

M. M. TALLEYRAND.

THIS Proteus is descended from one of the first noble families in France—A courtier favoured by the unfortunate king, and a bishop; betrayed his order, disgraced his cloth, and laboured to destroy his sovereign.

An intriguer of the first class, he has been reckoned as being a man of great abilities; but those who did so conceive him, were ignorant of the case.

The French revolutionists certainly did nothing that shewed talents, except talents for destruction; and in that sort of work a little talent goes a great way. Even amongst the revolutionists, and the monsters who, as the Abbé Raynal said, by a species of infernal magic, had converted France into a cave of robbers and murderers, Talleyrand was not conspicuous, except for extravagance of opinions. He did not distinguish himself, like many others, either by eloquence or abilities of any sort.

When permitted to return to France under Bu-

naparte, Talleyrand became his favourite minister*, and it is then that he is supposed to have displayed his uncommonly great abilities; but even this we are ready to doubt, or rather to deny.

In the revolution, the French held a superiority over other nations, independent of the abilities of any man, or set of men. They had risen up with jacobin energy and jacobin morality, whilst the other nations of Europe, ignorant of the change, and unprepared to resist it, continued in the old way. It was like a well-prepared and desperate ruffian attacking a peaceable unsuspecting man, when half asleep, and unequal to resistance.

It is true, that it took an amazingly long period

* Talleyrand came over in the last days of Louis XVI. with the French jacobin ambassador to London, and intrigued in every way, in order to revolutionize England. He was sent out of this country soon after the ambassador; but, as he was afraid to return to France, he went to America, and remained several years at New York, where he lived on the bounty of some of his countrymen, who were in better circumstances than himself.

By his intrigues he got back to France, and had the address to pass himself off as a man of great and profound skill. Hauterive, who was in America at the same time, and is really a man of abilities, assisted him in this, and in persuading Buonaparte that they knew how to ruin England.

to rouse Europe to a sense of her danger, and still longer to that energy which was necessary for resistance; but, till she was so roused, and so prepared, the success of the French was infallible. It was just as natural, (or rather necessary), that the French should conquer other nations, as that the harder metal should penetrate the softer when they come into collision. We may judge now of the facility with which the French succeeded, when we consider the difficulty that has attended the bringing on the reverse their arms have met with.

What share Talleyrand might have in the aggrandisements of Buonaparte, it is difficult to say; but, till the treachery to the royal family of Spain, he is supposed to have guided and advised him.

Let us suppose that it was so, where was the merit? Did Talleyrand think that an empire so extensive and so hastily erected could be of long duration; but particularly, when supported by coercive measures, and running contrary to all the propensities, habits, and prejudices of the people, of whom it was composed, and by whom the different subjugated states were inhabited?

If the depth of Talleyrand's political sagacity could not discover the evanescence of such an

empire, we can assign to it but a very inferior rank.

The French revolution, being properly appreciated, and the ignorance of its nature amongst other nations taken into account, it is very clear that the period when Talleyrand and his master triumphed was the least surprising of all. The French armies were immense in numbers, and the soldiers were the most experienced in Europe, when Buonaparte placed himself at the head of that immense Colossal power. The nations around had previously lost courage as well as force; for they had been beaten when the armies of France were inferior both in numbers and in discipline. Bribery, corruption, fraud, and force joined, could not fail to triumph for awhile in such a situation of things: but the basis was wrongly laid; for the coercion of other nations depriving the people of all liberty and all comfort, (the plan on which Buonaparte always proceeded), was certain to occasion revolt the first opportunity, and, before any distant period, the destruction of the empire.

The attack on Spain was certainly, in point of policy, a most egregious error, besides being a great crime; but if Talleyrand was accessory or adviser

to what was done previous to that, he was far from being a profound politician; for every step taken by the chief who governed France led evidently to present embarrassment and future destruction.

