either save or destroy, and also by successful speculations on the stock exchange:[53]– means of acquiring riches highly discreditable to his character, but thought lightly of in a country that teaches the philosophy of indulgence, and had recently seen wealth so rudely scrambled for, that the "*Res si possis recte*" had become as much a French as ever it was a Roman proverb. His health, moreover, was broken, and unequal to the constant attendance on the Emperor's person, which had become almost inseparable from his office; while the elevation of Berthier to the rank of vice-constable established

[51] *Mémoires de Rovigo.*

[52] *Mémoires de Rovigo*, vol. iii. p. 116.

[53] With regard to his habits in this respect, it may not be amiss to refer to the American correspondence: *State Papers and Public Documents of the United States*, vol. iii. pp. 473-479.

a precedency exceedingly galling to his pride. Under these circumstances, he solicited and obtained permission to retire, and already Prince de Benevent received the title of "vice-grand electeur," raising him to the rank of one of the great dignitaries of the Empire; a position which it appears – so small are even the greatest of us – he desired.

This change in his situation, however, was by no means as yet what it has sometimes been represented – a "disgrace." He still retained great influence in the Emperor's councils, was consulted on all matters relative to foreign affairs, and even appointed with M. de Champagny, his successor, to conduct the negotiations with the court of Spain, which, owing to the invasion of Portugal and the quarrels which had already broken out in the family of Charles IV., were beginning to assume a peculiar character.[54]

It has been said, indeed, on the one side, that M. de Talleyrand was opposed to any interference with Spain; and, on the other, that it was actually he who first counselled Bonaparte's proceedings in that country. It is probable that he did so far compromise himself in this matter as to advise an arrangement which would have given the territory north of the Ebro to France, and yielded Portugal as a compensation to the Spanish monarch. It is not impossible, moreover, that he knew as early as 1805 – for Joseph Bonaparte was then told to learn the Spanish language – that Napoleon had vague dreams of replacing the Bourbon by the Bonaparte dynasty in the Peninsula. But when the French armies, without notice, took possession of Burgos and Barcelona; when an insurrection deposed Charles IV., and the Emperor was about to adopt the policy, not of peaceably aggrandizing France and strengthening Spain against Great Britain, but of kidnapping the Spanish princes and obtaining by a sort of trick the Spanish crown, he was resolutely and bitterly opposed to it, saying: "*On s'empare des couronnes, mais on ne les escamote pas*" ("one takes a crown from a sovereign's head, but one does not pick his pocket of it"). "Besides, Spain is a farm which it is better to allow another to cultivate for you, than to cultivate yourself."

Comte de Beugnot, in his memoirs recently published, speaks thus of these transactions:[55]

"The Prince de Benevent was acquainted, in all its details, with what had passed (at Bayonne). He appeared indignant. 'Victories,' he said, 'do not suffice to efface such things as these, because there is something in them which it is impossible to describe, that is vile, deceitful, cheating! I cannot tell what will happen, but you will see that no one will pardon him (the Emperor) for this.' The Duc Decrès, indeed," M. de Beugnot continues, "has told me more than once that the Emperor had in his presence reproached M. de Talleyrand for having counselled what took place at Bayonne, without M. de Talleyrand seeking to excuse himself. This has always astonished me. It is sufficient to have known M. de Talleyrand to be sure that, if he had been favourable to dispossessing the princes of the House of Bourbon of the Spanish throne, he would not have resorted to the means that were employed. Besides, when he spoke to me, it was with a sort of passion that he never displayed but on subjects which strongly excited him."

There can be no doubt, indeed, that what took place as to Spain was a subject of great difference between M. de Talleyrand and Napoleon. M. de Talleyrand would never afterwards during the reign of Louis XVIII. have publicly affirmed this, surrounded as he was by contemporaries and enemies, if it had not been true. Moreover, the general voice of the time, which is more in such cases to be

[54] A note written by M. Izquierdo, Spanish ambassador to the Court of France, and dated 24th of March, 1808, is exceedingly curious respecting these particulars.

