

Literature.

THIERS' HISTORY OF THE CONSULATE AND THE EMPIRE.

(Continued from No. 23.)

The whole of this statement is full of daring assertions. Apart from the testimony of Nelson or Jomini of the relative condition of the two fleets, their position shows that the fire had ceased of necessity, as between the British ships and the mainland, when the British fleet and the land batteries precluded the flag of truce was sent on shore. The intervention of the Danish ships between the British fleet and the land batteries precluded the interchange of shots except through the very ships. These intervening ships were at once British prizes filled with Danish subjects, for the Danish fleet, as Jomini himself acknowledges, had mostly struck before Nelson had sent the flag of truce. Denmark was not more willing to fire on her own countrymen than Nelson on his own prisoners. Lord Nelson's letter to General Lindholm conclusively refutes M. Thiers' view; that his transmission of a flag of truce was a politic manœuvre. The commodore answered Nelson: "seems to exult that I sent on shore a flag of truce. Men of his description, if they ever are victorious, know not the feelings of humanity. You know, and His Royal Highness knows, that the guns fired from the shore could only fire through the Danish ships, which had surrendered; so that if I fired at the shore, it could only be in the same manner."

Turn next to Nelson's attack on Boulogne, and to M. Thiers' extravagant assertion that its failure produced the peace of Amiens. He states that there were two attacks on that port—on the 4th and 16th of August, 1801. The first—which, according to Nelson, was a mere reconnaissance, resulting, nevertheless, in the sinking or grounding of eleven out of twenty-four assailable vessels, without involving any injury to ourselves—is described by M. Thiers as a bombardment during sixteen hours, without causing any injury to the French.

Of the second attack M. Thiers says: "The English saw themselves everywhere repulsed; the sea covered with their floating corpses; and a good number of their boats were either lost or taken." (Vol. iii. p. 174.)

Æschylus is more descriptive of the battle of Salamis than M. Thiers of the battle of Boulogne. When the Greek wrote the description of the Persian disaster which M. Thiers appears to have adopted for the English action,

"Philon
Alidona somata polubuphe
Kathanonta leges pheresthai
Plaghtois en' diotakassin."

he asserted what was probably no more than literally true. But if we refer to Nelson's despatch, we shall find, not only that none of our boats were taken at Boulogne, but that the total of our killed (few of whom probably fell overboard in the action) was forty-four.

It would be an abuse of argument to notice the assertion that the ill-success of this attack induced us to sue for peace; further than to observe that, whereas this action was fought on the 16th of August, the detailed proposition of a peace, arranged between M. Otto and Lord Hawkebury, is dated the 23rd of July. He must be a bold advocate who will fortify an egregious misconception of a naval action by an equally glaring anachronism.

Take one other instance in this period. It shall be Trafalgar, the greatest perhaps of all the achievements of our arms. Here M. Thiers, after an elaborate depreciation of a victory which even his ingenuity cannot quite distort into a defeat, draws great solace from the reflection that Trafalgar was obliterated by Ulm; a victory won on the previous day in the heart of Europe, and therefore generally known during a considerable period before the 'forgotten' battle was made public.

The French historian's narrative forms a succession of distinct assertions, each more inaccurate than the preceding one.

1. "Moreover," he says, although the English had twenty-seven ships and ourselves thirty-three, they possessed the same number of guns, and therefore an equal force. It appears, on the contrary, from the last volume of the 'Nelson Despatches,' that the

guns of the English fleet were 2148, and the guns of the combined fleet 2634. According, therefore, to M. Thiers' own estimate of force, the allies were more powerful in a nearly exact proportion to the relative number of their ships. The British, moreover, who captured twenty-four out of their thirty-three line-of-battle ships, were better judges of the number of guns on either side than the allies, who did not board one of ours.

2. M. Thiers' next position is, that at any rate the allies were inferior in the engagement, since ten French ships, forming the van, remained inactive, while the British fleet was almost simultaneously concentrated. The northern column, commanded by Nelson, came up twenty or thirty minutes after that of Collingwood. (P. 153.) Now it happens that only four out of these ten French ships escaped uninjured; and that while the author himself acknowledges that the action, on the part of Collingwood's column, began at eleven (p. 150.), our own official despatches assert that the 'Victory' did not open fire till one. Nelson, they inform us, was six miles distant when the action began, and the wind meanwhile entirely sank. The disproportion, therefore, of the British, during a great part of the action, was by much greater than even their total disproportion on the sea.

3. M. Thiers next takes refuge in single combats. He tells us that the French 'Bucentaur' was simultaneously attacked by four ships; and he does not tell us that the 'Royal Sovereign,' which bore Collingwood's flag, sustained reception of the allies, unsupported by any ship within a mile. He asserts that the defeat of the French fleet was heroic, perhaps, without an equal in history, and deserved to be cited beside the triumph of Ulm; but he has already cited Ulm as the triumph by which the 'victory' itself of Trafalgar is to be tested and obliterated.