A wise minister would have made the Rhine the boundary of the empire, and would have consolidated the confederation of princes on the right bank of that river, by making them easy and happy, and the people contented. The continual changes of the arrangements which the despot had made were highly impolitic. As he pretended, like other impostors, to be infallible, he ought not to have made a king of Holland, and then dethroned him. He ought not to have made his brother Joseph king of Naples, and then transferred him to Spain, removing Murat from the duchy of Cleves to the throne of Naples. People even of very moderate penetration saw in all that the appearance of a state of things that could not long remain. They saw in it a sort of fermentation that must produce destruction, and lead to real and immediate evil.

In the first place, it made all those chiefs who were dependant on the caprice of Buonaparte uncertain and dissatisfied, and it accustomed the people whom they governed to consider them as only

temporary rulers; so that it took away every principle of stability from every part of government.

We have said, that we do not know how far Talleyrand might be the adviser of Buonaparte till the invasion of Spain; but, as it is on account of his real or supposed advice given previous to that period, that he obtained the reputation of a profound politician, we must and do assert, that if he so advised Buonaparte, he did not deserve such a reputation. From the time that Buonaparte became first consul he committed a series of errors that, in a man who had the address and ability he had formerly displayed, are quite inexcusable; and for a great part of that time Talleyrand was his supposed adviser.

We may divide the political life of Buonaparte into three parts—The first, from his obtaining the command of the army of Italy, till he became first consul; the second, from that time till the treaty of Tilsit; and the third, from the treaty of Tilsit till the present time.

The great actions, though attended with still greater atrocities, that signalized the first period, obtained for Buonaparte the reputation of a general of

first rate talents, and he continued for some time afterwards to deserve the character.

The second period was dedicated to the gratification of that inordinate ambition which has been his ruin; and the third period has been the completion of his madness, his folly, and his visionary schemes.

By this division of his life, we find that his really great achievements were before he was assisted by Talleyrand; that Talleyrand assisted him in his first extravagances; but that he would not go all the length in folly and wickedness that his master wanted.

As it is very possible that this cunning and unprincipled man may still have a part to act on the political stage, we request those who have to take care of the interests of Europe, to be on their guard against his bad faith, and not to over-rate his abilities; for they are only those of an intriguing gambler, who, as a branch of a noble and very ancient family, disgraced his rank; as a minister of religion, betrayed the church; and, as a favoured subject of a virtuous and good king, rebelled against his sovereign and his benefactor. Whatever is wily and wicked may be found in this apostate priest, this pretended statesman, and profligate courtier. Hatred

and contempt, unallayed by any respect for talents, ought to be his portion.

European cabinets have hitherto been inclined to give great credit to Talleyrand as a profound statesman; and it is possible, that, though his master's reign may be near an end, yet Talleyrand may have art enough to preserve his consequence: we think this the more possible, if not the more likely, that he is supposed to have endeavoured to dissuade Buonaparte from some of his worst and latest extravagances and crimes.

It is of importance, then, to unmask this profound statesman, and undeceive the cabinets; and we shall shew, that, not only has he been wrong in detail, but that the principle on which he proceeded, if he encouraged and directed Buonaparte till 1807, as is supposed, was radically wrong, and betrays not only a wicked mind, but a weak head, and a great ignorance of the history of mankind.

Honour is of a similar nature with virtue, though springing from another root; it also produces nearly the same effects. There is, however, one great difference in respect to the circumstances under which they are found to flourish. Honour may flourish under the most despotic governments, and may be carried to the greatest height under kings whose

power has no limit but their will. Virtue, on the contrary, flourishes most where there is freedom: but, as republics cannot flourish without virtue, so monarchies can neither have prosperity nor stability without honour. The whole of Buonaparte's reign has been distinguished by treachery, and an utter contempt for every thing honourable.

This contempt for honour was coupled with unlimited ambition, which is another enemy to the stability of empires.

Montesquieu observes, that the advances of a government to despotism are so many approaches to danger. The history of the Roman empire is, of this truth, a great example. In proportion as the emperors became tyrannical, did they become dependant on their mercenary troops; as is the case at the present day in Turkey and Barbary.

In addition to contempt for honour, and giving loose to a despotic disposition, both of which are enemies to the prosperity and stability of a state, Talleyrand and Buonaparte struggled for an extensive increase of territory, which is more ruinous still.