[55] "Le prince était instruit dans le plus grand détail de ce qui s'était passé à Bayonne, et il m'en parut indigné: 'Les victoires,' me disait-il, 'ne suffisent pas pour effacer de pareils traits, parce qu'il y a là je ne sais quoi de vil; de la tromperie, de la tricherie! Je ne peux pas dire ce qui en arrivera, mais vous verrez que cela ne lui sera pardonné par personne.' Le duc Decrès m'a plus d'une fois assuré que l'Empereur avait reproché en sa présence à M. de Talleyrand de lui avoir conseillé tout ce qui s'était fait à Bayonne, sans que celui-ci eût cherché à s'en défendre. Cela m'a toujours étonné. D'abord, il suffit de connaître un peu M. de Talleyrand pour être bien sûr que, si au fond il a été d'avis de déposséder du trône d'Espagne les princes de la maison de Bourbon, il n'a certainement pas indiqué les moyens qu'on a employés. Ensuite, lorsqu'il m'en a parlé, c'était avec une sorte de colère qu'il n'éprouve qu'en présence des événements qui le remuent fortement."

trusted than any individual testimony, loudly proclaimed it; and as to not answering Napoleon when he was pouring forth in violent and insulting language the accusations which he sometimes levelled at those who displeased him, it is well known that M. de Talleyrand never replied to such attacks but by an impassible face and a dignified silence.

IX

Nor were the affairs of the Peninsula the only ones on which M. de Talleyrand and the Emperor at this time disagreed. The French troops entered Rome and Spain (for Napoleon was now for despoiling the Pope as a prince, after courting him as a Pontiff) about the same epoch; and the Prince of Benevent was as opposed to one violence as to the other.

It was not, however, out of this affair, or that affair in particular, that the enmity between the emperor and his former minister – an enmity so important in the history of both – took its rise.

M. de Talleyrand, the Empire once established and fortunate, had attached himself to it with a sort of enthusiasm. The poesy of victory, and the eloquence of an exalted imagination, subdued for a time the usual nonchalance and moderation of his character. He entered into all Napoleon's plans for reconstituting "An Empire of the Francs," and reviving the system of fiefs and feudal dignitaries; by which it is, however, true, that the followers and favourites of the conqueror had nothing to lose. "Any other system," he said, "but a military one, is in our circumstances at present impossible. I am, then, for making that system splendid, and compensating France for her liberty by her grandeur."

The principality he enjoyed, though it by no means satisfied him, was a link between him and the policy under which he held it. He wished to keep it, and to safeguard the prosperity of a man, whose adversity would cause him to lose it. But he had a strong instinct for the practical; all governments, according to his theory, might be made good, except an impossible one. A government depending on constant success in difficult undertakings, at home and abroad, was, according to his notions, impossible. This idea, after the Peace of Tilsit, more or less haunted him. It made him, in spite of himself, bitter against his chief – bitter at first, more because he liked him than because he disliked him. He would still have aided to save the Empire, but he was irritated because he thought he saw the Empire drifting into a system which would not admit of its being saved. A sentiment of this kind, however, is as little likely to be pardoned by one who is accustomed to consider that his will must be law, as a sentiment of a more hostile nature.

Napoleon began little by little to hate the man for whom he had felt at one time a predilection, and if he disliked any one, he did that which it is most dangerous to do, and most useless; that is, he wounded his pride without diminishing his importance. It is true that M. de Talleyrand never gave any visible sign of being irritated. But few, whatever the philosophy with which they forgive an injury, pardon a humiliation; and thus, stronger and stronger grew by degrees that mutual dissatisfaction which the one vented at times in furious reproaches, and the other disguised under a studiously respectful indifference.