4. M. Thiers yet more widely misconceives the dastardly conduct of Dumanoir, whom he represents as making with his four ships for the rear-guard, where sixteen French and Spanish ships were engaged with Collingwood's column.

Discouraged by the fire which threatened his division, and consulting prudence more than desperation, he did nothing. (P. 165.) What he did is recorded with invincible circumstantiality. The continuance of the engagement, and therefore Dumanoir's scheme of sharing it, is an entire error. The allied ships in question, according to every testimony, had already struck. Dumanoir poured his broadsides into friend and foe; and the Spanish prisoners were permitted to return his fire. M. Thiers adds, that he made his escape through the Straits. The vanishing point is happily chosen. M. Thiers has perhaps forgotten that his whole squadron was captured in the Mediterranean by Admiral Strachan.—(Bay of Biscay E. M. G.)

5. The author's view of the results of this battle is still more inaccurate. "The allied fleet," he observes, "lost six or seven thousand killed, wounded, and prisoners." (P. 172.) Lord Collingwood asserts that he took 20,000 prisoners alone. The author adds, that we made one admiral prisoner: we made three, Villeneuve, Alava, and Cisneros. He says, that our losses were 3000: they were 1690. He applauds the heroic escape of the "Algeiras," she rose upon her captors after her surrender. He asserts that of the seventeen ships which we capture, nearly all escaped us in a storm. It is obvious that the sinking of ships already half wrecks, which is gracefully designated as an 'escape,' involved no appreciable diminution of success. He speaks of sixteen ships as remaining to the allies. An analysis of their fleet drawn from Collingwood's despatches—which accounts for twenty burnt, wrecked, or taken at Trafalgar, four afterwards taken by Sir R. Strachan, two escaped after capture, dismantled, and three entire wrecks escaped to Cadiz—leaves four available ships of the two nations as the results of the battle of Trafalgar.

These criticisms suffice to indicate the degree of accuracy with which M. Thiers describes our naval victories. We might pursue the inquiry in regard to other actions if it were necessary, with the aid both of public authority and of private testimony.

We now pass to the second of these four periods, that which is presented by the years 1806-7.

No student of European history in the age of the empire can have failed to perceive that the year 1806 formed a distinct era in the ge-

neral system of the Continent and in the domestic and external politics of this country. The dissolution of the German Empire, and the creation of the Rhenish Confederacy, followed the battle of Austerlitz and the Peace of Tilsit. The fall of Prussia, in the same year, finally established the military and commercial dominion of France over Germany. The battle of Trafalgar, at the close of 1805, had nearly extinguished the maritime contest which had endured since the year 1793. Thus, since the institution of the Consulate, France and England, each upon her own element, rose from certain superiority to uncontested power. But while the maritime ascendancy of England had sprung from a contest for domestic independence, the military ascendancy of France had sprung from a contest for foreign supremacy. The success of France was, therefore, temporarily more productive than that of England; and her conquest created alliances which the ocean did not yield. The perils of England were not, therefore, allayed in proportion to the extent of her conquests by sea. As she triumphed on the ocean she became isolated by land; and the western continent was gradually moulding itself into a military empire, which received from Paris its alliances and its commercial laws.

Such was the state of Europe when Mr. Fox acceded to power in January 1806, after an exclusion of twenty-two years, and reverted to that scheme of peace with France which had been the dream and the ambition of his life. Between a French alliance and continental isolation it was already probable that no alternative was left to this country. The disasters of 1805 had swept away the element of military confederacies abroad: Austria had received the law from France; the doubtful faith of Russia soon passed into open hostility; and the relations of the king of England with Prussia were unhappily the result of that scandalous act of bad faith—the occupation of Hanover. The restoration of an Anglo-French peace, under a government both conciliatory and firm, was now the greatest problem of the day. No passage of our modern history has, however, been more widely misapprehended.

It was the foreign policy of Lord Grenville's Ministry neither to pursue the principles adopted by Mr. Pitt; as M. Thiers has represented it, nor to abandon the Continent, as Sir A. Alison has chosen to repeat. The Cabinet of 1806 decided either to negotiate a general peace, or to prosecute the war with extraordinary vigour. But its prosecution was marked by this difference, that English treasure was to be reserved for English military equipments, rather than lavished in disastrous subsidies to Powers whose sagacity we had always questioned, and whose good faith we saw plainly disproved.