The extent of the Roman empire, though gradually acquired, and rendered solid by all human means, was evidently the greatest cause of its

destruction*. The same was the case with the more crude empires of Alexander and Charlemagne. If, therefore, a prince wants stability to his fortune, and to establish a dynasty, (the modern mode of expressing the establishment of his race), he will be honourable in his dealings, moderate in his manner of governing, and limited in his ambition for extent of empire.

A frantic sort of energy, which assumed the appearance of power and strength, has sometimes existed under despotic monarchs, who aimed at very extensive power. Louis XIV. of France, and Charles XII. of Sweden, are two examples, but they were like two brilliant and evanescent meteors — two transitory flashes passing athwart the political horizon, leaving both kingdoms in a state of weakness and debility. Those monarchs, however, were both honourable; and the men by whom they were aided, were honourable in a high degree. Had they been otherwise, France must have been divided,

* An anonymous writer, about the middle of the last century, says, "Were the Gallic monarch as uncontrollable as he seeks to become, and conqueror of all the countries he desires to reign over, no means would be so likely to put an end to his family and their domination, as those that he is so assiduously applying for their establishment in greater glory."

and Sweden become a desert, after their exertions were over.

The ancient government of France was guided by a principle of honour which, in adversity, rescued it from humiliation; and, in its moments of success, made it one of the most brilliant objects in modern times. Buonaparte and Talleyrand were not ignorant of this, but they wanted wisdom, moderation, and honour themselves; and, therefore, when they established a legion of honour, in imitation of those who understood and valued it, they bestowed their base-born badges on the most determined ruffians that the revolution had produced.

Opinion is free, even under the eyes of the most despotic tyrant; and every one felt internally, that Buonaparte's legion of honour consisted of those who had most distinguished themselves in the arts and practices of murder, plunder, and every species of crime that was suited to the taste or the interest of Buonaparte.

The man who on neutral ground way-laid, and afterwards murdered, the last descendant of the great Condé, might very properly have been decorated as a chief of banditti, but could never belong to a legion of honour. The consequence was, that there was no honour in wearing the decoration,

which, nevertheless, some honourable men have condescended to do, when the chief of the banditti was in the zenith of his power*.

The Spaniards and Portuguese were both powerful while they remained honourable; but when they forgot the road to honour, they sunk in rank amongst nations: nor is it surprising that honour is so efficacious in producing beneficial consequences; when it is considered, that its action on the mind which is guided by it, is constantly in operation, and equally fearless in every danger that does not incur merited disgrace. It never balances an instant in any circumstance between what ought or ought not to be done, if it is not perfectly honourable; the same is the case also with virtue: whereas, where honour or virtue are not, there is a vacillating, temporizing, and flexible conduct that is incompatible with lasting prosperity.

In the history of England we shall find, that the most honourable sovereigns were the most prosperous, as well as the most respected. Edward III.

* It would be useless to lose time in shewing, that the ambition of too extended empire, and the want of good faith and honour, were the direct causes of the misfortunes of Buonaparte. So completely is that the case, that the Allies dare not trust him in a single instance, and see no safety while he exists.

Henry V. and Elizabeth, are the most distinguished for honour; particularly Edward and Elizabeth: and their honour consisted in preferring to every thing, the welfare of their people*. How different was the institution of the garter for the black prince and his noble companions, from that for the murderer of the Duke D'Enghein, and the plunderer of Hamburgh and Holland!

Even Machiavel teaches princes the value of honour. Yet this great, this profound statesman, Talleyrand, is ignorant alike of the principles and the practice; and, to sum all up, we will maintain that, though artful and cunning, his only claim to the title of a profound statesman is, that he has not erred quite so widely as his unprincipled master.

* Of the sovereigns of England, not one was so honourable as his present Majesty. He had not the failings of age into which Edward III. fell, nor the youthful vices of Henry V. nor the stain of betraying a relation, and a foreign queen, who had sought her protection, like Elizabeth. In honour and integrity, no public or private man ever surpassed the present king of England; and never did any kingdom stand so high amongst others as England now stands. The troubles and misfortunes of this reign came from external causes; the honourable, manly, and generous manner in which those troubles have been met and resisted, is all owing to the spirit of the monarch, and of the nation he governed.