X

This carelessness as to the feelings of those whom it would have been wiser not to offend, was one of the most fatal errors of the conqueror, who could not learn to subdue his own passions: but he had become at this time equally indifferent to the hatred and affection of his adherents; and, under the ordinary conviction of persons over-satisfied with themselves, fancied that everything depended on his own merits, and nothing on the merits of his agents. The victory of Wagram, and the marriage with Marie Louise, commenced, indeed, a new era in his history. Fouché was dismissed, though not without meriting a reprimand for his intrigues; and Talleyrand fell into unequivocal disgrace, in some degree provoked by his witticisms; whilst round these two men gathered a quiet and observant

opposition, descending with the clever adventurer to the lowest classes, and ascending with the dissatisfied noble to the highest.

The scion of the princely house of Périgord was, indeed, from his birth, quite as much as from his position in the Empire, at the head of the discontented of the aristocracy; M. de Talleyrand's house then (the only place, perhaps, open to all persons, where the government of the day was treated without reserve) became a sort of "rendezvous" for a circle which replied to a victory by a *bon mot*, and confronted the borrowed ceremonies of a new court by the natural graces and acknowledged fashions of an old one. All who remember society at this time, will remember that the ex-minister was the sole person who had a sort of existence and reputation, separate and distinct from the chief of the State, whose policy he now affected to consider, and probably did consider, as verging towards the passion of a desperate gambler, who would continue to tempt Fortune until she grew wearied and deserted him.

Nor did the Austrian alliance, which the Emperor had lately formed, meet with M. de Talleyrand's approval, although he had at one period advised it, and been also mixed up in the question of a marriage with the imperial family of Russia. This change might have proceeded from his now seeing that such an union as he had at one time favoured, in the hope that it would calm the restless energy of Napoleon, would only stimulate his ambition: or it might have been because, having had nothing to do with the resolutions adopted at Vienna, he had gained nothing by them. At all events, what he said with apparent sincerity, was – "Nothing is ever got by a policy which you merely carry out by halves." "If the Emperor wants an alliance with Austria, he should satisfy Austria: does he think that the House of Hapsburg considers it an honour to ally itself with the House of Bonaparte? What the Emperor of Austria desires, is to have his provinces restored, and his empire raised and revived: if the government of France does not do this, it disappoints him; and the worst enemies we can have are those we disappoint."

These sentiments, however, found as yet no echo out of the circle of a few independent and enlightened politicians.

I remember two of these – both high in the service of the Empire – M. de Barante and M. Molé, referring in my hearing to a conversation they had had at the period I am speaking of, and one saying to the other, "Do you call to mind how we both regarded what was passing before us as a magnificent scene in an opera, which, whilst it satisfied the eye with its splendour, did not fill the mind with a sense of its reality?"

But the masses were still dazzled by the splendid achievements of a man who, of all others, in ancient or modern history, would have been the greatest if he had joined the instincts of humanity with those of genius: but now each day that passed added to the fatal disposition which separated his future from his past; each hour he became more haughty and self-confident, and more inclined to an isolated career, which neither tolerated counsel nor clung to affection. Josephine, the wife of his youth – Pauline, his favourite sister – Louis, his youngest brother – Massena, his ablest general – were added to the list on which his two ablest ministers were inscribed. He had no longer even the idea of conciliating mankind to his arbitrary authority. His mighty intellect, subdued by his still mightier ambition, submitted itself to adopt a system of despotism and oppression which interfered not only with the political opinions, but with the daily wants, of all his subjects and all his allies.

War with him had become an effort to exterminate those who still opposed him, by oppressing those who had hitherto aided him. Thus, he had seized the Roman pontiff, kidnapped the Spanish king, taken violent possession of the Hanseatic towns and the North of Germany; and even those countries which were free from his armies, were bound, as he contended, to obey his decrees. In this state of things commenced the last and fatal struggle between the two potentates, who a short time before had projected partitioning the empire of the world as friendly confederates, and were now prepared to contend for it as deadly foes. Nor was the justice of M. de Talleyrand's views ever more conspicuous! The destruction of Prussia, by making Russia and France neighbours, had in itself

tended to make them enemies. Moreover, the proud and offended, but dissimulating Czar, though redoubling his courtesy towards the court of France after the choice of an Austrian archduchess, lest he might be supposed hurt by the rejection of a marriage with a princess of his own family, had begun to feel that, with the rest of continental Europe subdued and Austria apparently gained, he was alone in his independence; and to fret under the rein, which his imperious rider pulled, with superb indifference, somewhat too tightly.