M. Thiers appears to labour under the strange misconception that, while Napoleon in 1806 was earnestly desirous of restoring peace with England, his views were defeated by the triumph of an alleged war-party in Lord Grenville's Cabinet, after the death of Mr. Fox. We will take these two broad assertions singly. Their tendency is to throw into paradoxical contrast the aggressive designs of England and the pacific dreams of Buonaparte. M. Thiers thus describes the views of the Emperor:—

"This proposal charmed Napoleon, who thoroughly desired a reconciliation with Great Britain; since it was from that country that all wars sprang, like a stream from its source; and there were few direct means of conquering her, one alone excepted, very decisive but very doubtful, and for Napoleon alone practicable—that of the invasion. He displayed a lively satisfaction with this grand overture, and received it with the greatest eagerness." (Vol. vi. p. 442.)

That Napoleon was really desirous of peace, at the outset of the negotiation, was not questioned by Lord Grenville's Cabinet, and has rarely been questioned since. But in the following passage, a doubt is thrown by M. Thiers himself on the good faith with which Buonaparte designed to conduct the negotiation:—

"Napoleon clearly saw that in not precipitating negotiations, and in hastening on the other hand, the execution of his projects, he would attain his double aim, of constituting his empire as he wished; and of consolidating it by general peace." (Vol. vi. p. 458.)

He here implies that Buonaparte designed to renew, during the negotiation, the Conti-

mental aggressions which he practised between the preliminaries and the peace of Amiens.

The conduct of Napoleon, in entertaining the English negotiation, was probably a consistent link, intervening between his naval confederacies and his continental system, in the policy of subjugating the Continent by first paralysing the influence of this country. His original scheme, to invade England during a temporary maritime supremacy—

"Such deep designs of empire doth he lay
Over them whose cause he seems to make
in hand,
And prudently would make them lords at sea

To whom, with ease, he can give laws by land"

had just vanished at Trafalgar. He now therefore designed not 'general peace' upon equal terms—but the separation of England from the Continental Powers, whose hostility to France such a separation would soon extinguish. But while this peace jointly with his separation was the aim of Buonaparte, a peace without a separation was the aim of Mr. Fox and of the Grenville Ministry. This difference is implied, if only in the desire of Buonaparte to negotiate with England singly, and in the resolution of Mr. Fox to negotiate jointly with Russia. The negotiation, on the part of the British Government, thus arose:—

A member of Lord Grenville's Cabinet called upon Mr. Fox during the afternoon of the day in which an impudent offer to assassinate Buonaparte had been made to him by a refugee. "Something has happened this morning," said Mr. Fox, to his colleague, "which may tend towards an understanding with France." Mr. Fox then detailed to his visitor the affair of the assassin. He added, "whether we have any chance of peace or not, I cannot do otherwise than send word of this to Buonaparte; but (he pursued) while confining my remarks to this subject, I may treat it in such a manner as to lead him to suppose that he is mistaken as to the sentiments of hostility which he imagines to exist towards him in this country."

The negotiation which thus originated M. Thiers has fallen into perhaps not unnatural inaccuracies in delineating. The Earl of Yarmouth (afterwards Marquess of Hertford), who had been a prisoner of war under the harsh edict of Napoleon in 1803, and had meanwhile become a friend of Talleyrand, was chosen by Mr. Fox to conduct the negotiation, which he afterwards vested virtually in the Earl of Lauderdale. M. Thiers, in strict adherence to his normal bias, praises Lord Yarmouth and depreciates Lord Lauderdale. The truth is that the former greatly exceeded his instructions; and Mr. Fox, unwilling to disgrace the original envoy, sent Lord Lauderdale to Paris, ostensibly as his colleague, while he invested that nobleman in fact with the entire control of the negotiation. Lauderdale, therefore, when he reached Paris, was viewed by Talleyrand as an interloper who had thwarted the intrigues of the French Government. Hence, apparently the odium which he encounters from M. Thiers. The author's view of Lord Yarmouth possessed much shrewdness, and was a master in that knowledge of the world which no doubt, is of greater value than genius without social experience: but has he no equal to Talleyrand.

But the two principal distortions in this history, which gloss over the conduct of Napoleon, so far as the negotiation itself is concerned, are—first, that no understanding could be arrived at with the English Government in regard to Sicily; and secondly, that Napoleon was justified in demanding that England and Russia should negotiate separately. These are quickly disposed of. The author describes Sicily as being "throughout the insoluble question." That question was insoluble simply through what Mr. Fox himself describes, in his despatches of the 3rd and 4th of August, as the 'tergiversation of France.' It is on record in those despatches that the surrender of Sicily to Naples was distinctly conceded by Talleyrand to Lord Yarmouth at the phrase of 'uti possidetis,' and that the concession was afterwards repudiated. The second position—that of joint negotiation with Russia, is thus stated:—

To be continued.