

Now what can be thought about such a life as this? Was it a work of art or a lie? Neither, to the best of my belief; and I deny, moreover, that Talleyrand was a great man. He did not create his own destiny; he did not make events. Picture to yourself other circumstances, and you may always be sure how Talleyrand would have behaved under them. Louis XIV would have found in him an excellent man of business, who would have commanded success in diplomacy by his adroitness, and in salons by his wit. Under Louis XIII he would never have been a Mazarin; between the Fronde and the League, between to-day and yesterday, he would have been crushed. He required a field wide enough for flight as well as for party tactics. This noble field was granted him as an inheritance from one moment to the next, and being a prudent man, Talleyrand knew how to make use of it. His six perjuries may, in the eyes of some, be considered pardonable in his circumstances, but a really great man would never have involved himself in the dilemma of being obliged to commit them. It would seem from what has been said, that he did not take a large and comprehensive view of things, but had a stock of isolated maxims always on hand, which can readily be put to the test at any moment. Talleyrand philosophized about events and about the natural weakness of the human heart, but paid less attention to moral questions. He did not altogether repudiate conscience, but its warnings were of no great weight with him. He sucked the very marrow of those around him; absorbed the purposes, interests, fears, and even the understanding of the outer world, and enlisted everything on the side of his own advantage. Talleyrand did not call every act a deception, which ended in the non-fulfilment of a promise which had been given, but he took into account the intention of his opponent, and recognised the fact that one man preys upon another. Why keep faith with those, thought he to himself, who are ready to deceive you at any moment? According to him, circumstances excused everything, and he believed the only debt he owed to heaven was not to succumb to them. Egotism was his religion, and he did homage at the shrine of any virtue which he thought might injure him. He had, however, some general rules of conduct which might even be called sublime. Thus, any two courses being proposed, he took care to choose the one which would yield him most advantage. If he saw that a round-about course would pay better, he could even be magnanimous enough, for example, to vote against the establishment of a chamber of peers, although it would for the moment have added greatly to his own dignity. On such occasions his form dilated, his words grew nobler, and the *nimbus* of an unselfish love of virtue played around his head. Still he felt no great eagerness for such opportunities of dis-

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