Besides, though invested with unbounded authority over his people by law and custom, there was the example of his father to teach him that he could not wholly disregard their interests or wishes; yet this was what the Emperor of the French exacted from him. His subjects were not to sell their produce to the only purchaser who was ready and desirous to buy it; – and being thus harshly and foolishly placed between revolution and war, Alexander chose the latter.

XI

On the other hand, Napoleon, in determining on a conflict of which he did not disguise from himself the importance, awoke for a moment to his former sense of the necessity of using able men in great affairs, and was disposed, notwithstanding his disagreements with M. de Talleyrand, to send him to Warsaw to organise a kingdom of Poland; nor was it surprising that, confident in the sagacity and tact of the agent he thought of employing, he was also satisfied that, in the event of that agent's accepting employment, he might count perfectly on his fidelity; for throughout M. de Talleyrand's long career and frequent changes there is not any instance of his having betrayed any one from whom he accepted a trust. The difficulty of reconciling the Prince de Benevent's position with that of the Duc de Bassano, who accompanied the Emperor on this campaign as minister of foreign affairs, prevented, it is said, the projected arrangement. But neither during this transient gleam of returning favour, nor after it, did M. de Talleyrand's opinion against the chances which Napoleon was unnecessarily (as he thought) running, ever vary; neither were they disguised. He insisted principally on the chance of war, which often decides against the ablest general and the most skilful combinations; on the great loss which would result from a defeat, and the small gain that would follow a victory. The whole of Europe that the reckless general left behind him was, he knew, kept down merely by fear and constraint, and though ready to assist an advancing army, certain to fall on a retreating one. Besides, supposing defeat was almost impossible, what had France to gain by success?

Alexander might reiterate his promise of preventing all commercial interchange between Great Britain and his dominions; but would he be able to keep that promise? He could not. The mind of Napoleon, however, had now been trained by Fortune to consider wars mere military parades, shortly after the commencement of which he entered the capital of his conquered enemy and returned to Paris to be greeted by enthusiastic acclamations at the theatre. He required this sort of excitement, and like most men similarly influenced, convinced himself that what was pleasing to his vanity was demanded by his interests.

There were three epochs, indeed, in Napoleon's career: the first, when he fought for glory abroad to gain empire at home; the second, when, being master of the government of France, he fought to extend the limits of France, and to make himself the most powerful individual in his nation, and his nation the most powerful nation in the world; the third, when France being but a secondary consideration, his ambition was bent on becoming master of the universe, and acquiring a dominion of which France would be almost an insignificant portion.

It is necessary to bear this in mind, since it explains Napoleon's Russian campaign; it explains the difficulties he raised against withdrawing his troops from Germany after that campaign had ended in defeat; and his constant dislike to accept any conditions that put a positive extinguisher on his gigantic projects. To support his own confidence in such projects he persuaded himself that a charm

attached to his existence, that supernatural means would arrive to him when natural means failed. He did not, however, neglect on this occasion the natural means.

When Fouché expressed his apprehensions at so vast an enterprise, the soldier's answer is said to have been, "I wanted 800,000 men, and I have them."[56] But France had begun to be at this period wearied even with his successes; and the affair of Mallet, which happened just previously to the arrival of the bad intelligence from Russia, showed pretty clearly that her Emperor's fall or defeat left an open space for any new system that circumstances might favour or impose.

No sooner, then, had the news that Moscow was burnt reached Paris than M. de Talleyrand considered the Bonapartist cause as lost. Not that Bonaparte might not yet have saved himself by prudence, but he was not prudent; not but that the French government might not yet have brought as many men in uniform into the field as the allies, but that nations fought on one side, and merely soldiers on the other.

The sagacious statesman, therefore, who now began again to be consulted, advised a conclusion of the war, promptly, at once, and on almost all conditions. So, again, when the defection of the Prussians was known, and Napoleon summoned a council to determine what should be done under such circumstances, he said: "Negotiate: you have now in your hands effects which you can give away; to-morrow they may be gone, and then the power to negotiate advantageously will be gone also."[57]

During the armistice at Prague (June, 1813), when the prestige of two or three recent victories coloured the negotiations, and France might have had Holland, Italy, and her natural frontiers, both Talleyrand and Fouché, who was also asked for his advice, repeated constantly, "The Emperor has but one thing to do – to make peace; and the more quickly he makes it, the better he will make it." So also, when M. de St. Aignan, after the battle of Leipsic, brought propositions from Frankfort, which might even yet have given France her frontier of the Rhine (November), M. de Talleyrand urged their acceptance with the least delay, and told the Emperor that a bad peace was better than the continuation of a war that could not end favourably.[58]

Napoleon himself at this time wavered, and with a momentary doubt as to his own judgment, and a remembrance very possibly of happier times, offered the portfolio of foreign affairs to his ancient minister, but on the condition that he should lay down the rank and emoluments of vice-grand-elector.

The object of the Emperor was thus to make M. de Talleyrand entirely dependent on his place; but M. de Talleyrand, who would have accepted the office, refused the condition, saying, "If the Emperor trusts me, he should not degrade me; and if he does not trust me, he should not employ me; the times are too difficult for half measures."

XII

The state of affairs at this period was assuredly most critical. In looking towards Spain, there was to be seen an English army, crowned by victory, and about to descend from the Pyrenees. In looking towards Germany, there was a whole population, whom former defeat had exasperated, and recent success encouraged, burning to cross the Rhine in search of the trophies of which an enemy still boasted. In Italy, a defection in the Emperor's family was about to display the full extent of his misfortunes. In Holland, the colours of the exiled family (the House of Orange) were displayed with rapture amidst shouts for national independence; even the King of Denmark had left the French alliance; while in France a people unanimated by liberty, an army decimated by defeat, generals that

[56] "Il me fallait 800,000 hommes, et je les ai." —*Mémoires de Fouché*, vol. ii. p. 113.

[57] *Mémoires de Rovigo*, vol. vi. p. 66.

[58] "Une mauvaise paix ne peut nous devenir aussi funeste que la continuation d'une guerre qui ne peut plus nous être favorable." —*Mémoires de Rovigo*, vol. vi. p. 229.

had lost their hopes, and arsenals which were empty, were the sole resources with which its ruler had to encounter all Europe in arms.

The refusal of M. de Talleyrand, then, to accept office at such a time, unless with all the confidence and splendour that could give it authority, was natural enough; but it is also not surprising that the sovereign who had made that offer should have been irritated by its rejection, whilst many urged that the vice-grand-elector, if not employed, should be arrested. All proof, however, of treason was wanting; and the chief of the Empire justly dreaded the effect which, both at home and abroad, any violent act might produce; for it was far more difficult, than many have supposed, for him to strike, when his power was once on the decline, any strong blow against an eminent functionary. His government was a government of functionaries, throughout whom there reigned a sort of fraternity that could not safely be braved.

This stern man had, moreover, – and this was one of the most remarkable and amiable portions of his character – a sort of tenderness, which he never overcame, for those who had once been attached to his person, or had done eminent service to his authority.[59] He resolved, then, not to take any violent measure against M. de Talleyrand; but though he could restrain his anger from acts, he could not from expressions.

A variety of scenes was the consequence. Savary relates one which happened in his presence and that of the arch-chancellor. I have also read of one in which Napoleon, having said that if he thought his own death likely he would take care that the vice-grand-elector should not survive him, was answered by M. de Talleyrand rejoining, quietly and respectfully, that he did not require that reason for desiring that his Majesty's life might be long preserved. M. Molé recounted to me another, in the following terms: "At the end of the Council of State, which took place just before the Emperor started for the campaign of 1814, he burst out into some violent exclamations of his being surrounded by treachery and traitors; and then turning to M. de Talleyrand, abused him for ten minutes in the most violent and outrageous manner. Talleyrand was standing by the fire all this time, guarding himself from the heat of the flame by his hat; he never moved a limb or a feature; any one who had seen him would have supposed that he was the last man in the room to whom the Emperor could be speaking; and finally, when Napoleon, slamming the door violently, departed, Talleyrand quietly took the arm of M. Mollien, and limped with apparent unconsciousness downstairs. But on getting home, he wrote a dignified letter to the Emperor, saying, that if he retained his present dignity, he should be by right one of the regency, and that as he could not think of holding such a charge after the opinion his Majesty had expressed of him, he begged to resign his post, and to be allowed to retire into the country. He was informed, however, that his resignation would not be accepted, and that he might stay where he was."

It is to be presumed that insults like that I have been relating went a great way towards alienating and disgusting the person they were meant to humiliate; but though at the head of a considerable party which were dissatisfied, M. de Talleyrand did little more than watch the proceedings of 1814, and endeavour to make the fall of Napoleon, should it take place, as little injurious to France and to himself as possible.[60]

During the conferences at Chatillon, he told those whom the Emperor most trusted, that he would be lost if he did not take peace on any terms; when, however, towards the end of these

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[59] "'Jamais,' dit-il au dignitaire qui le lui insinuait, 'jamais je ne donnerai la main à la perte d'un homme qui m'a longtemps servi.'" —*Mémoires de Rovigo*, vol. vi. p. 298.

[60] M. Thiers gives the account of such a scene as we have just described, but fixes it in 1809; nothing is omitted, not even the position of M. de Talleyrand and his hat; and in this account M. Thiers makes Napoleon accuse Talleyrand of the murder of the Duc d'Enghien.I cannot but believe that M. Thiers's authority has been incorrect. Count Molé could not be mistaken as to dates and facts, for he was present at the scene I have related, and stated to me all the details, as I have given them, without touching on the Duc d'Enghien, which he certainly would have spoken of had Napoleon himself done so. The Emperor's reproaches were, according to Count Molé, entirely confined to what he considered were M. de Talleyrand's intrigues at that particular time – intrigues which were not, however, then further advanced than in clearing away the obstacles which might interfere with his defection, if Napoleon was ultimately defeated.

conferences, peace seemed impossible with Napoleon, he permitted the Duc Dalberg to send M. de Vitrolles to the allied camp with the information, that, if the allies did not make war against France, but simply against its present ruler, they would find friends in Paris ready to help them. M. de Vitrolles carried a slip of paper from the Duc in his boot as his credentials, and was allowed to name M. de Talleyrand; but he had nothing from that personage himself which could compromise him irrevocably with this mission.

M. de Talleyrand saw, nevertheless, at that moment, that a new chief must, as a matter of course, be given to France, and he wished to be the person to decide who that chief should be, and under what sort of institutions the government should be assigned to him.

Still, his communications with the Bourbons were, I believe, merely indirect. Many of their partisans were his relatives and friends. He said obliging things of Louis XVIII. to them, and he received obliging messages in return: but he did not positively adopt their cause; in fact, it seems doubtful whether he did not for a certain time hesitate between the ancient race, and the King of Rome with a council of regency, in which he was to have had a place. At all events, he kept the minister of police, according to Savary's own account, alive to the Royalist movements in the south. It may even be said that he did not desert the Bonaparte dynasty till it deserted itself: for at the Council, assembled when the allies were approaching Paris to determine whether the Empress should remain in the capital or quit it, he advised her stay in the strongest manner, saying it was the best, if not the only, means of preserving the dynasty, and he did not cease urging this opinion until Joseph Bonaparte produced a letter from his brother, stating that in such a case as that under consideration Marie-Louise should retire into the provinces. It was then that, on leaving the council chamber, he said to Savary:[61]

"Here, then, is the end of all this. Is not that also your opinion? we lose the rubber with a fair game. Just see where the stupidity of a few ignorant men, who perseveringly work on the influence acquired by daily intercourse, ends by carrying one. In truth, the Emperor is much to be pitied, and yet nobody will pity him; for his obstinacy in holding to those who surround him, has no reasonable motive; it is only a weakness which cannot be conceived in such a man. What a fall in history! To give his name to adventures, instead of giving it to his age! When I think of this I cannot help being grieved. And now what is to be done? It does not suit every one to be crushed under the ruins of the edifice that is to be overthrown. Well, we shall see what will happen!

"The Emperor, instead of abusing me, would have done better in estimating at their first value those who set him against me. He should have seen that friends of that kind are to be more dreaded than enemies. What would he say to another who let himself be reduced to the state in which he is now?"

XIII

The observation that it did not suit every one to be overwhelmed under the ruins of the government about to fall, applied, as it was intended to do by M. de Talleyrand, to himself. The part, however, he had to play was still a difficult one; desirous to remain in Paris in order to treat with the allies, he was ordered, as a member of the regency, to Blois. Nor was it merely because he feared that Napoleon might yet conquer, and punish his disobedience, that he disliked to resist his command;

[61] "Eh bien! voilà donc la fin de tout ceci. N'est-ce pas aussi votre opinion? Ma foi! c'est perdre une partie à beau jeu. Voyez un peu où mène la sottise de quelques ignorants qui exercent avec persévérance une influence de chaque jour. Pardieu! l'Empereur est bien à plaindre, et on ne le plaindra pas, parce que son obstination à garder son entourage n'a pas de motif raisonnable; ce n'est que de la faiblesse qui ne se comprend pas dans un homme tel que lui. Voyez, monsieur, quelle chute dans l'histoire! Donner son nom à des aventures au lieu de le donner à son siècle! Quand je pense à cela je ne puis m'empêcher d'en gémir. Maintenant quel parti prendre? Il ne convient pas à tout le monde de se laisser engloutir sous les ruines de cet édifice. Allons, nous verrons ce qui arrivera!"L'Empereur, au lieu de me dire des injures, aurait mieux fait de juger ceux qui lui inspiraient des préventions; il aurait vu que des amis comme ceux-là sont plus à craindre que des ennemis. Que dirait-il d'un autre s'il s'était laissé mettre dans cet état?" —*Mémoires du Duc de Rovigo*, cités par M. Thiers.

there is a sense of decency in public men which sometimes supplies the place of principle, and the vice-grand-elector wished to avoid the appearance of deserting the cause which notwithstanding he had resolved to abandon.

The expedient he adopted was a singular and characteristic one. His state carriage was ordered and packed for the journey: he set out in it with great pomp and ceremony, and found, according to an arrangement previously made with Madame de Rémusat, her husband at the head of a body of the National Guard at the barrier, who stopped him, and, declaring he should remain in the capital, conducted him back to his hotel, in the Rue St. Florentin, in which he had soon the honour of receiving the Emperor Alexander.

The success of the campaign had been so rapid, the march to Paris so bold, the name of Napoleon and the valour of the French army were still so formidable, that the Emperor of the Russias was almost surprised at the situation in which he found himself, and desirous to escape from it by any peace that could be made safely, quickly, and with some chance of duration. Beyond this, he had no fixed idea. The re-establishment of the Bourbons, to which the English Government inclined, seemed to him in some respects dangerous, as well on account of the long absence of these princes from France, as from their individual character and the prejudices of their personal adherents. To a treaty with Napoleon he had also reasonable objection. Some intermediate plan was the one perhaps most present to his mind; a regency with Marie-Louise, – a substitution of Bernadotte for Bonaparte; but all plans of this sort were vague, and to be tested by the principle of establishing things in the manner most satisfactory to Europe, and least hateful to France.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.